child, be still

He thinks, some days, that this is helping her as much as it is him. The days when she seems very far away despite sitting right beside him. When the look of longing on her face as she speaks of the past makes her seem like a ghost, haunting her own life.

Crook and Assassin, trying to dull each other's broken edges. Weaves in and out of canon, following season 1.
Notes

I am currently watching The Flash, so my characterization for Mick and Len is based primarily on LoT and general online info. Spoilers for Arrow and Legends through current seasons.

Please note this is NOT fluff or romance. I don't think this is as dark as I tend to write, but it is definitely angsty.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Chapter Summary

Set during and after 1x03

*Sara does not do well with stillness.*

Chapter Notes

*Ave Mary A* (Pink)

Additional Characters/Relationships: Shado (flashback), Rip & Sara

Additional Warnings: vague reference to past rape/non-con (The Amazo)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

xxx

*i need you to tell me*

*child, be still*

xxx

Sara does not do well with stillness. She never has; most of her rebellious teenage actions had been born of boredom more than anything else, and after, *after*. After, she had learned a thousand different meanings of stillness, learned to read each type, each sound, each drawn and bated breath. Waiting, waiting, with only her own mind to keep her company.

So no, Sara would prefer just about anything to stillness. Which is usually not a problem, because cities are loud and full of bad people doing bad things, but the Waverider is different. It’s… calm and still and silent in a way only outer space can bring, she muses. It’s a *new* kind of stillness, and it throws her off more than she’d like to admit.

She trains as much as she can, but there are only so many hours in the day her body will let her do so. When the brains of the operation come up with a new plan, a new location, she kicks some ass and kills some bad people. And in between, she *waits*.

xxx

*help me let go*

xxx

It turns out not waiting isn’t much better.

She’d kept herself under control well enough – for a while.
But faced with the odds at the bank, holding back isn’t an option. And the man who’d greeted them, Blake – he reminds her far too much of Ivo. It makes her skin crawl, her stomach turn, and letting the haze of violence rush over her is a far preferable experience.

Until it’s gone.

Until Rip is screaming her name as she drives her blade down, again and again and again into the wood floor. Until the face sneering up at her, whole and unbloodied, morphs into Ivo. That’s my girl, it whispers. Taught you well, you little bitch-

She knocks him out with a blow, hovers on her knees over him- you always did look good on your knees- her fist finds his face, over and over and-

“Sara.” She freezes, blinks, smells blood and stumbles backwards, hands slippery against the floor. Rip is staring at her, and if he hadn’t thought she was a monster before, he certainly does now.

She doesn’t remember crawling to her feet, or staggering toward the door, but suddenly she’s there and a figure looms before her. She falls instantly into a fight stance, acutely aware of her lack of weapon, and then relaxes fractionally when she recognizes Snart’s goggles, and the cold gun.

“You guys finish up here without me?” he asks, smirking, and Sara feels bile rise in her throat. She pushes past him without a word, and makes it all the way outside before vomiting up everything she’d eaten that day.

No one says a word to her on the flight back to the Waverider, Carter’s body awkwardly placed on the floor of the jumpship. Her hands are still bloody, and she can feel Jax’s eyes dart to her half a dozen times before she quells him with a glance. She can feel Snart’s gaze as well, from where he’s standing braced behind Mick’s seat, but she can’t quite bring herself to look at him. Instead she just wipes her hands absently on her torn dress, pretending they don’t shake.

xxx

of the chaos around me

xxx

It’s early morning when they bury Carter, calm and clear and quiet. It reminds her uncomfortably of Lian Yu, of burying Shado in the middle of nowhere where no one will find her. With no one to remember her but ghosts.

Sara shivers, leaving as soon as Rip has finished speaking. It’s probably rude and someone probably noticed, but she can’t bring herself to stay. She can’t shake the monster from the night before, can’t escape the pure joy she’d felt pounding Blake (Ivo) into the ground. Can’t stop remembering his words, his hands, the savage light in his eyes and the fanatical devotion she’d seen echoed in Savage’s followers. (Sometimes on Rip’s face.)

She shakes her head sharply to dispel the memories, gets halfway to the small training room on the Waverider before stopping abruptly. Normally, she can work herself into exhaustion, can lose herself in the movement. But today she’s not sure she wants to lose herself. Isn’t sure it’s safe.

After standing frozen for a few seconds she turns, making her way to the cargo hold. It’s the least likely place for anyone to show up (she hopes) and she sinks down with a sigh. There’s a small exercise ball on one of the crates and she grabs it, tossing it in the air a few times before bouncing it off the wall.
She’s been doing that for a good twenty minutes, counting out each throw and switching off hands (right hand throw, right hand catch - one thousand one hundred five) when she hears footsteps, and suppresses a groan (right hand throw, left hand catch – one thousand one hundred six). Maybe if she ignores them, they’ll go away. (Left hand throw, left hand catch – one thousand one hundred seven).

But she has no such luck, as Snart appears in the doorway. He raises an eyebrow, watching her throw the ball against the wall and catch it as it comes back (left hand throw, right hand catch – one thousand one hundred eight).

“Is this recess or timeout?” he drawls. The ball slams the wall with even more force this time, and Sara grinds her teeth.

“ Heard you took a trip,” she says instead of answering. It’s quiet and calm and too goddamn still. She wants to fight someone, but she can’t bring herself to even sharpen her knives right now, so instead she hurls the stupid ball against the stupid wall again and again and again.

“ You and Jax trading notes now?”

Sara snorts derisively. “Please. Gideon is very helpful when you remember to ask her.” Thud. She switches hands absently, fumbling the ball and losing her place and count, and gets irrationally angry at that. The ball threatens to dent the metal this time.

“ Really.” His voice takes on a darker tone, one Sara hadn’t expected, and she looks up at him with a small frown. “ And what did Gideon tell you? ”

“ That you just can’t help yourself from stealing shiny things. ”

Snart growls, catching the ball before it returns to Sara. “ I’m serious, Lance.” And he is; he looks more shaken than she can remember seeing him before, and she thinks back again over what Gideon had told her.

“ So am I,” she answers slowly. She crosses her arms to keep from fidgeting, finds herself tapping her food instead. Snart stares at her for another few moments, then sighs, tossing the ball back to her.

“ You left the ‘funeral’ awfully fast.” Sara blinks at the rapid topic shift.

“ Been to enough for two lifetimes.” She shrugs. “ Didn’t know the guy. Just another body in the ground. ”

Snart’s eyebrows shoot up, and he folds his arms. “ That’s a little cold, coming from you. ”

“ I seem like the warm and fuzzy type to you?” she asks dryly. Considers putting a knife in the wall next to his head just to see him jump.

( Isn’t sure she trusts herself with a knife in her hands right now. )

“ No, more like the undead. ”

"So like Vandal Savage." The bitter words drop leaden in the air, and the ball suddenly feels too heavy to throw. She wonders what would happen if she let others drink her blood. Would they feel effects from the Lazarus Pit too?

She can’t help the shiver that runs down her spine, or the way that Snart looks at her. "Definitely not what I meant," he responds slowly, eyes narrowing. "Last I checked your resurrection was a one time deal."
As though *that* was the point. The ball slams into the wall with far more force than necessary and finally bounces off behind some crates. Sara lets her head drop back, folding her hands in her lap, and closes her eyes. Maybe if she doesn't look at him he'll go away. Out of sight...

But his footsteps creak in the wrong direction. She hears him settle a few feet away from her and suppresses a groan, cracking her eyes open to glare at him. He's not looking at her; instead, he's setting up a game of solitaire, long fingers deftly dealing out cards in absurdly precise lines.

"What're you doing?"

He glances at her, one corner of his mouth quirking. “I know you’re not a card shark, but even you must recognize a game of solitaire.”

Sara contemplates all the ways she could hurt him without actually moving – if she hadn’t gotten up to find her ball, she’s certainly not getting up just to kick his ass – and growls, “Why are you doing it here?”

He shrugs, not looking at her, gaze fixed on his game. “It’s a free country. Ship.”

Sara tries very hard not to scream in frustration. “You know I can think of seven ways to kill you without getting up, right?”

“See, you say that, but…” He leans on one arm, finally glancing up at her, and there’s something hidden under that smirk that softens her anger a little. Just a little.

“Wouldn’t be worth the trouble,” she finally mutters.

“Seems like nothing we do really is.”

Sara thinks back again over what Gideon had told her – stealing an emerald to keep his father out of jail. She’ll have to ask Gideon for more details (and Jax, now that Snart mentioned it). All she says is, “I’d drink to that.”

Snart reaches inside his jacket and pulls out a flask, holding it up with a smug expression.

“My savior,” Sara snarks, but accepts the flask.

    xxx

    *the devil that hounds me*

    *(i need you to tell me)*

    xxx

Chapter End Notes

Gifting to *isawet* because I am hopeless Sara/Leonard/CaptainCanary trash and she should be too :'). I was going to try to finish this before posting it, but I got impatient. It's currently at ~25k, so there's plenty to come.

Comments/kudos make me feel warm and squishy :')
If you'd like to cry and flail with me, I'm on twitter. I'm a frequent and unapologetic all-caps user.
Chapter Summary

Set after 1x03, before 1x04

*watching her is like watching fire dance*

Chapter Notes

This was just supposed to be a short filler section but it got away from me oops?

Additional warnings: Lewis Snart is his own warning. So are Lian Yu and The Amazo and Ra's al Ghul, actually.

Additional characters/relationships: Mick & Snart (& Sara??)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

xxx

*if the darkest hour comes before the light*

xxx

After the flurry of activity over the team’s first week together, the next is frustratingly quiet. Locating Savage seems to be a more monumental task than Rip had initially let on, as he and Gideon spend hours and then days arguing and plotting. This leaves Sara with far too much free time.

She slowly rebuilds her training regimen, keeping a tight cap on her anger. It takes a few days before she can fully lose herself in the movements again, without fear of completely losing control. Beating Blake (Ivo Ivo Ivo) senseless seems to have satisfied the bloodlust. For now.

It's strange having no one to spar with; between the League and Team Arrow, she's never lacked for partners. She misses it, more than she'd expected to. Misses the easy comradery of her friends and family, the intimate knowledge and skill of the League. Mostly, she misses Nyssa. Misses the absolute trust and certainty that she could let go and Nyssa would catch her, keep her in line, keep her together. Now, she hardly trusts herself, and the others have yet to earn it. (She supposes Ray is an exception, but isn't sure that really counts for anything).

So, she trains alone. In her down time she casually flips through Gideon's massive data stores (although Gideon refuses to let her watch anything that came out after January 2016, no matter how much Sara begs). One evening she remembers her conversation with Snart in the cargo hold, and decides she might as well start reading up on her teammates.

“Gideon, you have some sort of database of our timeline, right?”

“I do,” Gideon confirms. “But I should warn you, Captain Hunter has forbidden me from showing
you your future.”

Sara snorts softly – it seems this will be a continuous battle. “Don’t worry, I’m more interested in the past right now. What was Snart doing when he snuck off in 1975?”

“As I told you earlier, Mr. Snart and Mr. Rory stole the Maximilian Emerald.” Sara could almost swear the AI is being purposefully dense.

“Okay, but why.”

“Emeralds have a high monetary value to humans,” Gideon states, as though explaining to a small child. Sara lets out a slow breath and reminds herself she can’t really kill a computer.

“Fine, then where is the emerald now?”

“Now is a relative term, Miss Lance-”

“Gideon.” Sara grits her teeth, and takes another breath. “Is there a reason you’re being intentionally difficult?”

There’s a moment’s hesitation, and then Gideon answers, “Mr. Snart was reluctant to share the information.”

Sara makes a noise of frustration, pressing the heels of her palms to her eyes. “Fine, I’ll just ask Jax. Can you at least show me background information?”

“Of course. However, you should know that Mr. Snart has asked me to inform him of any team members accessing his data.”

Sara rolls her eyes. “Of course he has.” She rubs wearily at her neck; it’s later than she’d thought, and it’d been a long day of doing very little. “Has he looked me up in your database?”

“He has.”

A smile slowly spreads across Sara’s face; it feels strange. “Well, then tell him karma’s a bitch.”

The vast majority on him is criminal (shocking); records of a few stints in jail and juvie (shocking) and newspaper articles about dozens of crimes he’d been implicated in. A younger sister, Lisa. And a father, Lewis-

Apparently Snart had killed his father.

Sara pulls up the police record, reads in horror about the bomb Lewis placed inside his own daughter to force Leonard to cooperate. A quick glance at Lewis Snart’s records show a corrupt cop, in and out of prison all of Leonard’s life. A social service investigation that was quickly buried.

Sara thinks of Ra’s and Nyssa, of Merlyn and Thea, and feels sick. As a distraction, this is not working all that well. She looks at her pillow, her body aching for rest, but… Flashes of red, the sound of knives through flesh and-

She sighs. “Gideon, please show me everything you have about me.” She might as well know what everyone else can see.

There’s a few local articles from when she was a kid – her class raised the most money for a Red Cross charity event, and Sara picks out her little eight year old face, smiling and carefree. She’s listed in her graduating high school class, and then – the sinking of the Gambit.
Her name shows up as an afterthought, halfway through the article. “Friend of Oliver Queen’s”. Even before her first (and second and third) deaths, she’d been almost a ghost.

Beyond that, there’s very little. Ta-er al-sahfer shows up in the League Book, but other than the ledger the League keeps no written record. Even reconnaissance information she’d gathered was burned at the end of a mission. She scrolls back through the names until she finds Nyssa’s, fingers the screen as though it could somehow bring her closer. But Nyssa had dealt with Ra’s al Ghul her entire life; she doesn’t deserve having some mutated version torment her through Sara.

Sara knows Snart will probably follow all the breadcrumbs, and almost asks Gideon to look up the Gambit, but… even now, years later, safe and warm in her room, she can feel the water pulling her down, can taste salt and cracked lips and terror. That would only lead to Lian Yu and The Amazo and other dark places she’s not ready to return to.

She has Gideon turn on a movie, and drifts off to the quiet buzz of voices on-screen trying to drown out the ones in her head.

xxx

where is the light?

xxx

Changing your own past is, frustratingly, not as easy as it might seem.

Snart supposes it shouldn't surprise him, as someone like Rip would've accidentally destroyed humanity if it were that simple. But still, it's disappointing. He almost wishes he'd just gone ahead and killed his father, but nothing would be worth losing Lisa. And who knows what kind of horror it could've brought to his own life. He'd briefly debated killing his father at some point after Lisa was born, but foster care could've been even worse.

_TIME wants to happen._ So Gideon had told him, when he’d looked back at the new article of his father’s arrest, as though somehow it might've changed. He’d known even before double and triple checking that it hadn’t, because every inch of his skin is the same, every scar and burn, every ache of old breaks. But he’s had little else to do the past few days – they’re floating in the temporal zone while Gideon and Rip work out exactly where and when to travel. Snart has a feeling they’ll be doing a lot of this.

Idle time has never been all that good for him. Or Mick, he thinks with a wince, watching his partner from across the room as he cleans his gun for the thousandth time, agitation clear on his face as he slams his tools around. Snart will have to ask Gideon about the engine room; maybe Mick could at least watch some fires burn, even if he can’t set them. Maybe Snart will even join him; he’s played so many games of solitaire that he’s started dreaming about it.

When he’s too restless to sit still any longer he paces absently down the hall, silent by habit. There’s a steady clanking sound coming from the tiny room Sara had converted into a sort of gym, complete with something she calls a Salmon Ladder. He has yet to see her use it, and pokes his head around the door to find her scaling it with somewhat terrifying strength.

He watches her for a few minutes, wonders if she knows he’s there. Moving quietly is an ingrained skill for him, but she’s supposed to be a ninja assassin. Not that he minds; watching her is like
watching fire dance, powerfully graceful, soothingly chaotic, entirely mesmerizing. And layered over that barely contained fury is an icy mask, cool and calm and measured. She’s somehow a perfect balance of the two, of fire and ice, and he can’t help the spark in his gut at that. Can’t help wondering how she’d fit with him and Mick, heat to his cold, calm to Mick’s fury.

He wonders if Sara would let them watch her instead of Gideon’s flames.

“You wanna spar, or are you just gonna stand there all day?” Snart blinks. Sara drops from the ladder, grabbing a towel before turning around to face him.

“I’m good watching,” he drawls. She doesn’t look surprised.

“Could be useful, you know, in case you ever end up without that gun of yours.”

Snart shrugs. “I prefer doing things from a distance.”

“I’ve noticed.” She tugs a shirt on, tucking a few sweaty strands of hair back from her face. Her eyes fix on him, blue and intense, studying him as she walks over into his space. He can’t shake the feeling she’s… testing him. Gideon had informed him Sara had looked up his file. He’s not surprised – he’s already read up on all the other team members, the ship, anything Gideon would give him access to. It’s an old habit, one of his good ones. It always pays to be over-prepared.

So he can’t help wondering if her movements are calculated to get a reaction from him. He doesn’t mind, exactly. It’s nice to spar with someone who can read people almost as well as he can, who seems as attuned to tiny fluctuations in mood and place as he is. But he’s also not used to being read quite so well, and he finds it unsettling.

Strangely, though, he doesn’t find her unsettling. She’s a world class assassin, could probably kill him five different ways without moving an inch, and it should probably scare him at least a little. And it’s not that she doesn’t look deadly – he’s seen her fight enough to know better. (He wouldn’t mind watching her fight again, if he’s honest with himself.)

But while most people would’ve unnerved him enough by now for him to gracefully slide out of their space, somehow he doesn’t mind her there.

Sara stands there for a few more moments, then shrugs, turning away to walk toward a punching bag. “Suit yourself.”

xxx

(where did you go?)

how did you know to get out of a world gone mad?

xxx

Chapter End Notes

This is really not intended to be a RogueCanary fic, but Snart was feeling contrary this chapter so  ¯\_(ツ)_/¯
Chapter Summary

Set after 1x05

"Now why don't you put away your toys like a good girl and come upstairs with the grown ups?"

Chapter Notes

Hunger (Of Monsters and Men)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

xxx

hungry for the kill

xxx

When Rip asks her (tells her? Orders her?) to kill Stein, Sara feels something inside her die. She remembers his words to her, only weeks before – You’ll be better. You can be better.

And now. Now.

We’re just pawns, Snart says, and she doesn’t even believe her own half-hearted protest.

They all get back in one piece, no thanks to Rip, all thanks to Snart. It rankles a little, that a convicted criminal is giving her morality lessons. (But then, Nyssa is considered a terrorist in multiple countries, and she’d brought Sara back to life after Lian Yu. Sara supposes she shouldn’t judge Snart too harshly.)

Still, she doesn’t feel like celebrating with the rest of them, not even with the promise of stolen whiskey. She spends far more time than necessary cleaning her weapons, returning them to their storage cases. She’s showered once already since returning, and is considering another when Snart appears in the doorway.

“Is that all you do?” he asks, arms crossed in front of him, shoulder resting on the doorframe like he’s holding up the goddamn wall. Sara glances at the knife and whetstone in her hands, shrugging.

“Killer has to keep her weapons ready,” she answers bitterly. Leonard sighs, looking down, then slowly makes his way over to her. Well, to the wall a few feet away from her, where he resumes his task of holding the ship up.

“Except you didn’t kill him,” he points out. Sara doesn’t even dignify that with an answer, just keeps her eyes on her blade. The motions are steady, methodic, soothing. Now, if Snart would just shut up… “Sara-”
A knife appears in the wall, an inch from his ear, and Sara tilts her head. “Gotta keep ’em balanced, too,” she states. “Or that would’ve gone between your eyes.” Leonard gives her that humorless smile he usually reserves for Rip, and reaches up to yank the knife out.

"Cute," is all he says. "Now why don't you put away your toys like a good girl and come upstairs with the grown ups?"

He very nearly gets a blade in the eye for that. Sara's vision goes red and black at the edges for a moment as she tells herself very firmly that leaving Snart's bloody corpse in the storage room would be a very terrible idea. Satisfying, but terrible.

"Fuck off, Snart," she finally manages to snarl. The bastard smirks, and if he doesn't stop pushing her goddamn limits she's going to-

She very pointedly turns away from him, muttering under her breath in Arabic all the different ways she could kill, maim, and torture him. Definitely not in that order. Gideon informs her that such behaviors will not be tolerated. Sara just growls in answer, enjoying the fleeting look of uncertainty on Snart's face when she turns back around. He will definitely ask Gideon to translate later.

“If you’d followed the plan, maybe it wouldn’t have been a problem at all,” she states as evenly as she can. “Guess that code of yours only applies to you and your partner.” He goes silent at that, and Sara ignores him again as she slowly puts her weapons away, absentley fingering the throwing stars Rip had given her. Maybe next time she throws something sharp at Snart she can use one of these.

With a sigh, she closes the case and resigns herself to a weapons-free evening.

"The booze had better be amazing," she snips as she stalks up to him. She holds out a hand for her knife, which has already disappeared into whatever void Snart's conquests occupy. He just raises an eyebrow, looking at her innocently. “Ugh, keep it.”

She pushes past him, and makes it a few steps before he says, “Sara.” She freezes, slowly turning around when he doesn’t continue. He’s fiddling with her blade, staring at his hands. “Rip shouldn’t have asked you to do it,” he tells the knife. Sara flinches. “He made you choose, between your team and your future.”

She wants to tell him to shut up, but her voice won’t work. He finally looks up, face serious and lacking it’s trademark smirk. “You chose right.”

He pushes off the wall and walks the couple steps toward her, holding her knife out hilt-first. She takes it, still unable to speak past the lump in her throat, and doesn’t move until the sound of his footsteps has faded.

xxx

**but this hunger, it isn’t you**

xxx

Chapter End Notes

"Sara Thinks about Killing People a Lot" is the alternate title for this fic
Chapter Summary

Set during and after 1x06

*even with the city in ruins around her, for a moment it feels like coming home.*

Chapter Notes

Additional warnings: accidental self-injury

*Winter* (Tori Amos)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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*i hear a voice: you must learn to stand up for yourself*

---

When Lisa was six, she'd fallen in love with the rabbits they saw on the side of the road while walking to school. It was a small, two lane road, with no sidewalks and a ditch to either side, the land beyond full of overgrown vegetation. Lisa used to tug on Leonard's hand every time she saw something move, running after it on her short little legs, making various excited noises and cries of glee. She never seemed to realize that she only frightened them away, and never seemed to care. She'd just enjoyed seeing them.

One day Leonard spotted a rabbit before her, big and fat in preparation for winter. He'd stopped, putting his finger to his lips when Lisa looked up at him. He picked her up, whispered, "You've gotta really quiet, okay?" She'd nodded, feet swinging in excitement, as he crept closer. The rabbit froze, then continued its foraging, and this continued until they were a few feet away and Leonard could see the whites of its eyes. He crouched down slowly, putting Lisa down and resting his chin on her shoulder as he stared.

"He's so fuzzy," she whispered. He could feel her excitement as she practically vibrated, but she managed to keep herself contained until, spooked by whatever ghosts rabbits see, it had bolted off into the brush. Then she'd screamed with glee, jumping up and down, chattering for a week about the cool rabbit.

Their father had come home from prison not much later, and Leonard tried to make it a game, when they huddled upstairs in his room to avoid Lewis's anger. "Quiet like hunting rabbits," he used to say. "You don't wanna scare them, right?"

Lisa was seven when Leonard went to juvie, eight by the time he was out. He'll never forget the day he came home, his father strangely silent as they drove away from the prison. Leonard could feel the
tension in the air, anger a heavy weight over them, and he'd made himself as small and quiet in the seat as he could. Hunting rabbits.

From the outside the house had looked the same, but one step through the door and he could almost taste the fear that permeated the hall. Broken bottles and the smell of alcohol were nothing new, but there was an added layer of hostility draped over the place, and Leonard wanted nothing more than to disappear.

Until a face peered over the top of the stairs, pale and alert. Like a rabbit ready to dash from its hiding place in one last desperate attempt to escape.

"LENNY," a voice had shrieked, and a few moments later he'd been nearly knocked over by a whirlwind of dark hair and knobbly knees. He'd wrapped Lisa in his arms, her face buried into his chest and her little arms clinging to him with surprising strength.

He hadn't even had time to say anything before his father came through the door, and Lisa shrank away, trembling, her tiny fingers twisted into the fabric of his shirt. And then he'd really looked at her, skinny arms mottled with bruises, a half-healed gash peeking through her hair. He'd never been so angry and terrified all at once, had never hated anyone so entirely - not the guards in juvie, not even the boys who had nearly killed him that first day.

And he'd never hated himself so much before in his life - he'd left her alone with that monster. He'd done that. He'll never forgive himself for that. In that moment he'd sworn that he'd never abandon her that way again, he'd never let her pay for his shortcomings. He'd never hate himself that much again.

So the look in Sara's eyes, when she realizes what had happened to Star City when she didn't come back - he knows that look intimately. Knows the hatred and anger that come with it - the terror. She'd had a sister here too, he knows. A family. A father who'd actually raised them right.

It's like coming home from juvie all over again, only Lisa isn't here to protect. Maybe that's why he wants to help Sara fix this.

(He's also a big fan of her telling off Rip, but that's beside the point.)

xxx

cause i can't always be around

xxx

Dead. Every single one, dead. Except Oliver, and the irony that they are the only two to make it this long alive doesn't elude Sara. All she can think is that it must be punishment, penance for past wrongs they've spent their lives repaying. Or Oliver did, at least. Sara's not sure she ever really tried.

Maybe she deserves this.

Grant Wilson starts to laugh from where he's tied up on top of the bus, and Sara can't help flinching at the sound. If she closes her eyes he could be Slade, insane and hell-bent on ruining them. (And, if she's really honest, she's not sure she didn't deserve that punishment as well. If not for her, maybe Shado would still be alive.)

"Lance," Wilson drawls, an insane light in his eyes as he stares up at her. "It threw me at first, given your relation to the late Captain Lance. But I remember now, my father's stories. Sara Lance. Dragged from the ocean, kicking and screaming, poor little girl taken by brutes of men with no white knight to rescue her."
Sara's crouched with a knife at his throat before she can think, snarling, and he laughs. "There she is, the feral wild child. Remade by a madman into his pet torturer. At least I made my own way, bouzin, instead of fucking my way to safety."

Oliver pulls her back even as she screams in rage, blade leaving a thin line on Wilson's neck, and Connor knocks the bastard out with a kick to the head.

"Sara," Oliver says, low and not quite threatening. "Don't." Goddamn Oliver and his never-ending tragic sense of honor. Even now, after living 15 years alone in a broken city, he keeps to his goddamn code. Keeps her in line. She has no idea how he's held onto his morality, wonders if he'd managed to drag it back out just for her.

The thought is oddly sobering, as she thinks back to only hours before when she'd dragged him back into all of this. Back to himself. Maybe they both survived as more than just punishment; maybe it was for this. Maybe it is as it's always been, to hold each other back from the edge.

"What will you do with him?" she finally asks, hollow and weary. It's not like her father is around to hold him in jail. She tries not to dwell on that too long, but there's an ache in her chest that won't fade.

Oliver's still gripping her shoulders, and he doesn't let go until she reluctantly turns away from Wilson. "I'll think of something," he answers, in that patronizingly reassuring tone that makes her want to either hit him or kiss him. Maybe both.

"You really haven't changed," she murmurs. "Well, except the beard. You look like Island Ollie."

He smiles, barks a short laugh that sounds out of practice, and her lips twitch in return. She misses him suddenly, fiercely, this Island Oliver who lived with her on the edge of disaster, who pulled her back from the brink of savage insanity. Misses the time when the world was simple, live or die, us or them - except not really, because she'd been 'them', and Oliver had still saved her. She wonders, sometimes, how things could've been if Ivo hadn't found them on the sub. What life could have been like for the four of them, if they could've tamed Slade's wildness with care and acceptance the way the people around her do now. The more she thinks about it the more she realizes she's exactly like Slade, and the only difference is the people in her life.

She turns around slowly, made stronger by Oliver's presence at her back, by her team on the ground a dozen feet away. "I didn't need a white knight," she tells Wilson's unconscious form. "I needed family, and I found them. I'm sorry your father couldn't find the same."

Oliver's hand rests back on her shoulder, gently this time, and even with the city in ruins around her, for a moment it feels like coming home.

xxx

_he says: when you gonna make up your mind?_  
_when you gonna love you as much as i do?_  

xxx

Sara showers the dust and grime of 2046 off her, but the memories won't clean so easily. She hadn't thought anything could faze her anymore, not after the League, but this - this had. Seeing Star City in ruins, knowing everyone she'd loved was dead - even if Rip says it's not real, it feels real. Far too real.
She makes her way to the mess hall, physically exhausted but mentally far too keyed up to sleep. Gideon prepares something hot that she tries to eat, but it tastes like ash, and she can only pick at it.

"I don't think the food is that bad," a voice behind her says. Sara sighs, although she's not quite as annoyed by Snart's presence as she might've been a few weeks ago. He's grown on her, or maybe the team has grown on him.

"Not hungry." She pushes what looks like mashed potatoes around her plate while he fiddles with the coffee maker. (Gideon had insisted she could provide coffee for them in her all-purpose food dispenser, but both Ray and Stein had just looked at her creation in horror and demanded a proper coffee machine for the ship.)

"Want some?" Snart asks, pulling two mugs out when she nods her assent. The machine hisses and bubbles and he stays at least three feet away from it, eyeing it like a dangerous animal. He really doesn't like heat, she thinks, suppressing a smile.

When it's done he pours them both a cup, sliding one to her as he settles across the table from her.

"Thanks," she murmurs. "How's Mick?"

"About how you'd expect." He stares at his mug for a moment, fingers wrapped around it in almost a death-grip, eyes very far away.

"Well, he hasn't burned the ship down yet, so..."

He smirks mirthlessly. "He does at least have a sense of self-preservation."

"Lucky us." She'd already asked Gideon for security footage of their... meeting? If Snart had felt the need to keep Mick locked in his room... Well, it doesn't bode well for any of them. She knows the look in his eyes, the wild gleam she's seen more and more frequently - it's the same look she'd seen in Slade.

And she can't help wondering what will finally tip Mick over the edge, and if any of them will survive it.

xxx

cause things are gonna change so fast

xxx

"You okay?" Leonard asks. Sara is much more subdued than normal, not bristling at everything he does or says. They're sitting in the little room that passes for a cafeteria on the Waverider, complete with a machine that can (supposedly) make any food. Gideon says it's something like the fabricator they use for clothing, which doesn't make Leonard feel any better, as those clothes usually return with a great deal of blood on them.

He'd found her staring blankly at the wall, picking at a plate of food. He hadn't expected anyone to be in here at 3am, and hadn't been quiet enough to cover his escape to less populated areas, but Sara isn't bad company. She's quiet, almost lethargic, as though all the fighting today had drained her entirely. He appreciates quiet.

She shrugs, wrapping both hands around her mug. "I don't know what I should be," she answers after a moment. Her gaze is unfocused, lost. "Rip says that this version of Star City isn't real, but..."
"But it feels real." She nods. "For what it's worth, you did make a difference."

Sara snorts derisively, shaking her head. "Yeah, after leaving all my friends and family to die." She puts the mug down, scrubbing her hands across her face. "It didn't work for you. What if nothing changes here?"

Leonard's stomach twists, and he's going to kill Jax, but he forces his voice even. "That was the past. This is a possible future."

"That doesn't even make sense." She's agitated, coiled like a spring, ready to snap something. Someone. Maybe coffee hadn't been the best idea. "It's the past for Rip, right? He was born in 21-something, so 2046 was his past."

"None of this has ever made any sense," Leonard retorts. "Why would it start now?"

Sara buries her face in her hands with a growl of frustration, and Leonard goes quiet. He's noticed before the way she seems to... reign in her anger. To pull in on herself, to calm the frenetic energy currently about to tear her apart. Gideon's archive hadn't had too many details on that pit she'd been resurrected in - not surprisingly, the League of Assassins doesn't really leave a paper trail. Most of what's there is hearsay and folklore - a fountain of youth, so to speak - but then, here's Sara, back from the dead, so maybe it is all true. Maybe someday he'll ask her.

So he sits with her in silence, enjoying the calm, easy quiet that's so rare on this ship. It's why he loves these early morning hours, when the rest of the ship is sleeping and the only sound is the gentle hum of the Waverider.

"He told us we would be heroes," Sara says suddenly, hollowly, jolting him from his thoughts. He'd started to wonder if maybe she was really asleep, and sleeping with your eyes open was something they taught in the League of Assassins.

"He told us a lot of things."

"I thought..." Her voice fades, and her hands shake a little where they grip the mug. "I thought I could maybe make up for what I've done. What I am. But you were right. He only wanted me to kill for him."

"And me to steal," he almost says, but he's never been ashamed of that. Sara seems to genuinely want to be better, whatever that means.

"He used us," he agrees instead. "But that doesn't mean we have to let him."

She takes a sip from the mug, and he pretends not to notice how her eyes glitter. "Y'know it's funny, out of all of us, you and Mick end up being the only ones here for the right reasons." Her half-smile is mirthless, face blank. It's her assassin look, he's coming to realize. Cold, detached, everything he should love. But somehow on her it just looks... wrong.

"Well, I haven't found anything on board worth stealing, so..." Her face softens a little at that, and it somehow feels worth it just for that.

"Already cased the whole ship, huh?"

"I have no idea what you're talking about." She smiles, but it fades quickly, and he finds himself missing it.

"For what it's worth... I think trying to save the world counts as making up for whatever you've
"Somehow atoning for being a murderer by killing more people doesn't seem right," she points out drily.

He shrugs. "Depends on your point of view, I guess. You don't kill in cold blood or for fun, and you don't enjoy it like Mick does."

She goes very still at that, frozen, face smoothing over again. He expects another prolonged silence, but instead she says quietly, "The way I was resurrected - the Lazarus Pit - it's how the head of the League stayed alive for centuries. Every time he goes in, it absorbs all his hate, his rage. And when it brought me back to life, it put that... evil inside me. They call it a bloodlust, but it's more than that, it's..." She shakes her head, shrugging. "It's like being possessed. It makes me want to hurt, to kill, for no reason at all."

"But it isn't you."

She gives a short, mirthless laugh. "I don't even know anymore."

"That wasn't a question." Her gaze snaps to him, shock and anger warring with gratitude. She opens and closes her mouth a few times, then looks back down to stare at her coffee mug, eyes bright.

"Thank you," she mutters. Leonard smiles.

They lapse back into comfortable silence, until Gideon says hesitantly, "Miss Lance."

Sara's eyes narrow, and she growls, "What, Gideon." Leonard thinks the AI is lucky she doesn't have a body for angry assassins to hit.

"I... wish to reassure you that your timeline has been restored."

Sara deflates, slumping back in her chair. "And how are you gonna do that?" she asks dully.

There's a slight pause, and Leonard finds his interest peaked. He and Sara stare at the wall expectantly, as though that will somehow help.

"Please do not inform Captain Hunter of this," Gideon starts, and Leonard is suddenly very interested. "As I said, your timeline is as it was. However, you've been gone for several months. And while it is not safe for you to know your future, perhaps we could consider this period an... alternate present."

Leonard raises his eyebrows, glancing at Sara. She shrugs, and states, "I'm listening."

Gideon hesitates again, then finally continues, "I thought you'd wish to know that Nyssa al Ghul has escaped from imprisonment, and displaced Malcolm Merlyn as Ra's al Ghul."

A real smile explodes onto Sara's face, the first he's ever seen. He wonders if this is what she'd been like, before she'd died.

"Of course she did," she murmurs, eyes soft and far away.

"Nyssa al Ghul?" Leonard asks Gideon.

"Nyssa Raatko, also called Nyssa al Ghul, Daughter of the Demon, Heir to the Demon, beloved of Ta-er al Sahfer."
"She's got more titles than that dragon chick on Game of Thrones," Leonard breaks in. Sara glances at him in amusement.

"You're such a closet nerd." The smile is still on her face, so he'll forgive the insult.

"Ta-er al Sahfer?"

"'Canary','" she answers absently. "Well, yellow bird. My League name."

"Your girlfriend was the mother of dragons?"

Sara laughs. It sounds almost like a sob, and she looks as shocked by it as he is. "If I ever see her again, I'm definitely telling her that."

xxx

i tell you that i'll always want you near

xxx

She dreams of dark waters pulling her down, of cages and fear and men in black and yellow masks, fighting her for each and every breath. They're all around her, pinning her down, slicing open her chest to cut out her heart and laugh.

She feels nothing. She feels everything.

Hands grab at her from all directions, fingers sliding along every inch of her skin no matter how she twists and writhes. She can't make out their words, only the low hum of jeering voices, almost as loud as the crash of the sea. She claws at them, trying to pry them from her, but as soon as she pulls one hand off two more appear and there's too many, they're too strong.

Sara wakes gasping, fighting off phantom hands, sobbing for breath. It's dark, too dark, like the ocean in the night lit only by stars. Going on to infinity in every direction, no land in sight, no hope.

"Gideon, lights," she manages to choke out. They're immediate and blinding and she flashes to the sun and blazing sky, burning her skin, lips cracked and bleeding-

Be still, a voice whispers in her head, soft and hard as the steel of her sword. Calm yourself, Beloved. You are no longer in that place, you will never again be in that place. You are stronger than you were, and I am here.

"You're not," Sara whispers into the dead air of space. "You're not here, Nyssa. I don't know how to fight without you here."

There's a hand on her cheek, warm and calloused and familiar, and Sara leans into Nyssa's warmth even as she knows it can't be real.

"I'm real enough," Nyssa says, amusement in her voice, and Sara closes her eyes.

"I'm still dreaming," she murmurs. If she doesn't open her eyes, relies only on touch and voice, maybe she can keep Nyssa here just a little longer. Being in Nyssa's arms was the only place she'd ever felt truly safe. Both contained and set free, controlled chaos. Nyssa had trained a lifetime of calm, and not even Sara's feral wildness could threaten that quiescent void. The irony had never been lost on her, that the demon should be the one to calm her.
But Nyssa is gone, and the real demon inside Sara is not so easily contained. "Does that make it any less real?" Nyssa asks her, ghost fingers tracing Sara's jawline. "I dreamed of you before I ever met you, habibti."

Sara remembers the story, drawn out in languid pauses between stolen kisses. Nyssa had been 12, lost, alone, and poisoned. A white angel had come to her in a vision and healed her, she'd told Sara with a sly look in her eye, an angel that looked like Sara. Sara had laughed for days over that. An angel. (She supposes she's lucky Nyssa didn't force her to change her League name to that.) Ra's had only smiled, told young Nyssa that the same white angel had visited Talia as well.

"You deserve far better than me," Sara tells the phantom presence. "You deserve someone far less broken than me."

"We all get many things we don't deserve, and yearn for the things we think we do. We spend our lives searching for these things and forget what's right in front of us."

Lips brush against Sara's, soft and yielding, and Sara squeezes her eyes tighter shut and drags Nyssa down with her, drowns herself in that warmth. It isn't real, Sara knows that, but for this moment she can let herself pretend.

xxx

you say that things change, my dear

xxx

When Sara wakes, her arms are stinging sharply, and she looks at them in confusion. There are long red gashes, her fingernails crusted with dry blood.

"Shit," she mutters, scrubbing at her face. She's lucky no one was here for her to hurt in her sleep.

Her body aches as she drags herself to her tiny bathroom, carefully washing off the blood (much to Gideon's offense, as Sara refuses to let her treat the wounds). Aches from fighting yesterday, aches from her nightmares, aches from phantom touches long since gone. A hot shower helps a little, but there are still bags under her eyes, and her whole body feels heavy.

Breakfast on the ship is usually an informal, fluid collection of whoever happens to be awake at the time. None of them really keep regular hours, despite Gideon's attempt to keep a normalized 24-hour clock. Ray and Kendra are there when she enters the mess, Ray as usual looking far too awake for the hour. Sara shares a long-suffering smile with Kendra, who's nursing a mug of coffee while Ray prattles on about something. Mick isn't there, and Sara is strangely grateful for that. She's not up for that level of dark right now.

She settles next to Kendra with her own cup of coffee, not even bothering with food yet. Kendra skewers her with that mothering look she gets, asks, "What were you up to last night?"

"Nothing nearly exciting enough to leave me this tired," Sara answers grumpily. "Ugh, I hate morning."

"Morning has coffee," Ray puts in brightly, and Kendra laughs as Sara rolls her eyes.

"Well, he has a point," she teases.

Sara makes a face, gulping down some of the offending beverage. "Other parts of the day have coffee too."
"You are the grumpiest assassin I've ever met," a voice drawls behind her, and Sara groans. She certainly hadn't expected him to be awake this early, considering they'd been in here not long ago.

"Ugh, no, it's too early to deal with you," Sara mumbles.

Snart settles across from her with a smirk, and he looks far too awake. "Well, unfortunately for you, Assassin, this is a common area." Sara flips him off, letting her arm fall back down before remembering her wounds. She can't help wincing slightly in surprise; Leonard's eyes narrow, his gaze sharpening, and Sara nearly groans aloud. She's going to pay for that.

xxx

(never change)

xxx

And she does, only a few hours later when she's in her room, trying unsuccessfully to distract herself with a book.

"Do you ever sleep?"

Sara nearly jumps out of her skin, and Snart nearly looses pieces of his before she registers non-threat.

"Didn't anyone ever tell you not to sneak up on an assassin?" Her heart is beating too fast, and it takes a few slow breaths to steady it.

"I thought the point was that no one could sneak up on an assassin," he smirks. "You didn't answer my question."

Sara shrugs, returning to the book she'd been trying half-heartedly to read. "Not if I can help it."

"How's that working out for you?" He takes a step into her room and Sara sighs, putting down her book. Glaring does no good with him anymore.

"Peachy," she mocks. "What d'you want, Snart?"

He's silent, just watching her for a moment before striding over to the bed, into her space. She flinches away automatically, and something shifts in his eyes, something soft and understanding. He stops, leans against the side of the bed, and points at her covered arms.

"Let me see," he orders.

"Snart-"

"Sara."

Sara sighs. She's too worn to deal with this. Wordlessly she shoves the sleeves up on her arms, revealing the scabbed gashes, accidentally reopening one. It starts to bleed sluggishly and Sara mutters a curse, wiping the blood away roughly and sucking it from her finger.

"It's not what you think," she states, thumbing away more blood. Leonard's eyes flick from her arms to her face, considering.

"And what do I think?" he asks quietly. Sara's not used to this, not from him, and she shifts uncomfortably. She tugs her sleeves down again, not meeting his eyes.
"I did it in my sleep," she mutters, not answering his question. He hums, nodding as though it were the most natural thing in the world, and Sara has to shove down the bubble of hysterical laughter in her throat.

"You let Gideon look at it?" he asks.

"She's refused to let me treat it," Gideon pipes up promptly, and Sara glares at the ceiling. "Perhaps you'll have more luck convincing her."

"Ha." Sara pushes the book from her lap to tug her knees to her chest, back to the wall. "Good luck with that." There's a tiny smile on Leonard's lips.

"How about this, you go to medbay in the morning and I give back all your knives I stole." Sara narrows her eyes.

"You wouldn't dare."

With a slow smile Snart slips a hand inside his jacket, drawing out a blade she'd assumed was lost in the field. "I've got a few throwing stars, too," he informs her. "Think I'll keep those, they look pretty badass."

Sara growls, making a grab for the knife, but he pulls his hand back. "Ah ah, I want your word. Medbay, morning."

"Fine," she hisses. "Just give me that." He holds it out and she snatches it back, inspecting the blade. "Ugh, it's dull. How long did you keep it in there??"

"Good thief never tells."

"Who said you're a good thief?"

He grins slyly, answers, "I got your knife, didn't I?" Sara shakes her head in disgust, but feels a smile play at the edge of her lips. "Besides, you enjoy sharpening them. Now you have something to do."

"Thank you SO much," Sara retorts sarcastically. He looks inordinately pleased with himself.

He's silent for a few minutes, watching her slide the blade along the whetstone she keeps by her bed ("Of course you do."). She doesn't mind his presence; she actually finds it oddly comforting.

When she's finished he says quietly, "This isn't a long term solution, you know." Sara closes her eyes, shivering as the nightmares immediately press against her mind.

"It's the one I've got for now."

He nods slowly, then pulls out a deck of cards. She expects him to set up one of his games of solitaire but instead he pauses, looking at her.

"Wanna play?"

"You cheat."

He actually grins at that. "I can teach you."

xxx

skating around the true who i am
(1x07) there's a beast

Chapter Summary

Set during 1x07

"C-c-careful, Snart, someone might th-think you c-care."

Chapter Notes

this night (black lab)

xxx

there are things i have done

xxx

"So, what was your closest near-death experience?" he asks. Talking. They should keep talking to stay awake. "I mean, without actually dying."

Sara snorts softly, pulling her arms in closer to herself as she shivers violently. "You mean I have to pick?"

"Top three."

"Hmm." She's silent for a moment, and he pauses to take in the fact that she's actually comparing near-death experiences. She holds up a finger and says, "The Gambit. Shipwreck, floated for... three days, I think. Lost track of time, but I would've died of dehydration if it'd been longer." Another pause, and a second finger. "Ivo. Had a gun to my head, and my friend's. Told Oliver to choose which of us lived."

She tilts her head, considering. "I guess that's only a 50/50 chance of dying. Not really near-death." She lowers her finger. Leonard feels a little sick. "Okay, The Amazo." She raises her finger again. "Friend blew up the ship with me and Ollie on it."

Leonard raises an eyebrow. "You have a weird definition of 'friend'."

"Says the man best friends with a pyromaniac." Sara smirks, teeth chattering. "God, I'd kill for Mick's gun right now."

"Coming from an assassin, that's less than reassuring." Sara just looks at him, and he shivers from more than cold.

"You met him, actually," she says as an afterthought, voice a little strained. Her fingernails are turning blue. "Well, met is an overstatement. He was one of the Bratva in the locker room in the USSR. I wonder if he recognized me, all those years later." She fades, eyes going unfocused.
Talking. Need to keep talking.

"Okay, that's two," he says. He huddles into his jacket, eyeing her thin shirt. That can't possibly give any warmth.

"Hmm?" Sara blinks. "Oh. Right. Um." Her lips are pale. A sheen of frost is starting to form on her face, and probably his too. "Lian Yu. Island near where the Gambit sank. Near the Amazo. Swam back after Anatoly blew it up." Leonard can't tell if her story is muddled, or his brain. Maybe both. "Nyssa found me. Wounded, starving. Rescued me." Her voice goes soft, a faint smile on her lips. Then she shudders, groaning, hands buried under her arms. "F-fuck, it's c-cold."

Before he can think too much about it, Snart shifts away from the wall and starts to take his jacket off. "Here," he says, trying not to shiver too obviously. "You need it more than me."

"T-the hell I d-do."

"Don't be an idiot," he growls, tugging the jacket over her shoulders. "You're smaller than me, you'll freeze faster."

"C-c-careful, Snart, someone might th-think you c-care."

"If it'll make you feel better, I need you alive because once you die your body stops generating heat."

Sara barks a harsh laugh, pressed into his side. "That's better."

He regrets giving her the jacket almost immediately, because fuck it is cold. But her lips are turning blue, her shivering so violent she's rocking back and forth. At least she hasn't stopped shivering, he tells himself. That's a bad sign. Still, when she presses her cheek to his shoulder, hands gripping his arm weakly, he doesn't push her away like he would almost anyone else. Dying or not, his personal space is very nonnegotiable.

Except with Sara, it seems.

When her shivering starts to slow, he finds himself wrapping an arm around her in desperation. "C'mere," he stutters. "G-Gideon?"

"Repairs are almost complete. I believe Mr. Palmer will make them in time."

"In t-t-time for who." His entire body shudders violently, contracting on itself, pulling Sara in with it.

Gideon is silent.

"S-Sara," he tries, but there's no answer. At least she won't die alone, he thinks, as his eyelids start to droop. At least he won't either.

What could be moments or hours later, he slowly registers Gideon's voice repeating his name, over and over. It feels marginally warmer, he realizes, trying to focus. "Mr. Snart!" Gideon repeats again, quite loudly. "Mr. Palmer has fixed the hole, and I've opened the doors. I'm attempting to raise the temperature in the airlock, but it will take some time. Please move yourself and Ms. Lance to a warmer area."

"Mmph," is all he can manage. There's definitely hot air flowing in his direction, and he carefully works his joints as they warm. "S'ra. Sara." No response, and her lips are so blue, skin deathly pale. "Gid'n. Sara."
"Miss Lance has a dangerously low body temperature, but she is alive," Gideon replies calmly. "Please attempt to move her out of the airlock."

"Ray? Kendra?"

"Both Mr. Palmer and Miss Saunders are currently occupied and cannot assist you." Of course they are. Leonard grits his teeth, hissing under his breath as he attempts to move. His entire body feels like ice, like it will shatter if he pushes it too hard.

But. Sara.

"Mr. Snart, please hurry. She can't survive much longer at this temperature."

"Working on it," he grits. Sara is already cradled to his chest, so he just tightens his grip and slowly presses up the half-wall they'd been leaning against. He sits there for a moment, adjusting his grip, and then staggers to his feet toward the warmth.

"If you'll proceed to the lavatory to your left, I've already turned warmed that room sufficiently," Gideon informs him. Snart stumbles in that direction, thankful that Gideon opens the doors for him; his fingers aren't really working. And his arms are full of Sara.

He makes it inside the small bathroom, blissfully warm, and collapses against the wall as the door slides shut behind him. Ice crystals melt off his face and hair, dripping onto Sara where she's prone on the floor. He brushes at the ice still caking her hair and face with clumsy, half-numb fingers, wishing she'd gain some color back.

"Come on, Sara, wake up," he mutters, shaking her shoulder. "Gideon, she's not waking up."

"Her internal temperature is still well below average, but it is rising."

"Yeah, but she's not waking up." Gideon remains silent, and he growls impatiently. "Come on, Lance, you didn't survive all the shit you've been through just to let a little cold kill you."

She groans, and relief floods him. Her eyelids flutter, still glittering with bits of ice.

"Why'd you wake me up?" she croaks. "Was havin' a nice nap."

Leonard makes a noise, part laugh, part groan, part sob. "Sorry. Gideon, could you return Sara's temperature to hypothermic please?"

"That is not advised."

Sara groans again, choking on a laugh. "Joke, Gideon." She eyes Leonard, and amends, "I think." Snart just rolls his eyes.

"Come on, lightweight. Let's go find the hero of the hour."

"I'm totally telling Ray you said that."

"You wouldn't dare."

xxx

there's a place i have gone

xxx
Sara doesn't think she's ever actually seen Snart smile before. But the look on his face when Gideon tells them Mick had escaped the Time Pirates - strangely, it makes her feel like maybe things will be okay.

xxx

there's a beast, and i let it run

xxx

Things are not okay.

Mick is really trying to kill her, is the only thing she can think when he sets her arm on fire. It hurts like a bitch, and those Rogue guns give an entirely unfair advantage, and she's trying very hard not to think about the fact that Mick is really trying to kill her.

She'd seen Snart go down, but there hadn't been time to see if he was okay. Ray and Kendra should be able to hold off the pirates, but if Mick gets the time drive, they're all screwed. Which is why she's angry with herself, furious, for not taking the kill. She'd had Mick, just for a moment, had felt the pull of his spine against her hands - its fragility has never ceased to amaze her, so delicate, even for a man as big as Mick. But she'd frozen, just for an instant, Snart's words from earlier still echoing in her mind. He's been standing up for me ever since.

The moment had been enough for Mick to throw her off, so now she's cornered with no weapon and-

A blast of ice, and Mick is down.

"Sara??" It's Snart, and there's a strangely strong wave of relief that he's okay.

"I'm good," she bites, trying not to move her arm too much. Mick glares up at her, then shifts his gaze toward Snart as she steps out.

"What're you gonna do, Snart?" Mick sneers. The look on Snart's face guts her more than anything Mick could do, and as he opens his mouth to say something else Sara kicks him sharply in the back of the head, instantly rendering him unconscious.

Snart doesn't move. He keeps his gun trained on Mick, face frozen in horrified disbelief, until Sara reaches him and places a hand on the cold gun, gently lowering it.

"Leonard," she says softly. His eyes remain fixed on his partner. "We'll get him to the brig." His face remains a mask of anguish, but his gaze slowly shifts to her. "Go see if Gideon or Rip need any help, okay?"

Ray has already moved around them, in a kind of stupor. With his suit, moving Mick shouldn't be a problem; Sara just doesn't want Snart here to see it. His gaze shifts back to his partner, dazed and disbelieving, until she winces as she moves her arm and remembers it's burned. Then his eyes snap to her with laser focus, voice grating as he bites, "You're hurt."

"It's nothing," she says, shrugging. But his eyes remain fixed on her arm with what she suspects is a shock reaction, and Sara quickly revises her plan. "Ray, you got him?" She shifts to block Leonard's view of Mick, a hand still resting lightly on his gun. Ray mutters an affirmative and Kendra catches Sara's eye, giving a sharp nod with a glance at Snart.

"Go," Kendra pushes. "We got this."
Sara steps forward, further into Leonard's space, and that's what finally snaps him out of it. She hates doing it - she's read enough of his file and seen enough of his reactions to know how strongly he feels about human proximity - but right now, she just wants to get him out of the room. "Come on," she urges gently. "Come on, Leonard."

He moves numbly, letting her guide him out in a kind of stupor. The engine room is near what she's starting thinking of as their cargo hold, and she takes him there without any real thought. It's familiar and comforting, and she has enough weapons stored there to take down a small army. Plus some extra clothes, and her recently-frozen body is grateful for that.

Leonard leans slowly back against the wall while Sara rummages around for a spare jacket with her uninjured hand. His gaze is still fixed on her arm, and she's careful to show no signs of pain when she pulls the jacket on. She hasn't had a chance to really look at the injury, but on her very well-refined pain scale it doesn't register as serious enough to need treatment until after this mess is resolved.

Once her arm is covered, Leonard blinks, shakes his head slightly as though waking up. He slides down the wall until he's sitting, knees against his chest, gun resting on the ground beside him.

Sara hasn't felt this helpless in a long time.

"Gideon, can you handle Rip and the others?" Sara asks quietly. She resists the strong urge to take Leonard's hands in hers, to try and rub a little warmth back into him.

"Of course, Miss Lance," Gideon responds immediately. "Shall I inform you of any... updates?"

Sara chews her lip a moment, then answers, "Not unless it's an emergency. Just... just give us a little time, please."

She sits down a few feet away from him, watching as his eyes dart back and forth, following unseen ghosts.

"Leonard," Sara says quietly. His eyes flick to hers, then away again.

"I didn't... I never thought he'd..."

Sara closes her eyes. "I know."

"He almost killed you."

"I know." Sara shrugs, adds, "I almost killed him right back." Nothing, not even a twitch of his lips, and Sara really hates this.

"You should've," he says instead, quietly, staring fixedly at the floor.

"Not my call." It's not who you are anymore... "I've killed a lot of people. I wasn't going to make your partner one of them." Putting that between them would've been something unforgiveable, she knows, and she finds the thought disquieting.

"So it's my call, then." She's never heard this tone from him before; he's frequently cold, even cruel, but never this... hollow.

"That's not what I meant," she tries, but he's no longer listening, eyes unfocused again. "Leonard-"

"My partner. My responsibility."
"You are not responsible for his shitty choices."

"Yes, I am." That's another new tone, dark with anger, and she thinks she can see why he was Central City's most wanted, once upon a time. "I should've left him in 2046. I chose not to. That's on me." _Guess it's time to choose a side_...

Sara shakes her head, but he's already pushing to his feet, cold gun clutched in one hand like a lifeline.

"Gideon, have everyone meet in Rip's study," Leonard says, then amends, "Everyone but Mick." He drawls it, so close to normal it could almost be a joke, except for the dull anguish in his eyes, the twist of his mouth, the shake in his hands. The very painful fact that it's not.

All Sara can do is trail behind him to the command deck, trying to ignore the steadily increasing pain in her arm. She settles wearily in a chair once they arrive, and Leonard looks at her sharply. But before he can say anything the rest of the team starts to filter in, various states of shock on their faces.

The others run through options, but Sara knows Leonard has already made up his mind. Still, when the others start to file out, and Rip says, "Mr. Snart, a word," all Sara can remember is hearing the same damn thing before Rip asked her to kill Stein. Leonard doesn't deserve _that_.

So she stays in her chair, trying to ignore the pain shooting through her arm, until Rip fixes her with a long-suffering glare. "Miss Lance, if you would..." He gestures to the door, but Sara crosses her arms.

"Sara." Snart looks at her, face a mask of anguish, one that hurts her more than Mick's gun ever could. "Go. Let Gideon fix your arm."

"Leon-

"Go." His voice cracks, and he grates, "Please." And she can't refuse him, not now.

```xxx
now it's running my way
xxx```
Chapter Summary

He returns alone and promptly vanishes.

xxx

there are things i regret

xxx

He returns alone and promptly vanishes.

Sara lets him.

She could ask Gideon where he is, and Gideon would probably tell her. She doubts there's anywhere on the ship any of them could actually hide from Gideon. Of course, if there were, Snart would be the one to find it.

She's been talking herself in circles for an hour when she finally sighs, and asks, "Gideon, do you know where Snart is?"

"Yes."

Well, at least there's that. She doesn't elaborate, and Sara doesn't ask. He deserves that much.

Sara busies herself applying a salve Gideon had made her to the burn on her arm, wrapping it carefully. She doubts it'll even scar. And whatever painkillers they've invented in the future are amazing, because she can hardly even feel it when she's done.

He appears like a shadow slipping through her doorway, dark and haunted. Sara actually jumps a little; he'd gotten far closer than he should've without her noticing. She's not quite sure what to make of that, and doesn't really want to examine it now.

He didn't kill Mick, is the first thing she thinks when she sees him. He looks horrible, like a ghost haunting her room - ashen and bleak, eyes dark holes in his face. But Sara knows, intimately, the mannerism of taking a life - and more importantly, that of killing a friend. Leonard may be many things, may even be a killer, but he hadn't killed today.

She finds that she's relieved, more for Leonard's sake than Mick's if she's honest. She's still suppressing any feelings regarding Mick's betrayal as adeptly as the League had taught her to; it may be an unhealthy coping mechanism, but it's definitely better than some of her other ones. Those tend to end with someone dead.

While she's still trying to work out what to say, he asks, "How's your arm?" His voice is low and rough, but not with its usual drawl. That's gone, replaced with an anguish Sara can feel.

She rolls her shoulder a little, answers in a voice that's far too soft, "It's fine. I've had a lot worse." His face twists into something horrible at that before he visibly suppresses his emotions, almost as
skillfully as Sara.

They do make quite the masochistic pair.

She wants to ask if he's okay, but the question seems so pointless, so futile. She feels helpless all over again, and she'd promised herself this wouldn't happen. True, it's not her who's in trouble, and no amount of physical training could fix this, but...

"I'm sorry," she whispers. It's as useless a statement as she is, but it has to be better than nothing. "He didn't give you a choice, Leonard."

He's drifted toward her, gaze on her arm so intense she's surprised it doesn't burn another damn hole. "There's always a choice," he grates. Chosen. Self-hatred drips from his voice, with enough violence behind it that Sara starts to really worry.

She closes her eyes, and remembers the words he'd said to her not so long ago, a lifetime away. "You chose right," she echoes softly.

He bows his head, and even from a few feet away she can see him tremble. He seems... lost. Untethered, not knowing where to go, or how to stay. She thinks of the airlock, of the love in his voice when he'd told her about Mick. And she thinks of her own betrayal of Nyssa, of the agony on her Beloved's face when Sara had chosen someone, someplace, else.

Sara uncurls from her place on the bed, standing slowly. Leonard retreats a step, a nearly tangible wall between them, his eyes still fixed on her arm. Sara pointedly folds her arms across her chest, one hand wrapped over the offending spot.

"I'll be okay," she tells him quietly. Promises. "You will be too." His lips stretch in a gross imitation of a smile, and then he's gone, as dark and silent as he'd come.

xxx

that you can't forgive

xxx

He can't breathe.

He sits huddled on his bed in dim lighting, wrapped in every blanket he has, and he's still cold. It's like he's back in the airlock, freezing to death, only this time there's no Raymond to fix the hole Mick had torn open.

Leonard had started to almost feel like a part of something bigger, something better. He'd never tell her, but Sara had become something of a role model for him. Someone who had been to very dark places and somehow come back, who embraces her darkness while still standing in the light. He'd thought that maybe, through her, he might do something worthwhile. They might.

Only Mick had sold them out at the first opportunity, and crushed all of that.

Leonard alternates between numbness and an anguish that leaves him gasping, between wanting to seek out someone, anyone, and needing to close himself off. He'd grown complacent on board this ship, with a crew sporting an actual moral compass. It's made him soft, weak. It's made him hurt.

"Mr. Snart, I can turn the temperature up, if you're cold," Gideon informs him for the fifth time. He doesn't even respond this time, just shakes in his cocoon of blankets. He's pretty sure she'd sounded...
exasperated. Well, she's the one who keeps asking.

It's only five minutes later when she starts, "Mr. Snart."

"Leave it, Gideon," he snaps.

There's a small pause, and then Gideon continues, "Miss Lance is at the door," She definitely sounds offended this time, and Leonard rolls his eyes. What's the use of an AI if you give it emotions to get in the way?

Before he can respond to that the door opens and Sara enters, while Leonard mentally curses meddling AIs to whatever technological hell they go to. Sara's wrapped in several layers, shivering, arms wrapped tightly around herself.

"Still cold," is all she offers in explanation before climbing onto the bed beside him, leaning into him like she had in the airlock. He should push her away, should get her out of his space, but he's so cold. And his throat is too tight to speak anyway, body shaking and shaking until he and Sara seem to tremble in sync. Her cheek is warm against the fabric of his shirt, slowly seeping through.

He still can't breathe.

At some point when she's stopped shaking and he's started gasping, Sara reaches up to place one hand gently on his chest, right over his heart. Which is beating far too fast, now that he thinks about it.


Leonard leans his head back against the wall, closes his eyes, and tries. Tries to focus only on her hand, on the warmth it brings, and nothing else. She rests her head back against his shoulder, and he can't remember the last time anyone has so thoroughly invaded his personal space - and somehow, impossibly, he doesn't care.

At some point, when he's more asleep than awake, he hears Sara mumble, "Gideon, heat up and lights down, please." She's going to leave, and there's a strange hollow in his chest when he thinks of losing her warmth, of being alone - he's never had a problem with it before, and it vexes him that he should now.

But Sara just pulls the blankets closer, burying herself so only the very top of her head sticks out, still pressed against Leonard. And he can't help smiling at that, at how adorably juvenile she can be when she's not a bloodthirsty ninja assassin.

He falls asleep to the drowsy warmth of her, chasing out the cold.

xxx

you can't forget

xxx

When he wakes she's gone, but there's a deck of cards on his pillow with a note scrawled in her handwriting: "Rain check. Freezing to death check?" and despite everything, he finds himself smiling.

xxx
there's a gift that you sent
you sent it my way

xxx
(1x07) there's a game

Chapter Summary

She's used to causing chaos, not stilling it. She's very much like Mick that way, she realizes, and wonders if that's what Leonard needs. Someone's fire to counter with his cold.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

xxx

so take this night

xxx

He's a ghost over the next few days, while Rip and Gideon on finding Savage and the rest repair the damage done by the Time Pirates to the ship. There's too much free time again, too much stillness. Sara spars with Kendra, but Kendra has Ray on her mind, and Sara could care less about that right now.

The rest of the team seems to be trying their hardest to forget about everything, which is probably for the best. Sara doubts Snart would take well to any of them pushing him, even the slightest bit. She'd left the cards for him, so he knows when he's ready to come be a social human being again, she'll be there. And she lets him brood in peace, alone, for three entire days before she's had enough.

"Gideon, where's Snart?" she asks, after seeing one too many longing looks pass between Kendra and Ray. She's bored, she's restless, and if she doesn't have a conversation with someone who isn't a goddamn hero soon she's going to snap.

"In his room," the AI responds promptly. Sara begins walking down the hall, and Gideon continues, "Miss Lance, he has requested that I only open the door in case of emergency."

Sara reaches his room, banging her fist into it a few times, and growls, "How much of an emergency would it be if I started breaking bones out of sheer boredom?"

There's a long silence, and then the door slides open.

"Gideon, I told you-"

"Deal with it, Snart," Sara snaps, as the door closes behind her. He's curled at the head of his bed, looking like he hasn't moved in days. "I'm bored, I'm useless, and if I hear about one more of Ray's heroic adventures I'm going to take his heroic head off." She flops dramatically down on the bed beside him. "Consider this damage control."

She looks up at him, unshaven and pale, eyes red and weary. He glares back, daring her to say something, and when she just grabs a pillow to get comfortable he mutters, "As long as you're quiet."

So she's quiet. Quiet, she's come to realize, is not the same as stillness. Not here, not with him. Quiet
Something he values, and something she's willing to learn to tolerate for him. With Nyssa, silence had always been a challenge, something for Sara to test. Her chaos had come up against a vast, gaping calm and run itself dry. Nyssa had possessed a seemingly endless supply of patience when it came to Sara.

Here, though, it's different. Here the quiet feels fragile, and her chaos something to be carefully tempered. And she's not quite sure why, but it's something she wants to do. Wants to learn. My little canary, all grown up, she hears Nyssa mock in her head, and smiles to herself.

Her presence seems to strengthen the calm, which is something she's probably never experienced before. She's used to causing chaos, not stilling it. She's very much like Mick that way, she realizes, and wonders if that's what Leonard needs. Someone's fire to counter with his cold. Well, Sara has always been good at running hot.

Sara spots her deck of cards on the ledge at the end of the bed and grabs it. She sets up a game of solitaire and promptly loses three times, cursing as softly as she can under her breath. There's a tiny noise she thinks is a chuckle, and she very pointedly does NOT look at Leonard. She'd spoken in Arabic, and the only way he could've understood is if he'd asked Gideon to translate, what feels like a lifetime ago in the storage hold. She sets up another game and tries not to feel too smug.

Some time later she glances over to find him asleep, and smiles to herself.

wrap it around me like a sheet

He wakes in a cold sweat from a dream where he kills Mick, cutting open his chest and ripping out his heart. It's hot and messy, so much blood, and his own heart is pounding unbearably fast as he gasps into the darkness. He presses the heels of his palms to his face, lets himself sob, just once, a rushed exhale that leaves his chest feeling crushed.

"Len?"

He's crashed into the wall, bruises forming on his back and hand reaching for his cold gun when he remembers Sara. Sara had been here. Sara had lost four games of solitaire and then he must have fallen asleep, because it's all he remembers. And that's definitely Sara's voice, rough with sleep, and Sara wouldn't hurt him, at least not like this, not without a reason, and his brain doesn't care about any of that as adrenaline overloads his senses and he shakes and shakes and closes his eyes and tries very hard not to think about anything at all.

"Gideon, lights on low, please," he hears Sara say, and no. He doesn't want her to see him like this. He doesn't want to open his eyes and find that it had been real, that he'd killed Mick and torn out his heart, that he hadn't killed Mick and now Mick is here to kill him and-

"Leonard." Sara. Sara again, and she doesn't sound like the world is breaking. "Hey, look at me." She's close, from her voice, too close. He has to open his eyes, can't stand the thought of someone in his space unwatched, unguarded, unsafe.

He cracks his lids and there she is, small and sleepy-eyed and kneeling in front of him on the bed. "You were dreaming," she says, so softly he hardly even recognizes her voice. "It wasn't real, okay? We're in your room on the Waverider. I came and played some cards, and you fell asleep." Solitaire. She's horrible at solitaire. "I didn't want to move and wake you up, cause Gideon says you haven't
been sleeping, so I just stayed here." She's rambling, he thinks absently, but it strangely doesn't annoy him. Usually he values quiet over just about everything, but he thinks silence right now could crush him.

"I'm sorry if I scared you," she continues. "I didn't want you to sense someone was here but not know it was me." He realizes she's watching his reaction, his body language. She's even better at reading people than he is, and it's second nature to him.

"'s'ok," he finally manages to choke out. She doesn't move from her crouch, one leg curled under her and the other pulled to her chest, chin resting on her knee. He's not accustomed to stillness from her; she's always barely contained chaos, quivering at the edge of motion. But now she sits the way he imagines she does when waiting for a kill, and the thought makes him shiver.

She doesn't ask him what he'd dreamed about, and for that he's grateful. But it's quiet now, too quiet. The darkness presses in again, and his mind casts about for something to hold onto, something not drowning in misery. He remembers the airlock, and the mess hall weeks ago, remembers the only times he'd seen Sara really smile. In desperation he choke, "Tell... tell me about Nyssa?" And her body softens, the smallest bit, face creased in understanding.

"Hmmm." She tilts her head, eyes unfocused for a moment. "Well, when I met her, I was nearly dead," she begins, slowly uncurling from her stance.

"Bad habit for both of us," Leonard mutters, and Sara snorts softly.

"Makes it interesting, I guess." Ugh, assassin humor. "It was after The Amazo blew up. I survived the blast, managed to grab a piece of wreckage before passing out. Next thing I know, I'm being dragged from the water by a super hot ninja. Real step up from the time before." She smirks, humorlessly. "I was hallucinating, I was so far gone. I didn't think she was real. I told her she was too beautiful to be real."

Leonard snorts, mumbles, "Smooth."

"Hey, I was wounded, dehydrated, and starving, I'm impressed I got a full sentence out." She shifts closer to him, leans against the wall a foot away. "She never let me forget it, though," she says fondly. "I don't remember much for awhile after that. They kept me well drugged."

"Sounds nice."

"I think it was more for them than me," she retorts wryly. "Apparently after living through two shipwrecks and spending a year in hell on one, I'm not too fond of boats." Leonard hums, wondering if she thinks of the Waverider as a ship.

Sara shrugs, shaking her head sharply. "Anyway, I guess I impressed her enough with my mostly-dead charm that she didn't kill me."

Leonard starts laughing at that, a wheezing, pathetic sound that has Sara looking at him with concern. "Ninja assassin dating sounds dangerous," he explains through gasps.

"You have no idea." Her suggestive little eyebrow wiggle does him in, and he thinks he might actually be approaching hysteria.

But - the darkness no longer presses at his edges, no longer threatens to consume him. Sara smiles at him, a little sadly, and just says, "You are clearly sleep deprived."

"Hmm." He doesn't argue the point, just closes his eyes and tries to return his breathing to normal.
"You could probably have Gideon sedate you," Sara suggests. He cracks his eyelids open; she looks serious.

"I'll pass."

Sara shrugs, smirking. "Afraid you might wake up dating a ninja assassin?"

"I don't do the dating thing," he mutters, trying to focus. But his eyes flutter closed, exhaustion overwhelming his desire not to dream.

"Okay, Crook, lay down. I'm not dragging you off the floor when you pass out and fall off the bed."

"I would not-" A yawn splits his jaw, and maybe she has a point. "Don't wanna sleep," he mumbles absently.

"Unfortunately not an option."

"Coming from you, that doesn't mean much."

Her eyes narrow, and he thinks the look would scare most sane people. In his current state, he just finds it adorable. "I've been trained to keep my body functioning on minimal sleep for extended periods of time," she informs him icily. "You are just going to fall off the bed."

"I taught you cards. Consider this repayment."

Sara shakes her head, smiling a little. "Trading vices, huh?"

"Something like that." How can he tell her he'd rather die of sleep deprivation than face those dreams again?

"I'll teach you to swear in Arabic," she says slyly. "Unless Gideon already has."

"I have no idea what you're talking about."

She just raises an eyebrow, looking annoyingly smug. Leonard yawns again, exhaustion pulling him down, and Sara sighs, "Could you at least lay down, so I don't have to drag you off the floor?"

He obeys, muttering under his breath about annoying assassins, which luckily for him Sara ignores. Sleep pulls at him, but he fights it, still not ready to face those dreams again. To face Mick.

He thinks maybe Sara fell back to sleep, until she says softly, "It's not your fault, you know." Leonard almost pretends he's asleep, but knows she would never fall for it. And ignoring her has never turned out well for anyone. "He betrayed you," she continues when he finally opens his eyes to glare up at her blearily. He should've known she'd eventually try to talk.

"He was only here because of me." His voice is smaller than he'd like, still rough with nightmares and half-sleep.

"'There's always a choice,'" Sara quotes him softly. He hates her a little for that. "He made his, Leonard. That's on him, not you." He wants to believe her, he really does, but the sick feeling in his stomach won't go away.

Sara studies him for another few moments before looking down, her fingers tapping at her leg in what he's discovered is her anxious tell (when she can't find anything sharp to play with). She sucks in a slow breath, finally says, "Three years ago, while I was still in the League, Malcolm Merlyn started an earthquake in Starling City that killed 500 people." Leonard remembers; he'd seen footage
on TV of the aftermath, and he thinks with a shiver of Star City in 2046.

"I went back home, for the first time since the Gambit crashed, to make sure my family was okay. Connections to your old life are forbidden in the League, so I had to slip out in the middle of the night without saying goodbye to Nyssa." Her voice is quiet, eyes very far away. "She came after me, to bring me back to the League. Back to her. But seeing my family and friends, remembering who I used to be... being a cold-blooded murderer seemed suddenly impossible. It was like... waking up from a bad dream. I couldn't go back."

There's a long silence, weighted with memory, and he wonders all over again just what terrible things she'd done to survive. Wonders how she'd possibly pulled herself out of that. Wonders if she has any idea how strong she is.

"Nyssa kidnapped my mother, to force me to return. I had betrayed her, and the League, in her eyes. I'd betrayed everything we'd built together. And so she lashed out the only way she knew how. She should've killed me, but..." Sara shrugs, sighing heavily. "Instead, she let me go. Released me from the League. She couldn't kill me, no matter how many reasons she had, no matter how much pain it was going to bring her."

*What're you gonna do, Snart?* Leonard closes his eyes.

"I've been on the other side of this," she tells him quietly. "I've been on the wrong side. What Nyssa did wasn't right, but..." She shrugs, exhaling sharply. "The alternative was killing me, or bringing me back to her father for punishment, which would've been worse."

"What happened to her?" The words are out before he can think, and her face darkens.

"Nothing good," she answers shortly. Leonard wants to apologize, but before he can, she continues harshly, "Mick chose to be here, Len. We both know if he'd really wanted to stay in 2046, he could've. He could've just walked away after we fought Wilson, but he chose to come back. And he chose to turn the rest of the team over to pirates. Not you. You don't get to take that from him." Her eyes gleam in the dark, intense and vaguely feral.

A challenge, or maybe a threat, and he must be feeling particularly masochistic, because he mutters, "It's not that simple."

Sara laughs hollowly. "Of course it isn't. And it is. You can love and hate someone at the same time, Len. You can love and hurt someone. Sometimes I think the people we hurt the most are the only ones we really love."

"That is terribly cynical, even for an assassin."

Sara shrugs. "'Love is for children.'"

Leonard stares at her for a good ten seconds, stutters, "Did... Did you just...?" There's the faintest twitch of her lips, and he groans. "Of course that would be the one superhero you quote. Do you eat men after sex, too?"

"Would you like to find out?"

Leonard groans, shaking his head as he pulls the blankets up over his face. "I'm asleep. No eating me." There's a strange noise, and if he wasn't absolutely, positively sure Sara Lance couldn't giggle, he'd swear it was a giggle. He pulls the blankets down to peer over, finds her smiling in a way that makes her look years younger. It makes her look... alive. He hadn't even realized how often she seems just a ghost, haunting the halls of the Waverider.
"Nyssa was actually the one who loved her," she explains when she notices his eyes on her. "I used to drag her to movies occasionally, to try to remember how to be human. I think she really connected with the whole child warrior thing." Leonard vaguely recalls Gideon telling him the Heir to the Demon was a master swordswoman by the age of eight, and shivers. "Besides," Sara says, grinning wickedly. "The Black Widow only eats male mates."

"Okay, I am officially sorry I asked about Nyssa." But then, Sara is smiling again, really smiling, so maybe he's not. He wishes there were some way to hold this moment over into the dark recesses of his mind, to chase away his dreams.

After a few minutes of silence, Sara tilts her head, an unreadable expression on her face. "I can stay," she says quietly. "If you want."

It's all he can do to nod once, sharply, feeling adrenaline rush through him even as relief eases his chest. Sara settles back against the wall by his head, and a few moments later he hears a familiar hissing sound.

Leonard cracks his eyelids open, turning his head to look at her in amusement. "Where'd you even get that in here?" he mumbles, already half-asleep. Sara just smiles at him serenely. Leonard supposes he shouldn't really be surprised she'd managed to squirrel away a whetstone in his room.

It's probably a testament to how screwed up they both are, but the steady sound slowly relaxes him, the motions strangely soothing. Most people laying beside a master assassin sharpening her knives would probably be terrified, and maybe he should be too, but instead the rhythm lulls him toward sleep. A death-march lullaby.

xxx

i know i'm not forgiven

xxx

("I didn't kill him," he says suddenly into the quiet. Sara looks at him with infinite sadness and answers simply, "I know.")

xxx

but i need a place to sleep

xxx

Chapter End Notes

Sara/Nyssa/Natasha would be an amazing OT3 though, I'm just saying ;)
Chapter Summary

She has that look, the one that says she's probably going to do something someone else will regret.

(Or, the one where Sara and Len have a food fight and watch Marvel movies and Len catches Feelings)

Additional characters: the Lady Birds + Ray & Sara & Snart

Additional warnings: accidental self-injury

Chapter Notes

Gideon and the Space Toddlers is another alternative name for this fic.

This section was getting long so I decided to split it further and voila here you go.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

xxx

there's a game

xxx

When Sara wakes it's mid-morning (according to Gideon), too early (according to her brain) and too bright (according to Leonard, who mumbles something and pulls his pillow over his head). There's a crick in her neck from falling asleep sitting up in the corner of his bed, and as Sara rolls it out she mutters to herself about stupid crooks and stupid beds until Leonard points out that no one made her sleep sitting up and shouldn't assassins be better at that, anyway? She leaves in a huff, still rubbing her neck, and groans when she nearly walks straight into Kendra.

"Sara Lance, did you spend the night in someone else's room?" Kendra is grinning like a kid in a candy store. "Are you and Snart...?"

"Please, Kendra, if I was having sex with someone on the ship you'd be the first to know about it."

"Really?"

Sara rolls her eyes, smirking. "No." Kendra turns around to walk with Sara to the kitchen, arms folded across her chest.

"Okay, but you did just out of his room wearing yesterday's very wrinkled clothes, so..." Sara lets a
smug little smile creep onto her face. "Seriously, I don't know what you two do in there, but you always come out looking like shit."

"Gee, thanks."

"You know what I mean." They reach the kitchen and Sara sighs, pouring herself a cup of coffee. She definitely needs caffeine for this. Kendra pours herself one and sits in one of the chairs, while Sara leans against the counter.

"He's just... having a rough time. With Mick."

Kendra nods, all lightness gone from her face. "I still can't believe it," she says. "He was really going to just... turn us over to the time pirates? I thought he and Snart had some code, 'never leave your own behind'."

Sara shrugs. "Guess we didn't count as his crew," she answers darkly. 'Crew' has seemed to have a very fluid definition, from day one.

Kendra senses her mood shift, and asks hesitantly, "How's Snart?"

"About how you'd expect."

"Drowning himself in a sea of stolen goods?"

Sara chokes on her coffee, coughing until she can breathe again. The knot in her chest eases a little, and she answers drily, "Something like that."

They drink in silence for a few minutes, until Kendra stands. "I already ate, so I'm gonna go see if anyone else is awake. Training later?"

Sara nods absently, watching her go, then drains her cup and grabs a couple plates of food. She just doesn't want to get caught up in conversation with anyone else, she tells herself as she pads back to Leonard's room, balancing the plates and fresh cups of coffee.

He's awake when she has Gideon open the door for her, back in his curled position at the head of his bed. He blinks, looking surprised to see her. "Thought you were gone," he says, and something about the quiet resignation in his tone makes her chest ache.

"What, and let you starve? Then who will teach me to count cards?" His lips twitch into something that's almost a smile, and he takes the plate and coffee she hands him.

"Breakfast in bed, assassin? You going domestic on me?"

"Shut up and eat your food, crook."

He peels the wrapper off a cupcake in his absurdly precise way (why Gideon makes them with the wrapper on is still a mystery), long fingers compressing it into a ball and-

_Thwack._

Sara blinks.

"Did you really just throw food at a trained assassin?"

He shrugs, states, "And if I did?" nonchalantly before biting into the cupcake. Sara growls, popping a few berries into her mouth before dipping one in syrup and slinging it toward his head.
"You are on, crook."

xxx

that i played

xxx

They spend the day watching movies (after cleaning up the carnage from breakfast, which Gideon had refused to send maintenance robots to do. Something about 'if you act like children you will be treated like children'.) Sara makes endless fun of the various fight scenes, while Leonard tears the heroes' best laid plans to shreds. It's the most fun she's had since coming back to life.

Somewhere between The Avengers and Thor (a hammer. Who actually fights with a magic flying hammer?) Gideon reminds Sara that she and Kendra have a training session. Sara groans and considers blowing Kendra off, but she could use some sparring to release her pent up energy. Pent up bloodlust. She sighs, dragging herself upright with a glance at Snart.

"Feel free to finish God of the Magic Hammer without me," she smirks. "Maybe figure out how to break into that rainbow pathway."

"It could be useful," he drawls. "It would definitely send Rip into hysterics." He's sprawled across the top half of the bed, which is better than curled in a ball at one end. Still...

"Take a goddamned shower, Snart." She leaves to his offended growl, deftly dodging the half-eaten pastry he lobs at her head and Gideon's reprimands as the door closes behind her.

xxx
	here are rules

xxx

The third time Kendra actually manages to land a blow on Sara with her staff, the other woman stops with a sigh.

"You're distracted," she states, one hand on her hip. Sara blinks.

"I am not." Okay, maybe she is a little. She hadn't gotten much sleep last night, and the emotional fallout of Mick's betrayal has been... draining.

Kendra raises an eyebrow. "I hit you three times today, Sara. Usually I'm lucky if I get one close." Sara glares, and Kendra adds slyly, "Also, there's food in your hair."

Sara growls, reaching up to touch her hair. "Goddammit, Snart." Kendra is definitely laughing at her, and she comes closer to bat Sara's hands away.

"Here, let me." She pulls out a few crumbs that are lodged in Sara's braid, grinning. "Food fights, really?"

"I won," Sara mutters sullenly.

"Yeah, I can tell by the cupcake in your hair and the frosting on your cheek."

Sara hisses, rubbing furiously at her cheek to find... nothing. "Really, Kendra?" she growls. The
"I'm sorry, I couldn't resist. You're kind of adorable like this."

"Ugh." Sara purses her lips, sitting on top of a box in the cargo hold. "You and Snart both seem to forget I could kill you a hundred different ways without breaking a sweat."

Kendra shrugs. "No, we just know that you won't."

Her absolute certainty rocks Sara a little, as she remembers all over again what she is. There are moments here that she can forget, truly forget, but that's all they are - moments. Still, she appreciates even the brief glimpses the others draw out, glimpses of what she might have been.

"You do remember I nearly killed you not that long ago, right?" Sara reminds her bitterly.

"But you didn't." Sara looks at her hands, stained with phantom blood, and says nothing. Kendra sighs. "Look, I admit I was skeptical at first, but not anymore. You won't hurt us, Sara. I believe that."

Sara's not sure if her confidence is touching or naïve. Probably both. "I'm not sure I do," is all she says. Kendra looks sad, and Sara has her staff up before the other woman can say anything else.

xxx

i had to break

xxx

Later that night Sara checks with Gideon before half-dragging Leonard from his room, heading for the mess.

"Everyone's busy or asleep," she tells him for the fifth time. "You need food, and I'm not smuggling you any more cupcakes."

"Yes, mother," he mutters, dragging his feet like a goddamned six-year-old. Sara rolls her eyes, sighs, and bites back a scathing response. "You know, I could just get Gideon to send me food on one of her little roombas."

"Nope." Sara can't help smirking. "Gideon's on my side this time."

Gideon, wisely, chooses to remain silent on the subject. Leonard pouts, kicks petulantly at the wall, and earns himself a, "Please do try to refrain from acting like a toddler in public," from the AI. Sara chokes on her laugh, coughing, and Leonard glares at her with all the force of... well, a bedraggled kid, is all she can think. It's somehow both adorable and heartbreaking at once. But there's a real smile threatening to form on his face, the first Sara has seen since Mick, and the world feels a bit lighter for that.

xxx

there's mistakes that i made

xxx

Leonard will never tell her, but he does feel quite a bit more human after showering and eating. He's actually not sure who would be worse, Sara or Gideon. Either way, he keeps his mouth shut, and
slips silently into the mess the next morning while only Sara and Ray are there. Sara is nursing a cup of coffee, bleary-eyed, half-listening to whatever Ray is saying with far too much excitement for the early morning.

She smiles when she sees him, tilting her head with one raised eyebrow. "Look who decided to rejoin society," she greets. Leonard doesn't dignify that with an answer, just snags a cup of coffee and settles beside her when she makes room. Ray had stopped speaking when Leonard entered, and is now just watching him, an uncertain expression on his face. Well, Leonard is not going to make this any easier for him, he thinks, as he buries his face in his coffee.

Sara takes pity on them both, asking Ray about whatever they'd been discussing earlier. Ray mutters a vague excuse about needing to science something and stands, nearly tripping over himself in his haste to leave.

"Well, that went well," Leonard can't help drawling.

Sara hums, gaze following Ray as he disappears. She has that look, the one that says she's probably going to do something someone else will regret. Her fingers twitch absently, eyes cold and face smooth, and Leonard shivers. He'll have to do something about that - not for Ray's sake, but for Sara's. He doesn't want her having to live with accidentally killing the super atom out of some misguided surge of rage.

He waits until that night, catching Raymond on his way back to his room. Leonard realizes this is a stupid idea, even as he opens his mouth, but he figures he owes it to them to try. Owes it to Sara, at the very least.

Ray tries very hard to ignore Leonard as they converge at his door, keeping his eyes down, until Leonard sighs, "Raymond." Ray is too damn polite to ignore that, so he finally stops, looks up. There's a little fear on his face, but more just... disgust. It twists Leonard's stomach.

"Have I done something particularly offensive to you recently?" he drawls, and Ray barks a surprised laugh.

"Are you kidding me? Well, other than killing Mick, no, we're just fine." He tries to turn away and god, Leonard should just let him go, but for some reason he can't. For some reason Ray's opinion suddenly matters, the team's opinions of him matter. It's annoying, and he hates it, but there it is.

"You do remember the time pirates, right?" he asks, trying to keep his voice bitterly sarcastic and not just bitter. "Scruffy guys, trying to kill us...?"

Ray rubs at his eyes. "Yeah, and Mick screwed up, I know that. But he also saved my life a few weeks back. He didn't have to - apparently you just wanted to leave me in the gulag. You had no problem leaving me behind then, and now no problem killing your own partner. How are any of us supposed to trust you?"

This was a terrible idea.

"Do you even care about anyone but yourself?" Ray demand. "Did you even care about Mick, or was he just someone else to use?"

That one is like a kick to the stomach, and Leonard can't help flinching back. The words echo in his head, and he hears Jax saying them only weeks before - days? months? years? Before, when Mick had still been here. Before.

He can't say anything to that, can't get the words past the lump in his throat, and he turns away
before Ray can see the emotion threatening to overwhelm him. This was a stupid idea; Sara is welcome to waste the guy.

Leonard is not normally prone to fits of rage - or fits of any emotion, when it comes down to it. Emotion is a weakness, and weakness can be exploited. He had learned that before he learned to speak. But now - now it crawls under his skin, hot and aching, and he wonders if this is how Sara feels all the time. Wonders how anyone gets anywhere in life feeling things this vividly.

He makes his way toward the gym, pacing restlessly, fists clenched around the fevered rush thrumming along his skin. There's a punching bag in the corner and he swerves toward it, nervous energy surging as he swings at it once, twice, again and again and again. The world blurs around him, edges of his vision going dark as he screams, fists pounding at the punching bag, again. Again. Again. He goes until he realizes he's on the ground, knuckles bruised and bloody and broken as they attack metal, face a mess of tears and snot. He can't get enough air into his lungs and his head starts to spin, the world tipping under him, and the next thing he knows his cheek is pressed to the metal and his tears are dry, body collapsed and shivering with cold.

"Mr. Snart!" He makes out Gideon's voice, realizes she's been droning in the background for a while now. He makes a vague noise in answer, bringing one arm up to cover his face. Gideon is still speaking, and he lets her words wash over him without really listening until he hears "...Miss Lance is on her way..." and forces himself upright with a yelp.

"No." He coughs, the muscles of his chest uncomfortably sore. "No. I'm fine."

"On the contrary, I believe you've managed to break seven of your fingers. And as you were not responding-"

"Well, I'm responding now," he snaps. He forces himself to look at his hands, a mangled, bloody mess, and feels sick. The world spins again and he closes his eyes, trying for deep breaths. "Please don't wake Sara up," he says wearily. "I'll do whatever you say."

There's a very long pause, until finally Gideon just clips, "Medbay, now." If he didn't know better, he'd think she was angry. He forces himself upright, trudging toward the medbay, dizzy with pain and emotions that refuse to subside, even now, even with blood and broken bone to appease them. At this point he'd do anything Gideon said, so long as she takes that away for a while.

He collapses onto the padded chair when he gets there, works the IV bracelet around his wrist with clumsy, mangled motions. It hurts, terribly, but he'll take that pain over these feelings a thousand times. Gideon instructs him to place his hands on the armrests, and then there's a pleasant warm rush in his head and blissful, sweet nothing.

xxx

*but i made them my way*

xxx

Chapter End Notes

Leonard has a lot of Feelings and they're Terrible okay. Honestly this fic is angst with food fights idek what to do with these idiots.
Also I refuse to believe that spaceships exist without little maintenance & cleaning robots swarming around to deal with the mundane aspects of Space Life. And a la John Crichton I'm positive Len has adopted one and reprogrammed it to do his bidding. BECAUSE I SAY SO. (and because this is a time travel show they can actually go to 1812 I'm just saying)
"What the hell."

Sara is used to being woken at all hours, for all manner of reasons. Most of them are vaguely acceptable. This is not one of them.

Gideon had dragged her from sleep, requesting assistance in the tiny room that passes for a gym, only to reroute Sara's sleepy, stumbling steps to the medbay. There she'd found Leonard, passed out in the chair, and his hands... all she can think is she couldn't have done a much better job on them if she'd been trying.

"What happened, Gideon?" she demands, drifting to where Leonard lays on the medbay chair, the warrior part of her brain callously analyzing the damage. Gideon had said she'd begun fixing the breaks in his fingers, setting them straight, but the flesh is still bruised and bloody.

"He was overenthusiastic in his training," Gideon answers. Sara can no longer tell when she's being sarcastic.

"What was he sparring with, the wall?"

"The floor, actually."

"Jesus christ, Snart." Her fingers graze his shoulder lightly and he stirs, just for an instant. Sara blinks rapidly a few times, clearing her throat before asking, "Can you heal the breaks completely?"

"Yes," Gideon replies. "I've given him a sedative, as the resetting process is quite painful. He shouldn't be in too much pain when he wakes."
Sara can only nod. He'll be pleased, some small part of her thinks, that he won't lose dexterity. Hard to pick pockets with broken fingers. The rest of her focuses on the immediate situation; emotions have no place here, unless she wants to spiral down into the darkness. She takes slow, deep breaths, and focuses on what Gideon is doing.

When Gideon has finished healing what she can, Sara sits down beside the chair with a first aid kit. She cleans his hands as gently as she can, wiping off the dried blood before wrapping the abrasions and placing several ice packs on his fingers. They may not need to be splinted, but the bruising will still hurt like a bitch.

Finally, when she's finished, she lets herself ask, "Gideon, where was he before this happened?" She knows it's a bad idea for her to know but, well. She's never really been one for good ideas.

Gideon hesitates, like she knows exactly what Sara is thinking (which is a terribly uncomfortable thought). "I'm not gonna do anything," Sara says, trying very hard not to growl it. The bloodlust answers the bitten down snarl with clenched fists and tensing muscles. "I just want to know so I can hopefully prevent it from happening again." One way or another.

(The bloodlust hisses, greedy and hungering.)

Sara can imagine Gideon sighing, before she finally says, "I believe he spoke with Dr. Palmer before going to the gym."

Sara growls, low in her throat, fingers balled so tightly she feels her nails break skin. One way. Or another.

The bloodlust purrs.

xxx

so take this night

xxx

He wakes to nauseating pain and glaring lights, and the quiet hiss of steel on stone. Sara.

"Dammit, Gideon," he mutters, or tries to mutter. It comes out as a small groan, and Sara's eyes snap to him, laser sharp and predatory. She looks a hair's breadth away from going full bloodlust on him, and Leonard can't help the little shiver of fear that rocks through him.

Her face softens slightly, although her eyes remain ice. She returns to sharpening her knife, and states, "You're an idiot," in between strokes in a tone just daring him to protest.

He's an idiot, but he's not that big of an idiot.

xxx

lay me down on the street

xxx

Sara makes herself wait before confronting Ray, wait until the rage boiling inside her has subsided to a manageable simmer. As much as she might want to beat him bloody, she knows that won't help anything other than her bloodlust.
So she waits. She sits with Leonard for a while, sharpening knives, feeling so on edge and jumpy that Gideon finally kicks her out, citing fears that Sara will accidentally knife the next person to wander into the medbay. (She's not wrong.)

It's morning by then, and Sara finds Ray and Kendra sitting in the mess, leaning toward each other with disgustingly happy looks on their faces. Somehow their smiles fuel her anger even more, and all her half-formed plans to try to be civil fly out the window. Airlock. Whatever.

Kendra glances up at her with a greeting, but Sara can't even pretend an answer. She stomps up to the table, crosses her arms, and bites, "We need to talk." Ray doesn't seem to realize she's talking to him, until Kendra glances back and forth between them a few times and asks, "What's going on?" Sara grinds her teeth, and Ray finally looks up.

"Me?" She will not knock his perfect teeth out of his perfect face, she will not...

"Now," she growls.

He has the audacity to look absolutely lost as to what she's upset about, and the edges of her vision go red. She prowls out into the corridor, pacing as Ray follows more slowly, until Sara finally snarls, "What the hell did you say to Snart?"

Ray frowns. "How did you... I don't see how that's your business."

"You made it my business when Gideon woke me up in the middle of the night to stop Leonard from breaking his remaining three fingers," Sara snap. "Whatever you said to him had him sparring with a metal floor."

He has the decency to look shocked, at least. Sara crosses her arms tightly, digging her nails into her skin to ground herself. "Look, you don't have to like him, you don't even have to talk to him - hell, I think everyone would prefer it if you didn't. But you do have to treat him like a goddamn human being."

"His best friend!" "His best friend, who had just betrayed us all to pirates and who would've killed the rest of us, if we were lucky. Did you somehow forget that part?" Ray looks away, jaw clenching, while Sara practically vibrates with anger. "Tell me, Ray, what the hell was he supposed to do? Give me one good alternative. One."

Ray is silent, still not looking at her. Sara feels a little of her anger drain, leaving a crushing weariness in its place. "Have you stopped for one second to think about the fact that he had to do this to his best friend? Have you considered how hard that was? He chose to save our lives over Mick's. And you really say we can't trust him?"

Ray finally glances at her, face stony. "It's not right," he mutters. Sara wants to shove his self-righteousness down his throat.

"You're right. It's not. But it was also the best choice he had. And if you say shit like that to him again, I'll make you wish Mick had killed us that day."

The bloodlust howls, and Sara walks away before she does something she can't take back.

When she's hurled her entire collection of knives into the cargo bay wall, then studiously cleaned and sharpened them, she feels stable enough to return to the medbay. Gideon is uncharacteristically silent about Sara's mutilation of the ship. Maybe she knows it's better than mutilation of team members.
Leonard is gone when she gets there, and Gideon informs her he'd returned to his room upon waking. Exhaustion hits Sara hard, as it does every time she has to fight off her demons so violently, pulling herself back inch by inch from the edge. She'd been half out of her mind with rage earlier, had seen the fear on Leonard's face when he'd woken briefly. She doesn't think he's ever been truly scared of her before, and somehow that makes her sicker than the rest of it.

She's outside his door before she knows what she's doing, and she pauses a few feet away. This is probably the last thing he needs, her drained bone-deep over something entirely and not at all his fault. But she desperately needs to see him, to see that he's okay, to silence the demon screaming in her head for blood.

She hovers there for several minutes, entire body trembling, until finally she chokes out, "Gideon, is he... is he okay?"

Instead of answering Gideon opens the door. He's curled on his side, back to the door - entirely uncharacteristic, and she has to walk all the way to the bed to see that he is, in fact, breathing. His hands are a purple mess, but they're no longer mangled.

His eyes are open, although he says nothing (and says everything by leaving her unguarded at his back). The next breath she takes is nearly a sob, as she hovers beside the bed and whispers, "I'm sorry."

He rolls slowly onto his back, eyes dark and haunted to match her own. His hand shakes when he reaches for her, and hers does as well when she carefully takes his bruised fingers in hers. She can't help flinching, whispers, "I'm sorry," again as he pulls her closer, too close; she isn't safe. But he keeps his grip firmly when she starts to pull back, head tilted questioningly, no fear on his face. Sara looks down at their hands, rubbing her thumb lightly across his knuckles as she reminds herself that she hadn't done this. No matter how much she's wanted to, she hasn't hurt anyone today. The demon howls in her head, monster, you're a monster, but Leonard looks at her without fear and touches her without recoil, and his silence is loud enough to drown out the screams.

xxx

i know i'm not forgiven

xxx

(In retrospect, it'd been a stupid idea, with the bloodlust still humming just beneath her skin. But she'd needed a break, and the Waverider had needed to set down someplace solid for them to finish the repairs, and it turned out that the rest of the world in this 2046 wasn't in complete chaos.)

Rip sets them down in a remote area in the Middle of Nowhere, USA, outside a small town she can't even remember the name of. He and the rest of the nerds get to work on the ship, Leonard sulks in his room, and Kendra shoots such longing looks at Ray that Sara has to get out or risk injuring one of them. She dresses in what Gideon assures her is the local fashion - the American Midwest, at least, hasn't really changed - and hides a few knives under her clothes because Rip isn't here to tell her not to. It's terribly petulant, but somehow she can't bring herself to care.

The town has one bar and it's dark, smells mildly of sweat and fear. Half a dozen men sit on stools, bent over their drinks. Maybe the world isn't quite so different from Star City after all. And maybe this wasn't such a good idea after all. A couple of the men look up when she walks in, and the dark leers on their faces don't bode well for them.

But then, if she's honest with herself, she'd come looking for a fight. Being cooped up on that ship
with nothing to hit but punching bags has done nothing for the rising impatience of her bloodlust, the stronger need to kill. She's found that while nonlethal fights don't completely satisfy it, they at least lessen it for a while. Enough that she doesn't completely lose control.

Except this time, she does.

She's hardly had time to order a drink before the first man is on her, looming over her with too much whiskey on his breath. He, at least, gets a fair warning when she growls at him to back off. The rest don't, as she considers breaking the wrist of the first man warning enough. She downs a shot, enjoying the heady rush, the tingle of adrenaline. Closes her eyes and stretches out her senses, hears the heavy breathing on all sides, the scrape of chairs and whimpering of the asshole with the broken arm. Tastes the fear, and smiles.

She moves like a demon, like the demon, faster and stronger than any human should be. It's not just training, she knows, in some small part of her mind. The part that says this is dangerous, this is wrong, this will haunt her in the small spaces of her mind she has left for herself. But the rest of her moves with gleeful abandon, a knife in each hand like extensions of her wrists, slashing out in fiercely calculated motions. The demon rejoices at the terror in their eyes, the blood that spatters across their bruised and battered skin. Their broken bodies, vacant eyes. The warmth coating her hands, dripping from her knives.

In that moment, when the demon lusts over their deaths, Sara grins with feral glee at the reminder that she no longer needs to be afraid.

She makes it back to the Waverider somehow, shaking so badly she can hardly get the outer door to open. Gideon instantly inquires what happened, if she's injured, if she needs assistance. Sara growls a negative and stumbles down the hallway, praying she'll make it to her room before anyone sees her.

She does, and spends the next half hour in the shower, so hot it scalds her skin bright red. She's condemned to live this life with red hands, it seems.

This timeline isn't real, she tells herself, over and over and over. Isn't that what Rip had insisted, over and over and over? Until they complete the repairs, this is just a fading future. The men she'd killed won't matter. Can't matter.

She has to believe that, just as strongly as she'd had to help Oliver, and the disjointed realities jar her hard enough to make her dizzy.

It's tempting to ask Rip for reassurance, but she can imagine his reaction - "You can't just go around killing people in every bar you find!" She settles with a question to Gideon, who magnanimously doesn't piece together inquiries about dead men with the copious amounts of blood Sara had been covered in on her return. And she reassures Sara that yes, this timeline is temporary, and no, nothing done here will damage their own timeline (or change it for the better; Gideon sounds very smug when she uses saving 2046 Oliver as an example, knowing Sara has to let it slide).

Still, Sara can't shake images of broken bodies from her mind, or the rush of gleeful satisfaction that had come with breaking them. She wants to believe it was only the bloodlust, desperately, but... she pictures Ivo and his men lying there, and that sick pleasure is entirely her own. And she can't help wondering if all the bloodlust does is amplify her own desires.

She finds herself outside his door, and knocks before she can think about it too much. And instantly regrets it - it's the middle of the night, and he has enough on his plate without her undead assassin problems. He probably won't answer anyway, and maybe he's asleep, and she's a few steps back
toward her room when she hears the door slide open, and his tired voice say, "Sara?"

She turns slowly, arms tucked around herself. His eyes rake her over once, and she must look pretty awful, because he just tilts his head toward his room and says, "Come on."

He sprawls back on his bed before the door closes behind her. The blankets are already a tangled mess - she'd clearly dragged him out of bed.

"You were sleeping," she murmurs.

He rubs his eyes, smirking a little. "Observant." She swallows, guilt leaving an acrid taste in her mouth, but he just asks, "Cards?" She considers, then shakes her head. "Movie?" That gets a nod.

Leonard pats the bed next to him as Gideon rattles off choices. Sara's not listening, every step feeling like a battle. When she finally sinks down beside him Gideon has chosen something for them, music and voices droning quietly in her ears. Just enough to cut off the constant stream of thoughts in her head, and Sara feels herself relax a little at that.

Leonard hands her a pillow, having already chosen a spot leaning against the wall. Sara hesitates a moment, then places the pillow next to him, laying down rather than sitting beside him. She curls on her side, forces her muscles to loosen, and tries to breathe.

She's half asleep when she feels his fingers begin to play with the ends of her hair, twining it absently. It lulls her deeper toward sleep, and she sighs softly when his fingernails scratch against her scalp.

"Get some rest, birdie," he whispers.

She falls asleep and for the first time in a very long while, she doesn't dream.

xxx

but i hope that i'll be given some peace

xxx

Chapter End Notes

A note on the timeline: as the show is... let's go with ambiguous on how all this time travel stuff really works, for the purposes of this story the "current" time doesn't change until the Waverider actually jumps to a new time. So, after leaving Star City 2046 and jumping back into the temporal zone, "outside" it's still 2046 until they jump to 1958. (We know Rip spent a week trying to figure out when next to jump, and the time pirates took over before they actually went anywhere. Anytime. Whatever. They only jumped away from 2046 when Gideon got her update.)

The new season is so close, guys. I'm super excited to see Sara and super terrified to see what they do with Len's character =\
(1x08) where do you go, little bird?

Chapter Summary

She should know better by now than to hope.
Set during & post 1x08 (Night of the Hawk)

Chapter Notes

Or, the one where it STILL DOESN'T MAKE SENSE why the Waverider couldn't jump back to 1958 and Sara calls it.

arlington (the wailin' jennys) (one of the few songs I prefer live)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

xxx

where is your home, restless wind?

xxx

HARMONY FALLS, OREGON (1958)

Sara feels oddly protective of him.

It's annoying.

Seeing him sitting alone in his chair, Mick's empty seat beside him screaming at the room - it hurts. More, because before everything had gone to hell, she'd had hope they might actually come together as a team. She misses that, she realizes, misses having people around her she trusts with her life and who trust her with theirs. *Family*. What Oliver and Team Arrow have, what she was never quite a part of. What the League was to her, once upon a time.

She knows Mick had never wanted to be a part of this, not really, but she'd hoped that maybe if Leonard warmed up to them, Mick would follow.

She should know better by now than to hope.

The latest time jump leaves her feeling sicker than normal, swallowing bile and blinking stars from her eyes. She stays seated while Rip prattles on about Oregon and Savage, but then Jax starts making pointed comments to Leonard about Mick. She can only stand it for a few minutes before she snaps.

"Enough," she bites, fingers to her temples. She *hates* time jumping. "Have you all forgotten that Mick *betrayed us* to time pirates and would have *left us to die*?" There's an almost deafening silence,
and she catches Leonard watching her with a strange expression on his face before Rip cuts in, "Miss Lance is right, this will get us nowhere."

She's in the small fitting room by the fabricator, styling her hair in the mirror the way Nurse Sara would apparently do it, when Leonard appears behind her. He leans against the door frame, watching her in the mirror, with the look he gets when he has something to say but can't quite figure out how to say it. So Sara says nothing, just argues with her hair over staying put in this ridiculous roll, until he bursts out, "You didn't have to do that."

Sara blinks. "Do what?"

"Defend me." He crosses his arms, practically squirming in discomfort, and Sara sighs. She sticks one more pin in her hair and turns around, leaning back against the mirror.

"Yeah, I did." His mouth twists almost petulantly. "We need to come together as a team right now, not tear each other apart. If they want to be mad at someone, it should be Mick."

"Mick's not here."

Sara almost rolls her eyes, but manages to stop herself. "So what, you're the next best thing?"

"Yes!" He snaps his mouth shut, closing his eyes for a moment, and Sara feels that annoying pang in her chest he's so good at causing.

"Look, if you want to punish yourself, fine, but I'm not gonna let them do it for you." His shoulders tighten and he looks away, unconsciously working his healed fingers against his arm. At least he doesn't bother denying it. He doesn't look at her when she pushes past him, or when she pauses, turning back to face him.

"And for the record, Leonard, I wish you wouldn't punish yourself either."

xxx

do you search for a place to belong?
(search in vain, search in fear)

xxx

HUB CITY (1958)

***

Turns out none of it matters, anyway.

To her credit, Kendra tries. She really does. She keeps Sara busy - training in an abandoned warehouse a few miles outside town, cooking and cleaning and endless repetitions of what board games exist at the time. Sara refuses to play card games; it feels like a betrayal, somehow.

But as days turn to weeks, weeks stretching to months, Sara can no longer ignore the itch under her skin. It's the bloodlust, yes, but also the nagging doubt that finally explodes to life with Ray's newest failed beacon.

They're never going home.

She's known it for a while now, subconsciously. The rest of the team have a time ship; being late
isn’t really an option. She could chalk the first few weeks to caution, to making sure they don’t overlap their timelines. Maybe even a month or two. But past that, there’s only one explanation – they’re dead. No one is coming because the Waverider is gone, the team with it. The callous (insecure) part of her brain that says maybe they left them behind on purpose - acceptable losses, collateral damage - makes no sense. They might leave Sara, even Ray, but without Kendra they can’t defeat Savage.

So the only real explanation is that they’re dead.

At three months in she starts to see the same realization dawn on Kendra's face, in the shadows under her eyes, in the wildness of her sparring. Ray remains annoyingly oblivious. Sara tries not to think about any of it too hard, not to think of Jax's refreshingly unjaded outlook, of Stein's quiet smile, even Rip's consternation at dealing with the lot of them.

And Leonard.

She can’t think about that.

She can’t think about her father, her sister, Nyssa and Oliver and all the friends and family she’ll never see again. She wonders what they'll think happened to her. She wonders what she’ll do in 50 years, wonders if she’ll watch her life unfold from afar. The thought is nauseating, leaves her shaky and sleepless many nights.

There’s nothing for her here but the memory of a phantom future. She’s already a ghost in her own time, haunting her old life twice reborn. Doing that again would serve no purpose but to torment herself, and she realizes that’s no longer something she wants. She hasn’t atoned for her past and future sins, but for the first time since the Gambit went down she suddenly doesn’t feel like this suffering is something she deserves.

The trip to Nanda Parbat feels like going home.

xxx

if there's no home, is there no death?

xxx

Chapter End Notes

My updates will be a bit slower in the near future, as 1. class has started up and 2. I'm trying to catch up on all the DC shows (126 to go, including LoT rewatch. Send help.) I have the next uh... 16? chapters more or less written but editing is a bitch. I'm also waiting to see what they do with Len to decide how I want to finish it.

One week! =O

PS someone nominated this fic for a CaptainCanary award \o/ I've never had my writing nommed for anything so ty whoever you are! If you're so inclined, go check out all the talent and vote!
Chapter Summary

Sara had forgotten how cold space is. The kind of cold that could seep into your bones, the kind you don't notice until it's frozen your blood. The cold you become inured to, rather than one you brace against. It's like drowning, and she's had more experience with that than she'll ever be comfortable with.

Post 1x09

Chapter Notes

various storms and saints (florence + the machine)

Or, the one where coming home is awkward when you just tried to kill your team

Additional warnings: canon temporary loss of body parts
Additional characters: Ra's al Ghul & Sara

See the end of the chapter for more notes

xxx

and i'm in the throes of it
somewhere in the belly of the beast

xxx

NANDA PARBAT (1960)

***

Peace with the League of Assassins...

Sara feels like she's being torn in two. Like she's actually living as two separate people, one layered atop the other; her core self, cold and dark and obedient, with memories but no emotion; and her living self, her feeling self, that had been stripped away these past two years. She remembers the team, even remembers caring for them, but she can't feel that affection. All she knows is the need to obey and protect Ra's al Ghul. It's all she wants to know, all she needs to know - it's simple and constant; it's peaceful.

Until she has Kendra at sword point, ready to make the kill, and her head nearly splits in two.

That moment Rip had woken her in her bed in Nanda Parbat, the moment her old friends were more than just a memory, her feeling self had begun to wake up. She'd thought it stripped away by League training, but instead found it had just retreated inside the cold and the dark, the ice and stone. And
now that it has awoken, it refuses to subside again.

So she stares down at Kendra, emotion warring within her, the need to obey and the need to kill and the need to love. How had she ever lived this way, before? How had she ever lived so divided, so chaotic?

Even as they're fighting Chronos, she considers her future. She can't let her friends die, but she's also not sure she can leave this place. This time. She hasn't felt this peaceful since coming back from the dead, and she's not ready to give that up. Not even if it means losing half of herself.

But then - then his voice echoes out of the hallway, laced with agony, and Chronos isn't Chronos at all, and Sara knows she can't stay here. She can't leave Snart alone with that. She won't.

xxx

oh, you got a hold on me

xxx

Leonard has always had a high pain tolerance; it'd come with his life, in more ways than one.

But this? This is new.

He stares for a moment at the shattered remains of his hand - his hand - before forcing himself upright, swallowing bile. He grips the railing he'd been shackled to with his good hand, dragging himself to his feet, and has to rest his forehead against the wall for a good thirty seconds before the world stops spinning.

He doesn't have time for this.

When he can stand without passing out, he slowly stumbles toward the exit, injured arm tucked across his body. He can't look at it, can't think about it, can't think about anything but getting to the others in time. In time for what, he's not entirely sure, but he knows he needs to be there.

A cliff looms before him, outlines of a stone city. Nanda Parbat, the ship had said. It takes longer than it should for him to remember where he's heard that name before, and then he feels a cool trickle of fear. What are they doing here? From what Sara has told him, this place is exceedingly dangerous, and all intruders are executed. Maybe Sara could enter unharmed, but the rest?

He shuffles a little faster and tries not to think.

There's a trail of bodies left by Chronos. Mick. Mick- don't think don't think. Apparently even League training can't stand up to future tech. Len follows the bodies like breadcrumbs, until the sounds of fighting make that unnecessary. He comes to some sort of hall, and sees-

Mick, down, about to die.

"DON'T" he shouts, before he can think. "Don't kill him."

He doesn't know what his mouth is doing; Chronos had threatened all of them. Had threatened Lisa. Len should let the others kill him, put that threat to rest, but, but...

But it's Mick.

So he shows them.
Sara knocks Mick out with one swift kick before her head swivels back to Len. Her face is still stone, eyes flecks of ice that might terrify him if he weren't already in so much pain. Her gaze drops to his hand, eyes widening slightly, a crease on her forehead betraying her concern.

"Explain," she snaps, voice hard and nearly unrecognizable. Just how quickly had she fallen back into this life? Five sets of eyes fix on him and he withers; it's too much, the pain and the fear and Mick.

Oh, god, Mick.

He sags into the wall and it's Ray who says, in a strangled voice, "Your... your hand..."

"Observant," Len sneers. Good. He needs something to focus his anger and pain on, and Ray will do nicely.

"We need to get you back to Gideon," Ray babbles. "You can't..." He fades, and Len shakes his head impatiently.

"It's effectively cauterized."

"Your cold gun, of course." Ray looks too excited, and Len is glad Stein is still Jax's problem. "That's fascinating, how did you-"

"Later," Len snaps. He sways, a wave of pain washing over him, and suddenly Sara is beside him. He hadn't even heard her move. "Goddamn ninja," he mutters, but gets no response, not even a twitch. What had they done to her here?

She carefully raises his injured arm by the elbow, eyes scanning it callously. "Effective," she states. "No blood loss. Dead skin will need to be cut away."

"Thank you, doctor," he drawls. He can't keep the pain from his voice.

Her gaze snaps to his face, scanning him methodically. "Shock," she intones. He hardly recognizes her, eyes so cold. Then she looks away, toward the team, and orders, "Bring Rory outside. Now."

No one moves, and she growls, "If he remains, he will be executed. Go." All of them but Rip obey; he and someone Len assumes is Ra's al Ghul are both watching Sara warily.

She turns back to Len, and for a moment she looks very lost, like she's had the ground pulled from under her. Then the mask is back in place, and she's stone. "Wait here," she orders. As though he has a choice.

She's a few steps away when he hears a battle cry, and one of the League members Mick had only wounded on his way in comes flying out of the shadows, sword raised, intense gaze fixed on Len. Intruder. As Len turns to face the newcomer his stump bumps the wall and he nearly blacks out in pain, scream turning to retching, vision dark at the edges and - he's going to die. After everything, a nameless ninja in a city that doesn't exist is going to be the one to bring down Captain Cold. At least he'd saved Mick's life, he thinks absently, seeing nothing through the pain; at least the rest of the team will be safe.

But there's a gliding silence, then the quiet slice of steel on flesh and the warm spray of blood, and his vision slowly clears. Sara is standing in front of him, breathing hard, sword dripping at her side. As she slowly turns she looks as shocked as he feels, confusion swimming just under her stone mask. She meets Ra's eyes and her gaze hardens with a stubbornness that Len recognizes as purely Sara, and the Demon looks back with something Len could almost swear is paternal exasperation, because of course. Of course the Demon's Head would find accidental assassination an endearing quality.
"I protect my own," Sara states, head held high, almost a challenge. Ra's holds her gaze for a long moment, then nods and gestures her closer. Len sags back against the wall, bits and pieces of their conversation hitting his ears, but he pays little attention.

He hears "Nyssa" float by and nearly laughs, because Rip will *kill* Sara for that. Try to. He'd love to see that fight go down.

Then they're back at his side, Sara's eyes raking him over again. Something nearly imperceptible has changed - he can see it in the edges of an almost smile on her lips.

"Wait outside," she orders after a moment, glancing between the two of them. "I will be there shortly."

Len has no problem following her orders, but he's a little surprised at how quickly Rip obeys. But then he has to move, and has no energy to focus on anything but putting one foot in front of the other.

xxx

*i don't know how i don't just stand outside and scream*

xxx

Sara removes her cowl slowly, placing it on her bed - the same she'll use in 50 years, the only place she's ever felt truly at home. At peace. Her gloves follow, then her coat. Boots and soft leather armor and pants.

She turns to look at herself in the mirror, eyes taking in the hard toned edges, new scars and not-quite-healed wounds. Her necklace, a long silver pendant on a leather thong, that looks so much like the one Sara had found here when she'd first (last?) made this her room. She'd given her find to Nyssa, a thank you gift for bringing Sara in, bringing her *home*. For teaching Sara how not to be afraid.

The thought is enough to make her pause.

She runs her thumb along the smooth sides of the pendant, mind drifting back through scattered memories like flickering lights. *I have always been afraid*, she remembers Nyssa whispering to her in this bed, years ago and years from now, words swallowed by the dark. *But you've given me reason not to be*.

Sara pulls out a knife, and sets to work carving delicately into the soft metal. When she's done she locates the loose brick in her wall, the same she'll find in 50 years, and hides the necklace with a little smile.

*FEARLESS.*

xxx

*i am teaching myself how to be free*

xxx

"How far is the jumpship?" Speaking English still feels strangely foreign.

Snart's face is pale, lips pressed in a thin line. He blinks up at Sara from where he's slumped just
outside the entrance to Nanda Parbat.

"Not far," he answers, tone clipped. "Bottom of the cliff." Sara takes her eyes over him once - he won't make it that far. And she doesn't want to carry Mick. Chronos. Whoever he is. (Don't think about that. Not now.)

"Alright. Jax, you can fly that thing, right?" Jax nods, still watching her warily. Good, a small part of her thinks. She shakes it away. "Find it and fly it back here. Go," she orders. He obays with a quick glance at Rip, who is watching Sara carefully.

"The rest of you get back to the Waverider," Sara states to those still standing. "Jumpship can't hold all of us, and we need Gideon to prep the brig and med bay."

Ray frowns, looking between her and Rip. "I'm sorry, why aren't we all just going back to the Waverider?"

"Because Snart just froze his hand off," Sara snaps, patience gone. "And unless you want to carry Rory, go." Ray just stares at her for a moment, but Kendra tugs on his arm, and they all shuffle off.

Sara breathes out sharply, closing her eyes for a moment, and tries to center herself. It doesn't work, not the way it should, not the way it has for the past year. Kendra had reminded her of who she is (was?), and for that she's grateful (somewhat). But Sara can also feel the bloodlust rearing its ugly head from where it had coiled dormant, and that - that she's not sure she can live with again. And Ray fucking Palmer certainly doesn't help keep it back.

"So, how've you been?"

It's like he'd punched her in the stomach; that drawl, even forced and dripping with pain, brings everything back to her in a rush. She turns toward him slowly, still ready to strike at any sign of trouble - she hadn't realized, until she'd rejoined, just how on edge she'd been in her time with the League. Hypervigilant and deadly.

"Two years," she states, keeping her face smooth, emotionless. "It's been two years." Snart's brow furrows.

"What?" He glances at Rory, still unconscious beside Sara. She wishes he'd stir, so she could knock him out again. "I knew M- I knew he'd done something to the Waverider, but..." He fades, eyes glassy, skin almost gray. Sara curses silently; she'd assumed he'd known. He clearly hadn't needed any more shocks today.

"Let me see," she orders instead, kneeling before him and gesturing for his arm.

He shakes his head, grimacing. "Nothing you can do here." Sara clenches her jaw and stands, because he's right, and she hates it.

The jumpship appears a few minutes later, landing neatly in the center of the canyon. Once, Sara thinks, she might've felt pride. Might've answered Jax's smile of exhilaration with her own. Now, she only feels cold.

"Help me get Rory," is all she says to Jax, grabbing him under the arms of his suit to haul him up. Jax complies silently, and they drop him unceremoniously on the floor. Snart follows, or tries to, but he's sitting back down on the rock when she returns for him.

She says nothing, and he doesn't turn down her outstretched hand. He leans on her heavily, lets her slip an arm around his waist in support, and guides him the few steps to the entrance. He's cold, she
notes absently, and trembling uncontrollably. Clearly going into shock.

(She finds herself a little grateful, because focusing on him is much easier than thinking about how much her life had just been flipped on its head.)

Jax takes off as soon as they're sitting. Sara ignores his protest when she promptly stands again, digging through the emergency supplies to find painkillers and a blanket. She carefully injects the medication into Snart's arm before wrapping the blanket around his shoulders-

- he wraps his jacket around her shoulders, pointing out that she's smaller and more susceptible to the cold than he is-

Sara shakes her head sharply to dispel the memory. She'll need to talk with Gideon about time drift, or whatever Rip had called it, and figure out a way to make it less... distracting.

"Cold," Leonard mutters, rocking a little as he clutches the blanket to him with his good hand.

"I know." Sara finds her voice too soft, hard exterior already cracking. She remembers the way Snart been after Mick's betrayal, remembers card games and whiskey and bar fights, and realizes she'd missed him.

"He said he'd kill her," Snart slurs. "Lisa, he said he'd kill her over and over and over. He'd make me watch."

At the mention of his sister, Laurel floods back into Sara's mind, and her entire body goes stiff with rage. "That's not going to happen," she snarls. It would be so easy to kill him, lying on the ground a few feet away. But Snart doesn't deserve that, not now. Not here.

"My fault," she hears him mumble. "'s my fault."

"He made his choice," Sara tells him. Again.

xxx

(if you could just forgive yourself)

xxx

Sara had forgotten how cold space is. Nanda Parbat certainly could be, during the icy winters, but this feels different somehow. Sara had always found an invigorating calm in the snow, so quiet and biting. Space feels like the kind of cold that could seep into your bones, the kind you don't notice until it's frozen your blood. The cold you become inured to, rather than one you brace against. It's like drowning, and she's had more experience with that than she'll ever be comfortable with.

Snart refuses medical treatment until he sees Mick in his cage, and Sara knows better than to fight him. Whatever future painkillers had been stocked on the jumpship seem to work very well, and he can almost stand on his own. Lean against the wall, anyway.

Listening to Rory rant and rave is doing none of them any good. The cold has started seeping through her again; she can feel its pull as steadily as the dark waters that had dragged her down. Seeing the rest of the team - had they been family, once upon a time? - seeing them bicker over Rory's capacity for redemption while she stands to the side, still dressed in the only outfit she'd retained from her pre-League days - it sucks the air from her lungs. She pulls her jacket closer around her and shivers.
And it shouldn't hurt that Snart doesn't think Rory can change. It shouldn't feel like ice in her veins, sharp and jagged. It _shouldn't_.

It does.

Still, she's known for a long time that she's a lost cause. She'd known that the moment she'd taken up a knife on The Amazo, when she'd turned into Ivo's sadistic pet torturer. When she'd realized exactly how far she would go to survive.

*Just wondering, when did you become so scary?* She remembers Anatoly's words suddenly, vividly, as though they were yesterday, and nearly laughs. Grant Wilson hadn't been wrong, calling her a feral wild child. *Prochnost*. Strength. No one ever expected the little girl lost to survive. To thrive. She'd proved them all wrong, again and again and again, and she won't apologize for it.

No, she's not a lost cause, because she chose this life at every turn.

Still, it hurts.

She's learned well enough how to push that hurt away, but that doesn't mean she has to stand here and enjoy it. And Snart is deteriorating fast; she can tell by the pallor of his skin, beads of sweat lining his forehead. She pushes off the wall, ignoring the others while they continue arguing over Mick, and moves to stand in front of Snart. Conveniently between him and Mick's line of sight.

"Okay, you've seen him safely imprisoned," she says brusquely. "Med bay, now."

The fact that he doesn't protest tells her how far gone he really is, and she has to force down the spike of worry that shoots through her. The full ramifications of his injury haven't had time to manifest in her mind yet, and she hopes they don't for him until Gideon has him well drugged. All she can hope is that future tech has some amazing prosthetic limbs.

He leans on her as they exit the brig, although he's clearly trying to hide it from Mick. Once they're through the door he's nearly a dead weight.

"Got any more of those painkillers?" he asks through gritted teeth.

"As a matter of fact, yes." It's Rip, striding down the corridor behind them. Sara feels a little awkward around him, as she hasn't yet apologized for holding a knife to his throat and nearly getting them all killed. She hasn't apologized to anyone, actually. The words stick in her throat, still warring with the fading urge to protect Ra's at all costs.

There's also a strange protectiveness she feels for Leonard, a gut reaction she doesn't really understand. Maybe it's the lingering League loyalty, latching on to the nearest person she cares to protect. Whatever it is, it leaves her forcibly stopping herself from attacking Rip when he gets too close.

And from the look on his face - from the looks on all their faces - he knows it.

There's a sudden onslaught of memory, of feelings and emotions so strong she gasps, nearly drops Snart as she staggers.

"Sara?!" She's not even sure which of them says it, but she feels Snart's weight shift off her - she assumes onto Rip - and she runs before either of them can say anything else.

She gets to her room and collapses on the floor, gasping, forehead pressed to the cold metal. Her body won't stop shaking, as wave after wave of memory crashes through her. It feels like she's
reliving every moment of her life, crammed into mere seconds.

"Gideon?" she chokes out, when she can find a single breath.

"I'm here, Miss Lance," Gideon immediately answers.

Sara takes a few more breaths, then manages, "What the hell is happening to me?"

"Time drift," Gideon says, cheerful as ever. "It appears that you deviated much farther from your self than either Dr. Palmer or Miss Saunders, so the readjustment will be more severe." Sara makes a noise, somewhere between a laugh and a sob, and Gideon continues, "The effects are not physically harmful and should run their course relatively quickly. I don't believe you were gone long enough to fully forget."

Sara shakes her head into the floor, shuddering. She hasn't forgotten, not really. She remembers the events of her life, but almost as though they were a movie she'd seen, not something she'd experienced. It's like coming back to life, coming back from the Pit, and the idea that she's been wrenched back that far leaves her trembling.

At some point during the onslaught Leonard's face shows up in her mind, and she gasps when she remembers what he'd done. "Len?" she croaks. "Gideon, is he...?"

"Mr. Snart has already recovered," Gideon reassures her. "I've restored his hand, and he's resting."

She must be hallucinating. Hands don't just magically regrow. But that's a problem for later, when her own head isn't trying to kill her.

She has no idea how long she's stuck on the floor, incapable of lifting her head without the world going dark. Eventually the flood of memories, of feelings, seems to ebb, or maybe she's just becoming inured to them.

"How long will this last?" she eventually manages to ask, carefully pushing herself upright. The world spins dangerously, black at the edges; closing her eyes only makes the flashing memories more intrusive.

"A few hours at most."

Sara Lance doesn't whimper. Ta-er al Sahfer certainly doesn't. But Sara... just Sara does as she crawls to her bed, digs her fingers into the mattress to pull herself up and collapse onto it.

"Shall I send someone to assist you?" Gideon asks.

"No." It's bad enough Gideon can see her like this. "You said no permanent damage?"

"That is correct."

Sara grits her teeth, pulls a blanket over her head, and resigns herself to wait.

She doesn't know how long she lay there, alone in the semi-dark with only her life on replay for company, but at some point Gideon's voice jolts her from her shaky haze.

"Miss Lance, Miss Saunders is at the door."

Sara rubs her eyes, body stiff and creaking. "Tell her I'm not in the mood to be lectured." She'd actually managed to half-doze, and the memories are no longer overwhelming her. They're still vividly present, as though she'd just relived her entire life, but they're not flashing unbearably through
her mind as though she were actively reliving them.

"I do not believe that is her intent," Gideon responds. "She has brought... hot chocolate."

Sara's lips twitch at that, at how Kendra it is. "Alright, let her in."

Kendra enters with two mugs and a look that's half amusement and half concern. "Gideon's turned into a chaperone while we were gone," she greets. At Sara's questioning look, she continues, "She asked me my 'intentions'. Also, you look terrible."

Sara glares at that, but can't help smirking a little. "That's my fault, sorry. I thought you were here to lecture me."

Kendra frowns, walking over to hand Sara a mug. "Nope, just hot chocolate. Why would I lecture you?"

She sounds serious; Sara blinks. "I just tried to kill you," she answers, and Kendra sighs. "That wasn't you." Sara can't believe how certain she sounds. "Rip told us about the time drift. I hadn't been able to hawk out in years, so I get it. And Ray..." She shakes her head again with another sigh. "Ray seemed ready to settle down. To give up being The Atom. We all... changed."

"You didn't try to kill the entire team," Sara retorts. The guilt twists her stomach, leaves a bitter taste in her throat.

"But you didn't." Sara suppresses a growl of frustration, and Kendra's eyebrows raise as she sips her drink. "You know I can still read you, right? The League of Assassin's got nothing on a hawk demigoddess."

Sara can't help it; a smile forms on her face, feeling strange and out of place. "You did have an excellent teacher."

Kendra returns her smile a little smugly. "The best." Sara takes a sip of her drink; chocolate was one thing not readily available in Nanda Parbat, and she had definitely missed it. "But really, Sara, are you okay?"

Sara sighs, rolling her tense shoulders. "I'm fine. Gideon says the time drift affected me more than you or Ray, so readjusting is..." She shrugs.

"Enough to make you look like you've been on a three day bender?"

"Sounds about right." Kendra mouth twists with concern and annoyance. "It hit me all at once, after we locked Rory up," Sara explains.

"That was a few hours ago." Sara rubs her forehead, nodding. "Gideon, why didn't you tell us she needed help?" Kendra demands.

Gideon sounds offended when she answers, "Miss Lance requested that I tell no one."

"Sara." Kendra looks torn between anger and heartbreak. "Look, I know you're still in Assassin Mode right now, and you're used to doing everything on your own, but you don't have to here. We're friends, right? A team. Family."

Sara swallows the lump in her throat and nods. She's not sure anyone but Kendra really want to see her now. She'd seen the way they'd looked at her in the brig - scared. Waiting for her to snap. And
they're not wrong; she's dangerous.

Kendra sighs in exasperation, seeming to know what Sara is thinking. "Sit forward," she orders, moving behind Sara. "Your hair is a mess." Sara hadn't had a chance to take it from its braids, and she reaches up to touch the tangles with a wince. They hadn't exactly been top priority with her memories flooding back. "Your earrings are both stuck, you're lucky you didn't tear them out of your ears," Kendra half-growls. She's working them out with a little more force than necessary, and Sara tries not to wince. Pain from an enemy's blade, she can take. Pain from Kendra being upset...

It shouldn't bother her as much as it does. And yet.

"I'm sorry," she states, staring at her hands where they're folded in front of her. Kendra sighs, dropping the earrings into Sara's lap.

"No, I am. We should've tried harder to stop you from leaving, or to keep in contact. We shouldn't have let you go alone." The lump in her throat is still there, and Sara feels tears burn her eyes. She definitely hadn't missed this part of emotions. So far, she hasn't found a single upside to getting that part of her back. It's distracting. Disorienting. Embarrassing and painful.

"I doubt it would've changed anything," she eventually answers. "We were all... different."

Kendra begins unbraiding her hair, much gentler than she'd been. "Well, I'm still sorry."

Me too, Sara wants to whisper, but that isn't fair to Kendra.

"You tried," she murmurs instead. "And you kept me around for six months. If it'd just been Ray I'd've been gone in a week."

Kendra snorts softly, agrees, "So true." They sit in silence while she finishes unbraiding Sara's hair, then makes her promise to sit still while she goes to find a brush. Sara doubts Kendra will mind if she just lays down - she's suddenly overwhelmingly exhausted, physically and emotionally and every other way possible.

"Roll over," is all Kendra says when she returns, and Sara obediently shifts onto her stomach. The instinct to immediately obey will need to be purged, again. But for now she lets Kendra work out the knots in her hair, and drifts off to sleep feeling warm for the first time in two years.

XXX

the monument of a memory

you tear it down in your head

XXX

Chapter End Notes

Still no Len this ssn *throws things* not even a mention *throws more things* At least we've got Sara "I'm here to corrupt your women" Lance queering up history.


(1x09) banks began to break

Chapter Summary

*Leonard Snart, poster boy for emotional health.*

Or, Being Friends with Robots because People are Hard: an Autobiography by Len & If I Kill all the Emotions I Don't have to Feel Them: an Autobiography by Sara

Chapter Notes

Additional warnings: brief reference to past rape/non-con (The Amazo)

As someone mentioned in the comments, the transition from League of Assassins Sara and Handless Len seemed way too quick on screen, so the previous chapter, this one, and the next one all take place before the very final scene in 1x09 when they jump to 2147.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

xxx

*but still you stumble, feet give way*

xxx

Sara's avoiding him.

She's avoiding *everyone*, actually, although he supposes it could just be regression into some assassin mindset. He remembers seeing her a few days ago, but for her it's been two years; certainly enough time for habits to change.

But still, she has to eat sometime. Probably. Of course, she also probably learned various ways of surviving extended periods of time without food. Or maybe she's gotten (even more) adept at sneaking around the ship in the odd hours of the day. Or she'd figured out the air vent system (he'd given up on that; perks of being a tiny ninja assassin).

Of course, he's also avoiding everyone, but at least he has a damn good reason. (Don't think about that).

Gideon is annoyingly, uncharacteristically unhelpful. Which, to be fair, he'd been grateful for in the past, when Sara had been checking up on *him*. But that doesn't mean he can't be annoyed now that their situations are reversed.

So, plan B. (Always have a plan B, and C, and a few after that.) He saunters into the cargo bay (okay, maybe a tiny bit of him is just hoping Sara's here) and finds it empty. He'd long ago mapped out the entire ship, including all it's hidey holes and, more importantly, Gideon's blindspots. He's
pretty sure blindspot isn't the right word - they're more like "places Gideon can't see and is polite enough not to fix or mention". Or she's just screwing with him, although he'd like to think annoying Rip is higher on her list of priorities. Which this particular hiding space certainly would accomplish.

Pressed into a corner, he shoves aside a crate from the wall and carefully lift up a panel, peering inside. He whistles quietly, smiling when an answering trill sounds from the darkness. "Hey, 1812. Wanna have some fun?"

(Don't think).

xxx

outside the world's a violent place

xxx

Sara isn't wallowing. She's not. She's just... strategically relocating herself. Mainly to her room.

After reconfirming that the whole team was okay (and that Gideon had, in fact, regrown Len's hand, because why not?), Sara had holed up in her room and slept for the most part of two days. Gideon tells her this is a normal reaction to time drift reacclimation; Sara pulls a pillow over her head to muffle a scream. She wants this to be over. Living through her life once had been bad enough, each new wound reopening old, barely healed cuts. Now it feels like ever old scar has been ripped open, raw and bloody and seething. Sleeping helps, some, but the memories follow her there, usually morphing into nightmares even worse than reality.

Several days into her self-imposed isolation, she’s woken by a tapping sound on her door.

"Gideon, I told you to just ignore anyone who came to the door," Sara says irritably.

"Actually, you said to ignore any team members," Gideon corrects. She sounds... odd. "This... is not exactly a team member."

Sara blinks. "What the hell does that mean?"

That apparently means Gideon lets the door slide open, to what appears at first to be nothing. Then Sara hears a little tune played in mechanical beeping sounds and glances down to find one of Gideon's maintenance robots whirring in. "Gideon, what...?" The droid is... painted, red white and blue with the numbers "1812" scrawled in Leonard's annoyingly straight handwriting. When it reaches the foot of Sara's bed it extends a clawed arm, in it gripped a deck of cards. Sara carefully takes them, and finds a note attached - Time drift check?

She laughs for the first time in two years.

xxx

some things you let go in order to live

xxx

Len is very busy trying not to think about the fact that Mick is in a cage a floor below him when he blinks and finds Sara standing in his doorway. He has no idea how long she's been there, leaning against the door frame with her arms crossed, his deck of cards in one hand. Her hair is longer than he remembers, face sharper, eyes colder. Still, they soften a little when he smiles a greeting.
"Assassin," he says, sitting up from where he'd been stretched on his bed. "Or maybe I'll have to go with Ninja, now."

She smiles faintly, but doesn't answer, just takes a few hesitant steps into the room. He realizes there's probably some sort of League protocol for entering someone else's space - there would have to be, to keep them from killing each other. He wonders how many old habits she'd fallen back into, and how long it will take them to fade again. Even just the way she... exists is different; on guard, body held at sharp attention, even if she looks relaxed. He can tell, can see the way her eyes quickly survey the room, the way her muscles tense at every sound, the blank, impassive look on her face.

He hates it.

He's certainly no stranger to hypervigilance; as a criminal, it's just smart business. But he also understands the value of having safe spaces, having someplace to go where some of those walls can come down. No one, not even League trained, can last forever so on edge. Not with their sanity.

The Waverider used to be that place for them, or bits and pieces of it that they stole for themselves. Suddenly he's blindingly angry at Mick, at Rip, at Ra's al Ghul for taking this from them. For leaving Len jumping at shadows, waiting for Mick to escape, waiting for him to hurt someone else. For leaving Sara with hard edges that he can't touch, a darkness he can't quite understand.

She's still hovering in his doorway, so he looks pointedly at the single chair in his room and says, "In or out, Canary. You're letting out the cold." She moves inside, rolling her eyes - some part of her, at least, is still very Sara.

"I met your pet robot," she says as she curls up like a cat on his chair. Complete with claws.

"Rogue robot," he corrects absently, and she rolls her eyes again. Yup, still very Sara.

"Does Gideon know you're defiling her things?"

"We have an understanding," he answers serenely; Sara throws the deck of cards at him. Len smirks, drawls, "I can see the League did wonders for your maturity level." It slips out before he thinks and he mentally kicks himself, cursing his overactive mouth as all levity drops from her.

"I'm sorry I didn't..." She looks down at her hands, then gestures at his. "Gideon told me she'd fixed it."

He holds his hand up, flexing his fingers. "Pretty neat trick she's got." He tilts his head, looking at her where she sits so strangely subdued. "She won't give me anything about how you're doing, though."

"I didn't lose a hand."

"No." He resists the urge to shake some sort of... emotion out of her. "Just two years." She still doesn't answer, still doesn't look at him. "A week ago for me, you were in here playing cards," he says quietly. She flinches at that.

"A week ago I was in Hong Kong slitting a man's throat while he slept." Her hands tremble for a moment and she laces her fingers together, pressing them into her lap. She seems poised, waiting for something - what, he's not sure.

So he shrugs; the others may try to delude themselves as to what it means to be in the League of Assassins, but he never has. "Is that supposed to make me piss myself in fear?" he drawls, and her head shoots up, surprise flitting across her face. And... relief? "Sara, you were an assassin. I may not
have finished high school, but I do know the definition of the word."

Her shoulders shake with something between a laugh and a sob, and she whispers, "I missed you," in a voice so small he doesn't think he was supposed to hear it. He considers letting it go, but she looks so... lost that he can't.

"Missed you too," he says. "Had to rely on Rip for backup, and you saw how that turned out." He holds up his hand, wriggling his fingers with a smirk.

She doesn't smile, just answers quietly, "I'm sorry I wasn't there to stop him." Len isn't sure who he hates more at the moment, Mick or Ra's al Ghul.

"Yes, how dare you not be on board for the surprise attack you knew nothing about." Her forehead creases and she turns away, hurt flashing in her eyes before she wipes the emotion from her face. "Really, Sara, you can't be everywhere protecting everyone at once."

"You're not everyone," she snaps, biting the words off with a shocked intake of breath. She pushes off the bed, gets halfway across the room before he even realizes she's moving.

"Sara!"

She stops in front of the closed door, leaning her forehead against it, hands clenched into fists. Len slides off his bed to move toward her slowly, not quite sure what he's going to do, but sure he's not ready for her to leave yet. "Sara," he says again, more gently, and her shoulders slump.

She shakes her head against the door, bites, "I can't do this."

He stops close enough to touch her, but doesn't. "Sit in my room?"

"Feel."

It's funny, usually that's his line, and here he is trying to get an emotional reaction from her. Just not... like this.

"Have you met me?" he asks wryly. "Feelings not required."

"Yours aren't the problem." Her voice is harsh, words almost a warning, and he doesn't think he likes League Sara much at all. But she's hugging herself, both arms wrapped tightly across her chest as though in restraint, or trying to hold herself together.

Len sighs. He's been trying very hard to avoid emotion altogether, because emotion brings pain, and he's not ready to face the massive landslide of hurt thinking about Mick will bring. Sara makes that difficult. Sara somehow always manages to worm her way into the deepest parts of his mind, to tease out long-dormant emotions, to make him care. Even now, fresh from the League and an emotional robot, she manages to get to him.

"I thought you were dead," Sara says suddenly, jolting him from his thoughts. "I thought you were all dead."

She sounds... small.

She turns slowly, sliding down to sit with her back to the door. "Yeah, Ray and Kendra said that." He crouches down to sit with his back to the bed, eyes almost level with hers. If she'd actually look at him. "Sorry to disappoint."
Her entire body jerks and she twists her head up to glare at him, eyes wide and shining. "Don't..."
Len swallows, instantly regretting his words.

"Sorry." He frowns at his hand, flesh so new and flawless, and reaches up to grab the exercise ball Gideon had fabricated for him off the bed. "I'm not really used to people caring one way or the other." He pauses, thinks of Mick, and mutters, "Or they care the opposite way."

Sara sighs harshly, head falling back against the wall. Her eyes are tightly shut, face a mask of misery as she fights whatever demons are rampaging around in her head, and Len finds himself irrationally angry at them. Wishes they were flesh and blood so he could hurt them. He's not quite sure what to do with this Sara, who seems torn between emotional numbness and mania.

"You remember when you said a killer's not who I am anymore?" Her voice is rough, grating. "Apparently it's all I am."

Len frowns, shaking his head. "Way I see it, it's the opposite of what you are." She still has her eyes closed, still won't look at him, and he squeezes the ball so hard it hurts. "You heard what Rip said about time drift. You forget who you are, forget your identity. You don't become it."

She's silent for a long time. Finally, she murmurs, "I felt at peace for the first time since... god, since before the Gambit. The bloodlust was almost gone, and I felt like I finally belonged somewhere."

"Sounds nice." She glances at him, vulnerability written all over her face. "But... it wasn't really you, Sara. It was..." He pauses, struggling to find the right words, rolling the ball around with his fingers. This isn't his strong point, but it feels important, somehow, to get this right. "That peace you felt was because you were losing pieces of you - your bloodlust, yeah, but also other things. Humor, for one." He throws the ball to hit her knee and she huffs, grabbing for it. "See, only a few days ago you would've knifed that poor ball."

She throws it at his head instead, hitting him squarely in the forehead, and sometimes he hates her ninja skills. But the edges of her lips twitch, and her eyes are a little softer, so he'll take it.

He picks up the ball, absently tossing it back and forth between his hands. "Rip said you were entirely devoted to Ra's al Ghul," he continues. "That you lived to serve him. That's not you, Sara. You are stubborn and strong-willed and you take orders almost as badly as I do."

Sara chokes on what could be a laugh, wiping swiftly at her eyes. "Careful, Crook. That almost sounded like a compliment."

"Just don't tell anyone. I have a reputation to keep." She just shakes her head, and they sit in comfortable silence for a few minutes while she pulls back in her familiar pattern, suppressing her emotions. Her bloodlust. Len just works through his hand exercises, giving her all the time she needs.

"I don't know if it's worth it," she finally says softly. "I don't know if this version of me is worth having the bloodlust back."

"It is," he answers instantly. "You beat it before, you'll beat it again."

She shakes her head slowly. "I never beat it. I learned to live with it, to channel it, to mitigate it. But it never went away, it never even lessened, I just... learned to predict it."

"So you learn it again." She drops her head back against the wall, eyes closed.

"I don't know if I can," she whispers.
"Bullshit." Her eyes snap open, and he tries very hard not to shiver at the look in them. "Do you really think you were a better person with the League? You were ready to execute your friends, Sara. In cold blood, without the bloodlust."

"Thanks for the reminder," she snaps.

"Maybe you need it." He's tempting fate now, he knows he is, but he's not going to just sit here and watch her give in. "After everything, you're just gonna... roll over and give up?"

"Fuck you, Snart," she snarls, pushing to her feet in one fluid motion. "You have no idea-" She choking off, back to him, arms crossed over her chest.

"What, no idea what it's like to kill? To be the bad guy?" The sarcasm practically drips from his voice, but he can't help it. She whirls, eyes somewhere between blazing anger and that strange deadness he's come to associate with the League. Len doesn't move from his sprawl on the floor.

"To be alone."

That... that trips him up. That was not at all what he'd expected. He thinks something close to pity must flash across his face, because she snarls, "Don't. Captain Cold. You say you pride yourself on being alone, on not caring, but you have always had someone. Your sister. Mick. A crew."

"You have never been where I was, you have never been trapped with a group of men who would fuck you and throw you aside like a ragdoll as though it were nothing, you have never been absolutely certain in your bones that you are never going home, that no one is ever coming to save you, and you have to do whatever you can to survive and if that means learning how to kill and learning how to not care then you do it because... because..." Her voice grows progressively higher, wilder, and by the end she's nearly incomprehensible and Len can't breathe. By the time she breaks off he's on his feet and she's backed into the wall, arms wrapped around herself, eyes wild and gleaming.

"Sara." He hardly recognizes his own voice, soft as it is. He takes a few steps toward her, reaching out to touch her arm. He can feel the tension in her muscles, rippling through her body - dangerous, a part of his mind whispers, but he ignores it.

Part of him is angry, wants to snarl that he does know, he does. And in many ways maybe he does understand, but he realizes that at the core, she's right. He still catches glimpses of that world through Lisa, small moments when he realizes just how different the life of a little girl or a stranded teenager could be from his. There is so much about Sara's past that he doesn't know, but he's pieced together bits and pieces from clues she's dropped - The Queen's Gambit, The Amazo, Lian Yu - and he can only imagine the things she'd had to deal with there. Well before the League.

"You're right," he says quietly. "There's a lot I can't understand. I'm sorry." She blinks up at him, fight draining from her in a rush, and he catches her elbow as she sags against the wall. "That doesn't change the fact that you beat this before, and you can again."

She closes her eyes at that, dark bruises beneath them making her look almost skeletal. He releases her arm as she slides down the wall to sit, her knees tugged to her chest, looking far too small.

"Sorry," she mutters, fingers digging into her arms. "I didn't mean to..." She shrugs.

"I'm not bleeding, so I'd say we're okay," he tells her with a small smile, carefully sitting a few feet in front of her. She doesn't make any comments about how quickly that could be corrected, and somehow that worries him more than said comments would.
"It's the time drift," she finally says, sighing. "Gideon says it'll take me a little while to readjust, and in the meantime my emotions are... crazy." Well, that would explain the quick jumps between apathy and mania.

" Doesn't mean they're wrong," is all he says.

Sara gives him an odd look. "Leonard Snart, poster boy for emotional health." His laugh surprises him; he'd forgotten that was something he could do.

"I try."

She tilts her head to study him, head bumping wearily back against the door, arms still tucked around her knees. She still looks too small, too young. "So what's with the rogue robot?"

Len smirks. "Your next space education, apparently." She raises an eyebrow, and he glances at the wall above his desk, where Gideon had started projecting their videos after Sara's capacity to sprawl became obvious. Really, for someone so small, she should not be able to take up three quarters of the bed, sitting. While simultaneously capable of fitting her entire body into a curled ball on his chair. Maybe she really is a cat.

"Gideon, do you have Farscape in that database of yours?"

"Of course, Mr. Snart."

"Excellent." He grins at Sara smugly. "A requirement for living in space, Lance."

"If you say so." She stretches her legs out in front of her, just close enough to him to kick his knee lightly. "Nerd."

He shrugs. "Guilty. Me and Mick used to-" He cuts himself off so hard he chokes, closes his eyes against the look on her face.

"Len-"

"Don't. Please." He can't face that yet, not with Sara here and Mick ten feet below them.

She sits silently for a few moments, then asks hesitantly, "You really think he can't change?" She sounds... sad, resigned, and he knows this isn't about Mick.

"Sara, you and Mick are very, very different people."

She grimaces. "I didn't..."

"Didn't have to. You said you need him to reform for your sake, but that's bullshit. You said it yourself, when we were freezing to death; he was already in a dark place."

"And I'm not?"

Len studies her, anger and defiance not quite covering the fear on her face. The loneliness. "You fight it," he answers quietly. "Mick embraced it." He always had; they always had, and Len's not sure when that changed for him. Sometime around when he met a resurrected ex-assassin, he imagines.

Sara turns away, setting her chin stubbornly. "What if I don't want to fight it anymore?" Len shrugs.

"We find out if you can really take on the whole team."
She stares at him for a moment, finally shaking her head with a disbelieving snort.

"So," Len says, gesturing at the mess of cards Sara had thrown onto the bed. "Cards?"

xxx

* sing it out loud: who made us this way? *

xxx

Chapter End Notes

For any of you non-space educated folk, **this** is 1812 ;) Len is not as crazy as Crichton but I can totally seeing him fiddling around with a robot because he lost Mick so he needs a new friend I'm not crying you're crying Len is a huge bucket of angst okay.
(1x09) electric in your blood

Chapter Summary

His new hand is unnerving.

Or, the one where no one just grows a new hand and is fine with it just like that, and Sara works on the Mick problem.

Chapter Notes

Additional warnings: panic/anxiety? Look Len is basically a walking panic attack at this point so. Mentions of the Amazo.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

xxx

i know it seems like forever

xxx

His new hand is unnerving.

Len is used to knowing every bit of his body intimately, every scar, every limit. He'd needed to, when he was a kid trying to hide from his father, when not knowing exactly how wide his shoulders were could mean being spotted under the desk, and days of pain. When knowing just how much weight to put on various creaky stairs could get him to his room unharmed. When just the right amount of pressure on the trigger of his cold gun could be the difference between death and mere unconsciousness.

But this new hand - it doesn't work the way it's supposed to. The way he remembers. It pulls funny, the muscles are weak, his skin is oversensitive and there are no scars. Sometimes he looks at it and doesn't even recognize it, nearly hacks it off his arm again.

He has Gideon fashion him an exercise ball and starts using it religiously, intent on getting back to normal as fast as possible. Especially with Mick around - no, don't think about that. Squeeze, toss, throw. He tests the cold gun again and again and again when everyone else is asleep, until he has the same control back. He locks and unlocks everything on the ship ten times before deciding it's mostly back to normal.

Except...

Except when Kendra is taking the coffee pot from him one morning her fingers brush his, and the sensation is so intense he gasps and drops the coffee. The pot shatters, hot liquid flying everywhere, and Leonard stammers apologies even while he feels bile rise in his throat, the press of the team around him. And then he's gone, stumbling through the corridors until he makes it to the cargo hold.
His safe place. Safe, because no one will look for him here.

Well, no one but Sara. And he's surprisingly okay with that.

And she does look for him, true to form, a few minutes after he'd curled up in the corner.

"Len?" He jumps; goddamn assassin stealth, he hadn't heard a single footstep. "I know you're in here. Gideon told me."

"Traitor," he mutters. Sara's head peaks around the corner of a few crates he'd hid behind, and she tilts her head.

"Don't worry, I think she'd only have told me." He doesn't really know what to say to that. What to think of it. What to do about a meddling space ship...

He automatically stiffens when Sara steps into his space, sinking down the wall beside him with their shoulders just shy of touching.

"I didn't..." He swallows, but he just can't force his normal drawl out. "I didn't hurt anyone, did I?"

Sara shakes her head. "Nah, just the coffee pot. Maybe Gideon's feelings for that." Leonard has his new hand clutched to his chest, working at the muscles with his free fingers. "It's your hand, right?" Sara asks. He can't help flinching. "When I was resurrected - well, after I got my soul back, anyway - I felt like a stranger in my own body. It was me, every bit the same, but..." She shrugs, stretching her legs out in front of her. "Took me months to really get used to it. Still not used to some things." She licks her lips, fading. Leonard remembers the nurse in 1958 and very pointedly doesn't ask.

"Do you still have your scars?" he asks instead. Sara snorts softly, lifting her shirt up a little to reveal massive gashes, long since healed. Leonard holds his hand up in front of him, studying it, slowly turning it over. "Mine are all gone." He pauses, finishes bitterly, "Physically, anyway." The fact that there's no burn mark from his father's cigarette doesn't mean it never happened.

Sara hums softly, reaching for his hand. She hovers an inch away, waiting, until Leonard takes a deep breath and lowers his wrist onto her palm. Even that small contact sets off alarm bells, the sensation nearly too much to handle. "Easy," he hears Sara murmur. He's not breathing right again. Sara doesn't move, just sits with his hand in hers until the adrenaline flooding his system fades.

Then she slowly, carefully wraps her fingers around his wrist, drawing their hands down between them. It's easier, this time, although still overwhelming enough that the edges of his vision go dark. He closes his eyes dizzily, but Sara seems to somehow understand his limits and stops again, just holding him there.

"Breathe," he thinks he hears her say over the roaring in his ears. "Breathe, Len." Her touch vanishes, leaving him feeling both calmer and colder at the same time. But she's still close enough that he can feel her warmth, can hear her breathing - steady, slow. He doesn't open his eyes until he can match her.

"Okay?" Sara asks softly. It's all he can do to nod. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have pushed you."

Len shakes his head, curling his fingers into fists. "Actually, I think it... helped." She has one hand resting on her thigh, and he carefully brushes the back of it with his fingertips. It tingles enough that he shivers.

Sara nods, tapping her fingers against her leg absentely. She opens and closes her mouth a few times, then finally just shakes her head and says nothing. Len can't help smiling a little. "Share with the
class?"

She snorts softly, sighing. "It's... too complicated," she finally says, mouth twisting. "Just..." Her fingers continue drumming out random patterns, and she shakes her head again. "Too much right now. But..." She glances at him, looking more open than he's ever seen. "I understand."

He nods slowly as she stands, straightening her shirt. "Same time tomorrow?" she asks, mockingly, but she tilts her head and looks at him with a sincerity he could read into it. If he wanted.

Does he want it?

He nods again, mutters, "Sure." Twists his fingers into knots around each other as she walks away.

"Sara." She pauses, glancing back, and the words nearly stick in his throat. "Thank you."

She smiles.

xxx

*i know it seems like an age*

xxx

It becomes a routine, her finding him alone at some point each day. Talking him through the panic as he acclimates his hand to physical contact. He drags her story out bit by bit, the parts that aren't in Gideon's file. The parts where no one touched her, after the Amazo, until Nyssa. The parts where she taught Nyssa how to be human, and Nyssa retaught her how to feel.

And the parts on the Amazo where people did touch her, and Leonard has to talk himself out of taking the Waverider back and burning the ship down.

He thinks, some days, that this is helping her as much as it is him. The days when she seems very far away despite sitting right beside him. When the look of longing on her face as she speaks of the past makes her seem like a ghost, haunting her own life. Those days he finds it easier to wrap his fingers around hers, and when she grips back with painful strength it feels good.

xxx

*one day this will be over*

*i swear it's not so far away*

xxx

He takes to watching the security feed of Mick. Mick, who has the patience of a stick of dynamite, and about as much self control. Had. Had.

Now he sits motionless for hours, back straight, eyes forward. If Gideon hadn't already checked, Len would think he was a robot. He's never seen Mick go more than a few hours without a flame to occupy him, not without tearing something or someone apart. Now, it's been days. Weeks. And there's nothing.

Sara catches him watching once, but she says nothing. It's late, or early, not that it really means much for either of them. Sleep is apparently a thing of the past. Her hair is damp, which means she'd just showered, which means she'd been training. He glances at her knuckles, sighing when he finds them bruised. She glances pointedly at the monitor, Mick's prone form plainly visible (does he sleep sitting
up?) and Len rolls his eyes. Fine, they're both train wrecks, but at least he's not taking it out physically on his body.

Still, pushing it would be pointless. He flips the channel to an episode of Farscape, and she lets him wrap the scrapes on her knuckles with a huff. Trading vices, or something.

He sleeps better with her there, though, although he's fairly certain she never even closes her eyes.

xxx

i know you're bleeding, but you'll be okay

xxx

Sara doesn't tell Len that she probably spends more time watching Mick's security feed than he does. Every instinct inside her screams threat when she looks at him, when she remembers he's really here. Because she knows, she knows, she knows. Going back is not an option. No matter how hard you try, it's impossible to undo that kind of damage. The Mick they'd all known is dead; the question is, will this new Mick be one they can ally with? Befriend? Trust?

Family had been the catalyst for her, both times. Not only because the team had become a sort of family, but the way Kendra had said White Canary had reminded her instantly, painfully of Laurel. Sara can't think of anyone more family to Mick than Len, but sticking those two together is not something she thinks Len can handle right now. Not and keep his sanity.

So, she tries the next best thing.

She waits until she's positive Len is asleep before whispering her orders to Gideon (who had been not the least bit surprised to learn of a star-spangled rogue robot). It rolls up to the small "window" in the force field that can be deactivated to slide food into and out of the cell, and Mick turns his head. 1812 deposits the food, then gives a questioning little trill, and Sara realizes she's holding her breath. Mick looks up toward the camera, then back down, tilting his head a little at the robot.

Then he whistles a few notes, sending the robot into trilling hysterics and Sara to a grin.

Maybe there is some hope, after all.

xxx

hold on to your heart; you keep it safe

xxx

Chapter End Notes

I don't think I've ever written a last line of a chapter so disgustingly non-angsty and I hate myself a little.

Wow now that I'm 30k in I'm finally getting toward some of the original stuff I wrote for this fic WHAT IS LINEAR WRITING?

Happy Legends day! My OTP is reuniting tonight. By which obviously I mean
Sara/Knives :'}
(1x10) let it bleed

Chapter Summary

I thought we'd established I don't have feelings.

Or, Sara didn't just Get Over those two years

Chapter Notes

So... this is actually supposed to be part of a longer chapter, but it's been done forever and the rest isn't and I figured I owed you guys an update, so... here it is ;)

hurricane (30 seconds to mars ft. kanye west)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

xxx

tell me: would you kill to save a life?

xxx

Killing is easier this time around, with no Team Arrow between her and League training. The others seem eager to forget those two years had ever happened - besides Ray, but that's for Kendra to deal with. When it comes to Sara, and her return to cold-blooded killing, they all seem happy to forget. And with Mick in the holding cell to occupy any spare thoughts, it's hardly surprising they quickly move on.

Sara wishes she could.

It sickens her a little, that returning to the League had felt like going home. She tells herself it was just the time drift, that she'd lost bits and pieces of herself, that it hadn't really been her.

But part of her knows that it had been. That the bits and pieces she'd lost had only revealed her core self - and that self is a killer. It's not really surprising, she realizes - after the Amazo and the Island and her first round of League training, she'd been stripped bare of everything Sara Lance had been. She'd become that core self, that darkness - Taer al-Sahfer. White or black, it's what she is. And this time, without Nyssa to tease out her last bits of humanity, it's a wonder there had been anything left for the team to find.

League work had been done mostly with blades her first time around; as an organization that existed primarily before guns, and almost exclusively before silencers and sniper rifles, it's not really surprising. Tradition, Nyssa's voice explains wryly in her head. A bullet is so impersonal, and death is always personal. With a blade, you are the weapon; with a gun, you are just a catalyst. Lose the gun and you are nothing. Lose a blade and you merely change form.
Still, the younger generation had seen the wisdom in learning modern weaponry, even if it wasn't their first choice. And Sara finds it disturbingly simple to use a sniper rifle. Impersonal. She could take down everyone in sight and feel nothing. She could walk away with clean hands, not even breaking a sweat.

She could kill this kid, she realizes. The thought hardly fazes her. It should. Humans are not game pieces to be thrown around, discarded at will. It shouldn't be so easy to kill a child.

But it is, and she doesn't know how to change that.

Snart doesn't seem to have a problem with it either, but then, he's currently on a "no one can ever change and everyone is an asshole" bender. Which shouldn't bother her so much, but it does. You and Mick are very different people, he'd told her, but in the end they're really not. In the end she's perhaps worse, because she chose this life. Over and over and over.

She can only delude herself for so long.

"How'd Savage get his hands on you, anyway?" They've returned to the ship, minus one adolescent mass-murderer, and Sara is meticulously cleaning her knives in an attempt to quiet her mind. Snart is not helping. His drawl irritates her even more than usual, and she slams the lid of a case shut so hard the plastic cracks.

I was trying to decide if I should kill or maim those soldiers, she could say. I was considering the exact amount of force and torsion to apply, the slight changes that could mean the difference between life or death. How the human neck can be snapped so easily. How simple it is to take a life.

"Luck," she answers shortly. She strips her suit, ignoring him entirely, ignoring his eyes on her flesh, her scars. He doesn't bother to hide it, although his gaze feels more... contemplative than predatory. She tugs on her sweats, leaving her suit in a crumpled heap on the floor. It will need to be washed - honestly, who thought white would be a good color for an assassin?

"At the risk of you taking my head off, what's got you so touchy?" Sara clenches her jaw, resisting the urge to snarl. Or take his head off. The edge of Snart's lip curls up, and he sounds far too smug when he observes, "You really don't like someone getting one up on you."

"Of course I don't," Sara snaps. "I especially don't like dangerous men putting their hands on me. I thought you'd understand that."

She regrets the words as soon as they're out of her mouth, watches his face smooth over into its Cold mask. He'd brought it on himself, she tells herself, pushing her buttons - knowing he was - but that doesn't stop the guilt from clawing at her. She's trying to be better, or something.

She's not really sure why anymore.

He surprises her, though, looking down as he sighs, "I suppose I deserved that."

"No one deserves that." Her voice is clipped, as tight as her throat, and her muscles are beginning to ache from being held so tense. She rolls her shoulders, trying to relax them, trying not to imagine all over again how easy it would've been to shoot the future destroyer of the world. It's not the kid's fault he's got an immortal psychopath as his tutor.

She thinks of Ra's and almost laughs.

(He'd be disappointed, that she hadn't taken the shot. Rip is disappointed she'd considered it. She doesn't know what she is, and Snart-)
"Why are you so sure Mick can't change?" she asks abruptly, startling him into looking at her. She's so careful to keep the rage out of her voice that it comes out far too soft, and understanding flickers on his face. His shoulders drop a little and he sighs, tilting his head.

"I told you, Sara. You and Mick are-"

"Very different people, yeah. Only the thing is, Leonard, we're not. And if you feel that way about him..."

"I thought we'd established I don't have feelings."

Sara has to close her eyes against the sudden burn, and clenches her jaw so tightly her teeth ache. The lump in her throat nearly chokes her. She knows her voice would break if she tried to speak, so she storms out without another word.

Rip stops her before she makes it five steps with a tight, "Med bay, Miss Lance." She blinks. Reaches up to feel a crust of dried blood, a thin line where the knife had been. It must've been exceptionally sharp for her to feel nothing, and her respect for Savage goes up. Just a little. She can appreciate his methods, even if she hates his ends.

"It's fine." She shrugs. "I'll clean it-"

"That wasn't a request," Rip snaps, and her body instinctively goes on alert, back straight and muscles coiled to defend, adrenaline surging. She's not entirely sure what has her so rattled, but she knows it's not a goddamn cut hardly deep enough to warrant the term. Rip closes his eyes, takes a deep breath, and says more calmly, "Please, Sara, let Gideon heal that."

Before she can answer, she hears that drawl again behind her, so irritating it sets her nerves all on edge again. "Don't worry, I'll make sure she gets to med bay like a good girl."

Sara whirls, snarling, "Fuck off, Snart." She storms past Rip, who has the presence of mind to stay silent, just holds up his hands and backs out of her path.

Snart follows her, because of fucking course he does. Sara ignores him completely, digging viciously through the cabinets in the med bay for butterfly closures, because there's no way she's going to let Gideon heal a scratch.

"Sara." She peers into the mirror to apply the bandages, refusing to meet his eyes. She could probably use a normal bandaid for this, it's so small. "Sara." Christ, he's like a fucking toddler. And then he takes a step too close, too close, and she whirls with a knife to his throat and thinks about how easy it would be, no harder than taking out that kid today, and there’s a crash as she backs into the cabinets and supplies fall to the floor, her knife with them.

He has a cut to match hers, now.

She can’t look at him. She can’t be near him, can’t be near any of them. She’s dangerous. She’s an animal, a monster, she has no business being near even someone as crooked as Snart.

“Sara.” His voice follows her out the door. She shuts it out, and tries not to think about the only fights she runs from.

xxx

tell me: would you kill to prove you're right?
I'm so sorry for the wait, the US election hit me a lot harder than I expected and my best friend's girlfriend died in an accident over Christmas so RL has been rough. I promise there's still a lot left to come.

I'm also sort of stalling to see how they treat Len's return - I definitely did NOT think we would have to wait this long. I'd originally intended to write a sequel following season 2, under the assumption that the initial episodes without him would be terribly painful but it'd be okay cus he'd COME BACK. But now "initial episodes" is "all of season 2" so I'm not sure I'll be able to get through that.

So fair warning, I have a really terrible habit of writing in canon. Like, painfully and meticulously so. That means Len is still going to die at the end of this, and whether or not he comes back is currently up to the writers. Goddammit. (If he doesn't come back I do have an AU "what if Mick had died instead of Len" running through my head, so. That sequel might happen. I have an ending planned for this one that is canon and terrible that I might make an epilogue if I end up ignoring Destiny, so anyone who doesn't want to read Len dying again can skip it ;) )

Anyway, I'm super behind on everything and haven't watched TV since November which means I haven't seen the crossover or any eps after. I know, I'm terrible. I don't mind vague spoilers but I'd appreciate nothing specific =)
(1x10) heretic child

Chapter Summary

"It's how they kept me locked up, after the Pit."

Or, Sara tries regression therapy and Len is not amused.

Chapter Notes

which witch (florence + the machine)

warnings: injury/self-injury, implied OCD

See the end of the chapter for more notes

xxx

chained and shackled
all unraveled
it's a pity

xxx

The world seems hazy when Sara wakes, dragging herself out of a groggy darkness, head pounding almost unbearably. She raises a hand to her face-

Or tries too, hears a clink of metal and finds her wrists shackled and no not again they won't take her again they won't cage her-

"Miss Lance, please calm down."

Sara is already yanking frantically at the chains, the room dimming as she feels her breathing spiral out of control, but she knows that voice she-

"Miss Lance - Sara - you are not in any danger." Gideon.

"Gideon?" Her heart still threatens to beat out of her chest, but her movements slow, skin already broken and angry against the metal. "W-what the hell?"

"Nothing was done without your consent," Gideon says, as calm and cheerful as ever. "I have respected your privacy, as requested."

It comes back to her slowly, as though she'd been near-blackout drunk. Safe, she recalls. Safer. For them. She takes a slow breath, counting in, counting out. Feels a familiar constriction around her waist and whimpers, curls in on herself as much as she can, trying to breathe shallowly enough that she doesn't feel the restraint.
She's okay. She's fine. She's safe, and she'd done this to herself, and so long as she doesn't think too hard...

"Shall I ask someone to assist you?"

"No." For the first time she regrets not taking Snart up on his offer of lock-picking lessons. Deeply. "What the fuck did I do with the key?" she mutters, trying to rub her face before remembering she can't. There's another moment of panic, and she has to force herself not to yank on the chains. Counts her breathing in and out and in and out and closes her eyes.

Then Gideon says blithely, "You instructed me not to fabricate one," and Sara loses it all over again.

Only an insistent pounding on her door, what could be moments or hours later, interrupts her frenzied writhing, snaps her back to reality with a nauseating jolt of clarity. She sucks in a breath and freezes, realizing what she'd just done. Her shoulder is close enough to dislocated that she feels queasy, wrists a mangled mess of blood, and she's about to snap the bone in her thumb to get free when the door slides open.

Sara instinctively tries curl in on herself, a reaction she hasn't had in years, and that's somehow worse than all the rest. That makes her want to be sick, but she's not about to add that to this humiliating scene, and she finally forces herself to look up to see Snart standing there, because of fucking course he is.

"Get out," she snarls, or tries to. It comes out far too small. Snart's face is very carefully smooth, no hint of any emotion on it, and that's probably the only thing that keeps her from snapping entirely. His eyes flick along the chains as he walks toward her, laser focused, seeming to forget she's even there. Forget that his future conquest is currently attached to a person.

She jerks frantically at her wrists, as though they might this time pull magically free. Chokes, "Don't touch me." Snart freezes, expression softening enough that she wants to hit him, make him hurt.

"Sara," he says slowly, like she's some sort of wild animal. "I'm not going to hurt you."

"I know that," she spits, even as her heart races and the edges of her vision darken and- "Get out." He doesn't move. Sara backs into her bed, trying to cover the way she's shaking, and whispers again, "Get out."

Snart takes another step towards her instead, his eyes not on Sara but again on the chains. He has a lock-picking set in his hands. "This will only take me a minute," he tells her quietly. Still focused on the chains, reaching out to finger the lock near her wrist. Sara is shaking so hard the metal rattles, until he places one hand lightly on hers, for just a moment. "Sara." He's still not looking at her.

She waits for the snarky comment, for him to needle her within an inch of her life over how much easier this could've been if she'd only swallowed her pride and let him teach her. But nothing comes. There's a strange expression on his face that she can't read, and he's silent as he works at the lock. Sara curls in further on herself and wishes she could disappear. Wishes Laurel had just left her in the ground.

He frees her left hand first and she instantly wraps her arm across her stomach, shuddering. When he kneels to work on her left foot, Sara grabs behind her on the bed for his toolkit, blindly trying to feel for something that will work. She has her eyes closed, so focused that she gasps when he touches her wrist, stilling her search.

"Here." She feels him press his lockpick into her hand, hears the soft clink of metal as he sorts back
through the mess she'd made. Doesn't open her eyes until he's knelt back down.

Her hand is surprisingly steady as she works at the chains around her stomach. Every inhale reminds her that the constraint is there, cold metal pressing through her tank top, and with each breath that passes she feels the panic in her gut swell, the tightness in her chest squeeze harder against her lungs.

By the time she gets her lock free he's moved to her right foot. Sara tears the chains from around herself, gasping for air, shaking too hard now to do any good with her last hand. She tugs frantically at it, only managing to stay partially still because Snart hasn't freed her foot yet, panting faster and shallower and the world starts to go dark at the edges, limbs tingling with adrenaline and she can't breathe and-

"Sara." Her foot is free and Snart's standing up, slowly, hands held up as though to reassure her as she kicks away the chains with a choked cry. He's moving so slowly, too fucking slowly, and Sara reaches up with her free hand to jam her chained thumb against the hard metal of the cuff and break the bone. It snaps audibly, and she thinks Snart is yelling at her but she's finally, finally free.

She scrambles backward, curling into the corner of her bed with her knees to her chest, arms crossed and half covering her head, her labored breathing the only thing she can hear over the pulsing of her heart. And she fades out, for how long she doesn't know, comes back into herself raw and aching some time later. Raises her head slowly, expecting to be alone, but-

But Leonard is sitting in the chair by her desk, fiddling absently with his gun.

It should, by all accounts, send her back into a panic. But instead she feels her shoulders loosen, entire body sagging with sudden exhaustion.

She slowly starts testing her limbs, hissing when she jolts her broken thumb. Len looks up at that, eyes seeking hers, expression hauntingly concerned before his face smooths over in its usual cold mask. Sara can't meet his gaze. Had hoped maybe she'd dreamed this, all of this, and then she starts to laugh, realizes that last night, for the first time since coming back from the League, she hadn't dreamed.

The irony is nauseating.

The chair screeches as Leonard stands. Sara watches from the corner of her eye as he slowly approaches the bed, holding out an ice pack.

"For your hand," he says quietly. "Gideon says you should have her heal it as soon as possible to make sure it sets straight." He rubs at his own newly-grown hand with fingers he'd mangled not long ago, and Sara isn't sure if she should laugh or cry. Presses the ice to her thumb and grounds herself on the pain, wonders how many times Gideon has begged Rip to get rid of the lot of them.

"Do you know why I was such an asshole yesterday?" Sara blinks. He's spread his tools across the bed, meticulously placing them back in their case, gaze fixed on his hands.

Sara rubs her wrists, huddled in on herself, and tries for snippy when she answers, "Cause it was Wednesday?"

His lip twitches, but he doesn't look at her. "Cute." Sara narrows her eyes, and has no doubt he can feel her gaze. "Do you know why Rip was so touchy? Why Ray and Stein got into such an argument at dinner over "the perils of interfering with our descendants" that they were shouting across the table?"

Sara shrugs, trying for nonchalant, trying to calm her rapidly beating heart. "Cause it was still
Wednesday," she mutters, tugging her knees closer to her chest and wishing he would leave. Leave her alone to nurse her wrists and her pride and her... time drift, apparently.

He finally looks at her, eyes hooded, no trace of a smile on his face. "Because just like that-" He snaps; Sara jumps a little and hates it. "-Savage had you. Could've killed you." His gaze drifts to her neck, to the wound still covered there, and his voice softens as he says, "Almost did." He reaches toward her suddenly and she flinches (hate it, hates it). He pauses, but doesn't lower his hand, just slowly moves until his fingers brush the bandage.

Strangely, Sara's heart rate finally slows.

She takes a few deep breaths, waiting until she can keep her voice even to state, "We all knew what we were getting into," as strongly as she can. It almost works. Snart leans back, dropping his hand.

"Maybe. Thing is, Sara, you didn't seem to care." She blinks. "You're not invincible, Canary. You're not a demigod or a metahuman. You don't have superpowers or an indestructible suit."

"Ray's suit isn't-"

"You are not immortal." He seems surprised by his own outburst, stunning her to silence. He closes his eyes for a moment, taking a slow, measured breath. "You are not immortal," he says again, more calmly. "And while you may not value your life, Sara, others here do. Maybe think about that the next time you jump head-first into a fight."

Sara narrows her eyes, glaring. "Coming from you, seriously?"

"I'm not the one chained to my own bed."

The words are like a physical blow to her gut and she curls in on herself, breath stuttering, arms tucked tightly across her stomach. There are bruises there too, she knows, although nothing as bad as the wounds on her wrists. "Get out," she whispers, willing her voice not to shake.

"Sara-"

"Get out."

He goes.

xxx

i'm getting tired of crawling all the way

xxx

It takes twenty-two minutes to calm her breathing, and another three for the guilt to get so strong that she tugs on a sweatshirt and slinks from her room.

Len's not in his room, and Sara is too embarrassed and stubborn to ask Gideon where he is. She eventually finds him in the cargo bay, going through a box of hardware. There are piles of nails and screws and other odds and ends around him, meticulously sorted, so neatly arranged she wants to throw up. It had taken twenty three minutes for her to realize how close to home this was all hitting him, and this obsessive display of order, control, is ample evidence.

He doesn't look at her, doesn't even acknowledge her presence, but she can tell by the way his shoulders tense that he knows she's there. Sara pulls her sweatshirt tighter around herself, wincing
when her ribs remind her they're bruised. Her thumb throbs, a dull ache that's slowly started to spread through her hand. She'll get Gideon to heal that, later. When she feels more… together. Herself.

Len is still ignoring her; Sara is suddenly exhausted, suddenly far too weary to deal with any of this. Fighting her own mind is hard enough without human complications.

It's hard enough on her own - too hard.

She doesn't want to fight it that way anymore.

She sits down across from him, on the far side of his piles, watching him continue laying pieces out. Tugs her knees to her chest and crosses her arms over her stomach and thinks about scattering the piles, just to see his reaction.

"It's how they kept me locked up, after the Pit." It takes her a moment to realize she'd been the one to speak, doesn't remember forming the words or deciding to say them. Isn't sure she ever would have. Len stills, eyes fixed on his hands, face carefully blank.

"It's the part I can remember," Sara continues. Her voice is disturbingly even, as though she were describing someone else's life. Someone else's nightmare. "I remember Nanda Parbat, in the dungeon. Hand and feet and waist. They understood how dangerous I was." She closes her eyes and swallows, shaking her head against the whispering darkness. "My sister didn't. She just chained my hands. That was her mistake."

Her hand aches fiercely now, and she balls her fingers into a fist. Focuses on the pain. An anchor. "It's all I remember: the darkness and the chains and the anger. The rage, that someone would cage me. The need to get free. To... hurt someone." Nails dig into her palms, hard enough to draw blood. She forces herself to relax her fingers. Some. "So I did. Get free. Hurt someone. A lot of..." Hands are shaking, she notices absently. Forces them still.

"I tell people I don't remember, but I do. I don't think Laurel could take it if she knew. It was just... rage. Rage and hunger. I would've torn the throats out of every abusive man and then moved on to the rest. And sometimes I regret that I didn't. Sometimes I think the demon in my head is right, that I should just give in and let the bloodlust take over and tear the eyes out of any man who leers at me-"

She chokes off, feels Leonard's eyes on her, hears his bones creak where he's tightly gripping the lid of his case. A slow breath, and another, and her body aches with phantom pains long past.

"'To see the world burn,'" he murmurs. Quiet and low and so very deadly. Sara shivers.

"I tell people I don't remember because remembering means some part of me is still her. And if people knew how much, they'd never look at me again."

His eyes don't leave her.

She can't bring herself to look at him. Rubs her wrists absently, flesh raw and aching, and nearly jumps through the ceiling when cool fingers gently still her. Leonard's kneeling in front of her, takes both her hands to look over the wounds. His fingers barely ghost along the flesh, avoiding her thumb except to shift the ice pack a little. "Let me clean these," is all he says. And it's all she can do to nod, tucking her arms back across her stomach when she shivers uncontrollably.

Sara had washed the worst of the dried blood off her hands before leaving her room, but Len returns with a damp towel anyway. "You only get to bleed all over your own room," he tells her. "It's rude to bleed on public spaces." Sara's lips twitch; it feels strange, muscles no longer used to smiling.
She pulls up the sleeves of her sweatshirt and winces, dried blood sticking to fabric and flesh. She really should have thought that one through - it's her favorite sweatshirt. Dammit. Len sits in front of her, carefully taking her broken hand, this time removing the ice pack to study it.

"Small bone at the base of the thumb," Sara tells him wearily. "Not the actual finger."

"That makes it so much better."

Sara shrugs. "Does if you don't have Gideon to fix everything."

"I'm starting to think that's not actually a good thing." His fingers trace the edges of the swelling, then run along the bone. Sara grits her teeth and doesn't flinch. Her thumb is curled against the palm of her hand; she'll have to straighten it for Gideon to heal it properly. She hopes Len doesn't know that.

Then his fingers wrap around her thumb. Sara inhales sharply to protest but he's already pulled the offending digit from her palm, quick but steady, until it's flush with the rest of her fingers. Sara chokes on air, on the small yelp she refuses to make, blinking back tears of pain. "You could've warned me, you asshole."

Len shrugs. "You could've waited thirty seconds for me to finish picking the damn lock."

Sara just glares, not trusting her voice enough to answer that. Len grabs a bandage, binding her thumb in place against the rest of her hand before moving on to the wounds on her wrist. Those, at least, are straightforward, and Sara relaxes at the familiar sting of alcohol.

"I shot a hole through my dad's chest, and the only thing I regret is not doing it sooner." He says it quietly, almost like an afterthought, eyes fixed on the gauze he's started carefully wrapping around her wrist. "I've killed people for less reason than looking at me. I've killed people for testing me. I've killed people for being in the way. I've killed people when it was convenient." He finishes wrapping, ties off the fabric with meticulous precision. "It'll take a lot more than that to never look at you again, Sara."

"That's different." He glances up at her at that, eyebrows raised a little in question. "Killing in cold blood isn't what I regret. I tried to convince myself it was, but I've run back to the League too many times for that to be true." She can't meet his eyes, pulls her hand from his to press the ice back against her throbbing thumb. "The League was the first place I really had any control of my life, but what I am now..." She looks at his carefully ordered piles, has the sudden urge to smash them. "Controlled is the last thing I'd call it. I didn't choose this."

"You chose to be here."

"I'm not sure Rip tricking us into saving the world counts as choosing."

He shrugs, taking her other hand to wrap the wounds. "Could've left. You're still here."

"Where else am I gonna go?" She doesn't mean for it to sound so despondent, and she winces a little. Len gives her a strange look.

"You've got family, friends. I'm sure your local scooby gang would be happy to have you back."

Sara snorts, choking a little at the thought. "Yeah, I tried that last lifetime. Turns out former assassins don't make good team players."

"Rip apparently didn't get the memo."
"Rip hired me to kill people," she answers drily. "He's the only one who got it."

"Hm." He finishes bandaging her second hand, gently lowering it to her lap. "I guess having an actual good cop for a dad could complicate things. Mine would probably be proud to have you."

He freezes the moment the words are out of his mouth, and Sara feels a cold, sick pit in her stomach. She pulls away, tucking her arms across herself as he closes his eyes. "That... did not come out right."

"I think it probably did."

"Sara." He catches her arm when she tries to stand, gentle but firm. "I'm not letting you run away again."

"I'm not-" She bites off, the lie too big and too recent to even try. "I'm not good for you to be around, Leonard. Not like this."

"I'm not sure that's your call." Sara exhales sharply, pinching the bridge of her nose with her free hand. "In case you haven't noticed, Sara, I'm not exactly a model citizen."

"But you are in control of your actions," she says softly, eyes flicking to his neat piles again. "I'm not. Not always." She pulls her hand from his, reaching out to brush her fingers against the thin red line on his neck. The skin is hardly broken, not even scabbed, but guilt makes her stomach churn all the same. "I'm not safe."

"Safe has never really been my thing."

"Goddammit, Leonard." Sara drops her hand as though burned. "This is not a game. This is not some con or heist, this is my life, and your life."

He stiffens at that, eyes going cold, face smooth as stone. "I'm well aware." While before he'd hardly looked at her, so focused on her hands, now his gaze is uncomfortably piercing. "Just like I'm aware you were upset well before this." He gestures to his neck. "You've been off since you got back, and while normally I wouldn't care, yesterday it got you captured. And that's dangerous for all of us."

"So what're you saying?" Her voice doesn't shake, not even a little. "I'm a liability?"

She doesn't miss the way he flinches at that, but his voice is ice when he responds, "I'm saying you need to get your head screwed on straight before you get someone killed."

Sara stumbles back as though he'd hit her.

"Fuck you, Snart."

His neat little piles scatter before she's gone.

xxx

it's my whole heart
burned but not buried this time
xxx

Chapter End Notes
Um, so, sometimes when two people care about each other but are also both struggling they end up hurting each other. I'm sorry. They'll make up soon I promise.

The show hasn't really used this but I can absolutely see some of the team doing reckless things and getting injured because they know Gideon can fix them. Like eh, stuck in handcuffs, let me cut off my hand to get free I'll just grow a new one. And no one should point this out to Sara cus she'll feel totally justified cutting off other team member's body parts when she's angry.

Sorry the updates are so infrequent, I'm trying to do better. Thanks for all the feedback, it always makes my day!
Chapter Summary

"You're in my room, Lance," he reminds her. "Where else am I gonna go?"

Or, feeling shitty is more fun with other people.

Chapter Notes

day old hate (city and colour)

Also featuring: Sara & Mick

See the end of the chapter for more notes

xxx

now you still speak of day old hate

xxx

Visiting Mick is always a bad idea.

Still, Sara somehow can't help herself. Can't help but wonder if, had things been just a little different, she'd be the one in that cage instead of him. (Still thinks she should be, more days than not.)

They spend the majority of the time in silence; Sara hasn't been one for small-talk ever since her dayjob became killing people, and Mick is less chatty than she remembers. Still, he's usually the one to speak first, if she doesn't leave before either of them say a word.

"I know why you keep coming here," he says suddenly, when it's 4am and Sara had long ago given up trying to sleep. She'd considered going to Snart's room, but he's probably asleep, and after... after, she's not sure she ever will again. Not sure she deserves his company anymore. Because she'd hated him for awhile, through an entire set of knives quivering in the wall, but once the rage had quieted she'd realized he was right. In his own sarcastic, emotionally stunted way, he was right.

Sara's just not sure what to do about it.

She's also not sure why she's here, of all the places on the ship she could've gone. A reminder, maybe, of what happens when you let the devil play a little too long unchecked.

She glances at Mick, brain fumbling on scant sleep and random flashes of memory that still plague her, fleeting and intense and entirely unpredictable. Gideon had said there was little more she could do for that.

"And why's that?" she answers, letting her head drop back against the wall. She's far too tired for games tonight. She hadn't even been sure he was awake; he sits so still that he could almost be asleep
with his eyes open. She's wonders if he actually sleeps at all, or if the Time Masters had somehow figured out how to negate that annoying human limitation.

"I remind you of you," Mick answers in that low drone that makes her ears ache. "You're trying to figure out why I'm in here and you're out there." He shifts the smallest bit, turns his head to look straight at her. And smiles. "Maybe you think you belong in here too."

His laugh follows her out the door.

xxx

*though your whole world has gone up into flames*

xxx

Sara wakes in the dark, screaming.

She chokes off instantly, product of years of training - Nyssa would be disappointed, she thinks absurdly, that she'd cried out at all. Life or death, and she'd be dead.

Still, she likes to think her body only permits this when she's somewhere she *knows* is safe, and if a spaceship in the middle of the temporal zone isn't safe... well, it's not, but no one is going to sneak up on her. No one she doesn't at least partially trust.

Sara buries her face in her hands and lets herself sob, just once.

The room brightens, just a little, and she hears Gideon's voice ask, "Are you alright, Miss Lance?"

"Fine, Gideon," Sara answers roughly.

"Your heart rate is elevated and your core temperature is high, as are your CO2 levels-"

"I said I'm *fine.*" Sara scrubs at her face, forcing her breathing to slow, wills her hands not to shake. Curls her knees to her chest and swallows bile and tries very, very hard not to think.

Gideon ruins it, of course. "Your dreams were of the nature to upset most humans," the ship informs Sara casually, and if she'd been flesh and blood Sara would've put a knife in her.

"Stay out of my dreams," she snarls, nails digging into her palms hard enough to draw blood. "Do you understand? Stay. Out."

There's a long pause, then a subdued, "Of course, Miss Lance. I did not intend to cause you distress."

"Just stay out of my head." Sara lays down and pulls the blankets completely over her, as though that could keep Gideon out.

"I was merely attempting to help-"

"Gideon."

The silence holds this time, and the lights dim back to black.

xxx

*now blank stares and empty threats*
"That damn robot," Mick says suddenly one day, when Sara is dozing on the floor outside his cell. She's not sure when this became a habit, and she's pretty sure it's probably a bad one to have, but she feels better keeping watch when she can't sleep.

She blinks at his words; it's been days - weeks? - since she sent 1812 to his cage, and neither have said anything about it since. Mick is actually looking at her, instead of staring straight ahead the way he normally does, and Sara tilts her head in question.

"It's Snart's work, but I doubt he sent it." She doesn't miss the way he sneers Len's name, lip curling a little. It's not a question, so she just stares back at him until he grunts, leaning his head back against the wall, eyes drifting away. "He always was such a damn pussy. Should've let him die in juvie, put him out of his misery."

He's watching her out of the corner of his eye, and Sara clamps down firmly on the rage that tries to rear its ugly head - he's been baiting her for days, trying to make her snap. She's not entirely sure what he hopes to accomplish; maybe he's hoping the bloodlust will completely break her; maybe he's just bored. She wishes the first option didn't sit quite so heavy in her mind.

"He probably would've preferred that to watching you betray him," she answers lazily.

Something flares in his eyes and she sees the muscles tense in his jaw, his hands curling into fists. After his initial violent outburst when they'd first imprisoned him, he'd settled fully into this strange apathy. Sara doesn't know which is real, doesn't know if that rage had been merely a purposeful draw on old characteristics. A skin Kronos had slipped back on, trying to get to the team. Snart seems certain that's all it was, sure the Mick they all knew, Sara imagines he'd be trying as hard as he could to convince them he was Mick. Kronos's single-minded goal would still be to capture the team, or at the very least escape, and his best chance of that lies through Mick.

Sara's not so sure. She's watched security footage of the cell, has seen Kronos pull on different masks for different visitors. If he were truly, utterly Kronos, Sara imagines he'd be trying as hard as he could to convince them he was Mick. Kronos's single-minded goal would still be to capture the team, or at the very least escape, and his best chance of that lies through Mick.

No, this man is some sick combination of the two. This man wants to hurt them, all of them, to twist their emotions and cloud their realities. He wants them to suffer, and that - that could only be Mick. Brainwashed soldiers like he should have been find no pleasure in other's pain; it's simply a necessity. But even after his betrayal, Mick clearly hates the entire team, Snart in particular.

Sara thinks dealing with Kronos would, in retrospect, be easier.

But she watches him struggle to remain aloof at her veiled accusation, and lets a slow smile spread across her face. For most of his life, Sara imagines he's only had to look scary for things to fall into place. Being a hunter didn't change that, it amplified it.

Sara learned, long before the League, how to read a room. How to spot potential trouble, how to diffuse angry tempers, how to act and speak to sustain the least damage. Any self-confidence she displays has been fought for, tooth and bloody nail. Mick's was handed to him with broad shoulders and a dick.

Sara decides she might actually enjoy this, if she can keep the bloodlust under control.
so let's face it: this was never what you wanted
but i know it's fun to pretend

xxx

"Mr. Snart." Leonard sighs, pausing in his work cleaning his gun.

"What is it, Gideon?" It's 2am, and he's awake at this hour precisely because no one bothers him.

Gideon hesitates, which always piques his interest. "It's Miss Lance," she eventually says. Len can't help the little trickle of concern he feels crawling up his chest, but he shoves it down ruthlessly; Sara has made it clear his presence is unwanted.

This is not a game.

And yet he still finds himself asking, "What about her?"

That hesitation again, and then, "She has... repeatedly requested that I not monitor her dreams, or attempt to aide her in non-life-threatening matters, but I believe she could use your assistance."

Get out.

"Pretty sure Sara wants nothing to do with me right now." (It does not hurt to say that out loud.) No, he's not thinking about this again. He'll fix every damn robot on this ship before he thinks about Sara chained to her fucking bed. He hasn't seen her in days, and he imagines she'd like to keep it that way. A theory he's tested in true petty form by spending more time than necessary, normal, or desired in the public areas of the ship, with other members of the team. And sure enough, no Sara.

This is not some con or heist.

It's selfish and mean and he knows it, but he can't help it. Because he's still angry and hurt about things he shouldn't be angry and hurt over, because Sara leaves him feeling raw and vulnerable so damn easily and then runs.

Because Mick is still pressing on his mind every waking moment, and between the two of them Len can hardly breathe. So he does what he does best and dons his flippancy like a mask, lets his voice drawl and his words take on a nasty edge. He presses into her space just to call her out, and true to form, she retreats.

(He's such a goddamn asshole sometimes.)

"Yes, you've made that quite clear."

Len raises an eyebrow at her snippy, disapproving tone. "Got something to say to me, Gideon?"

He can practically hear her muttering under her breath, until she finally just states, "Miss Lance hasn't left her room in three days." Get out.

"Her choice, not mine."

"A choice you've facilitated." This is my life.

Len glares at the ceiling. "Oh no, you're not putting this on me. The last time we went through this she was less than thrilled at my entrance." And chained to her fucking bed, but they don't need to talk about that. Sara has made it quite clear she doesn't want to. Get out.
"Be that as it may, I believe she could use your company."

"Too damn bad." This is your life. He's glaring at empty space, now. "In case you hadn't noticed, Gideon, I'm not having the best month. I don't need Sara reminding me what a shitty person I am, or that all I do is use people-" Do you care about anyone but yourself?

No. He's not thinking about this. He doesn't care.

He hurls a screwdriver at the wall, snarling. He's well aware he's not exactly adept at sharing his feelings, but that doesn't mean Sara needs to throw them back in his face every time he tries.

There's silence, and Len sighs, flopping back onto his bed. Great, now the fucking ship is angry with him. Not that he cares.

Ugh.

It's several minutes later that Gideon says, in a subdued tone, "I don't believe that's what she meant, Mr. Snart."

"Let it go, Gideon." He grinds the heels of his hands into his eyes, sighing. "She can get herself out of her own damn chains this time." Could've last time, as she'd made clear. Should've. Gideon never should've sent him, and he should've just left when she'd told him to go. She'd told him, and he'd stayed anyway, and there's a sick pit in his stomach every damn time he thinks about it. But how could he leave her chained?

This is not a game.

"I understand you're hurt, but there's no need to be cruel. And Miss Lance is not currently chained."

"I'm not hurt," Len snaps, scowling. Throws an arm over his eyes. Hurt would imply feelings, and he doesn't have those. He doesn't care. His only use for emotions is to manipulate people.

(He's just like his father-)

No.

No.

Sara hadn't meant it that way, Gideon claims. Sara, for all the hell she's been through, had had a normal childhood. Sara probably didn't even realize what her words would mean to him, or her actions. And he'd snapped right back, for something she hadn't understood, then spent the next few days antagonizing her.

Len sighs.

"Where's Sara?

xxx

isn't it great to find that you're really worth nothing?

xxx

He hears quiet noises from the bathroom, muffled by the door and probably Sara's own attempts at quiet. Leonard knocks, calls, "Lance, it's Snart. You alright in there?" There's no answer, just the same painful sounds, and he says softly, "Gideon?"
The door clicks and he opens it, so carefully. Sneaking up on an upset assassin in the bathroom is not high on his list of smart moves.

"Sara," he says again, trying to keep his voice low and even. "It's Len. I'm coming in." Still no answer, although now he can make out her gasping breaths, broken by retches. "Please don't kill me," he continues, moving inside and shutting the door. The room is nearly black, until Gideon dials up the light few notches.

The sight that greets him makes him forget every bit of anger he might still feel. Sara is curled in the corner, one arm tucked tightly across her stomach, the other gripping the toilet seat with white knuckles. Her hair is a tangled knot at the nape of her neck, her tank top is soaked through with sweat, and she's breathing frantically enough to make his own chest ache.

And worst of all, she hardly seems to register his presence. No knives or glares or death threats, just desperate gasping, and no wonder Gideon had called him in.

Leonard approaches slowly, still cautious of her ingrained training, and kneels beside her.

"Hey, birdie," he greets softly. Her forehead rests on the rim of the toilet, body heaving when he places a careful hand on her back. "Rough night, hmm?" She still doesn't answer, still doesn't look at him, but he feels her relax the slightest bit under his palm, hears her breathing slow just a little. He begins to rub gentle circles against her sweat-soaked shirt, wondering what could possibly shake his assassin this badly. Not sure he really wants to know.

Especially if it's his fault.

He sits with her for a long time, continuing the motions as she slowly, slowly calms down. She jerks forward once, coughing and retching, nothing coming up but bile. Leonard winces in sympathy, smooths an errant strand of hair back from her forehead and waits for her to settle again.

When she's finally calmer, breathing slowed, Leonard asks quietly, "Water?" Sara nods. He tucks a strand of hair back from her face again before standing, feeling the need to do something. Anything. He can't stand to see her this miserable.

He fills a glass of water, searching through the cabinets until he finds some mouthwash. She takes both with trembling fingers, silent and white as a sheet, and Leonard wants to hurt something. That wouldn't help Sara, though, so he sits quietly while she rinses her mouth. When she still says nothing, he asks softly, "You alright?" It's a stupid question, but this, this feelings crap, it's not his strong point. And hell, it's not Sara's either. But she looks so small, curled with her knees to her chest and her back pressed against the wall, that he can't help trying something.

He's honestly a little shocked when she slowly shakes her head, eyes fixed on the ground in front of her. He'd expected denial, and isn't quite sure what to do with honesty. "Wanna tell me?" She shakes her head again, resting her chin on her knees. Leonard nods, then shifts to sit beside her, shoulder pressing lightly against hers. She could move away easily if she wanted, but she stays, and the nagging concern in his chest eases just a little.

"Okay," he tells her. He gets, better than anyone else on this ship, that pushing her won't help. Gets that whatever help she'll accept, it has to be on her terms. "Back to your room?" She shakes her head for a third time, breath catching, and he gets it. "Mine?"

Her knuckles are white where they grip her legs, and he can feel her trembling, but she nods.

xxx
"Gideon, can you put together something for rehydration?" Sara is perched on the edge of his bed, shoulders hunched, as Leonard digs in his drawers for a clean shirt.

"Of course. Please proceed to the mess hall." He nods absently, tossing Sara the shirt.

"Be right back." She gives a small nod, arms still wrapped defensively around herself, and it takes everything he has to leave her there alone.

He waits until he's safely out of her hearing range, then asks quietly, "Gideon, is she alright? Physically?"

"Miss Lance is mildly dehydrated, and her heart rate is still above normal. She has averaged only two hours of sleep per night for the past week, well below recommended human rest patterns, and has been eating an averaged 62% of her daily required caloric intake."

"So no," Leonard drawls.

"She is not in immediate danger, but should the pattern persist, it will severely limit her functionality. This is why I brought it to your attention."

So, they have an AI mother for a ship. Great. "Why me?" he asks as he enters the mess. "I'm not exactly great at this feelings crap. Why not Kendra?"

"You and Miss Lance share that disdain for emotional discussion and attachment. And having observed all relationships between the crew, I have determined her to have the strongest connection to you."

"Huh." He grabs the large cup of brightly colored liquid Gideon had prepared, staring at it dubiously. "If you say so."

Sara is sitting on his bed when he returns, engulfed in his shirt. It's easy to forget how small she really is, when she takes down men twice her size. There's an automatic flash of steel in her eyes when the door slides open, but it quickly softens when she recognizes him.

"Brought you a present," he smirks. Sara answers with a ghost of a smile. She's still so pale, eyes dark and bruised. "Drink up." She takes the cup from him, making a face as she takes a sip, but she obediently takes another.

Obedience was well-taught in the League, he muses. It's why he hates giving her orders, why he carefully phrases everything he asks of her. Especially now, with the League so fresh in her mind. He wonders how long it will take to fade, wonders at how quickly she fell back into it.

He waits in silence for her to finish, respecting her reluctance to talk. He certainly understands it, and knows pushing will only make things worse. He can't force her to talk. What he can do is make sure
she's physically okay, and hope that her mind might follow her body.

When she's drained the cup he tilts his head. "Okay?" She nods wearily. She has her knees tucked under her chin again, and for a moment she looks so young that he can't breathe. "Alright, you need some sleep. Gideon was very particular about that."

Sara turns her head toward him, resting her cheek on her knees. "Traitor," she mutters, but her eyelids flutter, and Snart wonders what Gideon had put in that drink.

"Come on, lay down," he orders gently. "Unless you want me to tuck you in after you pass out."

She sticks her tongue out, in one of those unexpected moments where she seems so innocent it breaks his heart. He holds out a hand, forcibly not flinching when she takes it. Sara is Good People.

She crawls up under the blankets next to him, laying her head on his pillow. All he can think is that she looks terribly small.

"Will you stay?" Her voice is rough, eyes staring at anything but him.

Leonard tilts his head, kicking off his boots. "You're in my room, Lance," he reminds her. "Where else am I gonna go?" Her lips twitch a little, but she still looks so sad and lost that he can't help adding softly, "I'll stay, Sara."

She nods once, sharply, hisses a shaky breath as he lays down on top of the blankets beside her. She's curled on her side facing him, fingers clutching absently at the sheets where her hand rests between them. Leonard hesitantly places his hand over hers, stilling her movements, and twines their fingers together.

"I'll stay," he says again. Her eyes finally flutter closed.

xxx

and i fall, i fall, i falter
but i'll find you before i drift away

xxx

Chapter End Notes

(I kept the dick line fight me)
(1x10) turn what the savage take

Chapter Summary

*Focusing on Sara is a good distraction. Most of the time, anyway. Most of the time he feels like she takes the edge off of how shitty his life is, and he hopes the reverse is true.*

*(Sometimes he thinks their broken edges only clash, only grate against each other to cut deeper.)*

*It has to be better than nothing.*

Or, Sara and Len work on communicating. Communicating is hard.

Chapter Notes

[wire to wire](razorlight)

Warnings: fairly lengthy discussion of past child-abuse, self-injury/suicide. Parts of this one are pretty dark, so please heed the warnings.

Also featuring Kendra and 1812, cus he's just so cute

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

***

*how do you love on a night without feelings?*

***

Whatever Gideon had put in Sara's drink lets her sleep soundly for a good eight hours.

Leonard wakes up well before her, and carefully slides off the bed. She doesn't wake, just shifts a little, and he sends a silent thank you to Gideon. Leaving her alone in his room doesn't seem like a good option - for both selfish and unselfish reasons - so he settles at his desk and sets to work cleaning his tools. It's not really necessary, but it keeps his hands busy, and his mind from wandering too far.

Sara wakes a few hours later with a groan. "What the hell, Gideon," he hears her croak as he turns around, and can't help the quirk in his lips.

"Good morning," he says calmly, ignoring the (rather pathetic) death glare she sends him.

"Ugh." She pulls a pillow over her face, mumbles into it, "I feel like I got hit by a truck."

"You should thank Gideon for it not feeling like ten trucks," he points out as he walks over to lean against the edge of his bed. He grabs the corner of the pillow and tugs at it, revealing her bloodshot
eyes and messy hair. She looks... the word adorable floats around his brain, and he wants to kick himself.

Sara kicks him instead, and then he finds a second pillow thrown in his face with far more force than someone should be able to muster having just woken up. He grunts, pushing the pillows away with raised eyebrows. "What are we, twelve?" Sara just mutters something under her breath, probably more death threats in Arabic. He pretends not to notice.

She's watching him when he gets the pillows out of his face, suddenly looking uncertain. "What time is it?" she asks, pushing herself upright with a wince, hand to her stomach.

"Does that question really mean anything out here?" She gives him a look.

"It's 11:43am," Gideon chimes in oh so helpfully. Sara's eyes widen, freezing for a moment with her fingers halfway through her hair. It's almost comical, except no one should be that shocked about sleeping through the damn night.

"Oh," she manages faintly. Her gaze flicks to Len, something far too close to vulnerable there for comfort, blurs out, "You're still here."

Len tries very hard not to feel guilty. "I told you I'd stay, Sara. And you're still in my room."

He says it with a half-smile, but she winces. "I'm sorry." She rubs at her eyes, grimacing. "Shit, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to…" She swallows, shaking her head.

"Sara-"

"Gideon must've put something strong in that," she rambles on, shoving back the blankets. Stares at her (his) shirt for a moment and seems to shrink, somehow, whispers, "I'm sorry."

"Sara." Her guilt on top of his is enough to make him nauseous. "If I didn't want you here, you wouldn't be."

She won't look at him, frozen in place with her head down, legs crossed, arms tucked loosely across her stomach. "Gideon shouldn't've told you," she mutters. "I told her not to bother you, I swear, I didn't-t-"

"I'm glad she did," Len cuts her off. He can't stand to listen to any more, to wonder just how much damage he'd managed to do. She tugs a pillow to her chest, chin resting on it, still not looking at him.

"You were right," she finally says. Len blinks, biting back a sarcastic response. "What you said, about me being a liability. You're right."

"That's not what I said."

She shrugs, shifting restlessly, hugging the pillow closer. "Doesn't matter, that's not..." She makes a small noise of frustration, shaking her head sharply. "I'm not safe. I know that, and you know that, and I wasn't trying to hurt you. What I said in the cargo bay, I wasn't trying to hurt you. I was trying to protect you from me. I'm sorry."

She says it in such a rush that it takes him a moment to process. She's pushed herself back against the wall, face nearly buried in the pillow now.

"Yeah, a meddling AI explained that to me," Len answers slowly. Now, more than ever, he needs to get his words right. "Also told me I've been an asshole, so I'm sorry too."
Her lips twitch, an exhausted smile that fades quickly. "Used to that."

There's another pang of guilt, and he says quietly, "You shouldn't have to be." Her eyes flick to his for a moment at that, and she frowns.

"I just… I don't understand exactly what I did," she finally says, voice too small. "I've been trying to stay away when I'm angry, when I can feel the bloodlust getting too close. I told Gideon not to bother you. I don't know what else I can do, I don't know what else I did wrong."

"Sara, stop." Len closes his eyes, guilt nauseating now. "You didn't do anything wrong."

"Obviously I did." There's a hint of exasperation there, a hint of the Sara he knows, and that gets him to open his eyes. He studies her for a moment, still pressed against the wall with the pillow hugged to her chest. Scrubs at his face and wishes this were easier. Finally he turns away, leaning back into the bed. He doesn't think he can look her in the eye for this, maybe ever again. But she deserves some sort of explanation. She's earned one.

"When Lisa was small, our dad used to occasionally pretend to be a real father. Once every few months he'd spoil her, buy her toys and take us out for ice cream." She'd treasured those toys, he remembers far too well. Clung to them like it could bring back the father Lewis pretended to be. Len clenches his fists, trying to banish the images from his mind.

"She would be so happy, for just a few hours," he continues softly. "My dad knew I'd do anything to protect her, knew I wanted her to have as normal of a childhood as she could. So he used her to… motivate me. Never hit her. Gave her just enough attention that she never fully hated him, never quite understood why I did. He used to…"

Len breaks off, cheeks hot with shame even decades later. He can't look at Sara, can't see the pity he knows must be on her face.

"Any time I got too mouthy, he'd casually bring her up. 'I can always give this lesson to Lisa instead.'" He flexes his fingers, working the palm of his new hand. He's still not used to the smooth flesh, unmarked or scarred. He can feel Sara's gaze, can hear the small hitches her breathing makes beside him. But she doesn't say anything, and for that, he's grateful; he doubts he could start talking again if she did.

"But the worst part wasn't the pain, or the humiliation." Len closes his eyes, but it does nothing to erase the memories. This is not a game. "The worst part was when he'd bring Lisa in, tell her how ungrateful I was, what a bad son, and didn't I love him? Didn't I love my dad? And Lisa would stand there with these big eyes, half-terrified, half-crushed. And I'd have to say it, every time. 'I'm sorry I was ungrateful. I'll do better. I love you, dad.'"

Even now, bile burns the back of his throat. It's an effort to keep his voice steady, to force the words out. "I use people. I'm not a good person, and I'm well aware of it. I use fear to manipulate people. Anger, greed. But I never, ever, use… kindness. Love. Not like that. I will never be like my father."

He doesn't realize his hands are balled into fists until Sara's fingers gently loosen them, doesn't realize he's crying until he tries to look up and the world is blurry and distorted. There's a sharp pain in his palms as Sara brushes her fingertips across them and Len realizes he'd cut his skin - and he can't help but be glad. Glad his hand is no longer unscarred, no longer a sad mockery of a life he'd never lead.

"I'm sorry," Sara says softly, tugging at his hand to turn him back towards her. He can feel her eyes on him, but still can't bring himself to look at her. "That wasn't what I meant, Leonard. I'm sorry that's how it came out." He blinks rapidly, but all it does is send tears down his cheeks, and Sara's
arms around him. Her hold is loose, cautious, and somehow not uncomfortable at all. He feels her chin rest on his shoulder, one hand grazing the back of his neck as she murmurs, "You are nothing like your father."

He gives himself three breaths, three moments to take in the comfort she offers, the instant sense of safety he somehow feels. She holds him like he belongs there, and he's not sure what to make of it. Not sure he deserves it.

He scrubs at his face when he pulls back, muttering, "I wish I could believe that." Rubs at his arms and sees her frown.

"If he'd found me last night like you did, what would he have done?" Len feels his jaw tighten, turning away, but Sara's hand on his arm stops him. It takes a concerted effort not to flinch. "Hey. I mean it, Len. Would he have even checked if I was okay? Let alone stayed with me, taken me to his room, given me clean clothes and something to drink and a safe place to sleep?"

There's a lump in his throat he can't swallow, can't force words around. Still can't meet her eyes. "You are nothing like him," she says again. "Believe me, I wouldn't be here if you were."

That pulls him up short, shocks him into looking at her, at the soft smile on her face. "There you are," she murmurs.

And something inside him just snaps at her kindness, at the way she continues to accept every part of him without judgment, without flinching. And- "I didn't use Mick." - he finds himself whispering. Doesn't know where the words come from, but suddenly they're there, and Sara's face twists in a mixture of anger and heartbreak.

"I know you didn't," she says tersely, voice hard, but her grip on his arm is still gentle. His skin chafes, and resists the urge to twist out of her hold "I knew it before you broke seven fingers to prove it."

"I didn't use him," Len repeats. His voice is far too small. She's still holding his gaze, won't let him turn away, eyes somehow cool and calm and blazing all at once.

"I know," she says again, much gentler. "I know, Len." She's rubbing her thumb against his arm, the fabric of his shirt shifting against scars hidden beneath, tissue tight and aching. He flinches slightly before he can help it, and Sara's face softens. She runs her fingers down his forearm to take his hand in hers, palm up. Fingers the cuff of his sleeve with her other hand and looks at him questioningly, cautiously.

He should pull away. God, he should pull away, but he closes his eyes tightly and drags in a shaky breath as she gently pulls his sleeve up, material bunching at his elbow. He feels her fingers trace lightly along the scars there, her thumb absently rubbing against his wrist where she's still holding his hand. Hears a painful gasping sound and realizes it's his own attempts at breathing.

"Hey." Her touch on his arm is gone, replaced with a palm against his cheek. "Hey, Len, look at me." He bites his lip so hard he tastes blood, slowly opens his eyes. There's a frown creased between her eyes, and she studies him for a good thirty seconds before it eases and she looks back down. Moves her hand back to ghost along the scars, old and raised and hideous.

She traces one, from the middle of his wrist all the way up his arm. Tilts her head up at him and murmurs, "How old?" Len wipes at his eyes with his free hand, realizes it's shaking and tries to suppress the tremors.
"Fourteen," he mutters. "I was an idiot."

"You were in pain." It's quiet, unwavering. Len gives a hollow laugh, eyes slipping shut again. Sara's thumb is still rubbing circles against his pulse, grounding him, even as the world reels behind closed eyes.

"I was a punk kid," he whispers. "Today they might throw me in a psych ward, but then it was just prison. Especially for dirt poor trash." Sara's grip on his wrist tightens. "Didn't mean to survive first day in juvie. Mick... put a damper on my plans." His heart is beating far too fast, echoing through Sara's skin and back to his. "Got out, and Lewis had started hurting Lisa. Saw what I'd nearly left her alone with." It still leaves him nauseous.

"But you didn't." Again, that immediate and unshakeable support Len doesn't understand.

He snorts derisively, scoffs, "Through no fault of my own." Rubs at his eyes again, with fingers that still tremble. "Made a promise that day, to live for her. To do what I needed to do to keep her safe." Counts his inhale, exhale. Inhale, exhale. "Never thought it would have to be from Mick."

Sara's eyes go dark and dangerous for a moment. "He won't touch her," she growls. Len wonders when an assassin threatening to kill his former best friend to protect his baby sister became his definition of sweet.

She tugs his sleeve back down, gentle touch so in contrast to the anger that always simmers just beneath her skin. "I didn't kill him the last time, when he tried to take the timedrive," she says, much quieter. "I could've. Nearly snapped his neck. But I didn't... I didn't want to do that to you."

She sighs, sinking back to sit cross-legged on the bed. "Maybe I should've. In the League, betrayal is the worst possible sin. Those are the people Ra's would practice his new techniques on, finding all the ways to prolong suffering just a little longer. I could make dying take days, or take someone to the very edge of death and then bring them back."

She blinks, shakes her head as though dispelling a demon. "Mick would've been lucky to die with just a snapped neck. But not anymore. I kill him now, he's got a lot more to pay for in my book."

...an assassin threatening to torture and kill his former best friend.

"I don't want that on you," he says quietly, staring at his hands, the palm he'd injured now sporting dried blood. "If Mick was anyone's responsibility, he was mine."

"It's not about responsibility." Len looks up at her, frowning. "It's about protecting your own." He remembers her saying the same thing, back at Nanda Parbat, when she'd killed the assassin about to end Len's life. I protect my own. It hadn't really registered, then, with his missing hand and Mick screaming in his head.

But now...

Now, it leaves a little kernel of warmth in his chest, something soft and soothing, something that's his to keep.

"I don't know what to do," he says quietly, shoulders sagging as he turns to lean back against the bed. "I always have a plan, but this..." He shakes his head, tries to force down the despair that's creeping in. "I don't know what to do," he whispers again.

It's oddly a relief to say it out loud, to finally admit it to himself. To admit it to Sara.
"Well, first, we eat breakfast." Len blinks, glances over at her with a raised eyebrow. She has a terribly innocent expression. "Then, assuming Rip hasn't suddenly had a breakthrough on tracking Savage - right, Gideon?" She tilts her head, gazing at the ceiling. For some reason that never fails to amuse him.

"That is correct. I also strongly recommend you avoid any strenuous activity today, Miss Lance."

Sara rolls her eyes. "And that was my next point," she says drily. "So, for today, I declare movie day. And considering how terrible I am at following doctor's orders, you should probably stay and make sure I do." She smirks, and Len can't help a small smile as he shakes his head.

"You're impossible, Canary." She shrugs serenely, leaning back in the pillows with a very satisfied look on her face. More like cat that ate the canary.

Len walks into his bathroom, still shaking his head. His smile fades as he catches sight of himself in the mirror, eyes red, face gaunt. He resists the urge to smash the damn thing. Splashes some water on his face and takes a slow breath, tries to ease some of the tension from his shoulders. Having Mick here is... Draining. A constant pressure in the back of his mind that won't let him relax, not even for a moment.

Focusing on Sara is a good distraction. Most of the time, anyway. Most of the time he feels like she takes the edge off of how shitty his life is, and he hopes the reverse is true.

(Sometimes he thinks their broken edges only clash, only grate against each other to cut deeper.)

It has to be better than nothing.

And it has to be better than ruminating about all the things Mick could've done. Almost had the chance to do. If he's honest, the thought of watching Lisa die doesn't scare him as much as watching what she'd've gone through if he'd never come back. And Mick - Mick knows this. Mick knows far too many ways to break him.

No, better to think about Sara than any of that.

She gives him a sharp look when he emerges, and he realizes he forgot his smile and Cold mask in the bathroom. But it's Sara. She'd see through them anyway.

He walks over to his desk, grabbing his boots. "Alright, Canary, unless you're going to the mess like that, I suggest you change."

She's still studying him with that half-concerned, half-terrifying look, but it finally softens as she leans back into her pillow.

"I can't leave," she says solemnly. "No strenuous activity, remember?"

"I could always carry you," Len points out.

"I'd like to see you try."

Len just rolls his eyes. "You still have to eat," he says. "And I am not bringing you breakfast in bed, assassin."

"Aww, I'm hurt," Sara pouts. "That's okay, Gideon can send me something on her robots."

She looks up expectantly, and Gideon confirms, "I can."
"Hey!" Len protests. "You refused to do that for me."

"Walking to the mess hall will do Miss Lance no good," Gideon explains evenly. "That was not the case for you, Mr. Snart."

"Traitor," he mutters.

Sara smirks. "She just likes me better."

"I hate you both." She's not playing with a knife, he realizes suddenly. The absence bothers him more than the weapon would. He tugs on his boots, a thought occurring to him, and says slyly, "You know, I bet Gideon won't send you coffee."

"That is also correct."

"What?!" Sara flops back down on her pillow, pouting. "I hate you both."

Len chokes on a laugh, can't stop the smile that threatens his face. "Congratulations, we all hate each other."

"I hate neither of you," Gideon counters.

"I bet I could change that," Sara mutters darkly. Still no knives, though. It's downright unsettling.

Len shakes his head, walking to the door. "Please don't start a war with the ship while I'm gone."

"She started it by withholding coffee." Len rolls his eyes, palming open the door. "Hey, Len?" He pauses, glancing back at her curled on her side. She looks small again, still wearing his shirt that's far too big for her. "We'll figure something out." Len nods, throat too tight to respond.

Just for that, maybe he'll get her some coffee.

xxx

we go where the wild blood flows
(on our bodies we share the same scar)

xxx

"Hey, Snart?" Len freezes, shoulders tensing automatically; his instinctive reaction to this ship, now. He hates it.

But it's just Kendra, the only other person on this boat that he can tolerate besides Sara. He forces his body to relax, and turns to face her. "Kendra."

"Have you seen Sara today? She's usually up by now, and she's not in her room." She pauses, narrows her eyes for a moment, then continues slyly. "Meaning she's probably in yours, right?"

Len gapes for just a moment, crossing his arms. "Gideon, are you spreading rumors?"

"I would do no such thing," the AI immediately answers, and Kendra laughs.

"Relax, I know you two are in and out of each other's rooms all the time. And there are food fights involved."
"That was once," Len protests.

"It was one time too many," Gideon states. Len rolls his eyes.

"So, is that a yes on Sara?" Kendra asks. Her smile has faded, and Len sighs. She's worried, understandably, and he can't fault her for caring. Much as he'd like to.

"Yes." He turns slowly, gesturing her with him as he continues toward the mess hall. "Did you need something from her, or…?"

Kendra shakes her head, sighing. "No. I just haven't seen much of her, not since we got back. I know the time drift thing was really rough for her." Len nods; he's not sure how much she knows, isn't comfortable telling her anything without Sara knowing. "It's just… she seemed to be doing better, but after 2147 it's like she disappeared. I got why she was careful after we got back from the 1960, but she hasn't trained with me once since 2147."

Huh. Len hadn't known that, although he can't say he's surprised.

"She did before we went after that little brat?" Kendra nods.

"Yeah. I mean, she was holding back so much it was almost offensive, but she showed up. Now…" She shrugs. Len mulls over her words as he absently piles food onto plates, tells Gideon to make Sara a cup of decaf coffee. A compromise that hopefully won't end up with him bleeding.

"You busy?" he asks abruptly. Kendra blinks.

"No? Don't think any of us are, except Rip."

"Come talk to her." He doesn't look at her, grabbing a mug for himself instead. "I think she could use the company." He pours coffee, can feel her eyes on him. "She's declared today movie day, so I'm relying on your good taste," he drawls, and finally looks up. "Coffee?" She nods slowly, watching him with an expression he has no idea what to make of. Something soft and considering, automatically making him uneasy.

"You know," she finally says, moving to grab Sara's coffee from the fabricator. "For someone who claims not to care about anyone, you sure do put a lot of thought into this." There's a lump in Len's throat that he can't speak around. "I know everything that's happened with Mick is…" She shrugs, shakes her head. "A mess. But that doesn't have to dictate the rest of your life."

He wants her to stop talking. Wants her to take the words back, to stop looking at him like he's damaged, but his voice still won't work. "Whatever you and Sara have, it's helping both of you," Kendra finishes firmly, taking her cup of coffee from him. "So, movie day?"

When they reach his room Len stops in the doorway, narrowing his eyes at Sara: she has a disturbingly innocent expression on her face, leaning against the wall in the middle of his bed, munching on his private collection of chocolate. (Real chocolate, not whatever Gideon claims is real. Recycled blood does not belong in chocolate.)

Sara smirks when she looks up, just daring him to say anything. He'd only been gone a few minutes; she couldn't have gone through too many of his hiding places. Who knows when she'd even found this particular one.

Ugh.

"That does not count as breakfast," is all he says, placing the tray of food he'd brought on the desk.
Sara rolls her eyes. "You're such a mother hen."

"Perils of raising a baby sister," he drawls. "I also brought you a hawk."

"Oh?" Sara leans to look around him as he steps inside, then grins at Kendra. "Hey, you. Is that coffee?"

"It is," Kendra smiles, walking to hand Sara her mug.

Sara takes it gratefully, then turns to Len with a wicked look. "You know, Len, I'm pretty sure hawks eat canaries."

Len stares at her for a moment, then shakes his head. "No, it is too early to deal with you. I'm gonna take a shower."

"Aww, you'll miss the movie!"

"I've seen it. I wasn't dead, remember?"

Kendra gives him a weird look, and Sara explains, "I'm still catching up on everything I missed while I was dead."

"Oh my god." Kendra sounds horrified. "Does that mean I have to watch every movie ever made? I'm not sure I could handle that."

"Hmm." Sara pops another piece of chocolate into her mouth and Len can't help snatching the bag away, grumbling under his breath. He hands her a plate of food before she can protest, and that just gets him a sly look and an innocent, "I thought you weren't bringing me breakfast in bed, crook."

"You would've whined all day," he points out. "And eaten all of my chocolate." She just smirks, turning back to Kendra, discussing the intricacies of her movie problem, and if she'd watched them in the past but no longer remembers does that still count?

Len closes the door to the bathroom with a long-suffering sigh. Kendra can keep Sara out of too much trouble. He hopes.

xxx

how do you love with a faith full of rust?

xxx

The minute the door closes behind Len, Kendra skewers Sara with a look.

"His shirt? Really, Sara?" Sara chokes on the strawberry she'd been chewing, glancing down. She'd forgotten she was still wearing the damn thing.

She shrugs, trying to play it off. "It's comfy." Kendra raises her eyebrows, crossing her arms. Sara sighs. "It's not what you think, not that it's any of your business." She half-smiles to take the bite out of her words, and Kendra deflates.

"Sorry. You're right, I've just been worried about you. I've hardly seen you in weeks."

Sara looks down, feeling a little guilty. "Yeah, sorry. I've been… I'm still trying to readjust, you know?"
"Still?" Kendra frowns, and there's suddenly a strange pit in Sara's stomach. Still. She bites her lip hard enough to nearly draw blood, shrugging.


"Hey, I didn't mean it like that." Kendra looks concerned again. "It's just… me and Ray didn't experience anything like this. Why's it so different for you?"

"Maybe because it was you and Ray," Sara answers quietly. Stabs at another strawberry. Kendra looks guilty, and that's not what Sara wanted, not really. "It's fine, Kendra. It's… it's done. We didn't think they were coming back. I'd make the same choice again." Sometimes I wish they'd never come back for us at all.

But no, she still wouldn't leave Len alone with this Mick disaster.

Kendra nods unhappily, sipping at the coffee she'd brought with her. Sara grabs her own cup from the bed stand, choking on her first sip.

"This is decaf," she growls, glaring at Kendra.

Who doesn't quite suppress a laugh, hedges, "I don't know, Leonard just handed me mugs."

"Ugh." She puts the offending mug down. "Gideon, would a real cup of coffee kill me?"

"Caffeine is quite detrimental to sleep patterns," the AI answers cheerfully.

"I just woke up!"

No answer. Sara snarls curses under her breath and plots all the ways to make Gideon's existence miserable.

"Not sleeping?" Kendra asks. Sara nearly groans. "That why you haven't trained me in weeks?"

Sara rubs her eyes, lets her head thunk back against the wall. "I told you, it's the time drift. It's… fucking with my head. Makes it hard to sleep."

"Okay." Kendra is studying her, and Sara can't help shifting uncomfortably. "But you were training before 2147. What's changed since then?"

Goddamn her for being so observant. Although Sara supposes anyone would notice weeks of absence. "You remember how you said you couldn't hawk out anymore?" she asks. Kendra nods. "Well, it was the same for me, except with the bloodlust. And just like you got your powers back…"

"You got the bloodlust back," Kendra finishes softly. Sara nods. "I should've seen that, Sara. I'm sorry."

"Nah, you had your own crap to deal with. And Ray," Like Ray. "It didn't really hit me until 2147, until we were actually fighting. Until I had some soldier in a chokehold and nearly snapped his neck out of habit." Kendra flinches slightly, and the pit in Sara's stomach grows deeper. Thinks of how easy it'd been to take down Per Degaton's guard, how easy it would've been to shoot the kid between the eyes.

"After that I… I was too distracted. Savage got his hands on me. I ruined the whole damn mission because all I could think about was wanting to kill every man on that field." She can't look at Kendra, can't stand to see the horror on her face. "Anyway, I decided until I've figured this out, I'm
probably not a good sparring partner."

She forces a smile, forces herself to look up at Kendra. There's sympathy there, but also fear. Sara wants to throw up.

An odd metallic knocking noise makes both of them jump, but then Sara finds herself giving a real smile. She knows that sound. A moment later the door slides open and 1812 zooms in, beeping a greeting to Kendra's great amusement. 1812 comes straight over to Sara, a giant steaming mug balanced in his extended claw. Sara accepts it while Kendra just stares.

"Thanks, 1812," Sara says with real gratitude, sighing with pleasure at the taste of real coffee.

"What is that?" Kendra practically squeals. "He's adorable."

Sara choked a little on her coffee. "Just a… repurposed maintenance robot, I guess you could call him." Kendra climbs off the bed, kneeling down to inspect the robot. "He loves to play 'guess that song', if you really want him to like you." Kendra gives her a confused look, and 1812 enthusiastically starts playing 'Twinkle Twinkle Little Star'.

When Kendra laughs and guesses correctly, Sara says, "Hey, 1812, Kendra is like 4000 years old. I bet she'd know way more songs than we do."

"I don't remember most of that," Kendra protests, but 1812 bursts happily into something Sara doesn't recognize. After a moment, Kendra's eyes widen, and she says wonderingly, "I… I know that. I don't know how, but I do."

Sara smiles tiredly, settling back deeper into her pillows. "Music, it's like muscle memory. Stays in your brain for no good reason, taking up valuable space."

Kendra gives her an amused look. "You sound like Ray," she observes. Sara makes a face.

"Ugh, take it back." Kendra rolls her eyes, turning back to 1812. "You're gonna be his new favorite," Sara sighs. "So much for coffee." 1812 makes sad little beeping sounds at that, wheeling back over to the bed beside her, and Sara can't help but laugh. "Nah, go play, little guy. Kendra's much better company than me today."

He obeys, and Sara has Gideon start the next movie on her list. With subtitles, so as not to disturb their little game. She only half-watches, sipping her coffee, somehow exhausted despite just waking. And having *slept*. The entire damn night. She wonders if Gideon would give her more of whatever she'd laced that drink with.

"Miss Lance." It's Gideon, in just a small speaker at the head of the bed. Sara frowns, glancing at Kendra cooing across the room, and answers, "Yeah?"

"Removing Per Degaton from the timeline had no effect. That was not your fault."

Sara blinks. It's a sign that she's far too sleep deprived that it takes her a moment to remember the conversation she and Kendra had been having before 1812 arrived. She rubs at her eyes with her free hand, mutters, "Yeah, but that was just kidnapping him. If we'd killed him-"

"The outcome would've been the same." Sara scoffs, shaking her head, but Gideon continues, "Time wants to happen. It would have taken a great deal more than your capture to change this outcome."

"Then why did we even bother trying?"
"Captain Hunter has an… optimistic view of probability." Sara rolls her eyes at that. "What happened was not your fault, Sara. Neither is your reaction to the time drift. It affects everyone differently, and you are simply unfortunate enough to have a strong backlash."

Sara's eyes burn, and she takes a swallow of coffee to try to get rid of the lump in her throat. "Thank you, Gideon," she whispers.

xxx

you've been looking for someone you can trust
(to love you, again and again)

xxx

Kendra almost keeps Sara out of trouble. When Len emerges from his shower, Sara fixes him with a very satisfied look, and he knows she's done something. Narrows his eyes, notes she's using a different mug, and nearly falls on his face when he trips over something.

A confused little warble greets him, and Len sighs. "Sorry, 1812, didn't see you there." He glares up at Sara, then back at the robot. "What did you do?" he demands.

"You brought me decaf," Sara informs him serenely.

"1812, you betrayed me," Len tells the little robot, shaking his head sadly. It actually seems upset, makes little questioning noises and whirling around his feet.

"Aww, don't blame the little guy," Sara smirks. "You're the one who made him a rogue, after all. He's just doing what he's supposed to. Or… not supposed to."

"He's adorable," Kendra breaks in. She's on the floor beside the bed, obviously playing with 1812, movie muted. "Aww, he loves you, Leonard. He's so excited to see you."

"Len built him," Sara says very seriously. "1812 is kind of his child." Len is going to kill her. Kendra seems to think it's the cutest thing in the world. Temporal zone. Which might actually be true, and ugh.

Len leans down to pick up the offending robot, looking him in the two antenna-like eyes. "No more coffee for Sara," he orders sternly. "Actually, just ignore Sara altogether."

"Hey!" Sara protests. "That's not fair, he likes me too."

Len pinches the bridge of his nose and wonders when this had become his life.

"Fine," he sighs. "Just go, 1812."

"Well that was mean," Sara says, shaking her head. "Poor little guy was just trying to help." Len fixes her with a glare. She just smirks back. Knowing there's no way go win this one, Len walks to the desk to grab his hopefully still warm breakfast. Future tech at least has some awesome kitchen contraptions.

"What does Gideon think of this?" Kendra asks, standing to return to her place on the bed.

Sara and Len both snort at that, and Gideon states coolly, "I have no idea what you're talking about, Miss Saunders." Kendra's eyebrows go up.
"I… see," she says, fighting back a laugh. "Why do I have a feeling you two are to blame every time Gideon is in a bad mood?"

"Hey, we could be so much worse," Sara points out. Len gingerly climbs on the bed beside her and she immediately steals a strawberry from his plate. Len knows better than to try to take it back, not if he wants his hands un-pronged by her fork.

"We could," he agrees. He deftly shifts his plate out of Sara's reach as Gideon says icily, "You have both been worse." He and Sara both hum; she has a point.

"Is that an invitation for a food fight?" Sara asks innocently.

"I believe you will find I can make your lives quite unpleasant," Gideon retorts cheerfully. "Beginning with the removal of all forms of caffeine from the mess hall."

Sara sighs, tells Kendra, "She plays dirty."

Kendra is shaking her head, disbelieving smile on her face. "You are both children. Ray and Stein might actually murder you if you take away their coffee machine."

"They'd try," Sara corrects.

"You really think you could take on Firestorm?"

"Nah, Jax likes me too much to help Stein."

Len swallows a mouthful of muffin, points out, "Jax is terrified of you, Lance. Not sure that's the same thing."

"Yeah, and what about Ray's suit?" Kendra asks. "I mean, unless you sabotaged it beforehand, your batons aren't going to do much."

"Hmm." Sara exchange a glance with Len, eyes dancing, and Kendra groans. "Oh no."

"We'd need to take out the lasers," Sara says thoughtfully, tapping her fork on the plate. Kendra buries her face in her hands.

"Actually, just a blade would probably work," Len remarks casually. "Hit the main power, left hip. No more murder." Sara and Kendra both stare at him, and he shrugs. "What, you think I haven't looked up the blueprints to that thing?" Never know when you might need to take down one of your own, he doesn't say. Sara hears it anyway, because of course she does, nudges him gently with her elbow.

"I'm going to just stop talking now," Kendra states.

Sara smirks, settling back into the pillows with a terribly smug expression on her face. "That's probably for the best. Gideon usually backs down too."

Len winces. Before he can say anything, the paused movie flips to a different video, and music suddenly starts to play.

First to fall over when the atmosphere is less than perfect
Your sensibilities are shaken by the slightest defect
You live your life like a canary in a coalmine
You get so dizzy even walking in a straight line
Sara keeps a blank face, continuing to eat her breakfast as though nothing had changed. Len laughs so hard he almost falls off the bed.

xxx

she says: love, i hear sound, i see fury

xxx

They get through two movies and have just started a third when Len realizes Sara has fallen asleep. "Gideon," he says quietly. The sound immediately fades out, and Kendra glances at him from the other side of Sara in confusion before noticing their sleeping companion.

"I'm supposed to meet Ray, anyway," Kendra whispers. "Keep her out of trouble?"

Len snorts softly, waving her out with an eyeroll. As though that were possible.

It's only half an hour later that Sara starts shifting in her sleep, breathing fast, mumbling incoherently. Len is debating whether or not to wake her when suddenly she's flailing, tangled in the blankets, eyes roving underneath her lids.

"Sara?" He's afraid to touch her, but he doesn't want her to hurt herself; when her hand hits the wall with a sickening crunch, he shifts to carefully hold down her shoulders, hoping that with the blanket over her she won't have time to knife him before she really wakes. "Sara, wake up. Hey, you're dreaming, it's okay. Wake up."

She does so suddenly, jerking upright before going completely still, rigid where he still grips her shoulders. She's not even breathing, and Len is quick to brush the hair out of her face to meet her gaze, wild and terrified. "Hey. It's me, Sara. It's Len. You're okay." She exhales sharply, sucks in a breath just as fast, the rest of her still disturbingly motionless. "You're in my room," he continues gently. "You fell asleep, had a nightmare. I woke you up. You're okay."

She gasps several more stuttered breaths before the panic goes out of her eyes, her shoulders gradually loosening, giving way to violent trembling that wracks her whole body. "You're okay," he murmurs again. She nods frantically.

And then surprises him, laying back down with her pillow clutched to her chest, face buried in it, curled up with only an inch between them. Len's chest gets so tight it aches, at the implicit need behind that. At how terrible they both are at this.

"Hey..." He shifts, leaning back against the wall beside her. He remembers the last time she'd done this, pale and bruised and covered in phantom blood. He has Gideon start the movie again, threads his fingers through her hair as he'd done then and feels her instantly start to relax.

It's strange, using his hands to do anything but hurt.

She stays there for a long time, never sleeping, her trembling slowly, slowly fading away. Len only detangles his fingers from her hair to tug the blanket back over her, rests his hand gently back against the part of her head not buried. It's oddly soothing for him as well, combing out snarls, able to make something right.

It's only when the movie has finished that she eases her grip on the pillow, shifting onto her back with a measured sigh. Len tilts his head to look down at her, murmurs, "Hey, birdie." He pauses,
hums. "Maybe I'll have to go with 'cat' from now on."

"Call me kitty, I dare you." Len can't help the smile on his face, shakes his head.

"How about kitten." She glares up at him balefully, and his smile widens. "Tiger?"

"Ughh." She shoves the pillow at him, doing little from the angle she's at, and Len tries very hard to suppress a laugh. He takes the pillow away from her, looking back to take in her pale face, shadows still under her eyes.

"You alright?" he asks, much softer. She nods, scrubbing at her eyes.

"Yeah. Sorry. Didn't mean to fall asleep. Kendra left?"

"Little while ago, yeah." Len studies her for another moment, notes the hollows in her cheeks, the weariness lining her face. He grabs one of the cups of water still resting on the bed stand, murmurs, "Sit up, birdie. Here." She makes a face, but pushes herself upright, shifts back to lean against the wall beside him. He waits until she's drained the cup to ask, "Are your dreams always this bad?"

Sara sighs, wipes at her cheeks again and shakes her head slowly. "They've been getting worse," she finally says. "Since the League." Since they abandoned her there for two whole years.

She hasn't talked about it, not really. Not beyond what she'd told him when she first got back - that the bloodlust had been gone. He'd gathered from Kendra that Sara had lasted with her and Ray for six months before leaving (impressive, that Ray still has all his body parts). Which means she'd been a year and a half in the League, with the bloodlust fading.

It's easy for the rest of them to gloss over, because for them it'd been a few days. Easy to expect everyone to fall back into the same rhythm they've kept for months. Kendra and Ray seem to be managing, but then, they'd shared that experience. Sara had been alone, and is now miles and ages away from everyone she'd known for the past two years. From people who had known her.

Two years.

Leonard doesn't usually do guilt, and he knows this isn't even really their fault, but there's a hot sick feeling in his stomach anyway.

(If he hadn't let Mick live it wouldn't have happened, so it is his fault, a little voice in his head tells him. He wonders if Sara has put that together. He wonders if she hates him for it.)

"I'm sorry," he says, and his voice is weaker than he'd like. Sara glances at him, eyes red and gleaming. "If I hadn't-"

"Don't." Exhaustion and steel. "If this is the price for you not killing your partner, I'm okay with that."

That only makes the guilt stronger. And there's a strange warmth in his chest that he doesn't want to examine further. "I'm not sure I am."

Sara sighs, dropping her head back against the wall. "Don't have to be," she says wryly, a mirthless smile tugging at her lips. "Besides, if I hadn't told Ra's about Lian Yu, I might never've met Nyssa." Her voice softens, almost unrecognizable. "It was worth it for that."

"She must be pretty special."
Sara smiles sadly. "She is."

"So what happened?"

"I died." Her voice cracks, shoulders tense again, jaw clenched, and Len could kick himself. He's not good at this. But he remembers what she'd told him, what feels like a lifetime ago - what was, for her - that Nyssa had let Sara leave the League, to save her from punishment. He wonders, now, just what kind of torture the Head of the Demon might enact on his own daughter.

Not so much different from his own father, in the end.

"Do you dream about her?" he asks, when she seems too lost in her head again. Nyssa is usually a topic that can calm her, at least some.

Sara closes her eyes, murmurs, "Sometimes." She rolls the empty glass slowly between her palms, no doubt devising how to make it a weapon if necessary. Len thinks he should find it disturbing, but instead it's... comforting. "She didn't want them to bring me back," Sara continues after a moment. "The Pit isn't supposed to be used to bring back people who have been dead a year. She knew it would make me..."

"Wild and bloodlust-y?"

Sara laughs. "I'm a saint now compared to what I was when I came out of the Pit. I was..." She shrugs, shaking her head. "I was feral. Nyssa knew it would do this to me, knew I'd rather stay dead."

"Being undead was part of your pillow talk?"

She glances at him, glaring daggers, and just answers, "Yes." The glass in her hands threatens to shatter where she grips it, and he raises his eyebrows pointedly. She growls, but puts it down.

"But you're not... whatever you were when you came back," he says slowly. "You got your soul back, or yourself, or... something."

"Yes," she answers again shortly, tugging her knees to her chest and resting her chin on them. "Friend of Oliver's helped with that. Well, most of it. Couldn't get rid of the bloodlust."

Yes, he definitely knows that.

"I haven't..." She pauses, glancing at him with trepidation. "Since I came back from the dead, some of the things I do, or feel, it's... it's like it's for the first time. Things hit me, stupid little things like... like seeing the sunset or hearing a song or-"

"Or dropping a coffee pot when someone touches you," Len breaks in gently.

Sara hums, smiling a little, tension in her shoulders easing. "Yeah. It's random, intense. Like reliving thirty years of experience at once."

"You seem to have the fighting part down."

Sara kicks him lightly, shaking her head. "It's like... like I have all the muscle memory and actual memory of my life, just not..." She bites her lip, frustration on her face.

"Not the feelings?"

She shakes her head, eyes closed, lines creasing her forehead. "Some of the things that... that I'd
thought I'd moved past... they... I dream about them, and it's this... flood of memories and all that fear that I'd beat back is there and I can't stop it I can't..." She scrubs her face, breathing shaky. "I'm sorry. I'm... I'm sorry."

"Sara."

"I know you don't like talking about feelings."

"Sara." She won't look at him, just turns her attention to a loose strand on the blanket, tugging at it intently. "If you don't want to talk, that's fine. But you don't get to put it on me." She glares up at him, scowling. Lisa will have a fit if she ever finds out he was the one trying to talk. But Sara's been running from this since she came back from the League, and it's clearly not working. Len still can't help but feel partially responsible for that, for her. It's a strange sensation, one he's not entirely sure he likes.

Caring for people gets you hurt, or killed. Losing his damn hand to Mick should have proved that plenty, and yet here he is, provoking an assassin.

"It's funny," she murmurs, almost eerily calm now. "The first time I joined the League, the first time I killed for them - it didn't scare me. Didn't make me feel sick like the Amazo did. Just made me feel... powerful. Like I didn't need to be afraid anymore." She smiles faintly, eyes very far away. "Second time I went back, killing was... a concession. To myself, to Nyssa, to Ra's. I'd finally made some sort of peace with myself, with what had happened to me, with what I'd become. And then I died."

That statement will always leave a sick feeling in his gut.

"And then I came back," she whispers. "And killing was the only thing I could think about. And then I got my soul back, and it was still the only thing. I tried to go back, back to the League, back to Nyssa, but they didn't want me. She didn't want me. She knew what I was, what I am. Soul or not."

Her voice is cracked, bleeding. Len has never wanted to hold anyone as much as he does right now.

"So I left. And then I went back to the League, again, because I had nowhere else to go. And it just felt right. Killing felt right. It wasn't an insatiable need anymore. Only that was a lie, the peace was a lie, and now I feel like I've been killed and resurrected all over again and I'm so scared."

The words hang in the air for a moment, and she seems shocked by them. Somehow, that breaks his heart more than the rest.

He places a gentle hand on her back, still trying to come up with something to say to that when she says softly, "It hurts." Her voice is so small, eyes fixed on her hands. "All the time, it hurts. I have to fight for control, every second of the day. Even when I sleep, it's there. It's worse. I live through all of it again and again and again and then I wake up to a little more pain than the day before."

He has no fucking idea what to say to that.

She sniffs when he wraps an arm hesitantly across her shoulders, burrowing into his side, head resting on his shoulder. He can feel her trembling faintly, can't help wondering if she wakes up like this every damn night. If these nightmares come every time she tries to sleep. Gideon must know, as she'd somehow knocked Sara out for the entire rest of the night, but Len doubts that's a good long term solution.

He's tracing patterns against her arm where his hand rests, listening to her carefully counted breaths, when she says suddenly, "It helps." He shifts, trying to look at her, but she's staring down.

"What does?"
"This." She swallows hard, pressing a little closer. "You."

He has no idea what to say, again. Tightens his arm around her and presses a quick kiss to her forehead, murmurs, "Good."

xxx

she says: love's not a hostile condition
(love me, wherever you)

xxx

Chapter End Notes

I'm kind of nervous sharing parts of this. I hope I got everything alright.

The song Gideon plays for Sara is Canary in a Coalmine by The Police, because sometimes Gideon has just Had Enough. (But also she cares too much oops.)

Thanks as always for your feedback, it always makes my day!
(1x10) silently, won't you carry me home?

Chapter Summary

_It's been a very long time since anyone has thought of her safety, and not of keeping safe from her._

Chapter Notes

This became the chapter that never ends, so I'm splitting it up so I can update a bit more regularly

**surrender** (digital daggers)

**xxx**

**secret**

*hidden underneath it*

*trying hard to keep it safely out of reach*

**xxx**

The bloodlust seems worse this time around, although Sara knows it can't be. Knows, rationally, that it only feels this way because she'd had over a year without it. While she's grateful she'd regained her independence with the Waverider's return, _that_ had come back as well. _That_ makes her sick, just thinking about it. _Feeling_ it. Like every bit of progress she'd made since coming out of the Pit has been wiped clean.

She's always felt a little out of place on the ship, with the heroes and saints. At first Snart and Rory had made her feel less... _criminal_, then just Leonard. Len, who had frozen off his own hand to save them. To save Mick.

No, she's definitely the worst of this bunch.

_It's not who you are anymore_, she remembers him saying in her ear, so long ago. Not to him, maybe, but to her it seems a lifetime. He must be disappointed, she thinks, when she's curled on the floor of the training room in the early hours of the morning. He'd evolved, and she'd regressed.

She's still afraid to train, afraid to really let go. After living without the bloodlust for so long, all the control she'd gained over it is gone. She'll have to rebuild that, and honestly - she's too tired. It doesn't seem worth it. Sometimes she wishes they'd just left her there, in Nanda Parbat. Left her to live out her life in the only place she's ever really fit in.

"Didn't we have a talk about sleeping?" Leonard's drawl startles her. He's leaning one shoulder on the doorframe, arms folded, watching her.
"Says the man also not sleeping." She's too tired for this. She's too tired for banter and word play. She's too tired for everything.

Leonard tilts his head, a frown creasing his forehead, still studying her. She waits for him to say something, anything, waits for the inevitable lecture. But it doesn't come. Instead he walks over and wordlessly holds out a hand.

Sara takes it, hesitantly, lets him pull her to her feet. He keeps his grip, leading her out of the training room and down the hall, until they reach his room. Then he stops, glancing at her as the door slides open.

An offering.

She doesn't let go of his hand.

He smiles slightly, pulls her inside and straight to his bed. Then he finally releases her, pulling back the blankets and crawling under. He shifts toward the wall, leaving space, leaving the choice to her.

Sara thinks of the bloodlust, of her dreams, and her stomach twists savagely. She shuts her eyes tightly, hands clenching into fists.

"Sara," Leonard says softly. She opens her eyes to find him watching her with far too much understanding. "It's alright."

It's not, she wants to scream. But he feels so safe, and she can't breathe, so she hesitantly sinks down beside him.

"I don't want to hurt you," she whispers, fingers clenching at the blankets. His eyes glitter up from his pillow as he gently takes her hand again.

"You won't." He sounds so goddamned certain she could cry.

"You don't know that. I'm dangerous, Len, I-"

"You're a survivor." He rubs his thumb along the back of her hand. "You did what you had to. We'll deal with the fallout as it comes."

She crumples in the face of his certainty, lets him pull her down beside him. He's left space for her under the blankets, which surprises her, but she's too weary to think about it right now. He's warm, and she's so cold, shivering in the darkness of space. He tugs her hand gently, almost a question, and she hurts too much not to let him pull her against him, to pillow her head on his shoulder and curl into his warmth.

He's not Nyssa, but he feels almost as safe, arm protective around her. She'd forgotten how good it could feel to not have to keep one eye open at all times. To innately trust someone to have her back, to keep her safe when her guard is down.

To be able to let her guard down at all.

"You worry so much about keeping people safe from you," he says quietly, once she's settled. His fingers trace along her arm so lightly it tickles. "You can't be on guard all the time, Sara."

"I have to be." She can't keep the weariness from her voice, not now. "If I'm not, I remember how afraid I am."
She didn't mean to say that.

Her brain vetoes the words a few moments too late and she flushes red, suddenly grateful for the darkness. But he just tightens his arm around her, murmurs, "You're safe, little bird."

It's been a very long time since anyone has thought of her safety, and not of keeping safe from her.

She thinks maybe she's trembling, thinks maybe it's the cold, only his hand runs gently along her back as though to soothe her. "We'll get through it," he says softly. She almost believes him. "Later. Now, sleep."

She sleeps.

xxx

creeping

i can feel it breathing, coming to the surface
find me in my dreams

xxx

He watches.

It's the first sleep she's had in three days, Gideon tells him. Three days. She's gray with exhaustion, shaky and jumping at shadows, and with her skillset it's only a matter of time before someone gets hurt. 'Someone' probably not being her. When she shifts in her sleep Len finds himself running a hand along her back, hoping to soothe her. The last thing she needs right now is more nightmares.

"You're okay," he says softly. She's mumbling incoherently, but she sounds like she's in pain. "Shh, you're alright, you're safe." He has a sudden, vivid memory of doing this for Lisa, on the nights she'd woken hysterical out of dreams. Remembers desperately trying to calm her down, keep her quiet. Anything other than quiet was a danger to them both.

He imagines Sara has a similar ideology regarding noise, wonders if this is yet another side effect of the time drift. Somehow he can't see making noise in your sleep as a desirable quality in assassins.

That, or she really does feel safe here, and that prospect is... too much to think about right now.

Especially when Sara gasps in her sleep, then presses closer to him, face buried into his chest. Leonard wraps both arms around her in response, threading his fingers through her hair, trying to calm her. She needs the sleep, desperately; it hasn't even been an hour, and if this is how it's been for the past few weeks...

"Please calm down," he murmurs. "You're safe, little bird." But she doesn't calm, starts to fight his hold aimlessly. And then suddenly she's doing so with all her strength, shoving him away hard enough to bruise with desperate, frantic motions. Len releases her, not wanting to make whatever she's dreaming worse, but she just continues writhing in the blankets.

"Sara." It's almost a plea. He tries putting a hand on her shoulder to stop the worst of her flailing, but she flinches away from his touch with a noise he never wants to hear her make again.

He's about to ask Gideon for help when she jerks awake on her own with a horrible cry, throwing herself upright so fast she tears the blankets. In the next moment she seems to realize he's there and shoves at him while fighting with the sheets she's tangled in, with an inhale that sounds like it tears her throat.
"Sara," Len says desperately, hands held with his palms flat open, trying to seem as unthreatening as possible. He's afraid to touch her, afraid to move. She stumbles from the bed and into the corner, sinking to the ground with one leg curled under her, the other drawn to her chest. Her fingers are white where they wrap around her leg, forehead pressed to her knee, shoulders shaking with quiet gasps.

Len slowly moves across the bed, sliding down to the floor a few feet from her. "Sara," he says again softly. "Sara, you're okay. It's Len, and you're in my room on the Waverider. You were dreaming." She doesn't react, doesn't give any sign she's heard him. Len doesn't know what to do; dealing with Sara on edge has always involved careful negotiations to not get stabbed - he doesn't know what to do with this Sara, who shies away from his presence, who seems more likely to run than fight.

He settles carefully beside her, not quite touching, close enough to hear every hitched and shaking breath. "Sara, can you hear me?" There's a beat, and then a tiny nod into her knee. "Okay. It's Leonard, alright? I'm not going to hurt you. No one here is going to hurt you." She sobs a breath, and Len can't help reaching for her, placing a careful hand between her shoulder blades. "It's me, okay? It's Len. You were dreaming."

He begins to run his hand along her back when she doesn't flinch away, feeling each gasp, the awful way her body shakes. And then she shocks him, jerking forward suddenly to wrap her arms around his neck and cling. Len freezes for a moment; no one hugs him, except occasionally Lisa. No one but Sara, it seems, as he loops his arms around her, one hand tucking her head against his shoulder. She's invaded his personal space so slowly and completely in the short time he's known her that this seems... natural.

"I've got you," he breathes, tightening his hold against her shaking. "Shh, I've got you." He wonders if she wakes this way every night, every time she closes her eyes, and feels a little sick. "You're safe," he whispers, when he feels the dampness on his shirt where her face is pressed. "You're safe, little bird."

It takes a long time for her to calm down, longer still for the silent tears to stop. He waits for her to pull back, not wanting to rush her, needing her to understand that he's here. When her grip around his neck eases some, he rubs a hand along her back, carefully loosening his hold on her. She keeps her head down, hair in her face, until he gently tucks it back to see her red-rimmed eyes.

"Hey there," he murmurs.

She sniffs, rubbing at her face, and mutters, "Sor-."

"Say you're sorry and I'll have Gideon switch all your coffee to decaf."

She makes a noise, half laugh, half sob, and leans forward to rest her forehead on his shoulder. He tangles his fingers into her hair as her breathing stutters, asks softly, "Still the memories?" She nods into him. "I'm sure Gideon has something to help," he tries, but she's already shaking her head.

"No. Pushing it off won't help, I need to just... just deal with it..."

Leonard closes his eyes against the burn there, swallows around the lump in his throat. "But you're not," he says gently. "You're not sleeping, Sara. You're not eating. This isn't helping you, it isn't helping anyone." She's silent, trembling. "You want to get better? You want to deal with it? Then let us help. You can't fix things while your body is so exhausted, you know that."
"It's... weakness." Her voice is tiny, and some day Leonard is going to find Ra's al Ghul and teach him what it means to be afraid.

"Doing nothing different and just waiting, that's weakness," he tells her quietly. "Trying something new, letting people help you, even when you're terrified? That's the strongest thing you can do." He presses his lips to her temple, one arm tight around her waist. "You are the strongest person I've ever met, Sara. You're strong enough to beat this. But you need to let us help you, you need to trust us. Trust me. *Please.*"

She shudders once, violently, like her entire body is trying to shake off some phantom being. And then she nods into his shoulder, pressing her face into the crook of his neck with a small sob. He stands slowly, pulling her up with him, and when she keeps her arms around his neck he lifts her up, one arm in the crook of her knees, the other around her back. She's holding him tight enough that it's hardly any work at all, her body disturbingly light in his arms.

"Gideon, I'm bringing Sara to the medbay," he says quietly. He can almost hear a smile in Gideon's voice when she acknowledges.

Sara looks painfully small when he lowers her onto the medbay chair, arms slow to release their deathlock around his neck. He stays close, not that he really has a choice - even exhausted, her fingers curl around one wrist with bruising strength. Len reaches with his free hand to snap the med bracelet onto her arm, not even trying to break away.

She's calmed some, eyelids fluttering even before Gideon gives her anything. "Crook has a heart," she mumbles, blinking up at him.

"You're delirious."

"Mm. Still true." Len shakes his head, hooking a stool with his foot to drag over next to her bed. He settles beside her, resting his hand on the one gripping his other wrist. Sara slowly eases her hold, lets him pull his arm away and replace it with his hand.

"Close your eyes," he murmurs, rubbing his thumb along her knuckles. "I'm not going anywhere, little bird. Just close your eyes."

xxxx

*sweet despair, feel you devour me*

xxxx
(1x10) taken down i give in

Chapter Notes

Chapter warnings: discussion of trauma, PTSD & prescription medication

xxx

locked in
buried under my skin
riding on the whispers
restless in the wind

xxx

That's how a killer thinks, and that's not you anymore.

The words are faint and far away, a feeble shield that falls easily under the weight of the world. The future. Her future, her friends and family and home.

Sacrifice one for the good of the many.

It's almost laughable, that saving the world should require breaking the last bit of her humanity.

Sara, don't -

She takes the shot.

She wakes screaming.

There's a vague clattering of metal, flashing lights in her eyes and some part of her remembers she's in the medbay. But Stein, she'd killed him, her hands are coated in his blood and she can't breathe, can't think, can only stare at her hands and fight the grip on her arms and they're trying to take her away, they're trying to make her leave Stein but she won't-

"Sara." Eyes stare into hers, blue and ice like the fingers that wrap around her own and no, the blood, there's too much blood-

Hands on her cheeks, cold, shaking, or maybe that's her. "Sara," the voice says again. She blinks. "Sara, hey. You're in the medbay, alright? You were dreaming, it was just a dream." Her lungs remind her that she needs air at some point and she gasps, choking, feels fingers gently stroke her skin as the voice soothes, "Breathe. You're okay, just breathe." She gasps again, stutters, "Stein -"

"Is fine. You didn't shoot him." Leonard. The voice is Leonard, she remembers. "It was a dream, Sara. Not a memory, a dream. You understand?"

She does, and she doesn't, and she sobs another breath when he pulls her forward, fingers in her hair as she rests her forehead on his shoulder, struggling for air. "Gideon, whatever you gave her isn't working," she hears him say. Gideon. Gideon monitors their dreams, she remembers now. Gideon must've told him what she'd seen. Dream. Not memory.
"Clearly," she hears Gideon answer, and Sara tries to laugh at the sarcasm in her tone but it comes out a sob, not enough air.

"Easy," Len murmurs, lips right by her ear. "I've got you, just breathe." His hand rubs circles on her back, steadily, and she tries to work her lungs in time with the motions. It almost works.

She hears the IV bracelet whir softly, and Gideon say something about medication she doesn't try to understand. "No more dreams," she chokes into his chest. "Please, no more dreams." She feels his heart beat a little faster and the air catch in his throat as he breathes, "Okay. Shh, okay, just hang on, Sara." He sounds like he's on the verge of tears, and that's not what she'd wanted, and then there's a pleasant warmth and then nothing at all.

xxx

hunted
i can feel it coming

xxx

Len lays Sara down gently when it's clear she's asleep, her breathing slow and steady. He rubs a hand over his face, carefully pulling a blanket over her. When he can keep his voice steady, he asks, "Gideon?"

"I have given her a moderate sedative, as well as something to reduce dreaming. It may not have 100% effectiveness, but should provide some relief." Leonard drops slowly back onto his stool, head in hands. "I should also note that this is not a long term solution," Gideon continues. "Nor is it a cure. It will help the symptoms, but will not treat the cause."

"Which is what, exactly?" he demands. "Neither of us have ever been pictures of mental health, but this is..." He shakes his head, helplessness bitter in his throat. Nothing he's done has made a bit of difference, it seems.

"I... believe that re-experiencing all of her memories upon returning may have induced an acute stress reaction."

He can't help it; he laughs. And then he can't stop, hysteria bubbling up from his fractured edges, tears streaming down his cheeks at the insanity of it all.

"I'm... not sure I understand the humor of the situation," Gideon says, and that just makes him laugh harder, as does trying to stay as quiet as he can.

It's several minutes before he has himself under some semblance of control, and he wipes his eyes with shaking fingers.

"Sorry, Gideon," he manages eventually. "It's just... the magnitude of it."

"Yes. It is quite horrifying."

"That's putting it mildly." He pinches the bridge of his nose, sighing. "What can you do? What can I do?"

"I can't do much, I'm afraid. Shock recovery simply cannot be rushed. I can alleviate the anxiety and help her sleep, but if she's too sedated, she won't process the events the way she needs to. I've done so tonight only because she's incredibly sleep deprived."
Len swallows back the lump in his throat, reaching out to gently take Sara's hand in his. He traces her knuckles with his thumb, feels the rough callouses and taut scar tissue that should be only vague memories. "You said it can't be rushed." His voice sounds choked, and he takes a moment to steady himself. "How long will she be... like this?"

"There's no definite timetable, but the strongest symptoms should subside within few weeks. The situation is... rather unique." Len gives a mirthless laugh. "Any one of the traumas she's endured could individually put her into shock, but the readjustment period she underwent happened over only a few hours. Her reaction is far too strong to treat as simply a singular response to that, but I also don't believe every traumatic memory is compounding. The human brain couldn't withstand that onslaught."

Len starts to feel sick, and wishes she'd stop talking. "Luckily I now have access to the vast majority of her memories. I can sift through them to find the ones that put her into shock in the past, but that may not be indicative of her reaction now. Some things she became inured to will now be traumatic, just as some things she found traumatic the first time will now seem commonplace. But it's a start."

Len imagines living through his life all over again and shudders. "It's not fair," he whispers before he can stop himself. He thinks for a moment Sara's hand is shaking, then realizes it's his own. "Living through this once was hard enough, it's not..." He bites his lip, hard enough to taste blood.

"It is... an unfortunate side effect of time travel," Gideon concedes. "Usually, any time suffering is self-created. Most often, people return to the same moment in the past over and over and over, hoping to create a different outcome, but all they manage to do is relive that pain again and again."

"Like our dear captain," Len mutters. Like his own failed attempt to make his own childhood even a little better.

Gideon is conspicuously silent for a moment; Len can practically see her computing all the possible responses she could give him. He's never heard her offer up so much information unsolicited; This must be getting to her, too.

Finally, Len just says quietly, "Sara didn't ask for any of this."

"No. And I can't help feeling partially responsible."

Len frowns, looking up - a terrible habit he's picked up from Sara. Gideon is not in the ceiling. "Why would you be responsible?"

"I could have intervened earlier, despite her... Protests."

Len snorts softly. "How many knives did she throw at the ceiling?"

"Too many." Despite everything, Len can't stop a small smile from forming on his face. She's nothing if not predictable.

He's also acutely aware that this is far more his fault than Gideon's. If he'd killed Mick...

*If this is the price for you not killing your partner, I'm okay with that.*

He wonders if she'll still think that when the week is up.

Len sighs, rubbing his tired eyes. "She already..." Len closes his eyes, fighting the burn. "She already had a hard time sleeping, before any of this. And hypervigilance is the baseline for assassins."
"Which is why it's been difficult for me to aid her in the past, even if she would have accepted my help. But as you said, she survived until now. Perhaps this can even give her a chance to deal with things she's refused to until now."

"Or break her," Len murmurs. Gideon doesn't answer that. "What can I do?"

"Forcing her to rest will probably be the most difficult part," Gideon tells him. Len snorts.

"No kidding. This would be so much easier if they could just sedate her.

"I currently have her on a fluid IV, as she was approaching severe dehydration again." (Again?) "As I said, I'd like to avoid sedating her if I can. There are medications that provide long term relief for PTSD, but in the short term, her body needs to heal.

"Please tell me Rip knows nothing about this."

"He doesn't, although that may have to change should her condition not improve."

Len pinches the bridge of his nose with a sigh, tries very hard not to think about what that would mean. "I know. Just… talk to her about it first, please."

"Of course."

She stays silent after that, leaving Len to his thoughts. Particularly dangerous for him when he can, in this case unfortunately, remember every damn conversation he's ever had. Or people who have talked at him is frequently a more accurate description, while he'd let their words fall on deaf ears. Habit with prison shrinks, once working them in juvie had stopped panning out as an adult.

Now he's grasping frantically at fragments of memories, trying to make sense of the various diagnoses and conditions throw at him over the years. Words like 'abuse' and 'trauma' and 'victim' and he'd hated that, he'd always hated that. Hated the way they tried to stuff his life into neat little boxes, labeled each problem with a nice logical cause. For the first time, he wishes he'd actually paid attention.

Finally, he sighs, burying his face in his hands in frustration. "Gideon, what if she doesn't get better?"

Gideon is silent for far too long. Sara has slipped up too many times now for her to ignore, he knows. Or him, for that matter. He hates that right now, he's not sure he'd trust her in the field. This is all she has; losing it would kill her.

She has to get better.

"Better' is perhaps the wrong word to use," Gideon finally says. "Her experiences will all remain the same. She's dealt with all of them before, which suggests she'll be able to do so again. I believe it's simply the sheer magnitude of re-experience that's making it difficult for her to manage."

"Meaning?"

"She needs to face her memories. Right now she's working herself to exhaustion to avoid them. Distracting herself. While this may work normally, right now it's doing more harm than good."

"So we're back to making the assassin sit still."

"So it would seem."
Len glares blearily at the ceiling, mutters, "Easy for you to say, she can't stab you."

"Not for lack of trying."

xxx

(don't make a sound now)
(maybe it won't find us after all)

xxx

Gideon's newest medication attempt seems to finally work, and Len actually dozes for a while on the second chair. He blinks awake when he hears Sara start to shift, then Gideon's cheerful, "Good morning, Miss Lance."

Len drags himself up, mumbles, "What, I don't get a greeting?" Sara's head jerks toward him, eyes wide, pushing herself unsteadily to a seated position. There's absolute panic on her face for a moment before she orients herself, hand searching for a knife that isn't there. It slowly fades when she recognizes him, gaze darting around the room before fixing back to his.

"Hey, it's okay," Len soothes. "We're in the med bay. Gideon gave you something to help you sleep." She just stares at him, breathing shallow and rapid, like she doesn't quite believe he's really here. "It's okay," he says again, slowly reaching out to take the hand still searching for a weapon. "You with me, birdie?"

She freezes when his hand takes hers, but after a moment she exhales slowly, the tension in her body draining. "Yeah." Her voice cracks and she winces, squeezes his hand once before pulling from his grip to rub at her face. "Fuck."

Len grabs a glass of water for her from the sink, trying to ignore the way it shakes when she takes it from him. She's still a thousand miles away, eyes unfocused and darting, mouth pressed in a thin line. "Sara," he says quietly, to no answer. "Hey." She blinks, looks up at him like a ghost, peering from behind haunted eyes.

"Just..." She tugs her legs up, wrapping her arms around them and pressing her forehead to her knees. "Just give me a minute."

She sits there with her face buried for a long, long time, gulping down air, visibly trembling. Len just sits with her, running his hand up and down her spine, waiting. Waiting for her to stop shaking, to start breathing, to pull herself back from the edge of whatever hell her mind has dragged her to. It takes an effort not to speak, but he forces himself to remain silent. He's watched her do this enough times now to know her fragile control takes every bit of energy and focus she has.

When she finally lifts her head, shock white and red-eyed, Len just murmurs, "Hey there." Her lips twitch, exhaustion apparent in every feature. Len hesitantly tucks her hair back from her face, something pressing on his lungs when she turns a little into his palm, face crumpling as she shudders a breath.

"I'm so tired," she whispers. "I'm so tired, Len."

Before he can think too much he slides his arm around her shoulders, gently tugging her towards him. She's small enough to fit under his chin, even sitting curled on the med chair, hair tickling his neck as she exhales slowly.

"I know," he murmurs, pressing a kiss to the top of her head before resting his chin back against her.
"I know you are." She sniffs softly, taking another forced breath as she presses her forehead to his chest, shuddering.

"I don't know what to do," she mumbles into his shirt, half an octave too high. She turns to wipe angrily at her eyes, but he feels tears soak through his shirt anyway.

"Gideon's got some ideas," he tells her. "And she thinks the worst of it won't last too long, so long as you don't try to suppress everything. And take better care of yourself physically, meaning eat and sleep."

"So basically, don't be myself," she mutters, and Len can't help the short laugh that bursts from him.

"Pretty much."

She wipes at her eyes again, turning her head sideways on his chest, as though she's listening to his heartbeat. "I don't trust myself right now," she says after a few minutes. She's calmer now, no longer trembling against him, but she still feels too small.

Len hums, rubbing his thumb absently against her shoulder. "Do you trust me?" he asks. There's a beat, and then she nods slowly, sagging into him. "Okay. Then trust me when I tell you that right now, all you need to do is keep breathing. You feel like shit, and you cry, and you get through the day. That's it."

She shifts, starts, "Bu-"

"No buts." Len pulls back, looking down to study her. "You're in a shit place, Sara. You've been through hell, and you need some time to work through that. That's okay."

"We're on a spaceship in the middle of the timestream chasing a genocidal psychopath," she says wryly, the corner of her mouth quirking. "Not really the best place or time to do that."

"Beauty of it is, it's a time ship," Len retorts, shrugging. "You let me worry about Rip. Gideon's got your back."

Sara lets out a harsh breath, bringing a hand up to rub at her neck. "What am I supposed to do, sit here and... be miserable?"

Len finds himself actually smiling at that, answers dryly, "You relax, Canary. Ever heard of the word?" She smacks his stomach a little too hard and he coughs on his laugh, shaking his head. "I thought I'd taught you better by now. Always do as little work as you can get away with."

"How did you possibly end up as Central City's most wanted with that attitude?" She sounds vaguely horrified.

"Trade secret."

She snorts, crossing her legs and resting her elbows on her knees, head in her hands. "Well, I could use one of those right now."

Len considers for a moment before answering, trying to sound nonchalant, and not like this situation has him a little more on edge than he'd like to admit, even to himself.

"Take your meds, eat your food, get enough sleep." Sara looks up at him, just a shade shy of calculating.
"That your professional opinion?"

Len shrugs. "Nah, that one involves more expletives." Sara huffs a laugh, shaking her head, then blinks.

"Gideon, what did you even give me? Do I want to know?"

"Probably not."

Len choking on a laugh, even when Sara glares at him. "Hey, you asked," he smirks.

"Ugh, I hate you both."

"Be that as it may, you'll still need to return every few hours so I can monitor your progress," Gideon states, ignoring Sara's noises of protest. "Only until I've stabilized your regimen."

"Then what?" Sara demands.

Gideon hesitates, and Len feels Sara tense up. "That will depend on your progress," she finally answers. Sara growls, pulling the med bracelet from her wrist and throwing it at the ceiling.

"I hate this," she states.

"I'm aware," Len answers dryly. "But it's not like we have anything else to do right now." It's half-true; he knows Rip has been working nearly non-stop in his study, trying to find another place and time to go after Savage, but given that 2147 was supposed to be a last ditch effort... well, Len figures that could take a while.

And if it doesn't, he'll make it take a while.

"Alright, Canary, let's get you out of here before you break something Gideon actually cares about."

Sara blinks. "What time is it?"

"It's 6:15am," Gideon answers.

Sara winces. "Shit. Did you sleep?"

"Apparently I get the first shift and you get the second," he answers wryly. "Don't worry about it, Sara. Let's get breakfast." She makes a frustrated noise, but doesn't push it.

It's going to be a long week.

xxx

broken down, i give in
    i surrender
xxx
The first day passes in a blur; Sara is fairly certain Gideon has her drugged to the gills, but she'd slept, so she can't bring herself to be upset.

*It won't last too long,* Len had said, and it's what she's clinging to, the only thing getting her through each minute. She's dealt with all of this before. She can do it again. She has to be able to do it again.

If she could only sleep without reliving every moment, without her mind twisting the outcomes into more and more horrific endings. That's the worst part, waking up no longer sure of what's real. That, at least, Gideon can help with. Sara has lost count of how many times the AI has retold Sara bits and pieces of her life, always in that calm, cheerful voice. She's long since given up on keeping Gideon out of her dreams; she doubts it had ever worked at all. And now she clings to the steady reality Gideon can provide - does provide, every time Sara dreams. Every time she wakes with phantom blood on her hands and a scream on her lips, Gideon is there to reassure her.

Most of the time, anyway. Sara has come to dread her silence more than her words.

"You look like shit."

Sara raises an eyebrow; the door hasn’t even closed yet, and it usually takes at least half an hour of silence before one of them ends up speaking, if they do at all. "Always the charmer," she responds drily.

Mick frowns, standing, and Sara blinks. She's not sure she's actually seen him do that, not since the day they locked him up. Obviously he can't spend his entire day sitting on that bench, but he
certainly tries. And if she didn't know better, she'd say it was concern on his face. "Aww, don't tell me you care, Mick. You'll make me all weepy."

He sneers, but the intent expression doesn't fade. Sara walks slowly along the wall of the cell, watching him out of the corner of her eye as he hovers, tracking her steps, inches away and powerless. Sara smiles.

"Aren't you going to tell me why I'm here?" she asks when she's passed the corner of the cell, continues to the wall and spins around to face him. He just narrows his eyes at that, slamming his palms into the cell wall. Sara doesn't flinch.

"What exactly is the plan here?" Mick growls. He starts to pace, like a caged animal. "Keep me locked up here for the rest of my life?"

Sara shrugs. "Don't know. Not my call." She slides down the wall, stretching her legs out lazily. "Least we're not torturing you."

"See, that'd be interesting."

Sara actually laughs. "You offering?" She's joking. Mostly.

"Mm, knew I liked you." Sara smirks, tugging a knife from her boot to pick at her nails. Mick is quiet for a few moments, but he seems incapable of silence today. "Snart know you come here?"

Sara thinks of Len's face, talking about Mick, missing Mick, fearing Mick, and maybe she's not joking after all. She'd told Len she'd make Mick hurt for what he'd done. Wonders how much Gideon would let her get away with. Wonders how Time Master training holds up to the League.

"Yeah, I tell him all about it while we cuddle and make friendship bracelets."

Mick snorts. "He really hasn't made a move on you?" Sara just looks at him, and Mick leers. "Yeah, bastard's not all there when it comes to that, is he? Damn shame, really." Sara still says nothing, and eventually he backs down under her gaze, muttering to himself. He's still pacing, though, and it's only a few moments of silence before he asks, "How long have I been in here?"

"You really expect me to believe you haven't kept track?"

"Humor me."

She considers fucking with him, finally just shrugs and says, "Twenty-two days." A little of the nervous energy leaves him, but there's still an undercurrent of tension in the room that leaves her unsettled. "Got plans?"

He sneers, apparently done with conversation for the day as he returns to his current dayjob of being a bench statue. Sara rests her head back against the wall, eyes half-closed, daydreams about all the different ways she could make him hurt. She'd start by freezing his hand off, obviously. It may be cliché, but she thinks it will make her point rather well.

Besides, the Waverider can probably do for Mick what it did for Len. And he had said he was bored.

"Gideon-"

"No."

Sara chokes off, pouting up at the ceiling. Mick gives her a vaguely curious look.
"I didn't even ask yet."

"I am not going to dignify that with a response."

Sara sighs. "I'll pick my battles."

"That is what I'm quite afraid of."

Sleep, Sara decides, is a torture method in disguise. She can't believe the League hasn't found a way to forego it all together.

She hasn't slept well since the Gambit went down, but this… this is something else entirely. Her dreams have never been this vivid, this coherent. Have never refused to fade like this. Have never felt so real.

Sometimes Ra's is there, teaching her, punishing her: too slow, too loud, too soft, too weak. His marks are left with sword and dagger, designed to last. To hurt and scar with minimum effect on functionality. What good is a soldier if it can't fight? What use for lessons if they do not last? Sara had long been both ashamed and proud of her many scars; now they simply make her feel old.

She'd received far fewer this time around in the League, but some of those are still an angry red. She could have Gideon heal them, she knows, but she hasn't yet, doesn't think she ever will. They're reminders of what she has survived, of what she can withstand - but also of what she can't, of where she's failed, of how she can still be made to be afraid if she's not careful.

Ivo's marks were rarely visible. Are remembered in the occasional instinctive urge to fade away from dangerous men, the hair trigger that still sets off when someone opens her door uninvited, or locks it behind them with her in the room.

The initial dread she still feels every time she wakes up, for just one moment still on that ship full of ravenous men. Alone in a sea of stars with a pack of wolves and only a hungry wolf to guard her.

The momentary horror that she cannot protect herself.

It had taken many years to not wake up to that dread. Sara wonders how many more it will take to fade again. How many late nights she'll spend running through all the ways she can now defend herself, all the ways she could kill a man.

And how long it will take for that to not make the bloodlust sing in her bones.

Not even Nyssa can provide her any relief, as every time Sara sees her face it's contorted with pain, phantom memory of what Ra's had done to her on failing to return Sara to the League. For releasing Taer al-Sahfer.

And after Sara was gone, for daring to love her.

Sara isn't sure if these truly are memories, if the Pit had transferred that to her along with its other horrors, or if her mind is just coming up with new methods to torture her. Either way, it leaves Sara sicker than almost all the rest.

If she were stronger, braver, she'd have asked Nyssa about them before leaving. Running. (Is it
And now, after rejoining the League, after reliving, there are far more bits and pieces she hadn’t been aware of after her resurrection. Fragments of memory that are distinctly not hers. Sharp edges and oozing with something decidedly Pit-born.

Ra’s had never broken Sara the first time around – he hadn’t needed to. It had taken two near-drownings, two deaths of Sara Lance and one rebirth as something not her own, something Ivo’s, for her to come to despise her past self completely enough that an offer to destroy her, to become someone else, someone stronger, had been a godsend. Ra’s hadn’t had to break her, because Sara had been all too eager to forget her past self. To leave Sara in the dust of Lian Yu, the salt of the ocean, the splintered wood and mangled metal of ships determined to see her drown.

Ra’s had taken particular pleasure in making Taer al-Sahfer travel by sea.

And Sara can feel that pleasure.

Gideon doesn’t have any good answers, only something about brain waves not quite matching her own. Which only serves to terrify Sara – she’s always assumed that no matter how disconnected it feels, the bloodlust blackouts have still been her. Her appetites amplified. The thought that there’s actually… something else inside her makes her skin crawl.

“Can’t you… block those brain waves or something?” Sara asks, 3:00am and trying to breathe.

“I’m afraid not,” Gideon answers. “Rather, doing so would help nothing. They are merely an indicator.”

Sara sighs, rubbing her eyes wearily. As though her own memories hadn’t been enough. “Have they always been… like this?”

“No, although the pattern does tentatively match with that of your bloodlust.” Sara shivers. “Did you have memories that weren’t your own before 1960?”

“A few, but just… bits and pieces. You can’t tell?”

“No.” Gideon sounds frustrated, and Sara would smirk if it were about anything else. “I only have access to what you experienced in the reintegration process. You have to visualize a memory in order for me to see it; I can’t simply… browse through your brain.”

“Well, that’s a relief,” Sara mutters.

“Perhaps.” She sounds offended. Sara groans and flops back onto her pillows.

“So that means you have no idea if these are really Ra's memories or just… normal dreams.”

“Partially correct. I cannot compare them against your own memories. However, I think it’s safe to assume that when your brain wave pattern begins to match that of the bloodlust, you are probably experiencing a true memory.”

Great. Just great. Because her own memories weren't enough on their own, because hearing about Ra's escalating cruelty from Nyssa in stolen whispers wasn't torment enough. Sara grinds the heels of her palms into her eyes, snarling curses of eternal torment in Arabic on the off-chance the demon in her actually understands.

“I will actually allow that, this one time,” Gideon informs her. Sara barks a laugh, shocking herself.
Takes a slow breath, and forces herself to ask, “Which of his memories have matched with the bloodlust?”

A beat too long before Gideon answers, “All of them, I’m afraid.”

Sara feels sick.

“They’re not mine,” she whispers. Nyssa, six years old and caught stealing food. Nyssa, hanging chained from the ceiling, her tiny feet hardly brushing the floor. Nyssa, bleeding. Cowering before Ra’s.

Nyssa, teary-eyed and dead-voiced, informing Ra’s al Ghul of Taer al-Sahfer’s death. Nyssa, stripped of title and family and home.

Nyssa, defiant and proud, kneeling before Oliver, ready to die.

This is the memory she clings to, desperately. All my life I’ve lived in fear of you. But now, as I stand before you ready to leave this earth, I want you to know I am not afraid.

The League didn’t make Sara strong. Ivo and Ra’s only taught her how to be afraid; it was Nyssa who taught her how not to be.

The fifth time she wakes up in the space of two hours, sweaty and shaking, Gideon’s voice droning in the background, she throws back her blankets and tugs on a pair of sweats.

"Miss Lance-"

"Save it," Sara cuts her off shortly. She glances at the clock: not even midnight yet despite what feels like days of trying to sleep. "Is Len awake?"

"He is. If you'd let me-"

"Gideon." Sara presses the heels of her palms into her eyes, exhaling slowly. "Just leave me alone for a few hours, please."

Surprisingly, she does. Probably gossiping with Len. Sara wonders absently if doctor-patient confidentiality applies to artificial intelligence.

Lucky for him, Len shows no sign of having colluded with a traitorous robot. Gideon must’ve at least warned him she was coming, though, because he doesn’t look the least bit surprised when she stalks through the door. He has a loop of string wrapped around several of his fingers, and Sara can’t help smiling a little.

"Kang sok," she greets. Len turns his head a little to look at her, blinking.

"That’s not Arabic," he observes. Pauses, then states, "I'm slightly concerned I now know that."

Sara snorts, shaking her head. "Chinese. What they call Cat's Cradle." She gestures at his fingers. "You know you're supposed to play with someone, right?"

"Considering you probably learned how to murder me with this string, I think I'll pass." Sara rolls her
eyes, bumping her hip against the edge of his bed. He's still laying on his back, one knee up, foot of his other leg balanced precariously on it. "Just doing it for dexterity anyway. Gideon recommended it." He gives her a pointed look. "Speaking of which."

Sara groans. Gideon is the worst.

"Hey, you're the one who came in," he points out.

"Regretting it," Sara mutters. She doesn't, though, not when the press of memory and dreams eases a little. Len raises an eyebrow, detangling his fingers to gesture at the bed beside him.

"Bed, Canary."

"That is awfully direct, Snart." He fixes her with an unamused look and doesn't budge. "You and Gideon are the real monsters," she grumbles, flopping dramatically onto the bed beside him.

"Yes, having people care about your well-being is terrible."

Sara raises both eyebrows, staring at him. "Did you even hear what just came out of your mouth?"

He pauses a moment, gaze unfocusing. Then just states serenely, "You're a horrible influence on me." Sara pulls a pillow over her face with a groan. He pulls it away a few moments later, observes, "It would be very embarrassing if you fell asleep like that and died from pillow asphyxiation."

Sara snatches the pillow back, tucking it under her head this time. Len offers her a blanket, which she only accepts because he keeps his room so cold.

She's considering actually falling asleep when he asks quietly, "Want to tell me?"

"No." Sara pulls the blanket up to her chin, curling on her side and sinking into the pillow. But when she closes her eyes all she can see is the darkness, and even knowing Len is a few feet away all she can feel is that gaping, endless loneliness. The absolute certainty that she's on her own, that no one is going to help her. That no one could ever find her, just a speck in that vast dark sea of stars.

It's not the same here. It's not. But sometimes the similarities make her head spin, her stomach clench, her hands search for something solid to ground on.

"Could you-" She cuts off words she hadn't meant to speak, flushing, presses her face into the pillow and wishes she had any idea how to do this. How to ask for what she's not even sure she needs, isn't sure he wants to give.

But she feels him move closer, feels fingers tuck her hair back before resting on one shoulder. "C'mere," he says quietly, and maybe Gideon isn't the absolute worst all the time. Sara shifts over, resting her head on his shoulder before she can think about it took hard, shivering violently as she closes her eyes. The dark is still there, oppressive and looming, but Len's hand runs along her arm and he's warm under her cheek and Sara will forgive Gideon for her over-enthusiastic mind-sharing, just this once.

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She wakes up in someone else's bed, to someone else's body heat, and lashes out instinctively, hard enough to propel her almost off the mattress while she feels for a knife-
"Sara." Coughing noises come from whoever she'd just-

Sara shakes her head, blinks, tries to drag in a breath between pulsing heartbeats. Len. Leonard. She'd hit-

She stumbles back, hand hitting air to send her tumbling to the floor, rolls to all fours and frantically sweeps her tangled mess of hair from her face and she'd hit him, and there's blood on the sleeves of his shirt and blood on the stretch of skin that’s exposed and blood on her nails when forces her gaze down and no no no-

Hits the wall, the door, only it doesn't open. She can't be here, she needs to get out, away, away from him and him away from her and-

"Sara." He kneels to eye level, matches her height, always does. Slowly, slowly reaches out, hands on her forearms. "Sara. It's okay. You're safe here. I won't hurt you." She knows that. She knows that. Presses back against the door anyway and it still won't open.

"Gideon isn't going to let you go until you calm down," Len tells her quietly. Sara thinks that should send her further into a panic but it doesn’t, just leaves her feeling… contained. Not calm, but also not about to spin apart at the edges. Tethered.

Without even using real chains this time, she thinks with a bitter laugh. Len gives her a concerned look. He’s still gripping her arms gently, keeping her from retreating any further, even if there’s nowhere to go. She doesn’t understand how his hold doesn’t send her brain spiralling, his touch doesn’t make her want to lash out. Closes her eyes and presses her back into the cold metal of the door, counts her inhales and exhales until she can open her eyes again without the world spinning out.

Len is still holding her arms, thumb pressed to the pulse point on one of her wrists, absently running along her skin any time her heart rate spikes. “You with me, birdie?” Sara blinks. Forces her eyes to focus on him, and nods.

“Yeah. Sorry.” He shakes his head, finally releasing her, and Sara feels unbearably lost for a moment. The lights are on and she can see that she’s safe, but she might as well be drowning in the cold, the dark, the endless expanse of sky.

Her nails catch her eye, drying blood coating her fingertips. Len’s sleeves are down now, but that can’t hide the stains already forming. "I hurt you," she whispers. Len glances at his arms, shrugs.

"I knew the risk. Maybe you can cut your nails for the time being, though." He gives her a lopsided smirk she doesn’t even try to return. "Like I said, Lance. Cat."

A laugh bursts from her and she nearly chokes on it, shaking her head. Tucks her arms around her knees to rest her chin on them, shudders, tries to ground herself here. If she can just center here, can pull together enough of the pieces to resemble something vaguely human, vaguely functional, maybe that can be enough. Here, contained, tethered. Safe.

She takes a deep breath. Whispers, “Okay.” Another breath. "Okay." Closes her eyes to feel the cold metal bruising her spine, beneath her bare feet. To hear the quiet hum of the ship, to smell the faintest hint of coffee, because why wouldn't Snart be drinking coffee in the middle of the night.

When she finally opens her eyes, he hasn't moved from his crouch in front of her. Just tilts his head and says, "Time to get off the floor, Canary." He stands with an exaggerated groan, mutters, "The things I do for you," as he holds out a hand. Sara uncurls after only a moment's hesitation, then
freezes, seeing the blood on her fingers again. She retracts her hand, bringing the other one up to
stare at it as well, the rest of the world fading away. She’s a monster.

Suddenly Len is kneeling in front of her, hands gently taking hers. “Here,” he murmurs, rubbing a
damp cloth over her nails, scrubs until every hint of blood is gone. “There you go.”

Sara can’t look at him. Cleaning blood from her hands doesn’t fix anything. If anything, she deserves
to have it there, deserves the constant reminder of what she’s done.

Len stands, holding out his hand again. This time Sara takes it, keeping it in hers after she’s up to
look over the scratches she’d given him. Tries not to feel nauseous. "You should go have Gideon
heal these," she mutters, reaching for his other arm. He must’ve been trying to hold her down, she
realizes, and she inhales sharply at that thought and drops his hands, takes a step back and crosses
her arms tightly across her stomach.


He's watching her carefully, stands frozen where she'd left him. "Just me," he says quietly. She nods
curtly, not moving, all her effort put into that, into breathing, into not following every instinct
screaming at her to run.

She doesn't run. Not anymore. Especially not from Len.

"I'll see Gideon tomorrow," he tells her after a few minutes have passed, and she's no longer
vibrating with nervous tension. He hesitates another moment, then asks softly, "What about you?"

Sara… considers.

Every bone in her body aches, muscles desperate to run, mind screaming to flee. But…

But Len is standing there with the bloody marks she'd left, and he's not asking her to go.

"Let me clean those," she finally answers. It's his turn to waver, stiffening instinctively, and for a
moment Sara almost breaks into hysterical laughter at the two of them. Partners in misery. She might
feel bad about pushing him if he weren't doing the same damn thing to her.

He nods. Sara would smile, if that didn't take more energy than she has. "You're not as subtle as you
think you are," he mutters, and that at least draws a soft huff from her.

"Karma, or something."

He flinches when she carefully rolls his short sleeves up, and she wants to think it's in pain. (She
knows better.) The marks aren’t deep, luckily, more scraped and bruising flesh than blood. Still,
she’d managed to draw blood in several places.

“Lucky Gideon is used to getting blood out of clothes,” she observes. Len rolls his eyes.

“Somehow I doubt she feels that way.”

He’s quiet while she cleans the blood off his skin. Sara tries hard not to think about how strange it is
to tend wounds, not give them.

I’m going to save the human race, Sara. Maybe you can help me.

Sara shudders, swallowing hard. Len frowns, and before he can say anything she blurts out the first
thing that comes to mind. “I wanted to be a doctor, when I was a kid.” She’d forgotten that, until
now. “Planned to go to med school, if I didn’t flunk out of college.”

“Well, here you are,” Len points out, slightly drawled. “Just took the ‘time abroad’ version of getting there.”

Her barked laugh startles her. “I’m pretty sure it doesn’t count if you’re cleaning up wounds you inflicted.”

“Semantics.” Sara scoffs, shaking her head. “Okay, next time I get beat up by someone not you, I’ll let you fix me up.”

Sara levels a glare at him. “You’re getting beat up by other people?” she demands, smacking him lightly on the shoulder. “Cheater.” She takes his hands in hers again, his sleeves still rolled up. Feels him tense up again, just a little. The skin on his new arm is almost disturbingly smooth; the wounds Sara had left will probably be the first scars he’ll have. "Still not used to that," he mutters.

"The hand or in general?" He freezes, eyes darting up to meet hers for a scant moment before he looks away. She's never brought this up, figures it's his business and he won't thank her for prying. But recently… Sara can't help that touch is something that grounds her, always has. Which he's clearly caught on to. But the thought of him hating every moment of this makes her stomach turn.

"Both," he finally answers shortly. There's a knot in her chest that won't ease, and Sara releases her hold. He hadn't asked for this, any of it. And tonight he hadn't even offered his company, Sara had just taken it.

She swallows hard, whispers, "I'm sorry."

*Ivo gives her a room in his quarters. The door doesn't lock.*

Sara quickly gathers up the first aid material, trying to push the memories back, to stop the way her hands shake on the bloody rags.

"Sara." His hand stills hers. “It’s okay.”

“No, it’s not," she snaps, pulling from his grip. “None of this is okay.” He’s pulled his sleeves down, covering all trace of what she’d done.

*Sara knows every inch of Nyssa's skin, intimately. Each mark and perfect flaw, every scar. She knows the story behind all of them, drawn from her Beloved over years in the quiet moments they'd stolen.*

*She returns to Nanda Parbat to ask Ra’s for an army. She returns to once again cast Sara Lance aside, because once again, Sara Lance was not strong enough.*

*She returns to Nyssa and Taer al- Sahfer, to blind loyalty that allows her to breathe. To Nyssa whispering words like 'stay' and 'home' against her skin.*

*To tracing half-healed wounds on Nyssa's back. To scars Sara does not know. To guilt that chokes her and anger that blinds her, when Nyssa slips a shirt over the angry wounds wounds she’d endured for Sara. Because of Sara.*

“Covering those up doesn’t make them go away,” Sara snarls at Len. His face hardens, mouth pressed into a thin line, but his eyes are still soft when he retorts, “And how’s ignoring your flashbacks working out for you?”
When Sara tentatively asks about staying in Ivo's room, he just gives her that cruel smile and answers, "If you'd be more comfortable in the guard's quarters, you're welcome to stay there."

Sara doesn't ask again.

"Peachy," she spits. Scrubs her hands over her face and takes a slow breath. Mutters, "Sorry." This isn't Len's fault. This isn't anyone's fault but her own. "I should go."

He studies her for a moment, finally just asks quietly, "You going to sleep tonight?"

Sara is suddenly so weary she could cry. Gives him a hollow smile, answers, "Million dollar question," before slipping out.

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x

Chapter End Notes

The rest of the section is mostly done so I should update pretty quickly =)
(1x10) i can't save them from this darkness

Chapter Summary

*Ievitably, the rest of the team work their way into her dreams.*

Or, Sara throws things at people a lot.

Chapter Notes

I'm not particularly happy with this, but I can't look at it anymore lol. There are probably errors because... I can't look at it anymore XD

More Kendra, cus Sara needs more friends in her life \o/

See the end of the chapter for more notes

**xx**

*loud mouth*

**xx**

Inevitably, the rest of the team work their way into her dreams.

Not just memories of their time together; no, sometimes she's dragged from the wreck of the Gambit, only to be rescued from the guards by Stein. Who speaks in his own voice but with Ivo's crazed edge, sanity being eaten away by obsession, and she can't look the professor in the eye for *days*. Once Rip is the one to point a gun at Sara’s head, then turn to shoot Shado while Sara sits frozen, helpless. Once she's with Nyssa, blood on her hands and body at her feet, and as her lover rolls the woman over onto her back Sara finds Kendra's lifeless eyes staring up at her.

Dreaming of Leonard is the worst. Laurel, Nyssa, the rest of her closest friends and family - they're far enough away to give her a chance to disconnect them from her nightmares. Far enough that even when it takes hours for the darkness to fade, for phantom touches to disappear, that distance is still there.

Leonard, though, is *here*. He's inside this monster and in those moments when she can't tell the dream from reality, it's too *much*. Once she kills him in the medbay, instead of leaving just a scratch. Once she's in a pit-haze again, escaped from the basement and following a girl's screams. She's on the attackers with feral glee and as she jams the knife into his body again and again and again it's Leonard's face, staring up at her.

Once he's the guard who first drags her from the Gambit's wreck, throws her in prison.

Once he's the one who drags her back out.

**xx**
suits and ties

She can't even look at him the next day. Can't look at anyone, and holes herself up in her room, curled under all her blankets and still shivering. The idea of being near anyone right now is nauseating; the thought of anyone touching her is petrifying. She closes her eyes and tries to picture something else, anything else, but the image still haunts her behind closed lids.

Gideon is unusually subdued, having had to talk Sara down from this nightmare, as with all the others. Only "don't worry it was someone else that raped you" doesn't sound as reassuring as the rest of Gideon's calm retellings do. Sara curls in on herself, buries herself into her pillow and wishes she were anyone and anywhere else.

liars
with money
and girls

It's two days before Gideon refuses to let 1812 bring her any more food - or more importantly, coffee. Sara is pretty sure she only got away with it this long because the robot also brings whatever pills Gideon has prescribed. She's given up asking about what she's taking. The resulting diagnoses Gideon cheerfully spouts are more than Sara wants to hear. And, for whatever reason, she trusts Gideon. At least this far, and the medication seems to help. Takes the edge off most of her dreams, lets her at least lay in bed not sweaty and shaking and heart racing.

So Sara dutifully takes her pills, and 1812 brings her various gifts. (Usually food; after Rip had stumbled onto the robot wheeling down the hall with a knife clutched in its claw, beeping one of his cheerful little tunes, Len had had a talk with 1812 about proper robot etiquette. Which apparently doesn't include waving weapons around, although Sara secretly rewarded him with a tiny little drawing of the League brand on his casing. Maybe she can get Nyssa to add ninja robots to the League army.)

He keeps Sara well supplied until Gideon finally threatens to make the conditions in her room unsurvivable, which Sara is only 99% sure she wouldn't do. Then she slinks out toward the mess, muttering about sociopathic spaceships.

Len appears fast enough that Gideon had to have told him. Sara can no longer muster the energy to even roll her eyes.

"Look who decided to rejoin society," he mocks with a small smile, but he looks exhausted, eyes dark and haunted. Sara glares and tries to drown her guilt and fear and all the rest of her stupid emotions in her coffee.

"You're the only one here, and I don't think you count as society."

"Semantics." He moves out of her field of vision, and Sara turns fractionally, watching him out of the corner of her eye.

She hates this.

He doesn't comment, just comes to sit across from her with two plates. Sara sighs when he places
one in front of her, promptly stealing one of his pieces of fruit. Sara has no idea what it is – she’s pretty sure Gideon just makes them to annoy Ray, who has spent an unhealthy number of hours trying to identify it in his little makeshift lab – but whatever it is, it’s actually quite tasty.

Len fixes her with a glare. “Seriously?”

Sara shrugs. “Yours taste better,” she answers serenely, snagging another piece before he manages to get his plate out of her reach.

“You saying Gideon likes me better?”

“At the moment, I imagine you’re the lesser of two evils.”

Len just shakes his head, mutters, “You’re worse than my sister.”

“I’ll take that as a compliment.” She begins eating her own food, and they fall into an easy silence. She greatly appreciates that about him, that he doesn’t feel the need to fill empty spaces with useless noise. Her own head is loud enough as it is without having to split her focus with inane conversation. She finds his natural state of sprawled apathy oddly grounding.

Then she reaches out to steal another piece of food from his plate, because she’s an idiot. He grabs her arm to stop her and Sara can't help it; she flinches away, skin crawling, rolls her shoulders and whispers, "Don't."

He looks like she’d shot him. He looks like every single fear he's ever had has come to life, like he’s staring down the cold fun at Mick again, like he’d chop his hand off again if he thought it would fix anything.

"I'm sorry," he murmurs, and then he's gone.

xx

the kind you
fit in your pocket

xx

Several showers later, she finds him in the cargo bay, flask in hand. Settles down carefully with a foot between him, knees to her chest, chin tucked against them.

"It wasn't you," she tells him, when the silence begins to throb against her ears.

He takes a pull from the flask, not looking at her. "I know." Sara wraps her arms around her legs, pulling them closer, and he asks softly, "Do you know?"

Sara blinks. Tries to pull her thoughts together from the haze that's been following her around, answers slowly, "I know." Chews her lip and tries to focus. "I know," she says again. "But I still remember. I still… feel it."

"Hmm." He takes another swallow from his flask, holding it out to her. Sara waits expectantly for Gideon to protest, shaking her head with a huff when she doesn't. "Normal dreams can feel real." Sara shakes her head again.

"Not like this." She closes her eyes with a sigh, suddenly exhausted. "I remember everything I dream. Real or not. And it doesn't fade like normal dreams."
"I'm assuming that's the time drift."

Sara hums. "So Gideon says. Something about re-experiencing traumatic memories and compounding flashbacks and some other jargon I don't remember." She holds up a hand before she's even done talking, mutters, "Don't even start, Gideon."

Len snorts softly, tilting his head to look at her. "She'd be a great prison shrink."

Sara chokes on a mouthful of whiskey, coughing for a good thirty seconds before she manages to catch her breath. "Oh my god," she eventually manages, wiping at her streaming eyes. Len looks halfway between amused and concerned, hovering just short of touching her.

"It wasn't that funny, Canary," he says mildly. "You okay?"

"Peachy." She smirks, hating the distance between them. Hating that she'd dragged him into this, hating that he's going to second guess himself on everything now.

Hating that she appreciates it.

"I think we found your true calling, Gideon," she says into that gaping hole.

"I'd be happy to practice on the both of you," comes Gideon's cheerful reply.

It's Len's turn to choke a little mid-swig, shaking his head, giving Sara a mildly terrified look. "Maybe stop making suggestions to her," he whispers.

"Hey, if I have to deal with her, the rest of you should too." She considers a moment, wincing. "Oh my god, Ray would never stop talking."

"Kendra would probably be grateful."

"Hey, you said it, not me." She tilts her head to glance at him. "I'll have you know I'm an expert at holding grudges."

"I'm shocked. Truly shocked." He tugs his exercise ball from one of his pockets - Sara will never cease being amazed at how much he can fit in that jacket. Not that she'd ever tell him so. "Mainly, I'm shocked anyone stays alive long enough for you to keep holding a grudge."

Sara gives him a sly look. "Why would I kill them when I can leave them terrified for the rest of their lives that I might show up and decide to exact my revenge?" Len raises his eyebrows. "You have much to learn, young Padawan," she states serenely.

"I'm gonna really regret showing you space movies, aren't I."

"You have no idea." She catches the ball before he can when he throws it against the wall, and they bounce it back and forth a few times before Sara states, "Gideon can tell me what's... real, and what's not. She says everything I remembered coming back, she can access."

Len nods. "She told me that much." Sara shivers. "That helps, right?"

"I've gone insane already if she couldn't."

"You trust her?"

"More than I trust myself right now." She sees him frown, tugs her knees a little closer to her chest. "On the bright side, I don't have any repressed memories to deal with." Len gives her a look, and she
shrugs. "Hey, I'll take a win where I can get it. Not dealing with new shitty life adventures is definitely a plus."

Len shakes his head with a sigh, half exaggerated and half heartbroken. "You know, I think we need to come up with a new bar for defining positive life experiences," he says wryly. "Ours has gotten ridiculously low."

"We're chasing a genocidal time travelling psychopath," Sara reminds him. "Pretty sure that sets the bar for us."

"Says who?"

"Uh, reality?"

"Hmm." Len looks contemplative, which probably means he's going to do something stupid. Sara sighs.

"Movie?" she asks. She throws the ball against the wall a few times before angling it to bounce back to him…

Smacking him in the forehead when he makes no move to catch it.

"What the…" Sara chokes on a laugh, and he growls, "The hell, Lance?"

"You weren't paying attention, clearly." He glares at her, and she just asks again, "Movie?"

"Will you stop throwing things at me if I say yes?"

"No promises." Sara smirks, standing, only hesitates a second before holding out a hand. Forces herself not to flinch when he takes it, reminds herself that she's here and she's safe and Len is the last person she needs to be afraid of.

Hates that it's so hard.

He tilts his head a little to look down at her once he's standing, releasing her hand instantly. "Okay?" he asks quietly. She nods. Hates this.

"So what's the space movie for today?" she asks. He smiles, and it gets a little easier.

xx

doll
made of paint and china

xx

Early the next morning she marches into his room, lays down next to him with her head on his shoulder, and states, “Shut up, I'm trying to sleep,” when he takes a breath to say something.

He smiles.

xx

your worth lies only in these

xx
Sometime in the middle of the sixth night she wakes up too nauseous to even get to the bathroom. She barely manages to lean over the edge of her bed before her stomach rebels, violently enough that she tumbles to the floor. She manages to miss the mess, somehow, grabbing blindly for the trashcan by her desk as another wave of nausea rushes over her.

On the bright side, she doesn't remember what she'd been dreaming about.

She doesn't realize Gideon has been conspicuously silent until she hears the door slide open, and then it's too late.

"Gideon, I told you." She chokes off when she feels her stomach twist, then fingers pulling her hair back, tying it away from her face.

"I told Gideon to ignore you when you're suffering needlessly on your own." Len. Of course. He sounds angry.

Sara coughs, spitting, bites out, "'m not-"

"No? You enjoy puking your guts out?" Yup, definitely angry. Sara groans in answer, leaning back over the trashcan to bring up the rest of dinner. Len sighs, mutters, "You're a mess, Canary."

_No shit_, she wants to snap, but her stomach refuses to settle and all she can manage is a pathetic little whimper. This is his fault, and Gideon's fault, and she's miserable enough to wish the AI would just knock her out again. She's too dizzy to even raise her head, just crosses her arms to rest across the trash and buries her face in them, shuddering.

A moment later there's a blanket being draped across her shoulders, Len's hand rubbing a few times along her back before pulling away. She tries not to feel absurdly lost without that touch. She hears him moving around, focuses on the different sounds in a desperate attempt to distract from the nausea. But it's hopeless, and soon enough she's retching again, too tired to even lift her head, just shifting a little over the trash.

Len's hand is on her back again, rubbing gentle circles, the other gripping her shoulder. "Poor little bird," she hears him murmur over the rushing in her ears, the awful noises her own body is making. He doesn't move away this time, just continues the motions until her retching dies down, leaves her shivering and exhausted.

"Here, Sara, lift your head for just a minute," he says, gently pulling at her shoulder, hand moving from her back to press against her forehead. "C'mon, this'll help."

Sara is too tired to argue, just lets him shift the trashcan out from under her and move her to the step at the base of her bed. He's put a pillow there, she realizes through a haze, tucks the blanket closer around her when her shivering doesn't ease. There's a clean trashcan sitting right beside the step, and a glass of water beside that.

It's all so... weirdly sweet that Sara suddenly wants to cry. Closes her eyes against the burn and doesn't react nearly as fast as she should when a damp cloth presses to her forehead. It's Len; she knows it's Len, and she knows Len is safe, knows he won't hurt her, knows he won't leave her unguarded like this. And even if he did, Gideon is still there. Gideon would warn her if someone had entered to maliciously place a nice cool towel on her forehead.

So she doesn't open her eyes, just sniffs and lets him gently wash her face off, the back of her neck where she feels too hot. Lets herself drift off, half-dozing, aware of his hand once again running circles on her back, soothing her toward sleep.
The nausea wakes her more times than she can keep track of, but he's still there every time. She's vaguely aware of him trying to get her to drink, of heaving the water right back up several times before managing to keep some down. After that it's him who wakes her, too many times, making her drink until she finally throws the glass at his head.

After that, he lets her sleep.

\[ \text{xx} \]
\[ \text{but you're real to me} \]
\[ \text{xx} \]

She half-wakes to the floor spinning away and for a moment thinks she's actually lost her mind. It takes her a moment to realize Len has picked her up, placing her back in bed and covering her with probably every blanket in the room. She tries to say something, but all that comes out is a vague noise, buried in her pillow.

She tries again, manages to croak his name, feels his fingers tangle in her hair.

"Shh, still right here," Len whispers. "I've got you, Sara. Go back to sleep."

She fades out to the world spinning lazily behind closed lids, his fingers tracing the spiral pattern it makes against her back, into the darkness.

\[ \text{xx} \]
\[ \text{little bones} \]
\[ \text{will you break these legs like twigs now?} \]
\[ \text{xx} \]

He's dozing when she finally really wakes, sitting on the step she'd spent half the night on. The pillow is still there, at least, but it looks terribly uncomfortable, his cheek pressed against the mattress. Sara slowly rolls onto her side, facing him, wincing as her stomach muscles make themselves known. Very, very angrily. Her mouth tastes awful, and she has a raging headache, and she's far too tired to do anything about any of that. She just wants to sleep for a week.

Len's eyes snap open when she shifts, red and weary but instantly focused on her. Sara tries to smile, but even that takes more energy than she has.

"Hey," he greets, lifting his head to rub his eyes. "How're you feeling?"

"Disgusting." She sounds even worse than she feels, and winces. Len reaches for the water and Sara tries to sit up, groaning when her stomach muscles complain. "Ow."

"Here." Len places another pillow under her head, handing her the water. Sara takes a few cautious sips, making sure they settle before drinking the rest. It helps her head, although her mouth still tastes awful. "I've got something from Gideon, too, if you're up for it," Len tells her.

Sara scrubs at her face, wincing when she raises a hand to her hair. She desperately needs a shower, but doubts she'd make it through one right now. "Please tell me it has the same drugs as the last one. I want to sleep for a week."

Len smirks faintly, but his eyes are pinched, mouth twisted in a frown. Sara reaches out, placing a
hand on the mattress with a weary smile. "Len, I'm okay. Just tired." He nods slowly, then hands her another suspiciously bright drink. She drinks it without issue, and has no idea if the exhaustion is from that or what she'd already been feeling.

Len looks even worse than she feels, though, so she mumbles, "You should sleep. Look like shit." "I am not leaving you alone right now." His voice is tight, final. Sara sighs. "Okay, then come here." She shifts toward the wall, leaving him plenty of space. "If you're gonna stay, you're not allowed to be on the floor. My room, my rules. Don't like it, go sleep on the floor in your room."

He gives her an exasperated look, but doesn't argue. When he's settled on his side atop the blankets, facing her, Sara lets her eyes drift closed. "You should've told me you were this sick," he says quietly. "Or at least Gideon."

Sara wants to argue. To defend herself, try to explain. But she's too tired, and he deserves better after what he'd just done for her. "You're right," she murmurs, forcing her eyes open. "I should've. I'm sorry."

He looks away when she meets his gaze, fingers picking at the edge of one of her blankets. "Scared the shit out of me," he mutters, and it must be the exhaustion or the drugs but something in Sara's chest threatens to shatter at that, at the look on his face. "Thanks to you, I'm okay," she tells him. Covers his hand with hers and closes her eyes. "Gideon, on the other hand, is in the doghouse."

Len snorts, and Gideon says calmly, "I must point out, I warned you about trying to reduce your dosage too quickly."

Sara winces, feels Len's eyes burning a hole through her. "Something she conveniently forgot to tell me," he growls. "Yell at me later, please. Sleep now."

He deflates, probably only because he's as tired as she is. "Fine. You're lucky you're cute, assassin, even covered in puke."

"Don't push it," she grumbles, but he's already asleep.

xx

there's a pain here
you'll never have to feel

xx

He drags her (half-literally) to the med bay once she wakes up. Sara decides the fact that he's able to do so means maybe she really should let Gideon do… whatever fun things she has in store today.

It takes far more effort than it should to stand, to walk to the bathroom and make a halfhearted attempt at cleaning herself up a little. She still doesn’t think she’d make it through a shower without passing out. Her hands shake as she runs the water, no matter how hard she tries to still them. Her
legs feel like they might give out if she stands still for too long.

In short, she’s close to helpless.

It’s fucking terrifying.

Halfway through rinsing her face off her vision starts to darken at the edges, and she lowers her head to press against the cool metal of the counter, focuses on taking slow, steady breaths. She’s just dehydrated, exhausted, and dangerously low on blood sugar and caffeine. That’s all. She’s fine. No one on this ship is going to hurt her.

Unless Mick gets free-

Sara firmly shuts down that line of thought. It will do her no good to worry about things she can’t control.

Her body starts trembling anyway.

“Okay,” she whispers to herself. “I can do this.” It’s another minute before she feels steady enough to raise her head, slowly making her way to the door.

Len looks up from where he’s flipping a coin along his knuckles, and from the way his eyes narrow Sara figures she looks as awful as she feels.

“Med bay, now,” is all he says. Which is how Sara ends up half-dragged through the corridors of the Waverider, mostly because her legs keep trying to give out and the pace she’d be able to keep on her own is apparently not fast enough for Len.

She can’t help a small sigh of relief when she finally collapses into one of the medical chairs. She puts on the med bracelet when Gideon orders her to, closing her eyes against the way the world spins slowly, spots flickering on the white ceiling above her.

“Gonna yell at me now?” she asks wearily, not opening her eyes. Len scoffs.

“You couldn’t even win a fight against a baby right now, Lance. I’ll wait until you’re vaguely capable of defending yourself.”

Sara’s eyes fly open at that, sudden panic flooding her chest. Her free hand grabs instinctively for a knife that’s not there, and Len rolls his eyes. "For fuck's sake, Sara, that wasn't a threat."

Sara makes a noise that sounds more animal than human, and Gideon says icily, "Mr. Snart, if you can't be civil, I suggest you leave."

"Civility has just ended up with her back here," Len retorts.

"Regardless." "Stop it." They both fall silent at Sara's voice. "Both of you, just… stop. You've done enough for me. Just… let it go." Len stares at her incredulously for a moment, and Sara cuts him off as he opens his mouth to reply. "This is why I didn't want Gideon bringing you in," she says shortly. "You have to enough to worry about without me, Leonard."

"Not your call, Canary."

"It is when you're using me as an excuse to avoid Mick."
"Using you?" He takes a step forward, arms tightly crossed, eyes blazing. "Is that really what you think?"

Sara sighs. Sinks back into the chair, murmurs, "I think it's easier to focus on someone else's problems than of your own."

"At the moment, yours are a little more pressing."

Sara gives him a look. "Mick is sitting in a cage downstairs," she says drily.

"And he's not going anywhere."

"Neither am I."

"I know." He's staring at her so intently she has to look away. "That's the problem."

Sara has no answer for that.

Gideon does, however, states in that same icy tone, “Mr. Snart, perhaps you should take a break. I’d like to speak with Miss Lance alone.” Len looks at Sara for another moment before glancing up with a frown.

"Go take a shower," Sara orders before he can protest, gesturing at the door. "Gideon has me on house arrest. I'll be fine."

He raises an eyebrow, face softening a little. "Famous last words, Lance." Sara rolls her eyes.

"Get out, asshole." She waits until he's been gone a few minutes to ask tightly, "What do you want, Gideon?"

“Do you have any memories of your resurrection?”

Sara swallows. “Yes. Why?”

“I should rephrase, any new memories?”

“I remember everything, Gideon. I remember waking up drowning, I remember attacking Nyssa and Laurel. I remember being chained in the damn basement and escaping and every person I killed.”

“And you didn’t before?”

“Not this… vividly. Coherently. Before it was just… feelings really. Anger, rage. Chains. Now it’s like any other memory.” She pauses for a moment, demands again, “Why?”

“I believe your body is… struggling with this.”

“You mean realizing I should still be dead.” Sara clenches her jaw at Gideon's silence. “What does that mean?”

“Nothing serious. I believe it’s why you’re having a particularly difficult readjustment.”

Sara wraps her arms across herself, shivering. “Never tested time drift on someone who’s been resurrected, huh?” she asks dully.

“No.”
Sara rubs her arms, suddenly freezing. She’s about to ask Gideon to turn up the heat when she hears footsteps – not Len’s – and freezes.

It’s Jax – of course it’s another member of the team, she tells her brain. Calm the fuck down.

“What’re you doing in here?” is the first thing out of his mouth. It sounds a shade too accusatory, and Sara’s snap defenses try to go up. She hasn’t spoken to him since returning, she realizes. She hasn’t really spoken to anyone but Len and Kendra. Ray, Rip and Stein are all holed up with their respective projects, but she has no idea what Jax has been doing.

It’s been only weeks for them, she reminds herself. Just one day between leaving them behind and finding Sara a devoted assassin. The difference must’ve been shocking.

So why do they seem to be having a harder time letting things go back to the way they were than she does?

“Food poisoning,” she finally answers shortly.

Jax raises his eyebrows, and Sara feels the anger trying to wake up. “Sure.”

“Really not your business,” she says curtly.

“Yeah, whatever.” Sara thinks he’s going to let it alone, but a moment later he says, “You knew Rory was alive, didn’t you.”

Sara sighs. She’s too exhausted for this. It seems so insignificant to her now, years away. “Yeah.”

“And you didn’t think the rest of us deserved to know?”

“It wasn’t my secret to tell.”

“Not your-” Jax rubs a hand over his mouth, turning away for a moment. “Unlike you, Sara, some of aren’t actually used to people around us dying all the time.”

Sara wants to laugh. Or maybe cry. Wonders how many people she’s seen for since Mick betrayed them. How many she’s killed. "Can we not do this right now, Jax? Please?" She tries to keep the weariness from her voice, the desperation.

Jax scoffs, shaking his head, and walks out without another word. Sara curls onto her side and tries very hard not to cry.

She'd never imagined she could feel more alone on this ship than stranded in the past.

"Gideon?" she whispers, pretending she doesn't sound so small.

"I'm here, Miss Lance."

"Could you-" Her voice breaks, and she pauses, waits until she can keep it even to continue, "Could you tell me… anything? Just…” She shakes her head, breaking off, buries her face as she flushes red with shame.

But Gideon answers, almost gently, "Of course. Is there anything in particular you’d like to hear?"

“Anything,” Sara whispers.

She slowly relaxes to Gideon's drone, not hearing the actual words, just focusing on the sound of her
voice. The IV helps as well, and she's starting to feel vaguely human again when she hears Stein's voice yelp, "Miss Lance!"

Sara nearly jumps out of her skin, again reaching for a weapon, again coming up empty. Which she’s glad for when she sees the stark fear on Stein’s face, fear of her.

“I wasn’t expecting to find you here,” he stammers after a moment. Sara doesn’t answer, can’t find her voice. Not sure what she’d even say. “I’ll uh, I’ll come back later.”

“’s fine,” Sara manages wearily. “Just pretend I’m not here.”

“Oh, um. Alright.”

Sara closes her eyes and tries not to think about how they’d been family, once upon a time.

Her heartrate jumps again when Jax skids through the door, eyes a little wide. He glances back and forth between her and Stein a few times, finally asks carefully, “You good, Gray?”

Sara’s stomach drops through the floor.

She starts to laugh, can’t help it, and the other two state at her like she’s about to explode. “Wow,” she manages to choke out. “You’re that scared of me?”

They glance at each other. “Can you blame us?” Jax asks.

“You did almost have us executed,” Stein fills in with a nervous look. “We’re simply… cautious.”

“Cautious.” Sara spits the word. She’s the one who can hardly stand, and they’re still afraid of her. “You thought I was going to kill you in Nanda Parbat out of spite, because you hurt my feelings.”

“What feelings?” Jax demands. Sara reels back as though he’d hit her. “I’m sorry, Sara, but how do we know you’re not gonna just… revert to crazy assassin mode at any moment?”

Sara thinks of the wound on Len’s neck, of chains and broken bones and lucid dreams, and whispers, “You don’t.”

“I mean, you nearly killed Gray before you did assassin school round two.”

“I’m sorry, she did what?” Stein demands.

Sara feels sick.

“Gideon, do I need to be here any longer?” she bites, pulling the bracelet from her wrist before she’s even finished the question.

“You really should remain-”

“Too late.” She gets her legs over the edge of the chair, sitting up too fast, blinks away stars furiously. She sees Stein instinctively move toward her, hears him start, "Miss Lance, are you-"

"Don't touch me," she snarls. Stumbles. Tries not to think about how helpless she is right now, desperately wishes she had a weapon.

The rest of the world fades away as she focuses on putting one foot in front of the other, one hand braced against the wall, trying to remember which direction her room is. The lights are too bright, and there are too many turns, and how far has she come?
Footsteps, and she tries to whirl, falls back into the wall as her vision goes dark and-

“Sara?” Kendra. Kendra appears in front of her, blurry and weaving. Then she’s beside Sara, an arm around her waist just as Sara starts to collapse. “Ookay, Canary, we’re taking a trip to medbay.”

“No,” Sara croaks. “My room. Please.”

Kendra sighs, but starts helping Sara in the direction of her room. Probably only because it’s closer, but Sara will take it.

She makes it to her bed, barely. Collapses into the blankets with a groan. “Okay, what the hell, Sara?” Sara makes a noise into her pillow. “Nuh uh, You don’t get to nearly pass out in the hallway and not explain it.”

"Food poisoning," Sara mutters.

"You're a terrible liar."

“Am not.”

Kendra rolls her eyes. “Gideon, does she have food poisoning?”

“Cheater,” Sara growls, even as Gideon gives a cheerful negative. “I’m fine,” she mumbles. “Just need sleep.”

“Yeah, that’s very convincing.”

Before Sara can respond, the door opens, because apparently privacy is not a thing on this ship anymore.

“Fancy meeting you here,” Len drawls. Sara groans. “What’d she do now?”

Sara grabs the nearest thing – her water glass, she thinks – and throws it at him without lifting her face from the pillow.

“Almost passed out on her way back from medbay,” Kendra answers. Sara hears a thunk against the wall.

“I did not,” she mumbles.

“You really did.”

“I can’t leave you alone for five minutes,” Len sighs. “Gideon, shouldn’t she still be in medbay?”

“She should indeed. There was a… complication.”

There’s a moment of silence that neither Sara not Gideon fill, and Len says slowly, “Do I need to kill someone?”

“That’s my line,” Sara mutters. Still, somehow it makes her feel a little better.

"Sara." His voice is much closer, and she feels the bed creak as he leans against it.

"It's fine, I'm fine," she states, muffled in the pillow.

“I’m not even responding to that line anymore. What happened?” Sara just shakes her head. “Sara.”
He sighs. “You know Gideon will just tell me later.”

"So ask her later."

She can practically hear his eyeroll. "I'm gonna go check with Gideon," Kendra says, voice just a little exasperated. "Try to keep her out of trouble for five minutes?" Sara growls, but it sounds rather pathetic with the pillow still in her face.

"Pretty sure that's not possible," Len drawls. Sara kicks him, or tries to, but that would require energy, and her position is not optimal. "That was pathetic, even for you." Sara rolls onto her back, intending to try again, but the lights are too bright and she sees stars for a moment, even laying down. Presses her palms over her eyes and takes a slow breath.

"How're you feeling?" Len asks, much more serious. Sara rubs her face wearily.

"Tired." She lowers her hands to find him studying her, concern back on his face.

"You still look like shit."

"Thanks, Snart."

He gives a small smile. "Less like a zombie, though, so there's that."

"Feel like one," Sara mutters.

"Hungry for brains?"

Sara chokes. "Don't worry, yours is the last one I'd want to touch."

"Ouch."

"But if I have nightmares about zombies now, it's entirely your fault."

"Hey, you're the one who was actually dead."

Sara shivers. Imagines her body lying in a coffin, imagines what it would've been like to wake up there. Would they have put her back if she hadn't regained her soul?

"They buried me in the suit I died in." She doesn't even realize she'd spoken for a moment, until Len gently stills her hand where it's running along the scars those arrows had left. "Resurrected me in it. Chained me up in it."

"Must've smelled pretty awful," Len murmurs, forcing a small laugh out of her. He touches her shirt under her hand, asks, "Can I?"

Sara hesitates, then nods tightly. She pulls her shirt up, revealing the surprisingly small arrow scars, white and faded now. Len gently traces his fingertips across them, making her shiver, her heart beat a little faster. His gaze is fixed on her stomach, slowly moving from the arrow scars to another old gash, shallow and long across her side, to one that's angry red and barely healed over. He looks up at her then in question, and Sara gives a mirthless smile.

"Ra's believes lessons are best remembered through blood and pain."

Len snorts softly. "He's not wrong." His eyes drop back to the scar, fingers tracing it featherlight. "I thought mine were bad," he murmurs.
"Yours are different." She catches his hand. "Ra's wanted them as visible as possible." Lewis, she imagines, wanted quite the opposite. "And I chose to stay there. I wanted to stay there."

He nods slowly, tugging her shirt back down. "Do you wish we hadn't come back?"

Sara freezes up, blindsided by the question. She hasn't really considered it, not since she made the decision to leave back at Nanda Parbat.

“Sometimes,” she answers slowly. “The League is… simpler. Easier, in some ways. Most people who join have experienced some loss, some horror they can’t live with.” She shrugs. “It’s easy to die for someone when you have nothing to live for.”

She feels something crack in her chest, pressing on her ribs, her lungs, her heart. Something dark and deadly, something that refuses to leave her alone. She closes her eyes, shifting a little in pain, trying not to let it show on her face.

It must, though, because a moment later Len gently presses his palm to her chest, just beneath the hand she suddenly realizes is clutching her throat. Her hand. Sara slowly lets it drop to rest on his, dragging in a breath. Another. Focuses on the way his hand rises and falls, hers with it, not on the way her body aches or the tears she feels escape from behind closed lids.

She has no idea how long he sits with her, but her tears have dried on her cheeks by the time she rubs at her eyes, sniffing. Takes one last deep breath and opens them.

“Rough day, huh?” Len says, and Sara manages a small laugh.

“I hate this,” she whispers. Len lifts his hand from her chest to tuck her hair back hesitantly, murmurs, “I know. And you’re going to hate me, but you need to go back to the medbay, Sara.”

“I’m not going back there,” Sara says harshly. Something in her voice must convince him, because he sighs and asks Gideon, “Can I set her up on an IV here?”

“Miss Saunders has already inquired. It will need to be a manual insertion. The medical cuff only works in the chair.”

Len looks at Sara questioningly. “Your choice, birdie.”

Sara swallows hard, whispers, “Can’t you just leave me to be miserable in peace?”

“Nope.” He smirks, but his voice is gentle when he says, “You’re stuck with me, little bird.”

“And me.” Kendra enters with an IV rack, and Sara makes a noise of protest. “Sara Lance, you are going to stop wallowing and let us help you right now, is that clear?”

Len smiles a little, glancing to Kendra and back. “Mama bird,” he whispers.

“Says the mother hen,” Kendra retorts.

Sara pulls a pillow over her face.

"What have I said about pillow asphyxiation?"

“That it’s how you’re going to die when you drive me insane,” she mumbles into the fabric.

“They have a Smothering with Pillows class at the league?”
Sara growls, rips the pillow from her face to try to hit him with it, but he already has his hands up to stop her.

“Fool me once,” he drawls. Sara makes a frustrated noise, but before she can retort Kendra walks over with the IV.

“Okay, children,” she sighs, taking the pillow from Len and putting it on the desk, out of both their reach. “Sara, I need your arm, please.”

She can’t help flinching when Kendra inserts the needle, looking away.

“If at first we don’t succeed… well luckily we have a boat full of prisoners to test our trials on.” Ivo smiles. Sara stretches her lips.

“Hey.” Len squeezes her left hand, rubbing his thumb along her knuckles. “You’re here with us, Sara. It’s okay.”

She nods tightly, closing her eyes. Focuses on Len’s hand and nothing else. “You’re okay,” he murmurs again.

Her last thought is that Gideon most definitely spiked the IV.

xx

there are some things
i just can’t forgive

xx

Chapter End Notes

I really do love Jax and Sara’s relationship, and her and Stein for the most part. But they were both assholes in this episode so¯

xx(˘´¯⁄)¯
(1x10) i have seen what the darkness does

Chapter Summary

*She waits for it to get easier.*
*It doesn't.*

Chapter Notes

Featuring: Kendra & 1812 (Gideon is basically a MC at this point idek)

Warnings: *points at tags* basically all of them for this chapter. I've also changed the rating from T to M because I was deluding myself when I thought this fic wasn't as dark as my usual stuff¯\_(ツ)_/¯

Meet Me In The Woods (Lord Huron)

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

xxx

*i took a little journey to the unknown*

xxx

"You've got to be kidding me." Kendra has her hands on her hips, staring up at Sara in disbelief. "There is no way Gideon thought this was okay."

"I most certainly did not."

"Yeah, didn't think so."

"Very funny," Sara mutters, forehead resting against the wall. Approximately 20 feet off the ground, on the small platform at the top of a rope. A rope that she had thought was a brilliant idea to climb.

Her body hadn't agreed, apparently. Being this high was probably a terrible idea given the dizziness that still plagues her, but she could've deal with that, if her muscles hadn't decided to just stop working. Now Sara is pretty sure she'll fall if she attempts to climb down, which would be incredibly embarrassing.

Possibly less embarrassing than someone finding her stuck, though. At least it was Kendra. Len would never let her live it down.

"So how exactly are you planning on getting down, Canary?"

Sara glares down at her. "Just taking a break. I'm comfy."
"Uhhuh." Kendra sighs. "Gideon, how long has she been up there?"

"Forty-seven minutes," Gideon answers before Sara can growl at her not to. Stupid meddling spaceships. And hawks.

"You're an idiot," Kendra announces. Sara rolls her eyes and shivers. All warmth she'd generated from climbing has long since worn off, and now she's just covered in dried sweat and a fine layer of dust she'd blown off the platform while collapsing onto it.

Okay, this was a really stupid idea.

"You gonna help me down or what?" she asks crossly. She desperately wants a shower. A warm, warm shower.

Kendra snorts. "How am I supposed to do that? There is no way I'm climbing that thing, not even to rescue you."

"We came here to rescue you."

"I don't need to be rescued. I've found peace here."

Sara shivers with more than just cold.

"I don't know," she mutters. "Get me a damn ladder."

Kendra raises an eyebrow, then gets a suspiciously smug expression on her face. She takes off her jacket, and Sara backs away from the edge of the platform in sudden horror. "Oh, no way," she growls, backing into the wall as Kendra suddenly appears before her, hovering with lazy flaps of her wings. "No."

"Come on, little bird," Kendra mocks. "Time for your flying lessons."

"I hate you."

Kendra preens. "You have a strange way of saying thank you." Sara glares at her balefully, only earning a laugh. "Come on, Sara. It'll take two seconds. I promise I won't drop you." She gives Sara a sly smile. "You're not afraid of flying, are you, Canary?"

Sara mutters under her breath about insufferable hawks, but slowly crawls out toward Kendra. (Tries not to think about how even that makes her legs start to tremble.)

Kendra catches one of Sara's shoulders when she stumbles, sliding her arm around Sara's back and scooping her up before Sara can protest.

"Alright, I've got you," Kendra soothes when Sara latches one arm tightly around her neck. "You stink."

"You better not tell anyone about this," she mumbles into Kendra's shoulder.

Kendra huffs a laugh. "Yeah, I don't think that's gonna work for me." She lands lightly, carefully setting Sara down. "Maybe I'll have Gideon make a home video for my Waverider scrapbook."

"I will hurt you." She wavers, legs threatening to give out, and Kendra tightens the arm she still has around Sara. "Wait, are you really making a scrapbook?"

"I have an entire section for 'stupid things Sara does'."
"Ugh." She's managed to walk to her small pile of belongings, grabs her water bottle eagerly. "You've spent too much time with Snart."

"Probably. That is your fault, though." Sara makes a face, halfway through her water. Kendra waits until she's drained the bottle to ask, "You gonna be okay?" Sara nodds wearily. "You sure? I can fly you back to your room."

"I hate you."

Kendra smirks - she's definitely spending too much time with Len. "Alright. I'm sure Gideon will let me know if you need rescuing again." Sara flips her off as she turns to leave. Kendra waits until she's at the door to add, "And please take a shower, Sara."

Sara's empty water bottle hits the door as it closes.

xxx

i come back changed
i can feel it in my bones

xxx

After the... flying incident, Kendra is assigned to babysit her in the gym.

Well, Gideon doesn't use so many words, but the intention is clear. Apparently, working herself to exhaustion is not an approved method of dealing. Pointing out she's always done so in the past gets her nowhere, so now she's stuck with a babysitter.

Which, coincidentally, means she starts to really train again. Kendra is always the one to ask, and at first Sara is afraid to even let Kendra spot her. But gradually she falls back into her routine - which, her body reminds, she has NOT kept up - and eventually even sparring. Knowing Kendra can hawk out, and that Gideon could summon help if Sara really lost it, makes it a little less terrifying.

But only a little.

xxx

i fucked with forces
that our eyes can't see

xxx

Her body aches, a good ache, the kind that means she's gaining strength.

But also that she'd lost it.

She'll never go back, she'd promised herself. She will never be that vulnerable again. That weak. She will never be that girl she still sees in her dreams.

The girl fades, as the nights pass and the days go on. The dreams pale, becoming less vivid, less blurred with reality. Time moves forward, something she's never been so acutely aware of as she is here, watching the odd green flow of time pass by. Time heals all wounds.

She waits for it to get easier.
It doesn't.

xxx

now the darkness got a hold on me

xxx

Kendra's eyes are wide and glowing red when Sara realizes she has her hands around the other woman's neck, but it's the fear in them that finally snaps Sara out of it. She immediately drops her hold, one hand to her mouth in horror as she backs away and doesn't stop, just turns and runs to the fading sound of Kendra's voice, the pulsing of her blood that was sickening music to Sara's ears.

She doesn't stop her blind dash until she hits a dead end, no idea where she is. Presses her forehead to the wall and chokes in air, eyes closed, tries desperately to forget the look on Kendra's face. Not that she deserves to forget.

Len eventually finds her on the upper level, tucked away by one of the few windows the Waverider has, staring out at the spiraling green of the temporal zone. She used to do this on The Amazo, gaze out the tiny porthole and try to remember the rest of the world. How it looked, colors beyond sky blue and black ocean. Smells beyond salt and sweat and fear, sounds beyond rolling waves and faint screaming. The feel of sun on her skin, wind in her hair, steady ground beneath her feet.

Her room was more of a closet than a bedroom, one door and no window. Standing with her back to far wall, she could stretch her arms and touch either side. She knew exactly how many steps it was from her bed to the threshold, how many from there down the hall to the tiny bathroom. Which floorboards would creak, which doors would squeal, how many breaths she'd have to hold when Ivo returned drunk for him to stumble by without remembering her existence.

She could navigate that ship in the dark, long before the League taught her how. Had to, on the days he locked her in her closet, when she counted steps and rolling waves and screams to keep from going insane. She measured time in the reach of her bangs and the cycles of her body, in tears of relief each month she bled. In the way her body hardened, soft edges giving way to muscle and bone. On the days she was trapped there she watched the slim crack of sunlight at the bottom of her door, tracked its movements across the floor and imagined her family somewhere under the same sun.

On the nights, she held herself on trembling limbs between the walls, a moment longer each time, an inch higher. Her muscles would ache for days, but this ache she controlled; this ache made her stronger.

She'd never grown out of that need to seek out windows and heights. Even here, where height is relative and all she can see is swirling green.

"Am I interrupting any deep thoughts?" Sara glances at Len as he saunters over, shaking her head.

"Nah, I'm pretty simple. Point and kill."

Len smirks, but there's no lightness to it. He slowly settles across from her, mirroring her pose, boots not quite touching hers.

"Kendra's fine," he tells her quietly. Sara swallows. Grits her teeth against the burning in her eyes, grips her arms tighter where they're crossed around her drawn up knees. She can feel his eyes on her, stares fixedly out the window. "What about you?" he asks. Sara laughs hollowly.
"Really not what's important right now."

"Yes, it is." Sara leans her head back against the wall, closing her eyes. "At the very least, the last time this happened I found you chained to your bed."


Len sighs. "Sara-

"I don't know what you want me to say, Leonard." She drops her hands back around her knees, looking away. "I'm dangerous. I can't be trusted."

"Kendra knew the risks."

"That doesn't make it okay," Sara snaps. "You wanted to know what happened in the medbay a few days ago? Fine. Stein stumbled in on me and he was so afraid of me Jax could feel it. Came running. And I can't even be angry, because do you know what Jax asked me? How they could trust I wouldn't go back to Taer al-Sahfer. How they could trust me with their lives, trust me at all." She laughs mirthlessly, chokes on bitter words. "Obviously, they can't."

Len is already shaking his head. "Taer al-Sahfer and the bloodlust are not the same thing."

"At the moment, they might as well be."

Len frowns. "Well that sounds like bullshit. Gideon, is that bullshit?"

"It is indeed."

Sara pushes herself up the wall, eyes hot, throat tight. "You don't know what you're talking about," she bites out. Len just looks up at her and tilts his head.

"Probably true, but I'm pretty sure Gideon's smarter than I am."

Sara makes a noise of frustration and crosses her arms, turning away to stare out the window. Watches the green swirl angrily, energy crackling through it, almost like lightning. Almost like a storm, a constant storm they're trapped flying through endlessly.

She would've given anything to have this power on The Amazo.

"The bloodlust was gone when I nearly executed the team," she states when she can keep her voice even. "That wasn't an accident in the heat of battle. I can't blame the bloodlust for that."

"No, you can blame Ra's." Sara hates the little twinge of obedience that name still stirs. "You can blame me or Mick for getting you stranded there, or Rip for recruiting you in the first place."

*I'm going to save the human race, Sara. Maybe you can help me.*

"Or myself, for doing this again," she murmurs, as much to herself as to him.

*I have replaced evil with death. And that is what the League exists to do. And I have killed several thousand more men since then. And the world is better for it.*

That memory isn't hers. The one where she drives a blade through Oliver's chest. The one where Nyssa is jealous of Oliver's impending death, because he will see Sara again.
Sara shivers.

"Doing what again?" Len is still sprawled on the floor, arms resting on his half-raised knees, fingers tented together. He looks annoyingly relaxed, and Sara has to repress the instinctive need to make him fear her.

She shakes her head, looking back out at the storm. "For all their... many, many faults, Ivo and Ra's both truly believed they were making the world a better place."

"By killing and torturing people." Sara doesn't look at him. Can't. "Don't get me wrong, I'm not judging. But I at least admit that I'm a criminal."

Sara gives a faint smile that echoes back at her from the glass, glowing green and twisted. "'Sacrifice one for the good of the many'." She can see his reflection in the window, eyes glittering in that strange light. "Isn't that what we're doing here?"

Len tilts his head, looking away for a moment before his eyes glimmer back at her. "Something tells me Rip wouldn't appreciate you comparing him to Ra's al Ghul or your mad scientist."

"He's not mine," Sara snaps instantly, whirling to face him.

He dips his head, murmurs, "Sorry. Not yours." Sara drags in a breath and turns away again.

"And Rip has no moral ground to judge anyone," she bites.

"True enough." He pauses, and when she stays silent continues, "None of that makes this your fault, Sara."

She leans her forehead back against the glass, says bitterly, "I was so desperate to belong somewhere that I went back to the League after just six months." She's exhausted, suddenly, body feeling like a dead weight dragging her down. She doesn't know how else to make him understand that she'd chosen this. Some part of her, that small, scared, weak little girl still inside her had chosen this. Had been so terrified of being alone that giving in to Ra's was an acceptable alternative.

"You thought we were dead." She watches his reflection slowly push itself upright. "You thought we abandoned you there. You thought you were never going home." Sara shivers uncontrollably, rubbing her arms to try to warm herself. "You had to watch Kendra and Ray be together, while you were on your own." There's not even a hint of mockery in his voice, and Sara shivers again. "Sara, of course you went back to the one place you knew."

Sara swipes at her eyes, shaking her head, but she's out of responses. Len leans against the opposite end of the window, frowning out of the corner of her eye. "Hey. What exactly would your alternative have been?"

"I don't know." Her voice is clipped, biting, but he doesn't back down. Sara keeps her arms tightly folded, on a hair trigger, stepping back when he moves toward her. It's not him, and they both know it, but she still can't shake the tightness in her chest, itching in her lungs, heart thrumming against her ribs.

She hates this. She hates the sorrow and hurt on his face, hates the way her body trembles without her permission, hates the way each breath is a struggle that leaves her exhausted.

He doesn't leave, just leans back into his corner to sit quietly. Sara closes her eyes and counts her breathing, in and out, over and over and over. It's strange, trusting him so completely even when the thought of being touched makes her skin crawl. She sinks down when her legs start to shake, presses
her head back against the wall and forgets how to breathe.

"I don't know," she mutters again, lungs itching unbearably. She starts to gasp, fragile control slipping away. Feels her heart pounding, adrenaline racing uncomfortably through her, lungs seizing up as she starts to hyperventilate. Sees Len clench his fists when she presses a hand to her chest, choking.

He moves toward her, says quietly, "I'm going to sit next to you, okay?" She nods. Tries not to flinch when he settles in front of her. He freezes, and she feels his eyes on her for a long moment before he asks, "Do you want me to leave?"

She almost nods. She's on edge enough that even proximity is too much, too close, too loud. But the thought of being alone right now, of her pieces scattering to the edges of time with no one to hold her together... that scares her more.

So she shakes her head and presses her face to her knees, chokes out, "Too close." She hears him shift, feels the crushing weight of proximity slowly lessen, the iron fist choking her lungs gradually easing.

"Okay," he murmurs. "Is this alright?" She nods, not looking up. "Okay, now I want you to tell me hear, other than my voice and yourself. Close your eyes, push everything else away, and tell me what you hear."

It's hard to hear anything over her own harsh gasping, but eventually she can make out the gentle hum of the Waverider's engine, more noticeable on the upper levels without so many other instruments overshadowing it.

"Engine," she croaks out.

"Good. What else?"

Sara nearly cries with the effort it takes to focus again, but she forces herself to do it, squeezes her eyes tightly shut and eventually manages, "Wheels. Squeaky. Robot?" Hears Len hum.

"Bingo. Alright, birdie, now what you feel. Physically, on your skin."

Adrenaline is all she can feel for a moment, ragged air in her lungs. Squeezes her hands so tightly her nails dig into her skin, feels her heart rate slow. Whispers, "Nails." Chokes on a breath, and another, until she can extend her awareness beyond lungs that are too tight. "Floor is hard. Cold." She shivers, somehow hot and freezing at the same time. "It's cold."

"'Space is cold', birdie."

Sara groans and laughs, or tries to. Mumbles, "That was terrible."

"Limited material here." Sara shivers again. "What else?"

It takes far too much energy to focus, and she nearly chokes on a lungful of air when she whispers, "Fabric on my skin. Rough. Gideon was sloppy."

Len snorts. "Good. Okay, now I want you to open your eyes." She presses her face harder into her knees instead. "Open your eyes, Sara. Tell me what you see." She takes a deep breath, pauses when she realizes she'd taken a deep breath, and opens her eyes into her knees.

"Dark," she mutters. Practically hears Len's eyeroll.
"Okay, you're at bird level of awareness. Let's try human."

"Ugh." She takes another breath and slowly raises her head, rubbing stars from her eyes with shaky hands. Looks down at the floor, mumbles, "Metal."

"Details," Len says, more gently. "Forget everything else, Sara. Just tell me what you see."

She sniffs, lets her eyes drift along the floor to the wall panels. "More... really boring metal." She sees his mouth twitch out of the corner of her eye. "Window. Green stuff. Divided ceiling..." She counts the spaces, murmurs, "Five across. Three inside those." Takes a slow breath into aching lungs, lets her gaze drop to Len for a moment. "Crook." He smiles.

"Better?" She nods, lets her head drop back against the wall again wearily.

"Yeah." Presses her hands to her face for a moment. "Fuck."

"I've heard that's a good distraction as well." Sara snorts, dropping her hands to glare at him. She's distracted by a flash of metal, the whir of wheels.

"1812," Sara says with a shaky smile. "Hey there, little guy." The robot trills a greeting. He rolls straight over to Sara and drops the bag he's holding onto the ground next to her.

"Is that mine," Len demands, as Sara unwraps a piece of chocolate, casually popping it in her mouth. She shrugs.

"Don't look at me, he's your Rogue." 1812 bumps her leg with a questioning noise, one of his side panels popping out. Sara reaches inside to pull out a throwing star she'd been missing, snickering at the look on Len's face before remembering she should be glaring because he had definitely stolen this from her.

Len nudges the robot with his foot, says sternly, "I thought we talked about running around with weapons." He turns his glare to Sara. "This is definitely your fault."

Sara shrugs again, leaning back against the wall wearily. "You told him not to let people see him with weapons. I just taught him how to be more sneaky."

"You must have been a nightmare as a child."

"Only when I got caught." Len shakes his head. "Besides, I knew only good kids got presents from Santa."

"Were you one of those girls who desperately wanted a pony?"

Sara snorts, gives him a sly glance. "Actually, when I was ten my dad got me a canary. I trained him to start singing every time my dad turned off the tv on me." The thought eases something in her chest; she'd forgotten she has memories that aren't terrible to revisit. "I'm pretty sure it's still the thing he regrets most in his life."

"You've always been like this," Len says a little mournfully. "That where the League name came from?"

Sara nods. "You have to give up your old life, your old self. Your old name. But I didn't want to forget where I'd come from. How helpless I'd been." He frowns, and she shrugs, cutting him off before he can say anything. "Anyway, I got to ride plenty of horses at Nanda Parbat. Ponies are still the best way to travel in the mountains."
"So, can you hit a target standing on the back of a galloping horse? I'm pretty sure that's a ninja requirement."

She gives him a secretive smile, shrugging. "Working with the horses was probably the most fun part of training. They've been breeding them there for a thousand years, so they're incredible animals."

"That's not an answer to my question."

Sara just smirks. "So, what did you want as a pet?"

"A dinosaur."

Sara chokes, 1812 gives an uneasy little burble and starts playing the theme from "Jurassic Park", and Len full on laughs. Sara... doesn't think she's ever heard him do that before. "You know, we could go visit dinosaurs in this thing," she says with an amused look at 1812. "I bet we could fit a small one in the cargo bay." The little robot makes a distressed noise and starts... shaking his eye stalks back and forth. Sara can't help a small laugh.

"Hmm." Len tilts his head at the robot with a fond smile. "Gideon would probably have a fit."

"We'd also probably get eaten. Not really how I want to go." She winces before the words are even out, and his face falls a little. "This time, anyway."

"Looks like 1812 wouldn't survive it either," Len observes, as the robot starts flashing lights at them. "Is that...?"

"S-O-S," Sara finishes.

Len shakes his head. "There is definitely a story here. Gideon?"

Gideon, predictably, doesn't answer.

xxx

i have seen what the darkness does

xxx

Kendra shows up at her door with hot chocolate, a hug, and a very satisfied look on her face. Sara doesn't manage to get out more than her name before Kendra has placed the mugs on the desk and engulfed Sara in a tight hug. "Don't you dare try to apologize," she says fiercely, and Sara is pretty sure there are wings around her as well as arms. She swallows back the I'm sorrys on her tongue and tentatively returns the hug, circles her arms around her friend and - yup, those are definitely wings.

She pulls back with something that is definitely not a giggle, and Kendra looks just as surprised. "Huh." The wings retract. "So, I guess that's something I do."

"Mama bird," Sara says very seriously. Kendra sighs, shaking her head as she grabs the hot chocolate she'd brought, the smug expression back on her face. Sara eyes her warily, accepting her mug before Kendra says, "So I had an idea." Sara suppresses a groan. "Well, actually, Gideon had an idea."

"Even better," Sara deadpans earning herself a disgruntled look.

"You mentioned something about brainwaves, so I asked Gideon about it." Sara raises her eyebrows.
"She thinks that she can tell when you're about to... go all bloodlust on me. And she could shock you or something, to keep you from losing it."

"Shock me," Sara states. "Like a dog."

Kendra winces. "That's not... I don't know what she wants to do, exactly. I don't think she does either, cause she doesn't know what would work to pull you back. But it's worth a shot, right?"

Sara stares at her impassively for a moment, then asks, "Gideon, would it work?"

"I'm not certain, but as Miss Saunders explained, there are multiple triggers we could try to shock you out. Assuming I can detect the change in time."

Sara rubs her eyes, sighing. "Can you?"

"I believe so. The primary problem is that it happens quite rapidly. Any intervention would need to be just as fast."

"So, shock collar." Kendra winces again.

"Jesses, I believe, or shall I inform Mr. Snart you've accepted Kitty as an alternate title?" Kendra chokes on her hot chocolate; Sara stares at the ceiling.

"Gideon, did you just make a joke?"

"Of course not."

Kendra coughs, sputters, "You've corrupted her. We're doomed."

"I should remind you both I can make your lives quite unpleasant."

"Aww, see, you say that, but you never actually do," Sara points out smugly. "We know your secret, Gideon. You love us."

"I am incapable of such emotion."

"Sure you are."

Kendra shoots Sara an exasperated look, sighs, "You're lucky Gideon hasn't accidentally murdered you yet."

"Nah, she loves me."

"You are annoyingly certain about that."

Sara just shrugs. "I guess we'll see."

xxx

say goodbye to who i was

xxx

The first time Gideon tries out her new toy, Sara can't bite back a scream, and thinks maybe Gideon is at least a little sadistic. Her entire brain feels like it's on fire and she drops to the floor, clutching her head, vaguely aware of Kendra fumbling at the slim metal band around Sara's neck. Kendra is
speaking, she thinks, but she can't make out words over the roaring in her ears, her own gasped breathing.

The sensation fades, slowly, agonizingly slowly. When she can finally lift her head without unbearable pulses of pain, she finds Kendra staring at her with something close to panic. "Sara??"

Sara makes a vague noise, wincing. "Ow?" Coughs, and drinks the water Kendra hands her. "Ow."

Kendra snorts softly at that. "No kidding. You okay?"

"Ow." Sara straightens slowly, rolling her neck, electric pulses still occasionally shooting through her. It feels like someone had pinched all the nerves in her neck at once, and she's going to feel that for days. "Ow."

Kendra shakes her head with a disbelieving look, asks, "Gideon, was that... necessary?"

"It had the intended effect," the AI intones. Kendra rolls her eyes. She'd dropped the choker Gideon had fabricated for Sara, giving it dubious glances

"I didn't feel... bloodlusty," Sara points out, leaning back against the nearest wall with another wince. "At least, I don't... think I did?"

"I believe that's part of the problem," Gideon tells her cheerfully. "You don't realize it's taking over until it's too late. Your brain wave patterns had started to match those of past instances with 98% accuracy. I can show you the results if you wish."

Sara waves her hand, mutters, "No, thank you. My head hurts enough as it is." She rubs at her neck, muscles already aching. "Well, at least it worked?"

"Yeah, at incapacitating you," Kendra says, gesturing at Sara's prone form. "Pretty sure you're gonna need something a little less severe."

Sara hums, closing her eyes, pressing back against the cool metal of the wall with a shrug. "Right now, I'll take anything that works."

"Well I'm not going to fight you if you're going to do this to yourself."

Sara glares blearily up at her. "This was your idea. And it works." She rubs her neck again with a sigh. "I'll get used to it. It's fine, Kendra, I've gotten used to a lot worse."

Kendra actually growls a little in frustration, throwing down her sparring staff. "This is not the League, Sara. Your lessons do not need to involve pain."

"Maybe they do!" It's harsher than she'd meant, and Kendra's eyes widen a fraction. "It makes sense to me that you'd need as much pain to shock me out of it as I can inflict."

"There are so many things wrong with that statement, Sara, I'm..." She shakes her head. "I'm not having this conversation with you."

"Fine." Sara pushes herself upright, slowly, and Kendra sighs.

"Sara-"

"It's fine," Sara cuts her off wearily. "I get it." It still amazes her a little, that Kendra is so... alive. After four thousand years of living. She must remember very little of it. She can't. Sara can hardly handle two lives, one lifetime. To remember hundreds...
She shivers. No, Kendra can't remember. Not and still be so... bright.

She must've been incredibly good, to still be even half-way decent. Whatever good means. Whatever Sara isn't.

Sara won't drag Kendra down with her. Not like this. Not for nothing.

"I'll have Gideon work on it," she tells Kendra, trying to force a smile. Sara knows it won't fool her, not for a moment, but she has to try. It takes too much effort from aching muscles, but she manages to push off the wall, start slowly down the hall back toward her room. She just wants quiet.

She wonders when that became something of value to her. Remembers passion and chaos and blood, remembers heat in her gut and fire in her veins, but she can't touch them anymore.

She wonders when she became more alive in her dreams than in real life.

Exhaustion, she tells herself. It's just exhaustion. It will pass.

It has to pass.

xxx

follow me into the endless night
i can bring your fears to life

xxx

It passes, and slingshots far beyond, because of course it does.

She stumbles down the hallway, half asleep, or maybe half awake, or maybe neither. Maybe she's still in the dream, the dream where she-

No. No, this is real, this has to be real. Because Not Real is Len-

No.

She can't shake it. Can't shake the image of his body, can't shake the feeling of knowing he was dead. Gideon's words mean nothing against that.

Leonard opens his door at her frantic banging, rubbing his eyes, and the relief is so strong Sara has to take a step back, hand pressed to her mouth, hunching over a little. "Sara?"

"You're okay," she whispers, feels tears roll down her cheeks and doesn't care. "You're..."

He steps forward, placing a hand carefully on her shoulder. "I'm fine, Sara. Hey. I'm fine." She sobs a breath and leans forward into him, chokes, "You died," into his chest. Feels his fingers slide up into her hair, one arm tight around her waist, a sharp exhale as he realizes what she'd meant. "I'm okay," he murmurs again. "Here, come inside, come on."

She nods, but tightens her arms around him instead of pulling back. He rubs her back a few times, and Sara tries to let it calm her, knows she needs to fucking calm down, but she can't get the image of him-

She shudders violently, can't stop the way her body trembles. "Hey..." Len's voice is soft, too soft. "Sara, I'm right here." She feels his lips on her temple, fingers still scratching gently against her scalp. "Come inside, okay? We'll figure this out, just come sit down."
It takes everything she has to let him go, but she forces herself to ease her grip. Len slowly pulls back, his hand sliding to the back of her neck, not letting her look away. He studies her for a long moment before simply saying again, "Come inside."

Nothing is better inside.

Now it's all she can do to huddle in a ball on his floor, arms tucked tightly around herself, trying to breathe. She feels dizzy, like the world is untethered and she's going to slip off, going to fall into space and float there alone forever - "Sara." Len. Len is kneeling in front of her, hands on her upper arms, shaking. No, that's her. "Please don't leave me alone," is what she whispers, and that's not what she'd meant to say at all and the heartbreak on his face is too much, everything is too much. His hand slides to her cheek, gently tilting her face up, and for a moment she thinks he's going to kiss her and the thought is both reassuring and nauseating and she hates this.

Luckily for her, Len is far more sane than she is at the moment, and he understands. "I'm not going to leave you alone," is all he says, very gentle, thumb brushing at tears Sara hadn't felt fall. She wants to throw her arms around his neck and wants to run and wants to scrub her skin until it bleeds and - "Hey." Len, again, and she coughs as she remembers to breathe. "Sara, I need you to slow down a little, okay? I need you to breathe." She nods frantically, tries to focus on her that, tries to close her eyes and let everything fall away but that's too terrifying, too dark, too alone. Instead she leans forward, presses her forehead to his shoulder and shudders and works her lungs with the rise and fall of his chest, focuses on here and now and she's not alone, she's not.

Minutes or hours or days later, she hears Len say quietly, "Come lay down, little bird." Realizes she's breathing. Feels his arms around her and wraps her own around him tightly, desperately. He's the only steady thing in her life right now and the thought of losing him - "Shh, it's okay," he murmurs, slowly standing and pulling her up with him. "I'm here, Sara. I'm not going anywhere, just come lay down." She's not breathing again. She doesn't start until he eases her down and stretches out beside her, until after a moment's hesitation he rolls onto his side and pulls her against his chest. Until she can feel his heart beat through her skin, until she's choked out "I can't breathe" into his shirt a hundred times over.

"You can," he tells her, firm and gentle all at once. "You can. Slow down, focus on me. Just you and me, right here, right now." Later, she'll remember to be embarrassed, mortified by this. Right now she feels like his arms around her are the only thing keeping the darkness from swallowing her whole.

Len, for whatever reason, tolerates it. Tolerates her, her erratic swings between flinching from him and clinging to him. She doesn't know why, why he puts up with her when his own avoidance of touch is so obvious. But he does, and right now she'll take anything he'll give her.

"There you go," he murmurs when she finally manages to suck in a full breath. His voice rumbles in his chest, echoes through her. "That's it. Just stay with me, little bird. Right here." It's the only place she can imagine being right now.

It's only when her trembling has died down, when her breathing is almost even, that she forces herself to pull away. Rolls onto her back and wishes the inch between them now didn't leave her so cold.
"I didn't think your dreams were still this bad," he says quietly, frown creasing his forehead. Sara presses the heels of her palms into her eyes, sighing.

"They're not. Usually." She shivers and drops her hands, forces her breathing to remain calm. "You died."

She feels his hand rest on her free one, thumb rubbing absently along her knuckles. "I'm still here." She knows that, *obviously* she knows that, but she still can't shake the awful image, the blood on her hands- "Gideon tells you what's real and what's not, right?" A nod. "Okay, she told you this wasn't real, didn't she?"

Another nod, and Sara feels her cheeks flush with embarrassment and shame that she can't just shake this. He takes his hand off hers and for a moment she's utterly lost, presses herself down into the blanket she can feel and the pillow soft under her cheek and-

Fingers in her hair, startling her to open her eyes. Len is studying her with an unreadable expression, finally asks quietly, "How did I die?" Sara shakes her head frantically, but he doesn't let her go. "Sara. This is obviously screwing with your head. How did I die?"

"I killed you." She tries to keep her voice even, fails. "I've killed you a lot, actually, I..." Swallows. She's stopped keeping count. "You wanted me to," she whispers. "You wanted me to and I did."

He freezes for a moment, closing his eyes, lets out a slow breath before opening them again. "Sara..."

She hadn't even realized until this moment why this dream had shaken her so much. Sees the lines on his face, the tension running through him, the weariness that echoes hers. The lines on his arm that haunt her.

"You can't leave me alone," she chokes. Pulls back to look at him fiercely. "You can't."

"I won't." The words are quiet, voice maybe more sincere than she's ever heard. "I won't, little bird." He tucks her hair back from her face, hand lingering on her cheek. She thinks again, for a moment, that he might kiss her, even as she knows he won't. Not now, not when both their worlds are spinning dangerously out of control.

But after... after *what*, she's not sure, but after - maybe.

For now she buries her face back into his chest and lets his gentle fingers in her hair lull her back to sleep.

xxx

*show me yours
and i'll show you mine*

xxx

Chapter End Notes

For the record, I started this fic before Len died =) And had all of it sketched out before s2 aired, when we were still sweet summer children believing Len was coming back =)
So this is fine and here's your friendly reminder Len dies at the end =) =) =) And every
time you want to think LOOK THEY'RE MAKING PROGRESS remember Len dies at the end =) =) =) It's a fun way to live yes

No I'm not bitter why would you think that
At some point, he’s going to remember to be upset with her for making him be... emotionally responsible.

Chapter Notes

silhouette (aquilo)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

xxx

devil's on your shoulder
strangers in your head

Len shakes his head with a sigh. He’s tired of hearing her apologize. He’s tired of watching her writhe through nightmares, tired of her waking up screaming, tired of wondering if today is the day she accidentally knifes him.

“Tell me?” he half-begs, because Captain Cold may not beg and Leonard Snart may just sneer, but Len is tired.

She shakes her head. He’s very, very tired of her silence.

She hasn’t told him any of her dreams - memories - whatever they are, except for scant scraps here and there. Gideon had told him only once, that first night in the med bay, and only because Sara had been half out of her mind.

So he’s waited. Waited and pretended it doesn't kill him to watch her so constantly in pain. Pretended he doesn't check with Gideon on an hourly basis to make sure she's still okay, she's still breathing. Gideon, for whatever reason, actually puts up with him.

Somehow that doesn't make him feel any better.
He pretends it doesn't break something inside of him to know some version of him had hurt her. Even though it's not real, never had been, even if it's only in her head - it makes him sick. The look on her face when he'd touched her, the fear and revulsion - he'll never forget it.

He pretends seeing her so sick didn't shake him to the core.

But at least whatever Gideon is doing seems to be helping. Mostly. At least enough that Sara no longer looks like a walking corpse. He’d be angry that no one but Kendra even seems to notice, if he didn’t think that would probably be worse for Sara. After what she’d told him about Jax and Stein in the medbay, Len had pulled the story out of Gideon. Which she’d only consented to after he’d sworn not to harm either of them, and he’s greatly regretting that promise. He could take the team giving him shitty looks and dirty words behind his back, but hell if he’ll let Sara take that.

At some point, he’s going to remember to be upset with her for making him be… emotionally responsible. But then, she’d been right, that morning in the medbay when she’d told him he was using her to avoid Mick. He supposes he owes her something for that.

He owes her for the nightmare that had brought her here tonight.

He sits up with a sigh, glancing at the screen by his bed. 12:23am, so hopefully he won’t run into anyone. He glances Sara, blinking blearily up at him, and orders, “Stay.”

He returns a few minutes later with a thermos of espresso, one of hot chocolate, and a bottle of rum. Sara is still there, to his relief, sitting with her back to the wall, blanket tucked around her. She raises an eyebrow at his drink collection and points at the bottle; Len ignores her, pulls two mugs from his personal stash (it's not stealing if Gideon would give them to you for free, crook) and pours espresso and hot chocolate into each. He adds a little rum before turning back to hand one cup to Sara, who makes a face.

“You’re welcome,” Len drawls. She rolls her eyes.

“Straight alcohol would’ve worked.”

“But this tastes so much better.”

She takes a sip, grudgingly admits, “Okay, it really does.” Len sits cross-legged in the middle of the bed, pulling out a deck of cards with a smirk. “Now, really?”

Len shrugs. “Got better plans?” She wrinkles her nose a little, but doesn’t protest again as he splits the deck, hands her half and tosses down a card. Sara eyes him skeptically. “War? I haven’t played that since I was like six.”

“Don’t worry, you’ll get the hang of it,” Len drawls, earning himself a glare. At least she doesn’t throw anything.

“I was banned from playing it when it became clear I was very serious about winning the slap battles at all costs. I think Laurel still has scars.”

Len shakes his head, can’t help a small laugh. “You really were always like this. No slapping, just highest card.”

Sara full on pouts. “You’re no fun.”

“I value my un-knifed body parts,” he retorts drily, gesturing pointedly at her cards. “Come on, Canary. Unless you’re already admitting defeat.” Her eyes narrow slightly, and she throws down a
She wins the first couple tosses. When Len finally gets one, he lets the card sit there, taking a gulp of coffee. Sara frowns, but before she can say anything, before he can remember that this is a terrible idea, he tugs up the sleeve on his left arm, fingering a small, circular scar near his elbow.

“Lewis,” he says quietly, not looking at her. “Made the mistake of contradicting him. Used me as an ashtray” He swallows, forces himself to glance at her where she sits frozen, eyes hooded. He takes the two cards, throwing down another, and waits.

She slowly places her mug on the end table, then a card down in front of her. It’s higher than his, and she closes her eyes, jaw clenching, hand still resting by her card.

She takes both cards without speaking.

Len wins the next toss, and he thinks it’s the hardest thing he’s ever done, fingering an old gash on the back of his arm. States, “Glass from a broken window in a robbery. I was 10.”

Sara visibly flinches. Len feels horribly exposed, wonders what had possessed him to do this. Remembers Sara half out of her mind only hours before and throws down another card.

She does too, makes a small noise in the back of her throat when she wins again. Her hand hovers over the cards, eyes pressed tightly shut. She slowly collects them, chokes, “Len…” when he just tosses down another card.

“Play your card, birdie,” is all he says. She does; Len turns his arm over, fingers a row of thin faint lines almost the length of his forearm. Sara stares fixedly, and Len murmurs, “One for every day in juvie I was away from Lisa.”

Sara convulses a little, tears streaking down her cheeks when she closes her eyes again. She reaches out blindly, taking his wrist, fingers running feather light along his skin. “Gideon tells me what’s real,” she whispers. “Gideon tells me…”

"Hearing Gideon tell you what's real isn't the same as talking, Sara."

She gives a choked laugh. "Pot, kettle."

"I'm not the one with horrific nightmares." She opens her eyes slowly, staring at his arm, mouth twisting. “And sometimes she can’t help, right? Like tonight.” He resists the urge to still her fingers where they still run anxiously along his arm. “You see things that haven’t happened, but you wonder if they could.”

Her jaw clenches and she turns away, bites, “Don’t…”

“Sara. I would never do that to you.” She shakes her head a little, not looking at him. “Hey. I know Gideon can’t tell you that, but I can. I would never make you do that.”

He frowns, mentally running back through the bits and pieces he’s gleaned from Sara and Gideon and Kendra. “Those are the ones that still bother you,” he says slowly. “Not things that have already happened. Things Gideon can’t convince you won’t happen.”

“They feel as real as the memories,” Sara says softly. She’s finally released his arm. “They feel so real.”

Len gives her a long look, though she still refuses to meet his eyes. “They’re not going to feel any
less real just bouncing around in your brain,” he finally points out. Sara picks at the blanket. Len sighs. *Poster boy for emotional health.* “Sara.” He stills her hand and she freezes, swallows, glances at him for a fleeting moment. “You don’t need to talk to me,” he says, quiet and weary. “But you need to talk to someone. You need to trust someone.”

She looks up at him, finally, eyes red and so, so lost. "I don't know how," she whispers. "I don't..." She hunches around her arms, tucking them across her stomach. "If I say it out loud then it's real again, and I don't know how to live with that."

"You're already living with it.” She closes her eyes, moisture lining them. "It's already eating you alive. Saying it out loud will hurt, but then it won't just be on you anymore." He reaches out carefully, so carefully, to tuck a strand of hair back from her face. "There's not a lot of people I'd want to listen to," he says with a mirthless quirk of his lips. "You're at the top, little bird. If you want to tell me."

"I just want it to stop," she whispers. "I just... I don't want to share it. I don't want to remember it. I just want it to stop."

Len swallows down the lump in his throat. "I know," he murmurs, when he can speak. "And I wish I could do that for you, believe me. But I can't, Sara. Neither can Gideon. It's a shitty reality that we have to deal with."

She wipes at her eyes, sniffling, mutters, "When did you become so full of life lessons?"

"About the time you needed it."

"Ugh." She reaches for her mug, knuckles white where she grips it.

They sit in silence for a few minutes, sipping at their drinks, until Len says softly, "Gideon told me she has a therapy program that might help you."

Sara shakes her head firmly. "No. No therapy." Len isn't the least bit surprised.

"Yeah, I always thought the shrinks in prison were a load of crap." She huffs, shivering. "Still, future tech might be better." Sara just shakes her head again. Len half-expects Gideon to jump in, but she seems to realize she won't help anything right now.

"I handled it all on my own before," Sara says quietly, almost convincingly. "That means I can do it again. I have to do it again." Her voice cracks, just a little. Len closes his eyes.

"You can," he agrees. "But you don't have to, Sara. You lived through it once, and that was bad enough. If there's a way to make this any easier-"

"I don't deserve to."

Len's stomach drops through the floor.

"Sara," he breathes. Curses himself for being so dense, for not seeing it. "You think you deserve this." She looks away, jaw clenched.

"I know I do," she answers tightly. "I'll take Gideon's meds so I can function. I'll sleep and eat so I can function. But that's it. The rest of this I deserve, and I'm only keeping myself at a baseline so I can still fight and try to make up some small part of what I've done. That's it."

Len feels sick.
"The more I remember, the more I feel, the more I realize just how much I deserve this. To feel every bit as much pain as I have caused."

"Do I?" She pulls up short, crease in her forehead. He doesn't let it drop. "How much pain do I deserve, Sara? I've done terrible things too. I started even younger than you."

She frowns sharply, mutters, "That's different."

"Is it?" Her fingers clench into fists, knuckles white. "You've spent a lot of time trying to convince me you're no different than Mick. You can't have it both ways, so which is it? Do we all deserve to suffer or do we deserve another chance?"

She glowers, tugs her knees to her chest. "It's different," she insists, still not looking at him. "You were a child."

"And you were a kid." She shakes her head, rubbing angrily at her eyes. "You didn't choose to get shipwrecked any more than I chose Lewis as my dad."

"I shouldn't have been there in the first place."

"Cheating with your sister's boyfriend doesn't warrant years in hell."

She smiles faintly, looks up at him with sad eyes and a helpless shrug. "Doesn't it?"

Len feels nauseous, because he has no idea how else to convince her that no. No, she hadn't deserved any of it.

"You didn't choose your father," she says wearily. "I chose to get on that boat. I chose to be Ivo's assistant. I chose to betray Oliver, and then to let him take me with him when he escaped. I chose to stay with the League when Nyssa found me. I chose to abandon her for my family, and then to abandon my family for her. I chose to be a killer. I deserve to pay for all of that."

Every word is like a nail in his coffin, straight down through his skin. The self-hate rolls off her in waves and he is so helpless against that. Tries to take a breath and fails.

Sometimes, he thinks, their broken edges serve only to cut the other further. And he can only stand in the face of that guilt he understands far too well for so long without succumbing to it.

He knows, knows in every fiber of his being that she does not deserve this. But at the same time, with the same intensity, he knows that he does. He deserves every bit of pain he'd caused Mick a hundred fold back on him.

Something must show on his face, because Sara suddenly curses. Buries her face in her hands, drags her fingers through her hair and pulls away. "God, this is why I don't..." She exhales sharply, makes to climb from the bed. Len grabs her wrist, a hold she could easily break from if she truly wanted to.

She doesn't pull away.

"No more running," he says quietly. "Please."

He can feel her trembling, can feel the effort it's taking her to stay. He tugs gently at her hand, and she slowly, slowly settles back onto the bed. "You chose to survive," he tells her, not releasing her wrist. "You chose the best of some shitty options. Isn't that what you told me about Mick?" She just clenches her jaw, gaze unfocused on the floor.
Len releases her to rub his eyes, suddenly exhausted. He doesn't want to think about Mick, a floor below, a physical reminder of his own failure. He doesn't want to think about any of this.

Sara shifts closer suddenly, resting her forehead on his shoulder with a shaky sigh. "I'm sorry," she whispers. "I'm..." She shudders, like her body is trying literally exorcize the demon from her mind. Len hesitantly wraps an arm around her waist, feels her settle into him. "I'm trying," she chokes. Len's chest begins to ache.

"I know you are, little bird," he murmurs, running his hand along her spine. She takes a slow breath, knocks her forehead against his shoulder a few times lightly.

"I don't want to hurt you," she finally says, voice small. "I always end up hurting you."

Len considers his words, hopes desperately this won't push her away. "Then listen to yourself," he says. "What you've told me applies to you as well, Sara. I know you don't want to see it, but it's the truth. You don't deserve this. You don't deserve to suffer twice over your entire life. If you really feel like have something to make up for, do something good to pay it back. You sitting alone miserable in your room doesn't fix anything, doesn't help anyone."

Her breathing is hitched, but she makes no move to pull away. "And most of what you've been through wasn't something you need to make up for," he says softly. "Running away with your sister's boyfriend does not mean you deserve something like the Amazo. Honestly, Sara, that's pretty much the only decision you got to make. The rest was survival. Was fallout from what was done to you." He tightens his arm around her a little, tucking her closer. "This is eating you alive, little bird. You need to let some of it go, please. Let me take a little of it for you."

She sniffs softly, but eventually, slowly, she nods. "G-Gideon, can you just... just show him?"

"I can." Len feels sick at the thought of that. He strokes her hair back gently, lets his hand rest on the back of her neck.

"Still not talking," he murmurs. "Gideon can show me events, Sara, but not what you're feeling. And that's what I care about."

That seems to hit her, for some reason. She stills completely for a moment, not even breathing, before sagging into him with a sigh. She reaches out to pick up the two cards still face up on the bed, fingering the edges before tugging her shirt up to expose the three puckered scars on her stomach.

"I died," she whispers, raw and unsteady. "It hurt."

\[
\text{xxx}
\]

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\text{as if you don't remember}
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\text{as if you can forget}
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\text{xxx}
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They play for hours. Visible scars turn to invisible injuries, broken bones and pain long healed. When her face gets too pale and pinched, Len trades one of his heists for a League mission, or something Lisa had done as a kid for one of Sara's wild child tales.

Sometimes Gideon will gently point out an error, or a reassurance that this version is, in fact, correct. Len wonders just how many variations Sara has seen. He asks Gideon when Sara finally falls asleep beside him, curled on her side, looking far, far too small.
"Her brain essentially... rebooted," Gideon tells him. "All of her long term memories were triggered and accessed - initially, just raw sensory data."

"Which is what you can see?"

"Correct. But human memory is a great deal more complex than mere sensory images – that is simply the base on which they’re built. Emotional responses are layered on top. Any time the memory is recalled, new relational information is stored."

"I’m guessing you can’t see any of that."

"Not until she dreams it, and I can still only verify the initial memory, not her emotional response."

Len pinches the bridge of his nose wearily. "Why the variations?" he asks. "She said they still feel more real than normal dreams."

Gideon hesitates, sounds a little uncertain when she answers, "I believe her mind is still trying to integrate her death. Normally, memories are moved to long term storage while you sleep. Her brain seems to be reversing that process, unpacking each one layer by layer. She sees all the different possibilities as dreams."

Len can't help reaching out to stroke Sara's hair back from her face lightly, sighing. "There's really no way to make this easier on her?"

"Unfortunately not. At this point, the best thing she can do is sleep. The process can only continue while she's asleep, and induced unconsciousness isn't the same. Even sedatives can slow the process, so I've given her the lowest dose I can."

“And it’ll what, keep going until it runs out of memories?” Gideon hesitates again, a beat too long. “What aren’t you telling me?”

“It is possible her brain will stop once it’s gone through all her memories.” Len raises his eyebrows, waiting. “It… is also possible it will not. As I said, it’s trying to make sense of her death. If it doesn’t…”

"She really loses her mind," Len murmurs. Gideon doesn't answer. "Dammit, Lance, you're not allowed to leave me alone with these do-gooders, understand?"

Sara doesn’t answer either. Len is left trying to figure out how he even got here, lying in bed with an undead assassin, pretending he’s vaguely emotionally stable. Now would be a very good time to get out of this, before it's too late.

Len sighs, pulls a blanket over both of them and tries to get at least a little sleep.

xxx

but tonight you're a stranger
some silhouette

xxx

He's woken abruptly by an elbow jammed into his ribs.

He automatically shoves himself back, teeters on the edge of the bed before remembering Sara. Sara, who is now twisting like something possessed, breathing in panted gasps, clearly still stuck inside
whatever nightmare her mind has conjured up this time. He starts to say her name, to reach for her, then falters; waking her up has never helped before.

"Gideon, what is she dreaming about?" he asks shortly. Gideon doesn't answer. "Dammit, am I going to make things worse by touching her?"

"I don't believe so."

Len shifts closer, swiftly pulls her upright and wraps her tightly in his arms. He holds her as still as he can; it's not easy, as she fights him with almost superhuman strength, but in the past she's usually woken when the movements have become violent enough to hurt her. He hopes maybe, if he can keep her still enough, she'll calm down. She'll get through the nightmare without waking, without remembering.

"It's alright," he murmurs, as her flailing slowly quiets. "You're safe, Sara. You're safe."

She seems to calm the more he talks to her, the tighter he holds her. At some point she stops fighting him, burrows into his shoulder with a quiet whimper she would never, ever admit to while awake.

"That's it," he whispers. "You're alright, little bird. I've got you, I promise, just relax." She shivers, shakes her head against some unseen demon and presses closer. "Shh, whatever you're seeing, it's not real, okay? You're safe on the Waverider with me. You're safe."

Eventually the tension leaves her body, and her breathing evens out. "Gideon?" Len asks quietly.

"The dream has ended," Gideon says, and he feels a rush of relief so strong it's dizzying.

This is the first time he's really felt like he's helped her.

He slowly, slowly lowers them both back down onto the mattress, only letting out a breath when she's settled down and he's pulled a blanket back over them. Len tries to shift a little so she's not laying mostly on top of him - he doubt she'll appreciate waking up that way, and he doesn't want to wake up to any more knives at his throat. But she makes a little noise of distress when he starts to pull away, pressing closer in her sleep, and Len sighs, resigs himself to being her current pillow and future pincushion.

She has several more nightmares in the scant few hours she's asleep, but each time, Len manages to calm her before she wakes. At around what would be dawn, were they not floating in space and time, she stirs, blinking sleepily, mumbles, "L'n?"

"Right here," he murmurs, tucking her hair out of her face. "Go back to sleep, little bird. You're alright." She shifts a little, already half-asleep, mumbles something incoherent and promptly passes out.

Len doesn't even close his eyes.

xxx

(just hold me)

xxx

Chapter End Notes
*peeks between fingers* feeling super self-conscious about this one. Hope y'all like it.
Chapter Summary

They just might drag each other through this.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

i give up

xxx

She sleeps for nearly three days straight.

After weeks without real sleep, now that she can her body seems eager to make it up. Len talks her down from more nightmares than he can keep track of. It gets easier, as her unconscious mind starts to recognize him. She doesn't fight him as hard, for as long.

Still, there are some dreams he can't help her through. The ones when Gideon warns him not to touch her, that leave her flinching away if she wakes, gasping and terrified.

Seeing her terrified hurts more than anything else.

She doesn't always wake from those, but when she does, Len only stays long enough to make sure she knows where she is. Then he leaves, takes a shower or grabs some food before returning to his room to wait. Wait for her to slip through the door and curl up at the top of his bed, toes tucked under his pillow. Sometimes she falls asleep like that, sitting in the corner. Other times she lays down with a blanket pulled tightly around her, a physical barrier between her and the world.

Sometimes Gideon will tell him where she is but not to disturb her; sometimes the AI sends him after her, to whatever corner of the ship she's managed to hole up in. Then he arrives with a deck of cards and a thermos of something hot, and they play until his voice is hoarse and her hands no longer shake.

xxx

"Have you ever seen the ocean at night?"

Len blinks. They’re sitting back at her upper level window, her wrapped in a blanket with her head resting on the glass, him sprawled beside her. They'd been pointing out figures in the green swirls that look almost like clouds ("That's not a flying dinosaur, Snart. It's clearly a canary."), until Sara had gone quiet. He shakes his head in answer.

"I used to think it was beautiful," she murmurs absently, still staring out at the storm. "Walking on the beach, waves coming in, crashing out the dark. Running to keep your feet from getting wet, like... dancing on the edge of disaster." He can see it, suddenly, Sara ankle deep in sea water, pants rolled but soaked anyway, laughing.

"You can see a glimpse of it, if you pay attention. The space between the waves and the sky. It's
small, so insignificant when you're on the shore, but out there..." She fades, shivering.

"On a boat, with the lights on, it's like a city sky. Drowns out the stars. But without it..." She swallows, eyes glittering blue-green in the dim light. "It's the most terrifying thing I've ever seen," she says softly. "It's a darkness that eats up the light, that stretches on and on forever. And if there are stars, you can't even tell where it ends. They reflect right back, and it's like you're floating all alone in empty space. Like you're the only person in the entire world."

"Or stuck in an engine room with a degenerate thief," Len points out gently. She shivers again.

"I've never been as scared as I was that first night," she whispers, tugging her blanket tighter around her. "Not even dying was that lonely."

Len thinks of Mick waking up alone in the woods, in the cold and the dark, and swallows hard.

"When I was little, before Lewis started bringing me along on jobs, my grandfather used to take me while Lewis was... occupied." Len is proponent of the idea that if you talk for long enough, whatever you're talking over will eventually just go away. "He'd bring me to this little house he owned on the outskirts of town, one Lewis didn't know about." Len can't help smiling a little; he has few good childhood memories, and most of those are of his grandfather.

"During the summer we'd camp in the backyard. It was far enough from the city that you could see all the stars, and I was convinced one day I was going to be an astronaut." He looks at her, still huddled in her blanket. "That or I'd bring back the dinosaurs, I hadn't decided."

Sara snorts, glancing at him, shoulders loosening a little. "I suddenly understand why you decided to come on this mission after all," she says drily.

Len shrugs. "All a matter of perspective." Her eyes darken, and Len looks back out at the green swirls. "That, for example, is definitely a pterodactyl."

Sara throws her long forgotten cards at him, but she’s smiling.

They just might drag each other through this.

xxx

It takes 38 seconds from the moment Gideon wakes him to the moment he skids onto the bridge, and it's still not fast enough. Stein and Jax are both there, as is Ray - and, to his relief, Kendra. She's managed to keep the others back, shoots him a concerned look of relief and nods at the corner.

Sara is crouched there, white as a sheet, knife gripped in visibly shaking hands. Len approaches slowly, hands held out, and her eyes snap to him.

"Sara, it's Len," he says quietly, watching her eyes dart around before fixing back on him. "Do you know where you are?"

She doesn't answer. Len squashes down a stab of panic, continues, "We're on the Waverider. No one here is going to hurt you, okay? You're safe. Whatever you saw, it was only a dream."

Sara still doesn’t respond, grip on her knife not easing. “Gideon, what about the collar?” he hears Kendra ask, and doesn’t have time to ask what she’s talking about before Sara suddenly goes rigid with a sharp gasp of pain, both hands fist to her head, knife still clutched in one.

“What the hell,” he snarls, taking a step toward Sara.
“Later,” Kendra answers shortly. “Gideon?”

Len tunes them out, turns his focus back to Sara. She’s slouched against the wall now, both hands still pressed to her head. He says her name again and she wavers, takes a breath he can hear stutter in her throat. ’L-Len?’ she whispers. He takes another step, almost close enough to touch.

"Yeah, little bird, it's just me. You're safe, I promise." He reaches out slowly to touch her wrist, can feel how badly she's shaking. "Put the knife down, okay? I'm not going to hurt you, no one here is going to hurt you."

He very carefully slides his fingers around the hilt, and she lets him tug it from her grip. "It hurts," she chokes. "I-I was dead. I was dead." Len tosses the knife down – she's going to kill him for that later – and gently pulls her hands from her face.

"I know," he murmurs. "But you're here now, Sara. You’re safe on the Waverider. You had a nightmare, but it wasn’t real.” He pulls her toward him slowly, worried she’s going to collapse she’s shaking so hard.

“Len,” she whispers again.

“Right here.”

"Are you real?” Her voice is tiny and an octave too high and he has both arms around her, holds her tightly against her shaking, as though he could somehow fix this just by anchoring her.

"I'm real," he whispers. He thinks she's crying, but the noises are like nothing he's ever heard and nothing he wants to hear again. "This is real, Sara. You're alright."

He hears movement and remembers the others. Kendra appears beside him, says softly, "Sara, we're going to bring you to the study, okay? Let you lay down on the couch." A quick glance shows the bridge is now empty except for them.

Sara wraps her arms around Len's neck in answer. He sighs, murmurs, "Alright, kitty." She makes a noise between a growl and a laugh and a sob, but she doesn't let go. Kendra says something about medbay as Len rests his palm on Sara's back, states, "I will carry you, Canary."

"Ugh." She draws back slowly, hunching a little as she returns one hand to press against her stomach. Len frowns, forces back a stab of concern and slides an arm around her waist to guide her over to Rip's study. Questions will have to wait until she's not white as a sheet and shaking. She collapses onto the small couch, rolling onto her back when Len nudges her curled knees so he can crouch beside her.

She's actually a little gray now, and Len says tightly, "Gideon, she's in pain." Sara's jaw clenches, eyes squeezed shut, pressing her head back into the pillow. "More pain than usual," Len amends. He knows how high her tolerance level is; for her to be visibly showing this much must mean it's excruciating.


Sara's hands clenches against her stomach again, over the arrow scars, and Len remembers what Gideon had said about her body thinking it should be dead. Wonders if that's what she's feeling right now. He stills the motions, twines his fingers through hers instead.

He hears someone approach behind him, then Stein's voice, and Sara nearly breaks his hand.
"Get out," Len growls, pressing down on Sara's shoulder gently to keep her in place.

"Perhaps I could-"

"Get. Out." He regrets not bringing his cold gun, to at the very least scare him off.

(He realizes he'd hurt the others, maybe kill them all for her, and finds himself a little terrified.)

Luckily, Kendra chooses that moment to return. She ushers Stein out before Len can hurt him, and kneels down beside Sara.

"Alright, painkiller from Gideon. Then we need to get you to medbay. She says your mind still thinks it's half asleep and she wants to... change your brainwaves?" Kendra shakes her head. "I lost her there."

"Fun," Sara croaks. She still hasn't opened her eyes, still seems determined to break Len's hand. Kendra takes Sara's free arm, deftly injecting her.

"You're getting disturbingly good at that," Len observes.

"I was probably a doctor during at least one of my lives," Kendra returns drily. "Okay, medbay."

Sara swallows, arching back a little into the couch. "Gimme a minute," she mutters. Len absolutely cannot take this for another minute.

"Come here," he orders, slipping his arm around her back to gently ease her upright. She leans into him with a choked off whimper, buried in his shoulder. Len had intended to bring her to the medbay, but when he starts to slide his other arm under her knees she chokes, "Wait. Please, just... a minute."

Len frowns, sighs, "Alright." She's actually shaking with pain, and it's starting to make him nauseous. "Meds should act fast, just hold on." He's definitely making that up, but he has to believe Gideon gave her something good or he might lose his mind. He takes one of her hands in his free one, her instant grip nearly crushing it.

He glances over his shoulder to see Kendra still there, watching Sara with worried eyes. "Big bird, can you go deal with… the rest of them?" He can't keep the venom out of his voice, and he's probably being just a little unfair, but right now he really doesn't care.

Kendra's eyes snap to his, narrowing. "Did you just call me 'big bird'?"

"You didn't seem to like mama bird." Sara makes a noise that could be a laugh, buried into his shoulder. “Besides, he was the best character on Sesame Street. No shame there.”

"We are going to have a long talk about nicknames later," Kendra mutters.

"And collars," Len says pointedly. Kendra at least has the decency to look a little guilty.

It takes a few minutes, but the pain seems to finally ebb, enough that Sara's shaking eases some, and her grip on his hand is no longer bone-crushing. "Alright, medbay," Len murmurs. She nods, standing with a wince. When he's certain she's not going to fall right back over, Len carefully releases her. "You gonna make it that far?" She glares up at him, a little of the normal fire in her eyes, and something in Len's chest eases a little.

But only a little, because she's shaking again by the time they make it there. Gideon starts spouting something about brainwaves and dreaming and dissonance, and Sara presses her hand to her stomach
like she's trying to keep her insides from spilling out, and Len is so absolutely, utterly done with all of this.

"Can't you just get rid of that memory?" he demands, when he hears Gideon say something about remembering her death. Sara grimaces.

"It is a great deal more complicated than that, or I already would have done so," Gideon responds, sounding offended. "Memories are all interconnected, and networked with sensory and emotional receptors. Erasing anything beyond the most recent could cause catastrophic damage to her mind."

“What exactly do you call the current situation?”

Gideon goes silent for a long moment. Eventually she asks, "Miss Lance, before the time drift, what was the very first thing you remembered about your resurrection?"


"And the last thing about dying?"

Sara flinches. Len squeezes her hand gently, and she takes a slow breath. "I saw Thea. I remember the first arrow hitting, then the second-" Her voice breaks, fingers trembling in Len's, breathing forced and measured. "Then pain. I think I felt the last arrow hit, but there was already so much..." She closes her eyes tightly. "I stumbled back. That's where it stopped, before. Staring at Thea. And even though I knew she'd just killed me, I still wished she was closer." She smiles faintly, twisted and pained. "It was just... tunnel vision after that, though, with the rest of the world dark and Thea at the other end falling away."

She shudders, hand pressed to her stomach. "That's all," she whispers. "Next thing I knew was chains."

"You had no memory of the Pit?"

Sara shakes her head. "I can tell because the new memories are... disconnected. Like I'm just experiencing the event with no reaction, no..."

"No emotion." Sara nods. "I may be able to safely remove those. They are purely sensory memories, with no emotional component, which makes it a great deal simpler."

"So do it," Len growls.

"There is still a great deal of risk-" Gideon starts.

“Please just do it,” Sara cuts her off. Were Gideon human, Len is 100% certain she would've sighed. "Very well. I will need to briefly anesthetize you."

Sara nods curtly, eyes already closed, lines of pain still creasing her forehead. “Just make this stop.” Len's not sure he’s ever heard her sound quite so... desperate. It’s nauseating. Her eyelids snap open suddenly, anxious gaze fixed on him. "Len-"

"I'll be here." He squeezes the hand still in his, and she nods, letting out a slow breath. "Close your eyes, birdie. Let Gideon do her thing." Her eyelids flutter closed again, hand going slack a moment later.

Len settles in to wait.
"How is she?" It's a sign of how strung out he is that the professor manages to startle Len from a half-doze.

"Asleep." He couldn't keep the cold out of his voice even if he wanted to. "Only reason you're not already out the door."

Len doesn't look at Stein, just watches from the corner of his eye as he slowly approaches. The man is lucky Len is more worried about Sara than annoyed at the rest of the team. And Stein, with his conceited, overbearing presence, sets Len on edge more than he’d like to admit.

Still, he knows Sara hopes to mend whatever bond she’d had with the old man. So for her sake, he forces himself to be… well, civil is probably the best he can really hope for.

“I’m afraid I’m uncertain as to why you’re being… unusually hostile,” Stein says, because apparently testing Len’s limits is the game of the day. He feels a renewed surge of empathy for Sara fighting off the bloodlust; Len isn’t prone to fits of emotion, but if not killing people is always this hard for her, no wonder she hates it so much.

The worst part is Stein didn’t even do anything to warrant Len’s reaction, not in comparison to the other assholes in Sara’s life. He just pushes all the wrong buttons, and as keyed up as Len is right now, Stein is actually managing to get under his skin.

"Medbay, Sara, Jax," he answers shortly. "Ring any bells?"

"Ah." Stein at least has the decency to look sorry. "Perhaps we were... a bit overzealous in our assumptions."

"Perhaps?" Stein winces. "You know it's funny, Kendra and I are the only ones who actually got injured that day, but the rest of you are the ones treating Sara like some rabid animal." Stein can't meet his eyes. "Or maybe ‘funny’ isn't the right word. Sad? Pathetic? Cruel? Gideon, help me out."

"I believe you're doing quite fine on your own, Mr. Snart," Gideon responds drily. Sara shifts, moaning in her sleep; Len and the professor both freeze for a moment.

Len carefully takes her hand when she shifts again, says softly. "It's alright, Sara. You're safe." She quiets as he rubs his thumb lightly along her knuckles, asks, "Gideon?"

"A very short dream. Over now."

Len lets out a slow, weary breath, remembers Stein is there and finds the professor watching him with an odd look. "Earlier tonight, that was the result of a… a nightmare, correct?" Stein asks tentatively. Len eyes him warily, but nods. "I take it this is something of a recurring problem?"

"I'm not the one you should be asking."

"No, I suppose not."

He leaves, looking thoughtful. Len supposes he should count that as something of a win.

She wakes up quietly.
It’s… disconcerting. He's gotten so used to her violent dreams that he'd forgotten how good she normally is at… ninja-ing.

"Good…” Len blinks. "I have no idea what time it is."

"Too early," Sara croaks. "Bright."

"Light does that."

She makes a disgruntled noise, arm over her eyes. "Did it work? Or'r you a hallucination 'n' 'm crazy?"

"Both," Len deadpans.

"Neither," Gideon cuts in crossly. "The procedure appears to have been successful. Your mind had already successfully endured a great deal of stress, which increased your tolerance of any cognitive dissonance."

"I think that was a compliment," Len whispers, and Sara's lips twitch.

"Told you she likes me best."

"I wouldn't go that far." Sara mumbles something unintelligible, curling on her side with one arm under her head. She looks… adorable, and Len has to suppress the urge to tuck her hair back from her face. He taps the metal band around her neck instead, the one he'd assumed was just a necklace until today. "Wanna tell me what this is?"

"Nope. Wanna sleep."

Len sighs; Gideon had been annoyingly mute on the subject. Anything he gets out Sara right now would probably be delirious, anyway. "It’s gone?" he asks. She doesn’t need to ask what, just nods wearily.

“Now I just have normal trauma to live with,” she says with a sleepy smile. "Never thought I’d be grateful for that."

“Remember that thing I said about our bar being too low?” Sara snorts, shaking her head, eyelids already fluttering shut. “Get some rest, birdie,” Len murmurs. “I’ll be here."

xxx

Sara is still sleeping in the medbay when Gideon informs him that Rip wants to jump them to some point in time Len glazes over, based on the slightest bit of sketchy evidence that has a probability of success with too many zeroes after the decimal for Gideon to list.

“Have you tried telling him that?” Len drawls.

“Why I didn’t think of that?”

Len blinks. “Gideon, was that sarcasm?” He can’t help smirking when she doesn’t answer. “Okay, fine. Assuming this even does pan out, is there any reason we need to jump now rather than in an indeterminate number of days?"

“Not that I’m aware of.”

“Okay, so tell our dear Captain that.”
“Why didn’t I think of that either?”

Len glares at the ceiling. “Okay, now you’re just being rude. If you’re so smart and have all the answers, why are you telling me?”

“Finally, a useful question.” Len’s eyebrows shoot up; Rip must’ve been particularly snippish today. “You have a talent for… persuasion that I am somewhat lacking,” Gideon states, sounding miffed.

“Are you talking about my charming personality or my penchant for violence?”

“I imagine both will prove useful here.”

Len stretches, glancing at Sara’s prone form. She’s been out cold for hours, and probably will be for hours more, but he still doesn’t feel right leaving her alone. He’d told her he’d stay, and that’s not the kind of promise he’s comfortable breaking. “Can you have Kendra come keep Sara company while I knock some skulls together?”

“Way ahead of you,” Kendra greets, appearing in the doorway. “Whose heads are you knocking?”

“No one’s,” Gideon quickly interjects, and Len smirks.

“No takebacks, Gideon. I’m telling Rip you put a hit on him.”

“I did no such thing.”

“Besides, you’re not the resident assassin,” Kendra reminds him drily. “I don’t think Sara would take it well if you moved in on her territory.”

“Hmm, you make a good point.” Len sighs, standing. “I guess I’ll just stick to threats of imminent violence.”

“Your restraint is admirable,” Gideon states icily.

Kendra groans. “You guys have ruined her.” Len gives her a smug grin. Kendra sits in the chair he’d vacated, frowning a little at Sara. “She’s really out. Gideon, did you sedate her?”

“I did not. Her body is catching up on weeks of sleep deprivation. She will likely remain unresponsive for at least a few more hours.”

Len tilts his head, asks Kendra, “Have you seen those videos where people see how many potato chips they can put on their sleeping cat before it wakes up?”

“Aaaand this is why you’re leaving now,” she sighs, making a shooing motion with her hand. “That would absolutely result in you bleeding, and I don’t want to ruin this shirt. It’s one of the few I haven’t put wing holes in.”

“I can always fabricate replacements,” Gideon says, and Kendra and Len both shake their heads.

“You still haven’t given me a satisfactory answer as to what happens to the blood,” Len says, and Kendra nods vigorously.

“Thank you,” she exclaims. “I thought I was the only one who worried about that.”

Len is surprised Gideon doesn’t project that creepy head of hers just to roll her eyes.

He saunters into Rip’s study a few minutes later, states without preamble, “We’re not time-jumping
Rip looks up, blinking. "I'm sorry, what-

"Sara needs time." Len is absolutely done mincing words.

"Yes, well, time is unfortunately something we cannot afford to waste," Rip answers. He's already looked back down, and Len slams both hands on the table. He shouldn't have listened to Gideon when she told him not to bring his cold gun.

"We're on a time ship," he says, low and dangerous. "We make time."

Rip gives him that condescending look that always makes Len want to tear his face off. "It's not that simple, Mr. Snart. Look, I'm not sure what your... relationship with Sara is-

"Our relationship is none of your damn business," he growls. "What is your business, or should be your business, is the well-being of your team. And Sara. Needs. Time. Or did you miss the walking nightmare she just had?" Rip pinches the bridge of his nose, and Len continues, "Gideon, care to back me up?"

"I agree with Mr. Snart, Captain. Recovery from two years of time drift is not instantaneous, especially given the severity of Miss Lance's deviation."

"You do know that if you'd killed Mr. Rory like you were supposed to, none of this would've happened!"

Len really regrets not bringing his cold gun.

Hearing those words - the ones his own mind whispers to him over and over and over – coming from Rip's mouth... He forces a sneer onto his face, forces himself to be cold cold cold and bites, "If you hadn't insulted him every other word, that decision would've been unnecessary." Rip scoffs; Len crosses his arms and glares with every bit of anger he can draw up.

Before either of them can say anything, though, Gideon cuts in calmly, "Perhaps now is not the best time for this discussion." Discussion. Len snorts. "Shall I put the current course on hold, Captain?"

Rip sighs, waves a hand in assent. "Using my own team against me, Gideon? I'm hurt."

"I've done nothing of the sort." Gideon sounds miffed. Len thinks about telling Rip Gideon put a hit on him, just for fun.

"We're bonding," he drawls instead, to Rip's amused look. "She finds my violent demeanor very attractive. We even have a little robot lovechild."

"And here I thought that thing was definitely Sara's," Rip mutters, rubbing at his eyes.

"Oh, it's hers too. We have the most interesting love triangle- OW." Len yelps as a mild electric shock runs through the metal lining the door frame he'd been leaning against.

"Yes, I can see it's going splendidly," Rip sighs. "Please don't antagonize the AI, Mr. Snart. We need her for life support."

"I don't know, Captain," Len drawls. "I think she's starting to like me."

Neither he or Gideon mention the small army of robots that hover menacingly behind him on his way back to the medbay.

anywhere in the near future."
"So I hear you tore into Rip the other day," Sara greets, looking up from her book. Len rolls his eyes.

"Gideon gossips like a teenage girl."

Sara smirks, something he's fairly certain she's picked up from him, and tilts her head in a way that is entirely her. She's sitting cross-legged in one of the few pieces of comfortable furniture on the ship, a plush chair in the rec room, and she looks... his mind skitters around relaxed. He's not sure that's ever something that could apply to her, but more-so now than ever before.

"I think she was bored before we showed up," Sara says in a mock whisper.

"We are definitely more interesting company than Rip Hunter." He slides down the wall across from her, crossing his legs, and Sara shakes her head at him. "What?"

"Do you have a natural aversion to furniture?"

"You're sitting in the only chair, Lance," he points out, raising an eyebrow.

She shrugs. "We could share."

Something twists in his stomach at that, not entirely unpleasant. It's not as though she hasn't been in his space more often than not, hasn't touched him more than most people combined. But that had always been out of some version of necessity, and this...

He shakes his head mutely, not sure what he could say. Sara doesn't look surprised, more... contemplative, studying him like a puzzle. After a moment she closes her book, shifting down to sit on the floor in front of her chair. Len raises an eyebrow as she digs in the pocket of her jacket, pulling out a deck of cards.

"No way to play up there anyway," she says with a smile, and he can't help himself from returning it.

"You're strange, Lance."

"So I've been told." She studies him for a moment, continues quietly, "Also been told Rip tried to blame all of this on you."

Len can't meet her gaze, fiddles with a button on his jacket instead. "That seems to be his thing," he drawls, trying for nonchalant. "Blaming things on everyone else until it finally smacks him in the face." Sometimes literally, he thinks wistfully, remembering the look on Rip's face when Kendra and Sara both punched him. Good times.

Sara gives him a look, shaking her head. "Still." He can feel her eyes on him, resists the urge to squirm. "Not your fault." She stretches her legs out, tucking her toes under one of his shins, catching Len off guard. He instinctively stiffens, forces himself to relax as his cheeks flush, shame heavy in his stomach.

Sara freezes, gaze intensifying. "Can't figure you out," she murmurs, head tilted. He feels like a bug being stared at by a cat, and about as comfortable.


She shakes her head. "No, not that." She nudges his leg gently with one foot and he can't help
stiffening again, too keyed up by this conversation not to. "This."

"Sara." He can't keep the tightness out of his voice. "Please don't."

She frowns, and Len flicks his eyes to hers for a moment. There's... something close to disgust there, and he feels his stomach drop out, air sucked from his lungs. Sara tugs her knees to her chest, arms wrapped around them as she glares at him. "You don't get to do that," she snaps. Len can only stare, utterly lost and annoyingly hurt. He's not sure what he'd done to warrant this, and he feels his walls snapping back up, cold and familiar. "No, not that either," Sara growls. "You can't hide behind that goddamn cold mask and expect me to let you... hurt yourself with me."

He blinks; of all the things he'd thought she'd say, that... was not one of them. "What?" Sara shakes her head impatiently. "You can hardly stand being touched, but you let me into your space when I need it. I can't sit with it anymore, Snart. I can't feel this awful-"

"Sara." She breaks off, jaw set defiantly. It's not disgust with him, Leonard realizes; it's with herself. "It's not... that simple."

"So speak slowly." He narrows his eyes, sighing; this is not a conversation he ever enjoys, with anyone. But Sara deserves... something.

"If you were hurting me, I wouldn't be here," he finally says, trying to look at her. "You're right, I don't... usually enjoy being touched. You know why, I'm not gonna..." Her gaze softens, a little tension draining from her shoulders. "It's instinct, pulling away. I doubt it'll ever fade, and I'm not sure I'd want it to." He swallows hard, focuses on slow, steady breathing. "But with people I trust, I can..."

His throat is thick, words jumbled in his brain. He's never been good with feelings, and something like this leaves him feeling horribly vulnerable. Eventually, he manages, "I can teach myself not to hate it."

Sara is watching him with an unreadable expression, and Len is pretty sure his face is about to catch fire, his stomach about to sink through the floor. He wants to run, but he doesn't think he'd be able to manage that with any dignity intact, and-

"Okay." Sara's voice is quiet, head tilted. Leonard nearly bursts into hysterical laughter. "You can learn not to hate it. But Len, do you want to?"

That sobers him up instantly, because no one has ever bothered to ask him that before.

He thinks of her curled beside him, warm enough to chase out the pervasive cold that follows him. He thinks of her taking the time to literally hold his fucking hand while he readjusts it to existing, of her clinging to him like he's the only steady thing in her life, and-

"Yes," he answers finally, small and hesitant. "With you."

xxx

divenire

Chapter End Notes
(1x10) i know you can feel this

Chapter Summary

"Trust you to find a cold beach."

Or, the one where I try to write at least one vaguely happy scene for these idiots cus dammit they deserve it

Chapter Notes

speeding cars (walking on cars)

Additional warnings: brief mention of underage non-consensual sex

This is only the first half of this chapter but I wanted to get at least something out before TOO long. I've been working on this section for like a year and a half and it's fighting me for every word fml

See the end of the chapter for more notes

xxx

so if i stand in front of a speeding car
would you tell me who you are?

xxx

"Do I seem to you like the type of person who likes surprises?"

Len sighs.

"Sara, do you really think Gideon would let me get away with anything right now?" He looks at her expectantly, arms crossed and a frown on her face. "I promise, this trip is danger-free." She narrows her eyes. "Cross my heart, hope to die."

Finally Sara sighs, shoulders loosening a little. "I will stick a damn needle in your eye," she mutters as she walks past him, then stops abruptly. "Please tell me we're not going to see dinosaurs."

Len can't help a small smile. "I considered it," he drawls, earning himself a light kick. "Needed Gideon's help, though, and she really doesn't like dinosaurs for some reason."

"When you've been rammed off a cliff by a pack of 10-ton lizard-birds, your opinion will be noted," Gideon states icily. Sara tries and fails to hide an amused grin.

"We will definitely need that story later."

Len pilots the jumpship - or rather, lets Gideon pilot it, as she very archly points out. Len just rolls his
eyes as he exits, only turning when he realizes Sara isn't behind him anymore. She's standing on the ramp, arms crossed, shoulders so tense his own start to ache.

"Snart." Her voice is tight, eyes a little wide.

Len takes a step back toward her. "Come on," he orders gently. "Jumpship's right here, Sara. Gideon is monitoring us, and she'll let us know if anything goes wrong. She won't leave us behind."

"Like she wouldn't in 1958?" Her voice cracks the smallest bit and Len frowns. He's been so focused on the effects of her coming back that he'd forgotten the team had all but abandoned her and the lovebirds.

"Jumpship's still here," he counters. "It can take us back home, okay? We're not gonna get stuck here."

He hates the uncertainty on her face, hates to think of her waiting and waiting and waiting for the Waverider to return. To think of her feeling so alone she'd gone back to the damn League of Assassins for company.

Finally she exhales sharply, mutters, "Least you're better company than Ray."

"Damn straight."

"So not."

Len smirks, shaking his head. "Point," he concedes. "Still better company."

"By a fraction."

"Ouch." Sara scoffs, eyes darting around at lightning speed, and Len sighs. "Sara. There's no one around for miles. Gideon checked."

She blinks, gaze slowly settling on him. "Where are we, anyway?"

"Somewhere in northern Europe."

Sara starts, looking at him in disbelief. "Trust you to find a cold beach."

Len shrugs. "Have to keep up appearances, Canary."

Sara shakes her head, muttering, "Day at the beach,'" to herself, and Len can't help smiling.

"It'll be worth it," he promises, earning himself a disbelieving glare. "C'mon, I want to show you something."

xxx

what's on your mind?
did i get it right?

xxx

It's a half-mile walk from where they'd landed - Len hadn't wanted to spook his target. There's an old road to follow, now cracked and covered with dirt and plant debris. It looks eerily apocalyptic, which Len supposes isn't all that far from the truth. The beach is narrow but long, sand having quickly reclaimed any traces of human development.
He feels Sara tense up beside him as they walk down the short path to the sand, but then they round a corner to a shallow cave where he'd tethered his catch and she freezes completely. Len tilts his head at her, smiling. "I got you a pony," he says smugly, trying to squash the sudden apprehension that tightens his chest. It... confuses him. He's never given a damn what others thought of him, outside of Lisa and Mick. Caring what Sara thinks is both annoying and... reassuring.

She stares for a moment, and then starts laughing so hard she actually falls over, getting sand all over her pants. Len flushes, looking away, feels his cheeks turn red as her arms around his neck as she launches herself at him. "Thank you," she whispers. Len falls back a step to keep them from tumbling over, made more difficult because of the sand, his arms instinctively coming up to catch her.

(Nope, still not used to this.)

(But maybe he could get there.)

He sets her down carefully when she releases him, half expecting to be knocked back on his ass. But Sara just blinks up at him with that look that makes him feel warm inside, like he's something worth seeing. She's smiling, a real smile, and it's enough to ease the last of the tension in his chest.

"So are we riding or what?" he asks. She bites her lip, and he finds it unnecessarily distracting.

"Do you even know how?" she asks, eyeing him doubtfully.

"I'll have you know I'm a very capable rider," he responds archly. Sara gives him a look. Len sighs. "Like apparently all girls, ninja assassins or not, Lisa always wanted a horse. One of the first things I did once my father was gone was get her lessons. That and ice skating."

Sara snorts. "I'm beginning to think your family has an unhealthy obsession with ice." Len ignores that.

"Anyway, she always insisted on dragging me with her on rides after that, every new place we went. Pretty sure she wants to ride every possible trail in the world." He shrugs, smiling fondly. "You should take her to Nanda Parbat, if we ever get home from this trainwreck. She'd probably swear fealty to you."

Sara gets a wicked grin on her face, and Len groans. "I'm going to regret that, aren't I."

"No idea what you're talking about," She looks at him with wide, innocent eyes, like he can't see the knife she's twirling.

"I can't take you anywhere, Lance," he sighs.

"Not true." She's beaming; he's really not sure why she didn't choose cat instead of canary for her League name. "You're taking me riding!" She turns toward where the horses are tied, and Len starts walking toward them. "Where'd you even get horses?"

"Gideon."

"Please tell me she didn't... fabricate them."

Len shudders. "No. I guess the world outside the conglomerates isn't all doom and gloom - there are some small towns around, pretty backwards in the way of technology, but..." He shrugs, holding out a palm to one of the horses. She lips at him, return to grazing when she finds he has nothing edible. "Plus, no humans is clearly good for nature."
She's quiet, and Len turns to find her watching him with an unreadable expression. "What?"

She shakes her head. "Nothing. Just... wouldn't have expected you to be good with horses, of all things."

"Don't need a heart to like animals," he retorts, turning back before he says something stupid. "What the hell is trash like you doin' here? Not even good enough to muck out the stables, what makes you think I'd let the whelp ride one of my beasts?"

He flinches at the hand on his shoulder, but Sara doesn't pull away. "Don't do that," she says quietly. She squeezes his shoulder and he lets the tension ease from his muscles, still not looking at her.

"Sorry," he mutters. "Habit."

_They get to his car before Lisa asks quietly, "Lenny, why'd she call us that?"

"Don't worry about it, Lise. We'll find you someplace better."

"I know." She sounds sad, which is the exact opposite of what he'd intended. And then she pulls him into another hug, gentler this time, murmurs, "We need some new ones."

He could get used to this.

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cause these secrets
all that we've got so far
the demons in the dark
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Predictably, there are ninja lessons.

It's actually been a while since Sara's ridden a horse, not that she'd ever let Len know that. She'd forgotten how _free_ it feels, can't remember the last time she'd felt so light. The last time she'd really smiled. She's never been one for sentiment, could never afford to be, but after floating in space for a good month straight, she finds she truly does appreciate the grounding tranquility of nature. She'd always been a little awe-struck by the mountains Nanda Parbat was built into, a giant city that hardly touched the foundations of stone. Stone the sea could slowly eat away - how the sea had allowed her to survive its raw power is still a mystery to her.

It's terrifying and calming - Len was right, that with people all but gone, the world simply settles back into its own steady rhythm. For all humanity's horrors, it's still drowned out by the power of wind and rain and stone, and if Sara could survive that - she can survive anything humanity throws at her.

Anything, she decides, except food.

"I swear to god, Snart, if you get any of that in my hair I will force-feed it to you." She turns her head to glare, finds him a few paces behind with an innocent expression on his face, half-eaten banana in hand. (Where does he _fit_ these things?)

"Gotta keep you on your toes, assassin." He looks more relaxed than she's ever seen him, and Sara has a sudden, irrational urge to just take him and _run_, away from Savage, away from the Waverider and her memories and Mick. She knows she'd regret it almost instantly, but after everything they've
gone through, this freedom is intoxicating.

Instead, she ends up spearing various objects into the air with her knives while crouched on her horse, because apparently she's incapable of letting threats to her ninja status go.

Eventually, when the sun has moved considerably lower and the beach is covered in hoof marks, Sara sees a figure appear at the far end of the beach and instantly freezes. Len glances over, calls, "Relax, it's just Kendra." Sara frowns; he has a far-too-innocent expression on his face.

"And why is Kendra here?"

Len smirks, shrugs, taunts, "Race you to the hawk." He's off before she can get another word in, and Sara growls, wheeling her horse around to follow.

He only wins because he cheated with that head start.

Kendra doesn't look the last bit surprised to see either them or the horses, just stays out of the reach of spraying sand until they both wheel their mounts in. "Well?" Sara demands.

"We realized we never had a welcome home party," Kendra says, looking just a little apprehensive as Sara's glare slides from Len to her.

"She realized throwing a surprise party for an assassin could be dangerous, so naturally she enlisted my help," Len drawls, dismounting with an expectant look at Sara. Kendra has taken the reins of Sara's horse - probably to ensure she doesn't run away, Sara thinks ruefully, which is... fair. She dismounts, running a hand along the horse's shoulder before moving beside Kendra.

"You and Ray were stranded too," is what comes out of her mouth, and Kendra rolls her eyes. "Fine, it's our party too. I think everyone is just happy to be off the ship for a little while." Sara hums absently. She tries to take the horse's reins from Kendra, who pulls her hand away with a reproachful look. "Oh no. You are going to march right over to the rest of the team and be a social human being for an hour or two." She turns her look to Len, raising her eyebrows expectantly. He gives an exaggerated sigh and turns his reins over as well.

"At least with 4000 years of experience, you probably know how to handle a horse," he drawls. "I suppose my social presence is required as well?"

Sara glares, grumbles, "You are not abandoning me now, Snart."

"Oh my god, would you two just get over there? Being civilized human beings won't kill you, I promise."

"No, but it might kill them," Len says with a smirk.

Kendra pinches the bridge of her nose, and Sara has to bite back a giggle, because the White Canary absolutely does not giggle.

"You, no killing anyone," Kendra states, jabbing a finger at Sara. "And you..." She turns to Snart. "No... being yourself." Sara chokes back laughter at the disgruntled look on his face. "When I get back, I expect you both to be over there with drinks and food and actual conversation. Got it?"

"Yes, Mama Bird."

"Call me that again, I dare you."
"She's been spending too much time with you," Len whispers to Sara.

"It's funny, I said the same thing to her about you," Sara retorts drily.

"What can I say, I'm just an all-around positive influence."

Kendra groans. Sara rolls her eyes so hard it hurts.

xxx

lie again
play pretend like it never ends
this way no one has to know

xxx

"Miss Lance."

Stein. Sara swallows hard, trying to suppress the instant rush of emotion, trying not to remember the med bay not long ago. She'd just managed to work up a light buzz, working her way through the impressive feast Gideon had managed to put together in the time Sara and Len had been on the beach. Kendra had even had her fabricate some tables and beach chairs, drinks served with customized umbrellas for every damn one.

In short, she'd worked too hard.

Sara twirls the little canary-on-a-stick and smiles.

She turns to face Stein, as he corrects himself, "Sara. Could I speak with you for a minute?"

Sara gestures toward the ocean, letting him fall in alongside her. "I've got nothing but time," she responds with a small smirk.

They walk in silence for a minute, until they're far enough away for the wind to take their words. "I… wanted to apologize, for the way I reacted in the med bay," Stein finally explains. "You… startled me, and Jefferson and I have the sometimes unfortunate bond that lead to his… appearance."

Sara doesn't say anything, not really sure what there is to say. Stein stops, carefully touching her elbow to get her to face him. "And not just for the medbay. You were right, I should never have assumed you would resort to killing us over… hurt feelings. Even if we did abandon you for two years, which is probably good enough reason."

Sara swallows, tries to smile as she looks away. It's too close, that pain. That fear. This type of fear stems from events she can't control; this type of fear is why she's tried so hard to cut herself off from people. Tried so hard not to get attached, for all the good it's done.

At least the League will exist in a majority of the eras they visit, she thinks wryly. Small mercies.

"I can't speak for Jefferson, but I know you are far more than just an assassin, Sara. I know that you have feelings, even when you try to suppress them or use them to seduce nurses." Sara smiles at that, a real smile, if small. "You are an extraordinarily resilient woman, Miss Lance. I'm not certain what happened on the bridge, but I do know that whatever it is, you will most certainly beat it."

He doesn't seem surprised at her lack of response, just pats her shoulder once and returns to the others.
Sara follows him with her gaze, to the small fire Ray is kindling. It's nearly dark now, and they're far enough away from the nearest Conglomerate that there's almost no light pollution. The stars are brilliant and blazing even in the twilight, all the way down to the horizon where they meet the sea, and Sara can't stop the cold wave of adrenaline that rushes over her.

This is different, she tells herself. Everything about this is different. She's not stranded. She's not even on the ocean, or a boat. She's infinitely more capable of taking care of herself now.

She's not alone.

She takes a couple slow breaths, times them with the steady crash of waves. But with the firelight at her back the ocean is suddenly just a massive, unending darkness, and she backs away a few steps before turning around, making for the edge of the sand. There's a worn stone wall there, chest-high and still mostly standing. She climbs up and crosses her legs, counts her breathing and out.

She doesn't think about the last time she lit a fire on the beach. She doesn't think of being dragged back to the Amazo as ransom. Bait.

She doesn't think about drowning again.

"You're thinking too hard for a party," Len's voice breaks into her musing. Sara blinks. He holds out a beer for her, leaning his forearms on the wall to look out at the sea.

"Did Kendra notice our jailbreak?"

Len smirks. "I think we were civil for the required period of time. That and she and Ray were very happily cloistered by the fire."

"'Cloistered', really?"

Len shrugs, falling silent. Now that she's aware of it again, the quiet is suddenly filled with sound - water lapping at sand, waves crashing to shore, wind whistling across all of it.

"I can see it," Len eventually murmurs into the noise. Sara frowns questioningly, and he gestures out at the water. "'Ocean at night.' " Sara can't help the shiver that runs through her, the way her muscles seize up. Can feel Len's gaze on her, soft and contemplative. She wraps her arms around her knees, pulling them closer against the cold.

"Sara," he says quietly. She's staring at the wall she's sitting on, counting stones and tracing cracks with her eyes. "Hey. I need you to do something for me." She frowns, not lifting her gaze. His fingers wrap gently around hers, carefully detangling their deathgrip on her legs. "Sara." He tugs insistently on her hands until she glances up at him. "Look," he orders softly, gesturing at the ocean again. "Just look."

Sara closes her eyes. Takes a slow, deep breath, and turns her head, can't quite force herself to reopen them. She's vaguely aware of crushing Len's hand in her grip, tries to relax her hold. A moment later he shifts closer, and she feels his arm wrap around her back, lets herself sag a little into the solid, grounding warmth he provides.

For someone so cold, he's incredibly warm sometimes.

"It's beautiful," he murmurs. His chin rests on top of her head, body effectively surrounding her. Anchoring her.

Sara opens her eyes.
She can feel the panic swirling in her gut automatically at the sight, the dark waters reflecting the giant moon where it's starting to set. The strange shadows flickering along the beach from the bonfire, the faint echoes of stars along the horizon.

But she can feel Len too.

"I'm very tired of being afraid," she whispers. Len tightens his arms where they encircle her now, presses his lips to the crown of her head.

"Tell me what you hear," he murmurs. Sara huffs a small laugh, closing her eyes again.

"Waves." She drags in a slow, deep breath. "Wind in the trees. Voices." She pauses, tilts her head. "I was gonna say I can't make anyone out, but then there's Ray." She feels a laugh rumble in his chest.

"Alright, birdie, now what you see." Sara exhales slowly, forces back the anxiety, and opens her eyes.

It is beautiful. "Ocean at night," she murmurs. "Waves crashing on the sand." She presses her cheek against his arm, swallowing hard. "Feel my heart beating too fast," she whispers. "But I feel yours too." His thumb rubs along her shoulder, a grounding point.

She's been staring absently out at the water for a few minutes when she notices it, trails of hazy green coming in and out of focus. They steadily brighten and Sara sucks in a breath. "Is that…?"

"Northern Lights," Len murmurs. She can hear the small smile on his face. "Just trying to diversify your late night experiences."

Sara barks a laugh, feels her lips stretch into a real smile that feels out of place on her face. She blinks back the burn in her eyes furiously, that he'd done all of this for her, that she'll no longer have only trauma and tragedy to associate with this bit of her life.

It's tiny, but it's everything.

Sara tilts her head back to look up at him.

"Can I ask you a question?" She lets her head rest on his arm, feels him stiffen the smallest bit. *With you.* He raises an eyebrow, looking back down at her. "You said you can learn to tolerate someone's touch. Have you ever wanted to before?"

There's a spasm of pain on his face, for just a fleeting moment, and Sara feels the bloodlust uncoil. Forces it back down, as Len forces on one of his trademark smirks. "I think Gideon gave you too many happy pills," he drawls, but Sara can feel the way he tenses. She frowns, reaching up to grip both his hands where they rest on her far shoulder, keeping him in place.

"I'm serious."

Len sighs. He gently tugs himself free from her grip, turning to lean against the wall beside her with his arms crossed tightly over his chest. Sara wants to be angry, hurt, but the look on his face is so... vulnerable that she finds she can't be. She tugs her knees in closer to her chest, resting her chin on them, says quietly, "Len, you just saw and heard about basically every dark, twisted, embarrassing thing from my past." That thought still twists her stomach a little, but Len hasn't judged her for a single thing. "You asked me to trust you, and I did. Now I'm asking you to trust me."

He exhales slowly, not quite looking at her, one foot bouncing a little as he leans into the stone. "Not often," he finally answers, very quietly. His eyes are wide and dark and very far away. "Lisa's
mostly a given. Mick is—" He breaks off, swallows hard. "—was… safe." He goes quiet for a long moment, and Sara absently runs through various methods of torture.

"When I turned 16 my dad decided it was time for me to become a man." He snorts derisively. "Put me in the back seat of his buddy's police car with a hooker they'd picked up. Told her she'd walk free and clear once she was done with me."

Sara wonders how many undiscovered methods of torture there are, and if maybe Gideon had some future ideas she'd share, just this once.

Len shrugs. "Don't like sex much. Never felt like explaining that to anyone, and the world I run in isn't exactly the cuddle on the couch type."

Sara snorts softly, imagining couches at Nanda Parbat. Len darts a glance at her for the corner of his eye, shoulders so tense it makes her own ache. "Sorry. Trying to picture Netflix and chill in Nanda Parbat." He gives a half-smile and Sara uncurls slowly, crossing her legs to rest her elbows on them. He looks ready to bolt, like he's waiting for her to just… walk away. Worse.

He looks like he's waiting for her to take everything from him. And the thought that what they have could mean so much to him is… both terrifying and warming. The thought that she could absolutely break him right now is nauseating.

He'd never felt like explaining to anyone, but he'd explained it to her.

"Hey." Sara touches his arm, can feel him trembling the slightest bit.

The world I run in isn't exactly the cuddle on the couch type.

He's never had this, she realizes. He's never had someone to just… be with. To watch movies all day, to play cards with. Sara had never given it much thought – in Starling, even as the Black Canary, she'd still had friends and family. They'd had game nights and thanksgiving dinner and secret Santa in between catching bad guys. Because for all the hell she's been through, she'd grown up normal. She has that familiar comfort to fall back on.

Len had none of that. Len had pain and fear and fighting for survival, had learned love was just keeping your sister alive. Was sex in the back of a police car with a stranger, was freezing off your hand to save your best friend after he betrayed and tried to kill you.

Len had learned that once you outstayed your usefulness, you were put down like a rabid dog.

And now he's afraid he's outlived his usefulness to her.

Sara grips his shoulder, tugging insistently until he turns. She searches his face, the fear and vulnerability there making her feel a little sick.

"Hey. When you first lost Mick, and I kept you company, do you think I did that to… to get something out of it? To use you for something?" He swallows hard, not looking at her. "Len, you were hurting. I don't like to see you hurt. That's it, okay? That's enough."

He finally glances at her, eyes dark and lost. But there's a little spark of hope there that Sara is desperate to draw out. "I enjoy spending time with you," she tells him softly. "I'm not doing it out of pity or necessity. I'm doing it because I like you, and I care about you, and I will deny I ever said this if you tell anyone."

His lips twitch a little at that, face softening. Sara places a gentle hand on one arm where they're both
still crossed defensively across his chest, murmurs, "Okay?"

He nods after a long pause, mutters, "Sorry. I'm... not used to people..." He shrugs helplessly, and Sara doesn't imagine all the ways she could murder Lewis Snart.

"I know," she answers simply. She rubs her thumb against his shirt, feels him shiver. "That's why I'm telling you."

He lifts one hand to scrub at his face, mutters, "Sara Lance, poster child for emotional health," and Sara full-on laughs. She can't remember the last time she'd done that.

She catches his hand when he drops it from his face, shifting to sit cross-legged on the wall in front of him. It's his new hand, free of even the scars that should be left from her nightmares – Gideon must've seen to that. Probably for Sara's own sake, she realizes absently. She should start calling the AI Space Mom.

"Hunayn al-Julud," she says. Len looks at her blankly as she rests his hand palm-up on her crossed legs, reaching for his other hand to do the same. "Skin Hunger, Ra's called it. Touch deprivation. The only non-lethal deprivation humans can't learn to tolerate." She traces her fingers along the creases in his skin, feels him shiver.

"Take away necessities for too long - food, water, sleep, air - we just die. Take one sense - sight, hearing - the rest grow stronger. Take away possessions, we rebuild. Take loved ones, we move on. But touch" - She brushes a faded, circular mark in the center of one palm, edges a little raised where his skin had burned. "We don't grow stronger for it. We don't learn to tolerate the absence, we don't adapt. And we don't die. We just... fade."

Len sits frozen, eyes closed, except for the faintest trembling Sara feels when she presses her palm to his. "It was his favorite method of torture, for people he didn't need anything from. For the ones he just wanted to suffer. Solitary confinement millennia before its time."

(She still has those memories, although at least the older ones only surface as direct recall.)

"Needing something that makes your skin crawl..." Sara gives a mirthless smile, a hollow little laugh. "'It's self-sustaining torture.' She considers him a moment, considers the way he avoids touch with a quiet skill that could only be the product of a lifetime of practice. Skill that makes it hard to even notice he's doing it, that even concentrating, Sara still misses more times than not.

She doesn't notice him flinching from anyone else, because they never get close enough for it to even be an issue.

Except with her.

She knows how awful it is, craving something that can also make you sick, that can terrify you. She's only had to live with it for half her life; she can't imagine what it must be like for him, to have lived this way for most of his. To not even have good memories to fall back on, to have no way of understanding that this reality isn't the way it has to be. To have no frame of reference for anything good or healthy, anything not based on pain and manipulation.

"Nyssa helped me through it," she finally tells him quietly. "When everyone else felt threatening, she just felt... safe."

"You feel safe."

Something in Sara's chest cracks open at that, at the shell-shocked look on his face the moment he
says the words. He flushes, starting to turn away, but Sara tightens her hold on his hands, waits until
he settles to murmur, "Good." He won't look at her, jaw clenched and shoulders tight, and Sara
aches to take that away.

She's just not quite sure how. Her go-to method of fucking until she can't think straight is obviously
not going to work for him – and, if she's honest, she's not sure how well it would work for her at the
moment either. Which leaves her foundering with no release, and no way to help.

But she can't just leave him alone like this.

"You said you never felt like explaining it to anyone," she starts hesitantly. "I'd like to listen, if you
want to tell me."

xxx

if i stand in front of a speeding car
would you give your little heart?

xxx

Chapter End Notes

So I have a whole lot of feelings about Len's sexuality and touching and I may or may
not have a 30k document of alternate versions of this scene um. Writing is hard. Writing
Len is the worst he's such a little shit. I'm really uncertain about sharing parts of this
sooo I hope it turned out okay *peeks from under blanket*
Chapter Summary

Sara is going to make Lewis's death take days.

Chapter Notes

This bit wasn't going to make the final cut, but with all the sexual assault/harassment charges going around right now, I decided to suck it up and publish it. Sorry for the abrupt start, it really belongs at the end of last chapter.

So, additional warnings: long-term effects of rape (no graphic descriptions)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

xxx

advertise my secret
i don't really need it

xxx

He stiffens up again, jaw clenching tightly. "This is the last thing you need," he mutters, scrubbing at his eyes angrily. Sara frowns, catching his wrists.

"What, a damaged crook lost in time and space?" She tilts her head with a little smile, eyeing him as she tugs his hands down. "Hmm, maybe you're right..." Len huffs, not looking at her. "Maybe I want to be here with you."

That gets him to glance up, finally, a frown creasing his forehead. "I just don't understand why," he says in a small voice, and Sara is going to make Lewis's death take days. "No one is this... nice to me without wanting something and I have nothing to give you."

Weeks. It will take weeks.

"Leonard," she whispers. "Do you honestly believe that? That you've given me nothing?" He flinches a little, eyes pressed shut. Sara feels suddenly, hopelessly out of her league, like he's trapped behind a mile high wall she can't break through.

She bites the inside of her mouth, hard, until she can keep her voice steady. Asks, "You remember what you said to me, about not using Mick? About not using... kindness against people?" He doesn't answer. Sara rubs her thumb lightly along his palm, his sharp intake of breath enough to set her chest aching again.

"Do you think I would do that?" she asks softly. He shakes his head, eyes still closed. "Hey, look at me. Please, crook." She waits until he at least opens his eyes, staring down. "I'm not looking for
anything," she tells him gently. "I'm not expecting anything from you, okay? You don't owe me anything." He swallows hard, gaze fixed on her fingers where they grip his. "Is it really that hard to believe I just want to be here?" His jaw tightens, and if anything he looks more upset. "Len."

Sara doesn't know what else to say, how else she can convince him. He turns away, pulling from her grip, and Sara forces herself to remain still, to give him whatever space and time he needs. She knows, intimately, just how hard this must be for him, but that doesn't make it any easier for her to remain silent.

It's an agonizing minute before he says, very quietly, "When I spend too much time with someone, they inevitably want... more." He breaks off, voice catching painfully in his throat, and it's all Sara can do not to reach for him. "And I've tried, but I always end up..." His hands are clenched so tightly Sara's afraid he'll bleed. "I freak out, and they leave. And I don't want you to leave." The last is so small and choked Sara can hardly make it out, has to take a moment to talk the bloodlust down from taking the jump ship and hurting everyone who had ever left him alone. Who had left him like this.

Instead, she cautiously takes his nearest hand, easing his fingers from their deathgrip. She tugs at him until he turns, lets her repeat the motion with his other hand, rubbing circles on his wrists until she can keep her voice even.

"Leonard, look at me." She tugs at his hands gently, until he opens his eyes. Sara rests a hand on his cheek, murmurs, "Hey. I'm not leaving, okay? Whatever this is, whatever we have... right now, I think it's exactly what both of us need. After all of this is over, maybe that will change. Maybe it won't. It'll still be your choice, your pace, always."

He doesn't believe her. She can see it in the set of his jaw, the sheen in his eyes, the defensive hunch of his shoulders. He's lived so long in black and white, people either family or enemy, always temporary partners, never friends.

Except Mick, the exception who had proved his rule.

Sara thinks it might've been better if Len had just killed him after all. Thinks that pain would've been easier to live with than... whatever hell this is.

She wants to kiss him, desperately, wants to try to take some of that pain away. To at least let him forget, for just a moment. Knowing she can't makes her ache in ways she'd forgotten she knew how.

"I threw up," he mumbles suddenly. "After... after the girl in the back of the police car. She laughed."

She wants to kiss him, desperately, wants to try to take some of that pain away. To at least let him forget, for just a moment. Knowing she can't makes her ache in ways she'd forgotten she knew how.

"I threw up," he mumbles suddenly. "After... after the girl in the back of the police car. She laughed."

Sara closes her eyes, stroking his cheek lightly with her thumb, and doesn't think about new ways to torture Lewis Snart or how long her list of future victims is getting.

"You were a child," she says softly, feeling sick. "You were a child, Leonard."

"I was old enough."

Sara frowns, pulling back with a shake of her head. "You were sixteen," she says, trying to keep the edge off her voice. "You didn't choose to be there."

"I didn't try to stop it." It sounds like a line he's repeated to himself countless times. "I could've done more, I..."

Sara touches his chin lightly, lifting his head. "Not saying no is not consent," she tells him, gentle but firm. "You know that, right? What happened to you was rape. Letting it happen because you
couldn't speak up to her, or to your father – that's still rape. That's not something you just get over. There are tears on his cheeks, and Sara brushes at them very gently. "That's not something you ever need to feel ashamed about," she says softly. "Not ever, Len."

"I hate it." His voice shakes, and tears are streaming down his face now. "I hate that it's still the first thing I think about when anyone gets close. I hate that it still makes me feel sick. I hate that I can't just stop it." He's full on crying now, and Sara would do very bad things to take this pain for him.

"I know," she murmurs. "I know, Len. But that doesn't make it your fault. None of it." He presses his knuckles to his eyes, shuddering, and Sara bites her lip hard enough to taste blood. Waits until his breathing is no longer labored to ask, "You've never told anyone about this, have you?"

He shakes his head, and Sara feels sick at how long he's carried this alone. "What about Lisa?"

He shakes his head again, grates, "She didn't need that on top of everything."

"Neither did you."

He inhales sharply at that, slowly lowering his hands, eyes red and raw. "She didn't understand why I couldn't let her touch me, for months," he says, voice cracked. "I don't think she ever really put it together. She was just a kid."

"So were you."

She remembers him saying the same damn thing to her, not so long ago. He sighs, shooting her a disgruntled look that tells her he remembers too. His shoulders loosen a little, and Sara feels hers do the same.

"I got used to her again pretty quickly. But trying to be comfortable with anyone else touching me just... didn't seem worth it." He swallows hard, glances at her with heartbreaking vulnerability. "Until I met you. Until you..." He shakes his head, laughs hollowly. "Until you stopped a panic attack just by touching my chest and I..."

He chokes his next breath, lets Sara place her hand gently over his heart, just the way she had that night. "I don't... know what I want. Or how to..." He shrugs desperately, breathing shaky.

Sara slides her hand up to the back of his neck, stroking his skin lightly. "Okay," she soothes. "We'll figure it out." He leans forward, resting his forehead on her shoulder with a shuddering sigh, and Sara can hardly breathe. She slips her free arm around his waist, gently tugging him closer. "I'll help you figure it out, okay?" She slowly traces her fingers along his spine, feels him shiver. "Is this okay?" He nods, almost shyly, and Sara's chest starts to ache again.

"It feels good," he says, voice heartbreakingly small. "And I don't... know what to do with that."

She'll use the Lazarus Pit on Lewis, she decides, so she can torture him indefinitely. Nyssa would probably even help.

"I'll help you figure it out," she whispers again, when the red clears from her vision.

He doesn't say anything else, pulls away slowly a few minutes later. Sara brushes at his cheeks with a gentle smile, murmurs, "You're missing your light show." He gives a wet chuckle, glancing up over her head to where the sky is still colored.

"I'm surprised we can't hear the nerds geeking out from here."
Sara hums, turning to face the ocean again, leaning back against his chest. He wraps both arms around her, crossing them just under her chin, and Sara can't help smiling. She tilts her head back to look up at him, asks, "You okay?"

He nods, resting his chin on top of her head when she lowers it. They watch the lights in silence for a few minutes, until he says, very quietly, "Thank you." Sara reaches up to rest her hand on his arm, rubbing gently a few times. Feels him exhale slowly, then ask, "So, does that look like a dinosaur to you?"

Sara groans, shaking her head. Sighs, "You know what, crook, tonight I'll let you have it."

xxx

    if i could call you half-mine
    maybe this is the safest way to go

xxx

Chapter End Notes

    #MeToo
Chapter Summary

She's all that fire tempered with ice, with a calm he doesn't think she knows she has. She's Len's cold, but not frozen irreparably through. She's more than either of them could ever hope to be.

Chapter Notes

avalanche (matthew good)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

xxx

if everyone's a casualty
then take your time
there ain't no trouble

xxx

"You still look like shit."

Sara rolls her eyes, arms crossed, door not even closed behind her. "Gee, thanks, Mick."

"You always call me that." He's practically vibrating, eyes gleaming at her from where he stands in the corner by the door. Like he'd been waiting.

"It is your name."

He follows her along the wall, her steps slow, his impatient. "Some of 'em call me Kronos." He jerks his head vaguely out of his cell. "Hunter calls me Mr. Rory like he can force it back on me like a skin." Sara doesn't answer. He wants something, has for days, has since the last time she found him pacing. And he may be different, but this Mick still has little patience.

She shrugs, sliding down the wall to her usual sprawl. "You missed a nice beach bonfire," she tells him, tugging out a knife to pick some remaining sand from under her nails. Mick growls, slamming one fist against the wall of his cell like it will actually do something this time.

"Idiots," he growls. Sara raises an eyebrow.

"Something to share with the class?"

Mick sneers. "Not with you."

Sara blinks. She'd assumed, at first, that he'd been trying to make her snap. That he'd seen her back with the League and had thought to use that against her. But no, it's not her he's baiting. It's Len.
She flips her knife for a while, studying Mick - he is definitely Mick, the Kronos armor crumbling in the face of... what, Sara's not entirely sure. Time, maybe. Proximity to the team. Boredom. Whatever it is, the Time Masters clearly hadn't done a very good job of brainwashing him, had relied too much on his anger and sadism. Or maybe hadn't been able to overwrite enough of it.

When she's left awhile later, still flipping her knife as she makes her way back to her room, she asks, "Gideon, what kind of protocols exist for hunters?"

"I'm not certain. Their existence is... 'off the books', I believe the colloquialism is in your time."

"Can you guess?"

"I can do no such thing," Gideon says primly. "I can, however, make a logical estimate."

Sara rolls her eyes so hard it hurts. "Please, continue."

"Given Mr. Rory's increased anxiety, I would say that the deadline for his check-in is either very soon or already passed."

"And what happens then?" She's reached her room, leans against the doorway to half-gaze up at the ceiling.

"Again, there's no official answer. But considering their covert nature, it is likely other hunters will be sent after both Mr. Rory and his target."

Sara rubs her forehead, sighing. "If he were Kronos, he'd've done everything in his power to get out of that cell, right?"

"Correct."

"Pretending to be Mick would be the easiest way. What he's doing now? Pissing everyone off? Not helping him get out. Which means he's just doing it because he's still pissed, which he wouldn't be if he were Kronos. Right?"

"I... believe so, yes."

"So, he's Mick. With some new skills, but still Mick. Problem is, it was Mick who betrayed us in the first place. We were gonna put him in that same damn cell until Rip convinced Len to kill him. We're exactly where we would've been, with no more reason to trust Mick than we had before."

She slams her palm into the doorframe, sighing. This is such a mess - was such a mess, without the added problem of their likely new hunters.

"Mick knows there are hunters coming after him - after us," she says slowly. "So why hasn't he said anything? I get wanting to drag it out, make us suffer, blah blah. But we're down to the wire, from the way he's acting, so why is he still staying silent?"

It's a rhetorical question, mostly, but Gideon answers anyway. "Because there's something he cares about more than survival."

Sara starts to laugh.

"Len is gonna hate this."

"He is," Gideon confirms.
"We are not talking about this again."

Sara sighs. "Yeah, Len, we are." He's glaring at her from his bed, book forgotten beside him. "Look, if it was just you and him, I'd let you drag it out as long as you wanted. But it's not. We probably have hunters coming after us right now, and we need to know if that's the case. Mick is the only one who can tell us that."

"So why don't you ask him."

He's in full petulant mode, arms folded, back to the wall. Sara pinches the bridge of her nose. "He's had plenty of opportunities to tell me. And you know he's all about self-preservation. So why, if they're gonna come kill him, wouldn't he have said something?"

"Don't patronize me, Sara, I really hate that."

"Then stop being obtuse." He just glares, jaw clenching. Sara sighs, walks to the opposite end of the bed and perches on the edge. "I've been in there… Half a dozen times at least. He brings you up, every time. At first I thought he was trying to provoke me, but…" She shakes her head. "He knows you. He knows you won't be able to help watching the security tapes. He's trying to get you angry enough that you'll go down there."

"And that's a good thing, why?"

"Because that's the only way you two communicate." Len closes his eyes, crossing his legs to rest his elbows on them. "Look, he doesn't give two shits about the rest of us. If you weren't here, I bet he'd've spilled weeks ago. But you are, and you won't even see him, and you are hurting his big manly feelings."

The edges of Len's lips twitch for just a moment. "Still don't see how that helps."

Sara raises an eyebrow. "Cause if you go down and talk to him, maybe we can figure out what the hell is about to happen, and what to do about it."

Len leans forward, rubbing his hands across his face. "Great, so the fate of the team relies on me managing Mick again."

"Len."

"Don't, just…" He pushes off the wall, gets to the edge of the bed before she moves to block his path.

"Hey. I'm not saying you have to trust him. Are you really going to just pretend he's not down there for the rest of your life?"

"That was the plan."

"Well it's a terrible one."
"What else am I supposed to do??" he demands, voice cracking the slightest bit. "How is this different from the first time around, when Rip said the brig wasn't meant for long term incarceration? Nothing has changed, Sara. If he is really Mick, he is still in that same dark place you said he wasn't coming back from."

"I said the same thing about myself!" The words are out before she can filter them and she turns away, pressing a hand to her mouth. Closes her eyes and takes a slow breath. "You know, for all that you've done for me, for all you… believed in me, you still don't think Mick can change. And no matter how many times you say we're different, it's still a slap in the face."

"Sara-"

"Don't." She takes a deep breath, swiping at her eyes before turning back around. "You can't have it both ways, Leonard. I know that he hurt you, and I'm not saying you should forgive him. But if you can't give him a chance…" She shrugs. Tries not to think about how much this still hurts.

"How can you not see the difference?" He's on his feet now, arms crossed tightly. "Sara, you feel bad for every single time you've hurt one of us. Every time. You really think Mick regrets anything he's done?"

"You won't know unless you ask him."

xxx

i'm spinning
you're spinning
the world's spinning
and we're laughing

xxx

This is a terrible idea.

Len knows Mick doesn't want to talk, no matter how much Sara believes it. They don't talk. They never have. They save each other's lives and occasionally ruin them, give each other wounds and take them.

But Sara is right about one thing – Mick seems to be waiting on him. It's getting hard to convince himself the man in the cage isn't at least partially Mick; Kronos would certainly have escaped by now. Mick probably could have too, but instead he's sulking.

Ugh.

This is a terrible idea.

It's the only one he's got, though. He's still coming up empty on ways to fix this. He's done a fantastic job of ignoring the issue as long as possible, but avoidance sadly hadn't fixed the problem this time.

So, Plan B, only he doesn't have a Plan B, so he's stuck with Sara's Terrible Idea. Knowing Gideon agrees doesn't help in the slightest. In fact, it only makes it worse, cause it all comes back to being Len's fault.

He doesn't do guilt.
And yet.

This is all, technically, still his fault. Keeping Mick in check had been his responsibility; killing Mick had been his responsibility. Everything Sara had just gone through - is still going through - is his fault, and no number of ponies can fix that.

And worst, she thinks she's just like Mick. Len doesn't know how to tell her that in a way she's right; she does share many of his traits, his chaos. But she's more. She's all that fire tempered with ice, with a calm he doesn't think she knows she has. She's Len's cold, but not frozen irreparably through. She's more than either of them could ever hope to be.

He owes it to her to do this, he supposes. And maybe this way she'll see how different she is from Mick. She'll see just what Mick is capable of, Kronos or not.

If it takes Len dying to prove that to her, it's still worth it.

xxx

and we're ruthless
and we're cunning
and i'm heir to it all

xxx

Chapter End Notes

*pats Len on the head*
Chapter Summary

Sara growls in frustration, at Gideon, at Len, at herself for thinking Snart could possibly handle this in an emotionally mature way.

Chapter Notes

I've had most of this written for a year now, so I figured I might as well just post it. Apologies for any mistakes, I can't get myself to check it over right now.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

xxx

i'm charming
(the devil's charming)

xxx

"Miss Lance, I feel I should inform you that Mr. Snart is about to do something... misguided."
Sara snorts. "You're gonna have to be a lot more specific, Gideon."
"He is currently in Mr. Rory's cell. I believe they're attempting to kill one another."
Well, that's certainly specific, Sara thinks, halfway down the hall before she realizes she's moving. She shuts her brain down, doesn't think about how Len possibly ended up inside Mick's cell, doesn't run through various ways this could play out, doesn't ask Gideon for probabilities on Len's survival. Doesn't try to decide if Mick really wants him dead.

She skids through the door to find Len on the ground, Mick slouched beside him. "Get away from him," Sara snarls, seeing red. For one awful moment, she thinks Len is dead, but he groans a moment later, trying to push himself upright.

"Don't," he slurs. "Sara, don't." She realizes she's holding a gun; she'd stashed one in a hidden wall panel in the brig weeks ago - she may not like firearms, but she's not taking chances with Mick.

There's a sharp pain at her neck and she hisses, blinking - Gideon has refined her collar quite effectively, now just a tiny device Sara can place behind her ear. Although just this once Sara doesn't think she'd mind letting the bloodlust go.

She growls in frustration, at Gideon, at Len, at herself for thinking Snart could possibly handle this in an emotionally mature way.

"Back up," she bites, gesturing at Mick with the gun. "Against the wall." He's hardly even breathing hard; Sara wonders if Len had even fought back. That thought sends her a step forward into the cell,
and Mick finally obeys her, slowly sliding away from Len to the wall.

Sara kneels down beside Len, briefly glancing away from Mick to take in his already swelling face. He's trying to sit up, rather unsuccessfully, one arm curled across his stomach. He coughs, spits blood, and Sara feels another shock in her neck.

"Len?" she asks sharply, gripping his shoulder to help him upright.

"I'm fine," he mutters, coughing again to prove his point. Sara is getting tired of electric shocks.

"The blood??" she demands.

He shakes his head, wiping at his mouth, grimacing when his hand comes away sticky. "Jus' my lip," he mumbles. Mick opens his mouth and Sara cocks the gun, growls, "One word." He sneers, but obeys quickly that the bloodlust sings in her head, desperate for more. She hisses, twisting her head a little as there's another shock, and snarls, "Last time, Gideon."

"Would you prefer to turn into a mindless killer?"

"Yes."

Mick laughs. "You know, blondie, I really did miss you."

Sara fingers the knife in her sleeve, but she'd have to let go of Len to throw it properly, and she deserves a goddamn parade when all of this is over and she hasn't made anyone bleed. Len is mostly sitting on his own now, and Sara risks another glance at his face, already purpling and swollen.

"What the fuck, Snart??"

He glares at her, pathetic with his eye nearly swollen shut even if the bloodlust weren't crowing in her mind. "You wanted us to communicate," he says sullenly. "This is how we communicate."

"Letting him beat you to death is not communicating," Sara snaps.

"I knew he wouldn't kill me." He won't meet her eyes, gaze fixed on the floor.

"Did you?"

He doesn't respond. Doesn't react at all, just stares down with dull eyes a thousand miles away.

"How dare you," Sara growls, voice a little choked. "You-" She cuts herself off, closes her eyes and takes a slow breath. "You know what, fine. Do whatever the hell you want, Snart." She stands, stalks from the cell without another glance at either of them.

"Gideon, I need the rest of the team on the bridge, now. Rory, with me, or I put a bullet in your skull."

xxx

we're ruined
but we're still building
xxx

"Run," Mick says, and Sara can almost hear Nyssa's offended response. I'm not running, Sara.

To be fair, the League had never dealt with time-travelling assassins before.
She drifts over to Snart, huddled and bruised and bleeding, and sighs. She's still angry, furious with him, but they have bigger things to worry about, and... well, it's hard to stay upset when he looks so miserable.

"This is not what I had in mind when I said you should deal with it," she observes mildly, cataloguing his injuries. None of them look too serious, which tells her Mick had never really meant to kill him.

Still. Len hadn't known that.

"Yeah, well, me and Mick talk best with our fists."

"Clearly." She touches the unbruised side of his face, carefully turning his head and checking his pupils. Tries to ignore his flinch. "But it's funny, he's got almost no bruises. Guess he did all the talking."

He pulls away to stand, hissing in pain. "Don't," he growls. Sara lets him go, limping from command. When she does push him, she doubts either of them will want an audience.

Cause oh, does she have some choice words for him.

Still, as she heads toward her own room, she mutters, "Gideon, did Mick do any serious damage?"

"Mr. Snart has sustained severe bruising and I believe a fractured rib, but nothing life-threatening," she answers promptly. Sara raises an eyebrow, smiling a little.

"Still keeping tabs on us?"

"Of course, Miss Lance. The safety and well-being of this crew are of primary importance." Gideon pauses, then says, "I believe Mr. Snart is headed for the cargo hold, should you wish to locate him."

"Thanks, Gideon."

She stops by the med bay first to pick up some ice and bandages and painkillers, and to give Leonard a little time. By the time she reaches the storage room it's been nearly an hour, and she figures she's given him plenty of time to wallow. And herself enough time to reign in the anger still hot in her gut.

Still, something tugs painfully in her chest at the sight of him curled in a corner, half-hidden behind some crates. Sara swallows down the lump in her throat, and makes her way over to him.

"Alright, clean-up time," she greets, crouching down. He blinks up at her, arms tight around his knees, and for a moment she's dead set on hunting Mick down and hurting him. "Come on," she says softly instead. He hesitates, and she realizes it's not just Mick he's afraid of right now. She forces down every bit of emotion that drags up, and tells him quietly, "Len, I am still incredibly upset with you, but right now I just want to take care of your injuries. That's all." She holds out a hand and steels herself against the sheen in his eyes, against the way his fingers shake when he finally takes hers.

She pulls him carefully toward her, settling him so she can work more easily, and begins cleaning the cuts on his face. He's eerily quiet. No protests, no sarcastic comments, just apathetic acceptance. Sara forces herself not to think about that right now, focuses on working as quickly and carefully as possible. He flinches a little when she presses the ice to his cheek, but that's the only reaction she gets.

Until she says, hesitantly, "I need to check your ribs."
His sharp intake hurts her throat and his eyes widen with sudden fear, back going ramrod straight even as he gives a small yelp of pain. "They're fine," he hisses. Sara bites her lip.

"Gideon told me she thinks at least one is fractured. I can take you to the med-bay instead, if you want. Have her fix it."

"No." He's shaking, breathing rapid and shallow, and Sara has a vivid memory of being caged on the Amazo, of being small and helpless and alone and so, so scared.

"Hey." She sits back from her crouch, trying to catch his eye. "Do you trust me?"

"I don't trust anyone."

Sara sighs, closing her eyes, "Len." He says nothing. Sara leans back against the crates behind her, arms crossed. "You can't just walk about with a broken rib," she finally states.

"I've had worse."

"That's not the point."

"Then what is?" He finally snaps, finally shows some of the anger she knows he must feel. "We had our little chat, like you wanted. In case you hadn't noticed, our recent conversations have ended with me breaking or losing body parts. What else do you want from me?"

That pulls her up short, but she forces herself to just say calmly, "For you to let me check your ribs."

He laughs. It's a harsh sound, quickly dissolving into pained coughing, and she takes the opportunity while he's distracted to slide back into his space. He flinches back, and Sara's stomach does a nauseating little flip. She swallows hard, says quietly, "Leonard, if you don't want me to do it, that's fine. But then you need to let Gideon take a look."

He shakes his head slightly, arms tucked across his chest, and Sara forces herself to back off. To give him time.

She's really terrible at this waiting thing.

Waiting gives her too much time to think. Think about things like how many knives she can put into Rory before he bleeds out and the human body can be drained of blood in 8.6 seconds given adequate vacuuming systems and so many things she cannot be thinking about right now if she doesn't want to lose her mind to the bloodlust.

She closes her eyes and takes a slow breath, pretends she's back in Nanda Parbat and moving, speaking, breathing out of turn would earn her a lesson. In this case, not pain for her but for Len. She can do that.

Forty-seven breaths later, she hears the whisper of fabric on skin as he tugs his shirt carefully over his head, a sharp inhale as he moves the wrong way. Sara rakes her eyes over the bruises on his side, in full angry reddish purple, and waits for him to settle before reaching out. She runs her fingers lightly along his skin, checking for swelling.

"I think it's just this one," she eventually murmurs, trying to ignore the way he flinches. "I'll be fast."

He quivers under her touch, breath coming in shallow pants, but as she works he slowly calms. By the time she finishes he's no longer shying from every touch, and she takes that as a victory.
"All done," she finally says, handing him his shirt. He tugs it quickly over his head, wraps his arms back around his stomach and hunches over. She can hear his rapid, unsteady breathing, and digs her nails so hard into her palms they threaten to break skin.


She continues the litany until the panic is gone from his eyes, then reaches out slowly, placing a hand flat on the ground beside him. And waits. Waits until he stops shaking and starts breathing, and finally rests his cold hand on hers.

"Thanks," he grates.

She nods, turning her hand in his and wrapping her fingers around his. "You ok?"

He shakes his head slowly, and there's a lump in her throat she can't swallow. She shifts back to sit beside him against the storage crates, shoulders not quite touching. "You want me to go?" she asks. She would, if he wanted. The worry might kill her, but she'd do it.

But he shakes his head again. "Alright," Sara says, as lightly as she can. "What's the distraction of the day? Movie, cards, training...?" He's certainly in no shape to do anything, but he's been teaching her lock picking and other master thief skills in return for what he calls "Ninja Lessons", so he could at least supervise.

Nothing really gets a reaction from him, though. He just stares dejectedly at the floor and states, "I'm just tired."

Somehow, that's worse than if he'd fought her.

"Okay," she murmurs. She presses her shoulder lightly to his, feels him sag into her the smallest bit. "We can just sit here for a while, yeah?" He nods absently, clearly a thousand miles away. He looks like he had the night he marooned Mick, and Sara has to fight the bloodlust back again. And again, and again, and again.

 severity

 the world's stopping
 but we keep going
 severity

"Well isn't this just adorable." Leonard sits upright so fast he gasps in pain, and Sara is on her feet with a knife in each hand before she can think. Mick stands in the doorway, leering.

"Get. Out," Sara snarls. The bloodlust is shrieking, scrambling for control, and it takes everything she has to force it back.

"You think you could take me?" Just one knife in the eye is all she'd need. "Pretty sure last time I burned you, Blondie."

"And thanks to you I've had a few extra years of training with the League." She takes a step forward, teeth bared. "Last time I was holding back. Won't make that mistake again."
"Hmmm." Mick grins, wide and predatory. "Really wanna go another round?"

Sara matches his smile with what she knows is a feral look, and purrs, "You have no idea." The next moment finds him pinned to the wall, a knife through the shirt at each of his shoulders. "But Rip seems to get upset when I start killing people, so consider yourself lucky."

"You still got guts." Mick tears himself free, and peers around her at Snart. "Should've let the little girl fight for you, Snart."

"You say that like it's an insult," she hears Leonard drawl over the blood rushing in her ears.

"Gideon, how upset would Rip be if I killed Mick just a little bit?" Sara asks sweetly.

"I believe he would request at least four functioning limbs," Gideon answers in a prompt deadpan, and Sara lets her gaze flick down Mick's body.

"Only four, hmm?" She steps forward, patting Mick's cheek with one hand. "I'd be worried about the AI making you a eunuch, if I were you."

.xxx

avalanche

start inside of me

.xxx

Chapter End Notes

This fandom has sadly soured a lot for me in the past month, which is making continuing to write it difficult. I don't want to abandon my fics half-finished as I have in the past, so at the very least, I will do my best to finish this one.

I'm sorry I haven't responded to everyone's comments, depression has been kicking my ass. I really do appreciate each and every one.
(1x10) feet on ground, you'll come round

Chapter Summary

Well, if nothing else, she's starting to get the bloodlust back under control. Mick is damn good practice.

Chapter Notes

human (aquilo)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

xxx

i know that it's been rough
it shows in your reflection

xxx

After Mick's unsolicited appearance, Len is far too on edge for them to stay there. Even back in his room, with the door closed and locked behind them, he's practically vibrating with nervous energy. She's never seen him this agitated; it's a little scary, and she remembers all over again why he was Central City's most wanted, once upon a time.

"Len, look at me. Look at me." She grabs his arms, stilling him, and holds him there until he finally meets her eyes. "He's limited to public areas, okay? I already had Gideon lock everyone's quarters, the weapons room, and the fabricator. None of the consoles will take his input without someone there to supervise." He lets his breath out in a rush, deflating. "I'm not giving him a second chance to hurt anyone. To hurt you. Understand?" He nods, eyes closed, and Sara rubs her hands along his arms a few times. "Take a deep breath," she orders gently, waiting for him to obey. "Good. Another."

She has to be careful, so careful. He's on the edge of panic, and she knows how sensitive he is to touch; the last thing she wants is to push him into a full panic attack. But leaving him alone isn't an option either, not like this. He's not shying away from her touch, not anymore, but he's still on hyperalert from his showdown with Mick - Sara's lived that way enough to know all the signs. He's been that way in part since Mick returned as Kronos, in a state of hyperawareness Sara has come to realize isn't how most humans live their lives, and it's probably why he looks so exhausted now.

Well, it may have worn him to the bone, but she still has a little energy left in her. And if she can use that to put his mind at ease, it's worth it.

She counts out a few more breaths, until he's breathing slowly, evenly, until his pulse isn't so rapid under her grip. "Good," she says again. "Now, time for you to get some rest. Gideon gave me some painkillers to knock you out. You're dead on your feet, and your body needs to heal." When he opens his mouth to protest, she shakes her head sharply. "No arguments, crook. I'll stay here and
keep watch, okay? It'll be safe. But you're no good to anyone this strung out."

He makes a frustrated noise, scrubbing at his face. "Gideon, where's Mick?" he asks, voice tight.

"With Captain Hunter, discussing the hunters and how we might evade them."

Len rubs his neck, muttering, "Mick doesn't discuss strategy, he just... burns things." He paces with frenetic energy that leaves Sara exhausted.

"He also has a good sense of self-preservation," she points out wearily. "Len, please leave it for tonight. If Rip wants to try his luck, let him, but Mick can't get in here."

"I'm not hiding in a fucking cage," he snaps. "I'm not..." He pauses in his pacing in front of a small mirror over his desk, fingertips tracing the bruising around his eye. "Used to have to hide these from him, when we were kids," he murmurs, almost to himself. "Didn't want him going after Lewis, getting himself killed. Now he's giving 'em to me."

Sara closes her eyes, throat tight. And snaps them back open at the shattering of glass, Leonard's hand bloody and black and blue. She snarls, instantly at his side and maneuvering herself between him and the glass, grabbing for his hand.

"The fuck, Snart??" she hisses. None of the cuts look large enough to need stitches, but there are pieces of glass embedded in his skin. Sara backs him into his bed, pushing him down to surprisingly little resistance; he's deathly white, and she starts to worry he's going into shock.

"You have a first aid kit?" she asks. When she gets no response she puts the question to Gideon, trying not to snarl. Anger is the last thing he needs right now, but he is pressing every one of her damn buttons.

She slams drawers louder than necessary in her search, although it does little to calm her. She wants to hurt something. Kill something. Kill **Mick**. Her vision goes red for a moment and she stills, hovers at the edge of whirlwind insanity. Every cell in her body vibrates, senses stretched and screaming at her to move, to fight. To stalk and kill.

Well, if nothing else, she's starting to get the bloodlust back under control. Mick is damn good practice.

"Why'd you let him do this?" she asks when she's calmer, his hand clean and bandaged.

Leonard's forehead creases. "I didn't *let* him-"

"Yeah, you did." Sara crosses her arms, leaning her hip against the bed. Normally, she'd let it go, but if Mick is going to have free range of the ship, she needs to know Snart's not going to get himself killed. "Mick doesn't have a scratch, and I know you're better than that in a fight."

"Sara, just-"

"No, I will not let it go!" He flinches at her tone, and she bites her lip, rubs wearily at her eyes. "God, Leonard, you really expect me to pretend you didn't just try to get yourself killed? You think I don't know what that looks like?"

"That's not-" He chokes off, fingers curling into tight fists. He still won't look at her.

Sara takes a few slow breaths, forcing her voice to remain... well, calm is probably too much to ask, but she bites back the anger as best she can. "Then what is it?" she asks, folding her arms to keep
from fidgeting. "Because I have lost too many people that way, and I will not let you be another one."

"Can we please not do this tonight?" His voice cracks, eyes pressed shut, and all the anger leaves her in a rush. Leaves her drained, utterly exhausted, entirely over this mess.

"Fine," she says wearily, rubbing at her eyes. She shakes her head, sinks down into the chair at his desk, body like a dead weight. He looks at her with the one eye not swollen shut, frowning. "If you think I'm gonna leave you alone after today, try again."

"I don't need a fucking babysitter," he snaps.

"Apparently you do." And she needs to not have nightmares about this tonight, thank you very much. "Take your damn pills, Snart."

The glare he shoots her is terribly pathetic, given the bruises covering half his face. With his arms crossed and a petulant scowl on his lips, he looks so much like a scared kid for a moment it makes her a little nauseous. "I did what you wanted," he mutters sullenly. Sara raises her eyebrows in disbelief.

"This was definitely not what I wanted."

"How exactly did you expect it to go?"

"More than ten seconds without picking a fight would've been a good start." She pauses, a little tendril of memory nagging at her. "This how it went in juvie, you starting a fight you knew you wouldn't win?"

"Shut up."

"No." She crosses her arms tightly, closing the space between her and the bed where he sits huddled. "You wanna take bets on what I'm going to dream about tonight, Leonard?" He flinches, and it's probably not fair of her to put that on him but he'd nearly let Mick kill him.

If Mick had actually wanted him dead, Len would be dead.

Sara is suddenly dizzy, leans her hip against the bed to cover the way her head starts to spin. "God, what the hell, Len?"

"You should be happy," he returns dully. "Proved your point well enough."

"Don't put this on me," Sara snaps, but the guilt is already eating away at her. She'd pushed him into this. She'd projected her own goddamn insecurities onto Mick, and Leonard had paid the price.

He doesn't respond to that, doesn't even look at her, just huddles back against the wall with his arms tucked defensively across himself. Sara scrubs at her face, not sure if she's more frustrated with Mick or Len or herself.

"Either take these and sleep, or talk."

He takes the pills. Because of fucking course he does.

XXX

i know that it's been hard
but even when it's hurting
He'd fully expected to die today, and he's not quite sure what to do now that he's still alive.

He hadn't been sure, when he walked into that cage. But then he'd seen Mick's eyes, as he beat on Len, had seen the pure hate there. The wildness that reminds him so much of Sara caught in the bloodlust, it makes his stomach turn.

So he'd made his peace, or some version of it. He's tired – tired of trying to forget Mick is here, tired of being on edge every moment of the day, tired of aching muscles and the anxiety that won't let up, no matter how hard he tries to bury it in helping Sara. He's tired, and he still can't see a way forward from this, no matter what Sara says. Because nothing has changed, not really. The only difference now is the number of times Mick has tried to kill them.

Only – Mick hadn't killed him.

And now he has to deal with that on top of everything, and he's too fucking tired.

Sara doesn't push him, until she does. And Len is tired, until the adrenaline kicks back in, until he's vibrating with a nervous tension that makes him sick, makes every part of his body ache with a nauseating intensity.

Gideon, bless her, gives Sara something that lets him sleep, at least for a few hours. He wakes up in the darkness feeling sicker than before, presses himself into the corner when he hears breathing and tries to stifle his own gasping. Can't be heard. Have to stay quiet, and hidden, and then he remembers Sara and stumbles to the bathroom to get sick.

He huddles on the toilet for a long time, head in his hands, shaking. Waits until he's calmed his breathing to lift his head, tucks his arms across his stomach and closes his eyes.

He can't do this again.

"Mr. Snart, Miss Lance would like to know if you're alright," Gideon says at some point into the silence. Len wipes at his face.

"Tell her I'm fine."

He drags himself up, not quite stifling a yelp as his ribs remind him they're broken. He's still shaking, nearly too much to stand, head spinning as he does.

"There's a glass for water to your right," Gideon informs him, almost gently, as though it wasn't his own damn bathroom. But he takes her not-so-subtle suggestion, carefully drinks a cup and feels a little better for it.

And he can no longer avoid looking at himself, not when he's now standing in front of the mirror. He stares at his reflection with one eye, other still swollen shut, skin pale where it's not purple. He feels nauseous again, reaches down to carefully tug his shirt up, biting back noises of pain each time his rib shifts. His entire chest is mottled, scars standing out even more starkly than usual, pale and raised in a sea of angry violet. Removing Sara's neatly tied bandage is more difficult than it should be, and he's starting to regret not letting Gideon fix the fracture.

He makes it into the shower, turns the water on as hot as it will go and sinks down, knees to his chest, forehead resting on them. Every drop of water feels like a knife hitting his skin, but slowly the
warmth begins to ease a little of the tension still twisting him in knots, calms the way his body still trembles.

He sits there until the shaking fades completely, until the adrenaline is gone, until all that's left is a hollow in his chest.

And then he finally lets himself cry.

When his tears are spent, face even more swollen than before, he tilts his head back to let the water rush down his skin. It hurts where it hits the bruises, and he grabs on to that pain, lets it fill the part of him left hollow and empty. Uses it to push back the anguish and fear and desperation that threaten to overwhelm him.

If he's going to have to stay alive, he needs to drown them.

xxx

there's lines between the spaces
hiding where you are

xxx

By the time he rewraps his ribs and pulls on clean clothes, it's been several hours, and he half-expects Sara to be gone. But she's still sitting on the desk chair, absentmindedly flipping a knife, eyes snapping to him the moment he appears. She looks him over as she stands, lips pressed in a thin line, lines of concern on her forehead.

Len has the absurd urge to start crying again.

He looks down instead, hears her soft footsteps as she approaches him. "Did you rewrap your ribs?" she asks, and she reaches for him.

Len flinches back. He can't help himself, not when his adrenaline is still on a hair trigger, muscles tense and ready to spring. Sara freezes, a look of horror on her face.

Another moment and she takes a step back, then another, shaking her head slowly. "You... you thought I'd..."

"No." Len closes his eyes against the anguish on her face. "No, I..." He makes a noise of frustration, hating that he can't make her see. "That's what I wanted you to see," he whispers. "You wouldn't do this, Sara. You just... Wouldn't. You're not Mick. You're nothing like him."

"Seriously, that was your plan? To get yourself killed to prove your damn point?" She's suddenly vibrating with anger, eyes blazing, and Len knows she wouldn't hurt him, he knows, but he steps back anyway. The look on her face guts him, and he's desperate to say something, anything to make it better, but the words stick in his throat, forty-odd years of silence in their way.

"Do you honestly think I'd be happier knowing you were right, if you were dead?" Her voice cracks, and Len closes his eyes. He doesn't know how to explain it in a way she'd understand.

"Sara, please."

"Please what?" she snaps. "Do you have any idea how terrible I would've felt if you'd died? After I convinced you to go see Mick?"
He... hadn't thought of that.

He slumps back onto his bed, stares at his hands. "I'm sorry," he whispers.

Sara scoffs, but he sees her shoulders slump from the corner of his eye, sees some of her anger drain. Sees her rub her hands across her face, and feels guilty all over again. This is the last thing she'd needed.

"You asked me to trust you, so many times," she finally says, voice calmer. "And I did. But if you don't trust me by now..."

"I do."

"Not what you said yesterday."

Len closes his eyes, half-remembering his words. "I wasn't... thinking straight," he says quietly to the floor. "I'm... God, Sara, you know I'm as fucked up as they come. I didn't..." He shakes his head sharply, swallows back the lump in his throat. "It's an instinctive reaction. I can't just... turn it off. I'm sorry."

Sara sighs. "I am too." Len flinches at how final that sounds. He can't force himself to lift his gaze, not even for a moment. "It took a lot for me to let you help me," she says quietly. "But I did. And I need you to do the same now."

He hears her footsteps as she comes closer, sees her boots, and then her hands as they gently cover his. He swallows hard, finally forces himself to look at her. He has no idea what to make of her expression, a mix of too many emotions to name.

"I know," he whispers. "I just... I need a little time. Please."

She's quiet for so long he's afraid she'll leave without answering, but finally she just murmurs, "Okay." She reaches up to place a hand lightly on the back of his neck, presses a quick kiss to the top of his head, and Len barely stifles a surprised noise. "You know where to find me."

xxx

*and i know it's not enough
but these things, they all get better*

xxx

Chapter End Notes

So I'd expected this to end much angstier but then Sara was like, mature and stuff, so you can thank her for that.
(1x10) i'm just a ship lost at sea

Chapter Summary

It takes a moment for him to talk down the immediate adrenaline rush, his lizard brain screaming at him to run, to hide, to get away. Len tells it to shut the fuck up and doesn't move.

Chapter Notes

I've realized the only way I'm getting this section up is posting it in small pieces while tipsy, so here we are.

additional warnings: panic/anxiety is a bitch y'all

while we were hunting rabbits (matthew good)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

while we were hunting rabbits
i came upon a clear
the sky, its stars like fortune
drilled me

xxx

"D'd you drug me?" is the first thing Len manages when he drags himself out of sleep, sluggish and disoriented. His mouth is painfully dry, entire body aching, enough that he can't even tell what's an injury and what's not.

"I gave you a sedative for your own well-being," Gideon greets, not the slightest bit apologetic. Len groans.

"How long w's I out?" he grumbles, rubbing his hands over his face before he remembers not to. "Ow."

"Not quite 24 hours," comes the cheerful reply. Len blinks. "I was going to wake you within the hour; you're approaching serious dehydration."

Len licks his lips, or tries to. "No shit." He eyes the bathroom, ten feet and a thousand miles away. His entire body protests when he tries to sit, and he flops back with a moan, feels desperate enough to ask, "Can you please send me some water, Gideon?"

"I can." A brief pause, then, "If you don't mind, Miss Lance would like to bring it to you."

Len sighs. Now that he's feeling... less unstable, he supposes it's only fair. Sara had been... unnecessarily kind to him. She'll also keep trying until he lets her in, so he might as well just give in.
"Fine. But tell her there will be no discussion of feelings."

Gideon doesn't dignify that with an answer. Sara enters only a minute later, which sends Len's eyebrows up just a little. She looks hassled and weary; Len feels a little guilty knowing he's probably at least part of the reason.

"You look like crap," she greets, and the muscles in Len's face protest as he finds himself smiling.

"Thanks, Canary."

As the lights slowly brighten Len winces, headache making itself known. Sara is holding what appears like several gallons of water, and looks unimpressed when he rolls his eyes.

"You want the aspirin I brought, you have to drink one of these."

"I'm pretty sure that would kill me."

It's Sara's turn to roll her eyes, now standing a foot away from the bed. "Slowly, dumbass." She holds out a bottle at arm's length, not coming any closer, and Len's chest starts to ache. He catches her wrist instead of the bottle, tugging at her arm until she moves closer, leaning into the mattress.

"Thanks," he murmurs, finally taking the water. Sara holds out the other bottle on the bed next to him and folds her arms, foot tapping anxiously. She's not quite looking at him, seems to be trying very hard not to speak, and Len sighs. "C'mere," he orders, shifting toward the wall with a wince. "Sit, you're making me nervous."

"Sorry." She hesitates, glancing at him. "You sure?"

Len hates how much he appreciates her asking.

He nods, and Sara kicks off her boots before shifting to sit next to him. "Drink," she orders, leaning back against the wall with a sigh. Len obeys, body reminding him how thirsty it is, and he pointedly ignores Sara's smug look when he drains half the bottle in one go.

"I miss anything?" he asks, trying to keep his voice light. Sara snorts.

"Nothing of interest. Mick and Rip fighting loud enough for the whole ship to hear, unless the AI has drugged you." Len can't help tensing at that, just a little. He'll have to see if Gideon can soundproof the walls. He can see Sara studying at him from the corner of his eye; sometimes he hates her ridiculously attuned senses. "Honestly, it's nice to see Rip taken down a peg for once," she continues. "Suddenly Mr. "Are Any of You Time Masters" has some competition."

Len smiles faintly, wishing he could enjoy the same. But that... will take more time than they probably have.

Sara is not quite vibrating again, fidgeting with the rings on her fingers, clearly working very hard at keeping his no feelings rule. Len sighs, slowly presses his shoulder against hers, and feels her freeze. It takes a moment for him to talk down the immediate adrenaline rush, his lizard brain screaming at him to run, to hide, to get away. Len tells it to shut the fuck up and doesn't move.

Sara very carefully leans against him, like he's some sort of skittish animal. (His lizard brain sniggers). "I missed you," she murmurs, and something small and timid and... warm uncurls in his chest, enough to make him either giddy or terrified.

"I wasn't even out a day, birdie," he answers, trying to keep his tone light.
"I know." She shifts a little, shrugging. "But I can only train for so long, and solitaire is really boring."

"You're just saying that cause you always lose."

Sara huffs. Normally, she'd probably kick him; today she doesn't, and Len appreciates her even more.

Ugh.

He finds himself nodding off again before he even finishes the water, jerks himself awake several times to Sara's amusement. It's embarrassing.

And... he trusts her. He does. Or so he continues to tell himself, but his brain and body don't seem to be getting the message. Won't let him nod off, jolt him painfully back to consciousness the moment he fades out. He feels his face heat up the third time it happens, his eyes annoyingly itchy, skin tight and stretched and aching. His body doesn't feel like his own, a damaged cage he's trapped inside, a brittle shell that refuses to obey. Muscles that refuse to ease, fingers that tap against the grooves in the bottle counting one-two-three-four-

"I know we're not talking about feelings," Sara says suddenly, and Len is absurdly grateful for the interruption. "And that's fine."

It takes a few swallows of water to ease the way his throat's closing over before he manages to croak, "I'm sensing a 'but'."

Sara doesn't kick him, again. Len is sure he'll pay for that somehow later. "But... being miserable is usually more fun when you do it with someone else."

Len chokes on the water he'd been drinking, coughs a few times before rasping, "Is that League of Assassins wisdom?"

"Nah, that's 'I had time drift and this asshole wouldn't let me deal with it on my own' wisdom." That's just not fair.

"You're insufferable," he grumbles. Sara presses her cheek into his shoulder and answers smugly, "I know."

She rests there until he's finished one of the water bottles, then reaches into her pocket. Len can't force back the instant adrenaline rush that simple movement induces, feels Sara freeze beside him and knows she can tell, can hear his breathing escalate and feel his heart beat too fast and his blood pulse and-

"Len. Aspirin."

Her voice is so calm and quiet, a hard roadblock for the panic struggling for control. He sees her hands - both hands, palms up, weapon-free. Sees her reach for him slowly, feels her fingers wrap gently around his wrists, her thumbs pressed to his pulse, rubbing gentle circles against the anxiety trying to claw itself out of his skin. "S-Sara."

"Right here." Her touch doesn't falter, still steady and grounding on his wrists. "Just me, crook."

He knows that. Logically. But his body isn't listening, no matter how loudly he screams at it. "S'ry," he mutters. Gasps. Sees Sara shake her head through tunnel vision.
"Just breathe." Breathing. Right. He can do that. Theoretically.

Theory becomes practice, eventually. It takes long enough that he knows his lungs and chest muscles are going to ache later, along with the rest of him, because pain never goes halfway, apparently. Sara is still gripping his wrists lightly, thumbs still rubbing along his skin, the rest of her motionless as though she's afraid of spooking him. Which, Len thinks ruefully, is probably fair.

When he's feeling marginally less unstable, he gently tugs his hands from her grip, reaching for the second bottle of water to finally take Sara's proffered aspirin. He feels her eyes on him, waits for... what, he's not actually sure. A lecture, probably.

But she just mutters, "You're a mess," with a sigh. Len just makes a vague noise in agreement. Mess is an understatement. Barely functioning hypersensitive disaster is more like it.

God, his body aches.

He feels fuzzy again, glares blearily at the empty container in his hands. "Gideon, did you drug me again?" he demands.

"I did no such thing."

Len frowns, stares at the bottle like it will somehow reveal something to him. "Sara-"

"I wouldn't do that," Sara cuts him off indignantly. "I get that you're in a shitty headspace right now, but I'll only tolerate so much."

She says it lightly, teasingly, but Len flushes anyway. His eyes are hot and he feels a little sick, water sloshing in his stomach, Sara's words oscillating with it, over and over and over in his stupid useless brain. He would manage to fuck up the one good thing in his life right now, it's all he's ever really been any good at. His father was right. (He's been waiting for this anyway.)

Len clenches his jaw so hard his teeth creak, runs his fingers faster over the plastic ridges like he can draw some kind of order from their perfectly etched lines. It's his fault, all of this, for breaking his patterns. He's gotten this far by planning and preparing every last moment he possibly can, staying five steps ahead, far enough to deftly avoid any unpleasantries. Unpleasantries like bruised skin and broken bones and prison cells, like warmth in his chest and skin pressed on his and this is his fault, his fault, he'd said words he'd sworn he never would, he'd broken his first rule of staying cold and removed and detached.

Detached is better than too close.

Skin on his will never be anything but pain. Anything else is more than he deserves, would come at too high a price.

*I'll only tolerate so much.* She was joking, but there's a truth to her words she can't fully understand. Can't, because Len hasn't told her, not really, not-

He jerks away from her, pressing back into the corner of his bed. Sees her frown, eyes going soft, *kind* in a way he could never, ever deserve. But she doesn't move toward him, and he knows she won't do so until he tells her it's okay, and he nearly starts to laugh hysterically at how he manages to be both not enough and far too much at the same time. Always has been.

He wasn't supposed to drag Sara into it. He hates having done so, hates the genuine concern on her
face, hates himself for putting it there.

He just hates all of this.

He almost wants her to get angry. She should be angry, or at least annoyed, anything but this... understanding that he can't fight against. It would be so much easier if she'd just snap, with rage or disgust or anything. No one has ever... adjusted to him like this. Met him where he's at, and not pushed further. Not walked away, not raged about leading them on, or any number of other instances that still keep him at night.

Len has no fucking idea what to do with kindness. And even less with patient... accommodation. He can't push back, because it just... moves with him. He can't fight it. His walls are useless against it, the way it flows through tiny cracks, the fractures in his cold mask.

It's terrifying.

And it's profoundly unfair that she can seem so calm when he feels ready to shake apart.

He knows that logic is faulty at best, knows she's fighting her own demons as well. Knows their positions were flipped not weeks ago, but he can't get his mind to fixate on anything but the endless anxiety that is here and now and will seemingly never leave.

He's honestly not sure what he's expecting from Sara, isn't used to the way she yields instead of fighting. All she says is, "Should I go?" and all Len can do is nod.

She goes.

xxx

until now i was a soldier
until now i dealt in fear

these years of cloak and dagger
have left us disappeared

Chapter End Notes

poor len. sorry len.
Chapter Summary

"Poor Gideon. Just when you thought you had humans all figured out, you had to go and meet us."

Chapter Notes

I played a drinking game for tonight's episode and therefore am gonna post this before I decide not to? idk.

Gideon is aces

earth (sleeping at last)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

"Mr. Snart, may I make an observation?"

Len snorts, tilting his head a little from where he's stretched on his bed to look at the ceiling. "Would saying no stop you?"

"Theoretically."

Len sighs. She’d left him well enough alone as he’d pulled his tattered edges back into some semblance of a human, showered and shaved and sullenly ate the protein bar 1812 brought for him. With coffee, so Len forgives the robot.

But now that he’s laying down again, Gideon seems to have made it her mission to mother him to death. Or at least into getting up.

"What is it, Gideon?" he asks, resigned to his fate. At least he has coffee.

"You are being, in Miss Lance's words, a dumbass."

Len chokes on said coffee, not sure if he should be amused or afraid. "We really are having a bad influence on you,” he observes, carefully putting down his mug.

Gideon ignores that. "She has also pointed out you're very adept at evading the topic at hand."

Len glowers, decides he can never let the two of them get along again. It's... disconcerting, to say the least.
"And what topic is that?" Might as well get it over with, or Sara will probably come banging on his door in the middle of the night.

"I have plenty." Gideon sounds positively gleeful. "Starting with prolonged child abuse--"

"Gideon," Len growls. He could almost swear she sighs.

"Very well. You can't stay locked in your room for much longer."

"I'm never locked in anywhere."

Gideon rolls her eyes. Len is 100% certain that somewhere, some disembodied head was just projected with the sole purpose of annoying Len.

The monitor over his bed starts displaying various arrest warrants and prison sentences and Len groans, grinds the heels of his palms into his eyes and winces as he hits bruised skin. "Very mature, Gideon," he mutters.

"As you observed, you and Miss Lance have had a wonderful influence on me."

Len wishes he had a knife to throw at the ceiling. Wonderful influence indeed.

"Why are you doing this?" he demands suddenly.

"I'm not sure I understand the question."

"This." Len gestures impatiently at the monitor. "All of this. Why are you helping me? Sara? Why do you--" He chokes off before he says anything more embarrassing. "And don't give me that 'the well-being of the crew is of primary importance' crap. There are much easier ways you could've... fixed all of this."

Gideon is quiet for a moment, and when she speaks she sounds hesitant. "You and Miss Lance have always spoken to me, rather than at me. I... appreciate it."

Len hums, considering. Murmurs, "Well, I know what it's like to feel less than human. I suppose Sara does too."

Gideon goes silent for a while, which is generally either a good sign of a very bad one. It proves to be the latter today, because everything on this ship wants him to suffer, apparently.

"I don't believe it's Mr. Rory you're avoiding," she states several minutes later, when Len had just started to hope she'd dropped it. He stiffens, growls, "You're right, I'm avoiding everyone. Robots included."

If Gideon is insulted by that, she doesn't let on. She probably knows Len well enough by now to make that particular evasion technique useless. It's just as well; antagonism requires energy and fire and he has neither of those to spare right now. No, all his energy is being spent quelling the inferno spreading into every part of him, raw nerve endings and twitching at shadows and muscles that ache and ache and ache.

Of fucking course he's avoiding everyone. One touch, one wrong look, and the adrenaline rushes like gasoline through his already fevered body. He needs cold and calm, needs anything but fire.

"That may be true, but you're avoiding Miss Lance far more than usual," Gideon continues, breaking the increasingly frantic thoughts whirling through his mind. "Given your current state, I'm not sure
"You're not sure or Sara's not sure?" It's petulant and pedantic but he's tired of this go-between, tired of the two of them treating him like a child who can't be trusted on his own. His traitor brain informs him that he probably absolutely deserves it, and he doesn't even bother trying to convince himself otherwise.

It may be his fault, but he doesn't have to like it.

"Miss Lance has chosen to respect your wish to be alone this time, to an unusual degree," Gideon answers. She sounds annoyed, and Len can't help smirking.

"Poor Gideon. Just when you thought you had humans all figured out, you had to go and meet us."

"Indeed. It's quite tragic." Len fiddles with the colored loop of string Gideon had fabricated for him what feels like a lifetime ago, the muscles in his new hand almost entirely back to their normal dexterity. His skin is still sensitive, though; he's not sure he'll ever be used to it until every square millimeter is scarred again. "Is there a reason you're avoiding her?" Gideon asks. Len suppresses a frustrated scream and drops his hands, stares straight up at the ceiling.

"I'm not." He winces even before the words leave his mouth. "Okay, fine. It's not her it's... having anyone close. In my space. My brain won't... shut off. It's too wired." He's knotted the string up too tightly, throws it off the bed with a growl and watches it flutter to the floor. "Sara is... also wired. It's just... too much. Too much noise, too much energy." He takes a slow breath, rolls his shoulders against the way his skin tries to crawl off his body.

"All of that was true after Mr. Rory's betrayal," Gideon says almost gently. "You allowed Miss Lance in then."

"Do you have a point?" Stupid question; of course she has a point, and he quite likely does not want to know what it is.

Gideon pauses a moment before saying, "You know that I can monitor your dreams, which, while not necessarily accurate, can provide a general understanding of an individual's mindset."

No, Len definitely doesn't like where this is going.

"I still find that incredibly disturbing," he informs her tersely.

"I understand." She doesn't sound the least bit apologetic. "You must understand that part of my core function is to ensure the well-being of those on-board. Not...-in the manner you seem to think. I do not view any of you as... pawns."

Len supposes he deserved that one.

"AIs like myself can't help acquiring this data, any more than you can stop assessing your surroundings without blinding yourself. How we analyze and use this input is where we can... vary as individuals."

Len's head hurts too much for this. "What does that mean?"

"That I don't like seeing you in pain."

That... leaves his chest unexpectedly tight. Leaves him trying not to think about what it says about him that an AI is more concerned for his well-being than the majority of humans he knows. Between
Gideon and Sara...... He's used to being the one looking out for a select few other people, not the other way around.

"I'm afraid you're too late for that," he murmurs.

"What you said to Miss Lance at the beach-"

"You heard that?" Len demands, suddenly sick to his stomach and far too hot.

"There's not much I don't hear," is the vague answer he gets, while he presses himself into the corner of his bed and concentrates on not throwing up.

"Christ, Gideon, you can't just… do that," he chokes, closing his eyes against the way the room seems to tilt and swirl.

"On the contrary, I can't not do it. There are times I wish I could." Len can hear the pulsing of his heart when she pauses, not sure which is worse, her silence or her words. "This is not one of those times. It is, however, why I don't believe Mr. Rory is the only cause of your current distress."

No, her words are worse. Len wants to scream at her to shut up, but his throat is too tight to speak, chest too tight to breathe, grip on his knees white-knuckled and tight enough to bruise.

"Asexuality is found all across the animal kingdom," Gideon states, and Len stops breathing at all. "While in your time it is not widely acknowledged, in the future it is an accepted sexuality."

Len feels like there's actual fire in his veins, like his mind is tearing itself in two, messy and electric and jagged edges that spark. Neurons connecting that shouldn't, bits and pieces of memory and realization flooding and vanishing fast enough to give him whiplash, to make his vision black and glittering, to- "That's not... I'm not..." He chokes off, buries his face in his knees, pulls for one fleeting moment of clarity to grate, "I am not having this conversation with you."

"Perhaps you should have it with Miss Lance."

"Gideon," he snarls. Tries to snarl, but it comes out small and muffled by the fabric of his pants. He presses the bruised flesh on his face down harder, until the pain is almost enough to ground him.

"If you don't stop that at once, I will send Miss Lance to do it for you," Gideon reprimands, and Len just snaps. Anger and frustration and a lifetime of eclipsed clarity explode through the anxiety, silence it long enough to remember to be livid, to bite, "Stop talking to me like a fucking child."

For Gideon to state, so calmly, "Then perhaps you should stop acting like one."

That... hits him harder than it has any right to.

That sets his body shaking against the sudden onslaught of... feelings. He doesn't even know what they are, too many emotions he doesn't have names for, but suddenly he's drowning in them.

"Get out," he chokes, pressing himself further into the corner of his bed. "Whatever the hell your version of out is, go."

Gideon doesn't say another word.

xxx

there was an earthquake
there was an avalanche of change
we were so afraid

(until the sirens sound, i’m safe)

Chapter End Notes

we'll see how i approve of my tipsy choices tmrw

I promise I'm not just perpetually torturing Len. Really.
(1x10) i come alone here

Chapter Summary

And somehow, impossibly, hopelessly lost in space and time, she feels like she's found a way back home.

Chapter Notes

apparently I'm still only gonna get this section up in small pieces, which... means more updates I guess? It should really only have been 2 chapters but I'm apparently not brave enough for that. Also they would've been ridiculously long. Anyway. I've looked at this for way too long and hopefully haven't edited *in* any mistakes.

promise (ben howard)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

xxx

meet me there
bundles of flowers
we'll wait through the hours of cold

xxx

Len is avoiding her again.

Sara tries not to let it hurt, she really does. She knows it's not his fault, not really. Knows he's trying.

But it's frustrating, and she misses him. Her nightmares no longer wake her constantly, but she misses his easy companionship, misses his quiet calm that tempers her rapid-fire thoughts. Misses having a warm body beside her more nights than not, even if all they do is sleep. Even if that's all they ever do.

Sara had long ago learned to separate sex and love; she'd had to, for her own sanity. Sex was simply another function of her body, another use for it. A tool, a weapon. The only reason she'd survived The Amazo, and there had certainly been no love there, nor even attraction. But keeping Ivo happy had kept her away from the guard quarters, and... well, rock, hard place.

For that whole year, the only thing that got her through was the thought of going home. Until Nyssa found her, until the chance to go home was suddenly real, until she thought of all the things that she'd done, that had been done to her, and she'd realized that home, her home, was something she could never touch again without tainting it.

And Nyssa... after so long being used, the idea of learning to fight back was irresistible.
As was Nyssa.

Nyssa was the opposite of everything that had been done to Sara. Nyssa was fierce strength and pride born of skill, not ego. Nyssa was fleeting soft edges where Sara least expected them, came to love them. Nyssa taught her, if not to love herself, to at least accept. Accept the things she'd done, the things done to her, and use that anger and that loathing to tear down anyone who would harm her.

And to love those who would protect her.

For a very long time, there was only Nyssa. And then Oliver, with all his broken edges, his desperate grasp at redemption, his talk of forgiveness, had nearly coaxed her into forgetting. Forgetting that she was fundamentally damaged, forgetting that the longer she stayed in the place she'd once called home, the more she tainted it with horrors it didn't deserve. She'd learned to live with them, but it had taken six long years, and she wouldn't put her family through that for anything.

And so home changed. Home was not a place or a person; home was acceptance. Home was unflinching eyes and gentle hands, was rock and steel and feral grins beneath soft silk and featherlight touches. Home was love.

And then she'd died.

She'd died, and come back with her horrors magnified a hundred fold, so great even Nyssa flinched. And then nowhere was home, and Sara had fled everything that once had been. Had fled as far as she possibly could, out of reach, out of time.

And somehow, impossibly, hopelessly lost in space and time, she feels like she's found a way back home.

She just wishes she knew how to tell him that. Wishes she could explain that sex is the last thing she cares about right now, in the face of all of that. That he matters to her far more than that ever could.

But he doesn't trust her, not completely. No matter what he says, no matter what he thinks, his body betrays him. She'd seen the way he'd jerked himself awake, over and over and over, until it finally hurt too much to watch. She hates this, hates not being there when he clearly needs the company, but she also wants to respect his boundaries. Especially now, especially after what he'd told her on the beach, that's far more important than her need to help him. Because if she breaks that trust, she knows that's something she would never be able to fix again.

So she lets him hole up in his room, trains with Kendra and fantasizes about beating Mick to a bloody pulp. Healthy coping skills, or something. Kendra calls it her murder mope, and Sara laughs for the first time in what feels like forever. It's only been a few days since Mick and Leonard's fight, but it feels like a lifetime. And Sara has had enough of those to actually make a comparison. (She should probably be better at waiting than she is, given that.)

(Sh's most definitely not.)

xxx

winter will howl at the walls
tearing down doors of time

xxx

"Are you drunk?" Sara demands. As ways of him deciding to speak to her again, this... was not one she'd expected. She's never seen him even get tipsy; they may drink together a lot, but he knows his
tolerance levels to a somewhat disturbingly accurate degree, because of course he does. Leonard Snart is all about control, but the man in front of her now is... well, most definitely not sober.

He blinks at her, eyes a little unfocused. He's barely upright, leaning against the wall like it's holding him up instead of the other way around for a change. "Maybe?" He frowns. "Yes. I think. Definitely."

Yes, tonight will certainly be interesting.

Sara sighs, orders, "Come sit down before you fall over."

He frowns again, looks ready to argue, then thinks better of it and stumbles over to the chair by her desk. Sara is honestly surprised he makes it, not quite sure how he got all the way to her room like this.

"How much did you have to drink?" she asks, crossing her arms. He glares up at her blearily. "Not y'r business."

Sara raises an eyebrow, retorts drily, "Pretty sure you made it my business when you showed up wasted at my door at 2am."

He blinks, blinks again, then slumps into the chair. "Oh," is all he mumbles. Sara suppresses a scream of frustration, just stalks to her bathroom to grab a glass of water.

"Drink," she orders, not quite slamming the cup down. He flinches. Sara hates herself a little.

"Not my mother," he mutters. Sara digs her nails into her arms where they're crossed again.

"Drink that, Snart, or I'm dragging your ass to medbay and letting Gideon deal with you."

His face does something vaguely upset and betrayed and Sara has to squash down the immediate guilt. She doesn't back down, just stands there with her arms crossed until he's finished the glass and her skin is covered with red crescent marks.

His eyes are a little clearer when he finally looks up at her, mumbles, "Didn't mean t'drink this much." Sara's jaw clenches.

"My dad and my sister are both alcoholics," she says tersely. "So trust me, that line isn't going to work on me."

"Oh." His face falls. He looks like a damn puppy. "Sorry. I'm sorry." He looks up at her almost pleadingly, states, "I didn't mean to. But Gideon... Ray wouldn't stop talking and... and Mick was there and then Ray wasn't talking enough and I wanted to leave but Mick was... I'm sorry."

Sara just stares at him for a moment. He's wavering where he sits, looks ready to burst into tears, and she sighs. "Okay."

"I didn't mean to," he says again pitifully, and Sara steps forward carefully into his space.

"Okay," she soothes. "I believe you." It's hard to stay upset with him when he's so damn miserable. And... almost adorable, and Sara hates herself for even thinking that. "You need to sleep this off, you're a mess. Come on." He nods, starts to stand and falls right back into the chair. "I'm gonna take your arm," Sara warns, trying to ignore the pang in her chest when he flinches a little. "Come on."

She gets him the few steps to her bed and he leans his hip against it, frowning. "'s your bed."
"You're an observant drunk."

"But it's... yours."

"Len, it's a bed," Sara sighs, pinching the bridge of her nose. "Please lay down before you fall over, I don't want to have to drag you up off the floor." That only seems to upset him further, and Sara has to press a hand gently to his back to keep him from stumbling away. "Leonard. It's okay. Please just lay down, alright?"

"I'm sorry," he says in a tiny voice, and Sara's heart does a funny little flip in her chest. He's apologized more tonight than the rest of the time she's known him put together. "I'm sorry."

Sara pushes a little harder on his back until he finally collapses onto the mattress, curling on his side. She pulls his boots off before he can react, tugs a blanket over his prone form. The half of his face not buried is still mottled greenish purple, although at least his eye isn't swollen shut anymore. Somehow Sara doubts he's let Gideon heal his ribs.

"Alright, crook," she sighs. "You can be sorry tomorrow. Right now, just get some sleep." She turns to put his boots by the door, but his voice stops her.

"W-wait, please, don't..."

Sara has never heard this particular tone from him, small and close to desperate. She turns back, leaning her hip into the bed, murmurs, "Len..."

"I'm sorry." He's not looking at her, head turned to stare at the door. "I fucked up with Mick, I fucked up everything, and I know I don't deserve it but please don't leave me alone."

"Hey..." Sara frowns, studying him. His eyes are red and watery, from more than alcohol,

"'m sorry," he whispers again in that tiny voice. "I'm sorry."

Sara rests a hand very carefully on his arm, expecting him to flinch – but he doesn't. She knows it's likely the alcohol, but she'll take any chance she gets to give what little comfort she can, even if reasoning with him right now will prove useless, and pointing out that it's her room will probably only make him more upset.

"It's okay," she soothes, rubbing his arm lightly. "I'll stay, Len. You're alright." He drags in a shaky breath, fingers of one hand clenching in the blankets. "It's alright," Sara says again, but this time he shakes his head.

"It's not." His voice hardens, anger Sara somehow knows is only directed at himself. "Mick was right," he mutters. "You deserve better than-" He chokes off, and Sara feels sick.

"Hey." She resists the urge to grab his chin, to force him to look at her. "What I deserve is not up to Mick, and it's not his damn business."

"'m not worth it," Len mumbles. "I'm not... normal. I can't be... I can't be enough for anyone. I'm not enough. I've never been enough. I've never been anything but a burden to anyone."

Sara shifts to kneel against the base of the bed, getting herself at his eye level so he can't avoid looking at her anymore. Well, not as easily, anyway. "That's bullshit," she counters evenly, resting her forearms on the edge of the mattress and her chin on top of them. "And Mick doesn't get to decide what you're worth, either." Len just shakes his head.
"I can't offer enough," he whispers, eyes red and watery and so, so lost. "I thought I could, I thought I'd get over it, get used to it, but I'm just..." He shakes his head again into the pillow, fingers clenching. "I'm just broken. I'm... deficient."

Sara whispers his name, closes her eyes at the disgust and self-hate in his voice. Thinks about maybe writing a how-to manual on torturing deficient parents. And arsonists who don't know when to keep their damn mouths shut.

"It's why I don't talk about it," Len continues, small and shaky and rambling. "Cause what I want and what's... expected are different, and it's usually not a problem, usually I can cut things off early enough, but with you..." His voice breaks, and Sara can't stop herself from reaching out, gently resting a hand on his fingers where they've mangled the sheet. "You feel different. You feel good, and I let it go too long, and I'm sorry. I'm sorry if I lead you on. I-I..."

"Leonard." Sara squeezes his hand gently, feeling him tremble. "You have absolutely nothing to apologize for. You've done nothing wrong." She rubs her thumb along the back of his hand, hoping to calm him a little, at least enough to sleep. "We all like what we like, and we can't change that."

"But... but I..." He can't get the words out, choked and shaky.

"This feels good?" Sara asks gently, rubbing her fingers along his arm. It takes a moment, but he nods, making an awful little noise of distress. "Then we'll stay right here," she soothes. "We'll figure out what feels good to you, and if it's not more than this, that's okay."

His next breath is shattered, and he turns his face into the pillow like he doesn't want her to see him. Sara feels absolutely helpless, hopelessly small in the face of his entire shitty life experience. He has a lifetime of people pushing him down, tossing him aside, telling him he's worthless, useless, broken, and Sara doesn't know how stay standing in the face of all that.

But she's always been stubborn. And hell if she's going to let Mick fucking Rory be the one to break both of them.

*I freak out, and they leave, and I don't want you to leave.*

He's still waiting for her to leave. He'll be perpetually waiting, and that thought makes Sara feel sick. Which is better than the heartbreak that comes if she thinks too hard about him living this way his entire life, which is better than the rage that wants to tear apart every person who has made him feel so small and unwanted.

"Oh, Len," she murmurs, reaching up run her hand over his close-cropped hair. "My poor crook."

She wonders if he'll remember any of this in the morning.

She sighs, takes a slow breath and forces down every bit of emotion that she can. The last thing he needs is her agitated as well. "Okay. We need to have this conversation when you're not drunk as shit, alright?"

"Won't have it otherwise," he mumbles into the pillow.

Sara snorts softly. "Oh, we'll have it. No backing out now. But I don't want you to regret it. Or forget it." He swallows, glancing up at her for just a moment. "Okay?" That gets a tiny nod. "Alright, then please get some sleep."

He nods again, but his fingers are clenched back in the blanket, body still far too tense. Sara places a hesitant hand back on his shoulder, gently rubbing his arm, and the way he instantly starts to relax
makes her heart ache. She's beginning to realize just how much such simple things can mean to him; she's always known he's *sensitive* to touch, and she's always been careful because of that.

And it breaks her fucking heart, to think that it's also something he craves. To think that no one has ever bothered to try to meet him where he's at, to adjust their own needs to his. To think that he's spent most of his life alone out of fear of being pushed too far, when all he's needed is this.

Sara slowly runs her hand along his shoulders, begins rubbing gentle circles on his back. "It's alright," she murmurs when he shivers. "Shh, it's okay, you're okay. Just get some rest, alright? We'll figure this out, I promise, but right now you need to sleep."

She sits there with him long after he drifts off, still absently tracing patterns on his back, and wonders if maybe this is what coming home feels like this time around.

xxx

*shelter as we go*

xxx

Chapter End Notes

see look I can be nice to Len?

brb hiding forever
Chapter Summary

"Gideon, are you sure I can't kill Mick?"

Or, Sara still thinks about killing people a lot.

Chapter Notes

I'm not 100% happy with this but I also can't look at it anymore so hopefully it'll hold up.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

xxx

surface
far below these burns

xxx

"Gideon, what'd Mick say to him?" Sara pauses, thinks back over everything Len had just said, and narrows her eyes. "Gideon, what'd you say to him?"

"I... believe I may have said something unintentionally cruel."

"Unintentionally?" Sara crosses her arms, glaring. "Is that even possible?"

"Of course," Gideon responds indignantly. "Usually, when the topic involves the human psyche, particularly that of volatile and unstable individuals who resist my aid for no rational reason."

Sara snorts, deflating. Gideon... may have a point. "Alright, fine. We are terribly annoying to deal with, now can you just tell me what happened?"

"You'll have to ask him about our conversation." Sara growls quietly, to which Gideon just states, "And the last time I informed you, you wound up slaughtering a bar full of people."

Sara freezes, stops even breathing for a moment. She can still see it, if she closes her eyes, can still feel the slice of skin and crack of bone-

"That's not fair," she chokes out, standing slowly and backing away from the bed. The last thing she wants to do is taint Len with this, to give him anything else to worry about. When she hits the wall she blinks, closes her eyes and takes a couple slow breaths. She's far more in control of herself than she was then, and even if she lets the bloodlust go, she's still wearing Gideon's device.

Which Gideon knows, she thinks sourly. "Are you testing me?" she growls, pushing off the wall and making her way to the desk chair. Len's water glass is still there, and Gideon is lucky Sara cares
more about letting him sleep than she does about throwing things at devious AIs.

"Perhaps." Gideon doesn't sound the least bit repentant. "I still can't tell you what I discussed with Mr. Snart, but I can show you what occurred in the kitchen earlier."

Sara flips off the ceiling, muttering threats under her breath as she turns toward the monitor. Ray is there in his pajamas – space themed, because of course they are – chatting at Mick and a clearly-inebriated Len, slumped over in the corner with a half-empty bottle of expensive whiskey Sara knows he keeps stashed in his room. Meaning he'd been drinking well before leaving his room, which Sara will absolutely grill Gideon about later.

Ray leaves, eventually, leaving Len alone with Mick between him and the door. Sara's muscles instantly tense, a protective urge she hasn't felt since Nyssa flaring hot in her gut, and she'll probably have to look at that later too, when Len isn't a drunk mess in her bed.

On-screen Len drags himself upright, but he doesn't get more than a few feet before Mick looms in front of him, taunts, "So, does blondie know you're not a real boy?"

Len actually stumbles back a step. "Shut up," he slurs. Sara wait for the rage to hit her, but all she feels is heartbreak. "You don't get to say that."

"She came to see me a few times, while I was locked in that cage." Mick leers, knocking back his beer. "Really is too bad, Lenny, she's quite a catch."

Oh, now Sara hates him for a whole new set of reasons.

The recording cuts off, which is probably for the best. Sara looks over at Len, skin pale and circles under his eyes, lines still creasing his forehead even in sleep. "Oh, Leonard," she murmurs. No wonder he'd looked like the damn world had dropped out from under him.

Sara wonders how many times this has happened. Something tells her that no matter what his hang-ups, Len wouldn't have stuck with Mick for this long if he'd always been so cruel. No, Mick is still trying to get back at him, in every way he can without killing Len.

Sara wonders if that's why Mick left him alive.

"Gid."

"No." Sara chokes off, glares at the ceiling. At least this time her intentions were pretty damn clear.

"Can you at least make his life miserable? Make the beer taste like crap. Give him cold showers."

"I have no idea what you're suggesting," Gideon says primly.

Sara grins. "Gideon, I think we're rubbing off on you."

"I find that suggestion offensive."

Sara just shakes her head, smirking. "I'm sure you do." She sighs, rubbing her hands across her face wearily. She's tempted to just crawl up next to Len, for more reasons than one, but in his current state she doubts he'd appreciate waking up like that. With another sigh she finally just pillows her head on her arms, muttering, "You're lucky I like you, Snart."

xxx

and who am i, darling, to you?
She wakes from a doze when Len bolts for the bathroom several hours later, and despite everything, she just doesn't have it in her to give him a hard time when he's so absolutely miserable. That has to hurt *horribly* with his ribs.

Sara follows him, ignoring the way he starts when she settles beside him. He's curled with one arm clutching his ribs, other white-knuckled on the rim of the toilet. Sara presses her palm to his forehead, giving him something to brace against, other hand on his back to hold him steady. It seems to help, the arm around his stomach easing a little, until he throws up again and makes an awful little whimpering sound.

"Easy, I've got you," Sara murmurs. She begins rubbing his back, careful to avoid his injured ribs, trying to calm him. Far too aware of how badly he's shaking, of the way he doesn't quite flinch away from her, the way he both calms and tenses under her hand. "I'm not going to hurt you," she says softly. "I'm not angry, Leonard. It's alright."

She can't be angry, not when he's so miserable, not when Sara can picture a thousand different ways this has gone for him before, none of them good. She may still be upset with him, but holding that against him right now would be beyond cruel.

He gradually calms, stops tensing up every other moment. His body sags, forehead resting on the rim of the toilet, breathing still ragged. "I'm sorry," he whispers after a few minutes have passed.

Sara shakes her head. "Not your fault."

He pushes upright slowly, wiping at his mouth with a towel Sara hands him. He's still so pale. "I got drunk," he mutters.

"Not the part I'm talking about." He swallows hard, staring at the floor. "Although that wasn't entirely on you, either."

He exhales heavily, resting his head in his hands, elbows on his knees, legs crossed. Sara hesitantly places a hand back between his shoulder blades, can feel him shaking with what she's pretty sure are tears. "Hey..."

"I'm sorry," he chokes again, and Sara thinks of words like *I freak out and they leave and I don't want you to leave* and feels a little sick.

"It's okay," she says, keeping her voice low and even. She begins to trace her fingers along his spine, so carefully. "We're okay, crook."

"I shouldn't have come last night," he grates, shuddering. "I'm sorry, Sara."

"Len..." Sara chews her lip, trying desperately to come up with a way to make him understand. To listen, to *hear* her. "Do you want me to go?" It takes a moment, but he shakes his head slightly into his hands. "Okay. Then I need you to trust me. You're injured, you're sick as shit, and you've already apologized more in the last few hours than the entire time I've known you."

His lip twitches, just slightly, shoulders drooping. He takes a shaky breath, sniffling, and Sara can't fucking take it. She shifts closer, slides her arm around his waist and rests her chin on his shoulder. "It's okay," she murmurs. "Trust me, alright? Please. I'm glad you're here and not miserable all on your own."

He makes a small noise in the back of his throat that sets off every one of Sara's protective urges, arm
tightening instinctively around him, free hand coming to rest on his knee. "It's okay," she repeats softly. "I've got you, crook. It's okay."

She sits there with him for a long time, listens to his shaky breathing, feels every tremor that rocks him. Tries to give him what sense of security she can, because she doubts very much that he's ever had anyone to do that for him. And she understands far too well what it feels like to have no tether, nothing to ground on; if she can give that to him it's the least she can do, after everything he's done for her.

He quiets, eventually, tremors finally easing from his muscles, body sagging with exhaustion. Sara hates being the one to pull away, but he'd probably sit here all damn night given the opportunity.

"I'm gonna get you some water," she says quietly, resting her hand on the back of his neck for a moment before forcing herself to move. Dehydration is his new superpower, apparently.

He has his knees pulled to his chest when she returns, chin resting on them. When Sara hands him the glass he just rinses his mouth, and Sara sighs. "That's to drink, Len," she says drily. He fucking 

He makes a vaguely disgruntled noise at that, and Sara tugs at him until he uncurls a little, returns to sitting cross-legged in front of her. Sara releases one hand to grab the glass, holding it out to him again, and the tightness in her chest eases just a little when he rolls his eyes.

When he shivers with cold, Sara murmurs, "Let's get you back to bed, hm? It's still early." She frowns at how pale he still is, how he sits so quietly, so... lifeless. "Hey," she says softly, touching his knee. He blinks, gaze slowly drifting to her. "Come on, crook. Still not dragging you off the floor."

He nearly blacks out a moment later, makes a noise of pain when Sara catches him without thinking, jarring his ribs. "Shit," she mutters, carefully easing her hold off his injured side. Bites her tongue so hard she tastes blood to keep herself from demanding he get to the medbay right fucking now. That won't help anything right now.

He makes a vaguely disgruntled noise at that, lets her pull him upright. He's still unsteady, and probably still dehydrated. Sara feels the familiar frustration start to rise and quickly squashes it. That won't help anything right now.

He nearly blacks out a moment later, makes a noise of pain when Sara catches him without thinking, jarring his ribs. "Shit," she mutters, carefully easing her hold off his injured side. Bites her tongue so hard she tastes blood to keep herself from demanding he get to the medbay right fucking now. That would probably only drive him back into his self-made prison of a room.
"You taste any blood?" she asks, a little more curtly than she'd intended. Pretends she doesn't taste her own right now. Len shakes his head, which doesn't actually mean a damn thing, Sara realizes sourly. Ugh.

He doesn't fight her when she guides him back to her bed, just sinks back down onto the mattress, huddled on his... less-injured side. It doesn't worry Sara, exactly, but after all the resistance she's met with recently, it's a little disconcerting.

She sighs, tugging a blanket back over him. He hardly twitches, doesn't even open his eyes.

"Len," she says quietly. Waits until he glances up at her with bloodshot eyes. Sara studies him for a long moment, finally just asks, "You need anything?" His face does something strange, and Sara remembers he's probably never been asked that question before in his life, and she really needs to kill something.

Len shakes his head a little, eyelids drooping. He looks absolutely miserable. Sara climbs up beside him, nudging him gently, orders, "Scoot over." He obeys without protest, and it sets alarm bells off in Sara's head, this continued... deference. Like he's still waiting for her to come to her senses and punish him.

Sara shifts to sit with her back to the headboard, his pillow right beside her, and stretches out her legs like a barrier between him and the world. She rests her hand lightly on the crown of his head, begins gently stroking her fingers along his scalp, hoping to ease any of his fear. "It's alright," she says softly when he shivers, burying his face into his pillow, pressing just a little closer to her. "Shhh, it's alright. You're safe with me, okay? You're safe."

She knows he'll probably regret waking up like this, but right now he's miserable, and the contact seems to help. And Sara is fairly certain at least half of his mind is stuck decades ago, in a place where nothing is soft or kind or gentle. She hopes that giving him something so jarringly different from what he's experienced before will be enough to pull him out of whatever hell he's in.

So she shifts a little closer, his face still buried in his pillow a few inches from her thigh, legs curled nearly to his chest. "It's okay," she murmurs. He surprises her, reaching out to grab her hand tightly, drawing their entwined fingers back to his chest. Sara doesn't resist, just squeezes gently and rubs her thumb along his knuckles. "I've got you," she says quietly. He's clinging to her like a lifeline, like she's the only stable thing in this world. "Shh, just rest, Len. You're safe, I promise. I'll keep you safe."

Later, when he's passed out again and Sara is fairly certain he's not going to die in his sleep, she asks quietly, "Gideon, can you tell how badly he's hurt?"

"Not without a full scan. I believe I'd know if he was bleeding internally, if that's what you're concerned about."

Well, it's better than nothing. "Thanks," she murmurs. Still, she's not likely to get any sleep, even knowing Gideon would wake her up if he needed help.

Ugh.

"You're a pain in the ass sometimes, crook, you know that?" She carefully detangles her hand from Len's, rubbing her hands over her face with a sigh. If she's not going to sleep, she needs to think about something else or she'll go insane before the night is over. "Have Rip and Mick come up with a plan yet?"
"They have not agreed on one, no."
Sara snorts softly, mutters, "I doubt they'll ever agree on anything."

"Quite likely correct. For now we are flying cloaked, but that can only prevent long range trackers from detecting us, assuming the hunters don't possess technology more recent than the Waverider's last update."

"How long can we keep doing that?"

"Indefinitely, if we're lucky. But given this team's record, I don't recommend relying on luck."
Sara sticks her tongue out at the ceiling. Gideon ignores her, continues, "The Time Masters have always been paranoid, and all time ships are equipped with a variety of tracking devices. While I and Captain Hunter disabled them as best we could after our... departure, any hunter ship in close range could likely reactivate one of the tracking beacons."

"So luck it is," Sara sighs. She shares Gideon's opinion on luck, especially with this team. Maybe Jax could find some way to destroy the tracking beacons Rip hadn't been able to, although if Gideon didn't know how it seems unlikely. "Any chance a new pair of eyes could figure out a way to destroy those beacons?" she asks anyway. She'd like to say it's hope, but it's more just... distraction.

"Mr. Jackson has been attempting to do so for the past couple days." Gideon sounds miffed. "It's possible that, given our rather hasty exit, I wasn't thorough enough in my efforts."
Sara hums, running options through her head to keep from worrying too much about Len. "Hey, did Rip ever ask how you felt about going rogue?"
There's a silence, then, "My... opinion was never requested, no." That seems to be a pattern with Rip, Sara thinks sourly. Captain Hunter has an optimistic view of probability, she remembers Gideon telling her. Time wants to happen.

"Do you even think we can pull this off?" Sara asks. "Kill Savage, or save Rip's family?"

"I think... that the probability is infinitesimal, and that the dangers of meddling with one's own lifeline are as pertinent and catastrophic as they are for any other event."

"Fancy way of saying no." Sara frowns, absently playing with the rings on her fingers. "If you don't want to be here, don't think it's worth it, why are you going along with all of this? It's not just Rip's life this is affecting, it's all of us now. For nothing?" Gideon doesn't answer. Sara mulls in silence for another few minutes, finally says slowly, "You're doing it for Rip." Silence. "You were willing to sacrifice your life, all of our lives, on the impossible chance that we might pull this off. Because Rip asked you to."

More silence. Sara huffs, shifting down to get more comfortable, grumbling, "You have terrible taste, Gideon." There's a very pointed silence after that, which Sara lets hang for a minute before asking, "For future reference, do you have a cure for hangovers? Cause I will forgive everything if you do."

"That depends entirely on who is asking."
Sara chokes on a laugh, trying not to disturb Len. "I knew you played favorites."

"You can prove nothing." She pauses, then adds, "However, if Mr. Snart is still feeling ill when he wakes, I may have something to help."
Sara can't force a joke out of that, just murmurs, "Thank you, Gideon."

xxx

gonna tell you stories of mine
(gonna be a burden in time)

xxx

This time she wakes to a stifled gasp and jerked movement, followed by complete and utter silence. She blinks sleep from her eyes to Len's curled form, pressed back against the wall, eerily still.

Shit.

"Len, it's okay," she rasps, rough with sleep. "It's Sara. You're in my room, you're safe."

He's staring at her with a terrified expression, arms clutching his knees to his chest. "S-Sara?"

"Yeah, Leonard. Just me." She keeps her hands in plain view, hardly daring to breathe. "Do you remember last night?"

"I-I…" His eyes are wide and panicked, and Sara doubts he remembers much of anything right now.

"Hey, Len. Nothing happened, okay? You just had too much to drink, and I didn't want to leave you alone like that." His breathing is slowing, gradually, the wild look slowly fading from his eyes. "Okay?"

He closes his eyes, nodding tightly. Sara resists the urge to reach for him, just murmurs, "Take a deep breath, crook." He does, and another, and after another minute opens his eyes. "How are you feeling?"

The last of the panic seems to vanish, and he slumps back against the wall with a small moan. "Like I got hit by a truck," he mutters, pressing the heels of his palms against his eyes. Sara winces a little when he hits his bruises, although he doesn't seem to notice. Something else to file away. "Fuck."

"Gideon?" Sara says, hoping the AI is in a good mood this morning.

She gets no answer, but a minute later the door slides open to admit 1812. He trills a greeting, making Len wince. Sara can't help smiling, hops off the bed and crouches down by the robot. "Hey, little guy. Quieter, okay? Len managed to give himself an epic hangover."

1812 warbles more quietly to himself as Sara takes the proffered syringe. Len frowns when she turns back around, raises a questioning eyebrow.

"I… think it's a hangover cure," Sara explains, tilting her head a little. Well, Gideon doesn't correct her, so she's probably right. Hopefully. Maybe she should bring it to Ray so he can decipher Gideon's secret.

But Len is already shaking his head, because of fucking course he is. "I am not in the mood, Snart," she says tartly, advancing on him. "I do not want to hear one word about not needing or deserving it, I don't want to hear any of the reasons you think being a miserable hungover lump in bed is going to fix anything, because it's not, and do not think that I won't pin you down to give this to you if I have to, because I absolutely will and you couldn't even fight off 1812 right now."

Len stares at her for a second, opens and closes his mouth a few times, finally just mutters, "Fine."
Sara tries not to feel too smug while she administers the shot. She has Gideon put on Farscape with subtitles, to Len's clear relief. He curls back up beside her, pillow pulled over his face now, Sara notes with amusement. "You'd think you'd never drank in your life," she mutters, climbing off the bed with a sigh. She grabs a clean towel, because she's considerate like that, returns to his rather pathetic form. "Get that off your face, Snart. You don't get to die from pillow asphyxiation either."

He just grumbles, flinching from the light when Sara forcibly removes the pillow. "Here." She holds out the towel, rolling her eyes when he just drops it over his face. "Oh, for fuck's sake." She grabs it back, orders, "Lift your head." He does, looking dazed. Sara squishes the pillow back into place before refolding the towel. He finally relaxes when she places it over his eyes, gives a small moan of pleasure that Sara can't help smiling fondly at.

"You're ridiculous," she tells him. And adorable, but she is not going to say that, ever. "Alright, I'll give Gideon's drug some time to work before I make you eat anything." He makes an unimpressed noise at that that Sara ignores.

She's halfway through an episode when he finally pulls the towel from his face, blinking blearily. "Rejoining the world of the living?" Sara asks, tilting her head to look at him.

"Ugh."

Sara can't help smirking a little, climbs down from the bed to get him water. "So, did the miracle cure work?" she asks when he takes the cup from her with shaky hands. He still looks like shit, but less like he's going to keel over and die at any moment.

"Well, I feel less like puking all over your bed," he mumbles.

"I appreciate it." He throws the makeshift eye-mask at her, missing by a foot, and Sara sighs. "That was pathetic, even for you," she tells him, leaning over to pick up the towel. Before she can, 1812 zooms over and grabs it, trills a greeting before wheeling out. Sara watches him go with amusement. "Poor guy must get bored cleaning up after you, crook. You should work on making more of a mess of your room."

She hears the bed creak, turns to find Len standing just a little unsteadily. "I think between the two of us, we even out," he tells her with a tiny smirk that doesn't go nearly far enough.

"You look like shit," Sara informs him. He glares at her half-heartedly, leaning back into the bed with a groan. "Seriously, how much did you drink last night?" She knows he can hold his liquor better than that.

"I haven't," Len says quietly, looking at his hands. Sara frowns questioningly, and he clarifies, "Been that drunk before."

Well that would explain… a lot.

"Nothing happened," she tells him again. He smiles faintly.

"I know."

"You remember?"

He's still staring at his hands, licks his lips before mumbling, "Can we please just forget last night happened?" Sara frowns, trying to look him in the eyes.

"No," she answers evenly. "I just wish it didn't take you getting drunk as shit to finally talk to me."
He makes a distressed sound that tears at her, flinching back, and it takes everything Sara has not to reach for him. Especially after he states, very quietly, "Thank you for… Humoring me."

"Jesus christ, Leonard, I wasn't *humoring* you," Sara growls. Len cringes, and Sara sees red for a moment, reminds herself it's not *him* she's angry at. "You really think I'd do that?"

He doesn't answer, gaze fixed on his hands, eyes wide and wet and staring. "I'm sorry," he whispers. "I-I'm sorry, Sara." He wraps his arms across himself tightly, like he's trying to physically hold himself together. "I'll... I'll stay out of your way, as best I can."

Sara blinks.

"What?" She's missing something, something obviously important. Len makes a pained noise, takes half a step toward the door. When Sara holds out a hand he freezes, hunching in on himself a little more. "Len, why would I want you to stay out of my way?"

He gives a derisive little laugh, grates, "Because I'm-" Shakes his head sharply, mouth twisted in a sneer. "I'm deficient."

"*Leonard.*" Sara maneuvers between him and the door, hand still raised "You honestly think that's what I see? After everything you know about *me*?" He won't look at her, shrinks back until he hits the bed again, slides down to huddle with his knees to his chest. Sara feels sick. The thought of him seeing her as *trapping* him here puts a cold pit in her stomach, but the thought of letting him leave like this is even worse.

"Okay, I'm gonna come a little closer," she says softly, slowly closing the space between them. She sinks down to sit cross-legged in front of him, turning everything he'd said last night over in her head. Now, more than ever before, she needs to get this *right*. Can't help feeling like she could absolutely shatter him if she's not careful.

"Len... Did I say something to make you think I'd want you to stay away? Did I do something?" He flinches slightly, and Sara pulls for calm. "Hey, that's not rhetorical. I'm asking you, Leonard. I'm trying to figure out what's going on."

It takes a moment, but he finally shakes his head, the slightest bit. Sara can't help feeling relieved. "Okay. Then why..."

"Because I'm *broken.*"

Sara has to close her eyes for a moment, throat thick with emotion at the sheer anguish in his voice. At how much he clearly *believes* it, at how much he's been torn down his entire damn *life.*

"You are not broken," she eventually manages, gentle but firm. She shifts a little closer, needing to do something, anything, to make this better. Even knowing she can't, she needs to try. To at least give him something to hold on to, something to build from that isn't self-hatred and disgust.

"You're not broken," she says again quietly. "And I will say that as many times as it takes to get through to you." He's looking at her with the tiniest amount of hope, like he's just *waiting* for her to dash it to pieces. She hesitates another moment before telling him, "Gideon told me what Mick said to you last night."

Len closes his eyes, jaw clenching, fingers balled tightly into fists. "What he said is *bullshit,*" Sara continues firmly. She reaches out carefully, rests her hand on top of one fist, trying to ease the death grip he has his fingers curled into. "You don't owe anybody anything, least of all me. That doesn't make you any less, Leonard. That doesn't make you broken." She rubs his now-uncurled hand
gently between her palms, murmurs, "That doesn't make us any less."

He flinches at that, dragging in a breath that must hurt his throat. But he still doesn't respond, doesn't speak, doesn't do anything but shake. A wave of helplessness washes over her, overwhelming and infuriating, and Sara wants nothing more than to fix this. Only she has no fucking idea how, and Len obviously doesn't either, and it's enough to make her sick with worry and anger.

When she's pushed every bit of rage back down, Sara takes his other hand, begins to uncurl those fingers as well. "When Rip found me, I was at a bar in Tibet," she tells him, quiet and steady. "Nyssa had just told me to leave her in prison in Nanda Parbat. My family and friends had no idea what to do with me. How to treat me, how to look at me. How to deal with the bloodlust. I felt like a stranger in my own body, my own home."

She pauses, presses her palm to his, fingers aligning with his uncurled ones. It's his new hand, skin still oddly smooth, an unnerving reminder of what they've both been through since joining this bizarre mission.

"I decided to join the team because I had nothing better to do," she continues. "I had nowhere else to go. No one I felt safe with. You changed that." Her voice cracks, and she swallows, takes a few slow breaths. "You've never looked at me like I'm a monster, never treated me like I'm a lost cause ready to shatter. You're the only reason I can sleep at all, the only thing I've had some days to hold on to."

She pauses again, blinks back tears and wishes he'd look at her. "Len, you're one of the only good things in my life right now. Do you really think I'd just throw that away?"

His face crumples, eyes still pressed closed. "Good things never last," he whispers. "I don't deserve for them to. Not after Mick."

Sara feels her heart break, reaches up to trace her fingers through the tiny bit of hair he's let grow. He turns into her touch subconsciously and Sara can't breathe, can't think about how alone he's been, how desperately he's needed this, or she'll never let him go. Can't think about his trademark drawl, calculatedly callous, about how he's held everyone at arm's length because getting any closer meant giving more than he was able. About how he's never had what he needs in his entire goddamn life.

About how he's just been waiting for her to be done with him.

"And what about what I deserve?" she asks quietly, when she's found her voice. "I don't care what you deserve, Len. I want to give you this. I want to be here with you, whatever that means." He shakes his head into her palm, eyes squeezed shut, entire body trembling with something Sara can't touch. Something old and deep and hopelessly entrenched.

Hell if she'll let it win, though.

She drops her hand, tries not to feel the ache in her chest at the loss of warmth. "Look, if you want me to stay away from you, I will," she tells him wearily. "You don't have to explain, you don't owe me anything. I just... I need you to have this conversation with me. I need to make sure we're on the same page, okay?" He doesn't answer, shaking enough that Sara is worried. "Leonard," she says softly. "Do you want me to go?"

He shakes his head the smallest bit. Sara lets out a slow breath, murmurs, "Okay. You think what you told me last night would change the way I see you?" A tiny nod, and Sara swallows back the lump in her throat. "Len, I already knew most of what you said. It didn't change anything for me before, and it doesn't now." She slowly, carefully reaches out, placing a hand on his knee. "Is this
still okay?"

He nods; somehow it feels like a major victory. Sara shifts to sit beside him, pressing up against his side, trying to absorb some of his trembling. "You told me what you don't like," she says quietly, resting her cheek on his shoulder. "What do you like?"

He stops breathing for a moment, entirely still beside her, before finally he whispers, "I have no idea."

"Hmm." Sara reaches for his hand, twining their fingers together. "I think here is a good place to start, yeah?"

He shudders, squeezing her hand as he drags in a breath. And another, finally looking down at her with the most heartbreakingly vulnerable look Sara has ever seen. She reaches up to rest her palm on his cheek, murmurs, "Hey, I've got you." She brushes at a stray tear with her thumb, so gentle. "Just stay with me, yeah? Just stay right here." She strokes his cheek, waiting for him to settle. "This is alright?" He nods, forehead creasing. "Okay. We're just gonna sit here for a while, okay? That's all."

He turns into her touch the smallest bit, leaning toward her, and Sara carefully wraps an arm around his shoulders, rests her chin back on his shoulder to let him lean his head against hers. "Just stay with me," she murmurs. "We're alright. Shhh, we're alright."

"I'm sorry," he whispers, choked and small. Sara shakes her head.

"You don't need to be sorry for this," she tells him, rubbing his arm gently. "And the rest of it... I'm not exactly in a position to judge bad mental health decisions." He huffs a small laugh at that. "We're trying to be better. That has to be enough." She hesitates a moment, then continues, "You're trying. I know you probably don't want to admit it, but you are. And I see it, even if no one else does."

She feels him shudder at that, rubs her fingers gently against his shoulder where her hand rests. He's stuck between worlds right now, doing too much good to call himself a criminal, but with too much bad for the rest of the team to fully trust him. It's a limbo she understands far too well, only she doesn't have Mick to deal with on top of that.

"I just..." he fades, and god, he still sounds so small and uncertain. He's never been here before, not like Sara has. He's been on the other side of the fence his whole life. "I don't know how to fix it," he whispers. "I don't know how else to be. I'm not this... this person I need to be to stay with the team, and I don't know how to be, and I'm trying-" He chokes off, voice breaking, and Sara feels tears burn her eyes.

"I know you are," she says softly. "Hey, I know."

"I've always had Mick." He swipes at his eyes angrily. "And now I don't, and once Rip decides he doesn't need me anymore I don't... I don't know what to do."

Sara frowns, still absently tracing her fingers along his arm. "Len, that's not... he's not going to just get rid of you, alright?"

"Why not?" he asks dully. "Did with Mick." Sara... blanks. It's that gaping chasm again, between her life experience and his, between his and normal.

"Mick was different," she says slowly. "Mick betrayed us. So unless you have some plans you're not telling me..." He huffs at that. "I won't let Rip do that to you," she says firmly. "Hey, that's not gonna happen. I'm not going to let you go all alone. I'm not." His face crumples, and Sara needs to kill something.
Someone is going to pay for this.

Mick is going to pay for this. And Lewis. And every other asshole who had convinced him so thoroughly that he's damaged, that he's worthless, that he's not enough. That the moment he's not useful to someone they'll just... abandon him.

She doesn't know how to convince him otherwise.

"I will stand up for you," she finally tells him, words feeling terribly inadequate. "I've got your back, okay? I know you are scared and in pain right now, but I need you to trust that. Trust me. Please. I'm not going to leave you alone, I promise."

He nods tightly, scrubs angrily at his face. Sara winces as he hits still-bruised skin, reaches out with her free hand to still him. "Don't," she says quietly. "I'm not gonna sit here and watch you hurt yourself, Leonard."

"'m not-" He chokes off, and Sara just raises her eyebrows. "I don't..." He shakes his head, words failing him, pinches the bridge of his nose with his eyes tightly shut. "Sara, I don't know how to do any of this."

His voice breaks and Sara instinctively pulls him closer, drops her hand to his shoulder in a protective hold. "Shh, I know," she murmurs, pressing her forehead to his temple. "I know. Just stay here with me, okay? That's all you need to do right now, just stay with me."

He shudders, trembling, and Sara talks herself back from the edge of rage again. And again, and again. He needs her right now, desperately. Needs one steady thing to hold on to.

Sara chokes back a hysterical laugh at the thought of being his stability.

"Gideon, are you sure I can't kill Mick?" she asks, feels Len huff.

"Unfortunately, yes."

Sara snorts softly, sighing. "Well, Snart, at least we have her on our side this time," she mutters.

"I've always been on your side, Miss Lance."

xxx

and maybe

just maybe i'll come home

xxx

Chapter End Notes

brb hiding again

*update 3/26: I realize most ppl won't see this but for those who happen to, this fic is on indefinite hiatus. Writing it takes a lot out of me and recently the fandom has just drained me instead of inspiring me. I'm sorry.
Chapter Summary

"I wish I could give him a treat," Sara sighs. "Gideon, what do robots like?"

"Peace, quiet, and dutifully obedient humans," comes the immediate deadpan response, and okay, she probably deserved that.

Chapter Notes

Okay, this is... tentatively sort of off hiatus. Sorry for the wait and the belated notice for it, I know most ppl prbly missed my note at the end of last chapter.

a new language (the myriad)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

xxx

could you wait
for redemption?

xxx

Sara’s stomach growling is what gets Len to slowly pull away, amused look softening the angry wounds on his face, the hopelessness in his eyes.

"Oh, shut up," Sara grumbles. "Some of us have been awake for a while."

"Didn't say anything." His voice is painfully hoarse, and Sara pushes herself to her feet with a groan to find him some water. "Breakfast?" she asks, handing him a cup. Len grimaces, shakes his head, and Sara frowns. "When's the last time you ate something nonliquid?"

"Yesterday afternoon," Gideon answers promptly, to Len's glare. "And all he had was an energy bar." Len's jaw is clenched like he's physically restraining himself from snapping back, and Sara sighs. Their fight, or whatever this is, is getting very old very quickly.

"Alright, I'm gonna go get us some food and check in with Kendra. You are going to shower. Gideon is going to apologize for whatever she said to you." Len's lip twitches the smallest bit. "Everyone got it?"

No one responds, which she takes as the appropriate answer.

xxx

find a word for us
other than shame
Sara's almost to the galley when she picks up voices floating down the corridor, Mick's rumble and Ray's unfailingly sunny tone, and groans. It's too early for this.

Mick has Ray backed onto one of the stools at the table, looming over a chattering Ray while Kendra watches from the corner by the food fabricator. They all look up when Sara enters.

"Oh, please, don't stop on my account," she greets, gesturing at Ray. "I'm just here for coffee and Kendra."

Mick grunts, turning back to Ray, who squeaks, "Hey, Sara."

Sara just shakes her head and goes to join Kendra, who has already started pouring coffee for her. "Once a barista..." She accepts the mug with a smirk.

"Shut up and say thank you."

"Good morning to you too." Sara leans back against the counter, watches as Kendra pushes buttons on the food fabricator and starts pulling out dishes.

"Hey, why don't I get coffee?" Ray calls from the other side of the room. Kendra shoots him an amused glance.

"You didn't ask, and you're kind of busy."

"She didn't ask either!"

Sara manages not to choke on said coffee, swallows and observes, "She just likes me better, Ray."

Kendra gives her an exasperated look, smacking her shoulder lightly with a spoon. "Stop it. How many plates am I making?" Sara blinks, realizes she's definitely already got food for more than one person. "Coffee is not breakfast, Sara Lance. You joining me or...?"

Mick looks up at that, leering. "Don't tell me Lenny finalmph-" Ray stuffs a doughnut in his mouth, and it would be comical if Sara weren't already a hair's width away from punching that sneer right off Mick's face.

"Finish that sentence, please," Sara purrs. "I haven't gotten to kill anything in weeks."

"Oookay, and we're leaving now," Kendra sighs, moving into Sara's line of sight. "I can't take you anywhere, Canary."

Sara pouts. "Why does everyone keep saying that? I'm lots of fun."

"Yeah, we need to work on your definition of "fun"." Sara glowers. "Come on, we can go hit a few things before we eat."

It's not a bad offer.

we could learn a new language

xxx
They don't actually end up hitting anything, but Sara feels more awake once they go through a few forms. She flops into the floor beside Kendra, stretching one leg out with a sigh.

"I miss having a real gym," she says wistfully.

"One where I don't have to rescue you?" Sara makes a face, smacking her arm lightly.

"Rude." Kendra shrugs. "We should probably go eat, even these fancy plate warmers don't work forever. And if I run into Mick in the mess again I might actually hurt him."

"You're hopeless," Kendra sighs. "You sure Leonard will want company?"

"Oh, I'm quite sure he won't, but he can suck it up." He could use good company, and Sara's not sure she counts as good any of the time.

"Is he..." Kendra hesitates, glancing at Sara. "Mick... had some pretty nasty things to say about him."

Sara snorts. "Shocking."

Kendra sighs. "Ray wants to "reintegrate" him – Ray's words, not mine. He keeps reminding Mick about the time he rescued him from the Russian gulag."

_Sara, don't do it._

(Not a rescue, not really.)

"Well, that will have to wait until we're 100% sure Mick is really on our side."

"You're not?"

Sara gives Kendra an incredulous look. "You are?"

"He didn't kill Leonard," Kendra offers. Sara narrows her eyes. "Well, he didn't, and he could've. Maybe made it to the jumpship before anyone could stop him."

"I thought I set my bars low," Sara mutters, glowering.

"Stop looking at me like that. I was there when Mick nearly made us into pirate booty."

"So was Ray," Sara points out crossly. "He still did his best to make Len feel miserable." There's that annoying protectiveness again, despite knowing how much Len would absolutely hate it. He'd told her as much, a lifetime ago while Mick's betrayal was still fresh.

But Sara can't help it, any more than she could for Nyssa. Or her family, or Sin, or even Felicity once she'd stopped seeing Sara as competition. Oliver, strangely enough, had never warranted this same feeling, which is enough to give Sara pause. Something to look at – later, when she's not getting weird looks from her friend.

"You okay?" Kendra asks as Sara shakes her thoughts off.

"Yeah, sorry. Just... thinking."

Kendra hums. "No, I mean... I know this all got dumped on you when you were already having a hard time."
Sara can't help a small laugh, shakes her head. "And all of it while we're chasing an immortal serial killer. On a time travelling spaceship, no less, which somehow doesn't fix the double booking problem."

"I try not to think about that too much."

"You and me both. I just end up asking Gideon too many questions."

"You know she's going to snap and kill you one day, right?" Sara just smirks. "And you still haven't answered the question."

Sara sighs, considering. "I'm... better," she finally answers. "Gideon perfected her little shock collar, so that... helps." She tucks her hair back, turning her head to show Kendra the small device.

"I assume it no longer incapacitates you?" She shoots Sara an appraising look.

"Bingo." Sara gives her a weary smile. As exhausting as all of this has been, that at least hadn't been for nothing. She'd never really had the bloodlust under control before, not really. It'd taken over too many times for it to be just a fluke. And back with the League...

Well, that hadn't been real control, she can see that now. Maybe if she'd stayed it would've remained dormant, but suppressing it, even unintentionally, had only made it come back worse than before. This time, she's had to actually deal with it. Figure out a way to channel that rage into something constructive. And having Gideon as a fallback has let her work on that without worrying about accidentally killing someone.

"Thank you," she blurts out suddenly, surprising them both. "For... Not giving up on me. And putting up with me, and coming up with that stupid collar."

Kendra smiles. "You're welcome," she responds, reaching out to squeeze Sara's hand. "Besides, I had a good teacher. I have you to thank for still owning shirts without wing holes in them."

Sara laughs, the sound startling her, the small ease of tension in her chest that's been lingering since she jumped out of the Pit.

"The struggle is so real," she agrees. "You have no idea how many clothes of mine have been ruined by blood spatter. So rude." She pushes herself to her feet with a sigh, stretching. "Gideon, please tell Len we're on our way with food. And coffee."

There's a pause that's just slightly too long, Gideon's tone the slightest bit petulant when she responds, "Very well."

Sara's eyebrows go up. "Did you apologize?" she asks, getting only a confused look from Kendra in response.

"Apologize?"

"Don't even ask," Sara sighs with a frustrated shake of her head. "Seriously, I have no idea, and I might smash something."

Kendra eyes the plate she's handing Sara dubiously. "You have far too much destructive energy for this early in the day," she observes. Sara just grumbles.

When they get back to her room, it's clear Len hasn't moved beyond dragging himself off the floor and into the desk chair. When he catches sight of Kendra he fixes Sara with a glare she shrugs off
easily. "She was bored," Sara explains. "I'm bored. Now we can all be bored together."

"I was quite busy staring at the ceiling, thank you."

Kendra huffs beside her, and Sara rolls her eyes. "Gideon, I think he's checking you out."

Len pushes himself upright with an exaggerated sigh. "Well, I did tell Rip that 1812 was our lovechild."


He climbs to his feet with a muttered, "You are very bossy, Canary."

Sara ignores him, continues, "You'd better be back here for breakfast in 20 minutes, or I'm sending 1812 to get you."

"He's a cat-sized robot, what can he do?"

"He's a member of the League, so watch your tongue." Len just flips her off as he walks out the door, not looking back.

The door has hardly closed when Kendra rounds on her, bursts out, "He looks awful."

Sara gives a mirthless laugh, rubbing her hands over her face. "No shit."

"I see now why you're still angry at Mick." Sara hums. "You know, I changed my mind," Kendra declares. "Let's go kill him."

Sara chokes, coughing on a laugh. "And here we were just talking about finally being in control," she answers wryly.

"Oh, I'm very in control. I still want to kill him."

"I have taught you well, my young padawan."

"Girl, I am like three thousand years older than you."

Sara shrugs, smirking. "Whatever you say, old ladybird."

Kendra gives a long-suffering sigh, looking up at the ceiling. "Gideon, I don't know how you haven't murdered her in her sleep by now."

"Remarkable restraint," comes the immediate answer.

Nineteen minutes later Sara is curled on her bed, Kendra at her desk, when she hears noise in the hallway, and the door slides open.

"...I'm going, I'm going!" Sara looks expectantly at the doorway, but it only reveals Len. It takes a moment for her to realize 1812 is behind him, occasionally prodding at Len's leg to move him forward. "Did you do this?" Len demands.

"No, but I wish I had," she answers, voice shaking with laughter. "Looks like he's growing up well. Taking initiative."

Len growls, actually jumping through the doorway to avoid one last satisfied prod from the robot.
"I wish I could give him a treat," Sara sighs. "Gideon, what do robots like?"

"Peace, quiet, and dutifully obedient humans," comes the immediate deadpan response, and okay, she probably deserved that.

Len glowers at her from where he's tucked himself against the foot of her bed, arms crossed. He looks like a bedraggled puppy, and it takes everything Sara has not to smile.

"I know you had something to do with this," he accuses sourly.

Sara scoffs. "Please, there would have been sharp objects involved if I had. I think he showed remarkable restraint."

"Ugh."

Kendra is laughing quietly from her seat at the desk, earning her another pathetic glare from Len. "Don't think I don't see you too, Big Bird," he grumbles. "I'll remember this."

"I'm terrified," Kendra deadpans. Len's glare shifts back to Sara.

"She's spending too much time with you," he gripes. "So is 1812, apparently. You're a terrible influence."

Sara shrugs, popping some fruit in her mouth. "Have I ever claimed otherwise?"

"Ugh." He shakes his head, turning to climb up beside her, but Sara stops him.

"Nuh uh, breakfast," she admonishes. "We did not carry that all the way here just for you to ignore it." He opens his mouth to protest and Kendra appears at his side, shoving a plate in his hands.

"You're welcome," she says sweetly.

Sara smirks at the vaguely shocked look on Len's face. "Having people care about your well-being is terrible," she mocks, which earns her another half-hearted glare. "Eat your breakfast, asshole."

xxx

and i'll call you out
by your favorite name

xxx

Chapter End Notes

This fic being unfinished is 1 of 2 things keeping me alive right now, so there will quite likely be more yay
They manage to finish breakfast without a single item of food being thrown (Sara considers it a feat, although Gideon does not agree), and she's arguing with Kendra over which of their Movies I Was Dead For list to watch from when motion at the corner of her eye has her instantly alert.

Before she can do more than sit up, though, Mick walks straight into an energy barrier in the doorway, falls back flat on his ass and curses loudly.

Sara is vaguely aware of Len beside her, frozen and somehow still putting off enough nervous energy that the whole room should be vibrating. There's also a knife in her hand, its familiar weight comforting, the cold metal a good enough anchor to keep the bloodlust in check.

It's not until Mick has regained his feet and stands glaring in the doorway, unable to get any closer, that Sara finally sheathes her knife.

"I don't think Gideon likes you very much," she observes casually, gaze fixed on the other man.

"Right back at her," Mick growls. "Geoffrey was a lot more obedient. Like a damn mutt."

Sara pauses for a beat, then states, "Gideon, I'm starting to have some doubts about our relationship."

Kendra chokes on the tea she'd been drinking. Len gives them both a vaguely terrified look that has Sara pressing just a little closer to him. "Gideon, can you sound proof that thing? And make it so he can't see us?"

"I can," the AI confirms. Sara waits, then rolls her eyes with a sigh. "Will you do so, please?"

The doorway turns an odd purplish color, which Sara takes as assent. Len relaxes, marginally, still exuding enough nervous tension to exhaust her. She glances at him, finds him pale again, lips
pressed in a thin line. A hand on his arm finds him trembling, and Sara has to take a moment to talk herself out of storming after Mick. Len needs her here more than she needs to knock Mick's head into a wall.

She takes his plate from its forgotten place on his lap, setting it carefully aside. No need to give Gideon anything else to complain about.

He doesn't react, hardly seems to notice her proximity, which is starting to really worry her.

"Oh!" Sara blinks, looking over at Kendra, who is now on her feet. "I'll be right back," the other woman announces, carefully poking at the purple doorway before stepping through it.

Sara is reminded, on occasion, of just how weird her life is.

She knocks her shoulder lightly against Len's. "You okay?" she asks quietly. He gives her a sharp nod.

"Just… unexpected," he states tightly. "I don't… switch well between on and off." He frowns at his hands where they're fidgeting anxiously, eyes not all here.

Sara hums in agreement, gently stilling the movement of his fingers. "That's what we have masks for," she points out.

"My goggles are for eye protection."

Sara snorts. "Sure, and you wear a parka in the middle of summer because you're cold."

"Maybe I do," he retorts, crossing his arms, but the look he shoots her is amused. "Besides, you don't wear a mask, White Canary."

_Where's the mask?_

Sara smiles a little, shrugging. "I used to. Before I died I was just the Canary, had a black mask with this awful blonde wig."

Len's eyebrows go up. "I definitely need pictures of that."

_You don't need it anymore. You've lived in the shadows long enough._

Sara shakes her head, as though she could dispel the memories that easily. "Not exactly something I have memorialized."

_I'm not a hero, Laurel._

"Hmm." Sara groans, inwardly kicks herself for giving him that string to tug so easily. Between him and Gideon, who knows what they'll dig up. She's lucky the League clung so fast to its history and tradition; cell phones had been an even harder sell than guns. Sara imagines Nyssa trying to order Siri around and can't help smiling.

"I know that smile." Sara blinks, finds Len studying her like the goddamn Cheshire Cat. He surprises her, then, continues quietly, "It's one of the good ones."

_Be a hero in the light. Be the White Canary._

XXX
Kendra returns a few minutes later, grudgingly announced by Gideon. She's carrying what looks like a board game, and Sara raises an eyebrow.

"I thought I made it very clear I'm never playing another game of LIFE in my life," she greets. Kendra smiles, setting the box down on the desk to open.

"This is a special edition," she explains, practically preening. "I had Gideon fabricate it. I actually thought of it while we were setting up the party, when the little umbrellas turned out so well." She tosses something at Sara, who catches the piece to eye dubiously. It's a little plastic white canary on a base; the next one Kendra throws her is a snowflake, and Sara has to choke back a laugh as she hands it to Len.

"You've been really bored," she says to Kendra, who gives her an unimpressed look. Len is eyeing the snowflake like he doesn't know if he should be touched or offended. "This version better not include babies," he states, fingeriing a tiny hole Sara hadn't noticed before, on the base of hers as well. Kendra beams.

"Nope." She tosses another piece over, and Sara grins when she makes out the red, white and blue shape. She grabs the snowflake back from Len, sticking the peg at the front of the new piece into the hole.

"We get robots," she announces, handing it back to Len. Who looks down at the tiny 1812 and smiles, for the first time in what feels like years.

"Alright, your game has promise."

Kendra looks just a little too pleased, and Sara eyes her suspiciously. "What's the catch?" she asks, not sure she wants to know the answer. Kendra deflates a little.

"I let Gideon come up with the name," she tells them, looking apprehensive.

Sure enough, Kendra holds up the box top and it reads "GIDEON AND THE SPACE TODDLERS".

"Aaand just like that, it no longer has promise," Len drawls.

"Don't say that, you'll hurt 1812's feelings," Kendra chides, and Sara nearly falls off the bed laughing at the look on his face.

"I'm… not even dignifying that with an answer," he grumbles, but he doesn't protest further when Kendra sets the board down in front of them.
have I successfully lured you into a false sense of hope hahahah sorry

I really didn't mean for that tag to actually make its way into the fic but Gideon no longer listens to anything I say so °╮(╯_╰)╭° She also has her own legends tag now! It's what she deserves I'm very happy for her

(I was 100% sure that Mick called his AI Geoffrey but when I went to look it up, I couldn't find it anywhere? Not sure if I missed it or I stole it from someone else's fic, if so sorry also A+ job making your headcanon my headcanon)
(1x10) and tell me some things last

Chapter Summary

"Earth to snowflake."

Chapter Notes

ummm okay this was just supposed to be like two paragraphs at the beginning of what's now the next chapter I guess? But it was thanksgiving yesterday and today is my birthday and I've been alone for both so this kind of wrote itself oops. At least Len can have some good company.

Sorry if it's crap, I pulled some bits I'd written and didn't intend to include so

heal (if i stay)  (tom odell)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Alright," Len concedes. "This was your best idea since the beach party."

Kendra smiles, a very satisfied look on her face as the door opens for her. "Why, thank you. I thought so too."

Sara snorts softly. "You let him think that was all for me, huh?" she asks, raising an eyebrow at Kendra. Len blinks, gaze darting a few times between them in confusion. Blinks again.

It would be almost adorable to watch his brain struggle to put two and two together, if it wasn't also so sad.

"Stop giving away my secrets, Canary," Kendra admonishes with a small smile. "And please don't destroy anything before dinner."

Sara pouts. "You promised I could hit things this morning, Hawkgirl. You didn't deliver."

Kendra gives an exaggerated sigh as she leaves, and Sara turns back to Len feeling… well, lighter than she has in a while. She'd forgotten how much she enjoys being part of a team - an actual, functioning team. They're certainly not there yet, but…

Well, maybe they could get there. Someday.
Len is still sprawled on the bed, lost in his brain, absently spinning the little snowflake between two fingers, eyes unfocused.

"Earth to snowflake," she says mockingly, and *that* certainly gets his attention.

"Keep that up and I'll start going with "Pussy"," he warns.

Sara smirks. "You wouldn't dare." Len's eyebrows go up, a tiny bit of Captain Cold in his glare, and okay, maybe he would dare. She holds both hands up, concedes, "Alright, snowflake will stay in the box." Len snorts, looking at the game piece once more almost fondly before tossing it to Sara to put away.

"Better than a closet," he drawls, an odd undertone in his voice that has Sara glancing at him again. He's not looking at her, staring off into space again, a tiny frown creased in his forehead.

Sara puts the lid on the box, nearly groaning when she sees the name again – she will need to fix that, later – and turns back to Len.

"Alright, crook, what's up?" He glances at her, face still lined with emotion she can't read. He lets out a slow breath, rolling his neck, mutters, "Just… long day."

"Lot of those going around." The edge of his mouth twitches, but that's all he gives her. Sara sighs, making her way back over to her bed.

"How do you do it?" he asks suddenly.

Sara blinks. "Do what?" He's got that faraway look again, frowning at nothing.

"Be around… *normal* people and not… drown?"

It's Sara's turn to frown, tilting her head. "You mean Kendra?" The quick flick of his eyes to meet hers before they dart away again is answer enough. "If your definition of "normal" is a five thousand year old woman who can turn into a hawk, I've got some bad news for you," she tells him drily.

He gives a faint half-smile at that, but nothing more, and Sara's frown deepens. She climbs up to sit beside him, bumping her shoulder against his. "C'mon, crook, you've gotta give me something else to go on here."

He exhales sharply, but he doesn't pull away from her. "She's… *good,*" he finally explains. "They're all good, except maybe Rip. And we're…"

"Not so good?" Sara finishes. He huffs, tension running through his shoulders Sara can *feel.* Suddenly all she wants to do is try to ease some of it from his muscles, and that is definitely not a line of thought her brain should take right now.

"She should hate me." Sara blinks. "Ray at least has that part right. I got her stuck in 1958 for two years, and she… makes a boardgame out of it."

"*Mick* got us stuck for two years," Sara corrects firmly. Len makes a dismissive noise, shaking his head, and Sara swallows down arguments that she knows he won't hear right now. Lets out a slow breath, and continues, "We're all just… people, I guess. We've done some bad things, now we're trying to do a good thing." She shrugs, leans her head back against the wall with a sigh.
"I'm going to save the human race, Sara. Maybe you can help me."

"See, that I can understand, sucking it up for the greater good. Dealing with the degenerates because we're useful, a means to an end. Hell, it's the reason I stayed on this little mission; Rip may be a bastard, but at least he doesn't shy away from that truth."

Sara closes her eyes at that, swallowing hard. Wonders if she'll ever be worth more than her knives.

"But this?" He gestures at the box on the desk. "This isn't... mission related. Kendra's not getting anything out of it. I keep waiting for her to finally play her hand but instead she... makes me a snowflake." His mouth twists a little, fingers absently playing with a stray thread on his pants.

"She's bored, remember?" That drags a short burst of laughter from him, shoulders loosening a little.

"Right."

Sara tilts her head a little, studying him from the corner of her eye. "You waiting for me to play my hand too?" she asks, which probably isn't fair, because she knows the answer, and she knows it's not his fault. Not really. "Sorry. That wasn't fair."

"I wish I wasn't." It's soft enough that she almost misses it.

"I know."

It might hurt, if she didn't know how deeply ingrained his defensive instincts are, how horrifically screwed his entire worldview is. He's a lot like Nyssa in that way, she realizes, growing up in a way not many could understand. That no one should have to understand.

Len exhales slowly, brushing the edge of his hand against hers for just a moment. "You keep putting up with me," he says quietly. "And I don't... I don't understand it. I don't understand why you watch movies with me, or why Kendra actually wants to just... talk to me and I'm..." He shrugs helplessly. "I don't understand why any of you care."

Sara's chest gets very tight for a moment, heart beginning its now familiar ache. Something shifts on his face, hardening, voice rough when he growls, "Don't. Don't look at me like that, don't... pity me."

"It's not pity, Len." Sara puts a hand on his arm, feels him tense in her hold. "It's..." She shakes her head in frustration. "You asked how I can be around normal people. And the answer is because I grew up around normal people. I was normal. I was..." She gives a mirthless laugh, head thunking back against the wall. "I was as normal a bratty teen as you get. And I still became this... thing that I am."

She hears Len's jaw creak, feels him tremor just a little under her hand. "My point is, it doesn't matter where you come from. It doesn't matter how good or bad you were, your family was. You can still grow into something so completely different that they won't even recognize you." She rubs his arm lightly, skin still unnaturally smooth. "You can, Len. I obviously did.

"It only took being stranded being stranded on a ship in hell for that to happen," he counters bitterly.

"And what exactly are you doing right now?"

He goes very still for a moment, exhaling slowly. Eventually answers, very quietly, "I don't know."

Well, it's an improvement over denial.
Sara squeezes his arm gently before releasing him, says lightly, "Besides, I can't imagine Kendra has been a good girl in all of her reincarnations."

"Hmm."

His gaze goes unfocused again, but this time Sara has no doubt where his mind is at. She smirks a little, shifting toward the edge of the bed. "You have fun with that, crook. I'm gonna go hit something for a while."

"Do I want to know what?"

Sara just gives him a serene smile in answer.

He watches her tug her boots on with an odd expression, finally asks, "You do remember this is your room, right?"

Sara shrugs, straightening. "I trust you," she answers simply.

The look on his face keeps her smiling all the way to the gym.

xxx

*take my heart and take my hand*
*like an ocean takes the dirty sand*

*(and heal)*

Chapter End Notes

(Here is your friendly reminder len dies at the end! \o/ no one get attached to good things they don’t last!)

I always feel like I should say thank you all a thousand times at the end of every chapter in case I don't get a chance, so thank you.
Chapter Summary

She understands why he feels like he has to hide every bit of pain she knows he's in. But she certainly doesn't have to like it.

Chapter Notes

...hello I'm alive sorry for the delay

new fic title is Sara Sighs

discoloration (dawn golden)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

it's been a while
since i've been gone and away

xxx

Sara returns to every single one of her formerly hidden knives lined up neatly on her bed, along with several that had gone missing weeks ago, and sighs.

She supposes she'd asked for that.

There's also a small, neat pile of new "career" cards for Kendra's game. One features FIRE FIGHTER, with that stupid picture from the night Slade nearly burned Starling City to ashes, of Sara holding the little girl she'd rescued as though she were some kind of hero. Ugh.

There are a couple others that don't feature Sara. She bursts out laughing at BARISTA, with Kendra's old employee photo. She wouldn't have recognized young Stein in formal rabbi attire if she hadn't spent that evening in the 70's getting high with him. And there's Jax as Mechanic, Ray as Teacher's Pet, and…

Huh. Well, that's certainly a find.

xxx

i watched your eyes reflect me
in a terrible way

xxx

They show up for dinner that night to find Mick already there, talking with Ray again. Len freezes in the doorway, then abruptly turns to stalk away.
Sara sighs. "Gideon, that was mean," she tells the hallway as she follows him.

"It's a small ship."

Sara rolls her eyes. "A little warning would be nice next time."

Len is slamming his exercise ball into the wall by his bed when she catches up, on his back staring up at the ceiling.

"I bet that's making Gideon very happy," Sara observes from the doorway.

"It most certainly is not."

Len ignores both of them, and Sara sighs again.

"You can't just avoid him forever," she presses, just barely keeping exasperation from her tone. He glares at her for a moment before looking back at the ceiling.

"You got your information from him," he retorts, hurling the ball harder. "I can avoid him as long as I want."

"Len."

"I've still got this from our last encounter," he says icily, gesturing at his face. "Figure I get a free pass at least as long as he's marked me."

Sara goes quiet, very graciously does not point out his encounter with Mick last night (God, had that only been last night? It feels like weeks ago, and Sara is very very ready for all of this to be resolved, one way or another.)

There's no way she wants it over more than Len, though, even if the only marks Mick had left this time were in Len's head.

"You're right," she concedes. Len has stopped throwing the ball, pushes himself upright with his back to the headboard and fidgets with it absently. "I'm sorry. But it seems like Mick's gonna be staying for now, so you guys need to find a way to tolerate each other." She fingers a knife in its hidden sleeve sheath, mutters, "We both need to."

"Does no one else see how insane this is?" He glares at the wall like it will fix something. "What's to stop him from turning us in to the hunters? Self-preservation, Sara. Maybe if he turns us in, the time masters will let him come back. Or at least let him live out the rest of his miserable life in a hole somewhere."

Sara pinches the bridge of her nose wearily. "Len-"

"How do we know the hunters are even after him? All we have is his word on that, for all we know he never stopped working for them-"

"Leonard." He snaps his jaw shut audibly. She's exhausted just listening to him; she has no idea how he's still functioning at this level of high alert. "Right now, all we're doing is hiding. There's nothing for him to sabotage, not without one of us or Gideon noticing. You think she doesn't have him on a 24/7 security feed? He still can't touch the consoles-"

"Maybe he doesn't need to. Maybe he has some tracking device hidden on him, something we didn't
"I have scanned him quite thoroughly, many times over," Gideon cuts in reproachfully. "The prison cell is designed to dampen any and all lines of communication, and I ran a low level local EMP when you let him out to fully disable any potential implants. I also required him to submit to a full body scan in the medbay before allowing him access to any part of the ship, something I regret not requiring of you as well."

Sara folds her arms, looking at Leonard with raised eyebrows. "See? You're not the only one worried about him, Snart."

"Nor are you the only one with any common sense," Gideon finishes icily. "In fact, given your current insistence on remaining injured, I would say you have little at all."

Sara sighs. "Gideon." Not that she doesn't somewhat agree, but antagonizing Len won't help anything.

Sure enough, he slams the ball hard enough into the wall panel that Sara hears a crack, winces a little at the Gideon-storm that is going to bring. Len freezes, lets the ball fall onto the sheets with no attempt to catch it, and Sara takes the opportunity to close the distance between the door and the bed. She reaches for the ball, tossing it between her hands a few times before holding it out to him.

It's a moment before he takes it, not meeting her gaze, shoulders slumped and head down. "Everyone keeps treating me like I'm the one that needs to apologize, to make things right," he tells his hands. "So you tell me, what was I supposed to do differently with a partner who betrayed the team, would've left all of you for dead? How is that my fault?" He throws the ball dejectedly, not even watching it bounce off into a corner, just staring at his hands with shining eyes.

"It's not," Sara answers, leaning against his bed. She very nearly gives in to the frustrated part of her that wants to scream I've been telling you it's not since the moment it happened, but that won't help anything either. "It wasn't your fault, okay? He put you in an impossible situation, and now he's using your guilt against you."

"I'm not-" He breaks off sharply, and Sara sighs. Wonders if he's actually heard a word she's said on the topic these past few weeks, if any of it has actually penetrated his thick skull.

"Right, you don't have feelings," she concedes wearily. "Fine. But it's still not your fault."

He huffs, but his shoulders loosen a little as he mutters, "He should've just killed me."

"Don't say that." Her voice is sharp, not quite angry, and he winces. Sara almost feels bad about it, but there's enough darkness in his eyes that she thinks maybe he needs to hear it.

They'd never really finished their conversation from the night Mick had beat him up, the one where Len had scared her badly enough that she'd checked in with Gideon every 15 minutes after he kicked her out to make sure he was still breathing.

And Sara would be lying if she said she didn't still worry about it, about the darkness she knows still plagues him, the despair she sees sometimes in his eyes.

She kicks her boots off with another sigh, climbing up to stretch out beside him before he can protest. Even not-quite-touching, she can feel him vibrating with tension, and she aches to ease that even a little. But his reservations aside, she's still uncertain about her own ability to be any closer to someone than this, still shaken by her reaction to a simple kiss from Lindsay, two years and a lifetime ago. She wants to tell herself it's just the time drift still fucking with her head, but the uncertainty had been
there before that. The newly undead hyperawareness of everything being reexperienced for the first time. The time drift certainly hadn't helped with that. She's getting better, but she'd been as sensitive to touch as Len is for a while.

And as for attachments… well, she's seen three times over now, the pain cause by her deaths. What her resurrection had done to Nyssa, to her sister, her father.

So no, she isn't sure she knows any better than he does what she really wants.

Well, that's not entirely true. Right now, all she wants is for him to stop flinching at shadows, to stop fighting her at every turn. To let Gideon heal his damn ribs.

It's a few minutes before he shifts, arm brushing against hers. Sara presses a little closer, resting her head on his shoulder when he doesn't protest. She can feel his cheek brush against her hair, feels the rise and fall of his chest as he takes a slow breath, the way it hitches just slightly when it jars his ribs.

He stops breathing at all for a moment when she carefully rests her palm on his chest, slides her hand lightly over what must be still-bruised flesh. It doesn't feel hot, which is good, but his entire side is still swollen.

"You can turn off for a little while," she says quietly, feels his breathing hitch again. "I'll keep watch, okay? Just try to relax."

"I can't." His voice is rough enough to startle her. "I'm trying, I've been trying, but I just… can't."

Sara rubs her hand very lightly over what she's fairly certain is unbruised skin, can feel his heart racing. "Okay," she soothes. "At least close your eyes."

He gives a mirthless laugh, pressing a hand to his face. "Doesn't help."

There's a quiet knock on the door a moment later and Len practically flies upright with a choked off yelp of pain, Sara with him.

"It's Miss Saunders," Gideon informs them snidely, while Sara focuses very hard on slowing her heart rate and not turning into a mindless killer. Snarls, "Gideon, warning." She is going to have a very long talk with the AI later. Later, when Len isn't quietly gasping each ragged breath in pain.

Kendra glances uncertainty between the two of them when the door slides open, laden with plates. "Is… everything okay?" she asks hesitantly. "I brought dinner, thought you might prefer someplace… not with Mick."

Sara gives her a smile, small but real. "Thank you," she says sincerely. "And yeah, we're fine, just… startled. Gideon is apparently in her Terrible Twos."

Len chokes behind her, coughing on what might've been a laugh, and Sara tries to squash a stab of concern at how pained it sounds. Pushing him right now is as likely to make him completely shut her out as it is to help.

Kendra, luckily, takes her cue from Sara and, after shooting Len a concerned look, just walks to the desk and places the food down.

"We should really just install a fabricator in here," Kendra observes.

"I like the way you think." Sara stretches, padding over to her friend. She shakes her head slightly when Kendra glances between her and Len again, worry clear on her face. "Maybe a coffee
"Something tells me Gideon would not approve that."

"Hmm." Sara reaches for a piece of potato on Kendra's plate, only managing to get her hand swatted and a disapproving look. "Snart can always steal Ray's for me."

Snart is clearly not paying any attention. Sara turns back to him when she gets no answer, finds him still on the bed braced against the wall, hunched over in pain.


"'s fine," he bites, like Sara can't see him braced heavily against the wall, hardly remaining upright.

"I swear to god-"

"Sara." His voice is tight with a desperate edge, and Sara snaps her mouth shut, hissing a breath. Physically bites her tongue to keep from snarling and turns back to Kendra, who hands her a plate with an expression warring between amused and concerned. Sara grabs it, hard enough that it threatens to crack, and it takes a very concentrated effort not to hurl the damn thing into the wall.

Kendra gives her a disapproving look like she knows what Sara is thinking, and moves around Sara with another plate before Sara thinks to warn her off. She freezes a moment later, and Sara sighs. Takes another moment to ground herself, focuses on how pissy Gideon will be if she actually breaks anything, and Kendra had been kind enough to bring her food and it would be very ungrateful to throw it at the wall like an actual toddler and-

Maybe Gideon has a very tiny miniscule point.

She takes one more slow breath, turns back to Len predictably curled into the corner of his bed. He's still hunched in pain, but now he's also retreating from Kendra, and Sara suppresses another sigh. Her room is one thing, but this is his space, and given his current mindset that's another thing entirely.

She takes the plate from Kendra, says very calmly, "Okay, food or medbay. Your choice."

He glares at her, or tries to glare, but huddled with bruises covering half his body it only manages to look horribly pathetic. "Stop… doing that," he bites. Sara tilts her head.

"Doing what?"

He gestures vaguely, mutters, "Just… just go."

"No." She says it quietly, but holds her ground. "I am done watching you run yourself into the ground over this."

"I am not your responsibility," he snarls, and Sara calmly agrees, "No, you're not." He opens and closes his mouth a few times, coming up empty. "You are my teammate, my crew, and I'd be a pretty crappy partner if I let you keep going like this." She sighs, suddenly just very done with all of this. "Besides, wasn't too long ago you called me out for being a liability, and you were right. You're no good to anyone like this, Snart. If it was just you, I'd let you wallow as long as you wanted, but these… people coming after us are not fucking amateurs. And I'm not gonna let you get yourself killed being a stubborn ass about getting basic fucking medical treatment."
"I would hardly call it "basic"." Gideon starts in a huff, and Sara cuts her off with an exasperated, "Gideon." She does not scream it the way she wants to, wishes not for the first time that she could send AIs to sit in a corner and think about what they'd done.

"I've worked through worse," Len says through gritted teeth. Sara wants to scream.

"Yeah, so have I, when I had no other choice. You have a choice." There's always a choice.

"Yes, and I've made mine," he snaps. "So I don't know what else you want from me."

Before Sara can answer, Gideon cuts in scathingly, "Perhaps if you showed a bit more gratitude, or any at all."

Sara sees utter panic flash across Len's face for a moment before he manages to compose himself. "Gideon, back off," she orders shortly. It takes all her self-control to place the plates neatly back on the desk and not hurl them into one of Gideon's monitors.

But the worst part wasn't the pain, or the humiliation. The worst part was when he'd bring Lisa in, tell her how ungrateful I was, what a bad son, and didn't I love him?

Len is staring at the floor now, eyes wide and far away. "-I. Kendra, I'm sorry," he whispers. "I appreciate you trying."

"I know," Kendra soothes with a glance at Sara. "Gideon's just in a bad mood or something, I wasn't upset to begin with."

"Gideon is going to get banned from the room if she says anything else like that," Sara amends. I don't understand why Kendra just wants to talk with me. She glares at the ceiling. "Gideon knows exactly what she's doing. And she's going to stop right now or I'm going to start breaking things."

Len still looks like he's waiting for the world to drop out from under him. Again. He doesn't look at her when she settles next to him, just stares at his hands, head ducked, shoulders hunched and tight enough to make Sara's own ache.

"Len," she says quietly. "Hey. Gideon is being a brat, that's not why I'm upset with you. Gratitude is the last thing I'm looking for."

He shakes his head slowly, like he's waking up. Grates, "'s fine. Doesn't matter."

"Don't you dare." Sara keeps her voice very carefully even, but after everything they've been through she is not going to let a pissy AI ruin this for him. "It does matter."

He's still shaking his head, still staring at his hands like he's never seen them before, flexing the fingers of his new one. Sara would half-believe he expects Gideon to take that away again, and reaches out to wrap her fingers around his before she can stop herself. He flinches just a little, and Sara doubts it's because of the faint bruising still coloring his knuckles, half-healed flesh over the cuts from punching his mirror.

"Len." He doesn't answer, but Sara can feel him trembling. It's too easy to forget how cut off he must feel right now, with everyone but Sara still seeing him as a criminal before anything else. As the person who lied about killing his best friend. He's far more tentatively balanced than he's trying very hard to come across as, and the kindness and friendship Kendra has shown him are one of the few things he has to hold on to right now.

And Gideon knows that.
"I'm sorry," he says again softly, and Sara nearly loses it. Snarls at the ceiling and thinks of all the ways she can make Gideon's life miserable and-

"Leonard." It's Kendra, and Sara barely suppresses the urge to growl at her as well. It's Kendra, she tells herself irritably. These protective urges are getting out of hand, and she really needs to kill something soon.

Kendra stands, glancing hesitantly at Sara as she approaches the bed. And normally he would probably hate this, but right now Sara thinks Len needs the connection and reassurance more than anything else. So she nods at Kendra, who leans carefully against the edge of the mattress.

"Leonard, you didn't do anything wrong," she says, still looking hesitant. Len is still staring at the sheets like they might swallow him whole. "I know you've been having a hard time with Mick being back. Honestly, I can't imagine having to do what you did, to make that choice." Len swallows hard, closing his eyes.

"I haven't forgotten what you did for us that day. I'm sorry if I didn't make that clear, and I'm sorry other people have been so hard on you for it. You saved all of our lives, and I don't think anyone showed you any gratitude for that." She gives the ceiling a brief glare, and Sara smirks just a little.

"So really, you not eating the food I brought because you're so worked up about the person who betrayed us wandering around the ship is not something you need to apologize for. Alright?"

Len still has his eyes closed, biting his lip hard, but he nods just a little. Sara mouths "thank you" to Kendra, who just gives her a sad smile in return. "This is me not saying I told you so," she says to Len, squeezing his hand.

He snorts softly, mutters, "Ugh." Sara rests her free hand on his shoulder, gently running her palm along horribly tense muscles. Normally, she wouldn't do this with Kendra here; normally, he wouldn't let her.

But normal, even on their level, had fled the moment Kronos removed his mask.

"We're on your side," she tells him, all levity fleeing when she feels the way he's trembling just slightly. "We've got your back, crook, okay? You're not alone here." He shudders at that, and Sara has a sudden, vivid memory of drowning in a dark sea of stars, of being surrounded by people and utterly alone on a ship in the middle of nowhere, and curls her arm around his shoulders.

"You're not alone," she whispers again. She can feel every stuttering breath he takes, hitched and in pain. Can feel the terror she knows far too well, that of being physically unable to fully defend herself, of being trapped like that with people who want to do her harm. The utter helplessness, the shame that comes with it.

She understands why he feels like he has to hide every bit of pain she knows he's in. But she certainly doesn't have to like it.

"Okay, we are all going to take this down a notch," Sara says quietly, when he's a little calmer. "I don't want to fight you, Len, but I can't just watch you hurt like this anymore. And Kendra has been worried, and if she's noticed you know other people have too." He shudders, but doesn't interrupt, which Sara hopes is a good sign. "I'm not doing this to annoy you, okay? I'm doing this because I'm worried, and I don't like seeing you in pain. No one here is going to use this against you, or pull one over on you, or they'll have me to deal with."

"And me," Kendra adds. "Against me and Sara, Mick's got no chance." Len's lips twitch the smallest bit. "And look, Ray is working his... sunshine charm on Mick, and Mick hasn't killed him yet. If
anyone can put up with Mick for long enough to actually get through to him, it's Ray. He can see the good in anyone."

"Except for me," Len murmurs, bitter edge to his tone. Sara's stomach clenches, slow, deep-seated anger trying to uncoil. "If Raymond can see something worth saving in Mick, what does that say about me?"

Kendra shoots a helpless look at Sara, who just shrugs. She's out of things to say, doesn't know what else any of them can do to get through to him.

Gideon chooses that moment to interrupt, because of fucking course she does.

"Captain Hunter has requested everyone's presence," she informs them tonelessly.

"You don't have to be there," she starts, but Len shakes his head.

"I'm not hiding," he says curtly. Sara sighs.

"Think of it as damage control on my end," she tries, but he just shoots her a look as he gets to his feet – more slowly than usual, movements stiff and awkward, and Sara is tempted to demonstrate just how out of commission he is with a simple push. She doubts he'd remain standing. "Fine," she grumbles instead; she doubts he'd forgive her for knocking him down either. "But after this I am dragging your ass down to medbay, got it?"

That just gets her another look. Sara makes a frustrated noise, asks Gideon, "I assume Mick is there?" Shifts to check that all her knives are in place as she gets up – not quite double the number she normally carries, because she is giving Mick zero leg up if he does decide to bail on them again.

She almost wishes he would. It would be better than this awful waiting.

"He is," Gideon answers in that same flat voice. Sara suppresses a groan, leans back against the bed to stomp into her boots. She thinks of Mick's face and moves one of her sheathed knives from inside her boot to the outside. Len grabs his gun off his desk. Kendra rolls her eyes with a heavy sigh and states, "You are both hopeless." Sara could almost swear the edge of Len's lips twitches. Almost.

"You really trust him not to flip?" Sara blinks, Len's question surprising her. He's not looking at either of them, fiddling with something on his Cold Gun with an intent stare, but the question is clearly directed at Kendra. Sara tilts her head, glancing at the other woman, who frowns.

"I'm not sure 'trust' is the right word," she answers slowly. "But he doesn't seem like the kind of person who would like working for the Time Masters. Maybe he didn't have a choice before, but now he does." I guess it's time to pick a side.

"And you think he'll choose us." A piece of... whatever his gun is made of drops from the side, clattering onto the desk. Sara does not jump.

Kendra hesitates. "I think he'll choose you."

Len freezes completely, not even breathing for a moment. He slowly, haltingly reaches for the fallen piece of his gun, carefully snapping it back into place and tightening a screw. Sara can tell his hands are shaking. "I didn't, though," he says, almost casually, like Sara can't see the tension in every line of his body. "I left him to die; the Time Masters rescued him. Doesn't seem like much of a competition to me."
You ungrateful bitch.

Sara flinches back, physically, body going rigid.

She could really have done without that particular period of her life on replay, thank you very much. "You didn't leave him to die," she hears herself say, echoed and far away. Len's gaze flicks to her.

"Might as well have."

"Bullshit."

He holds her eyes for a long moment before turning away, holstering his gun. "Doesn't matter."

"Also bullshit."

He gives a growl of frustration, whipping his head up to glare at her with cold eyes she hasn't missed at all. It's only knowing how badly he would take it that she keeps herself from taking a step back, body screaming at her to go on guard. She crosses her arms to keep her hands from twitching, staring him down, because hell if she's going to let Captain Cold or Mick Rory have either of them.

"Oo-kay, let's all just… take a step back, alright?" It's Kendra. Sara narrows her eyes; Len glances at Kendra with an irritated look, but all of the angry tension in him drains as quickly as it had arisen, shoulders drooping with a heavy sigh.

Kendra looks at Sara pointedly, eyebrows raised. "What?" Sara protests. "I'm not doing anything."

"You have murder look."

"I always have murder look." She sees Len smile, the smallest bit, and that finally gets her to relax. "Besides, I need murder look if I have to be in the same room as Mick."

Kendra sighs, crossing her arms. "Can you at least… pretend to give him a nonviolent chance?"

"Why, because he didn't beat Len into more of a bloody pulp than he already did or steal the jump ship?" Len tenses all over again and Sara silently curses her big mouth.

"Because he didn't kill any of us," Kendra says with a disapproving glare that Sara probably deserves this time.

"That's just it." Sara starts at the sound of Len's voice, hollow and lifeless. "He didn't leave me alive out of the kindness of his heart, Kendra. He did it because once I'm dead, he can't hurt me anymore. Can't punish me."

Sara nearly throws up at that, at the twisted look on his face that tells her exactly what that means to him. What Mick must know it means as well.

Before either of them can respond he's out the door, leaving them to trail hopelessly behind.

xxx

the whites of your eyes blackened
with a hardened decay

trying to plead with me
trying to swallow me whole
Chapter End Notes

I'm genuinely concerned depression is atrophying my brain so I really hope this isn't terrible??

End Notes

Comments/kudos make me feel warm and squishy :'

If you'd like to cry and flail with me, I'm on twitter. I'm a frequent and unapologetic all-caps user.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!