Typhon

by ladyofpride, theoneandonlyzoom

Summary

Some say love is bliss. Some would even say it's blinding, which is probably why Barry Allen is caught completely unaware when his secret nemesis finally mounts his first attack...
The man in the threshold

Chapter Notes

A/N: This is a continuation of the short story Methuselah, so you’ll probably want to check that out before you dive head long into this. If you have read it already, then I would like to warmly welcome you back to the madness... ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hunter Zolomon is a man of simple pleasures.

He likes a strong cup of coffee early in the morning and the occasional glass of Malbec in the evening. He likes long, relaxing walks in the park when the weather is cool and crisp, and sleeping in past ten o’clock on the weekends. He likes good food and even better company and can easily spending hours spoiling himself with both. He likes just about everything in his life, actually, although he recognizes that there are some ways in which it could be better. He is an ordinary man with ordinary wants and needs and the good fortune to be supplied with both, and he never would’ve thought it possible that he could somehow get so much more.

And then he met Barry.

Sometimes it’s a little surreal thinking about how much his life has changed in the last few months. For the better, of course. Where once he had drifted through the days in a quiet, if somewhat melancholy, sort of contentment, now he feels as though he’s really living again. Everything is new; everything is fresh, if only because he finally has someone to share his experiences with again.

He only hopes Barry understands how much he appreciates him.

It’s just a little unfortunate he’s too sick to show Barry said appreciation this bright spring morning. Instead, he lies bundled up under the covers on his side of the bed, watching with bleary eyes as his boyfriend sits up beside him. A solitary streak of light streams into the bedroom through a crack in the curtains, giving the younger man a warm glow as he stretches. Hunter is utterly mesmerized by the sight of him. The urge to reach out and touch is overwhelming.

Hunter’s fever is still running a little high though and he doesn’t have the strength to move. He’s completely drained from sweating and trembling and hacking up his lungs almost all throughout the night. From head to toe, his whole body aches. Even his unmentionables.

With a small shudder, he rolls over onto his side, pulls the comforter closer up under his chin, and curls his knees in toward his chest. He feels ridiculously weak for a man his size, but there’s nothing he can do about it and he refuses to whine, least of all because Barry, sweet boy that he is, shouldn’t have to put up with someone in as foul mood as his right now.

Sensing movement, Barry cranes his head to one side and stares down at Hunter’s quivering form. Then he reaches over to brush a stray hair back from Hunter’s sweaty forward and presses his cool fingers against his lover’s face. “You’re not as hot as yesterday. Do you want some tea?”

Mutely, he nods.
Eyes crinkling with delight, Barry smiles at Hunter and leans down to kiss him on top of his head. “You poor thing... At least next week is Spring Break. You won’t have to worry about missing any more classes.”

That’s true. Tina Yoon, his teaching assistant, has been holding down the fort in his absence. Today she’s proctoring the midterm for his class and will probably swing by later to hand over the exams for marking. He can work on that while he weathers this godawful flu, finally put a little productivity back into these long and uneventful days.

Barry kisses him again and then flies from the room in a flash of golden light. According to him, he doesn’t ‘get’ sick anymore, although as Dr. Snow’s cautioned him on more than one occasion, he certainly can. However, suffering a mildly sore throat for half an hour is peanuts in comparison to what most people have to put up with, so Barry might as well be immune to all human diseases.

In any case, it helps having a boyfriend with boundless energy, especially one that doesn’t shy away from you when you’re in poor health. Barry continues to kiss him fearlessly, germs bedamned, and Hunter silently lavishes in his attention.

He can hear the electric kettle bubbling in the kitchen as Barry returns. His hair is standing straight up on the left side, pajama pants hanging low on his hips. Yawning, he looks very much as though he would love nothing more than to climb back into bed.

“Any chance I could convince you to play hooky?” Hunter mumbles into his comforter, hoping against all hope that Barry says yes.

Laughing, Barry shakes his head as he pads over to the en suite bathroom. “Believe me, I wish. Luckily, tomorrow’s my day off. Just hang in there.”

Miserable, Hunter rolls over onto his other side and stares at his digital clock on his bedside table. It reads 7:47am. Normally, he would be well on his way to work right now.

It’s hard to stay miserable while living with Barry Allen though. After his shower, the young man prepares Hunter his tea and whips up his breakfast before carrying both into the bedroom. Then he fluffs up Hunter’s pillows and takes his temperature, mouth perpetually quirked in an easy smile, always exuding a sense of happiness and good will.

Hunter doesn’t know if Barry understands the effect he has on people, how utterly precious he is...

“What?”

Hunter blinks. “Hm?”

“You keep giving me that look,” Barry chuckles. He’s perched on the edge of the bed beside Hunter’s hip as he checks the readout on the electronic thermometer. “Like you’re in a daze…Do you want me to take you to the doctor?”

“No,” Hunter says softly. “I just…I’m really grateful to have you.”

Barry ducks his head and smiles a little harder, so vibrant and bright.

God, Hunter loves that smile...

“Thank you, but flattery won’t keep me away from my work.” Shutting off the thermometer, Barry tosses it onto the bedside table beside Hunter’s tea and water. “Call me if you need anything. And maybe fire me off a message sometime before 5 to let me know what you want for dinner.”
Something inside Hunter’s chest clenches. In a good way. It’s just another reminder of how badly he’s been missing this, the normalcy of living with someone who cares so deeply about him.

He reaches over to give his boyfriend’s hand a gentle squeeze. “I love you, Barry.”

Barry squeezes it back. “I love you too.”

And then he’s gone, flying from the apartment in a wild burst of air and light. Hunter has probably seen him do that a hundred times by now, but it will never cease to amaze him.

Barry will always be a marvel to him.

~***~

He eats his breakfast and then sleeps restlessly for a couple more hours. Then he checks his temperature again: 100°F, on the dot, and he’s still got that insufferable chill.

In a fit of boredom, he deems himself well enough to venture out of the bedroom, although he only makes it as far as the living room sofa before he needs to sit down again. Everything still hurts about as much as before, although his lower back is particularly peeved by the change in scenery, never seeming to be satisfied no matter which way he reclines on the couch. Regardless, he’s too weak to retreat, so he turns on the television and tries to find something other than reality tv and early afternoon talk shows to entertain himself with until Tina or Barry’s arrival.

Unfortunately, there isn’t much.

It comes as something of a welcome surprise then when he soon hears a knock at the front door.

A glance at the kitchen clock tells him it’s almost one o’clock, ample time for Tina to have collected the exams and driven down to his apartment. So he leans his head back against the armrest and, sounding somewhat muffled with his stuffy nose, bellows: “Door’s unlocked!”

There’s a tentative pause followed shortly by someone cautiously turning the door knob. Craning his head to look over the back of the couch as the door finally swings open, Hunter is a little shocked to see neither Tina nor his lover standing there.

Instead, he’s greeted with the sight of a strange man.

For a moment, Hunter assumes it’s the Earth 2 Harrison Wells. Once he adjusts his glasses though he realizes that that isn’t so. The man’s wearing a similar high-collared black coat and he’s got almost the exact same haircut, but he’s a little younger than Harry. Probably closer to Hunter’s age actually.

“I hope you don’t mind the intrusion.” Despite the fact that the door is wide open, the unfamiliar man doesn’t move to enter the apartment. “May I come in?”

A little lost for words, Hunter nods.

The other man bows his head graciously and step insides. Shutting the door behind himself, he politely toes off his shoes and kneels down to place them on the shoe-rack before making his way across the kitchen and into the living room. However, he doesn’t immediately take up a seat once he gets there. Instead, he stands with his hands in his pockets beside the couch, glancing out the living room windows at the glimmering river and the bustling giant of Keystone City beyond it.

Finally coming to his senses, Hunter straightens up a little more in his own seat and says, “Who are you?”
Smoothly, the man reaches into a concealed pocket in his coat and produces a small black wallet. He steps closer so that Hunter can see the shield tucked away inside as he flips it open. “Special Agent O'Shaughnessy,” he replies, although he says it so softly Hunter has to wonder if he heard the other man correctly. “I’m with the FBI.”

Startled, Hunter sits up even straighter.

Sensing his unease, O'Shaughnessy finally settles into the small loveseat adjacent to couch, tucking his wallet deftly into his coat. “Please, don’t be alarmed. I’m here on unofficial business. I just have a few questions for you and then I’ll be on my way.”

Hunter has absolutely no idea what the man is talking about, but he doesn’t imagine an FBI agent would outright lie to him. “Fine…but couldn’t you have called first? As you can see, I’m a little under the weather.”

“I apologize, but in my experience, certain information tends to be misinterpreted or accidentally omitted when shared over the phone.”

Hunter supposes what he means to say that it’s harder for a person to outright lie to an agent’s face than it is to fib over the phone. That, at least, he can understand.

Lower back protesting at the new position, Hunter shifts slightly in his seat in an attempt to get comfortable again. “What is it you wanted to talk about?”

Silently, O’Shaughnessy extends his hand. Between two fingers is wedged a small photograph that Hunter somehow failed to notice earlier.

Confused, Hunter takes the proffered photograph. It’s a small black and white image of Linda Park—or rather, it’s Doctor Light’s mug shot.

Hunter freezes.

He’ll never forgot what happened that fateful night last Christmas, but the details following Light’s arrest are still a little foggy to him. All he knows is that she was only in custody for a day or so before the police realized she was from the other Earth and promptly handed her over to the Flash for ‘deportation’.

“You recognize her,” O’Shaughnessy says, more as a matter of fact than a question.

“She abducted me last Christmas,” Hunter replies, trying to keep a straight face as he hands the photograph back. “And my mother. There was no trial.”

“She was returned to her…place of origin.” In one fluid motion, the photograph disappears into the agent’s coat pocket. “I’m not sure what happened to her following her arrest, but the commissioner assures me every last one of the metahumans who served under Zoom will have their day in court.”

Hunter is already aware of the deal Barry made with Light for her cooperation, but he doesn’t care that she practically got off scot free for his abduction. She’ll be serving a hell of a long term in prison for her long history as a thief anyway.

He’s just happy he’ll never have to see her again.

“I don’t know what I can do for you,” Hunter hopes he sounds indifferent enough to convince the other man that this is a subject he could honestly care less about. “Only the Flash knows what really happened to her. You’ll have to ask him.”
“The Flash answers to no one,” O’Shaughnessy murmurs. Hunter isn’t detecting any irritation or hostility on his part though, so he’s not sure what to make of that statement. “And besides, he’s busy keeping the criminal element of the Twin Cities in check. I’m sure he doesn’t have time for paper work or lengthy interviews with the police.”

Hunter almost snorts at the irony. If only this guy knew what kind of day job the Flash had…

Instead, Hunter clears his throat and says, “According to what the lead detective on the case told me, the Flash regularly touches base with the CCPD to ensure he’s upholding the legality of his arrests. I’m not going to pretend to understand how that works, but if he keeps this city safe, god bless him.”

“I agree,” the other man says, just as softly and inoffensively as ever. Leaning forward, he braces his elbows against his knees and clasps his hands together. “Regardless, I feel my questions would be better answered by you.”

“And what, pray tell, is it you want to know?”

“Specifically? Why you?”

Confused, Hunter tilts his head to one side. “I’m sorry?”

“Why did this ‘Doctor Light’ choose you?” O’Shaughnessy slowly unclasps his hands again, as though presenting the question with nothing but the utmost respect. “I don’t mean to suggest that you somehow know her personally, but I don’t believe she chose you at random. After all, she went to great pains to abduct your mother first in order to lure you into her trap. Why not simply pick someone up off the streets? After all, the Flash isn’t selective in the people he chooses to protect.”

Hunter can feel his heart suddenly hammering away in his chest—so hard, in fact, he’s almost afraid O’Shaughnessy can hear it in the heavy silence of the room.

Like any innocent civilian, Hunter has no desire whatsoever to lie to law enforcement. However, telling the man the truth would be the worst kind of betrayal imaginable given how ardently he loves and respects Barry Allen.

So he tells O’Shaughnessy half a truth instead:

“It was personal.”

For the first time since his arrival, the agent looks mildly surprised. He schools his features quickly though before he asks, “What do you mean?”

“This ‘Doctor Light’ told me she knew my doppelganger. That she…hated him. That she planned on killing me as soon as she was finished with the Flash because the experience would be…cathartic.”

Slowly, O’Shaughnessy nods his head, digesting that little bit of information. Obviously, this is not something he’s heard before. “Did she say who it was you reminded her of?”

“No,” he replies, which is an outright lie. He put two and two together pretty quickly when Light shoved that black leather suit at him and told him what to say to his boyfriend, although there had been a part of him that was still in denial until Barry confronted him at the cement plant. It had been such a cruel plot, one craftily designed to maximize Barry’s suffering if the boy had, in fact, decided to fight and eliminate him…

“Did she explain why she wanted to dress you up as Zoom?”
“No, but I think everyone in Central City knows he’s the Flash’s worst enemy. Maybe she thought it would be funny if he accidentally killed me?”

O’Shaugnessy nods again, averting his gaze downward thoughtfully. After a long, tense moment, during which Hunter hopes to god his bluff worked, O’Shaugnessy raises his head and says, “Thank you, Dr. Zolomon. I apologize again for the intrusion.”

“It’s no problem,” Hunter replies, more for decorum’s sake than anything else. He only hopes it sounds sincere.

Rising from his seat, O’Shaugnessy reaches into yet another coat pocket, this time to produce a crisp white business card. “If you have any questions or if you recall any other details, trivial as they may seem, please don’t hesitate to call.”

Hunter takes the card and gives it a quick once over. Truth be told, he has no intention of speaking with this man ever again. Nevertheless, Barry and Joe will probably find some use for O’Shaugnessy’s contact information, even if it’s only to suss out what exactly the FBI are up to.

Silently, O’Shaugnessy makes his way to the front door and slips his shoes back on. He pauses on the threshold though, hand on the doorknob, and turns back to Hunter. “Just out of curiosity…do you happen to remember what the Flash said to you that night?”

His question honestly has Hunter wracking his brain, because he doesn’t, actually. He frowns, pondering the other man’s question for a moment, and gradually the answer comes to him.

With a nod, he says: “‘You’re safe now’.”

With a small smile, O’Shaugnessy nods too, as though he should’ve guessed as much himself. “Thank you,” he says again. Then he tilts his head toward the door. “You should probably lock this.”

Hunter laughs, because, yeah, he sure as hell should.

He continues to sit there though as O’Shaugnessy finally closes the door. He feels absolutely drained after such a bizarre encounter. His heart is still hammering inside his chest.

He takes a deep breath. Then another. Closes his eyes for a second and just listens to the ticking of the clock in the kitchen, so slow and steady and reliable…

Once he feels a little calmer, he glances down at the business card still clutched inside his hand.

He believes a call to Detective West is in order.

Chapter End Notes

tldr: Hunter's stupidly in love and he just lied to an FBI agent because of it. Tsk tsk.
Very naughty, Hunter...
Dumb as an oyster

Chapter by theoneandonlyzoom

Chapter Notes

theoneandonlyzoom: A bit of a information-heavy chapter, but it will all make sense in the end. I promise ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hunter supposes he shouldn’t be surprised when he discovers this isn’t the first time the FBI have come snooping.

Detective West has dealt with a number of different agents from the most secretive and obscure branches of the government since the Flash’s conception. Some of these individuals are clearly skeptical about the Flash’s motives for going toe to toe with his fellow metahumans, but the mayor of Central City likes him, the Governor of Missouri likes him, and the President of the United States of America really likes him, so nothing ever comes of their ‘unofficial’ inquiries. All the same, Joe calls in a favour with his friends in high places while Cisco gets in touch with a mysterious hacker woman in Star City to assure them that a certain Special Agent P. C. O’Shaughnessy really isn’t on orders to stick his nose where it isn’t wanted. Collectively, they discover the man hails from New York but is currently on medical leave and is probably only in Central City to visit his half sister. O’Shaughnessy isn’t supposed to be working any cases until he’s given the all clear, so his little chat with Hunter was strictly a personal affair.

Hunter isn’t too sure about the reliability of that information, but Joe and Cisco trust their sources like the spoken gospel and Barry doesn’t seem too concerned. Hunter therefore puts his worries to bed and focuses on convalescing in peace, finally finding a reprieve from his infernal flu Sunday morning, just at the start of the University’s Spring Break.

And Barry has the day off.

Gleefully, Hunter secretly conspires to keep Barry in the bedroom well into noon, but Barry kills that plan the second he realizes Hunter’s health has taken a turn for the better. He kisses Hunter the moment he cracks open his eyes and tells him to get ready as soon as he can. Apparently, there’s a surprise waiting for him at S.T.A.R. Labs.

Hunter’s been to S.T.A.R. Labs on a few occasions by now, but no where near as much as the others. He knows he’s always welcome there, of course, but he also knows his doppelganger left a stain on their team’s psyche that will never be washed away. He sees it in the lingering touch of sadness in the corner of Caitlin’s eyes and the subtle side-glances Cisco occasionally throws his way. They’re not suspicious of him, per se, but so long as he shares the face and the name of their dearest enemy, he doesn’t know if they’ll ever feel completely comfortable lowering their guard around him.

Harry assures him this won’t always be the case.

Hunter likes Harry.

And more than just because he’s the true Harrison Wells, the genius not hell bent on destroying
Barry Allen’s life. His own doppelganger was murder about a decade and a half ago when Eobard Thawne’s ill-conceived plans took a turn for the worse, parading as Harrison for all those years and ultimately sullying his reputation beyond repair on this Earth. Harry was therefore no stranger to the team’s suspicions, although he had been given more of a cold shoulder than Hunter when he first started off with them. Their unease will pass with time, he assures Hunter, especially given how affable he was.

He’s half hoping that Harry will be there today, considering how often he drops by to ‘consult’ on matters, but as soon as he steps into the Cortex he knows that isn’t the case. The room is occupied only by Caitlin and Cisco, standing together before a large television screen hooked up to the far wall. It’s muted, but the text at the bottom of the screen suggests that something weird is going on in Gotham.

As Barry drops theatrically into one of the swivel chairs in front of the main console, his other teammates finally take notice of their arrival. Cisco pivots immediately to face them, smirking, giving Hunter a familiar once-over. He’s got a look in his eyes as though he knows something monumental is about to happen, quite possibly because it was expertly crafted by his unequivocal genius.

Hunter will never say it out loud, but he’s pretty sure Cisco Ramon is the godfather of Team Flash. Even though Barry technically owns S.T.A.R. Labs, Cisco is the king of the proverbial castle. These are his labs, housing his equipment, running his programs, to fulfill whatever bizarre purposes fit his fancy. He has the unofficial last say on just about everything, including whatever fashion details make their way into his latest design for Barry’s suit.

Hunter’s not intimidated by Cisco, but there is a part of him that quietly yearns for his approval. He’s Barry’s closest friend, after all. Hunter would love nothing more than for the kid to finally feel more at ease around him.

Given the magnanimous look on Cisco’s face today, Hunter just might be closer to achieving that feat than he initially thought.

Stepping around the main console, Cisco glances quickly between Hunter and Barry. After a beat, he says, “You’re late.”

Hunter’s heart sinks.

Unperturbed, Barry shrugs, still swiveling gently side to side in his chair. “My fault. I’m sorry.”

Miraculously, Cisco takes Barry’s answer at face value and shrugs in return. Then he raises the tablet in his hand and taps something on the screen. “You’re probably wondering why I’ve called you here today.”

“You’ve updated the security system.”

Cisco swings his arms back down hard enough that the tablet audibly slaps against his left thigh. “Dude, do not throw me off my rhythm.”

“…Sorry.”

Giving Barry a look of deepest exasperation, Cisco raises the tablet once more. Than he locks his gaze on Hunter, fixes another smile on his face, and steps forward. “I’ve updated the security system.”

Hunter nods slowly, not entirely sure what that has to do with him. But then Cisco extends his tablet toward him. “All that’s left is to input your information and then we’re done.”
It takes a moment for what Cisco just said to sink in. “My information?”

“Head print, thumb print, retinal scan—the usual song and dance.” Cisco shrugs as though it’s no big deal and shoves the tablet a little closer to him. “Now touch the screen. Palm side down. Try not to smudge it.”

Heels tapping softly against the floor, Caitlin steps up beside her colleague. She’s smiling too. “You should be able to come and go as you please. You are, after all, a part of the team.”

Hunter feels stupidly giddy all of a sudden, although he makes sure it doesn’t show. Doesn’t want to look too eager as he extends his hand and watches as the tablet scans his palm.

“Did we have another break in?” Barry asks quietly.

Once the scan is done, Cisco pulls back the tablet, taps another command onto the screen, and extends it toward Hunter again: “It’s going to take about ten thumb prints, back to back, to ensure it gets the whole surface. Lift your finger briefly between each one.” Instructions delivered, he glances back at Barry. “The alarm went off a couple of nights ago, but the cameras didn’t catch anyone on the premise.”

Pressing his thumb diligently against the screen, Hunter clears his throat and quietly asks, “Have you been robbed before?”

“We’ve had psychopaths bust in here oodles of times,” Cisco mutters, as if that’s the natural thing in all the world, “but we’ve never been robbed.” Then he squints, as though he’s just had the misfortune of realizing that isn’t quite true. “Well, some frat kids broke into the upper offices to steal a couch last year. I’m pretty sure it was pledge week. Joe got a good laugh out of ‘arresting’ them.”

Hunter can’t help but smile. It was a stupid thing to do on the kid’s part, but he can understand why they did it. Breaking into a condemned building once owned by a man who murdered a woman and then framed her husband, only confessing to the crime in a recording that was found after he’d been presumed dead? Sounded like one hell of an adventure.

S.T.A.R. Labs was practically a modern day haunted house.

The tablet beeps once Hunter has completed the second set of scans and Cisco pulls it back again. “Almost done,” he promises, rummaging around in his hoodie pocket with his free hand. He extracts something that looks like an awful lot like a penlight, pulling up the small cord attached to one end before plugging it into the tablet. Then he flashes the small device in Hunter’s right eye. When Hunter jerks his head back, Cisco sighs and takes a step closer, persistent. “Stop blinking.”

Hunter makes an honest effort to do just that, trying to keep his eye open long enough for Cisco to get a decent scan. Thankfully, Cisco lowers the device in evident satisfaction a few seconds later, shoving it back into his pocket before typing something else into his tablet. “There. Now you have free reign of the building, the permission to use any equipment that requires a thumb print, and the ability to lock anyone up in the pipeline.” He smiles charmingly up at Hunter, blinks slowly, then narrows his eyes ever so slightly. “Do not break my stuff.”

“…I won’t.”

Satisfied, Cisco darts off into the nearest side office and settles down before the computer stationed there. Then he yanks a new cord out from one of the desk drawers, hooks the tablet up to the laptop, and gets to work adding Hunter to the system.

Mind reeling from the unusual communion into their private club, Hunter sinks into the empty chair
beside Barry and gives his boyfriend a curious look.

Barry smiles coyly at him in return. “Harry’s broken a lot of his stuff in the past.”

“And he…hates Harry, right?” he clarifies.

Laughing, Barry shakes his head. “God no. He loves Harry.”

Hunter cocks his head to one side in confusion.

For some reason, that only makes Barry laugh harder. “Trust me. He likes you. Ever since Harry had to return to his Earth, Cisco’s been looking for another engineering buddy to talk shop with.”

Finally, Hunter allows himself to smile. “Oh yeah? …You think maybe he’d like to swing by one of my classes sometime? He could be a guest speaker.”

“I think he would jump at the opportunity.”

Hunter glances around the room at all the gleaming white surfaces and state of the art technology. Cisco didn’t build the whole of S.T.A.R. Labs with his bare hands, but he contributed so much it’s conception and continuing success. He truly is a genius in his own right. “Maybe someday he’ll be an instructor himself. There’s a lot the world could learn from him.”

Barry follows his gaze, glancing around the room until his eyes land unmistakably on his red suit, the leather recently cleaned and conditioned since his last run. It’s not hard to see that Cisco cares a great deal about all of his creations.

Barry smiles softly and says, “I couldn’t agree more.”

~***~

Though his plans were foiled earlier in the day, Hunter gives it another try as soon as they get home later that evening, long after Barry saved two dozen people from a fire and then gorged himself at an all-you-can-eat Chinese buffet. The kid is still bursting with energy and it shows in the spark of his eyes as he watches Hunter close the front door of his apartment, almost predatory in his gaze, clearly thinking of satisfying another appetite as they both shrug off their jackets and move into the bedroom.

They’re both terrible at trying to keep a lid on their desires, hardly able to keep their eyes off one another as they wordlessly pull each other close. Their lips connect and there’s a frisson of electricity between them, although whether it’s real or imagined Hunter doesn’t know. Everything about Barry is electrifying: his taste, his touch, his sighs of passion…

Even before Hunter knew Barry was the Flash, he’d always felt that there was something otherworldly about the younger man. He was just too sweet, too perfect, that it had broken Hunter’s heart the first few times he’d seen him at the park, sitting alone on that bench, so sad and forlorn. He’d promised himself then that he would do everything in his power to make Barry happy, and he would continue giving his lover his all until his dying day.

And he knows Barry shares his sentiments. They are so cohesive in their desires and ambitions sometimes that Hunter’s convinced he’s found his soul mate. Even as they entertain themselves with an activity as primal as this, so impatient that they’re screwing on top of the new comforter Hunter swore he wasn’t going to ruin, he feels nothing but the utmost peace. Wrapped up with Barry, his lover’s legs hooked high around his waist, cries muffled against his greedy mouth, Hunter senses that there exists a perfect kind of harmony between them.
They each have everything they could possibly want in life and more.

It’s only when they’re done that Hunter realizes how unusually tired he is, not being quite in peak condition so soon after his flu. As such, he has just enough energy to crawl under the covers after Barry cleans them off, already dozing lightly when Barry joins him in bed. His lover creeps into the crook of his arm and pillows his head against Hunter’s chest, seeming to listen to his heartbeat for a moment before he lifts his face to kiss Hunter fully on the lips.

“I took the wind right out of you, didn’t I?” Barry whispers in the growing darkness.

“I took the wind right out of myself, thank you very much,” Hunter murmurs, grinning. “You just lied there and looked pretty.”

“You know, it takes a ridiculous amount of effort to vibrate certain parts of the human anatomy,” Barry huffs in mock irritation, “So you’re welcome.”

Hunter pulls him down for another kiss. This time it tingles and he knows exactly why. “Thank you,” he breathes when they part.

With a smirk of satisfaction, Barry settles his head back down against Hunter’s chest and sighs. Relaxed, Hunter falls promptly asleep soon after him.

It isn’t too long before he wakes again though. It’s almost pitch black inside their bedroom now and Barry is no longer curled up beside him. Instead, Hunter can faintly make out his silhouette in the darkness as Barry searches for his clothes at the foot of the bed.

“Barry?” he says softly.

“There’s a hostage situation at CC General,” his lover replies, huffing a little as he undoubtedly shimmies into his jeans. “I have to go. I’ll be back soon. I promise.”

Heavy as he feels right now, warm and loose-limbed and still half-dozing in the safety of his bed, his stomach still does an impressive little somersault. It doesn’t matter how long Barry’s been moonlighting as a superhero, Hunter still gets a afraid every time he knows Barry’s about to head off against a criminal. He even still has the occasional nightmare about the day Light almost killed his lover, how Barry’s entire body seized in pain, jerking awkwardly on the ground, eyes wide with fear…

“Be careful,” Hunter murmurs as he listens to Barry moving toward the window. The boy opens the curtains a crack, the dim city light streaming into the bedroom and illuminating a strip of the carpeted floor, just enough for Barry to finally find his shirt.

There’s another spark of light, this time generated by Barry as he shrugs on the shirt and darts back to the bed, leaning down to kiss Hunter. “I will,” he promises. And then, in another burst of light, he’s gone.

Hunter knows Barry will head to S.T.A.R. Labs now, swap his clothes for his regular suit, and then race on over to the hospital. With most robberies and petty crimes, Barry’s gone maybe ten to fifteen minutes, top, depending on how long it takes for the cops to pick up his latest catch. Since this is a hostage situation though, Hunter has no idea how soon Barry will be able to swing in save everyone. He supposes that all depends on whether or not a metahuman is behind this particular crime.

Trying to relax again, Hunter turns over onto his side and stares at the solitary crack in the curtains. He focuses on it until his eyes droop, mind wandering aimlessly as his consciousness slowly drifts away…
He’s woken yet again though, the room still dark. For a moment, he wonders if Barry’s returned, but his apartment is dead silent. Barry would’ve kissed him awake, as he always does, because he knows how much Hunter worries about him.

Hunter shifts into a more comfortable position under his sheets. He feels unnaturally sad and frightened now, the same way he used to whenever he’d wake in the dead of night after Jonah passed away, his sleep-muddled brain momentarily expecting to find his fiancé in bed beside him before reality caught up with him again. Then he would feel a heavy sense of hopelessness settle inside his chest, crushing the tears right out of him.

His heart still aches a little for Jonah from time to time, but his mind is entirely focused on Barry at the present moment. He just can’t shake the feeling that something bad is about to happen. Or is already happening. He isn’t sure why though. He isn’t psychic, after all, and he’s positive someone would’ve called him if his boyfriend was gravely injured. Maybe it’s because he intuitively knows he’s safe inside his apartment while Barry is still out there somewhere doing his duty as the Flash. He’s just too concerned about his lover’s wellbeing to sleep properly. That’s it…

There really is no better explanation.

Eyes half-lidded, his gaze is slowly drawn back to the crack in the curtains. Slowly, his vision becomes more accustomed to the dark. And then he hears it—the softest rustle of clothing, as though someone is trying to move quietly inside the bedroom.

At the same time, he finally sees the faint outline of someone standing a few feet away from the bed. Heart pounding inside his chest, he wonders for a moment if his imagination isn’t simply running away with him, but then the mysterious figure shifts a little closer. It’s then that the shaft of light from the curtain falls on the object in the intruder’s outstretched hand, gleaming wickedly in the darkness.

Even though Hunter isn’t a gun aficionado, he’s seen enough action movies to know what a silencer looks like.

Hunter’s so overwhelmed by terror, he’s can’t move. He’s never felt anything like it before. It’s as though his entire body has ceased to function beyond breaking out in a cold sweat, heart beating so rapidly he can practically feel it inside his throat.

As the intruder takes another smooth step forward, illuminating more of the gun in his hand, Hunter immediately wonders what Barry is going to think when he comes home to find his body cooling in a pool of his own blood. He can already picture how hard Barry is going to cry, and he hates that, because Barry doesn’t deserve to cry anymore.

Hunter’s throat suddenly feels a little tight too. He doesn’t want to go yet, not when his life has finally blossomed into something so rich and beautiful. And he doesn’t want Barry to suffer the same way he did when Jonah died, always waking up in the dead of night, slowly crushed by the reminder that the other side of the bed is cold and empty…

Squeezing his eyes shut tight, Hunter braces himself for the inevitable.

Voice muffled, the intruder says, “Get up.”

Hunter opens his eyes again, still terrified, but now confused on top of everything else. The man doesn’t need him to stand up to kill him. In fact, Hunter’s in the worst possible position to defend himself lying flat on his back.

“Now,” the intruder snaps impatiently.
Hunter’s still paralyzed with fear, but clearly his mouth didn’t get the memo because he unexpectedly blurts out, “I’m naked.”

He doesn’t know why his brain felt it was important to share that little nugget of information, but the man obviously takes it into consideration because he’s dead silent for a long and awkward moment. Then he makes an odd flickering gesture with his gun toward Hunter’s bedside table. “Turn on the lamp and get dressed.”

The simple command seems to break the spell as Hunter is finally able to move his limbs again. He sits up slowly in bed and, sheets gathered tightly around his hips, leans over to switch on his lamp. Then he turns back to his assailant, curious to see what the man looks like, and it is then that he finally notices the other figure in the room, gun drawn, pointed at the masked man standing beside Hunter’s bed.

The fact that Hunter is staring directly at O’Shaughnessy must give the poor man’s position away, because the asshole decked from head to toe in black pivots suddenly to face him, knocking the gun from the agent’s hand. Surprised as O’Shaughnessy is, he still moves quickly enough to grab his assailant’s gun arm before the other man can take aim at him, grappling with the intruder as he’s shoved bodily backward. They stumble together toward the bedroom door until O’Shaughnessy trips and brings them crashing to the floor in the hallway, still fighting over the gun in the intruder’s hand.

Shocked by the sudden change of events, Hunter’s at a complete loss for what to do. Hard as it is to see what’s going on between the two men though, Hunter sees the intruder lift his other arm before he hears the unmistakable thump of O’Shaughnessy getting decked in the face and that finally spurs Hunter into action. He grabs the glass of water he left on his bedside table earlier that morning and chucks it as hard as he can at the intruder.

Hunter isn’t a violent man, but he works out and he’s decently built, and the glass shatters beautifully upon impact with the back of the moron’s head. It’s followed by the thud of O’Shaughnessy apparently landing a hit of his own before the intruder staggers to his feet, lurching out of sight as he makes a break for it. The last thing Hunter hears from him is the front door of his apartment slamming open against the kitchen wall.

O’Shaughnessy sits up suddenly, trying to wipe the blood away from his right eye, which is seeping from a horrendous cut just above his brow. He leans back into the room to snatch his own gun off the floor and then jumps to his feet, taking off after the other man.

Hunter just continues to sit there in bed, stunned.

He has no idea what just happened here…

An eerie kind of silence suddenly descends upon the apartment. He’s still covered in a cold sweat, but he feels numb inside more than anything else now. In fact, even though he reaches for his cell phone, he spends an awfully long time just staring at the screen, having absolutely no idea who to call. The police? Detective West? Barry?

He wants to call Barry first, because he feels as though he’ll go mad if he doesn’t hear his lover’s voice again soon, but a quick glance at Barry’s bedside table reveals that his cellphone is still lying there, charging.

Hands trembling from the recent rush of adrenaline, Hunter therefore texts Cisco instead: How’s Barry?

Cisco virtually always has his tech on hand, so the fact that he replies to Hunter’s message in ten
seconds flat is nothing unusual: **Pretty good. Epic metahuman hide-and-go-seek battle currently ongoing. :) Should be done soon.**

Hunter doesn’t know what else to say. He briefly contemplates sending ‘*Almost died—please send help*’, but instead he just says: **Okay.**

And really, there’s nothing Cisco can do for him except relay a message to Barry, who would then consequentially be distracted during his battle. Hunter should really just call 911 and tell them what happened. He wants someone who’s sworn to protect and serve—and handy with a gun—to tell him everything’s going to be alright now.

Just as he’s about to dial the number though, a light snaps on in his apartment, streaming down into the hallway and the bedroom. Then O’Shaughnessy worriedly calls out to him: “Dr. Zolomon?”

“In here,” Hunter immediately replies. But then he remembers that he isn’t wearing anything and hastily adds, “I’ll be out in a minute.”

O’Shaughnessy doesn’t say anything else, but Hunter can hear him moving around in the kitchen as he snatches his jeans off the bedroom floor and pulls them on. He then quickly tugs a sweater over his head and snatches his glasses off the nightstand before he joins the agent in the kitchen. He enters the room to find O’Shaughnessy sitting at the table, a wad of paper towels folded together and pressed against the wound on his forehead.

“Do you want a ride to the hospital?” Hunter asks.

“No, but thank you,” O’Shaughnessy replies, his voice as soft and steady as ever despite his recent fight for his life. “It’s not as bad as it looks.”

“You’re bleeding an awful lot.” In fact, the whole right side of his face is caked with blood, dry flecks staining the front of his dark green t-shirt.

“Head wounds always bleed like the dickens. Now, please—” The agent gestures to the chair directly across from him at the table. “Have a seat.”

Even though this is his home, Hunter obeys the agent’s command without question, settling uncertainly into the seat. Situated as they are opposite one another, he feels as though he’s about to undergo an interrogation.

Not sure what to say, Hunter waits for O’Shaughnessy to make the first move.

The man stares at him for a long time, contemplating something momentarily. Then he sighs and says, “Barry Allen is the Flash.”

Hunter doesn’t understand if that’s a question or a statement, so he keeps his lips firmly sealed. For the second time tonight though, he can feel his adrenaline levels spiking.

O’Shaughnessy studies his face, clearly waiting for him to give something away. Then he sighs again, pushes his chair back, and makes his way over to the door.

Confused, Hunter wonders if that’s all then, if perhaps the agent just said that on a hunch and was hoping for Hunter to confirm his suspicions. But the man actually stops just short of the door and kneels down, pinching something off the bottom of the shoe rack before he returns to his seat.

Silently, he deposits a small microphone on the table between them.
Hunter’s blood freezes in his veins. “Is that…?”

“I’ve been recording you since our last visit. But I didn’t bug your place because of the Flash. Discovering his secret identity was…an accident.”

Dumbfounded, Hunter picks up the microphone and examines at the devilish little device. Holy shit… “Then why did you decide to spy on me?”

“Because I wanted to learn more about you.”

Still confused, Hunter frowns at the agent. “I don’t understand.”

Clearly his throat, O’Shaughnessy leans back in his chair. “The last time we spoke, you weren’t being entirely honest with me. I had to know why.”

“Why would I lie to you?”

It’s a stupid question and Hunter realizes that even as he says it. The way O’Shaughnessy tilts his head ever so slightly to one side and gives him a blank look pretty much implies he’s thinking the exact same thing.

Embarrassed, Hunter stares back down at the microphone in his heads. Curious, he asks, “Is this still recording?”

Clearly unamused, O’Shaughnessy extends his hand across the table. Hunter drops the mic into his palm and watches as he shoves it into the pocket of his grey track pants.

Before Hunter can muster up a decent apology, O’Shaughnessy calmly continues with his interrogation. “You’re not in any trouble,” he says immediately. “Realizing now who your boyfriend is, I understand you were only trying to protect him. Believe me, I have no intention of sharing this information with anyone. Like I said earlier, this is unofficial business.”

“And why is that?”

“Because someone above me is refusing to let me properly investigate the matter.”

“What matter?”


Despite the fact that that’s his name, the implication of who O’Shaughnessy is talking about sends a small shiver down his spine. He nods in understanding.

“Or Zoom, I suppose,” the man amends, “since you share the same name.”

Crossing his arms, Hunter gives the man a curious look. “I promise to be honest with you now, but can you please explain to me how you knew I was withholding information from you.”

“Because when I was questioning you, you said Doctor Light knew your ‘doppelganger’. You could’ve been repeating a term you heard from her, but you sounded as though that made perfect sense—there being another you. You also sounded completely uninterested in her fate following her arrest. Considering the hell she put you and your mother through, I thought that was a little odd. Unless, of course, you already knew what happened to her.” O’Shaughnessy shrugs. “I planted the bug on my way out because I thought maybe your boyfriend would come home and you would laugh off the experience with him, because, honestly, people always get nervous and act a little weird
in front of an government agent. Instead, you called someone immediately after I left and gave them my information so you could figure out why the FBI was suddenly interested in the Doctor Light case.”

Awkwardly, Hunter rubs the back of his neck. He hopes to god the man doesn’t ask who he called, but he probably will before the night is through.

“To be honest, I was not expecting that at all,” O’Shaughnessy continues. “And I was certainly not expecting your boyfriend to chat about his latest escapades as the Flash at the end of almost every day.”

“…Barry is going to kill me.”

“I doubt that. Given the way you talk to each other, I don’t think he’ll be angry at you for very long. If he’s angry at all.”

“Thank you,” Hunter snorts in disbelief. Then something occurs to him. “How far into the apartment can you hear with that microphone?”

Unabashed, O’Shaughnessy’s eyes flicker in the general direction of the bedroom. “Pretty far.”

Hunter doesn’t know what to say to that.

O’Shaughnessy does. “It’s nothing I haven’t heard before.”

“I can imagine…”

“Look on the bright side: if I wasn’t monitoring you, I wouldn’t have known about your intruder.”

“You’re right, although your reaction time was freakishly fast. Do you just sit outside all night in your car and listen to us chat?”

“Of course not. There’s a gentleman two floors down that’s subletting his apartment to me for the month. I was thinking of collecting a little more information and then confronting your boyfriend about it in a couple of weeks, but then this happened.”

“And the guy who broke in here got away?”

“Yes, otherwise I would be booking him right now.”

“He just hopped in a car and drove off?”

“No. He hopped in a car and his accomplice drove them off.” O’Shaughnessy suddenly has an odd kind of twinkle in his eyes, as though this little tidbit of information is more important than anyone else can appreciate. “I think I know who attacked you.”

Hunter sits up a little in his seat. “Oh?”

“But I’m going to hold off on sharing that story with you until your boyfriend returns. In the meantime, we’re going to talk about you.”

Considering how forthcoming the other man has been with his information so far, Hunter doesn’t really feel like trying to be evasive anymore. “Sure. I mean, I take it you came to question me about the incident with Doctor Light because you thought Zoom might’ve returned?”

“Correct.” Lowering the waded up paper towels onto the table, O’Shaughnessy gently prods his
wound with his fingertips to check if it’s still bleeding. Satisfied that it’s not, he says, “When Zoom was defeated, he didn’t leave a body. Granted, when Det. West wrote his report for the CCPD, he was careful to mention that the speedster was ‘destroyed’ rather than ‘killed’. However, considering the atrocities that man’s committed, I wanted definitive proof… Given your connection to the Flash, you wouldn’t happen to know what really happened to him, would you?”

Hunter gives a small, incredulous laugh, because he knows how crazy this about to sound. “Yeah, I do…”

“And?”

“He was whisked away to the speedster equivalent of hell.”

O’Shaughnessy gives him a blank look. Then he licks his lips and says, “I understand you’ve had a hell of a night, Dr. Zolomon, but I’m not in a joking mood.”

“It’s not a joke,” Hunter replies, wracking his brain for a way to explain this. Then he gets an idea: “Are you religious?”

Cautiously, O’Shaughnessy nods his head. “Catholic.”

“Good. So you believe in the Holy Spirit, right?”

“Of course.”

“Well, all speedsters have a kind of holy spirit of their own that they call the Speed Force. All I know is that it’s the source of their power and that it happens to have a consciousness of its own. In fact, it also has a very small but strict set of rules that all speedsters must adhere to. A speedster can go on a murderous rampage like my doppelganger did and the Speed Force won’t give a damn, but if they break one of the cardinal rules, the punishment is pretty severe.”

“And which rule did your doppelganger break?”

“Barry says he was pretty nuts, so I imagine Zoom got into more trouble than anyone really knows, but he loved making doubles of himself.”

O’Shaughnessy looks completely horrified by that revelation. “Speedsters can…multiply?”

Hunter adjusts his glasses. “Kind of. I don’t really understand it myself, but it’s some kind of time-related trick. When a speedster runs fast enough, they can actually travel through time—which, by the way, is another one of those unforgiveable sins. Well, Zoom liked to travel a few seconds back every once in a while so that he could create a double of himself. He’d have to kill off that double eventually though, because such a disturbance in the universe tends to attract the Speed Force’s minions—and, as it so happens, during his last battle with Barry those minions finally caught up to him. They look awful, by the way. Like wraiths… They literally sucked the life out my doppelganger and then whisked him off through some portal, never to be seen or heard of again.”

O’Shaughnessy blinks. Then he frowns. Hunter is half expecting him to ask for proof, but instead he says, “Okay.”

“…You believe me?”

“Yes. I can always cross examine your boyfriend later, but given some of the remarkable things I’ve seen metahumans do these days, I think I can suspend my disbelief. I am, however, deeply concerned now.”
“Because he might’ve made another double before he died?” Hunter asks—which, of course, is a familiar issue to him. In fact, he’s waiting for the other man make the inevitable assumption that Hunter himself is one such double.

After all, he wouldn’t be the first.

As though reading his mind, O’Shaughnessy smiles gently. “Oh, I already know you’re not a speedster.”

It’s Hunter’s turn to blink in surprise. “Really?”

“Speedsters don’t get sick, do they? At least, not as half as sick as you were last week. I mean, your boyfriend sustains some pretty impressive injuries in battle and yet he’s up and running again within the hour.”

Hunter nods; he can see the logic in that. “So…does that mean you suspected I was Zoom before you came to speak with me last week?”

“Yes.”

“And when you saw how sick I was, you realized I couldn’t be him?”

“Yes.”

“And you deducted that my doppelganger was Zoom based solely on the incident with Doctor Light?”

“I had a hunch that your doppelganger might’ve been Zoom following that incident because, again, she set up a very elaborate trap for your boyfriend and went to get lengths just catch you. I suppose now she probably also targeted you because of your connection to Barry, but I certainly didn’t know that before our first meeting.”

“Then when did you decisively know my doppelganger was Zoom?”

O’Shaughnessy smirks. “Tonight.”

“During the break in?”

“No, at the start of our talk. I told you I was investigating the whereabouts of ‘Hunter Zolomon’ and you just made a vaguely disgusted look and nodded. Then I said ‘Or Zoom’ and you didn’t bother to correct me.”

Stunned, Hunter stares at him for a long moment.

He feels so incredibly stupid…

O’Shaughnessy gives a small wave of his hand, as though to dismiss the matter altogether. “Don’t be upset. It’s my job to squeeze people for information.”

He supposes that’s right. O’Shaughnessy does, after all, work for the FBI…

Hunter sighs. “Bravo… Now, can you tell me how you know so much about the doppelgangers and the other worlds? As far as I’m aware, that isn’t exactly public knowledge.”

“It’s not, but the CCPD had to share that information with us after Zoom’s army invaded our world. By then it had become a matter of national security. We thought for sure the Flash would be
outnumbered and that we would be left to fend for ourselves.”

“I guess it’s a good thing the government has so much faith in the Flash.”

“The majority of us do,” O’Shaughnessy concedes, but then his smile slowly fades away. “However, there are still those who would very much like to know his secret identity.”

“To keep him in check?”

“And to blackmail him,” the agent replies bluntly. “Because let’s face it: nuclear warfare is a messy business, but if you had someone who could swoop in and eliminate your enemies without leaving any unnecessary casualties, they would be the perfect killing machine, wouldn’t you agree?”

He does…

But if such a thing were to ever occur, it would destroy Barry. The poor kid has a hard enough time laying into criminals on the best of days. He can’t imagine Barry being able to live with himself if he were forced to take another person’s life, despicable as they might be.

O’Shaughnessy must already know what’s going through his mind, because he gently says, “I promise you, I have no intention of sharing your boyfriend’s identity with anyone. In fact, I’ve already deleted most of my recordings. You have my word.”

As it stands, Hunter has no reason whatsoever to believe the agent, but there’s nothing he can do about that. And besides, O’Shaughnessy easily could’ve spilled the beans to someone by now, but Barry was still here, safe and sound in Central City, enjoying his anonymity as just another run-of-the-mill civilian...

Hunter nods, but he still doesn’t know how well Barry is going to take all of this. He’s always so worried about someone discovering his identity and coming after his loved ones. After all, it was less than a year ago that Zoom murdered his father just to get a rise out of him.

Lost in thought, he almost forgets O’Shaughnessy is still there, watching him. But at least the man looks sympathetic; almost pained, in fact, as though he’s seen this dilemma played out one too many times before.

Obviously searching for something to do or say, O’Shaughnessy glances around the kitchen until his eyes latch onto the electric kettle beside the stove. “Would you like some tea?”

He thinks he might, so he nods. But as soon as O’Shaughnessy moves to push his chair back from the table, the front door swings open with the most theatrical creak and they both swivel their heads in tandem to face their unexpected guest.

Thankfully, it’s just Barry, hair wind-whipped and cheeks still a little rosy from running. He’s too focused on the scratched-up lock to immediately take notice of the FBI agent. “Hunter, what happened to the door?” he breathes. Then he finally turns his gaze on the two men seated at the table, giving O’Shaughnessy a weird look as he cautiously steps into the apartment. “Uh…hi. What happened to your face?”

“Barry,” Hunter says, “This is Special Agent O’Shaughnessy of the FBI. Agent O’Shaughnessy, this is my boyfriend, Barry Allen.”

“It’s a pleasure,” O’Shaughnessy replies, extending a hand toward the empty seat adjacent to him. “Please, have a seat.”
Barry arches one of his lovely eyebrows and gives Hunter a curious look.

Hunter sighs. “He’s been spying on us.”

The eyebrow drops as Barry fixes the agent under the coldest stare Hunter has ever seen. In fact, given Barry’s menacing stance and the way he suddenly clenches his fist at his sides, Hunter honestly has to wonder if his boyfriend isn’t contemplating dragging O’Shaughnessy halfway across the city and tossing him into the pipeline.

O’Shaughnessy probably understands he’s suddenly in a very sticky situation, given the way he straightens marginally in his seat, but he schools his features carefully as he says, “I know you’re the Flash, but I didn’t come here tonight to aggravate you. I have important information I would like to share with you. That is all.”

“You have five words or less to sell it to me,” Barry replies coolly, the ‘or else’ going unsaid. Of course, Hunter doesn’t know what that ‘or else’ would entail, but Barry is a creative young man. He knows how to dole out punishments without being overtly cruel.

O’Shaughnessy is the one to arch an eyebrow this time, seemingly impressed by Barry’s cold veneer. Then he quietly says, “T & E.”

T and…E?

Now why does that sound familiar?

It must be familiar, because Barry goes uncharacteristically still at O’Shaughnessy’s response. He takes a step forward and grips the back of the empty chair as though for support. “You know who that is?”

“No,” O’Shaughnessy replies, rummaging now for something in the pocket of his sweatpants. He pulls out a small USB device, which he places delicately on the table before Barry. “But I have a good idea who they might be.”

Slowly, as though in a daze, Barry picks up the USB device and turns it over in his hands. Then gradually, his resolve seems to strengthen again, the corner of his jaw twitching in determination as he returns his gaze to O’Shaughnessy.

“I’m all ears.”

Chapter End Notes

**theoneandonlyzoom:** Happy Birthday, Lady! January 6th, on the dot. ;)

**tldr:** Hunter gets his copy of the keys to Team Flash’s crib, is finally well enough to make love to Barry again, and concludes the evening at the business end of a gun. Also, O’Shaughnessy turns out to be more resourceful than Hunter gave him credit for. Silly, Hunter...

As a side note: to be as "dumb as an oyster" means that you never betray a secret.
Immediately following the mayhem at their apartment and O’Shaughnessy’s debriefing, Barry calls an emergency meeting at S.T.A.R. Labs.

It’s just a little past 4 a.m. when Barry delivers first Hunter and then the FBI agent to the facility at superhuman speed, but Cisco Ramon is still wide awake, music blaring from his side office in the Cortex where he’s hunched over his latest project. Hunter figures he must be working off all the energy drinks he probably consumed during Barry’s most recent late night mission.

Cisco isn’t immediately aware of their arrival though, so Hunter leaves it up to Barry to get his friend’s attention, walking calmly into the side office and knocking loudly against the door frame. Cisco inclines his head to one side, only far enough to catch sight of his friend, and then quickly dials down the volume on his music. “Back so soon?”

“Yeah. There’s…been an interesting development with the T&E case.”

“Cool, but first—” Turning farther in his seat, Cisco extends his right arm toward Barry. Astonishingly, it begins to vibrate. “Ta-da!”

Barry looks pretty much the same way Hunter feels in response to Cisco’s incredible feat, which is completely floored. He knows, after all, that Cisco lovingly refers to his powers as his ‘vibe’, but he had no idea the kid could do that.

His own interest now equally piqued, O’Shaughnessy quietly says, “I wasn’t aware Mr. Ramon was a speedster.”

Cisco snaps his head toward O’Shaughnessy, dropping his now-limp arm simultaneously to his side.Suspiciously, he narrows his eyes at the FBI agent. “I’m not… This is just a part of my new hologram technology. See—” He snatches a small controller off the desk with his free hand and extends his right arm toward Barry once again. At the click of a button, it begins vibrating. “Nothing new or unusual here, man. You’re welcome to try it out for yourself if you’d like.”

“I believe you,” O’Shaughnessy replies, completely unfazed. “That’s based off the same tech you used last year when Mr. Allen lost his powers, isn’t it?”

Once again, Cisco’s arm slows to a halt. He gives Barry a blank look, so hopelessly confused by the agent’s blatant comment.

Barry sighs, “He knows I’m the Flash. I spent the last hour bringing him up to speed.”

“A warning would’ve been nice,” Cisco mutters.
Smiling, Barry points to the cellphone lying facedown on the edge of Cisco’s desk. A quick glance at the screen tells the kid what Hunter already knows, that Barry tried calling him twice and fired off a couple of texts in an attempt to explain both who he was bringing to S.T.A.R. Labs and why he was bringing them at this ungodly hour.

When he finally reads the last text, Cisco’s eyes go unnaturally wide. “This is the FBI agent?” He rises from his seat, a little red in the face as he advances on O’Shaughnessy. “What are you going to do now, huh? Arrest us? Shut down S.T.A.R. Labs?”

“No.”

That stops Cisco short, sucking a bit of the wind out of his sails. “Oh…then what do you want?”

“Your help.”

“And why should we believe you?”

“You don’t have to,” O’Shaughnessy replies, using the same soft tone of voice he always does. “But it would be nice if you could try.”

Completely stumped on what to say to that, Cisco purses his lips together and, shaking his head, brushes past the man toward the main console. He takes up his usual seat, front and centre before the many computer monitors and pointedly avoids looking at the other man.

Sensing that he’s likely not going to get anywhere with Ramon, O’Shaughnessy walks into the side office and begins chatting with Barry quietly, hands folded loosely together behind his back. He’d changed his t-shirt and grabbed a sweater before they headed over here tonight, although Hunter suspects that the first thing Caitlin will do once she sees him is offer to stitch up the nasty scar above his eye that he covered earlier with a bit of gauze and nursing tape.

Cautiously, Hunter settles into one of the seats next to Cisco, wondering if the boy will blame him for their exposure to the FBI. Instead, Cisco sighs and says, “He isn’t the first one to figure it out.”

This comes as a complete surprise to Hunter. “What?”

“Barry once made the mistake of taking his hood off in front of a guy known as General Wade Eiling and the guy’s been hovering in our periphery ever since. He was running a covert metahuman operation for a while, which he clearly didn’t have permission to do, and he’s been a disgrace to the US military ever since. I always figured either someone else would connect the dots or he would spill the beans. This was all just a matter of time.”

Hunter licks his lips, conflicted. “I know this is going to sound strange, but…O’Shaughnessy’s kind of nice. He saved my life tonight. I really do think he wants to help.”

“He saved your life?” Cisco asks, although he doesn’t sound all that impressed. In fact, Hunter’s confession somehow only manages to make him look more suspicious. “How do you know that wasn’t just a brilliant ploy to gain your trust?”

He regrets saying that almost the second the words leave his mouth, because he’s positive he’s just undone all the hard work he’s put into trying to gain the kid’s trust—but Cisco surprises him by
bowing his head in embarrassment and saying, “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean it like that…”

“I know,” he replies, feeling equally ashamed. In a feeble attempt to change the topic, he nods at Cisco’s arm. “How did you do that earlier?”

Seemingly grateful for the out Hunter is offering to him, Cisco holds his right arm up for display, showing off the slim black band encircling his wrist. “Like I said, it’s just a hologram. Barry sometimes vibrates to conceal his identity from civilians and I think it’s kind of a waste of energy. I thought he might find something like this useful.”

“That’s pretty amazing.”

“Thanks.” Digging a nail under the edge of the black band, he slowly pries it off. Hunter’s surprised to discover it isn’t a closed loop, but rather one of those one-size-fits-all, slap on, magnetic bracelets that were popular way back in the 90s. “I’m not sure how comfortable he would be with wearing a choker, so I’m trying to figure out if he can get away with wearing it on his arm. At this point, I think it needs a little more juice.”

“Maybe I can help with that,” Hunter offers quietly.

Cisco looks cautiously optimistic. “Yeah?”

“You’re always burning the candle at both ends to help Barry. Perhaps you could use an assistant?”

“You certainly have the education for the job,” Cisco quips, grinning.

Suddenly reenergized, Cisco leans forward to boot up the computers on the main console and pulls up his schematics for the bracelet, poring over his plans for the device with Hunter for the ten or so minute it takes Detective West to arrive, Dr. Caitlin Snow in tow. Barry’s foster father looks as though he’s been up all night himself, probably due to his work at the precinct. Caitlin, on the other hand, is decked out in jeans and a sweatshirt for once, hair pulled back in a messy bun. Bleary eyed and yawning, she looks as though she’s coming down with the same flu Hunter had last week.

Evidently, Joe bothered to read his text messages before swinging by S.T.A.R. Labs because the second he steps into the room he looks O’Shaughnessy dead in the eye and says, “Talk.”

O’Shaughnessy and Barry share a look and then agent reaches into the pocket of sweatpants to produce the USB device he showed them earlier. Stepping over to the main console, he hands it off to Cisco, “If you’d be so kind…”

Cisco plucks the USB device from his fingers and plugs it into one of the computers. Whatever file was on the device opens automatically to display a long series of bizarre names:

* Loki
  Typhon
  Methuselah
  Echidna
  Ruaumoko
  Lelantos
  Mercury
  Yopaat
  Zelus
Eris
Bia
Kratos
Tane
Dolos
Janus
Antaeus
Boreas
Empusa
Parthenope

... 

The list goes on.

“What is all this?” Joe asks, gesturing with a half-hearted wave to the three screens along the far wall, which are still slowly rolling out the exhaustive list of random words.

“They look like mythological and biblical names,” Caitlin replies, stepping around the main console to get a better view of the screens. Then she turns to O’Shaughnessy. “Lazarus—isn’t that the name of the pit belonging to the League of Assassins?”

O’Shaughnessy blinks at her in confusion. Obviously, this is news to him. “Possibly? But these names refer to metahumans. At least the one’s we’ve been able to identify so far. For example, click ‘Typhon’…”

Silently, Cisco does just that:

**Active:** 21st September 2013 – 24th May 2016
**Status:** Unknown
**Location:** Unknown; CC (E?)

“Talk about sparse,” Cisco mutters.

“Some of these files were written in greater detail than others, but the information on this metahuman was kept to the bare minimum for a reason.” O’Shaughnessy replies. “Look at the end date.”

Hunter squints at the file, trying to remember what exactly happened in Central City last May. Of course, he already knows that’s when Zoom brought his army through to Earth-1. Quite a few of his metahumans had been put out of commission back then, but the date itself must be pretty significant to the team because Hunter can tell everyone else in the room just held their breath.

…Oh.

Figuring nobody else will want to say it, Hunter bites the bullet for them: “This is Zoom’s file, isn’t it?”

“That’s right.”

“And it’s short because he’s the ‘T’ in T&E, isn’t he? He doesn’t want anyone in his own organization keeping tabs on him.”

“What?” Joe blurts out, confused by what seems to be an extraordinary leap in judgement. He pushes back the flaps of his suit coat as he plants his hands on his hips, taking on his trademark defensive
Hunter likes that about him though. Joe never makes any kind of effort to hide the fact that he doesn’t always understand what’s going on, but he’s still quick to react when things turn ugly.

O’Shaughnessy, evidently getting a little weary from the night’s long proceedings, crosses his arms and shrugs. “Zoom had an impressive army and he made sure to keep track of his soldiers. In fact, we picked this list up a couple of months ago from one of the Earth 2 metahumans who evaded capture last May. Those of his people that are still at large have been trying to keep the list up to date.”

Barry, who’d been eerily quiet up until now, finally takes a step forward. He looks oddly hopeful. “If they’ve been keeping the list up to date, that means Zoom hasn’t shown up since I defeated him.”

“His status says ‘Unknown’, ” Joe is careful to point out, ever the voice of reason. “Not ‘Deceased’.”

“Because we’re the only ones who know the story of his demise. There’s no trace of him left on this Earth, so of course they don’t know where he is. If he’d made a double of himself, what reason would he have to keep them in the dark for this long?”

“I don’t know—maybe the fact that that lunatic answers to no one? He used to kill his own lieutenants for sport.”

“Then who is ‘E’?” Caitlin inquires. “If it’s true Zoom is no longer around to run his army, who else is there to keep them in order?”

“We’re not sure,” O’Shaughnessy replies, “But ‘Typhon’ is arguably one of the deadliest beings in Greek mythology and the so-called Father of Monsters. The Mother of Monsters, and his partner in crime, is Echidna. If we can figure out whose code name that is, the rest should fall into place.”

“And we’re to assume that each code name is a clue to the true identity of the corresponding metahuman?”

“For the most part, yes.” Momentarily, O’Shaughnessy looks a little uncertain of himself. “The gender of the code name doesn’t always match the gender of the metahuman, such as Lelantos, which is Doctor Light’s alias. And Barry Allen, who should be the fastest man alive, isn’t classified as Mercury. Instead, he’s referred to as Methuselah.”

“Who’s Methuselah?”

O’Shaughnessy smiles. “He’s an interesting character. Oldest man in the bible and the grandfather of Noah. In the Book of Enoch, he’s one of the people who’s warned about the Great Flood. There’s also mention of him having some kind of great sword that vanquishes evil, although I’m not as familiar with the Jewish texts. I suppose, to some degree, the name does suit Mr. Allen.”

Everyone nods silently in agreement, although the bit about Barry being the ‘oldest’ man in the bible reminds Hunter of something else his boyfriend once told him—about how he turned back the clock more times than even he can remember to hopefully return the timeline to it’s original state.

And if T&E somehow knew that, then there’s a good chance they’re keeping a closer eye on Barry than anyone has anticipated.

Stroking his chin thoughtfully, Cisco leans back in his chair and kicks his feet up onto the console. “So…a powerful metahuman who’s pretty much Zoom’s equal? How about Black Siren? Could’ve sworn they were an item when she came to Earth 2.”

“She’s still in prison,” Joe replies.
“And we already know her alias is Parthenope,” O’Shaughnessy adds.

Cisco shrugs. It was worth a try. “Okay then—lets see what ‘Echidna’ has to offer. We’ll just have to play detective tonight.”

O’Shaughnessy laughs under his breath as Cisco leans back forward open the file. They can all immediately see why.

It contains almost fewer details than Zoom’s:

**Active:** Always  
**Status:** Alive  
**Location:** Unknown; CC (E?)

“The hell do they mean by ‘always’?” Joe mutters.

“All other files have a definitive start date, but Echidna’s doesn’t.” O’Shaughnessy elaborates

“So we can’t even guess what Earth they’re from?”

“I’m afraid not.”

“Then this information is virtually useless,” Joe replies, although his tone of voice implies he isn’t necessarily trying to put a damper on things. “So long as we’ve known him, Hunter never considered anyone his equal.”

“We could ask Harry,” Cisco suggests. “He knew ‘Jay Garrick’ before the Singularity. He can also get a hold of Hunter’s old criminal files.”

Joe nods, but his face is still pinched with disappointment, eyes scanning the never-ending list. If anything at all, this information might be able to help them find metahumans who were operating below the radar up until now. Hunter, at least, refuses to see this little meeting of theirs as a complete waste.

Apparently, O’Shaughnessy feels the same way. He remains calm and collected under the team’s scrutiny, still smiling faintly as he quietly says, “Click the asterisk, Mr. Ramon.”

“With pleasure,” Cisco murmurs. When he does, a blue and black digital schematic fills the screen. It looks like a 3D lateral map of some building, although the bottom levels of the structure are far too small for a normal office tower.

Unless, of course, they represent subbasements.

“What is this?” Barry breaths, eyes alight with intrigue. Chasing ghosts and faceless entities is one thing, but kicking the door down to your enemy’s humble abode is bound to get better results.

“A very old and ‘repurposed’ poultry processing plant not too far from the cement plant where you fought Doctor Light. It’s also ‘T&E’s’ headquarters, although the metahuman we questioned said Zoom’s never set foot inside of it. Rather, it’s a ‘research’ facility run by people he trusts.”

“What kind of research?”

“No clue, but I would love to have a peek inside someday...”

Barry grins. “I think I can help you with that.”
Cisco rubs his palms together excitedly. “Now we’re getting somewhere.”

“Just a minute here,” Joe smoothly interjects. Cisco rolls his eyes at the man, but Detective West is completely unfazed by his gesture. “A lot has already happened tonight and I’m not about to let Barry run blindly into another trap.”

“What makes you think this is a trap?”

“Just look at what happened tonight.”

Still not quite up-to-date on Barry’s latest escapade, Hunter quietly asks, “What happened?”

“Only the weirdest thing ever…” Cisco leans forward to pull up a video of said ‘weirdest thing ever’.

It takes Hunter only a moment to realize what he’s looking at is a copy of the security feed from the Central City General Hospital. It’s the recordings from a single wing of the facility, showing the nursing station from various angles and a few empty hallways. Medical personal and a couple of civilians are huddled together around the nursing station, illuminated faintly by the dim emergency lights overhead. Faintly, Hunter can hear someone crying in the background.

Barry stands just a little off to one side of the group on the screen, glancing first down one hallway and then another. In a burst of light, he reappears on another camera, peeking into one of the patients’ rooms before zipping away again.

“Four masked men burst into the CICU ward tonight and sealed off the entire 15th floor,” Joe explains. “We couldn’t get in, so we had Barry run up the east side of the building and slip inside through an open window. But by the time he got there, the men were already gone.”

Hunter’s mind is blown away by the fact that Barry can run up walls. He raises his eyebrows, clearly impressed, which Barry notices. Predictably, his boyfriend averts his gaze and blushes.

Cisco kicks Hunter’s ankle gently under the console. “The hostages said the men corralled anyone that could walk into the nursing station and then booked it down one of the hallways.”

“It was a dead end,” Barry adds, waving his hand at the screen. “But I couldn’t find them anywhere. And then she appeared—”

On the screen, a woman materializes out of thin air, tall, dark, and beautiful, charging Barry from behind.

Barry, of course, dodges at the last possible moment, stepping deftly to the right as she disappears yet again. With a roar of fury, she reappears behind him again, swinging her arms out to strike.

Barry pivots and gets a sharp slap across the face for his troubles. He stumbles back a step, raising a hand to his stinging jaw.

Cisco pauses the video with a snicker.

Barry shoots him a steely look. Then he turns his gaze to Hunter. “Her name’s Shawna Baez. She’s a teleporter. Cisco likes to call her Peek-a-Boo.”

“Did you catch her?” O’Shaughnessy asks, intrigued.

“No, but that’s just thing—she spent most of the fight trying to catch me. She looked…completely out of it. Wouldn’t say a word and was sweating pretty hard. I thought maybe it was because she
was pushing herself beyond her capabilities.”

“How did the fight end?”

“She just vanished and didn’t return. Probably couldn’t handle it anymore.”

“And what time was that?”

Barry shrugs.

Cisco blows up one of the still frames of the nursing station, fast-forwarding the footage until the police stormed into the ward. The timestamp on the bottom of the screen reads 02:31:34.

“That man broke into your apartment around 2:30,” O’Shaughnessy muses aloud.

“Say that again,” Joe snaps, looking first at Barry and then Hunter. “Someone broke into your place tonight?”

Having everyone’s eyes suddenly trained on him, Hunter feels his throat tighten up with nerves. “Uh, well…yes.”

“And then what?”

“He pointed a gun at me and told me to get dressed.” Hunter tries to clear his throat, but there’s a bit of phlegm lodged at the back of it that refuses to go. He just hopes he doesn’t sound as stupid as he feels suddenly. “Agent O’Shaughnessy chased him off.”

“Oh, he did, did he?” Never one to hide his skepticism, Joe stares long and hard at O’Shaughnessy. The poor man just stares back at him in silence, understanding where Detective West is probably going with his inquiries and quite helpless to defend himself.

Clearly able to sense a witch hunt brewing when he sees one, Barry taps O’Shaughnessy on the shoulder and then looks at Joe before nodding toward the office behind him. “Can I have a word with you?”

Joe exhales loudly through his nose and then marches after the other two men into the adjacent room.

Curious, Hunter rises from his seat to follow them—but he’s stopped by a gentle tap on his shoulder.

He turns to find Caitlin smiling up at him. “Cocoa?”

~***~

In the floor just below the Cortex, there’s a blindingly white and fully-stocked kitchen at the far end of the second subbasement right next door to a large room of unused cots, obviously the go-to place for employees stuck overnight at work. He can tell Cisco probably frequents this room often given the sheer amount of junk food he finds in the drawers and the wealth of Star Wars themed cups and plates shoveled into the dishwasher. He’s pretty sure there’s enough twizzlers down here to feed almost every orphan in Keystone.

Caitlin fills an electric kettle with water and flicks it on. While it bubbles merrily on the counter, she reaches into the far back of one of the cabinets and rummages around until she finds an old canister of hot chocolate mix.

“I love cocoa,” she mumbles as she then searches for two appropriately sized mugs above the sink.
She produces one of the standard S.T.A.R. Labs coffee cups Hunter frequently finds lying around the place and another mug which is large and purple and decorated with a cartoon depiction of Harry Potter holding a glowing wand high above his head. She smiles fondly at it when she sees the picture.

Hunter doesn’t want to interrupt what is undoubtedly a pleasant memory for her, but it bothers him that he isn’t upstairs with the others right now, discussing just what the hell exactly is going on tonight. “Why are we making cocoa?” he asks, trying hard not to sound impatient.

“Because I’ve been craving it all night,” she replies. “And because they’re talking about you.”

“Me?” he asks. “Then shouldn’t I be there with them?”

“Don’t move,” she commands as he makes his way toward the door. Slowly, he turns back around and settles into one of the chairs at the small table in the corner. Once he’s settled, she says, “I need to talk to you about something that we probably should’ve discussed a long time ago.”

Patiently, he waits for her to begin, but just then the kettle beeps and she turns away from him, pulling a spoon out of one drawer to dole a heaping scoop of cocoa powder into each cup. Evenly, she pours the boiling water into the two mugs and then carries them over to the table.

Anxious now, Hunter takes a sip and burns the roof of his mouth.

Caitlin clucks her tongue at him and blows on her cup, waiting for it to cool before she samples it. Smiling after her first sip, evidently pleased with the temperature, she finally continues: “What do you think Barry’s greatest weakness is?”

Hunter shrugs. Honestly, he’s never given it much thought. “I don’t know.”

“Then guess.”

“…Fire?”

Caitlin glances up at the ceiling thoughtfully. “Possibly…but I’ve seen him recover from third degree burns in a matter of minutes. Try again.”

Mildly irritated, Hunter takes another sip of his cocoa. It’s cooler this time. Better. “I really don’t know… His heart, maybe?”

“There you go!” she chirps, startling him. “As a speedster, Barry would be indestructible if it wasn’t for his heart. Just look at your doppelganger…Did you know he conquered whole other worlds before coming to our Earth?”

Surprised, Hunter shakes his head.

“He liked playing games though, and that’s what tripped him up. He enjoyed being both the hero and the villain. Enjoyed toying with Harry. And Barry. He said he was going to keep Barry like a trophy after he was done destroying all the other worlds.” Something dark passes over Caitlin’s eyes as she says that, gaze slowly dropping to her cocoa. “He wanted to be both feared and adored. I think that’s the only reason he didn’t kill us all outright.”

Unsettled by the current course of their conversation, Hunter shifts uneasily in his seat. “Uh…are you okay?”

“Hm?” She glances up at him, seemingly shaken from her reverie. “Yes. I was just thinking about
how stupid love can make a person. Like Barry. He fell in love with you even though he knew he shouldn’t have and now your life’s in danger.”

“And I don’t regret his decision for a minute,” Hunter snaps. He’d been made aware of the many dangers of staying with Barry the night he first learned his boyfriend was the Flash. This whole situation, in a way, was inevitable.

“Good, because Barry deserves to be loved. But that’s just my point.” She picks up her mug with one hand again and tilts it to one side, idly watching the cocoa slosh around inside the cup. Barry loves you and now Zoom’s army knows that. If Barry wants to defeat them, he’s going to have to get you out of the way first.”

“I’m not leaving.”

“And that—” she says, punctuating that last word with a small jab of her finger with her other hand at his face, “—is what I wanted to talk to you about.”

Hunter leans back in his chair, annoyed. Clearly, she isn’t feeling well tonight and it shows. She seems more erratic than usual. “I’m sorry, but I’m not going anywhere. I don’t care what you say.”

Sighing, Caitlin sets her cup of cocoa down on the table heavily and rises to her feet. Her eyes flash wildly for a second in the dim light of the make-shift kitchen. They almost look blue with the way she tilts her head, but Hunter doesn’t have long to ponder the peculiarity of that optical illusion as she suddenly steps around the corner of the table and slaps him so hard she almost knocks him out of his chair.

Hunter’s glasses are knocked askew by the blow. He adjusts them as he staggers to his feet, face stinging from the hit. He hasn’t been slapped in the face since high school and even that was nothing in comparison to this.

He had no idea Dr. Caitlin Snow had it in her.

“What the hell?” he spits, pushing his chair aside so he can take a defensive step back. Quietly, she advances.

“I’m turning you over to them,” she replies, voice low and even. “Come quietly and I promise not to hurt you again.”

“No.”

She arches an eyebrow at his feeble response, the corner of her lip curling into a mirthless smile. “Then fight me.”

Hunter takes a deep breath, balking at the very thought. He’s never hit a woman before.

“No?” She raises her right arm across her chest, preparing to backhand him.

Hunter continues inching away from her, but eventually he ends up bumping into the wall.

There’s nowhere left for him to go.

Caitlin suddenly halts in her advance. Then she lowers her arm and slowly returns to her seat.

Once settled, she sighs and says, “Sit down.”

Not trusting her, Hunter stays right where he is. But Caitlin ignores him. She closes her eyes and
takes a deep breath, exhaling slowly between her pale lips. Apparently, he’s aroused in her something she’s having trouble shoving back inside its box tonight.

After an awkward moment of just standing there, staring at her, Hunter cautiously returns to his seat. When he does, she finally opens her eyes and says, “When Doctor Light advanced on you, you couldn’t hit her either.”

“I almost knocked her out with a steel pipe,” Hunter mutters.

“At the start of the fight, yes, because she was going to kill Barry. But when she turned on you later, you didn’t defend yourself.”

Weakly, Hunter shrugs.

“So what if Shawna Baez pops up in front of you right now? Are you going to let her whisk you off to the middle of nowhere and use you as bait?”

“…No.”

“Liar,” she mumbles, sipping her cocoa. “You’re a big softie, which is sweet, but it makes for a lethal combination with your obstinacy.”

“Then what is it you want me to do?”

“Nothing too difficult,” she replies. “When the boys are done discussing their next plan of action, Barry’s probably going to pull you aside and suggest taking you somewhere safe. If you argue enough with him, he’ll buckle under the pressure and let you stay, because he’s a moron like that sometimes. If, on the other hand, you really love him, you’ll just nod your head and agree with whatever he says.”

Hunter stares down at his cocoa for a long, hard moment, focusing on the faint tendril of steam lazily licking the air above the cup. His face still smarts where she struck him and his gut feels like its in a vice, all twisted up with shame and anger.

Somehow though he musters the grace to bow his head and nod.

As much as this pains him to admit it, he knows she’s right.

“Good,” she murmurs, shifting in her seat. “I, uh… I apologize for hitting you. I don’t know why I did that. I think… I think this flu is getting to me.”

“It was an effective lesson,” he replies. “Although it probably helps that I look like a certain someone.”

Caitlin’s eyes flash wildly again, although this time more with fear than anything else. Her hand trembles faintly as she picks up her cup.

Quietly she says, “You are nothing like that monster.”

~***~

With a heavy heart, Hunter follows Caitlin back upstairs to the Cortex. He steps into the room to find O'Shaughnessy and Cisco sitting together at the main console, staring at the schematic for Cisco’s holographic bracelet. Barry and Joe are gathered together at the other end of the room next to a bleary-eyed Hartley Rathaway, poring over the layout of T&E’s base of operations. Faintly, Hunter
can hear the young man say ‘impenetrable’.

Barry notices Hunter first, approaching him immediately, wringing his hands together the same way he always does whenever he’s anxious. Hunter already has an inkling why.

So Hunter cups his boyfriend’s face with both his hands the second he’s within reaching distance and steals a quick kiss. When they pull apart, he asks, “What do you need?”

Barry smiles softly at him, but his brows are furrowed with anguish. He looks so tense. “I need…I need to send you away for a while—but no more than a couple of days. I promise.”

In the corner of his eye, Hunter can see Caitlin leaning against the main console.

It pains him to have to bow out of the game so soon like this, both because he never would’ve thought of himself as a damsel in distress and because he doesn’t want to be away from Barry when he fights this battle. He’ll be worried about his lover constantly, but…

He’s no good to Barry like this.

Hunter strokes his boyfriend’s left cheek with his thumb and sighs. “Okay.”

“Smart man,” Joe says aloud, clearly impressed with his swift capitulation. “We’re going to take you to some FBI safe house outside Central City. We’ll collect you once we figure out who’s behind all this nonsense.”

Hunter’s only half listening to the other man. Barry suddenly looks so relaxed and Hunter’s heart feels lighter because of it.

Barry steals the next kiss. “Thank you.”

“I love you,” Hunter mumbles, commending his lover’s face to memory, his eyes, his smile, his perfectly pointed nose, as he tries to ignore the terrible weight that suddenly returns to his chest. He’s lost one lover already, but this one is resilient beyond imagination.

Barry’s going to find the heart of this organization and stomp it into the ground.

Hunter knows he will.

He’s sorely tempted to kiss Barry again, but then Joe’s pager buzzes in his pocket and the man whips it out sternly, face darkening as he reads the message.

Barry pulls away from Hunter to glance at the pager. “What is it?”

“Another hostage situation.”

“Let me see the address.” Barry grabs the pager before Joe even has a chance to extend it to him, muttering the location under his breath before he disappears in a brilliant flash of golden light. He reappears suddenly in front of Hunter, this time decked out in his signature red suit. “I think O’Shaughnessy should take you now.”

“But—” O’Shaughnessy begins.

“Stay out of trouble,” Barry continues, undeterred.

“Same to you,” Hunter chuckles.
And then, just like that, Barry vanishes into the night, Hunter’s lips tingling from yet another stolen kiss.

Joe nods sagely at him and then brushes past him at a sprint, already dialing someone on his phone to let them know he’s on the way.

That terrible weight drops suddenly into the pit of Hunter’s stomach, warm and noisome in a way that makes him feel vaguely sick.

But there’s nothing he can do about it.

~***~

O’Shaughnessy does not look pleased.

And because of that, Cisco looks offended. “What?”

“If Zoom’s organization knows where Barry lives, they probably already know he operates out of S.T.A.R. Labs,” the agent mutters, eyeing the large white utility van with dismay. And Hunter knows why. In the deserted streets of Central City at this hour of the night, they’re going to stick out like a sore thumb. “If they’re monitoring the facility, they’re going to have no trouble at all tracking us.”

“Dude, it’s the only vehicle in the lot with a full tank of gas. Caitlin caught a ride here with Joe, and Hartley biked. Can’t you just call an agent friend to come pick us up?”

“First of all, I’m not supposed to be on active duty,” O’Shaughnessy mutters, holding his hands out for the keys. Agitation aside, he knows this is the best they can do. “Secondly, no one is going to help me unless I explain to them why Dr. Zolomon needs protection, and I think we can all agree you don’t want anyone knowing the real reason behind that.”

Cisco shrugs helplessly, then walks around to the back of the van, climbing in as Hunter and O’Shaughnessy share a brief look.

Curious, Hunter asks, “What were you going to tell Barry before he ran off?”

“I was going to suggest that he take you to the safe house, since the chances of someone intercepting him would be next to nil.”

“Oh.” Actually, that probably would’ve been a better idea. “So, do I get to pick any of my stuff up first or are we headed straight to the safe house?”

O’Shaughnessy gives him a small look of pity. “I’m sorry, but we already know they’re monitoring your apartment. Besides, the fewer stops we make, the better. Once you’ve settled in, I’ll pop out to grab you a few essentials.”

“It can’t be helped,” Hunter shrugs. Then he climbs into the passenger seat of the van and buckles up as O’Shaughnessy settles behind the wheel.

As he fires up the engine, Cisco crawls toward the front of the van and plops down into one of the two side-way seats behind O’Shaughnessy. “How come you’re not on active duty right now?”

Backing out of the parking spot, O’Shaughnessy pauses momentarily to adjust his side mirror. “I was shot.”
Cisco hisses between his teeth in sympathy. Then he falls silent for a while as O’Shaughnessy navigates them out of the underground parking lot and into the city streets. Hunter can see a red sports car one block down east, hurtling through a yellow light at the intersection like a bat out of hell. The roads are eerily deserted otherwise.

Eventually, Cisco asks, “How painful is it getting shot?”

Quietly, O’Shaughnessy says, “I wouldn’t recommend it.”

“…Is it the worst thing you’ve ever felt?”

Hunter glances at O’Shaughnessy out of the corner of his eyes. Despite his calm façade, the other man looks vaguely pained by the question. “No, unfortunately.”

“Then what’s the worst thing you’ve ever felt?”

As the light ahead changes, O’Shaughnessy continues onward. He steals a curious glance at Hunter, clearly confused by Cisco’s line of questioning.

Hunter smiles. “He talks a lot when he’s nervous.”

Cisco barks out a small, unappreciative laugh. “I’m not nervous.”

“It’s okay to be nervous,” O’Shaughnessy replies cautiously, “but now I have to wonder why you insisted on coming.”

“Because I’m the only other metahuman on the team,” Cisco replies smoothly, whipping out a pair of hand-made shades from his jacket pocket. Hunter watches as he slips them over his eyes with no small amount of amusement. “Just trust me. When the going gets tough, you’ll want me there.”

O’Shaughnessy smirks a little. “I’m feeling better already.”

“Good. Now answer the question.”

O’Shaughnessy sighs. He makes a right at the next intersection and then says, “I was stabbed.”

“How’s that worse than getting shot?”

“I was only shot once; I was stabbed multiple times.”

“All at once?”

“The stabbing? Yes.”

“And where was this?”

“New York.”

Cisco makes a small noise of agreement, as though that answer needs no further explanation.

Hunter smiles and shakes his head, rolling down his window for a little fresh air. He rests his head against the frame of the window, glancing up at the cloudless sky. The stars are bright tonight, the moon a perfectly swollen semi-circle peeking down at them between the skyscrapers as they cruise seamlessly down the road.

Quietly, Cisco says, “I think it’s going to be pretty cool having an FBI agent as a sidekick.”
“Just a sidekick?” O'Shaughnessy asks, bemused.

Hunter chuckles under his breath.

And then his whole world explodes.

~***~

Well, ‘explodes’ might be a bit of an exaggeration. There’s an ungodly amount of noise as his world tips precariously to one side, shards of glass flying everywhere as Hunter smacks the side of his head hard against the door frame. His spectacles are knocked off his face as the van rocks back onto all four tires, head buzzing as he belatedly realizes the air bags didn’t deploy.

It takes him a while to figure out what happened, but he slowly realizes someone just blindsided them on the driver’s side of the van. They’re midway down the street though, which means whoever hit them was pulling out of an alleyway.

Concussed, and still a little confused, he turns his head painfully to one side to see how well O’Shaughnessy is holding up. The man is sitting slumped in his seat, head hanging forward. There’s an awful lot of blood on his face, but he’s blinking rapidly. Soon enough, he lifts his head and says something, but Hunter can’t hear him over the sound of his heart pounding in his ears.

O’Shaughnessy looks at him suddenly and goes rigid.

It’s then that Hunter notices the arm that drops down in front of him as a man leans into the van through the passenger side window. There’s a gun in his hand. It jerks once as he shoots O’Shaughnessy.

The bullet hits the agent square in the chest. But Hunter can’t be sure. He squeezed his eyes shut tight the second the gun went off, and he can’t remember if wearing a bullet proof vest is something Special Agents always do. He hopes that’s true. Otherwise, he doesn’t see how O’Shaughnessy can possibly survive a point blank shot like that.

He isn’t given much time to ponder the other man’s fate though before the passenger door is yanked open and the man reaches in to undo his seatbelt. Hunter grapples with the man for a moment, although the splitting pain in his head mollifies him pretty quickly. And anyway, he isn’t much of a fighter, least of all when he has to bend over suddenly in the middle of the road to vomit, either from the shock of seeing O’Shaughnessy gunned down so mercilessly or from being thrown around viciously in that tin can Cisco calls a van.

He comes back to himself kneeling on the ground, two men standing over him, one of which is trying to hold him upright by his left arm. The other crouches down in front of Hunter with a cell phone in his hand, pulling up the bottom of his black ski mask so Hunter can hear him say, “Your lover wants to say hello.”

Hunter spits a wad of blood in his face.

He blacks out again, waking slowly in the same position, held up limply by the other man as he bitches out the first one for smacking Hunter so hard. And, yeah, if his head didn’t feel like it was about to explode before, it really does now.

“Let’s try that again,” the man with the phone snaps, holding the cell less than an inch away from Hunter’s face. “Say hello to your boyfriend.”

It must be on speaker phone because Hunter can hear something that sounds a lot like someone
panting at the other end of the line, either because Barry’s been running around like crazy or because
he’s terrified. Or both. Given the circumstances, that’s entirely possible too.

Hunter bites his tongue.

After a moment, Barry says, “You’re lying.”

Irritated, the man stands up—and delivers a swift kick to Hunter’s ribs. Hunter makes a horribly
pained noise, but between his bloody lips it sounds a little less than human.

“Jesus Christ,” the man swears. “I have him and I’ll prove it. Come on, boys.”

Hunter fights the sudden urge to vomit again and raises his head. He can hear something being
dragged across the pavement. It’s Cisco, held up between two other men, head bowed forward
against his chest. He’s completely comatose so far as Hunter can tell.

The first man levels his gun at Cisco’s head and then looks down at Hunter. “Speak up. This is your
last chance.”

“No!” Hunter gasps, struggling to breathe. “Don’t shoot him. Please!”

“Hunter?”

“That’s right,” the gunman sneers, holding the cellphone up to his lips. “Now what’s it going to be?”

Barry is silent for a moment. Then he says, “I surrender.”

“Barry, don’t—”

The gunman kicks him again, almost gleefully. To Barry, he says, “Come out from wherever you’re
hiding and walk over to Miss Baez. Once I have confirmation that she’s transported you, your
fuckbuddy and your friend walk free.”

“If you’re lying, so help me god. I’ll—”

“Calm down, sweetheart. I have no reason to lie to you.”

Barry says nothing.

Cisco moans.

Suddenly, a new voice pipes up through the cellphone. “She took him. It’s done.”

“Finally,” the gunman mutters. Turning to the two men holding Cisco, he says, “Drop him.”

And they do exactly that.

The guy who’s only half-heartedly holding Hunter up on his knees releases him as well. Then the
small group makes their way around the van, presumably to jump back into whatever vehicle they
used to ram them, although the man with the cellphone hangs back a moment. He spits viciously at
the ground beside Hunter.

“I met your doppelganger once,” he says. “Nothing at all like you. He was the kind of man a guy
could really respect.”

Seething, Hunter replies, “Out of the two of us, he’s also the only one who’s dead.”
“You don’t know that,” the man snaps. “Nobody knows that. Once he finds out who we’ve snagged, he’ll be back.” He licks his lips, sneering, waving the business end of his gun in Hunter’s face. “And when he gets back, I’m sure he’s going to celebrate long and hard with Barry Allen. He’ll show your boy how a real man does it.”

Hunter’s head swims. He sees nothing but red for a moment.

The man laughs and then wanders off to join his comrades. Faintly, Hunter hears an engine revving up behind him before something that looks a hell of a lot like a hummer darts off down the street, barely slowly before it makes a hard left at the next lights.

Hunter leans forward and vomits once more, just for good luck.

Cisco moans again, then lifts his head up off the ground. “Oh my god…”

“Cisco?” he asks uncertainly, diaphragm still weak from the gunman’s most recent kick. “Are you okay?”

“What the hell hit me?” he grumbles, pushing himself up onto his feet. He gives Hunter’s crumpled form a brief once over. “What the hell hit you?”

Hunter doesn’t even know where to begin.

Trembling, he staggers to his feet as well, fighting down the urge to vomit yet again. He’s sure there’s nothing left to vomit, but he’s been proven wrong before.

Glancing back at the van, he realizes he should probably deal with the most pressing matter first. “They shot O’Shaughnessy.”

“Shit,” Cisco swears, walking kind of awkwardly around to the other side of the van. Hunter fumbles through his coat pockets, searching for his own cell phone when he hears the boy cry out, “He’s still alive!”

Hunter darts around to the other side of the van, peering around the crumpled door half hanging off its frame as Cisco leans into the vehicle, struggling to undo O’Shaughnessy’s seatbelt. The man is as white as a sheet, the front of his shirt stained red, staring blankly at Hunter as though he’s never seen him before.

“Don’t move him!” Hunter shouts, fumbling again for his phone. “We need to call an ambulance.”

“No time. Besides, we have something way better. Just get him out of the van.”

Cisco steps back suddenly and Hunter leans into the vehicle to take his place, not entirely sure what he’s supposed to do or how he’s supposed to do it. O’Shaughnessy’s free of the seatbelt though, so Hunter slips one hand under the man’s knees and the other behind his back, muttering a small apology before he hefts the poor guy out of his seat and pivots to follow Cisco wherever the hell wandered off to.

He’s very weak though, and horribly concussed, so he imagines he must be hallucinating when he turns around to see Caitlin staring at him in utter horror, dropping what appears to be a freshly brewed cup of cocoa. The black mug shatters upon impact with the floor of the Cortex. Hunter almost drops O’Shaughnessy in shock himself when he suddenly hears a whooshing sound behind him. He can see tendrils of blue smoke creeping momentarily in the periphery of his vision before they fade into nothingness…
What the hell?

“Score,” Cisco hisses excitedly under his breath. Then he whips off his goggles and says, “Caitlin, the FBI guy is probably going to bleed to death soon if you don’t hurry.”

She shouts something very colourful at him and then races into her rarely used side office, the one with the hospital bed and the tools of her trade.

Hunter staggers after her, hoping to god this was the right choice.

To be perfectly honest though, he has no idea how any of them are going to make it through the night.

Chapter End Notes

**tldr:** The team has a better understand of who T&E are and where they're operating, but the organization decides to strike again while the iron's still hot. Hunter has to say goodbye. Poor boy.
Cold and dazed and emotionally hebetudinous, Hunter sits on the floor in the hallway outside the Cortex, leaning back against one wall as he stares directly ahead at the other. It’s been a little over an hour since he returned to S.T.A.R Labs, his frenzied mind his only company.

Once O’Shaughnessy had been laid out on the gurney in Caitlin’s office, she pulled Hartley Rathaway into the room as a second pair of hands and promptly kicked Hunter out, instructing him not to leave the facility before she had a chance to look him over. Barry once told him that she was a one-woman wonder when it came medical crises, that she had dealt with bullet wounds in the past. In fact, she had helped Harry when he was shot last year, although his surgery had been complicated by the fact that the bullet remained inside his body. It probably works in O’Shaughnessy’s favour then that the shot went straight through him. Or so Hunter hopes. It all depends on what organs were nicked as the bullet passed through him.

Cisco didn’t care to linger while she worked, disappearing immediately through another portal to collect the van. Presumably, he had driven it back to the S.T.A.R. Labs and was now surveying the damage in the facility’s underground parking lot. Or, he was somewhere else in the building, dealing with the emotional fallout of tonight’s unexpected turn of events in solitude, much in the same way Hunter is now. Otherwise Hunter hasn’t the slightest idea where he could be. And part of him doesn’t really care.

Barry is gone.

Hunter’s been in a state of shock for the past hour, but it’s slowly starting to wear off. He’s now acutely aware of how dry his mouth is; how rapidly his heart is beating inside his chest. There’s also an odd tingling sensation in his fingertips and the back of his neck is slick with cold sweat, almost as though he’s coming down with another fever.

He certainly feels like he’s going to be sick again.

He bends his knees and leans forward between them, taking short, sharp breaths. It’s a fight to contain himself, to pull himself out of his impending panic attack. But he’s a grown man, for god’s sake, and he should be able to deal with this.

But he can’t. Not really. It’s been one whole hour and Barry hasn’t returned yet. And if he hasn’t returned by now, it’s because he’s been effectively subdued, the thought of which brings back the horrible memory of Barry lying on the cold hard ground last Christmas, gasping for air. Hunter knows Zoom’s organization is capable of restraining a speedster, but their methods are less than humane. Wherever Barry is right now, he’s suffering immensely. Alone.
Tears sting at the corner of Hunter’s eyes, but the sensation has the odd effect of pulling him back from the brink of madness. Yes, he’s sad, and yes, he’s afraid, but wallowing in grief isn’t going to help his boyfriend, who, with at least some certainly, Hunter knows is still alive. Zoom’s men want to offer him up to their long-dead leader as a trophy after all, although Hunter isn’t sure how long Barry’s going to survive once they realize Zoom is never coming back.

He raises his head to see Caitlin standing in the threshold to the Cortex, adjusting a fresh S.T.A.R. Labs t-shirt over her chest, her old own likely ruined from operating on O’Shaughnessy. She does not look pleased.

Hunter feels the terrible sensation of dread roiling around inside his gut. He’s no expert, but he knows she shouldn’t be done in an hour.

That can only mean one thing.

Hunter tries to swallow the lump in his throat. “He’s…dead?”

“No,” she mutters, much to his surprise. “He’s a metahuman.”

He stares up at her dumbly from his little spot on the floor, blinking, waiting for further explanation.

Sighing, as though words alone could never hope to describe the absurdity of what she’s just witnessed tonight, she pivots sharply on her heel and marches back into the Cortex.

Confused, Hunter pushes himself up off the floor and follows after her. He bumps into Hartley on his way into her office, who looks about as equally perplexed, although there isn’t a trace of apprehension or worry on his face. The danger, it appears, has passed for O’Shaughnessy.

Sure enough, the colour has returned to the agent’s face. His eyes are closed and his hands have been individually cuffed to the railing that runs along either side of his bed, but his vitals beep at a pleasant pace and his chest rises and fails with an optimistic regularity. His lungs and heart are in good order then.

Appeased with the state of O’Shaughnessy’s health, Hunter furrows his brows and turns to Caitlin. “What makes you think he’s a metahuman?”

Caitlin quirks an eyebrow at him and waves her hand toward her slumbering patient. “Care to guess?” she asks, as though the answer should be obvious.

Still frowning, Hunter moves closer to the bed and gives the man a closer look. The first thing he realizes is that the cuffs encircling his wrists are normal, not one of the sets that Cisco developed for metahumans. Apparently then, Caitlin feels O’Shaughnessy’s power poses no threat to her or anyone else in the building…

The answer comes to Hunter immediately, easily confirmed by the bandage Caitlin removed from O’Shaughnessy’s head. The skin above the man’s brow is smooth and pale, no trace of the deep gash Hunter had seen there earlier.

“He’s already healing?” Hunter asks.

“I barely had to do anything,” Caitlin replies. “He’s not quite as fast as Barry, but he’s certainly comparable. However, I’m not sure if he’s out cold because he’s responding to the drug or if it’s a side effect of his powers.”

“Side effect,” O’Shaughnessy mumbles, rolling his head over to one side, eyes still closed.
Hunter flinches back a step, surprised.

Quietly, Caitlin moves closer to the bed, watching as her patient rocks his head to the other side, fidgeting, evidently trying to rouse himself from his stupor. “Hold still,” she commands him. “The hole in your chest hasn’t completely closed itself off yet. Give it another thirty or so minutes”

O’Shaughnessy cracks his eyes open, half-lidded and hazy as he tries to focus on her. Speaking with the slight rasp and slow slur characteristic of someone waking from a deep and convalescing sleep, he says, “What happened?”

Caitlin glances up at Hunter across the bed, as though carefully piecing together what to say, and then returns her attention to her patient. “Your friends crashed our van and threatened Hunter’s life over the phone so that Barry would turn himself in. Peek-a-Boo disappeared with him about an hour ago and we haven’t heard from him since.”

“No my friends,” O’Shaughnessy mutters. He tries to raise his right arm and frowns in confusion when the limb is jolted to a halt by the cuff encircling his wrist. “Why the restraints?”

“You’re a metahuman.”

“And?”

“Zoom’s notorious for keeping them under his thumb.”

O’Shaughnessy’s blue eyes are still only half-lidded, but there’s a curious glimmer in them as he fixes his stare on his wayward physician. The barest crook of a smile graces the corner of his lips. “Not all of them,” he says softly.

Caitlin stares at him quietly. Something in her posture shifts as she draws herself up straighter, taller…defensive.

Hunter glances between the two of them, wondering if there’s more to their prolonged silence than what he’s seeing on the surface, but then Cisco wanders into the room and leans forward against the smaller railing at the foot of O’Shaughnessy’s bed. This earns him the attention of both Caitlin and the agent. “Then what’s your story?” he asks. “You’re a metahuman who just happens to have a passing fancy for Zoom?”

“No,” O’Shaughnessy replies. “I’m the only agent in the FBI who can survive a direct attack from Zoom.”

Silence ensues again as O’Shaughnessy patiently awaits their next question. While Caitlin and Cisco silently try to figure out what that said question should be, Hunter smoothly interjects with one of his own: “If you’re from New York, how did you get your powers?”

O’Shaughnessy inclines his head toward Hunter, blinking. He’s looking a little more alert now. “I have family in Central City. I was visiting them when this place blew its top.”

“My powers didn’t manifest for a couple of months. Bruises, cuts, scars—everything healed at a normal rate until a liaison with the NYPD stabbed me in the back during a case.”

“What did he do to you?” Cisco asks, clearly intrigued with the story despite himself.
O’Shaughnessy squints at him, confused. “He…stabbed me in the back.”

“Oh,” Cisco says, eyes widening. “Oh…Is this the guy you were talking about in the van?”

“Yes.”

“Why’d he do it?”

“He was paid off by a drug trafficker to take me out of the picture.”

“How freaked out was he when you didn’t die?”

“But I did die,” O’Shaughnessy replies. “In fact, I woke up in a mortuary. Scared the ME, but the FBI was able to keep everyone quiet on the matter, and the records were changed to show that I was instead hospitalized and in critical condition. After a while, they asked me to resume work. In fact, my first assignment was to uncover Zoom’s identity.”

Caitlin tilts her head curiously to one side. “And after the Flash defeated him, the case was closed?”

“No.” O’Shaughnessy shakes his head. “A couple of months into my work, my partners and I discovered that Zoom was building an army, one that we continued to investigate even after his ‘death’. Not only that, but we had enough evidence to suggest that someone inside the government was working with him when he was still alive. It was at this point that one of our informants disappeared and everyone was pulled from the case, effective immediately.”

“Suspicious,” Cisco mumbles.

“Exactly. We were reassigned to other cases and told to get the hell out of Central, but we knew we had to keep going. So, I allowed myself to get shot in the line of duty. I’m still given medical leave to cover up the fact that I’m a metahuman, and I’ve been using this time to find out what I can about Zoom’s army.”

“Besides the list of metahumans and the blueprints for Zoom’s Not-Lair, what else have you discovered?”

O’Shaughnessy’s gaze roams the ceiling and the rest of the room briefly, as though he’d never taken the opportunity to really look at this place when he was here earlier. “Other than your little operation? Not much. I have reason to believe there are quite a few members of both the government and the various intelligence agencies who have cut a deal with Zoom, but I don’t have any names yet. Additionally, I know Zoom operated out of other cities in North America during his brief stay here, but I haven’t been able to pinpoint the exact location of his other bases.”

Zoom took his whole Earth-conquering hobby more seriously than Hunter initially thought, which shouldn’t surprise him since the men who attacked them tonight where human. At least, so far as he could tell. Padding an army with mortal fanatics didn’t sound like too bad of an idea actually. Strength in numbers, after all.

But Hunter can feel something nagging at the back of his brain now: humans and metahumans, soldiers, bases…

**Bases.**

Alarmed, Hunter interrupts their conversation once again. “Do you think they’re going to transport Barry out of the city?”
“Wait,” Cisco interjects, voice slightly pitched with fear. “Why would they move him?”

“Because they know the FBI has the plans to their base,” O’Shaughnessy explains softly. “And tonight they found out I was helping you. If they’re smart, they’ll only keep your friend in Central City as long as it takes for them to figure out how to transport a speedster somewhere else. That is, of course, if they haven’t shipped him out already.”

“Hold that thought!” Cisco cries, whipping out his cell phone and swivelling suddenly to dart back into the Cortex. O’Shaughnessy tries to sit up again, a question forming on his lips, but then he’s reminded of his current predicament by the gentle rattle of his cuffs against the gurney railings.

Panicked, Caitlin motions him to lie back down. “You’re still injured,” she says before disappearing after Cisco.

Finally alone with the agent, Hunter lowers his voice and asks, “Is there any chance you can call on any of your FBI friends now?”

O’Shaughnessy blinks up at him in surprise. “You believe me?”

Exhausted, Hunter shrugs. “Barry’s in their clutches now. Seems kind of pointless to continue your charade if you’re really in cahoots with them.”

Smiling faintly, something like gratitude passes over O’Shaughnessy’s face. But then it slowly falls away. “There’s no one I really trust in Central City right now, and it would take too long for anyone to get here. I’m sorry…”

Hunter nods, throat tight with grief and disappointment.

There’s a very good chance he’s never going to see Barry again.

Feeling faint, he returns to the Cortex where Cisco and Hartley are already hard at work, furiously tapping away at the computers on the main console. Cell phone cradled between his ear and his shoulder, Cisco murmurs a word of assent, apparently following the instructions of whoever is on the other end of the line. He finishes off their conversation with a relieved “Thanks, Felicity,” before he catches sight of Hunter.

He grins.

“What is it?” Caitlin asks, standing with her arms crossed before the main console.

“Take a look for yourself,” Cisco quips with a small nod toward the television screens against the far wall. Both Hunter and Caitlin turn to see what appears to be the video feed of an overhead shot of a large building surrounded by an impressive arsenal of trucks and other vehicles. Difficult though it is to see, there are people milling about between them.

“This is the old poultry plant Zoom repurposed as a ‘research facility’,” the boy explains. “We can use the S.T.A.R Labs satellite to monitor them.”

Hunter’s chest swells with hope, heart hammering against his rib cage. “But how do we know they haven’t transported Barry anywhere yet? Maybe these guys are just packing up the last of their equipment?”

Cisco unclasps his hands, holding them open and apart in a gesture of utter helplessness. “Our friend,
Felicity, is going to keep her ear to the ground for chatter about ‘Methuselah’ or anyone else from the metahuman list, but that’s about all we can do pre-emptively. I’m hoping these guys decide to drive down to Star City, because at least then our allies there could flush them out of hiding. Otherwise… we just have to wait and see what these guys do tonight.”

Just as suddenly, Hunter can feel that cruel swell of hope deflating. They can’t wait. There’s no telling what those monsters are doing to Barry right now.

Lightheaded, Hunter rubs his face. This is so fucking frustrating. He doesn’t understand how Barry does this whole hero business, day in and day out.

Lowering his hands, he says, “O’Shaughnessy?”

“Yes?” the man replies, raising his voice just enough that they can hear him from the adjacent room.

“Can’t we just call the police and tell them a bunch of fanatics are holding a hostage at the old plant?”

There’s a short pause. And then: “Do they look like fanatics?”

Quietly, Cisco zooms in. He squints at the screen and then his face drops. “Uh, actually, they kind of look like regular military personnel. So…no?”

“Best case scenario: the cops show up and someone in charge over there laughs off their reports of a kidnapping,” O’Shaughnessy explains. “Worst case scenario: they kill anyone that comes knocking and then abandon the site posthaste. Either way, it won’t do you any good.”

“It’s the same thing that happened with General Eiling and Dr. Stein,” Caitlin murmurs. “We can’t send the authorities after them. We have to go in on our own.”

Hartley sits up straighter in his chair. “I still have my gloves. And my explosives. I could blast my way in.”

“And then they would shoot you. No, we need to be covert.”

“I can open a portal on the roof of the plant?” Cisco suggests, albeit weakly.

“What about opening a portal in one of the basement laboratories?”

“Someone would sure as hell see that,” he mutters. Rubbing his temples, he raises his voice: “Hey, Patrick—if we brought you along for the ride, how successful do you think we’d be?”

O’Shaughnessy is silent for a long moment. Finally, he says, “I appreciate your trust in my abilities, but a mission of this size is beyond the capabilities of just one agent, with or without your added expertise. If we try to sneak in, there’s a very good chance we’ll all die.”

“Pessimist,” Cisco grumbles, burying his face in his hands.

Hunter doesn’t know what to say. Seeing as this is their forte, he thought they would’ve figured something out by now. He knows that’s not a fair assessment of them, of course, but if all they can do is watch T&E from afar, then…

He knows Zoom is already dead, but Hunter still finds himself cursing the man to the lowest circle of hell. The devil isn’t even here anymore and yet he’s still wreaking havoc on Barry’s life—which is only going to get so much worse once Zoom’s secret organization realizes they’re never going to get
what they really want…

Slowly, as though waking from a dream, an odd sense of calm overcomes Hunter. Aloud, he says, “I know how to save him.”

Three pairs of eyes settle on him warily. They know he has little to no experience in their clandestine business and they’re probably worried that he’s too emotional to truly understand the difficult task that lies ahead of them, but he’s never felt so confident in their presence before. Usually he would defer to their expert judgment, but for once he realizes he has something unique to offer the team.

“How?” Caitlin finally asks, frowning.

“We’re going to give them what they’ve always wanted.”

Cisco laughs, though his nerves still shine through. “Oh yeah? And what’s that?”

Hunter’s surprised they haven’t figure it out themselves yet:

“Zoom.”

~***~

A week ago, he would’ve given anything never to see the godawful thing again.

And yet here he is, adjusting the collar of Zoom’s leather suit. Or rather, the fake leather suit that once stood on display in the Central City Museum’s Rogue’s Gallery exhibition before Doctor Light stole it for her own game of deceit. It’s been sitting in the evidence storage locker at Joe’s precinct since then, long overdue in being returned to its original artist, although thank god for that. Likewise, thank god the woman who designed it paid careful attention to his doppelganger’s overall physical dimensions. The thing almost fits like a glove. The boots are a little tight around his calves, but it isn’t a painful affair. In fact, the only painful part of wearing this suit is that Hunter now, in fact, looks just like his doppelganger.

And he hates it.

He hates the mockery of Barry’s lightning emblem on his chest. He hates the claws sewed into his gloves. He hates the reptilian smoothness of the mask and its jagged mouth—and in fact, he refuses to put it on this last article, not least of all because he couldn’t ever hope to mimic Zoom’s oily eyes, soulless and black, completely void of anything but an utter hatred for humankind. Fortunately, the team agree with him, although only because the man who shot O’Shaughnessy and threatened Barry over the phone obviously knew what Zoom looked like beneath his mask. Upon seeing Hunter in his doppelganger’s suit, there should be no question in their enemy’s mind that he is the man they’ve been looking for.

Or so he hopes.

As he’s fidgeting in his suit, trying hard to remain patient as Hartley and O’Shaughnessy gear up on the other side of the room, Joe and Caitlin silently look him over. Caitlin steps forward at one point to brush his bangs aside and say, “Smirk for me, please.”

Hunter’s as nervous as all hell right now, but he tries to relax his face, curling the corner of his lip in what he’s hopes is an adequate imitation of a smirk.

Given the disappointed look on Caitlin’s face, he isn’t doing a very good job of it. “No. You look too…nice. Relax a little—especially your eyes. Make it look lazy, coy, like you’ve won the game
and your opponent has only just come to terms with that.”

Hunter relaxes his face and closes his eyes. In his mind, he pictures the man with the gun, the one who spat at him and kicked him in the ribs. Except this time, he’s the one on the ground, bloody and beaten, cowering at Hunter’s feet as he begs for mercy.

Hunter’s never entertained such a dark fantasy before. Said ‘dark fantasies’ usually include doing the most deliciously sinful things with his boyfriend in the dead of night. This, on the other hand, is a purely malicious thought, one that he isn’t entirely ashamed of either…

Before his conscience has a chance to slap a little sense into him, he curls the corner of his lip again. With eyes half-lidded, he looks down at Caitlin and softly says, “Did you miss me?”

He isn’t sure why he said that, but it has the desired effect. Joe pulls a weird face and visibly shudders. Even Caitlin, usually so calm and collected, widens her eyes marginally before taking an uncomfortable step back.

She crosses her arms, hugging them protectively against her chest. “That’s…that’s perfect.”

As expected, guilt lances through his heart in the face of their open fear. He drops the charade immediately and shifts his weight uneasily between his feet. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be,” she replies. “I know thinking about him makes you about as uncomfortable as it does us, but you’re going to have to channel him if you want to succeed tonight.”

He nods, but the guilt remains. This is a side of himself he never even knew existed.

And he hopes to god it never sees the light of day again beyond what he has to do tonight.

Cisco, who had retreated earlier to his side office with his vibe goggles, reappears in the middle of their group. “I tried calling both Harry and Jay. They’re both facing a crisis of their own tonight, so it looks like we’ll have to go through with Hunter’s plan.”

“I should be going with them,” Joe mutters, hands planted firmly on his hips.

“This is a suicide mission,” Cisco sighs, “which is why we’re sending Mr. Impervious along for the ride. You’d be up against too many men on your own, Joe.”

“Then what about Rathaway?” Joe argues, jabbing his thumb at the young man. Hartley, who is making a few adjustments to his gauntlets, raises a hand, smiles humorously, and waves.

“Hartley can level the building with one well-aimed blast. He’ll protect Hunter if things get hairy. Besides, Zoom never met him last year, so no one in his organization should know he exists.”

“You’d be surprised what kind of trouble I get into in my free time,” Hartley quips, now pulling on a pair of green-tinted goggles. Next, he slips his hood up over his head, which casts a long and ominous shadow across his face.

Beside him, O’Shaughnessy—still a little pale from blood loss but doing remarkably well, all things considered—pulls on a mask of his own. He’s decked from head to toe in some kind of thin black cloth, which conforms to his lithe figure quite nicely, his only accessory being the heavy utility belt around his slender waist. The mask is made of the same material and covers his entire head, an odd kind of shimmer in the cloth where normally the eyeholes would be.

Cisco waves his hand in front of the man. “Can you see?”
O’Shaughnessy gives them a thumbs-up.

“He’s not going in without a gun?” Joe scoffs.

Caitlin shrugs. “He said he wouldn’t need one. Besides, if ‘Zoom’ shows up with two new metahuman lieutenants in tow, it would look suspicious if one of them had to carry a gun.” When Joe gives her a half-hearted shrug, she walks over to him and places a reassuring hand on his shoulder. “We need you and Cisco to cover the portal when everyone is coming back, just in case one of Zoom’s soldiers runs through instead.”

Slowly, Joe nods, rubbing his mouth, trembling with emotion. Then he turns to Hunter and clamps a hand heavily on his shoulder.

Hunter is expecting Joe to demand his assurance that this crazy plan of his is going to work, but instead the detective says, “You’re a good man.” His licks his lips, voice tight with grief and anxiety, and then solemnly adds: “Try not to die, okay? My boy needs you.”

Numbly, Hunter nods.

Behind the main console now, Cisco claps his hands together for attention. “Now that we’re loaded up, let’s figure out the specifics of our little search and research mission. O’Shaughnessy—” he gestures elaborately for the man to take the floor, “—if you’d please…”

Tugging the mask up past his nose, O’Shaughnessy steps forward, head turned toward Hunter. “We’re going to open a portal in the middle of the yard so that they know we’re coming. Once you step through, you’re going to demand to see Barry. Say as little as possible when we get there. If they start asking questions, ignore them.”

“Ignore them?”

“Just reiterate that you want to see ‘the Flash’. Knowing Zoom, they should realize they’re not going to get any answers until they’ve given you what you want.”

“What if that ticks them off?”

O’Shaughnessy smiles. “You’re the Destroyer of Worlds. What do you care?”

Hunter nods slowly. It makes sense: Zoom could probably kill them all in under a minute. He answers to no one.

Least of all, humans.

After Hunter’s had a moment to commend this information to memory, O’Shaughnessy continues. “With any luck, they’ll bring Barry up to us. If they instead decide to bring us down to him, don’t argue. Barry told me Zoom designed cells to contain speedsters back on his Earth, so he would’ve instructed his men to make a similar set up in their facility. If that’s true, do not enter the cell. Demand that they bring Barry out. I don’t think we’ll have much luck getting him out of there unless we force them to eliminate that obstacle for us.”

“What then? What if he’s drugged and bound?”

“Wave me forward with you to inspect him. Once I have a hand on him, I’ll send Ramon the signal.” He pats the front of his belt, likely because some kind of transmitter is tucked away inside with the other controller Cisco handed to him earlier. “Your friend will open a portal for us while Rathaway covers our backs. As soon as you see the portal, jump through. Rathaway and I will handle the rest.
Do you have any questions?"

Joe folds his arms across his chest. “What happens if the place is crawling with metahumans?"

“To be honest, I don’t think there will be any at the base. Your team took down Zoom’s entire Earth 2 army last year, and the ones that live on this Earth seem to have a healthy fear of the Flash, so much so that they’ll probably never come out of hiding. Additionally, Miss Baez was the only metahuman to lend her aid in Barry’s capture tonight. If they had more resources at their disposal, they would’ve used them by now.”

Joe nods, seemingly relieved by this revelation. Internally, Hunter sighs in relief. He doesn’t know how they would manage this mission if some hot-headed metahuman suddenly demanded to speak with him. His two companions seemed to be more than capable of taking care of themselves, but Hunter is particularly vulnerable to unexpected and volatile shows of force.

After a long, tense silence, during which no one else raises any more concerns, O’Shaughnessy turns back to Hunter. Softly, he says, “Are you sure you want to do this?”

Hunter doesn’t hesitate in his answer. “Of course.”

“As soon as our mission looks as though it’s heading downhill, I’ll send the signal for the portal and push you through. Despite the peril your boyfriend is in, I imagine the last thing he’d want is for you or any of his friends to die for his sake tonight.”

Hunter swallows and nods.

O’Shaughnessy smiles again and pulls down his mask, stepping up beside him. Hartley slowly moves into position on Hunter’s left as everyone else in the room backs away from their little group.

From his spot behind the main console, Cisco raises his arm, stretching it out toward the empty space before the three men. As he opens his hands, fingers splayed, a flicker of blue light appears before their very eyes, smoking, swirling, growing ever larger…

Even though Hunter’s been pulled through one of Cisco’s portals once before, he’s never seen one up close. It’s beautiful in a cold and haunting sort of way, waves of energy folding in and around themselves, growing brighter as the tear in reality gradually widens. A small breeze brushes against Hunter’s face, born from the gaping hole in the centre of the portal, like the faint and chilling gasp one feels at the mouth of a dark cavern.

Hunter clenches his gloved hands at his side. It feels awkward with the claws, but he’s too focused on the incredible sight forming before his very eyes to care. He can see people; can hear them shouting out in alarm, but still the portal grows…

“And!” Cisco hisses urgently.

Not giving himself time to overthink the matter at hand, Hunter leaps forward into the great unknown.

He only hopes they’re not too late.

~*~

Remarkably, Hunter lands on his feet.

He straightens slowly, cautiously, trying to keep the expression on his face neutral as he eyes the
crowd of armed men gathered around him and the portal. Their weapons are raised, but they falter at the sight of him, backing away slowly when Hartley and O’Shaughnessy suddenly emerge on either side of him. And then, with a soft whisper of air, the portal dissipates behind them.

There’s no going back now.

Scanning the crowd, Hunter realizes that upwards of at least forty men have their guns and rifles trained on them. He wishes now that he wouldn’t asked O’Shaughnessy how to talk someone out of potentially shooting him, but it’s too late for that. At least O’Shaughnessy was kind enough to remind him of one thing:

Zoom is a fearless sonofabitch.

Steeling himself, Hunter proceeds forward.

Without question, O’Shaughnessy and Hartley keep pace behind him.

He feels like their solidarity, more than anything, spurs the men into lowering their weapons. In fact, many of them continue backing away, seemingly ready to part before him without question—until one man pushes through to the front of the crowd, stopping just short of Hunter. “Sir?” he gasps, giving Hunter a sharp salute.

Hunter glances at the man’s sleeve. Two silver bands—what is that? Captain? Lieutenant? He has no clue. If his mother was here, she would know. She came from a military family, after all.

Dimly, Hunter realizes that it doesn’t matter whether or not he knows this man’s rank, because Zoom is the one in charge. So, giving the man a brief once over, one that evidently terrifies him, he says, “Where is he?”

“…Sir?”

...

Oh god.

What if Barry isn’t here?

Fighting down this fresh wave of panic, Hunter gives the man a thin smile and says, “Where is the Flash?”

“In the chamber,” the man replies hastily, seemingly relieved that he now knows what Hunter is talking about. “He’s…proving to be more difficult to handle than we anticipated. We were going to transport him to New Mexico tonight, but now that you’re here we—”

Keeping in mind that O’Shaughnessy told him to keep the chitchat to a minimum, Hunter cuts the man off abruptly: “I want to see him.”

“At once,” the man replies, pivoting sharply toward the crowd behind him. Before he can open his mouth, the soldiers move aside, raising their hands to salute Hunter and their Captain as they proceed toward the wide, open hanger doors of the old poultry plant.

Hunter tries to ignore the soldiers lining up on either side of him, but seeing them standing there in their tan suits, arms raised to honour Zoom, reminds him eerily of Nazis. And maybe that’s what they are—neo Nazis, looking for power and glory in the 21st century, being all too ready to take it by force…
Hunter lets a little of his disdain slip through on his face. He’s tired and miserable and surrounded by the most disgusting human beings on the face of the planet. The sooner he gets out of here the better.

Their escort leads them briskly across the yard and into the plant, passing more men who immediately halt in their current tasks to turn and salute him. Hunter ignores them, instead focusing on the fact that Barry is, in fact, still here. And giving his kidnappers hell, by the sounds of it. This gives Hunter hope; energizes him, in fact. If he can just get Barry out of this so-called chamber, they’ll be home free.

Hunter holds onto this thought as the Captain leads them to the far side of the plant toward a large loading elevator. They all step inside together before he slams the horizontal doors shut with a sharp tug and turns to a small intercom built into the far wall. Into the speaker he says, “Lower level 10. Typhon has arrived.”

Lower level 10? Dear god. He knows Cisco can open a portal wherever they want him to, but the thought of Barry being so far underground with these maniacs all around him gives Hunter a small sense of claustrophobia. He could’ve been certain he wasn’t claustrophobic, but suddenly the walls feel as though they’re closing in around him, and he’s…he’s…

“Sir?” the Captain asks quietly, “Are you alright?”

Hartley shifts uneasily beside him.

Hunter blinks and gives the man a blank look. “Yes.”

The man swallows, as though realizing that was a stupid question. Then he glances between Hartley and O’Shaughnessy and says, “Are…either of you Echidna?”

Hunter is honestly surprised that Zoom’s own men don’t seem to know who Echidna is. Or perhaps only the most elite do. Either way, that must mean Echidna is not someone currently in Central City.

Answering for his companions, Hunter sharply says, “No.”

He’s expecting the man to back down now, but he presses onward, seemingly propelled by some unknown fear. “I only ask because the woman you brought with you from your Earth is…well, she’s dying.”

Hunter frowns, wondering how to phrase his next question without sounding as though he knows absolutely nothing about what the man is saying—but O’Shaughnessy saves him from himself by gently shifting his weight forward and brushing the side of his foot up against Hunter’s.

“Sir?” the Captain asks quietly, “Are you alright?”

Hartley shifts uneasily beside him.

Hunter blinks and gives the man a blank look. “Yes.”

The man swallows, as though realizing that was a stupid question. Then he glances between Hartley and O’Shaughnessy and says, “Are…either of you Echidna?”

Hunter is honestly surprised that Zoom’s own men don’t seem to know who Echidna is. Or perhaps only the most elite do. Either way, that must mean Echidna is not someone currently in Central City.

Answering for his companions, Hunter sharply says, “No.”

He’s expecting the man to back down now, but he presses onward, seemingly propelled by some unknown fear. “I only ask because the woman you brought with you from your Earth is…well, she’s dying.”

Hunter frowns, wondering how to phrase his next question without sounding as though he knows absolutely nothing about what the man is saying—but O’Shaughnessy saves him from himself by gently shifting his weight forward and brushing the side of his foot up against Hunter’s.

“Sir?” the Captain asks quietly, “Are you alright?”

Hartley shifts uneasily beside him.

Hunter blinks and gives the man a blank look. “Yes.”

The man swallows, as though realizing that was a stupid question. Then he glances between Hartley and O’Shaughnessy and says, “Are…either of you Echidna?”

Hunter is honestly surprised that Zoom’s own men don’t seem to know who Echidna is. Or perhaps only the most elite do. Either way, that must mean Echidna is not someone currently in Central City.

Answering for his companions, Hunter sharply says, “No.”

He’s expecting the man to back down now, but he presses onward, seemingly propelled by some unknown fear. “I only ask because the woman you brought with you from your Earth is…well, she’s dying.”

Hunter frowns, wondering how to phrase his next question without sounding as though he knows absolutely nothing about what the man is saying—but O’Shaughnessy saves him from himself by gently shifting his weight forward and brushing the side of his foot up against Hunter’s.

“Of course.” Folding his hands neatly behind his back, the man turns toward the elevator doors and waits silently as they continue to descend.

A small eternity later, the elevator slows to a halt, bouncing gently as it reaches lower level 10. The doors spring open on their own here, revealing a shockingly white hallway—and four men, heavily armored and gunned to the teeth, all masked save for one.
Hunter tenses.

The unmasked man—the centre one to the right—takes a small step forward. He’s got platinum blonde hair and pale blue eyes. And he’s smirking as though he’s got an awful secret to share.

The Captain steps deftly off the elevator and then turns, waiting for Hunter to proceed.

Not sure what else to do, Hunter does just that, stopping short of the four men.

The blonde fellow looks toward the Captain and says, “We’ll take it from here, sir.”

“He wants to see Barry Allen,” the Captain replies. “Is the boy still giving you trouble, Greene?”

The man smiles, slow and lazy. “Not at all, sir.”

It’s then that Hunter recognizes his voice.

He clenches his teeth together so hard, his jaw aches. He’d love nothing more than to deck this asshole in the face, but he’s so close now. Just a few more steps and he’ll be reunited with Barry…

It takes a considerable amount of effort, but Hunter forces his muscles to relax. Staring at the Captain, Greene didn’t notice him tensing, but he seems to notice the way Hunter’s shoulders lower into a more comfortable position now, which he interprets as a good sign. “It’s nice to finally see you again, Zolomon.”

Hunter gives him a small nod.

Satisfied with the hand-off, the Captain turns back to Hunter. “Is there anything else I can do for you, sir?”

“No.”

Saluting, he retreats back into the elevator, the doors shutting smoothly behind him.

Once he’s gone, Greene nods toward the other end of the long hallway, escorting their small group forward. It’s completely bare save for the wide double doors at the opposite end. “It took us two tries, but we finally caught him. He’s a formidable foe.”

Hunter glances briefly over his shoulder at O’Shaughnessy, searching for some indication of what he’s supposed to do now. After all, it would appear that, despite only knowing Zoom for a short time, Greene was obviously closer to the man than any of his doppelganger’s other subordinates. Small talk might be necessary with him.

After O’Shaughnessy gives him a barely perceptible nod, Hunter says, “Of course. He’s the second fastest man alive.”

This earns him a laugh from the four armed men. Hunter wonders if they’re also soldier or just mercenaries. Their relaxed attitude feels like they’re more likely just guns for hire than anything else, cruel and efficient in their unlimited freedom.

“I know you wanted to have the first shot at taking him down,” Greene continues, “but for a while there, we were really beginning to wonder if maybe you weren’t coming back…”

There’s an edge of uncertainty to Greene’s voice that Hunter doesn’t like, most of all because he doesn’t know how to answer that question. So instead he returns Green’s lazy smile and continues onward in silence.
Miraculously, Greene takes his avoidance of a direct answer well. Grinning, he says, “I knew you were testing us. Metahumans aren’t always the best at everything, are they?”

“That’s certainly true,” Hunter replies honestly.

“Try telling Dr. Sloane that. She’s been killing herself over that serum of yours; can’t wait to meet Echidna.”

“Well, Sloane is going to have to wait a little longer.”

He really wishes he knew who the hell Echidna was.

Greene shrugs. “I get that. Your top priority is Barry Allen.” He smirks again. “By the way, I finally met your doppelganger.”

“Oh?” Hunter says quietly, irritation spiking.

“What a pushover. I think Allen is only with him because he looks like you.” At long last, they reach the end of the hall. Two of the other men step forward to open the doors for them so they can proceed unhindered into the vast room beyond. “I think you were right—the primal connection is between you and the kid, but good luck convincing him of that.”

Hunter isn’t listening to him anymore though. His attention is focused entirely on the glass cage in the centre of the wide space.

The ceiling above them stretches upward for probably a hundred feet, completely bathed in darkness, while the floor of the room is illuminated by a series of spot lights and the eerie glow of the far chamber. A series of long tables have been set up around it, loaded down with computers and other equipment, manned by the fifty or so men and women milling about inside the room. The nearest ones stop at the sight of him and salute. Hunter waves them off impatiently, passing them by briskly, Greene and his men easily keeping up.

As soon as he’s halfway across the room, he finally spots Barry himself—crouched in one corner of the cell, leaning his head against the wall, eyes closed. The left side of his face is smeared with blood and he looks deathly pale under the unnatural glow of chamber.

Hunter sees red.

And then he sees the angry face of an older gentleman, white beard neatly trimmed, as he steps smoothly between Hunter and the chamber.

“You promised me we would be allowed to study the subject in peace before you removed him from the premise,” the stranger shouts directly into Hunter’s face, “You promised you would not show up uninvited.”

Hunter is so phenomenally pissed with Barry’s current condition that he doesn’t have to feign the undertone of threat in his voice when he quietly says, “I don’t answer to you.”

The man—a General, he thinks, judging by the stars on his sleeve—recoils as though slapped. Greene, who seemed to be as equally surprised by the man’s rude interruption, gives the General one of his lazy smiles.

“Stand aside,” Hunter commands. They’re so close now. He can’t let anyone stop them…

“Why are you here?” The General continues, taking the volume of his voice down a notch in
uncertainty.

“I want to speak with him.”

Hunter thought this answer would appease the man, but nope. He’s still just as red in the face before, as though Hunter had delivered him the greatest insult known to man. “*Your* chamber didn’t work as advertised,” the man mutters darkly. Around him, the men and women manning the computers stare nervously between Hunter and the General. “We had to overlay the frequencies to prevent him from phasing through the walls. We also had to modify the sensors to drain him of his energy. He took down ten of my men and broke close to a hundred thousand dollars in equipment before we could subdue him!”

Hunter can hear what the man is saying, but it just sounds like so many words through the cold haze that settles over him. There’s a rushing sound in his ears as he takes a slow step forward. A muscle in his jaw twitches dangerously.

Softly, he says, “How’s that my problem?”

The General takes a deep breath, chest rising comically as he prepares himself for a second wind.

But then Hunter raises his arm.

Behind him, he can hear O’Shaughnessy shifting as he rests a hand casually on his waist, fingering the small controller tucked away inside his belt.

On cue, Hunter’s arm vibrates.

It’s an illusion, of course, granted to him by the small magnetic bracelet wrapped around the outside of his glove. Thank god Cisco thought to make it black, because no one seemed to notice it before Hunter’s arm became a blur, all eyes now trained on the terrifying limb as Hunter advances.

The General’s mouth clamps shut immediately. He takes a sudden step back, bumping into the corner of one of the tables. He’s still fuming, face a stark red against the whiteness of his beard, but he keeps his mouth firmly shut, glancing frantically between Hunter’s arm and his face, begging for mercy with his eyes.

“Are you going to continue making a nuisance of yourself or are you going to get out of my way now?” Hunter asks. He supposes he should feel guilty about what he’s doing, but this unexpected bought of anger is somehow serving to keep his head clear. He’s never felt this steely level of control in all his life.

Wordlessly, the General steps behind one of the tables, well out of Hunter’s way. He glances quickly at Greene, eyes flashing menacingly, but Greene smugly proceeds toward the glass cage.

Clearly, the two men are not the best of friends.

Hunter lowers his arm as O’Shaughnessy covertly turns off the bracelet and then continues forward, focusing once again on Barry’s still form in the corner of his cell. He would love nothing more than to rush inside and lift the poor boy up off the floor—but, as directed, he instead pulls up about ten feet short of the cage, Hartley stopping just behind him on his left, O’Shaughnessy on his right.

Greene, one hand on the door to the chamber, gives him a curious look. “Don’t you want to see him?”

Hunter plants his feet should-width apart and folds his hands behind his back. He’s not going
anywhere. “Bring him out.”

Greene’s eyebrows creep up toward his hairline in surprise. “Are you sure that’s a good idea?”

In answer to his question, O’Shaughnessy quietly steps off to one side. He grabs a collapsible metal chair from the nearest table and, legs scrapping audibly against the ground, drags it out in front of Hunter. Then he falls back in line.

Hunter glances over his shoulder at the General and then turns back to Greene. “I’m not going in there.”

Connecting the dots, Greene nods. Then he waves his men over.

The men and women manning the equipment closest to the chamber suddenly scramble up from their seats and back away in fear. Obviously, Barry made quite the impression on them the last time he managed to get out of his little prison cell.

As soon as Green opens the door, his three men file into the glass cage. Since Barry is huddled in one of the far back corners, all Hunter can really see is one of the men pulling something from his belt before he kneels beside the young man.

And then Barry springs into action.

He grabs the man by the wrist and somehow uses the guard’s downward momentum to pull himself up to his feet. The man face plants into the glass wall with a sickening crack as one of his companions steps forward, arm outstretched toward Barry. Hunter’s lover is moving at normal speed, but after years of fighting people much faster and stronger than himself, Barry’s clearly picked up some interesting moves. He grabs the man’s wrist smoothly and twists his arm up and around at an unusual angel, causing him to fall over onto the third man lest he break the limb as Barry darts past him toward the door.

Hunter’s heart leaps up into his throat, both because he is in awe of Barry’s integrity and grace in the face of immense danger and because O’Shaughnessy’s plan somehow didn’t account for Barry beating the daylights out of everyone on his way out the door. He supposes the agent will signal Cisco to open a portal as soon as Barry is out of the chamber, and then—

And then Greene moves.

He’s a slippery fellow in his own right, darting into the cell in a blur of motion that startles even Barry, who unfortunately doesn’t have time to change course or retreat. As such, Greene grabs the front of Barry’s red suit without consequence, Barry’s own momentum carrying his feet out from under him as the man slams him bodily into the floor.

Hartley hisses sympathetically between his teeth.

That boiling rage slowly bubbles up to the surface of Hunter’s cool veneer again.

He’s never wanted to hurt someone so much in all his life.

Thankfully, none of the bruised or beaten men deem it necessary to continue the fight. Hitting the ground so hard after expending so much energy already tonight knocks Barry clear out. He lies limply under Greene, who keeps him pinned to the floor as the man who face planted into wall kneels beside him. He snaps something onto each of Barry’s wrists and then clamps them together in front of the young man with a couple of white zip ties.
Cautiously, the men then pull Barry to his feet. The boy’s head lulls forward for a second and then he raises it, blinking in confusion. Quietly, he says, “Ow.”

Greene chuckles. The man who almost broke his arm snorts in derision. And then, between the two of them, they escort Barry out of the cell.

Hartley suddenly leans up close behind Hunter and urgently whispers, “Those are Cisco’s cuffs.”

Surprised, Hunter stares at Barry’s wrists as his boyfriend is dragged toward the chair and unceremoniously dropped into it. The poor kid lets his head fall forward, clearly still dazed from his unexpected fall. And sure enough, he’s wearing Cisco’s metahuman cuffs, because obviously S.T.A.R. Labs is never going to be half as secure as Cisco wants it to be, but how that matters now is beyond him, because…

Oh.

Slowly, so as not to dislodge Cisco’s holographic bracelet, Hunter slips off his gloves.

“What a wild thing,” Greene laughs under his breath, stepping up beside Hunter. “I think you’re in for a good time.”

Hunter is just about at his wit’s end with Greene’s insinuations, but the man’s about to get the surprise of his life, so he just smirks at him and hands him his gloves. “Hold these for me, would you?”

Greene takes the gloves and steps aside, watching quietly as Hunter steps forward.

Coming out of his daze, Barry focuses first on Hunter’s feet and then painfully leans his head back to look up at Hunter’s face. He frowns, confused, and then slowly shakes his head. “No…no, no, no…no…”

Gradually, so as not to startle him, Hunter lowers himself down onto his haunches in front of his lover. Barry just continues to shake his head, eyes now more alert, bloodshot and brimming with tears. He’s so…so afraid. “You’re dead,” Barry breathes in disbelief. “You’re dead. They sucked the soul out of you…”

“He doesn’t have a soul,” one of Greene’s men jests, much to the amusement of his companions. They all laugh in agreement.

“Barry,” Hunter says firmly, reaching for his lover’s hands. Barry tries to jerks them away, but he’s sore and tired, so Hunter catches them on the first try.

Barry’s tears spring free now, creeping down the sides of his pale and bloody face. “Please, don’t hurt my team.”

“Barry,” Hunter says again, softer this time. He tries to relax, tries to do away with his apathy and his anger in the hope that the boy will understand who it is he’s really talking to now. Then he loosens his grip on Barry’s hands, moving his thumbs over the sensors on either cuff. Silently, they spring open.

And Barry sure as hell feels it, frowning at Hunter in confusion, body frozen in shock.

Hunter finally smiles at him and whispers, “It’s time to run, beautiful.”

Barry’s gaze flickers behind Hunter briefly, first toward O’Shaughnessy’s dark form and then
Hartley, eyes lingering a moment longer on the latter as he undoubtedly pieces two and two together. Then he smirks.

Staring back down at Hunter, his eyes flash gold, the lightning coming alive once again in his veins. Then he fists the front of Hunter’s suit with his zip-tied hands and pulls him in for a crushing kiss.

The metahuman cuffs clatter to the ground.

Greene shouts out in alarm.

And then all hell breaks loose.

It starts off with a musical, though somewhat mechanical, trill behind Hunter, which he assumes is the sound of Hartley’s gauntlets powering up. His suspicions are soon confirmed when Hartley subsequently sends a blast-wave toward the cage, which explodes in an impressive shower of glass, raining down on the two men nearest the chamber. Hartley’s gauntlets trill again, this time at a different frequently, obviously so he can bowl people over without killing them. And he does just that as the third man approaches him, knocking the poor fellow backwards in a brilliant, if involuntarily, flip that sends him sprawling on the concrete floor.

Greene, unfortunately, isn’t the kind of man to just stand around and wait for horrible things to happen to him. Before Hunter even has a chance to realize the man is on the move, he catches sight of the lunatic lunging at O’Shaughnessy out of the corner of his eye, hitting the agent so hard and that they both fall head over heels over the nearest table, taking two computer screens and a scanner with them. Greene probably saw him reaching toward his belt, although Hunter wonders if the man really knows what’s in there.

All the same, they’re not getting out of here if Greene manages to break their transmitter.

Frantic, Hunter looks around himself for an answer to his current dilemma. Meanwhile, Barry is racing across the room, immobilizing one after another of the many guards that come flooding into the room. The place is swarming with them now, but between him and Hartley they appear to be tearing them down at an alarming speed, no doubt helped by the mass of frightened people trying to push their way through the solitary door at the far end of the room, the same door through which more guards are trying to get in.

Behind the table, Greene rises to his feet, yanking O’Shaughnessy up with him. He’s somehow managed to pull the FBI agent’s mask off and has fistred the front of his suit, using it to brace the poor man as he slugs him in the face. O’Shaughnessy hits the table on the other side of them with a loud smack, knocking over another set of monitors as Greene whips out a knife.

Furious, Hunter turns around and grabs the nearest object in sight, which just so happens to be the chair, which collapses together neatly in his hands as he steps around the table and swings it with all his might at Greene’s head.

Feet already caught up in broken equipment, Greene isn’t able to step back in time to avoid the blow. He raises his arms reflexively to absorb the brunt of Hunter’s attack, crying out in pain as he drops his knife, curling his right hand in toward his chest protectively.

Apparently, Hunter hit him hard enough to break something.

There’s a gun at Greene’s belt though and he somehow expects the man to go for that next, but instead the man just looks at Hunter, his face a mix of emotion as he gasps, “Why?”

Hunter blinks, his rage momentarily forgotten.
Unbelievably, the man still doesn’t get it.

Feeling elated for the first time tonight, Hunter mimics Greene’s slow and lazy smiles. “It’s like I said before: he’s dead.”

Greene frowns at him confusion. And then realization dawns on him.

At about the same time, O’Shaughnessy rouses himself from his stupor and staggers to his feet. Greene, though injured, whips his gun out fluidly with his left hand and pulls the trigger—but the bullet whizzes between O’Shaughnessy and Hunter as the agent grabs his gun hand and twists it sharply to one side. Then he decks the man hard enough across the face that Greene drops to the ground and stays there, obviously out for the count tonight.

Dabbing gingerly at his split lip, O’Shaughnessy turns to Hunter and smiles. “Thanks.”

Hunter nods.

Scanning the ever-dwindling crowd of guards around them, dented guns and rifles flying through the air as Barry breaks them beyond repair, O’Shaughnessy finally reaches toward his utility belt and pulls the transmitter out of one of his pouches. He hits the switch and waits.

Thankfully, it’s not a long wait. Just on the other side of the front table, between them and the shattered chamber, one of Cisco’s portals swirls to life. O’Shaughnessy then turns toward the mass of soldiers bottle-necked at the door, held at bay by Hartley, and shouts, “It’s time to go, Rathaway!”

Hartley reacts immediately, sending one last blast-wave toward the guards before he pivots sharply on his heel and sprints toward the portal. The soldiers open fire on him as soon as his back is turned, but Barry whisks him out of harm’s way, his golden light dancing across the room before he deposits his friend beside the portal.

As Hartley dives through it, Barry races over to grab first O’Shaughnessy and then Hunter, the latter of which he takes with him through the portal to the safety of S.T.A.R. Labs.

It happens so suddenly that when Hunter hits the floor of the Cortex he just lies there as he watches Cisco seal off his portal. Joe is standing not a foot away from Hunter’s head, gun trained on the portal until it closes completely. Then the detective relaxes his stance and stares down at the jumble of bodies before him.

Dusting off the front of his trousers, Hartley rises to his feet and says, “That’s it. I’m going on more field missions in the future.”

Hunter laughs. And then he gasps, suddenly smothered by Barry’s lips. His boyfriend is half-collapsed over him, kissing him within an inch of his life.

Joe clears his throat.

Reluctantly, Barry pulls away. His face is still pale and streaked with blood and tears, and yet he’s never looked happier. He’s smiling so hard, he honestly looks like he’s about to cry again. “You saved me.”

“Of course,” Hunter replies softly, raising a hand to brush the bangs back from Barry’s face. “I would do anything for you.”

Barry kisses him again.
Before Joe can get antsy, Barry is just as suddenly back on his feet—and is subsequently tackle-hugged by Cisco. Caitlin, meanwhile, wanders over to Hunter and offers him her hand.

He accepts it graciously. Once he’s upright, he quietly wraps his arms around her in return as she tackles him with a hearty hug of her own.

Quietly, she whispers, “I’m so sorry about what I said to you earlier. You’re a very kind and courageous man. We couldn’t have done this without you.”

“Thank you,” he whispers back, trying not to think about the cold fury that consumed him on his journey to free Barry or how easy it was to let that dark energy guide him. It’s a side of himself he would much rather forget existed, so he just closes his eyes and thinks about how this night is finally over—because it is over, technically, judging by the clock on the far wall. In an hour or so, it’ll be dawn.

Pulling away, Caitlin wanders off to fuss over Barry, looking him over with an expert eye despite his protests that he doesn’t need stitches. It’s then that O’Shaughnessy finally steps up beside Hunter, trying to rub the dried blood off his chin under his split lip. “How are you feeling, Dr. Zolomon?”

Hunter laughs. “Cisco is never going to call you anything but Patrick, so can we maybe cut it out with the formalities already?” He frowns suddenly in thought. “Your name is Patrick, right?”

O’Shaughnessy smiles softly. “That it is.”

“Good.”

“Anyway…I was going to congratulate you on a job well done. You did an incredibly brave thing tonight. Executed our plan flawlessly…Most men would’ve buckled under the same kind of pressure.”

Hunter bows his head. “Thank you.”

O’Shaughnessy pats him gently on the shoulder. “Go—get some rest. Tomorrow, we’ll chat.”

“Is it safe to rest?” he asks, wondering what Zoom’s organization has in store for them now. “Do you think they’ll retaliate?”

O’Shaughnessy shrugs. “I don’t know, but I think they realized tonight that they’ve grossly underestimated Barry Allen and his team—you yourself included. Given how you nailed home the fact that they’re fearless leader is dead, I don’t know what they could possibly gain from continuing their program. It’s obvious with what’s happening to that Baez girl that they can’t make just anyone a metahuman.”

Hunter shakes his head sadly. “But now I have to wonder…Do you know of any metahumans with healing abilities?”

The FBI agent crooks an eyebrow at him.

Hunter chuckles at his own stupidity. “I mean someone who can heal other people. The way they talked about Echidna, you’d think their power was a literal arcanum.”

Again, O’Shaughnessy shrugs. “I haven’t met or heard of anyone like that yet, but I’ll definitely look into it. However, I find it strange that Echidna is someone so incredibly important to Zoom that he considers them his equal, and yet nobody knows who they are… Did Zoom never talk about anyone when he was here?”
“Not that I know of. I'll ask Barry later, just to be sure.”

“Like I said, we’ll talk tomorrow. Right now, your boyfriend looks like he could use some sleep.”

Smiling, Hunter shakes his head. “Give him a couple of Cisco’s protein bars and he’ll be running up the walls in no time. He’s incredible.”

Watching the young man chat with Joe and Caitlin on the other side of the room, O’Shaughnessy nods. “That he is.”

The man gives him a friendly pat on the shoulder and then wanders over to Cisco, asking what the boy wants him to do with the suit. Now that Hunter’s standing alone, Barry immediately zips over to his side again, already looking livelier than he had been a few minutes ago. “Can we go home now?” he asks, eyeing the dark emblem on Hunter’s chest. “We need to get you out of this suit.”

“Sure, just as soon as I remember where I put my clothes.” Hunter brushes his fingers against the emblem, sighing. “I know this is probably the last thing you ever wanted to see me wear again.”

“Zoom’s dead; the suit is meaningless.” Barry inches closer to him, staring up at him with an intensity that is all too familiar to Hunter now. Lowering his voice, he says, “I would just really like you to get undressed already so I can reward you.”

Hunter smiles, excited. “Reward me?”

“Well, you are my hero.” Barry finally slips his arms around Hunter’s waist. “And Caitlin said tonight’s mission was your brainchild. You deserve a treat.”

Cupping Barry’s face, Hunter kisses him, nice and deep, with just the barest hint of tongue. “Then let’s go home,” he says breathlessly.

Eyes alight with mischief, Barry hugs him closer to his body and whisks him away into the night, Joe’s shriek about having to return the suit falling on deaf ears.

They’ll return the damn thing tomorrow.

Chapter End Notes

theoneandonlyzoom: We've got one crazy epilogue for you guys up ahead...
The bedroom curtains glow with the midday sun, white and diaphanous against the blinding light, shifting gently with the breeze.

Beside him, Barry stretches under the covers, kicking the sheets down to his waist in protest of the mounting heat. Then he rolls over and hooks a leg over Hunter’s hip, skin slick with sweat, scooting closer to give his boyfriend a wet smack against his left ear.

Hunter flinches, because it’s loud and it tickles, slipping his hand under the covers to give Barry’s naked thigh an appreciative squeeze. “So graceful,” he mumbles, voice hoarse with sleep.

Barry buries his face in the crook of Hunter’s neck and laughs. “God, I’m so tired…”

“But it’s hard to sleep when you’re around.”

“My apologies,” Hunter chuckles. “I guess I’ll just go then…”

Cupping the side of Hunter’s face, Barry draws him in for a kiss. He tastes faintly of strawberries, no doubt the latest flavour of Cisco’s miraculous protein bars. Barry wolfed down at least six of them before passing out last night.

“You’re perfect right where you are,” the younger man whispers against the corner of his mouth.

Hunter smiles. He traces his hand up Barry’s thigh and over his hip, skin warm to the touch, body molded perfectly against his own. Sometimes, he has trouble believing such a lovely creature is his and his alone.

Barry kisses him again, softly. When he pulls away though, there’s a gentle crease to his brow. “I know this going to sound horribly unromantic, but you need to be more careful in the future.”

Hunter blinks in confusion.

Barry sighs. “I’m sorry. I can’t stop thinking about last night.”

“I understand,” he replies, because he really does. Barry is a seasoned hero; Hunter, not so much. “But if I had to do it all again, you know I would.”

Closing his eye, Barry tucks his head back into the crook of Hunter’s neck. Quietly, he says, “The fact that you were able to pull off your little scheme is unbelievable. You’re lucky nobody clued into
“I think the sheer arrogance of everyone in Zoom’s organization sold the show more than anything I did, really. They were so eager to have him back, it probably blinded them to my flaws.”

Barry snorted. “You’re probably right. That mercenary you clocked in the head sounded as though he didn’t have a doubt in his mind Zoom was going to return. For a while there, I thought maybe he was right.”

“He only met Zoom once, but whatever they talked about gave him the conviction to go through with his plans even in his absence.”

Barry hums thoughtfully. “Zoom did have his charms…”

Hunter shifts onto his side, pulling Barry closer by his thigh. He’s always made a point not to talk about his doppelganger any more than strictly necessary, but his curiosity is finally beginning to boil over. He needs to know…

“What was he really like?” he asks quietly. “Everyone tells me I’m nothing like him, but they tend to glaze over the finer details. I know Caitlin loved him at one point; I know you believed he was a hero once…”

Barry reaches under the sheets and covers Hunter’s hand with his own, brushing his fingertips gently over Hunter’s knuckles. “Well…in the beginning, he was nice to everyone on the team. He helped whenever he could, even though he claimed not to have any powers. He’s actually the one who taught me how to generate lightning bolts.” He pauses thoughtfully for a moment. Then, with a soft sigh, he continues. “I think I was just excited to finally have a new mentor. Despicable as Eobard was, he left the team in a lurch when he died. We don’t need parental supervision, but it’s kind of reassuring to have someone who’s older and wiser around to give you advice.”

“So…the other Hunter was actually a decent human being at the start?” Hunter asks. He’s not sure how that makes him feel.

“Yes…and no. I think he would’ve been able to keep the charade up a lot longer if it hadn’t been for Harry. He always needed Harry to steal my powers, but I don’t think he was expecting him to flee to our Earth. That threw him off his game.”

“Why didn’t he just keep his interactions with Harry to a minimum if he disliked him so much?”

“To be honest, I don’t know if he disliked Harry more than anyone else. I’m sure he was annoyed Harry was giving him the runaround, but I think he only argued with Harry as openly as he did to further isolate him from the rest of us. It was just psychological warfare. He wanted Harry to feel as though doing what Zoom wanted was his only option of saving his daughter.”

“What an asshole.”

“Harry would wholeheartedly agree with you,” Barry laughs, raising his head. He steals a quick kiss from Hunter, then says, “Did anyone ever tell you about their fight?”

No, but Hunter can’t help buy feel intrigued. “Not really.”

“They got into a fistfight once. Your doppelganger threw the first punch…I think that should’ve been the first clue that he wasn’t as good as he was pretending to be, but I decided to overlook it. They bickered every once in a while after that, but they were pretty civil for the most part. Life went on as usual.” Barry glances up at the bedroom window, momentarily transfixed by the billowing
curtains. A cool breeze drifts across the room. “Then your doppelganger faked his death, and the next time we spoke face to face, I finally realized what a psychopath he was.”

Hunter frowns curiously. “Was his transformation really that startling?”

“Oh, you have no idea…” Barry glances down at him again, genuine fear flashing through his eyes. Brave as Barry is, his memories of Zoom are obviously something that will always frighten him.

Unconsciously, Hunter finds himself pulling Barry closer. He regrets asking about his doppelganger. “I’m sorry,” he says.

“Don’t be. You have a right to know.” Grinning, Barry cards his hand through Hunter’s hair. “When we tell you that you’re nothing like him, we mean that. He only ever pretended to be the good person because he enjoyed toying with people. Under all that charm, he was cruel and possessive—the complete opposite of you.”

Hunter smirks. “Complete opposite? Admittedly, I am little possessive…”

“Nowhere near his level,” Barry chuckles. “And besides, you’re a genuine hero.”

“That’s kind of you to say.”

“It’s true,” Barry replies. He kisses Hunter, smirking against his lips. “Speaking of your heroics, I still have to reward you, don’t I?”

“Do you?” Slipping his hand to the small of Barry’s back, Hunter shifts his leg between his boyfriend’s thighs. He can already feel Barry hardening against him. “I thought our bit of frolicking last night was my reward.”

“We passed out almost immediately afterwards,” Barry argues, rocking against him. “Unless, of course, you’d rather not…”?

“Do I look like a moron?” Hunter murmurs, desire lancing through him like an electric current. It must be because of the breeze. Now that they’re no longer bogged down by the heat, it’s a little easier to muster the energy for some good old fashioned fun.

“Not at all,” is Barry’s muffled response against his lips. And then suddenly Barry is moving to grab the lube off Hunter’s bedside table, not quite at super human speed, but still fast enough to convey his eagerness.

And Hunter just lies back and enjoys the show, hands creeping up Barry’s soft thighs as the younger man finally straddles him, bracing himself for the impending warmth and pleasure, the sensation of sinking into Barry’s heat and riding through the haze of ecstasy until they both find completion. They’ve done this dance at least a hundred times before but he’ll never tire of it, because somehow, in this multiverse of infinite earths and endless possibilities, this is the destiny Fate handed to him, and he’s going to milk his good fortune for everything it’s worth.

So long as he lives this life, he’ll always love and adore Barry Allen.

~**8**~

A shard of glass crunches underfoot as he surveys the damage, but he can already tell there’s no hope in repairing either the frame or the equipment still hooked up to it. Better to start anew, he thinks, but first he has to deal with the matter at hand, which is cleaning up the million-dollar mess that brat left in his wake…
Irritably, General McGraw smooths down the front of his uniform and pivots sharply away from the wreckage. Off to one side, a tech is still trying to determine if he can salvage any of the data on a ruined laptop. They’ve already made backups of almost everything so far, but they haven’t been able to move any of the equipment off site yet. That mercenary, Greene, warned him to grab what he could and run, but McGraw wasn’t about to start taking advice from that little shit. After all, McGraw had absolutely nothing to fear. General Eiling had gone toe to toe with the Flash before and was still successfully running his operation below the radar—and now the Flash was going to find himself having an equally difficult time shutting down McGraw. He was above the law. The Powers That Be were on his side.

Even so, that damn kid had no idea how much damage he’d caused tonight. And not just to the equipment. Between him and the boy with the gloves, they’d severely injured sixty-two of his men. It was a wonder they hadn’t killed anyone.

The corner of his jaw twitches as he turns around again, starting at the ruined glass chamber. Frustrated as he is, he tries to remind himself that this will all be worth it in the end. Someday, the Flash will be under his control and then he will be able to cultivate the boy’s more destructive tendencies in a way that’ll better serve his own needs, Zoom’s grand scheme bedamned. The foreign speedster is long dead.

Barry Allen is his alone for the taking.

Exhausted, General McGraw sighs. He should probably leave soon, try to get a little shut eye while he still can…

Behind him, a soft breeze tickles the hair on the back of his neck.

Alarmed, he turns sharply to face the newcomer, almost toppling over in surprise when he realizes who exactly it is.

At first, he doesn’t know what to say. Part of that is from the shock of seeing this man again, and part of that is due to the rage that suddenly comes bubbling back up to the surface. “You,” he hisses.

But the man isn’t listening to him. Though he’s standing directly in front of McGraw, his eyes are trained on the ruined chamber. A small smile graces the corner of his lips. “I take it my boy gave you the slip?”

Incensed, McGraw’s hands tighten into fists at his side. He’s never punched a speedster before, but he’s not above trying.

Finally, the man looks at him. His smile widens. “Amazing, isn’t he?”

McGraw opens his mouth to speak—but the other man chooses that moment to shove something into his right hand. Startled, the General glances down at the object.

It’s one of those cheap laboratory timers he’s often see upstairs in Dr. Sloane’s department. And it’s currently counting down from 23 seconds.

Shocked, McGraw almost drops the timer. He’s just about to an explanation for this sick joke, but already the speedster is gone, lightning licking the air in his wake as he darts across the room and through the far door out into the hall. He’ll be miles away from here long before the clock reaches 0.

The tech finally realizes what McGraw is holding and, frightened, makes a mad dash for the door. McGraw, on the other hand, settles down in a nearby chair. He’s seen hell before. He’ll face his fate
with dignity.

He only hopes the speedsters get what’s coming for them soon.

~***~

To be continued....

Chapter End Notes

Stay tuned for part three of the series---'Echidna'

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!