

The Curious Case of Harrison Wells

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/22153057) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/22153057>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Categories:	M/M , Multi , F/M
Fandom:	The Flash (TV 2014)
Relationships:	Barry Allen/Cisco Ramon , Barry Allen/Hartley Rathaway , Barry Allen/Cisco Ramon/Hartley Rathaway , Henry Allen/Tina McGee , Cisco Ramon/Hartley Rathaway
Characters:	Barry Allen , Cisco Ramon , Eobard Thawne Harrison Wells , Hartley Rathaway , Caitlin Snow , Ronnie Raymond , Henry Allen , Tina McGee , Felicity Smoak , Eddie Thawne , Joe West , Laurel Lance , Oliver Queen , John Diggle
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe , Barry Allen: Private Investigator , eventual polyamorous relationship , Henry Allen and Tina McGee are married , Henry got out of prison when Barry was eighteen , it gets explained in the story eventually , Barry can't resist flirting , first with Cisco then with Hartley , Cisco and Hartley didn't hate each other before the story begins , sniped at each other but more... flirty sniping , Barry is well aware he's a disaster bi , background Iris/Eddie mentioned , apparently 'framed for murder' is an inheritable trait
Language:	English
Series:	Part 1 of FlashVibe Week 2020 , Part 1 of The Curious Case
Collections:	Flashvibe Week 2020
Stats:	Published: 2020-01-08 Updated: 2023-10-05 Words: 16,661 Chapters: 7/?

The Curious Case of Harrison Wells

by [kitkatt0430](#)

Summary

When STAR Labs becomes embroiled in a scandal, its the worst time possible for Dr. Wells to go missing. But with Harrison Wells no where to be found, Cisco is determined to get to the truth behind his boss' disappearance. But detective work isn't exactly Cisco's forte, leading him to the door of one Barry Allen, Private Investigator.

Notes

Prompt: Song/Poem/Quote - "It has long been an axiom of mine that the little things are the infinitely the most important." ~ Sherlock Holmes

Also for the Polyamory prompt, though its' going to take Hartley a while to show up in person.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Chapter 1

Cisco hesitated at the door, hand poised to knock. He wanted answers, but he'd read plenty of mystery novels. Enough to know that those answers might not be what he wants to hear. It wasn't too late for him to turn around and start job hunting.

"There's no one in there anyway," came a voice behind Cisco.

Sheepishly, Cisco lowered his arm and turned around to face the man behind him. The cute brunet man behind him. "Uh, hi?"

"So, looking for a PI?" The man reached into his pocket and produced a set of keys with one hand while holding a coffee cup in his other hand. "Mind if I slide past you there?"

"Right..." Cisco stepped aside and let the other man pass. "You're, uh, Barry Allen?"

"Yup. Running a bit late this morning, sorry about that." Barry smiled winningly and Cisco's brain went 'cute cute cute'. "Anyway," the lock clicked and Barry opened the door, "come on in and have a seat."

"Thanks," Cisco responded, following the detective inside the office. No turning back now. "So, are you taking new cases right now?"

"That's right. I'm all yours." There was that winning smile again. Barry really needed stop making Cisco feel all melty like that. "What do you need? And can I have your name?"

"I'm Cisco Ramon. And I, uh, I need you to track down my boss." Fidgeting nervously, Cisco found a chair and sat down. "I work at STAR Labs."

"Oooh, I've been following the news pretty closely on that one. My sister is Iris West, so..." she was the lead reporter on the scandal that was sinking STAR Labs.

"Yeah, it's been a hell of a month." Cisco grimaced, as that was putting things mildly. "And now Dr. Wells has disappeared. The cops think he's run off to avoid being found culpable for fraud. I'd like to believe he wouldn't do that, but..." finding out Hartley Rathaway hadn't been lying about how Dr. Wells had fired him for discovering the flaw in the accelerator had turned everything Cisco thought he knew and could count on upside down. "I need to find him. But... I also need your help on something else. We still don't know how the flaws were introduced to the accelerator. Dr. Wells knew about it, or he wouldn't have been willing to try to cover it up like he did. Yet we've got nearly a year's worth of CCTV footage for the pipeline and zero instances on tape of anyone trying to modify the flawed section of the accelerator."

"And you're certain that it was sabotaged after being built, not that the plans were off or something along those lines?" Barry asked, sounding intrigued.

"No, I worked on that section myself. So did Hartley Rathaway. Rathaway was working on another part of the accelerator that hooked into that section and started getting funky readings. Made me drop what I was working on to check the connectors with him. But the connection was solid. I had a family thing that night, but Rathaway planned to stay to go inside the pipeline to check things over. I figured he'd have found the problem and we'd work to fix it together in the morning. But in the morning, Dr. Wells told us Hartley'd quit. I wasn't sure what to make of any of it. There was no way Rathaway would have just quit abruptly like that. Not with a potential problem in the accelerator and... he and Dr. Wells were friends. But I couldn't imagine why Dr. Wells would lie."

"Until Rathaway came forward about the flaw and being fired?" Barry filled in.

"Pretty much."

"You realize that if I find out how the accelerator was sabotaged, it may open Dr. Wells up to potential criminal charges for endangering the public, right? I'm more forensics focused, but I'm tech saavy enough to know just how much of Central City that accelerator would have wiped out if it overloaded. And I may very well end up finding out things about your boss you didn't really want to know." Pulling open a cabinet on his desk, Barry fished out a form. "This has my standard contract rate on it. Read it over first. I would like to take this case, but don't sign anything until you've actually read the contract all over okay?"

"Right..." Cisco slowly flipped through the pages, but the rates didn't seem too awful and the legalese was fairly straightforward.

"If you need time to think it over, check out the competition..."

"I actually picked you because you're a former CSI," Cisco said, looking up. "Considering what I'm asking for about determining how the accelerator was sabotaged, well... an actual forensic scientist wouldn't exactly go amiss."

Barry smiled, a soft, flattered expression. "Oh, that's... thanks. Most people who look me up see the, um, framed for murder thing and start looking for a different PI." He paused, turning nervous. "You, um, did know..."

"Yeah, and the whole being framed for a murder that was actually a suicide thing? That's just bizarre. Like something out of *Elementary* or *CSI: Miami*." Cisco offered him an encouraging look.

The former CSI had been framed by a dying man attempting to cast doubt on evidence Barry Allen had processed that had sent... Professor DeVoe? Anyway, the evidence had sent his wife to jail for manslaughter. Though eventually exonerated when it turned out the Professor had been counting on the police not looking too hard past his dead body in the CSI's living room, it seemed Barry's career as a CSI had ended shortly thereafter.

"I'm just sorry you went through that," Cisco added. "So, um... we both just sign the contract, then?"

"Yeah. And then I really am all yours."

Barry figured he probably shouldn't be flirting this hard with a client, but... there was just something about Cisco Ramon. The man was cute. Adorable even. And his hair... Barry wanted to pet his hair so bad. Stroke his fingers through the silky strands and see how soft it really was.

So, honestly, his flirting was tame for now.

It also helped that Cisco was sticking around despite knowing about the DeVoe debacle. Not exactly Barry's finest hour. He'd been convinced that DeVoe was the real murderer, not his wife, and had been poking around the university on his off hours. Made it all too easy for DeVoe to frame him and if Clifford DeVoe had been more careful in staging Barry's living room... it still didn't make sense to Barry, though. DeVoe was dying and had nothing to lose by confessing to the murder of his coworker, even if Barry's hunch had been wrong and Marlize really had accidentally killed Dr. Pavane. DeVoe's wife would've been free either way and DeVoe wouldn't spent the last few months he had to live in a state funded hospital awaiting a trial he'd never attend. Instead, DeVoe had killed himself months early, all while pining his hopes on a scheme that left all too much to chance.

Rather understandably, Marlize DeVoe refused to speak to Barry. So odds were he'd never get his answers.

Afterwards, Barry'd quit his job at the CCPD. While he was glad that the evidence had eventually proved him innocent, a lot of people Barry had thought he could trust had genuinely believed him capable of murder. He couldn't work there anymore. So he'd opened his own little investigative agency, finding other people their answers since he couldn't find his own. And it was doing pretty well, despite his past occasionally getting in the way.

Once the paperwork was signed, Barry wanted to see the video footage immediately. And Dr. Wells office and place of residence. Not necessarily in that order.

"When was the sabotaged section of the accelerator completed?" Barry asked as he got into Cisco's car so that they could head over to STAR Labs.

"About two months ago," Cisco replied. "There was a three week period where no one had anything to do with that section, then Hartley started hooking it up to the sensors in preparation for the December deadline." A deadline that had been missed, given that it was January and the accelerator had never gone live.

"So the most likely time for the sabotage would've been the Thanksgiving holiday."

"That's what I thought, but I've been all over the footage. No one goes near the pipeline during the break and as far as I can tell, the footage hasn't been altered." Cisco sounds defeated, which makes Barry want to pat his hand and be reassuring.

Too forward given the flirting he's already done? Maybe? Probably? Barry had no idea. He was terrible at gauging this sort of thing. But rather than risk coming on too strong, Barry kept to himself for now.

"So how many entrances are there to the pipeline anyway?" Barry asked instead.

"Two," Cisco responded confidently, then slammed on the breaks to avoid hitting a car that swerved in front of them. Smacking his hand against the horn, he swore under his breath. Then again, more loudly. "Shit, no, three. The two main entrances and there's a nearly hidden access tunnel underneath. I've never used it myself and I completely forgot it was there."

"So you haven't checked any CCTV footage for that camera?" Barry asked, just to confirm. "Then let's start with that footage first. And I was hoping you had a list of what the police may have taken from Wells' office when they searched last week. They should have provided someone with a list - whoever is in charge of STAR Labs with Wells missing or the STAR Labs lawyers - but hopefully someone else made an accounting too. As someone who used to work with the police and has a great respect for the work they do, let me tell you that it's always - always - best to have a full, separate listing from the one they make themselves. Let's just say it took a while to get some of the missing things taken as 'evidence' back after my name was cleared," Barry said when he got a curious sideways glance. "And I know exactly which asshole thought he could get away with stealing my tv."

Barry hated Spencer even before the tv incident. But the less said about that the better.

"Ronnie should know where that listing is," Cisco offered after a moment of thought.

"And he's going to be okay with you sharing that information with me?" Barry asked. It was entirely likely that Cisco would be violating an NDA by giving Barry the CCTV access and probably something he ought to bring up at some point.

"Actually, uh, Ronnie and Caitlin are pitching in the help pay for your services. We're sort of in charge of what's left of the STAR Labs employees. The only reason I'm hiring you on my own instead of through STAR Labs is that the lawyers Harrison hired for the Lab have gone full on obstruction mode. They'd never go for hiring you; they'd rather Dr. Wells vanish into the ether so they can pin everything on him and shut down STAR Labs until they can legally execute his will and turn over the remains of STAR Labs to whoever he bequeathed it to."

"See, this gets more interesting the more I hear," Barry said, grinning and slotting that information away. Obstructive lawyers - Dr. Wells' own handpicked lawyers - who'd rather have a scapegoat that vanished mysteriously than digging the man up from under whatever rock he'd found to hide beneath. It made sense when looked at from one direction. But... from another direction it said the lawyers might very well have something to hide regarding their relationship with the missing scientist.

Curiouser and curiouser indeed.

Once at STAR Labs, Barry started off inspecting Wells' office while Cisco went to fetch Ronnie Raymond, Dr. Caitlin Snow, and the list Barry had asked about. Barry took the opportunity to poke around on his own. Giving the desk a cursory inspection for hidden compartments, he concluded there weren't any. It was too solid, no hollow areas that he could hear. The drawers were the right amount deep, no false bottoms.

The computer was missing, presumably now sitting in a computer forensics expert's office somewhere. hilariously, the monitor was missing and Barry had to wonder if it was an honest mistake or someone trying to get away with upgrading their home computer station. Though it could be that someone working at STAR Labs 'borrowed' it since Dr. Wells wouldn't need it on the lam.

There were no photographs. Which was unusual. Barry'd read the man's biography during college. He had a fiance at one point, who'd died in a car accident. Wells had been driving, but cleared of any legal culpability in her death. Probably hadn't stopped the insurance company from blaming him, at least when it came to payouts on the totaled car. But in light of how she died and how long ago that had happened, it wasn't surprising there were no pictures of her in the office. Yet there weren't any pictures of his friends or even group photographs from work events. There were framed copies of awards he'd won over the years and his various diplomas adorning the walls. Just... not a single photograph.

Barry'd have to check Wells' house to be sure, but he suspected there were no photographs there either.

It wasn't necessarily a bad thing. Barry himself wasn't too fond of decorating with photographs. But he had a lot of pictures of loved ones on his phone and something told him Wells didn't even bother with that.

Wells had abruptly fired someone who'd considered him a friend with what was likely chilling ease, given what Barry knew of Hartley Rathaway's testimony against the man. Barry pulled out his phone and made a note to contact Hartley Rathaway. Right beneath the note to investigate STAR Lab's lawyers and to give Tina a call. Tina rarely spoke about her own friendship with Harrison Wells, which had fallen apart after Tess Morgan's death, because his personality shift had hurt her badly especially coming on the heels of the loss of a dear friend. But in light of recent events, Barry suspected she'd tolerate him asking questions about what happened.

Stowing the phone away, Barry couldn't really tell if anything else was missing. Could be USB sticks or drives that got taken away. Barry knew from the last West family dinner that Joe had been annoyed that the warrant for STAR Labs had only covered Wells' personal computer and not the STAR Labs servers.

"Ah, there he is," Cisco said, leading in the other two scientists. "Barry, this is Ronnie Raymond and Caitlin Snow. Caitlin, Ronnie, this is Barry Allen."

There was some polite handshaking and then Barry took a quick look over the list Ronnie handed him as well as a copy of the warrant from the day it was executed. About what he'd expected. "You should have the lawyers contest the taking of the monitor. It's not a two-in-one system and had no data storage capabilities, so technically the warrant didn't actually cover it. It'll give the STAR Labs lawyers something to do and keep them out of your hair if they're really being that obstructive to you guys."

"Not a bad idea," Snow agreed, something icy and pleased in her eyes.

Barry hoped he never annoyed her enough to make her wear that expression because of him. "Aside from that, it looks like they did a pretty straightforward search. Personal paper files and data storage technology only. Some crossover with STAR Labs data storage devices, but only that which was for his personal use. Considering he's being investigated for criminal endangerment of the city, this probably won't be the last warrant that gets executed. They'll definitely be coming for the servers next, though they may leave them in place and bring the computer forensicist here instead." Barry handed back the warrant and item list. "So there are paper files missing from the desk, but others still here. Can any of you tell if any of those files may have been removed before the warrant was served?"

"Hartley might've been able to tell, but..." Ronnie shrugged and shook his head. "None of us were really that close to Dr. Wells."

"Alright, well let's put the Wells side of the investigation on hold for now. Let's check out the CCTV recordings."

They started with the access tunnel camera, which apparently Ronnie and Caitlin had also forgotten about. Cisco felt marginally better that he wasn't the only one who'd made that oversight.

Barry was starting with the Thanksgiving holiday recordings, playing them pretty fast just to get an idea if anyone was there. But so far? Nothing.

"Huh." Barry paused the recording and then played it back at normal speed. There was a flash of light, but no indication of the source. Almost like something electrical had arced for a few seconds. It was impressive that the PI had even caught that at the previous speed.

"What is that?"

"A glitch in the recording, maybe?" Caitlin asked, but Ronnie immediately refuted that. "No, the recording quality doesn't show any signs of degradation."

It was slowed down further and replayed again. The flicker of electricity became lightning in motion... and the outline of a man. Barry was staring rather intently at the screen, face gone pale, as he ran it again.

"There's a man in the lightning," Cisco said, awed. "What the actual hell?"

Chapter 2

The man in the lightning still gave Barry nightmares. The red lightning, the yellow suit, the eyes lit up with electricity... and that voice. Dark and deep and hateful.

He'd been there that night for Barry. It was a certainty born of the intense ill will in the man in the lightning's stare that night. But something - or perhaps someone - had whisked Barry away in a blur of yellow lightning. When he'd made his way back home, it was to find Nora Allen dead and Henry Allen in cuffs, disoriented from his concussion but still worried for Barry. Joe had taken Barry away before he could reach his mother's body.

Barry, however, had been a canny child; he knew the truth would only make people call him a liar. So he took the truth and tried to twist it into something believable. A man in yellow broke into the house and attacked Barry's parents. He'd run away because his mom yelled at him to; his dad had already been unconscious in the other room. He'd been too scared to stop anywhere on his own street, but got lost trying to find Joe's house and in his panic turned around to run home again rather than try a stranger's house. It was a very believable story and certainly Joe had taken Barry's word as the truth. The detectives who'd been in charge of the investigation, however, wanted the lazy answer. Dismissed Barry's story as that of a traumatized child who was desperate not to lose both parents. In an absolutely stunning display of corruption, it turned out that the detectives even buried evidence proving that there'd been an intruder in the house that night. Possibly even two intruders.

It all eventually came out, of course. But by then Barry was eighteen. That was seven years with his dad that Barry'd never get back and no amount of reparations from the city could make what happened to their family alright.

But Barry never forgot the man in the lightning.

The recording couldn't be slowed down enough to show whether or not this man in the lightning wore a yellow suit. But the red electricity that surrounded him...

Barry knew with the same instinctive certainty he'd had as a child, that this was the same man. The same man who'd hated Barry and murdered Nora Allen because of that hatred. And, somehow, the man in the lightning was involved with Harrison Wells.

"That's your saboteur," Barry finally said, when they'd watched the replay several times over. "He probably used this entrance because he knew no one would remember about it."

"I'd say that's one mystery solved, but I'm still stuck on him moving faster than humanly possible and the lightning and the what the fuck?" Ronnie muttered.

"I'm right there with you," Cisco agreed.

"Yup," Caitlin third-ed.

"There has to be some kind of explanation for how its possible, though," Barry argued. "Just because we don't have a scientific answer now, doesn't mean there isn't one. The most obvious is that someone tried to doctor the recording to remove him entirely and somehow wound up with this artifact instead, but..." the video quality was too good, as Ronnie had pointed out earlier. Video artifacting was grainy, clumpy, messy. This... was not. This was pristine. "At the very least you should get a copy of this to a computer forensicist of your own to help prove there was an outside source for the sabotage."

Caitlin agreed. "It might even make the STAR Labs lawyers happy for a change. Give them something they can point at to clear the Lab of suspicion."

They ended up finding several more instances of the man in the lightning on the recording, once they knew what they were looking for. Barry was the best at catching him when the video was played fast; Cisco figured the detail on 4K monitors was meant for people with eyesight like his. But, slowly, Cisco and Caitlin managed to catch glimpses of the blink-and-miss-it light flares themselves. Ronnie couldn't manage it at all, though.

It was always the blurry, dark image of a man wreathed in red lightning. He never stayed in the pipeline long, though for someone as fast as this impossible being appeared, a few minutes was more than enough time to sabotage the pipeline. And to sabotage more than just the area Hartley'd alerted them to.

"I think we need to check the pipeline for more sabotage," Cisco finally said after the seventh instance of a pair of light flashes was found. (One for entering the pipeline, another minutes later as he left.)

"I think you're right," Ronnie agreed. "I'm going to run diagnostics on everything. Let you know what I find later, okay?"

"Yeah. Sounds good." Cisco hummed thoughtfully. "Barry, do you need to see footage from the other cameras?"

"Well, I'd recommend that whatever forensicist you hire go through all the camera footage to look for other instances of that... man in the lightning." Barry paused a beat. "I'd like to get an idea of what Wells movements were like in STAR Labs both before and after Rathaway got fired. See what changes, if anything. If there's some place he visited a lot, or perhaps somewhere he started avoiding more?"

"I can't really think of anything in his behavior or routine that changed after Hartley left," Caitlin spoke up, tone thoughtful. "I honestly don't think he'd leave anything here that would tell us where he is or what he's up to now that he's disappeared."

"How did Dr. Wells treat you two and the rest of his employees?" Barry asked. "Was he friendly?"

"Well, yes. Always took an interest in our work, encouraged us to do better..." Caitlin trailed off, glancing at Cisco.

"He encouraged us to compete," Cisco said, hesitant. "He was always trying to pit Hartley and I against each other. Which could be fun, but... I'm not sure that's what he meant for it to be. Sometimes it felt like he was trying to tip us over into something more like a rivalry than competitive coworkers. Dr. Wells was really good at making grand gestures and saying the right things to sound friendly. But sometimes there was something off. I just thought he was bad at socializing on a personal level. Or didn't like socializing on a personal level."

"I've often found," Barry told them, "that big gestures are often a distraction. It's the little actions that are infinitely more important... and therefore far more likely to betray a person's true intentions. Wells didn't change his behavior around the pipeline itself, but there may be something else in this building he wanted to protect or even remove. Checking his movements, though promising to be a long, boring task, could tell us more than he wanted anyone to know about his motivations or purpose in trying to cover up the accelerator's flaws."

It made sense. But Barry was right. It was long and boring and took at least an hour before something interesting came up.

They were starting with the footage from before Hartley was fired. A month before. And it was a little more difficult because they had to keep swapping cameras, watching Wells go about his week. Arrive, go to his office, visit projects, take lunch, go to meetings, leave for dinner... ad nauseam. And then they rolled around to Saturday. No one should've been there on Saturday. But Wells showed up. Went to his office for an hour. Then took a walk through the halls and disappeared into a camera blind spot.

"Which camera should pick him up next?" Barry asked, already preparing to swap cameras.

"None," Cisco told him.

"That hallway is a dead end," Caitlin agreed. "There's a janitor's closet at the end of the hall, but nothing else."

They watched and waited the recording. But Wells didn't come back out until hours later.

"Alright, who wants to check out a janitor's closet with me?" Barry asked.

"I do," Cisco and Caitlin chirped.

They headed to the closet and scoured every inch of it and maybe got in each other's way more than a few times, but eventually they concluded it was just a small closet full of cleaning supplies. No hidden USB sticks with video confessions on par with a James Bond super-villain's quest for planetary destruction. Just a lot of Windex.

Eventually the trio went back to the security booth and trawled through more footage. The following Saturday, Wells disappeared into that hallway for hours again. And the Saturday after that. But then the evening he fired Hartley, Wells went to that hallway after security finished 'escorting' Hartley out of the building and divested him of his identification badge.

Wells started visiting that hallway more often after that. At first upping to twice more a week, then every other evening, then every evening until the night of his disappearance. It had been thought that Wells had last been seen leaving work at the end of the day on Friday the week before. But now it seemed he'd returned that very evening, disappeared into that hallway and didn't come out until Sunday.

Which was odd, because the police had scoured the building on Saturday from top to bottom. Ronnie had been called in by the lawyers to help ensure the warrant was adhered to... but also because he was pretty much the most senior employee of STAR Labs left. But apparently Wells had been in the building the entire time.

They went back to the hallway and scoured every inch of it, but... there wasn't exactly much to go on and they came up with the same thing they got from investigating the closet. Nada.

Barry was frowning, staring at the long stretch of wall between the camera and the janitor's closet. "I don't suppose you've got the building's blue prints on hand?"

"Sorry," Cisco answered. "The pipeline blueprints we've got, but the rest of the building..."

"Guess I'll be paying city hall a visit tomorrow," Barry muttered, pulling out his phone to make a note. "We'll find that hidden room one way or another." He stowed his phone away. "At some point, I need to talk to Rathaway. Not yet, I want to gather more information first, but Rathaway knew Wells best, right?"

"Yes," Caitlin answered. "Made it all more surreal that he was fired so abruptly and then a week later he was helping to kick off a criminal investigation in Dr. Wells and suing him too."

"It was kind of bizarre that he had his parents' support too. I didn't even know they were reconnecting with him." Though there had been something over the last few months before everything went to hell. Hartley'd been lighter, happier... flirtier. Cisco'd sort of hoped that maybe it meant Hartley was interested in... but obviously there'd been other reasons for his improved mood.

"If I could get one of you to give me his number? Or, better yet, introduce me to him?" Barry asked.

Cisco nodded. "Yeah, I can introduce you to him. I... should probably try to get back in touch with him anyway. See how he's doing." Let him know his former coworkers didn't hate him for stirring up this hornets nest. He'd probably saved all their lives, to be honest. Hartley deserved to know at least one person recognized that fact and was grateful.

Barry would've liked to head home when the uber arrived at STAR Labs. He was tired and his eyes ached from staring intently at computer monitors for a good number of hours. But in a missing person's case, time was always of the essence. In this particular case, the longer Barry took to investigate, the more time Wells had to cover his tracks and disappear for good. And with the man in the lightning involved...

He'd given the uber driver the address of his parents' house instead and, on the drive there, he opened up his notes app and started a new page, linking it to the new case and to his scattered notes regarding the unsolved murder of Nora Allen. Two bullet points were added. Revisit the crime scene... and talk to his father.

Henry Allen had been unconscious when Barry had arrived downstairs that night. They'd never really discussed what either of them had seen, what Henry remembered about the break in or the lightning that had filled their house. At eighteen, elated at getting his father back, Barry had been afraid to ask if Henry had seen the man in the lightning too. Afraid that admitting he'd lied to Joe - to the police - would lose him his father all over again even though he'd known, rationally, that wouldn't be the case.

But Barry wasn't ready to talk about any of that yet, so those to do items could wait. Tina would be home soon, so he could start by asking her about Harrison Wells.

Chapter 3

"Hey slugger," Henry greeted Barry at the door. "Got a new case yet?"

"Actually, yes. Client was already at the door this morning when I got in to work. I, uh, might've taken a bit too long at Jitter's again." Barry smiled sheepishly.

Henry just laughed as he closed the door behind his son. "At least being self employed these days means Captain Singh isn't on your case about being tardy all the time."

"No, just when I'm consulting for the CCPD. So about half the time." Barry had been surprised that, after quitting the CCPD, the Captain had been the first person to show up at his little one-room office planning to hire him. Very pleased though, especially when Singh had been impressed by Barry's forethought regarding contracts and different rating systems for different kinds of jobs.

"You did your research," had been Singh's proud toned praise before he'd moved on to verbally sketching out the consultation work the precinct wanted to hire Barry for.

"So what's this one about?" Henry asked, drawing Barry's mind back to the present.

"You know that scandal at STAR Labs Iris has been covering?"

"Ye-es..."

"Some STAR Labs employees have hired me to find their missing boss. They're not exactly happy about his disappearance and even more pissed off because they don't know how the accelerator was sabotaged in the first place. Though its worse than initially thought. I was there most of the day and ended up giving them reason to investigate the rest of the pipeline. When I left, one of them was still in there going through everything and swearing every time he found another discrepancy that altered how the pipeline would actually work." Barry paused a beat. "I was hoping that Tina would be willing to talk to me about Wells."

"Better go start up a batch of blondies, then, to bribe her with. I think we've got all the supplies. Brand new bag of brown sugar in the pantry, anyway." Henry's expression was just a little too innocent.

"You just want me to bake you dessert," Barry accused.

"Guilty."

Laughing, Barry obliged him anyway, heading into the kitchen. By the time Tina was walking in the door, Barry was sliding a pan of blondies into the oven.

"Oh no, who's done what this time?" She gave a faux long-suffering sigh as she closed the door to the garage.

"I got a new case this morning," Barry told her.

Tina arched an eyebrow. "What does this case have to do with you baking for me?"

"The disappearance of Harrison Wells."

"Ah." Tina pursed her lips for a moment, mirth subsiding entirely. "You've got questions about him for me, then?"

"If you're willing to answer them?" Barry responded. He liked Tina and really didn't want this case to cause him problems with her.

"Once the blondies are ready and we're actually eating them. Who am I to turn down baked bribery?"

"I knew Tess better than Harrison," Tina told him, pausing a moment to take a bite of the blondie and then make a pleased noise at how it had come out. "I went to college with her. We were roommates. Had a bit of a crush on her, actually, but she was straight and I was too nervous to ever say anything. We met Harrison shortly after graduation and... he was like a smitten puppy. He was the one who introduced me to Jerry, actually, as they'd known each other through college too."

She took another bite of the blondie and then reached for her glass of milk. "At the time, I'd have told you Harrison Wells couldn't hurt a fly. Not a lot of self confidence, but ridiculous confidence in Tess' brilliance. I think the whole 'drank respect women juice' meme would've described him to a T." She smiled softly. "We were planning a double wedding.

"But then the accident happened. Harrison said he swerved to avoid a deer or a moose on the road and it was ruled a tragic accident. But afterwards... I wondered. I remember looking into his eyes and seeing a stranger. I thought, at first, it was grief and maybe the concussion from the accident that made his personality shift. Whatever it was, overnight Harrison went from this meek, kind man I was proud to know to this... callous, arrogant jackass that... Jerry and I ended up dis-inviting him to our wedding because he became just so unpleasant to be around. And that damned accelerator. He became obsessed with it."

Tina tapped her fingers down the side of her milk glass. "It was Tess' idea. He tells everyone that it's his project from conception to execution, but the accelerator, even the name of the lab he built, were all Tess' ideas. He had some goofy acronym... can't even remember what she said it was now, but Tess came up with STAR Labs." She sighed. "I'd like to think that he just didn't handle the guilt and his grief well and that's why he caused our friendship to disintegrate so thoroughly, but..." she shook her head. "So, what else do you want to know about him."

"Something about that accident is nagging at me," Barry admitted. "Not sure what, though. Where did it happen?"

"Just outside Starling city, one of the interstate highways. I don't remember which one anymore. The first four years, I left flowers by the side of the road each anniversary of her death. But then Jerry got cancer and I... couldn't keep mourning her and mourn him too."

Jerry'd been diagnosed with leukemia too late and died not too long afterwards. Barry didn't know much about him, but he rather suspected that Tina and Henry had spoken to one another about both Jerry and Nora at length.

He'd have to look up the accident later. There was still something about what Tina'd said about it that was nagging at Barry. "Before the accident, Wells lacked self confidence and Tess was the idea person between the two of them?" Barry asked, more for clarification's sake than anything.

"That's right. Harrison was brilliant at executing ideas and was far more a genius than he gave himself credit for, but Tess was the one who pushed boundaries and thought outside of the box. She'd come up with the brilliant idea and Harrison would figure out how to make it happen."

"What about afterwards? Do you know if Wells started coming up with his own ideas afterwards? Or was it all just him appropriating Tess' ideas as his own from there on out?" Barry wasn't sure where he was headed with this, but that something nagging at him seemed to be connected to what Tina had said, about how it was like looking into the eyes of a stranger.

"I'm really not sure. But I can't see this version of Harrison being particularly imaginative or inventive either. I'd consider it more likely he's been quietly stealing ideas from his employees than coming up with anything original." Tess huffed and shook her head. "I know of at least one lawsuit he settled for exactly that reason. He can say he was just trying to avoid bad publicity all he wants, but he nearly wrecked that young man's career and I rather suspect he intended to do the same to Dr. Rathaway."

Barry pulled out his phone and added notes on the car accident and the lawsuit. "Do you know the name of the former employee?"

"Farooq Gibran. He's a PhD student at UCC's physic's department. I... may have been keeping an eye on him for recruitment purposes." Tina smiled sheepishly and polished off her blondie.

Dutifully, Barry noted the name down for later research and then continued on with his questions.

Back at his apartment, Barry changed into his pajamas and popped open his laptop. He immediately started with googling the accident Wells had been in.

I-80, a few miles outside of town...

Checking the time, Barry grabbed his phone and called up Felicity.

"Barry, hey... uh, hold on a second..." there was a distant sound of Felicity giving Oliver directions over the comms. "Oliver says thanks for the mask," she told him.

"Oh, good. It fits alright?"

"Yeah, the fit's fine. So, what's up?"

"I, uh, wanted to ask you for a favor. Got a new case today, looking into the disappearance of Dr. Wells." Barry grinned as Felicity made excited noises.

"Oh, wow, did you get to go in STAR Labs yet?" she asked. "What sort of experiments are going on in there?"

"I did get to go in... and see their security room where I poured over a bunch recordings to help identify where the saboteur got into the pipeline and found some really bizarre things. I was hoping you would do a background check on Wells for me." He paused a beat. "And also see if Oliver and Thea will let me use their guest room when I come down to visit this weekend."

"What are you coming to Starling for? Also, yes. I'll put together that background check on him, though it probably won't be ready until, like... probably this weekend anyway."

"Thank you, thank you. And, uh, I'm going to Starling because Wells' fiance died in a car accident about fifteen years ago and something about it is nagging at me, so I'm planning on heading out to where the accident happened."

"So you think that his fiance's death has something to do with his disappearance now? Mind if I ask why?" Felicity sounded skeptical.

"Well, he disappeared because the accelerator was shown to be flawed - sabotaged even - and he was trying to cover it up." Barry paused a moment, for the drama of it. "The accelerator wasn't Harrison Wells' idea. It was Dr. Tess Morgan's idea, the deceased fiance."

"Ooooooh. And the plot thickens." Felicity sounded intrigued. "You've certainly been busy today."

"And about to get busier. There's a blind spot in the STAR Labs cameras where there has to be a secret room where Wells hid when the police served their warrant. He's not there now, because the cameras showed him leaving but not returning afterwards. So I need to figure out how to get in there. And I want to check out his house which... means taking a page out of Oliver's book."

"Illegal entry."

"Yup. I've got two former employees of his to interview: Hartley Rathaway and Farooq Gibran. And I suspect that you're going to turn up a number of other disgruntled former employees whom Wells stole ideas from." Barry let out a frustrated laugh. "To think I used to consider this guy my science idol."

"Dr. McGee is definitely way cooler."

"She's a good step-mom too. And a good sport about answering my questions about Wells. She used to be friends with Dr. Morgan." He laughed when Felicity made a frustrated noise.

"Ugh, rub it in that you know her, why don't you?"

"Come visit Central City and I'll introduce you to her."

"As soon as this whole super soldier serum thing gets wrapped up, I'm totally visiting," Felicity promised.

"Huh... you know, maybe you and the STAR Labs team could help solve a few of each other's problems. Dr. Snow is a bio-engineer and could probably help with your super soldier problem and they need an expert computer forensicist..."

"Technically, hacker not forensicist. Give me a sec," she switched back to the comms and asked Oliver about the guest room. Then, back on the phone, "Oliver says you can use his guest room whenever you want. Just give him a call when you get in town, he'll even come get you. Or, probably more likely, get either me or Dig to come pick you up."

"Awesome. Thanks. And, Felicity, you definitely count as a computer forensicist. A brilliant one at that."

"You're just flattering me because I'm doing you a favor," she teased.

"Because you're my friend," Barry corrected. "Want to do lunch on Saturday?"

"Sure. Look forward to it."

Chapter 4

Barry's first stop of the morning was city hall where he filled out a request form for a print out of the plans on file for the STAR Labs building. He was then informed that his request would be processed in the next two to four business days, upon which he'd be mailed the blueprints. Since the plans were publicly available, he didn't have to worry about the request being rejected, but it was definitely a ridiculous wait time.

From there he headed into the office and started making phone calls. Farooq Gibran was his first call. It went to voicemail, so Barry left a polite message that briefly sketched out who he was, why he was calling, and what number he could be reached at. He'd try again in the afternoon and evening. Hopefully, at some point Gibran would pick up. His next option would be showing up at the university and tracking him down in the physics department.

Gibran's name wasn't the only one of interest, however. Tina knew a number of Wells' contacts, current and former, often because they were people she made a point of refusing to deal with. The retired General Wade Eiling was one such example. Apparently Wells had done a number of army-funded experiments in conjunction with the General, who'd retired some months earlier. Officially, the General had retired with honors. Unofficially, the General had been told to retire now or risk those honors being stripped via court martial and a dishonorable discharge. Or so said Tina's own military contacts, at any rate.

It was the General Barry contacted next and Eiling answered promptly. He also agreed to meet Barry at a cafe for lunch, which was promising.

There were a few other names on Barry's list after his chat with Tina and the rest of the morning went to calling them.

When Hartley gathered his things and left STAR Labs, escorted off the premises by security, he'd been in panic mode. Went straight home and broke down crying just inside the door to his apartment, his box of things dropped to the floor - he'd found later his favorite mug had broken when the box hit the floor.

He might've sat there all night, back against the front door, steadily crying, except his parents called. They'd gotten back a day early from their business trip and were hoping that, despite the hour, he'd be willing to meet them for dinner. Maybe have a coffee and chat with them while they ate if he'd already eaten.

Hartley'd agreed immediately, snapping out of his panicked daze as a plan started to form. He'd washed his face, hoping the cool water would make some of the blotchiness in his face go away, and then headed back out.

For the first time since they'd reached out to him and started tentatively reconnecting with him, Hartley felt grateful and relieved to see his parents in a way he hadn't since he was a kid and didn't know what it was like to have his parents break his trust. He'd told them what happened and... they promised to support him and back him against whatever lies Wells

might tell about him. They promised to help him stop Wells from turning on the flawed accelerator.

Afterwards, he'd emailed Cisco to tell him what happened. And then he'd promptly ignored all of Cisco's emails and calls because...

What if he didn't believe Hartley? Or what if he did? Hartley didn't want to drag him into the middle of this mess and it was... safer for Cisco not to associate with him for now, right?

The truth, of course, was that Hartley was being a coward. He'd had a crush on Cisco for a while, panicked, and fucked up his chances with the other man.

So what he was not expecting, the Thursday morning after Dr. Wells officially ran away from his problems, was for his phone to play the chirpy, obnoxious theme he'd set as the ring tone for Cisco Ramon. Hartley basically dove for his phone and, sure enough, the screen told him it was Cisco calling.

He dallied for a full second, brain freaking out because Cisco'd stopped calling after the first week so why was he calling again now??? But his thumb brushed the answer button on instinct and suddenly there was a tinny voice over the phone saying, "hey? Hartley? It's Cisco."

"Um, hi?" Hartley said, bringing the phone up to his ear and feeling like that was the most inadequate greeting he's ever made over the phone.

"Oh, hey, you answered. Sorry, that was rude."

"No, it's fine. I... kind of deserve rude. Sorry I avoided your calls. And didn't call back." Hartley grimaced. He could apologize better than that, surely?

"I had intended to just show up at your apartment and annoy you into talking to me, but things at work went from confusing to blowing up in our faces pretty quickly, so... you know what? Lunch. Early lunch at that Thai place you like? It'll be eleven by the time we both get there so..."

Hartley blinked because... Cisco was inviting him to lunch? "Uh, yeah. Sure. I'll see you there."

And then twenty minutes later, at eleven o'five, Hartley was being seated across from Cisco and putting aside his menu. (Not that he needed the menu, Hartley knew what he wanted to order already.) Cisco looks good. Tired, but good.

"So, uh... how are things? For you?" Cisco asked, looking nervous.

"All things considered? Not bad. My parents are actually being supportive, which I'm still not used to, and I've started submitting my resume around to some of the local labs, though I really want the position at Mercury Labs." Hartley paused a beat, then added, "I've also watched, like, both iterations of *Scooby Doo* on Netflix right now."

"Oooh, there are two? I know they've got *Mystery Incorporated*, but..."

"*Scooby Doo: Where Are You?* The one where Simple Plan did the intro song. It's aged pretty well, but a lot of the music choices give away that it was made mid-2000s. The Smash Mouth in Australia episode gave me massive high school flashbacks even though they didn't even play *All Star*."

Cisco giggled and... Hartley relaxed a little. Oh thank god, they were going to be okay.

"What about you? What have you been up to?"

The mirth slides off Cisco's face and he looks very grateful when the waitress returns to take their orders. A few minutes later, though, and Cisco's buffer time is over.

"Oh, you know... becoming disillusioned of Dr. Wells, discovering that the pipeline is actually even more flawed than you discovered, and hiring a PI to find Wells so we can figure out what the hell he was playing at with the accelerator?" Cisco paused a beat. "It was confusing at first. You wouldn't lie about the accelerator like that and you wouldn't have voluntarily quit on short notice, or at all, the way Dr. Wells was claiming you had, but..."

"But it was Harrison," Hartley filled in.

"But it was Dr. Wells," Cisco agreed. "But then you went public with what happened and filed a lawsuit, so Ronnie and I and a few others went to fact check the pipeline. And we found it exactly as you described. And he wouldn't explain himself. Just kept digging the hole deeper until he up and vanished on us."

"Wait..." something clicked that his brain had sort of brushed over when Cisco'd initially said it. "The pipeline is more flawed?"

"Sabotaged. We worked on that pipeline section ourselves. It was perfect, until suddenly it wasn't. And, as Ronnie discovered yesterday, there's more. All over the place. The accelerator is riddled with changes that we're still documenting, trying to figure out what the final effect would've been when Dr. Wells turned it on that night."

Hartley swore softly. Then the waitress was back with their food and conversation had to cut off again. He toyed with his noodle dish with the chopsticks for a moment before saying, "I want to help figure out what he was doing with the accelerator. None of you worked on it as long as I did, you need my help."

"Well I was just going to ask you to talk to the PI I hired," Cisco drawled, sounding amused. "But sure, we could use your ever so humble help too."

"PI?" Hartley echoed, letting the teasing slide for now.

"We hired him to track down Dr. Wells. Make him face what he's done. And Barry's found out a lot for us, from how the saboteur was getting into the lab to where Dr. Wells was hiding over the weekend. And that's just after one day," Cisco gushed, blushing slightly.

"Barry, huh?" Jealousy twisted a little in Hartley's chest. "Is he cute?"

Cisco passed over his phone. The brunet on the screen was very cute indeed. Familiar too.

"What's his last name? I've seen him somewhere before..."

"Allen. He's Barry Allen."

Hartley nearly dropped Cisco's phone into his noodles, but he managed not to and handed it back instead. "As in the CSI from last year's DeVoe case?"

"Yeah. After his name was cleared, he went into the private investigation business. I guess some of his former coworkers burned some bridges with him when they thought he was guilty." Cisco stowed his phone away.

"He's Tina McGee's step-son. Did you know that part?" Hartley grinned at knowing something about this guy that Cisco didn't. "Harrison was obsessed with the case. Presumably because of his rivalry with her."

"I guess I missed that part when I googled him," Cisco admitted. "He got recommended to us by Caitlin's friend Ramsey. Barry tracked down one of his coworker's ex's who'd run off with their kid. And within twenty-four hours of being put on the case too, after the cops said the trail had gone cold. He's got a pretty impressive solve rate beyond that too; don't think he's had a single dissatisfied customer yet."

"Is that the sound of a crush I hear?" Hartley joked.

Cisco visibly pouted, looking ever so adorable. "Like you'll fare any better once you meet him."

"We'll see."

Eiling was like the Marvel Comics villain General Ross come to life and forced to retire. Basically, a self-righteous asshole who'd have experimented on humans if he could've gotten away with it. And considering his forced retirement, maybe he had experiment on people instead of animals after all.

For the most part, Eiling's interactions with Wells amounted to nothing useful and Barry was just about to mentally write off lunch as a waste of time, when Eiling brought up his final project with Wells and STAR Labs. A recently declassified project done some years earlier involving experimentation on gorillas. Expanding their intelligence using a chemical serum, the purpose of which Eiling sort of hand waved his way past, though Barry had his suspicions that started with super and ended with the word soldier.

All the gorillas in the project passed away, however. One by one until only one remained.

"Wells called the gorilla Grodd. Doted on the damn thing like it was his own kid. Taught him sign language, even." Eiling told him. "Creepiest damn thing I ever saw."

"So Grodd was a success, then?"

"Seemed like it. But his brain couldn't handle the stress in the end. It's body started degenerating, shutting down. Wells was devastated. Refused to have anything further to do

with army contracts."

For a moment, Barry thought of Clifford DeVoe and his mysterious degenerative disease. But he let out a breath and circled his thoughts back to Wells and Grodd. "Kind of unusual to hear Wells cared about anyone at all," Barry told him. "From all accounts, he was rather cold to everyone."

"Yeah, well Grodd mattered to him. Said some really weird things to the thing too. Real *Planet of the Apes* level creepy shit about getting back at the humans who'd harmed him."

Barry smiled politely and let the interview come to an end. The only thing he could say for certain was that Eiling was desperate for validation so that he wouldn't have to admit his retirement was one of disgrace. And while what he'd said about Grodd bothered Barry, he wasn't sure any of it was actually useful. Wells had a favored pet whom he'd experimented on and paid a terrible price for doing so. But was it relevant?

"Wait, one last thing, General. That last experiment, with the gorillas. Did it take place at STAR Labs?"

"No, the army had a facility just outside of Central City at the time and Wells would go there to oversee the experiments. Army took it over from the Air Force, though. The old Ferris Air facility. It got sold off not long after the experiment came to a close. Not sure who owns it now, just that the place is abandoned."

An abandoned facility where his favorite experiment had died under unfortunate circumstances sounded like an excellent place to check for the missing Harrison Wells.

Chapter 5

Farooq finally answered his phone later that afternoon and agreed to meet Barry at lunch the following day. Fridays were slow days for him, which worked in Barry's favor.

From what Barry could see from the man's social media and LinkedIn accounts, Farooq was a brilliant scientist who made friends easily. He was living with his parents to save money while his settlement from STAR Labs was likely paying for grad school. But most importantly? Farooq knew the side of Dr. Wells that he'd tried to keep hidden from his employees.

Barry cleared off his cork board in his office and started putting up the information he had so far. The crash fifteen years ago, the personality change, taking credit for Tess' work. (That last bit he linked to Wells taking credit for Farooq's work. He had a feeling there were a lot more instances of intellectual theft between those two points.) Building STAR Labs and the mysterious secret room. Grodd and the Ferris Air facility. Last but not least, covering up the accelerator sabotage and the mysterious Man in the Lightning.

Barry stared at that phrase for a long moment before pinning it up.

The Man in the Lightning was a saboteur and a murderer, but what else was he? If it were Joe or Eddie investigating an unknown murderer, what would they do next? The only potential contact was Wells, but he was missing too. So...

Reluctantly, Barry shelved it for the evening and moved on to tracing the ownership of the Ferris Air facility after the army sold it. He was four shell-companies deep by the time his phone started beeping, reminding him that dinner was a necessity of life.

Shell company number one was spun up just days before the facility came available to purchase and was the highest bidder at auction. It was named The Twenty-Fifth Century Adventure, supposedly an up and coming movie studio. Which never actually filmed anything, on the air base or elsewhere, and promptly disappeared entirely after selling the facility to Atomic Clock Inc. Atomic Clock Inc was registered as a maker of custom clocks, also repairing old clocks, with a particularly well made website to be found in the Internet Archive's wayback machine. Some very nice clocks were even made there it seemed, as the unknown benefactor of Atomic Clock Inc had hired one William Tockman, who'd worked out of Ferris Air for about a year before disappearing amidst rumors that he'd been hacking banks and funneling money into accounts around the world. Atomic Clock Inc went under as soon as its sole employee vanished and was purchased by Deadshot Gun Range that claimed to have gun ranges across the country (another foray into the wayback machine to find the defunct website) but Barry couldn't find any evidence there'd ever been any other gun ranges... or that the facility had ever actually been used as a gun range itself. Deadshot didn't hang on to the airbase for more than a month before passing it on to Abra Kedabra, to be used as a warehouse for storing equipment for magic acts and the like.

Once again, very nice website, no legitimate business to be found. Which made Barry wonder why Tockman had been allowed to use the premises. It was unlikely Tockman had owned Ferris Air himself and while Atomic Clock wasn't precisely a shell company like the others had been, Barry was pretty certain both it and all the other shell companies would prove to trace back to Wells eventually.

Over a bowl of curry rice, Barry switched over to looking into Tockman. Arrested in Gotham about six months after leaving Central, he'd been calling himself the Clock King at that point. William Tockman was currently an inmate at one of the New York Iron Heights facilities, captured by the Batman himself. However... during the time he'd been working quietly at the Atomic Clock, a number of STAR Labs competitors were hit by hackers, costing several of them contracts, research, and even forcing one to close down entirely. In fact, Mercury Labs had been one of the targeted facilities, forced to put research into a medical scanner on hold. STAR Labs put out a similar medical scanner earlier than Mercury Labs as a result. There'd been accusations that STAR Labs was involved in the hacks from the company that was forced to shut down, but nothing could be proven. Certainly the lab had benefited, though, producing a record number of patents that year.

Barry added that information to his cork board and made it a point between Wells taking credit for Tess Morgan's ideas and stealing from Farooq Gibran.

Hartley had to replay the clips of the man in the lightning a few times before he could believe what Cisco was showing him the day before. Even now, a day later and having slept in between viewings...

"That's just nuts," Hartley muttered.

"How goes the modeling program?" Cisco asked, coming back into the room with two coffees.

"I kicked Ronnie out because he was muttering under his breath and I don't think he actually slept last night. Caitlin was all too happy to drag him to the parking lot, so I assume they've both gone home. Also, the modeling is going both extremely well and exceedingly terrible." Hartley gratefully accepted the coffee Cisco handed him and pulled a spare chair over for the engineer to sit on. "Take a look for yourself. We haven't finished filling in all the damaged or otherwise sabotaged section yet, but..."

The screen showed an image of the accelerator, power building up until the entire building just exploded.

"Shit," Cisco breathed, scooting the chair closer as he sat down. "How fast is the time lapse on that?"

"One minute equals roughly an hour and with the alarm system apparently tampered with, we wouldn't have known anything was wrong until well after we were screwed. Up until it goes boom, we might have had a chance to vent the worst of it straight up but the only place to do that would be the pipeline... meaning it'd be a suicide mission." Hartley yawned widely and then drank more coffee.

"Did you get any sleep last night?" Cisco asked.

"Some. Not a lot. My head was kind of... spinning with it all. It's been a trip, thinking I knew him and then..."

"Yeah." Cisco's voice sounds rough and Hartley wonders if he's been getting any sleep either.

"So when do I get to meet PI Sexy?" Hartley asked, changing the subject.

"I don't know," Cisco admitted, rolling his eyes expressively for the joke, then added, "I should probably let Barry know we're back in touch with you now. He's been chasing down other leads. Do you think we'll actually be able to find Dr. Wells again?"

"For the sake of seeing him go to jail over this? I certainly hope so."

"Mr. Gibran?" Barry greeted, shaking the other man's hand before taking a seat at the table.

"Please, call me Farooq."

"And I'm Barry," he insisted in return.

"So, you want to talk about Dr. Wells," Farooq said, not even bothering to beat around the bush.

"Yeah. You've probably heard about STAR Lab's latest scandal." Barry noted the very satisfied expression that made its way onto Farooq's face.

"Couldn't have happened to a more deserving asshole," Farooq agreed. "Also heard Dr. Wells has gone missing. Ran away to avoid dealing with the consequences of his actions, most likely."

"That is the general consensus," Barry agreed. "Like I said over the phone, I've been hired to track him down. I'm trying to establish what his patterns of behavior were before he disappeared; should make it easier for me to find him. And since one of his patterns of behavior seems to be stealing the work of those more innovative than himself..."

"My name came up. Who did mention me, anyway?"

"Dr. McGee. Apparently she's got her eye on you as a potential hire for Mercury Labs." Barry grinned when Farooq preened a little.

"Seriously? Oh, wow, shit..." he was grinning widely. "I'd love to work at Mercury Labs once I have my PhD."

Barry was about to change the subject back to Wells when a waitress dropped by the table for their orders. Barry picked the first sandwich he saw on the menu - a chicken salad sandwich - and Farooq got a pasta dish and they both ordered waters. Then it was back to business.

"Right, so... Wells. He hired me straight out of college with my BS. Got my master's on the STAR Labs dime through the continuing education program. I thought that man hung the damn moon," Farooq told him. "There were a few nay sayers I really should have listened to, but at the time? I just they were bad apples or sour grapes or whatever. People jealous of Dr. Wells and shitting on his generosity for the sake of being jerks. And then I started on this home project.

"It was basically just an improved capacitor idea I had; something that'd make large sized lithium batteries more efficient. It's what I wanted to use as my PhD study, but I was getting a start on it to see if the idea was even viable. And it was. I made the mistake of mentioning it to Dr. Wells, though and... that weekend nearly all my research disappeared. I had enough left to prove I'd been working on it for months and when Wells rolled it out as the next project for powering the autonomous alarm system for the accelerator... I could prove he stole that research from me."

Farooq gave a little derisive snort. "He fired me when I came to him with my accusations. Said I'd never be able to prove it in court. But a few months later he settled with a lot of money and some NDAs rather than let the whole thing get turned into a media circus. I needed that money, though, and it was a lot more than I'd have gotten if it had actually gone to trial. So I let it go. Hartley Rathaway was a little shit about it at the time, but I figured... he was just where I used to be, believing Wells was everything he claimed he was. Now Rathaway's done what I wanted to and toppled Wells' little empire over."

"He's on my list of people to contact, but you mentioned there were some nay sayers when it came to Wells? Do you have any names for those people?" Barry pulled out his phone to take notes.

"Well... there was Dr. McGee, whom you've already spoken to, but... yeah I've got a few other names for you. Honestly, though, I really don't know how much this'll help you in the long run. I haven't spoken to him in well over a year and I doubt any of these people have much contact with him either."

"Any insight I can get on what kind of person he is gives me a better idea of where he may have gone to ground," Barry assured Farooq.

Dr. Wells house had been sealed off after the warrant to search the place for tech was executed. The front door had to be forced open and so the lock was broken, but sealed tightly enough afterwards that Barry didn't want to use it as his point of entry. It'd be too obvious if an officer came by the house to check that the seal had been broken. No alarm system - or at least none that he contracted out for. Maybe a DIY kit, which fit with the cameras Barry identified on a quick check of the property.

While Barry considered the back door as an entry point, he discarded it. There was a camera pointed at the door and Barry didn't want to risk not being able to erase the footage later. The windows were a no-go either. None of them opened so it didn't matter if they were covered by a camera or not. It wasn't worth breaking a window to poke around inside.

There was a skylight, however.

"Hey, Oliver," Barry greeted on his phone when the other man picked up. "I've got a thought experiment for you. Breaking into a house via skylight. Any ideas?"

Thirty minutes later, Barry was lowering himself into the living room of Wells' very expensive, very remotely located house.

Much like Wells' office, the house was a blank. The man had lived there for several years, but there didn't seem to be a single mark of personality stamped on the place beyond a clear love for stark 'modern' aesthetics.

It could have been a show house, for all the good it did Barry. In fact, he was just about to call it quits when he realized... there was discrepancy in the house itself. There was a missing room.

Barry counted his steps down the hallway again. Closed his eyes and considered the shape of the house's exterior, the size and location of the two bedrooms and bathrooms and closets. And he was certain. There was a room missing. Small, probably more a walk in closet than an actual room, but definitely no visible entrances where there ought to have been.

Tentatively, Barry knocked his gloved hand lightly along the hallway wall where he guessed the closet would be located. No indication of a doorway having been removed. If something had been walled up, there was no indication of drywall repair or barely visible seams where old drywall would have been connected to new. The walls lacked texturing, so he couldn't exactly check for places where the patterning overlapped in unusual ways either. But once he was back in the master bedroom he found what he was looking for. Just the barest hint of an outline where the drywall wasn't a perfect match. In the shape of a door.

Something was back there. Something important. And Barry didn't know how to get in there without putting a hole in the wall.

Still, he could send an anonymous tip to the police and let them put a hole in the wall for him.

A quick check of the house confirmed no interior cameras, hidden or otherwise, and Barry quickly found that the outside cameras probably weren't storing anything locally either. The home router had been disconnected and a closet that might've housed a small home-server unit was completely empty save for the cabling that came out of the walls only to connect to nothing. A quick check for WiFi signals with his phone told Barry that there wasn't a viable signal in range at all. Satisfied that he wasn't going to have to explain his skylight adventure to Joe, Barry left the house and headed for his next stop. Ferris Air.

There was something creepy about Ferris Air.

Barry usually didn't mind abandoned buildings. He'd been in enough of them, after all, investigating murders as a CSI and more recently while gathering evidence of embezzlement for a shipping company. But there was something about Ferris Air that made Barry uneasy.

His hand reached down to brush the cell phone in his back pocket. Maybe he should call Joe. Or Eddie.

While he did pull out his phone, all he did was shoot a quick text to Iris. *Checking out a lead on the missing Wells. Ferris Air.* The phone buzzed a few moments later with an answering text from Iris.

Let me know if you find him. I get first dibs on the interview.

Barry felt a little better as he put his phone away. Iris knew where he was which was good enough for now. Steeling himself, he walked up the airstrip towards the building.

He called out a few times, loudly, testing the waters. If someone was there, Barry was giving up his element of surprise, but... it felt like the right call. No response, though, even as Barry approached the front doors and tugged gently at the handle.

It slipped open.

The front room still looked military. Beige walls, shadowed despite the descent lighting from the windows. No electricity when Barry tried the switch, though. There was a beat up desk near the hallway that had seen better days. Receptionist's work spot, no doubt.

Ferris Air was a small airbase. There were three buildings total. The main building, which Barry now stood inside, with the main entry, two offices, and a decent sized conference room. The second building was actually slightly larger, housing two labs and two more offices. Presumably that was where the gorilla experiments had taken place. Then there was the hanger at the base of the airstrip, where there supposed to be space for about two mid-sized planes.

Using his phone as a light, Barry did a quick run through of the main building, but it was abandoned. Same with the hanger, which Barry checked out next. But as he was approaching the door of the lab building, Barry felt all his hair stand on end. Something nearby crackled like electricity. And the creepy feeling abruptly grew worse.

There was a red light in the corner of his eye and Barry spun around to face it... but there was nothing there.

Nothing.

Heart pounding, Barry turned back to the door... and it was open. It hadn't been open a moment ago, though.

"I should leave," Barry muttered, even as he walked up to the door, doing the very sort of thing he'd be shouting at the television for someone not to do in a horror movie.

There wasn't anyone inside the building, though. But in one of the labs, filled with empty cages, red and gold paint on the far wall read "TOO SLOW FLASH" with a stylized lightning bolt behind it.

A message, obviously. But for who? The man in the lightning? Or... was he the one who'd left it behind?

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Some AU version of Arrow season 2 is happening in the background. I don't even know, just that they're doing marginally better than in canon.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Barry didn't sleep much the night after visiting Ferris Air. The electric crackle he'd seen in the corner of the eye - red electricity - and the graffiti in the abandoned lab were stuck in his head, even long after he'd left the room full of empty cages behind.

There'd been no sign of Wells there, though he'd found the cage that had once held his beloved test subject, Grodd. In the end, Barry had gone back to the graffiti and taken a few pictures before giving up and heading back home.

When he did sleep, he dreamed of his childhood home and lightning in the living room. His mother screaming for him to run... red lightning coalescing into a monster in yellow, towering over him as it reached out with a vibrating hand and red glowing eyes...

He was exhausted and jittery at the train station, having had way too much coffee in order to be able to focus on buying a ticket for the early morning express to Starling City. He slept on the train, thankfully without the nightmares, though he startled awake at nearly every stop. The train arrived at Starling around 11:15 and Barry gave Oliver a call at the station. As Felicity had predicted, Oliver picking him up turned into Dig picking him up instead and he greeted the other man with a tired smile and a grateful hug before stowing his overnight bag in the backseat of the car before they headed for a cafe for lunch.

"So what's this I hear about skylight related shenanigans?" Dig asked.

"I'm looking into the missing Dr. Wells," Barry told him. "I needed to check out his house without disturbing the police 'do not cross' lines. Found a hidden room, though I couldn't figure out how to get into it. I did send the police an anonymous tip about it, though, so hopefully they'll be able to get into it for me."

Dig rolled his eyes. "You sound like Oliver, and that's not a compliment."

"At least I'm not knee-capping people with arrows?" Barry offered innocently, grinning when Dig snorted with laughter.

"There is that."

Barry had shown up in Starling earlier that year on his third case as a PI. He'd been looking into the missing fiance of a bride jilted at the alter. The man had turned out to be a con man

who'd stolen Barry's client's trust fund. Barry'd tracked the man down, gotten his client's missing money back, and turned him over to the police... only to overhear a rather interesting conversation at the SCPD. Barry'd stayed a few extra days at Starling only to wind up involved in tracking down a thief for Queen Consolidated, discovering the Arrow's real identity as Oliver Queen... and saving Oliver's life with rat poison. It was a weird story and Barry hadn't really expected them to stay in contact with him when he went back to Central. Oliver hadn't seemed to like Barry much - he kept throwing the events with DeVoe in his face as a reason to consider Barry untrustworthy - and his apology before Barry left had been... stilted at best.

Except... they did stay in contact with Barry. Felicity called Barry for help looking into a shady woman at the office, who turned out to be a former flame of Robert Queen's looking to take revenge on Oliver for being his father's son. Then Oliver called, asking if Barry had time to meet up while Oliver visited Central City to track down a guy with information on a super soldier serum. Dig came with him and... somewhere along the way, Barry realized he'd made friends with Team Arrow. Eventually Barry felt confident in reaching out to them for help on his own cases and... here they were now. Meeting up for lunch in Starling and Barry planning to stay the night in Oliver's guest room.

Of course, Barry could never tell Joe any of this. And Iris just thought Barry had a thing for Felicity and Oliver. Which he did, but he also did not want to involve himself in their 'will-they-won't-they' dynamic. Though he did have a preference for polyamorous relationships, whatever was going on with Felicity and Oliver was far too unstable for Barry's tastes.

Besides, he was still a little hung up on how Cisco was cute. Of course, he was also a client and Barry shouldn't be thinking of him that way.

"So what about the case is bringing you out to Starling?" Dig asked.

"Wells was involved in a car wreck about fifteen years ago, just outside of town," Barry replied, mind focusing back onto work. "His fiancée was killed in the crash and he apparently had a personality change afterwards. Alienated his entire social circle," Barry told him. "I'm not really sure what I'm looking for, but I wanted to see the location of the wreck myself."

"You should talk to Laurel while you're here; she might be able to show you the accident report," Dig observed. "We'll have to get Oliver to introduce you."

Barry grinned. "Thanks. That'd be great."

"Though knowing Oliver," Dig mused, "he's probably already told her."

Eddie frowned and knocked on the wall again. "Definitely a hidden room. You can see the outline of where the door used to be right here." He gestured to the subtle lines in the wall, half hidden behind the dresser and mirror up against the wall. "There's an attic, right?"

Joe nodded. "There's an attic access in the hallway. Volunteering?" he added with a smirk.

Rolling his eyes, Eddie nodded and followed him back out of the master bedroom to pull down the attic access... except it stuck. Locked, apparently. They had to go find a ladder to reach high enough to force the lock. But, eventually, Eddie did make it up into the house's attic. It was cold in the house due to the house's heating system having been turned off. The attic, Eddie decided, was unnecessarily freezing.

He really needed to buy some gloves.

Shining the light around, Eddie tried to orient himself to the rooms below. Which way was the hidden room? ... Probably over by that trap door to the left.

"I found something. I'm gonna check it out," Eddie called, scuttling carefully so that he didn't accidentally go foot first through the ceiling. He'd done that once in his parent's house, trying to check for where squirrels had been getting into their attic. He'd learned how to drywall a ceiling after that and they still wouldn't let him live it down. At least they'd found it funny and he'd blocked out the squirrel hole, so no squirrels made it into the house proper.

He's fairly certain that if squirrels had shown up in his parents living room along with his foot, it would've been a very different story.

Still, Eddie makes it across the short distance with no mishaps this time and popped open the trap door, illuminating the tiny room below with his flashlight. It's uninhabited, thankfully, and he can see a desk with some monitors on it below. "We got tech," he called over his shoulder to where Joe was poking his head up into the attic. "No Wells, though."

"Well, lets see if any of whats in there is covered by our warrant," Joe said, pulling himself the rest of the way up.

Eddie nodded and dropped down into the hidden room. "Not a lot of space in here. I'd recommend you stay up there," he cautioned. It was about the size of a walk in closet - probably exactly what it had been, once upon a time - and there was just enough room for the ladder, Eddie, and the desk in the room. No chair for the desk... but there was a light switch. It really didn't make the tiny space any less eerie, though.

He'd never been particularly claustrophobic, but there was something distinctly unsettling about being in a small room where the only exit was up. No windows, no doors... just smooth walls.

"There's a computer in here. And some drawers..." Eddie opened the drawers and flipped idly through the files there. Pictures, pictures, more pictures...

Eddie frowned, picking up one of the photos. The kid in the picture was oddly familiar looking, though he couldn't place where he'd seen him before. White kid, brown hair, standing in front of a grave. The other photographs were of the same kid but... one of the photos had another familiar face in it, one Eddie could easily place. Mostly because he was in the attic above. It was Joe.

A sinking feeling opened up in the pit of Eddie's stomach and he flipped ahead in the file folders, pulling out more pictures. The kid from the first photographs aging slowly into the

more familiar visage of Barry Allen.

"Joe! Forget what I just said. Get down here. You have to see this."

The road has been repaved at least once since the wreck, so there's no tire tracks to mark the place where Dr. Wells car flipped over all those years ago. But Barry finds the location anyway, thanks to the help of his new friend and lovely companion for the afternoon, Laurel Lance.

Oliver introduced them at lunch, having apparently mentioned to her what Barry was in town for just like Dig had guessed. She worked at the Starling City DA's office and was intrigued by Barry's investigation, so she'd actually pulled the file. There wasn't much too it since the wreck was deemed an open and shut case and she'd let Barry look it over while they ate at the cafe.

It was deemed a vehicular accident caused by the driver trying to avoid a large animal on the road. Likely a deer or moose, maybe a bear. The driver - Wells - had no alcohol in his system at the time of the accident and was not deemed criminally responsible for the crash. He was considered civilly liable by his insurance company, but not criminally liable.

There were some photographs of the crash site and that what Barry, Laurel, Oliver, Felicity, and Dig - because all of them were nosy and curious, so of course they all came along - used to find the exact piece of road where the crash happened. It hasn't really changed much, aside from the gradual repaving that happened over the course of fifteen years and the local greenery looking slightly more overgrown. It's located on a bridge with a big shoulder where Dig and Laurel park their cars before they all hopped out to look around.

Barry's not really sure what he's looking for. But he tries to use the photographs to imagine the scene as it would have been all those years ago. The paramedics arriving to the van upside down. Tess Morgan already dead, though cause of death wasn't listed in the file. That seemed like an oversight - probably shoddy records keeping on the cop's part. It didn't look like murder or something that could be classed as vehicular homicide, so who cared what the official cause of death was?

He'd have to chase that down later, just in case there was something interesting there after all.

According to the paramedic's reports, Wells was outside of the car, covered in scrapes from the shattered glass on his face and arms. He'd insisted they save Tess and said nothing more the entire way to the hospital after the EMTs pronounced Dr. Morgan dead on the scene.

He'd been standing away from the car, though, according to one of the two paramedics reports. Wells had been standing over by the bridge railing. It wasn't that big a distance between the wrecked car and railing, but... it was the wrong direction to have gone in if he was so concerned about Tess' well being.

Barry walked over to the railing and looked down. Not too deep and it was likely a watershed creek, in that it was only a creek when it rained or for a short time thereafter. The whole area below was extremely overgrown and probably full of poison ivy or poison oak.

With a heavy sigh, Barry realized he was going to risk it anyway. He just... he had a feeling there was something down there. Even after all this time. "I'm going to check out the creek bed," he called and then headed for the nearest side of the bridge where he could walk down the slope.

"Count me in," Laurel said, following along.

"So, if Oliver's the Arrow, does that make you the Canary?" Barry asked. If she wasn't then she had to be related. And given the way conversation at lunch had gone, it was pretty obvious she was aware of Oliver's vigilante activities.

"No, but if I borrowed her wig I'd probably look exactly like her," Laurel responded with a grin.

Barry hummed thoughtfully. Hadn't Sara Lance recently resurfaced in Starling City? He could have sworn he'd seen a headline about the lost Lance sister returning home. There's certainly something about Laurel that feels fierce, though, and Barry's not a hundred percent convinced she isn't the Canary. But he drops the subject as they reach the dry creek bed.

"So what are we looking for," Laurel asked.

"According to that file of yours, when the paramedics arrived Wells was standing away from the vehicle beside the bridge railing. Once the paramedics walked up, he was all about Tess Morgan's well being... but what was he doing by the railing in the first place?" Barry shrugged. "If there's anything down here to find, I guess I'll have to hope I know it when I see it."

Laurel nodded and they both looked around, splitting up a little bit and pointing out the poison oak to each other when they noticed it.

"Hey, Barry, I found something," Laurel called after a few minutes search. "No telling if its related to your case, but... I think I'm going to have to call my dad."

"Police officer, right?" Barry asked absently, walking over to join her. There's a skull laying half-buried in the mud, empty eye sockets gazing up at them.

"Yeah. I think we just stumbled onto a crime scene."

Chapter End Notes

Laurel just sort of sneaked in here and shoved Oliver and Felicity out of her way to get some screen time. Don't mess with Laurel when she wants screen time, I guess.

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

Been a while for this fic, but I had some inspiration strike. Dunno if I'll get more than this chapter out of it, but... even just the one chapter is progress.

"So you think this body might have something to do with the Wells crash?" Detective Lance asked, giving Barry an incredulous look.

Barry shrugged. "Could be. Wells was at the bridge railing when paramedics arrived and the remaining bones are in the approximate location where a body would fall if dropped off over the railing." He smiled politely when Lance's eyebrow went up. "Former CSI. I'm good at calculating trajectories."

"Right." Lance turned and gave his daughter a long look before turning to Oliver next.

Oliver and Laurel both just smiled back while Dig and Felicity exchanged their own looks and rolled their eyes. It was entertaining to watch and Barry would've liked to see what happened next, but his phone started ringing.

Excusing himself, Barry headed back up the incline towards the cars and answered his phone after a glance at the screen. "Hey Joe, what's up?"

"Bar, I need you to come by the station." Joe sounded... rattled.

Internally, Barry panicked a little. Had he been caught on Wells' home security cameras after all? "I can't right now. I'm in Starling city. Running down a lead on Dr. Wells."

"What are you looking into Wells for?" Joe's tone turned sharp, almost angry.

"His employees hired me to track him down," Barry replied, frowning. "Joe, what's wrong?"

There was a heavy sigh on the other end of the line. "Look it's... we went back to Wells' house today. There was an anonymous tip about there being a secret room in his house. Eddie and I went to validate it and... well, we found something. And that's about all I can say over the phone, okay? It's... I'd really rather you didn't take this case, Barry. Is there any way you can drop it?"

"I already signed the contract, Joe. I'm not about to break it without good reason." And even with good reason... somehow, this case was connected to his mother's death. Barry couldn't let it go. Not even for Joe's sake. "Look, I was gonna stay overnight, but tell you what. I'll head for the station now if you'll come pick me up from when I get back to Central this evening. I'll even stay in my old room tonight." Admittedly, he'd probably do that anyway.

He'd be exhausted getting home that late. But Joe sounded genuinely worried and Barry wanted to help put whatever was bothering him at ease.

"Thanks, Bar. I'll feel a lot better when you're back home," Joe said in relief. "Give me a call when you know which train you'll be on and I'll make sure to be at the station when it arrives."

Barry made his goodbyes then and headed over to Laurel. "I'm going to have to head back early. I don't suppose you'd be willing to keep me in the loop with whatever turns up with our Skeleton Doe?" he asked her.

"Sure, what's your number? That way we don't have to use Ollie as our go-between." They swapped phones, programming in their details for the other. Then Laurel headed over to stand between Felicity and Oliver, draping her arms over their shoulders and whispering closely in Felicity's ear.

Barry felt a little bemused at the sight. Maybe he wasn't the only one who'd contemplated dating both of them together. He wished Laurel luck, if that was indeed the case; she'd need it with those two.

The three of them rejoined Barry and they went the rest of the way back to the cars where Dig was waiting, reading something on his phone. "So, what's the verdict?"

"Dad doesn't think it's connected to the Wells crash, but I'll keep on him," Laurel crossed her arms and glanced back down the slope at the uniforms below. "I've got a feeling about this."

"So do I," Barry agreed. "But that call I just got was from Joe. Something came up in the Wells case that..." he frowned at his phone, suddenly thoughtful. "He wants me back 'cause of it. Which is kind of odd because he didn't know I'd been hired to look into Wells' disappearance until just now."

"You don't think this has anything to do with the skylight?" Oliver asked, sounding concerned.

"No... he'd have yelled at me over the phone for that." Barry shook his head. "I guess I'll find out tonight. I promised I'd catch a train back tonight. He hasn't sounded this worried about me since the DeVoe case."

Joe hugs Barry a little too tightly at the station and chatters a little too pointedly about nothing on the drive back home. Barry doesn't push during the drive but he knows Joe's been rattled badly by whatever it is he's found on the Wells case.

"What has you so freaked out that I had to give up sleeping in a spare bedroom in a literal mansion to take a midnight train back home?" Barry finally asked when they were settled with cups of tea in Joe's kitchen.

"We got a tip off about Wells' place having a hidden room. So when we went to check it out, Eddie found an old walk in closet that had been walled up. Attic access only." Joe hesitated,

but not long enough for Barry to prod him to keep going. "There was a computer in there. Forensics is still pouring over it, but it's mostly just more of the same vein of the pictures we found next to it. Pictures of... of you, Barry. Starting right after your mom died."

Barry knows he should be more surprised. But he's pretty sure he's bypassed surprise for shock instead. He knew there was a connection to the man in the lightning already... but this? This said the connection had existed since right after Nora Allen and Tess Morgan died. "What?" Barry asked, feeling faint. Thinking of the message painted in red and gold.

Was that message somehow for him? About him?

Joe was saying something about the pictures starting at Nora's funeral and hitting all the important milestones of Barry's life. Newspaper clippings too, chronicling things like the DeVoe case. But also Barry's high school Glee club when it made the papers for winning a national level competition. His robotics club getting a minor mention for winning a maze running competition. His track team competitions in college. And everything to do with Barry being eventually reunited with Henry. Barry standing as his dad's best man at Henry and Tina's wedding... it was all there, like some creepy sort of shrine to the life of Barry Allen.

Barry swallowed hard. He needed to tell Joe about the man in the lightning. Preferably without coming off as crazy while doing so. Joe was a cop, so evidence was best. And... for the first time, Barry had evidence the man existed. On the STAR Labs CCTV cameras.

... if he could get permission to show those recordings to Joe in the morning...

Barry let out a shuddering breath. "I'm home, Joe. I'm home and I'm safe and I think that's gotta be enough for us both tonight, okay?"

Joe nodded. "Do you understand why I want you off this case now, Barry? I know you've never had to break a contract before, but..."

"I'm not going to start now. I... there's something I want to show you, but I need my client's permission to do so. In the morning... in the morning I'll talk to Cisco and I'm going to show you why I need to follow this case no matter where it leads me."

"You can't just tell me?" Joe asked, a bit exasperated in tone.

Barry shook his head negatively. "Sorry, Joe. But in this case... seeing is definitely believing."

Sunday morning, Barry wakes up at what feels like an ungodly hour but is actually only eight-thirty. Part of him really, truly regrets not sleeping at the mansion - and getting to meet Moira Queen, that would have been interesting - and thus having an actual, full night's rest. But, ultimately, he knew that coming back early was the right things to do.

Fishing out his phone, Barry called Cisco.

"Hey, Barry," Cisco greeted, sounding like he might have been woken up by Barry's call. "How're things going with the case?"

"Well, after interviewing a lot of people, I can tell you that Dr. Wells had a penchant for stealing other people's ideas and settling lawsuits out of court, was very attached to a gorilla named Grodd who died in a military funded experiment, and that a literal skeleton was unearthed yesterday at the site of the car accident where his fiance died some fifteen years ago. Unclear if the skeleton is a coincidence. And the police have found evidence in a hidden room in Dr. Wells house that he was stalking someone since around the time Tess Morgan died."

"Every time I think I can't be surprised further," Cisco said. "Who's he been stalking?"

Barry hesitated. "Me. Actually. Since my mom died when I was eleven. There's something... I should have told you. When we saw the man in the lightning on the security cameras. I... I've seen him before. Assuming there's only one person capable of doing that - moving that fast. He's the man who killed my mom."

"... What?" Cisco's voice had gone a little shrill.

"I never told anyone. Because it sounds nuts, right? Oh, yeah, I saw a guy who can move so fast he trails red lightning; he murdered my mom and framed my dad. Sounds totally believable."

"I did not know 'framed for murder' was a heritable trait," Cisco muttered. And then added, "sorry, please continue," when Barry stopped talking.

"Obviously I couldn't tell the police what I really saw, so the official story is that I saw a man in yellow break into the house. And over time... I almost thought I had imagined the lightning and his sheer speed. And then I saw that recording and..."

"I get it. I wouldn't have said anything either. So... Dr. Wells is associated somehow with the guy who murdered your mom and has been... keeping tabs on you for that guy? It doesn't make any sense."

"Only because we don't know how they're connected yet." Barry had no doubt it would all make sense - in a rather terrifying way - once everything was pieced together. "I'd like your permission to show the security footage to Detective Joe West. He wants me off your case, but if I can convince him that the man in the lightning is real... I think he'll understand why I want to continue investigating." Why he needed to keep investigating.

"I'll talk with Ronnie and Caitlin, but... I don't mind." Cisco sighed heavily. "I mean, we probably need to show it to the police anyway. Oh, I got back in touch with Hartley and he's interested in meeting you."

Barry grinned. "Good. I've gotten the impression Hartley was closer to Dr. Wells than most?"

"Yeah. You know... Hartley recognized your name when I talked to him about you. He said... he said Dr. Wells was obsessed with the DeVoe case when it was in the news. I guess... the whole stalking thing isn't totally shocking, knowing that. Still weird though."

"Tell me about it. He used to be my science hero, you know? I figured he'd never actually know who I am, though. And turns out he's got a hidden room with pictures from my mom's funeral in it. Surreal doesn't even begin to cover this."

"I'll give Ronnie and Caitlin a call to see what they think about showing the Detective and I'll text you when to meet at STAR Labs. I'm assuming you want to show him today?"

"Sorry to drag you back in there on your day off," Barry apologized, "but if this person is helping Wells evade the police then better we show him now anyway."

"Alright, then plan for after lunch. Say... one o'clock?"

"We'll see you in the foyer," Barry promised.

End Notes

It feels weird writing a PI story and not having Ralph in it.

I'm not sure how long this one will be yet, but I have a pretty clear idea of where I'm going with this.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!