

Tangled Lightning

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Tangled Lightning

by [RedPaladin465](#)

Summary

Caitlin was a planner, always had been, but things just never seemed to stop changing around her. First, there was the Particle Accelerator explosion that turned her whole life and career on its head.

Then, there was Barry, whom she tripped and stumbled and fell in love with when he came crashing into her life alongside a freak lightning storm.

Then, there was this--the little plastic stick she held in her hands showing two glaring red lines.

Then, there was Zoom, who needed to be stopped before he threatened the lives of everyone she loved.

[originally written for Snowbarry Valentine 2020]

Notes

Obviously, this was not posted or completed in time for Simply Snowbarry's Valentine 2020 challenge- I know y'all said late posts were okay, but I bet you weren't thinking you'd get one THIS LATE. I AM SO SORRY.

But, uh, I stuck all the Valentine Challenge prompts in there that I could- see if you can spot them all ;) once I post the second chapter. LOL.

Enjoy the Snowbarry season 2 rewrite/pregnancy fic/fluff, friends!

Disclaimer: I don't own the Flash

Chapter 1

Caitlin was wholly unfamiliar with the feeling of dread rising in her stomach. Her hands were shaking, her breaths came out in quick pants, and she was visibly trembling. Dimly, she could hear the dry, ragged sob that broke through her lips, her free hand flying up to cover her mouth as the tears started slipping down her cheeks.

It wasn't supposed to last, she knew. This wasn't supposed to happen. Oh God, this wasn't supposed to happen.

She had woken up that morning, feeling sick and tired and went to the doctor expecting it to be...not this. She was a planner, meticulous with her work and schedule and most aspects of her life. Sure, everything that happened after the Particle Accelerator explosion and the emergence of the Flash had gotten her to loosen up a little, but still-

Still-

Forcing herself to take deep breaths, Caitlin stilled her tears, and with her hands still slightly shaking, she carefully cleaned the plastic stick and put it back into its container and walked out of the bathroom, clutching it tightly in her fist.

In the end, she supposed it was kind of her fault. After Ronnie, Barry had come crashing into her life along with a freak lightning storm, and Caitlin, who had lost faith in just about everything, found it once more—found herself once more—in the spark in his bright, earnest green eyes, in his enormous heart and desire to help the people around him, in his wounds and bruises and in his pained, sheepish eyes when her hands stitched him back together again. It really, truly, honestly did not take much for her to completely fall head over heels for him. Barry was so different from Ronnie, but in a way that was new, like a breath of fresh air. She wasn't lying when she told Ronnie, when he asked her to marry him again, wasn't lying when she talked to Barry at Mercury Labs—she said no to Ronnie, both times, because she couldn't leave him.

Leave Barry, that is.

It wasn't as if her answer to him was a surprise to Barry. At least, it shouldn't have been, if she ever got around to telling him. It should have been obvious in the way she moaned his name, the way she clung to him so tightly in his bed, in her bed, on the nights where they craved someone's touch, someone they trusted and loved...though she was fairly certain that the way she loved Barry and the way Barry loved her were two very, very different things. He wasn't quick on the uptake. Caitlin was his best friend, but Barry had come to mean everything to her. She wanted more, but seeing the way he looked at Iris, seeing the twinkle in his eyes when he talked about the brilliant and beautiful Patty Spivot down in the CCPD—there was no way she could ask for more from him. In fact, she was the one who encouraged him to find the love that he deserved.

He deserved it. He really did. Everyone could see through the flimsy facades he put on; Barry wore his heart on his sleeve, and Caitlin would not stand in the way of his happiness. She just wanted him to be happy, despite her own feelings toward him.

But now, it wasn't just about her feelings; this was so much bigger than her and so much bigger than Barry and Central City and everything else in her entire world that had now condensed to this one tiny thing growing inside her belly. It wasn't, Caitlin knew objectively, but as her maternal instincts flared to life, she couldn't help but feel that way.

It really was kind of her fault, though. Her last mistake—the night she *finally* cracked the secret to distilling a potent enough form of alcohol to knock Barry way past *buzzed* and well into *completely smashed*. He, for the first time since becoming the Flash, had *finally* gotten drunk, and *she* drank along with him—something less potent for her, of course—and then one thing led to another that really shouldn't have been surprising given their weekly midnight rendezvous complete with what Barry thought was a sweet, platonic breakfast in her or his kitchen the next morning, but it was *completely possible* that in their haste to rip the clothes off of each other, they'd forgotten about any sort of protection.

The moment they woke up, there had been a meta-emergency that required them to immediately speed to the lab, so it was also entirely possible for Caitlin and Barry to have been so used to *having* protection that they just...forgot. Caitlin could beat herself up about it all day. She shouldn't have been careless. She should have remembered, should have thought about it and at least made sure, but-

She put a hand on top of her still-flat stomach, and in that one single second before she had to deal with the inevitable train wreck that was going to be the rest of her life, she promised the little life inside of her that was no bigger than an apple seed she would do everything she could to protect it.

Despite the pit in her stomach every time Caitlin thought about Barry, actually seeing him was a hundred times worse. It felt like someone had dropped an anvil into her midsection, weighing her down; she had to force a smile when he waltzed into the med bay later that afternoon, whistling happily.

"Cait!" he greeted her enthusiastically.

Apparently, something in her expression gave her away, because Barry's face fell almost immediately. "Are you okay?"

Great, she wanted to say, her eyes flitting over to her purse on top of the desk where she had stashed the pregnancy test she took that morning, still showing the two lines on the tiny screen. *Fantastic; the sun is shining, you're beautiful, I'm in love with you while you're clearly in love with someone else, and I'm pregnant with our child.*

Maybe not the best way to breach the subject. Maybe she could just move away, maybe move to Keystone City for a while, for the remainder of her pregnancy, and give her and her child some space. Their child.

She sighed.

“I’m fine,” Caitlin said tiredly, waving him off. “Just haven’t been getting enough sleep these days.”

Barry’s eyes furrowed, moving closer to her. “Are you sure? I can get you to the doctor to make sure, and-”

And whatever else he was going to say was lost when Caitlin felt her stomach turn; she lurched toward the closest trash can with a speed that could have given Barry a run for his money and made it in time just scant seconds before she emptied her rather meager breakfast into it. Barry immediately zoomed to her side, holding her hair in his hands and rubbing soothing circles on her back.

“Cait, I think we should get you to a doctor,” he murmured, waiting out her retching. Caitlin didn’t even have the energy to shake her head, to snap back at him and say, ‘I *am* a doctor, damnit.’ She wasn’t angry at him, she knew, but she could feel her emotions starting to leak all over the place as she was still reeling and trying to recover from the events of the morning.

“Water,” she rasped, pointing to the general direction of her purse without looking away in case she had more to throw up. Barry flashed over, but the wind from his speed accidentally knocked her purse over—which didn’t actually contain a whole lot aside from the water bottle weighing it down—causing its contents to spill all over the desk.

Silence.

Caitlin gingerly pulled a tissue from the tissue box next to the med bay bed and wiped her mouth on it, looking over at Barry to see what was taking him so long and found him dumbstruck, standing in front of her bag and holding a very familiar-looking plastic stick. The blood drained from her face when he turned, agonizingly slowly, to face her.

Barry made some sort of half-hearted excuse to Cisco in the Cortex about Caitlin not feeling well, and despite her protests, immediately grabbed the good doctor, grabbed her stuff, and flashed her home. The world whirled around her until they were standing in front of her apartment door, Barry holding out her keys for her in his right hand. Seeing the stony expression on his face, Caitlin nervously bit her lip and unlocked her door, letting both of them inside.

He rounded on her nearly immediately.

“*Caitlin*,” he said as soon as the door closed. “*What* was that?”

She buried her face in her hands, reining in her emotions. How was she supposed to answer him when even she barely knew what was going on?

Breathing deeply through her nose, Caitlin sat down on her couch, still refusing to look up at him. “I just found out this morning,” she replied quietly, her emotions making her voice

wobble. For a moment, neither of them moved. Footsteps padded over to her, and she could hear the rustle of Barry's clothes as he kneeled in front of her, his hands gently prying them away from her face. It wasn't until then that she noticed-

Barry's hands were shaking too. Their eyes met, thousands of words in them, and yet, nothing being exchanged between them. It took him a while to find his voice, after swallowing hard a few times.

"Is...is it...mine?"

Caitlin would later blame the shock and the hormones for how everything in her snapped at that moment, and she burst into tears. "Barry," she cried, sniffing, "I'm so sorry, I *swear* it was an accident-"

It was either a testament to their friendship or Barry's big heart that he immediately pulled her close, her words muffled by his jacket. He was still in shock and trying to process, completely at a loss for words, so, in his experience with grief...he went back to the basics, trying to do what he could at the moment instead of thinking of everything else he couldn't control.

"No," he said gently. "No! Why...are you apologizing?"

She pushed away from him, hastily wiping at her eyes. "If I hadn't...if I had been more careful..."

Wordlessly, Barry took her hands, rubbing his thumbs comfortingly over her knuckles. They might have been co-workers, might have been fellow scientists, might have slept together, might have made mistakes, but it had always been clear to them that first and foremost, Caitlin Snow and Barry Allen were best friends, and nothing, not even something like this, could cause them to abandon the other. Besides, Caitlin couldn't *possibly* place the blame on herself. They were both at fault.

He thought very, very carefully about his next words. About what they implied, what they meant for him and his kind-of-sort-of-budding relationship with Patty and his lifelong feelings for Iris, what they meant for the rest of his life. It was surprising how much those things seem to fade in comparison to this one thing now. This...baby...this life that was now growing inside of Caitlin, it was a *fact*. It was as much his responsibility as it was hers. His right hand came to lift her chin up so that she was looking at him, and with a comforting smile, Barry opened his mouth and said-

"Hey. I'm with you, okay?"

To his surprise and slight horror, Caitlin only started crying again. This was better than any scenario she had imagined since she took the test and found out earlier that morning, better than she had dared hope for. The loneliness and panic and terror she had felt the whole day melted away, slowly seeping out of her the longer Barry's calm green eyes held her teary ones.

She sniffled again, clearing her throat and wincing when her voice still came out as a raspy whisper. “Really?”

Barry chuckled, pulling her into another hug. “Yeah, really,” he whispered when she started to sniffle harder. Not that he wasn’t terrified, and not that he didn’t even have to ask her to know how scared she felt, but because...well, because they had each other. They had always taken care of each other, and he’d be damned if he let that change. It had to be true, now more than ever. “Always.”

It took them a few weeks of awkwardness and fumbling interactions, trying to test and not overstep boundaries, but Barry and Caitlin eventually struck a balance in their odd relationship. It wasn’t quite a romantic relationship, but it wasn’t just friendship—it had never been just friendship, they realized the more they thought about it—not that they said anything to each other about it. On that note, they didn’t tell anyone about the pregnancy either; they decided to delay it as long as possible, even to tell their family and friends. How would they even begin to explain?

Besides, if word got out about Caitlin’s pregnancy, with Caitlin already being a high-profile target when it came to metahuman activity, things could potentially get dangerous.

That didn’t stop them from exploring their newfound equilibrium, though. She dropped by the precinct more for lunch during the week, and if Barry wasn’t at the station or moonlighting as the Flash, he was at S.T.A.R. Labs or at Caitlin’s apartment. They went out more together, with Barry putting an arm protectively around her shoulders more often than not, and she leaned into him as much as she dared to as they walked and talked and laughed during those afternoon hours they could get a break from work. Caitlin and Barry’s apartments both began to fill up with baby books that Barry absolutely speed-read through, and though they hadn’t actually done anything after discovering the pregnancy, they still occasionally spent the night at the other’s apartment—Barry’s overprotective personality meant he always felt better when he knew Caitlin was nearby, and Caitlin’s hormones, calmed only by Barry’s presence, acted up more than the books all said they should, as a possible side effect of carrying a half-speedster baby.

The metahuman physiology was also another thing that gave them a headache. They needed to know whether Barry’s superspeed influenced the baby in any way, but Caitlin’s doctor declared the baby happy and healthy before they disclosed the baby’s metahuman origins, so the two young parents breathed a sigh of relief and that was that.

Things were smooth sailing for a few weeks, with the two—three, three of them developing and settling into their routines.

Then Jay Garrick walked into the Cortex at S.T.A.R. Labs.

Despite the results of Caitlin’s lie detector test, Barry was still unsure and suspicious of the newcomer. He told her as much that night after his rough run-in with the fire at the waterfront and the sand metahuman who had tried to pulverize him with its rough punches.

“I mean, he just comes out of nowhere to warn us about Zoom not long after we first hear about this guy, and he’s volunteering so much information right off the bat. What if his information is wrong? What if it’s a trap, and he’s working with Zoom?”

Barry ran his hands through his hair, sitting at the edge of his bed. Glancing around, he mentally took stock of the space in his room, and then turned his attention to the living room outside. His apartment would not nearly be big enough for him and Caitlin and the baby, and *Caitlin’s* apartment didn’t really have the space for a baby; maybe they could pool their resources to get a bigger place—he saw a loft for sale the other day, and resolved to check it out and ask the listed agent about it tomorrow.

His brain screeched to a halt, making him outwardly wince. He and Caitlin hadn’t even started talking about space for the baby yet, or their living situations, or whether or not they would move in together—he just assumed they would, because honestly with the amount of time they spend together and with the new and exciting deepening of their relationship, Barry couldn’t imagine another night without Caitlin by his side. By now, they spent most of their nights together anyway.

“Look, Barry,” Caitlin replied, coming out of the bathroom in her pajamas after drying her hair. “I know that you’re still upset about Doctor Wells-”

He almost rolled his eyes at the name, but she paid him no mind, standing in front of him. “-but Jay passed every test I did on him today, and he gave us some key pieces of information on Zoom we wouldn’t have gotten otherwise.”

Barry *did* scoff at that. “Yeah, he sure did,” he bit out, his tone grating and rough. “And made googly eyes at you all afternoon while he did it too. I locked him in the Pipeline tonight for a reason, Cait, something is just telling me I shouldn’t trust the guy.”

Caitlin tried, she really did, but she couldn’t help the amused grin that slowly spread on her face. She bit her bottom lip, looking down at her baby’s father. “Wait a minute,” she said teasingly. “Are you...jealous?”

It took everything in her to not burst into giggles when Barry just grumbled and reached out to pull her closer, hugging her around the waist and putting his pouting lips on her still mostly-flat stomach, whispering to the baby inside. She wasn’t showing much; it was barely noticeable, even if someone was really paying attention to her. Carding her fingers through his hair, Caitlin bent over to press a gentle kiss on his head, momentarily astounded at how things, how they, how their relationship had changed in such a short time.

Caitlin Snow had been terrified plenty of times in her life, but there was nothing that could come close to the way she was feeling now, sitting behind the console inside the Cortex and listening to each ragged breath that came through the comms, watching as Barry’s vitals plummeted at an alarming speed on her screens.

This wasn’t the plan.

Barry was taking hits, far too many far too quickly, and then came the moment that would haunt her the rest of her days: Zoom's lightning-charged fists hit him one final time, and then the sound of Barry's spine shattering and his scream of pain resonated through the speakers in the Cortex.

Bringing her right hand to cover her stomach as if she could shield their unborn child from the horrors that were facing them now, Caitlin could only watch on in sheer terror with Cisco next to her, sharing in her fear, that fear growing when Zoom intercepted Harry's tranq shot. That was it—their only hope of taking Zoom down, gone.

"Never forget," they heard Zoom's raspy growl say through the comms. "I am the fastest man alive."

The screens in front of Caitlin were flashing, the electronic beeping at an all-time high as Barry's vitals dropped to almost nothing.

"He's killing him!" she cried.

It was only a couple of minutes after that when Harry ran back inside the Cortex, and then mere moments after, in a burst of blue lightning, Zoom appeared. Caitlin and Cisco immediately stood, backing away from the monster, who was holding something red and still in his grasp.

"Barry!"

Zoom ignored them, his scarecrow mask only facing Harry, who was standing across the console from Caitlin and Cisco.

"Harrison Wells. You thought you could defeat me with this?"

"I made a mistake," Harry whispered, wide-eyed and wound tight with anger and fear, looking very much like a caged animal.

The mask's mouth was a gross congelation of gray matter as Zoom responded, an impossible and dangerous glint shining in the mask's black eyes. "Yes...a costly one."

Before any of them could so much as move, he stabbed Barry in the stomach with his gauntlet, the hero's eyes widening in pain. "Goodbye, Flash. You, too, weren't fast enough."

The dart full of speedster tranq whizzed out of nowhere, hitting Zoom in the neck—Cisco had gotten his hands on the gun when they were all preoccupied, and the villain fell with a loud cry, dropping Barry to the ground and flashing off in blue crackles of lightning. Harry ran after him with an earth-shattering scream of, "*no...NO!*" but Caitlin had no time for him, couldn't even begin to bring herself to feel sorry for him or to pause at the guttural anger and despair she could hear in his tone. The only thing she could focus on was her fallen—

There was no time to dwell on that thought either, because despite wearing her uncomfortable heels in her already-delicate condition, she ran around the console faster than she ever thought she could and crashed onto her knees next to Barry, who was silent and still on the

ground. She pushed through her frantically beating heart and the terror lodged in her throat, blocking her airway, and forced herself to breathe, to focus. Lacing her fingers together, she started on chest compressions, allowing her medical training to take over her body on autopilot.

“Stay with me,” she pleaded. “Stay with me, Barry. Stay with me. Please, Barry, *please!*”

He didn’t respond, his shallow breaths not deepening despite her best efforts. “If you die,” Caitlin threatened through gritted teeth, her voice cracking on the last word, “I’m going to kill you myself, Barry Allen. *Do you hear me?!*”

Fortunately for all of them, Caitlin didn’t have to commit murder—but she stayed by Barry’s side through Joe’s fit of anger and Harry’s confession, through Iris running in to check on him in the afternoon and well into the evening after he had been stabilized. Joe, through Iris’ wheedling and a lot of convincing, had gone home, and only after Caitlin promised to call if anything changed with Barry. Harry went off to brood, and Cisco—she assumed he had gone home; it was quickly approaching a late dinnertime, and the rumble of her stomach jolted Caitlin out of her thoughts to just how much time had passed.

Between checking over Barry and making sure his vitals were stable, making sure his regenerative abilities kicked in like they were supposed to despite his extensive injuries, she had completely lost track of time. Caitlin may have been a workaholic, but it wasn’t often that she completely forgot to eat, especially since there was someone else she had to worry about now. Bringing her hand to her stomach, she rubbed her belly in comforting circles, sitting in the swivel chair next to Barry’s bed.

“You must have been so scared today,” she said softly to her baby. “Mommy was so scared. You probably felt it, didn’t you?”

She took Barry’s left hand in her free one, continuing to comfort their unborn child. “There are things here that Daddy and Mommy need to protect you from. And sometimes, people get hurt. Daddy...Daddy got very hurt today.”

Caitlin’s voice gave a little, her emotions coming down from their excruciating high in the afternoon to let everything that had happened in the past few hours sink in. She remembered the sickening sound of Barry’s spine shattering, recalled his completely motionless body on the Cortex floor, and between the trauma and her hormones, her tears were flowing before she could even register they were there.

“But Daddy’s going to be fine, okay? Daddy isn’t going to just leave you. He’s got superpowers, you see—he isn’t just the fastest man alive, he also has super healing. Mommy had to help him-” *help* being a gross understatement of everything she had done today, recounting all the bloodied cotton balls and bandages and gloves she had to go through that were now in the S.T.A.R. Labs’ incinerator. “Mommy had to help him today, but Daddy’s going to be okay, okay? He has to watch you come into this world,” Caitlin said softly. “He has to watch you grow up and play with you and teach you and love you. Daddy and Mommy are both so excited to meet you. Daddy just needs to rest a lot before he can be with you and

talk to you, so you and Mommy are going to have to stick with each other for the next few days, okay?"

She shouldn't have had her back to the door, because the very next minute, she nearly leapt out of her chair when she heard a rustle and a cough behind her. Cisco stood sheepishly in the doorway to the med bay, holding up two bags of food. "I knew you were going to forget to eat today," he told her matter-of-factly, "so I got us dinner."

Caitlin looked like a frightened deer caught in headlights, her doe eyes wide and worried. "How...much of that did you hear?"

Cisco shrugged, but he had never been a good liar. He just grinned helplessly. "All of it...?"

Cisco, the best friend anyone could ever ask for, managed to convince Caitlin to go home for the night despite her protests of not being able to rest anyway with all the worrying she was doing about Barry. He had reminded her over and over that pregnant women needed proper rest, or, at least, a proper place to rest, and the S.T.A.R. Labs med bay and Caitlin's lab just did not make the cut.

"Just tell the kid that I'm the best uncle," he said as he basically pushed her out the door, promising to call if anything changed with Barry, and threatened her he would personally send her home if she so much as stepped one foot into S.T.A.R. Labs before 8:30am.

Completely unsurprisingly, Caitlin was there at 8:30 sharp the next morning, sending Cisco home to get some sleep. And yet, Barry still wasn't awake. His healing abilities had definitely done a lot of the work, but as Caitlin had told a frantic Joe who rushed in around 9am, his body and mind were still resting from the entire ordeal. She repeated that to him, to herself, throughout the day...into the next...and into the next.

It wasn't until the fourth day that Barry begin to stir, a sense of déjà vu knocking into Caitlin when Cisco, who was leaning against the supplies rack while talking to her, looked over at him and said excitedly, "Hey, I think he's waking up!"

She nearly flew to his bedside, standing up so fast her chair rolled underneath the desk behind her.

"Barry. Barry?" Caitlin's trained eyes swept over him as she called to him softly. "Can you hear me?"

Finally, finally...he opened his eyes.

"Hey," he greeted them, voice hoarse and rusted from disuse. Relieved smiles broke out on Cisco and Caitlin's faces, the former letting out a chuckle.

"You scared the crap out of us." Cisco's expression quickly turned serious, indicating the severity of the situation. "You were gone for a long time."

Caitlin's agreeing nod was what really drew Barry's attention, her beautiful smile gone. "How bad is it?" he managed to ask through his dry throat, pushing the words past his cracked lips.

A thin sheen of water covered her eyes, but to her merit, she let nothing fall. "Bad," she whispered after a moment. "If...you didn't heal so quickly, I'd be very worried."

She spoke too soon, she realized only about thirty seconds later, when Barry's wide, terrified eyes met hers.

"I can't feel my legs."

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

In the wake of Zoom's attack on Barry and S.T.A.R. Labs, Barry deals with the aftermath of his injuries and PTSD...and then the entirety of Team Flash gets blindsided by Grodd's sudden reappearance. Caitlin's kidnapping ends up with an unexpected moment in the S.T.A.R. Labs med bay.

Chapter Notes

I started this fic thinking it would just be like a 5k oneshot, and now it's turned into...basically half of a season 2 rewrite with multiple chapters.

What even.

THANK YOU ALL SO MUCH for all your support and kudos and comments, it really means SO much to me! More to come, currently slated to be 4 chapters. May have to bump that up to 5...we'll see ;) enjoy!!

Disclaimer: I don't own the Flash/DCTV

Barry had felt helpless plenty of times in his life. His mother being murdered right in front of him, his father taken to prison for a crime he didn't commit, being bullied at school nearly every day by Tony Woodward—all those times he had been helpless, but he was convinced that only after he became the Flash did the feelings of helplessness increase. Back then, he had been powerless. Quite literally. Everything he had experienced before then was at the universe's mercy, and he was unable to do anything about it. But after his powers...it was true what they said, great power came with great responsibility.

After becoming the Flash, he could have outsmarted, defeated, thwarted metas and bullies that threatened Central City. He could have saved and helped the people around him, the people he loved, save for three occasions:

1. Caitlin's kidnapping at the hands of Snart and Mick Rory,
2. Eddie's tremendous sacrifice to rid the world of Eobard Thawne forever, and
3. F.I.R.E.S.T.O.R.M. flying into the singularity, killing Ronnie and saving the world.

But this?

He had never felt more helpless, physically unable to get up, to even move around and take care of the people he loved, to be the Flash and defend Central City. Zoom's display of power had shaken the people's faith in their superhero now that they knew he could be beaten, that there were things he couldn't protect them from.

"Barry," Caitlin said that night, the first night he came home after his ordeal was over and they could just have a moment of peace and quiet to themselves before bed, with a gentle hand on his cheek. "You *are* going to get better. You *are*," she insisted when he looked doubtfully back at her. "You've already healed so much from that first MRI I took! It'll take some time because your injuries were so extensive, but you've already made so much progress."

The steel in her honeyed gaze almost got through to him, but he only felt tears stinging the back of his eyes. "Caitlin, I couldn't beat Zoom, and he has already shown everyone that I can't protect them. Zoom knows he's faster and stronger than I am, how am I supposed to fight back against that?" Barry asked, feeling so incredibly lost. "What if he comes after us next? What happens if he comes after you?"

It was such a horrifying thought that he put a hand on Caitlin's stomach, over her now very miniature bump. They had gone around in circles in their conversation, so an exasperated Caitlin just huffily shut the lights and crawled into bed next to Barry. If she held him a little tighter, a little closer than usual, well, he just pulled her even closer, thanking every star he could name that she and the baby were safe.

Things looked up for a little after that; he was healing a little more every day, and Caitlin's weekly MRI showed a complete recovery in his shattered spine. Most would call it a miracle, but as for Barry himself...he still felt weak, only able to walk a few steps at a time with a cane. The wheelchair he had been in—Eobard-Wells' old wheelchair—had been a sore necessity, one he despised more with each passing day.

"All right, I got you," Joe murmured softly as Barry hobbled on the cane, handing it over to his foster father and taking slow, uneven steps in the Cortex. Joe's hand never left his shoulder, and Cisco was standing by with the wheelchair in case he fell. Which he *did*, after six small steps.

"I can't do it right now, all right?" he said tiredly, collapsing into the wheelchair. His doubt was coming back full force, and the room full of people he loved only looked on in worry.

"Yes, you can, Barry. We've been making so much progress."

Barry almost scoffed, righting himself in the chair. "Yep, six whole steps," he shot back sarcastically. "Someone give me a bozo button."

"Hey, give yourself some credit." Cisco slapped a hand on his arm. "You just broke your back."

Wasn't that the point? Barry was broken, in all the ways that Zoom wanted him to be. The constant reassurance from his family and friends was what got him through each day, and the small steps every day gave him that little bit of hope he needed to go forward. The day he

stepped back onto the treadmill—he finally felt that little burst of elation again, the one he felt when he first discovered his speed.

“Push yourself!” Joe called from outside the speed lab, a wide smile on his face and a worried Iris next to him. Barry tried; he tried and tried and he tried-

Barry knew what PTSD was. He experienced night after night after night after his mother’s murder, reliving the moment over and over again.

As he tried to run faster, that night, that fight came back to him full force, remembering the hits he had taken from Zoom, the pain, the moment he was stabbed, and one lapse in concentration was all it took for him to fall and slide off the treadmill, his confidence shattered once again.

“Did Caitlin come through here?” Cisco asked, nearly storming into the Cortex.

Pffft. If she had, Barry might have felt a little better. As it was, he played with the controls on his wheelchair, spinning in sad, slow circles. “No.”

The look on the engineer’s face was an almost-comical blend of confusion and anger, and if he was in a laughing mood, Barry might have smiled. “She just hit me in the face and ran away.”

Before his brain could catch up with the all-important question of *why*, the thought, *that doesn’t sound like Caitlin* ringing like alarms blaring in his head, Joe ran into the Cortex with a loud, “YO! GRODD!”

Both Barry and Cisco looked at him, trying to make sense of what he was saying. “What?”

“Godd’s back!”

And suddenly, in a sickening moment of clarity, the pieces all came together.

“Caitlin,” Cisco said, realization coloring his tone. “That must be why she was acting like that, she was being mind controlled!” Turning to the console, he immediately pulled up a feed of the Lab’s security cams, zeroing in on the one showing the back door opening and Caitlin walking out...with a giant, very familiar gorilla ambling behind her.

Barry’s eyes widened in horror, rising from the wheelchair to grab his cane, and all three men wasted no time in running to the back door, hoping against hope they would be able to stop them before Caitlin slipped out of their grasp, but she was gone.

The feeling was not unlike the first time Caitlin was kidnapped, but now the stakes were higher—Snart and Rory needed her as bait to draw him out, but there was no way to reason with a giant gorilla, no matter how intelligent. All throughout Joe and Harry and Cisco’s conversation in the Cortex, all Barry could do was stare at the cane in his hands, drowning in

helplessness. Caitlin must have been frightened; she was kind to Grodd, yes, but being taken against her will with their baby inside her...

He didn't even hear Joe call out for him until the second time he did. "Barry. Barry!"

"Yeah?" Barry tried snapping to attention.

"You can't blame yourself for this."

Joe's words nearly knocked him to the floor, anger and frustration and gladness, glad someone other than Caitlin finally said it to him, all warred within him. "There's nothing you could have done."

What was he supposed to say to that? "I still don't have my speed, how are we supposed to save her from Grodd?!"

His foster father's eyes seemed to see right through him; he had always believed that Barry could overcome the challenges set in front of him, and so far, he had. Joe had never stopped believing that he would make it through the next hurdle, and the next, and the next. He wasn't blind; Barry was not a difficult person to read, and after having known him for so long, after raising him, Joe liked to think that there wasn't a whole lot that this kid could hide from him. Certainly not the feelings he had for one Doctor Caitlin Snow, despite his previous belief that Barry and Iris would end up together someday. In fact, out of all of them, Barry was probably the most worried about her.

"You may not have your legs just yet," Joe told him, "but you still got that brain. Use it. Help us figure that out."

Barry wasn't a field officer, but he was still a brilliant CSI with years of experience and training, and with all the resources of S.T.A.R. Labs at his disposal. He wheeled himself to the screens around his Flash suit, his eyes flitting between them, trying to swallow past the lump in his throat. The absolute panic and dread he felt the first time Caitlin was taken was nothing compared to the quiet desperation he felt now that was bursting within him, and for the first time, he dared put into words the feelings he had for her for a long time coming:

He loved her. He could admit it to himself; he could no longer envision a life without her.

"Where are you?"

Henry's arrival was the catalyst that Barry needed to begin to truly break out of the downward spiral that had him caught in its rip tide, and even then it was a nerve-racking few hours of waiting for Harry-turned-Eobard to attempt to trick Grodd to let Caitlin go. She and Cisco walked in supporting an injured Harry between them, but that didn't keep Barry from standing up and rushing over to her as fast as he could the *second* she stepped into the Cortex, the two clinging tightly to each other as everyone else gave them a moment.

"Are you okay?" Barry asked, hands holding her face and eyes sweeping over her for any signs of injury, lingering over her stomach for a few seconds longer.

She gave him a reassuring smile, putting her hand over one of his. “We’re fine.”

We’re fine.

We’re fine.

We’re fine.

Not fine, his brain screamed at him during their meeting to discuss how to best remove Grodd from Central City *vis a vis* one of Central City’s breaches.

“Okay, even if you’re right,” Joe asked bluntly. “How do we bait Grodd to go through it?”

“My son’ll do it.” Henry spoke up, confidence in his stance, confident in his son. “Won’t you, Flash?”

Barry nodded, because of course he would, and then Caitlin shrugged, making her way back to the med bay from where she was standing in front of the console. “Let me get my coat.”

Startling to attention, he stared dumbly after her, his question slipping through his lips before it even crossed his mind. “Why?”

Her wide doe eyes met his, her head tilting to the side. “We need to bait Grodd into getting through one of those breaches,” she explained slowly, as if it were obvious. “He kidnapped me because he needed my help, so if I’m out there, he’ll come. That will be our chance.”

“No.”

Barry’s answer was immediate. Everyone else in the room wisely kept their mouths shut during the exchange. “We’re not using you as *bait*. He *just* kidnapped you, we *just* got you back, and I *am not* going to put you anywhere near him ever again.”

Caitlin pursed her lips. “*Barry*. This is probably the most solid plan we have, and Grodd doesn’t want to hurt me. He just needs me to do something for him. If it were anyone else, they might actually get hurt.”

“Snow’s right, Allen,” Harry piped up from the side. “Grodd’s almost guaranteed to come if she’s there as bait. We’ll set up a speed cannon where the breach is so that she can lead him there.”

“*No*.” Barry replied so vehemently that his tone caused Cisco, who was standing next to him, to flinch. Cisco, out of everyone else in the room aside from Caitlin, was the one person who fully understood why Barry was so against the idea, but even he had to agree they didn’t have a better plan. Besides, he also acknowledged the low risk that Caitlin would be exposed to—hopefully—making it truly, honestly the best course of action.

Evidently, she had had enough. Caitlin crossed her arms in front of her chest. “Barry,” she said calmly. “Can I talk to you for a moment?”

They made their way into the med bay as the rest of the group busied themselves, starting on the plan as she rounded on him. “Barry. I know you’re worried, but this is the best idea we have. This is the way to keep everyone else safe.”

“No, Cait!” He hissed. “I’ll think of something else, you are *not* going back out there.”

She was tired and exasperated, and was about to let out a snappy retort when she looked straight into his eyes and saw the absolute *fear* that was in them, that he had tried so hard to hide in front of everyone. It broke something in her, and Caitlin raised a hand to her stomach, the other reaching for his, which he gave without hesitation. Grasping her fingers, Barry finally allowed his walls to come down at last.

“I can’t put you and the baby in any danger, not if there’s even the slightest chance you’ll be hurt. I can’t,” he said, green eyes wide and pleading, begging her to understand. “I can’t lose you again.”

“I can’t lose you either!” Caitlin’s reaction was immediate. Her memories swept her back to that awful night Zoom found them, right here in this building, the night she had been so afraid that Barry wasn’t going to make it. She wasn’t lying—she really couldn’t lose him, not after all they’ve been through, after all they’ve meant to each other and are still discovering about each other. “And I know it’s been hard for you, Barry, but you have to know that just because you haven’t been able to use your speed like before, you’re still a hero. You’re still my hero,” she said, putting the hand that was previously on her stomach his cheek. “Our hero.”

Barry’s eyes misted over, but he knew Caitlin still didn’t understand; she *had* to understand, that wasn’t even an option, and so he opened his mouth and it felt like nothing at all to say-

“Cait, I love you.”

It didn’t feel all butterfly-fluttery or gut-wrenchingly nervous to say it, like the many times he thought it would feel all the times he had imagined telling Iris, or like anything he had ever read in those sappy novels he would absolutely deny he had read in his spare time. There was no planned or perfect moment or choirs of angels or a crushing weight on his chest, because the moment those words passed through his lips, it just felt—right.

Caitlin’s mouth fell open, but no sound came out. The silence was what brought Barry back from his elated high, his hopes plummeting in front of his eyes the longer she didn’t reply.

He really needed to get his brain-to-mouth filter checked before it ruined any more of his relationships.

“Uh,” Barry started gracefully. “I mean, I just thought I should tell you—it’s okay if you don’t feel the same way-”

His rambling was cut short when Caitlin brought both hands up to his face, making sure he was looking straight into her eyes. “Barry.”

Her head tilted to the side in that way it did when she was at her most adorably confused. “I—we—we’re—I love you too,” she finally said, her shock giving way to the joy fluttering inside her chest. “Of course I love you! Of course I—we—we love you too.”

Both Caitlin and Barry were aware of the many things they wanted to say to the other, were well aware of the situation that still faced them with Grodd and with everything else they needed to worry about, but for the moment, they stared at each other like (and completely accurately) a pair of lovestruck idiots in the wake of *finally, finally* admitting their feelings out loud.

“We need to get on with planning,” Harry said lightly in the Cortex, still standing in a circle with Cisco, Joe, and Henry and glancing at the two still in the med bay. “Ramon, can you go get them?”

Cisco stared him straight in the eye, unwrapping a lollipop and sticking it into his mouth, making no move to interrupt. “Dude,” he garbled around the candy. “I know you’re new here, but I’m not walking in there even if you pay me.”

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

“He’s slowing down,” she murmured, watching him on the treadmill, her hand covering her mouth in horror. There was something just so sickening, so wrong watching something that wasn’t supposed to happen...happen.

A glass shattering into pieces on the floor.

A car accident in slow motion.

The Flash losing his speed.

Chapter Notes

Sorry this is so many weeks late...work has been kicking my butt for 60+ hour work weeks the past month :(but here you are! And at the pace this story is going...I've added another chapter LOL.

Hope you guys enjoy, and are STAYING SAFE out there!! Sending you guys all the love and am praying for y'all! If anyone has anything specific they need prayer for, feel free to leave it in a comment below as well<3

Disclaimer: I don't own the Flash/DCTV

Seven weeks ago

Christmas at the West house was always a lively event, and it gave Caitlin and Barry time to decompress from their run-in with Grodd to just spend time with their family, as little as it was—but growing, in oh so many ways.

For one thing, Jay joined them this year, making the atmosphere even livelier. Barry seemed to get over his initial distrust of the man, after working together on several different occasions and catching a few metas. From her vantage point in the corner of the room, a steaming mug of tea in hand and curled up in the armchair, she could see the two of men engaged in a friendly conversation with Patty Spivot, Joe’s new partner at the CCPD, who was also there that night. Taking a sip, Caitlin watched as Patty and Barry both laughed at

something Jay said, and she found herself feeling so, so glad that the two of them still ended up as good friends despite the relationship that never took off...

Because she had gotten pregnant.

Caitlin swatted the thought away, sounding almost like an accusation more than logical reasoning. Because despite everything, she chose him, tripped and fell and then chose to plunge headfirst into love with him, and Barry chose her. He chose them. That thought warmed her more than the hot lemon balm tea she had her hand wrapped around.

For another thing, Wally made an appearance at the party, another welcome addition, despite the surprise curveball they were all thrown.

Harry had joined them as well, gripping a glass of something in his hands as he stood away from the hustle and bustle of the living and dining rooms. Instead, after a few moments, Caitlin found him standing next to her armchair and looking down at her with a scrutinizing gaze. There was a tense minute where the two scientists simply existed side by side with one another before Harry turned to look back at everyone else in the room, taking a swig of his drink. Caitlin carefully sipped at her tea.

“Congratulations.”

Said tea nearly spilled all over her front, the doctor whipping her head around to look at him before she could finish taking her sip.

“On what?” she asked, clearly not expecting that remark. He glanced back at her from the corner of his eye, the tiniest smirk in the corner of his mouth.

“Snow,” Harry started. “It’s Christmas. Everyone here is in agreement that the eggnog is fantastic, and yet, here you are, drinking tea.”

There was no actual snark in his words, just an interested lilt as the conversation continued. “Maybe I just like tea.”

That was what managed to finally draw the grin out of him. “While that might be the case, you also wouldn’t have looked so sadly at the eggnog earlier in the kitchen with Allen. And —”

He paused here for dramatic effect. It worked; Caitlin narrowed her eyes at him. “And?”

“And Snow...” Harry continued, now actually half-smiling. “I remember my wife before Jesse was born. You’re *glowing*.”

He raised his glass to her after that and left her alone, downing the rest of her tea as she continued to watch from her armchair. With all the people present at the party, it meant she and Barry didn’t get a whole lot of time to themselves, finding one or the other always dragged into some sort of (still welcome) conversation...after she had enough and got up to make a circuit around the room on her way to the snacks on the dining room table before returning to her seat. That was all right though; in her second trimester and just starting to

show more than a flat stomach with a minuscule bump, Caitlin was feeling more tired than ever, happy to soak in the cheerful atmosphere in her armchair with her mug of tea that Cisco magically kept bringing more of whenever she ran out.

Jay walked toward her a few minutes later, a warm smile directed down at her.

“Merry Christmas, Caitlin,” he said, tone too soft, eyes too fond.

Five weeks ago

“It means a lot,” Caitlin said, a bright smile on her face as she and Jay watched Barry train from outside of the Speed Lab. “You looking after Barry.”

Without hesitation, Jay turned to her, and she nearly stepped back in surprise at the intensity of his gaze, his words. “Barry’s not the only person here I’m keeping safe.”

It had been like this since Jay made it back to Earth-1, their Earth—Caitlin could see Jay’s growing feelings towards her, plain as day, without knowing that she was already involved with Barry. They had both been relatively busy anyway, and hadn’t spent much time together during the day other than training or capturing metas, so in not wanting to exactly spell it out for Jay, who really was just so sweet and protective of their team, Caitlin tried to let him down easy. She didn’t respond to his rather flirtatious remarks, didn’t encourage his charm other than offering a friendly smile in return, and sticking by Barry whenever she could.

There was something—call it motherly instinct—holding her back from letting Jay in on too much, on the full extent of her relationship with Barry and on her pregnancy, which could still be very easily hidden at four months along with the layers thanks to the cold weather.

Jay looked at her with all this tenderness written on his face, but Caitlin only smiled and looked away.

Two weeks ago

Caitlin had many regrets in her life—they all did. It wasn’t until Trajectory’s appearance did she feel that icy dread of regret flowing in her veins, Velocity 9’s effect turning the meta’s lightning a very, very familiar shade of blue that she and the rest of the team had mourned not long ago.

“I did this,” she whispered, curled up in a tight ball in bed that night. “I created Velocity 9—I didn’t know...I didn’t know Zoom...I wouldn’t have...”

“You were trying to help,” Barry murmured, dropping a kiss on her head as his hands ran soothingly up and down her back. “That’s one of the best things about you, Cait. No matter

what it is, you always try to help. Because you're good. You're a doctor, you save people. Don't let Zoom take that away from you."

Her eyes were filled with uncertainty in the darkness, but he was there to see it and remind her of the truth, over and over, until she believed it herself. After all, she had done the same for him so many times over, and it was finally his turn.

One week ago

"Hoo, yeah! I feel that!"

Barry's excited voice came over the comms, filling the Cortex. Caitlin couldn't help but grin.

"*That* is the tachyon device powering up the Speed Force in your cells like a quick charge battery. How do you feel?"

There was no effort needed to hear the smile in Barry's voice. "Different."

The three of them in the Cortex looked at the screens in front of them, Cisco barely reining in his excitement. "Let's see how long it takes you to get back here. On my count."

-

The second Barry sped into the Cortex, papers again flying every which way (*seriously*, they *had* to get those paperweights they've been talking about for two years now), Caitlin and Cisco stood up and walked around the console as Iris stood rooted in her spot, a wide smile on her face, all three—four, including Barry—of them completely dumbfounded.

"How long was I gone?"

"Let me put it this way," Cisco started, unable to contain his enormous smile. "You just *annihilated* your old record."

On the other side of the console, Caitlin was filled with so much pride she felt like she was about to burst. "Yeah, you went *four times faster* than you've *ever* been."

Barry raised his eyebrows in disbelief, managing to not drop his jaw. "Four times?!"

She nodded her confirmation, realization dawning on his features. "That's as fast as—"

That one moment was all it took, his unfinished sentence making her smile fall and her stomach drop as she came to the same conclusion he did—as did Harry, who just walked into the Cortex.

"As Zoom."

Twenty-four hours ago

Now well into her second trimester, Caitlin started in on and took full advantage of the looser shirts and afternoon naps, feeling tired around 3pm every day like clockwork. This, of course, was tempting enough for Barry to more often than not take late lunch breaks to leave the precinct and join her back in what was very clear now their apartment instead of just his—Caitlin had basically moved all her stuff in there anyway, her old apartment now up for rent. At least, on the days she felt awake enough to make it back to their apartment instead of just laying down on the cot in her lab.

There were few things that Barry really, truly found rest in. He loved his job, he loved his superhero persona and getting to help other people in such a big way, he loved running around and being the Flash and feeling the wind whipping past him; he loved sitting on the couch or at the dining table with Joe and talking, he loved hanging out and catching up with Iris, just like they used to all the time, still as thick as thieves and the best of friends, at Jitters or wherever her reporter adventures took her, and he loved being geeky and nerdy and science-y with Cisco, but he was convinced that there was no other moment that was quite as restful as just being there with Caitlin, one arm around her and the other hand resting on her stomach, waking up and seeing her sleep-addled face as she slowly floated back into consciousness.

“Morning,” Barry greeted her, grinning. She gave him a small smile, then shifted closer and snuggled back in, not quite ready to wake up. Unfortunately for both of them, though, he had to get back to work before Joe noticed something odd about his time off, and she had to get back to...whatever insane plan she and Cisco had cooked up that day. They discovered pregnancy brain sometimes made for the worst ideas, but it was good bonding for the two of them to try the ideas out anyway, resulting in a loud bang and a big laugh most of the time.

“Hey, Cait?” he said, gently nudging her awake.

“Hmmm?”

Caitlin turned her sleepy doe eyes at him, and Barry grinned so wide, he nearly melted on the spot. He pulled her close, their family completely held in his arms.

“I love you.”

She let out another soft, contented hum. “Love you.”

He pressed a soft kiss to her mouth, both of them smiling at the other, then dragged his attention from her face down to her stomach, where the bump was growing a little bit more every week. “We’re going to have to tell them soon.”

It wasn’t that they were ashamed—on the contrary, they wanted their family to know, but at the same time, it was the tiny little corner of the very big world they had carved out for themselves, holding their secret and their child close before having to share the news with everyone else. Caitlin nodded in agreement.

“How do you want to do it?”

Barry had asked her a serious question, she knew, but sleep was still clinging to her mind, and she moved closer to him to take in his warmth. Speedsters ran warm, after all.

“Together?”

He answered her with a quiet laugh, and then at the *exact same moment*, they both froze, staring at each other.

“Did you...did you feel that?” Barry croaked, his eyes wide, hand splayed over her stomach.

Caitlin was wide awake now; she nodded slowly, afraid to ruin the moment. Both of them looked down at her stomach, and barely a second passed before their heads snapped back up, their gazes meeting as broad smiles appeared on their faces. Barry’s mouth dropped as his eyes got even wider in wonder, and then to Caitlin’s complete amusement, started misting over.

“Cait?”

“Yeah?”

“Cait, it...it kicked.” His voice was suspiciously thick. “We’re having a baby.”

She couldn’t help it—a laugh really did escape her this time, her excitement and absolute love for the man next to her and their unborn child filling her heart to the brim.

Twelve hours ago

Funny how things could change in a matter of hours.

They *had* him. *They had him*. Everything was going according to plan, but Barry couldn’t stop kicking himself about it, angry that he had overlooked the *very simple possibility* that Jay—Hunter—could break out of his restraints. He was strong, but they didn’t think he was *that* strong, and using his parents against him had been a foolproof idea, and *he still got away*.

“He was right there,” Barry said dejectedly, drained and worn out after that disaster. He had sent Caitlin home first, deciding to go back to the West house with Joe and Iris to attempt to figure out another way to trap Zoom.

“I know,” Joe replied. Iris unlocked the door and flipped on the switch, letting them inside.

“I mean, we had him.” He was still so frustrated and so *done* that he didn’t even notice the Wests’ silence as he shut and locked the door behind him. “I can’t believe it.”

The moment he turned and saw the house a mess, with tables and lamps overturned and papers and books laying strewn across the ground, Barry's senses kicked into overdrive. He swung his eyes over to Joe, who relayed a silent command for him to check upstairs; he set aside his frustration and obeyed without another thought, flashing up the stairs to search for any traces left behind by whoever was here and ransacked their home. He heard Joe call for Wally just as he found the answer staring him in the face, his stomach dropping like lead as his family ran up the stairs.

YOUR SPEED FOR WALLY

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Standing next to Barry, Caitlin crossed her arms protectively over her stomach as she and the others waited in a silent dread while Harry recalibrated his equipment. Every second spent listening to Hunter talk about his grand plan sent her spiraling deeper into her terror, and Barry and Cisco, on both sides of her, shook with silent anger. To her left, both Iris and Joe looked at Hunter with hard, angry eyes, their quiet fury radiating from their voices when they forced their questions out through gritted teeth.

"Why the charade?" Joe finally asked, getting to the one question that had been burning in all their minds since the truth came out. "Running around dressed like the Flash."

Hunter didn't even hesitate. "To give people hope, Detective," he replied, as though it was the most obvious thing in the world.

Joe looked at him in disbelief. "Hope?"

"So I could rip it away from them."

There was no second of that exchange where he even stopped to think about his answer, exposing him to truly be the heartless person who had put them through so much in the past few months, who had hurt them so much in so many ways. Barry's anger grew at his answer; he gripped the table behind him tightly to keep from lashing out.

"It's so...fun," Hunter continued, standing up with a smile. "Pretending to be a hero."

Everyone was shocked into silence, unable to believe that those words had actually passed his lips. Caitlin's brow furrowed, her voice coming out in a whisper when she spoke for the first time during his whole tirade.

"You are no hero. You're nothing but a monster."

Hunter's face visibly dropped; his eyes, filled with arrogance and glee, dimmed and held a frozen sort of shock and terror before he shook himself out of it, smiling confidently when Harry walked back into the room.

It was time.

Every instinct in Caitlin screamed for her to stop him, but she knew better, knew that Wally's life hung in the balance, and for a true hero like Barry, whose strength was never in his speed, but in his heart, he wouldn't be stopped from doing the right thing.

"Barry," Joe started to say, calling out to him one more time as his foster son stepped onto the treadmill.

"It's all right, Joe."

There was nothing he could say to make it better. Joe couldn't apologize, not for trying to save his son's life while his other son willingly paid the price, and Barry couldn't reassure, couldn't console him in any way. They all knew it had to happen. Wally—his life could not be risked again.

He hit the button on the treadmill, and Harry activated his device at the same time with a somber sort of silence. There wasn't anything Harry could say either, his apologies already sounding louder in the words never said even as he helped Zoom take down the Flash.

Cisco was as close to the glass as he could be, watching on with worried eyes while Caitlin stood behind him, pressing her fingers to her lips to help keep herself grounded in the moment. She couldn't falter. She couldn't. Everyone in this room loved Barry, everyone was worried, terrified for him, and everyone, at this moment, had to be strong for him.

Caitlin watched on as he kept running, his lighting crackling around him, and then—

"He's slowing down," she murmured, watching him on the treadmill, her hand covering her mouth in horror. There was something just so sickening, so wrong watching something that wasn't supposed to happen...happen.

A glass shattering into pieces on the floor.

A car accident in slow motion.

The Flash losing his speed.

There wasn't even a need to look at the readings on the panels.

Harry's voice came out ragged when he spoke. "The Speed Force is leaving his body."

"He's becoming human again." Cisco swallowed past the lump in his throat, shaking his head.

He had never looked so tired, even on the nights he had gotten no sleep and was up catching metas or cracking cases in his lab—Barry was panting with exhaustion, sweat glistening on his forehead as he dragged breath after breath into his lungs, and then...

He fell. Iris, Joe, and Caitlin raced into the room, Iris reaching him first and pulling him up. "Barry, are you okay?!"

“I’m okay,” he tried to reassure her breathlessly. “I’m okay.”

For a split second, all of them could breathe again. Barry lost his speed, but was otherwise physically unharmed, though Caitlin would need to haul him into her lab to run tests to make sure. She put a hand on her stomach, taking a deep breath and trying to reassure the life growing inside her that the worst was over.

She was wrong.

Hunter’s maniacal laugh brought their attention back to him to see a terrifying sight—lightning coursed around his body, a mix of his Velocity-tainted blue and Barry’s natural red, his eyes darkened and demonized, and then as soon as it started, it was over. Before anyone could even blink, he was there, holding Barry in a chokehold against the wall with Barry completely powerless to fight back.

“Thank you, Flash!”

Heart in her throat, Caitlin immediately ran to them, tears building in her eyes as her fear squeezed her so tightly, she felt ready to pass out.

“Jay, *stop!* Please.”

Her memories of Barry that night, that first night they had tried to trap Zoom and instead had gotten Barry so gravely injured instead, came rushing back to her all at once. The sound of his spine snapping rang in her ears, and her stomach heaved, feeling as though she was going to be sick right there in the Speed Lab. She was shaking and cold and terrified, between having to face what was happening now and relieving her trauma all over again while trying her damndest to save her man she loved and making sure their baby still had a father by the end of the day.

There was nothing she could do, no bargain she could make with Jay—*Hunter*—but this one, the one card she had in her hand to play. Caitlin thought back on all of his advances to her, his clear infatuation with her over the course of the months they had known each other.

“If anything you ever said to me was true, then *please* just let him go.” Her voice gave way, fear closing up her throat. “Please.”

She had called him a monster before, but at this moment, she desperately prayed that he retained some sort of compassion—after all, he couldn’t have fallen for her if he didn’t, right? If he couldn’t feel anything anymore, he wouldn’t have been able to have feelings for her, to approach her even though she never addressed or reciprocated, right? “I know some piece of you did care for me, so if you have any humanity left, then please, let him go.”

Hunter hesitated for a moment, and then, *finally*, he threw Barry off to the side, fixing his dead gaze on her. She barely had time to feel relief before she was caught up in that sickening shade of blue lightning.

Cisco was the first to react. “*Caitlin!*”

Barry's wide, terrified eyes were left staring at the doorway Zoom had just taken her through, still in shock, still trying to process, still trying to move despite the fact that his body was entirely drained of energy. He was completely powerless without his speed, and for a brief, awful second, was thrown back into Harrison Wells' wheelchair during their brief encounter with Grodd and the spiraling despair he felt at being unable to, once again, save the person, the people, he loved.

"We're going to get her back, Barry," Joe said, immediately putting a hand on his adoptive son's shoulder. It didn't work, didn't soothe the frantic superhero who was now panting from exertion, exhaustion, and *sheer terror*.

"No...no..." Barry mumbled, stumbling over to the door. "*No!*"

Joe looked to Cisco for backup, but the man stood stock-still at the doorway, still unmoving. He tried again, putting a firm hand on both of Barry's shoulders as Iris made her way over, placing a hand on his forearm. "Barry," he said patiently, calling on his years of expertise as a police officer and as Barry and Iris' father. "Barry, listen to me. You have to calm down. We're going to get Caitlin back, just like all those times we did before. We *are* going to get her back."

"No, no, no, *no!*"

He brushed both Joe and Iris off, harsher than he had intended to, but he couldn't, he couldn't stop, he couldn't listen, not to them; there was only once voice he needed to hear, and she was gone, and he was powerless—quite literally—to save her. Barry's hand came up to his forehead, running his shaking fingers through his hair.

"Barry..." Iris whispered, and that was when Cisco finally turned to face them, when Harry opened his mouth to tell them the truth about his deal with Zoom, about Caitlin and why Barry was *so desperate* to get her back, and when Barry *exploded*, the words tumbling from his mouth before he could even think.

"*She's pregnant!*"

Dead silence. No one moved; the only sound in the Speed Lab was Barry's labored breathing.

Completely in-character, Joe was the first person to break from his trance, setting aside his shock for what needed to be done.

"I have so many questions," he clarified. "But first, we need to get her back. Harry?"

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Caitlin is ready to protect their baby at all costs--even in the face of the most terrifying villain Team Flash has seen.

Chapter Notes

Hi, everyone!

Apologies for the SUPER long wait and the kinda short chapter, but in return, it looks like this fic is getting yet ANOTHER chapter! Wow. I think I started off thinking this was going to be a long oneshot, then it turned into three chapters, and has been growing like a monster with a mind of its own. Honestly, I don't even know what the point is in planning fics out anymore if they're just getting longer and longer as I write.

Anyway, the reason for the holdup for this fic is because of SNOWBARRY SPOT (DISCORD SERVER)'S APRIL MINIBANG! Somehow...I finished my fic on time. Which, tbh, is actually a miracle considering how much time I really had to write the thing and finish and polish and edit. It's called "raindrops on roses", click on my profile and check it out! It's also part of the SB Spot April Minibang collection, so if you're in need of more Snowbarry goodness, go check out all the amazing art and fics that have been posted for this event.

Thank you all so much for the support and comments and kudos that have been POURING in for this fic, and I hope you enjoy this one as the next installment is coming!! :)

Disclaimer: I don't own the Flash/DCTV

For a moment, Caitlin could almost believe that it was Barry flashing her around Central City, like they had done countless times before. The world passed by her in a blur of colors, each bright shade causing the queasy feeling in her stomach to intensify and making her feel dizzier and dizzier until they finally stopped and she stood, swaying on her feet in a darkened, unfamiliar room.

“Where...are we?” she managed to ask, gasping as she doubled over, trying to catch her breath. Zoom took off his mask, looking at her with blue eyes so confused.

“What do you mean, Caitlin? We’re home,” he said, as if it were obvious. Caitlin blanched, feeling as if she was going to be sick. He took a step closer to her, but she held out a hand to stop him, immediately straightening and leaning away.

“Home?”

He nodded, extending his hand. “Home. We’re back on Earth-2.”

Her mouth opened in horror. They had been moving so fast, she didn’t even realize...

“Take me home,” she immediately demanded. “Take me back to Earth-1!”

“But this *is* home, Cait,” Hunter tried to say, only for her gaze to immediately sharpen, rage written all over her lovely face.

“*Don’t call me that!*”

He took a few hurried steps toward her, and she nearly tripped over in her haste to pedal backwards...only to find herself on the other side of the room. For a moment, they stood still in shock, jaws dropped, looking across the room at the other. Caitlin could have smacked herself for not thinking of it sooner.

Her baby was half-speedster.

She and Barry already knew there probably wasn’t a way to tell how his metahuman genes would have affected it—*her*, Caitlin reminded herself. She found out a week ago, thinking of a way to surprise Barry only for her to suddenly run out of time to do so—but having to find out like *this* was the worst possible time.

Apparently, the baby had inherited her father’s awful timing as well.

“How...did you do that?” Hunter’s once-calm façade was now completely shattered, rage contorting his features. “*How did you do that?!*”

Instinctively, Caitlin covered her stomach with her hand, her fear leaving her frozen on the spot. His cold eyes narrowed, realization hitting him as fast as a lightning bolt as he turned his furious gaze to her now-recognizably swollen belly, seeing it for what it really was after knowing what he was looking for.

“You’re pregnant.” It was a statement, not a question, one that was forced through gritted teeth. “You’re pregnant. You and the Flash. I should have known.”

He laughed, a sound that was both angered and hollow. “I’ll kill it. I’ll kill that thing, and then we’ll truly be able to be together.”

Caitlin’s eyes widened, both of her arms encircling her stomach as she hunched over, trying to protect her midsection as much as she could. “*NO!*”

Hunter snarled and flashed toward her, blue lightning streaking behind him as she instinctively took a step back, a strange purple-tinged scarlet lightning crackling around her.

Caitlin had no idea how to control a speedster's powers, let alone powers projected by a half-speedster *baby*, but it didn't matter—she was too slow; he grabbed her wrist, and the next thing she knew, she was chained to the metal rails of a cot deeper inside the dark room.

"It'll only hurt for a little bit," he told her in what she supposed he thought was a pacifying tone, but all she could feel was *panic*. Hunter brought up his right hand, vibrating it.

She was at a loss, words flying out her mouth in desperation before Caitlin could even register what she was saying, pleas turning into hardened, ferocious threats. "Please, no, please—I'll kill you if you touch my baby, I swear I won't stop—"

Then all of a sudden, he paused, his hand still vibrating in midair as he looked thoughtfully down at her stomach. It was a gaze that struck Caitlin with a deep sense of dread, and it didn't take a genius like her to figure out what, exactly, was going through his head.

He wanted to use the baby as bait.

"If it'll make you happy," Hunter said in a complete 180 of his earlier burst of outrage, putting his hand back down, "you can keep it. No harm will come to it."

The unspoken *for now* hung in the air, thick and tense. Shaking himself free from the heaviness of the present, he gave her a grimace-smile. "This is our home. I'll bring you something to eat, you must be hungry." He rattled the chain around her wrist that bound her to her cot. "These are power dampening cuffs. Your speed won't work here."

Caitlin Snow was many things—woman, scientist, daughter, badass, girlfriend (?), doctor, mother—but despite being all of those things, even in her current dire situation, she never stopped being *curious*.

"Where did you find these? Why do you have power dampening cuffs? You don't need them," she thought out loud, her brain whirring to find the answer. Why would Zoom need a pair of these cuffs if this was his home base? It didn't look like there were other metas sharing the space, and not everyone could have made it up the cliff; it was a straight drop to the bottom. He could outrun any meta, even *Barry* at this point, so why—

"I'll bring you some food," Hunter murmured, turning on his heel and speeding off, not addressing her questions. Caitlin's brow furrowed, tapping her index finger against her lips, a nagging feeling inside of her telling she was missing something important, something crucial, something vital that was happening *right this second*, and then she felt it.

Pain exploded in her stomach, her eyes snapping open as her mouth opened wide in a soundless scream, held back by sheer will. Her hands gripped her shirt and the white sheets on the cot beneath her for dear life, her body arching off of it to compensate for the ache in her back and her stomach, the sharp, excruciating pain making her writhe. Tears poured down her face, and as the pain intensified and darkness began to creep into her vision, Caitlin prayed with everything she had inside of her.

Please...let Nora be safe. Please.

Please, let Nora live.

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Caitlin was cold, so, so cold, and there was nothing she could do to warm herself up.

Chapter Notes

/grovels

I am so sorry this update literally took forever.

Thank you all so much for your continued patience and support. It means the world to me.

Disclaimer: I don't own The Flash/DCTV

Earth-1

“Barry, please.” Iris put the steaming plate down on the table, having long familiarized herself with the layout of his apartment—his and Caitlin’s, now, he supposed. Barry just stared blankly at the food in front of him. “You have to eat something.”

Seeing no change in his demeanor, she tried again. “*Barry*. Caitlin would *not* want you to do this to yourself, not after everything you’ve been through. How are you supposed to help her if you don’t even help yourself?”

“Iris.” His tone came out clipped, the first thing he’s said in over an hour, her name spilling from his lips before he turned to look at her with a hard look in his tired green eyes. “I can’t.”

If it were anyone else, his anger would have been obvious and evident, the air fraught with tension and stress—but this was Iris, one of his best friends, and basically his sister. She saw right through him, finding the frustration and worry and helplessness and desperation hidden behind his front, all those emotions swirling in and around him like a lightning storm. Sinking into the chair next to him, Iris put a warm hand on his shoulder, running her thumb back and forth.

“Caitlin’s strong. She’ll be okay, and the baby will be too. They’ll both be okay, Barry, I know it.”

“They’re not going to be okay, not when they’re with Zoom.” Barry slammed his fist on the table, startling her. He ran a hand down his haggard face. “I’m sorry.”

She scooted her chair closer to him and slung her arm around his shoulder, the way she did when he woke up with nightmares when they were kids. “I know you’re frustrated,” Iris said calmly. “But Caitlin is a badass, and you know it. This baby? It’s yours. You are both such strong, smart people. I know it’ll be okay too. Its parents are tough people.”

That was what brought the smallest of smiles to Barry’s face, even as fear ate away at him. Every minute he sat there without his speed was a minute where neither Caitlin nor their child’s safety were guaranteed.

“I’m sorry.”

Iris gave him a small smile in return, her hands squeezing his shoulders one last time before they fell away. “For what?”

“We wanted to tell everyone,” Barry explained, holding his hands together on the table in front of him. “About us being together, and about Caitlin’s pregnancy. We were going to tell you and Joe and Wally, then work our way out.”

She raised an eyebrow. “What about Cisco?”

Barry really did grin then. “Cisco was the first to find out. He overheard Caitlin talking.”

“Of course he did.” Chuckling a little, she rested her chin on her hands. “See? Everything is going to be okay. They’re going to be okay. Besides,” she said, her voice tinted with emotion. “I can’t wait to be an aunt and meet my little niece or nephew.”

The two looked at each other then and shared a smile, the moment breaking when a breach appeared in Barry’s living room, Cisco’s voice ringing clearly through the room. “Barry! Barry, you home?”

“Cisco?!”

Without thinking, Barry and Iris both stood and ran through the portal to land in the S.T.A.R. Labs Cortex, with Cisco and Joe standing in front of the console. “Everything okay?” he immediately asked.

“Yeah,” the engineer replied once he closed the breach. “I just thought you might want to be here for this.”

Barry raised his eyebrows. “For what?”

When Cisco didn’t answer, he turned to Joe, who only gestured back to the superhero putting on his visor and picking up a very familiar-looking helmet adorned with miniature wings on the side, the one that haunted Barry the past few weeks. “For this.”

There was a feeling of weightlessness in the deep darkness.

It reminded Caitlin of a time before all this, when things were easier and her father was still alive and they went on a family vacation to the beach—Caitlin's first time going to the beach. Her dad held her in waist-deep water, the waves fascinating her with their push and pull until one particularly big wave pulled them both under. For a moment, she was suspended in the water, closed in, held, weightless. Then her eyes burned because they had been open and she was drowning; she couldn't breathe, and the currents pulled and pulled at her until she kicked her way up by pure instinct, her father pulling her out the rest of the way and holding her close.

But that one moment before everything hit her, Caitlin had been at peace. She wondered if there would be a chance for her to go to that same beach again. Maybe she'd ask Barry, and they could make a trip out of it. She wondered whether she'd be able to take Nora to that same beach, wondered if she would be the one holding her beautiful little girl tightly in the water and Barry would be on the shore, taking pictures of them, or if Barry would be the one holding their daughter while she watched and laughed and treasured the moment and the sunlight and—

Nora.

Nora had to live.

Just like the moment where she first realized she was drowning, Caitlin felt gravity pull her harshly back down from the darkness she had been floating in as soon as Nora's name came to mind, and she forced her eyes open to see a dark room that looked like an old warehouse, the light barely being let in. The brightest source of light came from two doors in the distance, where her brain helpfully told her that there was a cliff behind them, and then she felt something cold and metallic around her wrist, her eyes snapping down to see a cuff chaining her to the dirty cot she was laying on. The next thing she knew, a pair of blue eyes were staring down at her.

Startled, she nearly fell off the other side of the cot, catching herself in time.

"Are you all right?" Hunter asked, his tone deep and worried. Goosebumps appeared up and down her arms, and she instantly recoiled away from him.

Her head was still pounding, her hand coming up to her forehead. "What..." Caitlin rasped, voice hoarse. "What happened?"

She felt the air around her crackle, making her headache worse before a single sentence came back to her like lightning.

Nora had to live.

Caitlin scrambled to sit up, fighting through the pain and vertigo to rest her hands on her... still, thankfully...slightly rounded stomach underneath her loose shirt.

“I was hoping you would tell me,” Hunter said at her bedside, looking at her baby bump in suspicion and distrust. “I found you in pain, just before you fainted. I’ve been watching over you.”

That did *not* make her feel better. Chills ran up and down her spine, and she fought back a hard shiver. Glancing around, she flailed for a distraction, anything to take his attention off of Nora.

“I’m—I’m cold,” Caitlin managed to get out through her now-chattering teeth. Her captor narrowed his eyes at her as he studied her face, silent for a long moment before he stood up, blue lightning streaking in his wake, then before she knew it, he was back and holding something big and bulky in his hands—a space heater.

Plugging it into the wall next to her cot, Hunter then turned it on and took her hands in his larger ones. She was unable to tear them away, her body weak from the interdimensional travel, lack of nutrients, and proper rest, but it turned out she didn’t have to. He let go of her the very next second, taking another step back from her cot.

“Cait—”

“*Do not call me that,*” she instinctively hissed.

He ignored her. “Your hands are so cold. Let me help you. I care about you. Speedsters run warm.”

Throwing a glare up at him as the space heater slowly warmed up, Caitlin opened her mouth to shoot a sharp retort back at him, but he only sighed. Hunter lifted his hand and reached toward her wrist, vibrating it and easily breaking the cuff chaining her to her cot.

“You’re not a prisoner here, Caitlin. You’re home, so make yourself at home.”

Having been left to her own devices, Caitlin had pulled the cot to as close as to the space heater as possible, but it didn’t help. No matter how close she got, how long she stayed next to the heater, she didn’t feel any warmer. Gritting her teeth, she swung her feet over the side of the cot and slipped her shoes back on, hoping that moving around would warm her up.

Nora was half-speedster, so theoretically, if her powers were being developed and were already leaking into Caitlin, she should be feeling hot by now. The doctor frowned as she rubbed her arms up and down, pacing around the area and trying to generate heat. She hadn’t yet told Barry that she had essentially already picked out their child’s name, but she knew that his mother was a huge influence on his life, so she hoped that he wouldn’t mind her jumping the gun on this. His mother’s name was such a beautiful name, and Caitlin was a little more than attached to it at this point.

She stopped walking then, looking around. In her preoccupation with the cold, she had walked on and on into an area that resembled an old factory complete with old, rusted machinery. It reminded Caitlin of an old barn house she had stumbled into as a child, and she

put a finger on the decrepit metal object next to her, running it down a ways when a loud voice startled her, making her nearly jump.

“See something you like?”

It put her on edge, and the scare just made her shiver harder as she whirled around to face the voice that had sounded behind her. White hair and piercing blue eyes greeted her, a cold smirk on her dark blue lips standing out against her pale skin.

“You’re...Killer Frost.”

The supervillain encased in a glass box uncrossed her arms, turning to fully face her. “And you’re Caitlin Snow.” She eyed her up and down. “Your little friend Cisco wouldn’t shut up about you. Made you out to be some kind of a saint.”

Mentioning Cisco made Caitlin just miss her friends even more, her desperation to get home bursting inside of her. It rivaled the cold that began to seep into her bones, gnawing at her. Killer Frost opened her mouth to say something else, her smirk growing, when she suddenly closed it again and gave Caitlin another once-over and then a thoughtful look. Her sharp gaze then zeroed in on her stomach, causing Caitlin to cross her arms over her midsection protectively.

“If you’re still brunette, that means your powers haven’t come in yet, right?” Killer Frost said in her signature satisfied drawl and almost ethereal echo. Caitlin’s eyebrows furrowed, her answer coming out through near-chattering teeth.

“I wasn’t affected by the Particle Accelerator explosion.”

At that, Killer Frost laughed, a dry, dragging sound that made Caitlin’s hair stand on end. “No, apparently,” she agreed, sounding gleeful. “You weren’t.” With that, she laughed again, until she was practically doubling over. Her white curls hung like a curtain between them, leaving Caitlin feeling even more outcasted and vulnerable than before, as if left in the cold as the villain continued to laugh. When she finally recovered, Killer Frost straightened up, observing Caitlin as if she were prey.

In a way, Caitlin supposed she was—trapped with no way home. Killer Frost could do anything she wanted to her.

“You look cold, Caity,” she commented, tone light.

The brunette grit her teeth and tried her best to stop her shivering. Her doppelganger was right though; she was *freezing*, and if only for Nora’s sake, she had to get warmer. She just prayed to anyone listening that her baby’s developing powers would keep it warm as well, despite her mother’s lack of. The supervillain approached the glass, smirk still plastered onto her face. Caitlin narrowed her eyes.

“What’s so funny?”

Raising her hand, Killer Frost let freezing mist fall from her fingers, cocking her head to the side. “You don’t sense it, do you?”

She made no move toward her, cautiously keeping her distance. Killer Frost laughed again, a condescending sound that was directed straight at her. “Oh, Caity. You’re in for a ride.”

Still eyeing her carefully, Caitlin pressed her lips tightly together as her doppelganger sighed.

“Tell you what. Let’s make a deal. If you can get me out of this carbine box...I’ll tell you what’s so funny. And you know what? I’ll sweeten the deal. Get me out of here...and I’ll help you get home.”

Just as Caitlin was considering her offer, a series of raps sounded behind her, startling her again and causing her to turn and see...someone, slumped onto the floor of a second carbine box with a heavy iron mask attached to his face.

“Who is he?” she asked, taking a step closer. The man knocked against the carbine wall again.

“Don’t know, don’t care,” Killer Frost replied with a hard bite in her tone. “But if he’s here, Zoom must need something from him.” She waved her hand again, mist still falling onto the dusty floor. “Doesn’t matter now. I’m not going to stick around for much longer.”

There was nothing around for Caitlin to use—her first thought was to jerry-rig jumper cables and a generator to heat up the carbine, but for all the old machinery that was there, none of them were what she needed.

“What’s the holdup, Caity?” Killer Frost asked, arms crossed and leaning against the wall of the box.

Caitlin huffed, but then an idea came to mind, one so absurd and so risky that she almost didn’t want to try it at all. Doing so would mean revealing her greatest weakness to her supervillain counterpart in front of her, and she didn’t even know whether or not it would work. She weighed the pros and cons in her head, brain whirring furiously.

Killer Frost was right—there was no way she was going to get home on her own, not in her condition and definitely not by relying on Nora’s still fledgling powers. Zoom was bound to come back at any time, so whatever she needed to do, she had to do it, and do it fast. Her chances of escape with Zoom were next to nothing, but with Killer Frost...maybe she stood a fractionally better chance with her. If she could free her, if Killer Frost kept her word...Nora would be safe.

Blowing out a breath, Caitlin steeled herself and approached the carbine wall, squaring her shoulders. Killer Frost straightened up, walking to stand in front of her.

“Well, Caitlin?” she asked, carefully pronouncing each syllable.

She prayed she wouldn't regret this. Rubbing her hands together, Caitlin concentrated on her baby, trying to attune herself to her baby's power like she had seen Barry and Cisco do, willing and reaching for the Speed Force. If the Speed Force was a living thing, it could, theoretically, hear her. She prayed it was enough.

Caitlin pushed through her cold, her uncertainty, her fear, her doubt, struggling against an unmovable wall, and then she was falling and falling and falling and falling and then something brushed against her fingertips and sent a jolt through her body, electrifying her. She had never felt more *alive*.

She hadn't yet opened her eyes, but she could feel the purple aura that enshrouded her, feeling and knowing the same purple lightning dancing in her eyes, and she simply reached forward to grasp the budding power that was the life growing in her belly at that very moment. It surged within her, purple lightning crackling in both her palms. She opened her eyes to see Killer Frost's wide ones, then placed both hands against the carbine and *pushed*, expelling the power from her to the glass in front of her.

It was almost surreal as time slowed down; Caitlin could actually see, hear, feel the vibrations running through the carbine, the way the glass was reacting to Nora's power, and the exact moment the glass gave way before it shattered cleanly underneath her hands.

Taking a step back, she watched Killer Frost look around, taking in her freedom before her gaze slid back onto Caitlin, a smirk growing on her lips.

"Well, well, what do you know," she purred, stepping over the shards in her heeled boots. "Looks like there's more to you than meets the eye after all."

It was pure luck at that moment that Caitlin saw Killer Frost raise her hand to shoot a frost blast straight at her, only managing to duck at the last minute. Still connected to the Speed Force, Nora's speed helped to slow time down, allowing Caitlin to escape unscathed.

"What are you doing, I thought we had a deal!" she nearly shrieked, her adrenaline throwing her senses into overdrive. The cold was back; even with the Speed Force's energy thrumming through her, it wasn't enough. Caitlin felt colder than ever, and she immediately started shivering again.

Killer Frost rolled her eyes. "Ugh, is *everyone* on your earth this gullible? Please, Caity. Now that I know your kid has powers, and with what it's done to your powers? I'd be stupid to not get rid of you first."

"My powers?" Caitlin echoed, wrapping her arms around herself in a futile attempt to retain any sort of warmth.

Her doppelganger laughed, walking directly in front of her and squaring her stance. "You asked me before what was so funny. Well," she replied, leaning forward to look her in the eyes. "Here it is. Your powers have started leaking, and now, it seems that they've been tampered with by your baby that's apparently half a speedster."

She paused then, tapping her index finger on her chin as her eyes filled with mirth. “Who’s the daddy, Caitlin? Is it that breacher who came to our earth a while back? He really was quite handsome in a suit.”

Caitlin was not about to answer any of her questions; instead, she readied herself and pulled on her connection to the Speed Force to access Nora’s powers, purple lightning surging around her when she prepared to run...only to slip and fall on her side when Killer Frost let out another blast. Her heart stopped, the millions of things that could go wrong with a pregnancy from a fall immediately coming to mind.

Pure fear took over then, red filling her vision as Killer Frost prepared another ice blast in her direction. Caitlin put her hands in front of herself, squeezing her eyes shut as she let out a shrill scream.

“*NO!*”

The next thing she knew, a loud *thud* hit the ground, and she cracked her eyes open to see the supervillain getting up from the floor...covered in ice.

“Well, Caity. Looks like you’ve got some badass in you after all,” she said in a harsh tone, her lips pulling up into a savage smirk, cold as ice. “See? We’re not so different from each other.”

While her doppelganger snarled and readied her next attack, Caitlin just stared at her own frost-covered hands in shock, her brain short-circuiting instead of processing what had just happened. It was over so quickly, and had come to her so naturally that it felt like nothing at all when the ice blast left her hands, as if it was meant to do that all along.

That thought, more than anything else, *terrified* her.

“No matter,” Killer Frost continued, raising her hands toward her once again after getting her footing on the slick ground. “You’ll be dead before you turn into any more of a threat. And a nuisance.” More mist fell from her hands, crackling as it met the iced-over floor. “It was nice to meet you, *Caitlin*.”

With that, Caitlin barely had time to register the long icicle forming in the supervillain’s hand, sent hurling in her direction. She tamped down on her fear the best she could, but she wasn’t fast enough; the icicle was headed toward her, and there was no way for her to outrun it on the slippery floor without risking further injury to herself and Nora. There was no way out for her...she and Nora were going to face their ends, right here in this old, musty warehouse in a world they didn’t belong in.

She closed her eyes, her last thoughts of a boyish grin and green eyes, and of a beautiful little girl with those same eyes, brown curls framing her face.

The Speed Force *tugged* at her then, completely enveloping her as she heard the streak of lightning from somewhere behind her, her hair flying back as she wrenched open her eyes to see Zoom, holding Killer Frost up by the throat and the icicle that was slowly turning red

buried deep in her abdomen. Caitlin let out a loud, gasp, her hands coming up to cover her mouth in horror.

“Yes,” Zoom hissed at her before dropping her to the floor. “It was nice to meet you.”

He turned to face her then, still on the ground and in shock. Through his gray mask, his soulless black eyes surveyed the area, the ice covering the entire floor. “Did she do this to you?”

Without waiting for an answer, he picked her up, carrying her back to her cot and sat her down. “You try that with the man in the other cell,” he warned, a clear threat in his words, “he dies too.”

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

The explosion slammed into him and shattered him into a thousand pieces.

Chapter Notes

This is where I grovel because I haven't updated in two months.

I'm so sorry! It took a fair bit to plan out this chapter; there's a LOT happening this chapter, so it was important to map everything out to make sure things flowed :) and then I had surgery early July for my torn ACL/meniscus, so recovery has been doing a number on me...

BUT THIS CHAPTER IS FINALLY DONE, HURRAY!!! I bring you a big update of 6.1k words in payment :) thank you to EVERYONE who has read, supported, left a kudo, or commented on this fic--I love to write and tell stories by nature, but damn if y'all aren't a huge incentive to get stuff done. Thank you guys so much. Really.

Disclaimer: I don't own the Flash/DCTV

Caitlin gripped the railing so hard she could feel it nearly twisting underneath her hands as a thin layer of frost coated the surface of the groaning metal.

“No! Don’t hurt them. Let them go, please.”

Everyone’s heads whipped up in shock, and she caught Joe’s surprised, horrified face when he saw her, gun still pointed toward Zoom, blue lightning crackling around the villain like a shield. Her hold on the rail tightened, and the thinnest sliver of self-restraint kept her uncontrollable ice powers at bay. It was imperative, now that she was back on her own Earth, that she kept everyone she loved safe. She made it home...but the price she had unwittingly paid was the price of putting them back into Zoom’s hands.

Her petite frame shook a little; Caitlin hadn’t eaten or rested much during her entire ordeal, just enough to nourish the little life inside of her. Even so, her weakness did not temper her resolve—looking down at them from above, she hoped Zoom could see the cold reminder in her eyes the deal they had struck before their arrival at CCPD.

Please, she had said. Don’t hurt them.

Why? He asked, his tone toeing the line between curious and mocking. *My destiny is to conquer this Earth.*

Please. Spare them, and I won't try to escape.

Zoom still wanted her to be with him, still wanted Nora to be bait and hostage to twist Barry's arm and hold the two of them over everyone's heads if things didn't go the way he wanted them to.

The minute you try anything, he had growled at her. *They die.*

"Tell everyone that this city is mine. Anyone who disobeys me will meet their end."

There was a brief silence, then Singh nodded without lowering his gun. "All right. Clear out!"

Everyone backed away from Zoom without turning around, their guns still pointed at him as they retreated from the precinct. In the few seconds Zoom and CCPD had their tense stand-off, Joe only took his eyes off the villain long enough to immediately look Caitlin over, quickly assessing her for any damage. He was torn between wanting to make sure she was okay, to bring her back with them, and guarding Wally while trying to keep Zoom where he was at the same time. It was only at Caitlin's subtle nod that he gritted his teeth and wrenched his attention away from her, keeping his son behind him as he and Singh covered all the others leaving the bullpen.

Zoom turned his soulless black eyes to her then, and Caitlin swallowed hard, trying her best to control the frost and lightning she could feel bursting through her veins if she wanted to keep everyone alive.

"Caitlin's with Zoom."

That was the first thing Joe said when he arrived in the Cortex to see everyone already there, planning their next move. He hurriedly explained the situation to them, Barry's hand running down his face and resting at his mouth while Cisco and Henry's expressions became darker and darker.

"But why would Zoom bring Caitlin here?" Iris wondered out loud, hands on her hips and brain running at miles a minute. "He knows he's just bringing her home, and that we'd stop at nothing to get her back."

"To show power." There was no hesitation in Harry's voice when he answered. "That's exactly what he did on my Earth."

Joe looked at him warily. "What are you talking about?"

Setting his cup of coffee down, he turned to face the rest of the group, voice grave. "The first thing he did was murder people. Slaughtered a bunch of policemen, then recruited every metahuman he could find. And those that disobeyed, he killed too."

Barry spoke up for the first time. “Where are the police now?” he asked sharply, looking at his foster father.

“Outside the precinct.”

“He’ll kill them, Joe,” Harry warned. “He’ll kill them all.”

But Joe wasn’t convinced, still banking on the one ray of light he could see in the bleak situation. “Not with Caitlin with him. She talked him out of killing everyone when he took over CCPD.”

“That’s what we’re going to rely on, Snow talking him out of it?” Harry sniped back in disbelief, scoffing.

The captain held his ground. “From what I could see, she was mostly unharmed. If he didn’t hurt her on Earth-2, he won’t hurt her now that he’s got her as leverage over us. Zoom knows we’re the biggest threat standing in his way.”

From the side of the room, Barry watched and listened as the two of them continued their heated discussion, his thoughts zipping back and forth.

First and foremost, the Flash was still out of commission. He didn’t have his speed, and there was no way to actually help the police, much less Caitlin, in the state he was in now.

Then, there was Caitlin and the baby. Joe said she looked unharmed, but it had been nearly a week since she had been taken. There was no telling if they were really okay until he could see her for himself, until she was with him. The ache he felt the past week intensified, the sting of missing her and the worry that tore through him burned twice as hot now that she was so close and yet still out of his reach.

Finally, there was the need to get his speed back. So far, there was only one viable idea, and that was Harry’s thought of causing another contained particle accelerator explosion. The risks they would be taking with that idea were enormous, and absolutely nothing could go wrong in the process. Everyone argued about it, about the possibility of causing another wave of dark matter exploding over Central City, about Barry’s safety, about the what-ifs and hows, and Barry was feeling increasingly backed into a corner.

He looked at his father, permanently back in Central City and watching Harry and Joe argue with a frown on his face.

Dad...I don't know what to do.

A hand on his shoulder.

None of us do, son. Not in these times. You've got to believe in yourself. You're the Flash. And more than that, you're you, Barry. Your powers are a big part of you, yes, but they don't define you. You determine the man you want to become.

A small smile.

Well, I've had a lot of guidance from the people around me.

A sad, answering smile.

I'm sorry I've missed so much of it.

It's not your fault. I've missed you.

I've missed you, son.

Dad?

Yeah?

I hope...I'll be as good of a dad as you are.

A tight hug, the nostalgia of being tucked underneath an arm that he once believed could hold up the entire world.

You won't, son. You'll be better.

Despite the risks and the numerous things that could absolutely go sideways, Barry wondered, not for the first time, what sort of sacrifices being a hero required. What was he willing to give up, what was he willing to chance, and what was he willing to trust?

When his father was arrested for the murder of his mother, he never doubted his father's innocence. It took him a long time to work through his thoughts and his emotions, but he could see clearly now that his dad had tried his best to protect *him* in the wake of his mother's death. He had sacrificed everything he had to ensure Barry was taken care of when he couldn't care for him himself.

Would he, Barry wondered, be willing to make the same sort of sacrifices for his family? It went without question that his actions would have heavy and dire consequences, but when he thought about his parents, his family, his team, Caitlin's smiling face and their unborn child, his heart lurched forward, and there really wasn't a choice to make at all.

She had never been in the precinct when it was empty like this, the halls echoing with Zoom's growl and a few metas that had made the crossing to their Earth from Earth-2. Locked inside the bullpen with two metas standing guard at the door, Caitlin found herself with a hand on her slightly swollen belly and glaring at her captor on the other side of the glass.

"Don't even think about escaping through the windows," he warned her with a dangerous smirk on his face. "They'll hear you." He gestured to the two metas who didn't so much as turn toward her. "And then they'll let me know, and I promise, Caitlin, I will kill everyone in sight the minute I get their call."

Her fist tightened in anger. "You know they're going to figure out a way to stop you, right?"

Hunter let out a condescending laugh. “Who? Barry? Wells? The police? No,” he scoffed. “Nobody can stop me now. Not anymore.”

“Then why are you keeping me here?”

Immediately, Caitlin knew it was the wrong question to ask. Hunter flinched, as if he was in pain; his eyes screwed shut, his head bowed and he took a moment to collect himself before looking back up at her, his voice wavering slightly as he said his next words.

“Because I don’t want to be alone anymore.”

The woman before him that he loved so much had no idea of the horrifying and traumatic memories that flashed through his mind, the days and nights of blood and lightning and torture and unheard screams resonating within their mental prison, the horrible, drowning, cold, hopeless, helpless pit he sank into for far too long before she came along with her brilliant, intelligent mind and bright smile, the one that never offered more.

He loved her so much, and if she didn’t offer, then he simply just took—even with the stark reminder that she was carrying someone else’s child, someone he had defeated time and time again, and wasn’t worthy of her, wasn’t worthy of being a father.

Her question had thrown him straight back into the pit that he had crawled out from, and when he next opened his eyes answer her question, he was the most vulnerable he had ever been in front of anyone since his mother was murdered in cold blood by his father right in front of him.

Caitlin looked at him, eyes hard, and he couldn’t hear her thoughts, no, but if he could, he would have seen the way she might have felt so sorry, so awful for him if he hadn’t been so twisted in every way. All he had done in the name of power, of fear, of his so-called love was turn her and everyone else against him.

The moment was broken when another asked meta holding a scythe approached them. Hunter pulled the grotesque gray mask back over his face before turning to the newcomer.

“And?” he demanded.

“He got away, but I’ll find him.”

Zoom’s eyes narrowed. “Later.”

“He needs to pay for what he did to my brother!” The meta suddenly exploded, his hands tightening around his scythe. Zoom was completely unperturbed.

“And he will. Later, Rupture!”

That seemed to cause the meta—Rupture—to remember his place. “What do you want me to do?”

“The police have gathered again,” Zoom rasped immediately. “They think I’ve spared their lives. Tonight...show them they’re wrong.”

Rupture nodded and walked away as Caitlin’s stomach sank, the chill she felt inside of her bursting to life and tempered only by the purple lightning beginning to involuntarily crackle around her. Zoom turned back to look at her, ripping his cowl off again.

“You disapprove?” Hunter sneered.

Caitlin glared right back through her fear and anger. “You said you would spare them!”

He bent down a little to look her in the eye through the glass. “I need to teach them a lesson.”

Without another word, he sped off in a blur of blue lightning, and Caitlin looked around frantically, the two metas guarding her door paying her no mind. Nora’s powers kicked in full force then, slowing time down as she whirled around inside the room, looking for something, anything to help. She couldn’t escape and she was pregnant, but she wasn’t helpless.

Spying an evidence box underneath a nearby desk, she took a step and sped over, roughly opening the top to dig through it for anything she could use. An almost savage grin of triumph appeared on her lips when she found her prize, and when she was certain her guards couldn’t care less about her, she pulled a sliver of controlled lightning into her palm to spark the phone battery to life, then proceeded to do what she had always done—try her damndest to save everyone’s lives.

“And what if it did work? I mean, what then?”

Barry stopped just before the doorway, hearing Harry, Joe, and his father’s raised voices.

“Joe? He goes up against Zoom, the monster that snapped his back and almost killed him, and then took not one, but two, three things that he’s convinced now that he needs in order to make him whole? His speed, and then Caitlin and the baby on top of that?”

“This is the way,” Harry replied hotly, tone low. “This is the only way. The people of Central City need the Flash.”

“Guys.”

He must have accidentally stepped into view, because Joe’s warning tone directed everyone’s attention to where he was, apparently, not very good at lurking. Barry took a deep breath, then fully walked into the room, looking at all three of the men he so respected.

“I know that you care about me, each of you, in your own way. And you all have your own point of view on this, but this decision is mine.” He looked at each of their faces. “I have to make it on my own.”

He was no longer the child who needed someone else to look after him, even though he knew they always would; the people who loved him would always look after him. But it was truly his turn to look after others too. Barry, as the Flash and as himself, could not stay the protected, not when other people were in need of his protection. Not when he now had a family of his own who needed him, who were still in danger. As a hero, as a friend and a son and now, a father, he had strength enough to risk everything, to make the sacrifices he needed for the chance to save them.

“Barry!” Cisco’s voice came over the comms. “Barry, Cortex, now!”

An hour of restless pacing and hearing about Rupture’s abrupt attack on Cisco and Dante later, Barry narrowed his eyes over at Harry. The contained particle accelerator explosion wasn’t just a possibility anymore, it was the only option that Barry could see. Zoom was by far the most dangerous villain they’ve ever come across, and he needed to be dealt with, and dealt with quickly before it was too late to save everyone in Central City and Earth-1.

Bent over the console, Harry and Joe answered a quick call from Wally and Jesse while Henry stood on the opposite side, giving his son a look that made him sigh. The computer to the right of the console started beeping, a normal enough sound in the Cortex that it didn’t immediately put all of them on alert. Joe looked over at it as Harry opened whatever was causing that sound.

“From CCPD,” he murmured. Joe straightened, a chill creeping down his spine in both anger and frustration when he saw the warning.

RUPTURE ATTACK JITTERS 2NITE.

“That’s Caitlin.”

That finally caught Barry’s attention. “What about Caitlin?” he asked, approaching the console to peer over at the message on the screen, his stomach dropping immediately when he registered her words. His fear for her safety came back threefold, warring against his pride that she was still putting everyone’s safety ahead of her own, no doubt taking a big risk in warning them.

“She sent us a message,” his foster father replied, eyes still glued to the computer. “Rupture is going to attack Jitters tonight. We gotta move, Barry.”

All three men turned to look at him then, his dad giving him a small, confident smile. “What are you going to do, slugger?”

The worst part, Caitlin decided, was the waiting.

She was used to helping out in one way or another, whether on comms or on the sidelines, but always contributing to the cause and taking down the bad guy. Being trapped and not knowing what was happening, not being able to help—that was the hardest thing she'd done. And with the lightning coursing through her veins and placating the frost that she could feel was swirling inside of her, her powers made it twice as hard for her to sit still, knowing she *had* the power to help. Caitlin put a hand on her stomach, rubbing in gentle circles.

“Are you okay, Nora?” she asked quietly. “You’ve been through so much. And you’ve been such a big help to mommy. You’re going to be so amazing, baby. You are already so amazing.”

She wrenched her hand away from her stomach, straightening immediately as one of the metas guarding her walked into the bullpen and, to her surprise, opened the TV in front of her.

“Zoom wants you to see this,” he said. Even with his mask covering his face, she could hear the mirth in his tone, and she glared at his back when he retreated, locking the door behind him.

“Breaking news coming out of Jitters coffee shop,” the news anchor said on screen, Caitlin’s heart leaping into her throat as she listened and read the headline—*Horror Unfolds at CC Jitters*. “CCPN has learned that a metahuman was just apprehended after an altercation with the Flash.”

With each word, she could feel relief seeping back into her upon receiving confirmation that everyone was safe. She paused then, thinking hard. Had Barry gotten his speed back? How?

The bullpen doors slammed open, blue lightning announcing Zoom’s arrival. He stopped a foot in front of her. Caitlin’s eyes widened, feeling mist seeping from her hands again when her fear returned full-force. “You told them Rupture was coming,” Hunter snarled, ripping off his mask and backing her up until she hit the corner of a desk. “How. *How?!?*”

His eyes roamed the room wildly, and both of their gazes landed at the same time on the evidence box Caitlin had forgotten to stash back in her haste to get the message out. She let out a strangled breath, closing her eyes only to have them fly open again when he grabbed her chin, forcing her to look at him.

“Oh, you...are smart, aren’t you? You betrayed me!”

Roughly letting go of her, he donned his mask once more, his cold, black eyes staring down at her for a moment before he sped off. Caitlin didn’t have to wonder where he was headed; the TV lit up again as Central City News flashed back onto the screen, and then she felt bile rise in her throat as she was violently thrown back to the Velocity 9 incident all over again. She just wanted to help, but her actions led to the horrifying events unfolding before her eyes.

“*Make sure you get this,*” Zoom hissed at the camera, and Caitlin watched as he ran around the room at the height of his speed, Nora’s powers showing her exactly what he was doing. She heard the resounding *cracks* when Zoom broke the necks of the policemen standing

before him, the doctor in her screaming at the blatant disregard for life he showed though she was only able to let out a whimpering, terrified sob.

The camera fell and she flinched when it hit the ground, showing only feet.

“I told you what would happen if you disobeyed me.” The villain’s voice came through loud and clear, and someone gurgled and choked in the background before a new voice joined the fray.

“Hey, stop! Stop! You’ve made your point!”

It was then that Caitlin finally let herself break down in enormous, wracking sobs, the so-familiar voice tearing through any defenses she had left after the adrenaline and fear and she sunk to the ground, her arms encircling her belly. She pressed her cold hands against her mouth in an effort to stop her wails, watching the screen as Zoom lifted the camera to face them and there he was, oh God there he was, desperate and frustrated and angry and helpless and scared.

“Barry,” she barely managed to whisper, praying with everything in her that Zoom would let him live.

“Central City,” Zoom said directly into the camera, panning it to show the damage he had done inside of Jitters. “The Flash you’ve seen in your streets is a fake, a hologram meant to give you hope.”

He almost sounded pleased with himself, even through the growl of his changed voice. “But there is no more hope, there is no more Flash, and there’s no one left to protect your city from me.”

His warning done, Zoom threw the camera to the side, but his every word was still audible from the microphone.

“Tell the rest of your force, Captain, that their policing days are over.”

A pause.

“You’re only alive because of Caitlin. Try something like this again, and my affection for her won’t stop me from killing you...or the rest of this city!”

What Barry had realized at that moment, listening to everyone in the Cortex squabble and snap and debate, was what he had known all along—there was no other choice. He needed his speed back, and from the beginning, Harry had come up with the option that seemed most likely for them to achieve that goal.

“I want to do it,” he said, cutting through the thick tension and bringing everyone’s attention to him. “One of the cops that Zoom killed tonight, he had a son. Same age I was when mom was murdered, and now, another kid has to grow up without one of their parents, because—”

Barry's voice broke, Iris startling and almost reaching for him before she put her hand down. He needed to get this out.

“—The Flash wasn't there to stop that monster.”

It was clear how much guilt he carried on his shoulders. Henry, Joe, Harry, his father figures and mentors, silently shouldered the worry and concern that was mounting in the room with each word, knowing that none of them in the room would blame Barry for what he was saying, convinced it was his fault.

“I left this city unprotected by giving up my powers to Zoom. I *enabled* him to rule this earth. I need my powers back.”

Cisco was the first to move after that, uncrossing his arms and standing at his full height, nearly staring his best friend down. “What about your own kid?” he challenged fiercely, surprising everyone in the Cortex. Barry flinched, but he didn't look away. “What if something happens to you, what's your kid gonna do?”

For a moment, no one breathed. Barry hung his head a little, but the determination in his green eyes never wavered. “My kid is going to have a future,” he finally said. “And that's only going to happen once we take Zoom down.”

From the side of the console, Harry hefted the speed canon onto his shoulders.

“Let's do it.”

Losing his speed was bad enough, Barry knew, but this here? It almost felt like he was swimming in molasses. The air was fraught with tension and worry, and Harry's detached, scientific personality was almost like a lifeline; it grounded him to the moment, with the doctor spouting out commands left and right and inputting line after line of code into the computer.

It wasn't until he felt the metal cuffs around his wrists and ankles did his heartrate begin to pick up. Barry felt his mouth go dry, and forced himself to take deep breaths through his nose and out his mouth, careful not to alert the others in the room to his anxiety. Iris and Joe were on edge enough as it was, and he had to go through with this, he had to. Central City, Earth-1, *Caitlin* was at stake.

“You're going to feel these clamps, but they're necessary,” Harry said softly, making last-minute adjustments.

“You good?” Joe asked from the side. It was all Barry could do to keep from breaking.

Instead, he just nodded at his foster father. “Yeah. You?”

Joe's eyes were shining already, but it was a look Barry had seen many times over growing up. He knew that the words were right at the tip of his tongue, Joe was never one to shy away

from difficult conversations after all, but he held them back if only to keep this moment while they still had it.

“I’ll be fine,” Barry tried to say, but Joe only gave a tiny smile in response. With a nod of finality, he stepped back, not thrilled about the situation, but seeing Barry’s resolve come through like it had so many times before, he had to let him go. Iris was next, her hands clasped tightly together in front of her. They had been the best of friends all their lives, and in this moment, he was grateful for her steady presence and support.

Then came the familiar, smiling face with eyes that held worlds of worry and pain, the face that he had missed so much over the years.

“Son...” Henry started, then trailed off without knowing what to say. There was nothing he *could* say to make the situation better, or to shake the fear that he would lose one more person he loved.

Seeing his uncertainty, Barry put on an even braver face. “Being the Flash...” he whispered, his eyes roving over each of his loved ones. The dam inside of him was about to break, and when the floodgates cracked open, there wasn’t a torrential wave like he thought there would be—instead, there was just one tear that slipped down his cheeks, weighed down with everything spoken and unspoken. “That’s the best version of me. That’s the version that can protect Central City and the people I love in it. If I don’t have my speed, I’ll never be that person anymore. I have to do this.”

There was an understanding in his dad’s eyes, fear layered with love and pride. “Okay,” Henry said softly. “Okay.”

Would he, Barry thought, be as good of a father someday? Would he be able to let go when he needed to, like in this moment now?

“You ready, Allen?” Harry’s gravelly voice spoke from the console when everyone had stepped back. He took a breath, then nodded once, sure in his decision. His pseudo-mentor gave another nod in return, his own salute. “All right, then. Here we go.”

The containment doors slid shut.

There was a moment of silence, the moment teetering on the edge of a precipice, the deep breath before the plunge, and then Barry was hit by the first onslaught of pain, several needles stuck into him all at once and injecting chemicals he *knew* didn’t belong inside a human body. He could hear Iris’ panicked voice, but there was no way to make out what she or Harry was saying behind the pain. He just knew he needed to find some way to reassure them.

“I’m okay, Iris,” Barry managed to grit out, his breathing ragged and words stilted. Beyond the doors, Joe and Henry’s voices joined hers, but then the lightning came through, and all of a sudden, his whole body was crackling, every muscle spasming against the pain as his body writhed against the force of nature. He felt the cuffs that kept him into place, forcing him to withstand it all as he let out scream after scream after scream, lightning no longer his ally, no longer under his command, but harsh and wild and unforgiving. His every nerve was on fire;

everything was burning, everything inside of him was burning and boiling, and then, finally, finally...

After a lifetime, Harry's level-headed, falsely calm tone cut through, a last lifeline.

"Initiating collision."

The explosion *slammed* into him and shattered him into a thousand pieces.

Barry's body had given out, every muscle exhausted by the lightning, and there was nothing he could do except hang limply in his cuffs as one force of nature replaced another, golden flames consuming his body completely and thoroughly, slowly burning him alive. It was the last thing he was truly aware of, the explosion tearing him apart, and he felt every single second of it.

Darkness came too late.

The two metas who guarded her in the bullpen directed her up the stairs into one of the forensics labs Caitlin had been to so many times before, the one that was just down the hall from Barry's. They unceremoniously plunked her into the stool, then promptly left the lab, leaving her to stare out the window and glare at her own reflection in her new prison, her hands twisting around a glass vial she found on the desk to keep busy. Her mind was hard at work though; between keeping the frost in her hands at bay and Nora's buzzing powers under control, she could barely concentrate on her own train of thought.

She gnawed at her bottom lip as she went over her encounter with Killer Frost again and again. There were so many things the woman said that bothered her, but Caitlin hadn't had time to unpack all of them until now, when Zoom was no longer terrorizing the rest of her team or the citizens of Central City...for now. She had to take advantage of every moment she had before the war truly began.

If you're still brunette, that means your powers haven't come in yet, right?

Caitlin grabbed at a lock of her brown hair just to check, and sure enough, it was the same chestnut color it had been all her life. But her powers had started manifesting on Earth-2, and if she had to guess, even before she met Killer Frost. That burst of pain she felt coming from Nora when she first arrived on Earth-2 and was chained to her cot—maybe something had happened there. Nora's powers were first triggered just before then, so maybe her own had something to do with her daughter's?

The minute she got away, the doctor vowed, she was going to get her hands on every metahuman biology and physiology and baby book she could find. If there were even any in existence.

Perhaps the baby was developed enough for her powers to come through, but given that Caitlin still had another full trimester to go, she had her doubts. She couldn't rule out the possibility that Nora was going to be one powerful speedster, but another theory was very quickly forming in her mind.

You look cold, Caity, Killer Frost had said almost immediately after meeting her. Could Killer Frost have seen her powers for what they were, even before she herself could? She confirmed indirectly that they weren't hit by the Particle Accelerator explosion, even in her timeline, so that meant...that meant Caitlin's powers came from something else inside of her.

The vial she had been holding shattered onto the floor as she dropped it, the revelation rolling around her head in shock. Nora's purple lightning started to crackle the air around her, Killer Frost's words on a continual loop.

Now that I know your kid has powers, and with what it's done to your powers?

Your powers have started leaking, and now, it seems that they've been tampered with by your baby that's apparently half a speedster.

See? We're not so different from each other.

If you're still brunette, that means your powers haven't come in yet, right?

You look cold, Caity.

Now that I know your kid has powers, and with what it's done to your powers?

Your powers have started leaking, and now, it seems that they've been tampered with by your baby that's apparently half a speedster.

See? We're not so different from each other.

If you're still brunette, that means your powers haven't come in yet, right?

You look cold, Caity.

Now that I know your kid has powers, and with what it's done to your powers?

Your powers have started leaking, and now, it seems that they've been tampered with by your baby that's apparently half a speedster.

See? We're not so different from each other.

Oh, Caity. You're in for a ride.

Suddenly, her theory didn't seem so crazy anymore. Nora's powers could have been kickstarted by their interdimensional travel, and both that and her body now housing her baby's powers could have then jumpstarted her own, if her powers had originated from inside of her rather than thrown onto her by the biggest scientific catastrophe of the millennia. Oh, God, her powers had originated from inside of her. What did that make her then?

A loud crack of thunder and a long streak of lightning caught her attention, the streak headed straight down to where she knew S.T.A.R. Labs was. Nora kicked then, hard, against her stomach and Caitlin nearly doubled over as she put one hand on the windowsill to steady herself and the other over her baby, the purple lightning now a tangible field around her. Something was wrong.

She didn't even have enough time to straighten and throw up her defenses before Zoom ran into the room, wrenching his mask off and tossing it carelessly onto the table. One of his hands stayed behind his back, as if hiding something from her. Caitlin eyed him warily, pulling herself together and trying to amplify Nora's lightning as much as she could in a clear warning to *stay back*. Hunter's enormous smile, however, remained on his face.

"I brought you a gift," he said excitedly, gesturing for her to sit on the stool. Caitlin pulled the stool farther from him, but lowered herself onto it anyway, her nerves now at an all-time high. "Guess what, Caitlin?"

Biting the inside of her cheek, she pushed some of the frost she could feel on her fingertips to join Nora's lightning in an effort to keep her powers from bursting forward. She didn't have to wait long until he broke, the maniac grin once more on his face. "I killed someone today."

"You've killed a lot of people today," she spat, unable to help herself or contain her fury and disgust, her stomach heaving as she recalled the police officers at CC Jitters with their snapped necks.

Hunter shook his head. "No, no, this is someone really special, Cait!"

Caitlin glared harder at him. "I told you not to call me that!"

Her outburst was ignored though, and when she opened her mouth to say something else, he finally pulled his hand forward and thrust something red and tattered and smelled of burnt meat and metal onto her thigh. She automatically reached for it to keep the object from falling off her lap, and still, it took Caitlin's mind a second to catch up with her eyes, and before she could even fully process what she was holding, she was already choking back tears.

"The Flash is dead," Hunter then said, tone quieter than she'd heard it in a while. He stood up, pacing in front of her. "Caitlin, you know, I've always measured my success by counting the number of victims I've had. But now, I think I'm going to widen my scope. Start counting the number of Earths I conquer instead."

He barked out a laugh, and with a loud woop of excitement, he grabbed his mask off the table and sped out of the forensics lab, leaving her stricken and in shock on the uncomfortable stool in the middle of the room.

One heartbeat.

Two heartbeats.

Caitlin ripped the trash can from underneath the desk and emptied the nonexistent contents of her stomach into it, knowing she hadn't eaten since the scraps she had in Earth-2 only to keep Nora alive. When she was finished, she dropped the trash can unceremoniously onto the floor, causing it to tip over and spilling everything inside underneath and around the desk. She stood up, and when she looked out the window to see S.T.A.R. Labs in the distance, her back hit the wall, her legs gave out, and then she could feel the cold floor against her cheek as everything went dark.

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Into the Speed Force.

Chapter Notes

I can't believe it's been almost three, THREE months since I last updated. I am so sorry. Things have been crazy at work until the past couple of weeks, and between post-op stuff, physical therapy, work, and other things just completely crowding my schedule, it was tough to find time to just write and plan.

The good news: I've got the rest of this fic figured out.

The bad news: this fic probably only has another 2-4 chapters.

The worst news: I have to add more details to my planning outline as I write lol.

This chapter was kind of hard to get through because so much of it was reimagined, and I had to find ways to make these reimaginings work. The creative process was super fun, but the making sense of it all was hard. This chapter was also kind of hard to write...it basically just wrote itself, but it felt kind of lackluster? Editing was also quite rigorous for this chapter, so I hope it holds up! It's such a fun, unique chapter, so I hope this chapter does this fic justice :)

Thank you SO much to everyone who has left a comment or kudo on this fic, and thank y'all so much for reading. Thank you guys so much for your patience and support. You guys are so wonderful.

Disclaimer: I don't own DCTV

There was a sensation of falling, and then hitting the pavement.

The instant his back connected to the concrete, his eyes snapped open, and Barry lurched forward...only to feel like an anvil just bashed against his head, and fell backward against something softer, thankfully, than pavement. He lay there for so long with his eyes screwed shut in pain; there was no way to keep track of time as wave after wave of pain dragged him under again and again, and he could only wait until it dulled enough for him to pull himself back together, piece by piece.

When he finally forced his eyes to open, registering the quiet around him and the softness under him, he saw the last thing he ever expected to see—

His old room in his childhood home, exactly the way he remembered.

Slowly, Barry sat up, drinking in the details and all the things he thought he'd never see again. Each object tied in with a memory, and tears immediately flooded his eyes as an indescribable *ache* formed and pulsed in his chest. He swallowed hard past the lump in his throat, logic finally kicking in and the nagging feeling in his gut pointed him to the *wrongness* of everything around him. It was too still, too quiet, the air too stale and too flat.

He swung his legs down from his bed, carefully opening his bedroom door and making his way downstairs to where he could clearly remember the living room being...only to see a strange girl, looking no older than fifteen or sixteen, sitting on his couch, right where he loved to sit as a child. Barry opened his mouth, the words on the tip of his tongue, when she turned her attention to him, and he took in her features—long chestnut curls framing her face, her wide green eyes so foreign and familiar at the same time. She tilted her head, observing him for a moment as he observed her.

“What are you searching for?” the girl asked him, catching him off-guard.

Barry nearly jerked back in surprise. “Where am I?”

Grinning back at him, she looked so lovely with that smile on her face and the trace of sadness in her eyes. “Don’t you recognize your own home?”

He didn’t look away from her, his mind struggling against the haze to make sense of everything. The girl stood up, stretching. “We supposed this form might be more familiar to you. We wanted to meet you.”

“I don’t...know you.” Barry squinted his eyes at her, trying to place where he had seen her before. She looked too familiar to be a stranger, but he was sure he had never met her in his life. Her second sentence hit him then, jolting him back to the strangeness of his situation. “What do you mean ‘we’? Who...are you? Am I...am I dead?”

The girl laughed at him. “No, you’re not dead. Don’t you remember what happened?”

Barry looked down at his hands, down at the carpet underneath his feet that he remembered last being coated in blood, someone’s blood, his mother’s—and then everything came rushing back to him, slamming into him like the contained Particle Accelerator explosion they had tried replicating, all to get his powers back to take Zoom down, to save Caitlin and Central City; the air left his lungs, and Barry keeled over, panting as the onslaught of memories came back to him.

“Zoom...he made it back to Central City,” he gasped. “He’s got Caitlin and the baby. We tried to create another Particle Accelerator explosion to get my speed back. Something must have gone wrong.”

“Wrong?” she asked, tilting her head adorably to the side. Barry felt as though someone punched him in the stomach, knocking the wind from him at the familiarity of the gesture.

“Please,” he rasped, “wherever I am, I need to get back to Central City.”

She looked at him, so, so sadly, and then in a blink, she was gone, and it was Joe standing in front of him. “We thought you were here to get your powers back.”

This, out of everything, was what finally knocked Barry to his senses. The Joe standing in front of him spoke in the tone and timbre he was so used to hearing from his foster father, but the words sounded hollow, empty. He drew himself to his full height, staring his false foster father down. When he spoke, his voice came out the steadiest it had been since he first woke up. “Who are you, exactly?”

Joe chuckled, but matched him eye-to-eye. “We...are you. And so many others, so many other things, all at once. We were there at the beginning of time. And we’ll be there at the end of it.”

Like a bolt of lightning, the answer came to him, sending him reeling. “You’re...you can’t be. You’re the Speed Force.”

The moment the words passed his lips, Barry knew, without a shadow of a doubt, that he was right. Joe looked amused, folding his hands in front of him.

“Why are you here, Barry?” the Speed Force asked again.

He swallowed, suddenly nervous. “I need to get my powers back, *please*. I need to go back to help, I need to take Zoom down.”

Barry was about to beg on his knees, his desperation and impatience swelling, choking him. He had no idea how to get his speed back, and he had no idea how to get home, but *he had to*. The light outside the windows faded from afternoon to evening, the calming colors changing rapidly into night as the lamps and lights inside the house flickered to life, bathing the room in a soft glow.

“We know what you’re running toward, Barry,” the Speed Force said as Joe. The very next second, Joe disappeared, and in his place was the last person he thought he’d see—his mother, still in the clothes she died in that fateful night, looked back at him. “But what are you running from?”

His knees hit the floor. Tears immediately welled in his eyes and slipped down his face, one after another, and there was absolutely nothing he could do to get them to *stop*. Something shattered inside of him, and he broke into so many pieces he didn’t even know where to start; the absolute ache and heartbreak and emptiness he felt when he lost his mother that night as a child and again as the Flash when Eobard Thawne killed her the second time, was unbearable. Even looking at her was unbearable, but Barry couldn’t tear his eyes away, everything in him brought to its knees in front of the person he loved and missed the most in the entire world.

“Why are you doing this to me?” he whispered, his throat constricting with every single emotion swirling inside of him.

“We’re not doing anything to you, sweetheart,” Nora replied softly, putting a hand on his cheek and then gently running her fingers through his hair. “You’re just so tired.”

Barry bit back a sob. His mother—the Speed Force, he viciously reminded himself—was right. He was *so tired*. He had been running on fumes since Zoom had taken Wally, had been run ragged and been so worried about him, about Caitlin and their unborn child and the fate of not just Central City, but of Earth-1, of all the Earth-2 metas that had shown up so far that he had been unable to truly fight back against, worried about his friends and the rest of his team and Zoom wreaking havoc through it all.

He was so tired. He was so tired.

“Why...did you choose her?” he asked brokenly after a minute. “Out of everyone in my life—why her?”

The Speed Force took a moment, still gently brushing his hair back as it answered him. “Your mother’s death happened to you, Barry. It made you who you are, but have you accepted it?” It paused for a single breath, fingers stilling, and then continued their movements. “Really accepted losing me?”

Barry couldn’t hold back his violent flinch as he pulled away from it—her, his anger feeding his heartbreak and pouring into his devastation. “*I know I’ve lost you!*” he hissed, tears dripping onto the carpeted floor. “*Every day* I know it!”

Neither of them spoke for several beats, his pulse thundering in his ears. Blowing out a harsh breath, he knelt down on the hard ground again, facing her once more. “I had a chance to save you,” Barry said, voice breaking with every word. He no longer cared about the distinction between his mother and the Speed Force; she was there, in front of him after all these years, and the flow of words just wouldn’t stop once he started. “You saw what I chose.”

“And you’re at peace with that decision?” she asked, not moving from her seat.

“At peace?” his tone took on a hard edge. “At peace.”

He shook his head, digging his nails into the hardwood floor. “How could someone ever be at peace with letting his mother die...deciding that his life was more valuable than hers?”

This was the moment his heartbreak and anger came to a crest, made clear that of everything he had been running from, he had been running from *her*. He had been running from the unbearable truth that he was responsible for his mother’s death, twice now, knowing what Eobard Thawne was after the first time he ran into their home, that he hated himself every single day for making that decision, saving his own life instead of finding a way to keep her alive.

Nora leaned forward, clasping her hands together. “Do you really think that she would have wanted you to die for her?” she asked quietly. “And out of all the people that you’ve saved as the Flash as a result of that decision...what about them? Do their lives have value too?”

Silence echoed in the room, eternity suspended between them. Finally, Barry sniffled, clearing his throat as he mustered his bravery to look her in the eye.

“You were right all along.” His whisper broke through the quiet like a crack of thunder. “I haven’t accepted it. Not for a second.” His voice became choked once more. “I don’t think I ever will.”

Nora’s expression crumbled, and she slid forward off the couch to kneel in front of him, her hands gently cradling his face, thumbs running over his cheeks. “Oh, my beautiful boy,” she said just as brokenly as him. “You have to find a way.”

Barry looked so lost, eyes wide in his mother’s arms. “How?”

“I don’t know.” She paused, her fingers continuing to soothe him just a breath later, lifting his chin to look him in the eyes. “But I know this. What you’ve become...it’s wonderful. A miracle, even. But it won’t make bad things stop happening to you. Even the Flash can’t outrun the tragedies the universe is going to keep sending your way. You have to accept that. And then?” her voice took on a lighter tone, a small smile finally breaking through. “You can truly run free.”

The truth in her words rang through him, like the lightning he once felt course through his veins.

“I know,” he replied brokenly. “I just miss you so much.”

He felt the last of his walls absolutely, completely crumble, and then for the first time, he opened himself to let the pain rush in. His loud sobs wracked his body as Nora tightened her arms around him, her son finally allowing himself to break apart. For all his fears, his worries, his anxiety, his pain, his losses, his mother—he felt it all and wept for all of it, allowing himself to shatter as he was being held, taking in his pain and then letting it go until he was nothing but pieces of himself, afloat at sea in a storm.

They stayed there for a long time, long past the end of his tears and his sniffles, and Barry slowly pulled himself together, piece by piece...the pieces that missed her, the pieces that held other people he loved, pieces of other people who loved him, pieces of the other things he loved. Everything that made him *him* stitched back together into a mosaic, broken pieces fitting together to create something new, something beautiful, something wonderful. There would be no unbreaking of those pieces, but coming together, they made a true work of art. And wasn’t that what the Speed Force was trying to tell him? Accepting loss, accepting tragedies, that his power didn’t make up all of who he was, didn’t make him immune to heartbreak and fear and confusion and difficult choices. Rather, he had to learn to accept *all* of them, not just the good of his powers, but the consequences as well.

“What if I told you,” Nora said softly, still gently stroking his hair. “That she was proud of you?”

“Who’s telling me that?” Barry replied, voice gritty and hoarse. “The Speed Force, or my mother?”

She carefully pulled away from him, offering him a smile before leaning forward to kiss his forehead. “Both.” Standing, she extended a hand to help him up on his shaky legs. “Come here.”

Leading him to the couch, Nora sat him down, then sat in the space next to him, reaching over to the coffee table to grab— “The Runaway Dinosaur?” he asked, sniffing, and the tiniest smile showed on his face at last. Nora returned his smile, squeezing his hand and opening up the book.

“What do you say we read through it one more time?” she asked. “It was always your favorite.”

At his nod, through his teary smile, she began to read. “Once, there was a little dinosaur called a Maiasaur who lived with his mother. One day, he told his mother, ‘I wish I were special like the other dinosaurs. If I were a T-Rex, I could chomp with my ferocious teeth!’”

“‘But if you were a T-Rex,’” Barry began, never taking his eyes off her as the words came to him like no time at all had passed, “said his mother, ‘how would you hug me with your tiny little arms?’”

Nora chuckled, turning the page.

“‘I wish I were an Apatosaurus,’ said the little dinosaur, ‘so with my long neck, I could see high above the treetops.’ ‘But if you were an Apatosaurus,’ said his mother, ‘how would you hear me in the treetops when I told you I love you?’”

‘What makes you so special, little Maiasaur?’ said its mother. ‘Is it your ferocious teeth or long neck or pointy beak?’

‘What makes you special is out of all of the different dinosaurs in the big, wide world...you have the mother who is just right for you. And who will always...’”

“‘Love you,’” both Barry and Nora finished together, sharing one last smile. She closed the book and turned to him, then placed the book in his hands.

“Your copy was lost, a long time ago. This is a gift.”

He looked back at her, confusion and awe evident on his face. “For what?”

Standing, she pulled him up from the couch, and leaned in to give him one last kiss on his forehead. Barry blinked, and then all of a sudden, his mother was replaced by the girl he had seen earlier, the one with the wavy chestnut hair and wide green eyes; for the first time, he truly took in her features, her face, her hair, and *oh*.

Oh.

He could see the resemblance between this girl and his mother, now that he had seen them side-by-side, could see the traits they shared and the ones he saw in the mirror every day and —

Caitlin.

There was no mistaking who she was now, and the realization crashed into Barry like a lightning storm. He brought his hand up to his mouth as he processed just who it was standing in front of him with a smile on her face, waiting for him to speak first. The tears that welled in his eyes weren't ones of pain, but pride and awe and wonder.

"You..." Barry tried to say, but he could only place his hand gently on her cheek like his mother had done to him, brushing his thumb against her skin and memorizing each of her features while he still could. "You're..."

He couldn't even get the words out, but he had to try. Swallowing hard, he looked into her eyes, mirror versions of his own. "You're so beautiful," he finally managed.

A wide smile bloomed on her face then, and it made everything inside Barry feel lighter, warmer. "I can't wait to meet you," he whispered.

She reached up to take his hand from her cheek, holding it in both her own.

"You're ready."

Barry blinked one more time, and she was gone. Instead, it was himself standing in front of him, complete in his Flash gear and a confident smile on his face. Speed Force-Barry gripped his hand tighter as Barry smiled in return, then in a flash of light, he fell back through the dark clouds into the freak lightning storm, each bolt lighting each nerve ending and sparking them to life, bringing *him* back to life. Thunder echoed around him, but as he fell through the sky, Barry relished in the sound vibrating through his entire being, and then he was falling into a violent swirl of blue and white and opened his eyes to see a breach closing above him—and the people he loved standing over him.

"Barry?!"

"Barry!!"

Someone bodily lifted him up, and then he was pulled into a firm hug he could recognize as his father's. Everyone was talking at once, and just as his father loosened his grip, he was passed around until everyone had had a chance to hug him—Joe, Iris, Cisco, *Harry*.

"You okay, Allen?" the doctor asked gruffly, his eyes shining suspiciously.

Barry couldn't help the grin as he took in the faces around him, nodding back at Harry. "Yeah, fine. Sorry I made everyone worry."

He readied himself to start running, but then remembered there was something caught tightly in his grasp. The book that the Speed Force, his mother, gave him as a gift to himself...and his daughter...he hadn't let go of it on his way back. Now, he carefully put it down on the

table to the side of the lab. He would ensure that his daughter would have the chance to read the book, that her parents would be there to read the book to her and with her. But first, she and her mother, both people he loved so much, had to be saved from the clutches of a villain who had been allowed free reign for too long. When he started pulling his cowl on, readying himself to run, Cisco spoke up.

“Uh...what are you doing...?”

“I have to go get Caitlin,” Barry replied, as though it was the most obvious answer in the world. After everything the Speed Force showed him, after everything he had come to terms with, everything he had learned...the confidence he gained and the wisdom he’d learned never left him. It made him feel ready to take on the world, as though being broken and being put back together was the most wonderful, powerful thing that could have happened to him. And, in a way, it was.

Cisco pulled him back to the present with a firm hand on his arm. “Whoa, whoa, whoa, you *can’t*! It’s only been a day since you were stuck in the Speed Force—I vibed you, by the way, you’re welcome—but CCPD is overrun with metas Zoom brought over from Earth-2. You’re only one person, how are you going to get past them and get Caitlin out safely?!”

“Cisco’s right,” Iris piped up. “We need to come up with a plan.”

Barry hadn’t counted on meeting any sort of resistance when his first instinct after getting back was to make sure Caitlin and their daughter were rescued. When he showed no signs of stopping, Cisco tightened his grip. “*Please*,” he pleaded, Joe, Henry, and Harry coming to stand behind him. “We just got you back after thinking you were dead, let’s not half-ass this. Not now.”

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