

"Back to Normal" finds Barry struggling with his identity after losing his powers to Hunter Zolomon, who kidnapped Caitlin at the end of the last episode. It's hard to be totally invested in this storyline, given how he didn't really need to lose his powers in the first place. At the very least, however, it's an opportunity for Barry's intelligence to come to the forefront.

Barry doesn't have much time to wallow in his emotions, since Harry gets kidnapped by a metahuman named Griffin Grey (Haig Sutherland), who confuses him for his Earth-1 counterpart. Griffin hopes that Harry can cure him. The particle accelerator explosion gave him super strength, but it came with terrible side effects: He is only 18 years old and looks like he is in his forties. Even though Barry has no powers, he can't help but try to be the hero, so he joins Joe and Cisco to confront Griffin. Barry doesn't land any shots on Griffin, but he does notice him aging right before his eyes. The more Griffin exerts himself, the more he ages.

Team Flash is very lucky that the first metahuman Normal Barry has to face suffers such an easily exploited weakness. At the end of the episode, Griffin basically dies from using his powers too much. It's a sad storyline, yet a forgettable one. Ultimately, Griffin isn't as interesting as what happens elsewhere in "Back to Normal."

The episode particularly focuses on the torn relationship between Harry and his daughter, Jesse Quick. He's finally able to track her down, but the family reunion isn't the least bit heartwarming. Jesse is still angry at Harry. She blames him for everything they've dealt with since the particle accelerator exploded. Yes, Harry's killing of the Turtle still makes him seem like a terrible, corrupted man. But Jesse's viewpoint is so moralistic that it feels rather ridiculous. It's an overly simple, black-and-white approach to the world.

After being kidnapped by Griffin, Harry is able to find some common ground with Jesse. She decides to stay at S.T.A.R. Labs, but how long will that last? Neither of them has a social security card or pretty much anything that would prove who they are to anyone on Earth-1. I'm glad that we're going to see more of Jesse's character, if only because actress Violette Beane definitely fits well with the rest of the cast. I'm not going to hold my breath, though: The Flash (and frankly, every other DC adaptation on the CW) seems unable to properly develop multiple female characters at the same time. Also, Jesse mentioning she had five majors in college doesn't make her seem super-smart; it just makes me wonder if the show's writers know how college works. But I digress.

Let's talk about the other father-daughter relationship that's begging for development. Aside from Barry himself, Iris and Joe are the heart of The Flash. It's a shame their relationship doesn't tie more consistently into the plot, especially considering all that has happened to them recently. Instead, Iris's storyline focuses on her relationship with Barry. She's finally acknowledging her feelings for him, and they even share a few touching moments. (It's pretty great when he admits, "You know you were the first person I saved after I got my powers?") Still, it's hilarious that he doesn't pick up on her feelings.

Iris is definitely getting more of the spotlight lately, but it's unclear if The Flash will handle her growing role all that well. Candice Patton is an incredibly warm presence, and she plays Iris with a mix of bravery and kindness that compliments the show's uplifting outlook on heroism. That said, have the writers forgotten she's a journalist? I'm very happy we've reached a point where Iris loves Barry romantically, but it's kind of odd that her relationship with Scott Evans was built up only to be resolved offscreen and immediately forgotten.

Thankfully, "Back to Normal" also livens things up by bringing back Killer Frost. Zolomon thinks he's in love with Caitlin, but this feels incredibly incongruous with how he's been presented. Having an abusive supervillain kidnap a woman who wants nothing to do with him is a bit out of this show's wheelhouse. This season has seen The Flash stretch into darker territory, such as the revelation about Iris's mother, but its typically light tone makes the grim stuff feel tacked on. Zolomon delusionally believes that if he keeps Caitlin imprisoned for long enough, she will realize she loves him. After he takes off Caitlin's handcuffs and speeds off, she takes a look throughout his lair, where she discovers her Earth-2 counterpart and the Man in the Iron Mask.

I haven't been completely on board with how Danielle Panabaker plays Killer Frost — or the design of the villain's costume — but to her credit, she's obviously having a lot of fun. Killer Frost's sharp humor brings a much-needed energy to the show. Caitlin and Killer Frost discuss the different points in their lives, including their icy mothers and how Killer Frost lost a brother. They make a deal to mutually ensure their own safety. Caitlin will help Killer Frost get out of the glass cell if she'll help her scale down the mountain. Once Killer Frost is out, she decides to renege on the deal and attempts to kill Caitlin. She apparently realized that Zolomon only keeps her alive because she looks like Caitlin, but that doesn't explain why she would waste time trying to kill her doppelgänger. In the end, Zolomon comes to the rescue. He saves Caitlin, then stabs Killer Frost in the chest with her own icicle — and it's infuriating. Pretty much every Earth-2 metahuman is under Zolomon's thumb and the show routinely kills them off. Killer Frost joins Reverb and Deathstorm on the list of fun character who should have lasted much longer.

At the very least, it would have been easier to watch Zolomon's childhood flashbacks if Killer Frost were still around to crack snide comments in the background. Her death is far from unique, though: The Flash has yet to find a female character whose potential it hasn't squandered this season.

After Killer Frost dies, Caitlin begs to go home to Earth-1. Zolomon seems utterly opposed to the idea at first, then he makes a typically grandiose villain speech about how he used to measure his success by the number of many people he killed, but now he'll do so by the number of Earths he conquers. Looks like Caitlin is going back to Earth-1 after all.

All the more reason for Harry to fulfill the promise he makes to Barry at the end of the episode. He swears he'll help Barry get his powers back in the most dramatic way possible: By creating another particle accelerator explosion to re-create how he gained his powers in the first place. Looking back on the shape of season two, this plotline would have worked much better if it kicked into gear several episodes ago. With only four episodes left, it doesn't entirely feel like an urgent, dramatic development. In a season that's been stuffed with filler, this seems like more of the same. It's just something to pad the time until Barry finally takes down Zolomon. Isn't it time we get to the good stuff?

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