In the Wake of Yesterday

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Summary

Two years after their failed attempt to bring Oliver home, Tommy and Felicity have settled back into their normal lives. Or at least, as normal as they can be with Tommy working for ARGUS and Felicity working on a highly secretive project with Dr. Brion Markov. Settled, at least, until they hear the startling news: Oliver Queen is alive… and returning to Starling City. Feelings resurface, tensions run high, and everything is different… in the wake of yesterday.

Notes

In the Wake of Yesterday begins directly after Before the World Wakes, so if you’re going to read this one, please make sure you read BtWW first!

Wooow, okay. So I for one wasn’t sure this day would ever come. Before the World Wakes was a huge undertaking and it was hard to fathom taking that on again. But it was clear from all of you lovelies, and from conversations with Kayla that we had stories that needed to be told. So here we are. We traded in one wild ride for another, and I really hope you guys are on board. We love the universe we’ve created and are so excited to bring the next chapter to you.
xoxo, Cassie

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I want to start by saying thank you to everyone who read Before the World Wakes. It was the most massive story either of us have ever been apart of, and we loved every minute of it. And because of that love, we’re here. This sequel came about because neither of us felt like we had told the stories of Oliver, Tommy, and Felicity to their completion. BtWW was a chapter in their lives, a crucial one, that has lead us here, to this chapter. One we hope everyone loves as much as we do. We have always had a pact with this verse to tell an honest story, no matter where it end up taking us. And I think if you believe in storytelling like we do, you’ll be happy to come on this ride. Without further ado, welcome to In the Wake of Yesterday.

With love,
Kayla
Chapter 1

Oliver Queen had learned years ago that fear was the quickest path to death. He had to adapt to the gnawing, pounding sensation that would flood his stomach every time a gun pointed in his direction, every time a blade would slice through his skin. And for a long time he thought his life was better that way. But that was all before Russia.

The thought that every single person he touched lost something of themselves to him, haunted every memory he had. And for a while he was sure he’d be able to keep himself cut off from feeling anything for anyone. But how did that old poem go, ‘no man is an island, entire of itself’? As much as he wanted to spend the rest of his days on Lian Yu, atoning for the lives he’d taken, he knew it wasn’t that simple. He had other wrongs that needed righting. Wrongs that his family had done to the people of his city. A city that felt like a stranger the more streets they passed.

He knew his mother was speaking to him. He could hear the constant hum of her voice as his thoughts muddled together, but he couldn’t focus on her. Because the second he let his mind settle on one thing for too long was the second he would lose his composure.

He wondered how long he’d feel like this? How long could he walk around his house, around his family, and not let things in? Was it even possible to fit back into the flow of life? Or would he forever be left with a sense of incompleteness in his soul?

“Thea is over the moon to see you.”

Those were the first words he’d registered from his mom. And they struck a chord with such fervor he couldn’t help but take a deep breath before he answered.

“I missed her too,” he said, turning to face Moira.

He could see the tears in his mother’s eyes. Welled in the corners, waiting to fall. Just one blink and they’d spill over, but she didn’t blink. Her eyes ever focused on him, like if she looked away he’d disappear forever.

Without thinking he reached for her hand, letting his cold, calloused fingers envelop her soft, warm ones. It had been ages since he’d held his mom’s hand. Not since he was a little boy, eagerly wanting to pull away for some adventure. His mother lowered her head, and he could feel the tears that had finally slipped hit the back his his hand.

“I missed you,” he said. But it didn’t feel like enough. Nothing felt like it could ever be enough. “So much.”

“You don’t have to anymore, my beautiful boy,” she moved her free hand to his cheek, another thing that reminded him of boyhood. “You’re home now. So nothing else matters.”

He just nodded. Because he couldn’t tell her she was wrong. He couldn’t tell her that he’d only come home because he had a mission to achieve, to right the wrongs done to the city, his city. And that mattered more. It had to. Otherwise his father had killed himself for nothing. And Oliver was well past done with not living up to the sacrifices of others.

They were driving past Merlyn Global, and he couldn’t help but search the crowd of employees for the familiar flash of blonde. It was a crazy thought. One he was trying to push out of his head over and over again. But he could feel the corners of the envelope in his pocket pressed into his thigh, reminding him how it felt when the same envelope had been handed to him.
She’d told him not to read it, not until he decided to return home. And for a long time he had only
honored her wishes because he was afraid it would hurt too much to read her words, to know just
how close to something real he could have had. Then after he left Russia, it was more like he
couldn’t bring himself to read them. Like he’d never be worthy of whatever she’d been compelled to
write down.

He still hadn’t broken the seal, not even after he decided it was time to come home. Whatever was in
the letter, whether it was a recount of their weeks together or an explanation of her feelings, it was
better left in the past. He had no way of knowing what Felicity felt now, and even if he did, it
wouldn’t be fair to her for him to come back like this. Not when he knew he couldn’t be with her, or
anyone.

They had reached the outskirts of town, the car traveling down the near empty, curving streets. And
Oliver let his mind wander as he tried to plan.

He’d have to set up a base of operations, get everything he had settled in somewhere secure. Then
he’d make sure he went over the list a few more times before he picked his first target. A couple
weeks and he’d be up and running for sure. But it was the waiting that was going to prove the
hardest.

Oliver hated waiting. He’d learned over and over that the more time you wasted the more likely
things could, and would, go wrong. But this also wasn’t something he should rush. The timing had
to be right, otherwise he’d find himself with more trouble than he was ready to deal with.

As his thoughts settled on the list, he felt himself let go of his mother’s hand, pushing his palms down
the legs of his pants. They were stiff under his fingers and he knew it was because they were new. It
had been awhile since he’d worn anything that still smelled like a store. Even before heading back to
the island, anything he’d bought for himself was second hand.

He felt trapped in his clothing, like any second the fabric would twist and constrict, strangling the life
out of him. These were the clothes of a man like Oliver Queen, and he’d spent so long denying
himself that title, that now he felt like an imposter.

“Here we are,” Moira said as the car pulled into the circle drive. “Home sweet home.”

He kept himself from flinching at the word, and forced a smile to his face. But he didn’t want to get
out of the car. Terror ran through his veins as he looked up at the stony gray mansion. He’d dreamt
of this moment, holding it in a place deep in his mind. Something to call to the surface when he
thought the end had finally come to claim him. One last taste of his past pressed in his memory. But
now that he looked at it, with his mother so close, and Thea just inside, he doubted all his actions
over the last year.

He wasn’t ready to be home, he couldn’t do this to his family. He couldn’t drag them down to wade
through his dark, damaged soul. His mother who held her head so high, without a seam out of place
on her tailored suit, but couldn’t hide the questions in her eyes. The questions about his father, and
what happened to him. And Thea, who was flirting with the dangers of drugs when he’d snuck back
into town more than two years ago. He would ruin them. Like he ruined everything else. And he
wouldn’t be able to bear it if he did.

“Is everything alright?” His mother asked when he hadn’t moved to get out of the car.

“Yeah,” he said, his head nodding a little. He knew he couldn’t outright lie. Not when his emotions
were so close to the surface. She’d see right through him. “I’m just a little overwhelmed. Nothing
that won’t pass.”
“Okay,” she leaned across the seat, pressing a kiss to his forehead, before she turned to climb out of the car.

Oliver waited a second, taking in a deep breath before he opened his own car door. He made his steps deliberate, anchoring himself to the present with every move forward. It didn’t matter anymore if he thought he’d made the right choice in coming back, it had been made regardless. And there was no going back. He was home now, and he’d have to live with that.

Before he stepped towards the house, he went to the rear of the car, grabbing for his trunk before the driver could pull it out.

“I’ve got it,” he said, giving the man a slight nod that it was okay to let go. The driver smiled, and left him to collect his things.

He wasn’t worried about his mother’s staff opening his belongings, but he couldn’t risk the trunk dropping and breaking open right there on his front walkway. Not when the entire thing was loaded with secrets he wasn’t ready to share.

He followed his mother into the house, taking in everything as slow as he could. He had no way of knowing if he should be enjoying this. If it was okay that a little part of him was glad to be here, glad to be home.

He would have dwelled on the thought longer if he hadn’t heard the sound of a door closing from upstairs. He focused in on the sound of the footfalls that followed as he gravitated towards the bottom of the staircase. And then she was at the top of them. Somehow taller than he thought she would ever get, but still so little to him too.

“Hey sis,” he said, barely holding the emotions back in his voice.

Thea’s smile broke across her face as she started down the stairs.

“I knew it,” she said, her pace only quickening the further she descended. “I knew you were alive.”

Once she reached the bottom, she lunged for Oliver, throwing her arms around his neck. And he did his best to hold her there, to cradle her to him, like he’d done so often when she was just a baby.

“I missed you so much,” she whispered to him. He’d almost forgotten what she sounded like when she was on the verge of tears.

“You were with me the whole time,” he replied.

A sense of belonging settled into his chest, and even if he knew it would only last the length of a hug, he held on to it. Nothing about his old life felt like it would fit again, but this always would. He would always be Thea’s big brother, and no one could ever take that away.

She finally pulled back, wiping the tears from her eyes, and folded her arms in front of her. “God it’s hard to even believe you’re here. You have no clue how many times I’ve woken up from this exact dream.”

He nodded. Because he did know. He’d had hundreds of dreams over the years about coming home, about seeing her again, and their mom, about Tommy too. They would always end the same way, they’d either walk away from him or he was forced to choose which ones lived and which died.

“Well believe it,” he gave her a smile, letting it slip easier than any other action he’d done in the last week. “Because I’m not going anywhere. Not again.”
And he meant it. It didn’t matter that he was on a mission. It didn’t matter the number of people he’d have to take down to rebuild his city. If for no other reason than the girl before him, Oliver was going to do everything in his power to always come home. Like he should have done two years ago.

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“Thanks for the raincheck,” Tommy said, opening the door to let Felicity into his apartment. It had been a whirlwind of excitement the last thirty six hours-- and most of it was not good excitement. Or at least, it was to-be-determined excitement. Apparently that’s what happens when one’s best friend comes back from the dead.

The story of Oliver Queen being found alive had dredged up plenty in the way of news clips. Everything from old girlfriends coming out of the woodwork to tabloids replaying tons of footage of the old Ollie- the playboy with a bottomless trust fund, back when the pair of them would turn the city into their playground. He’d been called dozens of times for interviews in the last day and half, and that hadn’t made getting Simon Connors and his family out of Starling anything less than a nightmare.

Once or twice he’d even been afraid that his position at ARGUS had been compromised, and for the life of him, he couldn’t decide if that was a good thing or a bad thing.

But such decisions would have to wait. Partially because he had company and partially because he really just didn’t want to think about any of it anymore. He needed a break. And movie nights with Felicity were always good for that.

“You were righting your bosses wrongs and helping a family in need. It’s not like I can exactly fault you for it,” she answered, moving swiftly passed him into the kitchen. She set the bag of food down on the counter, spinning around to find plates in the cabinet. “Besides, I got to help, albeit from my apartment with three-day-old reheated Chinese food instead of the take-out sushi I’d been drooling over all day, but still.” She spun back around to face him. “I’m babbling aren’t I? I should really stop, I just--”

Tommy crossed the distance between them, placing a hand on her arm, effectively silencing her.

“We don’t have to talk about it,” he said quietly. Truth be told, he wasn’t sure if he was ready to talk about the Oliver Queen shaped elephant in the room yet. From what Tommy had learned via texts from Thea, Oliver’s plane had touched down at dawn that morning, meaning they’d been back in the same city for just over twelve hours, but every time Tommy even thought about going to see his friend, his feet felt concreted in place.

“I know we don’t," she said, biting her lower lip. “But we kind of do.” Felicity shrugged out of his grip, moving for the silverware drawer. There was a beat of silence and then, “Has he reached out to you?”

“No,” Tommy answered quickly.

“Have you tried to contact him?”

“No.”

“Why didn’t he tell you he was coming back? I checked the Paris paper going back six months, Tommy. There was nothing. Why didn’t he…” her voice trailed off.

“I don’t know,” he answered, blowing out a long breath and bracing himself against the kitchen counter.
Felicity began pulling sushi containers out of the brown paper bag and shook her head. “It’s been two years,” she said with a huff. “He probably forgot about the paper thing. He said it was stupid anyway.”

“It wasn’t stupid,” Tommy countered. “It’s how we got back to each other in Moscow.” Memories flooded his mind. Frantic days and nights when he’d been stuck in Monte Carlo waiting to hear from them, hoping to find out that Felicity was alive. It felt like just days ago, the adrenaline recharging in his veins, bringing everything to the surface again.

He could see a retort on the tip of her tongue, but whatever it was, she bit it back as she opened containers and filled plates.

“Yesterday when we talked on the phone,” Tommy said, gauging her reaction carefully. “You said that I should go talk to Oliver.”

Every muscle in her body went rigid as she paused and then slowly lifted her gaze to meet his. “You’re right,” she said, swallowing hard. She stopped before elaborating. “We don’t need to talk about this.”

Felicity grabbed the two plates and brushed passed him into the living room. “Don’t forget the booze on your way in,” she called over her shoulder.

Tommy groaned. It wasn’t often that he found topics that Felicity didn’t want to discuss. He’d been careful over the last two years to breech the subject of her family sparingly and with great care, but otherwise, he’d found her to be mostly an open book. They’d made some sort of unspoken pact to not talk about Oliver once they’d returned home from Russia, and that had suited them well until now. But there wasn’t really a way to avoid it anymore now that Oliver was back. Tommy grabbed a bottle of sake and two cups and followed her into the living room where she’d already shed her shoes and jacket and was sitting cross-legged on the floor in front of the coffee table.

“You’re really going to avoid this?” Tommy asked, perching himself on the sofa next to where she sat on the floor. He nuded his leg into her arm to get her attention.

“There’s nothing to avoid,” she answered, her voice cool and detached. “I didn’t know Oliver before he was… just before. It would look suspicious if I went.”

“You could come with me,” he suggested with a shrug. “As like a--”


“I didn’t mean as a date,” he glanced down at her with a scowl. “Just as like, moral support. You’ve grown close to Thea the last several months. I was actually kind of surprised she didn’t ask you to be there when he came home.”

Tommy watched as a small shudder rippled through her body at the thought.

“She texted me yesterday about it,” Felicity admitted. “I might have told her it would be better for it to be just family there when he got home.”

He stopped, watching her for a moment. If there was one thing Tommy Merlyn was good at, it was reading people- especially after the training he’d received from Waller over the last two years. But somehow he always seemed to have a blind spot when it came to Felicity. He wasn’t sure if it was intentional or not.

“I can’t say that I blame you,” Tommy sighed. “Who knows how he would have reacted to seeing
you there with his family when he walked in the door.” He shook his head before standing and moving to the TV console to pop the DVD of *The Mummy* into the player.

The menu screen loaded as he walked back to the sofa and reclaimed his seat. He glanced down at Felicity again, not sure exactly what to say to make this whole thing easier on her. He had no idea what the future held for any of them. He couldn’t console her by saying that Oliver would welcome them back into his life with open arms, or that they’d all be the best of friends. The world was a darker place for all three of them than that. The last time they’d all been together had made sure of it.

“Do you think he-” Felicity started, and then broke off suddenly, as if her mind finally caught up to what her mouth was doing.

“Do I think he what?” Tommy asked, splitting his chopsticks apart before grabbing a piece of sushi with them in one hand as he maneuvered the remote control in the other.

“Nothing,” she said, shaking her head. “It’s stupid.”

Tommy wanted to be able to set her mind at ease, whatever was troubling her. He hated seeing his friend in such turmoil, but he knew that his head and heart were mimicking whatever it was Felicity couldn’t bring herself to say aloud. He couldn’t force himself to press her for more.

“Remember when our lives were easy?” She asked, her voice a little wistful.

Tommy barked out a laugh. “I do, but sadly it was before we met.”

“Hey!” she said, smacking him, but brightening a little just the same. “Things weren’t so bad after we came home.”

“You mean after my father blackmailed you into working for him and I similarly got blackmailed into working for Waller all to keep the secret of Oliver being alive actually a secret?”

“Yeah,” she said with a smile. “Business as usual for a while there, huh?”

“Sure Smoak,” he answered, rolling his eyes. “Whatever you say.”

His phone chimed with an incoming text and Tommy set his plate down on the coffee table to retrieve it. He’d expected perhaps Laurel, letting him know she was working late or on her way over to her father’s or something, but instead it was an SOS from Thea.

*Ollie’s been home all day. Can’t believe you haven’t stopped by yet. Momster trying to force family bonding. SEND HELP*

Tommy winced.

“Everything okay?” Felicity asked, pushing herself up from the floor to sit beside him on the sofa.

“Not sure,” he answered, flipping his phone around for her to read the message.

“I told you that you should go,” she said with a sigh.

“Come with me,” Tommy encouraged. Not only because he knew she really wanted to see Oliver, but also because ever since they’d left on the Merlyn jet on their hunt for Oliver, he’d always felt stronger with her by his side.

Felicity’s phone beeped with an incoming text of her own. She reached across the coffee table for it and scrolled to open the message. “Don’t think that’s possible,” she said, dropping the phone into
her lap. “I’ve got a bit of an emergency of my own.”

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Felicity maneuvered around the cubicled areas. The dimly lit room generated a low hum from the copiers in sleep mode, but she’d always found the sound of an empty office calming. It always brought her back to that night she met Tommy. And no matter what she wished she could change, that would never be one of them.

Felicity finally spotted the familiar brunette sitting at a desk surrounded by stacks of file boxes. “The phrase drowning in paperwork comes to mind right now.”

Laurel looked up, letting out a sigh of relief. “You are saving my life right now. It’s been crashing for two hours and I think it’s out to get me.”

She smiled, waving the bag of leftover sushi she’d brought from Tommy’s. No need to let it go to waste. She set it on Laurel desk before she spoke. “Don’t worry I’ll remind it who’s boss. Hungry?”

“He sent that with you didn’t he?” She eyed the bag but took it anyway, practically sighing when she looked inside. “I love this place.”

“I’ll make you a deal, you eat and I will fix that,” Felicity pointed at the laptop.

Laurel relinquished her seat at the desk, and Felicity took no time to claim it. Pulling the computer closer to her as she started typing away.

“Seriously if you ever get a parking ticket, I will totally help you contest it,” Laurel said, popping a California roll in her mouth. “So good. I may have forgotten lunch today.”

“And what big world saving case has kept a smart girl like you from sustenance?” She’d located the file that seemed to be causing the system crash, but she still needed to isolate it and run a diagnostic on what it was exactly.

Laurel looked around the empty room, like she was double checking they were alone, before she pushed a file over to her. Felicity read the name and cringed.

“Adam Hunt is your case? Isn’t he the scumbag trying to evict a whole building worth of families?”

“The one and only,” she replied with a grimace. “Every time I’m sure I have a way to nail him to the wall, his lawyers are two steps ahead of me with a loophole.”

“That sucks Laurel, really,” Felicity gave her a half smile, wishing there was something else she could do. “But if anyone can do it, I’m sure it’s you.”

Laurel rolled her eyes as she reached for the television remote. “You come all the way down to the Glades, bring me sushi, and fix my computer. I should be the one showering you with compliments.”

She and Laurel had hit it off almost instantly. And she was so thankful for that. As much as she hated to admit it, the stereotypical situation had plagued her head for days before she first met Laurel. What if the girl bought into the stupid notion that Tommy couldn’t possibly be friends with Felicity and not want to sleep with her? What if Laurel hated Felicity from the start and tried to force her sort of boyfriend to dump their friendship? But Laurel had been the opposite.

Instantly, they fell into a rhythm of mocking Tommy and discussing world views. They talked of their love for wine and which Lord of the Rings was the best movie adaption. She liked Laurel, and
she couldn’t be happier that Tommy had someone so driven in his life.

The clicking of the remote had stopped, but it took Felicity a full ten seconds for her brain to process the news report playing overhead.

“...There have been no sightings of Queen outside of the family estate. But a source close to the family reports that the family has cloistered indoors since Oliver’s return this morning. Speculation has been running wild in the business circles on whether Queen’s return will prompt a corporate shakeup at the family’s company. But no one from QC would comment on the rumors when asked.”

Felicity’s heart stammered in her chest as the newscasters continued to debate the timetable in which Oliver’s name would appear back in the tabloids with his drunken exploits. She had been avoiding the TV for a reason, sticking strictly to Netflix and her vast DVD collection. She was trying not to let his return get to her, but every time she caught his piercing blue eyes on the front page, something caught in her throat. And she’d have to fight herself to keep the memories at bay. Because that’s all they were, all they could have ever been. Memories of a short lived time when nothing had felt real anyway. And she’d promised herself when she returned to Starling that she’d keep those thoughts where they belonged. Far in the past.

Laurel had gone rigid in her seat as she stared up at the television, her focus burning into the old footage of Oliver. And Felicity felt ice drop in her stomach. Because she really didn’t have a right to sit there debating in her head over her brief time with Oliver. Not when Laurel had had so much more of it, and had lost even more from his time away.

“It’s cruel irony right?”

Felicity wasn’t sure she should weigh in, but she’d never been the silent type. “Him coming back?”

Laurel glanced at her, like she’d forgotten she wasn’t alone with her emotions. “I wished so many times that first year for one of them to come home, I made countless promises that I would forgive them both if they just… If I knew they were okay. And now five years later, and I would give almost anything not to have to see that face again.”

She felt for a second like Laurel could see into her soul, see the internal turmoil she was wrestling with over her own issues with Oliver, so she looked away. Folding herself into the world of code before her.

“Sorry,” Laurel said, shaking her head like she could clear the clouds of pain away from her. “You don’t deserve me dumping five years of crap on you.”

“It’s okay.”

Because what else could she say. There wasn’t exactly a guidebook for situations like this. When a part of you had been just as broken by the same man your friend once loved. But that time was supposed to have disappeared the second she left. She had left her feelings for Oliver in Moscow, tucked into a hotel envelope, scribbled hastily to the world’s smallest stationary. She’d left her feelings with him, in case. In case he changed his mind and chose to live for something, instead of signing himself to death. But it didn’t matter what she’d felt then. Not anymore.

“Change of subject,” Laurel said, clicking the TV off again. One of Laurel’s many good qualities: deflection. “How’s Mr. Perfect?”

Felicity knew who Laurel was talking about, she knew exactly the face that was supposed to pop into her head at those words. But unfortunately she was on Oliver overload, and his face was the
only thing that swam even close to the surface. So many images, scattered fragments that ranged from annoyed to amused. And it only brought a blush to her cheeks.

“Ooh that’s a good sign,” Laurel mused.

“Huh?” *Right. Damnit.* Felicity shook her head, trying to smile. “No, I mean he’s good. He’s away right now. But he’s still good. Also he’s not perfect so you and Tommy can stop with that.”

“But it’s so much fun,” she countered, finishing up the last of the food. “I mean clearly we only do it because he’s not good enough for you.”

“Well Tommy’s too protective, and you always side with him.”

“I do not. I will fight Merlyn on almost anything,” she let out an indignant huff. “But if you’re happy that’s great. That was the first blush I think you’ve ever had when I’ve mentioned him, so maybe things have gotten better. Or maybe he’s just so much better at things we don’t get to see.”

Laurel’s smirk helped Felicity to smile back. But really she felt like her stomach was churning. She didn’t want to talk about her dating life, she also didn’t want to think about Oliver. She needed something that could tune it all out, at least for a little while longer.

She got her answer when she finally narrowed down the origins of the bug in Laurel’s system. And bug was a pretty accurate term. According to the specs she’d run, the thing was spying on all of CNRI’s data, copying anything flagged in the Adam Hunt case. Felicity glanced at Laurel, knowing full well if the lawyer brought this before a judge it would just get the case thrown out until a proper investigation could be completed. But Laurel didn’t have that kind of time, and neither did the families Hunt was preparing to toss onto the street.

Felicity did what she could to corner the program, moving it to a flashdrive she’d brought along. Maybe Laurel couldn’t use this to help those people. But Felicity wasn’t a lawyer, she didn’t have to play by the same rules. If Hunt wanted to play dirty and hurt innocent people, then he was going to have to deal with the consequences. And Felicity was going to use his own software to do it too.

“All done,” Felicity announced, pocketing the drive. “It shouldn’t crash again.”

Laurel smiled, and Felicity relinquished the seat back to the brunette. “What do I owe? Really you have to let me pay you back some how.”

Felicity felt the drive in her pocket, thumbing it through her fingers as she winked. “When you get what you need to take this jerk down, don’t hold back. It’s getting late, I should go.”

“Thanks again Felicity.”

She didn’t reply as she left, feeling the energy surge through her. She really should be thanking Laurel instead. Because her friend had just given her everything she needed to avoid all her problems, at least for the night. And as an added bonus she’d get to take down a slimeball like Adam Hunt. What could possibly go wrong?
Chapter 2

Chapter by foreverfelicityqueen (stydiasredstring)

Chapter Notes

Hello my dears,
Are you ready? Chapter one was so well received and I forgot just how wonderful it is reading all your comments. It's great seeing everyone invest time and emotion into this verse. I feel like we've got a good one here for you. And I don't want to spoil it so let's move along.

Love ya,
Kayla

P.S. No one has be right yet, but Cassie says she'll give cookies to anyone who guesses Mr. Perfect correctly. Though she probably didn't mean literally.

It was an eerie feeling, being back in his old bedroom; it was preserved, not a thing moved out of place since the day they’d set sail on the Gambit. If he pushed his memory back far enough, he could still recall how the t-shirt had come to be strewn across his closet floor, or the last time his lips had touched the half-empty bottle of bourbon on the dresser. That, he was slightly surprised to still find there. Apparently Thea hadn’t come across it yet.

Oliver blew out a long breath as he dropped his gaze in the full-length mirror from meeting his own eyes to carefully scrutinizing his scar-covered abdomen. He’d heard the doctor speaking to his mother outside his hospital room several hours earlier, so even though she hadn’t seen them herself, she knew they existed. In some sick, twisted way, he was proud of each and every one of them. They were proof that he’d survived what lesser men had succumbed to. But that didn’t mean he wanted to have to explain them to everyone.

He raked a hand through his hair and turned his back on the mirror. Explaining his scars was the least of his worries.

Discarding the towel, he dressed quickly, still feeling too confined in the denim jeans and sweater his mother had bought for him. They weren’t conducive to hand to hand combat or back-alley chases on foot. But it wasn’t exactly like he could explain that to her either.

There was a knock on the door and Oliver barely had time to turn before it opened.

“I thought you said anywhere BUT the North China Sea,” Tommy’s voice bellowed before the door was even fully opened. He let himself into the room, his face dissolving into a grin before quickly closing the distance between them and enveloping Oliver in a tight hug.

“I texted Tommy,” Thea piped in, following closely behind. “I figured you could use a friendly face to help ward off all this family bonding stuff.”

Oliver offered her a small nod of gratitude before turning back to his friend. “I did say that,” he answered with a wry smile. “How ya been?”
Tommy shrugged. “Well, you know. Best friend got marooned on a deserted island while I was stuck here just partying my nights away and sleeping through the days.”

He could tell the lie tasted bitter on Tommy’s tongue. Things had changed for all of them in Russia and Oliver doubted very much that his friend had gone back to his party days once he’d returned home. Besides, if his body language had anything to say about it, Tommy was hiding more than just the fact that he wasn’t partying lately.

“Sounds like I have a lot to catch up on,” Oliver answered. If Tommy wanted to play the partying card, that was fine by him. In fact, it might be just the cover he’d need. No one would suspect a drunk menace of a billionaire of doing what he planned on spending his nights doing. “Thea, would you mind asking mom what time she plans on serving dinner? I might need to cut out a little early to make up for lost time.”

Thea rolled her eyes, a hint of sadness flashing through them before she disappeared. Whatever made him think he could handle this? A double life is one thing when the people you spend your days with are nothing more than nameless acquaintances. But how would he ever make it through lying to everyone he’d fought so hard to protect while he was away?

As soon as Thea had left the room, the tension shifted. Oliver’s smile faded and Tommy’s brows pulled together in a deep furrow as he moved closer.

“What is going on Oliver?” he asked immediately. “I thought you were going to give us some sort of sign or warning or something that you were coming back.”

Us.

And just like that his mind flooded with her yellow sunshine and her pink pursed lips and her infuriatingly endearing babble.

“I thought it would be easier this way,” he said, pushing down the memories with a thick swallow and a brief shake of his head.

“Easier for who?” Tommy asked, moving closer now, his voice a whisper. “What happened during the last two years?” He paused, as if wanting to press further but thinking better of it.

“I didn’t contact you because that’s not why I’m here,” he sighed, refusing to meet his friend’s eyes. “The man you knew in Russia… the one you knew before all of this happened… that’s not who I am anymore.”

A hand fell on his shoulder and Oliver flinched, every nerve of his being on high alert and ready to attack before he’d even had a chance to think about it. He took a deep, steadying breath and forced himself to calm.

“You think I care about that?” Tommy laughed bitterly. “I’m not the same person you knew then either. You’re my best friend Oliver. Everything may have changed, but that never will.”

“Ollie!” Thea’s voice echoed up the stairs. “Mom said you’re staying for dinner. And so is Tommy! Be down in five minutes!”

Oliver took a step back, out of Tommy’s grasp; he needed to collect himself, to compose himself. None of this was supposed to be this way; he’d been convinced he’d locked all of his feelings deep enough inside to get through his plan without any complications. Perhaps he should have known better, especially after how things unravelled in Russia. How easily had he been swept up in their plans to come back to Starling, to reunite him with his family? He’d let himself believe that he could
have that life again but now, even standing in his old bedroom staring at the man that was once inseparable from him-- now Oliver knew that it had always been a pipedream.

“I know you’re looking for an explanation Tommy, but I can’t give you one,” he answered finally, pushing passed his friend and out into the hallway. A night of careless drinking and taking home a nameless girl actually sounded like it would hit the spot just about then. Like a junkie falling off the bandwagon looking for another fix. But Oliver knew it wouldn’t sate the ravenous darkness in his soul. It wouldn’t quiet the demons or keep the ghosts at bay. He’d found but one remedy for that, and his fingers itched for his bow as he gripped the banister in the hallway overlooking the foyer downstair.

Tommy’s footsteps followed him into the hall. “Do you remember our conversation that night after the gala?” His voice was quiet and he came to lean against the railing, resting his forearms on the banister just to Oliver’s left.

Those were days Oliver normally tried to force out of his mind at all costs, but of course he recalled the words they’d exchanged. He’d told Tommy that he wasn’t coming home; things had been strained with them that night, so much turmoil on both their parts churning under the surface. He’d thought Tommy was turning his back on their friendship that night, after learning about the Bratva. His words stuck in his throat as he suppressed the memories; instead he nodded once in reply, so Tommy continued.

“It took me a while to realize why you did what you did,” he said and Oliver could feel the weight of Tommy’s gaze on him. He dragged his eyes up to meet Tommy’s, keeping his expression neutral. “Whatever your reason for coming home, it’s yours and yours alone. So own it. I know the kind of darkness you’ve got inside you and your mom and sister don’t deserve that, man. Whatever you’re doing here, make sure you don’t drag them down into it with you.”

A flash of anger darkened Oliver’s expression for a fraction of a second before he was able to mask it. Gone was the easy smile, the lightness that had always seemed to emanate from Tommy. They were replaced with something cold and dark of his own. Whatever Tommy had been up to since leaving Russia, and it wasn’t the partying he’d just eluded to. It hadn’t been the warm greeting he’d expected from Tommy, but it seemed more fitting this way, more genuine.

“Perhaps we should get that drink after all,” Oliver said, his voice even and cool. He met Tommy’s eyes again with a resolve of his own.

“After dinner,” Tommy grinned, everything about his demeanor shifting back to the boy that Oliver used to know. “I’ve been dying for some of Raisa’s roasted pork.” Tommy threw him a quick wink before trotting down the stairs, following the scent of dinner coming from the kitchen.

Oliver lingered in the darkened hallway a moment longer, his thoughts a muddled mess. The more he forced his mind away from Tommy’s use of the word ‘us’ the more it stuck in his head. He’d wanted to ask about Felicity, but couldn’t bring himself to. It wasn’t the time or the place. Besides, he’d left her letter unread for a reason. Just like he’d have to protect his mother and sister, it wasn’t fair to drag Felicity into his mess either. What was the old turn of phrase? Some books were better left on the shelf? He reached into the back pocket of his jeans, his fingers skimming across his father’s book. For now, it was the only book that mattered.

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Tommy felt the liquor burn as he threw the next shot back, keeping his eyes on Oliver as he matched him drink for drink. They had made it through dinner with only a few mild moments of awkwardness. Oliver outing Moira and Walter’s relationship, for one. He wasn’t sure if Oliver had
known the truth, or had just guessed by Moira and Walter’s constant body language. Anyone was likely to pick up on it. But watching from the sidelines had been almost too much. So he did what he always did. Diffused the situation with something humorous until the table calmed again.

It was Oliver’s idea to head to the loudest club Tommy could think of, in his words he wanted to ‘ drown out everything else’. But Tommy saw through that. Oliver wanted some place where they didn’t have to talk. Where they could go, drink, and be something that resembled what they used to be. Tommy wished it was that easy.

He wanted this to feel like old times. But it was like grasping at smoke. He could see what he and Oliver used to be, but he couldn’t hold on to it, no matter how much he tried. Tommy, however, wasn’t just going to give up. Leaving Oliver in Russia wasn’t something he could stop thinking about the second his plane landed back in Starling. No, it was something he carried around every day. He would imagine a thousand different ways he could have saved Oliver that day. But none of them had the power to change the past.

So Tommy named a club, a place he had been a few times over the last couple months. And he tried to keep a smile on his face. He tried to flirt with the bartender who was paying them a little more attention than the other patrons. He even tried to mouth off a few times. Because this was supposed to be his element. This place, and all the clubs like it, this was Tommy’s zone. Or at least that’s what he showed the public.

“What the hell is this?” Oliver asked gesturing to music playing around them. “It sounds like someone strangling a cat.”

“That’s pretty much the definition I’d give it too,” he replied with a laugh. “But honestly I don’t usually listen to the music. Too much entertainment other places.”

Tommy gestured to the blondes at the end of the bar, nudging Oliver’s arm. “And the entertainment seems pretty interesting this evening.”

Even as he said the words, he wished he could take them back. The girls were pretty sure, but he wasn’t interested.

Oliver watched as one finally turned to face them, but as soon as she had Oliver turned away. “Maybe I should ease back into it. Don’t want to take on too much too soon.”

“Right.” If Oliver thought he was being clever and evasive, Tommy would give it to him. No need to push the subject on their first night out. “Probably for the best. They don’t look like Fall Out Boy fans.”

Oliver cracked a smile, one that Tommy wished he could capture to film. A reminder that his friend was still in there, swimming through the dark waters. He was pretty sure he was going to have to drag him out of that darkness too. But he also wasn’t sure he was strong enough to do it alone.

His phone vibrate in his pocket, and Tommy could only hope it wasn’t who he thought it was. His hopes had been dashed the instant he glanced at the screen. Lyla’s number flashing across the screen. No name though. He wasn’t dumb enough to put any of his ARGUS contacts under their names.

“Hey I got to take this,” he said, meeting Oliver’s eyes. “Work.”

“Tommy Merlyn taking a work call, when a hot bartender is two seconds away from giving him her number? Guess some things really do change.”

Tommy could only shrug, adding in a wink before he walked off towards the back exit.
Lyla had already hung up by the time he reached the quiet of the alleyway. But the silence only lasted until the phone began to ring again.

“What’s up?” He said, barely giving his partner a greeting. He knew she’d kick his ass in training the next day for his lack of manners, but he really didn’t want to deal with ARGUS tonight.

“Waller wants you in the office now. And there’s only so much deflecting I can handle,” she replied. “I think she knows about Connors. Or at least she suspects enough to be keeping an eye on me.”

“Look tell her I will be in first thing tomorrow.” He had wanted one night with Oliver without the threat of ARGUS looming. He’d wished for it a hundred times back in Russia. But Amanda Waller seemed determined to screw with their lives forever. “But I can’t come tonight.”

“I get you have this other life outside of here,” Lyla’s voice dropped a little as she continued. “But don’t let that blind you to the fact that this isn’t a hobby, Tommy. It’s your job. One that comes above anything and everything, if Waller has any say.”

Tommy scoffed, because while it was a job, it’s not like he chose it. Sure Waller didn’t put a gun to his head and force him into ARGUS. But she might as well have. She had threatened Oliver and Felicity. She had made it perfectly clear that she wasn’t going to stop going after the people he cared about until he did something. A gun to the head and he would have said no in a heartbeat. But to go after the two people in the world he promised he’d protect? He couldn’t let her do that.

“I know that,” he said, as the anger seemed to sit in his throat. Anger at Waller for keeping him on such a short leash. Anger at Oliver for not being honest with him. But the majority of it was directed right back at himself. Because how could he fault Oliver for keeping secrets, when he was trying to protect those he loved from the truth with secrets of his own. Why should he give himself a free pass, if he was struggling to give Oliver the same?

“I will be in tomorrow,” Tommy reiterated, more forcefully than before. “And if I have to, I’ll take all the blame for Connors. I need eight hours Lyla. That’s all I’m asking for.”

The line was quiet and Tommy knew his partner well enough to know she had already agreed to his request. “If you are not here by 7:30, I will come to your apartment and punch you in the face.”

“Well key’s under the mat, but I’m sure a super spy like you won’t need it,” Tommy said, grinning into the phone. “Thank you.”

“Don’t thank me yet,” she replied. “You’re making this up to me with a year’s worth of coffee, Agent Merlyn.”

“Night Agent Michaels,” he said, hanging the phone up.

He had what he needed. Time to think of what to say to Waller. Time to show her he was right in keeping Connors and his family safe. The only problem was he had no clue where to start. But he knew he’d have to wrap up his evening with Oliver regardless.

“Mr. Merlyn,” a voice spoke from the end of the alley, and Tommy froze. He’d checked his surrounding when he came outside. He made sure he was alone. Right?

“Can I help you?” he answered, smiling at the woman.

The first thing he noticed about her was the platinum, almost white, of her hair. Straight bangs cut across her forehead, as the rest fell against her shoulders. She wore a tight red dress, with lipstick to match. And Tommy couldn’t help but be reminded of a Shakespeare quote. Something about a
flower and a serpent. There’s no way this woman wasn’t just as deadly as her heels suggested.

“I do hope so,” she said, closing the distance between them. “I believe you have recently acquired something of value to me and my associates. And I would like it returned.”

“Well I hate to snatch something from a pretty lady,” Tommy had learned a while ago that sometimes his charm was the only thing that could keep him safe before he could really assess a situation. So he was going to use it as much as he could. “But I think you might be mistaken.”

She smiled, the kind of smile Tommy had seen countless times before. On his father, on Waller. It was the kind of look someone got when they knew they had the upper hand.

A second later, her arm was flying at him, and Tommy barely had enough time to catch one fist before the other came sailing into his ear. The ringing knocking him off balance enough that she was able to bring a knee up to his stomach, cutting the breath right out of him.

She grabbed for his jaw, fingernails digging into the flesh enough that Tommy was sure he might bleed. “I’m only going to ask this once before we have a problem. Where is Simon Connors and his family?”

Tommy sputtered out a cough, making sure to meet her eyes. “Guess we’re going to have a problem.”

He had been so preoccupied with the woman before him, he hadn’t noticed her associate come up behind him. So he had no time to stop the pistol before it smashed into the back of his head, sending him crashing to the ground.

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Felicity settled back in for the night with a half-empty pint of mint chip ice cream and her laptop perched on her knees. She was under a blanket on the couch of her apartment, the TV streaming an episode of Veronica Mars made for background noise as she connected the thumb drive to her computer. There was something very existential about sleuthing while watching a tiny blonde sleuth on TV.

She took a bite of ice cream, letting the spoon sit in her mouth as she typed her password into the computer to bring it to life. Memories of her round the world trip with Tommy seemed to hit her at the strangest time-- one moment she was entering commands on her laptop and the next thing she knew the spoon turned to the metallic taste of blood in her mouth and images sprang forth behind her eyelids of shattering glass raining down on her. She coughed, sputtering as she pulled the spoon from her mouth and dropped it back into the cardboard container. It was possible that Oliver’s return to Starling had embedded itself a little more deeply into her brain than she realized.

Turning her nose up at the sight of the ice cream, Felicity pushed the lid back on top of it, sighing heavily as she stood, the container in one hand and the laptop in the other. She made her way out into the kitchen, depositing the dessert back into the freezer, and set the computer onto the counter.

“Alright Mr. Hunt,” she said, pulling the file folder up which contained the bug. “Let’s see what kind of dirt we can throw Laurel’s way.” She smirked as her fingers danced across the keyboard. Using someone else’s tech against them was usually considered a no-no in the hacking world, but Felicity had learned first hand what it could do to a person’s ego if they were hit hard enough with their own weapon, and she wanted to make sure that Adam Hunt felt the blow she was about to deal him.
Following the bug’s signature back to the origin point had been tricky. If she had to guess, during some pretrial hearing, Hunt had gotten his phone close enough to one of the DA’s to pass the worm through and it latched onto the CNRI servers from there. The coding on the thing was beautiful, even if it was one nasty beast.

She paused for a moment, reaching for her phone and quickly hitting Tommy’s name in her recent calls list. It rang several times, which was strange for Tommy. He usually either answered right away or sent it to voicemail immediately. But after several rings the call connected through.

“Felicity?”

“Okay so I know considering current circumstances you might not feel qualified to answer this but hypothetically speaking—” she stopped short, her brain finally catching up to her mouth long enough for it to register that whoever had just answered Tommy’s phone… was not Tommy. “Who is this?”

Nothing but silence filtered through the call. She pulled it back from her ear to make sure it was still connected. A voice deep within her told her that she already knew who the voice belonged to, even if she wasn’t sure she could breathe his name aloud.

“Felicity it’s… Oliver.”

She swallowed hard, leaning forward until her elbows rested on the kitchen counter. Her eyes closed and for a moment she allowed herself to exhale fully at the sound of his voice.

“Where’s Tommy?” she asked, her voice squeaking a little as she attempted to compose herself. It came out more like a child inquiring about their imaginary friend than anything else.

“The short answer to that question is that I don’t know,” he said, and there was an edge to his voice that she hadn’t noticed before.

“And the long answer?” She spun until her back was against the cabinet, panic filling her veins with adrenaline instantly.

“We were at a club and he stepped outside to take a phone call. I followed several minutes later and found the alley empty. I was about to call him when I heard his phone ringing with your incoming call. He must have dropped it.”

A club. Felicity forced her mind away from any memories that involved Oliver and clubs that might try to break to the surface. Still, it was his first night home after five years and they go out to a club? She reminded herself that it didn’t matter because Tommy was potentially missing. Her computer was back in her hands in the next instant and she was hacked into Tommy’s cell carrier’s GPS system a moment later. The phone call triangulated to a club downtown and before Oliver had even said another word, she was staring at a live security feed of him in the alley.

“How long ago did he leave to take the call?” Felicity asked, scanning back through the security footage.

“Ten minutes ago?” Oliver said.

It didn’t take her long to find the moment in question. She rewound the tape to the point where Tommy stepped outside the club and almost instantly noticed a van pull up at the end of the alley. A woman approached him, followed by a couple of large men and within a matter of moments Tommy was knocked unconscious and thrown into the van.

“Crap on a cracker,” Felicity breathed, enhancing the footage until Triad tattoos became
“What is it?” Oliver asked. On the other side of the computer screen she watched him pace around the alley in real time on the security cameras. She could almost believe that the years faded away and they were back in Moscow.

“Tommy’s business practices have...offended some unsavory people of late,” she answered. She wasn’t sure what, if anything, Tommy had told Oliver about his position at ARGUS, so she made sure not to spill the beans. It wasn’t her secret to share.

“Should we call the police?” Oliver asked, his voice a rough growl.

The question caught her off guard, after spending time with him in Russia and seeing just how much he was used to taking matters into his own hands. She considered his request for a millisecond before typing a quick text to Lyla outlining what had just gone down.

“Yes,” she answered finally. “I think that’s a good idea.”

Lyla texted her back almost immediately, saying she was up for whatever needed to be done to get Tommy home safe. Felicity switched from her phone to her computer, pulling up the cell carrier’s system again.

“I… I’ll let you know when I know more,” Oliver said, his voice taking on a different tone. And she wondered, if perhaps, it was catching up to him that even spanning 2 years, it seemed the moment they were all in the same place, chaos ensued.

“Thanks,” she said, before hanging up.

Oliver immediately dialed 911 from Tommy’s cell and Felicity forwarded the call to Lyla’s cell. The program she connected it through allowed her to listen in to the conversation.

“Nine-one-one, what is your emergency?” Lyla asked, sounding beyond professional.

“I need police assistance at Club Penthouse. My friend was abducted from the alley behind the club.” Oliver’s tone was gruff; he was clearly agitated by needing to go that route.

On the computer screen, Felicity watched on traffic cameras as the van Tommy had been thrown in finally parked down at the docks. She gasped when they pulled him from the van, unconscious, and threw him into one of the large warehouse buildings. And then everything went still.

“Sir, can you confirm that you witnessed this abduction?”

“What? No. I just. I can’t tell you how, but I know that he was.”

“Unfortunately, sir, without witnesses we can’t dispatch officers to your location. If your friend doesn’t turn up in twenty four hours, you can file a missing person’s report then. Until that point, there’s nothing we can do.”

Felicity pulled the live feed of the alley up and watched as Oliver let out a frustrated groan and scrubbed a hand down his face. He hung up the phone and immediately Felicity’s phone rang.

“I told him hiding Connors wasn’t going to end well,” Lyla said by way of a greeting. “But I think I got Queen on hold for the time being, so hopefully we can avoid a Triad versus Bratva war.”

Felicity blew out a long breath, feeling doubtful. If anything, it would only push Oliver to take
matters into his own hands. But at least the actual police weren’t involved yet. “Are you going to be able to get Tommy out of there without involving Waller?” she asked. She had a feeling the reason the Triad had taken Tommy was because he’d hidden Conners, and that wasn’t exactly something on his boss’s radar.

“I’m already heading into the city. Do you know where they took him?”

“I do,” Felicity said, feeling her adrenaline on overdrive as she turned away from the computer screen where Oliver was pacing around the alley. “I’ll talk you in.”
Hey lovelies! We just want to say again, how much we appreciate all of you for reading, leaving kudos, comments, reblogging, asking questions. We love interacting with you, so thank you. One of my favorite parts about where we picked up the story, aside from it being when Oliver comes home, is that it's right in the middle of so many other things. We're right in the action, right away. I hope you enjoy that as much as I do!

Anyway, no more digressing from me. Here comes the good stuff.

xoxo,
Cassie

Oliver hated feeling useless. He needed to be moving, doing something to find Tommy. If his friend was in trouble, and he didn’t do anything to help, what good was coming home? Yes he had his father’s mission, but he needed to protect his family as well. And no matter what they clashed on Tommy was a part of that.

The cops couldn’t do anything for him. And he cursed himself for even thinking they could. Twenty four hours was a long time, and a thousand different images of what could happen flooded his mind. He knew well enough the kind of pain and damage someone could inflict in such a short amount of time, and Oliver wanted nothing more than to keep Tommy from that.

He knew he needed to call Felicity back. Even if he wanted to keep her from these things even more. She had a right to know what the police said, but he didn’t think she’d take that sitting down. And he couldn’t get the image of her frozen in his living room in Russia, clutching a spare lamp, out of his head. What could she do against someone who could grab a grown man off the street? He had seen Felicity Smoak work miracles behind a keyboard, but that didn’t translate to thwarting potential kidnappers.

He had to stop and focus. He was letting his mind run in too many directions. And if his five years away had taught him anything, it was how dangerous an unfocused mind could be. If Tommy was in danger then he had to react. But he couldn’t do anything until he knew who took Tommy, and where they’d gone.

Oliver started walking the perimeter of the alley, making sure to check every crack he passed. It had been something Anatoly had taught him. To look for the smallest of things that could possibly lead to a bigger clue. The Bratva had used the method to locate anyone trying to spy in the organization. Oliver just hoped who ever he was dealing with was as careless as he was used to people being.

Tommy’s phone rang again, the sound turning Oliver to stone. He knew it was Felicity, but he had already fooled himself into thinking he was ready to hear her voice. He thought the time away would
dull what he felt for her. That if he ever ran into her he would be able to keep his composure. But the second she started to babble, he knew he was in a losing battle.

He knew he couldn’t skate around the truth with her. He couldn’t project the Queen charm and hope she’d be distracted enough by his smile, to look the other way; Felicity had an advantage most people in his life didn’t. She had seen him when he was as far removed from the playboy screw up he had once been, and she had grown to care for that man. He could pretend with his family, with the whole world, and hell he could even try with Tommy, but he couldn’t do that with her.

“Oliver?” she asked as he pressed the phone to his ear.

“Yeah, I was about to call you back.” His emotions- anger, frustration, worry- were running too high to mask them with her, no matter how much he might have wanted to. “The police said they can’t do anything for 24 hours.”

“Figured as much. But don’t worry, Tommy’s going to be fine,” she stated, and he could hear the familiar sound of computer keys through the line. She sounded so confident, so sure.

“You know who took him?”

“In a manner of speaking, yes.”

“And that would be?”

“Let’s just say they don’t play well with others.”

“Felicity.”

“Look I promise you Tommy’s fine, or he will be fine. Just trust me that I wouldn’t let anything bad happen to my best friend.”

It was one thing for her to dodge his questions, but it was clear that she was deliberately trying to keep him out of something. Something that involved Tommy’s safety. “He’s my best friend too, so I’m going to need some answers that are just a bit more detailed.”

“Why, so you can drop the full power of the Russian mob right in the heart of Starling?” She tossed back, sounding more annoyed than he had. “I get that you’re worried, but don’t be. Tommy’s been fine for the last two years without you so you shouldn’t work yourself up now.”

Her words cut deeper than any blade he’d faced, but then again the truth always did find a way of hitting close to the heart.

He could hear her sigh. “That didn’t come out the way I meant it. I just meant, he’s fi--”

“Fine, yeah you said that. But you could be wrong. He could have gotten grabbed by some psycho or jumped by a mugger or,” he trailed off, his eyes landed on something near the dumpster. “What if this is because of me? What if Waller decided it’s time for round two now that I’m back?”

The line was quiet as he bent down, picking up the stark white business card. Too pristine to have been there longer than a hour. Which meant someone could have dropped it while Tommy was out here. Although whether it was intentional or not was still yet to be seen.

“It’s not ARGUS,” she said. “If you trust me on anything, trust me that Amanda Waller had nothing to do with this.”
But Oliver wasn’t really listening. Not since he flipped the business card over. There wasn’t a company listed on it, no phone numbers or an address. All that was on the card was a symbol embossed into the center of one side. A symbol he knew very well.

“Oliver?”

“Yeah,” he said, standing up as moved the card closer to the light. “I’m still here.”

“Look, Tommy’s probably on his way back there right now. If you want I can check traffic cameras and sweep the surrounding streets,” she said, but there was hesitation in her voice. Like she wanted to say more. “I’m-- I’m sorry that this is how you had to spend your first real night back with him.”

Oliver huffed out a humorless laugh. He hadn’t even been home 24 hours, and it was already starting to feel like things were going downhill. It was like the darkness he’d spent so long trying to make himself comfortable with, had found it’s own way to nestle into Starling City, and start infecting those he cared for. Oliver just hoped he could eradicate the darkness from the city before the one inside him proved too all-consuming to stop.

He didn’t know what else to say to her, but he let a goodbye slip out. And he wasn’t deaf to the catch in her voice but he hung up before she could reply. He took his own phone out, dialing her number into his contacts before he lost the nerve completely, then pocketed both. His attention turned back to the symbol on the card, letting something else slip over him.

He knew who claimed the symbol on the card, and he knew that if they’d taken Tommy there would be no way they’d leave him alive to tell the tale. The Triad had never been lenient when it came to things like that.

He could only pray the intel he’d gathered on Starling’s gang related activity was still accurate. According to the information he had, the Triad operated out at the docks. And if they’d taken Tommy, chances are that’s where they were keeping him.

One way or another Oliver was getting his best friend back tonight. He didn’t care who he had to take down to do it.

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Coming to after being knocked unconscious was a very specific kind of hellish headache. It wasn’t akin to the stress migraine, or even the hangover throb behind the eyes. No, the aching, throbbing sensation reverberated through every cell in his skull leaving Tommy feeling like his brains were scrambled eggs. It was in a league all it’s own as far as pain went, and that left nothing to be said for the ungodly realization that he’d been kidnapped and was finding himself tied to a chair in somewhere cold, damp and dark.

“The least you could have done was let me buy you a drink before we started tying each other up,” Tommy said, finding his voice easier than he’d anticipated. He rolled his neck out, attempting to soothe the kinks in it and slowly opened his eyes to find the woman from the alley standing before him. “No?” he shrugged. “Right to the fun stuff, then.”

“Fun for him, maybe,” she answered, nodding to a dark corner where Tommy could barely make out a hulking silhouette moving toward him in slow motion. “But not for you.”

His mind raced with the possibilities looming before him. Truth be told he really didn’t have many options. They’d already told him what they wanted, and he’d be damned if he was giving up Connors. There was no way he could reach out to Lyla- he’d already checked for his phone, which
he had either dropped or they’d found on him and removed. He wrapped his right hand around his left wrist—there was always his homing beacon planted in his watch—

Except he’d taken it off before heading to the Queen’s house. Tommy hadn’t exactly anticipated spending his night...wherever the hell they’d taken him.

That narrowed his field of options down to one: stall them until he could break through the bindings.

“I don’t know,” he smirked, void of all emotion beyond the cool, collected mask he wore. “I don’t mind being tied up now and again.” He worked diligently against the restraints binding his hands, but getting out of them was proving to be more of a task than he’d hoped, all the while blood pounded in his ears, making it hard to concentrate on anything else.

The large shadowed figure stepped closer as the woman eyed Tommy carefully.

“You will tell me what I want to know,” she said, pulling a chair over until it sat directly in front of Tommy, and perched herself in it carefully. Her red dress glittered in the dim emergency lights of the warehouse and she crossed one leg over the other, a black stiletto heeled boot coming to rest precariously close to Tommy’s nether-region.

His eyes dropped to her boot, before slowly meeting her glare.

“You’re going to have to ask a little more nicely than that, darlin’,” Tommy answered. Judging from the distance of her chair, he needed her to move a foot closer in order for him to get enough leverage to push himself backwards to break the wooden chair he was tied to. It may end up popping his shoulder out of socket too, but that was a risk he was going to have to take.

The shadowed enforcer stepped under one of the lights in the warehouse, hands balled up into tight fists at his sides, eyes on the woman as if waiting for her okay to beat Tommy to a pulp. Luckily, she held her hand up, stopping him in his tracks.

“You seem to think you have some sort of advantage here, Mr. Merlyn,” she said with a wry smile. She leaned forward before speaking again. “Let me assure you, you do not.”

The distance wasn't ideal, but Tommy was convinced it was the only opening he was likely to get. As soon as she was within reach, he leaned back lifting his feet up and kicked off of her midsection, sending them both flying backwards in opposite directions. Tommy hit the floor hard enough to shatter the unsteady chair and rolled himself onto his side, pulling his legs between his bound hands so that they were at least tied in front of him. He reached for a splintered piece of chair as the big guy closed in on him.

“Looks like I might,” he said, even if he knew he was nowhere near getting out of that place alive yet.

The woman righted herself, her heels scraping across the floor as she stood. The look on her face was one of mild annoyance, like he was a fly invading her dinner plate. She narrowed her eyes and dusted herself off as she flicked her wrist toward Tommy. The big guy charged him and Tommy pushed himself to his feet holding the broken chair end in his hands.

“You kill me and you'll never find Connors,” Tommy said, dodging the advances of the enforcer. He took a swing at the guy, splintered wood scraping against his assailants forearm.

“Who said anything about killing you?” She laughed, but there was no humor in it.

Having his hands tied together was enough of a handicap without trying to keep up with the banter
too. Tommy rolled his eyes, tucking and rolling as two beefy arms tried to wrap around his neck. He managed to get behind the man, using his interlocked hands as a tool to strangle the guy. Bigger usually meant slower, and Tommy was grateful to find that the man barely had time to bring his hands up to his neck before Tommy felt him begin to buckle under the pressure. The man was on his knees in a matter of moments but Tommy couldn't revel in the victory. A hollow click of a gun being cocked pulled his attention back to the white haired woman.

“Enough of this,” she chided. “You are going to tell me what I want to know.”

“Or?” He prodded.

She aimed the gun lower. “Or I start with your kneecaps.”

“I wouldn’t do that if I were you,” a voice called from the darkness, and the corners of Tommy’s mouth turned up in a smile.

“What took you so damn long?” he asked, glancing over his shoulder.

“Traffic this time of night is horrendous in the warehouse district.”

Tommy was grateful for a good many things in his life- not the least of which was a partner he could count on for anything. Lyla came to stand beside him, gun trained on the white haired woman across the way from them both. With one swift movement, Tommy snapped the zip-tie around his wrists and then reached around Lyla’s back for her second holstered gun.

“How about you give me your word that you’ll forget about Connors and I let you live?” Tommy asked.

The white-haired woman scoffed.

“Worth a shot,” he shrugged, taking a few steps toward her. He lowered his voice when he spoke again. “I’ve got a better deal for you. You ever come so much as a hundred miles from Simon Connors or his family and the stunt you attempted to pull tonight will be like a playground fight over a jump rope compared to the hell I will rain down on you. However far reaching you think my organization is, I guarantee you it’s deeper and more hellish than you could ever imagine.”

If he scared her, she showed no evidence of it. He stepped back so that he was in line with Lyla.

“The Triad will not be threatened,” the white haired woman spat.

Lyla took a step forward this time. “Then perhaps we should send your bosses a message instead.” In one swift movement she re-adjusted her gun to something on the ceiling and fired once. The sprinkler system kicked on immediately, raining water down on them all. Lyla took the butt of her gun and cold-clocked the woman, sending her limp body to the ground.

“Let’s go,” Lyla shouted over the blaring alarm system and water pouring down around them. She broke into a sprint, and Tommy took off after her, not bothering to look back. Lyla’s Land Rover was parked just outside the west loading dock and they climbed inside. He barely had time to close the door before she took off, swiftly maneuvering through warehouses and back alleys near the docks.

“How’d you know where to find me?” he asked, settling into the seat.

There was a brief pause, before they both answered in sync. “Felicity.”
She wasn’t worried. She kept repeating it over and over like a mantra in her head. And she almost believed it too. Until macabre images of Tommy beaten and bloodied flooded her head. She could see it clearer than anything else, his body going limp under heavy hits until his chest stopped moving altogether. She had to shake her head to loosen the images grip on her. She couldn’t do anything for him if she fell apart. She had to be useful. Even if it was just in the digital sense.

Felicity grabbed for her laptop, opening up the surveillance footage again. She hit pause before Tommy was struck, and focused on the woman in front of him. Her platinum hair shined under the dim backlights, and Felicity could almost see the poison in her stance. This was someone who would do whatever it took to get what she wanted, even if it took burning a forest to the ground. Ice froze in her chest shattering when it hit her stomach.

“No,” she said pushing the device away. She knew Lyla was on it. And she trusted the woman to bring Tommy back safely.

She had to put her mind to use. And if it wasn’t helping Tommy it had to be helping someone. She closed the lid on her computer and slid it off the counter holding it close to her chest. Laurel needed information to take down Adam Hunt. The people in that building needed it.

Unfortunately the program she needed to worm her way into Hunt’s more sensitive files was on a drive back at her office. But it wasn’t like she would be getting any sleep until she knew about Tommy anyway. So she packed up her things, grabbed her keys from the table, and left.

As she made the drive to Merlyn Global she tried to keep her mind from wandering back to Tommy. But that only left her thoughts open to Oliver. She hadn’t had much time to think while she was on the phone with him. Now all she had was time and she’d be lying if she said she hadn’t thought about him over the last couple of years. About what it would be like if she ever got to speak with him again. She’d let it play out in her mind dozens of times, so sure that if they ever met again all her emotions would boil together in a haze of anger. That no matter his reasonings for coming home, she’d never get over him staying. What surprised her most though, was when it finally happened, she didn’t react the way she thought she would.

It might have hurt less if she hadn’t heard from Sofia all those months ago. She was hurt that Oliver hadn’t reached out to her, to them. To let them know he was coming home. But mostly she was relieved to hear his voice. After so long without knowing, of worrying that he’d die somewhere and be tossed aside like he meant nothing, she was happy he was back.

That didn’t erase anything. It didn’t change the fact that he chose the Bratva over his own life. It didn’t cover the ache that she felt the day he left them on the tarmac. But it did quiet her mind. It let her remove him from the long list of worries she’d accumulated over the years, and she was sure she’d sleep better at night now.

Not that she was thinking about Oliver at night. Nope not at all. Really she tried to save all Oliver thoughts to a more manageable time frame. But they always seemed to come up when she was with Tommy.

Tommy who was still missing. He was someone she’d never quit worrying about. Not as long as he worked for ARGUS. And now he’d gotten himself in more trouble than normal. She couldn’t help the chill that settled in her heart. What if Lyla was too late? She tried not to focus back on the last thing she said to Tommy, but she couldn’t help it. She wasn’t even sure she said goodbye. Just a rush of grabbing her stuff before heading out. She should know what the last thing she said to her best friend was right? In his line of work, it was never a guarantee.
“Stop,” she said as she pulled into her parking space. She took a deep breath, trying to steady her heart. “He’s going to be fine.”

He had to be. There wasn’t a future she even wanted to fathom that didn’t have Tommy’s smiling face in it. After all they’d been through, the good, the bad, and the in between, he was a constant for her. And she couldn’t lose that. Not now, not ever.

There were only a couple guards by the front desk when she entered and the pair barely glanced up as she scanned her badge to get past the security gate. She didn’t feel nearly as safe with these guys down here as she should. Maybe it was her emotions running high, but she couldn’t help a pang she felt for her former job. Long before Tommy Merlyn came into her life she’d had a decent job at Queen Consolidated. Sure she was underappreciated, and worked long hours, but there was comfort in the anonymity. She could walk through a room full of board members and no one had known her. Ever since her and Tommy return from Russia, there hadn’t been a single day like that.

As it was ever since her promotion she had very little down time at the office, hell she’d barely spent more than ten consecutive minutes in her own office over the last few weeks. She was always pulled away by someone on Dr. Markov’s team for a computer glitch or to review an equation, and then there were the times Mr. Merlyn himself would send her off on an inane errand that was completely not in her job description.

She didn’t know what Dr. Markov’s project was, and under any other circumstances she’d investigate. But part of her worried that if she knew what Malcolm had the doctor working on, things would get complicated real quick. And she wasn’t ready for complicated again. She barely recovered from Russia.

Or at least that’s what she told herself as she slid into her dark office. She tried to let herself believe that their showdown with Waller in Russia had shaken her so much that she could never return to normal. And maybe there was a grain of truth to it, but Felicity knew a large part of it felt good. She liked how in control she felt there. How even when it felt like the ground was crumbling beneath her, she could zero in on a problem and solve it. That’s what her trip had given her, a drive to achieve the seemingly impossible, and she’d been trying to quench it ever since.

Felicity grabbed her drive from the drawer and was just about to switch on her computer when she heard the voices. Even if she couldn’t see his face, Malcolm Merlyn’s was distinct over the hum of the idle printer in the corner, but she couldn’t quite make out the other man. It was obvious though that there was a disagreement.

“I am not interested in your current predicament, Mr. Hunt,” Merlyn said, his voice like ice. “The second that predicament shines unneeded light on your other investments, that’s when my interest will be piqued.”

“I’m trying to get CNRI off my back. But you don’t know this lawyer.” Felicity had never met Adam Hunt, but given the venom in his voice she could only imagine how red the man looked. “Every time I think I’m in the clear she comes at me again. If it wasn’t for my tech guys I could be behind bars right now.”

Felicity thought back to the files she’d seen at CNRI, how Laurel’s name had been on every single document. If Hunt was sore about a thorn in his side, his anger was most likely guided towards her friend.

“I think bars would be more preferable to here, drawing attention to our business connections,”
Merlyn said.

She saw their shadows stop just outside of her office door, and she summoned every bit of strength she had not to move. Chances were her boss would not think highly of her listening in on private conversations.

“I need your help Malcolm. None of my employees are apparently capable enough of dealing with Laurel Lance on their own.” Hunt paused, and Felicity could just make out him pivoting to face Mr. Merlyn. “But from the intel I was able to gather, she and your son happen to be somewhat involved.”

The silence had only stretched a few seconds, but they held an eerie stillness that made Felicity’s skin crawl. The calm was broken when Malcolm shoved Hunt hard against the frosted glass door. And Felicity had to cover her mouth to keep sound from escaping. Her heart pounded against her chest.

“I’m going to make this very clear,” Merlyn’s voice was low and dark. “That is the very last time you ever try and use my son to manipulate me. Because if it happens again, your problems will be a hell of a lot bigger than a legal aid attorney. Do I make myself clear?”

Felicity could barely see Mr. Hunt nod, before Merlyn let go, stepping back a good distance. “Very good. Now this is your mess. So I suggest you figure out how to clean it up.”

Hunt pushed off from the door, and walked off towards the elevators.

Felicity was rooted where she stood long after Merlyn followed the same path, the ding signaling she was alone on the floor. She couldn’t work herself into movement. She had known for years that her boss was ruthless and cold, but she’d never seen Malcolm Merlyn like that. She had feared for the other man’s life, with how quickly Malcolm had switched from business ally to something so much darker.

She didn’t know where to place the events she had just witnessed. But she did know two things for sure. The first was that Adam Hunt would not be hurting anymore families if she had her way. And the second was that she really needed out from under Malcolm Merlyn as soon as possible. If he could turn so quickly on a man he’d known and worked with for years, than Felicity really didn’t want his anger to ever be directed at her.

Her phone buzzed in her pocket, pulling her from what she’d seen in the hall. She barely glanced at the called ID before she answered.

“Lyla?” she questioned barely holding back the sob in her throat.

She heard a huff of laughter, followed by a pained ow. “Guess again Smoak.”

Relief flooded her. “Tommy. You’re okay?”

“I mean I’m a little bruised, but yeah I’m okay,” he replied.

She took a deep breath, feeling like the air was finally reaching her lungs. Tommy was okay. He was safe. “Are you going to the hospital? Should I meet you there?”

“I figured I’d just hit the onsite doctor,” he groaned. “No need to get insurance involved on this one.”

She could understand that. There’s only so many dislocated shoulders and knife wounds before the ER starts taking notice. And she would have left it at that, but Oliver’s face flooded her mind.

“Um you might need to come up with some kind of story though,” she sighed. “Especially since
Oliver found your phone in the alley and he’s probably going to have a lot of questions.”
Chapter 4

Chapter by foreverfelicityqueen (stydiasredstring)

Chapter Notes

Hello dears,

I will make this one brief. I just wanted to take a moment to say thank you for the continued support and love for this universe. Cassie and I adore reading your comments. And I know, especially for me, it can make my day getting a comment on this fic. So thank you for that. Without further ado, let's read.

Loves,

Kayla

Oliver pushed through writhing bodies on the dancefloor, mind singularly focused on the mission in front of him. He had to get to Tommy and get him away from the Triad. Oliver couldn’t fathom how his friend could have possibly gotten mixed up with the gang, but he would find out soon enough. Instinct and muscle memory pushed him forward, through the club and back out the front doors. He weighed his options quickly. Stealing a car would have been preferred, but it took him a moment to remember he wasn’t just another face in the crowd here. Now that he was back in Starling, he was in the spotlight. As if to prove the point to him, as soon as he stepped outside the club, camera flashes nearly blinded him and questions were hurled at him from behind a red velvet rope.

“Mr. Queen, not bringing home a girl tonight?”

“Mr. Queen, what can you tell us about your time away?”

“Have you visited your own grave yet, Oliver?”

The other voices blurred together, he only caught words here and there like “island” and “father” and “rescue”. But he couldn’t let himself get caught up in all that. Tommy was at the center of his mind, and keeping him safe from the Triad. He walked, as casually as he could muster, until he rounded the corner out of their sight. And then he shed his blazer and took off on foot, his dress shoes too tight on his feet, and his clothes too rigid and constricting to give him the kind of push that he needed to get down to the docks.

An SUV turned up the side street and quickly swerved to the side of the road, the headlights dying almost instantly. Normally something like that wouldn’t have caught Oliver’s attention. At least, not before the island and everything that came after it. But he quickly halted his steps, sinking into a shadow despite everything inside him that screamed to get to the docks.

He couldn’t be sure if they’d seen him before stopping, but when the vehicle pulled away from the curb a moment later, did a swooping U-turn and peeled off in the opposite direction, he was sure
they weren’t there for him. It took a moment for him to register that there was now a figure standing across the street.

Perhaps they were there for him after all.

He kept to the shadows as he watched the figure move toward the main street where the club was located. The man had a slight limp and hunched his shoulders over, touching gingerly at his face every couple moments. He paused and Oliver held his breath as the overhead clouds cleared for a moment and the moonlight revealed the man across the street.

“Tommy,” Oliver said, the name coming out like more of an expletive than he’d intended. Oliver removed himself from the shadow of the alcove and stalked across the street to where Tommy had frozen in his tracks at the sight of him.

“Hey buddy,” Tommy said, a smile that wouldn’t fool anyone plastered onto his bloody and beaten face.

Oliver shook his head. “You’ve got to be kidding me.” He turned on his heel, not really wanting to hear whatever lie was about to come out of Tommy’s mouth.

“Ollie, wait!” A sharp inhale sucked through teeth behind him in a hissing sound, and Oliver paused, but he didn’t turn back. “Listen, it’s not what you think…”

He spun back around now, daring Tommy to lie to his face. That was always one thing they’d never done before… And he knew things were different now, because there were things he’d never be able to tell Tommy, but he wondered with both amusement and morbid curiosity if the same held true for his once-best friend.

“Then tell me,” he said harshly.

Tommy shrugged, a roguish grin on his face. “Tuesday night didn’t tell me she had a boyfriend.”

Oliver’s eyes narrowed a fraction. “Is that so?” He didn’t know why, but something inside him felt like it was breaking. Strange, because he was sure he’d steeled every cell in his body before coming back to Starling.

“I figured it was the least I could do to let him knock me around a bit. Boost the guy’s ego some,” Tommy pressed on his ribcage and clenched his jaw and it broke through another set of walls that Oliver had thought were securely in place.

Oliver pushed his hands into his pockets and blew out a long breath. His left hand fell on his cell phone… and his right hand fell onto Tommy’s. His nerves steeled again and he pulled the device out, tossing it in Tommy’s direction.

“Felicity called,” he said, and then turned back up the street. Her name stuck in his throat like an itch he wanted to scratch. To Tommy’s credit, he didn’t call after or follow Oliver this time. Instead, Oliver silently made his way toward his discarded jacket. He grabbed it off the sidewalk and dipped into an alleyway. He wasn’t sure what game Tommy was playing.

He focused his mind on Tommy, not allowing himself a spare moment to think about Felicity and the two short exchanges they’d already had. It wasn’t how he’d wanted to walk back into her life… in fact he wasn’t sure that he’d wanted to do that at all. But it seemed that something was pulling them back together. He walked all the way to the Glades, quickly jumping the fence to Queen Industrial Steel Fabrication and Welding— the abandoned building his father had sold just months before they’d left on the Gambit.
He and Tommy had driven by earlier, on their way to the club, even though it was out of the way. Oliver was somewhat relieved to find it still empty. He had big plans for that building, and although it was a little ahead of schedule, he was determined that it would start tonight.

Besides, he was too keyed up, and it was too early to go home. No doubt Thea would suspect something if he walked through the door before 11PM. Even if the life of leisurely partying wasn’t how Oliver planned on spending his time anymore, he had a feeling he’d have to make it at least part of his cover in order to protect himself and the people he loved.

There was no equipment at the building yet, although everything had been ordered just that morning. One of the perks of having an unlimited bank account again. There was no such thing as too short notice. Everything from target equipment to high powered computers to CSI-level lab stuff would be at the building in a 40’ container by the next afternoon. His time with Anatoly had shown him that with the right amount of money, there was very little that couldn’t be accomplished.

But for now, he needed manual labor to keep his mind off Tommy and Felicity and Thea and everything he hadn’t expected to come back to. Everything he hadn’t expected to feel once he’d seen their faces and heard their voices again.

He slipped into the back door and took the stairs down to the basement two at a time. The foundation was still in good shape but it looked like a beam had collapsed at some point over the last few years. He’d have to haul it out of there if he wanted the place to be usable. And he’d have to speak with his mother at some point to see if the building was still in the company name. He had to imagine that it was, which is why it was still empty, but she’d know more of the legal steps he’d have to take to turn the place into a nightclub. It seemed to be the easiest way to hide his true intentions at the building.

All of that would have to wait for the morning. For now, all he needed was an outlet for some anger, and when he found the sledge hammer in the far corner of the basement and a pile of cement that would need to be broken down in order to remove, he knew he’d found just the thing.

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His ringtone blared out, causing every muscle in Tommy to seize. There was something terribly cruel about how much worse the next day was after an injury. And his whole body was splattered with them. It took far too much energy to roll over and grab his phone from the side table.

“What?” he groaned into the speaker, not even bothering to plaster some politeness into his voice.

“Cheerful greeting.”

He sat up straight, his ribs aching as he did. “Laurel, hey. Sorry, I thought you were someone else.”

“Obviously,” she mused and even though his whole body felt like it was on fire, he still found it in him to smile at her voice. “Must have been a late night.”

He paused. Her tone had shifted and he could hear the words she was leaving out, the elephant in their budding coupling.

“Not really, Ollie called it early,” he said, turning as many of his words towards the truth as he could. “After that I went and got some work done, must have lost track of time.”

It wasn’t a lie necessarily. He always tried his best to never lie to Laurel. Her bullshit meter rivaled almost anyone he knew. But he had gone to work after leaving Oliver. Because he really did need to see the doctor at ARGUS. Two cracked ribs, a bruised rotator cuff, and several contusions later, he
was finally cleared to go home. Once he managed to walk up all six flights of stairs, because apparently his elevator was out, the only thing Tommy wanted to do was fall directly into bed.

“Doesn’t sound like Oliver,” she said, her tone diluted with just a hint of annoyance. Their shared past colored all of the things Laurel felt for Oliver. And he wished he could explain more of what his friend had gone through, more of the sacrifices Oliver made for the people he cared about. But she couldn’t know about Russia, it wasn’t Tommy’s story to tell. And no matter the distance that had grown between the two men, he’d never betray Oliver like that.

“He’s changed Laurel,” Tommy said. “We all changed because of that stupid yacht. And I’m not saying you need to forgive him, hell you don’t even need to like him. But I can’t cut him out of my life. You know that right?”

“I get it.”

He was glad someone did. Because Tommy was running circles about last night for hours. He was picturing Oliver’s face, the look in his eyes when he tossed Tommy his phone. Oliver had been pissed, but there was something else too. Even as he let the words slip from his lips he could tell Ollie didn’t believe him. But he couldn’t tell his friend the truth. There was no way he could explain why he was mixed up in all this without it looking like he slapped Oliver’s sacrifices right in the face. After everything Waller had done, how would Oliver ever see Tommy’s choice as anything but a betrayal.

She was talking about something else, but Tommy’s pain had spiked and he could barely focus on breathing, let alone holding a phone conversation as well. He really needed that bottle of meds the doc had given him. Which was in his coat pocket… in the hall.

“So what do you think?”

He groaned, taking in a sharp breath. Dammit. He really should have been paying attention.

“Tommy are you okay?”

“Huh?”

“You sound like you’re in pain.”

He could brush it off as nothing, but he really wasn’t able to carry on a conversation with her right then. No matter how much he wanted to. “I bashed my shoulder into something. Hurts like a bitch.”

“Do you need to go to the doctor? I could drive you,” she sounded like she was ready to head out the door right then and rush over. And he was tempted to let her. But then he remembered his face, and his ribs, and the lies he’d have to tell. He didn’t want to do that.

“Nah, I’m sure all I need in a little R&R,” he said swallowing down the pain. “Seriously Laurel don’t worry about me.”

He had made it to the hall, the prescription bottle poking out of his pocket just enough to fill him with relief. If he had left them in his car he didn’t think he’d make it down the stairs.

“Maybe I like worrying about you,” she said a hint of a smirk in her voice.

“I could get used to hearing that.”

They were getting dangerously close to the things they didn’t do. The real relationship stuff that only
couples did. The stuff he wanted more than anything, and a part of him was desperate to have them with Laurel. But he didn’t want to hurt her. And as long as he was keeping a part of him closed off he always would. He didn’t have a choice.

The rapping on his door startled Tommy out of his head, and he nearly dropped his phone. Instinct kicked in, flooding his veins with a steeling paranoia, that had come from his years of training.

“Laurel I have to call you back.”

He didn’t wait for a reply, hitting end as he set the phone down. He reached for the drawer he kept his gun in, gripping it tight in his hand. No longer was he worried about his pain or the events of the night before. He was on high alert, his mind focused on the potential target on the other side of the door, and the things he would do to neutralize it.

The knocking sounded again, a little more incessant, its tone reminding him of annoyance and a sense of superiority. It had personality that was for sure.

Tommy pressed close to the wood frame, inching as close to the peephole as he could so he could look through.

It wasn’t exactly relief he felt when he saw who stood on the other side, but at least he could take his finger off the trigger.

“You have got to be kidding me.” he muttered, yanking the door open as he came face to face with Amanda Waller.

“Agent Merlyn,” she greeted him with a smile. “I wanted to see for myself that you were still breathing after last night.”

Waller didn’t wait for an invite as she brushed past him into his apartment. His home. The one place he tried to keep separate from the stuff he did for ARGUS. Waller was blurring the lines of his life, and he didn’t like it one bit.

“Thanks for your concern,” he replied, sarcasm dripping as he shut the door, making a sweeping glance. He had to be sure no one saw her here. “Though I’m having trouble believing that was your sole intention for coming all the way over here.”

“It wasn’t that far out of my way.” As she spoke she moved towards the living room and Tommy knew she meant for him to follow. “Besides when one of my agents gets kidnapped by the Triad, I’m inclined to check in on their mental health as well as their physical.”

“You care about my mental health?”

She settled herself against the back of his sofa, and Tommy hand to rest against the door frame to keep upright.

“I care about protocol.” she clarified. “Which Agent Michaels neglected last night when she opted to handle your situation on her own.”

“Because she didn’t call you first?”

“Because she didn’t bring you straight to ARGUS.” It was a rare moment for Waller. The porcelain exterior gleaming just a hint of something underneath. “The Triad is a large target. They have friends and allies everywhere. And you should have been debriefed before you interacted with civilians especially Ms. Smoak and Mr. Queen.”
“So this isn’t about protocol, this is about Oliver.”

“Believe it or not Mr. Merlyn the only thing I’m concerned with right now is Chien Na Wei discovering the identity of one of my operatives. She may not head the Triad but her reach extends all the way to the top. If they think for a second they can use you to learn more about ARGUS, it would not be good for any of us.”

“The only reason they brought me in was Simon Connors.” Tommy groaned, readjusting so his shoulder wasn’t hard against the wall. He really didn’t want to fess up to any of this. “They thought I could give up his location. Whatever he still knows, they think it’s worth pissing you off.”

“It’s a good thing Mr. Connors and his family were placed into witness protection this morning.” Tommy was sure the pain had messed with his head. He heard the words that Waller said but they didn’t make any sense.

“How did you...? What are talking about?”

“Did you honestly think I wouldn’t see this coming? You’re a bleeding heart Tommy and I knew the second I told you he had to be released you’d do everything in your power to protect him. And despite your insubordination, I decided that perhaps I dismissed your insight into Mr. Connors too soon. Simon is an asset and he can still be of use to us one day.”

“A pawn you mean.” Of course. He knew exactly how Waller treated people she deemed as assets, and it never ended well for anyone.

“Chess was never truly my game Agent Merlyn. But yes sometimes we need to have expendable people on the front line, if for no other reason than to prepare for the war that is to come.”

“Well at least his family will be safe,” he muttered, wishing his shoulder wasn’t burning. He could really go for hitting something.

“I also came to offer you something,” she said shifting her gaze around the room. “Something I think you should consider carefully before you make a choice.”

She was picking her words carefully, logging in his response to each one, that alone would have made him worry, but it was when she spoke again he really started to get concerned.

“You’ve worked hard for ARGUS, and despite the way you joined our ranks I truly believe you have become an adequate agent,” she paused, taking in a breath. “But I assumed one day the leverage that held you with us would become obsolete. And with Mr. Queen’s return that day has arrived.”

“What are you saying?”

“I’m saying this is your chance Tommy,” Waller finally met his eyes full on. “You can walk away from ARGUS, from the obligation that imprisoned you to an organization you never truly wanted to be part of. You can go back to being the son of a billionaire. Maybe settle down with that lawyer girlfriend of yours. You could have a normal life.”

A life without danger. A life where he knew when he’d be home. A life with Laurel and maybe kids someday. It sounded all too perfect.

“No.”
“I think you misunderstood, I--”

“No I heard you loud and clear,” Tommy said, cutting Waller off. “You’re offering me an out, a way to hit the reset button on everything. But I’m saying no.”

She didn’t show even a hint of surprise in his words. But still she asked. “And why exactly?”

“Because it wouldn’t be real,” he shrugged off the pain, taking a step closer. “I’ve seen a lot of crap since you crashed into my life, and all of it’s been bad. So I can’t walk away knowing I could have done something to stop it. I’m saying no.”

She smiled again, this one akin to the pride of a lioness.

“In that case,” Waller said, pulling a file from the inside of her long coat. “There is a mission, and it’s uniquely tabled to your expertise.”

She handed him the folder, and Tommy sighed. “You were so sure I’d say no?”

“You are not nearly as unpredictable as you’d like to believe yourself to be.”

He went to ignoring her, flipping open the folder. The picture drew in his gaze as a chill settled into his neck.

“Tommy, what exactly do you know about your father’s involvement with Dr. Brion Markov?”

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Felicity groaned, throwing a pillow at the perky alarm clock beeping across the room. She hated when she forgot to turn the thing off for the weekend, and with as little sleep as she’d gotten the night before, she was positive that everything about her appearance would betray her. Not that she had anyone to impress or anything.

She did, however, have a lot of work to do. She’d stayed at the office for another hour after she’d overheard the altercation between Malcolm and Adam Hunt- partially because she was still worried that Malcolm may come back and find her there, and partially so she could work her magic and dig up enough dirt on Hunt to bury him for good. If the way he’d spoken to Malcolm had been any indication, it was clear that Hunt was desperate and Felicity knew all-too-well what someone as dangerous as Hunt could do when they were desperate. She couldn’t let Laurel be on the receiving end of that.

She had barely dragged herself out of bed in order to turn off her alarm when her phone rang. “Seriously?!” she cried, slapping the clock into silence before reaching for her phone. She gritted her teeth when she saw who the incoming call was.

“Mr. Merlyn,” she said, trying to keep her tone even. Since when was it acceptable to call employees at seven thirty in the morning on a Sunday?

“Ah, Miss Smoak,” he replied, and she could almost picture him leaning back in his seat, stroking his chin like the evil overlord that he-- “Dr. Markov will be in for a meeting this morning. I’d like to have a full report of your work for him to peruse.”

She cleared her throat, swallowing down the anger rising. “But it’s Sunday,” she answered instead. There was a pause on the other end of the line. “Unless the employee ID scanners had some sort of malfunction,” he said. “It would appear you don’t mind coming in on the weekends.”
Crap. She hadn’t thought anything about going into the office last night. But that was before she’d overheard Malcolm and Adam Hunt’s conversation. Did he know that she’d heard them? Why hadn’t she thought about cloning her badge or erasing it from the system or something? She sighed, clearly she was losing her spy prowess.

“I’ll see you in an hour, Miss Smoak.”

The line went dead before she could respond. Not that she had any idea how she was actually planning on responding. She felt like she was being attacked on all sides. Malcolm Merlyn on one side, Adam Hunt on another. And then there was the fiasco of Oliver being back in town. She hated that she was still thinking about their two very brief conversations the night before. She hadn’t wanted talking to him again to be like that—both of them short fused and worried about Tommy. She’d wanted… hell who knew what she’d wanted. A hug? A meaningful look exchanged across a room full of crowded people? She scoffed at herself for the thought.

Besides, she had a boyfriend. Even though their schedules rarely meshed and she couldn’t actually be sure of the last time they’d seen each other, he sent her flowers regularly and always managed to make her feel appreciated.

She made sure to send off a quick text to him, so he knew she was thinking about him, before making her way to the bathroom to get herself showered and presentable for work. On a Sunday. Alone in the building with Malcolm. Who may or may not suspect her of overhearing his conversation the night before with Adam Hunt.

This meeting was beginning to sound less and less like a good idea.

Once she was showered and dressed, Felicity dropped herself down in front of her laptop, quickly setting up an anonymous email account and typed up an email that would bounce off servers around the world before landing in Laurel’s inbox. The contents of said email was everything Laurel would need to take Adam Hunt out for good, including irrefutable proof that he’d had his IT team hack Laurel’s computer for an upper hand on the case. And because Felicity was the best at what she did, it would be completely untraceable.

“Well that takes care of one monster,” she said to herself, a triumphant smile on her face as she pushed away from her desk. And the other? Well that would be a little more difficult to contend with.

She ran the conversation through her head a dozen different ways as she made her way to the Merlyn Global building downtown. Surely Malcolm would want to know what she was doing there so late. Would he also assume that she’d heard their conversation? Would he use it as new ammunition to hold over her head now that Oliver had come back from the dead?

Felicity blew out a long breath as she pulled into the parking lot. She shot a quick text to Tommy after parking, just for her own peace of mind so that someone would know where she was. She was sure she was just being paranoid. Oliver coming back to Starling had surely just brought up old feelings of Russia and the target on all their backs when they were there. Her phone beeped with a reply but before she could check it, a tapping sounded on her car window, making her jump so much that her phone flew out of her hand and onto the floor.

She turned, hand over her heart as she tried to calm her nerves when she saw Malcolm waiting for her, an unreadable expression on his face. Slowly, she reached to turn off the car’s engine, letting the silence fill the space between them as he took a small step back, staring at her expectantly. She popped the door open and unbuckled her seat, quickly grabbing her phone from the floor and steeling her nerves before stepping out of the car.
“Mr. Merlyn,” she said, feeling a hint of disdain seep into her words. “Is there something you couldn’t wait to share with me until we were inside?”

“Nothing of the sort,” he said, flashing her a bright smile. “I saw you pull in and thought we could walk up to the office together.” He paused, gesturing toward the building. “I wanted to ensure that our security team was meeting all of your after-hours needs.”

“The rent-a-cops that don’t bother to look up from the basketball game when someone swipes in?” she asked, keeping her voice cool. “They seem perfectly capable.”

“Good,” he said. “I’d hate to think that you didn’t feel safe at work.” His tone matched her neutrality, but as he held the door open for her to walk through, there was something in his eyes that made Felicity want to shudder.

She kept herself from doing so, but only barely. Thankfully, they were now inside, where security cameras abounded in the main lobby and in all major hallways. Although, as she’d just explained to him, the security guard at the main post barely looked up. Until he saw who had entered the building anyway.

“Mr. Merlyn,” he stammered, sitting up a little straighter in his chair and reaching to turn the volume down on the computer screen that was streaming some sporting event.

Malcolm cleared his throat, moving to lean on the countertop. “How’s the game, son?” he asked.

“G-good sir. I’m sorry sir. It’s Joseph sir.”

“Joseph,” Malcolm repeated. “Have you ever heard the phrase ‘one bad apple will rot the bunch’, Joseph?”

Joseph nodded.

“And do you know the meaning of that phrase, Joseph?”

Felicity bit down on her lower lip. Joseph looked like he might burst out into tears at being singled out by the boss on a quiet Sunday morning. He couldn’t even muster a reply, but just shook his head.

“It means that if I ever catch wind of sporting events being watched in my building— or any protocol that I personally put in place being ignored again, I will be forced to replace my entire security team.” He stood himself up straight and smoothed down his suit coat. “Do I make myself perfectly clear?”

Joseph nodded again.

“Good,” Malcolm said before stalking off to the elevator bank.

Felicity gave the young man a pitying glance before following the boss. If he was in a foul enough mood to scare that kid crapless, she had no idea what he had planned for her.

But when they made it up the executive floor, Malcolm parted ways with her with just a brief, “Markov will be here at eleven.” It made her blood run cold all over again.

Felicity quickly made her way into her office, but when she pulled her cellphone out to check the reply message from Tommy, she was surprised to see that it wasn’t a message from him at all.

_Thea: guess who is coming to dinner 2nite_
Thea: guess
Thea: i know ur awake
Thea: fine ill tell u
Thea: U R :)

Felicity gaped at her phone. She immediately dialed the younger Queen’s number and pressed the phone to her ear, her hand starting to shake.

“There you are!” the teenager’s voice giggled. “I thought I was going to have to get Ollie to drive me to your place to wake you up.”

Ollie.

Felicity’s heart leapt into her throat. “Wh-why? Why am I coming over for dinner?”

“Because my brother’s back from the dead!” Thea cried. “And I need you to meet him. You’re gonna love him, I swear.”

“What?!” she exclaimed, a little too loudly. “Thea, no. I don’t think that’s a good idea.”

“Don’t be so dramatic,” the girl giggled again. “It will be great. Oh, and Moira insists that you bring that boyfriend of yours. What does Tommy call him? Mr. Perfect. And it will be perfect too. Because… oh nevermind. You’ll see.”

Felicity crumpled in her chair. She was going to see Oliver again for the first time in two years… with her boyfriend in tow? Nothing about that sounded perfect.

“Dinner’s at seven. Don’t you dare even think about punking out.” She squealed like only a teenage girl could. “Oh, I’m so excited.”

Felicity swallowed hard. That made one of them. She couldn’t decide what exactly she was dreading more, whatever Malcolm had planned for her, or introducing her boyfriend to Oliver.
Hey lovelies! We're super excited to bring you the ever-elusive BOYFRIEND this chapter. (Yes, you read that right!) So pull up a chair/bed/cozy pillow/ floor/whatever you want.... and get ready! As always, thank you so much for your support. It really does mean the world to us. -- xoxo Cassie

It felt right, to finally be working towards his goal. He had wanted to wait, get settled back into things. But Oliver was starting to feel like the longer he waited the less like himself he was becoming. What was the purpose of the mask he projected to the world, if the only thing underneath was a crumbling man?

Now he had a plan, he had a timetable, and he had the list. It wasn’t much, but it was enough of a compass to keep him moving forward.

“There you are.”

He looked up at his mother as he entered the foyer. She was busy fastening an earring in place, and Oliver noted how much more dressy she looked than the night before. Not that Moira Queen ever looked anything less than classy, but this was his mother’s company attire, and company meant socializing. Something Oliver really did not want to do.

“Yeah I just came home to switch from the bike to the Camaro,” he said, hoping against the odds that she would let him out of whatever tonight was. “Don’t wait up.”

“Oliver.”

He paused on the staircase, internally groaning before he turned to her, keeping a smile on his face. “Yep?”

“I’d like it if you stayed in tonight. We have dinner guests.”

“I would Mom, but I kinda have plans.”

“With who?” Thea had bounded down to him from the second floor landing, stopping a couple steps above so she could meet his height. “Tommy said he felt like crap and couldn’t make it to dinner. Apparently one night out with you and the poor guy can’t even stand. What’d you do, make up for five years of drinking all at once?”

He glared back at her. Not in the menacing way he had come so used to over the years, but in the way he had missed for so long. “I know other people besides Tommy.”

“Unlikely,” Thea muttered, as she brushed past him coming to stand right next to Moira.

Great two against one.

“It’s important to me that you’re here tonight.”
And just like that, the fight quieted in him. He didn’t like it, in fact he hated how trapped he felt, but his mother was asking this of him. And he didn’t have it in him to say no.

“Okay,” he relented, his fingers twitching at his side. “I’ll cancel my evening.”

Moira and Thea sent him matching smiles, and he had never really seen how alike his mother and sister were until that moment.

He was still going to excuse himself. Maybe if he hid in his room long enough they’d forget about him. Maybe he could use the island as an excuse to cut out early. But that flooded him with guilt. He didn’t want to manipulate his family into leaving him alone. It felt wrong. They had been hurt by his time away, much more than he liked to think about. They had buried him, mourned him. They deserved better of the guy who came back, even if he wasn’t the same one that left.

The doorbell chimed through the space, echoing off the ceiling. No time for an escape, he mused, descending the last of the steps so he could come stand next to Thea.

“Oh, it look’s like Carter is early.”

At his mother’s words Oliver froze. “Wait, Carter Bowen?”

“Yes, Oliver,” Moira replied, rolling her eyes. “His family has always been dear friends of ours.”

He was looking forward to dinner less and less. It would be one thing if his mother had invited someone he actually liked. But Carter Bowen was the human equivalent of a gnat. Boring, annoying, and not likely to go away.


He didn’t have time to ask what she meant, because their mother had made her way to the door, pulling it open to greet their guest. Guests.

“Moira thank you so much for the invitation,” Carter said, leaning in to kiss his mother’s cheek.

But that’s not who Oliver was focusing on. No. It was the petite blonde standing next to Carter. Her nervous smile drawing him in like a magnet. She hadn’t changed, not even the slightest in the two years since he’d last seen her, and it was enough to cause his chest to ache.

He was vaguely aware he should say something, anything to ease the awkwardness that threatened to settle over their group.

“You must be Mr. Queen,” Felicity said, holding a hand out to him. “Felicity Smoak.”

He almost refused, but how would that possibly look? He had no choice. He never seemed to when she was involved. Oliver took her hand in his, and tried his best not to think about the last time they were that close. When her hand was in his, and she was close enough to kiss.

“You must be Mr. Queen,” Felicity said, holding a hand out to him. “Felicity Smoak.”

He almost refused, but how would that possibly look? He had no choice. He never seemed to when she was involved. Oliver took her hand in his, and tried his best not to think about the last time they were that close. When her hand was in his, and she was close enough to kiss.

“Please, Mr. Queen was my father. Call me Oliver.”

“Oliver,” she said with a smile, but he heard the sharp intake of breath. Felicity dropped her hand, turning back to his mother. “Mrs. Queen you look lovely as always.”

“Why thank you Felicity, I’m glad the both of you could join us tonight.”

_The both of you?_ The phrase stuck in the space between them like a poisoned snake ready to strike. Felicity hadn’t come here alone. She had shown up with Carter. Together. They were together.
“Well when Thea called I could hardly say no,” she replied, doing her best to avoid looking at him. Or at least that’s what it felt like. Like she was trying very hard to look anywhere but in his direction.

Thea on the other hand was looking at him, a little too closely for his liking and he really needed her to stop.

“Mrs. Queen,” Raisa’s voice pulled Oliver’s attention away from everyone and he had never been happier to see her in all his life. “Dinner is almost ready.”

“Thank you Raisa we will be there in a minute,” Moira replied. “If you will all proceed into the dining room, I’m just going to get Walter from his office.”

“If it’s not too much trouble Moira I really need to check in at the hospital,” Carter said. “Never know when someone might need emergency surgery.”

He said it like a joke, causing Moira to laugh along, but it gave Oliver the desire to punch him in the throat. Repeatedly. And the desire only grew when Felicity’s hand reached for Carter’s arm.

“I’m sure they’ll be fine without you for a couple hours.”

It was so easy and light, but the image burned in Oliver. He hated the bile that rose at the sight of the two of them.

“Gig, you know I can’t do that,” he gave her a quick peck. “I’ll be as quick as I can. I promise.”

After that he followed Moira from the room, the two chatting like they were thick as thieves. And for all Oliver knew, they might be.

“I’m sorry, Gig?” Thea turned her head to Felicity, arching her brow. “What in the hell was that?”

“It’s a nickname,” Felicity replied, ducking her head.

“No a nickname is a shorten version of your own name. That sounded like a pet name,” Thea said with a mix of amusement. “I thought you hated pet names.”

“Can we please drop my love life.” Felicity chanced a glance at him, and Oliver felt like his skin was on fire.

Of all the scenarios that plagued his nightmares over the years, seeing Felicity with someone else hurt worse. It was the kind of pain he didn’t even know he could still feel. It wasn’t that he didn’t want her to be happy, he did. More than anything in the world. But being so close made his mind blur the times. A step or two and he could be right back on that dance floor in Russia, Felicity’s heartbeat strumming next to his. But there was a lot more than time between the two of them.

Thea let out a long sigh. “Only because I love you.”

“So you two know each other well?” Oliver ventured, meeting Felicity’s eyes for a moment. “You and my sister I mean.”

“Oh Felicity and I go way back,” Thea answered wrapping her arm around Felicity’s shoulder. “We met in Russia.”

Oliver nearly flinched at the word and he couldn’t be sure but he thought Felicity may have as well.

“The fundraiser,” Felicity said, before she shook her head. “Tommy hosted one in Russia a few years back. Thea and Moira came, but we didn’t actually get to know each other until I got back. I
think I remember shopping for a dance that Tommy was ill prepared to deal with.”

“Ha, that was a good one.”

He couldn’t remember a single time in the last few days where his sister had smiled like that. And he began to wonder just how much of an influence Felicity had in Thea’s life. Whatever the amount he was grateful for it. There wasn’t many people he would trust with Thea’s well being, but Felicity was at the top of the list.

“Well dinner smells amazing. Guess to get Raisa to make your favorites you just have to come back from the dead,” she winked at Oliver, before she slinked off to the dining room. “I’m gonna see if she’ll let me sneek a peek at dessert first.”

He knew Thea hadn’t realized what she’d done, leaving him and Felicity alone. But the second his sister left the air became too stifling in the open space.

He didn’t know if he should say something, or worse what he could say without her face crumbling from the words he chose. That was the burden of coming back, the one he knew in the back of his mind he’d have to deal with sooner or later.

“I’m glad you’re okay,” she said. And he wasn’t sure which one of them was more surprised by her words. But Felicity continued before he could process. “I mean I’m not overly thrilled that you decided to just up and come home without a smoke signal or something, but I’m glad you’re not dead.”

“Felicity…” But he trailed off. He didn’t have an answer that could make things better. And anything he could think to say would just be a dressed up lie performing to an audience who most likely could guess the truth.

She was about to say something, he could see it in her eyes as she sucked in a breath, but then his mother returned, followed by Walter and Carter, and whatever moment they were having dissipated, though the effects of her eyes on his lingered long after they sat down for dinner.

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Before that morning, Tommy would have thought that being kidnapped and interrogated by the Triad and having to lie to Oliver about it was the worst thing that could happen to him. Turned out though, that was a highlight compared to his discussion with Amanda Waller and what followed. Because she suspected his father of some devious and evil things that went beyond anything he’d expected Malcolm to be capable of. And Tommy knew that if Waller was right, his life would never be the same.

He moved cautiously to the back of the unmarked, windowless black van that was parked across the street from the Merlyn Global building.

Lyla sat in front of a small computer screen, a frown etched into her features. “I should be the one doing this,” she said with a sigh. “Or literally anyone who wasn’t held hostage by the Triad last night.”

Tommy smirked. “I feel pretty good after those pills your doctor friend gave me,” he answered, by way of avoiding her remark. “Besides, do you really want to explain to my father how you got into his building with no keycard, after hours, when the whole place is on lockdown?”

Lyla’s brow quirked. “You're assuming I'd get caught.”
“No… I…”

“Relax Merlyn,” she said, rolling her eyes. “But just to be clear, we both know the only reason you're doing this is because you've wanted to James Bond your way into daddy's building since you signed onto ARGUS.”

“That's… only partially true,” Tommy countered, fighting a grin.

Lyla shook her head at the glee written all over his face. “I should not be letting you do this.”

“Waller's orders,” he said, holding his hands up in defense. “Besides, you worry too much.”

“Need I remind you where we found ourselves literally twenty four hours ago?” She asked, her hand finding its way to a cut on his face as she pressed with just a bit too much pressure.

“I'm fine,” he lied, hissing at the contact. Besides, he found himself caring less about his physical injuries and more about how to fix things with Oliver than he'd care to admit. He didn't know how things were going be between them, but he hoped they'd be able to find some sort of common ground in the coming days.

“Alright, guards are making their rounds on the roof. Time to get in position. I'll talk you in.”

Tommy nodded, tightening the harness strapped around his middle and popping open the back door of the van before disappearing into the alley behind the Merlyn Global building. He'd considered just going through the front doors, but he and his father hadn't been on the best terms lately and Malcolm was already giving him a hell of a time for not being in the building during regular business hours. He'd hate to think what his father would do if he knew Tommy was visiting in the middle of the night.

No, better to go in undetected when the building was empty. His father was old school when it came to the most private of his documents anyway. No digital paper trail. Hard copies in Malcolm's personal safe in his office. And Tommy just so happened to know the access code to get inside it.

The comm in his ear buzzed before Lyla's voice filled it. “Switching to the looped feed on the monitors,” she said. “Roof is clear in three… two… one.”

Tommy aimed the grappling hook launcher, taking a few steps back until he had a good angle at the roof of the building. With a steadying breath, he pulled the trigger, the recoil of the gun nearly knocking him backward. He’d only ever done this in reverse, repelling from the side of a building, never climbing up one, and he knew that gravity and his injuries would most certainly work against him. Once the hook was secure on the roof, he tugged a few times, before hitting the small button on his belt that began humming as it twisted the rope around itself, aiding in his climb up the side of the building.

“Making my approach,” Tommy said back into the comm. “We’ll have to let Lexi in tech know this thing works like a dream.” He didn’t want to admit it- in fact, he refused to admit it to Lyla, but this was definitely the most James Bond he’d felt since beginning his training with ARGUS. One foot in front of the other, Tommy climbed his way up the side of the Merlyn Global building. Once he’d reached the top, he moved quickly to the large vent that opened to the center of the private elevator that led directly to Malcolm’s office. “I’m in position.”

“Roger,” Lyla answered quickly. “Turning off the perimeter alarm… now.”

Tommy blew out a long breath. “Moment of truth,” he said, pulling open the large vent cover. He removed the buckle from his belt, securing it to the center of a kevlar bar before he positioned it over
the opening. He’d just climbed out into the center of the bar, dropping into the open space, when his phone vibrated in his pocket.

He pulled it out to silence it, but swore under his breath when he saw the name that flashed on the screen.

“Laurel hey,” he said quietly into the phone after answering. “I never called you back earlier. I’m an idiot.”

“Earlier?” she said a little absently. “Oh right! This morning. I actually forgot about that,” she said, her voice a little breathless. “I was calling to see if we could celebrate. I got a huge break in my case and–”

“The Hunt case?” Tommy questioned, still dangling above the open skylight from a thin wire.

“Are you on the phone?” Lyla questioned in his other ear. “You have got to be kidding me Merlyn. Hang up with your girlfriend right now or–”

“Hey Laurel, I hate to do this but I was just about to drop into the office,” he grinned a little at his own joke. “Raincheck on the celebrations though? I promise to make it up to you tomorrow.”

“As long as my face heals a little more by then,” he added silently to himself.

“The office,” Laurel repeated, her voice void of emotion. “On Sunday night.” She huffed a sigh through the phone. “If you didn’t want to get together all you had to do was say so, Tommy.” This time he could hear the anger behind her words. And then the line went dead.

“Head in the game, Tommy,” Lyla growled through his comm.

He nodded, not replying, but repelled himself down into the opening. He moved quickly, stopping once he’d reached the correct floor and wedged the elevator doors open. They opened directly into Malcolm’s office and Tommy pushed himself out onto the floor, detaching his rope and moving to the safe behind a large painting and spinning through the combination- his mother’s birthday- before pulling open the door.

“Waller gave me an out this morning,” he said, as he pulled the portable scanner from his pocket and began scanning the documents inside.

“What do you mean?” Lyla asked back.

Tommy sighed. “She told me I could leave if I wanted. Be done with ARGUS.”

“That doesn’t sound like Amanda.”

He paused, a name on a file catching his eye. It was a loopy scrawl he’d recognize anywhere. F. Smoak. He pulled open another, and another. Her name was all over them along with Markov. Whatever his father was doing, he was dragging Felicity down with him.

Tommy shook his head, pushing his worry for Felicity aside for the moment. “That’s why I told her no.”

“And that doesn’t sound like you,” Lyla said. “You’ve been itching to get out of here since she blackmailed you into it.”

“It was a test,” Tommy said, scanning the last of the pages before his eyes fell on something near the back of the safe. It was small, but the light reflected off it and he felt his heart jump into his throat.
and tears sting in the corners of his eyes as the memory flooded his mind. He’d forgotten about the tiny coin, a buffalo head nickel, but as he closed his fingers around it, it all came back to him. He swallowed hard, pocketing it quickly and then slammed the safe shut.

“Merlyn, what’s going on?”

“Nothing.”

“I’ve been trying to get your attention for two minutes. You’ve got forty seconds before the guards make their rounds. If you’re not off the roof by then, you’re going to have some explaining to do.”

Tommy gritted his teeth, pushing the safe closed before running for the elevator shaft. He had already attached himself to the wire and pressed the button on his belt to recall the wire back up to pull him out of the shaft when he felt his breath hitch. Had he heard the safe click shut? He tried to recall and couldn’t. Either way, he couldn’t waste any more time on it. He moved silently, pulling himself out of the open vent and disassembling the kevlar bar before putting the cover back in place. He could hear the door on the other side of the roof open and close and he hoped he’d be able to stick to the shadows long enough to make it off without being seen.

“He’s closing in, Tommy,” Lyla said.

He knew she was trying to be helpful; it was anything but. He ran for the edge of the roof, tightened the grappling hook against the edge and turned around. He closed his eyes, leaned back, and jumped.

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Felicity was trying to keep herself engaged in the conversation. She really wanted to show interest in what Carter found interesting. But truth be told she found his stories a little lacking in the excitement department. He was amazing in the things he did, and of course she could tell how much he loved his job, but Felicity couldn’t find it in her to care at the moment. Not when every time she shifted she could feel Oliver’s eyes on her.

He wasn’t being obvious about it, no one would notice. Not when Moira had Carter locked in a conversation about his time with Doctors Without Borders. But she noticed. She spent weeks with Oliver in Russia, she knew exactly what it felt like to have his gaze burning into her skin. And it made her wish she could get him to stop. But that would require acknowledging him, and she was not going to do that. Nope not at all. She was going to keep ignoring him as long as she could.

“Felicity?”

Her head shot up at Carter’s voice, his smile enough to let the guilt flood her veins.

“Sorry,” Felicity said, rubbing at her temple. “I was just working through a coding problem, let it get away from me, I guess. What were we talking about?”

She shifted her gaze to Oliver, but couldn’t hold it long. Even after all this time the pull was there, too strong and too confusing for her to pinpoint a reason why.

“Carter was just regaling us with tales of reforming neural pathways,” Thea replied, miming stabbing herself with her fork. Luckily Carter wasn’t watching her.

Oliver was. He rolled his eyes at his sister, and the two of them shared a look. The kind of look that she had hoped Oliver could have again one day. A moment with his sister, a moment that only the two of them could possibly understand all the nuance and subtext.
Oliver seemed to catch her staring so he turned to her. The full intensity of his gaze was focused on her, before he spoke. “How did you two meet?”

The air caught in her throat as a million thing ran through her head. Why was he so interested in her relationship? Why now? He had his chance, she’d left that door open for so long, nearly a year, in fact, of waiting for a word for him after Sofia’s call. But there was nothing. And she couldn’t wait forever. She wouldn’t.

“We met at a charity event,” she said, urging herself to look at Carter and smile.

“Your mother introduced us actually,” Carter added, as he took her hand, kissing it lightly.

Felicity had shifted just enough that she could see the tension coil in Oliver’s shoulders, but in a blink, it shifted as Oliver gave Carter a tight smile. “She did?”

“Well Felicity’s a brilliant young woman, and Carter is an accomplished doctor, I just thought they’d hit it off wonderfully,” Moira said with a smile. “It was mere luck that Carter happened to return from Africa in time for the hospital’s charity drive.”

She couldn’t help but feel like this was the moment she needed to be swallowed whole.

“Wow, Ollie just think, if you had been around Mom would have pimped you out instead.”

Correction this was the moment.

On instinct Felicity launched her foot into Thea’s calf, she winced but her glare didn’t shift to Felicity. Instead she looked at her brother with a mix of pain and confusion. At the same time Walter was coughing, having choked on his wine, and Moira was sending visual daggers at her daughter.

“See Mom, relax, I’m refreshing,” the teen replied, her tone was meant to mock, but Carter didn’t seem to notice.

Felicity really needed to get out of the dining room, she needed to be anywhere other than where she was. Because any more of this and she was likely to die of mortification. She had to excuse herself from the table.

“Excuse me,” Oliver said, standing before she could. “I have to go make a phone call.”

Damn, he stole her excuse. Felicity let out a huff as she settled back against her seat. She supposed she could claim a need for the bathroom, but she hated how that might look. Leaving the room moments after Oliver.

Her phone beeped and the whole table turned to face her.

“Sorry,” she grabbed it from her bag, giving Moira an apologetic look. “I should take this.”

She didn’t know number that flashed, but the area code was local, so she clicked on the message icon.

Meet me in the study.
She could ignore him, it was well within her right to do so, but there was the itching at the back of her head. She needed to know what he had to say for himself, even if she knew it was never going to be all.

“It’s work,” she said, as she stood. “Something to do with a misplaced binary code. Which could prove cataclysmic, so…”

“Oh please, go put out the fire,” Moira said with a smile. “We will entertain each other until you get back.”

“He’s work,” Thea added, her eyes pleading. And she couldn’t help but smile sympathetically at her friend.

She walked the hall of the Queen mansion, wishing she had a stronger will when it came to secrets and puzzles. Maybe that was her draw to Oliver. He was shrouded in mystery and covered in puzzling thoughts. Maybe that’s what had him sticking around her head for years.

When she pushed the door to the study open she was couldn’t help but feel a sense of relief that he was actually there. Perched against the arm of a chair, Oliver smiled but he didn’t lift his eyes to her.

“Wasn’t sure you would come,” he said, taking in a breath.

She wanted to laugh at how absurd it all was. The two of them acting out some dusty drama, skating around the glances they wanted to send each other. Having to act like they were nothing more than strangers.

“Well you did text me on my private, unlisted number, so I was a little inclined to figure out how exactly you got ahold of it.”

He chuckled, finally meeting her eyes. He watched her carefully, too carefully for her liking. “I took it off Tommy’s phone.”

“Because asking someone for their number is so 2011.”

“Honestly I wasn’t sure you’d want me to have it,” he pushed forward, not close enough to be in arm’s length, but enough that she could see him in the dimly lit room. “Especially after meeting your boyfriend.”

She shook her head. “Don’t do that.”

“What?”

“The alpha male protagonist bullcrap, where you look me deep in the eyes and say he’s not good enough for me.”

“I…” But Oliver trailed off, his hand twitching at his side. He was anxious-- or nervous, it was always hard to tell which. “I’m sorry.”

“For what exactly?” She didn’t know what she wanted from him. She wasn’t sure what answer would be enough for her to walk out the door and back to the life she’d constructed. But she knew she couldn’t leave until she heard one.

“Felicity,” he paused, and she wished she could just read his mind. It would be easier than watching
him choose every word so carefully. “I should have let you know I was okay. That I was coming back.”

“But you didn’t.”

“I didn’t.”

She turned away from him, squeezing her eyes closed as tight as she could. She was trying to will herself back in time, back to their last night, back to the club, where maybe, just maybe, she could convince him to leave with them.

But time didn’t work like that. They couldn’t go back. She took a breath and turned to face him again. “Why? We could’ve helped. I could’ve--”

“I didn’t want to burden you, either of you.”

“So you thought just showing back up would be better?”

“I thought the two of you would have moved on, into normal lives. Ones I didn’t have any right to disturb,” he sighed, running a hand down his face. “Not with this. But you’re with him. And Tommy’s keeping secrets. And things aren’t…”

“Easy?”

“Yeah.”

She didn’t know why, but she reached for his hand, clasping it tight in her own. “If you wanted things to be easy, you wouldn’t have come home.”

“That’s just it Felicity,” he said, pulling away from her. “I didn’t come… home. I came here to do something, something I can’t do anywhere else. So there’s a part of me that can never come back. And I think that part is the one my family wants the most.”

She felt the air shift, Oliver pulling back, away from her, away from this place. She could see the look in his eyes, ready to run.

“Can I say something you might not want to hear?”

“Do I have a choice?” he countered giving her the ghost of a smirk.

“I think, you think you’re too damaged to ever be the man your family lost,” she took a step forward, even if every part of her knew the pull shouldn’t be encouraged. “And because of that, you’re going to stand back and you’re going to try and not rebuild the relationships that mean the most to you. But you’re going to fail, and you should let yourself. Because your mom, and your sister, and Tommy, they love you. They don’t care if you’re broken or damaged, they just care that you’re home. So don’t do that to them. Don’t pull away from the people who love you.”

As she came closer he stilled, letting her into his space as she placed a kiss to his cheek. He smelled the same, after all these years. It was enough to make her lightheaded.

“I should get back,” she whispered, pulling away.

That’s when Oliver let out a breath, the heat hitting her hair enough to push the strands out of her face. He wasn’t nearly as good at closing off his emotions as he pretended to be.

“Think about what I said,” she moved towards the door. “Please?”
It was a request, one he could ignore or not, it was up to him. And as she opened the study’s door, she barely heard his faint reply.

“If it’s you asking, I’ll do it.”
Chapter 6

Chapter by foreverfelicityqueen (stydiareddstring)

Chapter Notes

Hello dears,
Let me start by saying your comments for last week were AWESOME. Any time I needed a pick me up, I reread them. Now you've met Felicity’s BF, and some of you are already plotting to help Oliver dispose of his body. We got lots more fun for you to come. So let's get on with the show.
Love and laughs,
Kayla

Oliver had never expected to be a sentimentalist. But as he stood in the study after Felicity had gone, he found his mind replaying everything about their conversation from the tilt of her head to the soft fragrance of her hair to the heat of her lips which still burned on his stubbled cheek. It enblazed a fire that he'd long since thought extinguished. It clouded his mind and crippled his resolve.

It wasn't just Carter- although that man was enough to make him want to vomit all over his brand new thousand dollar shoes. But seeing them together, forcing Oliver to literally come face to face with what he'd turned his back on two years ago- it instilled in him a need to further bury anything that wasn't connected to his father’s mission. He owed Robert that much.

That wasn't to say there wasn't a part of him, how big a part he wasn't even sure, that wanted to take her words to heart. To tear down the walls he'd spent years carefully constructing, walls that had already begun to show cracks in the foundation. But how could he complete his mission in taking down the men that had failed his city if he wasn't able to work outside the confines of the law?

So while he’d told her he would think about what she’d said, he knew that there was nothing more he could do about it than that. He couldn’t let them close, no matter how much he might want to, because it meant putting them further in danger than he already was by coming home. And that would riddle him with more guilt than he’d already heaped on himself from the last five years.

A quiet knock sounded on the door and for a moment his pulse betrayed him, his mind racing to the idea that perhaps she’d come back. But the head that poked into the study belonged instead to his sister.

“Hey Speedy,” he said, masking any residual emotion that might have still been on his face. He found that a smile crept onto his face at the eye-roll she gave him at the nickname.

“I have to say that’s one thing I did not miss about your time away,” she said, a brow raised in defiance that spoke volumes of the woman she was becoming. Confident, stubborn, perhaps a bit rash. Gone was the lanky pre-teen that lolloped after him and Tommy, desperate for adventure. Instead, there was a hint of mischief, something that told Oliver that his baby sister was more than
capable of finding her own adventures these days. Her grin vanished as she met his eyes. “Mom was worried. Everything okay with that phone call of yours?”

Oliver gave her a curt nod. “All that time alone on the island,” he swallowed hard, averting his eyes. “Sometimes things just feel a little claustrophobic.”

“Ladies and gentlemen, the entertainment stylings of Moira Queen,” Thea quipped. “Causing claustrophobia seems to be a particular talent of hers.”

“Careful,” he answered, narrowing his eyes playfully. “That’s my mother you’re talking about.”

Thea beamed. “I could take you.”

Oliver huffed out a humorless laugh and then hoisted her over his shoulder, as she squealed and shrieked for him to put her down. She punched playfully at his back, as he walked her back across the foyer and into the dining room. Their spectacle was met with horrified stares from around the table. At least from everyone but-- Oliver barely slid his eyes across where Felicity sat, visibly shaking while trying to bite back her laughter.

“Ollie! Put me down!” Thea shrieked again.

“Found this one trying to escape,” he said, as if that might be enough explanation to sate their mother. He dropped her into her chair, righted his shirt, and then dropped back into his own chair.

Moira cleared her throat. “Again, I must apologize for my childrens’ savage behavior,” she said, addressing Felicity and Carter, but staring straight at Oliver and Thea. “I know they were raised better than this.”

“I think it’s great,” Felicity piped in, and all eyes turned to her. A flash of embarrassment crossed her face and her bottom lip was tugged between her teeth. She cleared her throat before clarifying her statement. “Just that I know how much Thea missed her brother. I’m sure it’s heartwarming to see them interact like normal siblings after everything your family has been through.” She smiled awkwardly at Moira. “Sorry, my mind doesn’t always have a chance to catch up to my mouth.”

“Felicity is right,” Oliver agreed, savoring the taste of her name on his tongue, knowing it was a luxury he shouldn’t allow himself. “I think some semblance of normalcy is exactly what’s needed around here. And in typical Queen family fashion, I think we should have a party.” He’d known that in coming home he’d have to find a way to operate undetected, and it was starting to become very clear to him exactly what that would entail.

“A back from the dead party!” Thea grinned. “After you’re legally resurrected tomorrow.”

“I really don’t think-” Walter began, and then broke off mid sentence when his gaze met the weight of Oliver’s heavy glare.

He hadn’t meant it to be anything more than disapproving. But from the look on Walter’s face, Oliver thought perhaps it came across more as a predator about to pounce than he’d intended. His gaze shifted to Felicity, unsure of what he hoped to find there but desperate for it just the same.

“You’ll come won’t you Gig?” Thea asked, failing miserably at keeping a straight face.

“Gig!” Carter echoed, missing the subtle jab Thea had intended. “That’s what I call our girl here.”

Oliver’s fists tightened beneath the table. Every muscle in his body, in fact, was coiled and ready for an attack. But before he could do- or Thea could say- anything, Felicity cleared her throat.
“I’d love to, Thea, but I’ve been pulling long hours at work. I don’t think I’ll be able to make it.”

The remainder of the dinner passed without incident, and soon after the dessert dishes were passed out Carter received a phone call from the hospital and he and Felicity departed quickly. A mix of relief and dread flooded Oliver as he watched them walk out of the house, arm in arm. But he couldn’t let himself dwell on that. He still had big plans for the remainder of his evening.

Oliver took their departure as an excellent time for one of his own, and quickly bounded up the stairs to change out of his dress clothes. If he was lucky, he’d be able to get his computer system up and running before the sun came up. And maybe- just maybe, he’d be able to cross his first name off the list.

Adam Hunt was beyond despicable, with law enforcement and judges in his pocket and he was making plenty of headlines lately which had quickly gotten Oliver’s attention.

The upstairs corridor was dimly lit and Oliver felt his eyes adjust and shift, scanning the hallway as he walked to his room. It had become second nature to him, always being on alert, so much so that he rarely noticed he did it anymore. But being back home, back within the four walls he’d spent so many carefree hours, it was hard not to notice just how much he’d changed. He pushed into his room, closing and locking the door behind him before flipping on the TV. Not because he thought there was anything worth watching, but rather the lack of background noise in the Queen Manor had him a little unnerved. In Russia he’d been in the constant thrum of the city life and even on the island, where one might not expect much- wildlife sounded at all hours, to the point where Oliver had learned to predict anything from weather to predators based on the sounds he’d heard.

The TV sprang to life, a news anchor speaking mid-sentence as a Breaking News story scrolled across the bottom. In a fluid movement, Oliver slipped his shirt off, replacing it with a dark colored Henley and kicked out of his shoes as he moved toward the television, his eyes scanning the story at the bottom of the screen. He reached behind the screen, finding the volume control and turning it up until he could clearly hear what the anchor was saying.

“--Hunt, who seemed to be gaining traction during his trial, abruptly announced just moments ago that he had reached a plea deal with freshman CNRI attorney Laurel Lance. Neither were immediately available for comment.”

At Laurel’s name, Oliver deflated a little. He had been so focused on his father’s mission, he’d never even stopped to think about how he’d atone for his own sins. He’d never be able explain what had happened with Sara, and he was positive he would never find forgiveness for the wrongs he’d done to the Lance family. It didn’t surprise him that she was a lawyer now, but what did strike him was how she’d come out on top of an unwinnable case against one of the most dangerous men in the city.

With a huff, Oliver turned away from the screen and scrubbed a hand down his face. The news station hadn’t been able to get a comment from Hunt, but Oliver was certain before the night was over, he would find a way to make the man talk.

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He barely slept the night before, replaying the images over and over in his head. A constant loop of pain that was only dulled by the passage of time.

The nickel had been a secret. A promise between him and his mother, one that he struggled so long and hard to keep. He pulled it from his pocket, letting the light from the window catch the marred surface.
Rebecca spent a lot of time away when Tommy entered grade school. She was always off at some charity board, or overseeing some foundation work. And he loved her all the more for it. His mother was out in the world, helping to make it a better, safer place. She was his superhero. And he admired her so much for that. But he missed her all the time. So one day she came and got him from school earlier. She took him to the park and the zoo, and they spent the whole day just the two of them. A perfect day, just him and his mom.

When the hours dwindled and they reluctantly had to start heading home, his mother leaned down, picking something up off the ground. She turned to him with a smile.

“This is a lucky nickel,” she said, placing it in his palm.

Tommy gave her a confused look, before turning the thing over in his hand. “But it’s all scratched up. You can’t even see the face.”

“You think luck cares about how something looks,” she teased, tickling his side. “Nah, it has much bigger things to think about. But let me tell you something, whenever you hold this nickel and squeeze it tight, even if I’m miles away, I’ll be right there with you.” Then she pointed to his heart. “Because I’m always right here.”

He did the same thing the day they laid her in the ground. Placing the nickel in her palm. Because he had pictures and all her things. She’d need something from him to know she wasn’t alone either.

But then how did it get in his father’s safe nearly twenty years later? Why would Malcolm even bother keeping something like this?

His phone vibrated on the counter, and he glanced at the name before he answered.

“Morning,” he groaned.

“You sound like something the cat threw up,” Oliver replied.

He was pretending again, putting on a show for the world to see. Which could only mean his family was close by. Tommy didn’t have the energy to needle him about it. If Oliver wanted to have two personas for the world, who was he to judge. Especially since just last night he repelled off a twenty story building that happened to have his last name plastered on the side.

“Long night,” he said, because technically it wasn’t a lie.

He and Ollie hadn’t talked since the club. And he hated it. He hated the distance that was clearly growing between them. All he had ever wanted was his best friend back. Now that he had that, it felt like he was cheated out of something.

“You still coming this afternoon?”

His words clicked into place. Oliver’s legal resurrection. At the courthouse. “Would I miss the resurrection of Oliver Queen? Come on I’ve been waiting for this day for years.”

There was a long stretch of silence before Oliver spoke again. “Are we good? After the other night, I wasn’t exactly up for listening.”

“Ollie, we’re good.” At least he wanted them to be. He needed it. “I have to go to the office first, but I’m free around 11. We could grab lunch first.”

“You realize how much you sound like your father?”
“And now I’m hanging up on you,” he said with a smirk. “Later.”

“Bye.”

He dropped his phone back to the counter, scrubbing his hands down his face. He didn’t care how long it took. Even if it was years, he’d find a way for things to be okay between him and Oliver. He didn’t go through all the crap in Russia and with ARGUS to give up.

He had a vague thought of calling Laurel and apologizing once again for blowing her off. But he couldn’t offer a reason without lying to her. And he knew better than anyone how likely she was to blow up at a lie. It’s why he was trying to keep things from getting too deep between them. Because Laurel deserved better than someone who lied to her face. She had that once, and even if it wasn’t exactly the same, he didn’t want her to distrust him the way she did Oliver. But he also couldn’t bring her into his world. He knew her, he knew that the second she learned about things she’d want to be involved. To find a way to help. But it was too dangerous. Waller was too dangerous.

He realized he was cutting it close when he took a look at the clock, seeing it was quarter to eight. He shoved the nickel into his pocket, and grabbed his wallet as he headed out the door.

It was ten after when he finally made it through the doors of Merlyn Global. A respectable time if you were anyone but the son of the CEO, and Tommy tried his best to keep his head low as he walked up to security. He didn’t need word getting back to Malcolm that he was late.

He slid his badge across the scanner by the front desk, and waited for the solid green light. But instead the small box flashed a bright red at him, as an annoying beep sounded.

He tried his badge again, but the same shrill sound came. He let out a frustrated groan. This was not what he needed this morning. At all.

“Gia,” he called over to the front desk. Their young intern looked up at him with a sultry smile, that looked out of place on the undergrad. “Mind buzzing me in?”

“I wish I could help Tommy,” she said, sounding genuinely upset about it. “But Mr. Merlyn came by early this morning and told us we weren’t allowed to buzz anyone in unless they were here to meet specifically with him. He said there was some security issues that happened over the weekend. And he’s concerned we’ve been too lax with our measures.”

“Understandable,” he said, a nervous tension settling in his veins. He had been too concerned with getting out of there last night to consider what would happen when Malcolm discovered someone was in his office. His father was probably livid. “But as you can see, it’s just me. And maybe my card got demagnetized or something? I’m in a bind Gia. I have a conference call in an hour and I’m not nearly as prepared as I should be.”

She was relenting, he could see it on her face, but as her hand hovered over the button, he saw his father exit the elevator bay.

“Tommy, late again I see,” Malcolm said as he walked over to the front desk. “Ms. Adler, I do hope you weren’t about to go against the new policy, one that I quite clearly remember you hearing about at your morning meeting.”

“Mr. Merlyn, sir, I was just… I mean Tommy, or Mr. Merlyn was having issues with his security card. I wasn’t going to,” she paused, taking a step back from her boss. “I was about to call IT and see if it was a system error. That’s all.”

“That won’t be necessary, Ms. Adler,” Malcolm said, hitting the buzzer, before looking straight at
him. “We have things to discuss, and I knew if I didn’t take drastic measures you would find a way to hide from me for the rest of the day.”

He almost didn’t want to step forward. Something about his father’s facial expression, sent a chill down his spine. But he cupped the nickel in his pocket running his thumb across the deep gashes of it’s face, took a breath, and followed his father.

They were quiet the whole way up, and Tommy didn’t even bother to try and broach a conversation with his father. It was always better to keep their words as minimal as possible. But in the silence he couldn’t help but wonder about the man. And his intentions.

Waller may have had a lot of faults, but she wasn’t one to have Tommy investigate innocent people. His father was involved in something dangerous, something that had Felicity’s name written all over it. And he couldn’t help the conflict he felt.

Felicity was his friend, one of his best. And he would walk through fire for her. But despite all his faults, Malcolm was his father. And as naïve as that made him, he wanted to see his father be redeemed in his eyes. He wanted the man who use to read him to sleep at night or wake him and his mom up at midnight when he came home for a family movie night. He wanted his dad back.

“You’re awfully quiet this morning,” Malcolm finally said, side-eyeing him. “Still hungover from a weekend of drunken partying with your prodigal friend?”

It was the first time he had heard his father bring up Oliver in years. Since the gala in Russia. It’s like he wanted Oliver’s memory wiped from the earth. But Tommy knew about the deal with Felicity. He knew Malcolm was well aware that Oliver had been in Russia, that he and Felicity had found him after traipsing across the globe. But all of them had to wear masks around each other. And he was starting to think there would be a day when he wouldn’t be able to take it off for anyone, just like his father.

“Don’t worry, any liver damage I did to myself won’t keep me from coming into the office.”

“Unless it’s actually on time?” his father replied, pushing open the door to his office. “Have a seat.”

“Is this gonna take long?” He asked trying not to wince as he settled into the chair. He really should have taken some more vicodin before he left. “I have a conference call soon, and I should really get ready for that. Wouldn’t want to mess up an account this big.”

“That almost sounded like you meant it.” Malcolm took a seat behind his desk, giving his son a smirk. “But see it’s hard to believe Tommy when you spend more time away from your office than in it.”

“Dad, I realize I haven’t been the model employee over the years,” he said trying not to add sparks to whatever fire was building behind Malcolm’s eyes. “But business is good. The customers are happy. We’ve had a 28% increase of revenue thanks to our technology division’s growth and development. So I don’t see why the Executive Vice President, can’t be thirty minutes late here and there.”

“I gave you a job here because you asked for one, do you remember that?” Malcolm met his eye.

“You came here and you told me you wanted the responsibility that came with the Merlyn name.”

“Dad--”

“No, you don’t get to speak yet,” he cut him off. “You haven’t done a single thing in the last two years to live up to the title I so graciously gave to you. Do you realize how many people would break themselves over the chance to work for this company? And you treat it like a playground. You think
I’m a fool? That I wouldn’t find out that you broke into my office last night?”

He was trying his best to play dumb, to remain as calm as he could. But every muscle in him was screaming to react to the threat before him.

“Dad, I can explain.”

“You can explain why I found my safe open this morning? Why when I checked my office security feed, my own son was seen fleeing the room? I’m actually very interested in hearing this. Please enlighten me as to what was so important that you had to skulk around here like a common thief? You need money? Some horrid addiction you don’t want the creditors to find out about?”

If things were different, if their lives were different, he’d be able to tell Malcolm everything. And maybe in that perfect world his father could help. But there was so much distance etched on his father’s face, and he knew even if their relationship wasn’t strained by circumstances, he’d never be able to tell him the truth.

He pulled the nickel from his pocket, letting it clatter against the stark wood desk. Malcolm flicked his gaze to it, his eyes widened just a fraction in recognition.

“It was a bet,” Tommy said, letting out a strangled huff. “A stupid bet between me and Ollie. He said I had lost my game, and I wanted to prove him wrong. So I took that as proof.”

It was a long time before his father even moved, and when he did it was only to slide the nickel closer to him.

“The key card wasn’t a glitch was it?” he asked. “All this, the card, bringing me up here, it’s your over dramatic way of firing me, isn’t it?”

“Oh look you got something right.”

Tommy pushed out of his chair. “Don’t bother calling security, I’ll leave on my own.”

He turned towards the door but stopped. The question still nagging at him. “Why’d you keep it? Not a single day since we buried her have you ever acted like you give a damn. So why?”

“Sentimentality is a weakness we must squash from our lives in order to thrive,” Malcolm replied like he was reciting a mantra. “But there was a time when I thought I could hold your mother’s memory close and still go on. I was a fool. And the only reason I’m still on top, is because I let it go. Not the anger over her death, but the weakness that came with it. And that’s why you will never inherit this company. Because you are more your mother’s son than mine.”

It was enough for the fire in himself to rise, so much so he had to clench his fists at his side to keep himself steady. He was mistaken when he looked at Malcolm and saw the silhouette of the man he used to be, the father he used to be. Because that silhouette was a ghost. His father had died a long time ago. And left an empty, hatred-filled shell in his place.

But Tommy wasn’t angry. He wouldn’t give Malcolm the satisfaction. Instead he’d do everything in his power to take Malcolm down. And he’d start with the job Waller gave him. He’d find out exactly what Malcolm was up to with this Dr. Markov. If he had to, he’d make sure the man spent the rest of his life behind bars for it. And he wouldn’t let that eat at him.

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To say that Felicity barely slept would be an understatement. If she’d thought talking to Oliver on
the phone had been difficult, that left nothing to be said for how it felt to be a stranger standing in front of him. Because that’s what they were now, strangers. To the outside world, they’d never met, and to each other—what exactly were they to each other? Ships passing in the night? Fond memories of a time that was tumultuous at best? Something deep inside her wished she could say they were something more than that, but she couldn’t bring those thoughts to light. She couldn’t allow herself that. Not when she was with Carter and Oliver was home for some mission which meant only God knew what.

Whatever Oliver was home for, she was sure it wasn’t good. The intensity in his eyes when he told her he wasn’t home, that he was just back for ‘something’, it caused a chill to run down her spine and her blood to run cold.

Thoughts of Oliver shouldn’t have kept her up all night, but they had. So when her alarm went off Monday morning, Felicity nearly had to drag herself out of bed to get herself ready for the day. In the light of day, it was easier to push him from her thoughts. He’d always seemed to like dwelling in the shadows anyway.

She ran through her morning routine on autopilot, instead of letting her mind settle on him any further. She made mental to-do lists for her work day, everything from finishing prototypes for Dr. Markov to making sure to check in on Thea about this party the younger Queen had insisted upon to how she’d avoid Malcolm Merlyn during the course of the day. Something curdled in her stomach thinking about Malcolm, about how he’d acted the day before. She’d been afraid to voice her concerns about him before, but seeing the way he’d spoken to the security guard at the building made her a little terrified to be around him.

As Felicity sped down the roads of Starling City in frantic attempt to get to work on time, she pushed Malcolm from her mind as well, idly wondering just which topics might be safe for her thoughts to linger on. During the rest of her commute, she’d officially come up with nothing.

Pulling into the parking garage, Felicity steeled her nerves against the shiver that threatened to crawl its way up her spine. She wouldn’t let Malcolm get the better of her in her own workplace. But as soon as she put the car in park, a gentle tapping on her window caused a scream to erupt from her throat.

Her hand flew to her mouth, covering it to silence, or at the very least muffle, her scream. Heart pounding in her ears, she turned to find Tommy with a slightly amused smile settled on his features. She popped her door open and climbed out. “That runs in the family, apparently,” she deadpanned, before leaning back into the car to collect her belongings.

“Good to see you too,” Tommy said, matching her tone.

“Sorry,” she sighed, and then smiled, leaning in for a quick hug. “Your father did the same thing to me yesterday, albeit more ominously.”

Had it really only been the day before? So much had happened since then that it felt like weeks ago. Then again, all that had really happened was seeing Oliver face to face. But it was enough to make the previous morning feel like a distant memory.

Tommy frowned. “Malcolm ‘king of valet parking’ Merlyn met you in the parking garage?”

This time, Felicity couldn’t stop the shiver that ran the length of her spine. “Well when you put it that way, I feel much more comfortable about the whole thing,” she said, leveling a gaze at him. “And he didn’t just meet me in the parking garage. He tapped on my window and then insisted we
walk into the building together.” She huffed a ragged breath and squeezed her eyes shut. She’d been fighting off the feelings of dread that followed her when it came to Tommy’s dad for so long that when they finally settled over her, it was like being told a story about a haunted house when you’re standing in the middle of it.

“You’re turning a little… green,” Tommy said, putting a sympathetic hand on her back.

“I’m fine,” she lied, clearing her throat.

“Well, just hold onto that feeling, because I have something I have to tell you.”

Felicity wasn’t sure what Tommy was about to say, but if the grimace on his face had anything to say about it, it wouldn’t be good. “Can we go to my office? I’ve really got a ton of work to do for Dr. Markov and I’m kind of on a deadline…” She broke off mid sentence, noticing that Tommy wasn’t beside her as she’d begun walking toward the building as she spoke. Felicity turned back to find him rooted in place, eyes downcast. “What’s wrong?”

Tommy took a cautious step toward her. “I might have gotten fired this morning,” he sighed. “And I can’t say more than that. At least…” he looked around. “Not here.”

Her eyes narrowed. “Is this one of your weird jokes that I don’t understand until after the fact?” she asked cautiously. “Because seriously the dead fish thing is a little overplayed and… you’re not joking.”

He shook his head. “Meet me at the coffee shop around the corner in an hour. I’ll explain then.”

Despite the cloak and dagger routine, Felicity could tell that something serious was up. And if it was serious enough that Tommy was scheduling a meetup for them away from the office, she could only imagine it meant something was up with either ARGUS or Malcolm.

An hour later, she pushed into the coffee shop, already jittery even without caffeine. She found Tommy sitting near the back and quickly made her way to where he sat facing the door. In front of him a pile of files was scattered across the table and his brow was knit into a deep furrow. She took the seat across from him, folding her hands on the table, watching him. A hand raked through his dark hair as he looked up and met her eyes, blowing out a long breath.

“That bad?” she asked, trying to lighten the mood, even just the slightest.

Tommy shook his head. “Worse.”

Felicity felt the tension knot in her stomach immediately. She hated being in the dark, and if things really were as bad as he was leading on, she couldn’t imagine what that would mean. After a thick moment of silence between them, she prodded. “Just tell me what happened,” she said. “I’m losing my mind watching you wrestle with this.”

“This can not go any further than this conversation,” he said, placing a device that looked like a cellphone on the table between them. Felicity eyed it suspiciously, not because she was unsure of what it was, but because she’d given it to him. And she knew that it would jam any bugs or recording devices in a hundred foot radius.

“You’re really starting to freak me out here, Merlyn,” she said, eyes darting up to meet his.

“I broke into my father’s office last night,” he whispered, his voice barely audible to her and she was three feet from him. They both leaned in a little closer. “On Waller’s orders. And she could fire me or worse for telling you this. But you need to know. Because whatever it is my father has you
working on, it’s big. And it literally has your name all over it.”

He spun one of the files around and Felicity opened it with shaky fingers. Inside, plans for something she couldn’t quite decipher yet, with her signature all over everything. Bits and pieces she’d designed for Dr. Markov, things that she had no clue how he’d intended to use or fit together. There were projects years in the making, data and programs and devices she’d spent months constructing alongside two men she hadn’t given a second thought about trusting.

Tommy opened his mouth to speak but she excused herself. Rushing into the bathroom, she locked the door behind her and braced herself against the rim of the sink, taking a deep breath. She caught her eye in the mirror and shook her head until her hair fell from the loose ponytail.

“Who have you let yourself become?” she pleaded at her reflection. Because the Felicity Smoak she had been, never would have let herself be blindsided like this.

It’s like she’d been asleep to what was passing her by. But not anymore. She was bound and determined to figure out what Dr. Markov was building. No more sitting idly by, and staying out of the thick of things. If she was going to be implicated in something, she wanted to know what it could do. And figure out just how bad it could get, before it was too late to stop anything.
Oliver stood in front of his bathroom mirror, willing himself to swallow down the events of last night. Adam Hunt’s face was etched into his mind. His fear and arrogance soaked into every look. After an hour of interrogation Oliver finally got the details out of him.

Someone had hacked their way into Hunt’s system. And, without tripping the internal security, stole $40 million dollars without leaving a trace. But Oliver wasn’t giving up so easily. He snuck a flash drive into Hunt’s computer upon entering, hoping it would offer some kind of lead.

He set the drive next to his sink and huffed. Someone could be targeting Starling City’s wealthy in a pseudo-Robin Hood attempt to return the balance to where the city needed it… Okay someone else could be doing it. And he wasn’t sure he could handle there being another vigilante in his city. Not when he had so much work to do. If they continued, whoever this was, would only going to get in his way. And that wasn’t a risk he was willing to take.

He opened the medicine cabinet and grabbed the first bottle. The doctors had prescribed him something to help him relax. Said that all those years away might make it tough for him to readjust to being home. But there was no medication that could ease Oliver’s mind. Nothing he could take that would make it better for him at home. Though, as he counted the green and white pills, he noticed someone had certainly thought they could find ease within the bottle. And he had a sneaking suspicion that someone was his little sister.

Tack on another thing he was ill equipped to deal with; Thea following in his footsteps.

He took the flash drive and dropped it in against the plastic sides. The thing had to stay safe, and away from prying eyes. But he also needed to check the information he gathered and he couldn’t do it in the mansion. It wasn’t safe for his family. So he stuffed the bottle in his pocket and prayed no one asked about it. And he’d have to find a time to talk to Thea about the pills. Also probably not something to bring up at home, because as worried as he was, he didn’t think involving their mother was the right thing to do yet.

As he checked the time, he groaned. His mother wanted them to have brunch before the court proceedings, and knowing Moira Queen, he was already way too late for her liking.

Oliver took the stairs two at a time, almost running into Raisa when he reached the bottom landing.

“Mr. Oliver, no need to rush. There is plenty of food left,” she said with a warm smile, letting her hand rest on his cheek. “Do not worry, Mrs. Queen had an early morning meeting with Mr. Steele.
She’s only just come home.”

“Raisa you are a lifesaver,” he whispered with a grin. “Thea in the dining room?”

“Yes, along with a guest of Mrs. Queen.”

Oliver gave a confused look, but if Raisa knew she didn’t explain who the guest was as she continued up the stairs.

Thea sat at the table, her gaze intently focused on the wall just next to where he entered. A man stood there, his arms clasped in front of himself, with a stoic look on his face.

“Hello?” Oliver asked as he eyed the man closely. His stance said military background, at least three years.

“Mr. Queen,” he replied with a curt nod.

“Who are you?”

“Name’s Rob, sir.”

He turned to Thea with a raised brow.

“Beats me, that’s three more words than I got out of him.”

“Okay,” Oliver moved around the table, taking a muffin as he sat next to his sister. “Do we know why he’s standing there?”

“Unless you developed the ability to mindread overnight,” she countered. “I think we’re stuck in suspense.”

“Where did he come from?”

But before Thea could answer him, Moira made her way into the room, securing an earring in place. “Oh I see you two have met Rob.”

“Met isn’t the word I would I’d go with,” his sister snarked.

He tried to hid his smile as he asked. “Mom, why did you acquire a large man to stand in the corner of our dining room?”

“Rob is your new bodyguard.”

He had to force himself to not physically laugh at his mother’s words. Because of all the people in his family, he was the least likely to need a bodyguard. But Moira didn’t know that, and for as long as he lived he was going to make sure she stayed in the dark. But he was not happy about this development.

“Why do I need a bodyguard?”

“Oliver this is your first real public appearance since you came home,” she said it as if he wasn’t fully aware of things. “And every news outlet worth its weight will be there to cover it.”

“That not an explanation.”

“I know very well how you’ve chosen to handle the press in the past. So Walter and I agreed that
this would be a reasonable compromise.”

He felt like he was being kept under a microscope, every one of his actions analyzed by the people who wanted to be there for him. And he could see where they were coming from. But this just made him want to run.

“Mom, I really don’t think I need a bodyguard, and I wish you’d asked me instead of just discussing it with Walter behind my back.”

“And when would I have asked you?” she shifted towards him. “You’ve made an escape from this house every evening since you’ve been back. I haven’t gotten two minutes alone with you since—”

She cut herself off, pulling in her composure. But probably a little to reign in her words before she said too much. Another thing the doctors had told his mother, he was sure. Don’t press too much about his trauma.

“Oliver this is as much for you as it is for the entire family. I will feel better knowing someone has your back out there if something were to happen,” she reached across the space resting her hand on his. “So please, until further notice, Rob is with you at all times.”

He bit back a comment, giving her a nod. “Okay, then. Rob’s my guy.”

“Thank you.”

It was just like his mother to throw a large wrench directly at the heart of his plans without realizing it. The only advantage he had had was his ability to come and go as he pleased. He was banking on that freedom to move forward with his plans. But now he had a 200 plus pound tail to lose. And he would have to find the best way to make it seem like Moira’s choice. Perfect.

“So is Tommy coming today?”

Thea’s words brought him back, and he nodded. “Yeah I talked to him before I came down. He said he had to work this morning, but he’d meet us there.”

“Well hopefully he starts taking his job more seriously. Malcolm says he barely comes into the office on time, and that’s when he decides to come in at all,” Moira said, as she took a drink of her coffee. “I think he’s not feeling challenged enough, but regardless, as a namesake he has a responsibility to uphold.”

He heard the not so subtle hint in his mother’s voice, that edge that wanted Oliver himself to take steps back towards the family business. But even before the accident, that wasn’t the life Oliver wanted, and now it felt like it was worlds away. He couldn’t devote himself to the company and his mission at the same time. And he knew the list was a more important endgame.

“I’m sure Tommy’s doing what he feels is best for himself.” Even if that included getting involved in the Triad, and then lying about it.

Oliver wanted to dedicate all his energy on the people poisoning his city. But if his best friend was getting caught up in with one of those poisons, he couldn’t very well turn a blind eye to it either. He just had to figure out what was going on, and how to get Tommy to let him help. He just hoped it wasn’t already too late.

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He’d hated telling Felicity about the files that way, but was there really ever a good way to tell
someone’s best friend that they were shoulders deep in only God and his father knew what? In the
pit of his stomach, Tommy knew that whatever the plans were for, it was devious and evil and most
likely intended to harm.

The more Tommy thought about it, the more he felt the way Felicity looked after returning from the
bathroom- nauseous but with a burning need to set things right. How could his father really be so
despicable? Was it really only as a result of what had happened to his mother years earlier? Had
losing her changed him so irreparably?

He was lost in thought when Felicity reclaimed her seat, her lower lip pulled between her teeth as she
pulled the files toward her and studied one after another.

“This is bad,” she said, her voice low and on the verge of trembling. “Like really, really bad,
Tommy.”

He raked a hand through his hair again, nails scraping across his scalp as if it might help produce
some brilliant idea to get them out of this mess. Chancing a look up at her, Tommy found Felicity’s
hands shaking as she glanced through the files. Her eyes were puffy and her lips quivered and he
felt every single feeling that rolled off her like a wave of emotion. He hated himself all over
again for bringing her into this. Everything they were both caught up in could be traced back to him
asking her for help three years ago. Even if neither of them had known what the outcome would be,
he at least only had himself to blame for his mess. Felicity hadn’t asked for any of this, and she was
the last person in the world that deserved it.

He was caught in the middle of a rock and a hard place- being tasked with exposing his own father’s
doings while still needing to protect Felicity. Perhaps it was why he’d dodged all of Waller’s calls
that morning.

“What can I do?” he asked, hoping his voice didn’t sound as hopeless as he felt.

Felicity shook her head, blonde locks bouncing from one shoulder to the other. “I...I don’t know,”
she stammered. “Does he suspect you took anything? Is that why he fired you?” Her eyes grew
panicked as her lips pressed into a thin line awaiting his answer.

“I think I downplayed it enough,” Tommy sighed, remembering the coin. “He fired me because I’m
apparently a blight to the Merlyn name. Although if this,” he gestured to the files on the table, “is
what he thinks is right, then I don’t want to be involved anyway. And I don’t want you involved
either.”

She nodded, closing the files and stacking them neatly back in front of him. With a deep breath she
pushed her chair back and stood, smoothing her clothing back down. “I should get a cup of coffee
and get back. Can’t have him suspecting anything.”

Tommy was a bit bewildered. “No,” he said, reaching for her arm. “I don’t want you going back in
there. It isn’t safe.”

“I can’t do anything to remove my name from the files without being there, Tommy,” she said, much
more composed now. “I’m not ignorant to the things he’s done or planning on doing. To just up
and stop going to work isn’t an option at this point. I need to know what the device does, now more
than ever. But make no mistake, I’m no one’s Patsy.”

He had to give her credit. For all her ire, Felicity knew just how to focus in her attention like a laser
on the things that mattered most. She’d told him once that she was relentless when it came to
mysteries, and he’d seen over the last few years just how she threw herself into things she was
passionate about. But that didn’t mean he wasn’t going to be worried as hell about her every time she stepped foot in that building.

Tommy watched as she waited in line for her coffee, the constant twisting of the ring on her pointer finger the only indication of how nervous she really was. He took a deep breath and rolled the tension out of his neck before shifting his attention back to the stack of papers. He’d have to give Waller something, even if he wasn’t sure what.

As if on cue, his phone vibrated in his pocket and Tommy groaned as he fished it out. He wasn’t ready to explain anything to Amanda yet, and he was too caught up in this whole mess to have an actual conversation with anyone else. Thankfully it was just a text message from Thea.

_bak from the dead party 2nite!!!!!!!!!!!! u better come!!!!!!!!!!!!!!_

Rolling his eyes, Tommy dropped the phone onto the files just as it buzzed again.

_And Ollie says lunch in 1hr- b there!!!!!!_

With an expletive slipping from his lips, Tommy gathered the folders and shoved them back into his messenger bag. Every time he thought he had too much going on, something else came up. Now he’d have to sit through lunch with Oliver and what? What could they possibly talk about? How he’d just gotten fired by his own father who he was investigating for the covert intelligence organization he was employed by? How Felicity was mixed up in whatever horrible thing Malcolm was planning? And that was saying nothing for what he’d been caught up in the last time they’d seen each other, at the club and being snatched by the Triad.

Tommy huffed. “Great lunch conversation,” he muttered to himself as he made his way to the door. At the very least he needed to get the files somewhere safe and protected before he met up with Oliver. He couldn’t let them fall into any hands that weren’t his own- at least until he knew how to handle the situation.

For a brief moment he considered telling Oliver, if just to get another opinion on what to do. After all, they were best friends at one point, and Tommy wanted them to be again… or still. Plus Oliver had experience with less than savory people. If their time in Russia had taught Tommy anything, it was that.

He pushed through the door and out onto the street and nearly ran into--

“Laurel?”

She smiled, a bit curtly, until her eyes caught sight of the bruises covering his skin and they went wide. “Tommy?! What happened to you?” Her fingers flew to his face, where the makeup job he’d done that morning apparently hadn’t quite done its job. “I knew you sounded weird on the phone the other day.”

“It’s fine,” he lied, taking her hands in his and pulling them from his face until they rested in the small space between their bodies. “I’m fine.” He sighed, shaking his head dismissively. “It’s stupid.. Just drank a little too much the first night that--” he broke off.

“It’s fine,” she rolled her eyes. “You can say his name. I won’t break or anything.”

Tommy grinned. “I’d never dream of assuming that the great lawyer, Dinah Laurel Lance, would be anything less than unbreakable.” He leaned in, placing a chaste kiss on her lips, and felt her smile against him.
She pushed him back then, her face a mockingly stern. “I hope he’s as beat up as you after your drunken shenanigans,” she said, a bit of anger seeping through her words.

They didn’t talk much about Oliver. He always assumed it was because Laurel was probably torn between rage at what Oliver and Sara had done and immense grief over losing them both. Tommy couldn’t imagine what that felt like, never fully letting yourself feel one emotion or the other, because they were too intermingled. Perhaps he and Laurel had more in common than he realized, because part of him wondered if that’s what the feeling welling in his gut was every time his father’s face filled his mind’s eye.

“Ollie… he’s been through a lot,” was Tommy’s only reply, before swallowing hard. It didn’t appear to soften her. “I’m actually heading over to grab lunch with him before his big resurrection ceremony at the courthouse.”

She gave him a tight smile. “Good thing I’m in the office all afternoon.”

He didn’t like this, being caught in the middle of all their leftover, unresolved drama. He hadn’t actually thought it through enough to realize it would be like this once Oliver came home, but it made him thankful, at least marginally, that things with him and Laurel weren’t as serious as they could be. He’d kept her at arm’s length more for her own protection because of ARGUS, but he had a feeling they might both need some space now that Ollie was back.

“Dinner tomorrow,” she said, dropping his hands and hiking her bag up onto her shoulder. “And no more rain checks.”

Tommy nodded, giving her shoulder a quick squeeze. She tucked her hair behind her ear with a smile and darted into the coffee shop as someone else left. He was a fool for thinking he could get close to her, as much as he might want to. He’d seen what happened when men with families got involved in things with Waller. Tommy had helped one such family disappear back before things got complicated in Starling City. The Yamashiros had been separated from their son and from each other for months before reuniting and disappearing halfway around the globe from where Tommy stood. But that was a memory for another time. Tommy had too many things to figure out to allow himself any reminiscing. So with one final glance back to where Laurel had seated herself near the window with a cappuccino in a to-go cup and her laptop opened in front of her, Tommy made his way back to his car.

His mind moved from one mess to another as he wondered just what he was going to do about his father. Perhaps he could use Oliver’s expertise after all. Maybe he’d feel out the situation once they sat down to lunch, gauge how Oliver acted before committing one way or the other. It would certainly help to have someone on his side in this whole mess. He just wasn’t sure if Oliver was that person- not without knowing what had finally prompted his friend to come home.

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She talked a good game when she was with Tommy, but truth be told Felicity was terrified. The more she looked at the documents from the last couple of years the more overwhelmed she became. She wasn’t just mentioned a few times, she was integral in bring Dr. Markov’s design to life. She coded all the algorithms, designed the casing. It was like a walking neon sign that pointed straight to her.

“Unbelievable,” she groaned as she clicked another document open. She wanted to remove her name from everything, but it wasn’t possible. If she managed to get everything, people would still have questions. There would be gaping holes where credit needed to go. And the only way to fix that would have a fall guy. And Felicity knew she wouldn’t be able to do that.
“Ms. Smoak?”

Felicity jumped at the interruption, instantly closing out the files on her computer when she saw who stood at the door to her office.

“Mr. Merlyn,” she took a deep breath, trying her best to meet his eye. “What can I do for you?”

“I thought I’d come have a chat with you about recent office developments.”

“Developments, sir?”

“I assume Tommy told you he was let go from the company.”

She nodded slowly, rearranging the folders in front of her. “He did mention that at coffee, yes.”

Then Malcolm Merlyn did something she didn’t expect. His face softened as he took a seat in front of her. “I can’t get through to him anymore. Once, a long time ago, I thought that we could see things the same way, at least when it came to this company, to the Merlyn name, but I doubt Tommy will ever be the person I need him to be.”

She didn’t reply. Not because she believed the sincerity Malcolm was spewing, but because she was too concerned that he’d see through any attempt she tried.

“I’m telling you this Ms. Smoak, because you and my son are friends. He cares for you, he trusts you, and I believe that goes both ways. Am I correct?”

“Tommy’s one of the best people I know.”

“So are you considering leaving us as well?” Now he looked more like the man she knew, his face a mix of intrigue and calculation. “Because I’ve seen this happen many times. An employee gets let go, for legitimate reasons of course, and then the hard workers leave as well. Out of some sappy nobility clause in their friendship.”

“So you came down here to make sure I wasn’t quitting?”

“You’re good at what you do Ms. Smoak. Top notch in your field, and the only person besides Dr. Markov who has been with this project practically since infancy. Replacing you now, though doable, would set our timeline back at least a year. And that’s not an option,” he said, smoothing his tie as he smiled. “I know you didn’t sign up for this promotion under normal circumstances. I’m also aware the reasoning you did has shifted greatly over the last week or so. But leaving Merlyn Global now, well it wouldn’t reflect well on your career path.”

His threat was veiled ever so slightly with concern for her future. But she heard him loud and clear. If she tried to quit, the closest Felicity would ever get to computer work again would be the service department at Tech Village. And that made her… angry. It wasn’t just that he was blackmauling her into working for him. Though that was enough to light a rage deep in her. But it was the fact that Malcolm Merlyn honestly thought that he couldn’t be touched. That he could do or say whatever he wanted and he’d get away with it. Because he had money and power, and secrets on everyone. She hated him for it. And she wanted to bring him down.

“No sir,” she said steeling her gaze before she met his own. “I was not planning on quitting. In fact, I would like to be more involved with the project.”

“You would?”
“Of course,” she replied with a smile. “Like you said, I’ve been with this project almost since the beginning. I don’t leave things half finished.”

“Well that will be up to Dr. Markov to decide,” he watched her, waiting for her reaction. But Felicity had been taught by the best Vegas had to offer, and she wasn’t letting her hand slip now. “He’s very protective over the details. But I’m glad you’re still on board. And I look forward to what comes next.”

“So do I sir.”

Malcolm excused himself, closing the door behind him. As soon as she was sure he was gone, she could feel her resolve crumble. It was one thing to think about taking on Malcolm Merlyn. But Felicity wasn’t just contemplating something, she was actively playing with fire. And she didn’t think she had the strength to control which way the wind would blow.

But she had to try. Helping take down Adam Hunt had fueled this part of her she hadn’t even realized needed tending. When the risks were high, and people’s lives were at stake, Felicity couldn’t sit back and let things happen. Not anymore, not ever again.

So if that meant getting close to Malcolm Merlyn, learning whatever he wanted to do with this device, she was going to do it. Because underneath it all she knew it was the right thing to do. She knew that nothing good was going to come out of that thing, and she might be the only person capable of stopping it.

Tommy would be angry, and worried, but that didn’t matter. She could deal with Tommy’s fears. But if she walked away now, and someone got hurt, or worse, she’d never be able to live with that. It’s not who she was.

She opened up her file on the Markov device. But this time she wasn’t looking for herself weaved into the documents. Now that she was set on keeping this thing from doing any harm, she had to piece it all together. She was going to have to figure out what it did, and just how Merlyn planned to use it.
He’d ordered a drink while waiting for Tommy. It had been a luxury he’d missed on his last year on the island. He’d gotten used to the burn of vodka that trailed through his insides as Anatoly toasted ‘Prochnost’, the way it dulled the sharp edges of the pain around his heart and mind. He almost found himself whispering the word under his breath as he drained the clear contents and placed the glass back on the table.

“Some tomato juice, tabasco and a celery stick might make drinking that a little more acceptable with lunch,” a voice said behind him.

Oliver turned to find Tommy standing there with the fakest of fake grins plastered to his face. “It could have been water,” Oliver answered.

Tommy’s face turned pensive for a moment. “Trying to recall the last time I saw you drink water,” he said, tapping a finger at his jawline. “I think you were eight.” Oliver’s eyes followed his movements as he slid into the seat across the table.

It struck him then, just how careful and calculated Tommy’s movements were. Perhaps it was just his time away that made him pick up on things, perhaps the booze had gone straight to his head on an empty stomach. Perhaps he was reading too much into things. But the solid pit in Oliver’s gut told him something was definitely up with his friend. Something more than just a random coincidental run-in with a jealous boyfriend that had been the excuse the other day.

Oliver kept his expression neutral. “You look like crap, by the way.”

Tommy’s brow quirked at that, and he fidgeted in his seat. “Way to kick a man when he’s down, Ollie,” he jested.

“Tuesday’s boyfriend come back for more?” Oliver asked, testing just how much Tommy was going to push this story.

“More like no more loafing around the ole’ namesake company,” Tommy sighed. “I hope lunch is
on you because I just got fired.”

Oliver’s brow knit into a furrow. “Malcolm fired you?” He was a bit taken aback by this news. Sure, Malcolm Merlyn had never been Oliver’s favorite person in the world, but what could have caused him to fire his own son from the company?

With a shrug and an eyeroll, Tommy leaned back in his seat. “Apparently slacking off as a VP only goes so far.” But the lightheartedness was lost somewhere between his voice and his eyes. Something was on Tommy’s mind. And it was something big. Oliver was about to ask, when Tommy spoke again. “Today isn’t about me though. It’s about an event of Biblical proportions,” he grinned and signaled to the waitress. “Another round please. And it’s on my friend.” He winked at her, and she blushed and walked back toward the bar near the front of the restaurant.

“Not sure I should show up sloshed to my resurrection hearing,” Oliver replied.

“Since when does two shots of vodka affect Oliver Queen in any way?” Tommy leaned in a little closer. “Did those Russians teach you nothing?”

Oliver stiffened and cleared his throat. “We should probably discuss ground rules for what happened…”

Tommy waved his hands. “No ground rules needed, Dad,” he said, emphasising the last word.

Oliver’s tone may have been steely, but the severity of the situation needed to be conveyed. His story had been the same every time he’d been asked. The boat went down, his father and Sara had been lost, never making it to the island, and he’d spent 5 years marooned there waiting to be rescued. He’d practiced it enough times after Russia that the lie had become second nature. And he couldn’t allow anyone to jeopardize that for him.

Before he could reply, Oliver spotted a tall head of light brown hair enter the restaurant and a grin spread across his features. A moment later, the tree-like man cemented himself at the corner of the table, looking slightly unkempt.

“Ah, Rob,” Oliver said, giving the bodyguard a firm slap on the arm. “Good of you to join us.”

Tommy’s eyes slid to the man, and then back to Oliver with a brow raised. “What’s a Rob?” he asked, more than a hint of amusement in his tone.

“One of those mail order security guards,” Oliver answered with a toothy grin. “From… wherever those robot guards are manufactured.” He turned to the man in question. “Isn’t that right, Rob?”

The man in question shifted his weight uncomfortably and cleared his throat.

“Rob-bot brain does not compute,” Tommy said, his voice monotone and mimicking a computer.

“Your mother has requested you arrive to the courthouse promptly fifteen minutes before the hearing is to commence, sir,” Rob said.

“Your mother,” Tommy repeated with a laugh. “That explains oh-so-much.” He shook his head before turning his attention to Rob. “Take a load off, man. We’ll make sure Ollie’s on time.”

“But-”

“No but’s,” Tommy said, pulling out the chair. “What’ll you drink?”
“J-just a water,” Rob answered, awkwardly positioning himself in the seat beside Oliver.

“Beer it is.”

Oliver couldn’t help the warmth that bloomed within him at the easy exchange Tommy shared with the bodyguard. He hadn’t realized how much he’d missed the sincerity in his friend’s words until he’d heard them for what he thought might be the first time since returning home.

“No, but I really…” Rob sputtered.

“It’s one beer,” Oliver said, feeling the mask of his old life slip back into place. “Surely my mother didn’t rule out drinking of any kind.”

“Actually she did,” he answered a little more firmly this time.

“Well, we won’t tell if you don’t,” Tommy said with a wink.

The waitress came and deposited two vodka shots and Tommy ordered a beer for Rob. Oliver almost told him not to, because he had a feeling Rob was one of those no-nonsense, do as you’re told types. Oliver knew those types; the type that Waller would throw in on missions when she needed extra hands and didn’t want any back-talking. Oliver generally assumed Waller found that type to be expendable. She seemed to prefer people who could think for themselves, even if it meant she had to stare them into submission a time or two. But to drink or not was Rob’s decision, he certainly wouldn’t deprive the man of that.

Oliver slid one full shot glass toward Tommy and raised the other in his own hand. They both nodded their head toward the other and then threw back the contents of their glasses. The fire trailed its way down to his empty belly once more.

“So Rob, what took you so long getting here anyway?” Oliver asked as the waitress returned with a warm colored amber beer.

“I might have been here sooner had I known exactly where you were headed when you took off on your motorcycle, sir,” he replied dryly, his eyes intently focused on Oliver.

“Somebody wasn’t briefed well enough on me,” Oliver answered. “Lunch with Tommy basically always means here.”

“Unless it’s at the other place,” Tommy grinned.

“Oh right… it could have been the other place,” Oliver said quickly.

“What’s the other pla--” Rob began, but stopped when his phone buzzed in his pocket. He quickly clicked the bluetooth attached to his right ear. “Yes Ma’am,” he said quietly. A beat. “No, I’m right here with him… I understand. Yes… we’ll be right over…. Goodbye Mrs. Qu--”

“Something tells me you’ve been summoned,” Tommy said, a bit solemnly.

“I suppose lunch will have to wait,” Oliver answered, standing from his chair. “Let me just…. He frowned when Rob stood and moved toward him. “I’m just going to the Men’s room.”

Rob nodded once, his stance rigid.

Oliver offered Tommy a quick wink and then headed for the restroom, ducking into the kitchen at the last moment and making his way out the back employee entrance. After all, what was the point
of having a security detail if you couldn’t mess with them a bit?

He considered going to the steel factory, but knew that the hearing would only be delayed, not cancelled. Besides, there was something kind of thrilling about the idea of being able to rip up his own death certificate.

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It was harder than he thought it would be, sitting next to Thea and watching as a judge read through a paragraph of legal jargon. The words and their cadences held no real meaning to him, but he ended up with a jist of things. They had to recount what happened when the Gambit went down. And Oliver had to stand in front of everyone and… lie.

He was sure there was a version of the truth that resembled the words that came from his friend. He was even sure that Oliver had let himself believe a part of this story. But there were too many pauses, too many shoulder tenses, for that to be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but. Then again Tommy was privy to information the legal system of Starling City would never get. He knew where Oliver spent most of his five years away.

No matter what happened between them, Tommy had vowed he’d never tell a soul. Even as he watched the Queen family grieve for him, he knew Oliver’s secrets were his and his alone. If he wanted to carry them, then it wasn’t any of Tommy’s business how long he chose to.

The hearing took longer than Tommy expected, and every few minutes he had to keep hitting ignore on his buzzing phone so much so that Thea took notice.

“Little early for a booty call isn’t it?” she teased with a smirk.

He rolled his eyes, finally clicking his phone over to silent. “Head of a secret government agency, actually.”

“Ha, ha, you’re so funny. But I can see right through you. You’re not as sneaky as you think you are.”

“I have no idea what you mean,” he whispered, nodding as Moira and Oliver made their way over to them. “Damn do I wish I had brought the champagne to pop. This really calls for a celebration.”

“There will be plenty of things poppin’ at the party later,” Thea said with a grin.

Oliver groaned. “I’ll take things I never want to hear from my baby sister’s mouth for a hundred, Alex.”

“Younger sister. I’m not a baby anymore. But I’m still younger than that tired reference,” she teased, before turning to Moira. “May I have the gold card to go buy a new dress?”

“You just went shopping last week,” Moira replied, but Tommy could already see her reaching for her purse. Oliver watching the exchange as close as he could. Like he was trying to learn how his family worked. Instead of just asking them questions like a normal person.

Moira handed over the card, and Thea grinned. “Later losers.” Then she practically bounced out towards the back of the court house, Moira on her heels muttering about responsible shopping.

“So lunch? I know this great chinese place a couple blocks…” Tommy trailed when he looked at Oliver. The caged look was seated in his friend’s eyes, Tommy recognized it better than he wish he did. “Or we could do a raincheck. It’s been an eventful afternoon.”
Ollie nodded. “Yeah I didn’t expect that to be so… hard.”

“Yeah living always seems harder until you’re faced with the other side.”

He hadn’t meant to say it, not really. But the second he did, he could feel the way the words burned between them. Oliver chose to live the life of a dead man. It was that simple, and no matter what he did, no matter how much he wanted to wash it out, Tommy was always going to go back to that in his head.

“I’ll see you at the party,” Oliver said, moving to get past him.

But even before Tommy started to turn he could see his friend frozen in place, a whole different look on his face. And then Tommy opened his mouth to ask why was when he spotted Laurel in front of them, a stack of case files in her hands.

“Laurel,” Ollie paused, not meeting her eyes. “Hi.”

Tommy’s phone chirped. A sound that would confuse him on a normal day, but was more bizarre when he knew he had silenced his phone.

He pulled it out, looking down at the thirty or so missed calls, and cursed to himself.

“As fun as watching this little reunion would be,” he said, earning a glare from both parties. “I have to go attend to something. I’ll see you guys later.”

He should have felt bad, leaving Oliver defenseless against Laurel. But a petty part of him didn’t care. If Oliver wanted to come back, keeping more secrets than Tommy had silverware, that was fine, but he wouldn’t help him lie to Laurel. That’s where he had to draw a line.

Though with another look at the number emblazoned on his phone, he should have reconsidered staying just a little while longer. Because he was in even less of a mood to face Amanda Waller.

When he got to ARGUS about twenty minutes later, Lyla was in the main training area with a few new recruits.

“Careful Agent Michaels,” he called from the balcony above. “Breaking them in isn’t a literal mission statement.”

“Why don’t you come down here then?” she called back, blocking a guy who tried to go for her right flank. “Up the challenge.”

“I don’t think you can handle me Lyla.”

“Oh please, I could take you blind folded.”

“Challenge accepted,” he said, ready to hop the railing and drop to the mats below. But before he could move he spotted Waller standing opposite him.

“Agent Merlyn,” her voice was crisp over and clear over the buzzing of the training center. “My office, immediately.”

“Raincheck,” he said to Lyla, as he made his way across the bridge that connected the two divisions of ARGUS.

The thought of walking to the gallows stuck with him a little too much as he followed Waller towards her office. He wasn’t sure how he would take two firings in one day. Granted this one had a
bit more likelihood of ending in actual fire, gun or otherwise.

When he entered her office, she had already managed to seat herself in her high, wingback chair. “Close the door Agent Merlyn.”

He did as he was told, taking it upon himself to sit across from her, even if she hadn’t asked him to. But she wasn’t staring daggers into him so he assumed he guessed right.

“You didn’t check in.” Her tone was even, but he’d heard this speech before. And he knew exactly where it was going.

“I had a busy morning.” He hated that Felicity’s names were still all over the documents. But he had to hand them over. Waller wouldn’t take anymore stalling. He pulled a drive from his pocket setting it on her desk. “This has all the files I was able to scan before I almost got caught, and had to rappel down a 40 story building. So thanks for that.”

“Are you trying to tell me you didn’t enjoy that part?” she quirked a brow at him as she loaded the drive into her computer. “Did you make copies?”

“Of course I did,” he wasn’t going to get caught in a lie later. “I wanted a hard copy to go over myself.”

“Because you’re curious about your father’s work?”

“Because whatever this is I want to stop it,” he gritted out. “It’s the job. The target doesn’t matter.”

“They do when emotions get too high,” Waller replied. “And we both know your emotions sometimes act as a liability rather than an asset.”

“I’m fine.” He wasn’t sure if he truly was or not. But he did know he wasn’t having this conversation with Amanda Waller. “If Malcolm is doing something dangerous or illegal, then I can damn well make sure he doesn’t get away with it.”

“And Miss Smoak?” Waller asked eyeing him closely. “Her name pops up in this document an awful lot.”

“She’s not dangerous.”

“That depends on what side of this you’re looking at.” But Amanda sat up straighter, looking away from her computer. “But she doesn’t interest me in these documents. Malcolm Merlyn and Brion Markov do. And those are the two this investigation will focus on. Now do you think you can get closer to the project?”

“Not likely since I got fired this morning.”

He explained what happened, since the night before, leaving out the part about sharing the documents with Felicity. Even if Waller signed a paper swearing his friend was off limits, he wouldn’t put her in ARGUS’s way like that.

Amanda didn’t move for a long while, but he could tell she was thinking. “It was a calculated risk. Having you retrieve the documents was the primary goal. And hopefully our engineers can decipher how the pieces fit together. And more importantly what they’ll do when they are together.”

“So that’s it? Nothing left on that front at all?”
“Not until we know what Dr. Markov is building for Merlyn Global,” Waller pulled a file from the middle of stack and opened it. “I do however have another thing you could look into for me. Martin Somers, do you know him?”

She handed him the file, the face of a man in an expensive suit looked up at him. “He’s a major player in the Starling City money circle. I heard something about him being connected to a local murder.”

“Victor Nocenti.” Waller took a breath before she continued. “According to the prosecution, Nocenti witnessed Somers taking bribes in order to smuggle drugs into Starling City.”

“But the Triad run the drug trade in the city.”

“Exactly,” Waller said. “And if Mr. Somers is working with the Triad, we need that connection neutralized.”

“I can’t go against the Triad again Amanda. It’s a security risk, you said so yourself.”

“I did say that,” she took the liberty to lean forward, flipping to the next page. “Look who CNRI has officially appointed as the plaintiff’s legal counsel.”

The candid of Laurel was only a few months old, and Tommy all but shoved the folder back across the desk at Waller.

“So if the safety of Starling City isn’t motivation enough, if Martin Somers’ victim isn’t, maybe Miss Lance will be.”

And he hated that she was right. That despite the distance and as casual as he tried to keep things, Waller saw through him enough to know where to hit him the hardest.

“What do you want me to do?”

“I want you to keep Miss Lance safe, and alive. Martin Somers isn’t going to go away without a good lawyer on the opposing side. But I also need you to glean as much as you can from this case.” Her tone was all business, so Tommy knew there was more to it. “We need to know how deep Somers connection is with the Triad.”

“Because they’re a threat.”

“Yes.”

“Then why send just me?” He could probably do this alone. It didn’t seem like he’d be dealing directly with the Triad. And even if he had to engage, he wouldn’t get caught off guard again. “I could use Lyla on this.”

“Agent Michaels has her own mission. Until further notice she’ll be out of contact.”

“Since when?”

“Five minutes ago,” Waller replied, but her tone cut. “She’ll return when she’s done. And until then you need to watch out for Martin Somers. He killed once to protect his deals. He won’t hesitate to do it again.”

Tommy knew she was right. He hated admitting it, but he couldn’t focus on whatever mission Lyla couldn’t include him in. Not when he had to keep Laurel out of the Triad’s crosshairs.
Felicity’s stomach growled in protest to the fourth cup of coffee she swallowed down as she typed furiously on her keyboard. She’d shut herself in her office for the last six hours since meeting with Tommy, her vision beginning to blur from constantly staring at the screen. It briefly crossed her mind that perhaps buying a second Keurig for her office wasn’t the best idea, and that days like the one she was in the middle of were the reason why.

A knock sounded on her door, barely registering in her mind. Another, more insistent knock followed just seconds later.

“Miss Smoak?” Malcolm’s voice called.

She quickly minimized all her open tabs. “Come in,” she said, pulling open a new screen with Markov’s latest commission from her, in the event that Malcolm wanted to see what she was working on. But when the door swung open, Felicity noticed that Mr. Merlyn was not alone.

“Color me confused,” Felicity said with a frown.

“Mr. Merlyn offered to bring me up,” Thea said, with a smile that read more like ‘save me’ than anything else. “But you look like a caged animal. How long have you been sitting there?”

“Huh?” Felicity answered, standing from her desk chair. “Sorry, just kinda got in the zone and only took breaks for coffee.”

“Caffeine buzz,” Thea grinned. “No wonder you look--” she broke off, her eyes darting to Malcolm.

“Well, I will leave you ladies to it,” Malcolm said, with a look that could only be described as slimy. “Miss Smoak, perhaps next time your social calendar can wait until after business hours? But since you came in this weekend, you might as well take the rest of the afternoon off.”

Felicity felt her cheeks flush as he turned and walked back down the hall toward the elevator bank. What time was it? She’d lost track of the entire day.

“Oh god, I tuned most of it out,” Thea said with a dismissive wave of her hand. “Too busy planning this party for tonight. Which is actually why I’m here…” she paused, grinning.

Felicity shook her head. “I don’t like where this is going.”

“Come on, I need a new dress and you need to get out of your office,” Thea said, turning on her heel. “Correction, you have permission to get out of your office.” The younger Queen sibling pouted. “Please Felicity. I need some normalcy and shopping with you always makes me feel better.”
With a sigh, Felicity felt her resolve wavering. She was hardpressed to find anything she could say no to Thea about, and she had to admit with everything that had happened over the last few days, a shopping trip seemed like kind of a perfect distraction.

And kind of a perfect distraction it was. At least for her Malcolm problem. Felicity and Thea had spent a couple of hours shopping for a new dress for Thea to wear to her brother’s party. But Felicity had quickly found that a distraction from one problem brought with it a host of others.

“You never told me what you thought of Ollie,” Thea said from her dressing room.

Namely problems like that-- Felicity fought a groan in reply. It wasn't the first time Thea had mentioned her brother on their shopping trip and Felicity was beginning to detect a faint whiff of a setup on the horizon. Thea wasn't nearly as versed in covert matchmaking as she'd like to believe.

“What's there to say?” Felicity said finally, not wanting to play it too much the other way. “He's certainly handsome. I don't know what he ate on that island but it did him a world of good.” She froze, and then fought to recover. “I mean… I remember seeing this photo of him once in your mom’s office and he was handsome of course, but in that fratboy kind of way. Now he's…” she allowed the groan to actually escape her lips this time. She definitely hadn't meant to be quite so forthcoming with information.

Thea emerged from her dressing room, a grin on her face. “Sounds like someone's got a crush.”

“What?!” Felicity exclaimed. “I don't. I mean I don't even know him. I mean Carter and I…”

“Relax woman,” the teenager giggled. “No one is on trial here. You're allowed to find other people attractive and interesting even though you're dating someone. Besides it's not like your thing with Carter is really going anywhere.” Thea met the blonde’s eyes for confirmation on that fact.

“I'll have you know we had two phone dates last week,” Felicity said, defiantly.

Thea whistled. “Someone break out the bridal magazines,” she deadpanned.

Felicity felt her cheeks flush. “Isn't this weird,” she asked. “Talking about your brother like that?”

“You did?” Felicity's brow furrowed. “You never told me that.”

Thea leaned against the dressing room door, playing with the tag on the dress she had on. “Well he was dead… supposedly. Didn't seem like the kind of thing to bring up. Anyway, this dress is a huge no. I look like 1974 threw up all over me.”

Felicity laughed as Thea did a quick twirl and then disappeared into the dressing room to put on another dress. Leave it to her to drop a bomb like that and then walk away like it was nothing. But Felicity's mind couldn't let it go that quickly. How would she and Oliver get along, back in the same city, surrounded by the same people? How would they interact when they weren't running from covert government agents or reuniting long lost family members? Could they ever have some sort of normalcy between them? Did normalcy even exist after all they'd been through?

“I almost forgot!” Thea’s voice cried, her hand materializing over the top of the door with a hanger on her fingers. “I got this one for you to try on.”

From over the top of the door all Felicity could see was black straps. She had to admit, she was a bit intrigued. She stretched up onto her tiptoes and took the hanger from Thea’s hand. She held it up to
get a better look, and then grinned. It was cut a little on the short side, but the material crisscrossed in
the front, leaving a keyhole cutout in the midriff area. It was exactly her style, which meant
shopping with Thea was about to get a thousand times more dangerous.

She knew there was no occasion that would call for such a dress, but once she put it on, she needed
to have it. She stepped out of the dressing room with a smile plastered on her face and Thea
whistled.

“I have epic taste in clothes,” the teen grinned, motioning for Felicity to spin for her. “And it
screams Felicity.”

Felicity did as instructed, spinning around. She felt confident and beautiful and it almost made the
events of the last several days fade from her mind. Almost.

“That dress is what you’re wearing to the party tonight,” Thea concluded.

“But I--”

“No buts.”

“Thea really, I wasn’t going to--”

“You have to come, Felicity. Ollie could use a familiar face.”

Felicity froze. Had Oliver said something to his sister about Russia? Surely he hadn’t…

“Don’t look at me like that,” Thea said, rolling her eyes. “I’m not taking no for an answer, even if I
have to kidnap you.” She looked more serious than Felicity had ever seen the girl before. There was
something in Felicity’s gut that made her wonder if perhaps Thea’s insistence was due more to her
own insecurities than to those she was projecting on her brother.

“No felonies necessary,” Felicity said with a sigh. “I’m not staying long because I have too much
work to do…” she paused, glancing down at the dress again. “But I need a reason to wear this dress,
and a party seems as good a reason as any.”

“Yessss,” Thea said with a little dance. And then she paused, a devious glint in her eye. “I can’t
wait to see the look on Ollie’s face when he sees you.”

Felicity swallowed hard, a blush creeping into her cheeks. Because, if she were being honest, she
might just be anticipating the same thing. Maybe.
Chapter Notes

Hey lovelies! We're back with another update! And before we get to it, we just once again want to thank you all so much for the love and support you've shown us. We're so grateful to each and every one of you. We know everyone was excited for the party, so we won't keep you in suspense any longer! xoxo Cassie

Oliver hadn’t known what to expect when he had come face to face with Laurel for the first time. He’d been so concerned with how his mother would react, or Thea, about seeing Tommy and Felicity again. He hadn’t had time to prepare.

She was angry. Worse than he had ever seen her before. A white hot, anger that ghosted Sara onto her features a few too many times for him to maintain eye contact.

They didn’t speak long, but her words had burrowed into him like a weevil, “I hoped you’d rot in hell a whole lot longer than five years”. He deserved her pain and hatred. He deserved every words she shot at him. And he agreed wholeheartedly.

Oliver had done things over the last few years that were more than just survival. He’d become the very worst version of himself, and if he could trade places with Sara he would do it in a heartbeat. Because she deserved to make it off that island, to make it home. Not Oliver.

When Laurel had left him, a part of him wanted to tell her he was sorry. But he knew he was being naive. She didn’t want apologies. And there were no words he could ever hope to find that would make what he did okay.

So he would do what he’d learned to do best. He’d push this guilt down next to the rest of it, and he’d get back to work.

Hunt was the first name to be scratched off his father’s list, and even if Oliver himself hadn’t played much of a part in it, he still considered it a plus in the right column. But with the next target he was going to have to take a more direct approach.

Martin Somers. The man was standing accused of a contract hit on a former employee. If the rumors were true, he could have ties to the Triad. And the Triad had already spelled trouble once since he had returned.

He didn’t understand if Tommy had just assumed he’d be gullible enough to believe his friend’s story about some smack down given by a fling’s boyfriend, or if his best friend thought it was quid pro quo to lie straight to his face. *It’s what you’re doing right?* The voice cut through him like a razor. He wanted to believe what he was doing was different. He lied to protect Tommy, and the rest of the people he cared about. What excuse could his friend have for lying about getting jumped and taken by the Triad?

There was a scratching in the back of his head that threatened to shift everything. Tommy and the Triad. Martin Somers and the Triad. Somers had stock in Merlyn Global, almost every big name in Starling did, but Somers was also in the pocket of one of the most dangerous gang outlets in the city.
limits. If he had a deal with Tommy, and things didn’t go his way… Could Somers have sent Triad to take care of Tommy? And if that was the case, how did Tommy manage to make it out alive? No one had luck like that.

He wanted the vigilante to pay Martin Somers a visit, to get his sins aired out in the open, but he also promised Thea a party. And a Queen could be late to their own soirée, but missing it all together would raise more than a few brows.

So Somers would have to wait, along with the itch for a bow string between his fingers.

“Whiskey neat,” he called to the bartender over the roar of the crowd.

He shouldn’t be surprised this many people showed up to his ‘Back from the Dead’ party. Music, booze, and a chance to be spotted next to Oliver Queen, usually would draw in quite a crowd. But the sea of faces that surrounded him did nothing to ease the anxiety that coiled in his shoulders. **Threats. Targets. These are the the two ways you divide the world. It makes you a good soldier, not so good a companion.**

Anatoly’s words echoed to him across the memory. It was one of the last conversations they had before he’d left Russia behind him, and the thoughts of the tattered city sat like iron in his veins. He knew leaving meant tearing a hole in an alliance he had fought to earn, but he couldn’t stay there any longer.

He knew the person he had become, he saw the monster seated behind his eyes every time he glanced at his reflection. But the things he did for the Bratva, the things Anatoly asked him to do. They soured even the best of days he had. There were some things he’d never be able to shake, some blood that would never wash out, but that didn’t mean he had to keep doing them.

He had saved every member of the Knyazev family enough times by the end of the last year that Anatoly was practically ready to inter him into the family crypt, giving him a final resting place among the family that had come before them.

And even if he hated the things he was doing, Oliver had almost said yes. He almost scratched out that last little hole where a piece of Oliver Queen still lived. But then he’d lost an innocent, watched her die because of the darkness that consumed the Bratva. That night, he had found his father’s notebook in an old jacket, and he knew that couldn’t do it anymore. His father left him with a mission, one that he still was unsure if he was worthy to complete. But it didn’t matter, because it was about family. And the one thing he had learned in the Bratva was that family, above all else, was the most important loyalty you honored.

“There you are.”

He turned towards Thea’s voice, her raspy tone carrying just barely over the changing chords of the music. But Thea wasn’t alone.

He didn’t know if it was the fourth glass of whiskey, or the fog that settled in the club, but the pull to Felicity was stronger than it had been the night before. Her dress clung to her frame, and gave him vivid flashes to the last time he had seen her in a dress like that, in another smokey club half a world away.

“It is my party,” he said plastering on a smile they stepped up to the bar. “One that you really are too young to be at.”

“Can we please reschedule what I’m sure will be a riveting protective, big brother lecture for a later
“date,” Thea replied motioning to the bartender. “We’ll have two cosmos please.”

“What she means is,” Felicity cut in, rolling her eyes at his sister. “We’ll both have bottled water, because she’s underage and I’m driving.”

The bartender nodded to her, and Felicity smiled.

God he had missed that smile. But every time he saw it, whether in his mind or gracing her face, he felt the jagged motion of someone ripping out his insides over and over again.

“Felicity right?” he said in way of greeting. Because they weren’t supposed to be familiar with each other. He wasn’t supposed to be focusing on the way the straps of her dress hugged her shoulders, or how the cutout at the midriff exposed her pale, glorious skin.

“Nice to see you again,” she was trying to sound casual, but he could hear a little bit of edge to her voice. Like she was just as lost as he was in the navigation.

Thea was watching them closely, and it took more effort than he wanted to admit to pull his gaze from Felicity and focus on his little sister.

“That the dress you bought when you ditched Mom at the courthouse?”

“Sure let’s talk about ditching people,” she retorted with a grin. “Where is your security detail by the way?”

“Security detail?” Felicity asked.

“Yeah our mom got Ollie a bodyguard. He’s cute in a clean cut-never-had-fun-a-day-in-his-life, kind of way.”

“Rob is around,” Oliver replied. Because he did not need to listen to his sister and Felicity discuss the attractiveness of anyone, let alone someone he could name.

“Well, so are a couple of my friends,” Thea said, sucking in a breath and turning to Felicity. “Mind if I mingle for a few songs? I know you came here for me, but I have to make an appearance with these people. I promise I’ll be right back.”

“Go, have some fun,” Felicity said. “Legal fun.”

Thea rolled her eyes again, but a cheshire smile soon sat on her features. “Ollie, be your charming self and keep her company for me, please.”

Felicity looked at him with panic. “I don’t need--”

But Thea was already being pulled off by a group of her friends.

Then they were alone. But not. Because there were people all around them. At least a hundred bodies pressing up against each other, and swaying around to the music. Even with the partygoers, he could still recall the feeling of the two of them back at the club in Russia. Alone with the whole world shut away from them.

Oliver made quick work of downing his drink, before he turned back to the bar. “My sister, ladies and gentleman.”

“All the subtlety of a brick wall,” Felicity retorted, as the bartender passed her two water bottles, his eyes lingering on her a little longer than necessary. Oliver felt the flash of anger rise in his own, but
he shook it off and returned his gaze to her as she continued. “Seems to run in your family.”

“Meaning?”

Their eyes were locked in a battle of wills, each daring the other to look away first. But neither seemed to want to give in. “Just that Thea isn’t the only Queen to work their magic on me.” She paused as her words seemed to catch up with her brain. “God, I meant your mom setting me up with Carter. You know she and Thea have similar drives to influence other people’s lives.”

“They’re good at that,” he said trying to draw himself back from the conversation. But he wasn’t sure how to detangle himself from her completely. That wasn’t entirely true, he had a way. But he didn’t want to do that to Felicity. “Speaking of, where is your friend, Carter?”

“Wow guess the subtlety thing isn’t just the women in your family.” She turned until her back was to the bar, and he was glad for the distance from her eyes. But it just meant that he was free to keep watching her. “To answer your question, he’s at home. He has surgery in the morning.”

“And the work you said you had to do?”

“Why are you so interested in my personal life?” she asked, her voice dropping as she faced him again. “Why can’t you just… Why does this have to be so hard?”

He shrugged. He didn’t have the answers she wanted. Because the truth was things didn’t have to be like this. He was making it hard. It wouldn’t take much effort to slide his hand over and let his fingers trail up her arm. To look at her and pull her close, to kiss her like he had thought about doing for the last two years.

But that was the memories and whiskey conspiring against him. The drink in his hand may have steadied his need for a bow, but it wasn’t helping with the rational decisions.

He caught sight of Tommy from across the crowd, his friend headed towards the bar as he dodged his way around people and outstretched drinks.

“Hey buddy,” he greeted, planting himself on the barstool next to Oliver. “See you already found yourself a hot blonde to hook up with…” Tommy’s words trailed off when Felicity flicked her head up to look at him. “Felicity, how’s it goin’?”

“Tommy,” she greeted, the rest of her sentence seemed stuck somewhere in midair. As she looked between both of them, he could see a million thoughts pass across her face. But instead she shook her head. “I’m gonna go find Thea. Make sure she’s not getting into too much trouble.”

Oliver couldn’t help it, he watched her as she weaved through the throng of people, disappearing like she hadn’t been there at all.

He forced himself to look back at Tommy, but he knew his face wasn’t the mask he’d been trying to keep up the last few days.

Tommy gave him a tense smile. “Did I interrupt something?”

He signaled to the bartender once more, motioning for him to bring over another tumbler. As the man brought the glass, filling both with the cool amber liquid, Oliver finally spoke. “Nope.”

But it was almost like he wasn’t even trying to lie.
Tommy might have felt bad about accidentally labeling Felicity as Oliver’s hook-up, that is, if he weren’t so stressed about everything going on at once. Oliver coming home, the Triad, Waller having him look into his own father, Felicity being involved, needing to protect Laurel. It was like his entire life was converging into one big clusterfuck and he wasn’t quite sure how to sort out the pieces. So sure, maybe he wasn’t quite on top of things, and yeah, he’d probably have to apologize to Felicity later for the mix up, but right now Tommy just needed to get his head back in the game.

He picked up the tumbler full of whiskey and downed it in one swallow, allowing the familiar warmth bloom within him. Instantly, Tommy felt himself relax; it was like slipping into an old comfortable pair of jeans- just something about it that allowed him to fully exhale.

Silence loomed between them for a long moment; he and Oliver would have to come to some sort of arrangement at some point, but Tommy was a little worried to find out exactly what that would entail. “So you and Felicity…”

“Have officially met,” Oliver finished. “Last night. She and her boyfriend--” the word came out like a strained growl. “--came over for dinner.”

“Yeesh,” Tommy replied. “Sorry about that. I probably should have told you--”

Oliver shook his head. “She didn’t owe me anything.” His tone was firm and dismissive. Clearly that was all that they were going to say on the subject. But Tommy watched as Oliver’s eyes followed her across the floor as she sought out Thea.

“She really took Thea under her wing when we got back from Russia,” Tommy said, before motioning the bartender for a refill. “They’ve been thick as thieves ever since.” He cleared his throat. “I think she wanted to make sure your sister had someone there for her, even if it couldn’t be you.”

His friend’s eyes slid shut, shoulders tense. He stayed like that so long that Tommy actually wondered if he’d fallen asleep. But then his eyes opened and found Tommy’s. “Thanks for coming to the party,” Oliver said, his voice cool and collected, and then he stood and disappeared into the crowd.

“Any time…” Tommy said, blowing out a long breath, even if Oliver was already too far away to hear him.

His phone buzzed in his pocket and Tommy pulled it out, finding a text from Laurel on the screen. Where are you? it asked.

He sent her a quick message back, letting her know he was at the bar. He was a bit surprised she’d agreed to come, considering it was a party for Oliver and how frustrated she’d been with him the other night on the phone. But she’d seemed okay when he’d run into her that morning. Maybe she understood that Tommy and Oliver would always be friends, and that meant being around Oliver from time to time if she wanted to be around Tommy.

“Who are all these people?” Laurel’s voice asked, amusement mixed with a hint of disdain.

Tommy spun around in his seat, snaking an arm around her back and placing a kiss on her cheek. “You made it,” he said with a bright smile. Somehow, despite the insanity around him, Tommy found solace in her presence. “And I’m not sure even I know them all,” he said, to answer her question. “Just people looking to say they met the billionaire who came back from the dead.”

Laurel rolled her eyes but bit back whatever reply was on the tip of her tongue. “So you never told
me what happened to your face,” she said, claiming the seat beside his. “What kind of trouble did you two find yourselves in the other night?”

Tommy hesitated. He hated lying to Laurel, probably more than anything else about his job. But he couldn’t put her at risk by telling her, especially now that Waller had tasked him with keeping her safe from Somers. “Underground fight ring,” he answered with a grin. “You know how it is when the boys get together.”

“I know how it used to be,” she answered, slinging an arm up onto his shoulder to lean in a little closer. “But I suppose I foolishly thought those days were over.”

A knot formed in his stomach. They were getting dangerously close again, to the territory they usually avoided. Territory which included genuine concern, monogamy and unrealistic expectations of what his life could be outside ARGUS. He wanted all of those things, and he was realizing more and more that he wanted them with Laurel. But when Waller had given him the out, he said no. And it wasn’t because he didn’t want all of those things, but rather because he knew what dangers the world held, and he knew he couldn’t live his life blissfully ignorant of that anymore. Not when he had the capabilities to do something about it.

He trailed a finger down her arm. “Don’t know if those days will ever really be over,” he said, keeping his tone light, despite the anger forming in her eyes.

“What is this?” she asked, eyes narrowed. “Is this some game to you? I mean I know I might be a little hot and cold about this whole thing, but so are you Tommy. Last week you were this sweet, compassionate, funny guy, and suddenly Oliver shows back up in town and you’re acting like I’m just some flavor of the week. Is that really all I am to you, Tommy?”

Laurel turned on her heel and stalked off.

Tommy jumped up from his seat, calling after her as he waded through the crowd behind her. “Laurel wait!” he yelled, closing the distance between them. He’d just caught her arm when Oliver appeared beside him.

A scoff of disgust left her lips and Laurel rolled her eyes, pulling out of his grasp and disappearing through the door and out onto the small patio where several people stood in small clusters, most of them smoking.

“So…” Oliver said, eyes trained on Tommy. “You and Laurel, huh?”

Thea appeared at his side in the same instant. “I didn’t say anything,” she said, holding her hands up in defense.

“Me either,” Felicity added, completing their small circle near the door. She glanced at Tommy only briefly, her expression unreadable.

“They didn’t have to,” Oliver said, his face a mask of indifference. “Usually arguments like that are pretty self-explanatory.”

Tommy swore under his breath; thankfully the music drowned out any remnants of his words. He’d wanted to tell Oliver about Laurel, but he wanted to do it right, and in his own time. “Listen, I wanted to tell you—”

Oliver shook his head and Tommy watched as his friend’s eyes slid across to the blonde standing across from him. “No need,” Oliver said, but his tone held more weight. “You don’t owe me any explanation.” It was a long moment with his eyes locked on Felicity’s before Oliver blinked and met
Tommy’s eyes instead.

Thea blew out a long whistle. “Well as fun as the last five minutes have been, I think we could all use a shot… or twelve.”

“Thea, I don’t think—” Felicity started, but the teen had already disappeared in the crowd.

“I’ve got her,” Oliver said, his voice a low growl.

Felicity’s lower lip was between her teeth and she nodded but didn’t respond. This time it was Felicity who watched as Oliver walked away.

Tommy cleared his throat. “Well that certainly could have gone better,” he said with a sigh. “I don’t know why I didn’t say anything to him earlier about Laurel. I should have known. But this morning with my dad and then the whole device thing. I just wasn’t thinking—”

“Tommy,” Felicity said, taking ahold of his arms and meeting his gaze. “He sounded sincere when he said it was okay. Besides, he’s right. For all we knew after we left he—” her voice broke off suddenly and she swallowed hard. “Anything could have happened. To any of us.” Her eyes turned glassy for the briefest of moments and she looked like she might lose her composure. It was one of the only moments that Tommy had seen any chink in the armor she wore. But she took a moment and when she spoke again her voice held less emotion. “We’re going to do what we’ve always done, you and I, Merlyn.” She smiled, to convince him or herself, he wasn’t sure. “We’re going to take it one day at a time.”

“Together?” Tommy asked, feeling the weight on his chest lift.

“Hell yeah,” she answered back.

Tommy smiled. “Thanks. And hey, about the whole calling you Oliver’s hook-up thing from before?”

She smiled brightly. “Oh, I’m totally going to kill you for that.”

“Yeah,” he shrugged. “Kinda figured.”

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“You should go talk to her,” Felicity said over the steady roar of party sounds below. She and Tommy had moved up to the balcony of the club, which gave them a bit more privacy to talk, but still not quiet enough that anyone could over hear them. “I mean she did come to the party of her cheating, ex-boyfriend for you. That kind of devotion warrants a conversation.”

“That’s just thing,” he huffed, leaning back against his chair. “I can’t be fully honest with her, and if I lie she’s gonna see through it. God, it was easier when things weren’t so intense.”

“Easier for you or for her? And hint here the answer is not her.”

Tommy barely lifted his head to eye her. “I know that. I know Laurel deserves more from me than the stupid playboy persona, but I don’t know how to give that to her. I can’t tell her that it was my night job that gave me these bruises, and I can’t tell her the reason I got fired from my day job is because I had to investigate my father. Don’t you see? She deserves someone who doesn’t have to keep the important things from her.”

She understood where Tommy’s reasoning was coming from. Amanda Waller wasn’t someone who
she’d wish into anyone’s life, especially not someone as good as Laurel. But she also knew her friend might have more reasons for keeping the lawyer at arms length.

“Are you sure this isn’t about Oliver?” She asked, trying to keep her voice as even as she could. They didn’t usually talk about this, but she couldn’t help but wonder if Tommy didn’t want to take a step forward with Laurel because of their shared connection.

“Smoak, come on.”

“I mean he and Laurel were a thing for a long time,” she pressed, hating the fact that she couldn’t just drop it. “And maybe, some part of you doesn’t want to broach that history.”

“And maybe you’re projecting your conflicting feelings onto my relationship,” he quipped.

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

Tommy sat up, facing her as best he could at the angle of their chairs. “Felicity I love you, you know that, but I’ve known Ollie since before I can remember. I know what he’s like around people he has feelings for. He can try and pretend like he’s a different person now, but I see through that. Just like I can see through you too.”

She felt like her feelings were on exhibit, and Tommy was picking through every glance and facial twitch.

“Tommy I--”

“I’m not saying that you’re not making a point, because I hear you. But I am saying that you’re looking at my relationship like it’s yours,” he shrugged, placing a hand on hers. “You have been in this lull since Russia, and no amount of time you spend with Carter Bowen is going to change that. So please don’t act like I’m pushing Laurel away for Oliver’s sake. Because you’re clinging to a guy you barely even like because you’re afraid to feel anything stronger.”

“I’m not clinging to Carter.”

“Again, I love you,” he said as he stood up, grabbing his drink. “But you kinda are. And until you deal with that, you’re never gonna be happy. Not with him, not with anyone. But I think you already know that.”

She wanted to refute his words, wanted to tell him he was being stupid, but she didn’t think she could. Because a part of her knew he was right. She knew her relationship with Carter was something she had been using to mark time for a few months. And then she heard Oliver was coming back, and it was like every molecule in her came alive. She hated it. She didn’t want a half fling she had over two years ago to have this much power over her. But her feelings for Oliver hadn’t ever went away. They had laid dormant at the bottom of her heart, waiting for a fresh breeze to kick them up again. And here she was getting caught up in the chaos, in his chaos. It was too much for her to handle.

Tommy left before she could say another word, and she wasn’t sure if she was grateful or not. She didn’t want to be left with these thoughts swimming around inside her head.

Her phone beeped, and she barely could contain the lump in her stomach when she saw the name flash across the screen. How was she going to speak to Carter after that?

“Hey,” she said, pressing the phone to her ear. “What’s up?”
“I got the interview!” He said, his excitement bouncing through the speaker.

“Interview?” She felt a pain settle in her head.

“Are you okay, you sound like you’re somewhere loud?”

“Thea dragged me out to a party. It’s not important,” she said in a rush. “You were saying?”

“Well Seattle Grace called, I told you I was looking at their hospital before I moved back home, and they said they have an opening in their neurosurgery department. I mean they have a couple other prospects, but it looks promising.”

“Seattle?” It was like his words were blurring together, and she couldn’t quite follow the path he was taking. “Carter, I--”

“Nothing it settled, I might not even take the job, but I thought I should talk to you about it. Because you’re important to me Felicity.”

“Felicity!”

Her head shot up, Thea was coming closer to her, a drunken grin on her face. Apparently Oliver hadn’t been able to keep his sister away from the bar.

“I have to let you go,” she said into the phone. “I’ll call you tomorrow, and we can talk.”

“I’m leaving for the interview tomorrow,” he sounded dejected. “But I’ll be back on Friday. Can we have dinner then?”

“Yeah, dinner sounds--”

Thea dropped into the seat next to her, grabbing Felicity’s phone. “Miss Smoak is unavailable to complete this call right now, mostly because she is supposed to be having fun. She’ll call you back when she returns to her mature side tomorrow.” She ended the call and dropped the phone into Felicity’s lap. “Hi.”

She wanted to be upset at her young friend. But truth was, she really didn’t want to deal with the Carter thing tonight, and Thea had kept her from that. And now she had something to focus her attention on.

“I see your brother failed to keep you from finding the alcohol.”

“Well they don’t call me Speedy for nothing,” she grinned. “Besides Broody Oliver came out tonight, and he’s not nearly as interesting a conversationalist.”

“Thea, what’s going on?”

She had seen Thea drunk before, the younger Queen having called her a few times for a ride home from a club or a friend’s house. But when they went out together, they had an agreement. Thea had always seemed like she wanted to be more like Felicity. Which was a scary thing, to have someone look up to you with such intensity, but it also made her feel proud. Some days Felicity felt like she was floating through her life, like she never would settle on what she needed to be. She knew somehow that helping the people she cared about would always be a thing she needed to do.

“He doesn’t want anything to do with me.” Thea said, tears glistening in her eyes. “You know I spent the last five years hoping and praying he’d come home. Every birthday, his and mine, I’d wish...
for a miracle. And now he’s here, and it doesn’t feel like a miracle.” She turned her head to face Felicity. “Ollie thinks I’m just a kid, that I don’t notice things. But even I can see he’s not really here. That he doesn’t want to be.”

“He loves you,” Felicity replied, pulling Thea into a hug. “I know things seem hard right now, and they are. But you have to remember, you spent five years apart. You don’t know what he went through, but he doesn’t know how things were for you either.”

“Then he should talk to me.”

“You’re right,” she wiped the tears from Thea’s cheek. “He should definitely talk to you. But maybe what he needs is for you to talk to him.”

“Maybe,” Thea replied, taking a deep breath, then smiled. “You’re a wise one Felicity Smoak.”

“Trust me, I’m not that wise.”

“Sure you are,” her friend said, nudging Felicity’s side.

“I’ve been looking everywhere for you.”

Felicity froze, turning towards Oliver as he approached them. He seemed frayed as he looked at the two of them, his eyes skating glances at her.

“I bet,” Thea muttered, but it was only loud enough for Felicity to hear. Then she cleared her throat. “What do you want?”

“Speedy come on, It’s late.” He sounded wary, like he was waiting for the backlash of his words. “I’m taking you home.”

Thea looked ready to protest, but Felicity didn’t think the Queen siblings were ready to go a few rounds, especially in such a public place.

“How about I take her?” she said, meeting Oliver’s eyes. She hated the weight in it, how much static and emotion could be in a single look. “I need to go in early tomorrow anyway, so I can drop her off on my way.”

He quirked his brow at her. “The manor is on your way home?”

“Indirectly,” she mused, standing up, with a hand outstretched to Thea. “Trust me, I’ll get her home safe.”

Thea was swaying on her feet, and Felicity thought for a second like she might need Oliver’s help to get her outside. But Thea took a few steps away from their seats, and she seemed to be moving just fine as she walked towards the stairs.

“I owe you,” Oliver said before Felicity moved around him to follow her friend.

“You really don’t, Oliver,” she replied. “But you might consider talking to your sister when she sobers up. I think it could be good for the both of you.”

She didn’t let him respond, instead she walked to Thea, helping her friend take the stairs one at a time. If Oliver was watching them she didn’t know, and she certainly didn’t dare look back.

She was thinking about that chaos again, the one that stirred when Oliver came back. And she wasn’t ready to deal with it. She had too much else going on. Maybe once things settled with work
and with Carter, she could try to sort out her feelings for Oliver. Or maybe it was time to try and find away to move past them. Tommy was right, she’d been stuck since coming back from Russia, and maybe Oliver’s return was the thing she needed to finally put the past behind her. For herself and for her own happiness.
Hello lovelies,
Welcome to another week of this amazingness. As always the comments and love for this fic have been incredible. I mean I can't tell you how much this week sucked for me personally, and how great it felt reading your comments. They really helped. So thank you.

On another note, I also love how much you guys have been enjoying matchmaker, Thea Queen, and her obvious, but heartfelt attempts to hook her brother and friend up, have been some great writing moments for us. It's been fun playing with those relationships.

I'm kind of surprised that if anyone caught our little joke/nod-to-other-shows, shout out last chapter, you didn't comment on it. Maybe the McDreamy jokes are a little old even in fanfic? But we'll have to see what comes of that for our... dear Carter.

I should wrap this up so you guys can do what you obviously came here to do.

Much love,
Kayla

P.S. A certain canon character makes an appearance this chapter. And I hope you love them as much as we do.

“Mom,” Oliver huffed, dropping himself onto the couch. “I don’t think you’re understanding me. It isn’t that I don’t want to come back to the company, it’s that I’m not going to.” They’d been having this run around for a week now. Moira telling him he needed to take a place in Queen Consolidated, despite the fact that he had zero business acumen. Well, perhaps that wasn’t completely true. But as far as his mother needed to know, the only knowledge he had gained during his five years away was survival skills. He still hadn’t completely adjusted to being back in Starling; despite his best attempts, it was harder to rectify the side of himself that wanted to be happy back home with his family, and the side that lived in the shadows, righting his father’s wrongs.

“Sweetheart, all I’m asking is that you take a walk through with Walter and I. I know it doesn’t seem like you’d fit in--”

Oliver’s eyes slipped closed as he breathed deeply and calmly. “I spent five years in hell, not getting my MBA. I would do far more harm to the company than good.”

“Well you can’t do nothing,” Moira cried, her temper finally getting the better of her. “You come and go at all hours of the day. You’ve barely said more than three sentences to anyone in this house in days. You intentionally skip out on Rob, despite his best efforts to keep you safe.” She paused,
taking a few deep breaths before smoothing out her pantsuit and continuing. “I just want to make sure that you’re not withdrawing too much from the people that love you. I can’t imagine how difficult this has been on you, but—”

Her voice broke, and Oliver stood to his feet and crossed the room in three long strides, pulling her against his chest. She relaxed a little in his embrace, and Oliver swallowed the lump in his throat.

“I didn’t realize…” he began, and then paused. “QC isn’t the right place for me. But I wanted to talk to you about my trust fund. I had a meeting with the accounting team yesterday about using some of that money to start a business of my own. At the old steel factory.”

“In the Glades?” Moira’s voice was muffled, but her tone almost sounded offended. She pulled back to meet his eyes and her expression held the same contempt as her voice. She masked it quickly, but not fast enough that he didn’t catch it.

Oliver nodded. “The Glades could use some revitalization. What better way than to bring new business to the heart of it?” It wasn’t up for discussion, as he’d already set up his base of operations in the basement. But he knew he needed a good cover story. And having a club above his hideout was a good a cover story as any. It would explain away his being there so often, and late at night.

“You won’t come to work at your father’s company, but you want to start a business of your own?” she asked, her voice skeptical.

Oliver grinned, feeling the mask secure itself in place on his features. “A nightclub,” he answered brightly. “I mean if I’m qualified to do anything, it’s that.”

“You are destined for so much more—”

“I appreciate your concern,” he said, sternly. “But it’s my money and my decision. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I’ve got a meeting with a security team there in about twenty minutes.” Oliver hated the crumpled look that graced her features as he turned and headed for the door. And he really hated the shadow that was his ‘bodyguard’ that followed him outside and to the Bentley.

“We’re heading to the Glades, sir?” Rob asked in his normal, no-nonsense way.

Oliver nodded with a sigh; not wanting another argument to arise with his mother over ditching Rob. He could work around the man for now. And he’d make a point to ditch him later when he needed to hood up and seek out Martin Somers. He’d been doing research on the man for a week, and it was high time to pay him a visit that Somers wouldn’t soon forget.

He hadn’t spoken to or seen Tommy or Felicity in the last several days, but they’d both been on his mind for very different reasons. In all of his research, Oliver had come up with nothing that linked Tommy to Martin Somers, but that didn’t mean there was nothing there. And if Tommy was going to dance around the issue, then perhaps Somers would be a little more forthcoming. With the right motivation, anyway.

As Rob drove the Bentley toward the Glades, Oliver found his mind wandering to Felicity; something he’d tried (and failed) to keep from doing since he’d seen her last. Certainly since making his decision to come home, he’d thought about what it would be like to see her again. He’d often wondered if perhaps she’d lend her skill set to his crusade. Not that he’d ever take that route if he could help it. Felicity deserved to stay outside of the darkness he’d already pulled her into once.

There were no other vehicles outside the old steel factory as they approached and Oliver dug into his pocket for the keys to the front door as Rob put the car in park and cut the engine.
“Should I do a perimeter sweep, sir?” Rob asked, casting an unsure glance into the rearview mirror to meet Oliver’s eyes.

“Not necessary,” Oliver said, popping the door latch and stepping out. He’d already set up a closed network camera feed of the building that alerted his phone to any movement, and despite the neighborhood, the building had been relatively left alone in the days that he’d been back.

He had gotten the names of several contractors in Starling, unfortunately most of them were either directly or indirectly connected to names on his father’s list. Oliver had put out phone calls to the remaining few, and would be meeting with them later in the week to get estimates on the work he wanted done. But it seemed like it was never too early to start eyeing security, so he’d already gotten a jump on that.

The main floor of what would become the club was covered in years of dirt and dust, along with boxes and blankets that indicated that someone had made a home there at one point. But that was long before Oliver took to hanging up his hood in the basement.

The main door creaked as it was opened and Oliver tensed involuntarily, ready to spring into action.

“I wondered when I saw the name on the building,” a familiar voice said.

Oliver turned to find John Diggle standing in the doorway, arms crossed over his chest as his bicep muscles threatened to rip through his black suit jacket.

A smile ghosted across Oliver’s face at the sight of the man. “John,” Oliver said, nodding his head toward the man in question. “Good to see you.”

Diggle nodded back in response. “I heard you’d come back from the dead. Although I have to admit I’m a bit surprised about your entrepreneurial endeavors considering…”

The rest was enough to go unsaid. Whether he was referring to Oliver’s employment under the Bratva or how he’d spent his days before the Gambit mattered little. Oliver simply shrugged in response.

“Well whatever the plan, it’s good to see you man,” Diggle said, offering a firm handshake.

“Did you two know each other before, Mr. Queen?” Rob asked, taking up residence at Oliver’s left shoulder.

“Believe it or not, Rob, I met Mr. Diggle here while on the run from the secret government organization that his wife works for,” Oliver quipped with a grin.

Rob’s face contorted for a moment, as if trying to process this new information and failing miserably.

“More brawn than brain,” Oliver said as an aside to John. “Unlike you and I of course.”

“Obviously,” Diggle answered with a shrug. “So what's the security gig you've got going on over here? Doesn't look like much.” He took a short circle around the place, toeing an old crumpled box at the base of a staircase.

“Just a…” Oliver paused a moment. “Way to get back into things. The building was sitting vacant and well, you know what they say about idle hands.”

Diggle gave him a nod like he didn’t quite believe the words Oliver was speaking, but he didn’t push any further than that.
“I’ve got contractors coming to assess in the next few days and work should begin shortly after that. For now it would be mostly babysitting the building during construction, but for the right person… there’s certainly upward mobility possible in the future.”

A furrow creased Diggle’s brow as if he were trying to read between the lines of what Oliver was saying. “One rent-a-cop,” he said finally. “I think my company can certainly handle that.”

Oliver grinned, extending his hand for a shake. “I had zero doubts, Mr. Diggle.”

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He kind of felt like a stalker following Laurel around for the last week, keeping tabs on her comings and goings. Tommy had tried to stay in her life in conventional ways, but ever since Oliver’s party she had been ignoring his calls. Not that he could blame her. Things weren’t easy. And every time he thought he could get closer to her, his job proved to him just how wrong an idea that was.

He cared about her, more than he ever thought he could. And for the first time since he started working for Amanda Waller, he questioned if he made the right decision. He had made a choice to protect Oliver and Felicity. But he had to wonder if that choice should have been a group one. If he had told Ollie what Waller was planning, maybe they could have stopped her together.

But then the weeks surrounding Russia would flash through his mind. He had been shot at and chased from city to city. Waller wasn’t a threat they had time to sit on, and he knew that. But now she was more than the villain of their worldwind adventure. She had the access and the means to allow Tommy to keep the people in his life safe, and to give him a purpose he wouldn’t have been able to achieve on his own. Waller was a tool he could use to be the person he was destined to become. And sometimes sacrifice was the only way to achieve that.

But he needed to focus on the task at hand. Because Laurel was getting herself deeper and deeper involved in the case against Martin Somers, and he was worried. ARGUS had intel that Somers was working closely with the Triad, and Tommy knew first hand that if you messed with an asset of the Triad, they would make sure it was the last time you tried. He wasn’t about to let her get caught in the crosshairs of anyone that dangerous. He just had to find a way for her to let him in again. Even if it meant putting their hearts at risk.

Tommy waited until he saw the light of Laurel’s apartment switch on, her silhouette against the fire escape window, before he popped open his car door, making sure to grab the bag of takeout.

Laurel would be pissed at him for coming over, but he was hoping her favorite combo from the place on the corner might at least get him in the door.

He crossed the street to her building, and barely registered as someone plowed right into him.

“Watch where you’re going,” he said giving the kid a once over. He couldn’t have been more than twenty at the max.

“Whatever.”

Tommy rolled his eyes, glancing down at his… son of a bitch.

“Hey,” he called grabbing for the kid but he had took off around the corner. He shook his head and muttered. “I cannot believe I just got mugged on a street corner. Lyla is never gonna let me live this down.”

But he wasn’t too worried about the watch. He’d call in a favor with the ARGUS techs and have
them track the thing once the street urchin pawned it.

“Tommy?”

His head shot up at the open window above, Laurel’s frame outlined by the soft glow of her apartment. She had a look of concern and anger on her face, as she furrowed her brow at him.

“I brought food,” he said, holding up the bag.

“Do you have any idea what time it is?”

“Not really,” he gave her a sheepish shrug. “Some kid in a red hoodie just made off with my watch.”

Her eyes widened in alarm. “Are you okay?”

He could pretend like he wasn’t, but he really wanted her to trust him more. “Yeah, I’m okay. It wasn’t even that nice of a watch.”

“Keep it down,” he heard a woman screech from the apartment two windows down, and Laurel looked over before she glanced back at him.

She looked like she was weighing her options before she finally spoke. “Give me a second to buzz you in.”

He breathed a sigh of relief, as the door buzzed and the lock clicked open. Maybe a week apart was enough time for things to settle between them. Maybe Laurel had come to see his side of things. But even as he thought it, he knew that’s not what he wanted. He didn’t want her to settle for what he had said, and just accept that he was some rich playboy, who was never going to change. Laurel deserved more than that.

When he reached her floor he knocked on her door, but he didn’t have to wait long. She must have been standing close by, because the door swung open seconds later and Laurel stared him down with all the intensity he had assumed he’d see in her eyes. It almost made him smile.

“What are you doing here?”

“You buzzed me up.”

“Because Mrs. Abernathy loves to gossip about her neighbors and I wasn’t about to have an argument with you through a third story window,” she was blocking the way into her apartment, and he knew if he wanted to get inside he was going to have to do some form of groveling.

“I brought you a teriyaki bowl,” he held up the bag in front of him. “Extra peas, just like you like it.”

She contemplated the bag for a second, before taking it from him, and opening it. “There’s crab rangoon in here too?”

“Well you do love them so,” he smirked.

Laurel seemed to relent a little, gesturing him inside. It was a small victory, but he’d take it.

“Didn’t think I’d be seeing you for a while,” she started setting the bag down on her coffee table. “Unless you got arrested and needed a lawyer or something.”

The bite to her tone was softer than he deserved, but the words still dug their way into him, carving a hole in his chest.
“Laurel--”

“You don’t owe me an explanation,” she cut him off, taking a seat in front of stacks and stacks of paperwork. “I knew what we were when we started this. I knew who you were, it was stupid to think that a couple of years could change that.”

“It wasn’t stupid,” he whispered, shaking his head. “God, Laurel I want to be the guy you think I am.”

“You have a funny way of showing it. If you don’t want to be that person, why are you lying to me at every turn?”

There wasn’t an answer for that, not one he could share, and certainly not one he was willing to fabricate. But he had to try something, the brokenness between them was too much to just let it sit there.

“Because I don’t deserve you.” It might be the most honest thing he’d told her in months, and as the words slipped out, he watched as they settled on her. “I don’t.”

“What are you talking about?”

“I’m talking about the fact that I was a screw up and an ass, and I had no sense in changing either of those things. Until you gave me a second chance.” He reached for her hand, pulling her close to him. “But you deserve better than someone who freaks out at the first sign of commitment.”

He could feel her pulse quicken under his fingertips as she watched him closely, searching his face for some hidden meaning to his words, to whatever she was missing.

“You didn’t freak until now, so what changed? Was it…’ she shook her head, to knock out the emotions or the bitterness he couldn’t tell. “Is it because of Oliver?”

“Maybe a little.”

She took a step back, but she let her hand stay wrapped around his. “So you acted like a dick? Getting into bar fights and blowing me off?”

“You know the last time I was this serious about someone? Third grade, Janet Winslow,” he said with a shaking laugh. “But you and Oliver. He was everything to you once, and he screwed that up. Massively.”

“Thanks for the reminder.”

“I’m trying to say that I don’t want that.” Tommy took a shaky breath. “I don’t want to screw this up. But I don’t know how to be the guy you deserve.”

“Tommy…”

She trailed off, her silence giving away to a set of heavy boots outside the door.

“Are you expecting company?”

“It’s probably the beat cops my dad insisted follow me home.” He gave her a confused look before she continued. “My case against Martin Somers, the good detective doesn’t think I’m safe at home. But he’s crazy if he thinks I’m going to let someone like that walk.”

“Dinah Laurel Lance, always trying to save the world.”
“Hey if I don’t try and save it who will?”

Tommy nodded slowly, his gaze shifting towards her back window. It was dark in the alley, no light coming from the warehouse across the street. But he heard the scrape of metal on the fire escape.

“Laurel get down.”

“What?”

“Now.”

He yanked on her arm until they were both on the floor, the glass shattering behind the couch. Damn it. He should have predicted this. He had predicted it. One glance at Laurel, and his chest ached. He wouldn’t let them hurt her. But of course some punk ass kid stole the one way he had to call for backup.

“Where’s the gun?”

Laurel looked at him in panic. “...the gun?”

“The one your dad gave you. Where is it?”

“Hall closet,” she whispered, pressing her nails into his arm. “Tommy you can’t.”

He took out his cell, pressing it into her hand. “Call the police, I will be right back.”

This time she let him go, but only because he could see her fingers shaking as they typed in 911, pressing the cell to her ear.

He could see the distance from the couch to the hall, something he could make but whoever was behind the sofa wasn’t going to wait until he was armed. Tommy glanced at the cushions his eye catching the brown tuffs. It was ridiculous, but at the moment he’d take anything.

In a swift motion he threw the teddy bear over the couch, hearing it connect with the face of the intruder, as Tommy ran towards the closet, yanking it open enough to see the small box nestled against some shoes. Inside was a pistol, and Tommy didn’t have time for the wave a relief, as he raised the gun aiming for the person’s shoulder.

They ducked behind the wall, and Tommy cursed. This was really going to be a long night.

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It had been a whirlwind of a week since Oliver’s party, and Felicity couldn’t be sure if she was happy for that or not. Keeping busy meant less time to focus on those pesky emotions that kept threatening to make their way to the surface. Keeping busy meant avoiding them for just a little bit longer. But sooner or later she knew she’d have to confront them. She just hoped she’d have time to prepare herself for it before they overtook her.

Malcolm had managed to keep her busier than normal at the office. Apparently telling her boss that she was ‘all in’ with the Markov project meant her fifty hour work weeks became sixty hour work weeks. And late at night when she was alone in her apartment, she spent hours pouring over the schematics she’d pulled together from her phishing software she’d uploaded to Malcolm’s personal server in his office. He really had underestimated her. Or perhaps she’d been in such a fog the last couple of years working for him that she’d lulled him into a false sense of security; allowing him to believe that she’d follow him blindly to carry out Markov’s project, whatever it was.
She and Tommy had cancelled their movie night for the first time ever the previous Friday, since she’d made plans to go to dinner with Carter. A dinner, she might add, that he hadn't even shown up for. Apparently he’d been called into emergency surgery and hadn’t been able to contact her until later. And she didn’t mean to seem insensitive about it, because she understood the delicate nature of his job. He was saving lives after all. So anytime he couldn’t make it was because he was diligently working to save someone’s life.

But sometimes it just… bothered her. Maybe it wouldn’t have, or at least not as much, before Tommy said she was clinging to Carter because she was afraid to feel anything deeper. Because now every time she interacted with Carter she felt like she had to prove something to herself.

A knock sounded on her door, pulling her thoughts from the list of data she was compiling on her computer. She was surprised, not expecting anyone for another, she glanced at the clock… twenty minutes ago. Had she really been that caught up in her work? She shook her head as she moved to the door. Of course she had been. It wasn’t uncommon for hours to pass before she noticed.

She glanced through the peephole to find Carter standing there with a bag of takeout. Blowing out a long breath, Felicity pasted a smile to her face and opened the door.

“Hey you,” she said, moving to let him in.

“Hi,” he answered, dropping a chaste kiss on her lips. “I brought food. And I know I already apologized to you about Friday, but I was hoping to make it up to you.”

Felicity noticed that he also had something else with him, tucked under his other arm. “Is that a bag of ice?” she asked, closing the door and following him into the kitchen. It was a curiosity to be sure.

“Mmhmm,” he hummed with a grin, stashing the ice in the freezer and turning back to her just as she was about to peek into the bag. He wrapped his hand around her wrist, nudging it gently away from the bag, causing her eyes to jerk up to meet his. “It’s a surprise for later, Gig. I promise you’ll like it.”

“I hate surprises,” Felicity pouted.

“You’ll like this one,” he said. “Why don’t you go finish up with whatever code you’re working on and I’ll bring dinner out in a few.”

“I wasn’t working on--”

“I knocked for a good couple minutes before you came to the door,” he said with a smile. “That only happens when you’re concentrated on work.”

“I could have been in the bathroom,” she said, and then regretted it. Nice job Felicity, she chided herself inwardly. Just the kind of visual you want to give the guy.

“You’re cute,” he said, kissing her forehead. “Just go finish so we can have a work free evening together.” He pulled out his phone. “See, it’s off. Just you and me tonight.”

An intense pit of what she could only describe as dread filled Felicity’s stomach. A special surprise, no interruptions, right on the heels of Carter’s interview in Seattle? Surely he couldn’t be doing anything as rash as veering from the five year plan by popping a certain question early? Felicity didn’t want any popping going on. And no questions either. She was comfortable with the five year plan if only because it gave her a definitive timeline of events. She was tired of the unknown when it came to romantic relationships. Carter wasn’t like that. He was reliably unreliable and difficult to get ahold of and rarely around and… and she was doing exactly what Tommy had accused her of.
She was clinging to Carter to keep from anything deeper.

“Well I didn’t realize things were so private tonight,” she called over her shoulder as she made her way back toward her computer. “I am expecting an extremely important call from work, but I promise to keep it quick.” She cringed at herself for the lie, but sent Tommy a quick SOS message anyway.

She closed the lid of her laptop and tucked her legs up under her as she cozied into the sofa, phone in hand. Felicity tapped the phone against her leg, eager to speak to Tommy. When he still hadn’t called a moment later, she cursed under her breath and scrolled through her phone, clicking on Tommy’s name before she could stop herself. Felicity jumped up, running for the bedroom. “This is my call, be right back!”

Felicity closed herself in her bedroom and flung herself onto the bed, listening to it ring and ring and ring before finally going to voicemail.


Felicity groaned. “Tommy. It’s been like a week, I’ve been dying to talk to you. And I’m sorry about avoiding you after what you said at the party. It was just a hard pill to swallow and I wasn’t ready to—” she broke off, unsure of how to continue. “And anyway I… I think Carter is about to propose,” she whispered far too loudly.

She clamped a hand over her mouth and listened for any movement outside her door. When nothing stirred she continued. “Carter, as in Carter ‘five year plan’ Bowen. I can’t believe I’m leaving this in a voicemail I just had to say it out loud because I really wasn’t sure what to make of it. He said he had a special surprise planned and I just, I don’t know Tommy I needed you to talk me down because I’m going crazy. But since you didn’t answer- and you better have some amazing reason for not answering- I guess I’ll just have to imagine what you’d say.”

She sighed, thinking a moment. “Probably something like ‘get back out there, kid. Figure out what you want, stick to your guns and let things shake out’.” Felicity groaned. “And you’d tell me to call you back and tell you everything. Ugh, I hate that we haven’t talked in a week.”

A soft knock sounded on the bedroom door. “Gig?” Carter called quietly.

“I’ll call you back. Bye.” She hung up the phone quickly and dropped the phone onto the bed beside her. “I’m coming,” she said a little louder, hopping up off the bed and opening the door.

“Everything okay?” Carter asked when their eyes met.

Felicity nodded. “No,” she said.

Carter’s brow furrowed. “Head says yes, mouth says no.”

“Sorry, I…” she blew out a long breath. “Just a little off kilter tonight. I wasn’t expecting…” she trailed off as they moved back down the hall toward the living room.

“Let’s eat,” he offered. “You always feel better with some food in you.”

Felicity nodded and took a seat back on the couch, where a plate was sitting on the table in front of her. She was preoccupied the entire time she ate, mind racing with possibilities. It was exactly reasons like this that she hated surprises. Because one minute you’re blissfully unaware and the next you were the possible future Mrs. Carter Bowen… not that Felicity had any intentions of actually saying yes.
She placed her plate back on the table and Carter placed a hand on her shoulder, turning her toward
him.

“Ready for your surprise?” He asked with a grin.

“Actually,” Felicity said with a gulp. “I have to work early tomorrow and I really don’t think I’m
ready to take that kind of step. I mean I know there was a five year plan and things were going
good. And maybe the whole Seattle job thing spooked you or something but I just don’t think…”

Carter frowned. “Seattle? Five year plan? Felicity what does that have to do with making ice
cream?”

“Yeah I just… I mean I know it’s been a good few months—” she broke off mid-sentence as her
brain caught up with what he’d said. “I’m sorry what now?”

“Did you…” his brow furrowed. “Did you think I was going to…”

Felicity cleared her throat. “You wanted to make ice cream?”

“I have an ice cream maker. I’m kind of amazing at it, honestly. A hidden talent, so to speak. I just
thought…” Carter stood from the sofa and paced across the floor in front of her. “You thought I
was going to propose to you. And you were going to say no?”

“You wanted no interruptions for making ice cream?” Felicity asked, standing herself and raising her
voice just a notch.

“I wanted no interruptions because we haven’t seen each other in weeks and I wanted to talk about
my interview in Seattle. I wanted no interruptions because I’ve felt like for the last couple weeks
you’ve been completely MIA and secretive about everything. I wanted to talk about the possibility
of us moving in together because I turned the job down in Seattle and my lease is up soon on my
apartment and we might actually see each other a little more if we’re in the same place.” He sighed,
dropping back onto the couch and dropping his head into his hands.

“You weren’t going to…”

“No,” he said, raising his head to meet her eyes. “But apparently the same place is nowhere near
where we are.”

Carter stood, collected his jacket and the ice cream maker he’d apparently placed on the kitchen
counter, and left without another word.
Chapter 11

Chapter by holysmoaksover

Chapter Notes

Hey lovelies- It's so good to see you. Well, so good that you're here. Really I just wanted to use a Jane Bennet from Lizzie Bennet Diaries quote, and well, there we go. Anywho- did anyone catch who was in the last chapter? Someone who made a surprise first appearance a little early. (Someone OTHER than Diggle.) No? Well I've got two cookies for anyone who can tell us who it was.

But we've got lots of action coming at you this week... so, without further ado-- I bring you, chapter 11.

xoxo,
Cassie

Oliver pulled the book from his pocket, flipping the pages until his eyes landed on a name. Martin Somers. He had made a promise to cross Somers off his father’s list, and he’d let the man get away with his crimes for longer than he should have. People like Somers, and the rest of the names on the list, used their money and positions to rise up over the hard working people of Starling City, they used their influence to destroy. And Oliver wouldn’t let it continue.

Setting the book down next to his computer, Oliver pulled up the map of the water front. If his intel was sound, Somers would be working late at the docks, and that’s exactly where he would strike.

Hunt had been a trial run after someone had gotten to him first, but he was going to make sure the wealthy of his city started to take notice of the shadows around them. That they realized there would be no more stepping on people to get higher in the world. He wouldn’t allow it.

He made his way towards his trunk, pulling out his pants and hood, but paused a moment as his eye caught something. Nestled between his herbs and other things was the pale stone arrowhead. The hōzen that held the coordinates for the sunken supply of Mirakuru. It brought flashes of the island to his mind. Shado. Sara. Slade… He had read somewhere that the stones were supposed to symbolize reconnecting. But the only thing it had ever done for him was tear things apart. Still he couldn’t bear to part with it. Whether he was afraid the past would come back to haunt him, or he hoped to cling to the few good moments they all had on the island, he didn’t know. But he knew it was something for another time.

He shoved the lid down, trying to keep the past from escaping, and headed to change.

Within a few minutes he was zipping up his jacket, pulling the hood up over his head, and moving toward his bow and quiver. Tonight wasn’t the night to focus on anything other than his mission. He didn’t have time to dwell on the thoughts that kept him up at night. It was time to channel the other part of him, the part that thrived in the darkness. That fed off the things that made normal people cringe. It was time to be something else.

He took the back streets to the waterfront, weaving between buildings and alleyways. Avoiding any signs of life he could. But he knew some must have caught a glimpse out of the corner of their eye,
as the sleek bike cut across traffic.

He parked a few slips down from Somers base of operations. Climbing up the shipping container to get a better look at the layout in front of him. The containers were close enough he could travel this way, just until he reached where he needed to be.

He came to a crossway of containers, three guards standing outside the entrance to a warehouse. He readied his bow, making quick work of landing an arrow into all of them. He was trying to avoid killing as much as possible. Ever since the day he watched Tommy and Felicity’s plane leave, he had trouble landing a kill shot. As much as he hated to admit it, the time they spent together, even if it had been brief, had changed everything for him. And he wished a thousand times that he would have left with them. He did everything he could to hold on to his position in the Bratva, but even Anatoly saw that the hits would take more out of him than they had before. Every time he thought he would get over one, another would have to happen, spiraling him down even further. Until it was too much for him to take.

He jumped from his position, and the first guard tried getting back up to stop him. Oliver ducked out of his way, grabbing the man from behind and twisting his arm until he heard a pop, tossing him until his head bashed against the side wall. Two and three were trying to come at him next, but their reaction time had slowed. He had laced a few arrows with a sedative, glad that they went down on their own.

The corridor gave him enough light to step through smoothly, avoiding the creak of his boots against the cold floor. Halfway through he came to another guard. The man lunged, but Oliver used the momentum to drop the guy to ground, jamming an arrow through his hand before he could reach for the radio.

He pushed himself back up. That had been enough of a commotion to alert anyone else to his presence, so he had to move fast. Three more arrows, and five men later, Oliver was finally faced to face with Martin Somers.

He tried to escape during the fighting, but Oliver wouldn’t let him go. He pushed the man into a chair, clicking on the voice modulator before he pulled out an arrow and nocked it into place against his bow string.

“Martin Somers, you have failed this city,” he growled, steadying his aim on Somers shoulder.

“Who the hell are you?!?”

“I’m the guy who’s gonna put an arrow in you, if you don’t tell me what I want to know.”

“I can pay you,” Somers bargained. “My partners can pay you. Just let me go.”

“Your partners in the Triad?” Oliver questioned. “You really think they can help you right now?”

“You don’t know what they’re capable of.” He was getting bold, as a smirk grew on his face. “And when they find you, they’ll use that hood of yours to strangle the life out of you. All I have to do is ask.”

Oliver let the arrow fly, as it sailed across the top of the man’s shoulder. It was enough to break the skin as it pinned Somers to the wall behind him.

“Like you asked them to take care of Victor Nocenti?” He pulled out another arrow, this time lowering his aim to Somers lap. “You placed the hit on Nocenti didn’t you? He was going to expose your bribes so you had him killed?”
“Why do you even care?”

“That’s not an answer,” Oliver loosened his grip on his bow string, watching as Somers flinched. “Unless you want me to let go, you’re going to agree to testify. You’re going to give Mr. Nocenti’s family the peace they deserve.”

“There’s no point,” Somers screeched. “The trial’s gonna be over soon anyway.”

He returned his arrow to the quiver, moving forward, as he grabbed Somers by the throat. “What do you mean?”

“You really think my partners would let this farce of a case continue any longer.” His words sounded calm, but Oliver could feel the man’s pulse quicken under his fingers. “The problem is being dealt with, and come this time tomorrow, no one’s going to be talking about my case. All the news stations will be too busy with the latest tragedy to hit this town.”

He could feel the threat laced in the man’s words. Martin Somers’ number one problem was the case being built against him. The case Laurel was currently spearheading for Nocenti’s daughter. If Somers wanted to take care of a problem, he would look no further than the two of them.

He pulled Somers head forward just a little, then forced it back against the wall. Somers would be fine, except for the massive headache when he finally woke. But Oliver had other concerns. Somers said that things were ‘being dealt with’, and if he didn’t hurry the Triad was likely to end a life. He couldn’t let that happen.

He grabbed a phone from the floor, dialing 911. There was no way he’d make it to both addresses by himself, and he didn’t know where the daughter would be. So he had to rely on someone else.

“911, what’s your emergency?”

“There’s been a break in,” he said, the voice modulator still gargling his words. “You need to send a car to--”

“If this is in regards to the intruder at 422 Robard Rd, there’s officers already on their way.”

That was Laurel’s address. And he all but cursed under his breath. “Send another car to Emily Nocenti’s residence. This was a hit.”

“Sir…” the dispatcher sounded concerned. “May I ask who’s calling?”

He hung up without another word.

He raced his bike through the streets, willing himself not to be too late. All he could picture was Sara face as she slipped right out of his grasp. She had wanted to come home, she wanted to see her family again. And he couldn’t bring her home. So he owed it to her to protect Laurel, because she couldn’t.

He pulled the bike to a stop in the alley behind Laurel’s building, looking up to see the glass had already shattered on the fire escape. They were already there.

He took to the ladder, climbing the rungs two at a time, and used his adrenaline to roll himself into the open window. The first person he saw was a Triad member, he turned from the entryway, and locked eyes with Oliver. But he could see a gun just past the man’s head.

Oliver didn’t have time to focus on that, because the sound of the front door being kicked in seemed
to propel the first intruder forward. Somer’s guards had been taken by surprise, and were not well trained, unlike the man before him. Oliver hated the small part of him that relished having a challenge. It was like slipping back into his old training days with the Bratva, and he couldn’t wait to take on someone who could handle themselves.

Oliver glanced around the room once more. The gun was lowered now, and he could see who was on the other side. His heart clenched. If it had just been Laurel things would be easy, get her out of the room, and dispatch the intruders. But Tommy complicated things. He knew if he wasn’t careful his friend might notice something, something not right about him. And he wasn’t ready to confide in his friend this secret. He might never be ready.

But Tommy wasn’t watching him, he was currently in a fist fight with another, using his technique to rid the other of his weapon.

Oliver took a deep breath before he sent his guy over his shoulder. Maybe he didn’t have to worry about Tommy so much. Which was good, because the glint in his adversary's eyes told him he needed to remain focused, or he’d be spilling his own blood onto the hardwood floor.

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Commotion was coming from all corners of the apartment by the time Tommy had reached the gun and trained it on the man in the hallway. Behind that man, someone else entered through the broken window and Tommy felt himself bristle a little more. A dark green hood was all he could make out before the man in front of him charged, fists flying as he caught Tommy off guard.

He wanted to yell for Laurel, to tell her to tuck herself somewhere safe until police arrived and they were able to get everything under control. More police, he reminded himself. Since he’d just seen the two who’d been guarding the apartment flat on their backs in the hallway after the door had been kicked in.

He reminded himself to breathe, just like training had taught him. Breathe and focus on the direct threat in front of you. Head on a swivel. Diggle had taught him that. A fist connected with his cheek just as he lunged for the man, swinging the gun at him. Tommy knew it obviously wasn’t the most effective use of the gun he’d found in Laurel’s closet, but no matter how dire the circumstances got, he’d never been pushed far enough to take a kill shot. In fact, one of his only stipulations for working with Amanda Waller was that he wouldn’t be forced to kill. Then again, her response had been “Your funeral, Agent Merlyn,” so clearly her odds were against him.

The butt of the gun barely connected with the assailant’s head, nearly slipping from Tommy’s grasp. The man stumbled backward, his own weapon skidding across the floor. Tommy righted himself first, seeing movement out of the corner of his eye. He glanced to the left, where he’d last seen Laurel with his cell phone in her hand dialing 911. She still had the phone to her ear, but he could see the determination set in her features. He only hoped she had the smarts to stay out of the fight.

Tommy barely had a second to breathe before returning his attention to the man who was coming back at him for more. Swallowing hard, Tommy adjusted the gun, pointing it down at the man’s foot, and fired.

“Tommy!” Laurel screamed.

The man crumpled to the floor, wrapping both hands around his foot, his face altering between seething anger and pain.

“I’m fine,” Tommy called back over his shoulder. “This jackass might not be able to say the same
though.” He felt a smirk nearly creep up onto his face until he remembered the other intruders.

Tommy whipped around, seeing the man in the green hood fighting off two men at once. The way the hooded man fought, it was clear he had been trained, and trained well. Tommy watched in almost awe as the man in green used the weight of one man to propell himself into the other, knocking him out the broken window onto the fire escape. The hooded man spun around in one fluid motion and kicked the second man square in the chest, forcing him back against a wall.

Fire escape man had crawled back through the window, glass shards glinting off his dark clothes, and had caught the hooded man’s attention. Tommy took two strides forward, just as the second man pulled himself up off the floor. At full height, the man towered over Tommy, but he approached him anyway. All Tommy could think about was keeping Laurel safe. Nothing else mattered. Not even why some hooded stranger was helping him fight off the intruders. He would accept the help where he could get it, because the alternative was potentially losing her. And that was not an option.

Tommy and the hooded man stood back to back, fighting off the two men in sync, spinning around like a choreographed dance they’d been doing for years. Not even Tommy and Lyla were so synchronized.

His mind ran wild with possibilities as he dodged flying fists. It was the Triad, but he wasn’t sure if they were coming after him, payback for making them look foolish the last time they’d met, or if they were after Laurel for the case she was trying. Although the Triad wasn’t above collateral damage, something told him they hadn’t followed him there. Meaning the case Laurel was in the midst of with Martin Somers was far more dangerous than Tommy had anticipated. Not that he should have expected any less from the man.

One of the men picked up a metal candlestick from the end table and swung it. It missed Tommy by just inches, but collided with the back of the hooded man’s head, sending him flying across the floor. Tommy barely had time to right himself before they both rushed him at once. The one in front of him grabbed for Tommy’s gun, and they struggled until it clattered to the floor. Tommy kicked it as far away from them all as he could get it.

Tommy grabbed for the end of the candlestick, attempting to twist it out of the man’s grasp before he could be knocked unconscious with it. The man pushed Tommy to the floor, pressing the candlestick to Tommy’s throat. Tommy pulled his knee up with all the force he could muster, connecting it with the man’s groin. Tommy grabbed both ends of the candlestick and knocked the man in the head. The assailant’s body went limp, and Tommy rolled over, pulling himself to his feet just as the third intruder filled his vision, Tommy’s own gun trained right at his chest.

“Ugh, really?” Tommy groaned. “You’d shoot a man with his own gun?”

The man just smirked.

Tommy swallowed hard. And then a sick thunk sounded, something solid connecting with bone. The man fell to his knees before landing flat on his face at Tommy’s feet. Tommy’s eyes raised slowly, only to find Laurel standing before him with a cast iron skillet in her hand.

He quirked a brow. “Since when do you own cooking equipment?”

Laurel scoffed. “You’re welcome.”

Tommy moved toward her, pulling her into his arms. “I’m glad you’re okay,” he whispered into her hair. “But that was ridiculously stupid.”
“Again,” she said, her voice muffled in his shirt. “You’re welcome.”

“Thank you,” he said, kissing her forehead. Sirens wailed in the distance, slowly growing louder as Tommy spun around. He’d almost forgot about the man in the green hood. He needed to check to make sure their ‘assistant’ was alright. But by the time Tommy crossed the distance back into the living room, he found that the space on the floor where the green hood had been was empty.

He turned back to Laurel. “I didn’t make that up, right? There was a dude in a hood in here? Like some sort of.. of…”

“Vigilante?” Laurel supplied.

Tommy frowned. “The hell did he go?”

Laurel came to stand beside Tommy, wrapping an arm around his back. “I'm just glad he was here. That could have turned out really, really badly.”

Tommy didn't even want to think about what could have happened. The police never would have made it in time, and Tommy couldn't have fought them all off himself. He pulled her tight to him again, not willing to let her go. He wasn't sure how he'd keep her at arm's length after this. They'd forever be bonded by the events that had just transpired. But despite his job working for ARGUS, Tommy was finding himself less and less willing to keep their relationship surface level.

His adrenaline was beginning to subside as the police cars finally screeched to a halt on the street below.

“That wasn't your gun, by the way,” Laurel said, a hint of a smile in her voice. “You told him he was going to shoot you with your own gun. But it isn't.”

“Semantics,” Tommy said, shaking his head. “Besides we're dating, so that's kind of the same thing.” He met her eyes as he spoke and watched the spark that ignited at his words.

“We are, are we?”

Footsteps sounded on the stairs before Tommy could reply, and he felt himself tense when Quentin Lance hit the landing for Laurel’s floor, eyes wild with worry and made a bee-line for the apartment. He didn’t even stop to check on his fallen comrades, instead he stepped over their bodies, calling for Laurel, and pulled her into his arms as quickly and tightly as possible.

Tommy took a few steps backwards, as other officers approached, along with EMTs, and let them assess the situation and get to work on the myriad of bodies on the floor.

“They’re not dead,” Tommy said, wringing his hands together. Waller would most likely kill him for staying on the scene, but with Laurel there, it wasn’t like he had a choice. He heard Quentin speaking to Laurel in hushed tones, looking her over from head to toe, before hugging her tightly to his chest again.

One of the officers approached Tommy, pulling out a small pad of paper and a pen. “Can you tell me what happened here, son?” he asked.

Tommy nearly scoffed. The man was barely older than he was. “These guys came in and attacked us. One through the window… two through the front door. They took out the officers outside before kicking in the door--”

“And there was this man,” Laurel piped in, moving closer to them, out of her father’s embrace.
Quentin quickly followed, staying close.

“What man?” The officer asked, his brow knitting together in a furrow as he scribbled in his pad.

“Some guy in a green hood,” Tommy said. “He came in through the fire escape window. I didn’t get a look at his face. It all happened so fast. Laurel was on the phone with the police and this guy, he fought them off, helped us... “ he nearly shuddered as images of what could have been flooded his mind. “Helped us stay safe.”

Quentin huffed. “Green hood huh?” He moved to the officer and whispered something in his ear.

“What is it?” Laurel asked. The paramedics carried out one of the men on a stretcher, who was beginning to rouse, and didn’t seem too thrilled about being handcuffed to the board he was being carried on.

“He didn’t happen to be carrying a bow and quiver, did he?” Quentin asked finally, meeting his daughter’s gaze. “Because your report of some hooded vigilante is the second one we’ve gotten tonight.”

Tommy thought he heard Quentin mutter “Damn Robin Hood” under his breath, but he couldn’t be sure.

“Who did the other report come from?” Tommy asked, the agent side of him more curious than anything else.

Quentin squared a disdainful look in his direction before answering. “Martin Somers.”

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She was trying to push the evening’s events out of her head. Diving further back into work. Because what else could she do? Call Carter and tell him she freaked out for no reason? That she wanted to move in with him? He deserved better than a girl who lied to him. He deserved someone who was as invested in his stories as he was, someone who would be impressed by a knack for ice cream making. Someone who loved him back. And she would never be that person. She couldn’t.

Truth was Felicity had locked that part of her away a long time ago, and she didn’t think she’d ever let it free. So it was better that things ended with Carter before she really hurt him, and before she could hurt herself as well. Because in her experience, real feelings only ever led to heartbreak.

She loaded a program on her tablet and opened all the images of the Markov device. There were several dozen separate pieces, and it could take hours for her algorithm to orient them to fit into each other the way they were meant to, but that was okay. Felicity was more than willing to immerse herself in the project if it meant she got a clear idea of what exactly she had signed on to.

She thought back to the night she signed on to work with Dr. Markov, when Malcolm had all but blackmailed her into joining the team. She had done it to protect Oliver. Even if at the time he was doing every possible thing to push them away. She wondered if she’d do it again, knowing that the project was very likely a front for something nefarious. Of course his blue eyes flashed behind hers, giving her the answer. She would do it again in a heartbeat if it meant keeping him safe. She knew it in her bones.

Then again maybe Dr. Markov’s project had something to do with clean energy, or some world saving technology, They were basing their view point of the thing off the word of Amanda Waller. And if there was one person she trusted less than Malcolm Merlyn, it was the leader of ARGUS.
Her phone rang from its spot on the arm of her chair, and she grabbed for it, hoping Tommy had finally gotten her message. But another name flashed across her screen. Felicity couldn’t help the groan that escaped her lips as she hit the talk button.

“Hi Mom.”

“Baby girl? Can you hear me?” Donna screeched, and Felicity had to pull her phone from her ear. “This damn thing. Hello?”

“Yes Mom, I can hear you.” She took a deep breath, setting her tablet down. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing’s wrong.” Donna replied with a laugh. “Can’t a mother call her favorite daughter?”

“That depends if said mother needs her daughter to log into her email account and reset her password again?”

“I was calling because I miss you. We hardly talk anymore.”

It was another punch of guilt straight to the stomach. And Felicity wanted to say it was a recent development too. That all the extra hours at Merlyn Global kept her from picking up the phone and chatting with her mother. But it wouldn’t be true. The Smoak women had never landed on the same page about things. And sometimes she found it easier to let the weeks go by without reaching out. But that didn’t mean she liked the way their relationship played out.

“I know. Mom. I’m sorry. I’m just… busy,” Because it was easier to let her mom believe that than the truth. “Mr. Merlyn has me working overtime on this project. I’ve barely even been home over the last week or so.”

“You work too much, sweetheart,” Donna said. “How do you ever find the time to keep that handsome doctor interested, if you’re never around?”

Of course her mother would bring up Carter. She regretted ever letting it slip that she was even dating someone, let alone a rich doctor. Because every conversation they ever had circled back to how wonderful and smart their children would be. And how she was so happy Felicity had found such a catch, especially since she wasn’t jumping at the idea of being Mrs. Tommy Merlyn. If she told her mom that she just ended things with Carter because she thought he was going to propose, she would never, ever, hear the end of it.

“He’s a busy guy.” she blew out a breath, rolling her eyes. “He works more than I do some days.”

“Well that’s no way to have a proper relationship. A relationship needs romance and spontaneity to blossom,” her mom said, a smile in her voice. “Honestly, Felicity you need to do something to spice things up or he’s going to get bored real quick. I have a friend who’s a relationship therapist, and she says that adding a bit of flavor and mischief to the bedroom can really make all the--”

“Mom! Please dear god do not finish that sentence.”

“If you can’t talk to your mother about these things who can you talk to?”

She wanted to gag, because really she’d probably go to almost anyone else other than her mother to discuss her sex life. But she really didn’t want to discuss it about a guy she wasn’t even seeing anymore. She just wished there was a way to end the call already.

As if the universe heard her pleas, her phone beeped with another call. She pulled it back enough to see Tommy’s name.
“Mom, I have to let you go,” she said breathing a sigh of relief. “I promise we’ll talk soon. Love you.”

She clicked her call over before Donna could reply. Shoving the guilt from that down as well. She’d deal with it later. But right now she needed to talk to her friend.

“Where have you been? Did you even get my message? I mean I know we haven’t talked all week, but Tommy seriously don’t freak me out like that. I thought you were mad at me. And then the thing with Carter happened. And then my mother called, and I’m just really glad you called otherwise I might have had to fake illness to get off the phone. Granted she probably would have just flown out here and then I’d have to tell her in person that I dumped a doctor. So please talk me down from my crazy?”

“Felicity,” he said when she stopped to breathe. But something sounded off. She knew Tommy’s tone when things weren’t right. “Are you home?”

“Yeah, what’s wrong?” Just then there was a knock on her door. “Is that you?”

“Yeah.”

Felicity hung up and made her way to the door, opening it. Tommy stood on the other side. Laurel was next to him, along with a few officers and Detective Lance.

“What’s up?”

“I sort of need a favor.” Tommy said. “Laurel needs--”

“They’re being paranoid.” Laurel crossed her arms shooting a glare at Tommy before she shifted it to her father.

Tommy sighed, before he spoke. “Laurel’s place was broken into earlier this evening.”

“Are you serious?” She felt horrified, her silly issues with Carter paled in comparison to this.

“It’s not that big a deal,” Laurel said. But Lance was moving them all into Felicity’s apartment at that point.

“Three members of the Triad break into your place, and it’s not that big a deal?” Felicity had met Laurel’s father on a handful of occasions but he never looked quite as frayed as he did standing in her living room. “You won’t go to a safe house, but I’ll be damned if you stay there until this mess with Somers is sorted out.”

“Dad, you’re overreacting. I’m fine,” she said with a shrug. “And Tommy’s fine too. Thank you for asking.”

“He’s not my concern,” Lance said, shooting Tommy a look. “At least not right now.”

“I’m with you on this one, sir,” Tommy said with a nod, and then gave Laurel a look. “At least until maintenance gets the window and the door fixed. It’s a disaster in there.”

“All my case files are there, my laptop. How am I supposed to work without my work?”

“Maybe this is the universe's way of saying take a vacation.”

“Tommy,” Felicity whispered, placing a hand on his shoulder. “Not a smart one.”
“I’m not letting a break in keep me from nailing that bastard to the wall for what he did,” Laurel replied.

“Laurel--”

“Someone get my files or I’m going back myself.”

Detective Lance looked back at one of the officers. “Go get her files. But only the ones she had out on the coffee table. You’ll have to suffer without the rest.”

Tommy tugged on Felicity’s sleeve, motioning towards the kitchen. She followed him, letting Laurel and her father have a moment alone.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t know where else to suggest,” he said in a rush. “Laurel was adamant about not going to her father’s, but given things my place was out of the question until I check in with Waller.”

“Tommy it’s okay,” she placed a hand on his arm. “I like Laurel, and honestly this place can get lonely, so having someone else around who will help me mock you might be a nice change.”

“Even with your recent split?” he tested.

“Oh so you heard that in the rambling huh?”

“Yeah kinda hard to miss.” Tommy sat back against the counter before he spoke. “Is this about what I said, because Felicity I was a jerk last week.”

“But you weren’t wrong,” she shrugged. “Carter was a place holder boyfriend. Someone I could mention so people didn’t think I was pathetically single, people being my mother. But, I was using him so I wouldn’t have to feel anything heavier.”

“Just because my words were right doesn’t make how I did it okay,” he pulled her in for a hug, and Felicity wrapped her arms around him.

“So you took out three Triad members by yourself?” She smirked at him when she finally pulled back. “That’s impressive.”

“Wish I could take all the credit,” he shook his head, lowering his voice. “There was someone else there. He was well trained and managed to disappear once we fought off the attackers. Oh and the kicker, he was wearing a green hood.”

“Are we talking like army green or more of a Kermit the Frog type thing?”

“I’m being serious,” Tommy groaned. “I don’t know Smoak, there was something about him. I can’t put my finger on it, but fighting alongside him, it felt familiar.”

“Like you might know him?”

“My friends in leather are usually gorgeous female brunettes holding whips,” he joked. “But seriously. If someone’s running around Starling playing vigilante, things are about to get a whole lot crazier.”

She heard her tablet ding, and she pulled back from Tommy. The program was done piecing things together.

“Hold that thought.” She walked to the living room, grabbing her tablet.
“Thank you, Felicity,” Laurel said as she walked away from her father. “I know Tommy didn’t give you any warning about us showing up.”

“Mi casa es su casa,” she gave the girl a smile. “Seriously Laurel, you can stay as long as you need.”

“You’re a great friend.”

“No a great friend would have a guest room already cleaned for you. Mine looks more like a time capsule full of broken or outdated tech,” she clicked on her program, pulling up the device schematics. “Guess I have to settle for being a decent friend.”

Laurel laughed. And said something else, but Felicity was zoning out. Because her program had deciphered the device, and put the pieces in order. But the thing she was looking at couldn’t be what Dr. Markov was building. It just couldn’t.

“I gotta go,” Lance called to them, his eyes not leaving Laurel. “You need me you call.”

“Of course Dad.”

Felicity pulled the tablet to her chest. “The bathroom is at the end of the hall, and the guest room is on the left.”

“I should shower,” Laurel let out a shaky breath, the only sign that the events of the evening had affected her at all. “Tell Tommy not to leave until I get out, okay?”

“Of course.”

She waited until Laurel shut herself in the bathroom before she crossed the space back to the kitchen. But Tommy was exiting, stopping her at the doorway.

“What’s with the look?”

“I figured out what your father has Dr. Markov working on.”

“That’s great, what is it?”

Felicity shook her head, turning the tablet around to him. “It’s a seismic activity generator. Basically it causes earthquakes.”

“What would Merlyn Global need with one of those?”

“I don’t know,” she said, running a hand across her head. “But given the power source this thing could cause an earthquake up to 6.0 on the richter scale.”

“That’s not good.”

“No, it really isn’t.”
Chapter 12

Chapter by foreverfelicityqueen (stydiasredstring)

Chapter Notes

Hello my lovelies,
How are you all? I hope you're well. I want to give a shout out two our two readers who were spot on with who popped up a few chapters ago, JT0986 and geniewithwifi, good eye spotting our favorite hoodie wearing deviant. We love Roy so much we had to pop him in slightly earlier than canon would allow.

As for this chapter, no cameos, but there might be a bomb or two dropped in... Guess you'll have to read to find out.

Happy Reading,
Kayla

It certainly wasn’t how Oliver had planned to make his grand entrance into the spotlight of Starling City. While it was true he’d visited Adam Hunt previously, Oliver was hoping to keep his nightly activities off the radar of the police for as long as possible. But if the morning news was any indication, word of the green-hooded vigilante had spread like wildfire overnight. He was sure being spotted at the apartment of a detective’s daughter, especially when that detective was as dogged as Lance, had everything to do with it.

Oliver groaned, swallowing a few pain pills before taking a sip of water. His head throbbed and he was pretty certain that he had at least a slight concussion from the hit he’d taken over the head the night before. But that was low on his list of worries. Much, much closer to the top of that list was whether or not Tommy had figured out who’s face was hiding under that hood.

But he hadn’t received a phone call yet, and Tommy had never really been the type to hold things like that in for long. So maybe his secret was safe for now, even if Tommy must have realized how in sync they were when they were fighting. And when had Tommy gotten that good at hand to hand combat anyway? He’d been decent in Russia a couple of years earlier, but his skills had greatly improved over the last couple of years. Oliver found himself wanting to know what secrets his friend was hiding, even if he knew exactly how hypocritical that sounded.

A gentle knock sounded on his door, so Oliver flipped the tv off and moved toward the door, unlocking it before pulling it open. His mother stood on the other side, her eyes flashing surprise before she could mask it. Like every time she caught glimpse of him she was expecting it to be a dream, or that she had to reassure herself that he was really there, by checking on him every so often.

She smiled, reaching out to gently squeeze his arm. “I thought I heard you awake in there,” she said.

Oliver bowed his head in a single nod.
“Will you come down for breakfast?” she asked, and then looked as if she wasn’t sure if she wanted to finish her thought. “Walter and I would like to speak with you.”

His jaw clenched involuntarily for a moment. Part of him hated that his father had been replaced in their house, in the company, in her heart. And then his eyes slipped closed as he remembered the hell worth of five years he went through. When he opened them, he saw that same emotion he felt deep in his soul, in his mother’s eyes. She’d been through five years of hell too. He hated that he had to remind himself of that from time to time, taking her poise and grace for granted. She carried herself so well, hid the pain down so deep, that sometimes he forgot.

“Sure,” he answered finally. “I have some business to attend to, but I have some time.”

“Thank you,” she said, as if she felt his change in attitude tangibly.

“I just need to put a few things together, and then I’ll be down.”

Moira nodded and turned down the hall, leaving Oliver to his room. He spun around, regretting it instantly, when blood pounded in his ears and his head felt like it might explode. He gathered the recording he’d made the night before of Somer’s partial confession, along with the contractor estimate’s he’d received in his email that morning and headed downstairs. Thea was nowhere to be found, but Walter and his mother sat at the dining room table, and he could hear Raisa singing in the kitchen as she worked.

“Good morning Oliver,” Walter said with a nod.

“Walter,” Oliver nodded back, moving to sit across from his mother where an empty plate sat on the table.

Raisa came in, carrying a tray of pastries, waffles and bacon. He still wasn’t used to the food back at home. Or his every whim being catered to. And he really wasn’t used to the disapproving look from his mother when he took the tray from Raisa’s hands and set it on the table. In fact, he’d been more likely to be on the giving end of looks like that, at least when Akio had been with him.

Oliver’s heart leapt at the thought of the boy. It was hard to believe it had been two years ago that they’d been together in Moscow. Sometimes it felt like Akio and Felicity and Tommy had just left. Even though it hadn’t been ideal, Oliver still looked back fondly on those times. Grabbing pizza with Felicity and Akio, or the trip to the aquarium they’d taken with Ana and Sofia.

He swallowed hard, remembering the vow he’d made to himself that day; that he’d take Thea to the aquarium in Starling if he ever made it back home. He just might have to make a point to follow through on that promise. He owed it to Akio, and to Thea, and to himself.

“Oliver, did you hear what Walter asked you,” his mother was asking, pulling his attention back to the breakfast table.

“I’m sorry,” he answered. “I have a bit of a headache this morning and it’s knocking me off my game.”

“No trouble,” Walter said with a tight smile. “I just wondered how your plans were coming along for your business venture.”

“Just fine, thank you Walter,” Oliver answered. “I actually have a lot of work to do today, so if that’s all…”

He moved to stand, but his mother’s stern look cut him to the quick again. He’d spent years
wondering if he'd ever feel a look of his mother's washing over him again. He just hadn't realized how many of those looks would be disapproving ones. He knew he'd told his mother that he had some time, but he'd somehow forgotten how much it bothered him being in a room with the two of them together… as a married couple.

“Sweetheart, what you said the other day about not belonging at QC, well, as your mother I obviously didn't want to hear it. But Walter and I had quite a long chat with our financial team yesterday afternoon, and it seems there might be room for some diversifying under the QC umbrella for your nightclub.”

Oliver’s jaw hung slack for a moment as he tried to formulate a reply.

“Before you say no, please hear me out,” she continued. “That building is still owned by Queen Consolidated. Not only are there considerable financial advantages with creating a subsidiary, but it would also allow you to stay within your father’s company without the pressure that you felt taking residence within the corporation.”

Oliver swallowed hard, feeling the emotion well within him. It had been difficult realizing that honoring his father’s wishes had meant he wouldn't always be able to honor his father’s memory. But it had been something he'd reconciled himself to, if out of nothing more than the promise he'd made that horrible day five years ago.

Before he could stop himself he was out of his seat, rounding the table to place a kiss on his mother's head. “That sounds perfect, thank you,” he said quietly. “Thank you both,” he added, meeting Walter’s eyes.

Walter nodded in reply. “We've set up a meeting with a financial strategist for the end of the week. Do you think you can have your business proposal drawn up by then?”

“I will make a point to,” Oliver answered, reclaiming his seat and piling his plate with a waffle and some fresh berries. His phone chirped in his pocket and he pulled it out, quickly glancing at the incoming text message from Diggle, confirming their follow up meeting later that afternoon. He needed to get to the building earlier though, because he still needed to find a way to get the partial confession of Somers’ to Detective Lance. He would have done it the night before, if his entire plan hadn't gone to crap. Oliver was just grateful that Laurel and her client were safe. He probably would have been too late if Tommy hadn't been there.

Oliver tried not to think too hard about Tommy and the secrets he was keeping. But it seemed like every time they saw each other, Oliver learned something about his friend that bothered him a little more. More things weren't adding up, more questions than answers and Oliver was afraid that when the truth came out, things between them would never be the same.

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Tommy was starting to wish the crazy in his life would get on some kind of schedule. The last couple of weeks were weighing on him so much, and he knew if he let himself lie down he might not get back up for a good 20 hours. So instead of sleeping after he dropped Laurel off at Felicity’s, he got back to work.

He chased down a lead on a Triad hangout, taking out his extra frustration on a few low rung goons. He felt better, even if it sat on him in a cruel way. But they had put Laurel in danger, and he wouldn’t stand by and let someone take something he cared about from him, not if he had the means to stop it.
He nodded to the officer outside Felicity’s door, before knocking.

“Hey,” Felicity greeted, as the door swung open. She looked him in the eye and shook her head. “Did you sleep at all?”

“Who needs sleep when you have coffee?” He passed the to-go tray over, holding up a bag. “I brought bagels too.”

Felicity ushered him in, and Tommy took note of the chaos in her living space. Files scattered the couch and tables.

“Sorry about that,” he gestured to the case work. “Laurel tends to spread out when she’s working on something.”

“Yeah she was up for a few hours, just trying to find something she missed in Martin Somers file. She finally crashed around three,” Felicity explained, as they walked to the kitchen. “But it was nice. We talked, she ranted, we ate cold pizza. Kinda what I expect middle school would have been like if I hadn’t skipped a few grades.”

Tommy set the bag down on the counter before flashing her a smile. “Seriously, thank you.”

“Tommy it’s honestly not a problem,” she sighed. “It kept me from thinking too much about my own issues.”

“What your recent break up or the potentially catastrophic earthquake machine my father has you building?”

He was glad their relationship worked in waves of humor. The darkness that threatened to invade their lives over the last few years could overpower even the strongest of people, hell there were times when Tommy felt like it would crush him. When he had Felicity by his side, he didn’t feel that weight as much.

“We don’t know why Malcolm is interested in Dr. Markov’s work,” she lowered her voice. “He could want the thing done for a thousand different reasons. I mean he could be trying to aid in the collection of fossil fuels, or releasing pressure build up under tectonic plates. We don’t know.”

“But we do know that thing has the potential to be dangerous. It’s not a decor item to tie a room together,” he shook his head. “Nothing about that machine in his hands puts me at ease.”

“Tommy he’s your father.”

“I know that.” And he hated how much sorrow was in his voice. “But I’ve seen what this world can do to people. I’ve looked men and women in the eye who have given up everything that made them who they were, just for a chance at something else. So I’m not blind to the fact that I’ve seen the same look in his eyes, long before his interest in this project. Waller wanted me to look into him for a reason.”

“Amanda Waller is a parasite.”

“But she’s good at what she does,” he replied, pausing when he heard shuffling coming from the hall. He lowered his voice, as he leaned in. “And I can’t, I won’t, turn a blind eye to this. Family or not, if he’s up to something dangerous I will find a way to stop him.”

“Is that coffee I smell?”
Laurel came around the corner, and he had to force the smile on his face. He just hoped she wouldn’t see right through it.

“Yep,” he said handing her a cup. “Extra shot of espresso, two pumps of vanilla. And good morning.”

She gave him a quick kiss, before pulling back. “Boyfriend Tommy is exceptionally good at remembering the little details. But you look exhausted.”

“I have to get ready for work,” Felicity interrupted, grabbing her own cup. “I’ll leave you two to be adorable on your own.”

He wanted to call her back, but they couldn’t keep talking with Laurel there. Not when the subject was too close to his job.

“Tommy, maybe you should head home, get some sleep,” Laurel said once they were alone, moving until her arms wrapped around his neck. “You don’t have to shadow me all day.”

“What if I want to make sure you’re okay?” he whispered, his hands resting on her hips. “Last night scared me Laurel. If I hadn’t been there--”

“But you were. And I’m okay.”

“I can’t lose you,” he placed another kiss to her lips. Deep and full of everything he’d been holding back for months. But he pulled back again, meeting her eyes. “You’re too important to me.”

She smiled running a hand across his cheek. “I think it’s sweet that you want to watch out for me. But there are officers outside and my father will be here in ten minutes. He’s not planning on leaving me alone at all. Which will make the three meetings I have at the courthouse feel more like take-your-father-to-work-day. But you are just as important to me, and you need to sleep. I promise I will call you if I need anything.”

His phone beeped, and he let out a frustrated groan. He could only put off Waller for so long, and apparently he had let that time slip through his fingers. He pulled his phone from his pocket, reading over the message.

“Is something wrong?” Her interest was piqued, as he pocketed the device again.

“Not sure,” he didn’t want to lie to her. But it seemed like the more he tried to avoid it, the more it kept happening. “Sorry, it’s nothing. But I have to go deal with this thing. I’ll call you later. Maybe we can get lunch?”

“Tommy, what’s going on?”

“It’s just,” he paused, shaking his head. His mind racing to think of something to say, anything that she’d actually believe. “The free clinic. With losing my job at Merlyn Global, I just wanted to meet with the firm that handles all of the finances, and make sure that my employment status doesn’t need to be updated in the records.”

It wasn’t a lie. Because he did have plans to meet with the lawyers later in the week, but he still felt the stone of dishonesty settle in his stomach. But Laurel didn’t seem to notice the smudging of his details, as she rested a hand to his cheek.

“I’m sorry,” she whispered. She was comforting him, trying to ease the pain the memory of his mother sometimes brought to the surface. And it was felt like a slap to the face.
“I’ll call you later,” he said, before grabbing his coffee. “Promise me you’ll stick with the officers today?”

She rolled her eyes, but smiled. “I promise.”

Tommy took to the stairs, pulling his phone out once more. Waller had texted him to meet her at a diner a few blocks away. And as much as he hated the idea of being out in public with the head of ARGUS, he didn’t really want to drive all the way to headquarters either.

When he entered the restaurant the breakfast rush was in full swing, every spot seemed to have someone already seated. For a second Tommy questioned if he was in the right place, until he spotted Waller, wedged into the back of the diner, on a red, vinyl booth. How she managed to blend in and stick out simultaneously was a terrifying thing. Like a chameleon, she was never seen until she chose to be.

He took the open seat across from her, and Waller dropped her menu down passed her eyes.

“Good morning, Mr. Merlyn,” she greeted, folding her hands in front of her. Glad she wasn’t calling him agent in public. “How are you?”

“Starting the day with pleasantries, that’s never a good sign.”

“Would you prefer I skip them, and get this over with?” She quirked her brow up, the traces of a smirk setting into her face.

“It would feel more natural, yes.”

“Tell me about the men who broke into Ms. Lance’s apartment.”

Down to business, this was something he could do. Tommy leaned in, lowering his voice. “There were three of them, according to some thugs I came across last night, they’re varying ranking members in the Triad.”

“Do you think Martin Somers contracted their assistance himself or did one of his associates set the details in motion?”

“Can’t be sure,” he took an envelope out of his pocket, sliding it across the table. It was everything he took off the Triad members he’d roughed up the night before. “The goons from last night did say that they heard there was a fourth member sent to Laurel’s place. But I never saw him enter the residence.”

“Maybe it was your green hooded friend?” she challenged.

He was almost annoyed with himself that he hadn’t called it already. “You already read the police report.”

“I did,” she continued, dropping the package in her purse. “Any chance he was with the Triad?”

“Not unless they sent a guy to beat the shit out of their own hitmen.”

“So we have a rogue anomaly roaming the streets of Starling City? I don’t buy it.”

He was frustrated enough with the events of the night before, and the last thing he needed was Waller questioning his loyalty or whatever she was fishing for. He was too exhausted for this.

“I don’t know what to tell you Amanda,” he hissed, only vaguely registering the glare she sent him.
"You read the report, and I just told you all I know. You wanted me to make sure Somers didn’t make a move against Laurel, and I failed. So why don’t you find a way to make your job useful for once?"

He knew it wasn’t a smart idea to cross Waller, he knew how far and wide her wrath could spread. But there was too much going on, too many moving parts that attached to too many stories. He needed one of the plates above his head to stop spinning. Even if it was only long enough for him to breathe.

She smiled at him, a look that would unnerv e him even on the best of days. But today it only sent a chill down his spine. "I already have."

She rummaged in her purse for a second, pulling a thick file out, before she handed it to him. The tab read Connors on the side.

"What the hell is this?"

"You made the decision to protect Simon Connors and his family, and I finally found a way for us both to benefit from it."

Tommy opened the file, on top sat a document dated for that morning, and as he read through it he realized what it was.

"What did you do, Amanda?"

"I made an executive decision. The Triad was going to continue to seek out Mr. Connors because he had information they didn’t want falling into the wrong hands," she took the file back, setting it down between them. "They were never going to stop, not until they killed everyone he has ever cared about. But with Mr. Connors cooperation, I was able to secure new identities for his sister and her children. All I needed from him was loyalty."

"That document was a confession," Tommy glared back at her. "What did you have him confess to?"

"A contract hit," she stated as if he asked her what color his tie was. "He’s agreed to confess to taking money from Mr. Somers in order to murder Victor Nocenti."

"You are unbelievable."

"I’m a leader Mr. Merlyn," she shrugged. "I needed a way to justify our department spending time and resources on relocating his family, and I needed to find a way to keep Martin Somers from getting away with murder. Or would you like your girlfriend to be next on that list?"

"You’re asking an innocent man to spend life in prison for murder."

"No one is innocent in this world, Tommy. Simon Connors has his share of sins he must atone for, and I assure you no one forced him into signing that paper. We just had a talk."

"You forget I’m pretty well versed in what you deem as talking."

Amanda pushed off the table, standing tall as her heels clacked against the linoleum. "Mr. Merlyn, I know you’re going to view today as a failure, but just remember," she leaned in until she was inches from his face. "If I hadn’t found a solution to this problem, you and I would be having a very different conversation. It was either Simon Connors’ freedom or Laurel Lance’s life. You can play the noble card until the world burns, but you and I both know that if you were given the choice
yourself, you would have made the same one.”

She straightened herself, smoothing the lines of her blazer down. “You should go home and rest, Mr. Merlyn. I expect you back at work tomorrow.”

He didn’t watch her as she left. Didn’t dare shift in his seat at all. Because he didn’t want her to see how much her words dug into him. He wanted to believe he’d have been strong enough to find another way. He just wasn’t sure he could convince anyone else of that.

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Felicity left the kitchen, partially because she needed to get herself ready for work, and partially because she needed an escape. Not that seeing her friends so happy together was a bad thing, just that after her major blunder the night before with Carter, the idea of romance smarted just a little.

Okay, maybe more than a little. It wasn’t lost on her just how horribly her last few romances had ended. She’d clearly gotten ahead of herself and flipped out at Carter because… well because of more reasons than she was ready to put into words. A certain ship-wrecked, recently resurrected Bratva member more than likely among them.

She checked her phone before dropping it onto the bed. She wasn’t sure what she was expecting, but there were no missed phone calls or messages waiting for her. Probably for the best; the only thing she was likely to get at that point was a summons from Malcolm regarding the Markov device. The earthquake maker. She shuddered to think what Merlyn wanted with something as dangerous as that.

By the time Felicity had showered and dressed and returned to the living room, Laurel was alone, pouring over her case files on Martin Somers again. She was also whispering to herself, which Felicity couldn’t fault the woman for- she’d caught herself doing the same thing more often than she could count.

“Have you heard from Emily yet?” Felicity asked, reaching for the travel cup of coffee Tommy had brought by and taking a long sip, letting it warm her insides.

“Yes, thank god!” Laurel exclaimed, looking up from her files and throwing her loose hair over her shoulder. “Someone called the police and they were able to dispatch extra officers to her house before they could get to her.”

“I wonder who could have called,” Felicity mused, peering into the bag of bagels Tommy had left and plucking out a blueberry one. “I mean anyone that would have known about it would have been one of Somer’s goons.”

“Except the hood guy,” Laurel added, standing from the sofa and finding her way into the kitchen. She found the cupboard of plates and retrieved one before pulling out a poppy seed bagel.

“Right,” Felicity said, nodding as she tore into her bagel. Her mind wandered a bit, wondering about the hood guy, if only because it kept her mind from other, more painful thoughts. Like how she’d made a complete fool out of herself the night before with Carter. He probably wanted nothing more to do with her, and she couldn’t say she blamed him. And for that matter, she wasn’t sure she wanted anything more to do with him anymore either. After all, Tommy’s words still resounded in her head every time she even tried to think about Carter. She’d blinded herself to the truth for months; protecting her heart from anything beyond the light, happy go-with-the-flow fun she and Carter usually kept to.
But the hood guy was a mystery, and one that intrigued her, at that. Besides, why focus on things like Carter Bowen or the incredibly dangerous seismic generator when there was a potential vigilante in town?

“You okay?” Laurel asked, brow knit together in concern.

Felicity blinked. “Yeah, sorry. Did I space?”

“Only for like the last three minutes,” the brunette answered with a smile. “Work on your mind, or fun?” She ribbed Felicity a bit, emphasising her question.

“Neither,” she said quickly, with a shake of her head. She’d have to find a way to tell Laurel about Carter. But it was still too fresh, and with them being in close quarters for who knew how long, she wasn’t sure she was ready for quite that much girl talk. “Just thinking about your hooded friend. It’s been awhile since Starling has had a good mystery.”

Laurel shrugged. “If by a while, you mean last week when ‘billionaire playboy Oliver Queen’ came back from the dead,” she said, mocking the newscasters.

It did seem like every single news anchor painted him the same way during their broadcasts the last week or so. Although it was strange, because neither Tommy nor Oliver seemed that way to her. They were much more complicated than that, when one took the time to look.

“Fair enough,” Felicity relented, hoping Laurel didn’t notice the way she tensed when his name was spoken aloud. “So, what did I miss in those three minutes where I was spaced out?”

“Just my undying gratitude,” Laurel said with a sigh and then a sly grin. “No but seriously though. Are you a red wine girl or a white wine girl? It’s strictly for research purposes of course.”

“No gratitude necessary,” Felicity smiled back at her friend, ripping off another piece of her bagel. “But if it’s for research, then I’m strictly a red wine girl. Or tequila. Then again, tequila and I have a sordid past. So I’d stick to the wine.” She popped the piece into her mouth and then moved toward the entrance way, coffee in hand. “Alright, I should really run. But stay as long as you want. Eat whatever you want. Just stay safe until that loon is off the streets.”

Laurel nodded, holding up her hand. “Scouts honor.”

The blonde grabbed her purse, keys and coffee and headed out the door. Despite enjoying Laurel’s company, Felicity was grateful for the quiet drive to work. So much had happened in the last little while that it almost reminded her of her global trip with Tommy a couple years prior. Days that melded into weeks of clandestine meetings and secrets and…

“And Oliver,” she said his name aloud. If she was going to live in the same city as him, and be friends with his friends, she was going to have to get used to it. To be able to say it without tensing or reacting.

She needed something to keep her mind from wandering too far down any of those paths. As she maneuvered her way down the streets of Starling, Felicity flipped on the radio and tuned it to a news station to catch up on what she’d missed the last few days. It felt like she’d been holed up with a computer twenty four seven since Tommy had told her about what he’d found. Between that and stories on Oliver, she’d avoided the news more than she’d seen it lately.

“In other news a hooded figure seems to be making the rounds in Starling lately,” the DJ bellowed and Felicity turned the volume up. It was just what she was hoping for. News on the mysterious man who had saved Tommy and Laurel. “The SCPD has labeled him the Hood and reports are
beginning to filter in from various sources about the savior of the Glades. The validity of these sources is not yet known, however one thing seems to be clear- this guy is just getting started.”

Turning onto the main road that led through downtown, Felicity felt her heart rate pick up just a bit, anticipating more information on the Hood.

“In fact, both Adam Hunt and Martin Somers, men facing off against Glades based law firm CNRI, claim to have been visited by the man.” The broadcast cut to a sound byte, a bit garbled, but still enough to grasp. “He came out of nowhere… you know, like how they describe that vigilante in Gotham. Just poof, dropped from the sky. Except instead of high tech throwing stars, this guy uses a bow and arrow.”

Felicity’s foot slammed the brake in the middle of traffic, nearly causing her to be rear ended by the car behind her. Horns blared as she sat there, heart in her throat, holding her breath as she listened to the end of the story.

“There you have it folks. It would appear Starling has it’s very own vigilante, and with targets like Hunt and Somers, it seems this Hood has no problem making dangerous enemies. But something tells me he might be making enemies on both sides. Detective Lance from Starling PD had this to say—”

Pulling over to the side of the road, Felicity pushed the gear shift into park. She was going to be late to work but she couldn’t manage to drive as her brain sifted back through months and years of memories back to the very first day in Oliver’s apartment in Russia. And then again when he came to her aide in the cafe when Waller showed up. His bow and arrows. She recalled it, then, clear as day. Just days ago, when he’d texted her to meet him in the study at the Queen Manor. He’d told her that he wasn’t really home. That he was only back for something he couldn’t do anywhere else.

There were far more questions than answers, but there was one thing of which Felicity was absolutely certain: Oliver Queen was moonlighting as Starling City’s vigilante. And whether or not he wanted her to know, she’d be damned if she wasn’t going to find out why.
Chapter 13

Chapter by holysmoaksoliver

Chapter Notes

Woohoo! Felicity KNOWS! We're so glad you're all enjoying how things are going down. There's so much more to come, so hold on to your socks (or flip flops or whatever...)

Enjoy chapter 13, here we go!
-Cassie

Oliver stepped out of the shadows, the shards of James Holder’s beer bottle still clattering against the hard concrete rooftop. Holder was as corrupt as they came. His corporation put defective smoke detectors in low income housing in the Glades, resulting in too many fires, too many deaths. And unlike the courts, his brand of justice wasn’t going to let Holder get away with it.

“You’re him aren’t you?” Holder asked, a hint of amusement masking the nerves in his voice. “The Hood?”

Oliver made sure to click on his voice modulator before he spoke. “Guess my reputation proceeds me, but I could say the same for you.”

“My security team will be up here within 30 seconds, All I have to do is call out.”

Oliver tossed the guns he’d taken off Holder’s men. All five of them out cold a floor below where he stood. “Trust me, they won’t come.”

Holder looked like a rat caught in a trap, eyes darting for an escape. “What do you want?”

Oliver wanted a lot of things. He wanted this to be an easy job. He wanted to go home and night and hug his family without seeing the flashes of the lives he’d taken behind his eyes. But he couldn’t atone for those sins until he made the people on his father’s list atone for theirs.

“You know why I’m here,” he growled.

“I won that lawsuit.”

“Technicalities don’t work with me,” Oliver said, lifting his bow. “How many people died because of you? How many families did you destroy while chasing down the next profit? The dead can’t speak for themselves Mr. Holder. But they have a message for you.” Oliver paused, nocking an arrow into place. “James Holder, you ha--”

But his words were cut off, as a bullet sliced through Holder’s chest and blood stained his robe.

Oliver turned, shooting a couple of arrows into the direction the shots came from. But he barely had time to duck as the the bullets rained across the rooftop. James Holder’s lifeless body falling forward into the pool.
His mind raced as he tried to work himself out of the situation. He could try and outrun the gunman. But if the pain radiating from his shoulder was any indication, he had already been hit once. And the last thing he needed was a trail of his blood leading down from Holder’s rooftop. But he if didn’t leave soon, he’d have to deal with the cops.

The shots came to an end and Oliver chanced a glance over the edge of his spot. He couldn’t see anyone, but that didn’t mean they had left. But as sirens wailed in the background he knew he was running out of time. He had to get back to the Foundry.

It was nearly half an hour later, and Oliver was pulling closed the stitches on his arm. He was lucky the bullet had only struck his shoulder. He’d been careless out there. Not checking the surrounding buildings before he went charging into Holder’s place; it could have gotten him killed. And then what? Who would have protected his family from his secrets? He couldn’t keep this up for much longer. A handful of targets already and Oliver felt like he needed backup more than ever.

It wasn’t something he ever had to think about before. There had always been someone at his side. From Yo Fei to Slade, Maseo to the Bratva. Even if he couldn’t fully trust someone, he always trusted they had his back. But when he decided to come home, he decided to do things alone. And he never realized just how isolated that would feel.

He pulled out his father’s book, grabbing for the nearest pen. James Holder was the kind of man who was bound to have enemies all over. The problem was, whoever took a shot at him, might not stop at one victim. And the next time he got a shot off, it could be in a more public place. And Oliver wouldn’t allow that.

He put the pen next to Holder’s name, but his arm became numb, a tingling that spread out from his shoulder, and clouded over his vision. Poison. It had to be.

Oliver scrambled to his trunk, pushing aside his things until his hand gripped the pouch of herbs. He pinched them between his fingers, shoving them against his cheek, as he grabbed a water bottle and downed it. He took a deep breath, letting the herbs work themselves through his system as he fought off the fog of sleep.

He could name on one hand the number of poisons that could take effect that fast. But he only knew of one that someone would be crazy enough to lace into a bullet. Curare was a neurotoxin, and Oliver knew exactly who used it. He should have seen this coming. But he couldn’t do anything else as sleep pulled him under.

It was hours later when he woke, and exhaustion was heavy in his limbs. His hand came to rest on the wound, wincing at the ache in his arm. Information flooded back into his head. Curare was from South America, and many natives used it to poison the tips of their arrows. A trick Oliver was sure Floyd Lawton had picked up on one of his many visits there.

Oliver pushed himself off the floor, grabbing something else from his trunk. He unfolded the slip of paper, looking over the three names before him.

When Felicity had found the information to take down Waller two years ago, Oliver committed the other names on her short list to memory. Because if there was one thing he wanted to make sure of, it was that Amanda Waller never got her way when it came to task force X. Digger Harkness was in an Australian prison the last he’d checked, and Dr. Quinzel, now going by Harley Quinn, was a long term patient at Arkham Asylum. But Deadshot was in and out of the wind over the last two years. The information Oliver had been able to gather had been limited at best, and mostly involved his method of killing. But he did know Lawton was a gun for hire. And he knew better than anyone if you were trying to lay low while completing a job you picked the crappiest motel you could find.
Oliver worked his way up the stairs, cursing at how late-- early it was. He’d been out all night. And he knew his mother wasn’t likely to find him ditching his bodyguard as a step in the right direction.

“Oliver?”

He froze as the steel door slammed into place behind him. His mind searching for something he knew was hidden beneath the events of the last few hours. He had a security meeting this morning.

“Diggle,” he came closer, plastering a tight smile on his face. “You’re very punctual.”

“Even though it didn’t sound like it, I’m gonna take that as a compliment.”

Oliver nodded, cursing the timing of things. The longer he left Lawton alone, the more likely he could skip town before Oliver figured out who hired him.

“I wish I could stay,” Oliver said walking around the man. “But I’m late for a different meeting. And this associate isn’t likely to wait on me.”

“Associate?” the other man raised a brow.

Oliver could guess what train of thought Digg was taking as he watched him closely. And even if he knew he should let Russia stay in Russia he couldn’t help but respond to it. “That part of my life is done. Don’t worry about Bratva business coming into this one.”

Diggle nodded, seemingly satisfied with that answer. “So you asked me to come all the way out here and now you’re gonna bail?”

Oliver shrugged, flashing him a grin. “If you’re gonna work security for me Mr. Diggle, you might want to get used to the disappearing act.” At his words he paused, an idea springing to light. “Could hang out here for an hour, and if a guy named Rob shows up tell him I’m across town?”

“You want my help ditching your actual security detail?”

He didn’t reply, but Diggle didn’t seem to mind as he took a seat on one of the old crates, rolling his eyes.

“You’re lucky I need a job Queen.”

“Trust me,” he called back as he reached the door. “I know.”

Oliver only knew the motels in the Glades on reputation, but given Holder’s place and the likely direction Lawton had taken, he took a guess about which one he would be at.

He should have brought his gear with him, but going back downstairs would have been suspicious. And he still needed Diggle, so spooking him off this early with his bow and arrows was probably a terrible idea.

As luck would have it, he rounded the corner of the motel just as Lawton crossed the threshold of a room on the base level. Pulling his Starling Rocket’s cap down over his eyes, Oliver walked close to the wall, avoiding meeting anyone’s eye. Oliver Queen Spotted at Seedy Motel would not be the kind of headline he could spin without too many questions.

He knocked heavy against Lawton’s door, the sound of buzzing faint through the wood frame.

Oliver recalled another detail about Lawton, something to do with tattoos and his victims.

Before he could decide what he’d do if the man answered, bullets splintered through the wood. Oliver
pulled himself around the corner, staying low. He could hear shouts from passersby and he hoped no one caught a stray bullet. But just as soon as the gunfire started, it cut off. As glass shattered from the rear end of the room, Oliver raced towards the door. Even in a crappy hole in the wall on the edge of the Glades, the cops would be here soon. And he needed to see if Lawton left anything behind.

The room was in shambles, bullets had hit almost everything in their path, and Lawton didn’t have time to grab anything. But one thing that caught his eye sat on the nicked up desk. A clue to who could have hired the man. But when he moved closer to inspect it he cursed.

How the hell was he going to get data off a bullet ridden laptop?

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Despite Waller giving him the day off the previous day, for the first time in a long time, Tommy found himself really not wanting to be at work. He did however, want to visit Laurel, to help her clean up the mess in her apartment from a couple days before, and make sure that she was emotionally okay with being home. Just because Martin Somers was now behind bars, didn’t make the memories dissipate. Tommy understood that firsthand.

But more than that, he wanted to get back to her place. So he readied himself earlier than he needed to be at the office and headed to her apartment. He knew she wasn’t there yet; they were arraigning Somers that morning, so she’d be allowed back at her place later that night. But he wanted to check it out just the same. The more he thought about the hooded man from the night of the break in, the more uneasy it made him. And Tommy was hoping in all of the commotion that he’d left some sort of clue behind as to his identity.

He hadn’t gotten two minutes down the road when his phone rang. Tommy groaned, expecting Waller to be calling him in early, but was surprised to find Moira’s name flashing across the screen.

“Mrs. Queen,” he said, barely hiding the surprise from his voice. “To what do I owe this great pleasure?”

“Tommy,” she huffed, her voice bellowing through the speakers of his Maserati. “How many times have I asked you to call me Moira, please? You aren’t a schoolboy any longer.”

“Moira,” he echoed with a hint of a laugh. “What can I do for you this morning?”

There was a brief pause on the other end of the line before she answered. “I wondered if you might know where to find my son,” she said, her voice a bit hesitant. “He seems to have once again forgotten that he has a bodyguard to keep with him when he leaves the house.”

While it didn’t surprise Tommy that Oliver had ditched the guy, he was a bit amused that Moira thought it necessary for her son to have one in the first place. Then again, without her knowing how Oliver had spent the last five years of his life, she was justified in her concern. But Tommy knew better.

“I haven’t seen him, Mrs.--” he broke off mid sentence. “Moira, but if you’d like I can check some old haunts? Can’t imagine him getting into too much trouble at this hour.”

“Would you?” she asked, a smile in her voice. “I’d check the old steel factory first. The one in the Glades that Oliver had the insane notion to turn into a nightclub.”

Well that was news to Tommy. Not that Oliver had to tell him everything, in fact, there were plenty of secrets shared between the two. Tommy just thought those were more like past secrets, and less like normal, everyday activity secrets. But it appeared that once again he was being proven wrong.
by his friend.

“No problem,” he answered quickly. “I’ll be there in just a few minutes.” Tommy took the next left, which would lead him down into the Glades.

“Thank you,” she said, her voice truly grateful.

“I’ll be sure to give him a stern talking-to as well.” Tommy grinned. It was in moments like that when the old lie was easier to fall back into. The idea that things were the same as they’d been five years ago.

“Well if you don’t, be sure to have him call his mother, because I certainly will.”

Tommy smiled, a little more wistfully this time, and was grateful that she couldn’t see the change in his expression. Sometimes he felt too transparent for field work- then again, he did always seem to be able to put on the charm when the need arose.

He ended the call just as he came upon the old steel factory. He recalled Ollie asking to drive by it that first night, on their way to a club downtown. Tommy had made a point of how Robert had gotten out of the Glades just in time before the whole area had gone downhill, but Oliver failed to mention that he was planning on resurrecting the building.

The parking lot was nearly empty, save a single car near the old front entrance, but from the make and age of it, Tommy highly doubted it was Oliver’s ride. He knocked briefly on the door before letting himself in. Whatever Oliver was planning on doing to the place- it would have to be vast and expensive, because from the dust covered floors to the sunken in roof- the place would never pass a building inspection.

A figure stood in the wide span of the room, arms crossed. It wasn’t Oliver, that much Tommy was sure of. But it was still a familiar figure, and Tommy was unsure how to handle seeing the person in question there.

“Mr. Diggle,” Tommy said, clearing his throat as he approached. “Long time.”

Digg took Tommy’s offered hand and shook it firmly, before pulling him into a half hug/ pat on the back. He had only seen Diggle a few times since the tarmac in Russia and most of them had been frosty at best. Although Tommy had to wonder if it had anything to do with the fact that all of those previous times, Tommy had been with Lyla.

“You aren’t Rob,” Diggle mused when they took a step back.

“That I am not,” Tommy answered. “In fact, I was sent to look for Oliver by his mother on said bodyguard’s behalf. Seems my buddy has a tendency to slip out unnoticed.”

“Yeah, he’s good at that,” Diggle grinned. “We were supposed to have a meeting this morning but he said something came up. Asked me to stick around to point his bodyguard in the right direction.”

“And that direction might be?”

Digg shrugged. “Just said across town.”

“I hope you’re charging him for your time.”

“Oh believe me, I am.”
“Good,” Tommy said with a smile. “Well, I hate to jet, but I actually have somewhere to be too. I’ll call Mrs. Queen and let her know to send Rob somewhere downtown. At this rate she might just put a GPS tracker on Ollie.”

He could tell Diggle wanted to ask about Lyla. Whether or not they were still on good terms, how she was doing, probably if she was single. Tommy didn’t know enough about their relationship to know anything more than things were complicated. He didn’t pry and she rarely offered. But he knew they still felt something for each other. That much was clear in the way Diggle stood there, shifting weight from one foot to the other.

“She’s doing well,” he offered finally. He didn’t feel comfortable giving more than that, especially when it wasn’t common knowledge that Tommy worked for ARGUS. It had been difficult to keep his position mostly covert, but that was how he preferred it.

Diggle nodded. “Well I guess if you’re clueing in the Queens, there’s no reason for me to stay.”

“He give you a key to lock up?”

“I think I can manage.”

“Make sure to tell him you stayed at least twice as long as you really did,” Tommy said, pulling his own keys out of his pocket and swinging them around his finger. He pushed through the doors, feeling slightly like he’d betrayed Lyla by saying something to Diggle, even if it was clear the man needed a lifeline. Sometimes relationships were just too complicated to work out themselves. But anything more than what he’d said, and Tommy would have felt like he was meddling.

He slid back behind the wheel and dialed Moira, quickly telling her what little information Diggle had given him. He apologized and quickly hung up the phone, pointing his car back towards his original direction of Laurel’s apartment.

It took him several minutes to get there, and several more to convince the building manager to let him in. But once he reminded the man that he’d been with Laurel when the attack happened, he was allowed entrance with some reluctance. The doorway was crossed off with police tape, but Tommy quickly ducked under it and entered the apartment.

“Hey!” Someone called, startling Tommy. He turned to find a uniformed police officer coming down the hallway.

“Hey man, I’m sorry. Laurel’s just been blowing up my phone all morning. Apparently there are files she needs for a case she’s got in court today and they’re here somewhere. I didn’t seen anyone and just figured I’d slip in and out. You can call her father if you’d like. I’m sure he’d clear me.”

Actually, Tommy was very sure that he would be the last person Detective Lance would allow into Laurel’s apartment, but he could tell from the young officer’s face that Lance freaked him out more than Tommy did.

He held up his hands. “You’re good, man. Just make it quick.”

Tommy nodded, turning back to the mess that was left behind from the previous night. Scattered papers, broken lamps and vases and tables. Tommy move through the rooms, retracing his steps, recalling the movements. He’d learned through training with Waller how to stay in control when adrenaline runs high, but sometimes his memories still blurred. He was in the hallway with a gun trained on one of the intruders when he’d first seen the man in the hood. If memory served, the man had been confined to the living room, so Tommy moved there first, for anything- a torn piece of
cloth, a trail of blood, anything that might help identify the man.

He recalled that the man had gloves on, so he’d get no fingerprints. In fact, there seemed to be no trace of him at all. Tommy moved to the fire escape. On the stairs, something caught his eye. It could be nothing of course, but he carefully climbed out through the broken window, to get a closer look. Stuck between the holes in the metal stair was a single, loose green arrowhead.

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Felicity knew she had to keep her thoughts in check, which was only difficult every single time someone brought up the Hood. It had only been a couple of days since his debut into Starling City’s headlines, but his endeavours had already overshadowed Oliver Queen’s return. Felicity couldn’t help but scoff at that. Oliver had traded in the tabloid rags for one part of his life, to the front page fodder of another.

Because she was convinced more than ever that Oliver was running around acting the part of hero. And she wanted to confront him about it. But every time she pulled her phone out to call or text him something would stop her.

Would he even pick up if she called him? And if she somehow found the nerve to bring it up would he answer her truthfully? She doubted it very much.

If Oliver was the vigilante, which he had to be because honestly the timing just fit, then he was keeping it a secret from everyone in his life. She knew better than most that if Oliver wanted to keep something from someone then pushing him wouldn’t get her anywhere. She remembered every conversation between them, and she remembered all the times she tried to get him to talk about Tommy, about what he was going to do. But every single time he’d close up, he’d back off and go sulk. If she wanted the truth out of Oliver, she was going to have to find a creative way to get it. And that only proved more relevant when the news of another vigilante attack came in that morning.

“Prominent business man James Holder was found murdered at his private residence last night,” the newscaster for channel 5 said, as Felicity looked up from the line of code she was trying to finish. “Sources within the police department state that arrows were found on the scene, but that Holder’s death was attributed to a gunshot wound. Leaving residences to speculate if the Hood has figured out that bullets prove more effective than arrows.”

She exed out of the newsfeed window, with a growl of annoyance. But she wasn’t sure why. She knew Oliver had killed people, she wasn’t innocent to the notion that he had been deep in the Russian mob when they met. And she knew there was a darkness to him that she might never learn about. But something about the way the world was talking about the Hood irked her.

The only people he’d been linked to so far had been men Felicity herself knew were pretty bad. She had even given Laurel the information to take down Adam Hunt, and she knew Waller had Tommy focused on Somers. Something didn’t sit right about this latest attack.

She looked back down at her work, but the itch had already settled into her mind. She had to know what the police knew. So before Felicity could talk herself out of it, she pulled up a different program on her tablet, and wormed her way into the SCPD’s mainframe. The irony of doing something illegal to find out more details about Oliver’s illegal activities, brought a smile to her face. She really needed to nip this hobby of hers in the bud. But that was a problem for another day. And it wasn’t even a real problem. She was just curious. And curiosity was only ever sated by knowledge.

She found her way into Detective Lance’s case files, pulling up the one for James Holder. According to the officers first on the scene, Holder was found dead in his pool, one bullet wound through his
chest. His bodyguards were all found alive and unconscious on the premises. Which struck Felicity as odd. If someone had moved to killing their targets, why would they leave witnesses alive? Oliver would be smarter than that. But the part of the report that caught Felicity’s attention the most was Lance’s personal notes at the end of the report.

_Bullet appears to be from a high caliber rifle. Shots came from the rooftop west of Holder’s place. Given the evidence we can rule out the vigilante as a suspect. But not as a potential witness._

She somehow already knew that Oliver hadn’t done it. But it was good to know that he wasn’t being hunted as a murderer. And she wished the rush of relief that flooded her system hadn’t felt so damn intoxicating. She was having too much trouble sorting out her own emotions the last couple of days. Ever since Carter stormed out of her apartment, things had been coming to her in crashing waves, with enough force she felt like she could drown in it.

It had been good with Carter, safe and structured. She knew exactly where she stood and what was in front of her. But now her feelings were all over the map and she didn’t know how to navigate through the things she had tried for the last six months to ignore.

“Ms. Smoak?”

Felicity jumped at the interruption, dropping her tablet to her desk. She hated when Malcolm would just barge into her office. But the man in front of her wasn’t Malcolm Merlyn. No this was a man she rarely knew by face, only reputation.

“Dr. Markov,” she greeted, swiping away from the open case file. “This is certainly a surprise.”

“A good one I hope,” he said with a smile. “May I come in?”

“Yes sir,” she gestured to the seat in front of her desk, trying to keep her nerves in check. “I do hope I wasn’t lost in my own world for too long, while you tried getting my attention.”

He sat waving off her comment. “Nonsense. I know a few things about getting lost in one's work. Only the truest of brilliance can say they’ve shut the world out when they are focused.”

“Clearly you’ve never seen a teenager play a video game for fifteen hours straight,” she mused with a laugh. “But to what do I owe this visit?”

“Down to business,” he seemed to take that well as he readjusted in his seat. “Mr. Merlyn told me you wished to be more involved with the project. I have to say I am surprised. You’ve been working with us for so long, yet this is the first you’ve shown interest.”

“And I would like to apologize for that.”

“Oh?”

Felicity could feel her nerves fried to the ends. But she knew if she wanted to get to the bottom of the device, she had to play the role she’d been given.

“I’m rather young in this field, Doctor,” she said adding a shrug. “Being young and a woman, makes it difficult to be seen as serious when it comes to the technology we’ve been working on. I knew the only way to get ahead in my career would be to take some time and pay attention to the things around me. To be involved without getting too involved. But now I’m ready. I want to be fully apart of making this world a different place.”

“And you think my machine can do just that?”
“I know a seismic generator can be useful in a myriad of things, including finding safer more sustainable ways of retrieving fossil fuel. And if Merlyn Global is about to be at the forefront in changing an industry as combustive as that, you’re going to need me on your team full time.”

“You have been paying attention to things,” he gave her an impressed smile. “Not even my closest engineer has put together what we are building just yet. And he graduated Caltech with his masters at 21.”

“That’s impressive,” she smirked. “Not as impressive as MIT at 19, but still he should be proud. But you should be looking at this as an opportunity to have someone on your team who’s brilliant enough to see the long game in action, but has the foresight to only move when it’s time.”

“I see.”

“I know that Malcolm Merlyn wants this project done and ready long before the end of next year. And the only way to achieve that is with me fully involved with your team.”

“Merlyn Global does not own the full rights to this project, Ms. Smoak. I still have loyalty to Unidac Industries, and that loyalty will tie itself to whomever purchases Unidac at the auction tomorrow night.”

“We both know Mr. Merlyn is doing everything in his power to ensure that MG is the one who wins that auction. And I’ve worked with him long enough to know that he’ll get what he wants. He always does,” she sighed, resting her elbows against the desk. “And when he does, you’ll need a full time liaison from the company to oversee the next phase of the project. I think you and I both know, I’m the best candidate for that position.”

“Ms. Smoak, your ambition is not something I expected.”

“People like to underestimate me,” she said, as her phone beeped next to her. “But the wonderful thing about that is it only happens once. They know better than to do it a second time.”

He stood, smoothing his tie down. “If Merlyn Global secures the rights to Unidac, then I will make sure Malcolm knows my recommendation for you to be at the top of the list for liaison.”

“Thank you, Dr. Markov,” she stood too, holding her hand out to him.

He shook it. “It was a pleasure to meet with you Ms. Smoak. And I do hope we will be working more together in the future.”

“As do I.”

She waited until Markov had left before she dropped back into her seat, the reality of what she’d done hitting her hard. She had told Tommy only a couple weeks ago that she would distance herself from the company and this project. And now she wasn’t just involved, she was diving head first straight into the thick of things. But the truth was neither of them knew what was going on, and the only way to learn more was to stay and to get closer to things. It was the right thing to do.

She picked up her phone, barely remembering that she missed a text, and opened her messages.

The first text she saw caught her off guard. And she nearly dropped her phone just at the sight of the name. Oliver. She’d been trying to convince herself for the last day or so to contact him and get to the bottom of things, and now he was reaching out to her.

She clicked the icon open to view the two new messages. The first an address, not exactly close to
Merlyn Global but she was pretty sure she knew where it was. The second though was just two words. *Please come.*

She was getting close to playing with fire the more she let herself gravitate towards him. But she also knew she wouldn’t be able to say no. Not when every part of her screamed to go. And her keys were already in hand.

She groaned to herself as she clicked to reply.

*I’ll be there soon.*

She was only going to get answers. She kept telling herself as she grabbed her stuff and left her office. She just wanted to know what was going on. As she reached the elevator she let out a long breath. Because she couldn’t even convince herself of that for longer than a minute. How would she convince anyone else?
Oliver had paced the length of the steel factory basement more times than he could count before getting the nerve to text her. And it wasn’t because he didn’t want to see her. Because if he were letting himself be honest, and completely selfish, it was one of the forefront thoughts in his mind since the night at his Back from the Dead party, maybe even before then. But things with Felicity were complicated, and likely to always be that way.

That didn’t take away from his problem at hand. Had the laptop he’d recovered not been damaged, he would have probably been able to figure out how to crack the encryption on it to get the data off and figure out why Deadshot had been contracted to kill James Holder. But since the damn thing wouldn’t even turn on, that pushed things a little beyond his realm of expertise and squarely into hers.

Before coming home, he’d considered pretty carefully if and when he would add people to his crusade. He was glad to find that both of his top choices were still in Starling. Diggle and Felicity had the specific skillsets he was looking for in partners, even if it was hard for him to admit to himself that he might not be able to do this on his own. Diggle, he knew, could handle field work, but he hoped that despite any work that Felicity did for him, he could keep the truth behind it a secret from her. And as he sat in the small coffee shop in downtown Starling waiting for her, he considered very carefully that he was about to test that theory.

Once he’d received the reply from her that she’d be there soon, his head popped up every time the door opened. The laptop was in a messenger bag slung over the back of his seat and the hot cup of coffee in front of him warmed his hands, quickening his pulse. At least that was what he told himself.
was the culprit of his pulse racing. He wouldn’t let himself believe it was anything else.

Finally, the door swung open and she took a cautious step inside, glancing around until she met his eyes. Her ponytail swung behind her as she made her way over, an unreadable expression on her face. She looked determined, to be sure, but there was something else that he couldn’t quite place mingled across her features.

“Hey,” she said, a little breathless, taking a seat across from him.

“Hey,” he answered, not breaking their eye contact.

“Is this for me?” she asked, gesturing to the second take-out cup of coffee sitting on the table.

“As long as you still take it the same,” he said, and regretted it as almost instantly images of them in the cramped apartment in Russia, in the hotel room in Japan, flooded his mind.

“If it’s coffee, I’ll take it,” she answered a little brusquely. And then followed it up with a, “thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” Oliver said, blowing out a bit of air. It was stupid, being this uptight around her. He knew that, but there was just something about her presence that always did something to him.

“So what did you--”

“How is your--” he said at the same time. They both broke off mid-sentence. “You first,” he said finally, after a moment of silence where both refused to speak.

“This shouldn’t be this hard,” Felicity said, blowing out a long breath of her own.

“I know.” He understood her frustration. They’d been alone together plenty of times. But then again that was two years ago; after everything he’d been through, it felt like lifetimes.

She cleared her throat and took a sip of her coffee. “I was just wondering why you asked me to come. I mean not that I was opposed to seeing you, it’s just that, well, we haven’t done especially well with being alone together since you’ve been back. Which is strange, isn’t it? Since we spent so much time together…” her voice trailed off, her hands wringing themselves together on the table top between them.

He could see what being around him was doing to her, and he hated himself for it. “I was just hoping for some computer help, actually,” he said, turning to grab the bag from the back of his seat. He reached inside, pulling out the bullet ridden laptop and placed it on the table between them.

She eyed it carefully for a moment, before tilting her head in what he could only identify as frustration, annoyance or amusement. Perhaps some mix of all three. “What kind of help are you looking for, exactly?”

“Well,” he sighed. “I was at a coffee shop across town and I spilled a latte on it.”

“A latte,” she deadpanned. She reached for the device, circling the holes with her fingertips. “Because these look like bullet holes.”

Oliver shrugged. “My coffee shop is in a bad neighborhood.”

“Seems to be your lot in life,” she whispered under her breath. “Sorry, I just said that out loud didn’t I?”
“Eh,” he made a face, remembering how he’d saved her not once, but twice at the coffee shop around the corner from his apartment in Russia two years prior. “I don’t think anyone but me heard you.”

“Oops.”

He felt himself smile, something as easy as breathing and as difficult as a mind full of memories of all the horrible, terrible things he’d done. But with her, it was effortless. He’d missed the babble, the lightness that her presence brought with it.

Oliver cleared his throat. “Anyway, I was hoping you could see what you could find, give me a call once you’ve got the data so I can take a look.”

“Take a look?” She raised a brow. “I thought you said this was your laptop.”

He frowned, taking a sip of his coffee before answering. “I did say that,” he replied, but left it at that.

Felicity chewed on her bottom lip, looking like she wanted to say something further, but couldn’t find the nerve to. Oliver’s brow furrowed, watching her carefully as she pulled the laptop toward her. Her nails tapped against it, idly.

“I don’t think… I mean with work and everything…” she began.

“Felicity,” he said evenly. “I need you.” He paused, feeling the rise in his pulse again, the churning in his stomach. “Please.”

She cleared her throat, tapping out a different rhythm on the laptop, as if weighing her options. But he could see the resolve in her eyes. He’d already won her over. She stood abruptly, tucking the laptop under her arm and grabbing the half empty cup of coffee. “I’ll text you when it’s done,” she said, turning on her heel.

His eyes followed her, and she paused a few paces away, turning back and raising her cup. “Thanks for the java,” she said with a tight smile.

For the second time in just as many minutes, he wondered what she was holding back. What it was that she wanted to say and didn’t. Had it been something about Russia? About Akio? About Tommy or Laurel or Thea? Or was it about them? He swallowed hard at that, watching her walk the rest of the way out of the coffee shop.

He wasn’t sure if he felt more or less burdened after their meeting. Maybe both, and for different reasons. He inhaled a gulp of air, his thumb and forefinger rubbing together in his nervous tick under the table. He hated that he was getting her involved in this; he needed her distanced, out of harm’s way, safe. And yet here he was, pulling her right back into all of the trouble she’d left behind in Russia two years ago. She didn’t deserve this.

Oliver waited a moment longer before standing and slinging his empty messenger bag over his shoulder. He exited the coffee shop, and nearly ran right into Felicity. She had her cell phone stuck to her ear, with a worried expression on her face.

“Thea, slow down,” she said. “You need me to come pick you up from where?! ”

His brow furrowed, and he moved to face her. Felicity looked up, meeting his eyes with mild horror in her own.
“Okay, I will be there in twenty minutes,” Felicity said, before clicking the phone off and huffing a breath. “Your sister got arrested with some of her friends. Apparently they broke into some store downtown to try on dresses and are currently being detained by the SCPD.”

“I’m going with you,” Oliver said immediately.

“Did you ever have that talk with her?” Felicity asked, her voice rising half an octave. “Because she acts out when she thinks no one cares about her and last I knew you were doing a pretty good job of ignoring—” she broke off when Oliver flinched at her words. “I’m sorry. That was horrible of me. It’s just that I never had a sister, and I think so highly of yours.”

Truth be told, he had never quite found the time to talk to Thea about being back home. He’d wanted to, so many times, but he could never find the right words to express to her just what being home meant to him, how many times he’d imagined it.

“I’m going with you,” he repeated, taking hold of her arm to lead her toward his car.

A moment later, Felicity pulled out of his grasp. “I appreciate your concern, but no.”

“Felicity, this is my sister. I understand I might not act like it all the time, but regardless of what anyone thinks, I do actually give a damn about her. If she’s in trouble, I need to be there for her.”

He paused. “So, I’m going with you.”

He watched her swallow hard, her eyes averted. “Fine,” she all but growled. “But I’m driving.”

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Tommy held the arrowhead by its base, twirling it as the light caught against it’s sharp edges. No matter how many times he told himself to set it down, he held it tighter. Almost like he was willing it to spill its secrets. But of course the metal stayed silent.

He couldn’t think of another way to get any information on the vigilante, and he didn’t want to have to involve Felicity in yet another mysterious thing. She had been involved in way too much danger and violence at the expense of Tommy’s crusades. And he’d be damned if he ever got the girl shot at again. No Felicity was not the one he could go to for this one. At least not until he knew more about what he was dealing with.

“Agent Merlyn?”

Tommy jumped a little at the interruption. He dropped the object to his desk, moving a folder to cover it.

But the person standing there wasn’t Waller; it wasn’t a senior field agent either.

“Lexi, hey,” he greeted, giving the girl a smile.

She hadn’t been with ARGUS very long, a young computer wiz recruited out from under the NSA or something, and every time Tommy saw her his heart broke a little more. He couldn’t help looking at Lexi and seeing what life would have been like if Waller had sunk her claws into Felicity.

He recalled Lexi’s first day, her hair piled in a high bun of icy blue curls. And just ten months later, and she had stripped the bright colors from her hair. It now fell in short waves of black that barely tucked behind her ears. The light she once held in her eyes had dimmed. He knew, given just a little more time, Amanda Waller would have that light snuffed out for good.
“Am I interrupting?” she asked gesturing to the stack of paperwork he was supposed to be doing.

Lyla usually kept him from sliding too long with that. But she was still off on special assignment for Waller, whatever that might be. And Tommy had a lot on his mind recently. He probably should get some of it out of the way, but he didn’t exactly care.

“You’d think so, but no,” he let his feet drop from his desk, spinning until he faced her. “What’s up?”

She looked nervous, her eyes glancing back at the paper in her hand. “It’s just, Director Waller wanted to know if you were still attending the Unidac auction tomorrow? She said she needs an agent there to blend into the crowd.”

“A mission like this usually involves two agents,” he said, trying to fight back a groan. He could just picture who Waller would saddle him with since Lyla was out of town.

“She didn’t mention anyone else.”

Tommy’s eyes drifted up towards Waller’s office. She was there, a few agents in with her, as she commanded the room. It was strange she’d want to send any agent in alone, especially when she’d expressed specific concern over Malcolm’s involvement with Dr. Markov’s device. It was even weirder she’d want Tommy to go in on his own. He did have a tendency to go a little rogue on a mission.

Waller thought it important enough to have eyes on the auction, but not enough for Tommy to have backup? That or she was fearful anyone else from ARGUS would drawn the wrong kind of attention. Even if he didn’t want to, he knew he’d have to ask.

“I’ll let her know I can do it,” he replied. “I should still be on the guest list.”

“Okay,” Lexi nodded like she was going to walk off. But the girl lingered still, her eyes trained on Tommy.

“Is there a problem?”

“No,” she said, then stepped closer as she dropped her voice. “I know a few of the other agents thought what you did for the Connors family was stupid, suicidal even, considering the million shades of purple Director Waller went. But I thought you should know it was the right call.”

“Really?”

“I’m not delusional about what we do here, Agent Merlyn. It’s not all good,” she shrugged. “But knowing we have people like you and Agent Michaels in the field, trying to do what’s right, even in the smallest ways. It makes the job a little easier.”

She smiled, about to walk off, when a thought overtook Tommy. He knew what Waller would do if she got wind of Tommy using one of the junior techs on a personal project. But he needed help, and he’d already considered his usual avenue a no go. Plus if Waller found out he could play it off as following up on his case. The Hood had targeted Martin Somers, so it’s not like he’d be totally lying.

“Lexi?” he drew her attention back to him.

“Yes sir?”

“First let’s drop the sir,” he said holding back a laugh. “I’m not my father, nor do I want to be.
Second, call me Tommy.”

“First name basis with one of the senior field officers, yeah that’s normal,” she replied, but grinned. “What can I help you with, Tommy?”

“Good,” he moved the file off the arrowhead, picking it up gingerly. “I was hoping you could do a workup for me on this. The metal composite, the manufacturer, anything you can get.”

She took the arrow from him, and for a moment he almost snatched it back, all the training of their line of work shaking his head in violent succession. An ARGUS agent wasn’t supposed to trust, not right out of the gate. But Tommy pushed those feelings down, and let Lexi take the item. Despite his training and all the things he’d learned in the last couple years, Tommy knew to trust his instincts. It’s what had led him to Felicity, led him back to Oliver. If he could trust anything, he could trust that.

“Where did you get this?”

“A friend,” he said, hoping the lie sounded casual enough. Though technically it wasn’t a lie. He’d found it at Laurel’s place. And he’d consider the two of them friends. “That’s not as important. Can you do it?”

“I mean it might take me a few days,” she said, shooting a glance across the room towards her workstation. “But, as long as a major computer failure doesn’t occur in the next 48 hours, I should be able to track down something on it.”

“Thank you,” he leaned across his desk, hoping no one was paying attention to them. “And it might be best to keep this between us, just until I know what we’re working with.”

Tommy hoped she wouldn’t ask for more details. He hoped she’d take the arrowhead and go off to her computers without wondering just what had gotten into him. But it seemed he didn’t have much luck when it came to anything work related.

“Is this about that hood guy from the news?” she questioned, as she wrapped the arrow in a napkin from the edge of his desk. “Do you know him?”

The response caught in Tommy’s throat. He knew the answer was no. He’d never met the Hood, and he was sure he’d remember if he had. But something about the way they fought next to one another. That spark of something familiar. He couldn’t place why, but he knew there was a reason he felt a connection to the man in the hood.

As he thought it another thought flashed through his head. Someone he knew could fight like that, could hold their own against gang members. He’d seen it first hand, years ago.

“No idea.”

But Tommy was lying. Because he did have an idea. Maybe it was farfetched, but his mind had already latched on with a strong hold.

Because what were the chances John Diggle and the Hood would show up at the same time? Could Tommy’s old friend have upgraded to bodyguard of Starling City? And if so, what had fueled him into such an identity crisis?

Lexi left, the arrowhead tucked into her hand as she walked away. But Tommy’s mind was now firmly planted on other things. If Digg was the vigilante, he’d need someone on his side if and when things blew up in his face. Then Tommy considered the other thing. If Digg was the vigilante, Lyla would need to know. She could keep the details of their relationship from him as much as she
wanted, but Tommy knew his partner still loved the man. And she would want to do whatever she could to help him.

Everything was speculation at the moment, so he wouldn’t call Lyla. Not yet. But until he knew the truth for sure, he’d have to keep a close eye on Digg. He owed the man his life ten times over, and he’d do whatever he could to make the man’s sacrifices worth it.

Tommy looked up in time to see Waller striding over to his desk. She couldn’t know. Not about the arrowhead, and certainly not about his thoughts on who was under the hood. She’d use the information against Lyla, and he was through watching Amanda Waller screw with people he cared about.

“Director,” he greeted, letting the easy smile slip onto his face. Waller always told him he was transparent. But he was going to prove her wrong.

“I assumed when Ms. Weiss gave you my message you’d come and give me your answer.”

She was in a good mood at least. Though sometimes Tommy could barely tell.

“You mean in the 30 seconds since Lexi left my desk?” he shook his head. “I was just about to head up. I’m still on the guest list for the auction. Terminating my employment at Merlyn Global, didn’t blackball me from all social events.”

“Good,” Waller’s eye caught on something past him and her smile fell into a straight line. “You won’t be the only agent there. I’ll have eyes on you the whole time.”

“Amanda I don’t want to work with anyone I don’t trust.”

Her gaze fell back on him with annoyance. “I know. Which makes you a difficult agent to deal with at times. But lucky for you Agent Michaels is returning within the hour. And she’s agreed to keep you from getting abducted again.”

She stalked off, and Tommy rolled his eyes. Apparently he had been wrong about the good mood thing. But at least she didn’t know about the arrowhead. He would have enough to deal with keeping his current thoughts from Lyla. Because his partner could read him like a book. And he didn’t think she’d like the story currently playing up there.

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For some reason, it felt like old times. Maybe it was because 90% of the time Felicity had spent with Oliver, they were in panic mode, but as she drove the streets of Starling toward the police station, she definitely was getting Moscow vibes. The drive so far had been mostly silent, partially because she wasn’t sure she wanted to open any cans of worms while she was behind the wheel, and partially because she knew the moment she opened her mouth, she was likely to babble, which would no doubt have cataclysmic results.

She did, however, hate the silence. There had been times in Russia where they’d shared comfortable silences with her typing away on her computer and him cleaning his gun or whatever. But this was very much unlike that. In fact, every move she made, she could feel his eyes following her. And she just wanted to put up a partition between them or something. Not that she thought that would help.

Felicity navigated the streets of Starling expertly; not that she’d ever been to the SCPD before, but she knew where it was- downtown near the courthouse where she and Laurel had met for drinks on a number of occasions when Tommy was out in the field. Part of Felicity hated the lies they kept up in their everyday lives, but a bigger part of her agreed with Tommy that it was for the best, to keep
their loved ones from getting hurt.

And now that Oliver was back, that added a whole new layer of lies into the mix. Because she knew that what they shared in Russia was real. And there was a voice in the back of her mind that kept telling her that something was still there, even if she wasn’t sure she could trust that voice. Being in car with him, no radio on, no nothing, certainly didn’t help matters any.

“Is there something you’d like to say to me?” she asked, turning to meet his eyes, a bit unexpectedly if the look on his face had anything to say about it, as she stopped at a red light.

Oliver cleared his throat uncomfortably. “Should I?”

“I mean, it just feels like you’re burning a hole into the side of my head with the weight of those stares. Or maybe it’s like the Darth Vadar thing.”

“Felicity.”

“Are you trying to make my head explode with the force? If it’s about what I said back on the sidewalk, I really am sorry--”

“Felicity.”

“--I was just flustered and worried about Thea and I had no right to once again meddle in your relationship with your sister.”

“Felicity!”

A car horn blared loudly from behind her, startling her. She took her foot off the brake and pressed down on the gas. “How long was it green?” she asked.

“Around the time you mentioned Darth Vadar,” Oliver mused.

“Sorry,” she said, feeling a bit foolish. If there was ever a person she hoped to be able to control her babbling around, it was Oliver.

“I didn’t mean to burn a hole in the side of your head,” he finally said, almost too quietly for her to hear.

She had a feeling she would regret asking what came from her mouth next, but she couldn’t stop herself. “So then why the staring contest with my ear?”

For a moment, she’d nearly forgotten about her entire purpose in meeting him at the coffee shop. The laptop that was now sitting in her back seat, laden with bullet holes, another in a long line of mysteries surrounding Oliver Queen that needed to be solved. She’d been hoping for some time alone, to clear her head, to figure out how she was going to approach asking him if he was the arrow slingling vigilante. Or rather, forcing him to reveal it to her, since she was already convinced of the truth of it.

Oliver blew out a long breath, once again seeming to choose his words as carefully as possible. “Just thinking about something Tommy said.”

They were just a couple of blocks from the precinct now, and Felicity wished she could take a longer route, talk to him more to see what information she could get out of him. But Thea took priority. Even now.
“What did he say?” she asked, a bit fearful of his reply. She prayed to whatever higher power might be out there that Tommy hadn’t said anything about Carter. She wasn’t ready for Oliver to know, and she certainly wasn’t ready for him to find out from someone else.

“Not much just that you made sure to take care of Speedy while I was gone, so that she’d have someone looking out for her, even if it couldn’t be me.” There was something in his voice now, some emotion she couldn’t quite identify, that made her heart swell.

Felicity felt herself nod. “I saw how broken up she was, after the gala in Russia. And I know what it’s like to grow up losing people you care about. I figured if I could save her from even a fraction of that, I had to do it.”

She wished she hadn’t said it, given him that tiny little piece of her past, of her. But despite all his walls and the prickly exterior he tried to present to the world, she always found herself opening up to him in ways she wouldn’t with other people.

“I’m glad she has you,” he answered, his voice had evened out and was more collected than a moment ago. But she could still feel his eyes on her.

“What?”

“You know don’t you? Whatever this thing is that Tommy’s keeping from me.”

“Oliver--”

“I just wish he’d tell me. Whatever it is-- good or bad, I can handle it.”

She groaned throwing him a look. “Kind of the pot calling the kettle black don’t you think?”

She could see his shoulders tense, and even if it was the perfect opportunity to bring up the secret she knew about him, it didn’t feel right. So instead she took a different approach. “Oliver if you hadn’t had to use the Bratva as a chip against Waller, would you ever have told him what you were doing in Russia? Or would you have let him wonder?”

There was a long pause before he replied. “I don’t know.”

“I’m not saying I know what he’s not telling you,” even though she could tell Oliver didn’t quite believe her, she continued. “What I’m saying is, two years is a long time to be apart. And if Tommy’s keeping secrets, maybe he’s just not ready to let them go. It doesn’t mean he’s trying to hurt you.”

The silence stretched as she pulled into the parking spot at the precinct. Felicity put the car in park and turned to face him again. “I think you should wait in the car. At least let me assess the situation before you come in guns blazing with your ‘grr face’ on.”

Oliver smirked at her description. “I’ll make sure to keep my ‘grr face’ in check.”

Felicity narrowed her eyes. “Was that a joke from Grumpy McGee?”

He sighed. “You’re beginning to make me regret it,” he quipped.

Felicity cracked a smile of her own before pulling her keys out of the ignition and stepping out of the car. She sobered immediately when his head popped out from the passenger side and her mind supplied her with the memory of the news report from earlier that morning. About the Hood and James Holder. She still had a hard time believing that the man standing in front of her was capable
They walked side by side into the precinct, nearly talking over each other to the desk sergeant to explain why they were there. In the end, she allowed him to do the talking— but only because Thea was his sister. The officer buzzed them back to the holding cell area, where they were able to meet with Thea once her paperwork was processed and she was released.

Of course, it was Detective Lance who brought her up.

“Queen,” he said to Oliver. “Not used to you being on this side of things.”

She felt Oliver stiffen beside her at the venom in the detective’s tone.

“What the hell are you doing here?” Thea asked, with plenty of venom of her own directed at her brother.

“Pretty sure that should be my question,” Oliver threw back at her. “What were you thinking getting arrested?”

Thea shrugged with a smirk. “Guess I just wanted to see what all the fuss was about when you were a teenager.”

Felicity frowned. “Thea, this isn’t like you.” She knew that Thea tended to act out from time to time, but they had come up with a bit of an understanding, that she’d text Felicity before she got herself into trouble like that.

“What do you know?” Thea said, turning to her. “I wouldn’t have called you if I’d known you were bringing Ollie with you. I wouldn’t have called you at all if I didn’t need a ride, after the way you blew me off when things went south with you and Carter.”

Her heart clenched in her chest, for more reasons than one. Mostly because she’d hurt someone she cared about— someone that had been so hurt for so long and really, truly didn’t deserve anymore.

“Speedy,” Oliver growled.

Thea scoffed. “And where do you get off, Mr. Righteous Indignation? Getting drunk and embarrassing the family one day and then lecturing me for doing the same thing the next?”

“Thea,” he spoke a little louder this time, and Felicity felt herself shrink back, along with Detective Lance, to allow the siblings a moment to themselves. However, Oliver’s voice carried far enough for her to hear.

“First of all, I’m actually legally able to drink. And saying something stupid to a paparazzi or two is different than you and your underage friends breaking into a clothing store.”

Felicity cleared her throat, turning back to Detective Lance. “So is there something we need to sign saying we picked her up, or…”

Lance sighed. “I didn’t log it in… this time. But it’s only because she told me she was calling you, and from what I know from Laurel about you, you seem to be a pretty good influence on the kid.”

She swallowed hard, feeling even more like she’d let the younger Queen down. “We all appreciate your discretion in this matter,” she said quietly, before turning back to Oliver and Thea. “I think we should maybe take this outside, before Detective Lance changes his mind,” she said to Oliver.
He nodded, leading Thea outside. His eyes stayed locked on Felicity’s just a moment too long, and Thea’s words about Carter reverberated through her mind again. *Crap.* She definitely hadn’t wanted him to find out like *that.* They kept walking, but Thea stopped in her tracks.

“Wait… did you two come here… together?”

“I was getting coffee downtown when you called,” Felicity answered quickly. “And happened to run into your brother outside the coffee shop.”

“She looked upset,” he added. “And when she told me what happened, I insisted on coming with her. Don’t blame Felicity for bringing me. I wouldn’t let her leave any other way.”

“Kinky,” Thea quipped.

Oliver rolled his eyes, and Felicity felt her face go red. All at once, she remembering that she hadn’t stowed the laptop out of sight. It was still sitting in her back seat, laced through with bullet holes, for everyone, especially whoever sat in the back seat, to see.

“I’m going to clean out my back seat,” she said, clearing her throat. “Maybe you two can have a little chat.”

“Whatever,” Thea said, her voice feigning boredom. Her eyes, on the other hand, held more hope than Felicity had seen in the girl in a long time.

*Talk to her,* Felicity mouthed to him.

Oliver narrowed his eyes at her, but pulled his sister off toward the retaining wall. Felicity smiled, despite the look he gave her. She knew he loved his sister; he’d literally told her as much to make her bring him along to pick Thea up. It was definitely time he told his sister that too.

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Chapter 15

Chapter by holysmoaksoliver

Chapter Notes

Hey lovelies! Welcome to another Monday and another update. We hope you're enjoying so far and we've SO appreciated all your feedback. We love seeing comments, reblogs on Tumblr, even the hit count for how many times this fic has been viewed makes us excited every time we see it. So thank you. Just another quick reminder we WILL be taking a small hiatus after this chapter (only two weeks... we'll be back on October 2). Again, thanks for all the support, and enjoy!

xoxo
Cassie

Oliver hated the nervous energy that coursed through his veins. And he despised how much it called for him to run. To feel the asphalt thud beneath his feet as he went anywhere. But Felicity’s words rang out above it all. Talk to her.

She had a point. Things with Thea were tense, they had been since she pulled out of his hug the day he came home. And every time he looked at his baby sister, he could see another piece of her breaking off, falling into an abyss that no one was willing to pull her back from.

“Speedy--”

“Can we save the lecture? I already have one parent and the last thing I need is for my hypocrite, big brother to fill in for the dead one.”

She slumped against the wall, her eyes trained on a spot down the sidewalk. But he knew his sister better than she thought he did, he remembered everything about her from the time she was born until the last day he had seen her. And he knew she lashed out when she was hurting the worst.

“I’m not going to lecture you,” he said falling into place right next to her. “Mostly because I’m sure you already know what you did was stupid, but also because I know I’m partially to blame.”

She didn’t respond, but he felt her gaze shift towards him.

His instinct was to lie to her, hold back any and all truths. To keep her safe, a voice in his head whispered. As another challenged, to keep yourself safe. He didn’t want to be at war with himself about his family, and he couldn’t move another step forward until he gave Thea some kind of lifeline to grab hold of.

“When I was… away,” he fought the recoil at his words, forcing himself to look down at her. He needed this as much as she did. “I didn’t have anyone to talk to, to rely on. Speedy, I would wake up alone, and go to sleep alone. I would go days without saying anything at all.”

“Ollie I didn’t--”

He held up his hand, shaking his head. “I’m not telling you this for you to feel sorry for me. I just
want you to know, to understand, that I get it. I get that while I was there, alone. You felt like that here. And I wish I could tell you that I’m going to get better about opening up and talking to you. If I could promise that I would, but I can’t. Because a lot of things happened there Thea. And I’m not ready to face them. I’m not ready for them to be real.”

She sucked in a breath, the anger in her shoulders folding into something more painful, as she gave him a small nod. “It sucked. Not having a big brother while you were gone. I mean Tommy tried, hell even Felicity tried. But it wasn’t the same. So I kept a running bargain in my head for you to come back. Like if I go four weeks without asking for a new toy Ollie and Dad will come home. Or if I get Mom out of the house today, we’ll hear they found them alive. But the more time that went by, the less hope I saw in things. Why try so hard to be a good person, if only bad things happen to you?”

“You couldn’t be a bad person if you tried, Speedy,” he whispered. He had known bad people, he had been the worst of them from time to time. And his sister was the furthest one could get from that kind of darkness.

His hand fell against his pocket and he felt the stone there. On a whim he had taken it from the lair that morning, tucking it in next to his phone. And he couldn’t think of a person he needed to have it more than the girl next to him.

He pulled it from his pocket, taking her hand and placing the small object against her palm.

Thea quirked her brow up, amusement shining through her tear filled eyes. “You got me a rock?”

“It’s called a hozen,” Oliver replied, grinning at her. The thing had once brought so much grief and destruction through his chaotic life on the island. But here, with his sister, he had to wonder if it all had been a stepping stone on his journey home. “It symbolizes reconnecting.”

“That what we’re doing?” She pulled the hozen close to her heart, her fingers rubbing against the cool surface like it was a security blanket. But the fear was still there.

“How about we make each other a deal?” He waited until she looked at him. “I will do my best to try and be more present in our family, but you have to do something for me.”

“What?”

“Speedy I need you to stop with the acting out,” he felt himself almost plead with her. “No more drinking, or getting arrested. No more taking medications that aren’t prescribed to you. Because coming home, being home, it doesn’t mean anything if I lose you, okay?”

She nodded, but he kept staring at her until she spoke. “Okay. You got a deal.”

“One more thing,” he said chancing a look towards Felicity. The blonde had her head down, as she played with her phone, and he was sure he felt the corners of his mouth turn up just a fraction.

“I knew you weren’t letting me off that easy.”

“Apologize to Felicity,” he said. “She took time out of her day to come all the way down here, because she cares about you. And you being mad at me, doesn’t give you license to go off on her.”

Thea gaze followed him, her eyes squinting ever so slightly. “Do you? Oh my god, do you have a thing for her?”

He turned back to her fully. “That’s insane. I don’t even know her.”
“Wow you are like really crappy at this,” she was smiling and bouncing. “I can’t believe you’ve ever had game. You really like her.”

“Will you go apologize so we can go home,” he decided to avoid his sister’s words, shrugging her off.

Even if he did still have feelings for Felicity, it’s not like he could act on them. Thea said she and Carter broke up. That small voice echoed again. But it didn’t matter. Felicity deserved someone who could be honest with her always, who could invite her into their life in every way possible. And all Oliver had to offer was BS stories to cover up his dangers. She deserved someone who didn’t have to carry around the souls of people he had to send to the grave. She deserved someone who could sleep at night without fearing those same souls would strangle him to death. She deserved better than the broken man he’d become.

“Whatever you say,” Thea almost sang as they walked back to the car.

But she was still smiling. He knew his sister well enough to know she wouldn’t let this go. He held back a groan, because he wasn’t sure he was strong enough to deflect any plan Thea came up with. She was a Queen after all.

“Hey,” Felicity said when they approached, she shoved her phone back into her pocket. “You two have a good talk?”

Her gaze landed on him for a long second. As if to ask if he’d really taken her advice. He hoped she could see the thank you in his eyes.

“We’re good,” Oliver replied, letting his gaze linger on her longer than need be. Something that caused Thea to laugh next to them. Which she only squashed when he glared at her.

“Sorry,” she addressed Felicity. “I didn’t need to be a bitch earlier. You were doing something nice for me, and I really appreciate you coming here.”

“Any time,” Felicity said, giving his sister’s shoulder a squeeze. “How about I drive you two back to Oliver’s car.”

“We could all get lunch together?” Thea ventured.

“I don’t think that’s...” But he trailed off as Felicity spoke.

“You two should spend some time together. Besides, we’re super busy at Merlyn Global. The Unidac auction is tomorrow and I have a computer drive to look at for someone.”

She eyed him closely, a hint of a smile on her face, before she turned back to Thea. “But I promise, after the auction you and I are gonna hang out for 12 straight hours. I mean food, shopping, more food, more shopping. We will need to be carried home.”

“Deal,” Thea smiled hopping into the back of Felicity’s car wearing a grin.

Felicity watched him again, almost like she wanted to speak, but she couldn’t.

“Now who’s staring like Darth Vader,” he teased, the feeling uneasy, but nice against his vocal chords.

She shook her head. “Let’s go.”
She moved to round the car, but Oliver felt his hand reach for her wrist, stopping her. She turned her head towards him and he felt the air catch in his throat.

He wanted to thank her, to tell her how much he had needed that talk with his sister. That she had been right all along. The words wouldn’t come, but it didn’t seem to matter.

“I told you Oliver,” she whispered, moving back slightly. “Pulling away from the people who love you isn’t healthy and you shouldn’t want to do it.”

He nodded, letting her go to the driver’s side door. He followed suit, slipping into the passenger’s side, as an easy silence settled through the vehicle. Unlike their trip to pick up Thea, this was calmer, the air wasn’t charged with things unsaid. Or at least not as many things. It was nice. Until Thea decided the silence was too much apparently.

“So,” she drew out, and he could hear the giddiness in her voice. “Why did things turn south with Mr. Perfect? You never said.”

Oliver tracked her in the rearview mirror, shooting Thea a warning glare. Even if so many things sparked to life in him at the thought of Felicity being unattached.

“It just wasn’t…” Felicity faltered to find words. And he folded his arms into themselves to hold back from taking her hand in his. “It wasn’t one thing, but a lot of things that all came together.”

It was a vague reason at best. But it seemed to sate his sister. Not Oliver though. No, that answer sparked the selfish part of him that wanted to believe he was one of those things. Even if he didn’t have any right to a spot in her heart or her life. He had forfeited those things when he came back and left her letter untouched.

She pulled up next to his car, and Oliver was startled he hadn’t realized how long and far they had driven. He wished he could stay, seated next to Felicity in the quiet between them, but he knew he couldn’t.

Thea leaned forward, planting a loud kiss onto Felicity’s cheek with a laugh.

“Later, girlie,” she said, all but bouncing out of the backseat.

Oliver looked at Felicity once more, her eyes asking something he couldn’t pinpoint. But she shook it off.

“I’ll call you,” she said, and then she blushed. “I mean when I have the drive ready.”

He sighed, opening his own door. He didn’t think thank you would cover things. But he tried anyway. “Thanks.”

“Well apparently I can’t say no to anyone named Queen,” she mused, rolling her eyes with a smile, before she gestured over his shoulder. “Take care of her.”

“I will.”

And he got out, letting Felicity’s door fall close behind him. Watching as she sat idle for a second, her eyes on him again. The same question still pressed between her brow, but instead of rolling down her window and asking it, she just drove off.

Oliver watched her car go, wondering if he’d ever be able to give her the answers she was clearly looking for.
“Yeah,” Thea said behind him, the sarcasm dripping from her voice. “You don’t have a thing for her, at all.”

“Shut up and get in the car,” he huffed, but there was no malice to it.

They got in and Thea looked around, confusion on her face. “Don’t you have a bodyguard or something?”

Oliver pulled out his phone, the number of missed calls and texts from their mother and Rob had reached the double digits. “Yeah, Mom’s gonna kill me when I get home.”

“Then let’s not go home,” Thea challenged with a smirk.

And suddenly another memory for his time in Russia hit him hard. Something he had promised to do if he ever found his way back to his sister. “We could go to the aquarium.”

She considered his words for a minute. “Aren’t we a little old for that?”

“Well,” Oliver dropped his voice, and Thea leaned across the seat to hear him. “I won’t tell, if you won’t.”

She laughed, and Oliver wished he could bottle that sound and carry it with him whenever his thoughts went dark.

“Sure. Let’s go.”

Oliver pulled out from the parking lot, his sister by his side, and for the first time since he arrived home, his shoulders felt a little lighter.

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It was strange sometimes, the calm that Tommy found in sparring on the mats at ARGUS. Really anywhere, he wasn’t picky. He just liked the zone he found himself in when he was dodging punches coming toward him. It allowed his mind to work through things in a way it couldn’t otherwise. It was like having his focus diverted on something physical let his mind react to things without him second guessing himself.

Finding a sparring partner generally wasn’t difficult. At any given time there were plenty of agents in the building working on training exercises or just working out to better themselves in the field. Even desk agents were encouraged to take classes in self defense and other ARGUS sanctioned fighting styles. One never knew when an enemy might attack and it was always best to be prepared.

Already off to a shaky start for the day, Tommy decided taking some frustration out on the mat might be just what he needed. Especially if Lyla would be back soon; better to clear his mind of anything Diggle related before he had to meet her eyes. After changing out of his business suit, he pulled his boxing gloves on and headed for the ring in the corner of the training floor.

“Hey Merlyn!” An agent called from the ring. “Word around the building is you let the Triad use your face as a punching bag.”

The agent was someone Tommy knew more by reputation than anything else. He was a bully; the kind of guy who always kept track of kill stats, bench press weight, and just about anything else a person could name off. Hell, he’d probably did distance contests in the bathroom with whoever he happened to be standing next to.
“I really hate that guy,” Tommy said under his breath, to no one in particular. Then he turned to the agent with a grin and a thumbs up. “Good one Johnson,” he called.

“My name’s Jackson,” the guy called back, standing to his full height to be extra intimidating. “I also heard you disobeyed a direct order and your little girlfriend had to come bail you out.”

If Tommy hadn’t already known the guy was a douchebag, that would have been enough to seal the deal. The way he’d said ‘girlfriend’ it was clear the man didn’t appreciate female agents or the fact that they were just as proficient in the field as their male counterparts. Tommy took a few steps closer, until he was standing directly in front of the agent, who was at least five inches taller than himself.

“Who’d she have to screw to save your ass, anyway?”

Before he could think, Tommy’s fists were flying; he might be the shorter of the two, but he had both speed and the element of surprise in his favor. He got one good suckerpunch in before Jackson recovered, grabbing Tommy by the shoulders and slamming him into the floor. What Tommy didn’t have, was the upper body strength to fend off the guy. In fact, it took four other agents to pull Jackson off of him and another two to restrain Tommy.

“You ever talk about her again and I swear I’ll--”

“You’ll what?” Jackson seethed. “Call daddy on me?”

Tommy’s breath was ragged and he was nearly seeing red. He felt blood trickling down the side of his mouth where his lip had been busted open, and he smiled. “No,” he said. “I’ll let her at you.” He gestured behind Jackson, where Lyla was rushing over, concern knit in her brow.

“What the hell?” she breathed, coming to Tommy’s side. “Does Waller need to be informed of this?” she asked a little louder, for everyone surrounding them to hear.

Most of bystanders just murmured.

“It’s fine,” Tommy said, his voice a little rough. “Just a friendly sparring match getting a little out of hand.”

“Is that what went down?” she asked, turning to Jackson.

“Whatever,” he scoffed, pulling out of the grasp of the four men surrounding him and stalking off toward the locker rooms.

Once everyone else found something else to do, Lyla pulled Tommy aside. “Well that wasn’t exactly the homecoming I was expecting. What the hell Merlyn? Haven’t you had enough trouble the last few weeks?”

Tommy sighed, gingerly touching his lip where it was cut and bleeding. “I promise you don’t want to know.”

Lyla rolled her eyes. “He probably pulled some male chauvinistic bullcrap like he always does.”

“That doesn’t bother you?”

“Of course it does,” she laughed, but there was no humor in it. “But if I fought someone every time I was underestimated for being a woman I’d be as bruised and beaten as you have the last few weeks.” She paused, and then added, “And for the record, I can defend my own honor, thank you very
“Why don’t we get you cleaned up and you can fill me in on all the fun the director has planned for us tomorrow?” Lyla asked, pulling him toward the exit of the training room. She led him down the hall to the medical wing and into a small exam room, gesturing for him to sit.

Feeling as foolish and childish as a 5th grader, Tommy did as instructed, taking the gauze and ice pack from her while she dug around for a needle and thread.

“A stitch or two will help that heal better,” Lyla said, coming to sit in front of him.

Tommy removed the ice pack to give her a better look. “So where have you been?” he asked, meeting her eyes. “Waller made it sound very ‘need to know’.”

“I was tracking down a lead,” she answered, looping the thread through the needle and stitching his lip closed diligently. “Partially for Amanda, and partially for…” She cleared her throat. “For John.”

Tommy blew out a long whistle, causing Lyla to glare at him. “There’s a name I haven’t heard in awhile,” he said. “But since you brought up the husband, I should probably tell you that I saw him this morning.”

Her brow furrowed. “You saw Johnny? Where?”

“At the old Queen steel factory in the Glades. Long story short, Ollie is turning it into a nightclub and Diggle is working some security gig with him. I didn’t get the full rundown, just the highlights.”

Tommy could see the emotion churning beneath the surface; it was written all over her face. Lyla might be a damn good agent, but when it came to John Diggle, the woman had zero pokerface.

“I told him you were engaged,” he added with a smirk, just to see how she’d react.

“You did what?!” she exclaimed quickly, before meeting his eyes with mild horror and embarrassment. She placed a hand over her heart. “Dammit Merlyn, don’t do that to me.”

Tommy grinned wider. “Well if it makes you feel any better, he’s clearly still got a major thing for you too.” He wiped his hands together. “And that, my friend, is the last bit of meddling I do in that whole fiasco. The rest is up to you two crazy kids.”

Lyla pushed the ice pack back onto Tommy’s face. “It’s more meddling than you should have done in the first place,” she sighed.

“Yeah well, what can I say? I’m a romantic at heart.”

She rolled her eyes at that, standing and cleaning up the space. “The job I was on,” she said, changing the subject back. “I was tracking down Lawton.”

“Why does that name sound familiar?” he asked, knowing that he’d heard it before, but not being able to place it.

“He was on Waller’s short list for her Task Force X when we were in Russia. Along with Oliver and a few others.” Lyla cleared her throat. “And if my intel is correct, he was the one hired to kill Johnny’s brother.”

Tommy frowned. “If you were tracking him then why are you…” his voice trailed off, the answer to
his question hitting him in the face. “Lawton is in Starling?”

“Looks that way,” Lyla said.

Tommy stood and moved out into the hallway with her. They made their way back to where their desks sat in the large open floor plan office. He explained to her the minimal details of the mission Waller had tasked him with regarding the Unidac sale.

“James Holder,” Lyla said, looking through the case files on Tommy’s desk. “This was a Lawton hit. The M.E. found elevated levels of an unknown substance in his bloodstream. If we have the lab run those results I’m positive it will turn out to be Curare. It’s a favorite of his. He laces the bullets with it.”

“Holder was also listed as a bidder for the Unidac sale tomorrow,” Tommy added. “Looks like our missions just collided.”

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She kept looking at the corner of her screen, hoping the minutes had somehow melted into hours and it was time to leave the office. Which Felicity knew was not only irrational, but really throwing off her concentration on her actual work. But every time she tried to buckle down and focus, Oliver’s face came crashing to the surface, his words reverberating in her head. I need you.

He was keeping secrets, holding back the things she was only starting to understand, but he had come to her. And Felicity knew she wasn’t strong enough to stay away. Not when so many puzzles followed in his wake.

She focused back on the program open before her, three lines of code longer than when she started, and groaned. How was she supposed to finish day if her thoughts kept getting dragged further and further away.

Her text alert sounded, and she jumped at the opportunity for a distraction. When she opened it she couldn’t help but smile. Thea had sent her a series of pictures of her and Oliver’s afternoon adventure to the aquarium. In most of the shots Oliver was giving the camera a mock glare, or rolling his eyes. But Thea had managed to get a few with the two of them smiling widely.

She’d seen Oliver like this only a couple of times. Happiness coursing through everything on his face, making him look years younger than the tragedies he’d been put through. But when she thought back to the last time she’d seen it for sure, she froze.

It had been the morning of the gala, right before he and Ivan had left. When so much hope and promise wrapped around them, just before the illusion had been smashed to pieces by reality. We will continue this later, he’d said with a smile. It had been the last real smile she’d seen grace his features.

She had tried to tell herself she’d moved on from him. That she had put Oliver clear in her past the second she had come back to Starling City. But she knew if that was the case she wouldn’t have reached out to Sofia a couple months after coming home two years ago.

She had only wanted to make sure Oliver was okay. This crackling vein of doubt had run through her for weeks after the plane landed, waking her in the dead of night. She wanted— no she needed to know he was alright. She needed to calm her nerves and soothe the growing black pit that told her leaving him had been the wrong choice. So she had sent Sofia a message. Simple enough to do, after Anatoly had her reconfigure some of the Bratva’s private security. It didn’t say much, she couldn’t
bare to open up too many of the wounds she was still nursing. But it did ask one thing. Just one. Is he okay?

She hadn’t meant for it to sound cryptic. And after a few days she wished she could pull it back from the universe and bury it deep inside. But to her surprise Sofia had texted back. Nothing much. It was even more vague than her own message. All it said was. He’s still trying.

Trying to keep going? Trying to build himself up in the Bratva? She didn’t know. But she knew that it meant Oliver was alive, and at the time it was all she needed.

It went on like that for a year. A year of her texting the same three words, only to get the same three in reply. And Felicity went on with life. She worked, she hung out with Tommy, she got closer to Thea. She hadn’t moved on, but she was in a better place.

She never told Tommy her secret. Holding it close to her, as if another soul knowing would make it lose it’s power.

Then last year things changed. Because Sofia texted Felicity first. Something the girl had never done. And Felicity poured over the message for days after.

He left.

Sofia never gave her a reason why, and Felicity had been too scared to inquire further into things. But it had rekindled the fire in her, and she worked to find a way for him to come back, to come home.

She checked the paper in Paris every day, had traced the Yamashiro’s new cells, but there was no sign of him. For six months she searched and dug, and waited. She didn’t want to admit to how many nights she sat in front of her computer, retasking satellites, scouring the globe for his face. But each time she came up empty.

And then the charity event came around, and Thea had talked her into going. And Mrs. Queen introduced her to Carter, and suddenly she just wanted to be done. She wanted to go out and forget about every moment she wasted, staring at grainy security feeds. She wanted to move on from the crazy idea that Oliver would come back to Starling, to her. So she did. Or at least she tried. She tried for the last five or six months. And she thought she had succeeded. But then she saw Oliver’s face on the news and it all started to crumble.

She looked back at the clock again, and let out a sigh of relief. It was finally after five, and even if most days she relished the thought of staying late and avoiding other problems, she had a mystery to solve.

She made sure to take the long way round the building, not wanting to run into Mr. Merlyn. This close to the auction, he was likely to want everyone to stay late. Even if they had nothing to work on.

Traffic had been heavy on her drive across downtown, and it didn’t lighten up until she got a couple of blocks away from her apartment. But when her building came into view she let out a breath. Finally. Inside, she shut the door behind her and got to work.

Prying the casing off the laptop proved to be the easiest part of the whole endeavour. Felicity ran her fingers over the bullet holes when she took in the sight of the damaged drive and couldn’t help the whimper that escaped her lips.

“You poor thing,” she whispered, coaxing it out as carefully as possible. “Such a waste of a great model.”
Felicity set to work getting into the computer’s drive. The next time she looked up the sun had long since set, and her stomach growled in annoyance at her. But luckily she was almost past the encryption code.

She got up from her chair, stretching her limbs as she made her way to the kitchen for some leftover pizza.

Working on the drive helped put things into perspective for Felicity. Her life was a lot like the damaged laptop. Beaten and battered on the surface layers and the underlying components. But nothing had struck her in a vital part. Nothing so far had caused her too much pain to keep working, to keep moving forward. Whether Oliver told her the truth or not, whether they were something to each other or not. She still worked. She still held the things she needed to keep going. And that’s all that mattered.

She let herself lean back against the counter, listening as the microwave made it’s rotations. And that’s when she heard it. The quiet shuffle of shoes on the other side of her door.

The hair on her neck stood up, as fear crept along her spine. She flashed back to half a dozen times the feeling had visited her in Russia, the same panic sweeping through her mind. But instead of freezing in place, she worked her way to the wall beside the door, picking up the steel bat she kept in her umbrella holder. Tommy had laughed at her the day he saw it sitting there. But Felicity wasn’t foolish enough to live alone without a weapon. And she really didn’t like guns. She swung it up to position, taking a step back. If someone broke in, she wanted enough space between them to be able to run. But no one kicked in her door. Instead they knocked.

Felicity stepped closer, leaning up on her toes to check the peephole. On the other side of her door stood Oliver.

She dropped the bat to one hand, the edge of it clattering against the floor, as she pulled the door open.

Oliver’s fist was poised to knock again, as his eyes darted over her. He looked as shocked as she felt with him standing there.

“Hi,” he said, but it came out like a question. Like he wasn’t sure how he made it all the way to her door.

“Hi,” she parroted, not sure how to proceed.

He caught sight of the bat and laughed. “At least you’ve graduated to more formidable weapons.”

“Well we all can’t have a quiver full of arrows by our door,” she joked absently, and if she wasn’t mistaken Oliver stiffened at her words. She scrambled to find something to add. “Or guns. You know. I mean I was never one for the long range weapons. And I have surprising upper body strength for someone whose only work out is when she takes more than one device in her messenger bag.”

He looked up again, his gaze prickling against her skin. But he didn’t say anything. And the silence was only making the air between them thicker.

“Do you want to come in?” she gestured behind her, biting back whatever innuendo threatened to tumble out of her mouth. “I was actually about to call you. I’m almost done with that drive.”

He stepped inside, and somehow Oliver in her apartment cranked the heat around her up tenfold. She suddenly felt too exposed. Her whole life on display for him. She wondered if she’d cleaned anytime
in the last 7 days. It was ridiculous really. They had shared a living space before. He’d seen more of her bad habits than she let anyone else in on. But it felt different than Russia. Having him there, in her space, it felt almost too real to believe.

“I should have waited for you to call,” he said quietly, his tone speaking for him more than the words. He ghosted through her space, like he was afraid to touch anything. Terrified of leaving a piece of himself behind.

Too late, Felicity wanted to say. He was there, and she was already embedding his presence into the tiny room. Like he belonged.

“I mean, creeping outside a girl’s home late at night is a little Twilight, but I will forgive you just this once.”

His head quirked up in confusion. “Twilight?”

“Right, not much mainstream media while you were gone,” she shook her head. “Don’t worry about it, it’s not exactly up your alley.”

“I’m sorry I startled you.”

“It’s practically how we say hello,” she smiled, taking the chance to put the bat back in it’s spot. Then she moved around him and back to the laptop.

“You mean brandishing weapons that you have no intent in using?”

“Funny,” she said, as he followed her.

He took a seat on the edge of her couch, that out of place look on his face.

“She was sending me pictures of your outing today,” she chanced a glance at him, and that smile eclipsed his face again, just for a second. “It looked like you guys had a good time.”

“We did,” he sighed, something shadowing his features. It looked like he was thinking back on something. “It’s something I wanted to do with her, if I ever came back.”

“Working your way through a bucket list?”

She couldn’t help the teasing in her voice and the look Oliver gave her ran a coil of heat through her. She was playing with fire and she knew it. Oliver wasn’t just any guy. He wasn’t someone she could just joke with or tease, not like Tommy. Because every comment, every glance, was weighted with something more. And she didn’t know how to untangle those feelings from her soul.

“Something like that,” he replied with a gruff laugh. Some joke she wasn’t in the know of she supposed. “But we had a good time. And the talk helped.”

“Color me surprised.”

“I know you were right,” he said, meeting her eyes. “I know that the distance between me and Thea, between me and Tommy, a lot of that’s on me. But I can’t fix things. Not alone.”

“You’re not alone Oliver,” she let the words slip before she could stop herself, but she didn’t regret them. She could never regret telling him the truth.

He looked like he wanted to say something else, but her computer beeped, pulling them both out of the haze that was just the two of them.
“What the frak?” she leaned in, clicking a few keys until the rest of the data came through.

“What’s wrong?” Panic inched into his words as he stood, moving until he was standing just behind her, his fingertips hovering near her shoulder.

“Nothing, really,” she huffed, turning to shoot him a glare. “But your laptop here, apparently belongs to a Mr. Warren Patel. And according to this, he just authorized a wire transfer of 250,000 dollars. So again I have to ask. What the frak, Oliver?”

---

The only thing that made sense was that Lawton was hired by Patel. But Oliver didn’t have enough knowledge of the economic politics in Starling or Warren Patel to know why the man would want James Holder dead.

“Warren Patel,” he said carefully.

“Yes,” Felicity answered, crossing her arms over her chest. “I’m not sure what kind of Shakespearean thing you’ve got yourself mixed up in, but I really don’t want a part in it.”

“What?” Oliver asked, feeling a little bruised at whatever implication she was trying to make.

“Patel is one of the bidders for Unidac Industries at the auction tomorrow. As is your new stepfather.”

He’d heard about the auction; Walter and his mother had discussed it at breakfast a couple days prior. But Oliver didn’t know exactly what that would have to do with him. And it caught him a little off guard, how quickly her tone went from something akin to flirting to the accusatory one she had now.

Oliver narrowed his eyes just a fraction, catching her eyes in the reflection of the computer screen. “You think I’m working for Patel?” he asked, careful to watch for her response.

Felicity blew out a long breath. “I’m just saying,” she paused, pushing back from the computer and turning to face him. She leaned back in her chair so that she wouldn’t have to tilt her head. Oliver averted his eyes. “You come to me with a laptop with bullet holes owned by the guy, you’re secretive about what it is or why you have it.”

That feeling returned; the one he’d gotten when they’d been in the coffee shop, and in her car. Like she wanted to say something but was holding back. Either way, he needed to get to the bottom of whatever Lawton was up to.

“I’m not working for Patel,” he said brusquely. “Can you check his bank account to see if there have been any other wire transfers for the same amount in the last few days?” It seemed plausible that it was the going rate for a contract kill. His next request was something he could have researched on his own, but he knew she would be faster. And if this was a second payment, then it stood to reason that someone else’s life could be in danger. “And can you give me a full list of everyone bidding in the auction tomorrow?”

“I could,” she said, still facing him with her arms folded over her chest. Her tone was defiant and he could see whatever she’d been internally debating had finally made its way to the surface.

“But…” he pressed.

“But first you’re going to tell me something.”
Oliver’s jaw clenched reflexively, but he didn’t dare ask what she wanted to know. Something in the pit of his stomach told him that he already knew what it was.

“I did a trace on the bullet holes in this thing,” she said quietly. “I know they belong to the same gun that killed James Holder.”

He flinched involuntarily. Whether she was suggesting that he’d killed Holder, or she was somehow closer to knowing the truth, she was still closer than he ever wanted her to be to this darkness and bullshit. And then she’d mentioned his bow and arrows when he’d come in; that combined with the news hype about the vigilante and she was bound to know more than she was letting on. And obviously she wasn’t willing to just let it go.

“That wasn’t me,” he leveled a gaze at her. “But you knew that.”

“The bullets were laced with a special cocktail,” she said with a nod. “A signature of Floyd Lawton.”

“Dammit,” he whispered, but there was no malice in the word. It was more of a surrender, because despite himself, somehow he knew things would end up this way. She was the only one that had any inkling of the truth after Russia. The only person that had seen his skills with a bow. “I didn’t want you in this, Felicity.”

She stood, and where her chair had been positioned in front of him, it made her just inches from him. He could practically feel the heat rolling off her. “Tell me,” she demanded, her voice equally as low.

Oliver turned back, taking a couple paces away from her. It was too easy to get caught up in everything, being that close to her. It was too tempting to lay it all out there. His phone beeped in his pocket, the tone to alert him of police activity that might be linked to Lawton. He reached into his pocket to retrieve the device. Another shooting had been reported, this time by the security detail of a man named Karl Rasmussen.

“I can’t,” he said, turning back to her. “Not now, and not like this.” He lifted his phone to show her the blotter report. “Deadshot found another target,” he sucked in a breath. “Please Felicity.”

He watched her wither a little at the plea. Or maybe it was because of the contents of the message. Either way, she spun around, blonde ponytail bouncing as she reclaimed her seat, fingers flying across the keys.

“They’re both on the bidding list,” she said, her voice barely above a whisper.

“Patel is thinning the herd for the auction tomorrow,” Oliver said, moving closer to the screen to peer over her shoulder again.

“I’ve set up an alert for his accounts in case he makes another transfer. Maybe he’s just trying to scare everyone else out of showing up. Otherwise why hasn’t he taken them all out?”

“Might look a little suspect if he’s the only person to attend an auction that was once thought to be the biggest bidding war of the year,” Oliver said with a sigh. “But it’s possible Patel isn’t out of moves yet. I just don’t know why Unidac is so important to him.”

Felicity stiffened in front of him.

“You know something,” he accused, attempting to meet her eyes in the computer monitor again. But Felicity didn’t look up.
“It’s Dr. Markov,” she said quietly. “He’s kind of this eccentric genius and his loyalties are solely to Unidac. So, as they say… to the victor goes the spoils.”

“And Markov is worth killing for?”

She turned back to face him, her eyes darting up to meet his, before falling back to her hands in her lap. She pulled her bottom lip between her teeth before speaking again. “I’ve got a feeling Patel isn’t the only one who would think Markov is worth that much… and more.”

Oliver ran a hand down his face, as if he could rid himself of the horror the night had become. Long gone were the memories of the afternoon with Thea, forgotten was the flirty tension between him and Felicity, the chemistry he wasn’t sure he could deny, try as he might. Whatever was going down at the auction the following day took precedence over it all.

“We should get the SCPD involved,” he said, meeting her eyes. “They’ll have to be there to keep an eye out for Lawton. I can’t cover the whole building alo—” he broke off, his eyes slipping closed as the realization of what he’d just said hit him.

When his eyes opened again she was looking at him with a mixture of emotions crossing her face. Her head tilted to the side just a fraction of an inch, and she had a serene smile as she nodded.

“Just say it,” she said, her voice barely audible. She stood from her computer chair, moving toward him again. “I need you to say it.”

His eyes found the ceiling, his right hand caught in an endless cycle of the nervous tick he couldn’t even remember when or where he’d picked up. This was definitely not how he’d pictured the day going when he’d texted her that morning.

“Why?”

“Because I waited for you for a year!” she said, her voice loud and thick with emotion. “I looked for you. I scoured the globe for you, not once, but twice.” She scoffed. “Because I thought that after everything in Russia…” she shook her head, laughing bitterly.

He wanted to move to her, to comfort her somehow, but he stayed rooted in place. How could he comfort her when he’d been the one to hurt her?

“I couldn’t let it go. Couldn’t let you go. I can’t tell you how many times I considered hopping a plane back to Russia. Not that I expected to stay in touch like we were fifth grade pen pals or something. But just for something, some proof that I hadn’t made it all up in my head. That you were still…”

Alive.

She didn’t need to add that part in for him to know that’s what she’d wanted all along. He thought back to the first time he’d seen her again in the foyer of his home. The instant they were alone she’d asked him about it, wondered why he hadn’t let them know he was coming back. That hadn’t been what she’d wanted; she’d just wanted to know he was alive.

But was he? The truth was still too hard to bear. Everything that had happened in Russia, the lives he’d taken, the lives he’d seen lost. Part of him had convinced himself that the thing between them had been made up; some illusion he’d teased himself with all those painful memories ago. And seeing her again brought all those aches back to the surface. Every. Damn. Time.

If he’d reached out at all, he knew it would all come crashing down. The house of glass he’d built
for himself, the one he’d convinced himself he needed to survive. It would break through all the
dalls, just like she was doing to him right now. Turning his resolve to ash, like he’d stepped too
close to a flame. Because that’s exactly what it was to be near her.

“I think you need it too.” Her voice pulled his focus back to her. “You’ve told me already, you
know.” She smiled again. “That first night in the study at the manor. But I can see how much it’s
weighing on you. You already have so much else on those shoulders, Oliver Queen.” She
swallowed hard, reaching out to lay a hand on his arm. “You’ve trusted me with all your other
secrets for the last two years. Please, trust me with this.”

His stomach churned at her words. Would it relieve him of any of the weight if he told her? Or
would it just put her in more danger, in the path of more harm if she knew the truth? Before he could
talk himself out of it, Oliver sighed, letting his eyes slipped closed again.

“Felicity, I’m the vigilante.”
Chapter 16

Chapter by foreverfelicityqueen (stydiasredstring)

Chapter Notes

Hello my darlings,
Did we enjoy two weeks off? I bet the collective answer is 'no Kayla we did not, now give us the chapter'. But just before I do that, I wanted to reiterate how much it means to both of us, the love and support you guys show for this fic. Every chapter you guys are here and it really swells my heart how much you love what we're doing here. Without further ado, let's give you what you really came for.

Love ya,
Kayla

P.S. Format change from here on out. Because our lovely Oliver had two POVs last chapter we've switched up who's first. ;)

She wasn’t sure how she managed to get to work, or how she could possibly be sitting there listening to Malcolm Merlyn drone on and on about Unidac. Not when her brain was full of everything else.

Oliver was the Hood. She had known that already. But a part of her still had thought it impossible. But he told her. He had said the words, and his face. God his face carved into her soul as she held his gaze.

He had looked at her like he was laying the biggest part of himself at her feet, pleading that she’d keep it safe for him. She knew that look. She had seen it once before. The night he’d brought her back to his place in Russia, back to Akio. She knew what it meant for Oliver to trust her with something so sacred. And she didn’t plan on letting him down.

But then reality crashed between them, and he said he had to go. He rushed to see if Deadshot had managed to take out his next target. And Felicity had stood in her living room as old feelings crashed over her with such intensity, she felt like she was drowning in them.

They had kept her up all night. Images of Oliver silhouetted against the night, a bow resting firmly in his hand. And it struck her as oddly amusing that it felt right. He’d been so good, so much better than he allowed himself to believe, that there was no place for him to fit but as a savior to the city.
Someone who wanted to, and could, do good.

“What do you think Ms. Smoak?”

She looked up, her brain frantically trying to pick out what they’d been discussing. As hard as it was she pushed thoughts of Oliver back, guiding herself as close to the topic as she could remember.

“About the other bidders?”
“Yes,” Mr. Merlyn replied, his hands folded on the table in front of him. “Who do you think is our biggest competition?”

She looked over the list of bidders before her, a thick red line through two names. James Holder and Carl Rasmussen. Two people that had been killed for Unidac, and here they were discussing things like everything was business as usual. Like that was the going rate for doing business these days.

“QC has the power and the resources to make a real effort in the auction,” she said, the words rolling in her stomach like acid. She didn’t want to paint a target on Walter Steele’s back. Not when the man had been nothing but kind to her ever since she’d grown close with Thea.

Malcolm’s not the one putting hits on people. She reminded herself, even if it didn’t leave the comfort she’d been hoping for. Because her boss wasn’t behind these murders, but he wasn’t an innocent by any means. She’d seen just how ruthless he could be, she’d heard how he threatened Adam Hunt. If someone like Warren Patel would go to these lengths for an auction, what would Malcolm Merlyn do?

“But we know something QC doesn’t,” she added, trying her best to hide her nerves.

He looked at her with intrigue. “We do?”

“We know what acquiring Unidac can mean for the future of this company,” she challenged, hating the smile Malcolm shot her in return.

“Right you are Ms. Smoak,” he said turning to the rest of the table. “I think that’s all we need to go over today. Come this time Monday morning we should expect to have Unidac Industries listed as one of our subsidiaries.”

Cocky. Felicity wanted to mutter, but she bit her tongue as she gathered her things together. She was glad the day was winding down. She could go home and worry herself into knots over the auction from the comfort of her couch, with a pint of ice cream rested on her knee.

“Ms. Smoak,” Mr. Merlyn met her eye. “May I speak with you a moment?”

“Is something wrong Mr. Merlyn?” Though she couldn’t fathom what could be wrong. They had gone over the bid for the auction, the latest projections for the quarter, and what Unidac would mean for the company as a whole going forward. And Malcolm seemed to be in the best mood she’d ever seen.

“On the contrary, I wanted to inform you I spoke with the venue and was able to add your name to the guest list for this evening.”

“What?” She felt the panic sweep through her. The guest list, for the auction. The one a gun toting hitman was about 99% likely to show up at with the intention of hitting a target. “Mr. Merlyn I didn’t intend on attending the auction. I mean I really don’t see how my expertise could benefit the event.”

“You’re invested in Dr. Markov’s project, correct?”

“Yes, but--”

“Then that’s what will benefit the evening,” he stated, and Felicity realized this wasn’t a question. It was practically a demand. “Merlyn Global has had a corporate shakeup as of late. And the rest of us need to present a united front in all business endeavors. So I need you to cancel whatever plans you had for the evening, and make an appearance as the head of our technology department.”
“Mr. Merlyn I--” but her words caught in her throat as she registered what he had said. “The head of the technology department?”

“Felicity you’re bright, and talented, and very driven,” he said, each complement feeling more like a chain binding her to this place. “I spoke with Brion, and he is eager to have you working side by side with his team. But to do so, I need you in a different position here. Liaisons are generally the heads of their departments, and frankly I think you deserve a solid place in this company.”

The way he said it felt like a noose tightening around her neck. But she had come this far, and she didn’t trust Malcolm Merlyn with Dr. Markov’s designs. Not by himself. Maybe she could stop whatever he had planned for it, but only if she stayed and played her part.

“Of course,” she said taking a deep breath. “I will be there, sir.”

He smiled, like he had been waiting for her to confirm what he already knew, and then walked from the conference room.

Felicity took the chance when she was alone to steady her breathing. She had to stay calm, to keep her emotions in check. But everything from the last few weeks was curling in around her and she felt like she was barely keeping her head above it all.

Her phone buzzed against her palm, and it took a good few seconds for her to register that it wasn’t stopping. A call. Someone was calling her.

She looked down to see Oliver’s name and a calm rushed over her as she pressed the talk button.

“Hey.”

“Hi,” he replied, and she already felt the tension melting around her. “I contacted the SCPD. I gave them all you had on Patel and the payments.”

“You did, or the nighttime version of you?” she teased, and she let herself imagine a smile across his face. Even though she knew the game she was playing wouldn’t end well for either of them.

“Hopefully it will be enough to keep anything from happening tonight,” he hadn’t even paused to comment on her remark. “But I don’t think it will.”

“Good thing we’ll both be there to keep an eye on things.”

That got her a pause, long enough Felicity checked to see if the call had disconnected.

“You can’t be there tonight.”

“I don’t really think I have a choice.”

“Felicity this is dangerous,” he hissed, and she felt a defiant streak course through her.

“And that’s somehow new to me?” she countered, a new fire building in her. “Like I haven’t been in danger before? Because I could list the amount of times I have, with detail if you’d like.”

“Feli--”

“No,” she cut him off. “I’m going to the auction. I have to for my job. And I realize you have this pathological need to keep everyone you’ve ever cared about safe, but I’m not going to break if something goes wrong tonight. Not if you do your job. I’ll see you later.”
She hung up, dropping her phone back to the wood table. She knew she shouldn’t have gotten so frustrated. She understood why Oliver felt the way he did. But she needed him to see her as something other than the girl who needed him to come to her rescue that day in the cafe. She needed him to understand that she was tougher than anything life would throw at her. If she could go through losing Cooper, go through tracking Oliver down just to lose him as well, and come out the other side still standing. She could do anything. And she was going to prove it.

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Tommy slid into the back of the unmarked van, pulling the door closed behind him. Lyla was already inside, as well as, much to Tommy’s surprise, Lexi. The two were discussing comm channels and camera blind spots and they finished their overview before turning toward him.

“Ladies,” he said with a quick flash of a smile. “We all set to roll?” He adjusted his tie and then added. “I’ve got the Mercedes pulled around so we can head over together. Or, at least sort of.”

“Just going over settings one more time,” Lyla said.

“I’m all for fashionably late,” he retorted. “But if there’s a contract killer on the loose… when I’ve got friends and family there, I’d really like to be on time.”

Lyla gave him a look but didn't reply. He was sure it was because some part of her understood that mission or no, the safety of his loved ones was on the line.

Normally he was pretty good at keeping his cool, but Tommy was beyond freaking out. Not only was his father going to be there, but also Walter, Moira and Thea. Tommy had heard that somehow the SCPD had been tipped off to the link between the sniper and the Unidac auction, which meant a higher police presence. Tommy couldn’t decide if that was a positive or negative, but he was beyond curious as to who that piece of intel had come from. And that led Tommy to his next problem.

Because on top of all of that, he still hadn’t been able to keep his mind off the vigilante. He hadn’t said a word to Lyla about the Hood or his suspicions as to the man’s identity, but it was only a matter of time, now that she was back in Starling, before she heard about the vigilante.

Lyla’s phone rang and she held up a hand, glancing at it. “We roll out in two,” she said, before putting the phone to her ear and exiting the van.

Tommy’s attention turned back to Lexi, who was fidgeting a little nervously in her seat. “It’s not your first time, is it?”

She shook her head. “I’ve been… in the field before,” she said, clearing her throat. “Just not when a sniper may or may not be on the scene.”

“Don’t sweat it,” he said with a reassuring smile. “You’ll be safely locked in the van in an alley behind the building. No one will bother you out there. You’ll keep an eye on things and let Lyla and I know if you see anything suspicious.”

Lexi gave him a hesitant smile back. “Well when you put it that way…” she paused, and then a spark of something lit her features. “I almost forgot, I ran your arrow through the system.”

“Well lay it on me,” he answered, feeling the nervous energy grow. “Just make sure Lyla doesn’t hear… just between you and me, remember?”

She nodded. “Well the arrowhead itself had no prints except yours. It’s hand cut and polished from a
reinforced carbon-poly blend steel. The material itself seems to be proprietary. No way to trace it.”

“So it’s a dead end?”

Lexi shrugged. “Unless you count the three other crime scenes that identical arrows have shown up at in the last several weeks.”

Tommy blew out a long breath. “Thanks, Lexi,” he said finally. “I appreciate the rundown.”

“Of course Agent…” she caught herself. “I mean Tommy.”

For the briefest of moments, he was afraid he caught a glimpse of a blush creep into her cheeks, but she spun back toward the computers before he could be sure.

The van door opened again and Lyla jumped back inside. She gave him a pointed look, as if to say ‘you’re the one that wanted to leave’. Tommy took that as all the invitation he needed, slipping out of the van. He turned back to the two ladies inside, his hand poised on the door handle.

“I’ll see you over there,” he said, and then pulled the door shut. He clicked the tiny device in his ear. “Switching to comms.”

“Read you loud and clear,” Lexi answered.

He nodded, even if they couldn’t see him, and moved to his car. The ARGUS building was situated on the outskirts of the city, meaning it took them several minutes to fight the way through downtown traffic in order to get to the auction site. The traffic only made Tommy more agitated. He wanted the whole auction over and done with; to put Floyd Lawton behind them, whatever way possible. Tommy wasn’t naïve enough to think they’d be able to capture the sniper. Waller had tried and failed before with far more resources than she was offering them. This time around, Tommy would be content in keeping the attendees of the auction safe-- especially his loved ones.

As he approached the venue, Tommy pulled into the front of the building, stopping at the valet parking stand. He watched as Lyla drove passed him, rounding the corner of the building to pull into the alley around back. The valet cleared his throat and Tommy focused his attention back on what was going on in front of him. He exited the car quickly, only to find Thea lolloping toward him in a way that only a bubbly teenager could.

“Hey Tommy,” she said, her voice a sing-song quality toward it. He knew that tone; she was plotting something.

“Hey kid,” he answered with a grin, tucking all the worry and anxiety deep down inside. Business as usual… sure, he could do that.

Thea groaned. “Please no,” she said quickly, with a shake of her head. “That’s worse than Speedy.”

Tommy’s grin split wider. Thea Queen, always trying to grow up too fast. “You here supporting Walter today?”

She nodded. “I figured I owed it to them after yesterday.” She paused, as if waiting to gauge his reaction. “I got arrested,” she added, her tone betraying no emotion.

“Check fraud?” he asked, not missing a beat.

“Ha ha,” Thea mocked. “Anyway, the reason I was waiting for you--”
Tommy placed a hand on her back, leading her toward the entrance. “You were waiting for me?”

She nodded. “Yeah I wanted to ask you something.” She took a deep breath before adding, “what do you think about Felicity and Ollie?”

Tommy stopped dead in his tracks, turning to face her, raising a brow. “I think you shouldn’t be meddling.”

“But hear me out, please!” she pleaded, grabbing for his arm when he attempted to move further into the building. “I know she just broke up with Carter and he’s been through hell and back on that island.” Thea sighed. “But Felicity is just so…good. I think she could really help him.”

Tommy suppressed a laugh; not because he thought she was off base, but rather because if it was that obvious to Ollie’s seventeen year old sister, it was only a matter of time before other people started seeing it too. Tommy just hoped that for both their sakes, when people took notice, they didn’t start asking questions.

“So what’s your plan, cupid?”

“Well that’s where I was hoping for your help.”

This time, Tommy did laugh, because he felt like the last person who should be helping those two get together. If the tension between them at Oliver’s party the other week had anything to say about it, they didn’t seem to need much help in that department anyway.

“Speedy, I don’t think that’s a very good idea. Set-ups never really work out well, and if they want to pursue anything, they’re both adults.”

Thea rolled her eyes and mock yawned, covering her mouth exaggeratedly. “Boring,” she said. “Thanks though, I think I figured out exactly what I should do.” She smirked, and then turned on her heel and headed off toward the bar.

Tommy blew out a long breath, shaking his head. He remembered the plans and schemes he and Ollie got in when they were Thea’s age. He was grateful that she hadn’t been more aware of them as a kid; she always was the type to want to do anything her big brother did. *Okay Tommy, head in the game*, he reminded himself, glancing around the large open room.

“I’m in the building,” Lyla’s voice came in his ear. “I’ll be in the main hall within the next minute.”

“Lexi,” Tommy said quietly. “How are the eyes in the sky?”

“All clear so far,” she answered. “Police presence on several of the roofs surrounding the building.”

Tommy moved toward the kitchen door, where he knew Lyla would be making her entrance any moment. Sure enough, the door pushed open and she emerged, a blonde bobbed wig covering her dark hair and black cat eye glasses sitting on the bridge of her nose. She offered Tommy a glass of champagne.

“I like the look,” he said with a smile.

“I wouldn’t have had to wear this stupid thing if I hadn’t met your father two years ago,” she huffed quietly. “Not that he remembered me any of the four times I shook his hand.”

“Better safe than sorry,” he said, placing a folded dollar bill into the tip cup on her tray.
“What do you think about the balconies?” she asked, eyes darting around the ceiling.

Tommy shook his head. “Not enough cover,” he said, turning away from her without moving too far. Lyla was approached by another couple seeking drinks and Tommy’s gaze fell on the doors. “But I’m pretty sure we’ve got a bigger problem,” he sighed. “I’m going to have to go dark, and Lyla, you’re going to have to keep to the shadows. Oliver and Diggle just walked in.” He pulled his comm out of his ear, pocketing it, just as Oliver caught his eye across the room.

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The evening had too many variables packed into it, and Oliver feared what the outcome of the night would be. If it was just Deadshot against a room of Starling’s elite he could handle it, like any other job he’d done. But each step he took brought another face into his line of sight. His mother and Walter talking with Malcolm. Thea animatedly chatting with the daughter of their mother’s friends. His eyes had finally landed on Tommy over by a waitress when he turned to Diggle.

“Look alive Digg,” he said, but the words felt like they were more for himself. “SCPD thinks someone’s gonna target the auction tonight.”

“Which is why you asked me to come instead of your personal security?” the man raised a brow at him. But Oliver couldn’t blame him.

“You’re here because I trust you.”

“I don’t think you trust anyone, Mr. Queen.”

Oliver met his eye wanting to refute the words. Only he didn’t think he could, not in a way Diggle would believe him. But despite the prickling memories of his five years away, how every time he got close to trust, it was ripped from him in violent chaos, he did trust John Diggle. They had become comrades in Russia, working towards the same impossible goal. And maybe he liked the idea of letting people in who would understand the weight of what he’d been through. Who couldn’t possibly expect him to reset to the Oliver he had once been.

As if his thought had summoned him, Tommy walked up to them. And once again he felt the need to bury his secrets under a layer of his past he knew didn’t fit either of them anymore. But for some reason he couldn’t shed it. He couldn’t let Tommy in that extra little bit. And he wished he knew why.

“Hey buddy,” Tommy said with a grin.

But there was something else there, something that shot through Oliver. They hadn’t talked since his party, and the wedge between them only seemed to grow any time they were in the same room.

“Didn’t think I’d see you here,” Oliver replied, grabbing a glass of champagne off a passing tray. He didn’t want it, but it was always better to keep up appearances at these types of things. Someone with a glass is normal, milling about. But to go without would place more eyes glancing his way. “You trying to outbid your father for Unidac?”

Tommy laughed his head shaking slightly. “I’m not sure my meager trust fund would be enough to cover that one.” Then he turned. “Don’t see you for two years Digg, now twice in one week.”

Digg smiled, but Oliver could see there was something he didn’t want to talk about. “We’ll have to catch up, but tonight I’m working. Mr. Queen, I think I’ll go check in with Detective Lance. See if they need exits covered or something.”
“When did you run into John?” Oliver asked when the man in question slipped off. Though the words came out more clipped than he meant them too. But he had to try with Tommy. He couldn’t bare the thought of losing his best friend to the dark hole inside him.

“Your mom asked me to go looking for you, found him at that old steel factory. Where you are apparently opening a nightclub,” he gave Oliver a long look before he continued. “I must say of your career options, at least you chose one that seems the most fun.”

He spat the last word out like a dagger slicing through the air, and it struck Oliver. But the second his eyes slid back to Tommy, his friend was smiling again. The carefree ease Tommy tried to project was slipping the longer they stood in silence.

“Tommy, I’m—” he began but the rest of his sentence died in this throat. Because what was the use? He could tell Tommy he was sorry a million times over. But it wasn’t going to fix whatever had broken between them. It wouldn’t make the lies easier. It was like a bandaid on a bullet wound. It didn’t fix the real problem. And he had enough of those to fill an ocean ten times over.

Before he could think about it the words were out of his mouth. “I thought since you weren’t working for Malcolm anymore, maybe you’d want to help me with the club.”

“Work for you?” Tommy finally looked at him.

“With me,” he said, trying the feel of the words out. He wanted to mean them in another way. He knew there was a part of him who wanted to include his friend in his crusade. But Tommy wasn’t right for that, and Oliver didn’t want to drag everyone he loved into those things. “As a manager. You have more experience than I do with businesses. Between the two of us, I think it could be a great place for the Glades.”

“Since when do you want to better the Glades?”

“I’m trying,” he replied with a sigh. “Tommy, I want things to be okay between us.”

“Things are fine.”

Neither of them believed it, and he knew the rift between them was strong enough to suck in everything he held dear if he didn’t fight for their friendship. Even if a part of him wanted to give up and stop fighting, he wouldn’t give in to it. Oliver took put his drink to his lips as words flowed into his head.

If you give up before you accomplish anything, you might as well be dead.

He tried not to think about the events that led to him leaving Russia. Those weeks had been marked with so much pain, so much blood, that it was enough for anyone to drown in. He tried to keep those thoughts burrowed down under everything else. But he saw her then, like he’d conjured her right out of the deepest parts of his head and he wanted to rip the picture from his mind.

But Alina was a reminder of what darkness could do to the purest of people. He had already lost when it came to Felicity. She knew too much for him to keep her out of things. But Tommy? He wouldn’t lose Tommy the way he’d lost Alina. He wouldn’t watch as the shadows that clung to him ripped apart another good soul. He couldn’t survive that a second time.

“I have to go find someone,” he said, hoping Tommy didn’t see the ghost of darkness across his features. “But think about what I said. I think it would be good for both of us.”

He didn’t stay and wait for a response. He wanted to at least try and keep from lying to Tommy. So
when he walked away, he kept his head on a swivel. Lawton could get his shot off from anywhere. And unfortunately informing the SCPD hasn’t deterred bidders from attending, and the room was filled with potential targets. There was too many for him to cover on his own, too many for him and Digg too. He had to narrow it down. But the only person he knew who had the bidder list was Felicity.

He thought back to their conversation that afternoon, and how heated things had been. He didn’t want to fight with Felicity. But the same protectiveness he felt for his family came out in spades where she was concerned. He needed her to be safe, in a way that didn’t translate for him, and it left him feeling out of sync with things.

“Oliver, I didn’t think you’d be here.”

Oliver smiled as he walked up to the elder Merlyn, his friend’s father aglow with a look he knew all too well. Malcolm probably thought he had the auction in the bag already. But even though he tried to keep focused on the man before him, he couldn’t help his gaze sliding over to the blonde to his right. But Felicity was doing all she could to avoid looking at him.

“Mr. Merlyn, it’s good to see you,” he shook the man’s hand with a smile.

“I was under the impression from Moira that you had no interest in the family business.”

He was fishing for something, Oliver could tell probably better than most, but he wasn’t in the mood for whatever waited at the end of Merlyn’s baited hook.

“I’m just supporting Mom and Walter,” he grinned, but let it turn solemn. “But I overheard something about the bidders potentially being targeted?”

Malcolm scoffed and Oliver noted the way Felicity flinched at the action. But then Malcolm was speaking to him. “Let me offer you advice Oliver, if there’s a bullet with your name on it, some way it will find itself to you. No sense in worrying about it before it happens though.”

“I will take that into consideration, sir.”

Malcolm waved at someone across the room, and left without so much as a goodbye. Leaving Felicity just a hairs breath from him. Though he could tell she was doing her best to ignore him.

“Fe-lic-ity,” he let each syllable dance out in a whisper, enticing her gaze up to him.

“Was that for my benefit?” she questioned, taking a long sip from her glass.

“It would be safer for you if you weren’t here,” he began and she tried to move away, but his hand reached for her arm and she stilled at his touch. “But that doesn’t mean I couldn’t use your help.”

“Oliver, I know that things can get dangerous,” she looked around, making sure no one was close enough to eavesdrop. “But if I have the means to help someone, and I don’t, doesn’t that make me just as guilty as those who do wrong in the first place?”

She amazed him when she made things sound so simple. He woke up everyday and struggled with the choices he was making, but Felicity took one look and believed they were the right choices despite all the things they involved.

“Patel isn’t going to target the whole room,” he said, pulling her off with him to the side. “I’ve got
Digg checking in with the police, but we need to isolate the two most likely targets Deadshot might be here for.”

She eyed him closely. “What do you mean you’ve got Digg?”

Crap. He hadn’t had a chance to tell her. “I hired Diggle to do some security at my new nightclub.”

“Oliver,” she hissed, rubbing circles into her temples. “You can’t just hire Tommy’s ex bodyguard to work for you. What if he finds out about your pastime and decides to tell Tommy?”

“I wouldn’t have hired him if I thought that would happen,” he counted with a shrug. “I needed someone I knew would have my back. Someone I could trust, and who was more than capable of doing things. Tommy doesn’t need to be involved with this.”

“You two really need to just talk to each other,” she muttered, but pulled her phone from her pocket. It took a few seconds but then she looked up at him again with a groan. “Okay so the good news is, I know who the top two bidders are. The bad, but predictable, news is that one is Merlyn Global and the second is Queen Consolidated.”

“Of course it is.”

But Oliver didn’t have time to curse his luck, because the room was eerily still for a moment, before he heard the sound of gunfire raining down on them.

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Chapter 17

Chapter by foreverfelicityqueen (stydiasredstring)

Chapter Notes

Hello ducks,
That was weird... never doing that again. Anyway here we are, another chapter. And I know last week was a bit of a cliffhanger. Do I promise this wee is different, maybe? You'll have to wait and see. Lost of things happen very quickly this week, but I think you guys will like it.

love ya,
Kayla

Gunshots filled the air around them. And then the tinkling of glass shattering and hitting the floor. Screams erupted all around. Felicity reached for Oliver, but he was already moving toward her, pulling her under his arm protectively, and got them behind the makeshift bar near the corner.

She met his eyes with wild panic in her own, part of her selfishly wanting him to stay where it was safe, even knowing that he wouldn’t. Oliver had never been that type- not once, since she’d known him.

“Be safe!” she said, giving his arm a quick squeeze, watching him dart back out toward where his family had last been. She would have given anything in that moment to have her tablet with her so she could find where that sonofabitch was hiding and help Oliver get to him. But she didn’t; so she did the only thing she could… she waited.

Intermixed with the raining glass and gunshots, Felicity could hear the police comms as they communicated back and forth, tracking bullets and seeking out the shooter. Running footsteps sounded loud and hollow on the balcony above.

After a long moment, many of the screams had died down, either because people had found a way out of the building or… Felicity swallowed the bile that rose at the thought of the alternative. They’re just hiding, like me, she forced into her brain instead.

Sirens wailed in the distance, closing in fast and Felicity peeked out from her hiding spot to seek out her loved ones. Tommy, Diggle, Oliver, the rest of the Queen family; they’d all been inside when the gunshots rang out.

A few feet away she spotted Tommy, creeping along the back side of the banquet table with a gun in one hand. She met his eyes and he quickly made his way to where she was huddled, despite her short skirt and high heels. She had a fleeting thought that that should be the least of her concerns, but she pulled the bottom of the skirt down just the same.

“Have you seen Diggle?” Tommy asked immediately.
Felicity frowned. “John?” she asked, confused. “I mean I did earlier. Is he hurt?” she paused, searching his eyes. “Wait are you on the job?”

“Which way did he go, Felicity?” Tommy asked, his voice brusque and a bit abrasive.

She shook her head. “The shooter is Floyd Lawton,” she said, feeling anger rise in her belly. “And if you think that John has anything to do with--”

“I know who the shooter is,” Tommy answered, his voice low and rushed. “I need Diggle for something...else...”

Felicity pursed her lips, waiting a moment before responding. “I saw him head toward the officers stationed at the front entrance.” And while that was true, it hadn’t been the last place she’d seen him. The pit in her stomach only grew as Tommy gave her hand a quick squeeze and moved back along the side of the table where he’d come from. She didn’t know why, but she had a feeling that whatever Tommy-- or Waller by extension-- wanted with John Diggle, it probably wasn’t good.

No, the last place she’d seen Diggle was just seconds before the first shots rang out, moving toward Moira and Thea, where another bodyguard looking type was standing guard just behind them. Felicity had heard rumor of Rob, Oliver’s personal security guard, and assumed that was who the man was. But now she saw neither hide nor hare of any of them.

To Felicity’s other side, she caught motion out of the corner of her eye and whipped her head around. Near the podium, Malcolm sat, his back against the platform. To his left, Moira, Thea, Walter and Rob were huddled together, the bodyguard’s eyes scanning the room constantly for any movement that might be hostile.

Thea and Moira were visibly shaking, and Felicity wondered if they happened to look back at her, how she’d appear to them. It wasn’t the first time she’d been involved in a shootout, though that was a thought Felicity took zero comfort in. But she felt steady, despite it all. Something else deep within her, a part that felt sick and sadistic, almost missed this.

Not the killings, but the action. She’d been cooped up in her office at MG for so long that she had very little use for adrenaline spikes. The adrenaline coursing through her veins now made her feel more alive than anything she’d done since coming back from Russia. She felt like she recalled, with perfect clarity, the way Oliver’s arm had protectively covered her head as he pulled her behind the bar, the look in his eyes- blue made of hardened steel- when he’d left her there to keep her safe. Her heart fluttered a little at the memory.

She glanced at Moira and Thea again, as an officer came toward them, kneeling down to assess them and make sure they were safe, to get them out of the building. Thea caught her eye, motioning for her to join them, but in the same instant her phone vibrated in the small clutch bag she still had in one hand. It was a wonder she hadn’t dropped it in the commotion.

Quickly, she worked the phone out of her bag, a little confused to find Oliver’s name flashing there. “Oliver?” she whispered, turning her back to Thea and the rest of the Queen entourage.

“I need you,” he said, his voice rough.

“Where are you?” she asked immediately.

“Back stairwell,” Oliver answered, and then the line went dead.

Felicity felt her heart race. Something had happened; she didn’t know what it was or how she knew, but she felt it. She spun around, only to find Thea standing beside her.
“They’re clearing the building,” the younger girl said eagerly. “We have to go.”

Felicity cleared her throat, pulling her bottom lip between her teeth. “I actually have to…”

“My dear,” Moira said, coming up to them. “The sniper apparently got away, but they’re searching
the building just the same. My, don’t you just look afright. We should get you a glass of water, or
perhaps a shot of whiskey.” Mrs. Queen spun around. “Rob, I understand you’re looking out for us,
but what I really need right now is for you to find my son.”

Felicity took Moira’s turned back as the only opening she was likely to get. She slipped out behind
Walter, moving toward the hallway which led to the bathrooms on the main floor. It also led to the
service stairwell, which is where she expected to find Oliver; her heart was still in her throat,
worried what state he might be in.

She rounded the corner of the hallway, slipping into the shadows before finding the stairwell yanking
the door open, and disappearing inside. Felicity kicked out of her shoes instantly, grabbing them
before descending the stairs as quickly as possible. She had almost reached the bottom when she
saw the hooded figure leaning over the railing. Oliver’s steel blue eyes staring up at her. She took
the remainder of the stairs two at a time until she’d reached him.

A shiver ran the length of her spine when she took in the sight before her. The green hood was
pulled up over his head, dark paint across his face to help shield his identity.

“Do you need help getting out of here?” she asked quickly. “Because I’m not sure how that’s going
to work in your get-up.”

Oliver shook his head quickly, moving to the side, where John Diggle lay on the ground,
unconscious.

Felicity’s eyes went wide. “Did he get shot?!” she nearly yelled, rushing to kneel down beside him.

“I need you to get him to the old Queen Steel factory in the Glades,” Oliver said, but she barely
heard him.

She searched John for bullet holes, anything that might need pressure applied.

“Felicity,” Oliver said, pulling her attention back to him. “It was just a graze, but the poison. I only
have my bike or I’d bring him myself.”

She felt herself nodding absently, fumbling around her bag for her keys. “I… I can bring him there.”
She stood, taking a steadying breath.

“I’ll be there waiting for you,” Oliver said, placing his hands on her shoulders. “You can do this.”

Felicity wasn’t sure of the validity of that statement, but she turned on her heel, barely noticing the
pain as she walked barefoot across the underground parking garage. She turned back a moment
later. “But won’t they stop me coming out of the garage? I’m sure they’re doing searches….”

“Don’t worry about it,” he said.

And somehow, that was all she needed. She trusted Oliver; despite the two years he was gone,
despite not knowing where he’d been for one of them, despite not really knowing much about him at
all. She might not trust herself, but she trusted him.

She ran for her car, driving through the crazy maze of the parking garage until she reached them.
Oliver already had Diggle hoisted onto his shoulder waiting for her. Felicity flew out of the front seat, popping the back open for him to deposit Diggle inside. And then he swept her back into the car, his hand lingering on her shoulder just a moment longer.

“Wait thirty seconds after I leave so I can pull their attention from the entrance,” he said.

Felicity nodded, and then his heat withdrew from her shoulder and he closed her door. She watched as Oliver quickly moved to his motorcycle, his bow and arrows slung over his back, and pulled a helmet down over his head. He nodded once, before revving the engine to life and speeding the rest of the way down the ramp. She heard sirens start up, presumably once he’d pushed his way through the police barricade and then fade into the distance.

She swallowed hard, glancing in the rearview mirror at Diggle laying across her back seat. She wondered again, idly, why Tommy had wanted to know where John was. It was such an off-the-wall request that there had to be a reason behind it. If he was working, did that mean Lyla was there with him? Maybe she just wanted to make sure John was safe. It was as good an assumption as she could come up with, so as she wound her way down the exit ramp and out onto the street, she told herself that was exactly what Tommy had wanted to know.

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The worst part about of the evening wasn’t the shots that rang in his hears, but the chaos that had followed. Tommy could keep his cool with the best of them, but the second civilians were placed in harm's way he had a tendency to lose his head. And with so many people pushing around to take cover or make it to an exit, things were bad.

He had seen Rob usher Thea, Moira, and Walter together behind the stage, so at least he knew they were safe. And he didn’t worry about Malcolm, his father was too stubborn to be taken out by some sniper. But there were still people he considered friends roaming around the building.

As he moved up another level Tommy had one thought. He had to find Diggle. He knew the man would go after the shooter on his own, but this wasn’t a situation for solo work. Things like this required a partner, a team, and as far as he knew Digg had no one. He owed the man that much.

He shoved the comm back in his ear, before he steadied the gun in front of him again, pushing open the door to the fifth floor. A groan from the side of the room caught his attention as he froze to listen closer. He flicked his gaze down searching the ground until he saw it. An officer lying on the other side of the room, blood pooling around his shoulder.

Tommy holstered his weapon, pulling on the nearest set of drapes, which sent metal rings scattering everywhere, echoing in the open room, and knelt down next to him, putting the fabric against the man’s wound.

“You’re gonna be okay,” he said, even though the officer’s eyes were unfocused. He pressed down harder, trying to shock him back to consciousness, as the warmth of the blood soaked into the cloth beneath his fingers.

“Boy Scout?” Lyla’s voice cut through the comm, causing him to jump. But he didn’t respond to his codename, not even to scoff at her. He had always hated it. But right then all he could focus on was the man who grew stiller beneath his fingers.

“Harbinger I’m here,” he said, the air catching in his throat, making him cough. “I’m on the fifth
floor and I’ve got an officer down. There’s a lot of blood. I think the bullet hit an artery.”

“Tom... I mean Boy Scout and Harbinger,” Lexi said, crackling in from the van. “I’ve got eyes in there, and your shooter exited a balcony on the fifth floor and cut across to the renovation project next door. He was pursued by Starling’s new celebrity. After that the video feed cuts out and becomes distorted.”

Tommy was half listening to the run down of information, but every second that passed he pressed harder against the officer’s shoulder, willing the blood to stop. But it didn’t. It seeped out and stained his hands a deep red.

“Tommy,” Lyla said, but she sounded closer. There wasn’t the static of the comm in his ear, but a clear sense of her next to him.

Someone grabbed him by the arm and pulled him back, the makeshift bandage still clutched in his hands.

He looked up to see Lyla staring at him, her gaze filled with fire and fear. “Tommy, snap out of it.”

“I have to help him,” he said gripping the fabric tighter. “I have to save him.”

“He’s gone, Tommy. He’s gone,” but her words were wrong. They had to be.

“No, I can help.”

“Help me,” she pleaded yanking the cloth from his grip and tossing it on the ground. “Because Lawton is still out there. If we don’t catch him, that man died for nothing.”

He finally looked at her, his brain registering where they were and what was happening, and he nodded. “Sorry, I just--”

“Don’t be sorry, be alert,” she replied, but her looked told him they’d talk more about him freezing later. She placed a hand to her ear, as she walked around the stairs, checking their surroundings. Tommy followed, a little on autopilot, as his mind wandered back to the officer on the ground. The man whose blood was covering his hands, the one he couldn’t save.

He shook his head, as he pulled his gun back out. The weight of it against his palm seemed to settle the jittering feeling that had come over him. But he wished he knew why it happened. He’d seen bullet wounds before, had felt blood cover his hands, at ARGUS and before. But this was different.

It’s because you knew you couldn’t save him. He thought, but it felt like a scream against his skull. In the last two years he’d seen people die in the name of his organization, but he had never been that close. He had never felt someone die. He’d never seen the way their chest stuttered to a stop and then go still. This was his first. And the thought burrowed through him at record speed. It was the first, but Tommy knew it wouldn’t be the last. Not given the life he’d chosen to live. Waller had been strategic the last couple of years, picking his missions carefully, keeping him close to the interrogation side of things. And he thought it was just to keep his face from being out there. But now it felt like more. Maybe Waller didn’t think Tommy could handle watching someone die, maybe she didn’t think that burden would sit well against his shoulders. And he hated that she was right.

He had froze when he saw the officer. Panicked he’d recognize the face, but then even when he knew it wasn’t someone familiar he had been stuck. And that was something he’d have to work though. But not tonight. Tonight he was going to to help Lyla take down Deadshot.

“Yo Van Gal,” he said plastering a smile on his face. Fake it til you make it right? “You got anymore
“That’s a negative Boy Scout,” Lexi replied, with a sigh. “I may have caught someone running out the back exit of that ren-o, but the camera’s a blind spot, and I don’t exactly have clearance yet to access national satellites to redirect traffic cams.”

“We’ll have to speak to Waller about upping your clearance then,” he huffed, giving Lyla a wink to which she rolled her eyes.

“Let’s go Boy Scout,” she said, moving to the open balcony.

But Tommy stayed back, searching for evidence of a fight. There was an arrow embedded in the molding around the arches, splintering the wood. Shattered glass kicked around, but Tommy couldn’t figure out who had been where.

“Boy Scout,” Lyla called from outside.

“I told you,” he followed her out, his eyes still trained on the ground. “I hate that na--”

His words cut short when he saw the blood smeared along the edge of the balcony. He stopped short, the cold night air prickling against his neck. But he had to push it down, he couldn’t afford to freeze again.

“You think it’s Lawton’s?” He ventured locking eyes with Lyla.

“Or the vigilante that was following him,” she countered with a smirk. “We should take a sample, let Lexi run it through the system.”

Before she could reach for it though, Tommy grabbed her arm, a different kind of fear coursing through him. It was likely the blood belonged to Deadshot, but it was equally as likely it was the Hood’s, and if Tommy was right about who was under that Hood, he didn’t want Lyla finding out that way. He couldn’t let her find out that way.

“What do you suggest then?”

“Van Gal, if we get you this sample can you look into it without raising a red flag at the Homestead?”

“I think that might be the easiest thing you’ve ever asked me to do,” Lexi responded with a scoff. “Get me some and I can have it tested before the night’s over.”
“Thanks,” he said, turning back to Lyla. “See Lexi will handle it for us. Come on, Lawton’s long gone by now and we should clear out before the cops do another building sweep.”

He took out a vile and knelt down, gathering some blood before he put it back in his jacket. He could feel Lyla’s eyes on him, watching everything he did with careful calculation. He hoped she’d drop what happened earlier, but he knew her better than that.

“I don’t want to talk about it,” he said, shooting her a look. But Lyla just rolled her eyes.

“You froze.”

“It was a human reaction.”

“I know that,” she nodded taking a step back as he stood. “But it was also a reaction fueled by fear.”

“We’ve got to go.” He hoped she’d take his response as a way to end the conversation. Because he didn’t want to talk about this at all. “If Lexi can ID this sample from the van, we could have something to go on before dawn.”

“Fine, I’ll drop it.”

“Thank you.”

He walked in front of her, pulling his gun once more for their descent. Just because they thought Lawton had fled, didn’t make the building safe. They still had to make it back to the van unseen.

“Tommy,” Lyla said, standing shoulder to shoulder with him. “I’m dropping it for now. But we’re gonna have to talk about it eventually.”

He didn’t doubt she’d hold him to that either. “I figured.”

The auction had started the evening off with a bang, but Tommy suspected before the night was through, a few more things would add to the chaos that had already occurred. He just hoped if he was right about Diggle, Lyla would us a level head. Because the last thing they needed was for both of them to freeze when the situation called for them to move.

But he’d cross that bridge when he came to it.

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Oliver weaved through the streets expertly; the comm in his ear tapped into the SCPD scanner so he could hear their pursuit of him. Part of him wished he hadn’t needed to divert the efforts of the police in tracking down Lawton, but with an assassin that deadly, it was probably for the best that they weren’t all after the guy.

Once he was several streets away from the auction site, Oliver doubled back, finding a quiet alleyway to hide his bike in until the police cars lost him. He knew every moment mattered with a drug like curare, so he couldn’t hold his position long.

“The Hood is in the wind,” he heard in his ear, and found a small grin spreading across his features. He waited another moment before creeping out of the shadowed alleyway and back out onto the street. With his bow and quiver slung across his back, any sighting of him would be enough to put the cops right back on his tail, so he stuck to the side streets, twisting and turning until he’d made it to the Glades and the back entrance he’d installed at the Steel factory.
He barely had time to think about whether or not he should get the herbs from his trunk before Felicity’s car found it’s way to the entrance and Oliver guided her into the small parking spot, pulling the garage door closed behind her. He was at the car door before she’d even put the car in park and he had Diggle back over his shoulder before she had climbed out.

“Right down the hall,” he said, gritting his teeth as he pointed her in the direction. “Code to the door is Thea’s birthday.”

Felicity rushed ahead, punching in the code and pulling the door open for him. Oliver slipped inside first, moving quickly to the large metal table in the center of the space. He hadn’t exactly set up medical equipment, but something told him it might not be a bad idea to do so in the very near future. With his free arm, Oliver shoved everything off the table, sending it all clattering to the floor, echoing off the high, empty walls in the space. He felt Felicity wince beside him.

John, on the other hand, was shaking, and that was a very bad sign. Oliver laid him down on the table, face up, and pulled his shirt open, searching for the wound on the man’s arm. It was small, a graze only a couple of inches long, but the poison didn’t even need that.

“There’s a wooden trunk on the floor over there,” Oliver growled, glancing up at Felicity. He reached for her. “Actually just hold him. It will be faster for me to do it.”

She swallowed hard, nodding her head as she moved toward Diggle. To her credit, she looked far more calm than he expected of her as she grabbed hold of Diggle’s shoulders and pushed down with all her weight. Then again, after everything he knew of Felicity, he really should have expected as much.

Oliver moved to the trunk, quickly finding the herbs and mixing them into a cup with some water. He was back at Diggle’s side in a single long stride, hoisting the man up to allow him to drink the liquid. He felt Felicity’s eyes on him.

“How do you know this is going to work?” she asked, her voice small.

“Let’s just say I was already a guinea pig,” he answered.

Diggle’s shaking calmed almost instantly and Oliver felt his own shoulders relax. Until, that was, he realized exactly what he’d done. Felicity and Diggle both in the lair. Both in over their heads. Both in more than he’d wanted for them.

“He’s going to be okay?” she asked, her hands wringing themselves in front of her.

Oliver nodded. “The herbs will do their job. Curare is nasty, but I’m confident Diggle will make a full recovery.”

Felicity nodded in response, her eyes on the floor. Oliver felt the silence between them like a tangible object. He wondered idly if this was what people meant by the ‘elephant in the room’.

“So this is it?” she asked, twirling around the space before finding her way toward the computer desk. “The lair of the Hood?” A small smile graced her features at the moniker, meeting his eyes. She ran a finger along the length of the desk and then tapped her fingers against the metal top.

“I don’t call it that,” he answered, leveling her gaze. He broke the eye contact quickly, pulling the jacket off over his head and dropping it onto a nearby table.

When he turned back, he saw her look away quickly, her hair falling across her shoulder, shielding her face. But he’d caught the blush before she’d turned. He reached for a grey tshirt, slipping it over
his head and moving toward where she still stood at the computer.

“You counting all the things I did wrong?” he asked.

“What?” she said, turning quickly, nearly smacking into his chest. Her hand went out to steady herself, and it did, actually, land on his chest.

He imagined she could feel the sudden uptick in his heart rate, the hitch in his breathing as her hand settled against him. But if she did notice, she didn’t give anything away. “With the computer system,” he clarified, reaching for her hand to remove it from his chest. She seemed to realize what he was doing an instant before his hand touched her arm and she withdrew with a sheepish smile on her features.

“Maybe just one or two things I could improve on to make everything run a little smoother,” she said, and then her eye caught something and her nose wrinkled, like she’d smelled something sour.

“Only one or two, huh?” he gruffed, trying to shake off the heat from her hand that he could still feel searing through his thin shirt.

She glanced back at him then and laughed quietly to herself. “Do you think you could wipe off that war paint?” she said shaking her head lightly. “It’s a little hard to take you seriously.”

Oliver had all but forgotten about the grease paint he’d used to help hide his features under the hood. He grabbed a towel and a bottle of water and went to work getting it off his skin. He glanced at her as he worked, smiling a little to himself to see that she’d taken up residence in his chair and was clicking away on the keyboard. Even if he’d never wanted her down here… in the middle of all this… he had to admit he didn’t completely hate the sight of it.

“Better,” she declared as he made his way back over to her. “Also I doubled your processing speed and made a few other adjustments. Before you go all ‘grr face’ on me, just hear me out. Because if you’re going to be--” she broke off, and he realized it may be because he was staring at her.

“What?”

“Thank you,” he said quietly.

“You’re welcome?” she answered, except it came out much more like a question.

“Not for this,” Oliver replied. “Well, for this too, but I mean for earlier.” He paused. “And last night.”

A blush crept back up onto her features. “You’re welcome,” she said, more definitive this time.

Oliver hated the feeling of guilt that situated itself in his stomach. He was going to have to resolve himself to this sooner or later, because like it or not, he’d pulled her into his mission. Her and Diggle. His eyes traveled back across the room, landing on the sleeping form that lay on the metal table.

Her eyes must have followed his, because she cleared her throat before speaking. “How long is he going to be out?” she asked. “Does he know about all this?”

“Not yet,” Oliver answered, swallowing hard. “But I don’t see a way around that now.” He hadn’t thought much beyond getting Diggle the herbs to cure him, but now that things were calming down and he had time to think about it, it was clear that his timetable for telling John the truth was fast approaching. Like, as soon as John woke up. Which could theoretically be any moment. He felt his stomach flip a little at the thought.
“And Lawton?” she took a step forward.

“He disappeared before I could follow. And then I noticed Diggle and…”

Felicity nodded. “You made the right call.” She was at Diggle’s side now, brushing her fingers across his forehead, which was flecked with sweat.

“There were others I couldn’t save,” Oliver frowned.

“You made the right call,” she said again, with more conviction.

Before he could reply, Diggle stirred and Oliver moved in closer to the makeshift bed side, standing opposite Felicity. John’s eyes fluttered a couple of times before they opened, focusing on his surroundings.

“What… the hell happened?” Diggle asked, his voice a little hoarse.

Oliver took a deep breath. “We need to have a talk.”
Felicity watched as Diggle assessed his surroundings, taking in the damp, dark lit basement. She could see him process what had happened, but things weren’t fully snapping into place yet. His eyes landed on her with a brief nod of recognition, and then focused solely on Oliver.

“You’re him aren’t you?” Diggle raised a brow, his voice muddled with a fog of sleep and frustration. But he didn’t seem angry as he pressed the heel of his hand against his eyes. “The vigilante.”

Oliver flicked his gaze to her and she hoped he saw reassurance in her eyes. Because she wanted him to know he could trust her with this stuff, for some reason she needed him to trust her.

“Yeah,” he finally said, taking a deep breath. “You okay with that?”

“Am I okay with my boss running around in a green hood, shooting arrows at rich, white guys?”

Digg pushed off the the table, but staggered as his feet hit the floor. Felicity made a move to hold him up, even though she wasn’t sure she could manage for even a few seconds. But Oliver was at her side, helping Diggle back to his feet.

“Take it easy,” Felicity said, as Digg settled back against the metal surface. “People who get shot have a free pass on not standing for a while. Got it?”

Despite the circumstances she thought she saw the faint outline of a smirk grace Oliver’s face, but if he had it was gone just as quickly. All attention back on their ailing friend.

“If I got shot, why does it feel like that time I was hungover the morning of basic training?”

Felicity didn’t know how much John knew about Deadshot, about the list of names tattooed across his body. How another Diggle was etched there forever. But she knew that the reality of it was going to hurt more than ideas. She swallowed down the lump in her throat, ready to take the jump and tell him, but Oliver cut in.

“The bullet was laced with a drug call curare,” Oliver explained, moving towards the computer desk. He turned and settled against its edge. “The MO of a gun for hire that goes by the name of
Diggle’s eyes narrowed, and Felicity could just imagine his mind pulling up the last time the three of them had heard that name together. “You saying Waller put this guy on a business auction?”

“Floyd Lawton doesn’t operate for ARGUS,” Oliver sighed, and Felicity noted how his fingers rubbed together, his nervous tick she managed to pinpoint years ago. “He’s been off a lot of radars for awhile, almost no murmurs of him. Not since he did a job for a private client two years ago.”

“Who was the target?” Diggle asked, though something in his eyes told Felicity he had already guessed, and it was tearing a hole right through him.

“Andrew Diggle,” she supplied, hoping to spare Oliver from some of the weight of Diggle’s pain. But one look at his deep blue eyes told her Oliver would still carry this with him, he wasn’t built to shrug off the sorrow onto another.

The silence between them was full and hollow at the same time. And she wished she could light a thousand candles to cast the darkness out of both their eyes. But all she could do was stand her ground, and let them know she wasn’t going anywhere.

“So what, you save my life and in return I keep your little secret?” Diggle looked around again, his eyes landing on her. “What’d he barter to get you down here?”

“John—”

“Don’t okay,” Diggle cut her off. “My nephew lost his father, I lost a brother. And then I lost my marriage on top of that. That time we spent traipsing the world looking for you,” he pointed to Oliver. “We did that because Tommy believed in you. And you finally come back to town to what? Play at being a hero?”

“No,” Oliver said, but he kept his eyes on the ground. “I came back to right the wrongs done to this city. I don’t have any delusions about being a hero, or one of the good guys. But that’s not what Starling City needs right now. It needs someone willing to do what it takes, no matter the toll. I’m willing to pay that price if it means the people I care about never have to. And I didn’t save you so you’d keep my secret. You’re a good person, John. I couldn’t stand back and watch another one die.”

She wanted to ask him what he meant by that but she didn’t get a chance. Diggle slid from the table again, stronger on his feet than he had been. But Felicity still moved towards him, a hand outstretched just in case. He looked at her again, giving her a faint smile. “How come you always seem to get yourself involved with these stupid boys and their gunfights?”

“What can I say,” she replied with a grin. “Guess it was those aspirins someone gave me after the first time I was shot, they must have messed with my brain.”

“Funny,” he shook his head. “I don’t know what to think about all this.”

“Take your time,” Oliver said, pushing off the table, as he came to stand next to her. So close she could feel the heat rolling off his body. “But Digg, I think you could help here.”

“I’m not a hero either, Queen,” he said with a huff. “But if Deadshot comes around again, I want to be the one who takes him down.” He met Oliver’s gaze as a look passed between them. “I’ll get back to you, about the offer.”

“Diggle,” Oliver looked at him head on, like he was trying to decipher Digg’s words. “Take a few
days. I’d rather you make a choice when your head’s on right.”

“Yeah okay,” he said eyeing them closely, almost like he wanted to say something else. “Any chance either of you managed to grab my car before we left?”

Felicity looked to Oliver, who gave them both a sheepish shrug before he spoke. “We were a little preoccupied.”

“Here,” she said handing him her keys. “My Mini Cooper might not comfortably fit all of your giant muscles, but you should make it home okay. Oh and one of you owes me for the cleaning bill because blood stains on tan interior, not coming out without some work.”

Digg let out a rough laugh, but he didn’t say anything else as he found his way up the stairs and out the door at the top. Leaving Felicity alone with Oliver once more.

“That went well,” she said, throwing him a smile. “I mean all things considered, he could have royally freaked out.”

“I think the shock might have played into it a little,” he countered, but his mouth turned up at the sides, as he shook his head. “Getting shot by your dead brother’s killer, it kind of trumps working for a vigilante.”

“When you put it that way.”

She stepped closer to him, that heat like a beacon for her movements. She was fighting every urge she had not to put her arms around his neck and breath him in, but she didn’t think he’d let her get that close. She didn’t think she should let herself get that close. Oliver Queen was like a drug, and she was playing way too close to temptation. But she wasn’t sure she could back away either.

Oliver’s gaze burned into hers, like he lit each nerve on fire, and they sparked and crackled as it moved through her. He wanted to say something, she could see it written across his face. And she had a million things that clung to her own tongue to say in return. But before either of them them could speak, Oliver’s phone began to ring.

He grabbed the device, and sighed. “It’s Thea. I should take this.”

“Crap, I let myself get separated from them at the auction. She’s probably freaking out,” Felicity reached for her own phone, pulling it out. And sure enough there was at least a dozen texts from Thea and Moira, that ranged from concern to panic.

Oliver put his phone to his ear as he answered it. “Speedy, I’m sorry. I got held up.”

“Held up Ollie?” she could hear her friend through the phone, and she hated that she let the girl go so long without word from either of them. “I thought something happened to you. And I still can’t get ahold of Felicity. And I’m freaking out, and Mom wants you home.”

“Felicity’s with me,” he said, and as his face shifted she could tell he immediately regretted it.

“What?”

She grabbed the phone from his hand. Glaring before she spoke. “Thea, hey.”

“Why are you with Ollie? Where did you go?”

“I got,” she shot Oliver a look but he just shrugged. “I guess I was more freaked out than I realized. I
got turned around and started freaking out. Oliver found me and we’ve been driving around, until I calmed down.”

“But you guys are okay?”

“Yeah, Thea we’re okay,” she placed a hand to her chest, wanting nothing more than to pull the younger Queen into a hug. “I’ll have Oliver drop me at home, and then he’ll be on his way.”

“Hang on,” Thea said, and she could hear chatting on the other side of the call, but nothing distinct enough to make out.

“Why did you tell her we spent the evening together?” Oliver whispered.

She rolled her eyes at him, dropping her voice as well. “Because you were not offering me any other solutions. You brought this on yourself.”

“Felicity dear, it’s Moira.”

Felicity’s eyes widened and Oliver mouthed ‘what’.

“Hi, Mrs. Queen,” now she was on a phone call with Moira Queen. This evening was not getting any less weird. She really needed to just go home, open a bottle of wine, and sleep the events of the last 24 hours off.

“Please hand my son the phone.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

She gave the phone to Oliver, stepping back to give him some privacy. Also to collect her thoughts. She needed time to think. She needed to sort out this pull that happened anytime she was near him, before they were alone once again. She wanted to blame it on the adrenaline, that flying bullets and life and death situations made her lose her mind a little. But she knew that it was more than that. She knew her feelings for Oliver ran deeper. She just wasn’t sure how deep, and she didn’t know if she wanted to figure it out.

She decided to busy herself, folding up his discarded leather duds, while Moira gave him an ear full. It was the least she could do right? But sadly he was still wearing his pants, and by sadly she meant that she only had one thing to fold. Not that she wanted Oliver to be naked.

So as she worked on folding his jacked together something thick from the inside pocket grabbed her attention. She moved her hand inside until she pulled out a faded envelope. The ink on the front was smeared a little, but she still recognized the handwriting.

Her handwriting. She had given Oliver this very letter two years ago. And as her hand slid over the back, she felt the unbroken seal press into her palm.

He hadn’t read it. Hadn’t seen the words she put to paper, hadn’t known the emotions that had flooded the tiny hotel stationery. A part of her was relieved to know those things weren’t sitting between them. But a larger part mourned the idea she had had that she was a reason he’d come back. That her words had brought him back to her. It was a foolish thought, and she wanted to burn it from her mind at once. But she couldn’t. No matter how hard she tried to deny them, her feelings for Oliver weren’t in the past. When it came to the two of them she had always considered her feelings in present tense. Because it wasn’t over for her, she didn’t know how to make it end. And she knew she didn’t really want it to either.

She took the letter and shoved it down into her clutch before she could talk herself out of it. She
needed to ask him about it, but she also knew she would have to work up the nerve. It wasn’t something she could just blurt out.

“Felicity.”

His voice startled her and she dropped the leather jacket to the floor as she spun around. He gave her a confused look. “Sorry, I guess I’m jumpy. Tonight was a lot.”

“Yeah about that.”

“What?”

“Well because of the auction,” Oliver paused like he was physically trying to fight off what he had to say next. “My mother insists that you come stay at the manor, at least for the weekend.”

“What?”

“She wants me to bring you home right now.”

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Tommy slammed the door to the van shut with a frustrated groan. On the plus side, Lawton was injured, which meant it might slow him down just the slightest bit. On the downside, they’d been unable to identify the vigilante from the blood sample. Which meant Tommy’s concern over what to tell Lyla about her estranged husband was only going to grow.

He left the two women alone in the van, needing to pick up his own car, and needing some distance from Lyla so he didn’t spew his theory at her half-baked. That was the last thing his partner needed. As he walked around the building, he shot off a few quick texts to Felicity, Oliver and Thea just to check in. He’d already checked the hospital intake papers to ensure that none of them had been injured, but he needed to hear it from them, for his own sanity.

After getting his car from the valet stand (a nightmare considering all of the police presence that still surrounded the place), Tommy slid behind the wheel, unsure of his destination, just knowing he needed some time to try to piece things together.

While it was true that after Russia, Tommy had seen very little of Diggle, he couldn’t quite rectify the two personas in his head. John was a soldier through and through. To Tommy’s knowledge, the man had never pushed his way up through the ranks or sought out the Rangers or any mercenary type group. But then again, Tommy had never looked into Diggle before. Their meeting the other day at the old Steel factory had been the first Tommy had seen of the man in over a year. And he had mentioned working private security. Perhaps the gig provided him the cover he needed to operate as the Starling City vigilante at night.

Tommy tried to think back to the days of their globetrotting when Diggle had been teaching him hand to hand combat, and what fighting styles the man favored. Could that be why Tommy felt like he was fighting alongside a comrade during the Triad’s invasion of Laurel’s house?

The whole thing made his head hurt. If Diggle really was the vigilante, what were his motives?

“Agent Merlyn.”

Tommy swerved the car, slamming on the breaks. “Shit,” he breathed, one hand going to his heart. “Waller?” He glanced around the small car, before remembering that his comm was still stuck in his ear.
“No, this is your conscience,” she deadpanned. “You’re needed back at HQ.”

He suppressed a groan. “Is that really necessary? I was-”

“Did it sound like I offered you a choice?”

“I’ll be there in ten,” he answered, pulling the comm from his ear and throwing it onto the passenger seat. Part of him wished to have some cover-story job to go back to, a way to keep himself from committing one hundred percent to ARGUS, despite the fact that he’d already told Amanda he wasn’t leaving. The place just seemed like a soul-suck, and at least having an excuse to duck out of things every once in awhile made him feel like he still had a little bit of a choice in things. Even if that was just an allusion.

As he changed course and headed for the building that could best be described as a compound, Tommy fidgeted with his phone. Before he could second guess himself, he dialed Laurel’s number.

“Laurel Lance,” she answered almost automatically.

“Uh oh,” Tommy said with a smile. “You’ve got serious voice.”

“Tommy, hey.”

“Distracted serious voice,” he corrected.

“Sorry,” Laurel said, sounding a little more focused. “Just was in the zone cleaning the apartment. I guess I lost track of time.”

“Crap,” Tommy breathed. “I was going to bring dinner and help with that. Everything just got so crazy with the shooting at the auction and then-”

“Shooting?” she repeated. “God I leave the television off for three hours and…. Are you okay?”

He nodded, even if she couldn’t see him. “Yeah, yeah, I’m…” he cleared his throat. “I’m okay. Just a little shaken up.”

“Do you still want to come over?” she asked, and there was a hint of something in her voice that sounded suspiciously like a come-on. “I can open a bottle of wine…”

Tommy grinned. “Give me a thorough once-over to make sure I don’t have any injuries?”

“Mmhmm,” she hummed slowly.

“Be still my heart,” he cooed into the phone. “I need to...stop by and see Ollie first, but I can be there in a bit.”

“Don’t wait too long Merlyn,” Laurel said cheekily, and then the line went dead.

As he pulled into the parking lot at ARGUS headquarters, Tommy spied the van they’d used at the auction pulled up near the front. Lyla was jumping out of the drivers side as he approached.
“You too?” she asked with a furrowed brow.

He nodded. “Any idea what it’s about?”

“No clue,” Lyla replied. She pulled out her badge, scanning it across the door and Tommy pulled it open, letting her and Lexi walk in before him. He followed behind them, feeling anxiety build within him again. Did Waller know that he’d choked? That he’d frozen when faced with a dying cop and had blood soaked into his hands? Lyla had told him that they’d need to talk about it, and he would. But with her, not Amanda Waller. Waller was like a shark; one hint of weakness and she attacked.

*Speak of the devil*, he thought, spying the woman on the second floor bridge in the lobby.

“You two,” Waller said, pointing to him and Lyla. “My office, now.”

Tommy blew out a long breath, glancing in Lexi’s direction with a ‘save me’ look in his eyes. To her credit, she shrugged with a grimace and headed toward the Tech department. Tommy and Lyla made their way to Waller’s office in silence, pausing just outside the door, his hand poised to knock.

“Come in Agent Merlyn, Agent Michaels,” she called through the closed door.

Lyla shot him a look, which conveyed the same ‘how in the hell’ question that was going through his own mind. He turned the knob, pushing the door open and entering the office, Lyla coming to stand beside him.

“Lawton is in the wind,” Waller monotoned.

Tommy nodded. “To be fair, two sets of eyes and one on cameras isn’t exactly enough to bring in someone like Floyd Lawton.”

His boss leveled a glare at him. “I didn’t ask or offer what was fair,” she replied, before pressing her lips into a thin line. “Regardless, that’s not why you two are here.”

He and Lyla exchanged another glance, before turning their attention back on Waller.

“The plans that were recovered from Merlyn Global,” Waller continued. “Our team finally put the puzzle pieces together and we know what the Markov device does.”

“What is it?” Lyla asked.

Waller’s eyes narrowed at Tommy, just a fraction, almost like she could see the lack of surprise in his features, despite his feigning them.

“A seismic generator,” she answered finally. “Although the plans for it are currently unknown, our ultimate goal will be to bring in both Markov and the device before Merlyn Global is able to use it.”

Tommy felt his stomach clench; Waller wanted the device for herself. He understood wanting to take it away from his father, but Tommy would be damned if he let it fall into Amanda Waller’s hands. What was the phrase? Out of the frying pan and into the flame?

“I’d like to take point on this,” Tommy said, clearing his throat. “I believe I’m still the best person for this position, job at my father’s company or not. I still have ties there, can still get access to the building, albeit not unrestricted access.”

“And I was inclined to offer that position to you,” Waller said with a frown. “Even taking into
consideration your run-ins with the Triad the last few weeks.”

“But?” Tommy prodded. He glanced to Lyla, who was being unusually quiet, before looking back to Waller. “You said you were inclined.”

“Agent Merlyn, I’d like you to visit fourth floor medical before you leave here tonight,” she said, tapping on her desk.

“A psych eval?” Tommy scoffed with a shake of his head. “You’re taking me off this case because you think I need to get my head shrunk?”

Lyla cleared her throat. “It’s nothing personal,” she said quietly. “You’ve just been through a lot the last several weeks. Oliver coming home, getting kidnapped by the Triad…” her voice trailed off.

Tommy felt like he’d been punched in the gut. He might have expected that from Waller, but Lyla? His partner? One of the only people he had no secrets from? His breath hitched in his throat as Diggle’s face filled his mind’s eye. Fine, almost no secrets.

“Unbelievable,” he muttered, moving for the door.

Lyla moved after him, grabbing for his sleeve once they’d made it to the hallway. “Listen, I’m sorry. I didn’t think she was going to ambush you about a psych--”

“I can’t do this right now,” he said, anger creeping into his voice as he pulled out of her grasp.

“Tommy you froze in the field. My life could have been on the line. Your life could have been on the line.”

He blew out a long breath. “Agent Michaels, I can’t discuss this with you right now,” he said, his voice void of emotion. “I have a psych evaluation to get to.”

Tommy brushed passed her, stalking down the hallway. He’d had a comment about Diggle on the tip of his tongue, nearly letting it slip from his lips. But he couldn’t do that. Not until he knew the truth. Tommy groaned as he pressed the button for the elevator, just one more thing to add to the ever growing list of impossible tasks. And he wanted a full time day job? Who was he kidding? He had a hard enough time trying to stay alive. And apparently he now had to prove he was fit for duty. Because how would he possibly protect Felicity from Waller and his father if he couldn’t even keep himself on the mission.

Once in the elevator, Tommy scrolled through his phone, looking for a number that he knew was there, even if he’d never had to use it. He pressed the button to connect the call and waited as it rang, and rang, and rang, finally going to voicemail.

With a deep breath, Tommy left a message.

“Diggle hey, this is Tommy Merlyn. I think we need to have a chat.”

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Oliver pulled the motorcycle into the garage and cut the engine. He was glad to finally be home, because the ride from the Foundry hadn’t been comfortable. Felicity was pressed hard against his back, her arms wrapped around him, digging into his ribs. And it was close enough that his head was confusing things again.

He should have insisted Diggle take his bike, though with his shoulder raw from a bullet wound that
probably wouldn’t have gone well. But anything would have been better than pretending he and Felicity were something more to each other than reluctant friends sharing the same space and time. He wanted more, every time he looked at her he felt his resolve breaking a little more. But he couldn’t allow them to move any closer together. He couldn’t do that to her.

“Are you sure this is a good idea?” she slipped the helmet off and he watched as her blonde hair cascaded down her back. “I mean I should really just go home.”

“If you’re willing to tell that to my mother, by all means go ahead,” he said taking the helmet from her, but he tried his best to avoid touching her hands. They had touched too much already. Playing with fire for so long could only end in him getting burned, but damn did he want to press it further.

She took a moment while she thought, a range of expressions crossing her face. Almost like she was having a conversation play out in her head. “On second thought, one night in a mansion won’t kill me.”

“You’re afraid of my mother?”

“You didn’t seem to eager to tell her no either, mister.”

“You have a point.” Sometimes it was easier not to fight a battle against Moira Queen. There was no way to win.

Felicity smoothed down the edges of her dress, and he tried his best not to let his eyes linger on the way the red material bunched up high on her thighs. He let his mind think back to earlier in the evening, when the dress was smooth and clung to the curve of her waist. But creases had pressed into the fabric, giving the impression that someone had pushed it far over the tops of her legs. And a new set of images seared into his mind, as he cleared his throat.

“We should head in.”

“Lead the way,” she said, unaware of the way he couldn’t quite pull his eyes from her completely.

They entered through the kitchen. Before he could lock the door behind him, Thea came barreling into the room and threw her arms around Felicity.

“I was so worried about you.”

Felicity hugged her back, and pulled back a little with a smile. “I promise I’m alright. You didn’t need to offer me a place to crash.”

“Oh this wasn’t my idea. I’m good, but not even I am this good,” Thea moved on to Oliver, pulling him down into a tight hug. “You worried me too.”

“I’m sorry Speedy,” he whispered, letting a calm settle over him. He had known his family got out of the auction safe, but he hadn’t realized how much he needed the confirmation that they were okay. “I ran into Felicity and--”

“Yeah, you two were driving?”

“Which is why I didn’t hear my phone,” Felicity supplied with a grin. “Because of the engine and the wind.”

“So for the last couple hours the two of you have been riding around, alone on Ollie’s bike?”
He made a move to reply, but his words caught in his throat. It didn’t look the best. Oliver had used the bike excuse before, and really in the dress Felicity was wearing it wasn’t likely they had been on the thing for long. Plus his sister kept looking between the two of them like she didn’t quite believe the story.

“Well we stopped, obviously, because we weren’t on the bike when you called, and Oliver answered,” Felicity fumbled over her words with a nervous chuckle. “And when we stopped we talked for a little bit, because he saw how freaked I was, and wanted to calm down the crazy blonde, but we rode for a bit.”

She shot him a ‘help me’ look, but Oliver was trying his best not to break into a smile at her run on sentences. She had this way of coaxing a smile out of him even when he felt like he’d never be able to be happy again.

“She’s a good friend,” Oliver relented, because it was too late to backtrack. “It’s easier sometimes, talking to someone who didn’t know me before.”

“Well, friendship is always an important thing to have,” Walter replied with a smile. “Now I’m off to sleep. Because this evening has been rather eventful.”

“Night Walter,” Oliver called after him, slipping his phone from his pocket. It was late, but he needed to do this.

He dialed in the familiar number, and listened as the line rang a few times before it was picked up on the other end.

“Hey, you okay?”

“Uh, relatively,” he huffed. “But if you’re talking about the auction, yeah I’m fine, not a scratch. What about you, Thea, Moira?”

“We’re good, everyone made it out alright.” There was a long pause, long enough that he could give up on this endeavour, but he tried again. “Tommy, I know things haven’t been… easy between us. And a lot of that is on me, but I need you to know--”
“Oliver, whatever this is we’re good.”

“We aren’t,” he countered running a hand across his chin. “But we should be. And I want to try and make things better.”

He could hear low chatter though the phone, like a tv was on in the background that Tommy forgot to mute. Then his friend sighed. “I’ll come by tomorrow. We’ll talk then.”

“I’d like that,” he replied. “Night, Tommy.”

“Night, buddy.”

He hit end on the phone, dropping it back into his suit pocket. Maybe he would never understand what Tommy had been up to a few weeks ago, but he owed it to his friend to try and get past this thing between them. John was right. Tommy had once believed in him enough to travel halfway across the world. And even if he didn’t feel like he deserved it, Oliver wanted to keep that kind of friendship in his life. He wasn’t sure he could hold his head above water without it.

Oliver took the back stairs up towards his room. More than ready to fall into bed, and leave the next stage of planning for tomorrow. He could feel the aches in his shoulder from his fight with Deadshot. Maybe a hot shower before trying to sleep was a better idea.

He twisted the handle on his door, pushing it open in a swift motion.

He heard Felicity yelp, before she grabbed for the towel at the edge of his bed. She used it to try and cover the soft lacy fabric of her bra and underwear, as Oliver’s mind finally caught up to him and he shifted his gaze to the ceiling.

“What are you doing in here?”

Her voice was an octave higher than he had ever heard it before, and normally it would be enough to get him to crack a smile. But he didn’t think laughing or smiling would be a good idea right then.

“This is my room,” he replied, because it should have been obvious. “So shouldn’t I be asking you that?”

“Your room? Thea said I could use the shower in here because the one in my guest bathroom has terrible water pressure,” she said in a rush, a groan escaping her lips. “Which I’m just now realizing was probably a lie.”

He was going to kill his little sister. “Yeah.”

“I feel like I’ve just been parent trapped.”

He finally looked at her, the towel clutched tightly to her, as he fixed her with a confused look. “Parent trapped?”

“You know like the movie,” she explained.

“I’m aware of the movie, I’ve just never heard it used as a verb before.”

“Well now you have,” she gathered her dress and a pile of clothing together, things he assumed Thea was lending her, before she gave him an awkward smile. “I should go back to my room now. Because this has been mortifying. Not that you haven’t seem my underwear before… And by that I meant when it was on the floor. And that sounds worse. I’m gonna stop talking now.”
She moved to walk around him but her pile toppled, and her clutch went skidding off. The contents spilled out onto his floor, and Oliver bent to pick them up, but he stopped when his eyes landed on the letter.

Felicity must have followed his line of sight because the next words out of her mouth were. “I can explain.”

“You don’t have to,” he said picking up the bag and the letter.

“I do, because I swear I wasn’t snooping I just,” she sighed. “I just felt it in your pocket, and when I saw it something came over me.”

She was staring at him like she was waiting for something. And he’d have to be an idiot not to know exactly what she was looking for.

“You want to know why I never read it.” And he surprised himself with how low his voice was.

“Maybe, I don’t know,” she dropped the pile, taking a step towards him. “I mean why keep it, if you never… Oliver I need to know that what happened between us, that it wasn’t all in my head. Because the further from Russia I get the more it feels like I just made up all the moments and the feelings and then you look at me like that and I just, I don’t know anymore.”

He felt his arm reach out, wrapping around her as he pulled her in the last few inches. His brain screamed at him the hundred reasons he shouldn’t be doing this, that he should let go and ask her to leave. But his heart was affecting him in ways he couldn’t control.

His hand came up to caress her cheek, to fill the small gap that still sat between them, and when he met her eyes he knew there was no hesitation in her. She wanted to kiss him as much as he wanted to kiss her.

“Felicity,” they heard Thea call through his door and pulled apart, all but jumping back from each other.

“Um, yeah Thea,” Felicity said, pulling the door open. “Hey.”

“Sorry to interrupt,” she said, looking between him and Felicity. “But I brought you some shampoo. Ollie’s stuff is all manly smelling. But you know I’ll just come back later.”

“Not necessary,” Felicity was trying to keep her voice level, but he could hear the roughness there, and he tried to hid a grin. “Oliver and I we were just talking, about. Well I was thanking him for a daring, heroic rescue. Thank you for that.”

“Yeah, no really I can come back, like way later. Tomorrow even. You two look like you might want to be alone.”

Thea moved to leave, but Oliver caught her arm, slipping past the both of them. “I’m gonna hang out downstairs for awhile. Take your time in here, Felicity.”

Before either of them could stop him, he headed down the hall. Because if he let himself stay, he’d never leave her side again.
Chapter 19

Chapter by foreverfelicityqueen (stydiasredstring)

Chapter Notes

Hello dears,
Anyone still alive after last week's update? All in due time guys. Trust me, things are exactly where they need to be. And I think people will enjoy this chapter.... Possibly? Maybe? Just don't kill us.
Love ya,
Kayla

Felicity tossed and turned, unable to find sleep despite the thick warm comforter and the wall of pillows that adorned the bed. She'd been restless the entire night, and as the sunlight began peeking through the curtains of the large guest bedroom, she felt like sleep was no longer a possibility.

She tried to tell herself it was because of the shooting that day, or her concern for Diggle, or worry over the Markov device. Anything to keep her mind from exploring the other avenue. The one that told her that Oliver was right next door, sleeping in a bed that probably mirrored the one she was in, and that he was more than likely only half dressed. No- she couldn't think about that. Because the domestic rouse her mind kept trying to supply her with would be up soon. And even if Oliver had been about to kiss her the previous night... so what?

Felicity swallowed hard. Was he about to kiss her, when he'd pulled her into his arms? Had the knock on the door been some magical spell breaking, that would set things back on their normal course? Because Oliver and Felicity? She nearly scoffed at the thought. Talk about unthinkable.

But was it unthinkable? Sure, she'd spent the better part of two years thinking that way. But that had been in the interest of self preservation. She had forced her mind away from the possibility for so long that now it seemed like an open road- far stretching and limitless. Could they explore what they meant to each other, considering Oliver's extra curricular activities? And after everything he'd been through the last two years, was he even open to an emotional connection like the one they'd teased and danced around both two years ago and now?

"Slow down there, Smoak," she whispered to herself, pushing up from the mattress until she was sitting, her back against the headboard. "This is how you overthought the Carter situation. And look how that one turned out." She cringed at the memory, still not sure how she'd ever eat ice cream again.

Felicity swung her feet over the side of the bed, letting them rest against the cool floor as she replayed the events of the night before. Thea had been dogged, hurling question after question at her after Oliver had left. Questions like what they were doing in his room with the door closed, with her being half undressed. Or why they'd taken so long to come back to the house after the shooting. Or if Felicity had any idea how much she was blushing at all the prying questions.
She did, in fact, have an idea of how red her face was. She could feel the blush heating her cheeks and neck. She managed to wave off many of the questions, but only by closing the door to Oliver’s bathroom between them and turning on the shower.

“Okay,” Thea had called through the door. “But you better have answers prepared for tomorrow morning at breakfast.”

Groaning to herself, Felicity pushed up from the soft mattress, stretching out her limbs to rid them of the stiffness of sleep, or lack of it, as the case may be. She’d stayed in the shower a long time the night before; long enough to make sure Thea had gone to bed. She hadn’t been ready to handle any other questions. She had dressed quickly in the thin pajama shorts and camisole that Thea had lent her, slipping out of the bathroom with her clothes in her arm and the still-sealed letter clutched in her hand. They hadn’t had a chance to talk about it before Thea had interrupted. At least, not to any end that satisfied her curiosity. But Felicity thought it was only fair that Oliver get to keep it, so as she passed through his still-empty bedroom, she had tucked it into the top drawer of his dresser, her eyes lingering on it while she pushed the drawer closed.

The words had always been meant for him; and whether he wanted them or not, it was his choice to read it. She didn’t want to take that choice away from him.

Now, in the light of day, it was a little easier to push all the memories of the night before from her mind. She pawned them off as too much time together in an enclosed space after a trauma. She swallowed down the words that had been tempting her tongue the night before, as she stood wrapped in his arms. She pushed aside the feel of her hand on his chest, the fluttering of his erratic heartbeat still thrumming an electric rhythm on her fingertips.

Felicity dressed quickly in a pair of tight jeans that were probably calf length on Thea, but were almost too long on Felicity, and pulled a black tank top over her head, fluffing her hair a little as she studied her reflection. Her wavy hair was unruly after sleeping on it wet, and she was bleary eyed to be sure, but she pasted a tight smile onto her features anyway. What was it about being under the same roof with Oliver and wearing borrowed clothes that seemed to follow her like a plague?

Quietly, Felicity turned the handle on the guest room door, slipping out and padding barefoot down the hall toward the stairs that led to the foyer. She could hear faint movements from below and there were smells already wafting from the kitchen. It seemed as good a place as any to hide out for a while, and if she was lucky, Raisa might let her taste test whatever smelled so good.

She maneuvered quickly through the house; she hadn’t visited every corner of the sprawling mansion, but she knew enough to get her from point A to point B and in no time she was entering the kitchen, the smell of fresh baked goodies making her stomach growl in angry revolt. She tried to recall the last time she’d eaten anything, and couldn’t even place it.

“Miss Felicity,” Raisa said with a wide, but surprised smile. “You are up early.”

Felicity nodded with a shrug. “Sleeping anywhere but my bed usually doesn’t go over very well.” It was at least partially true, and it was far easier than bringing any of her other thoughts on the lack-of-sleep subject to light.

“I have coffee,” Raisa said with a knowing look, before pulling a mug from a cabinet and setting it in front of the blonde, who had taken up residence on a bar stool at the long island in the center of the kitchen.

“Bless you,” Felicity answered, wrapping her hands around the cup as Raisa poured until it was full. She lifted it to her nose, breathing in the deep, rich aroma. Taking a cautious sip, she let the liquid
warm her insides, shaking off the fog from lack of sleep and any cobwebs left in the corners of her mind.

“Mrs. Queen told me what happened yesterday,” Raisa said, turning back toward the stove to stir something in a saucepot. “It must have been such a fright for you all.”

Felicity nodded, feeling her mouth go dry. “I’m just glad we all got out of there,” she said, fingers absentely rubbing the side of the mug as she stared into the dark liquid.

“And that Mr. Oliver found you when he did,” Raisa supplied.

The blonde’s head snapped up at the mention of his name, but Raisa’s back was still turned to her, the maid bending over the oven to check on mini blueberry muffins that were baking inside.

“Mmhmm,” Felicity hummed, not sure she could trust herself when it came to talking about Oliver. When her mouth ran on autopilot anything was liable to come out. Instead, she busied herself with pulling her hair back into a quick ponytail; it might not tame the tangle of waves, but at least it would help her feel a little more like herself.

“I am glad that you all are safe,” Raisa said, pulling the muffins from the oven and closing it, before turning to the counter and depositing the hot tray onto a trivet.

“Me too. It could have been so much worse than it was.” Felicity blew out a long breath, thinking about Diggle, unconscious in her back seat. She would have to check on him. And to make a point to talk to Tommy about why he was searching so adamantly for the man. It still struck her as odd, but she didn’t know enough about Tommy’s motives to even speculate. She shook the thoughts loose, settling her gaze on Raisa as she buzzed around the kitchen. “Can I help with anything? I feel like a schmuck just sitting here.”

“Probably best that you don’t touch it. In the interest of everyone that might have to eat said food.” His voice was cool and calm as he spoke, with an easy playfulness that she had no idea how he managed.

Her eyes found him as he finished descending the steps into the kitchen from the back stair case. He had on a dark wash pair of jeans and a light blue button down, the sleeves carefully folded halfway up his forearms.

“Mr. Oliver,” Raisa threatened, looking at him with wide eyes.

Felicity swallowed hard, remembering the time she’d attempted to make him and Akio cookies back in Russia. She hadn’t translated salt and sugar correctly on the packaging, and so used them in opposite proportions. And the baking soda he’d had in the apartment must have been bad. And okay, so she was a terrible cook. Her eyes flicked to his for a moment, and a grin ghosted across his features, telling her that he must be recalling the same instance.

“I’m sorry,” he held up his hands in defense, turning his eyes back to Raisa. “But the stories Tommy has told me about her cooking…”

The blonde laughed, a little too breathy, but it was all she could muster as she nodded. “Yeah, on second thought, it’s probably for the best that I just taste test,” she said, prying a mini muffin from the tin and popping it into her mouth. It scorched her tongue instantly, but to her credit, she refrained from spitting it back out. Barely.

Oliver eyed her curiously and she felt another shot of electricity course through her when she caught his eyes flickering to her mouth and back up again.
“Hot,” she said, once she’d swallowed the muffin, as if that could explain everything away. “Which I should have known because I literally just watched Raisa take them out of the oven. I guess hunger makes you do crazy things.”

“Miss Felicity, you sit,” Raisa said. “Mr. Oliver has been my sous chef for many years. I’ve taught him almost everything I know.”

One of Felicity’s brows shot up. All Oliver had ever made in Russia had been trips to the local take-out place and bowls of cereal. And damn if it wasn’t hard to keep all those memories from resurfacing now that they were in his home. It was like everything she’d spent two years trying to tamp down was now flooding like a raging river breaking through a dam. She wondered if he could see it in her eyes now, how him pulling her against him the night before had withered away the remaining bit of resolve she had left. She broke their gaze, staring down into her coffee, just in case.

“Really? Oliver Queen, master chef?” Felicity jested.

“Not quite,” he answered, but he cracked an egg with a single hand, dropping the clear and yellow insides into a bowl. His eyes snapped to hers, a smug grin barely settling on his features before he went back to concentrating on the task at hand. He cracked three more eggs, all with a single hand, before whisking them into a frothy, pale yellow mixture.

Felicity watched him, fascinated as she tried to rectify all of the facets of Oliver Queen in her mind. Oliver the billionaire playboy, the shipwrecked fool, the hardened criminal, the calculated ARGUS agent, the protective older brother, the Bratva captain, the tabloid fodder, the arrow slinging vigilante, the kind, generous, caring man who makes eggs in the kitchen at six in the morning with his maid. It was almost too much for her mind and heart to bear.

She wondered how many people had the opportunity to see so many sides of Oliver; granted she hadn’t seen them all, at least not in sequence. But she’d seen hints, bits and pieces of each part of him during the short time she’d known him. And the thing that struck her the most was that all of those things that should worry her, that should scare her off and make her want nothing to do with him, only drew her in more.

Oliver Queen, the endless enigma.

“Felicity?” His voice brought her back, her eyes focusing on the man before her.

“Hmm?” she hummed, swallowing hard, as if the thoughts running through her head were on mass display.

“Just wanted to know if you need a refill on that coffee,” he said, pot in hand.

She nodded, holding her mug out to him as she turned her attention elsewhere. She had been fighting the feelings swirling around her heart since she’d first heard that Oliver was coming back. But sitting here in his kitchen, drinking coffee and watching him cook; well, for the first time, she found herself wondering exactly why she’d been fighting against it.

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Tommy wished he could turn his brain off just long enough to rest. But like everything in his life, the night barreled forward without any hope of slowing down. After his call with Ollie, he’d spent exactly thirty minutes with ARGUS’s appointed psychotherapist. He had seen a shrink once before. Shortly after his mother died, Moira had taken him to see a doctor, terrified he spent too much time not opening up about his pain. All he recalled from the afternoon was the building blocks the doc
had him play with while asking him to describe how he was feeling. And by whatever therapy standards he must have passed, because he never went back.

But this time had been quite different. The ARGUS doctor went over every mission Tommy had been involved in for the last two years, only focusing on the recent ones briefly. And had come to the decision that he should be placed on leave for two months. The doc said he needed time away from field work, time away from ARGUS. And it stung how conflicted he was about the whole thing.

On one hand, time away from ARGUS, away from Waller, was everything he ever wanted since he signed his soul to her years ago. But when he looked at the other side, he knew he had to see his work through until the end. There was too much at stake to let Waller get her hands on the device. And he couldn’t help but wonder if his leave had been suggested by his boss instead of the psychologist.

He heard the bedroom door creak open, and a smile slipped onto his face. It was a trying night, but when he fell into bed beside Laurel all those things kind of melted away.

“You still sleeping?” she asked as he felt the bed dip down beside him.

He could smell the rich scent of coffee, and he fought to keep his eyes closed long enough to play this game. “Maybe.”

“Maybe huh?” she laughed, just before her lips brushed against his. “Guess you won’t want this triple chocolate muffin from the bakery down the street.”

He ran a hand along her arm, finally opening his eyes in time to see Laurel turn back to him with a to go bag in hand.

“Your favorite,” she placed the bag on the bed with a grin.

“Not sure I’m interested in the muffin anymore,” he teased, but sat up taking a coffee from the drink carrier on the bedside table. “Sorry I dropped by so late last night.”

“You’re just lucky I was still up.”

“I am,” he whispered, giving her another smile. “Lucky I mean.”

She blushed, rolling her eyes before she spoke. “So I would love to spend a lazy Saturday with you, but I kind of have to skip out of here pretty soon.”

Her tone piqued his curiosity. “Anything wrong?”

“Probably not, but my mother’s in town,” she explained through gritted teeth. “And she wants to have brunch, says there’s something she needs to talk to me about.”

He nodded, not wanting to overstep. But he could count on one hand the amount of times Dinah had come to visit Laurel in the last few years, even less was the amount of times she had visited her mother in Central City. And Tommy wished he could do something to help the Lance family, to bring them closer. It wasn’t the first time the thought had crossed his mind, but he had never had the time to devote to it.

For once he had time in front of him, and even if Waller’s plans still weighed down like a dark cloud, he didn’t want to waste what he was given.

“Well if she’s in town for a while we should have dinner,” he said, reaching over to tuck a strand of
hair behind her ear. “You, me, your mom, your dad. Could be nice.”

“It could also be a train wreck,” Laurel quipped with a smirk. “What’s gotten into you?”

“I just want you to know that I’m taking us seriously,” he gave her a smile, kissing her cheek. “And what better way than to have dinner with the folks. Isn’t that something normal couples do?”

“Normal couple,” she mused with a grin. “I do like the sound of that.”

“Speaking of normal, I actually got a job offer yesterday.”

Laurel turned to face him fully, settling herself against his legs. “Hmm?”

“Yeah, managing a nightclub,” he paused, gauging her reaction. “The nightclub Ollie is opening actually.”

“Oliver asked you to work for him?”

“With him, but yes,” he sighed, running a hand through his hair. “Is that crazy? I mean I want to do something I’m gonna be good at, and with someone I know I can work with. But all that time apart, maybe he’s not the guy I want him to be.”

Laurel was quiet for a long time, then she shrugged, meeting his eyes. “Tommy, if you think there’s even a part of the guy we used to know in him, then you should do this. And honestly I cannot think of two more qualified people to run a club.”

“You’d be okay if I spent that much time working with Ollie?”

“Well as long as you don’t make out with him,” she joked as she leaned in close to him. “Because the only lips on yours should be mine.”

“Noted counselor,” he said giving her another quick kiss. “But seriously this feels like a test.”

“It’s not. I trust that you want to be this version of you, so you should trust that too.”

She turned her attention back to the pastry bag, when his phone buzzed on the bedside table.

“Who’s John Diggle?” she asked, glancing at the screen when he grabbed it.

“An old friend I used for private security a few years back,” he replied, reminding himself it wasn’t a lie. “Oliver hired him for security at the club, and I figured it we’re gonna be working together we should catch up.”

“Of course Ollie hired security before an actual staff.” She rolled her eyes. “Unfortunately I should get going. If I don’t my mother will just make her way here instead.”

“Call me later,” he said, as she stood up.

“Oh you can count on it.”

When she left Tommy pulled up his text from Diggle.

_I got a few hours. Meet me at Big Belly before noon._

If he wanted his answers to the growing list of questions surrounding his former bodyguard it was now or never. But he was starting to worry he wouldn’t like whatever he found out.
Tommy dressed quickly and made his way out of Laurel’s place, locking it behind him, and headed downstairs. Big Belly was only a few blocks away and he figured it be easier than finding parking downtown, so he made his way across the street when someone walked up to him. He groaned when he saw who it was.

“What do you want Lyla?”

“I wanted to check up on my friend and explain,” she said, following close to him. “You didn’t answer any of my calls.”

“Which is usually a sign that someone does not want to talk.”

“How did it go with the eval?”

“What, you buddy Amanda didn’t fill you in?”

She grabbed his arm, and Tommy had to twist to get out of her grasp. “That’s not fair. You know I had an obligation to protocol.”

“An obligation? Are you kidding me? You sold me out to Waller. That’s the only explanation I need.”

“Tommy you go off the book on missions all the time, and I never say anything,” she hissed, pulling him off to the side of a building. “You went behind Waller’s back with Simon Connors, and I backed you. You got kidnapped by the Triad, and I broke a dozen rules to save your ass. You took a damn personal call in the middle of breaking into Merlyn Global. Do you get that those things add up to a pattern of behavior?”

“Then talk to me about it,” he countered. “Don’t go running off to tell on me. We’re supposed to be friends.”

“But we’re partners first,” she sighed. “And I was going to talk to you about it, but then you froze in the middle of a mission, again. Tommy I can’t trust you to have my back in the field if this is going to be an issue.”

“Well then you don’t have to worry,” he pushed off from the wall, heading down the busy sidewalk again. Lyla kept pace behind him.

“What are you talking about?”

“I’ve been benched,” he gave her a sarcastic smile. “Two months off active field duty. So I can, and I quote ‘get a sense of normal’.”

“Two months isn’t that long.”

But they both knew it only took a few weeks for someone to become forgotten in their line of work.

“I have somewhere to be,” he kept walking, hoping she’d give up. But he knew Lyla Michaels better than that.

“I wouldn’t have gone to Waller if I had thought she’d take you off cases. You know that right?”

He did know that. He knew Lyla was looking out for him. But it still hit hard that she’d done it.

“Look I’m gonna be fine,” he plastered a smile on his face, even if it didn’t fool either of them. “Some R&R and I’ll be better than ever.”
“Tommy I--”

But Lyla’s words caught in her throat as she looked down the street. Tommy followed her gaze, and his eyes landed on the one person who could stop his partner dead in her tracks.

“Digg, hey,” Tommy said, looking between the two of them.

“When you said you wanted to meet,” Digg looked at Lyla for a long moment before he focused back on him. “I thought you meant just the two of us.”

“You’re hurt?” Lyla stared at his sling. “What happened?”

“Nothing you’d believe,” he replied. “Tommy, look if this is a bad time--”

“No it’s a good time,” Tommy jumped in, stepping back from Lyla. “We can finish this later?”

“Yeah,” she finally tore her eyes from Digg and nodded. “We’ll talk later. Bye Johnny.”

“Bye,” he all but whispered, then straightened up. “What’s this about Tommy?”

Now or never right? Tommy took a deep breath. “Digg, I want to ask you about the Hood.”

---

Oliver was at a bit of a loss. He knew that he should be keyed up, on edge about Lawton getting away and still being on the loose, about Diggle and Felicity knowing his secret, about countless other things that just hadn't gone his way since coming back home. But as he stood beside Raisa helping make breakfast in the kitchen that morning, with the feel of Felicity's eyes on his back as he worked, a calm had settled over him. He knew it was crazy, because as soon as he stepped foot outside the house, hell, probably as soon as Thea woke up and made her way downstairs, the feeling would dissipate. But for now, he enjoyed it while it lasted.

The day before had been a whirlwind of events, and that was before he'd found Felicity in his bedroom in nothing but her bra and panties. That was a vision which had burrowed its way into his brain, digging deep and reigniting feelings he'd pushed down since he'd watched her board Tommy's plane in Moscow two years prior. Not that some semblance of those feelings hadn't sparked once or twice since being back- the first night he'd seen her, when he'd texted and asked her to meet him in the study. Or at his party when Tommy had called her his hook up. Or showing up at her apartment late at night needing help. Okay so perhaps it had been something he'd noticed nearly every time he'd been around her, at least on some subconscious level. He hadn't been ready to give into those feelings then though.

But last night had been different. It was like all the years melted away and they were back in the hotel in Tokyo again, when he'd nearly kissed her the first time. He recalled, with absolute clarity the ease with which he'd pulled her into his arms, how warm and soft she felt against him, the sparkle in her eyes that seemed to mesmerize him.

“Mr. Oliver, it is like you never left the kitchen,” Raisa said with an approving nod.

Oliver gave her a quick smile, flipping the pan of eggs with a single flick of his wrist before setting it back down on the burner. The three of them chatted easily for a while, Oliver and Raisa cooking and Felicity sampling bits and pieces from the barstool he'd found her in when he'd come downstairs. He knew his mother and Walter would be making an appearance soon, he just wasn't quite sure how he was going to explain away what had happened the day before at the auction. His mother deserved an apology for disappearing, for worrying her for hours by not checking in. She definitely deserved
more than the half-assed flimsy excuse he knew he'd have to offer her.

Footsteps echoed down the hallway from the foyer and Oliver found himself stiffening, needing a mask in front of his family that he somehow didn't need with Felicity. Or Raisa it seemed.

“Oliver?” His mother called from the doorway. He paused, not ready to face her yet. “I answered the door expecting Rob… but I found a friend of yours instead.”

His brow furrowed as he turned to see who was there. And the shock that washed over him at the sight of the brunette standing beside his mother made his mouth go dry.

“Sofia?” His voice came out in a strangled wheeze.

Behind him, Felicity sputtered her coffee, before a gasp escaped her lips as well.

“Oliver,” the woman said with a shy smile. “It is so good to see you.” Her accent was as pronounced as ever, although her English was much improved. “And Felicity,” she added, a slightly shocked expression on her face as her eyes found the blonde behind him. “I didn't know that you would…”

“Sofia,” Oliver coughed, needing her to stop. Needing to find something, anything he could to explain this. “I can't believe you're really here.” He glanced at his mother. “Sofia was a foreign exchange student when we were in high school. We reconnected on Facebook recently and she mentioned she was back in the States for a bit of a trip.”

“Oh how lovely,” Moira said with a wide smile, which quickly turned to a frown when she asked. “But how do you know Felicity? She didn't go to school here in Starling.”

Oliver felt all of the air leave the room in a split second. Or maybe it was just that he couldn't bring himself to breathe.

“The gala,” Felicity supplied, turning all eyes to her. “The one that Tommy put on in Moscow a couple years ago. Tommy mentioned to me that Sofia was living there so when we were planning the gala we all met up. She was kind of a guide for us when we were there.”

“Small world,” Oliver said, an edge in his voice that he couldn't rid himself of. His mind raced with possibilities of why the girl could be in his house. Had something happened to her or Ana? Or to Anatoly? Were Anatoly and Mikhail coming to collect him now that he'd resurfaced?

“Mom, do you mind if Sofia and I use your office to chat for a bit?” Oliver asked, sliding his gaze quickly to Felicity. She had a deer-in-the-headlights look that he could only hope would resolve itself once Sofia was out of the room.

“Certainly,” she answered with a wave of her hand. “Just don't completely miss breakfast,” she said, her tone all motherly concern. “And if your friend would like to stay, make sure to let Raisa know so she can set an extra place.”

Oliver nodded before quickly ushering Sofia down a different hall to a quieter section of the mansion. He needed seclusion for this, whatever this was. They walked in tense silence, and Oliver pushed the door open, leading her inside and closing and locking the door behind them.

“What is going on?” He asked, keeping his voice quiet. If anyone decided they wanted to eavesdrop, Oliver wanted to make sure there was nothing to hear. “Did Anatoly send--”

“He doesn't know I'm here,” she answered quickly in a whisper of her own. “I'm here because I need your help.”
Oliver blew out a long breath, meeting her eyes. His relationship with Sofia had been a tense one; not bad, but not carefree either. He'd met her when he'd saved her from Chinese pirates attempting to recoup stolen merchandise from the captain of a Bratva shipping vessel that Oliver had stowed away on when he and Akio were running from ARGUS. And things didn't get much less complicated from there. He'd been under the employ of her father and uncle for more than a year, part of that time he'd kept the secret of her relationship with another Bratva member. They'd always been friendly, but had never really been friends. And then one day he'd left. He'd sent himself back to Lian Yu after watching one too many lights be snuffed out by the darkness of the Bratva. And he hadn't heard from or seen Sofia since.

“My help?” Oliver echoed.

Sofia nodded. “My father is…” she paused, and Oliver watch her eyes fall to the floor, her face running through a myriad of emotions before she could collect herself. “When you left Russia, Anatoly and my father stopped speaking. Things were difficult for many months as they struggled to fill the position of captain. Anatoly always favored you, and held out hope that you would return. But my father was hardened by your leaving. He refuses to name Ivan captain, despite urging from Anatoly and myself.”

Oliver frowned. He felt for her, but he wasn't sure what he could do to help. He'd left that life over a year ago… and not on good terms.

“My father is dying, Oliver,” she said, her breath hitching on the word. He wondered if it was the first time she’d said it aloud. He knew how much Sofia disliked the family she’d been born into. But family was family, and losing someone that close to you was always hard. “If a new captain is not named soon and my father’s mind changed, I will be forced to marry the eldest son of the Kuznetsov family– an abusive, alcoholic widower in his fifties with three grown children older than I. Ivan is beside himself. We were to be married a month ago, but my father forbid it the week before, claiming Knyazev duty comes before my own happiness. Ivan wants us to run away together, to disappear and never come back.” She laughed bitterly. “But I know my father. With his dying breath he would declare that we were to be hunted down at any cost. Brought back to face the wrath of Anatoly and the Kuznetsov man I am to marry.” Sofia took a deep breath, and shuddered as she exhaled.

Oliver stared at her blankly. “And... what would you have me do?”

“What you always told Ivan you would do,” she answered. She shifted her weight uncomfortably. “Relinquish your claim on the Pakhan title and make them see that Ivan is the right choice for captain. That he should take over leading the Bratva with Anatoly when my father passes.”

His head was spinning. The life he'd left over a year ago, one that he'd only ever taken out of desperation… they were somehow in a weird holding pattern because of him? He'd assumed that leaving meant that things in the Bratva would go back to their normal course of action. That he'd made such a small ripple in being there that his leaving would mean nothing for the brotherhood. Had he really been that wrong?

“I can't promise anything,” he said finally, meeting her eyes. “I left because…” Alina's face filled his mind and he swallowed hard. “It just got to be too much. My soul was…”

“You don't have to explain,” Sofia said. “Your choices are your own. But Ivan stood up for you because of promises you made to him. Even if you don't remember them, I do.”

Oliver felt something deep in his heart clench at her words. He took a step backward until he felt the mahogany desk against his legs and he leaned against it for support. He had a mission in Starling; one that needed to be completed at any cost. And if Floyd Lawton showing up in town was any
indication, things were certainly going to get worse before they could get better. But could Oliver, in good conscience, leave Sofia and Ivan to a life of bitter misery because he didn't follow through on his promises? Could his soul handle that kind of guilt?

“How long are you in Starling for?” He asked her after a long moment of silence between them.

“Just the day. It's a layover on a trip to New York to visit my mother's sister.”

Oliver grabbed a pen and paper and scribbled his phone number on it before folding it and handing it to her. “Call me when you're back in Moscow,” he said. “I need to make some arrangements.”

She nodded and then turned toward the door, pausing with her hand on the knob. “I'm glad you finally decided to come home Oliver. I think you don't realize the amount of people that truly need you.” Her voice was quiet but resolute. She slipped out the door and shut it behind her, leaving him alone.

He wasn't sure how he was going to do what she was asking. Something deep in his gut told him that stepping foot back in Moscow was like signing his own death warrant. But she wasn't wrong when she’d called him out on not keeping his promises. Old Ollie might not have cared about screwing someone over like that. But over the last five years Oliver had learned that true friends were hard to come by. And he knew that he needed to do whatever he could to make this right.
Chapter 20

Chapter by holysmoaksoliver

Chapter Summary

Hey lovelies! Happy Monday! We're so excited to hear all your comments about how ItWoY is progressing, so please keep them coming. We hope you enjoy this week's installement, so without further ado...

xoxo,
Cassie

The curiosity ate at her through another entire mug of coffee, as she moved with the rest of Oliver’s family into the dining room. It felt like torture waiting for Oliver and Sofia to finish their conversation. She chewed on her lower lip, trying her best to hide the fear that bubbled into her stomach. Why had Sofia come? Was it really to pay a visit to an old pal? Or had she come on orders from her family? Felicity didn’t know how Oliver got himself disentangled from the Bratva, but something told her that it hadn’t been a clean break. They didn’t seem like the kind of people who enjoyed losing.

She should be in there with him, helping him figure out what Sofia wanted. But she knew that would look weird. Oliver and her’s storylines had to run on different frequencies. Any discrepancy and people would start asking questions. She didn’t want to open up that kind of worms on her own. She couldn’t even fathom how they’d ever explain it.

“Breakfast is ready Mrs. Queen,” Raisa’s voice pulled Felicity from her thoughts. And she looked up from her coffee as Raisa brought the last of the food to the table. “Miss Felicity are you feeling okay? You look a little pale.”

All eyes darted towards her, and she tried to shake off her emotions, even if she wasn’t sure which ones were causing her the most distress. “I’m fine, just too little sleep and too much java I guess.”

“You didn’t sleep well?” Moira perked up again. Concerned crossed her face, as she glanced at Thea. “Which guestroom did you set Felicity up in? You know the tree on the west side needs to be trimmed. Poor thing was probably up all night with that banging.”

Thea gagged on her orange juice, and Felicity shot her a warning look. Her friend was really pushing these matchmaking attempts, and she wasn’t sure how to feel about it. On one hand Thea’s insistence was endearing. She had always thought of the younger Queen as family. She wanted Thea to know she was loved, that despite the breaks in her family, someone was still looking out for her. And she hoped she’d done a well enough job.

But there was another side to this. The side that kept a constant hum in Felicity’s chest when she looked at Oliver. It was the side that remembered every touch, that clung to each look they’d ever shared. And it was the side that Felicity was scared of most. Because falling back into her feelings for Oliver was as easy as breathing, but it wasn’t as simple as that. It couldn’t be.

“No trees Mrs. Queen,” she supplied with a smile. “I guess I was just more shaken up from last night
“Of course dear that’s why I wanted you here,” Moira said with a warm smile. “As a mother, I couldn’t very well let you go home alone. It wouldn’t have felt right.”

She nodded. “That reminds me, I should really call my mother. If she’s heard about the event and I don’t call her soon, she’ll worry.”

“Of course,” Moira replied. “Take it in the second study.”

Felicity thanked her as she left the dining room, a small wave of guilt sitting on her chest. She hated all the lying, the secrets. She didn’t want to do it anymore. But she also knew there was no way out of some of them.

Instead she lifted her phone to dial Tommy. Because when things spiraled he always found a way to give her something to hold onto, and she needed that more than anything.

But before she could hit send, Sofia came down the hall towards her. When she looked up, Felicity saw how much the last couple years must have changed the girl. No longer was there a youthful glow about the woman. Where her kindness had set in her eyes, now Felicity saw pain and determination. She would never know all that Sofia’s life had handed her, there was no way to get that kind of insight. But looking at her now, Felicity knew that whatever had happened recently it was enough to push her back into Oliver’s orbit. For better or for worse.

“Leaving so soon?” her words came out hollow, as she stood up straighter.

“It is best if I return to my hotel until my plane leaves in the morning,” Sofia folded her hands in front of her. “I do not wish to raise suspicion with the local… color.”

_Felicity thought as she took in a breath. “Smart idea. But it was good to see you.”_  

“I never expected our paths to cross again,” she said as she pursed her lips. “But I am glad yours and Oliver’s have. Despite our differences in loyalty, I did hope he would one day find some peace.”

She raised a brow before she asked. “What do you mean?”

Sofia glanced back down the hall, before she spoke again. “Has he told you why he left?”

Felicity shook her head, folding her arms in on herself. “It’s not any of my business. We’re just friends. If he doesn’t feel like sharing that with me, then it’s not my place to press.”

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“Fair enough,” Sofia sighed, taking in Felicity and their surroundings. “It must be nice.”

“I don’t live here,” she said, because she couldn’t fathom what else Sofia could be talking about.

“I meant the freedom to have wants, desires. The freedom to choose your own path.” She sounded like she was a million miles away, but then her eyes refocused on Felicity. “I should leave. It was nice seeing you Felicity. Take care.”

“You too,” she said, and she couldn’t help but watch the girl go. Because that’s what she looked like as she left the Queen mansion, not the brazen young woman who once lent her an entire closet full of clothes, but a terrified girl who wished more than anything else her life could be different. And she had never related to Sofia Knyazev more.
“Hey.”

She pulled her gaze from the front door, focusing on Oliver. He stood across from her, his back pressed against the paneling of the wall, with a look she knew all too well. It was the same look he had that night in the hotel in Tokyo, the one he gave her before the gala, and again in the nightclub. The look of losing before you ever really gained something.

“Was that the formal invite back?” It surprised her how even her voice was, but she couldn’t meet his eye. “Send in a face you trust?”

“That’s not why,” he paused as he looked around the foyer. Making sure they were alone no doubt. “It’s not why she came.”

“But you’re considering going,” she countered. “After everything your family has been through, you’re considering leaving them. Again.”

“I made a promise, Felicity. And I don’t know how to let it go.”

She could see the conflict spread through him. He was struggling to find a path through all that life was throwing at him, and she did feel for him. But Oliver was doing what he always did. Pushing away anyone who could help, because he couldn’t bare sharing his burdens.

“This isn’t like a gym membership Oliver,” she said taking a step towards him. He froze when she was inches from him. “And I’m guessing you didn’t leave with a pat on the back. So if you go back there, they’ll kill you. We won't have to wonder about it this time. All any of us will be able to do is grieve.”

“I don’t want this,” his voice just low and rough enough to tinge her skin. And she tried her best to keep her eyes on him as he continued. “I don’t want any of it. But if I can help, if I can set something right after… I need to help her. It’s important that I do this.”

“More important than the mission you’ve already given yourself?” She knew pressing the issue wasn’t going to give her anything new. But still she needed to try all the same. “Oliver things now, things here, they aren’t great but it’s your life, it’s who you are. And letting yourself get dragged back into that mess, it’s just going to destroy you.”

“Maybe I deserve it,” he shrugged. “Maybe not. I just know that I have to help Sofia. I owe it to her and Ivan.”

“And you have to do it alone,” Felicity finished, pushing herself off the wall. “I get it.”

“Do you?”

“Not really,” she replied. “But I know it’s what you want me to say.”

“Felicity--”

“Don’t okay. I know the lying thing keeps you from having to hurt the people closest to you with the truth,” she leaned in, putting her arms around his neck before she whispered in his ear. “But you never have to lie to me.”

Before she could stop herself she pressed her lips to his cheek, another act to push more memories to the surface. It was enough to open a flood in her, and she didn’t know how she managed to pull away. But she did, and then she took a step back.
“I should get my stuff,” she said, wiping a tear from her eye. “And then head home. I think I’ve already overstayed your family’s kindness.”

“You could stay for breakfast,” he looked at her, the pain covering his face. “Thea would hate it if you left.”

“I don’t think that’s a good idea. It’s better if I leave now,” she took another step down the hall. “Bye Oliver.”

He didn’t say goodbye, but she could feel his eyes on her as she made her way towards the stairs. Each step she took, felt like she was pulling further away from him. And she hated it. She just wanted everything to stop. She wanted to be able to change the course that someone else had set her on.

Then she paused at the base of the stairs, everything pulsing through her. Everything for the last few years had been decided for her. Leaving Oliver, keeping secrets, working for Merlyn. They weren’t her choices, they belonged to everyone else. And she was done letting others make the choice for her.

“Oliver,” she called out, turning back to him. He hadn’t left, it actually looked like he had stepped closer to watch her.

“Yeah?”

“Whatever Sofia needs, whatever she asked you to do,” Felicity took a breath, finally meeting his eyes. “I’m going to help you.”

“You just said--”

“I know, but I was wrong. You can’t do this alone, and more importantly you shouldn’t have to,” she smiled at him. “So whatever it takes, I’m gonna help you see this through.”

She took the stairs up, stopping at the top floor. She didn’t know what Oliver had promised Sofia, or how it would affect what he was doing for the city. But she would help for as long as she could.

She pulled her phone from her back pocket. She couldn’t very well leave on her own, not when Diggle had her car. She sent a text to him, asking him to bring her car to the Queen mansion as soon as possible. She was going to have to get home somehow.

---

Diggle had ushered Tommy into Big Belly Burger, where they sat across from each other, unblinking as they willed the other to say something first.

Finally, a waitress approached. “What can I get for you boys?” she asked.

Diggle looked away first, meeting her gaze. “Chili burger, extra cheese,” he said with an appreciative smile. “And a coke.”

She nodded, turning her eyes to Tommy. “And for you?”

Tommy shrugged. “The same, I guess.” Diggle hadn’t said a word to him since Tommy had mentioned the Hood, and it had definitely raised Tommy’s suspicions. But as he watched the man, Diggle’s demeanor was calm, collected; not like he’d been hiding a secret alter ego for the last several weeks.
“Carly working today?” Diggle asked.

The waitress shook her head. “Andy Jr. isn’t feeling well so she called out. You a friend of hers?”

“Brother in law,” he answered.

Tommy’s eyes snapped back to Diggle. The man had suggested to meet at a place where he clearly had familial ties; that along with the lack of tension in his features would suggest that whatever Tommy had suspected was incorrect. Unless that’s what Diggle wanted him to think.

“Oh, you’re John,” the waitress said with a warm smile. “I’ll be sure to let her know you stopped by. And I’ll be right back with those drinks.”

She turned to leave and silence fell over the table again. Tommy wasn’t sure how to actually voice his assumptions; he’d surprised himself by even asking Diggle to meet him at all. But there they were, so he needed to figure out what to say… and fast.

“So you and Lyla?” Diggle asked, turning his attention back to Tommy.

Tommy’s brow furrowed. “We’re friends,” he said, clearing his throat. “We just… stayed in touch after Russia and…”

John shook his head. “Looked pretty heated back there,” he said tilting his head toward the direction they’d seen each other outside. And there was something else in Diggle’s eyes as he leveled his gaze at Tommy. Something that seemed to convey that John Diggle knew far more than he was letting on.

Tommy frowned, more to himself than anything else. Because he had been the one to ask for this meeting, so why hadn’t he been prepared with any sort of answers to questions that Diggle might have? *Because you weren’t expecting Lyla to show up*, he reminded himself. But there was a tickle, somewhere near the back of his mind, that made him wonder if perhaps Lyla had been right all along, in going to Waller about his behavior. Maybe he was unfit for duty. Maybe Oliver coming back and everything that happened since then had affected him more than even he realized.

“If you’re wondering if I know that you work for ARGUS, I do,” Diggle said casually, clapping his free hand over his slinged arm. “Amanda had me do some freelance work for her a while back. I used her connections to try to identify who murdered my brother. But when she found out that I was doing personal work on the side using her resources, she burned me.” Diggle paused, darting a glance up to meet Tommy’s eyes before continuing. “I saw you sparring with Lyla that day. Everything kind of made a little more sense after that.”

The waitress arrived, placing two small cocktail napkins in front of them before depositing a glass on each.

“No one but Felicity knows,” Tommy answered, trying to keep the emotion out of his voice. If Diggle was going to be working for Oliver, Tommy wanted to make sure that if his friend ever found out about his day job, it would be from him.

“Secrets tend to be going around a lot lately,” Diggle said, an edge to his voice. He adjusted his sling on his shoulder.

“Yeah,” Tommy agreed and then nodded his head toward the sling. “How’d that happen? You didn’t have that yesterday.”

Diggle shrugged. “Stray bullet grazed me,” he said with a dismissive shake of his head.
Tommy’s eyes narrowed a fraction. “From the sniper?”

A nod.

From the police reports that Lyla had gathered in the previous days, the vigilante had been at James Holder’s residence when he’d been killed by the sniper. Chlorine from the pool had broken down the blood sample on the concrete near the pool too much to be identified, but it had appeared that the vigilante may have been shot with the bullets laced with curare. If Diggle really was the Hood, he’d have to know enough about the drug to find an antidote, and fast. And if he’d cheated death once that week, it was certainly possible that he’d done it twice.

Or perhaps the shoulder wound was from the night at Holder’s place and it was just bothering him more after the exertion of the previous day.

But that was a lot of maybes. And when it came to things like this, Tommy knew it was always better to have one’s facts straight.

“Lucky it was just a graze,” Tommy said finally. “I hear they call him Deadshot because he never misses.” He knew the shot was below the belt, especially if John knew that the man was the one hired to kill his brother. But Tommy needed to get somewhere with him. He needed to know what John knew.

Diggle flinched, his shoulders stiffening. Even when he met Tommy’s eyes they didn’t relax. “So you wanted to talk about the Hood?” he asked, his voice gruff.

The waitress returned, food in hand, setting the plates down on the table. It gave Tommy a moment to collect his thoughts, to figure how exactly he was going to approach the conversation.

“Yeah, I was just thinking since you’re working in private security now, maybe you’d heard something about the identity of the guy.” Tommy nearly groaned aloud at his own lie. But he feigned ignorance, keeping up the ruse as he bit on the end of a french fry. If their conversation was meant to be a give and take, his comrade hadn’t gotten the memo.

Diggle shook his head. “Nothing,” he answered, picking up his burger. Chili ran off the back side of it, hitting the plate with a splat before he took a bite. “Is that really all you wanted to talk about?”

Tommy shrugged. “Is that really why you came?”

It had been a shot in the dark. But the more Tommy thought about it, the more he was certain that at the very least, Diggle knew something. He wouldn’t have suggested they meet in person if he didn’t. But the bits and pieces that Tommy was putting together seemed to keep adding up to less and less.

“How’d you hurt your arm?”

“Honestly,” Digg started. “I came because I was curious. I get a call from you out of the blue asking about the Hood and I don’t know. I guess I figured I’d see what you knew. But this is starting to feel more like a fishing expedition than anything else.”

“It’s not like--”

“Pretty sure it is, man.”

Tommy took a bite of his burger, the silence hanging thick in the air. He chewed on his food and he chewed on what Diggle had just said, letting the words mull over in his brain.

“How’d you hurt your arm?” Tommy asked finally.
Diggle laughed, but there was no humor in it. “Thought you said it wasn’t like that.” He shook his head. “Alright let’s see. Not that I owe you an explanation, but I believe last I saw you, you were chatting with Oliver while I went off to find Detective Lance. He said I could relieve an officer by the back exit and I got about three quarters of the way there when the first shot rang out. I ran straight for the sound of the gunfire, making it to the second floor before most of the other responders. But there was an officer who beat me, facing off with Lawton.” Diggle gritted his teeth at the man’s name. “I moved a second too soon and Lawton fired, straight for the officer. The bullet was a through and through in the guy’s shoulder, and then it nicked mine. That’s the last thing I remember until I woke up a few hours later.”

Tommy found no hint of a lie in the face of the man looking back at him. He blew out a long breath. “I’m sorry,” he said quietly, feeling once again like perhaps Lyla had been right in her assessment of him. He hated feeling off his game. And maybe he was. But also, maybe he wasn’t. Because when he met John’s eyes, he could see that there was more to the story than that. Who had given him the cure for the poison in his system? How had he gotten out of the building with the police surrounding it.

John Diggle might not be the vigilante, but he sure as hell knew who it was.

“No sweat,” Diggle said after a long moment of assessing Tommy across the table.

Tommy wondered idly if Digg could see the questions that still raced in his head. “Listen, I hope this won’t affect us working together at the club,” Tommy said. He’d only made the decision to take Oliver up on his offer in that very moment. And perhaps it was to keep an eye on Diggle, but part of him wanted to see if his friendship with Ollie was repairable. He certainly hoped that it would be.

“Oh?” Diggle said, before finishing off the last of his burger and taking a long sip of his drink.

“Ollie asked me to join in on the fun. Manage the place.”

“I hope that me knowing your secret won’t affect us working together, either.”

_Touché_, Tommy thought. Although he wasn’t exactly sure how that was going to work. It was a lot of secrets to work around… Tommy working for ARGUS, the truth about all of their shared time in Russia two years prior, and the fact that Tommy was fairly certain that Diggle knew who the vigilante was, if it wasn’t Diggle himself, which it very well still could have been. But Tommy was a secret government operative… secrets were kind of his life.

“Nope,” Tommy said, finally finding his voice. “I’m looking forward to it.”

Diggle’s head bowed in a single nod. “Me too.”

---

Oliver had to get out of the house. He had to go somewhere and just let go. The need for his bow sent an ache through his hand and up until it settled in the muscle of his shoulder. He knew more than anyone that the bow was a crutch, a drug that kept him steadied in his life. And he couldn’t remember when it had become such a constant for him. Before Russia he was sure. Maybe the first time Shado had placed it in his hands, giving him a sense of purpose when everything else had spiraled out of control.

It wasn’t just Sofia showing up that had thrown him off. Though he had to admit that things were overly complicated now. He wouldn’t admit it to anyone, but he’d been running since he left Russia, left the Bratva. It’s the reason he steered clear of Leonov’s territory on the east side of town and part
of the reason he had kept the city appearances to places he could manage. No one left the Brotherhood of their own accord. There were accounts sure, of members being let go after high favors paid to the Pakhan had earned them passage out. But Oliver had left in the dead of night, the same way out as he had come in, stowed away on a ship bound for somewhere else. Only this time he made it all the way to his destination without being discovered. And from there he let what little money he had saved up buy his way back to Lian Yu. Back to the one place he truly belonged.

He figured once he was discovered missing, Anatoly would appoint Ivan to his position. Ivan had been his second, and the most logical choice to take over once Oliver was gone. But he should have known Mikhail would make waves. He hadn’t spent much time with Anatoly’s brother, but it was enough to know who guided the decisions in the family. Anatoly was in charge because he was well liked, a charmer of the masses. But Mikhail Knyazev ran the Bratva. And Oliver should have never underestimated by how much.

But he had made another promise too. One over his father’s grave on the island. And the weight of the notebook felt like a stone tied to his waist. He didn’t know if he was honoring his father’s wishes with his mission. He had no way to guess if this is what Robert had meant. But he did know that for some reason he had survived the island, ARGUS, the Bratva. He had done exactly what his father had told him to do, despite every time his body told him to quit. And because of that he knew he had to see this to it’s end as well. No matter where that lead.

He snuck through the kitchen, glad that Raisa was off doing something else. He got to the door, before he heard his mom’s voice on the other side of the room, coming in from the hall. He didn’t know if the need to hide came from wanting to conceal his emotions or the guilt over skipping out once again, but Oliver jumped into the pantry, leaving the door open just a crack.

“I told you that I was through discussing this,” Moira’s voice was as sharp as it was low, as she entered the kitchen completely. “Our dealings are done.”

His mother had taken a million business calls in his presence before, so he could tell the difference between something work related and something not. There wasn’t anything about his mother’s tone that told him this had to do with QC.

“I refuse to keep having the same conversation with you,” she hissed into the phone. “We agreed that as long as I got Walter to lower the QC bid for Unidac, that this matter would no longer be any of your concern.”

If there was one thing his mother had always stayed honest with it was QC, so why did it sound like someone had paid her to throw the auction? And why would she even take someone’s money for something like that? None of this made any sense.

“I swear to you, if you so much as even think about breathing a word of this to her or anyone else,” Moira whipped around and Oliver found himself pressing further into the shadows. “I will take any and everything I know about your interest in the project, and I will use it to burn your empire to the ground.”

There was a long pause, and all he could do was listen to his mother’s shallow breathes.

“No Malcolm, you do not test me when it comes to my family. Goodbye, do not call me again.”

He heard his mother slam the phone down and then the sound of her heels against the tiled floor as she left the kitchen.

He knew she wasn’t headed back, but he couldn’t bring himself to move. Nothing he had just heard
clicked with anything he knew about his mother. The calm, collected force of nature sounded like a hurricane on the warpath. And all because of Malcolm Merlyn? What could possibly be going on between his mother and Merlyn that would have her react like that? He added it to the growing list of things that he’d have to look into later. Because if there was one thing he was sure about Moira Queen, it was she the fact that she never struck unless someone struck first. Whatever Merlyn had said, was enough to ignite a rage in his mother, and he was sure she would follow through on whatever the threat had been about.

Oliver headed out before someone entered the kitchen, and made his way towards the garage. He needed a ride to clear his head more than ever. Maybe he could stop by the foundry and make use of that new bag of tennis balls he’d bought. Sinking some arrows into the back wall sounded more than cathartic.

But before he got all the way to the garage a car came driving up, and he had to slide a smile into place as Tommy pulled to a stop.

“Hey man,” Tommy called as he walked over to him. “I would have been here earlier but I had something to take care of.”

Right. Because Tommy had said he’d come over, so they could finally talk. Last night before he drifted off, when he’d tucked the feel of Felicity pressed against him as far back as he could, Oliver had thought about what he’d say to his friend. Because he was sick of the lies. On both their ends. He just wanted to tell Tommy everything, but now the Bratva was circling his life again. And he hated the desire to push Tommy as far away as he could. But maybe that was something he could tell Tommy. If anyone would understand it would be the person who crossed the globe looking for Oliver.

“It’s okay. The morning’s been eventful enough,” he sighed, the feeling of coming clean stinging against his throat. But if he wanted his friendship to work, he had to try. “Sofia came by.”

Tommy stopped moving, as his eyes shifted around. Oliver recognized the gesture, being on the lookout for signs of trouble was something he was more than familiar with, but it felt wrong watching someone else do it.

“As in Bratva princess, Sofia?” his voice was low and Oliver could feel the fear radiating from his friend. “Why?”

“She needs my help,” he replied with a shrug, pulling Tommy into the garage before he continued. “I didn’t exactly leave Russia on the best of terms. And because of that, things kind of imploded.”

“Doesn’t mean it’s up to you to fix them.”

He didn’t know if he could explain it to Tommy, the sense of duty he felt to the promise he made. But he had already opened the can of worms, and he didn’t think he could backtrack without detonating their friendship with it.

“You ever promise someone something that you think will be easy to deliver on?” He shook his head, letting his hand rest against his bike. “But then everything shifts, and things that you think are simple change. And then before you know it that promise is just another thing you bury to get out.”

Tommy stared at him for longer than he’d like, watching closely to every shift and movement he made. He felt like his friend had him under a microscope.

“I get it,” Tommy finally said, shaking his head. “Believe me I do. But what does Sofia coming here
mean for you?”

“I don’t,” but that wasn’t exactly true. He did know what it meant. He would either get Ivan exactly what he wanted, or he’d… have to figure out another way. “It means I have to help, no matter what it takes.”

Because Sofia had been kind to him. She and Ivan had been there and helped him with Akio and his friends more times than he would care to admit. And they deserved something good to come from it. Maybe that wasn’t with the Bratva. Maybe the only way for them to be happy would be to sever all ties with the family. It would take a lot of work, but it might be the only way he could make things right.

Tommy sighed, giving him a small grin. “Looks like I’m taking that job at the right time.”

“What are you talking about?”

“You offered me a job last night,” Tommy replied. “At the club. And I think considering things, it’s the right move for me. Get out of my own head for a while, and help you.”

“Tommy I can’t ask you to hang around when things might be getting even more complicated.” And Oliver hadn’t even told him about the worst of it. He didn’t know if he ever could, even though he knew one day he had to.

“You’re not asking me to do anything I wouldn’t choose to do on my own,” he looked at Oliver full on. “Ollie you’re my best friend, and I know I’ve been off the last few weeks. But that has never changed, and I’m not letting it now.”

There were still things Oliver didn’t know, things Tommy was holding in, but he looked at the man before him and for the first time since he had come home, things finally felt right between them.

“Okay, I look forward to having you as bar manager.”

“Club manager,” Tommy corrected him with a grin. “I take my job title very seriously.”

“Noted.” He laughed.

His phone chirped, and he pulled it out, seeing the text from Diggle.

As long as it leads to Lawton. I’m in.

He had expected John to take more time, to weigh the decision against every moral fiber of his being. But he couldn’t help the relief that the man was willing to help him out. Between saving the city and saving Sofia and Ivan from the Bratva. He was going to need all the help he could get.

“Good news?” Tommy watched him with a raised brow.

“Yeah,” he responded, dropping his phone back to his pocket. “I think it is. We should go talk to a couple of the contractors on my list.”

“Right now?”

Oliver shrugged, moving back towards the garage door. “No time like the present.”
Hello all,
Here we are another chapter, another dose of our faves. We're gearing up for some fun stuff. Honestly the next several chapters are some of my favorites yet. But I can't really say much more without spoilers. So I'll let you just read it. ;)

love ya,
Kayla

“We’ve been having this same argument for weeks,” Oliver growled, stowing his bow and slipping his quiver over his head before setting it beside the bow case.

“No,” Felicity countered, spinning in her chair near the center of the Foundry to face him. “You’ve been avoiding this same argument for weeks. Six of them, in fact. Ever since Sofia walked through your front door, looking for your help. So tell me Oliver, what exactly does she need help with?”

She knew she might be pushing it, but the last month and a half had been tense; with long nights and less and less sleep. And she’d been as patient as she possibly could waiting for Oliver to tell her what they were going to do about Sofia’s visit. She wasn’t going to wait anymore. She stood, as if being closer to his height might afford her some sort of advantage in this argument. Which she knew was silly; Oliver never did anything he didn’t want to do. Which was exactly her point.

He moved toward her, letting out a long sigh before meeting her eyes. “I promised Ivan something in Russia. That I’d help him become the next captain, in line to take over the Bratva someday. It’s the only way he and Sofia can marry.” His eyes fell to the office chair, using one hand to spin it around in place as he avoided her gaze.

“And now she’s cashing in,” Felicity supplied.

Oliver’s eyes darted back up, making her stomach clench. This time it was Felicity that needed to look away. Maybe it was the lack of sleep, but something about his eyes on her made her feel exposed.

“Ivan had my back over there. More than he needed to and definitely more than he should have,” he said, taking another step toward her, passed the chair, to rest his hand on the desk just inches from hers. “Apparently my leaving has affected the brotherhood in more ways than I anticipated. Anatoly never named a new captain and Mikhail is ready to marry Sofia off to some abusive asshole. And I can’t do that to them. Not after everything they did for me and Akio.”

“And me,” she said, a little softer this time. “I told you, I’m not letting you do this alone. You need someone to have your back.”

Oliver shook his head. “I can’t ask that of you.”
Felicity scoffed. “You didn’t. I offered, insisted even.” She tapped her fingers on the desktop, frustrated. “You brought me and Digg into this because somewhere, deep down in that heart you tell yourself you buried so long ago, you realized that you need people. Even if the mission isn’t the same, Oliver. That doesn’t mean we won’t have your back.”

She could see the struggle going on in his mind; the internal debate on whether or not he was going to take her up on her offer. Forget the fact that she wasn’t actually offering. She’d spent the last two years trying to rectify her conscience with leaving Oliver behind in Russia; she’d be damned if she was letting him go back there alone again.

“What exactly does Sofia expect you to do, anyway?” she pressed further, seeing his resolve crumble before her eyes. “I mean from what you’ve said, you didn’t exactly leave on the best of terms. I imagine your reception would be less than welcoming showing back up there.”

“I don’t know,” he said, his voice low. “But I have to try.”

Felicity’s phone beeped on the desk, startling both of them and breaking their gaze. “Crap,” she breathed. “Crap crap crap.”

Oliver’s brow furrowed in response.

“That’s my ‘hurry up dummy you’re late for work’ alarm. In case I ever get too caught up in… things,” she said, grabbing her phone and silencing the alarm. “Malcolm is going to kill me.”

He moved away from the desk, out of her personal space, pulling the hood off and replacing it with a grey t-shirt. Felicity struggled not to stare.

“Just let him know you’ve got a friend who could put some arrows through him if he ever threatens to try,” he answered with a grin ghosting across his features.

“Yeah but which one,” Felicity answered, without thinking. They hadn’t talked much about the other archer- the one who’d made his presence known a few weeks prior, although they were definitely keeping tabs on the man. She shook her head, grabbing her purse and keys. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have…”

“It’s fine,” he answered, even if she knew he was lying. Oliver had been more tense than usual about the Dark Archer’s involvements in their nighttime activities.

“I really do have to run,” she said, hiking her bag up onto her shoulder. “But I’ll see you tonight?”

Oliver nodded and glanced at his phone. “I should get upstairs too,” he said with a sigh. “Tommy will be here soon to go over numbers for the grand opening.”

Felicity moved toward the stairs, too aware of him right behind her. Things between them since the night at the manor had been strained at best. There had definitely been a spark of something there between them, something that felt more real than anything she’d experienced since… *Since Russia*, her mind confirmed. But the spell was broken the moment Sofia had stepped foot in that house and asked him to come back. To fix whatever it was the girl had thought Oliver had broken when he’d left. Felicity felt another flash of anger course through her. Why did Sofia have to come back now, when they’d only just gotten Oliver back?

She stopped at the top of the steps, stifling a yawn as she pushed the door open. “You know, I really need to start getting some more sleep. All these nights with you are exhausting.” Her mind caught up with her mouth almost instantly and she cringed. “I mean… you know what I mean.”
“I do,” he answered. And there was something in his demeanor that she couldn’t quite place. Something that reminded her of the Oliver Queen she’d seen in video clips before the Gambit went down. Almost… smug?

“And on that note, I will see you later.” She turned down the hall, nearly running right into--
“Tommy,” she froze, gaping at him.

“Hey Smoak,” he answered with a roguish grin. “Aaand Ollie.”

“This is totally not what it looks like,” Felicity sputtered.

Oliver came to stand beside her, rolling his eyes. “I hired Felicity to upgrade the computer system. She said early mornings are really the only time she’s free.”

Tommy nodded, clearly not convinced. “I am certainly not here to judge,” he said with a smirk. “Even though this is the first time I’ve heard about this from either of you… my two best friends, one of whom is my business partner.”

“I…” Felicity started. Her phone beeped again, her ‘you’re super late ringtone’. “I’ve really got to get to work.” She said, moving deftly passed Tommy and out into the parking lot, where her Mini Cooper was parked besides Oliver’s Ducati. Tommy’s car was parked on the other side of Oliver’s motorcycle, so even if she hadn’t awkwardly run into him in the Employees Only hallway, Tommy still knew she was there. Alone. With Oliver.

She forced her mind away from worrying about what Tommy thought of her and Oliver. Mostly because there was nothing between them. There was too much going on between her job, the Dark Archer, Oliver playing vigilante by night, and his suicide mission for Sofia. Maybe once things slowed down… or maybe not.

Once she’d made it to the office she chanced a look at the time on her phone. Not even nine o’clock yet. Malcolm couldn’t fault her too much for it; she was working more than sixty hours a week. And that said nothing for the hours she spent in the Foundry, and the time she put into finding a way to put a failsafe into Markov’s device without being found out. No wonder she was so tired.

Surprisingly, Felicity made it all the way up to her office without running into anyone at all, and she had to double check her phone to make sure it was actually a week day. Sadly it was, and she had barely sat at her desk and fired up her computer before a knock sounded on her door.

“Come in,” she called, stifling another yawn. Seriously, she needed to figure out how to add more hours to the day to get everything done she needed to.

“Ah Miss Smoak,” Malcolm said, poking his head inside. “I was just on my way up to my office and wanted to stop in. I spoke with Brion last evening and he said that the device is really beginning to take shape.”

Felicity nodded her head once. “Yes sir. I think you’re going to be very pleased with our progress.”

He smiled, and a sickening feeling took root in Felicity’s stomach. He seemed thoroughly pleased, and she could only guess at what type of horrific scenes were playing in his mind’s eye. “That’s actually why I’m here. Dr. Markov and I are off to check in with the team we have assembling the prototype. We may be able to test it within the next couple weeks.”

She swallowed down the bile that rose in her throat before answering. “That’s great,” she lied, a smile plastered to her face.
Malcolm nodded. “I’m not naive to think that any of this would have been possible, and at this level, without your contributions. I assure you, your efforts will not go unnoticed.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“Since I will be away this week on an early holiday, I am putting you in charge with the progress of the project, Miss Smoak. I trust that won’t be a problem.”

“No, Mr. Merlyn,” she said. “I appreciate your faith in me. I won’t let you down.”

He grinned again, the very essence of a cheshire cat, before knocking twice with his knuckles on the edge of her desk. “If all goes well, Starling City, and the world is about to become a very, very different place.” And with that, he turned on his heel and left her office, closing the door behind him, the click of the door hollow and echoing with its finality.

Dread filled her once she was alone. She’d spent so much time trying to figure out how to put something inside the device to keep it from working, that she’d barely noticed how close it actually was to completion. She needed to think of something and she needed to do it soon.

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Tommy looked up once again from the paperwork laid across the bar, mouth open and words poised on his tongue. But he held back. Because truth was he and Oliver were in a good place. The last six weeks felt like it should have when Oliver came home.

There was no longer this ARGUS shaped weight sitting between them. Though Tommy still hadn’t told his friend about his work over the last two years, but maybe he didn’t have to. Tommy hadn’t heard a whisper from his boss since his psych eval. And even if he knew how ludicrous it was, he hoped Waller would forget about him.

Not that he wanted to give up on stopping whatever his father had planned with the Dr. Markov’s device, that was something he was still pursuing regardless of his status as an agent. Even if he was several resources light. Felicity was still looking into a way to place a failsafe in the thing, and hopefully dig up whatever his father wanted to accomplish with it. Until they knew more he didn’t have much to do. And as selfish as it was, in the last month he had gotten a taste of how his life could be, how normal he could be, and it felt freeing. No looking over his shoulder waiting for a threat. He could stay at Laurel’s and wake up with her in his arms without fear of Amanda Waller showing up at his doorstep. It was nice. But he knew it couldn’t last. Eventually his boss would come calling. And he was uneasy about when that shoe might drop.

But that’s not why he was watching his best friend so intently. No that had to do with something else entirely.

“Either say what you want to say, or stop staring at me,” Oliver said, shooting Tommy a look.

“Who says I wanted to say anything.”

“Your face,” Oliver retorted with a groan. “Tommy I already told you, Felicity and I are--”

“Just friends?” He finished with a brow raise. “Yeah, see that would be more convincing if I didn’t know you both so well.”

“I’m not having this conversation with you.”

“Too late,” Tommy took the papers out from in front of Oliver and slid them down the bar. “Ollie,
we’ve been best friends since before lasting memories were formed. I know what you’re like around the girls you like. And Felicity pretends like she can hide her feeling so well, but she’s as transparent as you are.”

Oliver gave him a death glare, reaching for the business plan again. “We have actual work to do, and you’d rather sit here and gossip like school kids?”

“I thought I made that obvious.”

He could see the frustration set in Oliver’s shoulders, as his friend’s hand fidgeted with the pen next to him. He wasn’t wrong when he said he’d seen Ollie around girls he liked, but he was also certain he’d never seen his friend like this before. He was such a mix of nerves, and Tommy was beginning to wonder if maybe what Oliver and Felicity had in Russia had just amped up with the two of them back on the same soil. Maybe Oliver didn’t just like Felicity, maybe it was something deeper than that.

“Whatever I might feel for her,” Oliver said his voice ragged. “It doesn’t matter right now. I can’t be in a relationship, not with everything going on.”

“The club or the Sofia thing?”

They hadn’t talked much about Sofia since that afternoon over a month ago. He didn’t know what Oliver’s next move on the subject was, or if his friend would clue him in if and when he made a choice. But he wanted to believe they were passed the need to lie to each other.

Except you still kinda are. The voice in his head told him. It’s not like he didn’t want to tell Ollie about ARGUS, god he wanted to so bad. But he knew how his friend was likely to take that news. And if he could hold off on that a little longer, then he was going to at least try. Besides he wasn’t working with ARGUS at the moment. So at the moment it wasn’t a lie. Not really.

“No it’s more to do with the five years removed from basic human interactions, thing.” Oliver replied, running a hand down his face. “I’m not the picture of clear mental health. And things are complicated right now. I just got home. I don’t want to make everything worse.”

“Okay well first, you and I both know that’s a load of crap.”

Ollie shot him another glare, but before Tommy could continue they heard the thick metal door of the club opening. He shot a look to Oliver and then over towards the opened hall, ready to call out to the new arrival. But before he could Laurel came into view, an arm full of files with her.

“Hey,” Tommy said, and he was sure his smile matched his girlfriend’s.

She came up to the bar, leaning across it to give him a quick kiss. “Hello.”

“Did we have plans that I forgot about?”

Tommy chanced a look at Oliver, but his friend had reclaimed his papers and was conveniently not looking up from them. Of course. If Oliver was too chicken to tell Felicity how he felt, then he was certainly too chicken to look Laurel in the eye.

“No,” Laurel replied settling down on a stool. “But my mother is in town again, and apparently it’s for most of the month. So she’s decided to camp out at my place for bonding. It was for everyone’s safety that I find a quiet place to work.”

“So you chose a nightclub,” he teased. “Smart.”
“Yet to be opened nightclub,” she shot back with a grin. “It’s also ten in the morning, and besides the view is much better here than the public library.”

Oliver chuckled, and Tommy watched Laurel’s gaze shoot to him, like she just realized he was there. He knew Oliver could sense Laurel’s eyes on him, so his friend looked up and smile.

“Hi Laurel.”

“Oliver,” her voice was polite, but he could see the tension in her face. And he had to bet Ollie saw it too. “How are you?”

“Good,” Oliver replied, but he was already gathering up the stuff they’d been working on. “I think I’m gonna head out for the day. See if Speedy wants to grab something to eat.”

“You could always call a certain someone--”

“Drop it,” Oliver’s voice edged out a warning. He shook his head as he stood. “If Digg swings by, will you tell him I’m almost done looking over that bouncer list he sent over?”

Tommy looked over to Ollie, and he had to wonder if his friend knew anything about their mutual acquaintances other interests. Because he was still convinced Diggle knew something about the vigilante. John would disappear for the evening a few hours before any night activity would flare up in the city. And every time Tommy tried to nail down more information on the Hood he got stonewalled. Even Felicity refused to help him.

“I thought you said you hated mysteries?”

“Don’t you think we have enough on our plates without adding a vigilante to the mix? Just let this one go.”

But Tommy couldn’t let it go. He needed to know who was hiding under that hood. He needed to calm the ideas raging through his head. And the only solid lead he had was Digg.

“Yeah,” he replied. “Where’d he get to last night anyway?”

“Said something about having a thing to do,” Ollie shrugged. “I didn’t ask for details.”

“I’ll try to catch him before the end of the day.”

Oliver said a quick thanks and goodbye to him and to Laurel, before he headed for the door.

Laurel seemed to uncoil when the large door shuttered closed, enough that he could finally see how conflicted her face really was.

“What’s wrong?” Tommy focused on her, resting his hand over hers. “Was it seeing Oliver?”

“No,” she was adamant, and then she sighed. “It’s my mom, actually.”

“Staying at your place for a few weeks does sound like an intense amount of time,” he said, trying to be sympathetic. Even if he would give anything to have his own mother pop back into his life, he could understand Laurel’s point. He shot her a grin. “You can always spend more time at mine?”

“I might take you up on that.”

But there was no matching smile, just her fingers looping strands of hair about half a dozen times. Laurel had been doing it since middle school. The only real tell from the unflappable Ms. Lance.
“Laurel, what’s going on?”

She looked up, meeting his eyes as something darkened hers. Fear or concern, he wasn’t quite sure. But it worried him still.

“My mom finally told me why she’s been coming back and forth between here and Central City,” and if he hadn’t been looking at her he wouldn’t be sure she spoke at all, her voice was so low.

“Is she okay? She’s not sick is she?” He pushed the words out, hating how cold they could sound in the air around them.

Laurel let out a huff of a laugh, but he knew she was just getting angry at whatever was stewing in her mind. “No, that’s not it. She’s convinced of something, and now she’s here to convince my father of the same thing. She’s being so selfish.”

Laurel rubbed at her eyes, the only evidence that she could start to cry at any moment. And Tommy just held onto her other hand harder.

“You don’t have to tell me if you don’t want to,” he said, placing his other hand to her cheek. “But I’m here.”

“No I want to tell you,” Laurel let her head sink against Tommy’s hand. “I just don’t know how to form the words.”

“I got all day.” And he did. For her he’d sit there until dawn came the next day, just to let her take her time.

“She has this theory, and she thinks she has evidence to support it.”

“A theory about what?”

He didn’t know what Dinah Lance could have a theory on that would upset Laurel so much. Even though Laurel acted like she didn’t want to be around her mother, the two were usually very much on the same page about things. So whatever Dinah had told her, must have been something to shake Laurel to her core.

Laurel pulled back a ways, just so she could meet his eyes. “She thinks Sara’s still alive.”

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Oliver did not, in fact, call Thea to see if she wanted to get food. Instead, he climbed into his car and drove around the side of the building. He clicked the button to open the concealed garage door and pulled into the one of three parking spaces inside. He had a phone call with Sofia scheduled for later that afternoon and he was already keyed up about it. The last thing Oliver had expected six weeks ago was for anyone in the Knyazev family to darken his doorstep, and once again he was forced to play the hand he was dealt. But this time it seemed impossible- like any move he could possibly make would lead him right back to where he started five years ago: dead. And for the first time in a long time, that was one thing Oliver couldn’t let himself become.

But he had other things to do before his call with Sofia… namely, figure out what the hell he was going to do about helping her. He wondered, not for the first time since her visit, whether he’d be able to convince them to leave. Oliver had known since the day he’d met Ivan that the man’s loyalties were to Sofia above all, and he knew how much she hated the Brotherhood and everything it stood for. But when it came right down to it, would they be willing to turn their back on not only their families, but the only life either of them had ever known?
He pulled up the file on the computer that Felicity had compiled for him in the days since Sofia’s visit. Mostly schematics of the Bratva’s buildings in Moscow, but there were also copies of flight logs, a mockup of his fake ID to get back into Russia, and transcripts of several phone calls between Sofia and her father and uncle. His Russian was rusty from disuse the last two years, but he could understand most of what was going on. The wedding was set to take place soon, so whatever miracle Oliver was going to pull off, it would have to be sooner.

“That’s Russian,” Diggle’s voice came from behind him.

Oliver tensed, chiding himself for not even hearing the man enter. He stopped the audio and spun around to see Diggle standing there, arms crossed over his chest.

“You’re very astute, Digg. Don’t let anyone tell you otherwise.”

“They don’t,” he said, moving closer. “This got something to do with another name on your list?”

Oliver swallowed hard, meeting Diggle’s eyes. He wouldn’t be able to keep it a secret forever anyway. Better just to fill him in. “It’s not,” he said finally. “Sofia Knyazev came to see me a few weeks ago. She needs me to come through on a promise I made her before I left Russia.”

Diggle’s face was unreadable. “The damn Bratva,” he breathed quietly, shaking his head. “I guess I assumed coming back to Starling meant you’d left that life behind. Especially once you explained to me what that list was and how you wanted to right your father’s wrongs.”

“I did leave it behind.” Oliver’s jaw tightened. “And that’s the problem. I left without making things right for Sofia and Ivan. They need me Digg. I’m the only one that can do this.”

John leaned back against the desk, towering over Oliver. “You and I both know that ain’t true.” He paused for a long moment, letting his words sink in. “And I’m pretty sure we also both know that whatever she wants you to do, it isn’t going to end well.”

“Felicity already gave me that speech,” he sighed.

Diggle blew out a long breath. “And she wasn’t enough to convince you?” He shook his head. “You know why I joined up with you on this crusade?”

“To make Starling City a better place…”

“And to get to Lawton,” John added quickly. “This is selfish for all of us. We’re all fighting for something. So if you need to set things right with those two before you can move on and fight for your life here, then do it.” He paused again. “But just know how much you’re potentially giving up here to do it.”

“I know.”

“I don’t think you do, man.” He sighed. “In the Army I learned that you never leave a man behind. But I learned something else too. Just as important.” Digg paused before continuing. “Sometimes it’s hard to tell a hostage from a double agent.”

Diggle left him there to think about his words, moving toward the training equipment at the far end of the room. The distinct ‘thud’ of fists connecting with a dummy filtered through the large open space, the rhythm oddly calming to Oliver’s nerves.

He couldn’t be sure how much time had passed as he continued to look through the files on the computer, but it was enough time that his phone ringing in his pocket startled him, and he pulled it
out expecting it to be Sofia.

“Felicity?” he questioned into the phone as he answered. “Is everything okay?”

She took a deep breath before answering. “Okay is a highly subjective term. But really, no, I’m not.” She made a noise of frustration on the other end of the phone. “Listen, I should have told you this weeks ago, but obviously I can’t go back and change it now. And this is bad, Oliver, it’s really bad. I just don’t know what to do…”

He felt his pulse quicken immediately and he stood from his chair, moving toward his gear. “What happened?” he asked, his voice low and determined.

“There’s this project I’ve been working on for Malcolm Merlyn. I learned a few weeks ago what it does, and well, he’s getting ready to test it. To potentially cataclysmic results.”

Oliver paused, setting his bow back down in its case.

“Listen, I’ll tell you more when I get there. I’m actually on my way in right now. I just needed…” her voice drifted off.

He swallowed hard, not sure what to expect next. He’d foolishly thought she’d only been working in the IT department, like she had been when she and Tommy had come to Russia to find him. But that had been two years ago, and Oliver knew exactly how talented she was. He should have expected Malcolm to take advantage of that sooner or later.

“Park around back,” Oliver said quietly. “Tommy and Laurel are upstairs.”

The line went dead and Oliver slipped the phone back into his pocket, rubbing at his temples. “Looks like the team’s getting together a little early today,” Oliver said, moving toward where Diggle was still sparring with the wooden dummy.

“What happened?” Diggle asked, pausing with his fists poised to strike.

Oliver shrugged. “Malcolm Merlyn happened.”

His phone rang again and he fished it from his pocket, putting the device to his ear. “What?” he growled into it.

“Oliver?” Sofia’s voice was meek on the other end.

He pushed out a long breath. “Sofia. Sorry, just got a lot going on here. Did you have a chance to talk to Ivan?”

“I did,” she said quietly. “He is considering challenging the Pakhan for the title. My father will choose the fiercest warrior to protect his title, Oliver. And the fight will be to the death.”

“Tell Ivan not to do anything rash,” he huffed. “I can’t do anything from halfway around the world. But he doesn’t want to do something stupid that he can’t come back from. It’s not a lot, but we do have time. This is both of your lives on the line here. Remind him of that.”

The door slammed shut and Felicity entered, her eyes a little wild as she searched the spanse of the basement floor for him. Something clutched in his chest when he saw her shoulders relax after finding his eyes. She drew in a shuddered breath and moved to the computer chair, dropping into it, her eyes never leaving his.
“I will try Oliver but--”

“I’ll have my documents in the next couple of days. And I will be there as soon as I can.” He hung up before she could say anything more and dropped the cell phone onto the other side of the desk, leaning over the top of the monitor to meet Felicity’s eyes. “Tell me about this device.”

“Was that…?”

He nodded. “Ivan is getting impatient. Thinking about taking matters into his own hands. It’s a suicide mission, going up against whatever warrior Mikhail chooses to fight for him. But maybe he knows that and just isn’t willing to live without Sofia.”

“He’d damn her to a life with some abusive asshole?”

Oliver shrugged. “Maybe taking a shot at getting everything he wants is worth the risk.”

Felicity chewed on the inside of her lip. “Why not just run?”

His brow quirked in response. Because how many times over the past six weeks had he had that exact same thought?

“They want to be together. She always hated the Bratva life and he loves her more than any of it. If he’s really only challenging the Pakhan to make sure they can be together, then can’t they just be together somewhere else?” She paused. “We helped the Yamashiros disappear. And no offense to Anatoly, but Waller is way more far-reaching in that regard than the Bratva is. Waller’s resources are vast and scary and connected to probably every country’s security cameras in the world. If she hasn’t found them yet, obviously we did something right.”

“You did,” he corrected, and marveled a little at the blush that crept onto her cheeks. In the middle of her own crisis and still she was able to throw herself completely into helping other people. It was a talent- one she didn’t even know she possessed.

“Oliver?”

“Hmm?” he hummed, focusing on her eyes, which were regarding him curiously.

“I said, ‘do you think that’s something they’d ever go for?’”

“No idea,” he said with a sigh. “But it’s worth a shot.”

Felicity nodded with a tight smile.

“Now,” he continued. “Tell me more about this device.”
Felicity bit her lip as she took a seat opposite Oliver. She shouldn’t be this nervous with the truth. But then again she was only telling half of it. The other half wasn’t hers, and she couldn’t betray Tommy’s trust like that. Even though she felt like Oliver deserved to know.

“Felicity.”

His voice prompted her out of her stupor, and she met his eyes before speaking. “A couple years ago Malcolm started showing interest in Dr. Brion Markov and some project he was working on. It was around the same time everything as everything in Russia, and when I came back I was promoted to the team that worked with Markov. I still had responsibilities outside of the project, so it’s not like I was heavily involved the whole time. I just wrote code and redesigned a few of the components. I didn’t even think to focus more on what it would do when it was finished. It always felt so far off.”

Oliver had listened to every word, nodding along as she spoke. “What changed? Why would you start looking into it now?”

There was that truth she couldn’t broach with him. “Malcolm started getting very passionate about the project, adding more time and resources to it. Then threw all this money during the Unidac auction. And it just… didn’t sit right with me. So I decided to start looking into it further. And I decided to piece the thing together myself. Which took only slightly longer than I would have liked. I figured it out that night you saved Tommy and Laurel.”

“What does it do?”

“It can generate an earthquake. A pretty big one if the person running it is so inclined.”

She could see the tension settling in his shoulders, and fought back the urge to reach over and place her hand there. She could relate to the nerves. They had coiled and settled into her stomach weeks ago, and she wasn’t sure how to clear them out.

“Wait you said the auction was a tipping point for you?”

“Yes?” She backtracked over her words making sure she hadn’t let anything slip she shouldn’t have. No mentions of Tommy or Waller? Or ARGUS at all. “Why?”
“Something I overheard my mother say,” he muttered shaking his head. “It doesn’t matter. But if Malcolm is ready for testing, does that mean he wants to use it for something?”

“I don’t know.”

“And why would he want to use it?”

“Again I don’t know.”

“Where would he even use it?”

“Oliver I really don’t know anything else,” she cut him off with a huff. “All I know is this thing is currently in Malcolm Merlyn’s hands. And even if it wasn’t, it’s too dangerous to be in anyone else’s. It could level city blocks. And the only way to keep it out of the wrong hands is to destroy it before someone can use it.”

“Destroy it before a test can be completed? That sounds impossible.”

She tapped a steady beat out as her heel kept clicking against the polished cement floor. She had thought about it all the way from her office. And even though the thought of using that thing again, after all this time, filled her with dread. She knew it was the only way.

“Not impossible… I have this thing, well more like a computer virus. I created it in college, and well, it basically punches a backdoor into any computer’s root server. And since I know the schematics of the device, I know that it can get us into it and let us disable it.”

Oliver looked at her for a long moment, he looked like he was processing.

At some point Digg had wandered over, leaning himself against a pillar. He was the one who spoke next. “What’s the catch?”

She sighed. “The device has it’s own internal server. I can’t access it from an outside source. And if I’m caught tampering with it--”

“Malcolm will know who to blame when it doesn’t work,” Oliver finished for her. “So you need someone to sneak into the facility, and upload the virus onto the device.”

“I mean no, there’s,” she paused thinking over the plan in her head. “Actually yes that’s essentially it.”

“Well then we shouldn’t wait.”

He stood from his chair, but Felicity was quicker, planting herself in front of him. “Where do you think you’re going?”

“Well I don’t think I should break into a Merlyn Global facility as Oliver Queen.”

“I didn’t mean tonight.” She grabbed his arm, as the prickle of energy tingled her finger tips. “Oliver we have to have a plan for this. I need to rewrite some of the code so it knows exactly what systems to take down in what order and we should go over guard schedules so no one sees you until it’s too late to do anything about it. We can’t just rush in bow readied and hope for the best.”

He shot her a glare, but she wasn’t going to back down. This was her idea, and she would stand her ground about this. Oliver wasn’t going running into a situation without the proper set up. Not on her watch.
“Give me a few days,” she insisted, as she waited for his eyes to lock with her own. “Malcolm will want to start the testing soon, but it’s still enough time.”

“Three days,” he said when he pulled away from her touch. “We take it down, and then move on to the next problem.”

She nodded, but confusion flooded her head. “Wait isn’t that the night of the big Queen family Christmas party? You want to destroy billion dollar tech the same night as your family lights a tree?”

“You said the thing wasn’t safe in anyone’s hands,” he reminded her. “And besides with you and Tommy there, I can slip out for an hour, take care of the device, and be back before my mother even notices.”

“Oliver—”

“Speaking of,” he cut her off, pulling out his phone. “I have to go home. I promised Speedy we’d go through the family ornaments tonight and watch all the cheesy movies she wants. We’ll talk more about this tomorrow.”

She opened her mouth to speak again, but Oliver was already heading to the door. Once he left she dropped back into her seat with an audible sigh.

She could feel Digg’s eyes tracking her. “Something you’d like to say?”

He let out a gruff laugh, unfolding himself from his spot as he moved closer to her. “Why don’t you just tell him everything?”

“I don’t know what you mean,” she challenged, holding his gaze. But they both knew she was lying. She just wasn’t sure how John knew what she did.

“Look this thing between the three of us, it’s going pretty good,” he continued as he settled against the desk next to her. “But it only works if we trust each other.”

“I trust you and Oliver with my life.”

“But how long is he gonna trust us once he knows we’ve been keeping Tommy’s secret?”

Digg looked at her, and she found herself wanting to shrink back from his eyes. She knew Digg was right. That there was a part of her wound into anxiety over keeping something like this from Oliver. He deserved the truth. After everything Amanda Waller put him through, he deserved not to be blindsided by this. But she also knew that the words had to come from Tommy, otherwise it would just be another betrayal.

“We can’t be the ones to tell him,” she finally said, pushing back far enough that they faced each other. “I don’t disagree that he deserves to know. But Tommy has to be the one who tells him.”

“And when do you think he’ll do that?”

She knew the answer wasn’t one either of them wanted to think about. “I can talk to him, see if he’ll consider telling Oliver soon. I don’t want them to keep going on like this. But Tommy’s not the only one lying. Oliver should tell him the truth too.”

“Yeah before Tommy starts pointing fingers at anyone else in Starling.”

“What do you mean?”
“Few weeks back,” Digg said with a laugh. “He practically asked me if I was the Hood.”

Her eyes went wide. “And you replied?”

“With the truth Felicity. That I wasn’t. But if he was that close to the truth then how close is he gonna get the more times Queen goes out there.”

She pulled out her phone, scrolling through her contacts until she landed on Tommy’s name. “You’re right. We need to get them to talk to each other. And soon.”

“Any suggestions?”

“Shh,” she held up a hand as the other line rang.

“Smoak,” Tommy greeted into the phone. “What can I do for you?”

“Hey I figured since the Queen Christmas party is on our usual movie night, you might want to have it early this week. I was gonna break out a classic.”

“Felicity you realize that just because you love Robin Williams that doesn’t make Mrs. Doubtfire a classic right?”

“First, yes it does. And second, are you coming over or not?”

There was a pause while she heard his muffled voice say something to someone else, presumably Laurel.

“Yeah, that sounds fun. Laurel’s crashing at my place and apparently is bringing over her entire office to work on a case.”

“It’s just Joanna,” Laurel’s voice cut in.

“Either way, I could use a night of not lawyer speak.”

“Great, see you at eight.”

“Later,” he said, as she hung up.

“There I’ll bring it up tonight.”

“You could have done it over the phone,” John suggested with a smirk.

“Don’t make me smack you.”

He laughed as he walked off, but Felicity was too busy worrying to smile. She knew getting Tommy to talk to Oliver was the right thing to do. But the lead that dropped into her stomach made it feel like a bomb that was about to explode. And she didn’t know how to keep either of them from feeling the effects of the damage.

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Tommy stood outside Felicity’s door, poised to knock when his phone rang in his pocket. He fished it out only to find Amanda Waller’s phone number lighting up the screen. He swore under his breath, silencing the call. So much for radio silence from her then; she must have heard his thoughts on the subject earlier in the day and needed to remind him who his soul belonged to. Not that he was liable to forget.
Before he could get his phone tucked back into his pocket, Felicity’s door swept open and she stood before him, a curious look on her face.

“I thought I heard something,” she said. “Were you waiting for a formal invitation?”

Tommy shook his head, ducking into her apartment and putting his cell on silent. “Sorry just a… work call. But I’m still in the whole avoidance stage of grief over Lyla’s royal betrayal.”

Felicity wrinkled her nose. “Pretty sure there’s no ‘avoidance’ stage of grief,” she frowned. “But I’m sorry you’re still upset with Lyla. You two have worked together for a long time.”

Brushing past her, Tommy moved into the kitchen where he sampled some of the food she had on the counter before turning back to meet her gaze. He knew she hated when he stopped a conversation halfway through it, but sometimes he just needed to wrap his head around what was going on. Plus, he didn’t want to say something he might regret. His feelings of anger on the whole thing were beginning to fade, although he couldn’t be sure if it was just because being away from all the ARGUS drama was lulling him into a false sense of security.

“What exactly is the theme of this evening?” he asked, glancing over the plates of food. There were barbequed chicken wings, cheesy potato skins, crab rangoon, and meatballs in marinara sauce.

Felicity groaned. “I couldn’t decide on anything, so I got a bunch of takeout that just sounded good.”

“Comfort food,” he grinned, picking up a chicken wing. “Either that or you’re pregnant.” Tommy glanced down at her belly, missing his chance to dodge out of her reach and she smacked him in the arm… hard.

“Thomas Jasper Merlyn, you ever imply something like that again and you’ll have an empty trust fund and a repossessed car to look forward to,” she growled. Yes, Felicity Smoak just growled at him. And used his middle name.

“Someone is a little touchy,” he smirked, grabbing a plate from the drying rack next to her sink and piling it high with food. “Speaking of things you don’t like to talk about, how’s Oliver?”

Felicity narrowed her eyes at him. “I told you, I was at the club helping with the computer systems. Nothing is going on between me and Oliver.”

Tommy had to admit, there was nothing quite like teasing Felicity. She got so flustered, so worked up, and so quickly, that it was almost too easy. “Actually, if I remember correctly you said he hired you.”

She bit her bottom lip and nodded. “Yes, that’s exactly right.”

Tommy spun to face her, leaning against the counter with his plate still in his hand. “But if you’re an employee of Merlyn Global, and the club is a subsidiary of Queen Consolidated… isn’t that technically a conflict of interest that you could lose your job over?”

Felicity cleared her throat, a fire burning in her eyes. “Maybe it’s under the table,” she said finally. “Or maybe it’s more like a favor. We didn’t really work out the details.”

It was like pulling at a loose thread to see how much unravelled. And to be honest, he hadn’t meant more by it than just teasing her, but there was something in the set of her jaw, in the rigidity of her shoulders that told him she was hiding something.
“Oh, you guys are favor friends?” he asked casually. “Dare I say… friends with benefits?”

“Tommy!” she cried. “Why are you making such a big deal about this?”

He laughed, but there was little humor in it. “Me? You’re the one turning the color of a tomato at the sheer mention of Ollie. I know you say nothing is going on, but come on Felicity, anyone with eyes and ears can see that’s not true.”

“What do you want me to say?” she scoffed. “That we almost kissed a few weeks ago and now I can barely look at him because the Bratva had to show back up and ruin it all? I’m not going to let my heart get ripped out because of the dang Russian mob again, Tommy. It was hard enough leaving him there the first time. I can’t…”

Her voice trailed off and Tommy pulled her close to him, wrapping his arms around her protectively in a tight hug. “Hey, hey…” he cooed. “I’m sorry.” Truthfully, he hadn’t known his teasing would have as much of an affect on her as it seemed to, but he should have known better. Felicity was always better at hiding her true emotions than he was. It was one thing he had always admired about her. She got the job done and didn’t let things get to her. Sometimes he didn’t realize how deep her feelings ran.

After a long moment she took a deep breath and stepped out of his arms. “I don’t think I realized I was holding onto all of that,” she said quietly.

Tommy grinned. “Come on Smoak, we both know you only invited me over here tonight to snuggle and talk about Oliver Queen,” he said his friends name in a mockingly lovesick schoolgirl voice.

“You caught me,” she deadpanned, turning away from him and grabbing a plate of her own, piling it high with her strange mix of comfort foods.

Once his plate was sufficiently full, Tommy moved toward the small living room and claimed his seat near the far wall. It was strange, how much of a routine they had on their movie nights. When he came to her apartment she got the food, he sat on the couch near the far wall, leaning against the arm of the sofa so she could lay back against him. Usually halfway through the movie she’d fall asleep and he’d wake her when it was over. One of the first movie nights they had, Tommy hadn’t woken Felicity when he’d left and she text yelled at him for it the next day. Probably more because of the crick she’d gotten in her neck from sleeping on the sofa all night than anything else. But ever since then he’d always woken her when he’d left and she walked him to the door of her apartment.

It was strange, to think back to their time travelling the globe; the brief days they’d shared together where he wondered if they might ever be more than friends. And perhaps in some other twist of fate they might have been. But he liked that they were friends; that he could tell her all his girl problems and get some perspective on things, or that she could snuggle into him on the sofa in a weirdly platonic way that reminded him he had an ally for whatever battles came his way. There was nothing beyond their harmless, innocent flirtation and banter. Nothing romantic anyway. And they were both the better for it.

“So are you really subjecting me to Mrs. Doubtfire tonight or can we watch something better?” Tommy asked as Felicity appeared in the doorway and made her way to her side of the couch.

She feigned offense. “I was going to let you pick the movie… but you apparently just can’t keep your foot out of your mouth tonight so maybe Robin Williams will do you some good.”

Tommy smiled. “You know he’s probably the worst role model as far as good behavior is concerned, right?”
Felicity rolled her eyes. “Fine- put whatever you want on. I'll probably be asleep in an hour anyway.” She yawned, as if to confirm her own assumption.

“Someone has got you burning the midnight oil, huh?” Tommy asked, moving to her DVD collection. “What was the movie we watched last time? Didn't it have a sequel or something?”

“You brought over something weird and foreign last time. And if it has a sequel I'll be asleep in ten minutes instead of an hour.” She yawned again, stretching like a cat on the sofa, before settling in with her plate of food.

“Malcolm have you working extra hours on the seismic generator?” He asked, glancing over his shoulder at her.

Felicity shook her head. “No more than normal. But I'm actually glad you brought that up.”

Tommy plucked a 1960s era spy movie from the shelf and set the disk in the DVD tray before moving back to the couch. “You're glad I brought up the Markov device?”

“Yeah,” she bit her lip. “Your dad is leaving town this week and planning on testing it soon. This thing isn’t just theoretical anymore. And I kinda got someone else involved in order to stop it.”

Her voice was low and Tommy looked at her for a long moment. She looked nervous, and he couldn't imagine what she was holding onto, what she was about to tell him.

“Who exactly did you get involved?” he asked, trying to keep his tone neutral.

“The Hood?” she said, more like a question than an answer. She darted her eyes up to meet his.

Tommy was stunned. For a long moment all he could do was stare at her, as the opening movie credits started up in the background.

“I know someone who knows someone who had a way to contact him,” she continued. “I really didn’t know what else to do. Malcolm came into my office today bragging about how Starling was going to be a completely different place because of this thing and…”

“Do you know how dangerous that guy is?” Tommy asked, swallowing hard, still in disbelief. “What if he does something to my father? What if he tries to…”

“He wouldn’t,” she said defensively.

“You don’t know that!” Tommy said, his voice growing loud. Whether or not he still thought that Diggle was the vigilante didn’t change the fact that whoever was under the hood had been targeting the rich and powerful in Starling. And after interactions with the Hood, those men came away with varying degrees of injuries. If there was one thing Tommy knew about his father, it’s that he wouldn’t hesitate to fight back, which could have horrible results for anyone involved. “He works outside the law! And you don’t even know him, so how can you assume to know anything about what he would or wouldn’t do?!”

Felicity jaw set into a hard line. “Because I believe that he is doing what is best for Starling City,” she said, her voice quiet but resolute. “And yes, that may mean working outside the law, but Tommy, don’t forget about all the good he’s done. Don’t forget how he saved yours and Laurel’s lives last month. If that means exposing the rich and powerful for the shady things they do, then so be it.”

Tommy swallowed hard, his mouth running dry. There was a big difference between exposing
shady dealings and the bloodbath that the vigilante seemed to be leaving at the SCPD’s doorstep twice a week. Was that really what Felicity felt his father deserved?

“I can’t be here,” he said, moving to the kitchen to put his plate on the counter. He had never been as thoroughly pissed with Felicity as he was in that moment. What could have possibly possessed her to go to the vigilante about his father?

Without another look back, he moved to the door, exiting and closing it swiftly behind him. Felicity hadn’t said another word, from what he could tell, she hadn’t even moved from her position on the sofa. She had been so positive, so resolute in her decision, so sure that the Hood wouldn’t hurt his father. Tommy scoffed as he made his way toward the stairs. He’d never before taken her for naive. But in that moment, staring at her while she sat there with complete and utter faith in the man they call the Hood, Tommy wasn’t sure he could believe his eyes. The feeling hit him like a punch to the gut- another one to match the blow Lyla had dealt him six weeks ago. Felicity had betrayed him, sold out his father to the vigilante. And he wasn’t sure exactly how he was going to get over that; or even if he could.

Malcolm would fight and fight hard against anyone that came against him. Tommy needed to learn the man’s identity, now more than ever. It had just become a matter of life and death.

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“A little to the left,” Thea said as she waved her hand towards the wall.

They had been decorating the tree for close to two hours and he was starting to think his sister was messing with him.

“You realize that’s the right side of the tree not the left,” he countered.

“My left, your right.”

“We’re standing in the same direction.”

Thea smiled at him, and yeah he was now sure she was messing with him. But he didn’t mind. In fact with everything going on, it was nice to be at home with a little sense of normal. He grabbed at an ornament from the box, and tossed it a little in the air, grateful his mother had disappeared to take a work call. Moira hated it when they played with the good ornaments.

“Hey don’t drop that one,” Thea teased, swatting his arm. “When I’m the matriarch of this family, that’s going on my all red tree right in the foyer.”

“Over Mom’s dead body,” he said setting it back in the box. “We both know how tacky that would be.”

“Oh yeah, but I’m going for full tacky. I mean Let’s put a giant Santa Claus right on the rooftop,” she sat next to him, bumping into his shoulder. “What’s up with you tonight?”

Oliver was still focused on the box of decorations at his feet, and he barely looked up to answer her. “What do you mean?”

“Come on, you’ve been super quiet and a little moody all night,” she said, and then winked. “I mean more than usual.”

He wished in some version of his life he could tell Thea about the things that were happening. About the steps he had to take to honor their father. Or the promises he made a lifetime ago, that had come
to call at his door. But he didn’t want to taint his baby sister with that kind of darkness. So instead he gave her a wistful smile.

“I’m just missing Dad.”

She nodded, letting her head rest on his shoulder. “Can I let you in on a little secret?”

“Should I be worried?”

“Mom and I, we haven’t really done the whole Christmas thing since the Gambit,” she kept her voice low, and he wasn’t sure if she was trying to keep their mother from hearing or if she was trying to keep her own emotions from spilling out. “So this year, if we seem kinda down, that’s why.”

“You could have told me before I went all out on wanting a party,” he said, shifting so they could look at each other.

“Mom didn’t want you to feel bad about it,” Thea said plucking at a loose string on her pant leg. “And, well I figured with you back in the house maybe the holiday spirit would infect us all.”

He thought back to the last week, all the party planning and decorations going up around the house, and he realized no one in his family had seemed very invested in the process. At least not the way they used to be.

“So this whole, decorate the tree, cheesy claymation movie, night? This is all for my benefit?”

She bit her lip giving him a guilty smile. “Kinda. Sorry, Ollie, I just thought you needed the company. I mean you seemed really into this whole idea, and nothing else right now. And I just wanted to be here for you. Even if I cancelled a date to do it.”

He shook his head, placing a hand over hers. “Speedy, you don’t have to cancel plans to hang out with me. I can find other things to do with my time. I don’t need my little sister babysitting me. I could go out.”

“But you won’t,” she muttered with a sigh. “Come on Ollie, you either are at home or the club. You barely hang out with Tommy if it’s not business related. And don’t think anyone hasn’t noticed the distinct lack of ‘Ollie Queen’ tabloid articles. You’ve been sort of reclusive the last few weeks. So what gives?”

He looked at her, the little girl he always pictured in his sister’s place somehow morphing into a young adult before his eyes. He had missed the change initially, or maybe he hadn’t wanted to see it. But sitting with her now, he was grateful for who Thea was becoming. She was stronger and smarter than him, and he was amazed at how much light shown through her. Given the tragedy she had to live through.

“I’m just not sure that’s who I’m supposed to be,” he finally said. “I don’t want to feel stuck tied to this version of me that everyone sees, not when I feel like I haven’t been that person for a long time.”

“Well whichever version of you you decide to be, I promise I’ll always see you as my big brother,” she whispered and then smiled. “But I know a certain blonde who probably doesn’t see you as that guy.”

He chuckled as he shook his head. “You really are not subtle at all.”

“Come on, you two are perfect for each other,” Thea nudged. “She’s smart, and gorgeous, and talented. And I’ve seen the way you look at her. Ollie, I’ve never see you look at anyone the way
you look at Felicity.”

“What do you want me to say?” he shrugged, standing from his seat as he walked across the floor. “Felicity and I wouldn’t work. We can’t work.”

“Why not?”

He didn’t want to get into this with Thea. Not when his thoughts on Felicity were so scattered, even he wasn’t sure how to sort them out. He cared about her. And beyond that, he wasn’t sure he could push his thoughts beyond that. It wasn’t fair to her.

“Because, I’m not,” he paused shaking his head. “I don’t think I could be the kind of man she deserves. I like her, but I want her to stay in my life. And if anything, a relationship would complicate that further.”

Thea held up her hands in surrender. “I won’t bring it up again.”

“Thank you.”

“Except one more thing.”

“Thea,” he groaned.

“Just hear me out,” she stood, crossing her arms. “I’ve known Felicity for a few years now, and I know that she’s had a rocky past when it comes to guys. She’s never gone into details, and even if she did, I would so not spill them to you. But I know the last major guy she liked before Carter, well she never really felt like she knew where he stood feelings wise. She used to tell me how great it was that Carter was so easy to read. So if you like her and you don’t think you can be with her, just be honest with her.” she moved across the space, patting him on the shoulder. “Because she doesn’t deserve to be jerked around. Not again.”

She walked past him, leaving him alone in the glow of the tree. He thought about the timeline, of the guy Thea was talking about, who had left her so confused. He had a sinking feeling that he was that guy. He had jerked Felicity around when they were in Russia, let his feeling carrying him into a high that he knew would come crashing down. But he should have considered what that would do to her. How his life and his feelings would terrorize her. How his life would effect her hers long after they were no longer intertwined. Though it was hard to believe their lives could ever be separated from each other. No matter how much he tried to think of a time before he met her, tried to push her out of his head, as he moved further into the Bratva, he couldn’t. Every thought, every feeling, it was touched by Felicity. There was no before or after. He couldn’t erase her or recall a time before he felt her name on his lips. And he knew deep down that he never wanted to.

Oliver pulled the letter out of his back pocket. He had been carrying it around ever since he found it stuffed back in his drawer. He had wanted to ask Felicity why she’d given it back or why she hadn’t handed it back to him. But he could guess the reasons were the same as why he hadn’t brought it up. That whatever was in the letter, whatever words lied there, would only grow the more they spoke of it.

He kept it with him as a reminder of why he couldn’t pursue something with her, a reminder of the things that torn them apart the last time. But the more he felt it there, curl against his fingers when he shoved his hand in his pocket, the more the desire to open it grew. He knew the words would only push his feelings for her to grow. And he started to wonder if maybe it was time to release the what if’s from the envelope. To see what their time together had meant to her, and see if it matched what it had meant for him.
He slid his finger under the gap in the lip, tugging gently enough to not rip the contents inside. Her handwriting stood out, bold and intimidating against the cream colored paper. But there was no chance of going back now. Oliver took a deep breath, and settled into the chair near the fireplace, and finally let himself read the words Felicity had given him over two years ago.

Chapter End Notes

Alright lovelies- You didn't think we'd let Oliver read the letter without letting you guys know what was in it too, did you? Of course not! You can find it below.

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I wish I could lie and tell you that leaving now isn’t going to hurt like hell. I wish I could change your mind about staying too. I wish I had that kind of influence over the choices you make. But I don’t. Because the truth is we don’t really know each other so I don’t have the right to ask something like that of you. And it makes me angry. Which is crazy.

I know you’re doing what you think you have too. That this life is the only one you think you deserve. But you’re wrong. Oliver you deserve a life outside of the pain and the darkness. You’re not the things you’ve done. You’re not.

I hope you read this one day. Not because of a selfish desire to have you back in Starling, though I can’t say that it isn’t a shining thought amidst this swell of pain. But I hope you read this because I know you won’t allow yourself to heal until you come home. You are carrying so many burdens with you Oliver, I’m terrified that one day they’ll crush you to death.

Whatever life looks like when you come home, just know you belong there. You belong with your mother and your sister. With Tommy. And maybe one day with me. I can’t promise I won’t try to move on. I think we both know you’d rather I was happy, even if I’d rather be happy with you.

I don’t think there are words I can use for how I feel about you. At least not any tangible ones. But I know it’s real, and it’s strong. So don’t doubt that.

No matter what happens, I’m glad I met you. You changed my world. You changed me. And I’m glad you did.

-Felicity
Felicity hated that once again she and Tommy weren’t on speaking terms. And even more, she hated that it was all over Oliver’s secret. She hated that she was keeping things from both of them about the other, and that she knew exactly how angry they were both going to be once they learned the truth. It ate her up inside. But she couldn’t talk to either of them about it without spilling something. So instead, she let it eat her up inside.

It had been three days since she’d spoken to Tommy, since he’d walked out of her apartment, reminding her too much of the way Carter had left weeks earlier. But there was a vast difference between her relationship with Carter and her relationship with Tommy. Because Tommy, she couldn’t bear to lose.

The Queen’s Christmas party would be starting soon and Felicity found herself half-heartedly getting ready for it. She wasn’t ready to see Tommy and be avoided by him. And she had a feeling Thea would still be trying to push her and Oliver together, and honestly she wasn’t sure she could handle much more of that without things either imploding or exploding.

Felicity studied herself in the mirror, her hair carefully curled and pinned, cascading over one shoulder, her makeup highlighting her eyes, which weren’t hidden behind glasses like usual. Despite not celebrating Christmas because she was Jewish, Felicity decided she was going to enjoy the Christmas party; make the best of the situation in front of her and maybe get Tommy back on speaking terms with her. She smoothed down the gold dress that clung to her features, pulling down on the slit that sat across her thigh and took a deep breath. She could do this; it was one night where all of her secrets, all of the people in her life were likely to be standing in the same place at the same time. She could navigate through one night. Couldn’t she?

Turning away from the mirror, Felicity found her clutch, sticking her phone, lipstick and bluetooth
earpiece inside. If Oliver was serious about crashing the warehouse where the Markov device was being held, she wanted to make sure she was able to help him if the need arose.

She grabbed a shawl before pulling her door open, only to find Oliver standing on the other side. She blinked. “Hi?” she questioned.

“Hi,” he answered, his eyes raking over her before they met hers.

After a moment of silence between them, Felicity cleared her throat. “Why do I feel like you’re here to pick me up for prom?”

“That awkward?” he asked.

“I just wasn’t expecting you.” Felicity gulped, noting the bow tie; her eyes travelled downward, seeing suspenders peek out from under his black suit coat. She forced her eyes to the floor.

“We had a bit of a liquor emergency,” he said, with a lopsided smile. “Borrowing some from the club for the time being.”

“So you were in the neighborhood?” she asked with a furrowed brow, still not quite understanding what he was doing on her doorstep.

Oliver nodded, but he said, “No.”

Felicity watched him carefully, wondering why he looked so… nervous? Was Oliver really nervous talking to her? She couldn’t imagine why. But she waited, letting him finish.

“I actually got you something,” he said, producing a small box wrapped in simple silver paper with a green bow on top. “I know you don’t celebrate Christmas, so I guess I’ll have to say happy belated Hannukah?” He held out the box to her.

Felicity paused. “I… I don’t understand,” she said cautiously. Things between them had been strained since Sofia’s visit a month and a half ago, mostly because she’d badgered him about it for so long. But they were different now that he’d come clean with her about his plan, that they’d talked briefly about trying to get Ivan and Sofia to leave Russia and she’d told him about the Markov device… The last few days since then had been less tense and more… tense? Less angry tense and more sexually tense. Felicity’s mouth went dry at the thought and her eyes focused back on him, trying to keep her cool.

“It’s nothing,” he said with a shrug. “Just a way to show my appreciation. I didn’t really think this whole Hood thing through, and you’ve kind of helped me make sense of it.” Oliver cleared his throat. “You can open it later,” he offered.

Felicity nodded, placing the small box on her entry table before stepping out into the hall and closing the door behind her.

“Sorry,” he said stiffly. “For just showing up like this. I figured later would be hectic and with Thea practically planning our wedding, I figured gift giving should stay out of her prying eyes.”

“Smart,” she said with a small laugh as they made their way down the hallway toward the elevator. “Showing up together probably won’t help either,” she added with a nervous grin.

Oliver pressed the button for the elevator and they stood, listening to the whirring sound of it moving to their floor. “I’ll speed a little, so it doesn’t look suspicious,” he said with a wink.
“Sure, tell yourself that’s the reason,” Felicity answered, nudging into his shoulder. He stiffened beside her and Felicity felt her heart clench. _Two steps forward, four steps back_, she thought with an inward groan.

But then the elevator arrived and Oliver’s hand found its way to her back as he ushered her inside the car. The heat of his hand through the thin fabric was enough to bring too many memories back to the surface and she had to force her feet to stay planted in place to keep from pulling herself into his arms. She kept her eyes on her shoes until he cleared his throat, beckoning her eyes to meet his.

Felicity obliged, barely.

Oliver swallowed hard. “Felicity, I read the letter,” he said quietly.

“Oh?”

His phone rang in his pocket. “Sorry,” he said, fishing it out. The elevator reached the ground floor and Oliver let her exit into the small lobby ahead of him. “It’s Diggle. I need to take this.”

She nodded. “No that’s fine. We can talk…”

“Later. Definitely.” And then he disappeared.

Felicity blew out a long breath. Talk about dropping a bomb and running. He’d read the letter. Was that why he’d been acting weird the last few days? Now she couldn’t be sure. She made her way to her car, sliding into the driver’s seat and starting the engine, even though there was a huge part of her that wanted nothing more than to go back upstairs and settle into her couch with a nice bottle of red wine.

But Thea would never forgive her if she missed the party. And Felicity still needed to make things right with Tommy, or try anyway. And she still had to convince both him and Oliver to tell each other their secrets. She frowned as she pulled out of her parking spot; no wonder she had been so exhausted lately.

Several minutes later, she pulled up to the front of the Queen manor, a valet meeting her at the front entrance. Leave it to the Queens to go all out for a holiday party. She shook her head as she climbed out, making her way to the front door. She rang the bell and the door opened instantly, Thea smiling brightly from the foyer.

“You made it!” the teen cried, pulling her into a hug. “I’m so glad you’re here. None of my school friends are here yet and Raisa might have given me a glass of eggnog. Okay fine, I took it when her back was turned, but I promise I’m not getting drunk tonight. Just slightly tipsy, best way to be.”

Felicity took a step back, giving Thea a bright smile and a nod. “Good to see you too,” she said with a laugh.

“Come in!” Thea demanded, ushering Felicity into the foyer. The entire house was alight with glittering ornaments, brightly colored trees, tasteful christmas lights roped through pine swags on the doorways. Felicity felt her breath catch a little, taking it all in.

“You made it!” Moira all but purred as she came close. “So good to see you.”

“You too, Mrs. Queen. The house is… immaculate.”

“Thea and Oliver did most of it, believe it or not.”
Felicity’s eyes moved to Thea, who fake-polished her nails on her dress in exaggerated smugness.

“I believe Tommy and Laurel are around somewhere,” Moira continued. “And Oliver went out for some supplies, but he should be back any moment.”

“Just got back, in fact,” his voice corrected from behind Felicity.

She and Thea spun to find him, jacket removed and sleeves rolled up to his elbows, with a large box of liquor held in front of him.

“Felicity,” he said casually, his eyes lingering on her a moment. “It’s good to see you again.”

“You too,” she nodded quietly.

“If you’ll all excuse me,” he said, shifting the weight of the box slightly. “I’ve got a bartender eager for some alcohol to mix drinks.”

Felicity spotted Tommy and Laurel in the opposite direction and grabbed Thea’s hand. “Tell me about this tree,” she said, moving closer to Tommy’s direct line of sight.

“It’s a Christmas tree,” Thea said flatly with a furrowed brow.

“Do you have any special ornaments?”

“Why are you acting weird?” Thea asked, eyeing her carefully.

Felicity felt like she was under a microscope and she could barely focus as it was. Being back in this house with Oliver around made her head swim. Especially knowing that he’d both read the letter and gotten her a gift— which she hadn’t opened yet. It could be anything; she couldn’t even fathom what might be contained in the small box. But she couldn’t let her mind dwell on it too much. Because there were bigger things to deal with before the night was through. Fixing things with Tommy and Oliver embedding the virus in the Markov device were at the top of the list.

“I’m not,” she said with a shrug, even if she knew it wasn’t exactly convincing. “And don’t even think about mentioning your bro—”

Thea grinned. “Ohh, it was about seeing Ollie.”

“It wasn’t,” Felicity answered dismissively. “I just…” but she couldn’t finish her sentence. Because what was she being weird about?

“Your secret is safe with me,” Thea said with a wink before turning on her heel and walking away.

Felicity groaned; she would deal with Thea later. Because standing precariously close to her, looking at a piece of art on the living room wall, was Tommy. Laurel had disappeared somewhere in the last few moments since Felicity had caught sight of them. So, she took a deep breath and marched up to him, blocking his path.

“Tommy, we need to talk.”

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Avoidance was his tactic for the night. Tommy’s mood had been soured quite early in the week, and he had tried his best to get out of the evening. He told Laurel there wasn’t really a reason they needed to attend the Queen’s Christmas party.
“Moira invited us,” she insisted when they were getting ready earlier. “And apart from being your best friend, Oliver is also your business partner. Don’t you want to go?”

And the truth was so close to tumbling from his lips at her question. Because he didn’t really want to go. He didn’t want to see Oliver, who he was still lying to. And he didn’t want to chance seeing Diggle, who was either lying to him or lying for him, he wasn’t really sure where they sat on that. And he for sure didn’t want to see Felicity.

He had never been as angry with her as he was right now. It was one thing to still be working so closely with Markov and his father, but now she was involving the Hood as well? Someone who had left a trail of blood behind him since the second he showed up in Starling? Not to mention his new, dark rival who seemed hell bent on ending the lives of whoever the Hood had already visited. Darkness was blooming in the heart of his city, and he hated that Felicity was letting it stain her hands like this. After everything they’d been through, she knew better.

Laurel had ditched him for a bit to go pay her compliments to Moira. And again he was trying to avoid, trying to skirt around the party. Because apparently when you get let go from your family company, everyone knows it. And if the idle rich have any marketable skills, it’s their ability to corner you in conversations you really don’t want to be in.

He had narrowly escaped a conversation with an old friend of his father’s, when Felicity finally found him.

“Tommy, we need to talk.”

She kept her tone low as she glanced around. If it was any other fight, any other stupid, random thing, he would have given in then. He would have smiled and pulled her into a hug, and told her to drop it. But this wasn’t a difference of opinion over takeout menus. This was about what was right, and what was safe, and he didn’t want to budge.

“How about later,” he replied, and moved to walk past her.

But Felicity caught his arm, and her eyes bore into him with a mix of guilt and pain. “Don’t do that, not to me. If we have a problem, we talk about it. That’s always been the deal, remember?”

He couldn’t help the scoff as he shook his head. “Fine, let’s talk.”

He motioned for her to lead the way, even if he really didn’t want to have this conversation here, tonight of all nights. What he wanted was a drink in his hand, and something to take his mind off all the crap. His hand itched to pull out his phone and call Waller back. He had stared at her number all week, feeling the urge to know what she wanted. And maybe, just a little bit, hoping it was the call that would let him go back.

Working on opening the club was fun, and it was steady, but it wasn’t what he wanted to do with his life. Not forever. ARGUS, as insane as it sounded, was. He may still be pissed at Lyla, but he missed the work.

They finally stopped walking once they reached the study, and Felicity closed the doors behind them, before she spoke once more.

“I don’t want you to be mad at me.”

“Well then maybe you should stop involving the Hood in my father’s business.”

She shot him a glare. “You didn’t let me finish. I said I don’t want you to be mad at me, but I need
you to understand why I made the choice I did.”

“Felicity he’s a criminal,” Tommy spat. What about that was she not getting? “The things he’s doing, they are outside the law. Two wrongs don’t make a right, and you said it yourself that we can’t just assume Merlyn Global is going to use the device for something bad.”

She flinched, pulling her arms tight around her. “I wish you realized how much of a hypocrite you sound like right now.”

“Excuse me?”

“You’re giving me crap for asking the Hood for help, when you have Amanda Waller on your speed dial,” she hissed. “If we’re comparing people’s crimes, I think she takes the cake on that one.”

He gripped the edge of the desk, nodding along with her words. Not because he wanted to agree, but because when your best friend starts lumping you in with all the bad around, you start to resign yourself to the numbness that sets in.

“So because I work with ARGUS, it makes me one of the bad guys.”

“I didn’t say that.”

“No you really didn’t have to.”

“Tommy, if you knew-- if you understood why I went to him, why I trust him,” he could see the fight in her, like she wanted to say something, but she couldn’t. “I think you would see this differently.”

“Then tell me,” he knew his voice was raising, he knew even though the party was in full swing that he should keep his anger in check. He didn’t want anyone to overhear. So he took a breath, and started again. “Tell me why you trust a guy who’s put more arrows into people, than weeks he’s been active in the city.”

She shook her head, and he could see that she wanted to cry. But he knew Felicity well enough to know she’d never let those tears fall. “I can’t.”

“You mean you won’t.”

“No I mean I can’t,” she countered. “Dammit Tommy, I made a promise. Okay? Like the same one I made to you. We never said it out loud, but I promised. I promised I wouldn’t tell anyone about you working with ARGUS. And I haven’t, and I would never. Because you’re my best friend, and you deserve to keep your secrets if that’s what you want. And it makes me crazy, because Laurel deserves the truth. And Oliver sure as hell deserves it too. But you want to keep this secret, and I respect that. So why can’t you respect that I need to keep other people’s secrets too?”

It couldn’t have hurt more if she had slapped him right across the face. “You can’t compare that to this.”

“Why?” she shrugged as she met his gaze. “Because you sacrificed yourself for me and Oliver? That’s why you joined at first, and I believe that that’s what kept you going for a long time. But if Amanda Waller offered you an out right now, would you take it? Would you walk away from ARGUS and live a normal, happy life?”

She didn’t know it, but her words tore through his resolve in their argument, and he had to look away. He hadn’t told Felicity about Waller’s offer. At the time it had felt so ridiculous. The idea that
he’d ever be free from Amanda or the organization. But there was another part of him that hadn’t wanted to leave. It was the part that wasn’t Malcolm Merlyn’s son, or Ollie Queen’s best friend. It was Tommy, pure and simple. And he liked it.

“I’m not with ARGUS right now.”

“That’s not an answer,” she moved back towards the door and he tried to pretend he didn’t see her wipe at the corner of her eyes. Maybe he had been wrong about the tears.

He should have stopped her. Should have reached out and pulled Felicity into a hug, and apologized for being an ass. And he might have followed her out, if his phone hadn’t started ringing.

Without much thought he answered it. Placing his cell to his ear.

“Waller,” he greeted, because there wasn’t another person who could torpedo his mood any further.

“I was beginning to think you were ignoring me,” her tone was cool, but he could hear a hint of annoyance in her voice. “For future record, I don’t care if it’s a mandatory leave, when you see that I call I expect you to at least return it.”

He should hang up. He knew it down to his bones, but still he kept talking. “Future record?”

“That is if you get your ass over here for your latest evaluation,” Waller added. “We have an all hands on deck kind of mission tonight. And considering your expert knowledge, I would like it if you were on active duty.”

He felt that familiar rush, the anticipation of field work. He wanted this life. And he hated it just as much.

“What’s the mission?”

“We’re going to acquire Dr. Markov’s device,” she said like she’d been waiting for him to ask. “Tonight.”

Tommy was poised to reply. And a million thing screamed in him to tell her no. He should walk away, he should at least try.

The door to the study opened again, and Tommy nearly dropped his phone as Oliver entered.

“I’ve been looking everywhere for you.”

Tommy felt the guilt twist, Oliver before him, Waller on the phone. There was no way out of what he was doing without his friend hating it with everything in him. But Tommy couldn’t focus on that yet.

“I’ll call you back,” he said, hanging up before Waller could object, and pocketing the phone. “Yeah, I just needed a minute, to clear my head.”

“Oh okay,” Oliver was watching him closely. Like he had the first few weeks he’d been home, like he was still trying to figure out the secrets Tommy was keeping.

_Buddy, you so don’t want to know._ But Tommy coughed, and shook his head. “So, the Queen Holiday extravaganza everything you’d hoped it be?”

“More or less,” Oliver said, with a smile. “I actually think we need to talk about some things. Is now a bad time?”
It was, but Tommy couldn’t tell him why. He wasn’t sure he could ever tell Oliver the truth. Not about ARGUS or why he felt compelled to stay.

“I should go find Laurel,” he said pushing off the desk. “I’ve been hiding from mingling for too long.”

“Oh,” Oliver looked like he wanted to say more, but instead he just sighed. “Yeah, of course. Later. I can tell you later.”

“Later is good,” Tommy replied, patting Oliver on the arm before he left.

The smart thing to do would be to find Laurel and join the party. The right thing would be to find Felicity and beg for forgiveness. The good thing would be to turn around and confess to Oliver everything he’d been holding in. But Tommy didn’t do any of those things.

No Tommy pulled his phone out again. Because Waller had a mission for him. And right then he just wanted to feel useful.

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He had planned on warning Tommy about his father. Oliver had never had much love for Malcolm, but Tommy at least deserved to know the truth about his father. And Oliver planned on the Hood visiting the Markov device site later that evening, so it was the least he could do to warn Tommy about his father before that.

But Tommy had rushed out from the room before Oliver had been able to break the news to him. And once he’d made the decision to tell his friend about it, the harder it was to keep it bottled up.

He wondered, briefly, if telling Tommy his secret would feel the same way. That one day he’d decide to tell him the truth and he just wouldn’t be able to wait any longer. Oliver wasn’t sure he was ready for that day to ever come. Telling Felicity and Diggle had been calculated decisions to bring them onto his team… but Tommy? Would his friend ever forgive him for it? And would Oliver be able to stomach whatever secrets he knew his friend was hiding in return? Could their friendship survive once their secrets were exposed?

A knock sounded on the already ajar door and Oliver’s eyes rose to find Laurel in the doorway.

“Sorry I thought I heard Tommy down here,” she said, turning away from the room but not leaving. She paused a moment before turning back. “Can I ask you something?” She looked nervous but determined. Whatever was eating at her resolve had won.

Oliver nodded his head once, not sure he should speak.

“It’s just...” Laurel said, moving back into the room and closing the door. “My mom... she thinks Sara might be alive. And, well I guess I just figured that if anyone were going to know the truth, it would be you.” She sighed. “I wouldn’t ask at all, except that she’s spending all this time with my dad, renewing his hope that my sister might be out there. And you don’t know how broken he was- -” she broke off abruptly, swiping angrily at her cheeks where tears had fallen.

“Laurel,” he breathed quietly, taking a step toward her. His heart ached to comfort her in ways it hadn’t in years. The way he’d hurt her, hurt her family, that was something he could never atone for, no matter how hard he might try.

“I don’t need your pity,” she said, her tone harsh but thick with emotion.
“No,” he agreed. “You don’t.” He took a deep breath. He might not be able to come clean with Tommy tonight, but maybe he could help Laurel get on a path of overcoming her grief. “But you do deserve an explanation. There’s no excuse for the person that I was then, so I won’t try to make one. All I can do is tell you the truth and that truth is that I’m not the same person I was back then. And no, Sara didn’t survive.”

She slapped him, hard, and even though he saw it coming, he let her. Because he deserved it, a million times over, and then more. Laurel’s entire body shook as she stared at him with hard eyes. “It should have been you who died on that boat, not her,” she said.

Oliver nodded again. “You think I don’t tell myself that every day? That I didn’t wake up every morning of those five years away telling myself that exact same thing?” He moved until he was just inches from her. “But Laurel, those five years aren’t something that I’d wish on anyone that I cared about. And the Sara that you lost, would most certainly not be the one you got back. Trust me on that.”

He brushed passed her and out into the hallway. Wasn’t there supposed to be some sort of weight lifted? Because Oliver just felt more and more like he was letting everyone down. He had spent plenty of days wondering why he’d been the one to survive. Sara’s face filled his mind’s eye the last time he’d seen her. And even though he’d led Laurel to believe that Sara had never made it off the Gambit alive, perhaps that was easier than the truth. That Sara had survived more than two years of hell on Anthony Ivo’s ship and on Lian Yu only to succumb to the fate she’d escaped on the Gambit. Oliver hadn’t seen her again after the freighter they’d been on was torpedoed.

“There you are!” Thea called from the end of the hallway.

Oliver struggled to fix the mask back onto his features, not wanting her to see him as anything other than happy and enjoying the party they were all apparently enduring for his benefit.

“Hey Speedy,” he said with a smile, giving her a kiss on the top of her head as she wrapped her arm around him. “How’s the party?”

“So far so good,” she said with a smile. “And the decorations are on point.”

Oliver gave her an approving grin. “You did great with the decorations.”

“We did,” she amended. “Together.”

He nodded, relaxing a little as she linked her arm through his as they walked down the hall. He needed to learn to appreciate these moments when they came, because he knew how fleeting they were, and how dangerous his father’s mission really was. But it wasn’t the list in the book that made him want to appreciate the time with his sister. It was the looming trip back to Russia. He had told Felicity just the other day that perhaps Ivan thought that fighting to be the one he loved was worth the suicide mission. And fixing things for Ivan and Sofia was nothing if not a suicide mission for Oliver. So who in his life was worth fighting for?

They all were; he knew that. But his mind only supplied one name.

“Felicity looks beautiful tonight, doesn’t she?” Thea asked from beside him, as if sensing his thoughts.

He turned to look at her.

“I know, don’t meddle,” she said with a bored eyeroll. “I’m just glad you guys met. I always thought you’d be good together. Even before I knew you were still…alive.”
Oliver gave his sister a quick squeeze.

“I’m glad we did Christmas this year, Ollie,” she said, and it was like she was five years old again, her face full of hope and wonder.

“It’s tradition,” he said with a smile. “Traditions are important.”

“I’m glad you think so,” Thea grinned. “Would you mind waiting here for a minute? I want to get a present for you.”

His brow furrowed. “We usually do gifts on Christmas Eve, Speedy.”

Thea had already disappeared, leaving him alone in the quiet study at the front of the house. The last time he’d been alone in that room was when he was waiting for Felicity to meet him, one of his first nights home. He’d texted her, needing to see her; he remembered the way his eyes had devoured her that night. It had been like two years of being in the desert and she was a well of fresh water. He’d tried to keep his distance from her, but the more he saw her the more his resolve wavered. And then he’d read her letter, read in her own words what their time together in Russia had meant to her, and he couldn’t fight it anymore. He just hadn’t found the right time to tell her everything he’d kept inside since then.

A throat cleared from the doorway, causing Oliver to look up.

Felicity stood there, gold dress clinging to her body in all the right places, her blue eyes bright and trained on him. Thea stood beside her, their arms linked together much like his sister had done with him to get him to the room.

“She what is–” Felicity started.

“This is my gift to both of you,” the teen said with a smile. “Everyone sees how you two look at each other. I think maybe you’re just scared to make a move.” Thea’s eyes travelled up to the doorway that Felicity was standing in. “Huh, wonder how that got there.”

A piece of mistletoe had been hung from the doorframe.

“You know what they say about traditions, Ollie,” Thea continued. “They’re important.” She cleared her throat. “Anywho, I’ve got to go find Walter and Mom about a thing so…” And she turned and walked away.

Oliver felt his heart pick up speed until it was beating double time.

“I… had no idea,” Felicity said, her cheeks flushing deep pink and her bottom lip tugged between her teeth.

“Me either,” he sighed. “Although I should have suspected.”

“We don’t have to…” But she didn’t move from her spot under the mistletoe.

Oliver took a step forward. “I’m sorry I ran out on you earlier. After I told you about–”

“The letter,” she finished.

He nodded. “John called and needed to go over some details for tonight. I wouldn’t have left if it wasn’t… work related.”

“It’s okay,” Felicity said with a nervous smile. “I mean I knew you could have read it at any time. I
didn’t expect you to tell me when you did.” She cleared her throat. “Besides, it seems like we have an awful lot of… important… talks in the rooms of this house.”

He flashed her a smile, wondering when he’d closed the rest of the distance between them. She was so close now, but still in the doorway. Which meant that they were very nearly both under the mistletoe. The last time they’d been left alone in a room in his house he’d almost kissed her.

Granted, that had been his bedroom and she’d been half naked. And now his mind supplied those images again and he had to force himself from recreating that scene right then and there.

“I know you said we don’t have to,” Oliver said, his voice low. “But I did just tell Thea that tradition was important. So unless you have any objections…”

Felicity’s breath hitched, her head turned up slightly to meet his eyes. She shook her head, her blonde locks tumbling back over her shoulder. Oliver reached up, twirling a single curl around his finger. He wanted to savor this moment; a moment years in the making. He’d regretted not kissing her goodbye that night on the dance floor, or when he’d raced out to send them off at the tarmac. Bittersweet as it would have been, he’d wanted it then, and he needed it now.

Before he could lean down to press his lips to hers, Felicity’s hand pressed warm against his chest. “Oliver, wait….”

And then someone cleared their throat in the hallway behind her. Oliver’s eyes narrowed, stepping back.

“Felicity?” Carter Bowen questioned.

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Chapter 24

Chapter by holysmoaksoliver

Chapter Summary

Hi lovelies! I think the general concensus was that last week was kind of torture. I get it. I mean, it's been 23 chapters now of lots of angst, and you're all waiting for a certain pair to kiss. I have it on pretty good authority that it's coming. I'm not saying when, but it is. On another note, I can't believe no one mentioned that Oliver was there at her doorstep... and what he presented her with. Anyway, I won't take up anymore of your reading time. Enjoy!

xoxo,
Cassie

She could feel the pull to him. Like magnets being drawn back together, and there wasn’t a force on earth that could keep them apart. Except for the things she knew were still between them. The things she hadn’t been able to say, the secrets she was keeping from him and for him. And how they were all tearing her insides apart.

“Oliver, wait…”

For a fraction of a second she could see a look flash in his eyes. The same one that haunted her all the way from that hotel bathroom in Tokyo. She had told him to wait then. But things were different. Her reasons were different. And she wanted him to know that.

Someone cleared their throat behind them, and even if someone had given her a hundred guesses as to who it was, she still would have been wrong.

“Felicity?”

Frak. Frak. Frak. What the hell was Carter doing here?

She turned to face him, not sure if she was wearing a look as guilty as her insides were screaming. His eyes were focused on the two of them or maybe more on how Oliver’s hand hovered just at her hip, fingers skimming against the material of her dress. The action itself was probably innocent, but the feelings it sparked were certainly not.

She had to take a deliberate step out of his space just to clear the fog from her head.

“What are you doing here?” She tried not to look over at Oliver, but it was hard when she felt his eyes following her closely. Her ex was in front of her, and she really couldn’t handle both of them expecting her to say something about what had just happened.

“Moira invited me.”

“Of course she did,” she heard Oliver mutter, and shot him a quick glare. To be fair he seemed to take it to heart, and cleared his throat before he held out his hand. “Merry Christmas, Carter.”
“Yeah,” Carter shook it with a careful smile. “It must be nice to be home for the holidays after so long.”

“It is,” Oliver said with a tight smile, but she could hear some of the pain still in his voice.

Was he thinking about the last five years or the fact that he might have to leave once more? She wasn’t sure she’d ever get a real answer. There was still so many things left uncertain between them. And she hated it. She didn’t want any loose ends in her life. No conversations left unsaid, no questions without answers. And that’s why she was a little glad to see Carter.

“Oliver, could you give me and Carter a minute?” she asked, folding her hands in front of her, trying desperately to make him understand that this wasn’t because of him. But more inspired by him. If knowing Oliver had taught her anything, it was that you never knew what tomorrow could bring. So it was best to say what you needed to while you have the chance.

The intensity in which he looked at her threatened to spark her skin again, but then he shifted and said. “Yes, of course. I should probably go mingle with the guests anyway.”

“It was good seeing you Oliver.”

“You too.”

Once Oliver walked off, Felicity took a deep breath, and focused back on Carter. Carter who was looking at her in a way he never had before, like he was finally seeing the person in front of him. She wish she had planned a speech, or had practiced at least once what she’d ever say if they saw each other again.

“It was never going to work between us.”

His words caught her off guard, and she stared back at him in confusion. “Carter I swear, I never --”

“I know,” he cut her off waving a hand. “I know you’re not the type of person who would cheat on someone. But it was over for us long before that night wasn’t it? I mean the way you look at him, you never looked at me like that.”

“And what way is that?”

“Like you finally found a piece of you that was missing.”

She wanted to deny it, but she couldn’t. “There was a part of me that really wanted us to work.”

“But it just wasn’t as strong as the part that didn’t,” he supplied with a sigh. “I get it. You can’t fight for someone who doesn’t want you to fight for them.”

She almost laughed at his choice of words. Did Oliver want her to fight for him? Is that what she should have done in that dark club years ago? Or was letting him go the only way she got him back now? And how long would that last when he knew everything?

“Carter,” she paused, shaking her head. “I really do hope that you find someone amazing one day. You know someone who loves artisanal ice cream and watching those reality medical dramas. She’ll be brilliant and just as assertive.”

“And I hope that Oliver doesn’t do anything to mess this up,” he said with a smirk. “But if he does you should come visit me in Seattle.”
She rolled her eyes at his attempt to flirt, but his words stuck. “Wait, Seattle? I thought you turned down the job.”

“I did originally,” and he shrugged. “But ending a relationship just seemed like the best motivator to jump at a new opportunity. I need to get out of this city. It’s starting to get insane. Masked vigilantes roaming the streets, terrorizing the city’s elite. Seattle may have crime, but I will take that over this mess any day.”

And she saw another line drawn between them. Where Carter saw chaos and terror, Felicity saw order being restored and humanity taking a stand to fix what others had broken. She cared about Oliver, sure, but she felt like no matter who donned the mask, she would support the sentiment behind it.

“Have a good life Carter.” She reached over and squeezed his arm. “You deserve it.”

“You too,” he smiled. “I should find my mother and pry her out of the gossip circles. Goodbye Felicity.”

“Bye,” she waved a little, watching him walk away as a sense of relief rushed over her.

Felicity knew things were never simple. She knew that if she wanted her life to move forward she was going to have to let go of things from the past. She had to take the things caged in her and let them free. She was going to have to tell Oliver the truth, about everything. Even if some of the secrets weren’t hers, she couldn’t let either of them get deeper into this without being honest with him. She didn’t want a relationship built on lies. Because they didn’t last. And since she was being honest with herself, she wanted this thing with Oliver to last, more than anything.

Felicity took a deep breath, and finally moved from her spot. What was that saying? There’s no time like the present? She was going to come clean with Oliver, tonight. She just had to find him first.

The party had only grown since her time away from the main room. People stood chatting and laughing, as the pianist played a soft medley of Christmas music. She found Oliver almost immediately, like she was tuned into his frequency. And it sent a buzz through her skin, like he was something built into her and always would be.

She took a step forward, but before she could cross the room Laurel came into view, nursing a glass of wine.

“Hey, Laurel,” she greeted, trying to keep her eyes focused on her friend. “What’s up?”

“Do you know where Tommy went? I had to talk to some donor for CNRI, and the next thing I knew he was gone.”

“I haven’t seen him in awhile.” Not since he yelled at me for the same crap he was pulling in his own life. But she thought it was better if she didn’t tell Laurel they were fighting. She knew the lawyer too well to think she’d drop that. “Did you try calling or texting him?”

“Straight to voicemail,” she took a long drink. “Nice way to spend a party at my ex’s house.”

“I bet he just had to run an errand or something,” her phone beeped, and it almost made her jump. “Could you excuse me? It’s probably work.”

“Go, I’ll be fine,” Laurel assured as she took another sip.

“Call a cab if he doesn’t make an appearance in a few,” Felicity said giving her a quick hug. “Also
make him make it up to you.”

“Oh for sure.”

Felicity smiled, pulling her phone from her clutch. She had hoped it was just a text from her mother, showing off her new earrings Felicity bought her for Hanukkah. But if she was being honest she knew what the alert was before she even unlocked her phone.

It was an alert she’d built into the security system where the Markov device was being stored, telling her the building was finally locked down for the night. It meant no one but security would be there from now until the night crew came in at three.

She naively thought they could buy more time, more time to stop the test, to come up with a plan that wasn’t insane. But they didn’t, they were out of options. And if Oliver didn’t upload the malware by midnight, they would be out of time as well.

“Oliver,” she said when she finally made it to him.

He wasn’t alone of course. No Oliver was talking with his mother and sister. And Felicity was fighting back the fire in her cheeks as she realized her hand was curled around his bicep. But it wasn’t the time to freak out about what Moira Queen might infer from the touch. She could worry about that tomorrow.

“Everything alright?” His concern covered his face, and she wanted to melt it away.

She should just call Digg and have him take care of it. But Oliver would be furious. Plus he had the drive in his pocket, so that wouldn’t actually work.

“Can I speak with you?” she nodded towards the back doors. “In private.”

He glanced over his shoulder at his family. Moira was watching them intrigued, and Thea looked ready to throw a bridal shower. Again she’d deal with it later.

Once they made it outside, and she had pulled him far from the other guests, he let his hand slip into hers. Whether it was accidental or a bold move on his front, she wasn’t sure. But it was another thing that could wait.

“The building’s clear. The night crew working on their projects won’t be in until three, so if we’re still doing this,” she whispered in a rush. “I wish we could just hit pause you know. There’s still so much to consider, but there isn’t enough time…”

“Felicity,” he placed his other hand on her shoulder and she relaxed at his touch. “I figured I’d have to leave soon. It’s not that big a deal.”

“But it should be,” she shook her head and let her curls fall over her shoulders. “This is my mess, and I hate that you have to clean it up.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Markov’s device would barely function if I hadn’t been on the team working on it,” she looked at him with a sad smile. He had to go, there wasn’t time for them to get through all of this the way she wanted to, she had to wait. “I guess I just feel guilty. I’m sorry.”

“You have nothing to apologize for,” he glanced over his shoulder and sighed. “I should go, but you’ll be on comms right?”
She nodded, gesturing to her purse. “I’m also tapped into the security feed, so I can guide you past any hiccups in the rotation.”

Oliver squeezed her hand, looking like he wanted to do more, to say something else. But he just smiled, as he walked down the stone steps, heading off towards the garage.

She would have time to tell him later, she kept saying to herself over and over again. Until then she had work to do, and that required her to be 100% focused. She pulled the comm out of her purse, pressing it into her ear. And took a deep breath. Whatever happened next she was going to be ready for it.

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He had left the party without first seeking out Laurel, or anyone else for that matter. Waller had called, given him another ‘in’, back to the life of Agent Tommy Merlyn and he jumped like a dog commanded to do a trick for a treat. He wasn't proud of it, but there it was.

And besides, couldn't he be proud of it? Maybe not all of it, because there sure as hell were some shady points to the job. But on the whole, wasn't Tommy working toward making Starling City and the world at large a better place? Wasn't that something he could be proud of?

He had to ask himself then, why he was keeping it a secret at all. At first it was because he hated Waller and everything she stood for. In the beginning, back when she'd blackmailed him into working for ARGUS to keep her away from Oliver and Felicity. But he'd grown to enjoy most of the aspects of his job. Including being partners with Lyla and working to bring some justice to Starling. And he'd quite enjoyed the training too. At least, everything but the firearms. Tommy had little use for guns. He brought one with him on missions only because it was protocol and there were some protocols even he didn't break. But on the whole, Tommy despised the things. Necessary though they might be at times.

“Tommy!” Lexi came toward him as he moved down the hall. “You're back?”

“We’ll see,” he answered, pointing to the psych evaluation room.

“Do you have a minute before you go?” she asked, looking determined.

“Sure, what's up?”

“Well I know we talked about that arrow you gave me a few weeks ago. But since I wasn't able to find anything on it, I've been doing some more digging.” She pulled her tablet up and spun it around to face him. It reminded him of all the times Felicity had shown him something in the early days when they were trying to track down Oliver. A fresh flash of anger swelled within him as he thought of Felicity. “I've been able to find a few grainy video feeds, nothing solid enough to identify him. But I did find this.”

Lexi hit a button and static sounded through the small speakers on her tablet. And then a voice filtered through. “Police have been called to the scene, you have three minutes to get out of there before they arrive.”

Tommy knew who the voice belonged to instantly.

“Got it Felicity, headed back,” another voice said. This one was modulated roughly, but Tommy had heard more than enough.

He swallowed hard, his head spinning. He should have known from the way she talked about the
vigilante. He should have suspected that it was more than just her bringing this one thing to his attention after the way she had defended him. But the wound cut deeper than he thought imaginable. Especially when he remembered how she’d been so quick to shut him down a few weeks ago when he’d brought his suspicions to her. She’d said they had enough on their plates without adding the vigilante into the mix.

Apparently it was because she already had.

“Thanks Lexi,” Tommy said, clicking the tablet in her hands off.

“I don’t mean to overstep but… isn’t Felicity a friend—”

“You’re right,” he said quickly, his voice harsh. “You’re overstepping. And you should stop looking into this before more people get hurt.”

Lexi nodded, her short dark hair falling across her face as she kept her head low. “I just thought you should know,” she said softly, before turning and walking away.

“Lexi wait,” he called, and she paused, turning back toward him. “When was that audio taken?”

She shrugged. “Three, four weeks ago maybe?” she answered. “I would have told you earlier… but I thought it was something that needed to be done in person and I don’t have clearance for your personal information.”

His eyes slipped closed and he took a deep breath before meeting her gaze again. “Thank you,” he said. And then turned the handle on the door for his psych evaluation.

The fire that burned within him was apparently just what Tommy needed, because the evaluation was quick and almost effortless. Then again it could have something to do with the fact that he wasn’t actually allowing himself to feel anything; he’d switched back into Agent mode, which meant putting on the face he showed the world and keeping anything he might be feeling tucked into the dark corner of his soul.

Waller was waiting for him in the hallway when he’d finished. It always struck Tommy as eerie that she just showed up whenever and wherever she pleased, but it was something that made her effective at what she did.

“Agent Merlyn,” she greeted. “You’ve officially been reinstated. Briefing on the Markov mission has already started. And so as not to blindside you again, you will be working with Agent Michaels on this. She’s been on this assignment since Deadshot disappeared last month.”

“I appreciate the heads up,” he said, matching her pace as they made their way down the familiar halls.

“I also want to ensure that there will be no conflicts of interest here,” she said, halting suddenly outside a conference room door.

“I’m here to get the job done, Director,” he said earnestly. Although in the back of his mind, he couldn’t help but wonder about Felicity. She’d told him that she had enlisted the vigilante’s help with taking down the Markov device, but since she was working with said vigilante, Tommy wasn’t sure what ARGUS’s mission would mean for her. He just hoped they weren’t going to interfere with Waller’s plans. Because they had both seen first hand what happens when someone goes up against Amanda Waller; and he was positive that nothing would end well if that was the case.

Tommy briefly considered sending off a quick text warning her, but ultimately decided against it.
Besides, Waller ushered him into the conference room where a large team was already gathered and he hadn’t had time to, even if he’d wanted to.

It felt like his first day all over again.

“...Alpha Team will secure the perimeter while Beta Team infiltrates,” Lyla was saying from the front of the room. “Security at the testing site has increased over the last several days since the completion of the device. However our tech department has thoroughly spec’d the building for cameras, alarms and other security measures.”

“Everyone who hasn’t been to tack yet for gear, time to suit up,” Waller added, everyone’s heads quickly whipping in her direction. “Teams roll out in ten minutes.”

Hushed conversations broke out around the table as everyone dispersed. Within less than a minute, the room had cleared until it was just Tommy, Waller and Lyla remaining.

“Fill him in,” Waller said, and then turned on her heel and stalked out of the room.

“Lyla,” Tommy said curtly with a nod.

“How was your--”

“It was fine, thanks,” he answered brusquely. “Working with Ollie at his new nightclub in the Glades. Your man is our head of security.”

Lyla flinched. “Listen, Tommy. I know that how things went down--”

“No offense, Agent Michaels,” he said, keeping his tone even. “But I’d like to not go into my first mission back unprepared. So if you could just fill me in, as Director Waller ordered, I’d appreciate it.” And he hated himself for being so formal, so cold. But with everything going on, with everything he’d just learned about Felicity and the vigilante, Tommy couldn’t let himself be anything less than cool and collected in that moment. Because he’d go crazy with worry if he didn’t lock it all up.

This time his partner took it in stride. “You, Jackson and I are Beta Team, infiltrating.”

Tommy’s eyes narrowed. “I hate that guy,” he scoffed.

“At least he doesn’t see you as inferior simply because of your gender,” Lyla quipped.

“You trust him?” Tommy asked, meeting her gaze, falling back into the swing of things before he could stop himself.

“Didn’t really have a choice. Waller assigned the Alpha and Beta teams. Besides, he’s been a little better with female authority figures ever since I kicked his ass sparring two weeks ago.” Lyla opened a folder on the table in front of them. “Alpha team is taking out the security guards here and here,” she said pointing to the blueprint of the building. “We’ll enter here, find the device, disable and remove it. We have ten minutes to get the device removed before the security system is back online.”

Tommy picked up the folder, glancing through the rest of the pages. Everything looked pretty standard, until he found a memo written to Waller from Lyla, insisting that Tommy be brought back as his expertise was paramount for the current mission.

“Waller assigned the teams, huh?” he asked, pulling the memo out.
“I swear I didn’t plant that for you to see,” Lyla answered, looking a little sheepish. “But I didn’t say anything that wasn’t true. We need you back here, Tommy. ARGUS is better because of agents like you.”

Tommy nodded, extending his hand. “Let’s go steal my dad’s earthquake maker,” he said with a grin.

Lyla took his hand, shaking firmly. “You got it, partner.”

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Oliver jumped from the rooftop, his boots hitting hard against the steel fire escape. The feeling vibrated through him, settling into a echoed rhythm along with his heart rate. But the sound traveled no further than himself. He could see the security on the ground level. Two rent-a-cops, guarding the door.

“Felicity?” he spoke low into his comm, using the shadows to conceal himself. The chances of one of the guards looking up and spotting him wasn’t high, but he still didn’t want to risk it.

“Front security should be headed for their walk around in, three, two, one-- Oh look there they go,” he could practically hear the smile in her voice. “You have four minutes to get in there before they return. Also maybe we should keep first names to a minimum, since the company name on the build does pay my rent.”

“Duly noted.”

He leaped over the railing, scaling down the wall, his bow tucked into his arm as well as he could until he finally dropped to the ground.

“You know you didn’t have to take the roof, you could have entered through the side like Digg.”

“Then he couldn’t live up to the drama queen title he wears to well.”

Their words were laced with amusement. Even though they were in the middle of a mission, he liked having this level of lightness around him. With Felicity in his ear, and Diggle at his back, Oliver was starting to rely on the strength between the three of them. But that didn’t mean they needed to know that.

“Sorry is my vigilantism getting in the way of your conversation, because I can always pause for a few while you two finish.” He pushed on the window until he heard the faint pop of the glass as it opened sideways.

“Just be careful,” Felicity added, her voice took on a hint of worry, but as fast at it was there she was brushing it off. “You only have one shot at this.”

He wondered not for the first time that night, if maybe their feelings for each other were in a downhill slide. Maybe it always had the potential to be like this. Maybe the second he let himself feel like he could deserve it, that’s when things were meant to get easier. But then again she still pulled back from him, she had asked him to wait. His mind has flashed to that night in Tokyo. In many ways it felt the same, felt like the universe was hell bent on keeping him from a moment of happiness. But he saw the look in her eyes, how deep the longing had reached. There had been something else there, but there hadn’t been enough time to see it before Carter had interrupted.

He wanted to ask. He wanted to see if there was a chance they were finally on the same level surface. But he couldn’t ask. At least not while Diggle was listening in on them as well.
“Hey,” he whispered, when he finally slipped into the building and down the first hall. “Where are you hiding in my house anyway?”

“I’m in your bed,” Felicity paused, and he couldn’t help but crack a smile when she began to stammer. “On your bed. In your room. Sometimes I talk faster than I think.”

“We’ve noticed,” Diggle laughed.

But Oliver just shook his head. “Which direction?”

“Go left,” she replied. He could hear her typing faintly through the comms. “When you get to the end of that hall, there should be a stairwell that leads to the high clearance projects.”

“Should be?” Though he knew Felicity’s intel was spot on, it wasn’t the time for second guessing.

“It’s there,” she reiterated with a huff. “Honestly, it’s not like this is my first go at this. John as soon as those guards get back give it ten minutes and then hit them with a tranq dart.”

“I know, I know. Keep an eye on things until then. But Oliver man, I hate sending you in alone.”

“I’m not alone,” Oliver replied as he got to the stairs. “Not with you two yammering in my head.”

He could imagine their matching eye rolls, but he had to focus now. Part of the reason he once liked working alone was the silence. He could focus when it was just him. Zone out so it was just the problem before him and nothing else to get in the way. That method had gotten him into trouble a few too many times in Russia, but once he returned home it seemed to pay off.

He wasn’t working by himself though. He had eyes on everything, and backup in case things got dicey. And even if a part of him had grown accustomed to the solitude, he couldn’t admit to missing it. He preferred to have people he could depend on, people who depended on him in return. John, Felicity and Oliver had become a team without him even really noticing. And he liked it that way.

It made him wonder over and over again if it was time to tell Tommy the truth as well. Maybe Tommy wouldn’t want to be involved, maybe he wouldn’t understand why Oliver felt the need to pick up a bow and protect the city. But Oliver was starting to regret every moment he let pass without telling his friend the truth.

The stairs to the basement landing made no noise as he took the steps down, but he still felt the need to hold his bow steady in his hand. The whole level hummed with the sound of lights and static in the air. But not a soul seemed to be around.

“I’m in,” he looked both to his left and right, keeping his words as quiet as he could. “I thought you said this level had three guards?”

“It does,” she cursed, and Oliver could only assume she was trying to find them on the security feed.

Something didn’t feel right. He was on the high priority project level, it more than anything should have been crawling with security. The top landing should have had someone guarding the door. But the only two guards he had seen since arriving were on the perimeter.

“Digg, get in here,” he said as he pulled an arrow from his quiver. “And watch your back.”

“Copy,” Digg said before Oliver focused back on his movements.

Where the hell was everyone? His fingers glided along his bow string, holding the arrow as firm as
he could without snapping it. He wouldn’t let it go unless it had a target to hit.

“Tell me you have some idea of what’s going on.”

“I don’t know,” she sounded lost in a flurry of information, but Oliver needed her to give him something.

“We don’t have all night.”

“I know okay? Just give me a second,” she was hitting her tablet hard enough that he could hear every punch to the surface. And he swore he’d buy her a new one if she could give him something to go on. “Ah ha, thought you could hide a little program behind a normal looking firewall, that was smart but not as smart as I am.”

“As happy as I am that you’ve found a computer tech to talk to,” Oliver said, as he kept slowly across the open room. “Will you share with the class.”

“Someone sent out an email urging an evacuation of the lower level, due to a possible carbon monoxide leak,” she explained in frustration. “I didn’t get a ping about it, because it was only sent to the security office upstairs. They must have radioed to the guards on that level for the evac.”

“And what are the chances there’s suddenly a CO leak the night this close to when this thing is supposed to be activated.”

“Not likely,” she muttered. “But I can’t find out where the email originated from, it’s bouncing all around the internal servers. And without my laptop and a steady connection, it’s the least of our problems. This doesn’t change what you’re down there to do.”

She was right. And with the lack of security he could possibly finish what he came to do before anyone even knew they were there. He just had to get to the room with the Markov device. That would be the easy part.

He walked to the door, Felicity had said five down the left side, taking each step as carefully as he could manage. It was right in front of him, all he had to do was grab the handle and twist. But when he reached out he could feel the air in the room shift.

Oliver barely had time to pull back, before the weight of another bow came down hard against his forearm. He rolled under the movement, catching his assailant’s stature in the scattered light. Damn it.

“Son of a bitch,” Felicity and Diggle chorused together.

Oliver swung his bow behind him, knocking a kick into the archer’s chest. But it only made him stumble a little. This was going to be a long, long night.

Oliver was assessing what he could use in the space for his next move, when Felicity’s panicked words came flying into his ear. “No, no. no, crap. Not now. Not now.”
“What the hell is it now?” Digg’s question came in an echo through his head and in the room when he finally reached the top of the stairs. He popped off a few shots, which the Dark Archer blocked before his fist connected with the side of Oliver’s face.

“ARGUS is here,” were the last words Felicity said before things got so much worse.
Chapter 25

Chapter by foreverfelicityqueen (stydiasredstring)

Chapter Notes

Hello dears,
I'm really excited about this chapter. I'm a little afraid of how much you guys might kill us. But it's a risk I'm willing to take. So without further ado, let's jump right into this.

love ya,
Kayla

Things had gone to shit faster than Felicity’s fingers could fly across the keyboard. One minute everything was fine, and the next both the Dark Archer and ARGUS were closing in on them. Felicity cursed herself for not noting the heat signature closing in sooner, but the Dark Archer was on Oliver before she could blink. Then again, how had he made it passed her surveillance?

There was only so much she could do on her tablet, and unfortunately it mostly consisted of looking on in mild horror as Oliver and the other archer battled it out. Even once Diggle showed up and it was the two of them against the Dark Archer, they had a tough time gaining the upper hand.

Once the shock and horror wore off, Felicity switched gears, tapping herself into the ARGUS comm system so she could figure out what they were doing there. She shuddered at the thought of Amanda Waller with her hands on that device; it might be worse than Merlyn having it. But Felicity knew that it must be why they were there, and she felt the pit drop into her stomach when she realized that must have been why Tommy had ducked out of the party without letting Laurel know he was going.

“Boy Scout, Harbinger and Kratos are approaching the secure levels,” a voice said through the ARGUS comms.

“Uh guys,” Felicity groaned into her own comm to Oliver and Diggle. “I hate to interrupt but you’re about to get company in there.”

“Any chance you can stall them?” Oliver said, his voice labored.

Her fingers were still dancing across the screen of the tablet. “I can probably change the lock codes on the doors but it will alert MG that there’s been a breach.”

“Do it,” Diggle said. “We’ll figure it out in here.”

Felicity squeezed her eyes shut as she pressed the button to change the codes on the doors to the lower levels. When no alarms sounded she opened her eyes again, watching the security footage of Oliver and Diggle fighting the masked archer, wishing that there was something, anything she could do.
And then the Dark Archer went down, hard, and Oliver and Diggle moved in sync toward the room that held the device. Oliver turned the knob, pressing inside, and disappeared from the cameras.

Felicity tapped nervously against her tablet, feeling her anxiety shoot through the roof. The sound of a phone ringing pulled her attention from what was happening on screen. It wasn’t any ringtone on her phone, so she dug through her bag until she found Oliver’s phone that he’d left with her when he’d gone on the mission.

Sofia’s name flashed across the screen and Felicity felt her stomach bottom out. Before she could stop herself, she pressed the answer button and held the phone to her ear.

“Sofia?” Felicity questioned.

“Yes,” the girl sounded confused. “And this is… Felicity,” she supplied herself, her Russian accent thick and her voice weary.

“Oliver can’t come to the phone right now,” she said, feeling like a secretary and shuddering at the thought. Her eyes scanned the tablet before turning her attention back to Sofia. “It’s not because… I mean, I can’t say why… I mean, what can we do for you Sofia?”

“He told you why I came to see him,” the other girl said matter-of-factly.

“He did,” Felicity acknowledged. “We’ve been working on a plan to help.”

“Oliver has been stalling,” Sofia said, a hint of exasperation in her voice. “My father grows weaker every day, Felicity. The time for plans is over.”

The sound of an explosive pulled her attention back to the tablet screen and ARGUS agents infiltrated down the stairs.

“Talk to me!” Oliver demanded.

“ARGUS is closing in,” she said, leaving out the fact that she was still on the phone with Sofia. And almost nearly forgetting it, in fact. “It looks like three of them.” She paused, zooming in. “Crap. Crap crap crap.”

“What is it?” Diggle questioned.

“Two of those three are Lyla and Tommy.”

“Come again,” Oliver growled.

“Hey, stop right there!” A guard shouted at Diggle from the other end of the hall.

“We need a plan,” Diggle said, ducking out of view into the room where Oliver was still dealing with the Markov device. She heard the door slam shut right before a gunshot rang through the air.

Felicity muted the comm and turned back to the phone, where Sofia was yelling in Russian to get her attention. “Sofia, this is a really bad time. But I can assure you that Oliver is not stalling. I’ll have him call you back soon, and we’ll fill you in on everything.” Before the other girl could respond, Felicity hung up the phone, dropping it onto the bed. She turned up the volume on the ARGUS comms and listened in for a moment.

Felicity clicked her comm back on. “They’re two levels up. You’ve got forty five seconds. The guard is alone for now and I’ve jammed his signal so he can’t alert the rest of them. Take him out
and then take the hall to the left all the way to the end, turn right and that will lead you to the back stairs. I'll talk you out from there.”

“Your program has seventy seconds left to install,” Diggle said. “Can we leave the drive?”

It worried her that Oliver hadn’t said anything more after she’d spilled the beans about Tommy. But she couldn’t focus on that right then; she had to get them out and safe first. They could deal with the fallout after they’d made it out safe. “Only if we want my boss finding out I’m the one that sabotaged the device,” Felicity said, frowning.

Tommy, Lyla and the third agent reached the bottom level of the building. And then she realized that there was one other person down there that was still unaccounted for. The Dark Archer, who had been sprawled out across the floor at the bottom of the stairs had disappeared.

“If we don’t get out of here and he’ll find out a lot more than that,” Diggle said.

The security guard heard the ARGUS agents and moved away from the door, running down the hall toward the stairwell.

“ARGUS has the guard occupied,” Felicity said into the comm, as gunfire resumed. “Get out of there now!”

“It’s not finished,” Oliver growled, more anger behind his words than she thought possible.

“It’s downloaded enough to disrupt its main circuits,” Felicity said back, pulling up the device and finding the loose thread of the code embedded inside. She could work with that. “Get out of there,” she repeated, louder and more demanding this time. “Left out of the door.”

“One guard down here,” Tommy’s voice came through the ARGUS comms and Felicity’s heart clenched in her chest. “We’re moving in.”

Diggle and Oliver moved out of the room, taking a left down the hall to the end. They turned right as she instructed and ended at the door to the stairs.

“Felicity, it’s locked,” Oliver said, his voice harsh.

“I’m working on it,” she said, switching between code and security footage while still keeping an ear on the ARGUS comms. “I had to change the codes to slow them down.”

“I don’t need a play by play,” he spat. “I need an unlocked door.”

She finished the code and the door clicked unlocked and Felicity sighed, feeling her adrenaline subside just the slightest bit. She couldn’t believe she’d just dropped the biggest bomb on Oliver while he was in the field, and he’d need time to process it all. But that also meant if they weren’t careful, Tommy was about to learn a secret of his own in the next few moments. She wasn’t sure which one she was dreading more.

“Take the stairs up to sublevel 1, any higher than that and ARGUS will spot you. I’ll create a diversion to get you the rest of the way out of the building.”

“Good work,” Diggle said as they moved into the stairwell. “Now get us home.”

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Tommy kept his gun holstered as they made their way down the levels towards the high priority
basement. He had only been to Merlyn Global’s off site facility a handful of times, and each time he hadn’t made it past the first floor. His father used to say he wasn’t responsible enough to see all of their secrets. And he would try and refrain from rolling his eyes. But now he had to wonder what other skeletons his father had buried there, and how many of them he should worry about.

“Hey Boy Scout,” Jackson called from a few paces ahead of them. “Want to hurry it up. Some of us have things to do after this.”

“Shut up, Kratos,” Lyla countered, as she brought up the rear. “We all know the only plans you have tonight are with yourself.”

Their banter was cut off quickly by the crackle of their comms, as Waller began to speak. “I suggest all three of you focus. Ms. Weiss can’t seem to locate the majority of the Merlyn Global security.”

“Also the cameras on this level seem to be on a loop,” Lexi added, sounding a little distracted. “I almost didn’t notice it, it’s pretty damn flawless.”

_Damn it._ Tommy wanted to scream. A flawless camera loop, the crackle of static over their comms, the seemingly deserted building. He knew how good Felicity was when it came to this stuff, and since she was now buddy buddy with the vigilante, she had to be lending her services in the tech department. Tommy knew she had told him about the device too. So the question remained, which one of them would get to it first?

“I’m sending Alpha team in after you to help retrieve the device,” and with that the comms went dead again.

“Don’t you think it’s a little suspect the cameras are messed up?” Lyla whispered to him, as she came closer. “Almost like someone else is on a job.”

“Harbinger,” but Tommy kept his voice low, he didn’t want Jackson to overhear. “Just keep your head on a swivel.”

“Isn’t that usually my line,” she teased, but he saw the tension coil through her as she picked her gun from her back holster, keeping it firmly directed in front of her.

“We expecting trouble?” Jackson said when he turned to them.

“Always expect trouble, Agent,” Lyla said as she brushed past him. “That way it doesn’t come as such a shock when it pops up.” She stopped in front of a room, and pointed. “This it? Unit 374 right?”

“According to the director,” Tommy huffed, pulling a lock picking kit from his back pocket. A skill he remembered trying to perfect early in life, if for no other reason than to break into his father’s liquor cabinet. And he couldn’t help but grin at Malcolm’s own folly. Because of course he’d have a regular lock on the door. Billion dollars worth of work and tech, round the clock security system, but a pin tumbler lock. It felt too easy.

_Way too easy,_ Tommy thought when he pushed on the door and it gave into the room. “Guys we have a problem.”

Lyla shot him a look and took a deep breath. “Tell me you’ve just gotten really good at that.”

“And lie to my favorite partner,” he retorted with a head shake. “Someone must have beaten us here.”
Jackson slipped a little closer, having motioned the alpha team towards them. “Okay well that begs the question, where are they now?”

“No clue.” And it was the truth. If Felicity had the Hood in there somewhere, he wouldn’t have any idea which way they’d have gone. But he was damn sure going to find out.

He tossed a glance to Lyla, who seemed to know exactly what he needed from her before he could even open his mouth.

“Kratos, you and Alpha team extract the device and get it to the director at the rendezvous point on the south edge. Boy Scout and I are going to take a look around and see what we can learn.”

“I think I should go with you if Alpha has the device,” Jackson piped up as he narrowed his gaze on them. “We shouldn’t split the group.”

“Don’t disobey a direct order Kratos, or I’ll have to inform the director you’d be better suited for desk duty for a couple weeks,” Lyla gave him an icy glare.

She raised her brows just enough to see if he’d take to the challenge. But Jackson, as usual, was all talk.

Soon after the Alpha team showed up, lead now by Jackson, worked to maneuver the device out of the basement.

“Lighter than I thought it’d be,” Tommy mused as he watched them ascend the stairs with it. “Given how much grief it’s given me lately.”

Lyla watched as their team finally disappeared over the landing, then she did something he wouldn’t have imagined in a million years. Lyla Michaels yanked out her comm unit. And then for good measure she pulled Tommy’s from his ear as well.

“Ok, ow,” he rubbed at his ear and hissed. “You could have asked me to just take it out. Damn, you realize that’s attached don’t you.”

“Waller can’t hear what I’m about to say to you,” she kept her voice down, and her eyes darted through the space. “And before I tell you, just know I only kept it from you because I didn’t want you to feel like you had to be involved. You know we keep enough secrets in this life, you didn’t need to be responsible for one more.”

“What the hell are you talking about?”

And in a rush the words tumbled from her mouth. “Johnny’s been working with the vigilante. I’ve tailed him a couple of times over the last few weeks now, and he’s been helping take out thugs and such for the Hood.”

“Lyla--”

“I should have told you,” she cut him off as she stood straighter. “You’re not just my partner, you’re my friend and I should have been honest with you. And honestly I probably would have if we had even spoken in the last six weeks. But that’s the truth, all of it.”

His head was reeling with the new information. Especially since he had spent a couple weeks thinking Digg himself was the vigilante. And though he figured Digg was just working for the guy, he had completely pushed it from his head the last couple of days. Because Felicity started defending the Hood, and apparently working with him. Two people he’d trust with his life started taking up
with a guy who covered himself in shadow and mystery and he couldn’t figure out why.

Except the pieces started to fall into place. Felicity’s passion, Digg’s devotion, the timing of when the Hood showed up. Waller’s taunting remark about his friend in leather. She hadn’t just been digging about the police report. She knew, Felicity and Digg too, and here he was being the last to put it all together.

“I am such an idiot,” he muttered as he slammed a fist into the glass on the door.

A dumb idea on a normal day, but on this particular shit fest of a night, it was worse. Because the glass shattered sending shards through the small room. And one just happened to hit the motion activated alarm.

The noise blared through the lower level, red and white lights strobed across his vision, making it impossible to see.

“Why the hell would you do that?” Lyla elbowed him hard. “Are you out of your mind?”

“I know who the Hood is,” he growled, clenching his bleeding hand into a fist.

“Is that gonna turn off the German air raid above our heads?” she aimed her gun towards one of the speakers, and took the shot. It didn’t stop the sirens, but it lessened the volume considerably. “We have to go.”

“Yeah,” he shoved the lock pick back into his pocket, holding his bleeding hand close to his chest.

The sound of footsteps on stairs told him all he needed to know about that direction. They really, really couldn’t go out the way they came. Options. They needed options.

“This way,” Lyla grabbed his arm, jerking until he their steady footfalls were in a rhythm with the alarm going off.

“You know this is actually kind of fun,” he had to raise his voice over the chaos. “I mean not the alarm and emittent badness, but you and me, back in the field, it’s fun.”

“If we manage to make it out of this in one piece and without Waller killing us, maybe I’ll let you buy me a beer at your new club to celebrate.”

The club made him think of Oliver, and the realization that his friend had been lying to him for months tore through him again. God, this was not the day for secrets.

They ran until Tommy saw a turn off to the right, and he pulled her after him down the next corridor. The hall ended soon, and the only thing in front of them was another door. But who knew where it lead, or if it was even unlocked.

Before he could consider pulling his gun out to unlock it himself, the door bursted open. John Diggle, and another man dressed in green looked up at him, and it was like the air had glued them both in place. Even in the flashes of red, he knew the face that peered out from under that hood. And he wanted to laugh at how naive he’d been before. Because of course it was Oliver. That made sense. The feeling he got when they fought side by side, it hadn’t come from comradery in fighting styles. It was because he knew Oliver better than anyone else. Or at least he used to.

“Sweetie,” John said as Lyla gave him a questioning look.

“You only call me that when you want something.”
“I do,” Digg smiled and raised his gun. “Duck please.”

Lyla pushed them both down and Tommy barely had time to think before John popped off three rounds into one of the guards that had advanced on them. The next one went low but a second later there was an arrow through the man’s ankle.

“What the hell happened to your hand?” Diggle questioned, when he helped them both up. Oliver, he noticed, wasn’t speaking. He just stood with his bow firmly in his hand, ready for whatever came next.

“Short story, punched glass,” he explained with a shrug.

“The alarm going off is also courtesy of him,” Lyla snarked. “We should work together to get out of here. If it sent a signal to the local PD, the cops are already on their way.”

“You found your way in,” Oliver spoke, but the voice was garbled and sounded like it was going through some voice changing software. “You can find your own way out.”

“We can’t just leave them,” Digg hissed, grabbing onto Oliver’s shoulder. “You can be pissed about this later, right now let’s try not to get locked up.”

Tommy couldn’t tell if Oliver was considering Diggle’s words or considering stabbing the taller man in the shoulder with one of his arrows. But after what felt like an eternity, he finally looked ready to give in.

He touched his chest and then spoke, with the same modified voice. “Do you have another exit?”

Tommy watched closely, seeing how much Oliver flinched away from adding Felicity’s name to the end of that sentence. He felt weird, seeing his friend like this. Oliver clearly never wanted him to see this part of his life. But then again, Tommy never wanted him to see the ARGUS stuff either.

“Lyla hand me my comm,” Tommy said, and she passed it to him without protest. He placed it back in, turning the thing on. “Lex, tell me you got an exit strategy for me?”

“Agent Merlyn,” Waller’s clipped voice vice gripped him through the ear unit. “Who told you to take out your communication unit?”

“It fell out,” he said as smoothly as he could. “And we can discuss that once Harbinger and I are out. We need an exit for four, Director.”

Oliver head shot up at that, and he could almost feel the heat of anger coming off him. But Tommy was too preoccupied to worry about that.

“Tell Mr. Queen to have Ms. Smoak switch the digital signal over to analog. Ms. Weiss assures me that should eliminate your noise issue.”

“Tell her to switch the signal to analog and it should cut the techno,” he said looking directly at Oliver. But his friend didn’t make a move to speak. In fact he was pretty sure Oliver was going to try his damnest not to say another word to him for the rest of the night. “Exits will be easier to see without the strobe lights in our eyes.”

Oliver groaned but before he could hit his comm again, the sound cut off around them. The lights dimming back to the faint glow they held before, and the level felt eerily quiet.

“What are the chances that was just good luck?”
Oliver peered over his shoulder, and the next thing Tommy saw was the end of an arrow as Oliver knocked it into position.

“Not likely,” he gritted out, and Tommy followed his line of sight.

Down at the other end of the corridor was a figure dressed in black and holding his own bow, arrow already poised to fly. This was not how he wanted this night to go.

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Oliver was struggling to keep his emotions in check. It was marginally easier with an eminent threat looming before them. But his innate urge to protect Tommy would surely work against him. The Dark Archer loosed his arrow, and it went whizzing passed them, landing directly into the keypad for the stairwell. Sparks shot everywhere as it fizzled and died, leaving them with one less way out.

“Looks like it may finally be a fair fight,” the other archer laughed, his voice garbled and modulated the way Oliver’s was. Apparently he also had something to lose from people finding out his identity. Oliver would have to make quick work of that.

“I don’t need them to beat you,” Oliver seethed. The anger building in him would surely be enough to overtake the Dark Archer now. He took a few steps forward, standing in front of Tommy, Lyla and Diggle.

“Not exactly how I pictured running into you,” Diggle said behind him, his voice low.


“SCPD will be there in four minutes,” Felicity’s voice came through Oliver’s comm and he felt himself settle into an eerie calm. Four minutes. He could take this guy down in that time. And then they could all have a nice little chat about what the hell happened during the last two years.

“You stole something,” the archer said, readying another arrow. “And now I’m going to teach you what happens when you steal.”

Oliver didn’t give the other archer time to say anything more. He shot his arrow, watching it sail through the air. The other archer deflected it, and the wire coil that shot out on impact wrapped around a nearby support beam. But Oliver didn’t have time to see that; he charged forward, bow tucked under one arm and fist ready to fly. He could feel Diggle at his heels and they flanked the masked archer, much like they’d done on the stairs. But things were much different than they’d been just moments ago. The anger twined within him was nearly at a level he couldn’t control, and it was all directed at the masked man before him. Every time the archer swung a fist, Oliver dodged it. He made sure his own swings were harder, and harder to avoid. He landed a few good punches to the archer’s gut, and Diggle got his legs out from under him, landing the man on his back between them.

The archer threw something on the ground, a flash of light blinding Oliver, and an instant later the man was gone.

“That went well,” Diggle said with a shrug. “Now should we get out of here?”

Oliver shook his head, pushing the hood back for a moment to look at Tommy. “You two stole the device?”

“We acquired it,” Lyla said.
Oliver huffed a sigh. *Damn ARGUS and damn Amanda Waller*, he thought, scrubbing a hand down his face. How had his friend gotten mixed up in this? Questions for another time.

“And you’re going to give it back,” the Dark Archer’s modulated voice came from the other end of the hall. “Or else.”

The four of them turned to face him, Oliver positioning himself in front of Tommy. ARGUS or not, he needed to keep Tommy safe. He might have been trained by Waller, but that didn’t mean he had any idea what he was up against with this masked archer.

“Local PD is two minutes out, Oliver,” Felicity’s voice came in his ear. “And ARGUS backup has retreated to stay out of sight. The four of you are on your own.”

Oliver glanced over his shoulder at Tommy, who seemed to tense. Perhaps his boss had just told him that no backup was on their way to help. That’s who Amanda Waller was, after all. She’d gotten the device, her work was done.

The standoff with the Dark Archer didn’t last longer than that. He pulled two arrows from his quiver over his shoulder, letting them fly simultaneously. One grazed Tommy’s sleeve, the other went flying passed Oliver’s head. Oliver moved double time; nocking and releasing five arrows in just a few seconds. Each one was deftly avoided by the Dark Archer, who seemed to anticipate where Oliver’s arrows would go.

Diggle and Lyla both took aim next, firing their weapons, but the masked man didn’t even blink. He shot an arrow into each bullet, dropping it to the ground in the open space between them in the hall.

“The machine is long gone,” Tommy said coolly, coming to stand directly beside Oliver.

Oliver felt himself stiffen, caught between his anger and frustration and betrayal and the need to protect Tommy. Because the man in front of them was no one to taunt.

“Then I guess I’ll have to give you incentive to return it,” the archer said, nocking another arrow and sending it flying toward them. It landed at their feet, exploding into a fiery ball, making them all jump back a few paces. And when they looked back to where he’d been, the archer was gone.

“That was anticlimactic,” Tommy said, a lopsided grin on his features, until his eyes found Oliver’s.

“We still need to get out of here,” Oliver growled, his voice modulator making his gruff voice even harsher.

“Working on it,” Felicity said, the normal chirp gone from her voice. Now she only sounded determined. “I’ve rerouted the SCPD to the guard’s station at the far end of the building.”

“How did you do that?”

“Eh, I just called them and told them Malcolm Merlyn would pull his generous donations to the local police department if they interfered with the highly unstable substance testing he had going on at the facility,” she said.

“And that worked?” Diggle said with a laugh.

“Probably not, but it will buy you enough time to get out of there if you get your asses moving.”

That was the only invitation Oliver needed. He made his way through the fire, which had nearly put itself out, and to the main staircase they’d come down. Diggle was right beside him and Tommy and
Lyla were on their tails.

“Guards are confined to the main lobby,” Felicity said again in his ear. “But I’ll give you guys a full blackout once you reach that floor.”

Oliver took the steps two at a time until he reached the door for the main lobby. He paused, waiting for the all clear from Felicity. “In position,” he told her.

“I know,” she said, her voice confused. “But the guards aren’t.”

“What?”

“They’re gone,” she said, and he could hear more typing on her computer. “They were all here a minute ago, and then reassigned to other floors via secure messages on encrypted phones… and not from me.”

“This feel like a set up to anyone else?” Lyla asked, gun poised in both hands.

“It definitely doesn’t feel right,” Oliver agreed.

“But there’s no one in the main lobby at all. I mean you guys can literally walk out the front doors.”

It wasn’t that he didn’t trust Felicity; he knew she’d never do anything to intentionally get them caught, but with everything that had happened since he’d left the party, he wasn’t sure any of them were working at full capacity.

“And there’s nothing you missed?” he asked.

“I checked everything,” she confirmed. “No heat signatures, no silent alarms. It’s the fastest route out of there.”

Oliver blew out a long breath before pushing the door open and moving through the lobby. To her credit, she was right, and the four of them walked right out the front doors.

“Maybe they were sent to clear the other floors,” Tommy suggested as they made their way to the van that Oliver and Diggle had waiting on the other side of a broken chain link fence.

But Oliver shook his head. “That was too easy. Even with Felicity calling off the police, there should have been security guards swarming those stairs to catch us.”

“But the device was already gone. Maybe that’s all they cared about.”

“Maybe,” Diggle said with a shrug, pulling open the van door. “What? You have some other ride you’re waiting on?”

Lyla narrowed her eyes at him. “She works differently than you and I, Johnny,” she said.

Diggle nodded. “Yeah, I’d never leave a man behind, and she does it with enthusiasm.”

But Oliver still felt like something was off, like the other shoe was about to drop at any moment.

The four of them piled into the van and Diggle drove through the streets of Starling, pulling into the garage at the back of the Foundry. The entire ride had been silent, save for a few pleasantries between Diggle and Lyla. But Tommy and Oliver hadn’t said a word to each other.

Once the garage door had closed behind them, Oliver popped his door open, pulling off his hood and moving toward the main space of the foundry. And that’s when he heard Tommy scoff.
“Tell me we aren’t where I think we are,” he said.

Oliver spun around to face him. “Trust me, you do not want to do this right now.”

Felicity was already inside when they came in; she’d changed at some point, out of her glittering gold dress and into a pair of tight black pants and bright blue top. Oliver noticed she didn’t dare look up from her computer to meet either of their eyes.

“This is exactly when and where I want to do this, Ollie,” Tommy spat. “You’ve been working your operation under Verdant this whole time?”

Oliver laughed, but there was no humor in it. “What is it you’re mad about, Tommy? Because I’m not the one working for Amanda Waller, or did you forget that that’s who we were running from two years ago in Russia?” He turned his back to Tommy, moving to hang his quiver and bow.

“No, friend,” Tommy said, incredulously. “I remember very well. Because that’s the reason I’m working for her to begin with.”

“What?!” Oliver bellowed, spinning on his heel. “We had her beat. Why would you ever--”

“We never had her beat, Oliver. God, you of all people should have realized she was never going to stop.” Tommy’s face was beet red as he spoke. He shook his head, taking a deep breath before continuing. “After your little stunt with her in that room, after she left to lick her wounds, I heard her on the phone. She was going to use some virus Felicity had built and expose her to the world. She was never going to stop, Ollie. So I told her that if she needed to acquire someone to consider her whole mission a win, that she could have me.”

Oliver swallowed hard, his mind racing and his heart feeling both shriveled and swelling within his chest. “You shouldn’t have done that,” he said, his voice losing almost all of it’s venom.

“It was the only thing I could do,” Tommy answered, matching his tone. “Besides, it had been my idea to draw her out, to confront her. It seemed like it was what I…”

“She’s a piranha,” Oliver said, his voice finding some hardness again, but none of its malice. “You’re lucky she hasn’t gotten you killed yet.”

Tommy shrugged. “I’d like to think I can hold my own. Besides, Lyla’s pretty good at having my back.”

Lyla rolled her eyes. “As lovely as this bromance moment has been, I think I’ll call in and let the director know we made it out.”

Diggle disappeared with her, leaving Oliver alone with Tommy and Felicity.

“Not that you are really one to talk about secrets,” Tommy said after a moment, looking between them.

“Tell me,” Oliver said, his voice low and hard.

“Not that you are really one to talk about secrets,” Tommy said after a moment, looking between them.

“I don’t want to hear anything from either of you,” Felicity finally said, standing from the computer desk and moving toward them, arms folded over her chest. “You can be mad at me if you want, but the truth is, you’re both angry for keep secrets from each other that I told you not to keep.”

Oliver narrowed his eyes at her. “I can’t believe you didn’t say anything.”

“Tommy is my best friend!” she exclaimed. “Besides which, it wasn’t my secret to tell. You appreciated that aspect of my personality once.”
Oliver huffed a humorless laugh, scrubbing a hand down his face. “Is there anything else I should know?”

Felicity shook her head, but when she spoke she scrunched her nose. “There might be one other tiny little thing.” She paused, taking a breath before continuing. “It happened the same night, at the gala. And it’s actually what I was going to tell you earlier tonight, when we…” she gestured between herself and him with her hands, and then closed her eyes, shaking her head again as if to stop her from saying more or remembering the moment when they’d been pressed close under the mistletoe and she’d kept him from kissing her. “Anyway, the Markov device--”

“Guys, we have a major problem,” Lyla said, moving back into the room. “Six ARGUS agents were just abducted by the Dark Archer.” Her eyes landed on Tommy. “Lexi was one of them.”
Felicity’s first instinct was to reach for Tommy. She had never met Lexi, but the way Tommy talked about the girl, she knew Lexi didn’t deserve this. But as Felicity moved towards him he shrugged her off.

“That’s not possible,” Tommy shook his head. “She was in the van with Waller.”

Lyla kept a close eye on the room, her focus falling mostly on Oliver before she spoke. “Director Waller stepped away to see to the transfer of the device.”

“The one you guys stole,” Oliver added with a growl.

“I really don’t need a morality lesson from the former Bratva captain and current town vigilante,” she retorted, turning back to Tommy as she continued. “This isn’t your fault.”

“She’s right Tommy.” Felicity had folded her arms across her chest. She had somehow grown so cold in the last few minutes. “And whatever you need. I don’t know how I can help, but I will.”

He looked over his shoulder, and for a second she thought he was looking at her. But his gaze carried on behind her, to Oliver.

He cleared his throat, scrubbing a hand down his face. “You can’t help. ARGUS will have a tactical team ready the moment we track his movements, and it will be an agent only operation.”

“Actually,” Lyla cut in taking a deep breath. “Director Waller wants to put a hold on tactical.”

“Of course she does. She already has what she wants, who cares about anyone that got caught in the crossfire.”

“Oliver--”

“You know I’m right Felicity,” he continued, the frustration covering his face. “And so do they. Amanda Waller doesn’t do anything unless she benefits from it. She has the device. She won the match, who gives a damn about a few pawns right?”
Tommy moved like wind past her, pushing Oliver back into the med table. Trays and bandages hit the floor, and Felicity couldn’t help but jump back.

“I get we’re going through some issues right now,” Tommy spoke low, his voice resembling something darker she hadn’t heard before. “But don’t stand here and act like you’re better than any of them. There’s a 20 year old girl who’s missing because the dark version of you got pissed off.”

“Because your boss decided to steal a billion dollar tech project,” Oliver spat the words out like they were bile in this throat, even standing a few feat away Felicity took a step back. But Tommy stood his ground. “If ARGUS hadn’t been there tonight, none of this wouldn’t have happened. The device would have been out of play and no one would be up for collateral.”

“Out of play?” Tommy’s voice ticked up in amusement, turning back to face Felicity. “You did something to it.”

It wasn’t a question, but it felt highly accusatory. She hated the look he was giving her, like she had her nose somewhere it didn’t belong. The Markov device had been her burden, her project. And she needed to be the one who stopped it.

“You said it yourself, you didn’t trust Malcolm to have that kind of power under his belt,” she shrugged, but made a point to stand tall. “And I don’t care what kind of loyalty you have to ARGUS, I wouldn’t have trusted it to Waller either. The thing’s a dead weight now.”

“You should have told me.”

“I tried,” she countered. Without realizing it they had moved as they spoke. Tommy now stood, near Lyla, and somehow she and Digg had ended up next to Oliver. “You cut me out this week remember?”

“You didn’t try, you sided with Oliver.”

“There aren’t sides here,” she glared at him, then to Oliver for good measure. “Do the two of you honestly think either of you are in the right here? You lied, you both lied. We’ve all lied. To each other, to the people we care about. But the two of you are so damn focused on your own issues.” She couldn’t help but zone in on Oliver again. “I have spent the last two years holding in every single thing to protect you.”

“Felicity--”

But she just shook her head, she had already started and she needed him to let her get it all out. “I only took on the Markov project because Malcolm was going to out your secret in Russia. He knew we found you, and he was ready to tell the whole gala. But I knew that you didn’t want to come home, that you had to stay. So I agreed to work on the device. To protect you.”

She had forgotten Diggle and Lyla were there, and the realization suddenly made the Foundry feel too crowded. She pushed past Tommy and Lyla and pounded up the steel stairwell, stopping once she reached the middle on the club floor.

The chills were shuddering through her, and she wanted nothing more than to break down and cry. Or pass out. It had been a long day.

“Felicity?”

She wanted to tell him to go back downstairs and let her have just a moment to herself. But when she turned towards him, Oliver looked almost as wrecked as she felt. He didn’t take any steps to bridge
the space between them, but his eyes were trained on her anyway. If she swayed, she was sure he’d be there in a second to catch her.

“I shouldn’t have been angry at you,” he finally added, taking a seat on the neon lit stairs. “You’ve been… you’ve helped me more than I can ever thank you for, and you didn’t deserve that.”

“I wanted to tell you,” she took a shaking breath, and broke the barrier between them, taking a seat in the space next to him. “At least my part. I just didn’t know how.”

“I was so arrogant back then,” he turned to face her. “I thought that my choice was only my own. And that once you two left, you’d be able to move past it. But I should have known better. Especially where Waller was concerned.”

“Full disclosure time,” she pursed her lips, rubbing her hands down her jeans. “I didn’t just look for you, in those two years. I was in contact with Sofia, she would text me and let me know you were okay. And when she told me you left, I thought…”

“You thought I was coming back,” he finished with a nod. Then after a moment of silence he continued. “Does Tommy know?”

“No,” the usual wave of guilt flooded her. “I don’t know why I kept it from him. It’s like when it comes to you, I get lost in this fog. And I don’t know how to stop.” Then a little quieter. “I’m not sure I even want to.”

He eyed her intensely, and she could almost feel her skin warm where she had just felt like ice. She didn’t understand why it was like this with Oliver. Why every look and every word had the power to build her up and have her crash all over again. It terrified her how close to love it felt, but she wouldn’t dare say it out loud.

All she was sure of was the need growing in her to lean into him. There weren’t secrets between them anymore, there was no anger or resentment for the choices they made years ago. And as Felicity placed her hand against his chest, she felt the beat of his heart strumming out her favorite sound, the one that told her he survived it all. That he came home.

Oliver’s hand slid up her leg, curling around her waist and holding her tight. He looked at her once more, like he was waiting for her to pull back from him. But instead she smiled, her other hand wrapping around his neck as she drew them together. Then she kissed him. Her lips parting against his, letting everything she couldn’t form the words for pour out. She felt his other hand bracket her hip, tugging gentling until he had hold enough to bring her flush against him.

She could have stayed wrapped up in him for decades, their kisses shifting from sweet and soft to passionate and urgent. Taking time and making up for all they had lost. Felicity wasn’t sure she had ever felt so safe or wanted in her entire life, but she was sure that Oliver’s tongue was something entirely too intoxicating. She never wanted to stop kissing him.

“Sorry to interrupt.”

Tommy’s voice was like a splash of cold against her hot skin, and Felicity all but jumped out of Oliver’s lap. Luckily his arms were strong enough to keep her from hitting the floor.

She looked up at their friend, but Tommy’s head was tilted towards the ceiling, like he was afraid they had come up here and started stripping.

“Everyone’s fully clothed Tommy,” Oliver retorted.
Felicity couldn’t help but smack him, as her face turned a bright shade of red. But she figured it was best not to dwell on it. “What’s up?”

“Waller called Lyla back,” he said finally looking at them. But it was more like he was trying to gauge their reactions to his news.

Felicity wasn’t ready to take the bait, but apparently Oliver was. “What did she say?”

“She wants to meet to go over a plan,” he sighed. “And she wants both of you there as well.”

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"Well this is ominous," Tommy sighed as they piled back into the van, Felicity included this time.

"Why's that?" Lyla asked, settling into the passenger seat.

Diggle was behind the wheel again with Tommy, Felicity and Oliver taking up seats in the back of the unmarked van. Much of the tech gear they’d purchased hadn't been setup yet, so the desk was mostly empty, making the cavernous space feel even more hollow. Felicity and Oliver sat along the bench opposite the workspace while Tommy had claimed the bucket chair bolted in place seated at the desk.

"The last time the five of us were in a vehicle together, we were running from Waller. And now we're off to play catch up with her," Oliver supplied, as if reading Tommy’s mind.

"Because that," Tommy said, meeting Lyla's eye in the visor mirror she'd flipped down. Despite the mild panic they were still in having Lexi and several other agents taken hostage by the masked man from the MG building, Tommy felt like a weight had been lifted from his chest. Something about having all of the secrets between himself and Oliver and Felicity out in the open had released a hold on him that he hadn’t known was as debilitating as it had been.

“We’re not playing catch up,” Lyla insisted. “You’re providing tactical support for a rescue mission.”

Oliver huffed a sigh. “Whatever you have to tell yourself.”

“I know you two have bad blood,” Lyla said defiantly. “But--”

“There are no ‘buts’ when it comes to Amanda Waller. I will work on accepting the fact that Tommy works for her because I appreciate the sacrifice he made for me and Felicity,” Oliver said, his voice matter-of-fact. “But don’t fool yourself into thinking this is anything other than her flexing her muscles in Starling. Clearly she knows about my operation here. ARGUS has more than enough operatives to take out the Dark Archer. This little meet up? She’s sending me a message. Nothing more.”

Tommy’s eyes slid to where Oliver sat side by side with Felicity. It was interesting to see how far they’d come in such a short time, and with so many things against them. Then again, Tommy couldn’t say he was surprised. He’d known that Felicity had never really moved on after their trip to Russia. And one look at Oliver when she was around was enough to see that the feelings went both ways. Either way, he wanted to be happy for them, but his pride was still wounded from learning the truth about how they spent their nights together, from learning the things they were keeping from him.

“So what is the plan, exactly?” Felicity asked, clearing her throat.
Lyla’s eyes moved to her in the mirror. “Waller just asked that our team’s new friends in the field join us.”

“Any chance she knows that the device was tampered with?” Diggle asked, merging onto the bypass to get them to ARGUS headquarters.

“That would be my guess,” Lyla answered.

“Can’t say I’m disappointed,” Tommy said with a sigh. “Hopefully the Dark Archer knows what’s good for him and doesn’t hurt our agents until he gets it back.” But he knew his platitudes were worthless. His knee was bouncing against the metal floor and he couldn’t keep his hands from fidgeting. He was worried about Lexi; beyond worried. The Dark Archer was an unknown, but Lexi was too young and too innocent to be caught up in this world. Waller had already stripped most of the life from the poor girl, Tommy couldn’t stomach the idea of her losing more.

But he’d be lying if he said that he was upset that Oliver and his team were at the building that night. Without Felicity’s knowledge and Oliver and Diggle’s skill, he and Lyla could have been dead… or worse. And he didn’t trust anyone more when it came to the safe return of Lexi and the other agents. Waller included.

Diggle pulled up to the guard’s station at the perimeter of the ARGUS facility and Lyla leaned over, showing him her badge.

“These three are here on Waller’s orders,” Lyla said.

The guard nodded. “Got that call about ten minutes ago,” he said, and then pressed a button to open the fencing that surrounded the compound.

“Anyone else feel like the temperature just dropped about eight hundred degrees?” Felicity asked. Tommy looked at her with a curious expression, but she just shrugged. “Cold day in hell before Oliver willingly comes within a thousand feet of Amanda Waller.”

“I wouldn’t exactly call this willingness,” Oliver nearly growled.

Director Waller came into view at the front of the building and they all took a collective breath and held it. Tommy swallowed hard; the normally unreadable woman was pacing slowly along the bay of windows in the lobby, her arms folded over her chest. She still looked collected and calm, but Tommy could see the tension settled in her shoulders, her stance, her gait.

She stopped walking the moment the van parked outside and stared, waiting for them to enter. Tommy could only imagine the sight of them, the five people she’d spent countless hours and dollars tracking across the globe two years ago. He wondered, when she narrowed her eyes upon seeing Oliver, if she was recalling the conversation they’d had in a small back room of the American Embassy, where he’d threatened to rain down the full force of the Bratva on her. Or perhaps she was proud of the man he’d turned into, taking revenge and justice into his own hands; using the techniques she’d taught him to violent ends, stuck in the shadows she’d created for him.

“Director,” Tommy and Lyla said in unison as they entered the building.

But her eyes slid across both of them until they landed squarely on Oliver. Oliver, who didn’t stop in the line across the lobby with the other four of them. Oliver, who stalked up to Waller, came within a foot of the woman, and pulled a handgun from under his jacket and pressed it to her temple.

“Oliver!” Felicity gasped, moving toward him.
Tommy grabbed her arm, holding her back. More for her and Waller’s sake than anything else. He knew that Oliver needed to work through this in his own way, and if that was how he chose to do it, so be it.

“Mr. Queen,” Waller said, a hint of a smile in her voice. She stayed perfectly still, her eyes locked on him.

“How dare you,” Oliver spat.

“You felt it necessary to insert yourself into my acquisition,” she said coolly. “I thought it was only appropriate that you assist in recouping what I’ve lost.” A beat, and then. “And if you were going to shoot me, you would have done it two years ago.”

A long moment of silence passed between them, and then Oliver lowered the weapon, reholstering it behind his back and smoothing down his jacket.

“What you’ve lost?” Felicity asked, stepping forward until she was next to Oliver. “Six people’s lives are on the line. It’s not a misplaced set of keys.”

“Miss Smoak,” Waller said, her eyes briefly flitting to the blonde in question. “Your expertise may be otherwise required this evening.”

Felicity scoffed. “Oliver, Diggle and I are a package deal. I’m not giving you my expertise anywhere that they aren’t.”

Tommy stepped forward as well. “Director with all due respect, we have six operatives out there in the wind. Right now that should be top priority for everyone involved, Felicity included.” He knew that to get Lexi and the others back, he needed Oliver. And he also knew that Oliver wasn’t going to do anything without Felicity.

“I’d like a moment alone with my agents,” she said and then summoned Tommy and Lyla to a private corner.

Tommy followed, keeping stride with Lyla. “Why do I feel like we’re being led to the slaughter?” he asked her, keeping his voice low enough for only her to hear.

“Because you know the director,” she answered back.

“Agent Merlyn, Agent Michaels,” Waller said sternly. “I’d like to know why you two once again broke protocol in the field.”

“This is not a result of our actions,” Tommy said defensively. “This is the result of you stealing a billion dollar piece of tech without a second thought. And apparently you stole it out from under the nose of someone who wanted it a little more badly than you did.”

“The events of this evening are regrettable to say the least,” she answered, clasping her hands in front of her. “But unfortunately, my hands are tied in this matter.”

“What are you saying?” Lyla asked, narrowing her eyes.

“I’m saying that I am going back to my office to speak with the people who entrusted me to collect that device to see if I can salvage part of this mission. Meanwhile, since you two seem to have cozied up with the local self-proclaimed justice league, the five of you are going to get those agents back, or you’ll both be taking some time off.” Waller pursed her lips, like she wanted to say more, but didn’t. And then she smoothed her hair back into her tight bun and turned on her heel and
stalked off, her heels clacking against the cold marble floor as she went.

“So,” Oliver’s voice came from behind them.

Tommy turned to see the three of them approaching.

“Us coming here was…” Oliver trailed off.

Tommy rolled his eyes. “Exactly what you thought it was,” he said with a sigh.

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He had spent six months running from this place, running from her. And even with the time and distance, Oliver couldn’t help but feel like his lungs were constricting with every step. He felt trapped, like he had the moment he stepped out of that car in Hong Kong. Waller held all the cards, and he feared for what that meant. He knew how she operated, the type of people she would willingly write off for her own agenda. And the way Tommy had described his friend Lexi, told Oliver everything he needed to know. He knew who was expendable to the higher ups. And he’d do everything in his power to make sure his friends at least came out of this without blood on their hands.

“I don’t think we have a stockpile of bows and arrows to choose from,” Tommy quipped from other side of the table. The ARGUS amory was well stocked, every gun imaginable laid out before them. And Oliver didn’t want to admit how little control he felt with a firearm in his hand.

The one at his back was one thing. It was his own, or Diggle’s, but the guns and ammo in front of him were embossed with a logo. No matter how smart it would be to take a secondary weapon, Oliver wouldn’t touch one of these. He didn’t want to work with anything Waller had control over.

He drew his gaze up to Tommy, he tried to smile. But he couldn’t. He wasn’t ready to deal with the issues they still had between them. And he didn’t think he could reconcile the friend who traveled halfway around the world to find him, with the agent picking out his sidearm.

“You should go with a secondary that has less of a recoil,” Oliver interjected before he could stop himself. “Just incase things get too hectic to notice which is in your hand.”

“I don’t plan on using either,” Tommy said, but he reached for the 9mm to his left instead. “I’m hoping to get all of them out without this turning into a shootout.”

“Kind of a naive thing for an ARGUS agent to say,” he muttered, but Tommy shot him a glare.

“Is now really when you want to have the rest of this out?”

He didn’t. He wanted to help Tommy and Lyla with this rescue mission, then go home and crash into bed. He wanted at least five hours of sleep before he tried to talk to Tommy again. But he couldn’t just let this settle like it was nothing.

“I get why you did it,” he tried to keep his voice low so no one would look over. Lyla was standing close to Felicity as she picked over the tech she would be using. And Digg kept his eyes trained on the double doors, shifting every so often. If Oliver had to guess he’d say his security guard was living up to his title and keeping a watchful eye on anyone watching them.

“And the but is coming in three, two…”

“However.”
“So close.”

He sighed. “However, I’ve been home for months, Tommy. And you didn’t tell me you were working for her. If we hadn’t run into you tonight would you have ever told me?”

“Would you?” he countered with a shrug, then placed his hands against the table’s edge. “I didn’t tell you, because I knew you’d hate it. I knew after Hong Kong and Russia, you’d be pissed when you found out. So I didn’t tell you. At first because I wanted to find the right way, and then I just didn’t. I couldn’t.”

He wished they weren’t at an ARGUS headquarters. He wanted to talk to Tommy without the feeling of being watched from all sides, without the air thinning and Amanda Waller at his heels.

“I should have told you about the Hood when I started it,” he confessed, shaking his head. “I don’t even have an excuse. It’s not that I thought you wouldn’t keep it a secret, or that I thought you’d hate it. I just… didn’t.”

Tommy watched him carefully before he spoke. “A lot happened after we left you back there didn’t it?”

Alina’s face flashed through his mind, her eyes dimmed and cold as her blood seeped into the stone of the driveway. Then his father’s book, the edges of the first few pages still stained with the blood he couldn’t get to wipe off his hands. That night he watched as the people he was supposed to see as brother’s snuffed a light out of the world. Not because she was against them or because she had betrayed an oath. But because she had been in the wrong place at the wrong time. It was the night he packed up what little he owned and fled. He couldn’t keep giving to the Bratva, he couldn’t just let an innocent girl die in his arms one day and go back to business as usual the next like it meant nothing at all. He had run from Waller for the same reason. And he would be damned if he traded one fate for a worser one.

“Yeah,” Oliver said, clearing his throat. “It did. But that’s not an excuse.”

Tommy grinned, a small laugh escaping him. “Our lives are weird. Truly.” He pointed between them. “Hooded vigilante and secret government spy. Someone should market that into a movie.”

Oliver chuckled with him. “Speaking of secrets, I take it Laurel doesn’t know.”

“Could you imagine?” he blew out a long breath, before he grabbed for an extra clip. “She’d want to be so involved in all of this. You know how dangerous that would get.”

Oliver couldn’t help that his eyes followed Felicity as she rummaged through a box full of devices. The prickling sense that what had happened in the club had settled all back and forth debates in his mind. It didn’t matter what came next for him. He would do it with Felicity by his side. Because he couldn’t to bare it if she wasn’t.

“I do know,” he said finally looking back at Tommy. “But was it ARGUS that had the Triad breaking into her apartment or was it the fact that she’s her own person who makes her own choices?”

“Ollie--”

“I’m not saying tell her everything,” he interjected. “And I’m not trying to imply I have a greater understanding of relationships. But I know you care about her, maybe even more than that. And you and I can both attest over the last few hours, the truth is always better when it comes from the person who owes it to you.”
“Hey, you two almost ready?”

They both turned towards Felicity as she approached, and Oliver couldn’t keep his eyes off her. She looked gorgeous with her hair piled up in a bun atop her head, the few loose ringlets swaying against her cheeks.

“Yeah just gotta grab a mask from the other room,” Tommy said with a grin. He was obviously happy for a change in topics.

“Didn’t the Dark Archer already see your face?” she questioned.

“Yeah, that’s why it’s for Ollie,” he walked around the table, shaking his head. “I’ll leave you two alone for a minute.”

Oliver groaned rubbing his hand down his face. But Felicity just slid up next to him, her arm pressed into his side.

“How much of a hard time is Tommy bound to give us for that kiss?”

He smiled at her, despite how much he wanted to retreat back into the dark and away from Waller, he’d never leave as long as Felicity was here. And this is what they did right? Step in when someone thought they could use their power to take advantage of the situation.

“I think Tommy will cool down in a day or two,” he said nudging her lightly in the ribs. “Now Thea on the other hand…”

“Guess it’s too late to take it back huh?”

She was kidding of course, but Oliver could hear the caution in her voice. That part that would always think back to the last kiss they had in Russia before everything fell to pieces. He would do whatever he could to eclipse that part of her with something better.

“I wouldn’t want to even if it wasn’t,” he turned so he was facing her. “You’re my partner in this Felicity. And I’m glad you’re by my side.”

“Thanks,” she smiled, but looked down. Like she was too scared to be this happy with him. He really had a lot to make up for. “Things have just been really foggy between us, and I didn’t know if…”

Oliver placed a hand under her chin, and lifted it gently, and whispered. “If we weren’t standing in the middle of an ARGUS armory, with Amanda Waller like 30 feet away, I’d kiss you right now. Just to clarify some things.”

“Okay, well I will note that,” she said trying her best bite back the grin that had spread across her face.

Something must have done the trick though because her eyes focused on the window behind them. And before Oliver could turn to see what, or who had caught her attention she spoke again. “Do you find it strange that the same night we go to disable the Markov device, the Dark Archer shows up out of nowhere?”

“I find a lot of things about that guy strange.”

“And the fact that he was able to take out six trained, ARGUS agents like it was nothing?”
He had found that part worrisome. It made sense that he could take on the Dark Archer alone, but agents had guns and training. And things didn’t feel right. “What are you thinking?”

“That it wasn’t a coincidence Malcolm Merlyn took off the week his facility gets hit by three separate groups. Maybe he hired the Dark Archer to steal the device, or guard it. Maybe we messed up his plans.”

“You think Merlyn would do that?”

“I think something else is going on here,” she whispered as she let her hand fall against his. “Merlyn or not. We have to get those agents back. They don’t deserve to be treated like they’re expendable. But I think the only people we can trust to get the back safely are Digg, Lyla, and Tommy.”

He wasn’t sure about Malcolm, and he knew he’d never side with Amanda Waller again. But as Tommy walked back into the room, holding up a few tactical masks, he knew Felicity had hit close to something. He could only, truly count on the four people in the room with him. They would work together to get the agents back, and then they’d deal with whatever came next.
It felt strange to be as happy as she felt. Clearly she wasn’t as happy as she could be, since they were on their way to free six hostages from the grips of the Dark Archer at the behest of Amanda Waller. And maybe that scared her more than anything. Because Felicity was happy. And that made her wonder just how much more happy her heart could handle.

If she’d known that having Oliver read the letter would have led to all of this, she may have forced him to do it earlier.

“ Weird, isn’t it?” Tommy said, sliding into the van beside her, pulling her from her thoughts.

“ Hmm?” she hummed, not quite following his train of thought, probably because she’d been stuck on a tangent of her own rather than actually paying attention to what was going on.

“ Just the five of us back at it again; makes me hungry for beef stroganoff,” he said with a grin, handing her a comm before sticking one in his own ear. “ We had a few good days at Ivan’s house, planning that gala.”

Felicity nodded, thinking back to their first night at Ivan’s house. It had been where she and Oliver had first kissed in that little upstairs bedroom. She remembered the surge of butterflies in her stomach as she pressed herself onto her tip toes, with his arms wrapped around her, pulling her flush against his hard muscles.

“ We did,” she agreed finally, realizing that she hadn’t actually responded and was instead picturing Oliver, reliving all of their quiet moments together. She cleared her throat and averted her eyes, hoping the blush that had crept onto her cheeks faded quickly.
“Did you find anything yet?” Tommy asked, turning his attention back to the laptop that Felicity had set up in the gaping hole of where she’d planned a full out surveillance system to go. They’d ordered everything, she just hadn’t had time to get it installed yet. So for now, her laptop would have to do.

“I’ve run every trace on the phone call that Waller got that I can imagine. I’ve tried enhancing background noise, reversing the modulation, tracing the phone and cell signal. But so far nothing.” Felicity was frustrated; she hated coming up empty, especially when people’s lives hung in the balance.

“So all we have is the address he left to deliver the device to?”

“Unfortunately.”

“What are the odds that’s a trap?”

“Well since the plan was never to deliver said device,” Felicity said with a cringe. “I’d imagine the odds are pretty good for that being the case.”

Tommy blew out a long breath. “Alright, I just wanted to check in. Ollie and Diggle are just finishing up and then we’re rolling out.” He nudged her with his elbow. “Speaking of my other best friend…”

Felicity grinned before she could stop herself, and pushed him back. “Not now,” she scolded, but there was no malice in it.

“I saw that liplock,” Tommy smirked. “And you swore to me you were just helping him with computer stuff for the club.”

Felicity laughed, despite herself. “Well at the time, that’s all it was. Well, that and… the nighttime alter ego.”

“Kinky.”

She swatted him. “Not like that!” Felicity whispered harshly. “What you witnessed was the first since Russia.” And she felt her cheeks go pink again. “Now let me get back to work so I can find this whackjob and we can get your other IT gal-pal back.”

“Aw, that’s sweet Smoak,” Tommy said with a smile. “That almost sounded jealous.” He laughed. “You know you’re my number one IT gal-pal.”

“So is this your way of saying we’re all good?” Felicity asked, giving him a pointed look.

He shrugged. “You said it back at the club… lair? Whatever it is. Can’t be mad at you for keeping a secret for him when you kept the same one for me.”

“I have to admit I was kinda hoping you’d see it that way when everything finally came out into the open,” she said with a sigh, feeling like a weight had been lifted. “It just wasn’t fair for me to tell you.”

Tommy whistled. “Ollie with a bow and arrows, huh?” He grinned. “I feel like I remember you having a thing for Robin Hood. Isn’t there some print in your apartment…” He only broke off when she smacked him again.

“That’s not an archer thing, it’s a literary nerd thing,” Felicity said defensively. “Now shh,” she
hushed, pulling the headset back on and pushing them against her ears. Her eyes narrowed as she strained her ears. It was faint, even with the enhanced track, but she was angry at herself for not hearing it earlier. But growing up where she had, in the old commercial shipping area of Vegas, the sound of a freight train was unmistakable. She rewound the track, enhancing different directions, until it became clearer. And then she cross-referenced with train schedules around Starling and found the only place in the city that the Dark Archer could be hiding. She pulled the earphones off and spun around, surprised to find Oliver now sitting beside Tommy in the back of the van.

“I know that face,” Oliver said with a lopsided smile. “That’s your ‘I found him’ face.”

Felicity nodded. “That’s because that’s exactly what I did.”

He reached out and placed a hand on her shoulder. “Good work Felicity.”

“Thanks,” she said with a small smile.

John and Lyla returned to the van just as Tommy moved to the driver’s seat. He held out a set of keys to them. “Just had our van brought around,” he said, by way of explanation. “Figure we’ll need some way of bringing all those agents back.”

Felicity noticed a brief flash of a glare from Lyla shot in Tommy’s direction, but neither of them argued. And then, with a little maneuvering out of the compound, they were off. Just the five of them, facing off against a man who had somehow apprehended six trained ARGUS agents. Felicity just hoped they’d make it in time.

As soon as they were on the road, Felicity called Diggle’s cell, putting it on speakerphone so everyone could hear the conversation. “Okay so the place we’re headed is an abandoned factory near the river,” Felicity said, pulling up GPS to guide them there. “I’m working on getting satellite imaging now, thank you Amanda Waller.” She cringed. “Never thought I’d be saying that without sarcasm lacing my words.” And then she shook it off, her fingers returning to the keyboard and the task at hand. “There will be a lot of places that the hostages could be held, but I’ll narrow it down as much as I can before we get there.”

“That’s if he kept the hostages wherever he made the call from,” Diggle’s voice came through the phone.

“Annnd, it looks like he did,” Felicity answered, pulling up thermal imaging on the building in question. There were ten heat signatures, six of them in close proximity to each other and not moving. Hopefully that meant they were just detained and not…

“Tommy and Lyla,” Oliver said. “You two take the hostages. Diggle and I will deal with the Dark Archer.”

He was glancing over her shoulder, close enough for her to feel his breath against her cheek as he spoke. Her mind kept supplying her with all of the things she’d rather be doing right in that moment than freeing hostages. And yes, she knew how selfish that sounded. But this was Oliver Queen. Besides, it’s not like she could control what her mind thought about whenever he was close to her. That dam had been broken through the night he’d pulled her into his arms in his bedroom six weeks ago, and she wasn’t sure how she’d survived this long on cursory glances and her rambling, unintentional innuendo.

*Head in the game, Smoak,* she chastised herself. Because this was still six lives on the line, eleven if they counted themselves since they were not only going up against the best trained adversary Felicity had seen since joining this thing, but they were doing it without any bargaining chips. She could
fantasize about Oliver later. Her cheeks felt red at the thought.

“You okay?” Oliver asked.

Felicity cleared her throat, darting a glance at him before turning her attention back to her computer. “Yeah, just dehydrated I think,” she said, reaching for her bottle of water on the desk and taking a long swig to avoid any further probing questions.

Thankfully he let it drop, and she spent the rest of the ride to the abandoned factory listening to the four of them strategize about how they were going to get the ARGUS agents out. By the time they pulled over, they were half a block away from the building, Oliver not letting Tommy park any closer, since Felicity would for all intents and purposes be a sitting duck in the van. But they’d found an alley that provided good cover and Tommy backed into it so she could see anyone coming through the windshield, if it came to that.

She felt her stomach clench at the thought that this was what Oliver did on a nightly basis. Sure, she knew that in her head, but being out in the field, even if it was just in the van while she talked them through all the difficult stuff, it scared the crap out of her. Felicity was thankful, in that moment, that they were all much better trained than she was, that they had gotten all of their secrets out in the open and that they all trusted one another. They’d learned the hard way back in Russia that trusting each other sometimes meant the difference between life and death. Or at the very least, between freedom and extortion to working for some of the worst monsters the world had to offer.

The door slid open from the outside and Lyla and Diggle stood before them, fixing their earpieces in tandem.

“Check,” Lyla said.

Felicity heard the word echo through her own earpiece. “Read you loud and clear, Harbinger,” she said with a smile. “Hostages appear to be on the second floor near the north stairwell. The room has plenty of windows so keep a low profile unless you can have someone come in from above and take out any snipers they might have waiting, although I’m not currently reading any heat signatures on neighboring buildings.”

“Got it,” Lyla said.

Tommy moved back through the space, putting his own earpiece in. “Any movement that would lead you to believe they’ve got some alarm we’ve triggered?”

“Not so far,” Felicity said. “But we’re still half a block out. As soon as I see any movement, I’ll clue you in.”

“Alright,” Tommy answered with a nod. “I guess let’s do this.”

Felicity reached for Oliver, placing a hand on his arm. “Can you hold back a second?”

He nodded, a furrow to his brow. Tommy exited and shut the door behind him, leaving them alone. “What’s up?” he asked, worry lacing his voice.

“I just wanted to say...” she began, and then bit her lower lip. “Just, be careful I guess.” She shook her head, feeling a little foolish for even asking him to stay behind. She still needed to tell him about Sofia’s call earlier that evening, but this wasn’t the time or place for that. Oliver needed to be focused, he couldn’t have that dividing his thoughts- not when they were going up against someone like the Dark Archer.
“I’m always careful, Felicity,” Oliver assured her. He leaned forward, placing a gentle kiss on her forehead. “Besides, I know I’ll be fine going out there.”

“How can you be sure?” she asked, her brow furrowed this time.

Oliver smiled, giving her hands, which were wringing in her lap, a gentle squeeze. “Because I’ve got you looking out for me.”

“Oh,” she said, a little breathless. “Right.” Felicity cleared her throat. “Alright, don’t want to keep them waiting. I’ll see you on the other side.”

“On the other side,” he agreed and then grabbed hold of the door handle, meeting her eyes and winking.

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Tommy kept his pace steady next to Lyla, trying his best to listen and watch his surroundings. But everything seemed to be still around them. Not a movement out of the corner of an eye, not a rustle against the night breeze. Nothing. It made the hairs on his neck stand on end.

“How’s it looking Moneypenny?” he whispered, but winced at how loud it sounded against the nothing in return.

“I’m sorry are you talking to me?” Felicity replied through his comm. “Not that I’m opposed to a codename, but if and when it happens it will not be a secretary in the Bond universe. No matter how much I love her.”

“I could shout your real name through this deserted area, and see if that helps any,” he countered, earning him an eye roll from Lyla. “Or would you like to excuse my lack of prep time to give you a codename?”

“Whatsoever you say Boy Scout .”

“Boy Scout?” Oliver’s questioned, his voice clear of the modular but still low and gruff. “That’s the best thing I’ve heard all night.”

“Because the Hood is so much better.”

“Focus, kids,” Lyla turned giving him a look. And then she was fully mission focused. “Is the room still only registering six heat signatures?”

“A seventh just entered, but he, or she, is staying close to the east wall,” Felicity said. “This seems off right? Why would you only have one guard stationed on six highly trained operatives? That seems like an amateur move, but clearly he’s not.”

“Well let’s worry on making sure these guys are safe, and then we can worry about the logistics.”

But Felicity wasn’t wrong. Something didn’t feel right about what they were walking into. Ice walked up Tommy’s spine, and he couldn’t shake the feeling. But Lyla was moving on ahead, and he needed to have her back.

Tommy let his hand slip around his sidearm, gripping until his knuckles ached. He didn’t want to admit it, but he was petrified of what they’d find up there. Maybe there was only a new person in the room to guard the bodies.
He thought of Lexi, too young to lose her life to this world. He thought back six weeks, to the cop who bled out in front of him. He wasn't ready to be here. He could barely keep his breathing in check. But he had been so angry at Lyla for turning him in, then angry at Felicity for keeping secrets. When Waller called he jumped at the chance to prove to himself that he could get past his issues. He wanted this, but he shouldn’t be here. Not yet, not until he squared the things in his own life. He was a liability in the field. And he could get someone killed thinking like this.

“Boy Scout?” Lyla eyed him with a calculated look. He knew that look. It was the same one Lyla gave him that night at the auction. The one that told him, she knew he was unravelling.

“I’m good,” he said. And he would be. He had to get Lexi and the other’s out of there. Whatever came next could wait. “I swear.”

She nodded, and they took up the back stairwell as silently as they could move.

“You guys are right outside the door,” Felicity’s voice sounded relieved as she spoke. “Can you handle this for now? I have to switch to Oliver and Digg. They need my help getting around a laser grid.”

Lasers . Lyla mouthed with an amused expression. They had to give this Dark Archer credit. He did have style.

“We got it. Take care of the Hood and Freelancer,” he replied, then met his partner’s eye. “Wanna kick the door in?”

“I thought you’d never ask,” she grinned as she backed away from the wall. Lyla lowered her stance, than lifted her right leg, bashing into the door with such force it shattered off it’s hinges.

Tommy held his gun in front of him, following close behind Lyla as they walked rushed into the room. The guard was roused from his position by the bang of the door, and Tommy barely saw the guy coming towards them, before Lyla flipped him over her back. He dropped to the floor, and Tommy crushed his boot, hard against them man’s gun hand.

“I wouldn’t advise that,” he said, bending to pick up the discarded weapon.

The guy winced against the pain, but made no more to reach for the gun. Good . Tommy thought. He really didn’t want to have to square off against the guy.

“You’re gonna regret this. You actually think we didn’t know you were here,” the guard hissed, and apparently pride came before the fall, but sometimes it stuck around to be a bit of a dick.

“I really hate to do this,” but he took the butt of his handgun and smashed it into the man’s face with a wet crunch. His head lobbed to the side and Tommy was sure he was out cold.

“Takes care of that,” Tommy blew out a whistle, wiping his gun against the guard’s shirt. “Low level rent-a-thug. This archer probably needed muscle and not brains, given that he decided to mouth off-”

“Tommy,” Lyla cut him off, and when he slid his gaze up he saw why.

Right in the center of the room sat their agents, five of them taped together in a circle. In the lap of the person facing them sat a very large large quantity of C4. He shook his head, trying to unsee what was before him. But it was no use. Lexi sat holding the bomb.

She met both their eyes, and relief flooded her face. She was trying to say something behind theduct
tape across her mouth. Tommy took note of the purple bruise that bloomed across her cheek. Damn it.

“This is why they weren’t heavily guarded,” he pulled Lyla over to him, keeping his voice low. “None of them would be stupid enough to try and get out of this.”

“Well we have to get them out,” she countered, looking down to check her watch. “And we have to do it before dark and broody sends more goons to check up on them.”

“I’m open to suggestions.” Lyla threw him a glare, but he just held up his hands in surrender. “You’re the bomb expert.”

“Hold this,” she thrust her gun at him. Great now he was holding way too many firearms for his liking. But he didn’t dare argue with her. Lyla crouched down in front of Lexi, giving her a reassuring smile, as she leaned in to examine things. “Good news is Lexi here doesn’t have the blasting cap or the trigger. So as long as we don’t shoot at her lap, this thing will be just like a paper weight.”

By the look on Lexi’s face she really didn’t seem comforted by that at all.

“Tommy, walk the circle and see if you can see which one of our friend’s has the blasting cap or the trigger,” Lyla said glancing up at him. “We have to cut the power source before we get them out.”

Tommy set her gun down by her feet, and then did as he was told. He walked as slow as he could manage dragging his eyes over each face, everyone else seemed to be out. He feared they all might have head injuries or maybe were drugged. Whatever happened, he needed to make sure he got them out safely. All of them.

He could see embedded in the duct tape around them was a thin strip of blue wire. Tommy assumed this had to be connected with the blasting cap. Now for the trigger, but as he rounded his fourth person his senses began to freeze in protest.

One… two… three… four… Lexi made five… Who was missing?

“Lyla?” He swung his gaze back over the circle.

“Did you find the trigger?”

“Who was taken? Did we get a complete list of the missing agents?”

“Tommy could you please fo--”

“Answer the question,” he insisted. “Who was on that list?”

“Lexi,” she pointed before her. “Rodriguez, Mcguire, Tomes, Snyder, and Jackson.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, I’m sure. Why?”

“Because,” Tommy said, pulling his back from it’s holster, and pointing it at the closet behind him. “Jackson isn’t tied up here.”

Lyla looked up at the same time the closet door burst open, and they both drew their guns and aimed for their teammate. Former teammate.
“Hey guys,” Jackson said, with a smarmy grin, as he held up an old cell phone in one hand and a gun in the other. “Better be careful, wouldn’t want to blow this operation.”

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Oliver moved quickly through the maze, Felicity’s guiding voice in his ear telling him when and where to step. She was only able to cut off certain sections of the grid at a time; whoever had devised the thing clearly knew what they were doing. But lasers, really?

On the plus side- that meant they’d most likely found the Dark Archer’s base of operations. On the down side- they’d yet to come into contact with the man in question.

Diggle moved deftly behind him, both of them keeping perfect step to Felicity’s instructions. They were nearing the end of the corridor and Oliver felt a shift in the air, almost like he could sense what was coming next.

An arrow flew through the hall, sinking itself in the wall not three inches from Oliver's face. He turned quickly, his bow already raised and aimed, an arrow of his own ready to fly- but behind them, there was nothing more than the crisscrossing red lines of the maze.

“Talk to me, Foundry,” Oliver said, keeping his voice low and even.

“Sorry,” she said, and he could hear the wince in her tone. “That was my bad. Turned the previous sector on a second too soon.”

“Almost took off someone’s nose,” Diggle whispered behind him. “What are the chances this guy is actually down here?”

“Well someone is,” she answered through the comms. “And something tells me this guy is enjoying making you guys work to find him.”

“Clearly he knew we wouldn’t be bringing him the device,” Oliver huffed. There were so many things about that night that he wished had been done different. Too many things had transpired in the last several hours that he was sure he’d need a week just to decompress and sort through it all. From the truth about Tommy to finally sharing a kiss with Felicity to having his gun pressed to Amanda Waller’s temple to the rescue mission slash Dark Archer take down they were currently in the middle of. But there wasn’t a week to decompress and sort. There was only the task ahead of him.

Oliver continued forward, stepping when Felicity said to step, holding when she said to wait. They continued nearer to the door at the end of the hallway. He paused a moment, his hand on the knob, and took a deep breath.

“I know this isn’t exactly the best timing,” Felicity said through the comm. “But just be aware there’s enough C4 upstairs to level half the block.”

“Good to know,” Diggle whispered beside him.

“This guy likes the game too much to level the building with us all inside,” Oliver answered. He swallowed hard and then twisted the knob and pushed the door open.

Inside was a large, empty room. The high ceilings made everything echo, including water dripping somewhere off to the left. But it was too dark to make out anything beyond that.

“Heat signature is dead ahead about five yards,” Felicity said, as if anticipating the question that was on the tip of his tongue. “No wait. It’s ten feet to the right.”
“Which is it?” Oliver growled.

“Both,” she said, her voice growing exasperated. “Or neither. He’s spoofing the signal.”

Oliver took a cautious step into the space, and then let his instincts guide him. He moved to the right, keeping his back against the wall.

“I’d ask how you found me,” a voice called through the darkness, garbled and almost digitized. “But Agent Jackson was more than forthcoming with information. For the right price.”

“Foundry tell Tommy they’ve got a rogue among the hostages,” Oliver said immediately. That was the one thing about staying silent that Oliver had always found interesting. It was amazing what secrets people would tell on their own.

“On it,” she said back, and then the comm went quiet.

Oliver motioned for Diggle to break off and move left, perhaps they could find the man in the darkness and flank him. They moved in silence, in sync, like they’d been doing it much longer than the few weeks that they’d been in the field together. He still couldn’t see anything, but Oliver could sense that the Dark Archer was close.

“Hostages,” the voice rang out through the empty space, echoing into the cavernous room. A low chuckle followed the echo of the word. “I prefer to think of them as bargaining chips.”

“Not surprising,” Oliver said under his breath.

“But I suppose we should consider them collateral damage,” the voice was quiet now, almost a whisper, and too close to Oliver for his liking. “Since you didn’t bring me the device.”

A sharp blow to the back of his legs sent Oliver to his knees. He reacted immediately, swinging his bow around behind him, feeling it connect with something. A grunt escaped the other man. And then a cord wrapped around Oliver’s throat. His hand flew there, attempting to keep it from tightening around his neck. But his assailant was too fast and too strong. Oliver kicked his leg around, getting the other man’s feet out from under him. The pressure released on his throat and Oliver gulped in a breath.

Diggle was there now, landing punches into the Dark Archer as the man struggled to regain his footing.

Oliver found his feet, and then found the thin wire the man had tried to strangle him with. Rage filled his veins and for a moment, Oliver almost gave him a taste of his own medicine. He flexed his hand, dropping the wire to the ground as he threw a punch squarely into the masked face of the Dark Archer.

Leaning against a pillar, Oliver steadied himself, forcing deep breaths into his lungs. And then a gunshot rang through the air.

“Boy Scout! Harbinger! Talk to me!” Oliver yelled, and then coughed, his throat raw from being nearly crushed. He took a step toward the stairs, Diggle at his side.

“I have a feeling,” the Dark Archer said, his voice laced through with pain. “That they’re catching up with their former teammate.”

Oliver spun on his heel, ready to take the man out for good, but the Dark Archer had once again slipped into the shadows. “Foundry, where’d this coward go?”
“Coward, now is it?” the archer laughed from the darkness. “Seems I’m not the only one who is hiding their identity from the world.” An arrow whizzed through the darkness, catching Oliver’s bow and sending it flying across the room, landing with a thunk into the door they’d entered.

“Boy Scout and Harbinger are both okay,” Felicity’s voice came in his ear again. Oliver felt himself relax, just slightly, as he moved toward where the voice and arrow had come from. “And I just knocked out the relay system he’s been using for all his light effects.”

A second later the emergency lights in the huge room kicked on, giving Oliver enough light to see the second floor catwalk around the outside, the two staircases on either corner that led to the second floor, and the Dark Archer, blood dripping from beneath his mask, standing directly in front of him, twenty feet out.

“Not so scary with the lights on,” Diggle said with a shrug, coming to stand beside Oliver.

Oliver narrowed his eyes. “Yeah but without my bow, we’ll have to do this the old fashioned way.”

“When you’re ready,” the Dark Archer said ominously, taunting him.

Oliver charged forward, getting a running start before sliding onto his side, catching the man off guard with an attack to his knees. Diggle raced beside him, coming at the man with fists raised, poised and ready to strike. In movements quicker than Oliver could even anticipate, the other archer dodged and weaved through their attacks, and although Oliver couldn’t see his face, he almost felt like the man was enjoying it. Like he was just gauging their talent, studying them like one might a new species found in the forest to see how they behaved.

“I think I have something that may help,” Felicity said.

“Do it,” Oliver answered, before taking another swing and connecting with nothing.

“In three… two… one…”

The siren that sounded was deafening, with strobe lights and sprinklers, making every movement seem like a slow motion dance. The Dark Archer stumbled backwards just as Oliver grabbed an arrow from his quiver and jabbed it into the man’s knee before one final suckerpunch that knocked him out, sending him staggering backward until he landed on his back.

“Are the hostages out?” Oliver growled, feeling the adrenaline thrum through his veins, spurring him forward.

“About that,” Felicity said quietly. “Harbinger and Boy Scout may need a little assistance.”

Oliver huffed out a sigh, making his way toward the door, where his bow was still hanging off one of the Dark Archer’s arrows. He yanked his bow down, tucking it under his arm and then grabbed the handle of the door. The instant his hand touched the handle, there was a crackling, and then Oliver flew backward, electricity coursing through his entire body, every muscle buzzing and constricting. He landed, an unmoving heap on the floor, with a little splash and a lot of pain.

It took him a long moment to recover, and by the time he felt the sensation in his limbs return to normal, Diggle was standing over him, concern knotted in his brow, eyes working over him for injuries.

“Dammit,” Oliver swore, trying to push up from his back.

“Foundry,” Diggle said, hands going to Oliver’s shoulders to help him up. “The door we came in
isn’t an option anymore. Is there another exit on the second floor?”

But Felicity didn’t reply.

“Foundry,” Oliver tried, getting to his feet quicker than he should have, if the wave rolling through his head was any indication. “Come in.” His focus became singular in that instant. It wasn’t just that his comm had been damaged because of being electrocuted, because Diggle had addressed her first. His stomach bottomed out and bile rose in his throat. “Foundry,” he ground out again. And then. “Felicity!”
Chapter 28

Chapter by foreverfelicityqueen (stydiasredstring)

Chapter Summary

Hello ducks,
So the holiday's really shove your brain from your head. And this should have been posted hours ago. But Cassie and I have both been running on empty all weekend. We're sorry, but the wait is worth it, trust me. I won't make you wait any longer.

love,
Kayla

Felicity couldn’t imagine how she ended up here. Honestly in a million years she would never had predicted she’d be sitting in a van, running missions for vigilantes and government ops. But in a crazy way, it felt right.

Not the Dark Archer kidnapping people, or C4 being used as a leveraging tool for a damn device. But her, Oliver, and Tommy, working in tandem to stop a threat? It had to be what Russia had been leading up to. The three of them were meant to do this. And she felt how good it could be, how good they could be, together. And then the shot rang out. And everything after happened so fast.

Her hands shook, and her breath wouldn’t come in anything but short, ragged spurts. But she could get past that. She could get past anything affecting her, as long as she could get through to Oliver or Tommy.

“Anyone?” she tried again. But the comms were dead. Nothing but static. And that did nothing but sent another wave of anxiety through her. “Boy Scout? Freelancer? Harbinger?” she dropped her voice to a whisper. “Oliver?”

Felicity had two choices. She could sit in the van and wait for someone to come back, wait and worry about her friends. Or she could get up and do something about what was happening.

As much as option two terrified her, she knew it had to be the right choice.

Felicity popped the door open, and glanced around. It echoed back the sound in protest, as if to question why she would disturb the cool, dark night with the sound of metal on metal. If she didn’t know better, she’d almost think this place peaceful. But then again she knew there was a bomb two floors above ground level, and a masked lunatic with a bow running around.

Long gone were the days where a walk out at night by herself seemed like the right idea. She hadn’t done something like this since that night Oliver sent her packing from the club. She hadn’t understood the dangers then, she hadn’t wanted to face them. But now? Now she knew what lurked in the darkness, and she didn’t want to be caught off guard by it.

She reached below the passenger seat, pulling the taser out. “It’s only for emergencies Smoak. You
won’t have to use it,” she muttered to herself, dropping it into her coat pocket. “Gotta think this through.”

The urge to find Oliver almost overpowered her movements, sending her off towards his last location. But she had to be smart about things. If the Dark Archer was roaming around, he could easily take her. And then what? They have to rescue her on top of a room full of ARGUS agents? No she couldn’t let that happen. But there was something she could do.

She had looked over the blueprints of the building. She knew what floor the Tommy and Lyla were on, and she knew that there was exactly two other ways into that room. She felt for her other pocket, and smiled a little. Maybe she couldn’t do much to stop these threats after them. But she wasn’t powerless.

The roof access was out of the question. Even if she had the upper body strength to make it up the side of the building, which she really did not, she’d never make it down in time to help with whatever was happening.

Tommy and Lyla hadn’t said a word on comms long before they cut out completely. She hadn’t heard from them since the shot. And she was cursing herself for not asking what had happened. Because she wanted Oliver and Diggle focused. And she knew neither of them could be if something happened to Tommy or Lyla. But that meant she didn’t know. She didn’t if one of them had been shot, she didn’t know if it had been the rogue agent. She hoped it was, and that sent a rush of sickness through her. Could she really be the type of person who would wish someone harm to keep her friends safe? Not that he was innocent. He had betrayed his team, betrayed Tommy and Lyla. She didn’t give a damn about Amanda Waller or ARGUS, but loyalty was a thing you were supposed to have on a team. And if came down to this guy or someone she cared about, she wouldn’t lose sleep over it.

She decided to take the back staircase. The entrance was exposed on the west side, the only reason Lyla and Tommy had taken the front, but once inside it was a straight shot up to the second floor. The wrought iron, banister twisted along against the layout. So odd and out of place, the spiral staircase looked tore from a cliched movie and thrown into their mosaic evening of missions.

She tried to push her thoughts down and lock them there until later, but she couldn’t. She kept picturing Tommy and Lyla, Oliver and Diggle, just lying there, blood surrounding them, their bodies twisting at horrible angles. There were almost enough to push a scream from her lips. But she bit down, breathing hard until the images faded from vibrant splashes of red, to a cracked sepia.

“They’re fine ,” she hissed, taking to the stairs and quick and as quiet as she could.

Felicity had one advantage. Just one. And the second someone heard her, or worse spotted her, she would lose the only leverage she had over the opposition.

The stairs connected to the main room of the floor, opening up to a landing at the back of an office connected to where the hostages had been last on the heat signature map. And Felicity knew Tommy and Lyla were still up there. She also knew, given what Lyla had asked him to look for, they were looking at a C4 bomb, most likely connected to a wireless trigger on a cell phone.

She walked softly across the landing as the voices in the room ahead of her grew louder. She could hear the mix of pain, behind Tommy’s growl. He sounded hurt. Oh, god.

No, she was focused now. The Dark Archer had a bomb strapped to people. A wireless trigger, connected to a cell, but done quickly would have to remain in range of the bomb for it to be of any use. If this thing was for real the trigger was in that room, and at any second Jackson could have the
whole place blow.

He probably had an exit strategy. Standing closest to the far side window would be smart. The landing could hurt, but he’d walk away—limp away, with no more than a few scratches. And depending on how the Dark Archer got him to flip, the man could be crazy enough to do it.

Maybe he hated Waller, maybe he hated ARGUS, but she didn’t think so. Tommy hated Waller, and he was still a good man. He’d never betray a team no matter his personal feelings. No, this guy wasn’t a good man. He was vile, and she’d be willing to bet anything that all it took was a few grand and the promise of something vindictive, to get him to turn.

Felicity reached into her pocket, her hand curling around the taser, and took a step forward. The floorboard creaked. And not a quiet, gentle sound. No this was a groan of protest against intruders on it’s worn surface. It rippled a silence through the next room. And Felicity gulped back the curse.

The door flung open, and before she could protest someone had their arm wrapped around her from behind. The cool plastic of a dated cell phone pressed against her cheek.

“This a friend of yours?” he sniped over her shoulder. “Because I’m pretty sure she’s not mine.”

“Let her go.”

She found Tommy quickly in the room. His stance was weak, but his eyes remained hard, as he brought his gun back up.

His shoulder was bleeding, soaking into the fabric of his dress shirt. And she wanted to laugh at him for wearing a damn dress shirt on a covert operation. Her stupid, stupid friend.

“Now Agent Merlyn, we’ve been through this once already,” Jackson said with a grin. “I have the trigger here, so if you keep waving that gun around, no one here is gonna see tomorrow.”

“Why don’t you stop talking in cliches Jackson and tell us what you want?” Lyla looked the same as she had when they left the van, cool and calm in the face of danger. Felicity had never seen the pair of them like this, right in the middle of what they did every day. But her partner was bleeding onto the floor, and Felicity had to wonder if Lyla was just this calculated or if she was hiding the shake in her hands as well.

“See my boss wanted his machine back.”

“Not exactly his property,” Felicity gritted, trying to judge if she could kick the man in his shin. Though she wouldn’t dare before the trigger was out of play.

“See that’s the thing,” Jackson replied low in her ear, and it really made her shudder. “Tall, dark and arrow out there was only hired to keep the thing safe. And you guys kinda messed that up.”

She heard what he said, but everything seemed to process slower than normal. Malcolm hired the Dark Archer? Why the hell would he do that? How could he? She was starting to think there wasn’t a line the elder Merlyn wouldn’t cross to protect his assets.

“Too late to return it,” Lyla said in an even tone. “Even if Waller would part with it, the thing is dead weight now. Got corrupted in transport.” Then she distinctly flicked her gaze at Felicity for a second, before she focused back on Jackson.

“You’re lying.”
“She’s not,” Tommy shook his head. “It’s useless now. So why don’t you stop playing the villain and let these people go.”

Felicity couldn’t be happier they were distracting him, if they could just keep him talking long enough she could slip her hand into her pocket, just so and…

“You know Merlyn I never liked you.”

“Trust me the feeling is mutual,” Tommy was trying not to look at her, but she could see him start to fail. And she needed him to stop. She needed to be nothing but weight in this guy’s arms. She just needed a few more seconds to flip the switch on her device.

“Don’t you want to know why?”

She almost laughed as Tommy shook his head. “Not really. I’m not into the monologue bullshit.”

Felicity slipped her other hand into her pocket, her fingers curling around the handle of the taser. If she could just ease it out of place.

“What the hell?” Jackson grabbed her wrist, wrenching it and the stun gun from her pocket. He pressed so hard she dropped it, yowling in pain. “Bitch thought you’d get the jump on me.”

He shoved her backwards and she fell to the floor right in front of Lyla. The woman already had her gun back up, aiming at Jackson’s hand.

“Shoot me and we all die,” he hissed.

“We’ll see about that,” Lyla replied.

But it wasn’t Lyla’s gun that fired next. No it was Tommy who shot the cell right out of Jackson’s hand, and Lyla who maneuvered around her to take the man down. She had him bound and unconscious before Felicity could even stand.

“How?” she couldn’t finish her thought. Everything had happened so fast.

“Did we know?” Lyla questioned with a grin. “Come on, we both know you well enough to trust you wouldn’t have come up here without a cell phone jammer in your pocket. Smart more grabbing the taser next.”

“I was going to take him down,” Felicity said rubbing at her wrist. “Didn’t exactly go as I planned.”

“You did good Felicity,” Lyla whispered with a wink. “Really good.”

Tommy was finishing up untieing the other agents. Only a few were conscious, and she watched from the fringe as the young girl near the front pushed herself into a hug with Tommy.

“You’re okay,” he said over and over again, meeting her eyes across the room. “Lexi, you did great.”

“I am so not cut out for field work,” she reiterated as she finally stepped back. “Desk and lab from now on only.”

“We’ll see about making that happen,” Tommy smiled. “Help Lyla get Rodriguez and Tomes awake.”

Lexi nodded, and Tommy was free to make his way over to her. She wanted nothing more than to
fall against him too. But she couldn’t do that here.

“‘You realize this was really stupid,’” he said when he finally was in front of her. “‘Like crazy than rogue missions in foreign countries?’”

“‘Says the guy who spearheaded all of those.’”

“True,” Tommy sighed. “‘Where’s Freelancer and our nightly hero?’”

Frak. In all the anxiety over one the bomb she had pushed things too far from her mind. “‘Trapped in the building with no means of communication.’”

Tommy laughed, but when she didn’t join him he met her eyes. “Are you serious?”

“We need to get them out,” she gave a nod towards his shoulder. “Are you okay with that?”

“I’m still standing,” he managed a smile. But she didn’t find her friend’s being shot very funny. “I promise I’m okay.”

“Good,” Felicity said, pulling on his sleeve and dragging him towards the doorway. “Let’s go have a second rescue mission.”

“Great showing up with you in the field. Oliver’s gonna love that.”

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He still wasn’t convinced it was a good idea; in fact he was sure he would get an earful from Oliver showing up with Felicity by his side. But since Lyla was working on getting the ARGUS agents out of the building and he was kinda, sorta slowly bleeding out from a gunshot wound, Tommy knew he had to take his help where he could get it. Besides, they weren’t strangers to fieldwork together. Granted that had been two years ago, but still.

“You really should have let Lyla handle this so you could get some medical attention,” Felicity said as they pushed forward, toward where she said the catwalk was on the second floor of the room where Oliver and Diggle were stuck inside.

“I’ll manage,” he said, even though it was through gritted teeth. The adrenaline was starting to wear off and he was acutely aware with every step they took of the fiery, burning sensation radiating through his shoulder.

“You’re a crap liar, Merlyn,” she whispered back, pulling him to a stop and tucking them both into a small alcove. “If I remember the blueprints correctly, that’s where they are.” Felicity pointed to a small door that said Employees Only.

Tommy blew out a long breath. “So the doors downstairs were a no-go?”

Felicity shook her head. “‘Something happened to blow our communication. But there was a huge surge of electricity. I’m not sure if a transformer blew or something else happened. I just figured it was safer to go in from above. But I wasn’t really feeling the whole repelling-into-empty-air-through-a-skylight-Mission-Impossible thing.”’

Tommy looked at her curiously. “Have you been talking to Lyla?”

“What? No.”

He smiled briefly, recalling the mission to Merlyn Global when he’d done exactly that. “So last you
knew the two of them were stuck in there with the Dark Archer? A guy that took on four trained agents and came out victorious. And you want to go in... just me and you?”

Felicity cleared her throat. “Well when you put it that way...” She took a deep breath, as if to settle her nerves, and then pressed forward.

Once they’d made it to the door, she pulled her taser back out of her pocket that she’d retrieved from the floor after Jackson had forced it out of her hand. Tommy had to admit he was proud of her; he always was when it came to Felicity. She could be staring down evil incarnate and she wouldn’t bat an eye. Oh he was sure she was terrified on the inside, but Felicity Smoak always managed to put on a brave face for the world.

Following her lead, Tommy steadied his gun and reached for the doorknob.

“Wait!” She whispered harshly, grabbing his shirt sleeve. She listened for a moment, moving her ear closer to the door. “I think I know what happened to them.” She moved to the side of the door, pointing to a small wire. “It’s live,” she said shaking her head. “If we can find the power source I can deactivate it. If it’s the same thing as downstairs, one of them probably touched it, electrocuting themselves and frying the comm relay.”

Tommy didn’t follow most of what she’d just said, but he got enough to know that one or both of them could be hurt, and that the Dark Archer certainly knew what he was doing in luring them to that place. He watched as she moved quickly, back down the hall, following the wire along the corner of the wall and ceiling until finally she stopped. He made his way to her side, but what they found wasn’t a battery or electric charge. No, it was something far more sinister than that.

“More C4,” Tommy said with a sigh.

“It’s worse,” Felicity breathed, taking a small step backward. “The live wire is wrapped around a gas pipe. The electric charge from the door handle being touched starts a chain reaction that makes the entire building blow.”

“Because explosives themselves are so passe,” Tommy said, rolling his eyes. “Isn’t there enough explosive there to do that anyway?”

“Maybe, but that would be localized. It can be weakened by any number of things. But linking in the gas lines,” she paused. “Anything the gas lines are connected to. Who knows how many city blocks out, would be leveled.”

“This guy is some piece of work,” Tommy answered. “So what do we do?”

“I don’t know,” Felicity answered quickly, her voice frustrated, worried, worked up. “I’m not a bomb expert.”

And for the first time, Tommy noticed how much her hands were shaking, the quiver in her voice. She was beyond rattled, she was terrified. And it was beyond masking now. Tommy reached out, grasping her hand in his, and hissed at the pain that shot through his arm at the exertion.

“Felicity, listen to me. I get that you’re scared. It’s normal and it’s natural. But Oliver and Diggle need you. Hell, you and I need you at this point, considering how close we’re standing to this thing.” He met her eyes and gave her hand a quick squeeze. “You might not know bombs, but you know computers. And right now, that has to be good enough.”

She gasped in a shaky breath and nodded her head, looking between the door they’d just attempted to walk through and the bomb they were standing in front of.
For a moment, there was the sound of movement and Tommy moved toward the door as Felicity looked over the device. He could hear muffled voices on the other side, and although it was low, there was no denying that the voices belonged to Oliver and Diggle.

“Don’t touch the door!” Tommy shouted. “Or we all go boom!” He pressed his hand to his shoulder, and when he moved it away, it was slick with blood. Damn Jackson.

“What are you talking about?” Oliver’s voice came, gruff and strained.

“Looks like the Dark Archer wanted to give you guys only one way out. And level countless blocks in the process.” There was no use in lying to them. It would only put them in more danger. “The knob is connected to a bomb attached to the gas lines,” he explained further.

“Shit.”

Tommy could barely make out the word through the door. “Don’t worry, I’ve got my best girl on it.” He let the words slip out before he could stop himself, and then he cursed himself for it.

“Felicity is in here?!” Oliver growled. “How could you…”

“She came in when the comms went dead,” Tommy explained, glancing back to see her glaring at him. “She got Lyla and I out of a similar explosive situation… so she’s the only person I trust with this one.” His words were more to encourage the blonde to get them the hell out of the whole damn place, but he was sure Oliver could use them in that moment too.

“She shouldn’t be in here,” Oliver said, his voice raised.

“It’s my life, it’s my choice,” her voice came down the hall, a little quiet but still resolute.

“You can take that up with her when she gets us out,” Tommy replied through the door. “Is the Dark Archer still in there with you?”

There was a long pause. “No,” Oliver said finally. “He got out somewhere in the chaos when I was electrocuted downstairs.”

“You were what?” Tommy asked. “Geez buddy. And you’re still standing?”

“Takes more than that to keep me down.” But his friend sounded weary, like he was ready to pass out at any moment. Tommy hated to admit it, but he was beginning to feel that way too.

“Tommy, I need you!” Felicity called, and he moved quickly away from the door, back to where she was working on the mess of wires and tiny circuits. His shoulder pulsed with every step he took, but the pain that had been so persistent before, was a little more numb now.

“Alright Smoak,” he said, coming up to her side. “Tell me where you need me.”

“Hold this,” she said, pointing to a blue wire.

Tommy reached out, taking hold of the wire. It wasn’t until that moment, staring at that thin blue wire, his fingers red with blood, that he realized his vision was blurring in and out of focus. He felt himself sway, his shoulder connecting with the wall, sending a fresh wave of fire through his arm.

Felicity’s eyes found his in an instant. “Tommy!” she cried, horror completely unmasked on her face. She shook her head. “You’re losing too much blood.”

“I’m fine,” he lied, righting himself.
“You’re not,” she answered, gingerly removing his hand from the wire. “And one wrong move and we all blow to pieces. Sit down now. If the frakking comms would work I’d have Lyla come get you. You need…”

“Smoak, chill,” Tommy said, but he did as she requested, leaning against the wall and feeling himself slowly slide down it, until he was sitting, leaning against the wall, a huge block of C4 right above his head. He put his hand on his shoulder, his fingers beginning to feel like ice as he held the wound.

A blurry figure made its way down the hall. Tommy could see it, but it was like he was underwater when he raised his arm to alert Felicity. He could hear them talking, and somewhere far away, Lyla’s voice came to him.

“Boy Scout,” she said.

And he floated up to meet her. Or maybe her arm was around him and she pulled him up. Tommy couldn’t be sure. Everything was far away, happening in slow motion. He couldn’t make his mind focus on anything, he was too relaxed, too numb.

“Laurel,” he whispered, her face filling his vision. But when he blinked, opened his eyes again, the face he saw wasn’t Laurel’s, it was his mother’s. Tommy swallowed hard, tears welling up and spilling over at the sight of her.

“My son,” Rebecca Merlyn said, cupping his face in her hands. It was so bright, too bright. It stung his eyes. “You have become the man I always knew you would be.” Her voice was honey in hot tea, soothing all the rough edges, all the pain that persisted. “But your work is not yet done. Oh sweet boy, go back for me. Go back… and live.”

The warmth was ripped from him and Tommy’s eyes flew open, a small dome light and a metal ceiling greeting him. He was in the van, Lexi over him, defibrillator paddles in her hands.

“Gods, you’re back,” she breathed. “We have to get you to a hospital. You need blood.”

“But Ollie and Dig… Felicity and Ly--”

“They’ll be fine. Lyla went back in to help. They’re going to get them out. But that does no one any good if you bleed out in the van waiting for them.” Lexi smacked the roof of the van two times and it jerked into motion. “I gave you some morphine too. Why the hell weren’t you putting pressure on that wound?”

Tommy shook his head slowly, the only movement he could actually manage. “My friends… they needed help.”


“Laurel,” he said, drowsiness beginning to take hold.

“Do you want me to call her?” Lexi asked.

“She needs to know…” Tommy said, his voice falling off, and then sleep found him once more.

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Oliver had wanted to barrel through the door when he heard her scream Tommy’s name. It took all his strength, and Digg’s hand on his arm to hold him back. Right. The damn door was rigged to blow. And something was wrong on the other side, and he couldn’t do anything to help. They had to
“Felicity, talk to me,” he gritted out. It had been over four minutes without a sound from the other side, and he couldn’t help the worry that coursed through him.

“I’m here, I just…” she paused. “Tommy needed to go, so it’s just me right now.”

“What happened?”

“Later, okay. Let’s focus on getting you two out of there.”

“What if we cut the wire to the gas line?” Digg suggested.

“Please do not cut anything,” Felicity replied, her voice sounding tired and more than a little frustrated. He didn’t need to see her to know how tense she was, just the rise and fall of her tone was enough.

God what had they gotten into? A few hours ago his biggest worry had been getting the virus onto the Markov device. Now every person in his life flickered through his mind as the seconds ticked into eternity stretching before him. Eternity with no way out. Maybe this is what he deserved? A long line of impossible situations with no way forward. Maybe he was doomed to live a life of purgatory forever.

No. his head screamed back at him. But the voice sounded more like Felicity. And then Thea and Tommy. The people who needed him. The people he cared about needed him to not give up. Not again. There had to be something they could do, something to disrupt the signal or something.

“Felicity,” he called, waiting until he heard her shuffling closer. “What kind of detonator did the other bomb have?”

“It was a old cell.” She sounded steadier, like her mind was working through the problem as fast as she could. “I had a cell phone jammer that interrupted the signal.”

He flashed Digg a grin as the idea took shape in his head. “Okay, Felicity you need to clone the sim card of that phone.”

“Oliver, please tell me you’re not thinking what I think you’re thinking?”

“Then you’re gonna need to strip the casing off the wire,” he said, ignoring her comment.

“If I wrap that wire around the sim card this whole place could blow. Potentially a lot more. We still have to consider the gas line and,” she paused, and Oliver could almost feel her eyes slipping closed. “I don’t think I can do this.”

“Listen to me,” he wanted to touch her, to rest a hand to her shoulder until she relaxed underneath his touch, but he had to settled for this instead. “You are brilliant, Felicity There is no one else I trust to get me out of this more than you. It will work, but I need you to make sure it does. Please.”

She went quiet, and for a moment he thought she might not have heard him. But then he heard a throat clear and she spoke. “I’ll be right back.”

He let his head fall back against the wall, and took a deep breath. This was going to work. It had to work.

“What’s the plan? Why does she need another sim card?”
Oliver rolled his gaze to Digg and sighed. “Once Felicity strips the casing, she’d going to wrap the wire around the sim card. It’s going to set off a reboot for the entire circuit. Just enough time to cut the line to the gas and get the door open. Once it comes back online, the bomb will know it’s been interrupted and the backup trigger in the phone will set it off. We’ll have less than a minute to get clear of the building before it goes off.”

“That sounds like a really dumb plan.”

“And yet it’s the only one we got going for us.”

John laughed, shaking his head.

“Regretting signing on to this one?”

“No I’m regretting answering my damn phone two months ago,” he said. “No wonder your other bodyguard quit.”

“Rob quit?”

“Like two weeks ago.”

“Huh, I thought I was just getting better at ditching him.”

“It might have been the ditching that prompted the quitting.”

“I’m back,” Felicity said, and he could hear her dropping things at her feet. “Now for this to work, the two of you will only have about a ten second second to get the wire loose of the gas line and get the door open.”

“As soon as you connect the sim card, get as far from here as possible,” he said nodding to John who stood tall again. “We’ll get through the door.”

“Oliver if you don’t get it open in that time frame… Just please be fast,” she gulped once. “Lyla’s got the van close, she knows to gun it as soon as we reach the back hatch.”

“Get ready Digg.”

He listened for the signal, tired to imagine Felicity clipping the plastic off the wire, just enough to wrap around the sim once. He let his heart steady, and his focus became as laser as it had ever been. He knew what he had to do the second it was ready.

“Go,” she screamed and then everything moved so fast.

Oliver grabbed the wire around the gas line, he used his knife to cut it freee and twisted the frayed edges back to a closed circuit. He nodded once and Digg pushed the door open, running down the metal staircase and towards the van. But he knew Felicity hadn’t had enough time to go. Even if she had, she’d wait to make sure they got the door open first. So as soon as his eyes landed on her he reached and pulled her to his chest. He didn’t have many choices. The stairs would take too long with both of them. And the seconds were washing away before them. So he moved forward, one arm wrapped around Felicity, and jumped over the railing.

He took the brunt of the impact, the force sending a shockwave of pain through his already pulsing knee. But he shook it off, grabbing her hand as they ran towards the van.

John was already in the back, ushering the two of them closer, when he heard it. The low rumble of
the building behind them. It began to rattle and roar, as the detonations went off, one by one. But there was still a gap between them and their get away.

“I’m sorry,” he said and before Felicity could ask what he meant, he pushed her ahead of him, just far enough that John was able to grab ahold, and pull her in. “Tell Lyla to go.”

“Oliver, no,” Felicity shot him a look. She thought he was giving up. After everything, she thought he was sacrificing himself once more for everyone else. She didn’t get it.

Lyla hit the gas as he pumped his legs just a little further barely catching hold of the door before she tore out of the air like hell itself was on their tail. Given the heat that was cascading from the exploding building behind him, it felt about right.

Digg’s hand finally grabbed hold of him and hauled him further into the van with one last grunt. He met Oliver’s eyes and shook his head again.

“I’m putting in a formal request for a vacation,” he said, pulling the back doors closed behind them. “And I mean an all expense paid vacation.”

“Yeah, deal,” Oliver breathed out, letting his head fall back against the coarse interior carpet. He was alive. They made it out alive. He let his eyes open, scanning the van until they landed on Felicity.

Felicity who looked at him in a way he’d never thought possible. Like she was just starting to realize the weight of everything he did, everything he could do.

“You’re completely unfathomable,” she said, her voice low, but somehow full of awe. “I thought you were—”

“No,” he reached for her hand, letting their fingers lace together. “Never again. I have too much to lose.”

She fell against his shoulder, her hair brushing his cheek, and searing into his soul. “That was such a stupid plan.”

“I second that.” Digg had somehow made it around them and to the front of the van, taking the empty seat next to Lyla. “Where are the others?”

“Waller came and got the rest of them since we needed the other van for Tommy.”

And like that everything snapped back into clear, icy focus for him. Tommy wasn’t next to Lyla. He wasn’t in the van at all. And the ragged look Felicity shared with her hands told him more than anything else.

“What happened?” he questioned as he sat up, meeting Lyla’s gaze in the rearview mirror.

“He took a bullet to the shoulder, we didn’t have time to treat it before they went to get you and Johnny,” her voice was terse, but Oliver could tell she was just trying to hold back whatever emotions were already threatening to boil over. “They were going to take him back to headquarters to see the staff doctor, but Starling General was closer.”

Closer, meaning Tommy didn’t have time to waste getting across town. He needed a doctor fast. Which meant he could already be…

“He’ll be fine,” Felicity whispered as her hand found his again. “He has to be.”
Oliver wanted to believe her. He wanted this night over with, but he couldn’t bare the thought of it ending if Tommy didn’t get to see the sun of tomorrow. Having faith wasn’t something he normally did. There were the things in front of you and the people at your side, and that’s what you believed in. But with Felicity pressed to his side, her head resting against his shoulder, he wanted to much to see the same conviction in the world. Oliver would never claim to know much. But he was fairly certain that if she could, Felicity would will the whole world into believing Tommy would be okay. And somehow she made it alright for him to believe in something again.
Hey lovelies! Happy New Year to you all! We hope that 2018 will bring you all lots of happy memories. We have a minor amendment to our posting schedule that I wanted to tell you about. I know we’ve been announcing that we were going to take a 2 week hiatus, but we’re actually going to be taking a 3 week hiatus. So, we’ll be back on the 29th. Anyway, hopefully this chapter will be enough to hold you over until we’re back.

xoxo
Cassie

She had told Oliver that Tommy would be fine, but she wasn’t sure she believed it herself. After all, Oliver hadn’t seen the trail of blood along the wall where Tommy had slid down and fallen unconscious. Oliver hadn’t heard the way he’d mumbled about his mother, or watched the panicked look on Lyla’s face when she’d tried to rouse him and couldn’t. Oliver hadn’t witnessed those things, but Felicity had.

And despite her brave face for Oliver, Felicity was scared out of her mind that Tommy wouldn’t make it. She needed him to, though. Because she wasn’t sure she could handle losing him. Losing Cooper three years ago had nearly wrecked her, and Tommy meant far more to her than her college boyfriend had.

Lyla drove straight to the hospital, breaking more laws than Felicity could count on the way. They were mostly quiet as they drove, all of them coming down from their adrenaline rushes, too relieved that there were no casualties and too worried about Tommy’s fate for small talk.

Felicity took a brief pause in her worry to remind herself of the good they’d done that night. It had only been hours since Oliver and Tommy had learned the truth about each other, but it already felt like they were old pros working in the field together. Then again, thanks to Russia, they kind of were.

“You okay?” Oliver asked, nudging her a little to capture her attention.

Felicity nodded, her teeth fidgeting nervously along her lower lip. “Just…”

“I know,” he agreed quietly.

She wasn’t sure how he knew, since she wasn’t even sure she knew herself what she’d been on the verge of saying. But something in the set of his jaw, the worry lines on his forehead, the unmasked frustration and sadness in his eyes, told her that maybe he really did.

“He’s going to be okay,” she said again, to assure herself as much as to assure anyone else. “He has to be.”

Oliver’s arm moved around her protectively. “Tommy is one of the most stubborn people I know,” he said, low enough for only her. “He’s going to pull through.”
Felicity nodded, biting back the tears that were threatening to break through. “Oh god, I should call his dad. And Laurel. Frack what are we going to tell her?”

She met his eyes with anxiety and worry in her own, only to find the calm blue pools that her mind's eye could never quite perfect. “Shh, Felicity,” he hushed. “Once we know more at the hospital we can worry about calling people.”

She knew he was right, but it was like a band-aid on a gushing head wound. It did little to halt the flood of worry that continued to well up inside her.

The van came to a stop outside the emergency room at Starling General and Felicity and Oliver jumped out from the back seat. She turned back when she realized Diggle and Lyla weren’t following.

“If Merlyn shows up it may blow Tommy’s cover to have me there,” Lyla said with a frown.

“I’m sure we can find a cover story that will work,” Oliver said.

Felicity gave him a look but didn’t reply. She had personally been on the receiving end of an Oliver Queen cover story and could attest to their lack of work-ability. But this was neither the time nor place to mention it.

Lyla put the car in park and by the time she and Diggle made it to where Felicity was standing, Oliver had already disappeared inside. They made their way to him quickly, the four of them standing at the reception desk as the intake nurse looked up Tommy’s information.

“We can’t give out information to anyone but his next of kin or emergency contact,” she said with an almost bored sigh.

“But--” Oliver began in protest.

“I’m his emergency contact,” Felicity spoke up, and then shrank sheepishly at the look Oliver threw her.

“Felicity Smoak?” The nurse questioned.

She nodded. “That’s me.”

“Right,” the nurse said with a cursory glance up to meet her eyes. “Your friend was very lucky. The bullet was through and through, missed all major veins and arteries. He wouldn’t be in as rough shape as he is if he’d gotten here sooner. As it was he lost a lot of blood and the wound began to clot before it was properly cleaned. We’ll need to keep him overnight to monitor him and make sure there are no clots in his bloodstream.”

Felicity swallowed hard. “But he’s going to be alright?”

“They’re keeping him sedated for the time being. But yes, once we’ve given him some more blood and patched him up, he should be fine.”

Felicity clamped her hand around Oliver’s and gave it a tight squeeze. She felt him lace his fingers through hers and she leaned into him for support. Tommy was going to be alright. They’d gotten the other agents out. Sure, a building had been leveled in the process, but there were no casualties, and that was what was most important.
“Can we see him?” Oliver asked, his voice reverberating through her entire being as she leaned against him.

“I’ll take you back two at a time,” the nurse said.

“You go,” Lyla insisted. “I should go report back to Waller.”

Felicity and Oliver followed the nurse down the hallway, hand in hand, like it was the most natural thing in the world. The hand holding, not the hospital hallway. And maybe it was, but she couldn’t let herself dwell on that now. Not when the nurse pushed the door open and she saw her best friend laying there unconscious, hooked up to more monitors than she could count.

She looked away instantly, turning her head to keep from crying or vomiting, she wasn’t sure which. Felicity reminded herself that the nurse said he’d be fine, that Tommy was strong and stubborn and was going to pull through. She had to remind herself of all those things, if only to keep the mask of calm on her face.

“Tommy,” Oliver breathed, moving to his friend’s bedside, pulling her along with him. “I never wanted this kind of life for you.” His voice was quiet, and Felicity felt like she was intruding by being there. But Oliver kept a firm hold on her hand, so she stayed.

“He did it to lessen your burden,” she whispered after a long moment. “And he did it without a second thought for what it meant. Because he loves you.”

Oliver nodded, taking all of her words in. “He’s a brother to me,” he breathed, almost silent. She could sense the hesitation, the worry behind his words. Mortality always hit hardest when one was faced with moments like that.

“You’re not going to lose him,” Felicity answered. “Not to this, not to the Hood, not to Waller. Everything is out now. You have a chance to repair what the last five years stole from you both.”

He turned to meet her eyes, and the depth of emotion held in his gaze was enough to make her look away. It was sorrow and love; five years of things unsaid, of lies and misdirection, of needing a friend and having nowhere to turn.

“I’m...” she started, releasing her hold on his hand. “I should call Malcolm. Fill him in. And Laurel.”

Oliver nodded, turning his attention back to Tommy.

Felicity slipped out of the room, closing the door behind her. The range of emotions she’d seen from Oliver in the last few hours alone was enough to make her heart stop beating in her chest. She’d wondered once, if after everything he’d seen, he’d still be able to have some semblance of a relationship, if he’d allow himself to open up to her, to anyone. But if tonight had proved anything to her, it was that not only was he able to feel, and feel deeply, but that he probably felt more than he ever let on when they were in Russia.

Pulling her phone out of her pocket, Felicity found a quiet corner and tucked herself into it. She scrolled through her phone until she found her boss’s private number. She forced her mind back to the last conversation she’d had with him, trying to remember where he’d planned on being. Out of town before coming back to test the machine. And then she sighed. Test the machine we stole, she thought to herself. The line rang several times before his voicemail connected.

“Mr. Merlyn,” she said, clearing her throat. “This is Felicity. I’m at the hospital with Tommy. He’s been injured and I wanted to let you know that he’s in stable condition, highly medicated, but he
should be fine. They only gave me that information because I’m his emergency contact, but I’m sure he’d appreciate a visit from his father. Call me if you have any questions.” She ended the call, hoping she didn’t sound as guilty as she felt. After all, Tommy had been injured on a mission to steal something from his own father’s company.

After a moment she scrolled back through her phone and found Laurel’s number. She took a deep breath and hit the button to connect the call.

“Felicity?” Laurel’s voice answered after the second ring.

“Hi Laurel,” she answered, a little unsure. “Listen, there’s been an accident and Tommy is in the hospital. The doctors have assured me he’s going to be fine—”

“What?!” Laurel’s voice went up an octave. “What happened?!”

“I don’t know all the particulars,” Felicity lied. “He’s sedated right now.”

“I… I’m coming. I’ll be there in five minutes.”

The line went dead and Felicity’s hand fell away from her ear. It seemed impossible that it was just a few hours ago that they’d all been at the Queen manor for a holiday party. Exhaustion filled all of Felicity’s limbs in that instant and she slid down the wall until she was curled up with her knees against her chest on the floor. She couldn’t be sure how long she stayed like that, but her vision was blurry when she felt a hand cover her own. She blinked, finding Diggle standing before her, his hand extended. Felicity reached for him and he pulled her to her feet.

“Rough night,” he said, as they made their way back to the waiting room.

“That’s an understatement,” she answered.

“Maybe you should head out? Try to get some sleep?!”

Felicity shook her head. “Laurel will be here soon, and I should be here in case Malcolm shows up or calls me back.”

“Laurel’s already back there with Oliver and Tommy,” Lyla said, offering Felicity a cup of something hot. She smelled it and was pleased to find that it was coffee. She didn’t even care how crappy it may taste.

“How? When?”

“She got here a few minutes ago,” Diggle answered, leading her to a chair and sitting her down. “The nurse just took her back.”

“Laurel in a room with her gunshot injured boyfriend and her ex she’s on really bad terms with,” Felicity said, whistling. “Glad I’m out here and not in there.”

“That makes two of us,” Diggle said.

Felicity took a sip of the coffee and then pulled her feet up onto the chair, wrapping her arms around her legs, the way she’d been sitting in the small alcove somewhere in the hospital when Diggle had found her. She hadn’t been sleeping, but she hadn’t exactly been coherent either. She chalked it up to being overly worried, and all the events that had transpired. But when she had to stifle another yawn, she wondered if perhaps she’d somehow fallen asleep after all. She couldn’t imagine sleeping, given Tommy’s condition, but her eyelids continued to grow heavy, until all she saw was
the darkness of sleep.

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Tommy felt like he was swimming through a fog of memories. He tried to push past it, to throw his head above the surface into consciousness. But his limbs felt heavy, and he couldn’t do much more than blink his eyes open.

He could hear voices, they tried to keep their tones soft, but he could hear the edge in Laurel’s voice.

“Don’t fight on my account,” he groaned, and both Ollie and Laurel’s heads snapped towards him.

“Tommy,” Laurel breathed, launching herself towards his bedside.

He tried not to wince at the pressure her body put against his shoulder. Because he could feel like his body was bathing in flames and he’d still crave her touch. But he must have shown discomfort because Oliver took a step forward, and she pulled back to shoot him a glare.

“I swear when they find the guy who did this to you,” she shook her head. “He’s going to wish petty crime hadn’t been his choice profession.”

He shot a glance at his friend and Oliver cleared his throat. “The police will probably be back tomorrow to get your statement on the mugging.”

Mugging? Of course. Someone had to come up with a cover story for his gunshot wound. But even thinking about the paperwork Waller was going to force him into over this, was giving him a headache. “Right.”

“Maybe a nightclub in the middle of the Glades wasn’t the smartest idea,” she said, her words shooting daggers.

“Laurel, it wasn’t his fault,” he tried pushing himself up but the action took more energy than he could spare. He gave up and leaned back once more, reaching for her hand instead. “I’m fine.”

“You were shot,” she countered.

He wanted to hold her, to bring her head against his chest and let her hear for herself the steady beat that told him he was still there. But before he could, he knew what he needed to do.

“Laurel,” he whispered, dragging a hand through the threads of hair that had fallen in her face. “Could you give us a few?”

She didn’t look like she wanted to let him out of her sight, and at his words her hand tightened against his. But she met his eyes and nodded.

“I’ll be back in ten minutes,” she said, more to Oliver than to him. “Do not agitate him.”

Oliver held his hands up in surrender, watching Laurel as closed the door behind her. He turned back to Tommy with a tired look. “She’s highly protective of you.”

“Yeah,” he smiled, because even if the topic should be weird, somehow he knew Oliver wouldn’t make it that way. “I’m sorry if she was hard on you.”

“I probably deserve a lot worse,” Oliver said, taking a seat in the chair next to him. “Especially since all this seems to lead back to me.”
“You realize my earlier comment wasn’t just for Laurel’s benefit right? This isn’t your fault.”

“Isn’t it?”

“Not even you can take on the weight of everyone else’s choices,” he shook his head. “I knew what I was getting into when I signed on to this life, Ollie. And I chose it anyway. And gunshot wound included, I’d do it again.”

Oliver sighed. “Because of me.”

“Because of me,” he wanted Oliver to understand. He needed his friend to understand. “I trust a tornado more than I do Amanda Waller, but she showed me what kind of person I was right at my core. When the people I love are up against the wall, I will trade places with them in a heartbeat, without a second thought. And I’m not ashamed of that.”

“You could have died tonight Tommy.”

He hadn’t seen Oliver like this in a long time, not since long before his five years away. He could see the emotions fighting behind his friend’s eyes. Anger and guilt battling against pain and sorrow.

“And you could have died a million times over the last five years,” he replied. “But you didn’t. You’re here. You clawed your way out of that hell, and made it home. Whether that was fueled by family or vengeance, or just the last embers of a life you wanted more than anything, you came back. And I can promise you that whatever fire you held on to for so long, I’m never letting mine burn out. Because I know what it would mean if I didn’t make it home. I do. And I learned that from you.”

“I’m never going to be fully on board with you working for Waller.”

“Well finding out my best friend has a leather and hood fetish isn’t gonna be easy for me.”

Oliver rolled his eyes but continued. “But if this is what you want, I can’t stand in your way either.”

“Ollie,” he met his friend’s eyes for the first time since they were left alone. “Thank you, for having our backs tonight.”

“Yeah well, just don’t make hostage situations a regular thing.”

“I’ll try not to,” he laughed feeling the pull of his stitches. “Yeah maybe it’s too soon to laugh about it.”

“Probably.”

There was a gentle knock on the hospital room door. Laurel opened it a second later and he had to give her credit. He assumed she wouldn’t last the full ten minutes, but she had made it, with a couple seconds to spare.

“Am I interrupting?” she looked at both of them, but her glare settled on Oliver. “Tommy needs his rest.”

“I was actually about to go call home,” he said as he stood, giving Tommy a look. “I should tell Thea what happened before she hears it from someone else.”

“Will you see if you can get Felicity to go home?” Tommy ventured. Even though he knew it was probably an impossible request. “I know she’s probably propped up in some waiting room chair, dozing off. Someone should get to sleep in their own bed.”
“I’ll try,” Oliver said with a smile. “But she’s not gonna like it.”

“Tell her it was patient's orders.”

“Yeah, that’s not a thing,” he laughed. “But I’ll see what I can do. I’ll leave you two to talk.”

He said, sliding past Laurel, and out the door. Then Tommy’s attention focused solely on her.

“Oliver and Felicity huh? Should have seen that one coming.”

“I’m not even sure they saw it coming,” he mused. “But I know one teenage girl who will be pretty happy.”

He watched her closely as she tried to hold it together.

“Hey, come here,” he held his hand out, but he could feel himself growing tired once more.

Laurel walked to him this time, like she needed to zero in on every inch of him, and make sure there wasn’t something the doctors missed. He felt his heart seize when her eyes landed on his. Because he knew it now more than ever, he felt it in the weight of every look.

He could have died. All it would have taken was a couple inches over or a few minutes stuck at a traffic light, and he would have died with the most important words still stuck in his chest.

“I love you,” he said. His voice was barely above a whisper, but she heard him. Over the sounds of machines and the static calm through the hall, she heard him and she froze.

“You’ve never said that before.”

“I know,” he nodded. “But I needed to say it. I needed you to hear it before I told you the truth.”

She had taken a seat against his sheets, but she eyed him with confusion. “What are you talking about?”

“I wasn’t mugged,” he said, swallowing down the lump that threatened to form in his throat. “It’s a cover story, one that needs to be in place to protect people who were involved.”

“You’re not making any sense.”

He motioned to the counter, his wallet sitting on top. “Hand me that?”

Though his words had spooked her, Laurel grabbed it, and set it in his reach. Tommy dug through the slots until he found what he was looking for. And placed it down between them.

His ARGUS security badge had sat in the same spot almost every single day since he got it. The security scanner was advanced enough that they never had to remove them, for the monitor to know when they accessed the building. And he didn’t like to draw attention to the clearance level pass in his back pocket. But for Laurel to understand, he had to show it to her.

“This is where I work,” he said, pointing to the ARGUS logo. “It’s sort of a secret organization, and we assess threats to domestic and foreign governments and some private contracts, then we step in and handle them.”

Laurel’s eyes shot up, boring into him with an intensity he knew he deserved. “This says you’ve been working for them for over two years.”
“Yeah.”

“So the whole time we’ve been seeing each other.”

“Laurel—”

“You lied to me,” she said, her words hollowing a space inside his chest. “All those times you said you had to work on something for your father, or when you’d blow off a date last minute, the reason you never wanted to move past the casual dating stage. Is this the reason for all of that?”

“I didn’t want to hurt you.”

“Answer the question.”

He couldn’t. He wanted to take it back, to pull the words back in and start again. But he knew he had to keep going. “Yes. It was.”

She stood up, her hands shaking at her sides. “After everything with Ollie and Sara, you knew how hard it was for me to trust anyone. How hard it was for me to take a step forward. But you told me you wanted us. You stood in my living room, and made it sound like this was the most important thing to you. You did all that, and still kept this from me.”

“I needed to protect you.”

“I don’t need someone to protect me Tommy,” she spat back. “I’m an adult, and what I need is someone whose first instinct isn’t to lie to me.”

“Laurel,” he reached out, but the movement tugged at his IV, and his head swam as the medication clouded through his mind. “I swear that’s not what I was trying to do. You just, you don’t know ARGUS like I do.”

“Because you didn’t give me a chance,” she shook her head, tears forming in her eyes. “You need to rest, and I don’t think I can be here right now.”

“Laurel—”

“No, I’m gonna go,” she said taking a deliberate step back. She was distancing herself from him. “And you might not hear from me for a while. But I’m glad you’re okay.”

He almost called out to her again. But he knew it wouldn’t do any good. He knew that once Laurel made up her mind, it was best not to fight her. Even if it sent a new wave of pain through him. He kept repeating to himself that he had done the right thing. The truth was heavy and it was jagged, but in the end, things had to get worse before they got better. Right?

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Oliver felt like he could finally breathe fully, knowing that Tommy was awake, seeing it with his own eyes. His friend would make a full recovery; incredibly lucky to have only suffered blood loss and a bullet to the shoulder. Oliver knew first hand how much worse that could have been. A few inches in any direction and Tommy probably wouldn’t have survived. But Oliver couldn’t let himself think about that now; not when he had so much to be thankful for.

He had begrudgingly left Tommy and Laurel alone to talk. Oliver had a feeling Tommy was about to tell Laurel how he’d really gotten the bullet wound, and although Oliver couldn’t blame his friend for being honest, he just hoped the heavy dose of painkillers wasn’t to blame for the decision. Instead of
letting himself dwell on secrets exposed and still kept, he pulled out his phone, dialing his sister’s number.

Thea’s voicemail picked up automatically, and Oliver could almost picture her asleep in her bed, phone on the nightstand, charging cord nowhere to be seen.

“Hey Speedy,” he said, trying to keep his voice neutral. “I thought you might still be up. Listen, call me when you get this. There’s something I need to tell you.”

Oliver dropped the phone into his pocket and made his way to the waiting room. He smiled a little, finding Felicity exactly as Tommy said she’d be, curled up in a chair, clearly trying to stay awake despite her exhaustion. A tiny pang of jealousy echoed through his heart when he realized that Tommy knew so many things about Felicity that he didn’t, but it dissipated as soon as she stirred and met his eyes.

“Hey,” she said, yawning and stretching like a cat as he took the seat beside her. “How’s he doing?”

“Physically, he’s okay. But Laurel is back there with him now. And it didn’t sound like it was going very well,” he answered.

Felicity shifted until her head rested against his arm. It was strange, how quickly they’d fallen into the need for physical touch. Then again, maybe it was strange how it wasn’t strange. It felt normal, natural, like they were old pros at it, despite sharing their first kiss in two years just earlier that evening. Crazy that it was so recent, when so many things had happened.

“When he was…” she started, and then paused. She pulled away, meeting his eyes, and he could see the tears welling in hers. “Right before Lyla got there, when he was…” Felicity cleared her throat. “He was saying that Laurel needed to know. Something tells me that’s why it didn’t sound like it was going very well.”

Oliver nodded, wrapping an arm around her shoulder. She fell back against him instantly, finding a comfortable spot in the crook of his neck to settle herself.

“I almost lost you both tonight,” her voice was quiet, far away, like she was halfway back to whatever dreamland she’d been in when he’d interrupted her. “And I just got you back.”

He smiled a little at that, wondering how it had taken him so long to make his way back to her. He knew now, that it was what he’d wanted all along, even if he’d never let himself admit it before. He’d known the instant he’d seen her standing in the foyer of his house that first night, that the pull to her was too strong for him to deny. And he’d tried for too long to deny himself.

“Why don’t I get you home?” he asked, stirring her as he moved his hand to brush the stray blonde strands back from her face.

“No car,” she yawned, eyes still closed.

“Actually,” Diggle piped up, moving to stand in front of them, a set of keys in his hand. “Lyla had a couple people from ARGUS stop by the club and grab Felicity’s car.”

“Do I want to know how they acquired my keys?” Felicity asked, a single eye popping open from behind her glasses.

“Probably not,” Diggle said. “And don’t worry about anything here. Lyla has orders to stay, and since he’s stable, there’s no reason for all of us to stay.”
“You’ll call if anything changes?” Felicity asked.

Diggle nodded. “You got it,” he said, holding out his hand, presenting her keys.

Oliver reached for the keys and Felicity reluctantly removed herself from his shoulder. “Thanks Digg,” Oliver said. “For everything tonight.”

Diggle nodded, “Anytime boss.”

“I should check on Tommy before we go,” Felicity protested, as Oliver led her to the door.

“He’s the one that told me to get you home,” Oliver said, reaching for her outstretched hand and clasping it in his. He felt her resolve dissolve the moment his hand closed around hers and something tightened in Oliver’s chest. The weight of everything- the kiss, the touches, her letter from two years ago, the fact that there were no secrets left between them- it finally settled into a quiet hum somewhere near his heart. It connected to his pulse, which was suddenly elevated at the contact, and the closeness. And when he closed his eyes, visions of her half naked in his room bombarded his memories.

“Oliver?” Felicity questioned beside him, pulling him back into focus.

“Hmm?” he hummed, not trusting his voice.

“My car,” she said, pointing with her free hand.

They walked wordlessly the rest of the way. He tucked her into the passenger seat before rounding the car and making his way behind the wheel.

The air was thick, something settling between them that was akin to the half-asleep-dream-world where nothing felt quite real. Perhaps it was the lateness of the hour, or the fact that they’d just stared down death more than once in a six hour period. The kiss they’d shared most certainly factored in somehow, but Oliver didn’t allow himself to think about it too much. Instead, he relished in the dreamy unrealness of the quiet moonlit moments. Each streetlight the car passed under drew his attention back to her, one spotlight after another illuminating her hands resting carefully on her thighs, and the way her chest rose and fell with each deep breath she took in her drowsy state.

“Darth Vader,” she giggled, her eyes slowly rising to meet his as he stopped at a traffic light.

“What?” Oliver questioned, an impossibly easy smile gracing his features.

“You’re doing that staring thing again,” she clarified, sort of.

He recalled the memory, when he’d been sitting in the passenger seat of her car and she was trying so hard not to ask him if he was the Hood. It seemed forever ago, like most things did in the fast paced world they lived in.

“Sorry,” he said quietly, pulling his eyes from her once the light reflecting off her face turned from red to green.

“It’s okay,” she whispered back. She looked like she was about to speak again, but he pulled up outside her building, shifted the car into park and cut the engine. Silence settled between them.

“I’ll walk you up,” Oliver said finally, not willing to let her go just yet.

“I don’t know if that’s a good idea,” Felicity answered, unbuckling her seatbelt and popping the door
open, making the dome light in the center of the ceiling come on with almost blinding light.

But Oliver was already climbing out of the car himself, and he rounded to her side just as she was stepping out.

“Correction,” Felicity said, as she nearly lost her footing and stumbled into him. “I know it’s not a good idea.”

“Why not?” he asked, even if he had a good idea of what she was about to say. Selfishly, he just wanted to hear the words.

“Oliver,” she said, his name a tense dance across her lips. She blushed and squeezed his arm a little. Embarrassment never looked so sexy as it did on Felicity Smoak in that moment.

“Just to make sure you get there safe,” he said. “No funny business.” And he meant it, at least as much as he could with the pouty bottom lip she was giving him and the feel of her pressed into his side as they made their way to the building. It would be easy to spin her around and pull her into his arms, to kiss her until both their heads were clouded beyond reason and she asked him to come in. This was Felicity, after all. But on the other hand, that was not how he wanted this to be. He didn’t want to manipulate a situation where she was mentally, emotionally and physically exhausted. She meant more to him than that.

Felicity bobbed her head in a single nod and they stopped outside the front entrance. He offered her the keys and she fiddled with them until she found the right one.

“This feels like the weirdest end of a date I’ve ever had,” she said, moving through the door Oliver had pulled open. “Not that this was a date. I just mean you showed up here in a tux earlier. And then the party, and the kiss. And now...” Felicity cleared her throat.

Oliver had to fight to keep the grin from spreading full-fledged across his face. “Factor in the couple near-death experiences and it seems like it could be the new normal,” he said, pressing the button for her floor in the elevator.

“See you at the coffee shop for a run-in with some covert government goons?” she asked with a smile.

“It’s a date.”

“Oliver,” Felicity said, her voice sounding a little unsure.

“Felicity,” he answered, enjoying the taste of her name on his tongue. Although he had to admit, it made him ache for the taste of her lips pressed against his almost more than he could bear.

His phone rang, breaking the silence between them, and Oliver fished his phone out of his pocket, silently cursing the device the entire time.

“It’s Sofia,” he said with a frown. “Hello?”

“Oliver,” she said, her voice rough. “You have been avoiding me.”

“I’ve been a little tied up,” he huffed, not appreciating the accusation.

“My father grows weaker every day, Oliver. I need to know how you are going to fix this.”

Oliver blew out a long breath. He’d talked to Felicity about a plan- but one he wasn’t sure Sofia and
Ivan would go for, especially considering it would mean leaving Russia and never coming back. “Let your father announce the wedding to his choice for Pakhan. Make sure that they send an invitation for the wedding to me. Felicity and I will take care of the rest.”

“I am trusting you, Oliver,” Sofia answered, and this time she sounded defeated and weary. “This is not only my life but Ivan’s as well.”

He scrubbed a hand down his face. “I know.” He clicked the phone off and pocketed it.

“Invitation to Sofia’s wedding, huh?” Felicity asked. She had unlocked her door and was standing in the doorway when he met her eyes. “How are we going to take care of the rest?”

“I have no idea,” Oliver answered. “Another problem for another day.”

She nodded. “We’ve solved enough problems today.”

Oliver glanced passed her, the small box he’d dropped off earlier that evening sitting on the entry table. “You didn’t open it?” he questioned, curiosity creasing his brow.

“Been a little busy this evening,” she answered, moving to reach for the small gift. “Maybe you haven’t heard, but I disarmed a bomb today.” Felicity smiled, then bit her bottom lip. “Want me to open it now?”

“Up to you,” he said with half a shrug, taking a step toward her.

Felicity picked up the box and pulled gently on the green bow, unravelling it. Oliver held out his hand, taking the ribbon from her so she could focus on the silver box. She lifted the lid and pushed back the tissue paper, and a small gasp escaped her lips. The small pendant dangled from a chain, the rectangle shape an antique silver with black filigree, a subtle pattern of arrows mixed in with the swirls and lines.

“It’s beautiful,” Felicity said, a little breathless.

“There’s more,” Oliver said, pressing a small, almost hidden button on the side of the pendant. The pendant split, revealing a USB port.

“Frak,” Felicity breathed. “That has got to be the prettiest piece of tech I’ve ever seen. And that’s saying something.”

“You like it?” he asked.

“I love it.” Felicity turned around and lifted her hair. “Will you?”

Oliver cleared his throat, taking the chain from her hands and carefully securing it around her neck. He fumbled with the tiny clasp only once, and then his fingers lingered on her neck, brushing down her shoulder, following the curves he found like a blind man tracing the shape of her to commit it to memory.

“Can I ask you to do one more thing for me?” she asked, turning to face him. Her face was still flushed, but her eyes were unsure.

“Of course,” Oliver answered, his voice more hoarse than he’d expected.

Felicity swallowed hard before meeting his eyes. “I don’t want to be alone tonight.”

Oliver nodded, taking her outstretched hand, and followed her into the dark apartment.
Felicity sighed as sleep receded from her limbs. She shifted until she felt hard lines pressed against her back. For a second she stiffened, the strangeness of someone else in her bed sending her mind into spirals. But then Oliver’s arm wrapped around her, his hand resting against hers, and the night before came rolling through her mind.

The party. The mission. Oliver in her living room, his lips against hers. She asked him to stay the night.

“You’re up early.”

Even doused with sleep, his voice had a pull that sent tingles down her spine. And she couldn’t stop the rush of heat that spread with him so close.

She rolled around, making sure she could face him. Oliver smiled when she settled, even if his eyes remained closed.

“How long have you been up?” Because even if he looked serene and asleep, she knew that Oliver was probably faking it.

“Only a few minutes,” he said, finally cracking his eyelids and gazing at her. “I like listening to you sleep.”

“Oh god,” she buried her head into his chest. “I did something embarrassing didn’t I? Just don’t tell me if it’s going to bring me mortification.”

“Hey,” he said coaxing her gaze back up to him. “There’s literally no possible way I could find you anything other than absolutely gorgeous right now. Got it?”

“Yeah?”
“Yeah,” he whispered, dropping a kiss to her cheek.

She tried to deny it, but she could get used to this. Oliver in her bed, trailing kisses across her jaw, into the nape of her neck, lower until…

“I’m gonna make some breakfast,” he said, his body leaving her to the cool winter morning air, as he sat up.

“Um,” she tried to find something to say that would bring him back, but Oliver was already up and flashing her a smile.

“Don’t worry, I did my recon last night when I got up to get some water,” he said kissing her forehead. “You’ve got enough for pancakes and coffee.”

“Okay, but there really isn’t a rush.”

Oliver was already pulling his jeans back over his boxers. A sight that gave her far too much desire to grab hold of said jeans and drag them and him back down towards her.

“You sleep, I’ll bring you food when it’s ready.”

And then he was out of the room, like some kind of evasive ninja. What in the hell? Was he rethinking things? Had some new kind of catastrophe happened in the last sixty seconds that she didn’t know about? Why was he being so weird? The old Felicity would have sat and stewed, but so much had changed over the last few weeks. Hell over the last 24 hours, and she wasn’t about to lie there and wait to find out why Oliver was pulling a Houdini.

She grabbed her robe, wrapping the thin silk around her frame, and followed the sound of pans and clattering coming from her kitchen.

Oliver seemed like he was in his element, mixing bowls and measuring cups already out. He even had a whisk resting on top of one of them. She didn’t even know she owned a whisk.

“I thought you were gonna catch some more sleep?” he turned to her with a smile. The kind of smile that told her everything was fine.

She should be enjoying this. The sight of Oliver Queen, shirtless, cooking her breakfast. But fear and doubt wanted to coil into her stomach.

“What was that back there?”

“What was what?”

“Really?” she furrowed her brow, giving him the once over. “We were having some nice, morning fun, and you bolted.”

“I’m still here,” he said, pouring a cup of coffee.

“Okay, maybe ‘bolted’ was a strong sentiment,” she crossed the space, taking the mug from his hand and setting it down. “But you were doing some impressive kissing and then you got a sudden urge for pancakes. So either you have an internal clock that demands carbs by 8 am, or you’re not telling me something.”

“Felicity--”

“Oliver, if this is too much, if last night with the intense emotions and the near deaths clouded
everything for you. You can just tell me.”

“That’s not it,” he shook his head as he braced himself against her counter.

“Then what?”

He looked at a loss, a mix of things played across his face and she didn’t know if he wanted to tell her what was going on.

“Oliver, look—”

“I don’t have the best track record when it comes to relationships,” he relented, his words cutting off her thought. “There are things from my past that I don’t want to reenact. Especially not with you.”

“Oh,” she paused, because now she didn’t know what to say or do next.

“Waking up next to you,” he practically hummed the words, as he wrapped his arms around her. “This is the closest to magic I’ll ever get. And last night, just lying beside you, holding you in my arms. I want more mornings like that. I just don’t want to screw this up by going too fast.”

“Oliver,” she breathed as he captured her lips with his own. She didn’t understand how, but every time their lips met, she could feel more of her falling for him. She was sure she was half in love with him already.

When he pulled back, he brushed his fingers against the wisps of hair stuck to her forehead. “I really wanted to make you breakfast.”

“Yeah, pancakes,” she tried to follow his train of thought, but she really, really wanted to keep kissing him. She had never wanted anything more. She pushed up on her toes, threading a hand through his short hair, and pressed herself against him. Oliver caught her lips again, and turned them until she she could feel the fridge behind her. It’s surface cooling her searing skin.

Oliver drew back once more, both of them breathing in ragged bursts. And he shook with laughter.

“We should at least have a first date before this goes any further.”

“I thought we agreed dates could end up disastrous, what with the whole new normal?”

“Fe-lic-ity,” his stretched each syllable in a way that felt like they were dancing along her spine. And she looked up to meet his eyes.

She really couldn’t help but smile at the effect she was having on him. She arched a brow, tempting him back to her. But his phone buzzed on the counter.

“Damn it,” he muttered, reaching to pick it up. Oliver rolled his eyes when he looked down. “I might kill her.”

Felicity glanced at his phone and laughed. “You’re the one who told her to call you back.”

“Should have known better,” he countered, hitting talk and putting the phone to his ear. “Speedy, good morning.”

While Oliver busied himself on the phone, Felicity sneaked the coffee mug back into her hand. Maybe she shouldn’t have turned down breakfast for something decidedly more delicious, because honestly she was starving. And she really needed the caffeine.
She decided to grab her own phone and check in with Tommy. Then the weight of the previous night blanketed her. How could she have just left Tommy alone last night? She should have insisted on staying. She should have bulldozed her way back in there and woken up with a crick in her neck from the crappy hospital chairs.

She had several missed calls and texts. Mostly from Diggle and Lyla giving her updates. And she felt a wave of relief that they had agreed to watch out for Tommy in shifts, in case the Dark Archer decided to make a trip to Starling General.

What worried her most was the countless emails that had already clogged her inbox. Malcolm and Dr. Markov were already aware of the missing device, and none of the threads sounded promising. Of course he’d reach out about work and not his son who’s lying in a hospital.

The last email she read called for a meeting first thing Monday morning to discuss things further. At least she had the day to think about how she was going to move forward at Merlyn Global. It was clear Malcolm had hired the Dark Archer to protect the device. And he had failed. But Merlyn had also hired her to place the security system in his buildings, and when he found out that failed, what would he do? Would he suspect something was amiss when she wouldn’t be able to recover any footage from the night before?

“I told Thea I crashed at the hospital last night,” Oliver said, weaving himself through her thoughts. “After I assured her Tommy was fine, she calmed a little, but I figured she didn’t need to know about the sleepover.”

“I mean I’m pretty sure she’d just start picking out her future niece or nephew’s name. Hypothetical niece or nephew that is,” she replied with a smile, trying to shake off the rest of her thoughts.

“Are you okay?”

Somehow there wasn’t even the pull to lie to him. “Just worried about what comes next, with work and everything else. I mean when we’re in between crises things get a little weird around here.”

“Yeah,” he reached his hand out, wrapping it around hers. “Maybe it’s best not to worry about the next thing until we have to?”

“Seems like the best choice.” She leaned in placing a quick kiss to his cheek. “So about those pancakes?”

“We have a little time for that,” he grinned. “I do want to go see Tommy this morning. We both know the second he’s fully awake he’s gonna try and get discharged.”

“Maybe we should skip the pancakes and grab something on the way,” she bit her lip. Because she knew Oliver was right. Tommy never liked staying still when he was hurt or sick. And he hated being stuck anywhere if he had too much to think about. “Give me a minute to get changed and we can go.”

“You want me to go grab my shirt before or after?” His smile was teasing, but Felicity almost forgot he was standing before he in nothing but his pants. Okay well maybe not totally forgot. Her hand was resting nicely on his hip, fingers splayed out on across his flank. But she really hadn’t consciously noticed.

She pulled her fingers back slowly, and grinned. “I’ll bring it out.”

“Okay,” he mused as she dragged herself away from him.
As soon as she closed the door to her bedroom she let out a laugh. Because not once in the last couple of years would she have thought that everything she had wished for could fall right into place. Part of her screamed to be wary, to hold her feelings back and to let caution take hold. But she couldn’t. She couldn’t hold a part of herself back when Oliver was placing so much forward. They were finally on the same page, and she was going to keep it that way. She knew they could accomplish anything when they were working together.

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Tommy ached; and despite the throbbing in his shoulder where he’d been hit with a bullet not twelve hours ago, somehow the thing that haunted him the most was the memory of the look in Laurel’s eyes when he’d told her about working for ARGUS. It had been like a switch had been flipped and all of the love that they shared had vanished from her eyes in an instant. Most of him didn’t blame her. After all, he’d ended up in a hospital bed because of his job. And this was just the latest in a long string of incidents, the previous of which he’d had to make up lie after lie to cover. But there was a small part of him that had hoped for the best, that had envisioned her climbing into his hospital bed, snuggling into his side and telling him that none of it mattered. Because they were together.

Then again, that was probably just the painkillers talking.

Tommy knew better than to think that Laurel would be welcoming of more lies told by someone who claimed to love her. He knew the history she had with Oliver, and she was right, he knew exactly how hard it had been for her to open up to him. And he still lied to her face about one of the most important things in his life. For two years.

“She’ll come around, man,” Diggle said, pulling Tommy from his thoughts.

“And if she doesn’t?” Tommy countered. He really didn’t have high hopes for Laurel forgiving him. But he couldn’t keep lying to her anymore, not once he’d realized that his feelings ran as deep as they did.

“Then you make up for it,” Digg answered. “Whatever way you can. Flowers, romantic movies, something important that means something to her. You make her see that you’re more than just the job and that the thing you kept from her isn’t a dealbreaker.”

Tommy raised a brow. “Sounds like you’re talking from experience, man.” He knew things were still strained between Lyla and John, but was it possible that they’d found common ground on which to build a new foundation?

The other man shrugged. “Nah, I’m just particularly good at giving advice.” He threw Tommy a smirk.

“These must be some strong drugs, Digg,” Tommy said, repositioning himself and then wincing, pressing a hand to his shoulder. “Because that almost sounded like you were making a joke.”

“Huh,” Diggle gruffed. “Musta said it wrong.”

A nurse came in, changed the dressing on his shoulder, and pumped a syringe of something into his IV. Warmth bloomed within him instantly, and Tommy could feel drowsiness pull him under.

When Tommy woke again, Oliver and Felicity were seated on either side of him. Felicity’s hand was resting on Tommy’s and she gave it a gentle squeeze when he stirred.
“Hey,” she said quietly, pulling Oliver’s attention to him as well.

“Hey back,” Tommy said, his voice rough from disuse.

“How are you feeling?” Felicity asked, her eyes still full of worry. “That’s a stupid question. You got shot.” She huffed a breath. “I’m glad you’re awake. You scared me back there.”

“C’mon Smoak. You know you can’t get rid of me that easy.” He shifted, pulling himself up until he was sitting a little more. He hated seeing her so worried, but when he closed his eyes, his mother’s face flooded his mind. He was still fuzzy on the details but he remembered the warmth of her touch. Go back and live. Her voice echoed through his mind.

“I wouldn’t try,” she said, giving him a shaky smile, and then bit her lower lip. “You’ll have another visitor soon.”

“Thea insisted,” Oliver piped in for the first time since Tommy had opened his eyes.

A gentle knock came on the door and it pushed open slowly. “Speak of the devil,” Tommy said with a smile. “We were just talking about you, Speedy.”

The teen moved into the room, looking more meek than he’d ever seen her before. Usually Thea was sure of herself, confident, boisterous. But now she wore jeans and an oversized t-shirt, her mascara was running and her eyes were puffy.

“You okay?” Tommy asked her, on instinct.

“Me?” Thea scoffed. “You’re the one that got…”

“I’m fine, Speedy. Really. It was through and through. Didn’t hit any of the important stuff.” He’d never seen Thea look so concerned before. Tommy found himself a little surprised by it, but it warmed his heart just the same.

Thea turned to her brother. “And you’re opening a club in this neighborhood? When your best friend just got shot there?”

Oliver’s eyes moved to his sister. “It’s not that simple,” he said, lips pressed into a thin line. He threw a glance to Tommy, not that it would help. He might have blown his cover story with Laurel, but it was in place for a reason, and he wouldn’t be telling anyone else about ARGUS any time soon.

“Thea, to be fair, I wasn’t in the same area as the club,” Tommy started.

“But Ollie told me--”

“The club is safe,” Tommy interjected. “There’s tons of security, headed up by our friend Mr. Diggle. And I have it on good authority that the vigilante likes to keep an eye on the neighborhood.” He shifted his gaze to Oliver, trying to keep a smirk from his features. He could feel the dull ache resume in his shoulder, and he wondered fleetingly if he was the first of the two of them to have a scar from a gunshot. He’d have to remember to ask Oliver later on.

“Twinkletoes in the green hood?” Thea scoffed. “Please.”

Tommy snorted a laugh.

“Thea, I think what Tommy’s trying to say is that this was a fluke thing.” Oliver’s eyes were hard
when they landed on him. “And he’s going to be okay, so there’s no reason to worry about where the club is.”

She nodded, chewing on the inside of her cheek. “Good,” she said finally. And if Tommy wasn’t mistaken, her eyes were glassy. “I just couldn’t… if anything happened to any of you.”

Oliver stood, crossing the short distance between him and his sister and pulled her into his arms. “You’ve got nothing to worry about Speedy.”

Tommy glanced away. With the painkillers and other medications coursing through his system he felt nearly on the edge of tears. “I’ll be up and around soon enough,” Tommy said, his voice thicker with emotion than he’d anticipated.

Thea reached her hand out and took hold of Tommy’s.

Felicity cleared her throat. “I feel like I’m intruding.” She stood and moved for the door, but Thea blocked her path.

“Oh no you don’t,” she said, pulling her close to herself and Oliver.

Tommy watched as Oliver stiffened and a look of mild horror crossed Felicity’s face at the closeness. He was curious what had transpired after he’d lost consciousness the night before, but he didn’t dare ask with Thea around. Besides, if his friends had something they wanted to share with him, they would.

A booming voice from the hallway broke the four apart. “I think I can find the room of my only son on my own, thank you very much.”

Tommy frowned. Was it too late to feign being asleep? Probably with so many people in his room. Dammit.

A nurse poked her head in. “Tommy, you’re allowed two guests at a time. Remember?”

“Thank you Charlene,” he said.

“We will gladly clear out,” Felicity said, moving toward the door.

“Sounds like someone is afraid of my dear old dad,” Tommy said, a lazy smirk settling on his features.

“You bet,” Thea answered, pulling Felicity toward the door.

Oliver snuck out too. Tommy could see his father just outside the door, having cornered a poor med student who was cowering and nodding incessantly at whatever Malcolm was saying. Finally, his father stalked into the room.

“Tommy,” he said, his voice stern. “I wish I could have come sooner. I just spoke with your doctors and ensured you’re getting the best care. I have a team of the best surgeons in the country on standby should you need any further treatment.”

“Gee, thanks Dad,” Tommy said, narrowly avoiding rolling his eyes.

“You’re upset with me,” Malcolm deadpanned.

“How about ‘Hey son- how are you feeling?’ Or ‘Tommy I’m so glad you didn’t die.’ Literally anything would be better than what you just said.”
“I see. I didn’t realize you were looking for me to coddle you, son.” Malcolm took a step back. “I thought perhaps getting you the best care possible might be important.”

Tommy could feel the rage boiling beneath the surface. He and his father never saw eye to eye on things—not when they really counted. Malcolm always wanted to throw money at things to make them better, where Tommy preferred the personal approach. Thankfully, the rage was overshadowed by the medication he was being pumped full of and after a couple deep breaths, he was able to calm himself so the heart monitor stopped screaming at him.

He closed his eyes, took a deep breath, and then met his father's impatient gaze. “Thanks for coming, Dad.” He had uttered the words with as much sincerity as he could muster. His father seemed taken aback.

“I’m… glad you’re going to be okay,” Malcolm answered. And then he turned for the door. He bumped into the tray table and sent the clear bag of Tommy’s belongings careening to the floor.

A nurse poked her head in. “Everything okay in here?”

“Yes, thank you,” Malcolm answered, bending to pick up the items.

Tommy almost wished he had a camera, the sight seemed so foreign. Then again, it could have just been the meds messing with his mind. A lot of things seemed humorous to Tommy as he laid there in bed. He settled back against the pillows, his head growing foggy once more.

The next thing he remembered was shouting. Or at the very least it was someone talking loudly. And close by. He pulled himself from the haze enough to hear the conversation.

“No, I just got here. I’m checking everything now. Yes I understand you feel that we should have brought him directly in but your highly trained agents made a judgement call. Yes, I’ll call you back. Goodbye.”

Tommy’s eyes stayed closed but he knew Lyla was close by. “Checking everything, huh?” He asked, popping a single eye open. “Better be careful, I’ve got it on good authority I’ve got nothing on under this hospital gown. Don’t want your husband beating me up for any foul play.”

He found Lyla digging through his clothes and frowned. “One- that was a joke. And two, what the hell are you doing?” He asked.

“I’m glad you’re feeling well enough to joke, Merlyn, but this is serious. I need to know where your ID badge is.”

“It’s with everything else there, I’d imagine. In my wallet. Why?”

Lyla pulled out his wallet, dug through it, and frowned. “Because it was just used at ARGUS headquarters. The Dark Archer breached the building and stole the Markov device back. And eliminated Jackson.”

—

Oliver leapt across the rooftop, the burn of adrenaline pushing his muscles as they worked overtime. But there was no time to stop. This was the first solid lead they had in nearly a week, and he wasn’t going to let it slip from him.

“Jump to the brownstone roof after this and take the 9th street alley from there,” Felicity said, and he could hear the clicking of her keys and he turned into her directions.
“Where’s Diggle?” he questioned as his voice modulator distorted his words.

“He’s still in a meeting with Lyla and the she-devil,” she replied with a scoff. “It’s a good thing she didn’t ask us to come, because I would not have been polite when I told her to go to hell.”

A ghost of a smile crossed his face when his feet landed against the wet pavement. The snow gathered in the corners of the alleyway, but none of it stuck to the main tracks of Starling’s streets. There was too much traffic, foot and otherwise, for it to look more than a muddy gray on an otherwise dim street corner.

“Maybe we should refrain from calling our friend’s boss a she-devil.”

“Fine regular devil works too.”

He bit back a laugh as he kept moving. He was trying to be diplomatic for Tommy’s sake. But Amanda Waller had a way of ruining everything she got her hands on. And now she was ruining his city too. Even if he couldn’t crown her with the blame for all of the events that had happened.

Some of those sat squarely on the shoulders of Malcolm Merlyn. An enigma all on his own, but now things had changed. Because it wasn’t just that Merlyn had once blackmailed Felicity, or that he ran hot and cold with his own son. But he had acquired Unidac for the sole purpose of getting his hands on the Markov device, still with no endgame in sight for it either. Felicity had checked as many networks and files as Merlyn had dollars, and she couldn’t decipher what he wanted from it. Not that it mattered now. The machine was dead, regardless of who had it in their possession.

Then there was the Dark Archer. Malcolm had clearly hired the man to ensure the safety of the device, at any cost. There was a dead ARGUS agent to show for it.

Not exactly a tragedy. Because yes, Oliver wanted less blood in this vastly growing fight. But the man had shot Tommy. He’d tortured men for far less, and he couldn’t help the envy spike over the fact that the Dark Archer was the one who took him out. Oliver probably would have done much worse.

“You need to take the shortcut behind Elm,” Felicity said, pulling his focus back on what they were doing. “I’m reading a heat signature in the old shoe factory across from there. Also what the frak does this guy have against nice lit street corners?”

“Because being seen isn’t exactly his MO.” Tracking the Dark Archer had been hell, Felicity seemed more frustrated as the days went on, but they both had promised Tommy they’d find him.

His friend was sidelined with his injured shoulder, and Oliver could tell how much it was killing Tommy. He didn’t like knowing the other archer had used his access badge to break into ARGUS. But while everyone was wondering why the man would go through so much trouble to get a useless device back, and kill his ally in custody, Oliver’s mind was stuck on another question. How had he managed to do it?

An access badge could get you through doors, but that wouldn’t make you invisible. There had been no less than 30 agents in the building at the time, and until Jackson was bleeding out from a sliced jugular, no one noticed anything. How had he gotten in and out almost completely unseen? It was enough to make Oliver pause. Because if the Dark Archer had killed Jackson for failing, why hadn’t he killed Tommy? He saw his face, Digg’s and Lyla’s too, that night at the Merlyn Global facility. And Tommy had been injured in a hospital bed when he stole the badge, but he left Tommy alive. Why?
Felicity had tried to narrow down who took the badge. But it was no use. According to the hallway camera no less than a dozen people had been in and out of his room through the day. Plus the rooms had no cameras in them, and Tommy had been so out of it, he barely remembered more than their visit and his father’s. A dead end, but Felicity was still trying.

He knew it was all for Tommy’s benefit. Their friend was blaming himself for what happened, and if she could ease some of that burden she was going to try.

Oliver crept along the outside of the warehouse, keeping as close and low as he could.

“I don’t like this,” Felicity said, and in the stillness of the night it vibrated through him. “You should wait for Digg.”

“If I wait he could get away,” he said, the urgency evident. They had already failed twice before to take down this archer. He didn’t want to make it three. “I’ll be fine, I promise.”

He thought he heard her mutter something about not making promises he couldn’t keep, but Oliver shifted his focus to picking the lock on the back door. The tumblers and pins clicking into the right places easy enough.

“That was too easy,” her words voiced for him.

“I’m on alert,” he replied, picking up his bow and nocking an arrow into place.

He treaded along the ground level, each step as slow and steady as he could manage. His head stay on a swivel with every page rustling and metal step creaking. The wind had kicked up outside, a gentle howl following him through the space, and Oliver tried to push the shiver down.

At the center of the warehouse was a tall mass silhouetted against the darkness. Without hesitation Oliver steadied his bow, and let the arrow sail from his fingers.

It embedded in the center of mass, dropping the figure to the ground with a loud thud.

“What the hell was that?”

Oliver didn’t respond as he rushed toward it. But as the moon shone through the skylight, Oliver saw what his arrow has found.

A mannequin.

“Dammit,” he growled. “He’s not here.”

“What?”

“It’s not him,” he said again, lowering his voice.

“That doesn’t make any sense.”

Oliver wanted to agree with her. She had done the math, the research. She had triangulated and wrote an algorithm, and probably 900 other things, just to find the Dark Archer. But he was a step ahead other them, once again.

Oliver kicked the dummy, and for good measure kicked it once more. He managed to dislodge it from its base and the thing flipped over.

That’s when Oliver saw something taped to its front. He reached for it, hoping against all odds that
his flair for the explosives were not in play, and pulled it free. It was an envelope, a thick manila envelope, and in simple typeface it had three words written on it.

**FOR THE HOOD.**

Oliver didn’t even think of waiting, he pulled it, as the sound of tape being freed reverberated off the walls. He lifted the flap, cautiously aware that the man could have put anything in there, and dumped the contents out onto the ground.

Pictures, dozens and dozens of them, spilled out, and even in the pale light he could see them taking shape. Tommy was in all of them. In the hospital, at his apartment, talking with Lyla, Digg, Felicity, even him. Oliver felt his blood run colder. He could recognize a threat when he saw one. And as he reached the slip of paper behind all the photographs his suspicions were confirmed.

*If you’re the type of man I think you are, you’ll back off. Otherwise ARGUS will be down another agent.*

Oliver tried to restrain the urge to tear the paper to shreds, and as the corners crumpled in on themselves he knew he was losing the battle. But if there was any evidence on the paper, he had to keep it intact for Felicity.

“Oliver?” Concern elevated in her voice. “What’s going on?”

“It’s a threat,” he ground out, shoving the pictures and the note back in the envelope. “Back off or else.”

“We’ll get him.”

He wanted to believe her, but Oliver wasn’t so sure they would. The Dark Archer had been operating through the city for over a month now, and the closest they’d gotten to him was that night with the device. *It’s like he’s not operating from the same grid.* “If Digg radioes in tell him to call it a night.”

“You should too,” she said, and he could hear the exhaustion in her voice. “It’s a quiet night, you should come home.”

He knew she meant back to the Foundry, but her words sent an electric spike through his veins. The only good thing that had come from that night was he and Felicity finally getting on the same page. He found it odd how easy it had been too, to shift from their vague almost feelings into something real. And Oliver was taking the time to appreciate every aspect of their new relationship, and the slow build up.

He didn’t want to screw things up again. And it was more than just his growing feelings for her. Felicity understood when he couldn’t quite say what he meant. She filled in the gaps of things he needed before he knew he needed them himself. She didn’t judge him for the things he had done, because she knew why he’d done most of them. And when she looked at him she saw every piece, not in broken shards too jagged to hold, but as a person working to find the new balance between all the different layers. He was sure he loved her, even if a part of him didn’t think he deserved to do so. But he couldn’t back away now if he tried. She was to ingrained in him.

Once he made it back to the Foundry, he slipped his bike into the garage. He knew soon the place would be crawling with people all over. He’d have to talk to Digg about amping up security. They couldn’t very well have club goers stumbling to the back of the building and finding the secret entrance, once they opened.
“Hey,” Felicity called out when he made his way towards her computer setup. He no longer considered the computers his. Actually Felicity told him in no uncertain terms, that if he ever touched her babies without her permission, he’d be in a world of hurt. “I couldn’t get another hit on him anywhere in the city. It’s like he vanished.”

“I expected that,” Oliver huffed, dropping the envelope on the side of her desk. “He left us a parting gift.”

Felicity reached for it, pulling one of the photos out. It was a shot of Tommy through his living room window, as if a rifle was sighted on him. “Bastard.”

“Yeah,” Oliver added with a groan. “But we keep digging. Because he’s not just going to target Tommy. He’ll go after everyone.”

“You don’t think he knows do you? About you and,” she gestured around them. “All this.”

“I think if the Dark Archer knew who I was and where we operated from we’d have more problems on our hands.”

“True,” she let out a breath, setting the photograph down. “I’m sorry we lost him.”

He shook his head, reaching out as his fingers slipped into her grip. “I thought guilt was my thing?”

She rolled her eyes but smile. “You should take that off so we can head out.”

Again her words shifted in his head, and Oliver felt the rush of desire to pull her to him. He watched as her cheeks darkened when she registered her words, and the way she pulled her bottom lip back with her teeth. Yeah the resolve to take things slow was rapidly failing him.

But before he could act on anything his phone buzzed from the side of the desk.

“If that’s Thea, I might have to disown my sister,” he joked, as he reached for it. But it wasn’t his sister’s contact info that popped up. Instead the number was clearly from overseas. He pressed talk and held the phone to his ear. “Hello?”

“Oliver Queen, long time no talk.”

He cursed under his breath, trying to hold back his anger. “How’d you get this number Anatoly?”

“The Bratva has their ways,” his old friend said. Oliver knew the gesture too, Anatoly was trying to establish his hand in all this. “We have things to discuss.”

Felicity shot him a worried glance, and he couldn’t help but look away. The Bratva still held some of the worst things Oliver had ever done. And even if he knew it didn’t matter to her, he couldn’t help but feel ashamed of it.

“It’s been over a year,” he nearly growled into the phone. Friends or not, he knew Anatoly’s loyalty would always lie with the Bratva first.

“And yet here we are speaking,” he sounded bright. “My lovely niece has informed me today she will not be married unless she can include you on the guest list. And given how opposed to this union she has been, I am inclined to ask you why? Why would Sofia change her tone so soon? And why does she want you here?”

He sensed it in the way Anatoly was speaking, as if he wanted Oliver to trip up and give something
away that he shouldn't. But Anatoly seemed to have forgotten how much Oliver had learned from him. “Sofia’s getting married?”

His old friend scoffed. “Very well. I must warn you though. If you come back to Russia, I cannot ensure you shall leave it in one piece.”

“Are you threatening me Anatoly?”

“No,” he said simply. “You know how you left was a betrayal of brotherhood. You can be the only one who deals with the weight of that. I do not fault your choice nor harbor ill will. But others here do. Those loyal to Mikhail. So if you return, you must do so at your own risk. Because as much as I wish I could help, my hands will be tied.”

“Thanks for the warning.”

“Please think it through,” Anatoly said, his voice dropping to a whisper. And the line clicked off.

Oliver stared at his phone, long enough for the screen to dim, and then turn black. Things were really set in motion. Up until then, he had let Sofia and Ivan’s problem float in and out of his mind, always too much happening for him to focus on it. But it was coming faster than he’d like to admit. And there was no way to prepare for the return.

Russia was a pandora’s box of all the things he had run from. It was the start and the end of so much darkness and turmoil. But the only way to honor a promise he made was to go back. He didn’t know what kind of a man he was, not when everything had shifted so thoroughly so fast. But he needed to believe he wasn’t the kind of person who’d leave Ivan and Sofia to this fate. That he’d help them no matter the cost.

He looked at Felicity, who was watching him with an curious intensity. This was why he had to help them. Because if what he felt for Felicity was a fraction of what Ivan and Sofia had, then he knew just how much he’d fight to keep it. They deserved a chance. And they deserved his loyalty.

“You okay?” she questioned, standing next to him, as she leaned in to touch her palm against his chest.

He nodded, not trusting himself to keep the words he’d been thinking all week from slipping out. It was too soon to feel like this. But it didn’t seem to matter.

“As long as I have you,” he replied with a smile.

An alert went off on her phone, and Felicity turned to silence it. When she swiveled back she placed a kiss to his lips. “Happy new year.”

“Happy new year.”

He didn’t know what the year would hold. But he felt a confidence with her beside him. They’d return to Russia soon enough. And Oliver knew he should fear that when he did, he’d have to face the reason he left in the first place. But with Felicity next to him, he thought that maybe those demons could finally stay silent once and for all.
“Any word from her?” Felicity asked, sitting on the deep armchair that faced Tommy’s sofa where he was dutifully resting.

Tommy shook his head and shifted in his seat, finding a more comfortable position. “Not since she left my hospital room last week,” he sighed. “I knew it was a gamble telling her. But…”

Felicity frowned, knowingly. “But you love her.” She’d assumed as much for the last few weeks, just from seeing them together, or listening to the way Tommy talked about Laurel. Something had shifted in him, she thought, when they’d been attacked in Laurel’s apartment. She understood firsthand just how much a situation like that can put things into perspective for a person.

“I do,” he answered, his eyes falling to the ground. “I couldn’t keep it from her anymore.”

She nodded. She wasn’t sure if she’d label what she felt for Oliver ‘love’ but that urgency to tell him the secrets she’d been hiding, the need for him to know, that much she understood. She’d tried to keep her mind from wandering too much into the feelings territory when it came to Oliver. Things between them had fallen into place so quickly that she was just trying to adjust and enjoy the whirlwind of it all. But was it love? The fierce protection and worry she felt when he was in the field, the longing ache whenever he was out of her sight, the butterflies in her stomach when she caught a sight of him every time they came back together, the fire that spread through every nerve ending she had when he touched her. She couldn’t be sure it was love, but it sure as hell was a lot more intense than anything she’d experienced before.

“I could talk to her for you, see where her head is at,” Felicity offered. She actually hadn’t talked to Laurel since the Queen’s Christmas party and wanted to get in touch with her anyway. Neither of them had many female friends and Felicity was of the opinion that women needed to stick together.

“Thanks,” Tommy answered, standing and moving toward the pass-through to the kitchen where his meds were sitting on the counter. “But I think I need to do this myself.”

Felicity stood too, glancing at the clock in the kitchen. It was getting late and she had to pick up dinner before heading to the Foundry. She moved in, giving him a gentle hug while making sure not to squeeze his bad shoulder. Felicity was glad that he was up and moving around and not wallowing too much. Although if the take-out food containers littering the kitchen had anything to say about it, he was probably still wallowing some.
“I’ll see you soon,” she promised moving to the door. “Let me know how it goes if you talk to her.”

“I will Smoak,” Tommy confirmed. “Stop feeling sorry for me already. I’m fine.”

She nodded quickly and then ducked out of the apartment. She’d been to visit him most days since he’d been released from the hospital, keeping him updated on their search for the Dark Archer, even though they’d mostly come up with nothing. She had only come to tell him that they’d failed again and although she knew that the secret keeping thing was a slippery slope, she felt like Tommy had too much on his mind to tell him about the threat found in the envelope of photos. He was already being careful- they all were- so aside from barricading him somewhere, she wasn’t sure what more he could do by knowing. Besides, they’d tell him soon enough. Or maybe Oliver would. After all, it had been his decision to leave Tommy out of things for the time being to see how things panned out. But if the Dark Archer was going to resurface, he’d more than likely make his move soon.

Felicity made her way to the elevator, lost in the text conversation on her phone. She barely looked up when the elevator let out a ding to announce its arrival, but as soon as she was closed inside she could feel the hairs on the back of her neck stand on end. There were not many times she’d gotten such a feeling, but they always had accompanied the presence of someone. Someone she really hoped she wasn’t about to run into.

At the bottom level of the building the doors opened and Felicity took a step out. There was a figure sitting on a long bench near the main entrance and Felicity felt her blood run cold.

She moved closer, unable to force her feet to obey her brain when it screamed ‘STOP’ inside her head.

It wasn’t until she was directly in front of the woman that the paper that was hiding her face folded and settled neatly in her lap and she raised her eyes to meet Felicity’s.


“Is it though?” Felicity asked, scrunching her nose. “Because it kinda feels like you’ve been waiting for me. And I don’t appreciate being stalked by anyone let alone… well you.”

“You’ve always been quite astute,” Waller said, standing and smoothing her skirt back down into place. “I actually came to see Agent Merlyn about his desk assignments while he’s on provisionary medical leave, but I was informed you were inside, so I thought it best to wait.”

“Desk assignments?” Felicity asked. And then, “Wait you were informed by whom that I was inside?”

Waller waved the question off like it was the most mundane thing in the world. “Not to worry. I simply wanted to remind you of something that seems to have been affected since our mutual friend has reclaimed residence in the city.”

Felicity crossed her arms and felt her eyes narrow involuntarily. “Which is?” Somehow, even knowing that Waller was baiting her, Felicity couldn’t help but want to get to the bottom of the mystery the woman was dangling before her.

“That the deal I made with Agent Merlyn two years ago was that he works for me with the condition that I leave you and Mr. Queen alone. You’ll no doubt see how the last couple of weeks have,” she paused. “Inconvenienced that particular pact.”

“Listen Waller, if you’ve got something to say I wish you’d just do it. Mr. Queen and I are a bit alike in the fact that we don’t really go for all the pomp and circumstance you’ve got going on here.”
“Then I shall be direct,” Waller said, her voice dropping low. The shift made her seem somehow even more intimidating, if that was possible. “I assume your employer would be surprised to learn the origin of the particular virus affecting his new billion dollar paperweight. The deal that I made with Agent Merlyn only works if you and your boy toy in the leather hoodie stay out of my way. Disrupt a mission of mine again and not only will Malcolm Merlyn get detailed evidence of your involvement with the shutdown of his device, but I shall consider my agreement with his son to be null and void.”

Felicity felt her heart flip flop in her chest, and not in the good Oliver-just-walked-in way. No, this was due to something much more horrifying. She held her breath, not wanting Amanda Waller to see how the words had affected her. “Just because you’re currently operating out of Starling,” Felicity said, squaring her shoulders to the woman. “Doesn’t mean that we’re going to stop. The Hood is doing good here. Getting rid of the scum that’s been plaguing this city. You can threaten to go to my boss if you want, but don’t forget, I gained access to who pays your bills once, and I can do it again.”

An eerie grin split across Amanda Waller’s face, and then she actually laughed. Felicity couldn’t tell if it was genuine or just for her benefit, but it made her shudder nonetheless.

“I see why Mr. Queen admires you,” she said, taking a step back. “Just remember, my dear. No matter how good he is with a bow and arrow, it will never compare to the depth of pockets of the people who are backing me.”

Felicity gave her a single nod. “Deep pockets or not, I’ve never seen an arrow fly more true than when it’s in his hands. And the thing about organizations like yours, is that while they may always be around, even directors are replaceable. Now if you’ll excuse me, I’m late.”

Without waiting for a reply, Felicity spun on her heel and shoved through the glass door. The cool evening air felt like ice against her flushed face. She hated letting that woman get a rise out of her, but she hated even more the way Amanda Waller brought out the worst in her. Had she really just cryptically threatened the head of ARGUS? *Even directors are replaceable.* The words reverberated through her head. Yes, yes she had. And the worst part was, she didn’t even feel bad about it. Not when she took into consideration everything Waller had done to the people she cared about. She’d blackmailed both Oliver and Tommy into working for her, she’d split up the Yamashiro family for months and had even gone as far as to completely erase Maseo from digital existence. And more recently, she’d left several agents to die, and Tommy had nearly lost his life trying to save them as a result. So even though Felicity hated knowing that she had the capability of threatening the death of anyone, deep down, she wasn’t sorry she’d done it. And that scared her more than anything Amanda Waller had said to her.

She made her way to her car, glancing over her shoulder a few times, just for good measure, to make sure Waller hadn’t sent any goons after her. Felicity had just shoved her hands into her pockets for some warmth, when she felt her phone vibrate. It shrilled a second later, breaking the silence of the parking lot with a ringtone she’d assigned to Oliver. She pulled the phone out, debating for a moment if she was steady enough to talk to him without raising suspicion that something might be wrong.

And then she answered it anyway. “Hey,” she said, a little breathless.

“Felicity,” he replied, and she could hear the smile in his voice. It made her melt a little.

“Oliver,” she said back, stopping at her car. She switched the phone to her other ear, using her free hand to dig for her car keys.
“Are you able to be on comms tonight?” he said, but he sounded preoccupied.

Felicity smiled, despite everything that had just transpired with Waller. She unlocked her car and climbed inside. “That’s the plan. Just stopping at Big Belly Burger before I head over. Can I get you anything?”

“That depends,” he said. “Do you think you can order a tux at the drive-thru?”

“Well I’m pretty sure you’ve already got a good number of those,” she answered. “But I’m assuming this means your invitation to Sofia’s wedding came?” Felicity had been dreading the upcoming wedding more and more as the days passed. She couldn’t help but worry about what returning to Russia would mean for Oliver, and that was before he’d gotten the warning phone call from Anatoly. But Oliver was determined to do whatever he could to help Sofia and Ivan. And Felicity had made a commitment to being by his side when he did.

“It did,” he admitted, but something in his voice changed, like the weight of everything he’d left behind in Russia was crushing him with full force again.

“We are going to figure this out,” Felicity said. “And then Starling can get its vigilante back and everything goes back to normal. Besides, sometimes it’s best to just get hard things over with. Like going to the dentist.”

“Felicity-”

“No matter how much you hate it, you just have to set yourself an appointment and not think about it.”

“Felicity,” Oliver said, the smile returning to his voice.

“I was babbling again, wasn’t I?”

He huffed a laugh in response. “I just called to ask you something.”

“Right. Yes. Ask away. Was it about food, because I’m going to Big Belly--”

“Felicity, will you be my date to Sofia’s wedding?”

She grinned, glad that he’d cut her off from another babble. Because Oliver Queen had just used her name and the word ‘date’ in the same sentence. For the first time. Sure, it was a ruse to get them to Russia so they could actually spoil said wedding. But still, she’d enjoy the fact that Oliver was asking her on a date right up until it became a mission.

“I’d love to,” was all she said.

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He didn’t want to admit it while Felicity was over, but he was going stir crazy in his apartment. There was only so much TV and rest he could take before he needed to do something. Anything. He’d settle for reorganizing back case files for ARGUS. But he couldn’t ask her to hang around because he was bored and lonely.

Laurel hadn’t returned his calls all week. Of course he understood why, but it still hurt. It hurt knowing how much he had hurt her, with all his secrets and lies. And he had no way of making things right. The only thing he could do was wait and see if she could forgive him. Damn he hated waiting.
He considered taking a pill for his shoulder. The pain was starting to shift from a dull ache into a slice of white heat. But he wanted to be awake. Ever since that night every time he closed his eyes, and let the drugs lull him to sleep, he saw his mother. Like a beacon of light shrouded by the darkness. She told him how proud she was, and how much she missed him. But Tommy knew she wasn’t real. The pain he felt when he would wake though, that was more than enough to make up for that.

He thought he had gotten passed it, moved on from the grief over her death. But if getting shot had taught him anything, then there was no moving on from something like that. He just had to find a new way to deal with it.

The knocking startled him out of his thoughts and he rolled his eyes. He crossed the living room to his door and pulled it open.

“Seriously Felicity I’m…” his words halted when he saw who stood before him. “Not Felicity.”

“ASTUTE ASSESSMENT AGENT MERLYN,” WALLER replied with a sigh. “GLAD TO SEE YOUR PAIN KILLERS HAVEN’T DULLED YOUR DEDUCTION SKILLS.”

“What are you doing here?” he asked, wincing as his shoulder seized with pain. “Doc said I had to be out for another three weeks.”

“I’m aware of your medical limitations,” she said as she held up a stack of envelopes. “I thought I’d bring you your mail.”

He raised a brow. “Is it going to explode?”

“Don’t be absurd, Tommy. If I wanted to kill you there’d be less messy ways for that,” she said handing him the mail. “May I come in?”

WALLER didn’t wait for his reply as she brushed past him into the apartment.

“SURE DIRECTOR WALLER,” he said turning towards her. “MAKE YOURSELF AT HOME.”

WALLER perched herself against the back of his sofa and scoffed. “LET’S SKIP OUR USUAL HOSTILE BANTER SO WE CAN CUT TO THE REASON I’M HERE.”

“HERE TO OFFER ME A PROMOTION? MEDAL OF HONOR?”

WALLER lifted her gaze to him, her attention lingered on his shoulder for longer than he liked. Anger seemed to spike behind her eyes. But as soon as he noticed, her posture shifted and she was stone once more.

“You’re going to be stuck behind a desk for longer than three weeks,” she said simply. “We both know that even a clean shot like that is going to take long enough to rehab. And in light of your associations outside of ARGUS and your recent misplacement of government property, ARGUS is inclined to make sure, once again, that you’re fit for active duty.”

“That’s crap and you know it,” he was furious with what she was suggesting. That he somehow let the Dark Archer steal his badge or that somehow his friendship with Oliver could interfere with his job. “And if it wasn’t for my associations five of our agents would be dead right now.”

“I know,” she all but growled as she spoke. “I know that the success of that mission is owed to more than just you and Agent Michaels. But let’s get one thing abundantly clear. From this moment forward that information does not get spoken aloud again.”
“What?”

Amanda flicked her gaze to the window and then back again. “ARGUS is a secret government organization for a reason. We have to operate under the strictest code of conduct. One that you are so eager to torpedo at any given moment. And normally I would let these infractions slide. I can’t coddle each and every agent under my command, otherwise nothing would get done. But someone higher than me is under the impression that recent slip ups reflect back on my ability to run things.”

Tommy had stopped moving, leaning against the archway. He watched Waller closely, taking in the subtle tells she normally wouldn’t let slip. How her hands clenched in fists beside her, or how her breath came in short shallow intakes. He hadn’t seen her this angry in a long time. Not since the night they had bested her in Russia, and she was looking to lash out. Did she even have leverage for this?

“Your boss doesn’t know the Hood was involved in the rescue mission?”

She shot him an icy glare. “General Shrieve is not my boss. He is a parasite looking to weasel his way into ARGUS. And I assure you Agent Merlyn, as bad as you think I am, Shrieve is worse. Plus if he knew Oliver Queen was the vigilante he’d do everything in his power to use that against him.”

“What does this Shrieve guy have to do with Oliver?”

“Their paths crossed once a long time ago,” she said, with a sigh. “He wanted something from Mr. Queen, but it was never delivered on. There were extenuating circumstances. It’s not important.”

“Maybe I think it is.” Sure Waller said Shrieve was worse, but she was also facing down the barrel of this thing.

“It really isn’t. What is important is the fact that until we have vetted our entire Starling branch, Shrieve isn’t going anywhere,” she grabbed her bag, pulling out a file. “And that means I need you to not make waves when it comes to cases. This should keep you more than occupied for the next few weeks.”

Tommy took the file, flipping it opened to the first page. He read the dossier and scoffed. “Are you joking? This isn’t gonna take three weeks, this could take three years. I mean seriously, the League of Assassins.”

She crossed her arms, shifting slightly. “It’s important that we keep a close monitor on all groups that pose potential threats to national and international security. And I assumed the League would be more than enough thrilling antics to keep you entertained behind a desk.”

“Tracking the movements of one league member for the last three years is one thing, but this list has close to twenty names on it. How the hell am I supposed to get through all this?”

“Quietly, and at your desk,” she replied as she stood. “I realize that you don’t like me Tommy. And you don’t have to in order to do your job. But I do hope you trust me when I urge you to keep your head down while Shrieve is in town. I have down played this access card incident as much as I can. But if he even ponders for a second that you could have prevented that card from falling into the wrong hands, it’ll be over. Costing ARGUS not only the Markov device, but the chance to interrogate Agent Jackson, Shrieve will turn every part of your life upside down until he finds the weakness that will hurt the worst. So do us all a favor, and think before you act on any notions.”

She smoothed out her skirt, and smiled at him. “See you soon Agent Merlyn. And hopefully, you’ll take my words to heart.”
He nodded, watching as she walked past him and out the door. Waller wasn’t just angry about this General showing up. He could sense it in her movements. There was fear buried there too. And he didn’t think he wanted to face anything that could bring a crack to the exterior of Amanda Waller.

He turned back to his mail, not even sure how Waller had managed to get her hands on it either. And rolled his eyes. He would deal with ARGUS and his new case later. He should take care of some of the bills that had already started piling up from his stay in the hospital.

As he flipped through the mail, tossing bills down on the side table, and junk mail across the room, he paused at the next one. He recognised the logo in the corner. And with a curse under his breath he ripped the envelope open, hoping it wasn’t what he thought it was. But of course he couldn’t be that lucky.

Inside there was a folded page of blank stationery around a single check. A check made out to him for 45,000 dollars. From his father.

“God dammit,” he groaned, shoving the check in his pocket.

If Malcolm wanted to start acting like a dad that was one thing. Maybe Tommy could forgive the grievances if that was the case. But all his father ever did was toss money at things until the problem went away. And frankly Tommy was sick of it.

Tommy was almost to Merlyn Global before he even really registered where he was headed. But he had to deal with things. Everything about Malcolm was so corkscrewed in his head. And he didn’t need his father making it worse with money.

It was the man’s solution to everything. He could hear his father’s words reverberate in his memory. *There’s not a problem in the world that can’t be solved with more money.* And for a long time Tommy had seen that as a funny thing. How great was it that he could throw cash at a problem and it would disappear. But he hadn’t been that person in a very long time. And it would be damned if he ever became him again.

As he pulled into the parking garage at Merlyn Global, Tommy took a steady breath. He wanted to confront his father, but he needed a level head to do it. He couldn’t very well go storming up the top floor and start going off. He needed to be calmer than he was about this.

He rolled his window down and took in the cool rush of early January air. Even if the garage was mostly enclosed, he still loved the breeze that rushed through. When he used to work here, he’d sneak out midday and just sit in his car, just like this, and let the calm happen.

After a few minutes Tommy was almost ready, but before he could roll up his window he caught the rise of voices across the lot.

“This isn’t exactly the least conspicuous place we could have this conversation,” he heard the vice grip of his father’s words.

Tommy froze. The son in him told him to roll up his window and get out of there, but the agent was itching for information. He eased down into his seat, obscuring his head from view and listened.

“Your flair for the dramatics and bold moves are exactly why we needed to have this conversation.”

Even without a face to look at Tommy could hear the air of grace that followed Moira Queen. But there was an edge to her words, one he had only ever heard once a long time ago. Back when she had forced his father’s hand and taken him in. It was the tone of a mother out to protect.
“I’m dramatic? You’re the one refusing a perfectly acceptable gift Moira.”

“Gifts with you always come with strings attached,” she replied. Confusion flooded him. Why would his father be giving Moira gifts? Moira’s tone dropped, and he had to readjust to catch the next bit. “And I’ll be damned if you get her involved in your life.”

What the hell were they talking about?

“She deserves to know her father.”

Tommy’s felt a chill run through him, and he was certain it had nothing to do with the weather.

“She did,” Moira said, hurt and anger bubbling with each word. “He was a great man, and the last thing I will ever subject my daughter to is your parenting skills. Leave this alone Malcolm. I will not tell you again.”

He heard her heels click as she stalked off towards the other end off the garage. But even as the minutes passed Tommy couldn’t move. He couldn’t go upstairs and tell his father off, but he couldn’t leave either. So many things about his life had just crashed to pieces before him, and he wasn’t even sure how to process them.

He only knew two things for certain. Thea wasn’t Robert Queen’s daughter and after just coming clean about so many things, he now had another secret between him and his best friend.

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He knew that it was cheesy, calling Felicity like he had to ask her to be his date for the wedding. But there was something about Felicity that made him feel completely okay with it. With her, he wasn’t the Hood, or an ex-Bratva member or a playboy. He was just wholly and completely himself. And sometimes that meant being cheesy. Not that he necessarily had to admit it out loud.

“One triple chili burger,” Felicity called, making her way in, her heels echoing through the mostly empty space of the Foundry. “Although how you eat this stuff and keep abs like…” she froze.

Her eyes locked on his naked torso as he hung mid-air from the middle of the salmon ladder. Felicity swallowed hard and something flashed through her eyes that sent a bolt of electricity straight through Oliver’s core.

He hopped down, landing with a soft thud against the concrete and then reached for the grey tshirt he had laying nearby, and cleared his throat.

“Hmm?” she said, her head snapping up, like a kid’s toy that had just gotten fresh batteries. “Sorry what was I saying?”

“You were wondering how I keep my girlish figure,” he snarked as he reached for the Big Belly Burger bag she had in her hands.

“Right,” she said, shaking her head to clear it. She followed him toward a mostly-clear table near the computer desk. “Sorry. The mouth is either nonstop or nonexistent apparently.”

“It’s fine,” he said, trying to hide the smile from his face. “Thanks for the food.”

“You are welcome,” Felicity answered, her hand lingering across his back as she moved to the computer chair she’d insisted he buy a few weeks ago. Something about ergonomics. “So what’s on the agenda for tonight? I mean the Dark Archer has been poof since the other night. So are we
pulling out the list? Maybe try to knock off a couple other names before Moscow?"

Oliver was almost embarrassed that none of those things had crossed his mind since she’d walked in. But they were the furthest things from it in that moment. Getting the invitation, the call from Anatoly, it made the reality of what was on the horizon come crashing down around him. He thought back to the night they’d shared in Russia forever ago when he’d taken her to the empty club and they’d danced close to an entire list of songs, savoring each other's company before it was too late.

The familiar pang of anxiety flooded him again as he looked at her, swiveling back and forth in the bunker he’d designed to be his secret from the world. She deserved so much better than this darkness. But somehow it seemed like she made things a little less so when she was around. She was an ever-present glow in that darkness, a shining beacon of something he could only describe as hope.

“I’m not really sure,” he answered finally, when he caught her staring at him. “I hadn’t thought that far.”

“Oh,” she said quietly. “I just assumed since you asked if I was coming tonight.”

Oliver cleared his throat. “How lame would it be of me to say that I just wanted to see you?”

Felicity grinned, standing from her chair and making her way over to him. “Is that so, Mr. Queen?” She rolled his chair back and perched herself in his lap, draping an arm over his shoulder.

Oliver leaned up, pressing his lips to hers eagerly and was instantly intoxicated. It wasn’t just the taste of her lips, or the way she raked her nails against his scalp. Nor was it the moan she released as their tongues met, exploring each other or the feel of her pressed against him. But it most certainly was all of it, together, and more, that made his head swim and left him feeling drunk and always wanting more.

They broke apart, both panting, and she offered him a lazy smile.

“That is so,” he answered, resting his forehead against hers.

“I think I could get used to this,” she said with a sigh.

And Oliver felt himself smile, really and truly smile as he pulled her close. He could get used to it too. In another life, a simpler life where their biggest decision was whether to go out to dinner or order in and stay in bed all night. But in their world it had to be enough to have these stolen moments between the chaos. And it was enough, it would sustain him through the darkness and turmoil of whatever was on the horizon.

Felicity’s head tilted, her eyes squinting as she looked at something across the room. Oliver followed her line of sight to find Tommy stalking through the empty club upstairs on the surveillance monitors. He stopped at the door that led down to the Foundry and he proceeded to bang, over and over on the door.

“That doesn’t look good,” she said, standing and moving to the computer. “Want me to let him in?”

Oliver pushed out a breath and stood. “Yeah,” he answered. “Not sure what could have him so worked up.”

She buzzed the door open and Tommy came rushing down the stairs, worry creased in harsh lines across his brow. Briefly, a thought flickered that there were too many people who had access to that space, but it disappeared before it could etch itself in Oliver’s mind.
“How are you feeling?” Oliver asked as soon as Tommy reached the bottom level.

“Shoulder’s fine,” his friend answered dismissively. “I just… there have been too many secrets between us and now that we’ve got this whole new leaf thing going on, I can’t keep this to myself.”

Oliver frowned, glancing back at Felicity who simply shrugged.

“I should let you two talk in private,” she said, standing and moving to pass them.

Tommy shook his head. “You should hear this too. You’ve always been the cool-headed one.”

“Well color me worried,” Felicity said. She reached out, resting her hand on Tommy’s arm. “What’s going on?”

He pulled something out of his back pocket and held it up. “My dad sent me a check for $45,000.”

Felicity coughed, and then covered her mouth, motioning for him to continue.

“That sounds like your father,” Oliver deadpanned. “Throwing money at anything and everything.”

Tommy nodded. “That’s not the… I mean. I went to Merlyn Global to confront him. To yell at him and give it back but I never got the chance.”

Oliver felt panic churn in his stomach. Whatever had Tommy spooked was going to be bad and on top of going to Russia in the next couple of days, Oliver wasn’t sure he needed more piled on top of his already overflowing plate of responsibilities. But he kept his cool, he needed to be there for Tommy to deal with whatever he was about to spill.

“When I pulled into the parking garage I could hear him talking with a woman. About how someone deserved to know their father. My father.” He swallowed hard and Oliver could feel the pain and anger rolling off his friend.

“Wait,” Felicity said, her brow knitting together in a furrow. “Are you saying you have a sister?”

“A half sister,” Tommy said, his eyes glued to the floor.

The panic that was churning in Oliver’s stomach rose, the acid burning his throat as the words that Tommy was speaking began clicking into place. There was very little reason that Tommy would worry about keeping this a secret from him.

“No,” Oliver growled.

“I’m sorry,” Tommy said, his voice a strained whisper.

“What am I missing?” Felicity said, looking between them, her blonde ponytail whipping back and forth as she turned.

“The woman that my father was talking to.”

“No,” Oliver said again, harsher this time, if that was possible. “You’re mistaken. You weren’t hearing right.”

“It was Moira,” Tommy finished finally.

“Oh my god!” Felicity exclaimed, her hands flying to cover her mouth.
Oliver felt his feet nearly go out from under him. If he thought the effects of curare were bad, this was worse. How could his mother have…? He couldn’t even bring himself to think it, let alone say it out loud.

“Just because you heard what you did,” Oliver said, feeling his mouth go dry. “Doesn’t mean they were talking about Thea.”

“Felicity, can you do a DNA test if we get you hair or something?” Tommy asked.

She nodded, hands still over her mouth, eyes wide.

“And if it’s true, then what?” Oliver asked, his voice gravelly and loud; he sounded much more like the Hood than himself and he knew it. But he didn’t care. He couldn’t believe what Tommy was accusing his mother of. “She can’t know. She’s too fragile, too damaged still. She’s lived her whole life with my father. You can’t take that away from her.”

“I’m not saying my father’s a saint,” Tommy spat back.

“He’s building an earthquake generator, Tommy!” Oliver exclaimed. “He hired the Dark Archer, a man who not only is responsible for your shoulder but also for the death of an ARGUS agent. Not to mention the kidnapping of five of your fellow agents, and stalking and threatening to kill you.”

“I think everyone needs to take a step back,” Felicity said moving her free hand to Oliver’s arm so she was standing between them, a hand on each of them. “I understand this is a lot to process. But I also know that Malcolm having anything on someone is liable to end badly. If it’s true, and I’m not saying it is.” She paused, meeting Oliver’s eyes before continuing. “But if it is, better she hears it from someone she trusts than from him. Why don’t we do the DNA test and go from there?”

Oliver blew out an angry breath, and forced himself to release the tension building in his shoulders.

“That seems reasonable,” he growled.

Tommy nodded in response. “I’m sorry,” he said after a long minute.

“It isn’t your fault,” Oliver answered. “It’s an indiscretion between my mother and your father. Potentially.”

“I know,” Tommy said. “But still, don’t shoot the messenger is a thing for a reason.”

“I think I’m going to-“ Oliver hiked a thumb over his shoulder toward the back exit as if to finish his thought.

“Want me to come with?” Felicity asked.

Oliver shook his head. “No. I just need some fresh air.” He made his way toward the exit and disappeared out into the cold, dark night.
“So you and Ollie are really going?” Tommy handed over her coffee as he sat across from her. “I mean this is the same place we were more or less banned from over two years ago.”

It had been a hectic couple days since the invite had come, and Felicity was trying not to really think about the logistics of their trip. She knew they were doing the right thing, or at least she knew she was doing the right thing. She wanted to back Oliver, and regardless of if she trusted Sofia and the Bratva, she trusted Oliver. And he needed her.

“You say it like you wouldn’t be on that flight in a heartbeat,” she shot him a pointed look. “We both know if you hadn’t been shot you would be insisting on coming along.”

“I still could you know?” he shrugged. “You might need a getaway driver.”

“You know, in interest of keeping a bullet from your other shoulder, I’m going to pass on that,” she sighed. Truth was she wished she could bring Tommy, but Oliver didn’t want to risk him. Or risk the chance that Waller might send someone to tail Tommy. They were all valid reasons, but she still didn’t like the idea of leaving him out of things. “Sorry, you have to stay here.”

“Nah it’s cool,” Tommy took a drink of his latte and leaned back. But she could see the rigidness sitting there. Tommy was getting antsy for something, a fight, or maybe just a good mystery, either way she knew her friend wasn’t cool with sitting this out. “You should seriously reconsider taking Diggle though.”

“He’s staying here to run the club while you’re recovering,” she said, gesturing to his shoulder. “You have enough on your plate with Waller. And even me going, rests solely on if Malcolm approves my request for the time off.”

“Oh yeah because someone who’s worked nonstop for about three years couldn’t possible have banked up months of vacation time.”
“Have you even spoken to your father recently?” Felicity snarked, but the reality of her sentence came crashing soon. “Sorry, I didn’t mean it like that. I just meant, with the break in and the device being inert. He’s been on a warpath over every little thing. What if I leave and it raises suspicion?”

“Look Malcolm Merlyn is a great many things,” he set his drink down and leaned closer. “But we both know that if he thought for a second you had anything to do with that, you’d know it.”

“Yeah.”

She still worried. Malcolm had been in hushed meetings with Dr. Markov ever since the device was ‘recovered’ by an anonymous source. *Anonymous my ass* . Felicity knew exactly who dropped the device back on Merlyn Global’s doorstep. But how did her boss get involved with the Dark archer? And why would he do anything to help Merlyn in the first place? It didn’t make any sense. And Felicity hated things that didn’t make any sense.

“And then I’ll run off and join the circus.”

She shook her head and focused on Tommy. “What?”

“Circus is what you tuned back in on? That’s reassuring.”

“Sorry, I was thinking.”

“I know I saw the brows furrowed,” he laughed, then ran a hand down his face. “I was just wondering if you’ve run the DNA yet?”

“The machine’s doing it’s thing,” she bit her lip, wishing she had a better response for him. For all their sakes she wanted Tommy to be wrong. For Thea who did not deserve her world to be rocked another time. For Tommy who needed to stop seeing his father fall further from the man he used to be. And for Oliver, who had lost so much already. She didn’t want him to feel like he’d lose Thea too. “It should be done by the time I get back to the Foundry. Did you want to come with me?”

Felicity watched him closely, seeing how much he fidgeted under her query. He was as afraid of the results as she was to see them first. But Tommy asked her to do this, and she knew he wouldn’t back down from finding out the truth.

“I’ll meet you there,” he replied playing with his cup.

She narrowed her eyes, not wanting to leave him by himself, but before she could speak Thea came bounding over to them.

“Two of my favorite people in the same coffee shop,” she grinned plopping down in the open seat next to Felicity. “Which is perfect because I have a boy question.”

Felicity shot her an amused smile. “Is this about Calvin?”

“Please, Calvin was so three weeks ago,” she rolled her eyes. “This is a different guy.”

“Color me intrigued.”

“And me not interested in the love life of my…” Tommy trailed off shaking his head. “My best friend’s baby sister.”

“Please don’t be a grouchy about this,” she pouted. “There’s a reason I came to you and not Ollie.”

Felicity’s phone buzzed on the table and Thea reached for it before she could. “Ooh, speak of the
“Give me that,” Felicity took her phone back and opened the text.

She couldn’t help the flush to her cheeks. There wasn’t even much to his words. A simple. You got a minute? And it had her heart stuttering like a schoolgirl.

“You two are so adorable.”

“Thea,” she warned, pocketing her phone. “You really have to stop butting into your brother’s love life.”

“But if I stopped doing that I’d get less of the tomato face you’re wearing right now.”

Tommy chuckled under his coffee cup and Felicity shot him a glare. “I have to go. You two stay out of trouble?”

“No promises,” they replied in unison. She could hear their laughter erupt as she walked away.

Once outside she pulled her phone back out and hit Oliver’s speed dial. It rang once before he picked up.

“Hey,” he sounded out of breath.

“Hi?” she couldn’t help but smile at his voice. “You texted, so I assumed you wanted me to call you back. But you sound busy.”

There was the quick sound of something cutting through the air, and a distinct umph after.

“Not at all,” he replied, a grin in his voice. “Clearly I can multitask better than Digg.”

“I’m calling it a night,” she heard the other man through the phone, and then a little closer. “Will you come here and distract him so he doesn’t take out all this pent up energy on our test dummies.”

“He’s exaggerating,” Oliver said but there was a new tension in his voice. “It’s just…”

“Just what?”

“I had to book all the flight plans with the company jet today,” he paused. “It made it all more real and emittent. I’m sorry.”

“For flying me around in a private jet? Don’t be, it’s the only way to travel.”

“Felicity.”

“Oliver I knew what I was getting into the second I signed on to this.” She understood why, but she hated that he needed to be reassured so much. “I told you I would help you no matter what. I’m not backing down. Not now, not ever.”

“Thank you,” he barely whispered it.

“I’ll be at the Foundry soon,” she said trying to sound lighter. “I got some equipment I want to pack before we leave, and I need to check on the… the sample Tommy asked me to run.”

“Okay,” but there was a definite pause in his words. “I’ll see you when you get here.”
He hung up and Felicity almost wished she hadn’t brought it up. Everything had been on an upward slope for her and Oliver, but when it came to the idea that Thea might not be Robert’s daughter, he closed up. And she feared what would happen if she pushed the subject. She didn’t blame him for wanting to wait, to see what the results read, but she also knew that the pieces were probably starting to fit into place for him. How could he not look at Thea in the same way Tommy was in the coffee shop, with that crinkle of consideration. Was her sweet brown hair the result of a recessive gene down the line, or did she get it from her father? And just when she thought she was through keeping secrets from those closest to her.

Felicity turned towards her car when she caught sight of someone further up ahead of her.

“Laurel?”

The lawyer in question looked up, flashing her a small smile as she walked closer. “Felicity, hey. How have you been?”

“No bad. Busy, with work and stuff, but it could be worse.” *Like being off to Russia to deal with the mob. How about yourself?”*

But even as her words slipped out, she could see Laurel looking around, looking for an out of their conversation, almost like she wanted to be anywhere else. And it dawned on Felicity exactly why her friend looked so cagey.

“You know, I hope because of the whole Tommy thing, that doesn’t mean we can’t be friends,” she ventured. She should have went over and talked to her after the break up. But Tommy had been fresh out of the hospital and things just slipped her mind.

“How is he?” she fidgeted with the strap of her purse. “He’s not still… I mean there weren’t any complications right?”

“He’s fine,” Felicity supplied. “He’s been out of the hospital for a few days. He’s actually inside right now, if you wanted to--”

“It’s better if I don’t,” she cut in. “I just think seeing him would be too much. Did he tell you why we, why we broke up?”

“He did,” she nodded. “And I already told him I don’t blame you. You deserve the truth, and he knows that. I’m really sorry.”

She shrugged. “I have more time to focus on my cases anyway. Which is good, save the people, save the world, right?”

“Well if you change your mind and want to wallow instead, you know my number,” that at least earned her a smile from Laurel.

“Thank you Felicity.”

“What are friends for?”

She glanced at the coffee shop, and Felicity followed her gaze. Laurel suddenly did not look like she wanted to venture in for a cup.

Felicity held hers out, with a smile. “It’s a vanilla latte, no extra shot of espresso. But it’s the least I can do.”
“Thanks.”

Felicity’s phone started to ring, she would have ignored it, but the tone was reserved for Malcolm, and she didn’t think she’d get away with ignoring his call.

“I gotta take this,” she said giving Laurel a quick side hug. “But really I meant what I said, if you need to talk call me.”

“You don’t need to worry about me Felicity.”

But the way she smiled told another story.

Felicity didn’t have time to dwell on that as Laurel walked off, because of course her phone was still ringing.

“Yes Mr. Merlyn?” she pressed her phone to her ear as she finally finished her walk towards her car.

“Ah Ms. Smoak, I missed you this afternoon before you left for the day,” he said.

*Because I was avoiding you.* She wanted to reply. “Sorry sir, I was dealing with returning some emails regarding patents on a few things we’re working on. Was it important?”

“I’m just getting back to you about your request for some time off.”

“Oh, sir I assumed you’d just email me back, you didn’t have to get ahold of me.”

“Nonsense,” he dismissed her words, and she could almost imagine his arrogance stance as he spoke. “You’re the head of my technology division Ms. Smoak. I need to make sure you’re as sharp as you can be. Wouldn’t want another Markov device slip up.”

Her heart thudded in her chest. He couldn’t know? Could he?

“I only mean to bring it up because of course our head of security must not have been at his best when everything went down. It’s the only explanation.”

“I suppose so,” she replied, not wanting to throw someone else completely under the bus. “I know the request is short notice, but the invitation was also a little short notice as well. And I would be beside myself if I missed this.”

“Of course, your vacation has already been approved,” he said and Felicity wanted to breath a deep sigh of anxiety out. *Thank god.* “I do hope when you return though, you don’t mind assisting the boys in IT with trying to track down where this virus came from.”

“You’re trying to track down the virus?”

“Well we need to find out if any of our competitors sabotaged our research. Don’t you agree?”

She felt like the world had swallowed her whole. “Sure. I mean of course, sir.”

“Good,” he replied, though his tone told her their conversation had expired it’s needed length. “Have a safe trip and I’ll see you when you return.”

He hung up before she could, and honestly she couldn’t be more grateful. She had hoped Merlyn would drop the device since it didn’t work. But she should have known better. She should have predicted his obsession would have her looking into it more. But what would happen if she couldn’t dig anything up. Or worse, if someone else dug the truth up for him.
“Another problem,” she mumbled as she climbed into her car. “For another day.”

Because she had to get to the Foundry. She needed to see to the results of the DNA test and get ready to back Oliver in Russia. Malcolm Merlyn could wait awhile longer. He would have to.

---

“So you really won’t help me with my boy question?” Thea prodded once Felicity has left them alone in the coffee shop. She studied him carefully, as if looking for some chink in his armor to weasel her way in.

Tommy blew out a long sigh and then resigned himself to giving in. “Fine,” he agreed. “What is it?”

She grinned wide. “I knew I could wear you down. You always were easier to talk into things than Ollie.”

He scoffed at that. “Excuse me. I was not. And I am not.” But there was no malice in it.

Thea took a moment, carefully lacing her fingers together on the table top before meeting his eyes. “Okay… sooo. I kinda skipped this day in Health class and I need some help with the whole… sex thing.”

“Thea!” Tommy gaped at her.

“O.M.G.!!!” The teen cackled, nearly doubling over with laughter. “I thought Felicity’s face would be the priceless one.” She paused to catch her breath. “Tommy, I can’t believe you’d think I would actually… oh my god!”

His hand went to his chest where his heart was racing. Mild heart attack aside, Tommy could already feel the difference in how he regarded her. He never would have guessed it would have been so immediate or so overwhelming, the brotherly urge to kill whoever came close to doing anything like that with her. But there it was. He didn’t need the DNA test to prove what he already knew in his heart. Thea was his sister.

“Earth to Tommy Merlyn?” Thea said, waving her hand in front of his face. “Geez it was just a joke,” she laughed again. “Didn’t mean to make you go all comatose on me.”

Tommy shook his head. “Sorry, what did you say?”

“My real guy question,” she said with a raised brow. “And the reason I didn’t want to talk to Ollie about it. This guy… he’s kind of…”

Tommy found his mind racing with possibilities. Older? Married? Politician? He shook the thoughts from his mind. This was Thea. Teenager Thea, but still Thea. No need to fall down the rabbit hole until he knew what he was dealing with.

“Ollie would call him a hoodlum,” she said, rolling her eyes dismissively. “But he’s got a good heart, I can tell.”

“A good heart or a cute face?” Tommy asked, mirroring her raised brow.

“What’s the difference?” she responded with a grin.

Tommy laughed. “So you’re worried because you’re into a guy from the wrong side of the tracks and you don’t want Ollie to beat him up?”
Thea sighed, her face turning serious. “I just don’t want it to end… badly.”

But Tommy had all but tuned out the girl’s words, because outside, Felicity and Laurel were parting ways, a to-go coffee cup in Laurel’s hands, even though Tommy knew she’d never entered the shop. His heart ached to run after her, but he knew better. If Laurel came back to him it would be on her own terms.

“Sorry,” Thea said, her voice pulling him back. “I heard about you and…”

“It’s fine,” Tommy said dismissively, dragging his eyes away from Laurel’s disappearing form and back to the teen sitting in front of him asking for dating advice. He was pretty sure he was the last person that should be giving it, but he was touched that she’d asked all the same. Tommy cleared his throat. “I can’t say anything about things ending badly,” he said, his voice soft. “But I can tell you this, that whole ‘better to have loved and lost’ bullshit they spew… there’s some truth to it. No matter what happens with Laurel, I’m a better man for having her in my life. And who knows, maybe this punk kid will say the same thing about you someday.”

Thea seemed to chew on his words for a moment, then bounced out of her seat, planting a quick kiss on his cheek. “Thanks Tommy!” she said, turning to leave.

But Tommy cleared his throat, holding her in place for a moment. “Hey, how’d you meet this guy anyway?”

Thea spun back around with a wide grin. “I have you to thank for that, actually,” she said, leaning her elbows on the table. “A few weeks back you had me drop some papers off about the club with Laurel to look over. I didn’t get there until after dark, and since it was in the Glades… it wasn’t really the best area to be. Anyway, some jerk was following me, saying pervy things and stuff. Well this guy in a red hoodie came out of nowhere and fought off the douche and two of his friends.”

Something tickled the back of Tommy’s mind, but he couldn’t remember what he should remember. “A regular knight in shining armor,” Tommy said.

“Mmmhmmm,” Thea hummed. “Anyway, I’m going to see if I can figure out how to make it up to him. See ya!”

Tommy stayed at the table another few moments, his free hand curled around a cup of coffee, soaking in its warmth. After Russia, they’d have to tell Thea. It seemed like maybe the whole new leaf of not keeping secrets might take after all. Once the cup was drained, Tommy dropped it into a nearby receptacle and headed for the door.

Desk duty at ARGUS might not be as great as Felicity and Lexi had talked it up to be, but Waller has piqued his interest with his latest assignment. From the very little he had uncovered so far, the League of Assassins definitely seemed worthy of his boss’s interest. Covert, hella shady and virtually invisible. But Tommy knew where to look, and all he needed was one loose thread to unravel the mystery.

Despite Waller being lenient with him on the amount of time he spent at the office, he knew he would have to at least show up at some point during the day. But surely that could be put off until after he learned the verdict of the DNA test Felicity was running, right? Besides he had some paperwork at the club to finish up with. Payroll, inventory, all that good stuff he was learning about. It wasn’t glamorous, but it did feel like the first honest work he’d ever done. And that gave him a bit of satisfaction.

Tommy weaved through the streets on autopilot. So much of the last several days was still blurred in
his mind. He supposed he had the bullet through the shoulder and the painkillers to thank for that. But he didn’t like how foggy they made his head. Things he knew he’d experienced now felt like a distant dream, conversations jumbled together in his brain and he wasn’t sure why, but he’d been having a recurring dream of his father fighting off an intruder when Tommy was a young boy. Except in his dream, his father was a crazy ninja. After waking up from it that morning for the third straight day, Tommy dumped the rest of the pain meds down the toilet.

He parked outside the club and headed in, not surprised to find some of the staff already working on getting the place set up to open in a few hours. Tommy nodded to Digg as he made his way to the door that led downstairs, punching in the code to unlock it. Felicity and Oliver were already down there, heads close together, talking in hushed voices as he approached.

“If you two weren’t so cute, you’d be disgusting,” Tommy said with a smirk.

Oliver glowered in his general direction and took a step back. “Don’t know how I feel about you calling me cute,” he deadpanned.

“Just enjoy it buddy,” Tommy answered, clapping a hand over Oliver’s shoulder. “Anyway I’ll get out of your way, I just wanted to check on…”

“The DNA test,” Felicity said, clearing her throat. “Yes, well, the results are in, I just haven’t checked them yet.” Her eyes darted to Oliver quickly, and Tommy’s gaze followed.

Oliver folded his arms over his chest. Tommy knew that his friend was having a tough time accepting the fact that Robert Queen might not be Thea’s biological father. Or perhaps it was more the thought that Malcolm might be. But Malcolm was Tommy’s father, and he’d turned out okay, right? After a long moment Oliver relented, nodding his head.

Felicity clicked on something on the computer and brought up a new screen. “It’s a match,” she said quietly, finding Oliver’s eyes again before moving her gaze to Tommy. “Thea is your half sister.”

He hated the pained expression that crossed Oliver’s face, hated that it somehow had to do with them sharing a sister, even if it had nothing to do with him.

“We should tell her together,” Tommy offered, keeping his voice low. “When you get back from Russia. Better she hear it from us than some other way.”

Oliver nodded once before turning away. “I’ve got to pack for Russia. I’ll see you guys later.” He disappeared out through the side entrance before either of them could reply.

“That went well,” Tommy sighed, taking a few steps closer to Felicity. His shoulder throbbed, but it was better than the alternative of not being alert and on guard.

“He just needs time,” she answered softly. “Between this and Russia, he’s had a lot to process.”

“Felicity I don’t think it’s safe for you to go back there with him,” Tommy said, the words flying out of his mouth before he could stop them.

“I have to,” she answered, chewing on her bottom lip.

“But I know what Anatoly told him. Going back there is suicide.”

She shook her head. “We have a plan. I have to go to make sure he comes back.”

“And if I lose you both?” He questioned, his voice growing thick with emotion at the thought. He’d
just narrowly escaped death himself. He couldn’t bear the thought of losing them.

“That’s not going to happen,” she said, placing a hand on his arm. “I trusted you once to take me across the world on a risk-filled wild goose chase. And we made it back okay.”

“You don’t think a second round is tempting fate?” He sighed. He knew he couldn’t change her mind, but he needed to voice his concerns just the same. “We didn’t know how risky it would be that time. And now you’ve literally got a mob boss telling you not to come because it means death.” He sighed. “Geez Felicity I mean this is some real shit he’s into…”

“Tommy, I love him.”

The words were quiet. So quiet he’d almost thought he’d imagined them. But when he met her bright blue eyes, glassy and nearly brimming with unshed tears, he knew he’d heard her.

He nodded, knowing that everything else was wrapped up in those words. Felicity and Oliver would keep each other safe, if for no other reason than for what they felt for one another- because all other reasons, good as they may be, didn’t come close to that one.

“Call me if there’s anything I can do. ARGUS owes you one after getting those agents back. And I’m not afraid to cash in on your behalf.”

“Thanks,” she said with a small smile, wiping away the few tears that had fallen onto her cheeks. “I’ll see you soon?” She asked with a halfhearted shrug.

“You got it Smoak,” he answered, giving her shoulder a quick squeeze, and leaving her alone to finish her plans for saving Ivan and Sofia.

—

Oliver wanted nothing more than to push the truth from his mind and focus on the problems that awaited him in Russia. He wanted to steel himself against the rush of anger and pain that came from that one stupid test.

Thea wasn’t his father’s daughter. Thea wasn’t a Queen. She was the product of his mother and Tommy’s father. Thea was a Merlyn. He hated those words as they vibrated through his skull. He hated them with everything in him. And if Oliver could change one thing in this world, he wouldn’t bring anyone back, he wouldn’t erase his time away, but he would change that.

He shoved another set of clothes into his suitcase as his eyes caught a photo on his desk. It was Thea sitting on their dad’s lap, her smile spread wide over the two gaps at the front of her mouth. Oliver stood off to the side of the portrait, his teenage boredom barely concealed under the stuff cardigan his mother had insisted he wear, as she stood between him and his seated father. They looked like the perfect family. And everything about it was a lie. He moved towards the desk and flipped the frame over. He couldn’t bare to look at it any longer.

“Oliver, Raisa brought your suit back from the dry cleaners today.”

He turned towards his mother’s voice, walking through his door, with the garment bag over one arm. This was not the time for this. His emotions were too close to the surface. Everything old had been shattered for him.

“You can leave it on the chair,” he replied trying not to meet her eyes.

“A thank you would be nice.”
“Well I’ll thank Raisa before I leave,” he heard the clip in his tone, even if he was trying to keep his feelings in check he knew it was a losing battle already.

“Oliver, I don’t know what’s gotten into you but as your mother I don’t appreciate your tone,” she set the bag down and stepped further into the room. “I know the last few weeks have been stressful for you, what with the club up and running, and Tommy being shot. But there’s no need to take that out on your family.”

“You think I’m taking out my stress on family?” he scoffed. She couldn’t see how entirely demolished his concept of family really was right then. And he wanted to push this all down, but he couldn’t. It bubbled below the surface and he couldn’t stand it anymore. “What family?”

“Oliver--”

“I know Mom,” he turned to face her, throwing a shirt at his open bag. “I know about Thea and Malcolm. I know.”

She straightened at his words, watching him beneath a frozen mask. “What are talking about?”

“Tommy overheard you two arguing in the Merlyn Global parking garage last week,” he glared at her. “Next time you want to discuss family secrets maybe you should do so behind a closed door.”

“Oliver whatever Tommy thinks he heard, he’s mistaken.”

“Don’t. Mom just don’t lie to me right now,” he shook his head. “Okay this is more than what Tommy heard. We ran a DNA test.”

“How dare you.”

“How dare I? You’re the one who screwed this family over,” he hissed. “You lied for years about Thea, you kept that from her, and from Dad. And I’m pretty damn sure you’ve been trying to get Malcolm to keep this secret for months. You threw the Unidac auction for him, didn’t you? It was the only way he would keep quiet.”

“I did that for Walter.”

“You did it for yourself,” he countered. “You did it to protect your secrets, your lies. Because that’s what you do. And I can’t be apart of it.”

He walked to his bag and zipped it closed. “I have tried to think of a million reasons over the last week as to why you’d keep this to yourself. What could you possibly gain by keeping this secret? And then it hit me, it was never about gaining anything. It was always about maintaining this perfect family you constructed. But we’re not perfect, and we’re certainly not a family.”

“You don’t understand,” she shook her head, barely meeting his eyes. “You have no idea the things that Malcolm is capable of doing. His power and influence spreads far beyond Starling City. And had Thea grown up knowing the truth, your sister would be a vastly different person. You’ve seen the way he treats Tommy, his own son. How could you ever expect me to subject my daughter to the same cruelty?”

“You never gave anyone of us the chance to see this differently,” he stood in front of her, a heavy weight on his shoulders. “You didn’t give Thea the opportunity to choose this life over Malcolm. You didn’t give Tommy the time to grow up knowing he had a sister. Someone to love him when Malcolm wouldn’t. And you certainly didn’t let me find out about this from you. You would have taken this secret to your grave, had we not found out.”
“Yes I would have,” there was so much conviction in her words. “Because those are the choices you make to protect the ones you love.”

“Makes me wonder what other secrets you’ve deemed worthy of that vault of yours,” he stepped forward, grabbing the garment bag off the chair. “I’m leaving for the wedding tomorrow. When I get back, Tommy and I are telling Thea the truth.”

“I can’t let you do that.”

“Then you tell her yourself. But she needs to know. This secret, it isn’t something that should stay that way. She deserves to know the truth, and either it’s going to be you or it’s going to be us. But it’s going to be from someone who loves her. I won’t let her find out from a stranger.”

He gathered his stuff, and slipped past his mother.

“What do you plan on doing? Sleep on the jet?”

He turned back, and it struck him as odd how hollowed his mother looked. “I’m crashing at Felicity’s. She’s going to the wedding with me, and it makes more sense for us to leave from one place together.”

“What is this I hear?”

Thea came around the corner, a smile on her face. Oliver had to bite his cheek to hold back from spilling something to her.

“I can’t believe it,” she looked so giddy. “You two, at a wedding, honestly if you come back engaged, I will totally not even judge.”

“I think that’s moving a little too fast, Speedy,” he leaned in kissing her cheek. “I’ll see you when I get home.”

“Be safe, Ollie,” she smiled, leaning into his side. “And bring me back something pretty.”

“I will do my best.” He gave his mother one last look, but her eyes were turned away. “I should get going.”

“Tell Felicity I said ‘hi’,” Thea said with a wink.

“Yeah, okay.”

He didn’t stop to say goodbye to Walter or Raisa. He was sure if he spent another minute in that house he would combust from the secrets in him. He needed Russia now more than ever. Not for some noble honor of sticking to his promises, but because he needed to be as far from his mother’s lies as he could get. He was sick with how okay she was about lying to Thea.

Before he even realized it he was at Felicity’s door. They had agreed to meet in the morning for coffee before they left, but he couldn’t go home. And he didn’t think he could go to Tommy’s either.

He knocked gently on the door, and waited while he heard the shuffling on the other side.

Felicity opened the door, and every bit of stress in him relaxed. She tilted her head leaning against the door as a soft smile grew on her face.

“Hey.”
“Sorry for just dropping by like this,” he sighed, giving her a small smile in return. “I just, I couldn’t be around my mother.”

“Oliver you never have to explain thing to me. You’re always welcome here,” she stepped aside, motioning for him to enter. “I can’t imagine what you’re going through. But I’m here for you. No matter what.”

He pulled her to him, pressing a long and heated kiss to her lips. Nothing made sense. Not his mother’s lies, not the idea that Thea was only half his sister. Not the Dark Archer or a million other things. But standing there in Felicity’s apartment, their heartbeats mixing into a beautiful rhythm that only the two of them could hear. It made the most sense in the world.

“So,” Felicity said when they had to break apart to breathe. “Are we ready for tomorrow?”

“As long as I have you by my side, I can get through anything.”

“Good thing I’m not going anywhere then.”

He believed her. Somehow in the short time since he returned home Felicity had worked her way into his soul and showed him he could heal from the things that happened over the last five years. He knew it was love. He knew without a doubt that he loved her more than anyone before. But he couldn’t tell her yet. He needed to put Russia behind them, once and for all, before he could even imagine telling her. But he would. He didn’t think he’d last in life if he didn’t.

“Come on,” she whispered, tugging his hand towards the back of the apartment. “Let’s go to bed. We have a trip in the morning.”

“Okay,” he smiled at her, the pain from earlier had already melted away. Maybe it was just Felicity, maybe as long as she was by his side he could get through anything life threw at him. It made him all the happier she was headed to Russia with him.
Heyyyyy lovelies! Welcome to another chapter! We're so glad you're with us. We appreciate each and every one of you who join us on this journey and we LOVE hearing your thoughts on what's going on. So feel free to drop us a line at the end of the chapter (or Tumblr... we do our best to reply to reblogs there too). This chapter starts the next phase of this fic... so I won't keep you in suspense any longer.

xoxo,
Cassie

Stepping onto the Queen’s private jet gave Felicity all sorts of deja vu. Her trip with Tommy almost three years prior had ended in Russia, a bittersweet goodbye with the person whom she was now seated beside. She settled into the crook of Oliver’s arm that was draped over her shoulder and she breathed deeply to try to settle her nerves.

“It will be ok,” he assured her, placing a chaste kiss on the top of her head.

“I know,” she answered quickly, before worrying her bottom lip between her teeth. She wanted to be a calm rock, but with every inch they moved closer to Russia, the knot in Felicity’s gut only grew.

She couldn’t help but compare this flight to the last one she’d taken from the runway at the small private airport in the city. Because last time it had seemed like the world held every opportunity and possibility for her. Each theory and clue was ultimately to reunite two best friends. And even now, as she was settled into Oliver’s arms, it still felt like what was waiting for them on the other side was nothing but pain and destruction.

Felicity tried to sleep, to rid her mind of the worrying and the fears- but they followed her even to her dreams.

A fog had settled over the brisk morning air, a hazy glow hanging around the church as the car came to a stop out front. She noticed then, that she was in the backseat of a long limousine, the divider between the driver’s cab was closed, so she couldn’t see who was up front, but there was no one in the back with her. Her hands felt clammy and Felicity rubbed them down her thighs, surprised by the soft, fabric under her touch. She balked a little, when she realized that the fabric was white, and sparkly, and a dress. Not unlike a wedding dress.

The door opened, a chauffeur standing there expectantly, a bouquet of flowers in his hand.

Felicity gulped. It was a wedding dress she was wearing. The outside of the church was decorated for a sendoff with flowers and white tulle.

“Miss, it’s time,” the chauffeur said.

Her head felt as foggy as the air outside, she couldn’t make sense of anything that was going on around her. Why was she dressed like a bride? And why did she have a sinking feeling in the pit of
her stomach that told her something was about to go horribly wrong?

In the blink of an eye she stood at the back of the sanctuary, a room full of eyes on her as Wagner’s Bridal Chorus sounded from somewhere in the distance. The aisle was too long and the crowds in the seats too dense for her to see the groom waiting for her at the end, so Felicity did the only thing she could, she took step after step until she closed the distance between herself and the front of the church.

After what seemed like forever, the pulpit came into view, with a man standing on either side of the priest at the end. Her eyes locked with Oliver’s first, his black suit fitted perfectly, his eyes shining brightly. She broke their gaze to look at the man opposite Oliver, and her smile quickly turned to a scowl. Malcolm Merlyn grinned his ruthless, too-wide smile, sending a shiver down her spine. Felicity froze, her feet no longer working as she looked between the two men. Her two grooms.

Another blink of an eye and she stood at the front of the church, between Oliver and Malcolm. She wasn’t sure how she’d gotten there, because she was still rooted in place, the shock, horror and who knew what else still written all over her face.

“Dearly beloved,” the priest began, booming loudly.

Felicity shook her head. “No, this is wrong.”

“Darling,” Oliver and Malcolm said simultaneously. They both reached for her in tandem, some sort of sick mirroring that made her take a step back out of both of their grasps.

“We are gathered here today to witness the marriage of one man, and one woman. But first, the bride must choose.” The priest looked at her, waiting for an answer.

“What?” Felicity asked, brow furrowed.

“Choose a groom,” the priest stage-whispered, and quiet laughter filtered through the otherwise silent sanctuary.

“O-Oliver,” she said immediately, gut instinct taking over. She wasn’t sure what exactly was happening, but if the last couple of years had taught her anything, it was that more than anything else, she wanted Oliver by her side. No matter the cost, no matter the problem, if Oliver was at her side, there was nothing she couldn’t conquer.

Felicity took a step toward him and the priest glanced between her and Malcolm. The priest nodded once to Malcolm, and in the blink of an eye, Malcolm stood behind Oliver, a broadsword in his hand, pressed against Oliver’s throat.

The ear-piercing scream that erupted from her lips was enough to startle her into consciousness. Felicity gasped for air, her pulse racing and her breathing labored and sounding more like sobs as she opened her eyes.

“Hey,” Oliver said, cradling her head in his hands, his eyes darkening with concern. “Hey, it’s okay. Whatever it is, it’s alright.”

She felt the shudders tear through her body as she pulled herself into his arms. The hum of the plane reminded her that they were still journeying around the world in pursuit of a potentially unwinnable object. But even though Oliver was there, even though she had her hands gripped tightly around his forearms and his forehead was pressed to hers, she still had trouble making herself forget the memories of the dream.
“Do you want to talk about it?” Oliver asked.

Felicity shook her head. She couldn’t let herself dwell on the dream, let alone describe it to him.

“How about something to drink, then?” he asked.

She nodded at this. “Whiskey,” she said flatly. “Neat.”

Oliver blew out a breath exaggeratedly. “That must have been some dream.” He handed her a small tumbler, amber liquid filled halfway.

Felicity took a long swallow, feeling her nerves settle and her head swim. “How long until we land?” she asked after a moment.

“About an hour. You’ve been asleep for a while.” He reclaimed his seat beside her, wrapping an arm around her midsection and pulling her close.

“Been a rough few weeks,” she answered, stifling a yawn. “I’m sure you understand.”

“Nah,” Oliver said with a wink. “Same ole’ same ole’ for me.”

“Ha ha.” She rolled her eyes, nudging him with her shoulder. She pushed all the feelings of unease and anxiety over her dream down, and locked them into a box, forcing them from her mind. They were only an hour from Russia, an hour from landing. An hour from who knew what potential demise. She could fret over whatever her brain was trying to tell her in dream form another day. She needed to get her head in the game, and for now, that meant Malcolm and every thought that went along with him were moved to the back burner.

“I’m sorry about…” Felicity said, her teeth scraping over her bottom lip before taking another swig of the whiskey.

“You never have to apologize to me, Felicity,” Oliver said, his voice low and rough in her ear. It sent a different set of shudders down her spine, the kind that made her lean into him and wish and hope and pray that they’d miraculously make it through the next several days to see the other side.

“I just don’t want you thinking that you need to take care of me,” she sighed. “You already have so much on your plate and I…”

“Where is this coming from?” Oliver asked with a frown. “The dream?”

She shook her head. “Maybe, I don’t know. I just never want to be a burden…”

Oliver caught her off guard, pressing his lips to hers with urgency and fervor. He spoke against her lips when they finally broke apart. “You could never, ever be that,” he said.

Felicity nodded, exhaling deeply. “Sorry,” she said again, feeling all of a sudden like she was twelve years old- the whole awkward, gangly mess of her. She scrunched her nose at the face he gave her. “I know, I said sorry again. Sorry.” She cringed, feeling a smile creep into her features. She buried her head in his shoulder. Maybe the whiskey was going to her head after all. Or maybe it was the altitude. Or who knows what the hell her problem was.

“So,” Oliver said, his hand running down her leg. “Any thoughts on how we should spend the next hour before we land?”

“Oliver!” she giggled, but she didn’t pull out of his grasp.
“What?” he asked, shrugging innocently. “I thought you might have travel Scrabble or something in your bag.”

Felicity scoffed, because he’d made a pointed joke about her having the game packed in her bag the night before. “Well then,” she said, sobering from her bout of laughter. “I guess we’ll have to play a round and the winner gets to decide what we do next.”

Oliver grinned. “I think I might learn to like this game.”

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Tommy actually felt like someone was trying to drill a hole just above his eye, from the inside out. He had been researching three league names over the last week and had gotten exactly nowhere with each. The main issue was no one in the league seemed to use real names. They were all monikers of some kind. And it had him brushing up on his nonexistent knowledge of Arabic.

“What are the chances you want to switch assignments?” he looked over to Lyla with a grin. “There would be a really good bottle of white wine in it for you.”

“I’m more of a whiskey girl,” she countered. “Plus I saw that list, and no one would be dumb enough to fall for a trade like that.”

“Come on, please. I literally think my brain is going to fall out of my skull if I have to cross reference one more name.”

“The great Tommy Merlyn, recovers from a gunshot wound, but bested by a list of names.”

“Now you’re just being mean, they’re not even in English.”

She chuckled softly but rolled her eyes. “Wish I could help, but number one, Waller told me not to.”

“Damn it,” he muttered. “She got to you first.”

“And two, I am actually cutting out early today.”

Lyla shifted her gaze away, straightening her paperwork and pointedly not meeting Tommy’s gaze. She only did that under one condition, if she was hiding something from him. But they had been sitting a desk length away from each other for most of the week. Hell she hadn’t even gotten up the whole day until her phone rang a couple hours ago.

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing’s wrong,” she looked up shaking her head. “Can’t a person leave work early every once in a while?”

“A person yes. But you never do. Not once in nearly three years of working together have I ever seen you leave work early.”

“Well now you have,” she grabbed her phone, and a stack of memos she still hadn’t gone through, shoving them into her bag.

She was acting cagey, and nerves settled into her movements like a shadow cast across her frame. And it clicked for Tommy. He had seen Lyla like this before. Just once. About six months after he started working for ARGUS Lyla left work in much the same state, all nerves and hidden emotions. The next time he saw her she was pounding the speed bag in the training room like it had personally
smashed its way through her life. He later learned that was the night she and John had split up.

So he understood. Lyla’s tension, her desire to cut out, it had nothing to do with work, and everything to do with John Diggle.

“Tell Digg I say hi,” he teased as she stood up.

He buried back into his paperwork, but Lyla still gave his head a hard shove as she walked past him. He just hoped it would end better than the last time, otherwise it wouldn’t be a speed bag Lyla took her frustration out on.

He focused back on the names in front of him, reading through the list over and over again.

One of them had been the easiest to track. It was the only one that seemed to correlate to an alias. Nyssa al Ghul or Raatko, which seemed to be the name she traveled under. Her name was high up on the list of members that Waller had given him. And she was the only one who didn’t have a moniker it seemed. The name didn’t mean anything. Not the way the other’s on the list did. He had translated only a handful of them, ranging from the Canary to the Magician. They sounded more like myths and legends than real people. But Nyssa seemed real, or as real as anyone could be connected to an organization that dealt in shadows. She was his thread to something else, something more. He just didn’t know how to tug it loose.

“Where’s Agent Michaels?”

He hadn’t heard Waller approach, her heels somehow silent against the hard granite floors, but he could feel the agitation coming off her in currents.

He almost didn’t want to answer. “She left.”

“How is that possible?”

“I’m not exactly sure how to answer that,” he hesitated, biting back the sarcasm that he wished he could releash. But even he knew better than to poke Waller when she looked like this.

“This is the worst possible time for this,” she muttered more to herself than to him and shot a glance over her shoulder. “Is she coming back soon?”

“I don’t think so.”

“You don’t think so?”

He needed to change tactics before she found a target to settle her anger on. “Is there something I can help you with Director Waller?”

Before she could answer a man walked towards them. Tommy could see the tension coil in Waller as she stood up taller. She pushed herself to full height as her face turned to stone at the man’s approach. Not many had the chance to see Waller’s armor snap fully into place, but Tommy was sure he just had.

“General, I could have sworn I asked you to wait in my office,” she turned to face him, a poisoned smile creeping onto her face. “Perhaps you didn’t hear me.”

“I heard you just fine, Amanda.”

Tommy would have to be a new recruit not to see the disrespect in the general’s choice of addresses.
He had made a calculated decision to see just how Waller would react to it. But if she showed any sign of noticing she hid it far beyond Tommy’s line of sight.

“Well, if you don’t find my office suitable enough we could set you up somewhere else. I believe interview room four is usually free?”

“I’d rather walk around, talk to the agents and see what’s going on. I’m not the kind of guy who sits behind a desk while others do the hard work.”

Tommy had scars that weren’t as brutal as that comment alone. And he was starting to wish he had hightailed it out of there when Lyla had.

“Unfortunately,” Waller’s icy tone slashed back. “Agent Michaels had to leave urgently. So she is not available to debrief you on the Lawton file.”

“And where did she go?”

Waller’s pause was too long, he could see her trying to find a plausible lie for her missing agent and coming up blank. And if he could see it so could Shrieve.

“She had a family emergency,” Tommy piped in. “She said it couldn’t be avoided and had to rush out.”

“What kind of emergency?” the general’s eyes now landed on him.

“She didn’t go into detail, Sir,” he replied with all the coolness his father had tried to instill in him. If Malcolm had been good for anything it was teaching him how to remain calm while under scrutiny. “Though when someone throws out the words ‘family’ and ‘emergency’, I don’t like to pry for too many details.”

“And just who are you?”

Waller cut between them. “This is Agent Merlyn. He’s Agent Michaels’ partner.”

“Agent Tommy Merlyn,” Shrieve clarified. “Your badge got a man killed.”

The fact stated like that sent a sick a roll to his stomach, but still Tommy kept his face neutral. “That it did.”

“How does that make you feel?”

“He’s already been through a psych evaluation after this incident, General,” Waller said, her voice edging into annoyance. “I would never let an agent back in the field or on a desk until their mental health was thoroughly vetted.”

“I’m just asking the boy a question Amanda, you can relax,” Shrieve met Tommy’s gaze. “You feel like you came back to work after enough time off?”

“I think when you let your feelings get involved in what we do here, that’s when your results start to become erratic.”

It was something Waller would say, something he was sure he had heard from her at least half a dozen times. And it wasn’t like he believed it, but he knew it was the right thing to say. And the general seemed to like his answer. He rocked back on his heels and gave a wide grin.

“If Merlyn here is available why doesn’t he debrief me on the Lawton file?”
Waller tensed again, minutely while Shrieve’s gaze wasn’t on her. Tommy had the sinking suspicion General Shrieve didn’t know that he had been on a mandatory leave just a few months ago. And he didn’t think now was the time he found out either.

“Lyla’s put a lot of work into this debriefing,” he said, shooting Waller a glance. “I think she would probably lay me out if I took her thunder.”

“Very well,” Shrieve nodded as he cleared his throat. “I’m just going to have a look around the tech department. See if any of them are close to figuring out why they couldn’t even turn on that damned device while it was under our roof.”

As the general walked off, Tommy watched Waller. It was like she was trying to burn Shrieve alive with every step he took.

“That went well,” he ventured.

“That went horribly,” she countered. “I was trying to keep him from looking into you, and you went and cozied up to him.”

“You call any of that cozy?”

“Tommy, the second that man gets access to a computer he’s going to pull your files. All of them. He’s going to see that you were on a leave. And then he will see that immediately after your first mission back you were shot, had your badge stolen, and ARGUS was infiltrated. That will make him question you, and your involvement with missions. And then he’s going to notice the patterns around the city. Some of those lead right to the vigilante. And we don’t want that, do we?”

“What are you more afraid of Shrieve finding out?” Tommy asked as he dropped his voice. “That it was my father’s company we stole from or that you went to Oliver and asked for his help?”

“Don’t push me right now Agent Merlyn,” she hissed. “I may have to hold back when it comes to Shrieve, but I do not owe you anything. Keep working on your list, and stay away from the general.”

As she stalked off, Tommy let out a small groan. He had been trying to help Waller. Even if she wasn’t his favorite person, she did run ARGUS on her own. And for the most part over the last few years they had done some good work. Waller was at the helm of that. And no matter what wrongs Shrieve wanted to put on them all, he knew things around he worked because of her.

The search on his computer dinged, and Tommy looked up. He had asked Lexi to set him up with something to run the few aliases he had found through any transportation systems. And it looked like it just got a hit.

Nyssa Raatko had purchased two first class tickets to Hub City. And they were set to arrive tomorrow.

Maybe the list hadn’t been a dead end after all.

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The plane landed right on schedule on the private tarmac of the Moscow airport. Oliver had paid off enough of the staff over the last several days to ensure that their flight wasn’t logged into any record books. Hopefully that meant they’d be able to make it to their hotel before the Bratva discovered they were in the country.

“So do you remember when Anatoly had me upgrade the computer systems for them the last time I
was here?” Felicity asked, as she pulled her coat on and reached for her luggage.

“I do,” Oliver answered, giving her a curious glance.

“Well,” she said, drawing out the word for effect. “I never told anyone, but I installed a back door to the system and I have officially removed our faces and other information from their database. If they have any alerts set for us, they’ll go off if some random couple from Palm Beach ever decides to come to Moscow.” She blushed a little at her own ruse.

“Clever,” he answered with a smirk. “I’m sure said couple would be less than pleased, but it should work well for us while we’re here.”

Felicity bit down on her lower lip. “Do you think they know? That we’re here?”

Oliver let her walk in front of them as they made their way to the exit of the plane. “I think Anatoly knows that we’re coming,” he said. “Or at least that I am. But I highly doubt he suspects why or how or when.”

“That’s slightly comforting,” she sighed.

“Hey,” Oliver said, reaching for her hand and giving it a squeeze. “We’re going to be okay.”

“I hope so,” she answered, her eyes betraying her doubt. “Because I promised Tommy we’d both come back in one piece.”

“Well if you promised,” he said, nudging her forward.

They made their way down the stairs and onto the tarmac where a black SUV idled waiting for them. He could barely make out the driver, but he didn’t need to, because an instant later, the door popped open and Ivan stepped out.

It was still a little hard to believe that when he’d met Ivan more than three years ago, it had been on a Bratva ship in the middle of the ocean where Oliver and Akio were stowaways. Ivan had wanted to kill them then, and even kept Akio as collateral while Oliver raced to save Sofia. To say their relationship was complicated was a bit of an understatement. But true to Bratva code, they had become brothers in a way that Oliver hadn’t expected, so when Ivan moved closer and wrapped him in a tight (albeit brief) hug, Oliver was a little surprised.

“You’ve returned at long last,” Ivan said, a wide grin gracing his features. He turned to Felicity and hugged her tightly as well. “It is good to see you again, Felicity.”

“You too,” she said, her voice strained from the tight squeeze of his arms around her.

He released her and stepped back. “I have told no one of your coming,” he said, gesturing to the car. “Although Anatoly has wondered if you would be here. He’s asked me many times if I thought you would come.”

Ivan and Oliver loaded the luggage into the trunk while Felicity climbed into the back seat. Oliver climbed in beside her and Ivan maneuvered back to the driver’s seat.

“Thank you,” Oliver said with a nod. “We appreciate this, and your being discreet.”

“Well, since you are here to help Sofia and me, it’s the least I can do.” He put the car in gear and headed for the exit. “But how do you plan to change Mikhail’s mind? The illness has made him cold and hard.”
Oliver and Felicity exchanged a glance in the back seat. “We will discuss everything with you and Sofia at the hotel. Is she still meeting us there?”

Ivan nodded. “Yes, after the rehearsal dinner. I’ve been removed from the personal duty of the family, otherwise I would be there as well.”

“I’m so sorry,” Felicity said, reaching a hand up and resting it on Ivan’s shoulder. “I’m sure this must be so difficult for the two of you.”

“I’m not the one losing their father and freedom all at once,” Ivan sighed. “Sofia has not been taking it very well.”

They were all quiet for the remainder of the drive to the hotel, and Ivan parked around the back, where a small service entrance sat at the base of a narrow alley.

“I’ve gotten your hotel keys already,” he said, offering Oliver the pair of keys. “Room 213. It is at the quiet end of the hall away from the elevator. No security cameras inside, but I wanted to take every precaution for you.”

Oliver nodded. “Thank you,” he said, taking the keys. “We’ve got someone meeting us in an hour. You and Sofia can come back any time after that to go over the plan.”

Felicity ducked out of the vehicle ahead of him, rounding to the back and popping open the hatch. He followed and grabbed their luggage… everything except for Felicity’s computer case (which was larger than her suitcase) because he valued his fingers enough to take heed of her threats.

“You certainly know how to make normal, mundane things feel like a Hood mission,” she whispered to him as he poked his head into the service entrance.

“Don’t look at me, this was Ivan’s idea,” Oliver whispered back, although he had to agree with her. More and more of their daily lives were feeling like they were on the job. And he couldn’t decide exactly how he felt about that. When he confirmed that the hallway was empty, Oliver took her hand and led her into the building. There was a staircase immediately to their right, and it seemed like the best option for clearing the staff only areas as quickly as possible. Sure, they could always use the ignorant foreigner excuse, but not being seen was always better than having to explain oneself.

“Hey, by the way,” Felicity said as they climbed the stairs to the second floor. “Who exactly are we meeting in an hour? ”

“Just an old friend,” he answered over his shoulder. He stopped on the landing and clicked open the door to the main hallway of rooms. Still not a soul in sight. As far as luck went, so far they were doing pretty good. Oliver tried not to think about how that kind of meant it could only go downhill from there, and instead focused his attention on taking things one step at a time. He held the door open and Felicity walked out into the hall ahead of him.

“Is it someone I know?” she asked, a puzzled expression on her face. “You’re acting like it’s someone I know.”

Oliver chuckled, pausing in front of their room and pushing the plastic keycard into the electronic slot. It blinked green and beeped, unlocking the door and letting them inside. He moved into the space, turning lights on as he went, with Felicity still peppering him with questions as she entered behind him.

“Where’s the fun in telling you that?” Oliver asked, turning to face her and placing the bags on the
floor.

This time, it was Felicity who laughed. She took in the sight of the room, let out one of the heartiest
laughs Oliver had heard from her.

“What’s so funny?” he asked, giving her a curious look.

“You and Tommy,” she said, once she’d finally gotten ahold of herself. “I know you two were like
the billionaire playboy twins when you were younger, but you’re so different.”

Oliver’s brow furrowed. “In what way?”

Felicity plopped herself down on one of the double beds, giggling a little more to herself before she
answered. “When he and I went looking for you, the first hotel we checked into only had one bed.
He didn’t say a word to me about it until we got to the room. And now, here we are… dating or
together or whatever you want to call it. We shared a bed last night, and you booked a room with
two beds.”

“I didn’t want to be presumptuous,” he said with a frown. And then a little quieter, “not with you.”

“We’ve made do with less,” she smiled. “And by less, I mean me on the couch of your apartment
here and you on the floor. Not… you know… anything else.”

A blush crept onto her cheeks and Oliver could barely hold himself in place. Sometimes it was easy
to lump their time together in Moscow in with all the memories he pushed down below the surface,
the ones he didn’t let himself dwell on. But then there were other times, times when he felt like he’d
known her all his life, that he remembered that she knew him better than almost anyone in his life.
She certainly knew more of his secrets than most. She had been one of the first people he’d trusted
with it, even if she’d figured it out before he had told her.

“Oliver?” Felicity asked, waving a hand in front of his face.

“Hmm? Sorry.”

“It’s okay. I just asked if you thought there was time to grab some food before this mysterious
meeting of yours,” she said, eyeing him carefully as if to catch some clue about who it was with.

Oliver glanced at the time. “I’m not sure.”

It was strange being back in Moscow. All of the ghosts he thought he could leave behind or outrun
or hide from, Oliver knew they were all still waiting for him here. He knew it was only a matter of
time before they caught up with him, despite the promises that Felicity had made to Tommy and
despite how careful they were going to be. But somehow, it seemed less daunting. How could the
presence of a single person make him feel like he could slay any foe that came against him?

And how unrealistic was it to think that maybe he really could?

Before he could answer any of the questions that his mind supplied, or the one that was still written
all over Felicity’s face, a knock sounded on the door.
Felicity startled at the sound. It was crazy that being back in the confines of the city could have her so on edge so quickly. She faced down Waller and the Dark Archer, but the Bratva was a force she didn’t know much about. And it didn’t feel right to pry the information out of Oliver.

He held a hand out to her, and the gesture calmed her in seconds. It amazed her how at ease she felt by the simple squeeze of his fingers against her wrist. She knew it more now than she had earlier in the week when she let the words slip out to Tommy. She was in love with Oliver. It was the truest thing she had ever let herself feel in years, she just wasn’t sure how to tell him that without everything changing around them. She liked where they were. She loved what they did. And everything was still new. New relationship built on lingering feelings that had threaded into her heart long before she realized they were there.

“It’s okay,” he whispered, as he stepped out of her touch and to towards the door. “I promise.”

She nodded, taking a tentative step forward as he opened the door.

She should have guessed who Oliver had called. Should have known exactly who he would or could trust with this.

“How Maseo,” she greeted with a small wave. “Long time no see.”

“I have not gone by that name in a long time,” he smiled warmly, meeting Oliver’s gaze. “At least not anywhere that did not include my family. But it is a welcome sound to come from old friends.”

“It’s good to see you,” Oliver replied closing the door behind them. “I’m glad you came.”

“You asked a favor,” Maseo said with certainty in his voice. “After everything you’ve done for me, this is the least I could do in return.”

Felicity watched the two of them. More reserved of a greeting than the one she’d witnessed between him and Ivan. But then again, it seemed to fit the man before her. Maseo had been closed off when they met. A desperate man who looked degrees away from doing something foolish. And with the
exception of the moment he reunited with his son, Felicity had only ever seen this look of calm clarity on his features.

“I should have guessed,” Felicity spoke looking between them. “When you said old friend. Considering how many you have.”

Oliver gave her a look and she couldn’t help the rush to her cheeks at the weight of it. She should probably be glad for the two beds. Considering they had work to do.

She forced herself to focus back on their guest. “How is Tatsu? Oh how’s Akio?”

He chuckled softly, and nodded. “They’re well. When I told him where I was going he wanted to come, but I thought it best not to risk it. He misses you both. And he always speaks highly of the time you spent together here. Though the reasons for it were grim, he never looks back on it in fear or sadness. Thank you both for that.”

“He’s a great kid,” Oliver said clearing his throat. “I’m just glad he’s okay.”

“I am glad to see you got out of Russia,” Maseo finally said. “But I fear this trip is not the wisest of your choices Oliver.”

“It’s not,” he agreed, and Felicity was surprised with how quickly he had. “But I have a debt to pay. And I don’t like owing those. We need to help our friends. I think you of all people can appreciate that.”

Maseo lifted up a hard sided case, setting it on the edge of the nearest bed. Felicity hadn’t noticed him drag the thing in, and she chided herself on that. If she and Oliver were going to help Sofia and Ivan, she needed to treat Russia like any other Hood related mission. She needed to notice everything, and be the type of person who slipped out of Waller’s fingertips time after time.

“Smuggling something into the country?” she joked pointing to the case in his hand.

“You did not tell her the plan?”

Now Felicity fully looked at Oliver. Oliver and his cagey expression. Oliver who looked like he wanted nothing more than to put her on a plane back to Starling. He didn’t slip as she leveled her gaze at him.

“What plan didn’t you tell me?”

“Felicity--”

“I thought we went over the plan. You know what no, I distinctly remember we did,” she replied, her voice raising slightly. “I have the papers drawn up. I worked my ass off, and even conned Tommy into a little bit of his government magic to make them look 100% legitimate. What could you have possibly needed to keep secret until right now?”

Oliver stepped closer, his gaze hesitate as he shifted between Felicity and Maseo. He clearly regretted not telling her everything up front. She could see it on his face.

“Remember how we talked about how the best way to get Sofia and Ivan out of this situation was to get them fake passports and then out of the country like we did with Maseo?”

“I remember. Hence the documents in my bag,” she said, watching him closely.
“But do you also remember how I said the Bratva would rabidly follow the heir to their entire dynasty no matter where she tried to hide. I mean Sofia would have to be dead for her father and Anatoly to stop looking for her.”

“I don’t understand what that has to do with Maseo or this suitcase.”

“I needed Maseo to bring something to Russia that I wouldn’t be able to bring myself,” he paused shooting his friend a nod to open the case. “It’s not something we could have gotten when we landed either.”

As the case popped open, Felicity’s eyes were drawn to its contents. While the outside was hard metal, the inside was lined with foam, each side covered by it. And in the center, nestled into four separate squares was something Felicity recognized all too well.

“Oliver,” she took a shaky breath, meeting his eyes. “That’s C4.”

“I know.”

“You had Maseo smuggle explosives into the country. Are you insane? He could have been caught. He could have been detained at the border. He might never have made it home.”

“I agreed to the risk,” Maseo chimed in. “Because I believe no one should be forced into a life they did not choose. Oliver saved my son from such a fate, and I will always try to help save others from similar ones.”

“What are you planning on doing with that?” she pulled on his arm until he looked at her. “Threaten Anatoly and Mikhail for Sofia’s freedom? You know you’ll be dead before you even get a word out.”

“No. I’m not negotiating anything with them. We both know it wouldn’t do any good. They won’t respond to threats,” he replied. “I know they will never let her go until she’s married to whomever they think can be the next ruthless head of the Bratva. She’s trapped in this life Felicity. And Ivan’s going to die in it as well because he loves her enough to stay until the bitter end. And I can’t let that happen. I have to help them get away from here.”

“You just told me there was nowhere they could go that the Bratva won’t follow. As long as they’re alive, Anatoly and Mikhail will always come for them.”

“Exactly,” he whispered, his head dropped just enough to feel like they were the only two in the room. “The only way the Bratva doesn’t follow Sofia and Ivan is if we kill them first.”

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Tommy pulled into a parking space at the Hub City airport near Terminal A where the direct flight from the Ngari Gunsa Airport near Tibet that held Nyssa al Ghul and possibly an undisclosed second League of Assassins member would be landing within the hour. He had already contacted the Department of Homeland Security and requested that the pair be detained for questioning, but he couldn’t shake the feeling that actually speaking with Nyssa would be a lot more difficult than that. As he killed the engine, Tommy checked his breast pocket for the umpteenth time for the DHS badge he’d received from Ops earlier that morning.

Waller had seemed almost impressed when he’d explained that he’d found a connection to the list she’d provided him with the previous week, but then again, when it came to Waller, ‘almost impressed’ looked an awful lot like ‘bored’ and ‘exasperated’ and ‘enthused’.
He still wasn’t quite sure what he was going to say to Nyssa once he was in a room with her. Waller hadn’t been forthcoming enough with information to let him know why she was interested in the League- but Tommy tended to have a knack for saying the right thing at the right time, so perhaps he could just let his instincts guide him. So far it hadn’t worked out too terrible for him in the past.

Slipping out of his car and heading for the terminal, Tommy felt anxiety creep into the pit of his stomach. Words of doubt scratched at the back of his mind that told him going back out into the field in any capacity was too soon. He’d only just been shot, nearly died, had his badge stolen from underneath his nose, along with a myriad of other things that his mind chose that exact moment to supply himself with. His breath hitched in his throat, and for a moment, he paused outside the automatic sliding doors, watching them slowly open and close before him as he stood rooted in place.

“Snap out of it, Merlyn,” he chided himself quietly. “You’ve got this. You were an agent long before you were shot and you’re still an agent now. You can do this.”

“Sir?” A young woman in an American Airlines uniform stopped beside him. “Are you alright?”

Tommy nodded. “Just not keen on the whole flying thing,” he lied. It was easier than explaining the truth.

“I understand.” She gave him a sympathetic smile. “It’s more common than you’d think.”

“Thanks,” he said, with a small smile in return.

The airline employee nodded before heading into the airport and disappearing into the crowd. After another brief moment, he followed, finding his way through the crowd toward the international flight gates. He showed his badge to the TSA agents at the security checkpoint, and they let him through without a second glance. Tommy found the customs officers and checked in with them to ensure that they knew he was to be alerted as soon as Nyssa tried to enter the country.

He was led down a narrow hallway into a small interrogation style room. There was a long mirror along one wall, that he was positive was only one way. Tommy wondered briefly if there were any employees on the other side of the glass, watching him, curious as to why he was there. It didn’t matter if there were, all that mattered was that he was going to do whatever he could to ensure that this was a win for Waller. After all the grief she’d gotten over the last couple of days from General Shrieve, Tommy was sure she needed it.

Tommy checked his watch, the plane would be arriving any moment if it hadn’t already. A knock sounded on the door, and Tommy stood as a TSA agent pushed the door open and nodded to him. He followed the man back down the hall where he could now hear a woman’s agitated voice growing louder over the bustle of the airport.

“Ma’am, if you could come with me, please,” Tommy said, meeting her eyes as he stepped up to the customs officer she seemed to be verbally assaulting.

“I will not,” she seethed. “Not until someone informs me as to why I’m being detained.”

“Did you have someone travelling with you?” Tommy asked, ignoring her demands. “I believe there were two tickets booked using your credit card.”

The woman narrowed her eyes at him, ripping her arm out of the grip of the TSA agent who had come to stand beside her, and moved closer to Tommy. He had to admit, she had the look of an assassin if he’d ever pictured one. She was beautiful, with long, dark wavy hair, but her every move
was careful and stealthy, like a wild jungle cat ready to pounce. And her eyes? The term ‘if a look could kill’ must have been fashioned after Nyssa Raatko.

She brushed passed Tommy and down into the hallway he’d just emerged from. He turned on his heel and followed close behind her.

“This won’t take long,” he said, catching up and matching her swift stride. He didn’t like how he felt like she had all the control in the situation, but he couldn’t shake the feeling that she knew it too.

He led her into the interrogation room, closing the door behind him. Nyssa took a seat, looking more cool and collected than he felt in that moment. But Tommy didn’t let that stop him.

“Ms. Raatko, are you in the country on business or pleasure?” he asked, trying to get his bearings before he moved into anything too crazy.

“Is that question directly related to why I’m here?” she asked in return. “Or are you making small talk?”

“Your cooperation would make this all go a lot smoother,” he said, feeling the frustration beginning to rise in him. He just needed something, anything to bring back to Waller. He’d been involved in too many mistakes, too many blown ops, to come back empty handed again.

“I imagine it would,” she mused.

A knock sounded on the door and Tommy stood, opening it to find the TSA agent from the desk standing there.

“I’ve got her friend here,” the man said.

From the woman’s position behind the agent, all Tommy could make out was blonde hair and a small frame.

“Thanks,” Tommy said. “Stick her in the next room over and I’ll--”

Blue eyes peaked up over the TSA agent’s shoulder, and then the man was thrust into Tommy, knocking them both into the interrogation room. That seemed to be all the motivation Nyssa needed, because she was leaping up over them in the next instant.

Tommy found his feet before the agent, despite the throbbing in his shoulder and the exploding pain that reverberated down his arm from being shoved to the ground. Recognition scratched at the back of Tommy’s mind, but he couldn’t place how or why or what he should be remembering. But he thought that it had to be the eyes. Those piercing blue eyes.

He ran down the hall, the blonde nowhere to be seen, but he was closing in on Nyssa.

And then in a split second, she stopped dead in her tracks, Tommy almost knocking into her. Nyssa kicked her leg behind her, snaking it up so that her stiletto heel caught him square in the middle of the back, shoving him further forward into her, knocking him off kilter. Her arms were around his neck before he could blink, and despite his training, she was about to have him pinned in two seconds flat.

Shit. He had not thought this through. Questioning a member of the League of Assassins? How did he think this would go down? That she’d just politely answer his questions and then he’d send her on her way to assassinate whoever she was there to finish off? Had he really been that naive?
The searing pain in Tommy’s shoulder is what brought him back to his senses and made him remember his training. It made him feel alive in ways he knew it shouldn’t. It was unhealthy to use that kind of pain to feed his missions- but in that moment he just didn’t care. Tommy pushed up from the floor, despite the lack of oxygen from Nyssa’s hands around his throat. He shoved her into the nearest wall, lessening her grip enough to get a breath in. It was all he needed; he ripped her arm in the opposite direction, pulling it around her back until she growled in pain.

It broke her off of him so that he could gulp in a few more breaths before she came charging back. Her martial arts training was far above anything he’d studied at ARGUS and he knew that meant he’d have to outwit her. At least until some sort of backup arrived.

Tommy had thought that the first few moments of their altercation had been bad, but they were nothing compared to what came next. Apparently assassins didn’t take kindly to almost having their shoulders dislocated. Tommy blocked one out of every five moves she assaulted him with. She was a blur of hands and feet and every attack was directed at him. He got in a shot now and again, but only enough to slow her down- he was beginning to get the feeling nothing would actually stop her.

At least until a voice called from the end of the hallway.

“NYSSA, STOP!”

It belonged to a woman. Of that, and only that, Tommy could be sure. He assumed it most likely belonged to the blonde, the one that set everything into motion by shoving the TSA agent into him back at the interrogation room, but from Tommy’s spot on the floor, he couldn’t see her.

“He knows who we are, Taer al Asfar. He cannot live,” Nyssa said, glaring down at him.

The other woman spoke in another language, her tone gentle and unassuming. And then Nyssa backed off, leveling one final glare at Tommy, before she disappeared from his view.

Tommy groaned, slowly standing to his feet. He pulled his cell phone from his pocket, hitting the ‘end record’ button. If there was one thing Tommy had learned long ago, it was that sometimes, a recording might just save your life. Before pocketing the device, he scrolled through his contacts, highlighting one before dialing the number.

“Hey Boy scout,” Lexi chirped her greeting. “How’s Hub City?”

“Less than fruitful,” he answered, letting the moniker go for now. He’d remind her again once he was back at the office that she only had to use it on comms. “Feel like flexing your hacker muscles for me?”

“Sure thing, what do you need?”

Tommy moved back down the hallway, at a much slower pace, but he got there nonetheless. Several TSA agents had found their way to the back hallway and were staring at him and whispering, but none had lifted a finger to help him or stop the League of Assassins members from getting away.

“Photos of two women who just arrived at the Hub City airport. One goes by the name Nyssa Raatko. The other is blonde, but I don’t have any more description than that. If you can track them through the airport and get any sort of hint about where they might be headed, I’ll love you forever.” He swiped at his lip, which was split and bleeding. He couldn’t go back to the office looking like that. Besides, it may be better to stick around town, in case Lexi could get information on where the women were headed.
“I’ll call you back ASAP,” Lexi said, and then gasped. “Oh geez.”

“What?” Tommy asked, feeling his anxiety tick up another notch.

“I just saw what she did to you. Are you okay? I mean your shoulder and everything…”

“You got into the video feed already?” Tommy asked. Although he wasn’t really surprised. Next to Felicity, Lexi was the best hacker he knew.

“I did. And holy crow she’s like a ninja.”

“Mnhmm,” Tommy hummed, his pride more wounded than anything physical.

“Alright, photos incoming to your cell now. I’ll see what I can find as far as location.”

“You’re a doll,” Tommy said. His phone beeped twice with the incoming photos. The first was of Nyssa, all haughty warrior princess and downright lethal. But that wasn’t what made Tommy lose his footing and nearly collapse into a bench near the main entrance he’d come through less than an hour earlier. No, it was the second photo. The blonde haired, blue eyed bombshell that had entered the country with Nyssa. She was all hard lines now, where she used to be soft edges and teenage innocence, but there was no denying that it was her. Tommy’s phone nearly fell from his hand as her name slipped from his lips. “Sara…”

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He watched her from behind, her hands held tight around the railing as she looked out over the city around them. It was the stillness of her actions that sent a charge of worry through him. In all the time he’d known her, Oliver knew that Felicity was only silent when she was really worked up about something.

“You okay?” Oliver asked as he stepped out to join her. He let his shoulder brush against hers, and the warmth and ease that came from the contact spread over him. “Maseo went to set a couple other things up for us. He’s going to call the sat phone tomorrow when he has everything ready.”

She nodded, shifting to meet his eyes. “I’m just wrapping my head around using actual explosives to save people’s lives,” she gave him a small smile. “When exactly did this become normal for us?”

“For me it was around five years ago, but I feel like your normal started a little later than that.”

“Well then you clearly don’t know anything about the competitive world of MIT or having a Vegas cocktail waitress for a mother,” she mused, but fell silent. “Oliver, what if this doesn’t work? What if something goes wrong? What if someone gets hurt? What if we--”

“Hey,” her placed a hand to her face, rubbing his thumb along her cheek. She was so warm and soft under his fingertips. “It’s going to be fine. Everything is going to work out, I promise.”

“You can’t know that.” She dropped her hand to his, her fingers dancing along his veins. “I know we talked about getting them out of here. But this… Oliver it seems like a lot.”

“I know, but we can do it.”

“How do you know?”

“I just do.”

“That’s a lot of blind faith you have.”
“It’s not faith Felicity, it’s trust,” he shrugged shifting until he could rest her head on his shoulder. “I trust you. So I know no matter how crazy of a risk this turns out to be, we’re going to get through it.”

She tilted her head up, leaning into a kiss. It still amazed him how much he felt by such a small action. The whole world could end around them, and he’d barely notice anything over the touch of her lips on his.

“We’re going to need Sofia and Ivan 100% on board with this plan,” she relented as she pulled back. “If they don’t agree…”

Her words trailed off but Oliver understood the weight of them. If they couldn’t get Ivan and Sofia on board with this, then everything would slip through their fingers. He could see no other way to help his friends. No way to get them out of the Bratva and away from the Knyanzev’s without the plan he had in place.

The city was lighting something inside of him. He could feel the energy pulsing, filling him in a way he had tried so long to shrug off. This city had made him the man he was today, but it also broke the person he’d been before. There was a version of him buried underneath the rubble that thrived in this setting. And he knew he would have to dig at least part of that man out if they were going to make it back to Starling City alive, if he was going to make sure they made it back alive.

“Hey,” she whispered, running a hand through his short hair. “What are you thinking about?”

He still wanted to spare her from the darkest parts of himself, from the kind of things this place had turned him into. But he didn’t want to worry her either.

“You,” he replied, leaning into her touch. “And how lucky I am that I have you in my life. I don’t know what I would do without you.”

“You’re not going to have to find out,” the conviction in her words was staggering, almost as much beauty in that one sentence as she had in every aspect of her being. And Oliver was floored once again by how much love he could have for her. But he still knew he couldn’t say the words, not just yet.

“Thank you,” he said giving her a smile.

He wanted to kiss her again, to pull her to him and feel her heart beating right next to his. He wanted to get lost in the feel of her skin and to fall in further in love than he already was. But before he could press his lips to hers a knock sounded at the door.

Felicity froze. Her eyes wide as they met his, but he could see reality fall back into place a second later.

“That’s probably Ivan and Sofia,” she said with a nod. “You should get it.”

He dragged himself away, though the pull to stay within a few inches of her was stronger than ever. But he knew he couldn’t let them stay outside the room for much longer. The longer Ivan and Sofia were exposed, the more likely something could get back to the Bratva.

It only took a few more seconds to get to the door. He couldn’t help the hesitation as his fingers curled around the handle. In one blinding second he could see it. He could see that this could very well be a trap, an elaborate ruse to lure him back to Russia where a game of roulette would be the best case scenario for him. But he stamped down the fear and the doubt. If Felicity had taught him anything at all over the last few months, it was the need to trust his instinct. He knew the risks of coming back to Moscow, but he also knew Ivan and Sofia. They had been the closest to friends as he
would have allowed himself back then. And he trusted in that. He trusted in their need to be with one another as well. He had to see this through.

The first thing he noticed as he swung the door open was just how much the last couple months had effected Sofia. When he saw her in November there was a fire in her features, a fight that sat in every muscle, and behind each look she gave. But looking at her now it was like she had half given up already. Mikhail may be the one with the terminal illness, but Sofia was wasting away in this life.

“You came,” she stated, slipping past him and into the hotel. “I wasn’t sure you would.”

Her words were as hard and cold as a blade plunged into the chest. Oliver could take it. There were no words anyone could direct towards him that he hadn’t bruised himself with a million different ways. Sofia was in pain, and he would let her lash out if she needed too.

“Sofia,” Ivan chided as he trailed in behind her. “He’s here as a favor to us both.”

“He should have been here weeks ago,” she countered, the edge of her voice wavered on him, but Oliver could see her trying to stay firm. “We would not be so far in this mess if he hand come when he was asked.”

“I told you we needed time to get things in place.”

“And I told you, I didn’t have that,” she spun towards him her gaze shifting from Oliver to Felicity. “I have a sick father who desires to not only have me married off, but also to have an heir on the way before he leaves this earth. I’m sorry if my entire future inconvenienced you and yours.”

“Sofia,” Ivan pulled on her arm, bringing her back to his side. “Please, you mustn’t blame this on Oliver. He is not the one who said you must marry Maxim Kuznetsov.”

“But he is the reason Anatoly did not name you Captain. It is his fault we sit in this limbo.”

“We both know whether Oliver had stayed or not I would never have been Captain, not as long as Mikhail had a say.”

Her anger tapered away the longer Ivan had her gaze held, and he wondered if they even realized how much they fed off of each other’s moods.

“Maybe it would be better if we all sit,” Felicity cut in, her arm threading through his own as she came to stand next to him. “We can talk about what comes next.”

“What do you mean?” Sofia looked at them both on confusion. “Oliver has returned. He must challenge my father and Anatoly for his position and then relinguish it to Ivan.”

“I didn’t come here to challenge anyone for anything,” he replied. He could feel his fingers rubbing together, the nerves hitting harder than he thought they would.

“You came to help,” Sofia said. “This is how you help.”

“I can’t get Anatoly to do anything he doesn’t want to, especially with Mikhail guiding his choices. And come on Sofia, you know better than anyone that even if I challenge the Pakhan, and even if I somehow won, no one would respect Ivan as Captain, if that’s not what your family wanted. You think this Kuznetsov, would just back off after power was that close to him? You really think there’s any rules within the Bratva that would help you now?”

“You do not understand how the Bratva works.”
“The hell I don’t,” he looked at her, shaking his head. “I understand that they don’t care how loyal you are, or how long you’ve been with them. One slip up, just one, and you’re not a part of them anymore. They will cut you out as easily as it is for them to take a breath. And they won’t look back. I know because I was who they used to get rid of those who betrayed the Bratva. They don’t care about you Sofia. Not unless you’re doing exactly what they want you to do.”

“They are my family.”

“If that was the case this conversation wouldn’t need to happen,” he said, glancing at Ivan who held Sofia to him like a man struggling to hold his entire world in place. “If they loved you, and they wanted what was best for you, they would never marry you off to a man you could never love, a man that may hurt you- or worse. If they were really your family, they would see that you and Ivan are meant to be together. All you have known your entire life was the Bratva, and I realize how hard it would be to leave that behind. But if it’s a choice between them and your life with Ivan, I hope you know which one you’d pick. Because if not, Felicity and I will leave now.”

Sofia casted her gaze away, and he could see the cracks in her resolve. But it was going to take more than a couple fractures to break her away from her family. She needed to want to leave with every single thing in her. It was the only way things would work.

Ivan pulled her back to him, tilting her head up until she looked at him. “Sofia, vy dolzhny dumat’ o rebenke.”

It had been a long time since Oliver had studied his Russian, a long time since he had a need to look over the words or feel the way they hung heavy on the tongue. But he had lived and breathed the Bratva for months. He had befriended Alina, and listened to her stories from the hospital. There were words that could stick with you forever, no matter how long and far from a language you removed yourself. Oliver knew exactly what rebenke meant.

“Sofia,” he took a step to them, his gaze on the girl. He thought she was wasting away because of the wedding, because she was being forced into a marriage she didn’t want. And that was probably part of it, but he could see other things forming too. The shift in her build around her stomach, the way her face never seemed to sit with the same ease. “You’re pregnant?”

“Da,” she replied, barely holding back tears now. “And if my father learns of this he will kill Ivan and then he will kill my child. So I do hope you have a plan Oliver. Because if not, I do not know how I will survive.”
Chapter 35

Pregnant. The word rolled around Felicity’s mind, growing, expanding, taking on a life of its own. Until it filled every empty space in the hotel room, making Felicity feel like she was starving for air.

No wonder Sofia had been so adamant about Oliver’s help, and so desperate on the phone for him to get there as quickly as possible. Every day she was living in fear of someone finding her out. And every night she went to sleep a little more hopeless that help would never come.

Felicity turned away from them, gasping in a deep breath as silently as she could. The risk level for what they were about to do settling in her bones with one sharp inhale. It was no longer just their lives, no longer adults who could make their own choices, taking these risks to get out. Now it was the baby growing inside Sofia, the petite Russian girl who looked like she’d all but given up on getting out of this mess.

Moving to the mini fridge, Felicity grabbed a bottle of water and took a long swallow. Oliver’s voice drifted through the small space, the words not loud enough for her to hear, but somehow comforting all the same. They eased the tension in her shoulders— not completely, but enough that she no longer imagined a boa constrictor wrapped around her middle every time she tried to inhale.

“...right Felicity?”

She spun back to them at the sound of her name, Oliver looking at her expectantly. “I’m sorry, what was the question?”

Oliver raised a brow, and she wondered if he could guess at her thoughts. If the fact that Sofia was pregnant weighed on his mind a little more considering what his plan had been.

“I was just telling Sofia that you’ve got an encrypted phone for them, so we can go over the plan tomorrow morning,” he repeated.

Felicity nodded her head. “Yes, that.” She moved to the nightstand between the two beds, reaching into the bag she’d set there and pulled out a phone. She’d done the encryption herself, and it had been a thing of beauty. Then again, she’d used a similar encryption to the one she’d snuck into Anatoly’s computer system when she’d upgraded it for them two years ago. If someone in the Bratva had found and backtraced it... she shook her head. She was getting into the realm of extreme paranoia with that one. It was too far even for her.

Ivan held out his hand and Felicity offered him the phone.
“We’ll call once everything is in place,” Oliver said, sounding far too sure of himself for as unsteady as Felicity felt.

Sofia sighed, nodding her head, a grimace on her features. “You really believe this is the only way?” she asked softly.

Felicity’s eyes flicked to Oliver before settling back on the too-thin girl in front of her. She swallowed hard before answering. “I do,” she said finally. “It will mean giving up a lot. But I know this is not the life you wanted, and I’m sure it’s not the life you want for your child.”

The other girl seemed to chew on her answer for a moment, weighing her options. But Felicity knew there wasn’t an option, not really. She and Oliver had talked through it dozens of times, and the only way for Ivan and Sofia to be together, and to be together safely, was to get them out of the country. And Oliver knew the Bratva far better than she did, so if he believed the only way to get them out was to fake their deaths, then she would have to back him up.

“What about Ana?” Sofia asked. “Leaving will damn her to the same fate that my father has planned for me.”

“We’ve made arrangements for her as well,” Oliver said. “I had a feeling you wouldn’t leave without your sister.”

“No,” Sofia said, pursing her lips. “This means that my father will bury both of his daughters on his deathbed. Anatoly will have no living family once my father passes.”

“They have stolen your life already,” Ivan said, wrapping an arm protectively around Sofia. “All of your memories, haunted by their darkness. Don’t let them steal more of your joy, Solnyshko. We deserve to be happy.”

“Ana won’t be difficult to convince,” Sofia sighed. “She has always dreamed of leaving Russia, of exploring different worlds and discovering her own life beyond the family.”

“This will work,” Felicity said, reaching for Sofia’s hand and giving it a gentle squeeze. She wasn’t sure who she was trying to convince more, Sofia or herself.

“We should go,” Sofia said, offering a pale imitation of a smile.

“We’ll be in touch,” Oliver said, moving to stand beside Felicity.

Sofia and Ivan moved toward the door when Ivan turned back. “You are giving us the chance at a real life together,” he said with a solemn nod. “Thank you Oliver.”

Oliver nodded his head slowly once, holding the door open as the couple left and headed for the elevator. Felicity watched him as he watched them retreat. She could hear the ding of the elevator, and only then did Oliver come back inside, and latch and lock the door.

“That went better than I expected,” Felicity said, blowing out a long breath.

“I was sure she was going to fight me on it.”

Felicity frowned. “It doesn’t look like she has much fight left, Oliver.”

A nod. “I noticed that too. But she just needs a little more. Just to get through tomorrow, just until we get them out, and she’ll never have to fight again.”
He closed the space between them and Felicity let him wrap her tightly in his arms, her head finding the taught muscle against his chest as she breathed him in. It amazed her how little it took for her to relax into him. Despite the tension and the craziness surrounding them, standing there in his arms, she felt like everything might actually turn out alright.

And then the phone rang.

It wouldn’t have startled Felicity if it had been one of their cell phones, or even the sat phone, the mate of which they’d given to Maseo a few hours earlier. No, this was their hotel room phone, and the longer it rang, the more Felicity tensed.

Oliver released her after what seemed like an eternity of nothing but silence interrupted by the shrill ring of the phone. He moved to where it sat on the bedside table and picked it up.

“Da,” he answered, his Russian accent sounding more pronounced than when she’d last heard him use it two years before.

“Oliver Queen,” the words filtered through the receiver.

Felicity’s eyes flew to Oliver’s in a panic. He met her gaze with unmasked anxiety in his own.

“Anatoly,” he breathed, barely audible.

“I told you not to come here, Oliver,” the mob boss said, his tone quiet, almost sad. “This is no place for the resurrected son of Starling City. You don’t belong here anymore.”

“I was invited,” Oliver said evenly.

Felicity moved to his side, wanting to better hear the words being spoken on the other side. Her mind, already reeling with possibilities of what this would mean for them. Would they have to change the plan? Would Anatoly suspect that they’re up to something? Would he have Oliver shot on sight for coming back to Moscow?

“I believe I was more than clear with you when we spoke last,” Anatoly said conversationally. “But if I must be direct, then hear me now. If you are spotted anywhere near the wedding tomorrow, Mikhail has given orders to have you brought in, so that he may deal with your desertion directly.”

“A pleasure as always, Anatoly,” Oliver answered, before returning the receiver to the cradle.

Felicity smacked Oliver in the arm, pulling his focus back down to her.

“What was that for?” he sighed, a half smile on his face as he grabbed her hand in both of his.

“I’m sorry,” she responded. “Was that not just a threat from the friendly, neighborhood mob boss? You don’t look worried. Shouldn’t you be worried? Why aren’t you worried?”

“Felicity,” he said quietly, bringing her hand up to his lips to place a kiss on the heel of her palm. “That was just Anatoly’s way of letting me know what Mikhail’s orders are. He won’t tell them we’re here.”

“Oh,” she said quietly, feeling a little sheepish. “You guys are pretty tight then?”

“Enough so, at least, that he’d prefer me not to get caught by his brother.”

He brushed the hair away from her neck, placing a searing kiss along the juncture where it met her shoulder. Felicity felt herself shudder, felt his lips curl into a smile against her skin, felt her eyes
flutter closed as she pushed herself closer against him.

“We never did get that food,” he breathed against her skin.

“Hmm?” Felicity hummed, only half paying attention to the fact that he was saying anything at all.

“You still hungry?” he asked, pulling back until she was staring into the impossible blue of his eyes.

Felicity blinked a few times, rewinding the words in her head until she could piece them back together in a way that made sense. Food, right. He wanted to eat? Now?

“No really,” she answered, a little breathier than she’d expected.

Oliver smirked, and leaned in again, but Felicity stopped him, her hand on his chest.

“I do have one question first, though.” He looked at her expectantly, so she continued. “Do you have a preference on which bed you want to claim? Because I’m not that picky and I could go either way…”

He chuckled, removing her hand from his chest before pushing her up against the nearest bed, her knees hitting the side. Felicity wrapped her arms around him and pulled him down with her, laughing and kissing all the while.

It was a few hours later before they resurfaced from the pile of pillows and blankets, needing hydration and sustenance. The sat phone had buzzed a little while earlier, and while Felicity gathered two bottles of water from the fridge, Oliver checked the phone.

“Maseo got what we need.”

Felicity felt her nose wrinkle at the thought, but settled down next to him the sheet loose around her sides. Somewhere in the city, Maseo was driving around with a bunch of corpses in his car? She definitely preferred being on her end of things. And not only because it meant climbing back into bed with Oliver Queen. But that certainly was quite the selling point.

“Twenty four hours from now, this town is going to be turned upside down,” Felicity said, offering Oliver the second bottle of water. “The Bratva is going to look completely different after today.”

He nodded.

“What will Anatoly do once he’s on his own?” she mused, taking a seat beside him on the bed.

Oliver moved a loose curl, tucking it behind her ear as he studied her carefully. “He will find his way.”

Felicity chewed on her lower lip. It wouldn’t be easy for him, surely, to lose his entire family. But how would that affect his rule of the Bratva? She supposed only time would tell.

“We should get some sleep,” Oliver said, stifling a yawn. “Today is going to be one hell of a long, difficult day.”

“I think I’ll take this bed,” she answered with a grin. “I’m already pretty comfortable over here.”

“I’m not going to live this one down, huh?” Oliver asked, moving under the covers of the bed she’d just said she was claiming. “I told you I didn’t want to be--”

She cut him off with a kiss. “Okay, I guess you can stay here too,” she said, snuggling herself into
his side. “But no, you aren’t going to live this one down for a long, long time.”

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There were ghosts walking the earth. Tommy believed that more than ever after his best friend turned up alive years after the Gambit sunk in to the bottom of the sea. He believed there were forces around them that brought the impossible to the surface, that marked the soul forever by the collisions of lives. But he never thought lightning would strike his life twice.

Sara Lance was alive. Somehow, despite Ollie’s insistence that she had died when the boat sank, Sara was walking around Hub City with a member of the League of Assassins. It shouldn't be possible, but her blue eyes stared up at him from his phone. He hadn’t seen Sara since long before the trip that doomed her and Oliver to their deaths. She’d been away at school if he remembered correctly. But he could never forget the younger Lance. She had been his friend as much as Oliver and Laurel, and he grieved for her as much as he had Ollie.

But she wasn’t dead. He had the proof in his hands. Not dead. But not living either. Not if she was tied to something as dark and mysterious as the League.

“How the hell did you get involved in this?” he whispered as he set the phone down again.

But it’s not like he could judge. He and Ollie, they had both been thrown into their own versions of Purgatory, coming out the other side different than the kids they were before. Maybe Sara had a similar journey. Maybe she was only in the League as a means to survive. Maybe he really need to talk to Ollie about this.

But he couldn’t. Oliver was in Russia dealing with Bratva things. The very last thing, he and Felicity needed right now was something else to worry about. Plus Tommy had brought out this mess, he had been assigned to look into the League, and he was going to get to the bottom of this. Even if he had no clue where to go from there. But he could really use some kind of backup.

There was a steady knock on his hotel door, and Tommy felt the hairs on his neck rise. His hand reached on instinct for his side arm, and he moved from the single bed in a slow motion, trying his best not to pull on his shoulder. The pain still throbbed deep into the muscle and he couldn’t seem to push it down again.

As he reached the door he heard a voice from the other side. “Merlyn I swear to god if you don’t open this door right now I’m going to kick it in.”

“How’s the hell did you get involved in this?” he pulled the hotel door open wide enough to see his partner standing there, and just behind her John. “What the hell are you two doing here?”

“What are we doing here? What the hell are you doing engaging with the League of Assassins at a damn airport?”

He sighed. Because of course Lyla already knew what he was up to. Sometimes it seemed like Lyla knew more about what Tommy was doing than he did himself.

“You mind coming into the room to yell at me for this? I don’t want the entire hotel to hear our conversation,” he moved aside as Lyla brushed past him. “Hey Digg, good to see you.”

“You too,” the taller man replied. “How’s the shoulder?”

“It’s been better,” he closed the door behind them and turned back to his partner. “Okay now you can yell.”
“Is this a joke to you?”

“No, Lyla. In fact nothing in my life for the last three years has been anything resembling a joke. That doesn’t seem to stop the universe from having a sick sense of humor,” he muttered. “Look I didn’t tell you about the intel because I thought I could handle it.”

“You thought you could take on two assassins on your own?”

“I didn’t think it was going to come to hand to hand combat,” he huffed moving past both of them and taking a seat of the bed. “It was supposed to be recon only.”

She turned with him her eyes careful as she studied him. “You thought recon would go easy?”

“There’s a first time for everything. But you didn’t need to come rushing to Hub City with the calvary.” he gestured to Diggle.

“Oh I’m not the calvary,” John replied with a smirk. “I just wanted to see how badly that assassin busted up your face.”

“You thought is overwhelming, John.”

“What can I say, my team’s out of town I need some form of entertainment,” He paused, giving Tommy the once over. “Plus Oliver and Felicity would never forgive me if you died while they were half a world away.”

“Johnny was with me when Lexi called to fill me in on what you were doing here.”

Tommy watched them both with a grin. “Oh.”

“Shut up.”

“I just said ‘oh’.”

“I know what you saying ‘oh’ really means.”

He didn’t have time to investigate his friend’s love lives. “Lyla why are you here?”

“You need back up.”

“I don’t,” he replied with a shrug. Even if a minute ago he was thinking the exact same thing. But if Sara was alive and in the States, he had to try and solve this by himself. “I got into one fight with her. But I have learned my lesson, no engaging the target. I will be strictly on surveillance from now on. So please guys go home. I’m fine.”

“That’s crap and we both know it,” Lyla pulled the desk chair over, and taking a seat. “Why do you want us to go?”

“Lyla--”

“Tommy, I’m your friend and your partner. I’m not going to let you go on some kamikaze mission just to get Waller to back off. The League is dangerous. They have their own set of rules to follow. And it’s a miracle you aren’t dead right now.”

Was it a miracle? Or was it something else-- someone else? Sara had been there. She called out to Nyssa and the assassin had stopped her attack. She said something to Nyssa, but he had yet to listen over the recording and try to decipher what it was. Could he tell Lyla and John what really
happened? Could he risk Sara slipping through the cracks if he didn’t let them in? He didn’t think so.

“The other one stopped her,” he relented finally meeting Lyla’s gaze. “I don’t know what she said, but it stopped this Nyssa in her tracks.”

“And the surveillance from the parking garage doesn’t have audio. So we’ve got nothing.”

Tommy pulled the recorder from his pocket and handed it to her. “I wouldn’t say ‘nothing’. I maybe had that on the whole time.”

Lyla gave the device a once over before she handed it up to John behind her. The latter grinned as he rolled his eyes. “You and recording devices. Kind of a trend huh?”

“What can I say, it’s my best move,” he shrugged. “The other woman, she called out when I was being attack. And Nyssa, she stopped. And I believe I owe her my life for that.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Just let’s translate what’s on the device and then I’ll explain,” he looked at his partner as he pleaded. “Please Lyla, trust me on this.”

Digg had already moved to the small table, grabbing a piece of paper and a pen as he took a seat, setting the recorder down next to him. “Let’s get this over with then.”

The walls felt like they were contracting around him, and he could barely catch a breath. But he couldn’t push Lyla and Digg away. Not if he wanted a chance at talking to Sara face to face. He needed his friends. He needed someone else to know what was going on. If for no other reason than to assure him he wasn’t going crazy.

“Sounds like arabic,” Lyla commented, glancing back at him. “Which tracks with what little intel we have about the League.”

“Great,” he snarked. “You wouldn’t happen to know someone who can translate, would you? Because my linguistic skills are more than a little rusty.”

“I can translate it,” Digg said as he scrawled words down across the paper.

Lyla’s brow raised as an impressed smile crossed her face. “You speak arabic?”

“A buddy of mine in Kandahar was our unit’s translator. I got antsy when you were sent on that mission over enemy lines. He taught me some to keep my mind off worrying about you,” Digg looked at her. “Didn’t stop the worrying but at least it built out my resume.”

“Okay you two can flirt over that story later,” Tommy said earning him one of Lyla’s elbow’s right to his rib cage. “I just-- what does she say on it.”

“Honestly, not much,” John sighed. “When the dark haired woman called the other ‘Taer al Asfar’ that’s definitely arabic. Loosely translates to the yellow bird or well the canary. Could be a code name or something.”

“The League gives its members monikers. That one was on my original list.”

“Okay well that’s when it gets weirder,” Digg replied. “Because when the blonde goes straight into her reply, she starts going off about bonds and friendship, even family. She asked this Nyssa to spare you in the name of those bonds. So you want to explain to us why a member of the League of
Assassins considers you a friend?"

He could lie, but then again he usually couldn’t get one past Lyla. Not when things got too involved. Plus he promised he would tell her the truth. And he didn’t like breaking his word with her.

“Tommy, what’s going on?”

He pulled out his phone, bringing up the picture before he handed it to Lyla. “That’s the other woman. The one who traveled here with Nyssa.”

“Okay,” she studied the photograph, before she handed it to John. “She’s cute what’s the point?”

“The point is I know her, at least I used to.”

“What do you mean used to?”

“That’s Sara Lance,” he replied letting the words sit heavy in the space between them. “And until five hours ago, I was pretty sure she had been dead for years.”

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Oliver was roused from sleep by the shrill chirp of the sat phone signifying an incoming message. It was still dark beyond the small hotel room window and he carefully reached over where Felicity lay sleeping beside him to retrieve the phone. He paused for a brief moment, his eyes raking over her, committing each inch, each moment to memory. From the blonde curls that swept across her face to the gentle rise and fall of her chest, to the way she curled into him. The desire within him, the ache to protect her, almost overwhelmed him with its ferocity. He cursed himself, not for the first time, for bringing her with him back to Russia.

The memories jumbled up in his head when he regarded that place. Because despite being filled with so much pain and anger and loss, it was still the place where he’d protected Akio, where he felt his heart swell and soar more than he thought possible considering the circumstances. It was still where he met her.

Felicity stirred, as if she could sense his thoughts had turned to her. But a moment later she settled, and Oliver brushed a lock of hair away from her eyes. He could never truly hate Russia, despite how he’d been burned and beaten and broken when he’d left there. Because it had also led him back to Tommy, had led him to Felicity and things he’d never thought he’d feel again.

The message from Maseo was short- just an address for where the van was stashed with three bodies inside. Oliver glanced at the clock on the bedside table- it was just after 4AM. With a groan, he pushed himself up until he was sitting, his back resting against the headboard and rubbed a hand down his face. He typed back a quick response to Maseo, thanking him again for everything he had done, and pushed out of the warmth of the bed, carefully not to wake Felicity.

He showered quickly, letting the hot water soothe the muscles that were constantly tensed, always coiled and ready for a fight. It was strange that being on edge was his new normal, considering the life he’d led before the Gambit went down. But since then, he could count on one hand the number of times he’d truly felt relaxed. Oliver smiled a little, realizing just how many of those memories had Felicity at the center of them. She was better for him in more ways than he could ever explain to her, maybe more than even he knew himself.

“Hey you,” she said through a yawn when he emerged from the bathroom a moment later. Her blonde hair was wild as she sat up, pulling the comforter up over her shoulders for warmth. “What are you doing?” she asked, her lips downturned in an expression that was more pout than frown. It
sent a course of electricity straight through him.

“Maseo gave me an address,” he answered, moving back toward the bed and placing a quick kiss on her lips. “I figured I’d get a jump on the day so you can work your magic on the DNA results.”

“Hmm.”

“What?”

“You know that it’s still the middle of the night, right?” She stifled another yawn.

He did know. But he also knew that if he climbed back into bed with her right then, he’d never want to get out. And as much as he was enjoying getting to know all of the facets of Felicity Smoak, he also knew he needed to keep his head in the game.

“I’ll be back,” he offered, moving toward the door. “With coffee,” he added as he grabbed the room key, coat and hat and stepped out into the hall.

Her quiet words followed him out. “My hero.”

Oliver moved quickly through the halls, taking the stairs at the south end of the building to the ground floor. The check-in desk was vacant and he moved through the lobby without seeing another soul. The fact that Anatoly knew not only that Oliver was in Moscow, but also which hotel, even what room he was staying in, weighed on his mind. He pulled the lapel of his coat up and his hat down, to help shield him from the elements as much as to disguise his identity.

He had almost forgotten how the biting cold of Russia could tear through his bones, making him feel empty and hollow in a way that little else could. It seemed to freeze him to the core, and it was a long moment before he got his bearings, finally finding the direction he needed to reach the van.

Felicity had helped him bring the plan further into focus the night before once he’d told her everything about the bomb. She’d pulled up schematics from the city, noting that the building next to the church had access to a sewer line that was connected to the tunnels. Similar tunnels to those they’d used to escape Waller’s men from the cafe two years ago. The alleyway between the two buildings was wide enough for the van, and Oliver had a large magnetic logo for a florist waiting for him at a nearby print shop, so the van wouldn’t look out of place. It would give Oliver the cover he needed to get the bodies into the church, and enough to sneak Ivan, Sofia and Ana out of the church and into the building next door before they detonated the bomb.

Words reverberated in his head- words spoken to him as a mentor in a too-long-ago training session. Right now you fight like a man struggling to survive. You need to fight like someone who knows they will win. Anatoly had always known how to get through to him. And in those early days, it had been exactly what Oliver had needed. But today, he knew better. The fight, the war he was waging against Mikhail, Oliver knew that he would win. Because it had taken him five long years to learn what deep down he should have known all along. The people he loved, they might be a liability when used against him, but when they were fighting together? They would always be his greatest strength.

So he would win. With every step he took bringing him closer to changing the world around them, he knew that he would come out on top. He would lay siege to the Bratva, to Mikhail’s reign of terror over his own daughter. And. He. Would. Win.

Oliver weaved through the streets, remembering the nights he’d spent wandering the city, trying to outrun the ghosts he’d accumulated over the years. He’d never managed to get beyond their reach,
although he’d found a way to accept them, to live around them, instead of trying to force them out all together. He avoided the street with the burned down restaurant, the one that held Nik’s remains, along with those of his mother, deceased before Oliver had met the young, brash Bratva member. He hadn’t allowed himself to pull Nik’s memory to the surface for some time, but walking these streets, being back in this city-- it had a way of forcing things to the forefront of his mind that he’d otherwise avoid.

He finally found the van in a half empty parking garage, keys nestled into the wheel well of the front tire. He clicked the unlock button on the keyfob, hoisting himself into the back of the van before closing the door behind him. It wasn’t the first time he’d seen a dead body up close and personal. Hell, it wasn’t even the tenth time. But that didn’t make it any less eerie. Oliver pulled Felicity’s tablet from his pocket, pulling up the scan software and scanning the handprints of all three victims.

His phone buzzed as he climbed into the driver’s seat and backed out of the parking space, a text from Ivan.

Oliver set the phone on the dashboard, hitting the ‘call’ button, beside the number for the phone they’d taken the night before.

“Oliver,” Ivan said immediately, his voice low and anxious.

“You sound like hell,” Oliver replied, inching the van toward the exit of the parking garage.

“Well I’m going to die today, so it seems fitting.”

Oliver huffed. “It’s going to be fine.”

“So you’ve done this before?” Sofia’s voice piped in.

“Sofia, do you remember the first time you came to my apartment to watch Akio when I joined the Bratva?” He paused, waiting for some sort of acknowledgement from her. When she hummed, he continued. “You looked me dead in the eye, and with all the warmth and determination you could muster, you told me that even though all my circumstances had led me to that tiny one bedroom apartment with a kid I had no business taking care of, that if I trusted you, you’d do right by us both.”

“You did have no business taking care of him,” she sighed, but there was no malice in her tone.

“Well, I can’t look you dead in the eye right now, but I can still tell you... If you trust me, I will do right by the two of you. You’ve both done so much for me.” Oliver pulled out of the garage and onto the street. If she backed out now, he didn’t have another option for them.

“We will be at the church in two hours,” Ivan said after a long pause.

“Perfect,” Oliver said. “I’ll see you then.” He clicked the phone to end the call and dropped it onto the passenger seat beside him. He pulled into the parking lot for the hotel, hopped out of the van and locked it before heading back inside. He stopped short in the lobby, turning on his heel and making his way to the coffee shop across the street.

A few minutes later he was back in the hotel, taking the stairs up to the room and pushing the keycard into the electronic lock. He was a bit surprised that during the entire time out of the hotel, he never once experienced the prickle of feeling eyes following him. Anatoly’s warning aside, he’d expected the Bratva to have someone tailing him. But there had been nothing.

Oliver snuck back into the room, but all the lights were already on and he could hear the shower...
running in the bathroom. He sat the coffees down on the table, along with the cell phone and tablet. It all seemed too… easy. Not that any of it had been simple. But on the whole, things so far had gone off without a hitch.

So why did he have the sinking feeling that everything was about to go horribly to shit?
Chapter 36

Chapter by foreverfelicityqueen (stydiasredstring)

Chapter Notes

Hello lovelies,
How are you doing after last week? Well I for one think you'll enjoy this one even more than before. But I'll let you be the judge of that. ;)

As much as she tried, Felicity couldn’t fall back to sleep after Oliver left. She wished she could blame it on the static buzzing through her skin at the memory of their night together. She could recall the feel of every touch, every searing kiss. But reality and fear rooted itself into Felicity’s mind and she couldn’t shake the truth of what today would hold.

They would end three people’s lives today, even though they would live new ones come the morning. But the shock waves that would come from this would be greater than anything else. She knew what they were doing was the right thing. Saving Sofia from a fate worse than death, helping her and Ivan to give their baby a fighting chance at a future. But it would unravel so many things. And Felicity couldn’t help the prickling sensation that even with all their planning, with all their precautions, this could fall back on Oliver. She couldn’t-- wouldn’t, lose him to the Bratva. She had done that once before and it had torn a hole straight through her heart. This time had to be different.

She stretched and stood from the bed, picking up her phone as she moved around the space. It was too quiet as she stood there. She had the stray thought of turning on the television just for background noise, but somehow that made Felicity feel like the silence would only grow. Not like she’d understand a single thing on Russian TV either. So instead she did the one thing she could do when she felt the nerves creeping over her. She called her best friend.

The phone rang for a couple seconds before Tommy picked up. “Hey Smoak.”

“How,” she felt herself relax as she leaned against the desk. “I thought I’d call and give you the ‘we’re not dead’ update.”

“That’s good to hear,” he chuckled. “Something tells me that isn’t the only reason you called though.”

“Can’t a girl check in on her best friend?”

“She can, but I also know you Felicity. And if you don’t want to talk about it I get that, but you did call for a reason so…”

She knew she could trust Tommy with this. She trusted him with everything in her life. Big, small, and everything in between. She still wasn’t sure she could form the words. She wasn’t sure how to breath life into what they were doing.
“It’s just the plan is a little… elaborate,” she paused, her nerves coiling hard in her shoulders. “I’m freaking out that we won’t be able to pull this off. That I won’t be able to pull it off.”

“I don’t know the finer details of what’s going on, but I know you Felicity. And I know Ollie. You two work together better than anyone I’ve ever seen. Also you’re amazing when it comes to all things computers, everyone knows that. You can handle anything.”

“But if I don’t I could cost innocent people their freedom.”

“You need to swallow that fear down and take things one step at a time,” his voice firm and reassuring in her ear. “You kept your cool when I was bleeding out on my way to a hospital and a bomb was rigged to a gas line with our friends trapped inside. You and I both know that when you put your mind to something you can do anything. Don’t let your fear get in the way of your talent.”

She smiled. “Somehow I knew you’d be able to talk me down. Thank you.”

“It’s what I’m here for. Considering I couldn’t be there to help out.”

“Well you healing is more important. How’s the shoulder?”

Tommy paused. Too long of one for him to be doing anything other than trying to cover his tracks. “It’s still healing.”

“Tommy? What happened?”

“It’s not important,” he cleared his throat. “Look I promise if it was really bad I would tell you. But for right now you have your mission, and I have mine. And I’m not going to distract you with my problems, okay?”

“Promise me you’re okay.”

“I promise,” he replied. “Now I have to go. And I’m sure with it being nearly five a.m. there you actually want to get ready for your day. Felicity, everything’s gonna be okay.”

“Thanks,” she sighed. “We’ll talk when I get home.”

“We will, and hey, stay safe okay?”

“You too.”

They hung up and Felicity felt a little lighter. She hated to admit that she was feeling weak, that the idea of going against the Bratva left her shaken to her core. She knew Oliver would understand it, she knew he would have calmed her fears if she had told them to him. But she also knew that right now it was just the two of them. He needed his head focused on what came next, and she couldn’t be the reason he got distracted. Things needed to go exactly as they planned them or someone would get hurt. Tommy calmed her enough to let her keep going forward.

She glanced at the time and groaned. It was still early. But Oliver would likely be back soon, and as much as the bunched up comforter was starting to look more inviting, she knew she should shower and get ready before he returned.

The heat from the water worked out the remaining tension in her shoulders, pushing at her skin as she let the water soak over her. After Oliver returned they’d have a few hours to fake the medical records. She’d need all the time she could get to make them look perfect. One discrepancy and the plan would crumble around them. But this she knew she could do. It was like riding a bike, one very
illegal, computer based, bike. But this was what she did best.

As she made a move to step out of the bathroom, a towel wrapped tight around her, she saw a shadow cross under the crack in the door. Fear spiked for a second, but she took a deep breath and listened. The sound of Oliver’s boots across the carpet floor, the scent of rich coffee wafting through.

She opened the door to find him standing by the small table, setting the cups down. He barely turned towards her, a small smile pleasantly sat in his features. “Have a nice shower?”

“Could have been better if you were there,” she mused snaking under his arm to grab her drink. “I mean to conserve water of course.”

“Of course,” he teased. “Next time then.”

“Oh I will hold you to that Mr. Queen,” she took a sip of her coffee, letting the sweet liquid warm her insides. “Did you meet any trouble on your way back?”

“No,” he said, but hesitation sat in his eyes.

“What’s wrong?”

“I’m being paranoid. Everything is fine.”

“Oliver, if knowing you has taught me anything at all, it’s that there’s no such thing as paranoia when people literally want to kill you.” She moved towards her suitcase, pulling out jeans and a sweater. “Do you think Mikhail could know we’re here?”

“I don’t,” he shook his head. “If he did, then he’d be here. That much I know for sure. This city it has a way of messing with my head. Everything that happened here, everything I did. I feel like it’s sitting in the wings waiting to come back and haunt me. That’s all.”

She looked at him, hunched over the table, his eyes trained on the second cup sitting there. Like if he looked up he would fail at this facade he was trying to uphold.

“You’re not alone,” she whispered, coming to stand next to him. She rested her free hand against his. “I’m not going anywhere. And whatever happened here before you left, whatever made you leave, if that’s what’s holding you back, then I want you to know you can tell me. You don’t have to, but if you need to, you can.”

He looked up at her, some ghost of pain and guilt flashing in his eyes before he smiled at her. A sad smile filled with the past but a smile nonetheless.

She didn’t think he would say anything, and that was okay. She didn’t need to know, but she did need him to know she was there.

She moved to get dressed, and Oliver turned back a little giving her some privacy. Which was a little amusing considering how they’d spent their night. But she blushed all the same when she finished dressing and made her way back over to him, grabbing the tablet sitting on the table. She needed to get to work.

Oliver was watching her again as she worked. Pulling up the files and hacking her way into the local network. She didn’t mind his eyes on her. In fact it filled her with a warmth that she never wanted to part with.

“Her name was Alina,” he finally said, his voice barely above a whisper. And she looked up to meet
his gaze. “She was a friend, and it’s my fault she’s dead.”

“Oliver…”

“She was a nurse here, and she helped once when Akio had the flu,” he shook his head taking a seat next to her. “And after you and Tommy left Russia, I needed a friend who wasn’t in that life, who was completely outside of the darkness. So I would come around the hospital and take her to lunch. We never saw each other as anything but friends, which was a new thing for me. But I liked it. She helped me with some of my Russian, and I think I helped her not feel so alone.”

“She sounds like she was really great.”

He nodded. “She was a good person. Anyway, Anatoly got shot after a bad job, and they called a nurse to the house. When Alina showed up, I knew I had it completely wrong. She was supposed to be outside of it all, and suddenly, it seemed there wasn’t a single person in the entire city who wasn’t connected or poisoned by that life. She said she suspected I was in the Bratva, but she didn’t want to ruin our friendship by bringing it up.”

She set the tablet down, the program she needed was already running, and Oliver needed her more. She placed her hands over his curling her fingers around his own. Felicity could see the trajectory of the story before Oliver reached its end, but she didn’t interrupt. She let him continue.

“There was a turf war that broke out between the Bratva and another local gang. They didn’t have the numbers the Bratva did, but what they did have was access to guns. A lot of them,” he paused again looking at their hands intertwined. “Alina had come to do a check up for Ana, because Mikhail had refused to let her leave the house during the disturbance in the city. I was walking Alina to her car.” He looked so far away to her, like the memories had slammed it back in time. “And the shots started to ring out. There was so much chaos, so much smoke. I barely had time to get to my own gun and return the fire, when I saw her. Bleeding out in the driveway.

“The gunfire ended just as quick as it started, but everything else slowed down,” he met her eyes, and Felicity could see how long and hard this had weighed on him. “She died in my arms Felicity. And no one did a damn thing to help her. We couldn’t call for help because of the war, no one was allowed to leave until they spoke to Mikhail and Anatoly about what happened. A young woman died on their front walk and the only thing they gave a damn about was how to get the stain out.”

“Oliver,” she reached for him, pulling him into a tight hug. “This wasn’t your fault. It wasn’t.”

He shook against her, and then pulled back. “Maybe, maybe not. But I couldn’t stand one more day of living in a world that didn’t care who it hurt. They didn’t see Alina as a person, just as something to clean up later. I couldn’t be apart of that any longer.”

“So that’s why you left, and why Sofia thought you might be headed home?”

“I couldn’t come home after that,” he placed his hand over hers. “I couldn’t face my family or Tommy. Or you. Not knowing I had been apart of something that didn’t care who lived or died as long the Brotherhood survived. I wouldn’t have been able to look you in the eye, not after that.”

“Hey,” she reached for his face tilting it until he looked at her. “I don’t care what you’ve done. I don’t care what you were apart of, you can always come to me. Then, now, forever. You can come to me.”

“Felicity,” he sighed leaning into her touch.

“Shh,” she pushed forward, placing a gentle kiss against his lips. “You can always come to me,
nothing you say to me will ever change that.”

“Thank you,” he replied.

She felt the feeling bubble over, the emotion barely holding itself into her chest. It hurt so much she might explode. So instead of letting the worry and the timing freak her out she let the words slip past her lips. “Oliver, I love you.”

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It was amazing how unproductive a day of pounding pavement could be with no leads. And it wasn’t just Tommy’s time that was being wasted either. Lyla and John had stuck around, attempting to help him locate Sara and her League of Assassins friend. But between the three of them and Lexi on cameras, they’d come up with absolutely nothing.

And if that hadn’t been bad enough, the phone call he’d just hung up from had left him chilled to the bone. It wasn’t like Felicity to worry. Not the way her voice had just quivered and she’d second guessed herself. It made Tommy’s stomach clench at the thought of her and Oliver over there alone with no other back up. He hadn’t been privy to the details of their operation over there- but whatever was happening, Tommy was beyond concerned.

“What’s with the face?” Diggle asked as Tommy made his way back over to him and Lyla.

“Nothing,” he replied dismissively. They’d paused their search for Nyssa and Sara to grab some food and Tommy slid back into the booth across from the pair at the Hub City Big Belly Burger. Before either of them could press further, Tommy continued on his own. “It’s just- do you think they’re being safe there in Russia? Or at least as safe as possible? I know I told them I wouldn’t worry. But it’s impossible not to. I mean it’s Oliver and Felicity.”

Lyla stayed quiet, her eyes drifting to John.

“I think they’re both realizing exactly what they have to lose if they don’t make it back,” Diggle answered. “And it’s going to make them fight like hell to make it out of there alive.”

Tommy nodded, blowing out a long breath. His shoulder ached and he was frustrated over wasting the whole day with nothing to show for it. And on top of that, he was trying to force himself not to worry about Oliver and Felicity. He knew it wouldn’t do anyone any good, but the feeling was there just the same, rooting itself deep inside him.

His phone chirped with an incoming text and Tommy pulled it out, glancing down at the device. He tried to keep his face neutral as he read the message. It was from an unknown number, but he knew immediately that it was Sara.

33rd and Main. Twenty minutes. Come alone. -75

And all at once the memory flooded his mind and he was back in fifth grade going to sleep-away summer camp for the first time. He and Ollie had gotten the last seat on the bus to Camp Minnewaka, and they’d been right behind two girls. Ollie knew one of them, Laurel, from school, and they’d met her little sister Sara. Tommy remembered Ollie whispering to him to switch seats with Laurel, and when he moved to sit beside the younger Lance girl, she was drawing in a book. Tommy remembered asking her if her code name was Seventy Five, since her initials upside down looked like the number. It had been an inside joke between them the rest of the summer.

“Listen, I think I might go for a walk, clear my head,” Tommy said, glancing back up at Lyla and Diggle. Thankfully, the two had been in the middle of some private conversation, so he hoped his
annoucement wouldn’t cause too much concern.

“You sure?” Lyla asked, furrowing a brow. “I thought maybe we’d canvas downtown after we ate.”

He shrugged. “My head really isn’t in the right place,” he said with a frown. “With Ollie and Felicity…”

Diggle nodded. “We understand.”

“Besides, we haven’t found anything yet, and neither has Lexi. Clearly whatever these two are doing in Hub City, they don’t want any company.”

Lyla held his gaze for a long moment, before relenting. “We’ll check back in with Lexi, see if she’s gotten anything else. If not, we’ll probably head back to Starling tonight.”

“That’s my plan too,” Tommy agreed. “No sense in waiting around for nothing to happen.”

“I’m just sorry you weren’t able to get anything to bring back to Waller.”

Tommy frowned. “Well, I’ve got two names and two faces,” he said. “I wish I could leave Sara out of this, but I don’t know that I have that option.”

“And Laurel?” Digg ventured.

“I haven’t thought that far ahead.” He dropped a couple bills onto the table before pushing himself out of the booth. He couldn’t imagine why Sara was reaching out, but Tommy was already too deep in this mess to back out now. He needed answers. Even if they led to more questions, he needed something. Maybe it was just that he needed to prove to himself that it was really her. What would he say to Laurel? How could he possibly tell her that her sister was alive when he had no proof save a grainy image with no timestamp.

As Tommy walked toward the address she’d given him, he couldn’t help but recall what Laurel had told him several weeks ago. Their mother had been convinced that Sara was alive. Had it been the same for her, as it had been for Tommy, knowing Oliver was alive? Feeling, deep in his bones that his best friend couldn’t have been ripped from the world without him knowing?

More unanswered questions. His head reeled from them, but he pressed forward. Finally the intersection came into view- a small cafe on the corner with brightly colored letters above the door. He paused a moment, before heading inside, wondering if it was a trap. Would Nyssa have used Sara to lure him there?

The League is dangerous. They have their own set of rules to follow. And it’s a miracle you aren’t dead right now.

Lyla’s words coursed through his brain. Did she know something more about them? Did they have some sort of ‘if you see their face they kill you’ code that he didn’t know about?

“Psst,” someone whispered from a back corner.

Tommy spun on his heel, seeing a blonde ponytail in a Starling City Rockets baseball cap disappear down a hallway.

“Here goes nothing,” he huffed to himself, following her down the hall, through a kitchen, into a service entrance and then up a narrow set of stairs. She stayed far enough away from him to be out of reach. They climbed one landing, and then onto a second, before she pushed into a dark doorway.
The room beyond the door was dimly lit. A tiny efficiency apartment with a mini kitchen, couch and bedroom. But Tommy didn’t let his eyes do more than skim the place for any other signs of life before finally resting them on her. Her blue eyes shown brightly, even in the dim space, and her mouth was pursed disapprovingly.

“Sara,” he breathed, almost reverently. Because knowing she was alive, seeing the video on his phone- it was so so different than standing in front of her.

“Hey Merlyn,” she said, the easy smile he’d always known now replaced with a pale imitation of it. Like she had to force what once came so effortlessly.

“What are you… how are you…“

“I don’t have a lot of time,” she said, keeping her voice low. “Nyssa will be back soon. I just needed--” Her voice broke off, a sharp inhale replacing what might have almost been a sob.

“It’s good to see you,” he offered. Tommy couldn’t imagine what this was like for her. But he had seen the look in her eyes before. The one that said she’d been to hell and back and was lucky to still be breathing. He’d seen it in Oliver once, when they’d first met up in Russia. The look in her eyes said far more than he knew she’d utter aloud.

Sara swallowed hard. “Did you tell anyone I’m here?”

“Just my partner and her husband.”

Her brow quirked.

“My work partner,” he said, rolling his eyes. Then he added in a low voice, “at ARGUS.”

“Shit,” she breathed. “Okay but no one else, right? Not Laurel or my dad or--”

“No,” he said quickly. “But what the hell Sara? What’s going on here? What are you doing with the League--”

She shoved her hand over his mouth. “You aren’t supposed to know about that.”

Tommy wrapped a hand around her wrist, pulling hers away from his mouth. And it wasn’t lost on him the amount of strength she possessed. “Well I do,” he sighed. “I was following up on a lead on your friend Nyssa. Sara, what are you doing here? How are you alive?”

“I can’t tell you that.”

“Okay,” Tommy said slowly. “Well then why did you want me to meet you here?”

Sara’s eyes darted to the floor and he was beginning to get a sense that he knew exactly what she wanted from him. Silence.

“You can’t tell them,” she said quietly. “No one was supposed to know I was here. Ra’s didn’t think I should come at all, but--”

“Ra’s? That’s the leader, right? Of the League of--”

Sara squeezed her eyes shut. “Don’t,” she begged.

“I need you to tell me something,” Tommy said.
He moved his hands to her shoulders and Sara’s eyes flew open, her hands moving faster than he could see or imagine or even blink. She twisted her hands around, grabbing his forearms and pulling him toward her, almost connecting their skulls before she stopped herself, her eyes widening in horror.

“I can’t,” she said, releasing him and backing away.

Tommy gritted his teeth at the new pain in his shoulder from the force of her grip. But he pushed through it, because he didn’t know how much time he had and he needed to get through to Sara, to get info out of her or get her to agree to come back with him or something. The lines blurred too much for him to know exactly what he wanted from her. But he couldn’t let her go- not like this. Not when everyone who loved her thought she was dead and he had a chance to bring her back to them.

“Sara, please-” he took a step forward.

She mirrored it, stepping back, the look on her face a mix of horror, anguish and something else he couldn’t place. “Someone that was trained by the League has gone rogue,” she said finally. “Nyssa was sent to investigate and I was brought along for my expertise. I really can’t tell you anything more than that.”

Tommy let her words sink in for a moment. “You really brought me all the way here to make sure I wouldn’t tell anyone I saw you?” he asked.

“They can’t know,” she said, her voice barely a whisper. “It would be putting them all at risk.”

“Do you need help getting out?” he asked, grasping at straws but not wanting to let her out of his sight. He’d never forgive himself if he had a chance to do more and didn’t.

Sara huffed a laugh. “There is no getting out,” she said bitterly.

“But the people I work for--”

“No,” her tone turned to venom, to Laurel that day in the hospital when he’d told her the truth.

Tommy felt his heart break all over again. “I can’t just leave you here,” he said.

Sara’s hand flicked out to something tucked into a shadow. “I had a feeling you’d say that,” she said. He barely had time to register the bow staff before it connected with his head. “I’m sorry, Tommy,” was the last thing he heard, before everything faded to black.

---

I love you.

Three words. And he felt like the worry that had settled in his heart was finally quiet. Her hand was over his, and it was the only thing grounding him to the earth.

They had so much to do for the day. But he couldn’t stop staring at her. He wanted to stay in that moment forever, looking at Felicity like she could draw the broken pieces of him back together and make it like he’d never shattered at all.

“Obviously you don’t have to say it back,” she started to stumble over her words, her head retreating towards her tablet. “I just, I thought I would--”

“I love you too,” he pushed closer to her, he needed her to hear what he was trying to say. “I don’t
know how today is gonna go. I don’t know if Mikhail’s going to catch us, if we’ll get Sofia, Ana, and Ivan out of here. But I do know I love you. I have for a while.”

She smiled, and god could you light a city off the brilliance in her eyes. “You have?”

He wanted to kiss her. He wanted nothing more in the entire world than to pull her to him, and kiss her until they were both too breathless to think straight. In a perfect world, and a perfect moment, he would make sure they could spend the entire day wrapped up in each other. But before they could do that, they had to finish what he started years ago.

“Yes Felicity,” he smiled at her. “And once we finish in Russia, I promise to show you just how much I mean it.”

A blush crept into her cheeks as she began typing again. “I’ll have to hold you to that.”

“Looking forward to it,” he leaned in, placing a kiss to her cheek. “In the meantime, you need any help with that?”

Felicity grinned at him, then down at her tablet. “That depends. What do you know about reconfiguring an internet security system to slip in under the firewall and switch out medical records with nearly expert forgeries?”

He nodded, only understanding each of those words by themselves and not at all in the context she would need. “I’m gonna take a shower, and let you work.”

“Okay.”

Oliver probably took longer in the shower than he meant to. Letting the water run from hot to warm as he thought over their plan again. As soon as Felicity finished with the documents they would head out. Keep to the shadows and back streets as they took the van to the church. From there it was a waiting game until Ivan gave him the signal. Then they would get the three of them out of the church, through the back, and boom.

Everything would be fine. By this time tomorrow Ivan and Sofia would start their new life far from the Bratva. They just had to stick to the plan.

When he got out of the shower, the bathroom mirror had fogged over. Oliver reached up and wiped the condensation off the surface, and took in his appearance. It had been a while since he had been able to look at his reflection and not see the darkness simmering beneath it. For so long he had been sure that he would drown in that darkness. There had been so much regret, so many ghosts, he was convinced that the only way out of it was taking down as many people before his past caught up with him.

But things were different now. When he came back to Starling City, Oliver didn’t think he could let anyone in. He didn’t think they would want to be close to him after all the things he had done. But there was Tommy and his family, and Diggle. And there was Felicity, light and kindness who only ever saw him and not the weighted past that pulled him downward. She showed him how much light was left inside him, she pushed it to the surface. It’s not just that he loved her, because there was no question of that. But he was sure she brought out the kind of person he needed to be, the one so many people had tried to kill over the years. But Felicity breathed the kind of life back into him that allowed that person to surface again and stake claim to his life.

He dressed and exited the bathroom. Felicity was now in front of her laptop, her hair pushed together in a tight ponytail. She looked intensely beautiful. Like she could set fire to anyone with just the
stroke of a few keys. To be fair that was probably accurate. But it was more than that. Her talents and passion, made him gravitate towards her even more. He didn’t think he had ever met someone with so much drive in his entire life.

“How’s it going?” he asked, leaning against the door frame.

“I’m done. Hopefully it’s en--,” she stuttered as her gaze swept over him.

“You okay?”

“Yeah, just admiring how tight that shirt is,” she replied and then coughed. “Which is not important right now. I mean you clearly know that any form fitting shirt will show off your abs. Which is probably why you wear them. Especially in the lair to distract me from work. But to answer your original question, the documents are done. I uploaded them to the hospital server with the DNA markers in the other files. This should work.”

“Good,” he said coming to stand behind her. “I mean as long as the other parts of the plan go well this should be the icing on the cake.”

“Not sure we should refer to murder as cake, but okay.”

“It’s faking a few deaths, not murder.”

“Well thank you for that clarification.” She laughed turning back to her computer screen. “We should probably start getting ready.”

But as she finished her sentence there was a crash in the hall. Every muscle in his body tensed. It could be nothing. It could be a cleaning cart toppling over from a clumsy maid. But a part of him already knew that wasn’t true.

“Felicity,” he whispered, he grabbed the sat phone off the table, pressing it into her hand. “Take this and the laptop into the bathroom. Call Maseo.”

“Oliver what--”

“Whatever happens don’t come out until he or I are on the other side.”

“Oliver?”

“Please,” he urged, pulling her from the chair and walking her backwards towards the bathroom. “I need you to trust me.”

“I do.” But the fear was in her eyes, and he wondered if it reflected into his own. “Oliver I--”

“I know,” he pressed a kiss to her lips. “I love you. And I will be back.”

With that he closed her in the bathroom, and reached for the bag at the foot of the bed. Maseo had provided the explosives. But Ivan had done him one other favor. Oliver didn’t like it, but he knew he couldn’t walk out of the room without a gun in his hand. Not if he wanted to keep breathing.

He pressed it into the waist of his jeans before opening the door as slowly as he could. There were two men on the other side. He recognized them both and groaned. Oliver barely had time to react as the first one, a low level enforcer when he had left Russia years ago, stepped to him. He rushed for Oliver knocking him off balance and back into a wall. Oliver pushed his arm up, the angle had just enough force to be jarring as he pivoted around, slamming the man’s wrist hard against the wall until
he heard a crack. He didn’t waste time deciphering if it was bone or drywall.

Yury strode up to him next, a placid smile on his face. “See I tell them we need more back up. But no one listens to Yury. So I think we must do this the old fashioned way.”

They drew their guns at the same time. Oliver judged the distance, the barrel of Yury’s gun was centered on his chest, and he knew even if he managed to move and shoot, the bullet would still hit somewhere he wouldn’t be able to afford on his current time table.

“Yury,” he looked the man in the eye. Someone who once saw him as a brother, an equal. “I’m not here to cause trouble, so let me go and I won’t shoot you.”

“I don’t think you’ll be shooting anyone Mr. Queen,” another voice spoke from behind him. A gun pressed hard against the base of his skull. “You injured a man in my command.”

“I told you Vlad, we should not have brought a kid on such a trip,” Yury tsked. “He did not last long.”

Vlad. Ivan’s brother. Oliver could feel the last several days fall apart around him. “Long time no see Vlad.”

“Yes, and if you had been smart you would have not returned,” he leaned in a little and whispered. “Yury take his weapon.”

Yury stepped to him, taking the gun with a shrug. Like Oliver just hit an unlucky break.

“I must know,” Vlad spoke again. “Why are you traveling alone to Russia? You are either very stupid or you are up to something.”

Alone? Vlad thought he was in the city alone. Which meant that neither of them had any clue Felicity was in the room. He didn’t look towards the hotel. He didn’t flinch or make a single gesture that would brand him a liar. Instead he stood up straighter.

“Maybe I missed you guys,” he quipped.

Vlad must not have liked that because the butt of the gun came down hard against his skull, blurring his vision and dropping him to his knees.

“The only reason you do not die right now,” Vlad whispered as he knelted closer to him. “Is because it is Mikhail’s dying wish to see your life end first. And I would never deny him that.”

“Never had much of your own backbone huh Vlad,” Oliver managed to say. “It’s amazing you didn’t get picked as captain.”

“I said you would not die by my hands, Oliver. I never said you would be conscious when you left this hallway.”

And with another blow to the head, Oliver went crashing the rest of the way to the carpeted floor.
Chapter 37

Chapter by holysmoaksoliver

Chapter Notes

Whew, what a cliffhanger last week, huh? But you MADE it! You made it through the 'I love you's and the Bratva discovering Oliver at the hotel. And now, you get to find out what's next. But before we get there, I just want to take another moment to again say thank you sooo much for taking this ride with us. Kayla and I greatly enjoy hearing from you every week, and we love seeing what you think is coming next. Alright- let's get to the fun stuff!

xoxo,
Cassie

Felicity didn’t have time for her brain to process what was happening. One moment there was a crash outside the hotel room door, and then next she was tucked into the bathroom with the satellite phone and her laptop, a flurry of commands from Oliver still reverberating through her head.

Through the door, she could barely make out the muffled sounds of a scuffle in the hallway and her hands trembled as she lifted the phone to her ear. But Maseo didn’t answer.

She had no way of knowing how much time Oliver had, or how many men were out there, or what they planned to do with him once they got their hands on him. And Felicity didn’t have time to second guess herself. She shot off a quick SOS text to Maseo, then stashed the phone and laptop under some towels in the bathroom and crept from the small space.

Felicity could hear their voices a little clearer now, taunting Oliver in the hallway. She silently moved to the door, checking the peephole. Three men. One, Oliver had already subdued and was laying on the floor a few feet from the others. She thought through her choices as quickly as possible, limited though they were.

“Yury, take his weapon.”

She knew she couldn’t wait for Maseo to get there. Felicity backed away from the door, turning, eyes scanning the room for her suitcase. She found it on the floor by the bed and pulled it up, digging through with one hand as she tried to listen through the door. After what felt like an eternity, her fingers closed around the small leather case and she yanked it free and released the hook to open it.

Felicity eyed the vial, not giving herself time to change her mind. She’d only brought it with them for emergencies, but if anything thus far could be considered an emergency, it was this. Quickly, she moved back to the door. Through the peep hole she could see Oliver knelt on the floor, blood already spilling from a wound on his head. The bigger guy stood over him, a gun in his hand.

“I said you would not die by my hands, Oliver. I never said you would be conscious when you left this hallway.”
Felicity didn’t waste any more time. The gun connected with Oliver’s head as she wrenched the door open, moving to the large man now standing over Oliver’s motionless body. Heart in her throat, she pushed the needle into the man’s shoulder, plunging the contents into his arm. He reached up to his arm, pulling away the syringe and then swung around, fist almost connecting with her. And then in slow motion, he paused, and fell to the floor.

“Oliver?!” She demanded, eyes not leaving the other man, who she assumed was Yury. Oliver was splayed across the floor like the other two men, and he didn’t respond. Felicity bent down, pulling the gun from the unconscious Russian man’s hand and pointing it at Yury.

Yury stared back at her, dumbfounded, his own gun at his side. “What did you do?” he demanded.

“Oliver!” Felicity said again, moving to him, and nudging him. Finally he stirred, the heel of his hand pressing to his left eye as he sat.

“We have to get out of the hallway,” she said.

Oliver’s eyes slowly lifted to meet her gaze. “Felicity?”

She nodded, eyes flicking back to Yury. “You,” she said, pointing the gun at him. “Drop your gun and kick it away.” She wasn’t sure if it was because he was stunned that she’d taken down the big one in two seconds flat, but Yury did as she commanded. “Drag that one into the room.” She motioned to the smaller of the two unconscious men and then to the door to their hotel room. They couldn’t waste time in the hallway. Their commotion must have drawn attention from the other rooms in the hall, and although no one else had opened their doors, Felicity imagined half a dozen sleepy patrons watching her from all sides, or worse-- calling security.

Yury moved slowly, reaching down and grabbing the unconscious man by the jacket. Felicity followed his movements with the gun, which felt overwhelmingly heavy in her hands. Chill out, Smoak, she chided herself. This is not the time for a freakout.

Felicity could sense Oliver’s movements beside her more than actually see them. Her eyes were laser focused on Yury, making sure he didn’t try anything as he backed into the hotel room, dragging the other guy with him. She wasn’t sure what she would do if he tried anything. Could she pull the trigger? Did she really have a choice? She moved forward, making sure he didn’t have a chance to close the door on them or try to fashion a weapon out of a chair or anything. But Yury did as instructed, dropping the guy in the room as she watched from the doorway, her foot keeping the door propped open.

“What did you do?” Oliver said, his words echoing Yury’s.

“Etorphine,” she said. “Dexter uses it to knock people out.”

“The serial killing cop on that show?” Oliver asked, rubbing his head as he came to stand beside her.

Felicity shrugged. “I figured if an emergency arose…” Her eyes darted back to Yury. “We’ve got to get the other one out of the hall.”

“You heard the lady,” Oliver said, summoning the Russian.

This wasn’t happening. She wasn’t exactly the gun-toting, syringe stabbing, mob-threatening type. And as every second ticked by, she could feel more of her resolve withering away. But then she felt Oliver’s hand on her shoulder, offering her a quick squeeze of reassurance, and she felt the pieces fall back into place in her mind. She would be whatever he needed her to be, to get them home safely. Because she’d made a promise to Tommy, and to Oliver, and to herself. She would not let
Oliver eased the gun out of her white-knuckled grip and she breathed a sigh of relief as she moved back into the hotel room. Yury followed a moment later, dragging the hulking mass of Bratva member, with Oliver right on their heels. Oliver closed and locked the door behind them, gesturing with the gun for Yury to have a seat on the closest bed.

“Who else knows I’m here?” Oliver asked.

Yury shook his head. “Vlad wanted to surprise Mikhail with our good fortune. He didn’t tell anyone.”

A smile spread across Oliver’s face, cold and devoid of any actual happiness, and Felicity felt a shiver run the length of her spine. It scared her a little, how quickly he could slip back into the dark mask of the Bratva member he’d once been.

“Good,” Oliver said. He took two long strides across the room, before slamming the butt of the gun down on Yury’s head, sending the man sprawling across the floor in an unmoving slump.

He spun on her then, eyes intense and searching. “Why would you do that?” he asked, his voice feverish with worry. “You could have been killed. They know you’re here now. They could have hurt you or…” his voice trailed off as she pressed a hand to his heart.

“Hey,” Felicity answered softly. “We’re a team, remember?”

“You were supposed to call Maseo,” he said, a hard edge finding its way into his tone.

“He didn’t answer,” she replied, feeling far more like she was defending herself than she should need to. “And you needed me. If they’d taken you, you wouldn’t have left there alive. We both know it.”

Oliver blew out a long breath, confirming that he knew she was right. “What now?”

Felicity chewed on her lower lip. “The wedding,” she sighed. “If they don’t show up, people are going to get suspicious.” She moved on instinct, to the three unconscious men, digging through their pockets until she had all of their phones in her hand. “Thankfully, you are uniquely qualified in knowing Bratva protocol and can figure out an excuse to buy us some time.” She offered him the phones.

There was a brief knock on the door, and Oliver raised the gun, moving through the space like a ghost—faster and quieter than should be possible. He let out a sigh of relief, dropping the gun as he pulled open the door, letting Maseo into the space.

Maseo’s brow furrowed taking in the sight of the men. “It doesn’t look like you need my help,” he frowned.

“We do,” Felicity said, feeling the beginnings of a plan formulating in her mind. “We need a laundry cart and an access card to the staff halls.”

Oliver must have followed her line of thinking because he nodded along. And then he moved to the largest of the unconscious Russians, grabbing a pillow from the bed as he went. “Felicity, turn your back,” he said.

She did as instructed, feeling the tension in the room shift and shiver. She heard movement behind her as the second struggled, regaining consciousness as Oliver snuffed out his life. Yury was last and Felicity stayed in the room, her back turned, eyes squeezed shut and her entire body rigid, until
finally everything else went still.

Oliver cleared his throat.

“I’ll be back with what we need,” Maseo said quietly, the door latching shut a moment later with click.

Felicity blew out a long breath, turning to face Oliver. He looked… wrecked. It was the only way she could describe it. His eyes searched hers and she wondered what he was hoping to find. Whatever it was, he seemed taken aback when he didn’t.

“We can take them to the church with the others,” Felicity said. “Having real bodies there will make the imposters more believable.”

He nodded, eyes downcast, and she noticed a slight tremor in his hands. Felicity reached out, grabbing his hands, forcing his gaze to hers.

“Leaving them alive would have blown the mission,” she said quietly. “It would have left loose threads that Mikhail could tug on, potentially compromising Sofia and Ivan.”

Oliver nodded again, slowly. “Once the bodies are in the van, we’ve got to get going. We still have to set the charges in the church before everyone else starts arriving.”

Felicity blew out a long breath, rolled her neck to loosen the tensions in the muscles there. “No offense, but I really hate Russia.”

Oliver barked a humorless laugh, leaning in and placing a kiss on the top of her head. “I promise you after today, we will never, ever have to come back.”

She looked up at him, breathing him in, trying to keep her eyes from flickering to the bodies littering the hotel room floor like discarded liquor bottles after a raging party. “I am going to hold you to that,” she answered quietly. “One hundred percent.”

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Tommy had to admit he really hated waking up with a splitting headache. Between the knot on the back of his head, and the dull ache in his shoulder he didn’t feel like he could even stand, let alone follow after Sara.

He knew she was long gone by now. Didn’t matter if he had been out five minutes or five hours, she wouldn’t have stuck around long enough for another chat. Damn it. He didn’t even care that he had nothing to take to Waller. He couldn’t care less about his job. Not when he knows exactly how Laurel would feel if he could tell her Sara was alive. When he learned the truth about Oliver it was like a million different emotions rushed him all at once. But running through all of them, was relief and love, and he wanted to be able to give that to her and to Quentin. They deserved to know Sara was alive.

But then again he couldn’t just tell them. It was Oliver in Russia all over again. And he couldn’t justify keeping that secret from Moira and Thea, just to turn around and out Sara to her family. It wouldn’t be fair. Nothing about this was fair.

He felt the buzz of an incoming call, and despite the urge to ignore it and lie there a few minutes longer, Tommy pushed himself up. When he glanced at his phone he felt an unsteadiness fall over him that had nothing to do with being knocked out.
“Laurel?” he couldn’t believe her name had crossed his phone. Especially not now. “Hi.”

There was a long pause, but he could hear her, her breathing even. Almost like she had psyched herself up to call him. “Hi.”

“It’s good to hear your voice,” and everything in him screamed at the situation. Sara was gone. He didn’t know where. And he wanted more than anything to tell Laurel. To tell her everything and anything at all. “I didn’t expect—”

“I left a file at you place,” she cut in and everything kinda sunk around him. “I wouldn’t even bother with it, but apparently it holds the original transcript of a prisoner’s confession. And there’s a chance that he’s innocent so I need to look over it.”

“Yeah, I understand,” he coughed rubbing at the bump on his head. He couldn’t help looking around the room and seeing if Sara left anything behind. Even if he knew she would never do that.

“Are you home? I mean can I come by and pick it up?”

“I’m in Hub City, actually.” And because he couldn’t stand the silence. “For work.”

“Oh.”

He could picture Laurel’s face, taking in his words and analyzing them fully.

“I take it you don’t mean for Verdant?”

“While Hub City does have a vast number of straw distributors, not this time. It’s for ARGUS.”

The weight of his words seemed to drag them both down. He could feel that weight as he perched himself against the arm of a chair. This was new to him. Telling Laurel the truth and waiting to see how it would land. He didn’t necessarily hate it, but it felt weird. He used to know exactly how she would reply to things he said. Now he wasn’t so sure.

“I shouldn’t have called, I’ll just figure something else out.”

“Wait Laurel,” he sighed. “I’m headed back soon, but I don’t know how late I’m gonna be. So if you need the file now you should call Thea. She has a key to my place.”

“Are you sure?”

“I wouldn’t want an innocent man sitting in prison if you could do something to help him.”

“Thank you,” she said, pausing for a second. “How’s your shoulder?”

“Honestly? Hurts like hell right now. Not as bad as my head though.”

“What?” She sounded alarmed.

He realized he shouldn’t have brought it up. He was treading dangerous territory. Not only because of Sara, but because of Waller too. If his boss found out he shared any information with a civilian… But he made a promise not to lie to her again. And he couldn’t break that.

“Someone got the best of me in a fight,” he explained. “No big deal. Well except for the fact that now I don’t have anything on the one lead I did have. So there’s that.”

“Well you aren’t giving up are you?”
“Not many more stones to overturn here.”

“That’s not the Tommy Merlyn I know,” she all but whispered, then cleared her throat. “All I’m saying is if you had a lead, chances are there’s still clues to find.”

“This person bashed my skull with a bo staff and took off, I don’t think they’re in a particular chatty mood anymore.”

“Regardless, maybe they said something before they bolted? Dropped a hint they didn’t mean to?”

“I think they’re a little smarter than that.”

The line was silent for a while before Laurel spoke again. “Even the best mess up Tommy. The one thing I’ve learned from having a cop for a father is this, everyone let’s something slip. When they think they are being their most careful, that’s when they drop the ball.”

Tommy’s head still pounded but he thought over Sara’s words. Everything she said to him. Most of it was pleads to keep quiet. But she did give him one thing. One grain of truth as to why she was there. Someone that was trained by the League has gone rogue.

It wasn’t much to go one. It was practically the square in front of where he started, but it was something. And something meant he could take it to Waller.

“You are brilliant,” he said with a laugh. “Thank you.”

“Find your clue?”

“I think I might have.”

“I’m glad. I should go and call Thea.”

“Yes, of course,” he scratched at his head. “Good luck with the case. I hope it all works out.”

“You too,” she replied. “With whatever you’re doing.”

“I’d tell you if I could. I need you to know that. But this…” he wished he could see her face as they talked. “It’s complicated right now.”

“Isn’t it always?”

“Yeah.”

“Bye Tommy.”

“Bye Laurel.”

There was no lingering, no waiting to see who would hang up first. There had never been with them. And even if their conversation had felt strained most of the way through, Tommy felt a touch of who they used to be underneath. It wasn’t much, but it was enough to keep him hoping. And that was enough to get him moving out of the small apartment.

Once he was on his way back to his hotel he pulled his phone back out, quick to dial Lexi.

“Oh good. Agent Michaels just called me five kinds of worried. Are you okay?”

Crap. He should have called Lyla first. He’d deal with that in a minute. “I’m fine. I just had to deal
with something real quick.”

“She said you’ve been gone for like three hours.”

“Lex, I need you to do something for me. You have that list of the League members right? Their monikers?”

“I do,” she sounded like she was shifting some papers around. “Yes it’s right here.”

“Good I need you to cross reference it with the database and see which ones have been inactive for the last five years or more.”

“Did you get something off the blonde?”

Tommy had gotten more from Sara than she would have ever wanted. He knew how you spoke of people you worked closely with, how you spoke of current colleagues versus former ones. Whoever they were tracking hadn’t worked with Sara. And it sounded like they had been gone for some time.

“Just run the names, see what pops up,” he crossed the street, making his way into his hotel building. “Also can you do a run of activity in the local areas? See if anything at all matches with their style or MO.”

“That’s a lot of straws to be grasping at. You sure this is gonna turn into something?”

“I’m sure that these two are here for a reason,” he said hopping into the elevator, and punching in his floor number. “And I don’t care what it takes, we have to figure out what it is. I’m grabbing my stuff and headed back to Starling tonight. Can you have one of those done by tomorrow morning?”

“I can probably have the list done,” she replied. “The video feed is going to take a while to analyze and sift through.”

“Whatever you can get done will be great.” The doors opened to his floor and Tommy let out a sigh. He finally felt like he was onto something. Something real. And he couldn’t walk away from it. Not after what happened with the Dark Archer stealing his badge. He needed this win. And he was going to get it. “If Waller asks, tell her I’ll debrief her when I’m back.”

“I will do my best to say that without having a panic attack.”

“Thanks Lexi.”

“Always happy to help. Talk to you tomorrow.”

She clicked the phone off and Tommy dropped his into his pocket. This would work. It had to. And when he found out what the League was after then he could help. And if he helped, maybe Sara would talk to her family. He just hoped whomever they were going after wasn’t as bad as the last mystery he had to deal with. He really couldn’t take another Dark Archer on his case.

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Oliver hated Russia. Despite it bringing him back to Tommy, despite it bringing him Felicity, he loathed the place. Where he may have been uncertain before, he was now steadfast and resolute. He tried not to glance in Felicity’s direction as they made their way through the still relatively empty streets of Moscow, but only because he couldn’t bear to think of the look on her face if he did.

She’d seen him kill three men that morning. Well, not directly, but she’d heard it, experienced it in a
way that he’d never wanted her to. And that sat like a pit in his stomach, eating away at him bit by bit.

“You’re especially broody this morning,” Felicity remarked, finally pulling his focus away from the road and over to her side of the van.

He didn’t answer for a long moment, instead he studied her with quick glances as the road allowed. When he finally spoke, he could barely contain the thick emotion he felt writhing beneath the surface. “Back there at the hotel,” he said, his voice quiet.

“Listen if you’re going to lecture me again about how I should have stayed in the bathroom and let you get captured by them, you can save it.” Her tone was dismissive but not harsh.

“No, I…” Oliver paused. Because he what? He wanted her to be shocked and appalled by what he’d done? Expected her to flinch away from him and refuse to even meet his eyes? “I never wanted you to have to see me like that,” he answered finally, his voice still soft, barely above a whisper.

“Oliver,” she said, and then her hand was on his arm and it was almost him that flinched away. “I knew the risks of coming here. And I know that anything less than killing those three men would have compromised everything. My loyalties here are to you, Ivan, Sofia and Ana. I won’t risk them being found out anymore than you would.”

“But I killed them,” he growled, feeling anger flash at her lack of comprehension or care over what he’d just done. Like she didn’t understand how each one of those ghosts haunted him every day. Like she didn’t—

“I know,” she whispered in response. “But if it’s a choice of your life or theirs…” she paused, taking a deep breath and he risked a glance her way. Her eyes were blue fire and her gaze was leveled on him. “God Oliver you have to know that I’d pick you every time.”

Oliver swallowed hard, dipping his head in a brief nod, tearing his eyes away from hers. They drove the rest of the way to the church in silence. Oliver kept an eye on his rear view mirror where Maseo followed them on a motorcycle he’d procured that morning. It was risky, traveling together- one vehicle stolen and the other with six dead bodies in the back. But they’d agreed to stay together until the mission was completed. They couldn’t survive any other hiccups in the plan.

He backed into the alley next to the church and shifted the van into park, cutting the engine. Maseo idled the motorcycle at the mouth of the alley, keeping watch as Oliver and Felicity got out of the van.

“Do you have everything you need?” Oliver asked her, as she hoisted a messenger bag up onto her shoulder.

Felicity patted the bag. “I already hacked the traffic cameras and anything else I could access in a three block radius from here,” she said. “And I left a backdoor open in the access so all I have to do is…” she trailed off and then nodded. “Yep, I’m good to go,” she added concisely.

Maseo let out a small chuckle. “I bet Akio would have loved to see you again. He’s been learning more about computers the last few years. Probably a little of your influence bleeding in.”

“I’m not sure if I should feel honored or horrified.”

“Honored I’m sure, he cared for you deeply.”

Oliver gestured to the building behind her. “Maseo will get you to the rendezvous point on the other
end,” he said, reaching for her hand and giving it a quick squeeze. He hated the idea of her being that far away from him when literally anything could happen, but he wouldn’t risk her being any closer to the Bratva than necessary. He’d never forgive himself if she was discovered, or captured, or worse.

She opened her mouth to protest but paused, taking in the fire in his eyes, the desperate grip of his hand on hers, and then she nodded, exhaling a ragged breath. “I’ll see you on the other side,” she said, offering him a weak smile.

“By this time tomorrow, this will all be in our rearview,” he offered in return.

Felicity moved in close, leaning up on her tiptoes and placed a kiss on his lips. Oliver found himself breathing her in, wanting to hold onto this moment, commit it to memory, in case things went sideways and he never saw her again. He pulled back, releasing her lips, but keeping their heads close. Her eyes were closed and she looked so serene, he could almost convince himself that they weren’t staring down the barrel of a loaded gun with the enemy’s finger already pulling the trigger.

“Be safe,” she whispered, her breath washing warmth over his skin like a tropical ocean wave.

“You too,” he said back, feeling a lump forming in his throat. He swallowed it down, stepping back, out of her embrace, out of her warmth.

Oliver nodded to Maseo and he moved in quickly, putting a protective arm around Felicity’s shoulder, leading her away from him, away from the van, and to the building next door with the underground tunnels they’d all use to escape in just a couple short hours. With a silent prayer to whatever higher power may or may not be out there, Oliver moved to the back of the van, popping open the door and pulling out the wooden florist cart. It had a false bottom that would hide at least two of the bodies at a time, and there were several vases of flowers stacked in rows along the sides of the van. It seemed ironic that one small vehicle could contain so much beauty and destruction all at the same time.

He wasn’t disturbed as he worked, pulling Yury’s body out first and sliding it into the concealed bottom of the cart. The other unknown Bratva member was next, and after they were both loaded inside, Oliver grabbed a couple vases of flowers, perching them on the top of the cart and shut the doors. The service entrance of the church led directly to a fellowship hall under the sanctuary, and Oliver found an empty room off the large hall that was most likely a Sunday School classroom if he had to guess. By the time he’d stowed the first two bodies inside, he could already feel his limbs growing with exhaustion. The altercation with the three Bratva members had taken more out of him than he’d expected, and he was physically spent. But there was still plenty of work to do, so he shook out his arms, as if he could rid the exhaustion just as easily.

Just as he was heading back to the van for his second round of body stashing, a phone buzzed in his pocket. Felicity had already disabled the GPS and lock codes on the three Bratva members phones, but Oliver had kept them on him, in the event that any of them were summoned by Mikhail or Anatoly. Sure enough, it was Vlad’s phone that buzzed with an incoming text message from Mikhail. And the head of the Bratva was livid if the text message was any indication.

Oliver swore under his breath. Because of course Mikhail would task Vlad with escorting the bride to the church. Of course in a show of power, the man would force the brother of the man that Sofia loved to bring her to the place where he intended to effectively enslave her.

Instead of answering right away, Oliver reached for the sat phone, typing in a text message to Ivan. But the weight of his words were too heavy, and he couldn’t bring himself to hit send. How could you tell someone in a text message that you’d killed their brother? It didn’t matter that Ivan and Sofia
were about to turn their backs on the Bratva and disappear forever, news like that still needed to be in person. With a quick huff, Oliver stowed the sat phone and retrieved Vlad’s. He needed something convincing to buy them some time. And then it hit him- a way to tie everything up in a neat little box and make their plan go off without a hitch, if there was ever such a possibility.

He typed out his reply to Mikhail, detailing a scuffle early that morning while on patrol, with a rival mob family. He kept his sentences short, after reading through some of the man’s older texts, trying to get the tone similar. Oliver explained that Vlad, Yury and the other (whose name was apparently Pyotr) were off to teach the rivals a lesson and would meet the family at the wedding. He then sickly suggested that Ivan take his place bringing Sofia to the church, as a final display of power over the pair of them and their forbidden romance.

With a sneer at his own plan, Oliver hit the send button, acid churning in his stomach. At least it would get Ivan and Sofia to the church at the same time, and since Ana was her maid of honor, she’d be with them as well. He stowed the phones before grabbing the cart and heading back to the van.

Maseo was already there by the time he made it outside, the right side door swung open, thankfully revealing very little of the carnage on the inside of the van. When he emerged, Maseo had the case of C4 in one hand.

“That was fast,” Oliver commented, not expecting the man back for several more minutes.

Maseo nodded. “Felicity was very eager to give us enough time to set up. She raced ahead through much of the tunnel to the getaway car.” He held out a hand, offering Oliver a comm earpiece. “She said to give you this.”

Oliver felt a smile creep onto his features, despite the mission looming before them. He placed it into his ear, tapping it to activate. “Foundry, come in,” he said, feeling the calm of the mission take over. It was just like what they did every day in Starling. He could fool himself of that for now, anyway.

“There you are,” she chirped. “So I’ve got surveillance up and running. So far, you two are the only ones at the church. But if my translation software of Anatoly and Mikhail’s phone calls are correct, they’re leaving in fifteen minutes to make their way over there. I’d say you’ve got half an hour of alone time max.”

“Their phone calls?” Oliver questioned, as Maseo worked on loading two more bodies into the flower cart.

“What?” Felicity questioned defensively. “The Russian government is the one eavesdropping. I just pinpointed their cells and translated their conversations. Mikhail is very upset, bee-tee-dubs about whatever you texted him from Vlad’s phone. And I’m talking, could-make-a-sailor-blush kind of upset.”

Oliver grinned, relaxing into her babble as he and Maseo worked on autopilot. They moved back into the church with the cart, Oliver leading the way to the room he’d stashed the other bodies.

“If I weren’t so terrified, I might actually be proud,” she continued. “What did you tell him anyway?”

“Another story,” Oliver said, his voice strained as they moved the bodies into the room. “For another time.”

“Right,” she agreed.

Maseo grabbed the cart, moving back to the van for the third and final trip of bodies. Oliver
followed on his heels, just ready to get this part over with. He’d dropped bodies before, he was used to that. But this? Moving them, staging them? It made him sick to his stomach and he knew this would be just another in the long line of nightmares his brain supplied him with. They’d been quiet lately, but still present, always persistent, never actually disappearing fully from his subconscious.

“How are we on time?” Oliver asked as they ditched the last of the bodies, along with the cart, in the classroom downstairs.

“According to his phone’s GPS, Mikhail is leaving now.”

“Explosives will be set before he gets here,” Oliver said, grabbing the case of C4 off the cart before locking the door and breaking the knob off.

“We’ve got another problem,” Felicity breathed through the comms.

Oliver gritted his teeth, steeling his nerves for whatever was to come next.

“Moscow police put out a BOLO on that motorcycle we stole and there are no less than three police cruisers in your vicinity right now.”

“I will deal with it,” Maseo said, meeting Oliver’s eyes. “You set the charges and get clear of the building. And whatever happens, don’t come for me. I can hold my own, but if they are discovered, your friends won’t be as lucky.”

With a heavy sigh, Oliver nodded. Maseo held out the comm to him and Oliver took it, but not before closing his hand around Maseo’s. He held it firm, meeting the man’s eyes. “Thank you, brother,” Oliver said.

“It is the least I could do, for the man who brought my son back to life.” And with that, Maseo Yamashiro spun deftly on his heel, and disappeared out the side entrance of the church.
Chapter 38

Chapter by foreverfelicityqueen (stydiasredstring)

Chapter Notes

Hey guys,
We’re back with another awesome update. Hope you’re ready for some stuff to hit the fan and we’ll see what happens on the other side. Without further ado.

Kayla

Oliver couldn’t waste time worrying about Maseo. He knew exactly how little time they had left, and just what could go wrong if he didn’t get the things he needed to do done. Everything rested on his shoulders, and he would be damned before he let things fall apart.

He went to work setting the next round of C4, in a small alcove off the kitchen’s back entrance. He hated admitting it, even to himself, but the calm that coursed through him felt amazing. He could do this. He could be this person as many times as he needed to be, if it meant saving others from suffering. That’s how he’d sleep after this. He couldn’t worry about the destruction and he wouldn’t carry the pain around, letting it destroy him from the inside out. Not this time.

“How many is that?” Felicity’s voice pulsed in his ear. She felt too close. Too close to the charges, too close to the violence. Even if he knew she was blocks away, safe from this. “Because guests are starting to show up. And normally I would not fault anyone for being early to an event. But couldn’t people choose one day to sleep in.”

“I have one more to set,” he kept his voice low as he slipped through the shadowed edges of the building. There were a few people around, but none close enough to see him. Which was good. Everything had to be timed just right. “I’m thinking it should be at the center of the building.”

“You mean where everyone is going to be congregated?” the alarm was high in her words. “Please be careful.”

“I’m always careful,” he whispered back.

“I would love to argue that point with you, but this doesn’t feel like the time or place.”

Oliver waited until the main lobby cleared of people. There was one door to his left, and given the layout of the building he knew it would put him right behind the altar. The perfect place for the last charge.

Oliver slipped in the door, closing it soundlessly behind him. As soon as he finished he could mark this task off the list.

“Arrow?”
“Yeah?”

“Mikhail and Anatoly just arrived,” her words were all but a low hum in his ear. “So please hurry.”

“I will.”

He went to work connecting the last bit of C4 to the wall, just behind a large vase that sat there. If anyone wandered into the room they wouldn’t see it. Not that the plan would have enough time for anyone to wander into this area. Felicity would see to that.

“I’m almost done setting this,” he said, again his voice low enough that it didn’t carry past his comm.

“When I am you have to put in that call. You have the voice recording ready?”

“Yes, after sifting through twenty plus hours of Russian cinema I managed to piece together one authentic bomb threat. Which is the weirdest thing I’ve ever said.”

“Agree to disagree.”

“Hey jokes are my thing,” she teased. “Why don’t you stick to the brooding and trick shots.”

He couldn’t help the ghostly smile that crossed his lips. Even literally staring at explosive materials and she could make him feel like all this didn’t matter. All that mattered was getting back to Felicity. And he could only do that by getting the others out.

“I still think you are being unreasonable, dear brother.”

The voice rose up from the other side of the wall, and it froze Oliver where he crouched down. Anatoly was here. And Oliver would bet every penny he had that he knew the next voice even before he spoke.

“Ona moya doch’,” Mikhail weezed in a reply. “And I will decided how her future is set.”

“You have set her on a path with a man who could not possibly make her happy.”

“And I do so to protect all of us,” he countered. “Because you were too weak to set the right things in motion. Sofia is not damned to this marriage. She is the salvation of the Bratva.”

“Maybe men like us do not deserve salvation,” Anatoly said, and Oliver couldn’t help but feel remorse for his former comrade. The man had so many faces he wore to the world around him, he wondered if Anatoly was struggling to find which one was the truth.

A coughing fit erupted from the other man and Oliver’s hands kept still as he pinched the final wires together. He wouldn’t let this get ruined. Not when they were so close.

“My one regret in this life,” Mikhail said when his cough subsided. “Is not the choices I have made for my girls, but the fact that I must die while weaker men carry on in my place.”

It grew quiet after that and Oliver wondered if the men had left, or if they were staring daggers between one another. He didn’t have time to wait and find out.

“Mikhail just took a call,” Felicity said, giving reassurance to his fears. “And Anatoly slipped out a side exit. Are you done setting the last charge?”

“Yeah,” he replied as he stood up. “Make the call. I have to get to Sofia and Ana. See you on the other side.”
“You better.” And he heard the comm click off, the first stretch of real silence. He couldn’t help the nerves that rose up.

Oliver slipped through the now empty sanctuary. And he huffed a soundless laugh at the irony of it all. There was nothing safe about this place today. One way or another it was going to blow holes in several people’s lives. And he just hoped that things fell the way they had planned.

The back of the room lead to a long hall. Oliver knew at the end of said hall was a room. And in that room Sofia should be getting ready. If everything had gone the way it needed to go, Ivan would be standing guard with at least one other. And Oliver couldn’t justifying killing one more person today. He would have to get creative.

Oliver pulled Vlad’s phone from his pocket, bringing up his text log with Mikhail. The man was wondering where he, Yury, and Pyotr were when the ceremony was close to starting.

Oliver did the only thing he could think to do. He drafted one more text to Mikhail. The bomb threat would make everything look legitimate, but this would buy him some more time.

*Found charges in the basement. We’re sweeping the building for more. You should evacuate the church until we know if it’s a false alarm.*

Hitting send, Oliver took the phone and dropped it near the back pew. He didn’t need it anymore. Within seconds he could hear the low hum of movement through the doors, as dozens of people began exiting through the main doors.

“Arrow?” Felicity voice cut back in his head, and he could finally take a full breath. “SAT phone text. Ivan says the door is clear. Mikhail called them away to evacuate the rest of the church and then come back for the girls. Apparently they have important guests that take precedence.”

“Copy that Foundry,” he replied making his way down the hall towards the room. “Any word on Maseo?”

“Well authorities are being called away from the chase due to the bomb threat, so there’s that.” she sighed. “I’m sure he’ll be fine.”

When he reached the door he wasted no time with knocking as he pushed it inward.

Sofia tensed at the movement, but Ana lit up when she saw him. She had grown so much over the year he was gone. Nearly taller than her sister now, and more of a young woman than the kid in his memory. He barely had time to close the door behind him, before she launched herself into his arms.

“Oliver,” she was nearly crying against his shoulder. “When Sofia told me what was to happen, I barely believed it to be true. But you really are here to help us.”

She pulled back giving him a watery smile. “Spasibo.”

“Hey, you don’t need to thank me,” he said giving her a grin. “I’m happy to help you guys.”

“What about my father?” Sofia looked at him, fear bleeding it’s way through her face. “What if he comes to check on us? I don’t know if I can…”

“Sestra,” Ana said shaking her head as she came to kneel in front of Sofia. “Papa does not care about either of us.”

“He is our family still.”
“So was Mama. And I barely remember her, but I do remember how much she loved us.” She reached over and tucked a strand of Sofia’s hair back. Acting so much more like the older sister in that moment. “I remember how much she wanted for us to be happy. We have to try Sofia. You know we cannot stay here. Pozhaluysta.”

Sofia nodded, clasping their hands together. “You are my family Ana. You, Ivan, and… I want us to be safe.”

“Then we must go.”

He found himself comparing this exchange to the one he overheard with Anatoly and Mikhail. And he wondered how different an entire generation could be from the one that came before it.

“Foundry?” Oliver whispered. “How long until the bomb squad gets here?”

“I’d say five minutes tops, so you guys need to get out of there ASAP.”

“Got it,” he replied, then looked over to the girls. “We have to go. There’s a back exit that we need to get to fast.”

“What if we’re seen?” Sofia asked as she stood.

“It’s a blind spot. No cameras for half a block around it. You have to trust me Sofia, it’s the only way this will work.”

She locked her arm around Ana, the sisters standing tall with each other. He could see the strength pass between them, and he knew how in awe he felt by their determination to stick with one another. Family, whether born of blood or not, had the ability to push you forward even when everything ran bleak around you. It’s how he felt with both Tommy and Thea. And he was going to make sure the Knyazev’s sisters made it through this together.

He lead the girls from the room, keeping his pace fast as they walked through the empty church. He needed to get them out before anyone decided to go searching for those who were supposed to be sweeping for bombs. If they were caught he would have to fight his way out, and he didn’t think that was a fight he would win.

“Felicity,” he whispered, even if they had been using their codenames for a reason. He needed her to hear this. “If anything happens, I just want you to remember--”

“I refuse for you to say you love me right now,” she cut him off. “Dammit Oliver you’re going to make it back here and we’re going home. Do you hear me?”

“Yeah.”

“Now keep moving.”

He could hear the clicking of her keys, the steady rhythm putting him at ease. She was right. They had to make it home. He would get them home.

Once they reached the back door, Oliver pushed it open, but a shadow crept along outside the door and everything in Oliver seized.

He reached out grabbing the man by the arm and twisting until he was in a vice grip. Oliver didn’t know what to do next until the person spoke.
“It is me,” Ivan groaned, looking over to meet Sofia’s gaze. “We haven’t much time.”

Oliver let go and Ivan paid no mind to him as he swept Sofia into his arms. “I told Mikhail I would help Vlad and Yury sweep for bombs, and then get you two out. We have to go quickly before he gets suspicious. He already doesn’t like that Vlad is not replying to him.”

He shot Oliver a knowing look, like he already guessed what fate his brother had met. But if Ivan was angry he didn’t show it. Not when his whole world was wrapped in his arms.

“Let’s get out of here,” Oliver said ushering the three of them to the van.

As soon as Ivan was behind the wheel, Oliver let out a shaky breath. They had to be this close to set the explosives off. But once he hit the button, Ivan would gun it across the alley, and into the underground parking lot of the building next door. They would have less than a minute to grab the magnetic sign and change the licence plate, before the last explosion went off. By that point they had to be in the tunnel and on their way to Felicity. That was the plan. And Oliver needed to stick to it.

Ana gave him a look, then focused her gaze on the device in his hand. “Will that do it?”

“It will blow the whole church,” he answered with a nod. “No one will come looking for you after this.”

“Khorosho,” she said giving him a smile. “I will not mourn for a life I did not want.”

“Ana,” he started to say but she shook her head.

“Please,” she pointed at the device. “Just end this?”

Oliver did as she asked, he hit the button and a low rumble cascaded from behind them. There would be no turning back for them now.

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Tommy drove home in a fog- and not only because of the headache that still felt like it was splitting his skull in half. He had smoothed things over with Lyla after hanging up with Lexi- explaining that he’d gone back to the airport for another once over before calling it quits. He couldn’t bring himself to tell her the truth, not yet. Especially when there was little more to tell. Sara had played on their history and summoned him for nothing more than to make sure he would keep her secret. Anything more he’d gotten from their conversation (and he didn’t even know what, if anything he’d be able to salvage from it) would only serve as justification if the time came for him to tell Lyla about the meet at all.

He wasn’t sure he could blame Sara for her secretiveness. She’d been gone so long, living as someone else with the world she’d known moving on without her. But still- how would he manage to keep that secret from…

“Laurel?” Her name slipped from his lips, a whispered prayer that the figure in his doorway wasn’t a hallucination.

Her head snapped up and she froze, meeting his gaze from halfway down the hall. How had she even heard him so far away? He could have sworn he’d barely uttered her name. She shifted uneasily, clearly not anticipating seeing him. In another world, another life, she might be there waiting for him, front door opened ready to welcome him after a long day of work. But this, was not that life.
“Thea had some party emergency to run off to,” Laurel said with a sigh, trying to keep her tone neutral, but it was too forced. “I promised her I’d lock up as soon as I found the file.”

“Box on the dining table,” he said, almost absently, as he moved closer.

Laurel took a step back, retreating into his apartment, it was as if they were like sides of a magnet repelling. Every step he took, she mirrored it, never letting him get closer than several paces. He crossed the threshold into the apartment and shut the door, following her toward the table.

“I… I didn’t think to look there,” she said, turning her back on him to rifle through the box. “Seems you’ve packed up all my things.”

“Don’t do that,” he said, shaking his head. “Don’t make it seem like this was what I wanted.” Tommy swallowed hard, emotion clouding his brain. “I just couldn’t leave everything the way it was. It looked too much like you’d be back any moment and I knew I was fooling myself if I tried to believe it.”

“No, it’s good,” Laurel said finally, spinning back to him with the file in her hands. “It’s healthy or cathartic or whatever. There’s some stuff of yours at my place I should have brought with me.” She didn’t finish her thought, didn’t let him in on the ‘why’ of it. There was a razor and a few changes of clothes, probably a couple DVDs too. But it almost seemed like she wasn’t ready to let it go yet. Or maybe it was just his mind playing tricks on him again.

“So you were in Hub City for work?” She asked, finally finding the neutrality her voice had lacked before.

“Mmhmm,” he hummed, forcing himself not to move closer.

“And the lead you were looking for?”

Sara is alive. It would be so easy to utter the words, so simple to let them slip, to give her and her family the one thing they’ve wanted for the last five years. He’d promised himself, promised Sara that he wouldn’t, but that was before Laurel was standing there in his house, eyes boring into him with a look that screamed pain and regret and a hundred other things he didn’t want to identify. He could tell her now. Tell Laurel the truth and start to build a new foundation with her, something they could build their lives on-together.

“Tommy?”

His eyes slipped shut at his name on her lips. He wouldn’t tell her. He couldn’t.

“The lead… hasn’t panned out yet,” he answered finally.

She stood there for several beats, eyes searching his for what he couldn’t be sure. And then she swallowed hard and glanced down at the box on the table. “I should get going,” she said, grabbing the box of her belongings and heading for the door.

Tommy caught her arm, freezing her in place again. “Laurel wait,” his voice almost pleading with her. “I can’t tell you how many times over the last few weeks all I’ve wanted is for you to be here so I could just explain—”

Laurel flinched but didn’t pull away. “I think you’ve said quite enough on the subject, Tommy.” Her tone was harsh and she stayed facing the door.

“You’re right,” he said, surprising himself with the words as much as they seemed to shock her. He
deflated a little, the weight of this new secret growing until it overpowered every other thought and feeling he had. “My life is dangerous Laurel. I won’t try to pretend like it isn’t. And there are things that I can’t tell you about. But none of that changes how I feel about you. Everything I told you at the hospital that day was the truth. You can push me away as long as you want, but I’m not going anywhere, because I believe in this.”

He moved to face her, putting himself between her and the door. His hand slid down her arm, taking hers and pressing it against his heart. There were tears in her eyes, but she stood, unblinking, as if willing them not to fall. “I believe in us, Laurel. And I’ll wait, as long as it takes, for you to realize that we both deserve a chance to see where this could go.”

She huffed, breaking their intense gaze and turning her head. He could see the tears now, slowly rolling down her cheeks.

“You lied to me,” she whispered, voice quivering.

“I know--”

“For two years, Tommy.” Laurel swallowed hard. “That’s not just something I can overlook.”

“I wouldn’t expect you to,” he answered softly, taking her face in his hands, gently nudging her until she met his eyes again. “Just say you’ll think about it. About giving us another shot…”

She didn’t answer, but her brow furrowed in determination. “I don’t know.”

Tommy released her, dropping his hands back to his sides. He wasn’t sure what he was doing, trying to fix things with Laurel when the secret of her sister being alive was still so fresh, so heavy in his head. But he couldn’t let her go- no matter how hard it might be to keep something like that from her.

“I should go,” she said again, her voice barely audible, even in the otherwise silent space. This time, Tommy didn’t stop her as she left. He’d said his piece, and the rest was up to her. He knew, just like he did that day in the hospital, that Laurel Lance couldn’t be forced into a decision she wasn’t ready to make. But he almost felt a weight lifted, now that all his cards were on the table. Almost, except every time he closed his eyes, he saw Sara’s face. Laurel’s kid sister… alive, and no one knew it but him.

How? The question had flooded his mind again and again since he’d learned the truth. And he wasn’t sure he’d ever get an answer. He wondered idly if Oliver knew. If Sara had somehow sworn him to secrecy as well. Was there any way to find out without tipping Oliver off if he didn’t know already? Tommy wasn’t sure he could risk it. Didn’t know what it would do to Sara and her position in the League, if word of her being alive got out.

A knock sounded on the door, stirring him from his thoughts and his heart leapt. Laurel.

He moved swiftly, ripping the door open, ready to pull her into his arms. “I hoped you’d come back-”

But the figure that stood in front of him was not Laurel.

“Moira?” he questioned, looking at his friend’s mother with a sense of confusion.

“Did you tell her?!” Moira asked harshly, her usual calm demeanor nowhere to be found. Instead, her eyes were half-wild with panic, her outfit ruffled, like she’d hastily gotten dressed, and considering the late hour, it was possible that she had.
Tommy’s mind immediately flew to Sara, and his eyes went wide. “What?!”

“You did, didn’t you?” Moira sighed, eyes falling closed in defeat.

How? How did Moira, of all people know about Sara being alive? Did Moira know about the League? Was she... Tommy’s mind spun. Certainly his best friend’s mother wasn’t the rogue League of Assassins member. The thought was preposterous and he dismissed it immediately.

“I didn’t tell her anything,” he said, still feeling like there was a piece missing somewhere.

“Don’t play games with me. I know Thea was here.”

“Thea...” Tommy repeated, shaking his already throbbing head. And then everything clicked into place. Sometimes keeping secrets straight was exhausting. Moira wasn’t here about Sara, she was here about the sister that he and Oliver shared. Because somehow Moira found out that Tommy and Oliver knew what their parents had been hiding for nearly two decades.

“Yes, Tommy,” she said, leveling a glare at him. “I need to know exactly what you told my daughter about her father.”

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She didn’t feel the explosions go off. But she heard the chaos spill out from them. Within seconds after Oliver hit the detonator, sirens filled the city air. Felicity switched her comm link over to the authorities to listen in, and even though she could count on one had the number of Russian words she could actually make out, she got the jist of it.

The church was gone, and rescue workers couldn’t make it in while it was still ablaze. Good. she thought, with a slow nod. No one deserved to get hurt for what they had to do. Well, no more than those whose lives had ended.

A small part of her kept waiting to fall apart over that. The idea that Oliver had killed three people just that morning. But it never came. She understood it. The end justified the means, and perhaps in a different life, one that wasn’t filled with bombs and villains, it would have bothered her. But this was their world now. And sometimes the only way get through was to do the things that others wouldn’t.

She needed to see Oliver to know he was okay. She could hear his breathing when she switched back over to their comms, but Felicity knew the tension sitting in her stomach would only ease once he was in her arms again.

They had been through so much over the years. Losing one another and then crashing back together again. If this city had taught Felicity anything at all, it was that she couldn’t let go again.

“Foundry?” Oliver’s voice cut through her thoughts.

“Yeah?” she hoped she hadn’t been distracted for too long. She didn’t want to have to put words to her fears.

“We’re almost out,” he replied. “Any word from Maseo?”

She cursed herself for not checking before he brought it up. Her concern had been on Oliver, and getting him out of the church and back to her. She hadn’t looked at the phone since things started to go down.

She pulled up the text log with Maseo. With a sigh of relief she answered. “He managed to shake the
cops after the bombs went off. He’s gonna meet us back at the hotel.”

“Good.”

The next thing Felicity saw was motion on the other side of her window. Panic made a quick sweep through her veins until she saw Oliver exiting the tunnel. He was flanked by Ivan on one side, Sofia resting against him. To Oliver’s left was a young girl Felicity did not know, but she knew it had to be Ana. She resembled Sofia in looks, but the differences between the Knyanzev daughters were there too. Sofia held the conflict she felt in her eyes, her shoulders tense like someone might come up behind them and steal this moment from her. Ana looked ready to gut whoever tried.

She popped the van’s door open, just as Oliver stood before here.

“Hey,” he whispered, his hand reaching out to her cheek.

She felt herself mold to his fingertips, a cautious breath stuttering out. They got out. They had done the most impossible of impossible things, and they had made it through to the other side.

“Hi,” she replied reaching up until she had wrapped her arms around his neck.

Oliver held her close. Even without words she could tell he was thinking along the same lines she had been. They came close to something really bad happening. And there was no doubts anywhere in her mind about exactly where she needed to be.

“I’m glad you’re okay,” she said when he finally let her feet fall back to the ground. “Like kinda over the moon about it.”

“I know the feeling,” he pressed a quick kiss to her lips, lingering only long enough for her to get lost in his presence once again.

“Oliver,” Ivan’s voice broke through their moment, and Oliver turned to face their friend. “Should we get going?”

“I think we should wait a little while longer,” he gave Ivan a look motioning him off to the side. Then he turned to her. “We’ll be back in a second.”

She nodded, letting his hand slip from hers, even if the sensation left pinpricks across her skin. She wasn’t sure she was ever going to be able to go back to a way things were before this trip. She didn’t know how they would pretend to the world like they didn’t mean everything to each other.

“Thank you,” Ana said as she stepped closer to Felicity. “According to my sister none of this would be possible without you.”

“Sofia is giving me too much credit,” Felicity replied but smiled at the pair. “I only wanted to do what was right.”

“Not many live that kind of life,” Ana smiled as she hugged Sofia’s side. “I am glad Oliver saved my sister’s life that night. And I’m very happy you both agreed to help now.”

“You’re welcome Ana.”

The girl’s leaned into each other and Felicity watched in awe of their resilience. So many things had happened over the course of the last few months. Sofia had come within hours of having to marry a man she would never love. Ana had just watched her past blow up behind her. But still the Knyanzev sisters endured into the next path, locked in an iron grip with one another. They displayed
more strength in that moment, than she had seen in the eyes of any member of the Bratva.

“I must tell you something,” Sofia spoke as she turned to face Ana. “I meant to tell you sooner, I just was not sure how.”

“I know,” she said softly but they way she looked at her elder sister said more than her words. Her hand rested against Sofia’s cheek as gentle as she could. “I knew months ago. And I am so happy for you and Ivan.”

“Ya sozhaleyu sestra. I should have been more brave. I should not have let Papa go this far. I should have stuck up for you. My sweet Ana.”

“We are together. That is all that matters.”

Felicity stepped out from beside the two sisters. They needed a moment alone.

She wondered for a moment, as she hovered between the two girls and far off from Oliver and Ivan’s conversation, if this is what family did for one another? She had grown up the only child to a single parent. And as fierce as she loved her mother, Felicity had bailed from Vegas the second she could get away. She didn’t even consider how intense a connection to someone else could be until she two years ago.

She thought over the people in her life. Not just Oliver or her mom, but Tommy and Thea, John and Lyla, Laurel too. She would do everything in her power to protect all of them. She could say with great certainty that if the chance arose, she would give up her freedom, her happiness to save anyone of them. And she wondered if that was what it meant to have family, if maybe that was the reason Tommy wanted to tell Thea the truth so badly? Maybe he wanted her to know he would protect her at any cost.

“We’re getting ready to go.” Oliver had come to stand next to her, his eyes shining as he watched her. “You okay?”

“Who me? Yeah faking people’s deaths is my jam,” she joked. “I’m just thinking about what comes next when we get back to Starling.”

“I thought we had a one problem at a time rule?” he asked as he gave her a smirk. “You trying to jinx us?”

“I didn’t mean it that way. I meant,” her gaze turned back to the girl’s. Ivan had joined them, his arms wrapped protectively around Sofia. “What do we tell people? About us? I don’t want to go back home and then pretend what I feel for you isn’t as deep as it is. I don’t want to lie about what we mean to each other.”

“Who said we have to?”

“Oliver we just started dating, don’t you think people will find it weird that we’re already this connected. What would people say?”

“Felicity I couldn’t care less what other people think,” he pivoted them until they faced one another. “I love you. And I don’t have to justify that to anyone. I already lost enough time thinking I didn’t deserve to be happy. But I was wrong. And I’m never making that mistake again.”

“Okay.”

“Okay?”
“I mean obviously I love you too. And you’re right. We both deserve to be happy,” she stepped close to him, her arms reaching out to wrap around his neck. “And I’ve never been happier than when I’m with you.”

“That’s good to hear,” he whispered as he kissed her. “But we should probably get going. This parking garage is only going to be empty for so long.”

“Another 45 minutes,” she murmured as he settled her back on her feet. “Give or take a few minutes due to traffic rerouting.”

“Have I ever told you how remarkable you are?”

“Maybe, but it’s still nice to hear.”

“We should go.”

“Lead the way.” And he did, with her hand somehow attached to his, like it’s where it was meant to fit.

The way to their hotel had been easy to manage. All the destruction and chaos was behind them. The streets were almost ghostly in their silence. But none of them dared turn on the radio.

Oliver parked the van around the rear of the building. They knew the service entrance was the least visible from the main lobby, and given that they were still traveling with three people meant to be dead, no one wanted to risk a sighting.

They took the stairs up. Each of them dragging the more steps they took. The day had been long for everyone. And Felicity was glad that Oliver had gotten a double room. Their friends would need to rest before they left in the morning.

The do not disturb sign was on the handle as Oliver approached the door. She was right behind him, her arms tempted to wrap around his middle and lean into him. She could use some sleep too. Lots and lots of sleep.

Oliver froze once he pushed the door open, enough that Felicity stumbled into his back. But before she could ask him why he stopped, she was presented with the reason herself.

“Hello Oliver,” Anatoly’s voice rolled out from the room. “I would like to speak to my nieces.”
Hey lovelies! You guys are really enjoying these cliffhangers every week, right? I know, I know, they're rough. We're going to let up, I promise. Our heroes definitely need a little respite after everything that's been going on. So, let's dig in! xoxo, Cassie

“Your nieces?” Oliver repeated, feigning ignorance. He forced all emotion from his face, keeping his expression neutral. “I haven’t seen them. Felicity and I just—“

Felicity appeared at his side, helping him block the doorway, keeping the girls and Ivan out of Anatoly’s view.

“Strange,” Anatoly said, sounding almost bored. “How neither you or the girl are dressed for the wedding this morning that you came to Moscow for.” He looked up, meeting Oliver’s eye.

Oliver didn’t blink. Neither did Anatoly.

“And I must say, you’ve put too much work into this scheme for the three of them to be spotted in a hotel hallway,” Anatoly finished, standing from the armchair. He moved to the minibar in the corner of the room, working to mix himself a drink.

Oliver darted a glance over his shoulder to Ivan, who merely shrugged. Pushing out a long breath, Oliver moved into the room, and everyone else followed him, Ivan closing the door behind them. He felt like a child about to be scolded.

He couldn’t decipher Anatoly’s mood, but despite it all, he knew that anyone in on the secret of Ivan, Sofia and Ana being alive was a liability.

“Ah, girls, there you are,” Anatoly said patronizingly, turning back around, as if they’d just performed a magic trick. “Now, which of you would like to explain to me what the fuck you were thinking today?” His cool demeanor wavered, his temper beginning to flare, ready to explode at any moment.

“Mr. Kny-“

“That was rhetorical, Miss Smoak,” he bellowed.

Everyone else in the room flinched. Oliver moved to Felicity reflexively, putting a hand on her arm. She shrunk into him, letting him protect her like an umbrella from a looming hurricane. Anatoly’s eyes went to Sofia.

“If this had been anyone else,” he sneered, looking between his niece and the man she loved. “Do you understand what you’ve done to us? Done to your family, your brotherhood?”
“We did what we had to,” Ivan said, straightening until he towered over the other man. “The betrayal was not on our side, Anatoly. It was rendered by your brother the moment he decided that the Bratva was more important than his own daughter’s safety and happiness.”

Anatoly scoffed. “Happiness has no room in this life,” he said bitterly. “I thought you all understood that.”

“And what about my safety?!” Sofia interjected, her voice strained, weary but raised. “You know that Kuznetsov is an angry, spiteful man, a drunk. They say he killed his first wife.” A sob escaped her lips. “That is what you’d have for the niece you love so dearly?”

For this, Anatoly seemed to have no reply. “The Bratva is crippled for this. And once your father passes, there may be no coming back from the loss.”

“I won’t pretend to be sorry for what I asked Oliver to do,” Sofia said.

Oliver felt Anatoly’s eyes drift to him, and he steeled his nerves for the coming wrath. But a long moment of silence loomed in the room, as if everyone was afraid to break the fragile spider’s web of a scheme they’d put together by saying anymore about it.

“I should have put together what you intended to do,” Anatoly said finally. “The bodies from the morgue should have been my first clue. And then when you brought the father of that boy you kept here.”

Oliver’s eyes snapped up at the mention of Maseo. He was supposed to meet them at the hotel, but he wasn’t there. Had Anatoly gotten to him? Oliver felt his chest tighten at the thought of it. “Where is he?” Oliver growled.

“How should I know?” Anatoly said dismissively.

If Oliver had been standing anywhere else in the room, he would have missed it. The quick wink through the window of a rifle scope catching the afternoon sunlight. And then he had his answer. Maseo was at the building across the street, the red dot sight of his gun probably boring a hole into Anatoly’s back, a bullet eager to find the man’s heart.

But Oliver wasn’t ready for that. He wouldn’t let Anatoly die. He reached reflexively across the space, pulling Anatoly away from the window. If it came to that, Oliver would be the one to pull the trigger himself.

“Who else knows about the bodies?” Oliver asked harshly. They had to keep their secret as contained as possible. The safety and livelihood of Ivan and Sofia and Ana depended on it.

“Just the medical examiner. And all he knows is to call me when something strange happens at the morgue.” Anatoly said, glancing out the window. “I suppose your friend doesn’t agree with you that I should live?”

Oliver turned to Felicity. “Can you call Maseo? Tell him to stand down.”

She nodded, moving away to retrieve the satellite phone.

“And I never said I was letting you live,” Oliver growled, pushing Anatoly down into a chair. He hated this, hated what this mission was turning him back into. He’d never anticipated being in this position with Anatoly. But here they were.

“Too many unexplained deaths are bad for business Oliver,” Anatoly tsked. “Or did your time in the
brotherhood teach you nothing? There’s no such thing as a clean mission. There’s never a way to cover all of your tracks.”

Oliver felt bile rise in his throat. *Was this the moment?* He couldn’t keep his mind from wondering how many times over the last several days, that exact question. When would Anatoly find a way to lure him back? When would the Bratva once again lay claim to his soul, staining it in the thick, inky red-black of blood.

“But that is not why I came here,” Anatoly said, looking more calm than anyone in that room had any right to look. He smoothed his suit coat down, turning his head to look at Ana and Sofia. “I needed to see my nieces off. I know there is no keeping you here now. Even if I wanted to, the Bratva would never allow you to live after what you did today. I may have grown soft, in my old age, my dears, but even I must preserve what little authority I have left in this brotherhood.”

Ana swallowed hard, looking every bit the young, scared teenager she should. But Sofia straightened beside Ivan, her weary face almost gaunt in the harsh hotel room lights.

“I have an estate in Kefalonia, in Greece. No one knows about it, not even my brother.” He moved to the girls, clasping one of each of their hands in his. “I purchased it many years ago, when there was a woman I loved, and a hope of one day escaping this life, much like you’re doing now.” Sofia’s eyes narrowed, but she let her uncle continue. “I want you to stay there, my girls, for as long as you need to get settled into your new lives. That way I will know, for a little while, that you are safe.”

This was not at all what Oliver had expected from the man, but perhaps he should have. After all, Anatoly had always been the kinder of the two reigning Bratva brothers. He had offered Oliver and Akio protection, and even Felicity, provisionally, when none of them had done much to earn it. Oliver could call up memory after memory of Anatoly with his nieces, treating them more like daughters than their own father did.

“Thank you uncle,” Ana said, wrapping Anatoly in a fierce hug.

Sofia pulled in too, but the gesture was brief, mechanical, like she was waiting for the other shoe to drop. Or perhaps she’d just lost love for the man when he’d gone along with her father’s plan to marry her off.

There was no doubt in Oliver’s mind that Anatoly never would have spoken out against his brother in public. He would have let Sofia marry whatever man her father had chosen for her, despite the love he claimed to have felt for his niece. Anatoly and Mikhail were always difficult to read, and for as much as they argued behind closed doors, they always made sure to present a united front before their army, their brotherhood.

Anatoly turned to face Oliver. “Now, what of Vlad, Yury and Pyotr?”

“Collateral damage,” Oliver said, his voice low. “They’ll be discovered in the church, along with the bodies that will be identified as Sofia, Ana and Ivan.”

Fire flared in Anatoly’s eyes again. “That is too many,” Anatoly said, straining to keep his voice in check, acting like they’d agreed on a certain number of acceptable deaths for this mission.

“They came after me,” he answered. “I won’t apologize for defending myself.”

“I told you not to come here, Oliver,” the man replied with a sigh. “I told you it would not end well for you.”
Oliver tensed, not sure what to expect.

“I will have much rebuilding to do,” Anatoly continued. “And because you came here, because you destroyed my house, you will do something for me.” He paused, and Oliver wasn’t sure if it was for dramatic effect, or to get his emotions in check. “One day, I will come to you Oliver. And I will ask a favor of you. I do not know yet what this favor will be. But you will do it willingly, without protest or complaint.”

“Deal.”

Anatoly nodded, and then with a lingering glance back to his nieces, he exited the hotel room, leaving the rest of them in stunned silence.

Felicity moved first, stalking over to Oliver and punching him in the arm. “Why would you do that?!” she demanded. “You’ve barely gotten yourself out from under the Bratva and now you’re back in bed with them?”

“First of all, ow,” he said pointedly. Her lessons with Diggle had been paying off, and he couldn’t help the pride coupled with desire he felt for her in that moment. “Secondly, did I really have a choice? The three of them for all intents and purposes are dead. He can’t get anything else out of them. Besides, it’s not like he’s asking me to come back.”

“You don’t know that!” she cried, and he could hear the pain, mingled with anger in her voice. She was worried about him.

But Sofia shook her head, moving toward them and speaking up. “Anatoly wouldn’t have Oliver return. It would weaken his standing in the Bratva, and they are already crippled enough as it is. Most likely, he will use Oliver in Starling. If he doesn’t know about the vigilante yet, Anatoly will soon, and you will be an ally to them with their operations in Starling, maybe even Central City and Hub City. Help with acquisitions, looking the other way on drug deals. It will blur and probably cross the lines of your mission, and for that, I am sorry.”

Oliver blew out a long breath. “We’ll cross that bridge when we get there,” he said finally. “You guys should get some sleep.” He nodded to the beds, his brain reeling too much to rest yet, despite the exhaustion pulling at every inch of his body and mind.

Felicity followed him to the armchair, perching herself on the arm of it after he sat down. “Sorry about punching you,” she said quietly, scrunching her nose with the memory.

He huffed a laugh. “You’re probably more hurt than I am.”

She lifted her hand, knuckles red. Oliver reached over, grabbing the ice bucket. He pushed her hand down into the ice, watching her entire body shudder at the cold. Another wave of desire threaded through every nerve in him. It was almost strange, how quickly and easily the desire washed over him when it came to Felicity. But he thought back to their last time in Russia, the stolen moments between deadly scenarios. Would it always be like this, he wondered. Felicity settled into his lap, curling around him until her head rested on his shoulder.

“I can’t lose you again,” she whispered, almost to herself, as the room settled into silence around them.

“I told you,” he answered quietly, placing a kiss on her forehead. “Tomorrow we’ll put this place in our rearview, and never look back.”

“That’s not what I mean,” her voice was thick with emotion. “Not just this place. Not just
“Felicity, you are what keeps me together,” Oliver whispered. “So if there’s one person in the whole world who could never lose me,” he sighed into her hair. “It’s you.”

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“Do you maybe want to step inside?” Tommy asked even though the accusation in her voice told him he didn’t really want to have this conversation. At least not right then. “Or would you like all my neighbors to possibly listen in?”

Moira glared, but she did as he asked and stepped around entering the apartment. It was kind of amusing the more he thought about it. She had never come to his place. For all the talk and shows of affection, he knew she wanted to be around him in that moment as much as she would want a hungry tiger by her side.

“What did you tell her?”

Tommy closed the door behind her, sealing them in from the outside world.

“How do you even know that I--”

“Because my son accused me of being a selfish, horrible fiend for protecting her from this. And then Thea showed up at home well after curfew, she refused to talk to me, and the only thing she said was she had been at your place. So I would like to know where you get the right to ruin a teenage girl’s life like this?”

“I didn’t tell Thea anything,” he replied as he looked at her. This pillar of grace and clarity, a frazzled mess in front of him. “I made a promise to Ollie that I would wait. And I’m honoring that.”

She scoffed. “Yes because a Merlyn’s word is worth so much.”

“Don’t lump me in with him. And don’t act like we’re in the wrong here all while you’re playing a noble victim. Is that how you plan to spin this to Thea?”

He had never felt such a disconnect to the woman in front of him. The woman who took him in when his father bailed, who would run a hand down his cheek to wipe away the tears if he had nightmares about his mom. He hardly recognized her now.

“Do you remember when we found out the Gambit was lost?” She turned away from him a shudder passing through her shoulders. “You were over at the house grabbing something of yours from Oliver’s room. And they came and gave us the news. Thea screamed.” Moira threw her gaze back at him. “The sound wasn’t just loud, it was hollowing. I had never heard anything so bleak in my life and for just a moment I wondered if the news had shattered my baby girl for an eternity.”

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“Do you remember when we found out the Gambit was lost?” She turned away from him a shudder passing through her shoulders. “You were over at the house grabbing something of yours from Oliver’s room. And they came and gave us the news. Thea screamed.” Moira threw her gaze back at him. “The sound wasn’t just loud, it was hollowing. I had never heard anything so bleak in my life and for just a moment I wondered if the news had shattered my baby girl for an eternity.”

“I remember.” Tommy had been the one to grab Thea, to keep her from falling to the floor. She kicked and punched, her screams turning into sobs against his shirt. She had been about twelve at the time, but Tommy always pictured her much smaller.

“She broke apart that day because she lost her brother and her father. She is still struggling out of that darkness to this day, and you want to throw her life into another tailspin? Why would you do this to her if you both claim to love her so much?”

“We do love Thea. God Moira, she’s been a little sister to me a hell of a lot longer than I’ve known the truth. I have always cared about her wellbeing. I was always there for her.”
“And yet you still want to ruin her by giving her Malcolm Merlyn as a father?” She met his eyes in sorrow.

“She deserves to know the truth about her own life. Yes my father’s not perfect, he’s a shit father and an even worse person at times. But when it comes to dealing with him, it’s always better to know that you are dealing with him. Otherwise you get blindsided.”

They were at a stalemate. There was no push he could make for her to see his side, and there was nothing Moira could say that would make him back down from his position either.

“She knows something.” Moira’s tone was adamant. “She was keeping something from me tonight. So maybe you didn’t tell her, but you could have left something out. Maybe she saw something or--”

“Or she’s a teenager? It’s kind of built into their DNA to keep things from their parents.”

“And how would you know?”

The blow stung, probably more than it should have. Moira had been the person he told things to when he was Thea’s age. Kind of like a bonus parent given that his mom was dead and his father didn’t care. But he had to wonder if all those times had been an act on her part. Had she not been carrying his father’s child when Malcolm left, would she still have taken him into the Queen family?

“We don’t have anything else to discuss,” he said as he cleared his throat. “And we’re clearly not going to see eye to eye on this, so you can go now.”

She looked as shocked at her words as he felt. “Tommy I didn’t mean that the way it sounded.”

“I think you did, but it’s okay.” he moved back towards the door, but turned to face her once more. “When my mom died, I didn’t think there would ever be a place where I felt like I belonged. And then I came to stay with you guys, and then Thea was born. And I knew she was Oliver’s sister. But being there, seeing this little life just grow and become a person. I knew from the very beginning that I was always meant to be in her life. You may not want Malcolm in Thea’s life. And I get that. Hell I would trade him in too if I had the chance. But I love Thea, and as sure as I’m standing here, I can promise you I will never let her turn into him. She will always have me to keep her from becoming like that man.”

“Your father has influences and a darkness that even you cannot predict. You have to understand why I need to keep this from her.”

“How’s that going to go? He already knows,” Tommy said trying to keep his voice even. “If he knows, how long until he tells Thea?”

“Malcolm wouldn’t dare.”

“Because he’s known for being so kind and moral? You’re not that naive. You know that my father is just biding his time and waiting for the right moment to tell her. And when he does, he will make it seem like you’re the villain here. He will turn her against everyone who loves her.” He reached behind him and pulled the door open. “Don’t let Malcolm control this situation, Moria. Tell Thea the truth. Tell her why you kept it from her for so long.”

“She will hate me if I do.”

“No she won’t,” Tommy shook his head. “She’ll be angry, and she might lash out a little. But if you’re the one who tells her, she’ll see that you were trying to protect her. But if you let this come out another way, you could lose her.”
“But I only have until Oliver gets back, isn’t that the deal you two made?”

“We just want her to know the truth Moira. You can be the one who gives her that. Or not. But it’s going to come from someone who actually gives a damn about what happens to her. Because I won’t let my father manipulate this to his advantage.”

She stalked past him without another word. And Tommy wondered not for the first time, how different things would have been had their families lives not crossed so irrevocably over the years. But he knew the answer. He wouldn’t be nearly the same man he was today without them. The good, the bad, and everything in between shaped how he was. And he’d never wish to change all that.

Tommy pulled his phone out, dialing up his boss. Things had been all over the place the last couple days, but Waller had given him his assignment. And he needed her to know he was on top of things.

“Agent Merlyn, to what do I owe this late call?”

She sounded annoyed, but Tommy figured it had more to do with the General still being in town than his call.

“I just got back from some recon in Hub City.”

“I don’t believe I authorized you to get back in the field.”

“Relax, nothing happened,” he winced when his hand rubbed over the bump against his skull. She didn’t actually need to know about him getting his ass handed to him… twice. “But I have a lead on some League activity.”

“You do?”

“Maybe it’s nothing, but my gut says otherwise. And if the League of Assassins has taken interest in the area then we both know that means something bad is on the horizon.”

“Worse than billionaires having earthquake machines built?”

His jaw clenched. “I’m trying to keep you in the loop. Isn’t that what you want? For me not to go rogue on a mission again?”

The silence dragged on, and Tommy wondered just what could be passing through Waller’s mind. “When do you think you’ll have more than a lead?”

“Could be a few days, could be a couple weeks.”

“Keep this between your team. I would hate to have to remind what would happen if ARGUS’s current guest got wind of the details you’re working on right now.”

“Noted, Director Waller,” he had to bite his tongue to keep something sarcastic from following his words.

“See you tomorrow,” she said and then just before she hung up. “Good work, Agent Merlyn.”

He didn’t need praise from Waller, not to do his job or to want to do it. But something about the way the words had come out told Tommy all he needed to know. There was a hell of a lot more riding on this mission than tracking League members. And Waller was counting on him to deliver.

“No pressure,” he muttered to himself as he dropped his phone to the couch.
No pressure at all.

Felicity couldn’t sleep. Despite the exhaustion settling into her limbs, and the heaviness of her eyelids, and even the warmth of Oliver curled up on the bed beside her, his chest rising and falling with the steady rhythm of slumber. Despite all of that, she couldn’t shut her mind down long enough to find respite in the night.

They’d killed three people earlier that day. She knew it should weigh heavier on her than it did. She wondered what it meant for her soul that she wasn’t bothered by the knowledge that she’d had a hand in the deaths of three men not twenty four hours ago. She wondered, briefly, if it was why her brain was refusing to let her find sleep. Would she dream of them? Would their eyes burn into the insides of her eyelids, carving out an eternal piece of her soul?

With a frustrated sigh, she pushed up out of the bed, moving quietly through the darkened space. Sofia and Ivan were on the other bed, with Ana curled up on the chair, her feet dangling over one arm of it. Her laptop would be too bright in the space with so many sleeping bodies. But her tablet, that might be okay.

Felicity had never been much of one for goodbyes. They seemed so final, so 1600-page-epic-conclusion-ending, that she often found herself avoiding them altogether. Earlier that evening, they’d parted ways with Maseo. He was currently headed back to Destination Unknown- back to Tatsu and Akio and the life they’d created after the chaos that was and is and seemingly always would be Russia. Sofia and Ivan and Ana would have that too, once their plane left in the morning. And so would Felicity and Oliver. He’d told her as much himself. They’d put Russia in their rear view and never look back. She couldn’t wait to be gone for good, but still, there seemed to be something bitter twinging the sweetness of the thought of never looking back. Tomorrow Anatoly would lose two of the most important people in the world to him. And once his brother passed, he’d be all alone, the full weight of the Bratva on his shoulders. The thought of what something like that might do to a man like Anatoly caused ice to trickle down her spine.

She grabbed the tablet from her bag, moving to the small fridge to grab a water and the container of leftovers from earlier, where half of the piece of cake from dinner was calling her name. She popped the lid open and sat at the small table, tucking her feet up onto the chair and hugging her knees as she pushed a forkful of cake into her mouth.

Idly, she scrolled through her emails, mostly work related and spam. There was a reminder from Thea about her birthday party the following night, but otherwise, nothing really stuck out to her. At least until she came across one from Malcolm Merlyn- one with a subject line in all caps, one marked Highly Important.

**MARKOV DEVICE VIRUS**

Felicity felt her blood run cold. With everything that had been going on- Tommy getting shot, the mission in Russia, hunting the Dark Archer, she’d barely spared a thought for the virus she’d attached to the device. She’d had every intention of going back in and deleting the code she built as a college student, but she just had never gotten around to it.

Before she could let herself imagine up too many scenarios, she clicked on the email, opening the contents. She briefly skimmed through the body of the text, which was short, and let out a sigh. The IT team had isolated the virus and was scanning it for possible signatures within the text, but so far had come up with nothing. Malcolm expected her to jump right in on Monday morning when she
returned to work to find the creator of the code.

“Should take me no time at all,” she muttered under her breath. She forked another bite of cake, feeling anger rise inside her again at the thought of her boss. Under normal circumstances, she would say that having cake in front of her would erase any emotion that wasn’t pure joy, but when Malcolm was involved, it was never normal circumstances.

There was plenty about her boss that still bothered her, but lurking under the surface of it all, itching its way from the back of her mind was the question that had loomed for months. How were Malcolm Merlyn and the Dark Archer connected?

Another bite of cake down and Felicity placed the fork on the edge of the container, counting off on her fingers the things that they definitely knew about the connection between them, short though it was.

1. Malcolm hired the Dark Archer to protect the Markov device.
2. No one was off limits, not even Tommy, Malcolm’s own son, if that envelope of photos left for them was any indication.
3. 

There was no three because the list ended there, unfortunately. So how had the two gotten into contact? Was the Dark Archer only working at the behest of Malcolm? That thought stuck with her. All of the other havoc the archer had wrought in Starling, was it possible there had been some method to his madness? Some driving force behind it?

Felicity minimized the email on her screen, remotely connecting to her computer back at the Foundry, and called up the earliest video footage of the Dark Archer that she’d archived. She found the night in question and pulled up Malcolm’s movements. Perhaps if she could cross reference them, she could figure out the identity of the archer. Her boss was a little more difficult to track down. Malcolm often had late nights at the office, no phone calls, no credit card activity, pretty quiet. But Felicity could feel the thread of something, just out of her grasp. She needed to see where this led.

With fingers dancing across the keyboard attached to her tablet, she did the same thing with the next night of Dark Archer activity, and the next, and the next. It was a slow process, but once Felicity was in the zone, she barely noticed the time passing. She compiled the information on autopilot, waiting for a clearer picture to emerge before sifting through it.

Someone in the room stirred, but with her eyes adjusted to the bright light of the tablet screen, she couldn’t quite make out who it was. A moment later, Oliver appeared at her side in the darkness, his hand warming her shoulder, a chaste kiss finding its way to her head.

“Couldn’t sleep?” he whispered, his voice still think with drowsiness.

Felicity shook her head in response, almost not trusting her voice.

“Lovely breakfast you’ve got here.” His voice was low, lips barely brushing against her ear. The heat of it made her shudder.

In response, Felicity dipped her finger into the frosting on the cake, before moving it to his lips. Oliver shook his head, so she carefully touched it to his nose instead. She turned to face him fully, a wide grin splitting her features. In the blink of an eye, her finger disappeared into his mouth and he licked the frosting from it, his eyes darkening with the gesture. A gasp escaped her before she could stop it, and then it was Oliver’s turn to grin, pleased with himself for the effort.
Felicity cleared her throat, averting her eyes. There were three other people in the room, and it was no time for any shenanigans, as much as she might like to pull him back to bed.

“What are you working on?” Oliver asked, pulling her focus back to the tablet on the table in front of her.

She pursed her lips, unsure of how to respond. *Honesty is the best policy*, the childhood idiom sticking itself into her brain. “Trying to connect Malcolm and the Dark Archer,” she whispered back. “After the device debacle, I didn’t know if any of the other things he’d done in Starling have been on Merlyn’s orders.”

“Ohmm,” he hummed, hands going to her shoulders as he idly massaged the tense muscles there.

Felicity relaxed into his touch as her hands went back to the keyboard and she tried to put like information with like to help formulate a picture of Merlyn and the archer’s movements. At first it was jagged, the broad brush strokes of a painter getting the feel for a canvas. But slowly, the information began to make sense, or as much sense as it could make, considering. But despite Oliver’s hands kneading into her tense muscles, she could no longer relax. Every inch of her tensed as it finally clicked into place and Felicity felt her stomach bottom out.

It wasn’t until she ran a final program, taking bits and pieces of the Dark Archer’s partially concealed face from across all of the images in her system that she let herself believe it even might be true. But it was, the pieces morphing, moving like a grotesque puzzle until a face began to take shape. A face often concealed by a mask, but with enough markers that her facial recognition could identify it.

“When’s our flight?” Felicity asked, her voice strained.

Oliver froze over her shoulder, noting the distress in her tone. “Not until this afternoon, why?”

Felicity swallowed hard. “I think we need to change it.” She spun around in her chair to face him, showing him the generated image on the screen. “Oliver, Malcolm didn’t hire the Dark Archer.” She paused, not sure she could even bring herself to utter the words aloud. But she had to, she had to make it real, had to practice what she’d have to explain to her best friend as soon as she could stomach it. “Malcolm *is* the Dark Archer.”

Chapter End Notes

P.S. I didn't say we were going to let up THIS chapter. (sorry, I couldn't resist....) Much love to you all.
Hello dears,
Are you read for another fun filled chapter? Even though 'fun' isn't exactly the word to describe our heroes lives right now. But hey who knows what's in store for them. I mean I know, but I can't tell you.

Happy reading.

Love ya,
Kayla

He hadn’t heard her correctly. Exhaustion hung in his limbs and in his mind, and everything that happened to them over the last couple days had clearly affected them both more than he thought possible.

“We should get some sleep,” he reached for her tablet, but Felicity was more than a little protective over her equipment. He wanted to turn it off, to make the images go dark. “It’s been a long day.”

“Oliver, did you not hear what I just said?”

“It’s something we’ll talk about later.” He moved away from her, but she was quick when she wanted to be, and before he could reach their side of the room she was there, standing before him shoving the device towards him.

“We need to talk about this now.”

“Felicity, it’s impossible,” he whispered his gaze shifting over to the other bed. Ivan and Sofia were still out, and he didn’t want to wake them. “Okay, something in the program went wrong. And we’ll work it out tomorrow.”

“It’s already tomorrow,” she said pointing to the clock.

Technically she was right. It was well past three in the morning. There really wasn’t much night left. But he still didn’t want to talk about this.

“Felicity, no.”

“He’s the Dark Archer. It all fits. The device, killing rival business men the Hood already took down a few pegs. How else would he have gotten access to Tommy’s badge, when everyone else who came and went from that room was cleared except Malcolm? He’s been behind all of this.”

“You’re talking about Malcolm Merlyn.”
“I’m well aware of that. I work for the man, remember?”

“So you think the man you’ve been working with for nearly three years, is some bow wielding assassin?”

“Don’t dismiss this like I’m being paranoid.” She shook her head but kept his gaze. “Oliver the facial recognition was a match. This is real. We need to figure out how to tell Tommy.”

He couldn’t listen to this anymore. The room felt like it was climbing in temperature, and all the air had pulled away from them. No. Malcolm couldn’t be the Dark Archer. He just couldn’t.

So Oliver did the only thing he could think to do. The only thing he was good at doing.

“I’m gonna take a walk,” he said, grabbing his boots and a jacket that hung across the back of a chair.

“Oliver,” she looked at him in sorrow and disbelief.

“I promise I won’t be gone long. I just need to be alone right now.”

He didn’t give Felicity a chance to stop him as he headed out of the room. He was down both flights of stairs before he stopped to get his shoes on and laced, before he flung the jacket over his shoulders and continued out the back entrance.

The night air blasted ice cold around him, gnawing its way along his skin. He should go back inside. He should talk to Felicity about Merlyn. But just for a little while he didn’t want to think about any of that.

He found himself down a familiar stretch of road, one he should have feared to be anywhere near, especially given the day’s events. But the club before him was deserted. There was no line curved around the building, no hulking Bratva member posing as a bouncer standing guard at the door. If the door hadn’t been left ajar, he would have kept walking. He knew he should. But maybe a part of him was looking for a fight. The part that had already accepted the truth.

He should have known . He should have put the pieces together from that night in the warehouse. But he still didn’t want to believe it.

He wandered through the door, the old club barely lit in the deep night. Just a string of lights behind the bar. They gave a glow to the man sitting there, half a bottle of vodka next to him as the glint of glass shone across the space.

“Is this a private funeral?” Oliver called out, and Anatoly’s head snapped up, his eyes finding him quickly. “Or can anyone join?”

“You do not want to be near me right now Oliver,” he replied. He poured vodka into an empty glass and set it on the bar next to him.

“You should leave town,” Anatoly said, shifting his gaze towards Oliver. “The city is about to explode in destruction. And the shrapnel will land where it likes.”

“Just because Ana and Sofia are gone--”
“Mikhail passed this afternoon,” he cut him off, downing his drink. “My brother sought revenge for the bombing that claimed his girls, and in a rage his heart finally gave out. I am truly alone.”

He let his eyes slip close, the drinking sending a calming burn down his throat. “I’m sorry Anatoly.”

“I do not need pity from someone who hated my brother.”

“It’s not pity,” he poured another drink, as he spoke. “You know the kind of man Mikhail was. He was cruel and hard. But he was your brother, and I’m sorry everything had to fall like it did.”

Anatoly nodded as he stared at the other glass. Oliver understood the gesture. The drink was for Mikhail. A drink for a fallen soldier.

“Do not tell the girls,” he finally said.

“They deserve to know their father has passed.”

“If Sofia were to learn this right now, she would not leave before the funeral,” Anatoly poured himself another drink. “I know my niece. And I refuse for my blood to fill these streets. Enough of it will fall in the coming weeks. Let them leave thinking he’s still clinging to this earth.”

“If they ask I won’t lie to them.”

“You’re nobility must be annoying to your friends and family.”

Oliver scoffed, setting his glass down again. “Not entirely certain noble is a trait I’d list on my resume.”

“That is because you believe you are too damaged to be redeemed.”

“That’s not true.”

“Oliver,” Anatoly turned to face him. “Whatever progress you’ve made since you’ve been home, is only as good as your commitment to it. Take it from someone who has reached his lowest of lows. To keep forward you must be willing to work on it. It’s a process and it never ends until the day everything ends.”

“You’re getting really philosophical on me Anatoly.”

“I’m not willing to work any longer,” he spoke more to the glass in his hand than to the man beside him. “There’s no point in it.”

His former friend pulled something from his jacket pocket. It only took a second in the dim light for Oliver to see the gun take shape.

“Anatoly, what are you going to do?”

“Not me,” he met Oliver’s eyes and the pain filled every charge between them. Anatoly slid the gun toward him.

“No. I won’t.”

“I told you I would come to you with a favor, and you would do it without question.”

“Not this,” he shoved the glass in front of him back, and shook his head. “I won’t take your life for you Anatoly. I may struggle with the darkness in me for the rest of my life, but I know if I pull that
trigger, I’m gonna live with something a hell of a lot worse. You don’t get to just quit because everything’s turned to crap.”

“My family is dead. I am alone. The Bratva is in shreds. All out war is about to reign the streets of the city, my city. I will have nothing left in this world, and you will not grant a grieving man one request.”

“Because this isn’t grief.” He had never seen Anatoly so defeated in all the time they’d known each other. “It’s giving up. Yes Mikhail is dead, and you lost Ana and Sofia. But you still have the Bratva. You can still fight to keep this city.”

“You do not understand.”

“Are you serious right now? You think I don’t understand?” he took the vodka, moving it down the bar and for good measure he moved the gun as well. “I wanted nothing more than to end my life for the better part of five years. But I’m still here. Do you know why?”

Anatoly said nothing, but he did look at him.

“Because if I gave into those feelings, even for a second, there would be no coming back from it.”

“Rebuilding the Bratva from here will be nearly impossible.”

“Then walk away. Hell, give it all away. Just don’t give up in the process. It’s not you.”

“Perhaps I was wrong about you,” Anatoly replied, letting out a quiet huff. “Maybe you do believe in redemption.”

“Maybe we’ve both had too much to drink,” he said. He picked up the gun, placing it in the waistband of his jeans. Anatoly raised a brow at him. “I’m not leaving you here with a loaded weapon and a shelf of vodka. But I want to make sure you’ll be alright before I go.”

“I’m far from alright Oliver. But I promise I will not do anything foolish.”

“Okay,” he got up from his stool, and took a few crumpled bills from his pocket. “For the scotch.”

“Good. All my men know I do not drink that stuff, they would be suspicious if it went missing.”

“Goodbye Anatoly,” Oliver said giving his former friend one more look. “I’ll be seeing you.”

“Perhaps,” Anatoly replied, dragging his bottle back in front of him, then quieter almost to himself. “Or perhaps you have suffered the Bratva enough.”

Oliver didn’t ask him what he meant, nor did he want to linger any longer. The fight he had come looking for burned itself out when he found Anatoly. The once firm head of the Bratva had given him perspective. Maybe he didn’t need clarity when it came to Malcolm Merlyn. But he did need strength. From himself and the people around him. He had went against the Dark Archer more than once, and each time the man had bested him in a fight.

If Merlyn was the Dark Archer, it meant Oliver couldn’t beat him. And he didn’t mean physically. He knew in his heart there was no way he’d be able to look Tommy in the eye if he even tried to take Merlyn out. But Malcolm had tried to build a device that could take out a city. He strapped a bomb to people, killed his own partner, and then threatened Tommy’s life if Oliver didn’t back off him. If he could do all that, and still sleep at night, then they had to find out why. And when they did, they needed to be ready to stop him. No matter what.
Oliver took back to the streets, the early light filtering in through the clouds. He was heading back to
the one person who could really help him sort through all this. He just hoped Felicity would forgive
him for walking out on her earlier.

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Tommy had meant it when he’d told Moira that he’d trade his father in if he could. So he surprised
even himself when he got into the car and drove clear across Starling to where the Merlyn residence
stood, haughty and arrogant, looking down over the city, much like the man that owned it. Over and
over in his head, Tommy heard Moira’s words cut into him, worse than any blade.

*You want to ruin her by giving her Malcolm Merlyn as a father.*

Ruin her. Did Moira really think that? Did Ollie? Tommy’s mind flashed to Felicity telling them the
DNA results just a few short days ago. Oliver’s eyes had held the same look of disdain as his
mother’s over the thought of Malcolm and Thea sharing blood.

Tommy didn’t ever fool himself into believing that his father was good. In fact, Tommy found very
little redeeming about the man. But Moira made it sound like Malcolm was a monster who could
produce nothing else.

So then- the question loomed hauntingly in his brain- what did that make Tommy?

His grip tightened on the steering wheel as he turned up the long drive. Tommy couldn’t remember
the last time he’d been inside. His father rarely gave him reason to want to come to the house, and
Tommy’s work schedule with ARGUS and the club (and before that at MG) kept him busy enough
to stay away. Besides, he didn’t really regard the place as home- at least, not in the nostalgic way
that television commercials and sappy romances portray it. Tommy had few fond memories of the
large estate and grounds. He’d never had a treehouse in the backyard, the fridge was never covered
in his colorful, childhood artwork. No, memories like that had always been of the Queen Manor- of
Robert and Moira and Ollie and Thea. They’d been a surrogate family to a sad, lost little boy when
he’d needed it most.

And with one explosive conversation, Moira Queen had effectively tainted every single one of those
precious memories.

Tommy fought the urge to dial Laurel’s number. *Home*. She had been the closest thing to home
that he’d felt in a long time, and seeing her earlier that night just caused the ache for her to swell and
grow until it nearly overwhelmed his senses.

So maybe that was how he’d ended up back there. Back to the house of his childhood, where he
spent his days with nannies and maids, where he’d grown up nearly orphaned, especially once his
father fell off the deep end. Tommy didn’t remember much from those dark months directly
following his mother’s death. They were shrouded in so much pain and sorrow that he had spent the
better part of two decades pushing the memories down as deep as he could, not letting himself linger
on the sharp edges that still cut like a knife at the thought.

Keys jingled in his hand as he felt for the correct one in the dim light of the car, before he got out.
The house was dark and his father’s car was nowhere to be seen, but it didn’t matter. Tommy hadn’t
come to see his father anyway, not really.

The lock stuck briefly, before the tumblers clicked into place and granted him access to the massive
interior. Tommy moved inside, pocketing his keys and shutting the door behind him. The air was
stale and he could see the dust whirling through the air, glittering as it caught the dim moonlight
streaming through the high windows of the foyer.

When was a maid here last? When was his father?

Something moved in the corner of his eye- the briefest shudder of a shadow along the hallway on the second floor. Tommy’s breath caught in his throat and his hand immediately went to his gun holster. Which he’d removed earlier and left at home.

Tommy swore under his breath, trying to keep his cool. What were the chances that it was just his mind playing tricks on him? Probably pretty fair, considering the last twenty four hours. It wasn’t every day a ghost became real flesh and blood, but Sara had managed that impossible feat. Tommy’s hand twitched at his side, still itching for the gun that he wouldn’t find there. Even if he hated the damn things, he had to admit that having one on him made him feel at least marginally more like he could protect himself.

He took another step further into the entranceway, risking a glance up to the open railing that looked out onto the space where he stood. But all of the shadows stayed firmly in place. Tommy let out a breath, noting the ache in his lungs for fresh air. How long had he been holding his breath? He hadn’t even noticed.

Everything in the space was as he remembered it from the orchids on the tables to the thick, crimson curtains pulled back across the countless windows, to the faint smell of something sharp and assaulting. Cleanser mixed with burnt metal and gunpowder? The latter gave him pause, because although it was a smell that was laced through his childhood almost as much as Oliver was, it wasn’t until tonight that he’d actually been able to identify it.

But his father didn’t shoot. Tommy had never even seen a gun in the house.

Wood creaked overhead and Tommy’s head snapped up. Someone was there, watching him, waiting. But for what?

“I promise you this is a bad idea,” Tommy said to the darkness. “Whatever you think you’re going to steal, it’s not worth the wrath that is my father.”

The sound moved, four feet to the left, echoing through the cavernous space, and Tommy bolted for the stairs, bounding up them like he’d done countless times in his youth. They were quiet, he had to give them that. He heard no footsteps at all. If it weren’t for the old floorboards, Tommy might have believed he was really alone in the house. He grabbed a candlestick off a table as he reached the landing, eyes scanning the darkness for the one shadow that didn’t belong.

It wasn’t hard to spot, a hulking mass in a black hood, illuminated by the pale blue streaking through the windows. It gleamed off of the longsword the man had drawn.

“You!” Tommy sneered, and his shoulder ached from the memory of that night. The Dark Archer hadn’t been the one to pull the trigger, but Jackson was certainly working at the man’s behest.

“You shouldn’t be here,” the archer said, tension filling his electronically modulated voice.

“Neither should you,” Tommy answered, raising the candlestick, as if he had any chance of using it against the man. “I don’t care if my father hired you to protect his device. That gives you no right to be--”

The sword flew through the air, end over end until it dug into the carpet at Tommy’s feet, the broad hilt just inches from his hand. Tommy’s eyes darted between the blade and the man down the hall.
“My father always taught me not to start a fight you can’t win,” Tommy said, grabbing the hilt of the sword, gauging the weight of it in his hand. “But he’s not here.”

The archer made a noise under his hood that might pass for a snort or scoff, lifting a few small knives from inside his coat. “You should have heeded my warning about getting in my way,” he sneered. “Now you’ll get to see what your emerald archer tried so hard to protect you from.”

Faster than Tommy could blink, the knives came wooshing passed him, embedding themselves in the wall behind him with a sick thunk. Tommy swiped at his cheek with the heel of his left hand, noting the tiny trickle of blood now staining his hand. His eyes ticked back to the archer, who looked almost bored waiting for Tommy to make a move. Despite the threat, Tommy wasn’t afraid. He knew that the should be, the Dark Archer had literally painted a target on Tommy’s back, complete with riflescope photos to prove it. But Tommy also knew that the man’s aim was better than that. If the Dark Archer had wanted to hit Tommy, he would have.

“Next time won’t be just a warning,” the modulated voice came, as if sensing Tommy’s thoughts.

“You know for someone who is supposed to be so badass and fearless, it’s interesting that you hide yourself so thoroughly,” Tommy mused, taking a step forward. “What exactly do you have to lose by people knowing who you really are?”

“You’re not likely to find out.”

Another knife came hurtling toward him, but Tommy reacted instantly, lifting the sword to meet metal with metal. He pressed forward, charging the Dark Archer but the man was like smoke, moving like he himself was a shadow. He drifted in and out of Tommy’s view, and it took a second too long to realize why.

“Poison?” Tommy asked, reaching up to touch his face again.

“No. It’s just to help you sleep, son,” the archer said, and Tommy was surprised, how much the man sounded like his father. He knew it didn’t make sense, but it was almost as if his father materialized before his eyes. Tommy blinked, trying to clear his rapidly blurring vision.

“I won’t let you—” Tommy said, but he lost his train of thought, and then he felt nothing but warmth and dark and then there was nothing at all.

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She didn’t want to dwell on Oliver walking out. If she did, she wouldn’t like the path her mind took her on. So she had tried to lie back down, but the second her head hit the pillow a million fears and insecurities came rushing back.

Felicity wondered if there would always be a part of him would reverted back to the man she met in Moscow years prior. If going it alone was so close to natural for him, that anything else would be near impossible to achieve. She wanted to be wrong, but she couldn’t help but feel like there were grains of truth littered in her thoughts.

“It’s not always easy,” Sofia’s voice cut through the early morning hum from below.

Felicity should have been surprised at the sound of someone shifting behind her, but she had known it was only a matter of time until one of the other’s woke. And she would have to convince them Oliver would be back. He would be back. She trusted him enough to do that.

“Hmm?” she turned from the wall focusing on the young woman, who had perched herself on the
Sofia kept her eyes on the window, but she spoke to Felicity. “Loving one who carries both darkness and light within their soul.”

“Sofia I--”

“It is a small room Felicity,” she cut in a sad smile crossing her face. “And I have yet to sleep soundly since long before my father fell ill.”

“I’m sorry, we didn’t mean to wake you.”

“You have far too much weighing on you to worry about that.”

“Oliver and I just, we’re not agreeing on the right way to handle something.”

“Sometimes in relationships one must push the other towards what is right.”

“If you’re trying to tell me Oliver and Ivan are alike, I understand that.”

“Not at all,” Sofia drew her legs up, and tucked her knees bellow her chin. “I believe you have more in common with Ivan than Oliver does.”

“Not sure how to take that.”

“Fierce loyalty, undeniable faith, loving damaged hearts until it makes your own bleed? Sound familiar?”

Felicity didn’t know how to respond, but Sofia didn’t speak to receive comfort, she wanted to make a point, and Felicity knew she should try and listen.

“My family poured a darkness into me long before I could ever see what was wrong with it,” she turned her head, watching Ivan closely as he slept. “And when I met Ivan, I never imagined just how much more there could be to the world. I think I loved him long before I let myself believe I could. And when I finally accepted it, there was no turning back. But I knew he deserved more than I could give him. He fortunately did not agree.”

“He pushed?”

She brushed a strand of hair from his face and smiled. “He told me I was too strong to be so scared of what I felt. And that if I loved him half as much as he loved me, then nothing could ever tear through that. I kissed him then.”

“Sofia, Oliver and I are fine, this fight it wasn’t about us.”

She shook her head, leveling Felicity with the full weight of her gaze. “You need to push him to tell you things, no matter if it’s about you both or your work. It’s the only way to stay connected. People like me and Oliver, we need others in our lives to remind us why we keep moving forward. We need that person to push, even if it’s hard, even when we try to shut down.”

“I don’t…” But the door to the room opened slowly, and Felicity’s words died in her throat.

Oliver stood in the doorway as he held a carrier of four styrofoam cups, a fifth cup in his hand. As he closed the door, he pushed it back with force. The sound reverberated in the room, and Ivan shifted awake, a groan escaping his lips.
“I brought coffee,” he announced, skating his gaze past the room, and landing on Felicity. She could feel the words behind it too. But she looked away before she fell for it. She was going to make him at least speak to her before she forgave him.

“Coffee?” Sofia did not look overly thrilled at the prospect. Her face twisted into a grimace.

“I brought you herbal tea,” he replied as he gave her the cup from his hand. “My mother couldn’t even look at coffee when she was pregnant with my sister, so I figured tea was safer.”

“Thank you,” she took the drink and held it close to her. She looked between the pair of them before she grabbed for another cup and stood. “I’m going to entice Ana awake.”

Felicity suppressed the urge to roll her eyes, because Sofia was about as subtle as a brick wall in trying to give them a minute alone. Also it’s not like they could really be alone anyway. The room was no bigger than her kitchen.

Oliver set a cup down on the bedside table next to Ivan’s head. “We’re rolling out in half an hour. Better get up and drink that first.”

Ivan muttered something in Russian, which even Felicity knew had to be at least a little vulgar. But Oliver just smiled.

He turned to face her, offering the tray forward. “I got yours with cream and sugar, like you like.”

“Thanks,” she didn’t meet his eyes as she took the drink, pulling it close to her lips.

She took a long drink but sputtered. She gagged, and shook her head. “This is terrible.”

“It’s from the hotel break room downstairs, I figured I wouldn’t risk a bullet wound by going to an actual coffee shop.”

She smiled at that, despite her confused feelings. It was the eyes. Oliver had a way of looking at her, and she fell right into deep blue feelings.

“Can we talk?” he almost pleaded the way he looked at her before adding. “On the balcony.”

She almost told him they would talk later. After getting their friends out of town, maybe when they headed back to Starling. But she really didn’t want to jump on a plane with this much dissonance between them.

She followed him out, and watched as Oliver shut the small door behind them. But still he remained silent, the air biting at her through her thin sweater. She shivered, and within seconds he shrugged out of his jacket, and placed it on her shoulders.

“Thank you,” she muttered turning to face the city.

“I’m sorry about earlier,” he finally said, leaning into the railing next to her. “I wasn’t processing and I took that out on you. So I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay.”

“It’s not though,” he ran his hands down his face, and while he bent forward she caught a glimpse of the gun at his back. She knew he hadn’t left with it. So where had it come from? “There’s only one person in this world who I know cares about Tommy as much as I do, and I wasn’t thinking when I left here. I was trying to turn off my thoughts. Because you’re right. Everything fits. Everything we
know about the Dark Archer, everything we know about Malcolm. It all fits together, and I didn’t want to believe that anyone could be that cruel to someone they considered family. But I shouldn’t have taken it out on you.”

“What happened while you were gone?” she asked gesturing to the gun.

Oliver sighed, and took the gun from his jeans. “I was reminded why I don’t work alone. And why no matter what, I need to keep the people who are in my life close. Because I don’t want to be a man who feels like he’s lost everything.”

“Oliver--”

“I can’t lose you Felicity. I know I do stupid things, and I run when things get hard. But I promise I’ll always come back.”

She saw it now. The comparison that Sofia had made. The might that shone in both of them was brighter than either would ever claim to possess. But the way he spoke reassurances to her, how his voice cradled around her like an embrace she never wanted to leave.

She pushed up on the balls of her feet, kissing him hard and full on his lips. She raked her fingers in his hair, and dragged his head down as her feet settled back to the concrete.

Oliver pulled back slowly, a smile on his face. “So you’re not mad at me?”

She hit him against the chest, hard enough that her hand hurt and Oliver let out a little ‘umph’, but she was smiling too. “Don’t push it. We should still talk about things.”

“And we will, on our flight home,” he said. “It leaves a little while after we get Sofia and them on their plan.”

“You changed our flight?”

“You were right, we need to go home.”

“You know a girl could get used to that,” she mused as she slid her arms around his neck.

“What home?”

“I mean the being right part, but sure that’s nice too.”

He rolled his eyes. “We should get the other’s going.”

“Are you going to miss it?” she didn’t mean to ask, but she knew she wouldn’t be able to keep the question from her mind.

“Russia or the Bratva?”

“Either?”

“I think I’ll miss what it could have been,” he said letting his eyes focus back into the room. Ivan was sitting up, drinking his coffee as Sofia rested against his arm. “But I have a life back home, and I would never want to trade that for anything.”

“Good answer.”

Within the hour they were on the tarmac of a private airstrip. The charter plane behind them was
small, but it would do for the three of them—four if you counted Sofia’s unborn child.

“You’ll let us know when you get to Greece?” Felicity asked, her gaze shifting between the three people in front of her. They barely knew each other, but she couldn’t help but feel fiercely protective over each one of them.

“We will,” Sofia said, pulling her into a hug. “Thank you.”

“Be well,” she replied, then turned to Ivan. “You’ll keep an eye on them.”

“Until my last breath,” he nodded then turned to Oliver. “Thank you as well.”

“If you need anything just call.”

But Ivan shook his head. “You have more than paid your debt to me. You should wash your hands of this life and never look back Oliver. You have given me a future I can take pride in, do not fear for us.”

“I think you’re forgetting whom you’re talking to,” Oliver said as he handed Ivan an envelope. “This is all the cash I could get my hands on before we left. It’s enough to hold you over for a while.”

“You know when we first met, I was convinced I would be the one to end your life,” he glanced over to Sofia, and smiled. “But instead you saved mine and my family’s. If we have a boy we shall name him after you.”

Sofia laughed, as she pulled Oliver into a hug. “I am grateful too, but we will not be naming our son Oliver.”

“Whatever you name him, or her, I’m sure it will be great. Go be happy Sofia.”

“You too, Oliver. Thank you for saving me.”

“Thank you for asking me to,” he replied.

Sofia grabbed hold of Ana, leading her up the steps of the small plane. Ivan followed close behind.

Felicity watched the three of them settle into their seats, and she leaned into Oliver. No matter what happened, no matter what they had to do to get to this moment, she knew she would never regret it.

“We did a good thing here Oliver.”

“Yeah, I know,” he kissed her cheek, his lips warm in contrast to the cold air. “Come on, let’s go home.”

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Chapter 41

Chapter Notes

Hey hey lovelies! Happy Monday! (Honestly, Mondays kinda suck, but I enjoy this part of them every week... I hope you do too!) We know that our heroes are all having a bit of a tough time right now, but strength in numbers right? We hope you enjoy this week's installment! xoxo, Cassie

Despite the mask he’d worn in saying goodbye to Sofia, Ana and Ivan, Oliver felt like he was breaking apart inside. It wasn’t just the conversation he’d had with Anatoly- a man he’d never expected to see that low or broken. No- it was more the matter of Malcolm Merlyn, a looming threat that became more concrete and real as soon as they touched down in Starling.

Oliver had always thought the man despicable, but he’d never realized the true depth of it until Felicity had shown him her tablet in the early morning just too few hours ago. And this man was his sister’s father.

He couldn’t stomach it. And if he couldn’t even bear the thought of it… what would the truth do to Thea when he and Tommy told her? Hell, what would it do to Tommy to find out the truth? That his own father had threatened to take his life. Would Malcolm have followed through? Oliver couldn’t be sure of anything anymore. Except for one blinding truth that rang through all the doubt. Malcolm Merlyn was the Dark Archer- and Oliver would do whatever it took to stop him once and for all.

“Penny for your thoughts,” Felicity said, nudging his shoulder with hers. “You’re being very broody all of a sudden.”

“You could probably guess,” he murmured, glancing over at her in his passenger seat. They’d made it home, back to Starling and somehow it felt like their problems were growing instead of diminishing.

“Malcolm,” she said, her voice a strained whisper, like speaking it might cause him to appear.

Oliver nodded. He still wasn’t sure what they were going to do about his friend’s father, and knowing that he and the archer plaguing them were one in the same made Oliver less certain about their path. He wasn’t sure if it was a blessing or a curse, just that it was what they were dealing with, and it was complicated. It was always complicated.

His phone buzzed in his pocket and as he pulled up to a stop light, he pulled it out to read the incoming text. It was from Diggle- short and succinct but no less disconcerting. Oliver showed the message to Felicity and turned around at the next traffic light, their destination altering from the Queen manor to Verdant.

A few moments later they were pulling into the parking lot, Diggle leaning against his car near the front door.

“Hey,” Felicity said, offering John a wide smile and a tight hug as they got out of the car.
“Not gunna lie,” Diggle said in response, meeting Oliver’s eyes over Felicity’s head. “I almost worried you two wouldn’t make it back without Lyla, Tommy and I come to save your asses.”

Felicity pushed herself out of his grasp, swatting him on the arm. “That could not have been why you dragged us down here.”

He dropped his head, leading them into the club.

“Well that’s ominous,” Felicity whispered, grabbing Oliver’s hand as they followed Diggle inside.

Oliver understood the feeling, allowing it to root into the pit of his stomach, despite his brain screaming at him not to let it. He felt like he’d been living in that feeling more often than not the last five years, and he almost felt a calm in it. Almost.

Diggle led them into the security office before spinning to face them. “I didn’t want to make a big thing of it—"

“Bang up job so far,” Oliver interrupted.

“Yeah, I just—” he dropped his gaze to the floor. “Some things are just better in person.”

“Where you going with this Digg?” Oliver asked, feeling his anxiety grow, as well as his frustration.

“I’ve got reason to believe Tommy is into something, and in deep.”

“What sort of reason?” Felicity piped in.

“Because Lyla and I spent a couple days with him in Hub City where he told me he was into something deep,” Diggle answered. “It’s on assignment for ARGUS, but...”

Oliver’s hands balled to fists at his sides. Waller. He couldn’t stand the fact that Tommy was actually working for that viper, but that was honestly the least of his problems. Whatever happened in Hub City, Tommy would deal with it or he’d bring in Lyla or his IT expert or whatever it was that Tommy had done for the last three years before Oliver knew the truth.

“But...” Felicity prodded.

“But we’ve both reached out to him and haven’t heard anything in about twelve hours,” Diggle replied.

“I can trace his phone,” Felicity piped in, already spinning on her heel and heading for the door.

“Lexi already did,” Diggle said. “I just heard back from Lyla before you two got here. He went to his father’s house late last night and hasn’t left since. Lyla offered to go, but I thought maybe since you two are friends with him...”

“He’s at Malcolm’s?” Oliver asked.

Diggle dipped his head in a nod.

“We’ll take care of it,” Oliver said. He wasn’t ready to face Malcolm, but if that man did anything to Tommy, Oliver would kill him with his own two hands without batting an eye.

“It’s good to have you back.”

“See you tonight Digg.” Oliver grabbed Felicity’s hand, moving to the door. He paused at the edge
of the room and called over his shoulder. “We’ve got a lot of work to do.” And then he pushed back out through the security room, adding one more thing to his to-do list.

“Do you think Tommy knows?” Felicity asked, quickening her pace to keep up with Oliver’s long strides back out to the car.

Oliver didn’t know. His head was swimming with so much information and he was doing anything he could just to keep his head above water with it all. And why was it all coming back to Malcolm anyway? That man was the root of every problem his city was facing right now, of that, Oliver was certain. So how did they take care of Malcolm? Oliver wasn’t sure, despite all his brain’s platitudes, that he could actually kill his best friend’s father. His sister’s father. Bile rose in his throat at the thought, but he pushed it down. He needed to focus, and when Tommy and Thea were concerned, focus seemed to be the last thing Oliver had. But he had to find some semblance of it, the two of them deserved that much from him.

“I think if Tommy knows, we need to prepare ourselves for what we could find there,” Oliver said finally, dropping himself into the driver’s seat with a sigh.

_Hitting the ground running,_ he thought to himself. He had always been decent at that, at figuring out the most important things and focusing in on them like a laser beam. Oliver didn’t know where that came from, considering his lack of concentration on anything at school other than girls, but he was grateful for it nonetheless. Perhaps it was a result of the island, of the fire forging the steel inside him, burning away the unnecessary.

“Felicity?” he questioned, glancing over across the car. Felicity was quiet beside him, gnawing on her bottom lip.

“I’m not sure I’m ready to prepare myself for that.” Her voice quivered as she spoke, betraying her more than her words.

Oliver swallowed hard, reaching across the space to take her hand in his. “I’m sure it’s fine,” he lied. “He probably dropped his phone, or locked it in the car, or is passed out in a tub full of champagne with a leggy model.”

“That example came out a little too quick,” Felicity said with a huff of laughter. “Something you’d like to tell me, Mr. Queen?”

He lifted her hand to his lips, kissing it gingerly. “Only that my past indiscretions are in my past for a reason.” He sobered quickly, his eyes dancing across to her. “We’ll go to Merlyn’s and we’ll figure it out. No reason to worry.”

“At least not until there’s reason to worry,” she added, settling back against her seat. They drove in silence for a few moments. And then she spoke again. “Do you think it will always be like this?”

“What part?”

“The harried pace. The never knowing if we’re going to wake up one morning and someone we love is going to be…”

“He’s not,” Oliver said quickly, more because he couldn’t believe it himself rather than he needed to convince her of it. “Besides, that’s life for everyone. I could walk out in front of a bus. Your laptop could explode.”

“My technology wouldn’t dare turn on me,” she said, her voice having regained some of its usual bounce. “But I take your meaning.”
Oliver turned into the driveway. He could see Tommy’s car parked in the semicircle drive even from the distance. As he approached, nothing looked out of place. There were no other cars parked in the driveway, and no signs of a struggle. Oliver stopped beside it, putting the car in park before cutting the engine.

“You can stay in the car if you want,” he said, removing his seatbelt and popping open the car door.

Felicity shook her head. “I’d rather stay with you.”

He dipped his head in a nod, stepping out of the car, keeping his eyes alert for anything that might be amiss. There was no movement around the grounds, but as he checked the windows, he thought he saw a flash of something on the second floor, but as quickly as she was there, she was gone again.

Besides, she was a ghost. There was no way he’d seen her. He was overtired, it was a long flight and he’d just come from a place where so many ghosts haunted him. The justifications came easy, filling his mind as quickly as the doubts crept up.

“You okay?” Felicity asked, coming to stand at his side.

“Mmhmm,” he hummed back in reply, not trusting his voice. Because Oliver knew that there was only one word, one name that would pass his lips if he opened his mouth to speak. Sara.

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He really needed to stop waking up on the floor, his head filled with pain and confusion. This many hits to the skull could only end in permanent damage if he didn’t get better about not hitting the ground.

As consciousness flooded back to him so did his other senses. The light was filtering in through a nearby window, forcing his eyes to remain closed. But even without opening them he was distinctly aware of someone kneeling over him.

“Tommy,” her voice whispered, Sara’s voice. She shook his shoulder until he groaned. “Where did he go?”

“Who?”

“Taer al Asfar, we do not have time for this,” Nyssa scolded, and Tommy barely had the strength to look over at her.

“What happened?”

Sara looked back at him, and sighed. “You were poisoned. It’s a very potent substance the League uses, but it’s not fatal.”

He worked his way to sitting, as he rubbed the back of his head. “The League? Are you telling me the Dark Archer is who you’re tracking?”

“How do you we’re here tracking anyone?” Nyssa looked between both of them. “What have you told him?”

Sara looked like she was about to fight her way out of a cage match as she tried to think of an excuse.

Tommy wasn’t one to wait on others. “She didn’t tell me anything. Deductive reasoning told me you
were here looking for someone.”

“Please, like an ARGUS agent could decipher our intentions on their own.”

“I was smart enough to find you at the airport.”

“Yes but apparently not smart enough to keep yourself from being poisoned.”

“Enough,” Sara said as she stood. “Arguing isn’t helping, Nyssa. If he went after Tommy, we could already be too late. We should compare notes, tell him everything.”

“Absolutely not. We cannot trust him with this. He could go running off with the information, and the wrong people could know we’re here. It is too big of a risk.”

“He could have died, Nyssa.”

“That was the choice he made when he signed on to ARGUS.”

“You two realize I’m right here?”

But before Nyssa or Sara could reply the sound of wheels against the drive caught all their attention.

Sara moved to the window, watching for longer than it should have taken. She seemed frozen in time as something from the past ghosted across her face. But as soon as it was there, she pulled it back again and turned.

“We have to go,” she looked at Nyssa her eyes saying more than her words could. Then she looked back at Tommy almost apologetic as she spoke. “There isn’t time to explain. But that guy is dangerous, so next time you need to be more careful.”

“Sara,” he needed to get her to stay, he needed her to stop running from things, from her life, but within seconds she and Nyssa had rushed towards the back of the house. There was no way he would catch up.

“Tommy?”

He had just managed to get to his feet when he heard Oliver at the base of the stairs. No wonder Sara ran.

“I’m up here,” he called out shaking the last of the lethargy from his limbs. He had to get his bearings back.

When Oliver caught sight of him, relief seemed to flood through the house in a way he was sure it hadn’t since his mother had been living. It wasn’t just the days that had separated them. Oliver looked like he had feared for Tommy’s life.

“I’m good,” he said as Felicity followed Oliver up the stairs, but she kept glancing back, like someone would jump out behind her. Had they seen Nyssa or Sara? Not likely. If Oliver had seen Sara they would be having some form of that conversation, he was sure of it.

“We were worried,” Felicity came rushing at him, her arms wrapping around his neck and pulling him into a tight hug.

Yeah he really hadn’t read Oliver’s concern wrong. Because Felicity was being clingy. And she only got like that when he was in danger, or bleeding, or both.
“I can see that.” He met Oliver eyes over Felicity’s head. His best friend looking at him like weight of million worlds sat on his shoulders. Maybe they did? Maybe whatever happened in Russia had followed them home? “What happened?”

“Digg said you were here, but no one could get ahold of you,” Oliver said as Felicity pulled back. “We got worried something happened.”

“Damnedest thing,” he thought back over the last twelve hours, even if he was unconscious for most of them. He’d leave out Sara and Nyssa for now, it would be too much to explain. But he had to tell them the truth on something. “The Dark Archer was here. He attacked me, used some kind of poison to knock me out. But I’m fine now.”

His words didn’t seem to ease either of his friends, in fact they just brought another wave of panic across their faces. Felicity looked at Oliver, a silent conversation between them battled for a few seconds before she turned to him once more.

“He attacked you?” Oliver looked like was about to burst in fury. Felicity’s hand went to his arm to physically hold him there.

“We have to tell you something about the Dark--”

“Felicity it’s not like I went after him willingly. I know the dude is bad news.”

“It’s not that. Well not just that. When we were gone we learned some things about him and well. Oliver you tell him.”

Oliver looked at her, but any words he had wouldn’t escape his throat. He really was not looking forward to whatever they had to say.

“Tommy, is that your car I see in my driveway?” His father’s voice boomed through the halls, and each one of them stiffened.

He should have known his dad would be back at any time. And it should have probably concerned him that the person who found him this morning wasn’t the man who was supposed to live here. But he couldn’t dwell on that right this second.

“I’m upstairs,” he called back, earning him a glare from Felicity.

“Why would you tell him that?” she whispered.

“Because he knows I’m here,” he shot back just as low. “And Ollie’s car is out there too. What, was I supposed to act like I wasn’t here?”

Felicity didn’t get a chance to reply as Malcolm bounded up the stairs, each step echoing in his mind with the faint reminder of something else. But he couldn’t seem to grasp ahold if why.

“There you are,” Malcolm said instead of greeting him, then he turned his eyes to Felicity and Oliver. “Aren’t you a tad too old to be throwing a party while your father isn’t home?”

Felicity seemed to shrink back into Oliver’s side, which to an untrained eye might look timid, but for some reason Tommy thought of it more like she was holding Oliver back.

“Hello, Mr. Merlyn,” she said with a forced smile.

“Ms. Smoak, how was the wedding?”
“The what?” her eyes looked alarmed before she shook it off. “Right the wedding, it was kind of boring. Nothing to write home about.”

“Well what a shame,” he then turned his attention back to Tommy. “To what do I own the welcome home committee.”

He didn’t actually have a reason for being there. He had a million things burning in him that he wanted to say to his father, but none of them felt right in the light of day. Not after what happened the night before. So he did what he did best when it came to his dad. He lied.

“I was hoping you would reconsider about withdrawing your donation to the free clinic,” he said with a cool smile. This was the element his father had taught him to excel in. And as long as the words weren’t 100% a lie, Malcolm wouldn’t see through him. “We both know that while the company does well in the business sector, the second it becomes public knowledge that you are no longer supporting a clinic that provides healthcare to the underprivileged in the Glades, that’s when people will question whether or not Merlyn Global is really all about the people.”

“Tommy no one’s done a puff piece on MG’s humanitarian side in close to three years, why would they start now?”

“You’re right they haven’t. But all it would take is one call and a few interviews at the hospital to breathe some life into the story.”

He knew the dangers of threatening his father, he knew the man liked to lash out in unpredictable ways. But oddly it wasn’t Tommy who stood tense in the moment, but Oliver. Oliver who looked like he was ready to get in between Tommy and his father if the situation called for it. Even Felicity loosened her grip on his arm, taking a step away. The two of them were acting odd.

Malcolm laughed, rolling his eye. “You are all my worst qualities rolled into one, Tommy. Fine I won’t withdraw my donation, this year. But come next year the clinic will have to find another donor to cover the difference. I’m cutting ties with the Glades no matter the cost.”

“Great,” he said with a grin. “We will get out of your hair.”

He lead his friends downstairs and out the front door towards their cars. Oliver still on a razor’s edge and Felicity looked like she might vomit from nerves.

“Okay seriously what the hell is wrong with you two?”

“Not here,” Oliver said his voice as low as he could make it. “We can’t talk here.”

“Look if this is about the Dark Archer, he’s long gone by now so--”

“Tommy, we cannot talk about this here.” He looked Tommy straight in the eye, his breath coming in a slow even rhythm. “Meet us at the club. Go straight there. And then we’ll talk.”

“You guys are kind of scaring me.”

He hadn’t seen Oliver like this. Not this terrified. Not once over all the dangerous things they had seen and done. And it settled a fear deep in him too.

Felicity came up to them, taking Tommy’s keys from him. “Actually you go with Oliver. I’ll meet you guys at the club.”

“Felicity--”
“He needs to know Oliver. We can’t make him drive there with the possibilities caving his mind in,” she pulled him to her, kissing him quickly. “Tell him. We’ll all talk back at… the club.”

She climbed into his car and drove off first. He wasn’t sure what Oliver was about to tell him, but he was starting to wish he could have driven himself.

“Get in,” Oliver said as he motioned to the car.

Tommy followed his friend as they got in, Ollie turned the car over, and they were out of the driveway.

It was a few minutes of aching silence before he dared speak.

“You guys sure know how to thoroughly terrify someone,” he said the nerves weaving into his speech pattern. “This isn’t where you tell me a mob war is about to reign down in Starling City is it?”

Oliver just looked over at him remorse and guilt filling his eyes. “No, no mob war.”

“Then what the hell is going on?”

Oliver pulled off the road and threw the car in park. “Felicity discovered the identity of the Dark Archer.”

“That’s incredible,” he couldn’t figure out why Oliver wasn’t more excited about this. They had been miles behind the other archer’s movements for months. As far as he knew, they still didn’t even know how the man had connected with his father. “This means you guys can find him right?”

But Oliver didn’t reply. He just looked at Tommy. That same look people had given him after his mother died, the one Moira had tried to hide after his father decided to leave him. The one the police had when they told them about the Gambit going down. The one people wore when they had the worst possible news to tell you.

“You already know where the Dark Archer is don’t you?”

Because it all made sense. He had been protecting the Markov device, he had stolen Tommy’s badge to get into ARGUS. Had attacked Tommy with a sedative poison instead of something more lethal. Not because Malcolm Merlyn had hired him. His father would have never trusted anyone with so much access to what he considered valuable. When you cannot trust people, Tommy, you have to do a job yourself.

“Tommy...”

“I’m an idiot,” he said shaking his head. “All the signs were there. Every single clue pointed to him being the damn archer. But I was too blind to see it.”

“You didn’t have any reason not to trust him.”

“I really didn’t have one to trust him either,” he countered with a groan. “He could have killed me last night Ollie. He had the chance, but he didn’t. And then he called me son and still didn’t see it.”

“We’re going to figure out what he’s up to,” Oliver looked at him. There was a conviction in his voice that should worry Tommy, but it didn’t. “We’ll get to the bottom of this. I just didn’t want to keep another secret from you.”

Another secret. Like the one Tommy was holding in. He hadn’t meant to keep another one. And he
didn’t want to either. Sara had told him not to tell Laurel or Quentin. But Tommy couldn’t keep this from Oliver. Not after everything they had been through.

“In the interest of keeping with the ‘no more secrets clause’ in our friendship, I have to tell you something,” he took a deep breath and then like ripping off a bandage he spoke the words he was still struggling with. “I saw Sara. Oliver, she’s alive.”

---

She hadn’t expected to be as relieved as she found herself to be alone behind the wheel of Tommy’s car. Not that spending the last few days with Oliver had been bad, but Felicity found herself needing some solitude after the harried pace of their trip to Russia. And then coming home to an SOS from Diggle that something may be wrong with Tommy, it was just enough to make her head spin.

But now she was blissfully alone, with nothing but her thoughts for company. The instant that particular realization hit her, Felicity reached for the radio dial. Because after everything she’d witnessed in the last three days, the company of her thoughts was actually the last thing she wanted. Apparently she hadn’t exactly thought the whole solitude thing through very well. She fiddled with the dial for a moment, before settling on something with a quick rhythm and loud thump.

Even being alone with her thoughts, Felicity mused, was better than the alternative. Because probably half a block behind her, Oliver and Tommy sat side by side as Tommy learned the truth about his father. Felicity didn’t envy Oliver that conversation. She’d had a hard enough time meeting Malcolm’s eye back at the Merlyn estate, she couldn’t watch the eyes of his son and her best friend as they darkened with the realization of the truth.

Felicity startled when her phone rang, pulling into the only empty spot of the coffee house near the club before digging for the device in her bag. She wasn’t sure when she’d made the unconscious decision to stop for coffee, but considering her lack of sleep over the last few days, it probably couldn’t hurt.

Laurel’s name appeared on the screen and Felicity answered immediately, happy for the chance to discuss anything that didn’t pertain to Malcolm Merlyn.

“Hey Laurel,” Felicity said, tucking the device between her ear and her shoulder as she gathered the rest of her things in the car.

“Hey,” the lawyer answered, sounding unsure of herself, like she was second guessing her motives for calling. “You’re back in Starling?”

Felicity smiled. “Thea?”

“Yeah. She mentioned you two were going to some wedding in Moscow for an exchange student? I couldn’t make sense of some of it but I didn’t recognize the name she said Ollie told her.”

“This isn’t weird is it?” Felicity asked, trying to skirt the exchange student story that Oliver had invented to explain Sofia to his mother. “I mean I know you and Oliver don’t have the best—”

“It’s not,” Laurel confirmed. “My history with him is just that. And I won’t let it spoil my friendship with you.”

“Good,” Felicity said, feeling herself breathe a small sigh of relief. “So what can I do for you?” She popped open the car door and climbed out, heading for the entrance of the coffee shop.

“It’s actually about…” Laurel’s voice trailed off.
“Tommy.”

“Yeah.”

So that was why Laurel was hesitant. Felicity couldn’t blame her, although she had agreed with Tommy about keeping the ARGUS secret from Laurel in the beginning. Why did it feel like sometimes the only way to keep people safe was to lie to them?

Felicity stepped up to the barista, ordering her drink as Laurel filled her in on their brief encounter the night before. And then she turned around and paused, a smile creeping into her features. Laurel sat near the corner of the shop, case files strewn across a table, laptop perching atop a too-tall pile.

“... and I just don’t know if I’m ready for any of that. All I know is-”

“All you know is that you want to see him so you’ve taken up residence in his favorite coffee shop near the club?” Felicity finished, coming to stand in front of her friend.

Laurel looked up and met Felicity’s eyes, both women smiling as they ended the call and dropped their phones. Laurel let out a sigh. “Am I that transparent?”

“Do you still have a desk at CNRI?”

Laurel nodded.

“And one at your apartment?”

Another nod.

“Then yep- you’re a regular ‘ole ice cube because I can see right through you.” Felicity laughed at her own play-on-words. “Sorry, I didn’t get much sleep on the plane. Or in Russia.” She paused. “But not because of Oliver!” She felt herself blush bright red. “I just- I don’t sleep well in new places. Sorry my filter is especially nonexistent when I’m tired.”

“It’s ok,” Laurel said dismissively, and a little brusquely. They were both trying to find some common ground on which to speak about Oliver. Neither was having the best luck.

“Honestly, I think to the untrained eye, you being here is the right amount of ‘I happened to be in the neighborhood’, that he won’t think too much of it.” Felicity smiled. “So you saw Tommy and now the whole wall of ice around your heart might be melting a bit?”

“I don’t know,” Laurel shrugged. “I feel like I can’t trust my head or my heart where he’s concerned.”

Felicity considered that a moment. “Well then trust your gut- what does that say?” She wished she’d taken her own advice with Malcolm. Her gut had always left her feeling a bit queasy in his presence. Sure, she’d written it off, pushed the feelings away, forced herself not to think about them. She’d done it for the last close to three years, and where had that gotten her? Nowhere good, that was for sure.

“I’m not ready to forgive him,” Laurel said finally, chewing on the end of a pen as she considered Felicity’s words. “But maybe… someday.”

“It’s better than hating him forever,” Felicity replied, knowing how much Tommy would probably kill her for the conversation she was having with Laurel. But she also knew that Laurel was like her, and sometimes they just needed to talk things out to understand where their feelings truly lay. Felicity
cleared her throat. “I should probably let you get back to…” she gestured to the stacks of files. “All this.”

Laurel nodded. “Yeah, despite my change of venue for the day, I really do have a lot of work to do.” She dropped the pen from her lips, eyes fluttering nervously. “You don’t have to say anything to him, about me being here.”

Felicity grinned. “Oh, I’m definitely asking him to grab me a coffee,” she said, with a satisfied gulp of the hot liquid in her to-go cup, which was now almost empty. Although she stopped short when the reality of life came crashing back down on her. Malcolm was the Dark Archer and Tommy was certainly not going to take that information well. “Just… go easy on him if you see him?” Felicity added. “He’s--” she cut herself off, shaking her head. “Just go easy on him,” she repeated.

A question darkened Laurel’s eyes, but she didn’t utter it aloud. Instead, she dipped her head in a quick nod. “Thanks, Felicity. I’m glad I ran into you.”

“I’m glad you called,” Felicity countered. “I’ll see you at Thea’s party later?”

Laurel nodded. “See you then.”

With another long sip of her coffee, Felicity emptied the contents, dropping the cup into the waste on the way out. Perhaps she could boost Tommy’s spirits by having him bump into Laurel after all. She’d have to gauge his temperament when she saw him.

Pulling out her phone to glance at the time, Felicity cursed herself under her breath. She’d spent too much time at the cafe and now Oliver and Tommy were probably wondering if she’d stolen Tommy’s car and run for the hills. She smiled a little at the thought, although she would never actually leave Starling. Not with the state it was in with Malcolm the Dark Archer on the loose, plans for an earthquake generator never far from his sight or thoughts. What did he want to do with the machine anyway? Felicity had never really let herself contemplate that, but she mused on it as she got back into Tommy’s car and headed to the club.

Malcolm had been focused for years on that device. But what did he plan to use it for? More importantly- where did he plan to use it? The thought sent a shudder down her spine. With the amount of kinetic energy that device created, the results would be catastrophic. On a smaller scale and harnessed properly, it could have numerous real life applications- everything from demolition to who knew what. But the machine they’d built was anything but small scale. And there was no doubt in Felicity’s mind that Malcolm Merlyn had no plans to harness it properly.

At any rate, there was one thing Felicity was more than convinced of- they had to find a way to stop Malcolm from building another device and carrying out whatever gruesome plan he had in mind for it.

She pulled into the lot of the club, Oliver and Diggle’s cars both sitting in the parking lot. Rather than waiting inside, all three of the men were standing near the front doors, looking at her expectantly as she slid out of Tommy’s car and made her way toward them. When she was a few feet away, she tossed his keys to him, watching them arch up through the air before landing into his outstretched hand.

“Did you get lost?” Tommy asked. His relaxed tone surprised her, and if the news of his father being the archer bothered him at all, Tommy hid it well. Maybe too well?

Felicity’s eyes darted to Oliver, searching for confirmation that he had, in fact, told Tommy about his father.
“I-” she started, before concern crossed her own features. Because where Tommy was cool and collected, Oliver looked pale, haunted by some unseen ghost. “You didn’t tell him?” she asked.

“We should take this inside,” Tommy said, putting a hand on Felicity’s arm and moving her into the building. “Because while yes, I know about my father, that’s not what has Oliver looking like he may hurl at any moment.”

“He’s just used to being the only one coming back from the dead,” Diggle said, a hint of amusement in his voice.

“Alright, I’m officially curious,” Felicity said, moving out of Tommy’s grasp to turn and face the three men before her. “Who exactly is back from the dead? I swear it better not be Ivan and Sofia. I will kill them if they ruined my impeccable hard work of fake identities.”

Tommy shook his head. “It will be easier for you, since you never knew her.”

Felicity’s brow furrowed. “Okay, lay it on me.”

“Laurel’s sister is alive,” Tommy said, swallowing down the emotion that threatened to choke out his voice completely. “Sara. She’s alive and in Starling.”
Hola lovelies,

Are we ready for some fun, sweet times? Well you probably won't find them here... Because you know how Cassie and I do. Look some things are gonna go down in this chapter. Some emotional times, but I can assure you they are all for good reasons...
Enjoy!!!

Love ya,
Kayla

Their lives were full of the improbable, a fate that Oliver was struggling with each and every day. But this. This went beyond anything he could have fathomed.

He watched her die. Not once, but twice, she slipped from his grip and got swallowed whole by the ocean around them. But Tommy was telling him that Sara was alive, that he had seen her, and spoke with her.

“Wait, how can Sara be alive?” Felicity asked once they all made it into the lair. Oliver trudged behind the group, his mind reeling and drowning in the memories he had of Sara’s last few hours.

Her eyes landed on him, and Oliver did his best to keep focused on the ground. He didn’t have an answer. He wished he did, but all he had were questions piling higher than he could deal with.

“We didn’t exactly exchange a lot of details when we’ve see each other,” Tommy said as he leaned behind the group, his mind reeling and drowning in the memories he had of Sara’s last few hours.

“We didn’t exactly exchange a lot of details when we’ve see each other,” Tommy said as he leaned himself against Felicity’s desk chair. “I was too busy getting my ass kicked… twice.”

It was Digg who spoke next, he crossed the room in three long strides and stood in front of Tommy.

“What do you mean twice?”

“John look--”

“Did the target engage with you while you were missing in Hub City?”

“Sara texted me, and when I went to see her she urged me off her case.”

“Damn it Tommy, you could have gotten your ass killed. Why the hell didn’t you tell me or Lyla?”

“I thought I could handle it. We used to be friends okay?”

“Well clearly she doesn’t know that.”
“Enough,” Felicity’s voice rose with authority. “Come on Digg, give him a break.”

“Oh Tommy didn’t get to the best part about her rising from the dead. Why don’t you tell them the other news?”

That was when Oliver looked up. He didn’t focus on John or Felicity, but directly on Tommy. He knew that weight behind his eyes, had held his own before, and he shudder to think what could possibly be so bad about Sara being alive.

“She’s working with the League of Assassins.”

There was the other shoe falling through the abyss. Oliver had heard of the League, whispers upon ghost stories, but he never believed in them. Not until he saw the look on Tommy’s face.

“What’s the League of Assassins? And please no one say a league made up of assassins,” Felicity turned to him, and he couldn’t avoid her gaze any longer. “What aren’t you telling us?”

“I didn’t know about the League,” Oliver replied, because that’s as honest as he could reach in the moment. “I thought they were a myth.”

But even as his words slipped out he could tell Felicity knew he was holding something back.

“So did I until Waller gave me a list of names to follow,” Tommy said, pulling both of them back into the conversation. “It led me to a member, who came into Hub City with Sara. I wouldn’t be alive right now if it wasn’t for her. They were also at my father’s house before you guys showed up.”

“Sara was there,” he whispered as his fingers rubbed together. He knew, he knew it had been her in the window. But he didn't want to admit the truth. “Were they following you?”

“I think they were following the Dark Archer,” Tommy explained with a sigh. “Sara said they were tracking a former League member who went rogue.”

“But we just learned that Malcolm is the Dark Archer,” Felicity connected, only barely being able to hold back a shiver.

“Yeah,” Tommy huffed. “Trust me I’m connecting the dots on my absentee father’s timeline of events. He clearly was in the League at sometime…” he shook his head and met Oliver’s gaze. “I can’t believe I didn’t see it before.”

Oliver wanted to reassure him, to make Tommy see that he couldn’t have prevented this turn of events even if he had known from the beginning. Things had a way of happening no matter how hard you fought against them. Oliver knew better than most to try and change the tides. It was better to adapt to the current than to fight against it.

Felicity’s phone drew in all their attention, and even if it hadn’t, the ghost white look on her face would have.

“What’s wrong?” he moved towards her even before he really processed it, his hand reaching out to steady her in case she needed it.

She looked up from the phone, gulping down whatever initial reaction had overwhelmed her. “Malcolm wants me to come into work to discuss the project.”

“What?”
“The text said I should make it a priority to be there as soon as possible,” she huffed as she shoved her phone back into her pocket. “I really don’t want to deal with this right now.”

“Well you’re not.”

“What do you mean?”

“Felicity we just found out the guy who’s been running around putting arrows in people—”

“Careful there.”

“Fine the other guy putting arrows in people,” he groaned. “Is none other than your boss. And you think I want you spending any time alone with him? Especially after what we did to the Markov device.”

“Oliver, he’s not going to do anything at MG.”

“He poisoned Tommy in his own home!”

She reached out, placing a hand on his chest. “If I don’t go, that looks worse. The best thing we have going for us is the fact that he doesn’t know what we did, or that we know what he’s been doing. I can gather intel. Plus this is literally my job.”

“I agree with Ollie,” Tommy chimed in. “It’s too dangerous. Especially if the League is after him too. And if it’s connected to the Markov device, I think it’s better if you distance yourself from it.”

“Okay well thank you for that,” she pulled her gaze from him and focused on Tommy. “But all three of you have the most dangerous jobs I’ve ever seen, so none of you get to tell me if and when I can go to my security infested office building to check on computer related projects.”

“We’re worried,” Oliver replied. “We don’t want you getting in over your head and us not being there to back you up. You can’t ask me not to worry about you.”

She faltered at that. He knew after Russia, after everything he finally laid out, things might shift between them. And he didn’t want to use their time away as a measure of how much they should trust each other. But he needed her to understand where he was coming from.

“I can go with her,” Digg said as he cleared his throat. “Things have been quiet the last couple of nights, and you and Tommy obviously have more to talk about. And interesting or not, at least this will keep me busy.”


“I do what I can,” he grinned.

She leaned in and pressed a kiss to Oliver’s cheek. “I’ll call you when I’m done, and then we can talk.”

“Looking forward to it,” he replied, and watched as they left.

The silence sat still for longer than he liked. He used to thrive in the quiet. It wasn’t contentment he sought out of it, nothing like that had found him in all five years he had been away. But quiet meant a moment to breathe, to gather his thoughts, to push forward. Instead this felt stifling.

“What happened to her?” Tommy’s question had come out of that quiet, but Oliver had been expecting it from the moment he told him Sara was alive.
“Tommy, please don’t ask me this.”

“I just need to know,” he sighed. “I can’t tell Laurel she’s alive, because Sara asked me not to. I can’t give the woman I love, the one thing in this entire world that could possible heal the deepest of her tragedies. And I need to know if I’m wrong. If the Sara we grew up with died on that boat or if a part of her is still there.”

The worst of Lian Yu happened that second year. Slade, Shado, Ivo, Anatoly, Sara. It all flashed before him, and he couldn’t almost picture himself back there. Even after all this time.

“I don’t know Tommy,” he shook his head. “But I do know if she helped you, then that’s something. And it’s a hell of a lot better than nothing at all.”

“Yeah,” he sat down in Felicity’s swivel chair. “God this week is the worst.”

He had to agree with Tommy there. Things seemed to be colliding back in on each other, and Oliver had to wonder where it would all end. Malcolm being the Dark Archer, and on the run for the League of Assassin’s certainly changed things. Especially on a personal level.

“Do we still tell Thea?”

Tommy looked up at him, his face fixed with confusion. “We have to, don’t we?”

“Everything’s changed now Tommy.”

“Not really, he’s the same man, we just happen to actually know more. And I still think she deserves to know the truth. And considering Moira came and practically berated me about it last night, I think we need to tell her before he does.”

“Tommy he’s got League training, and a strong desire to possess a machine that could devastate a city. Plus he has one thing up his sleeve that you don’t seem to be nearly as worried about as I think you should be.”

“And what’s that?”

Oliver leveled him with a look, because it surprised him his best friend hadn’t thought about it yet. “Malcolm knows you’re with ARGUS which means he knows exactly which buttons he can push on you.”

---

Of all the things Tommy had never considered, the words that had just come from Oliver’s mouth were high at the top of the list. Tommy had been careful to keep the secret of his job with ARGUS, to the point where for two years he’d let his father believe he was little more than a delinquent to keep him in the dark.

But it wasn’t difficult to determine how his father had learned the truth. After all, Tommy and Lyla had infiltrated the Merlyn Global facility just a few weeks ago in order to acquire the Markov device, and the Dark Archer had been there. Unlike Oliver, who masked his appearance, Tommy had gone into the building in gear, but nothing covering his face. If his father didn’t know before that, he certainly did then.

Tommy tried to recall anything about that night’s events that could have tipped him off about his father’s own secrets, but so much of it had been a blur after getting shot that he couldn’t pinpoint anything.
“You alright?” Oliver asked, pulling Tommy’s focus back to the Foundry.

“Mmhmm,” he hummed in reply. “Just still kinda wrapping my head around it all.”

“I can understand that,” Oliver said, clapping a hand down over Tommy’s shoulder. “But don’t let it drag you down. I know how I reacted after finding out that Thea was… that he’s her…”

“You alright there, buddy?” Tommy asked, raising a brow. His friend looked like he was going a little purple in the face trying to get the words out.

Oliver nodded. “You aren’t your father, Tommy. And Thea won’t be either.”

He knew that the words were true, but there were a few times over the last days and weeks that the shallow twinge of doubt crept deeper into his mind. Working for ARGUS had certainly changed him over the last couple of years, but it shook Tommy to his very core to think that it had somehow honed him into a closer replica of his father.

“Nature versus nurture,” Tommy mused, more to himself than anything. “Kinda got the short end of the stick on both counts,” he huffed.

This time it was Oliver who quirked a brow. “Self-deprecation is a slippery slope.”

“Yeah, that’s really more your thing anyway,” Tommy agreed with a grin, letting the mask slip back into place fast enough to give himself whiplash. Whatever doubts he had about himself were his burden to bear and his alone.

Tommy’s phone chirped loudly in his pocket, silencing any retort from Oliver. The text message was brief, just a quick reminder from Thea about her birthday party that evening. He was glad for the reminder, since the culmination of the last several days had turned his memory into a sieve.

“Are you making an appearance at Thea’s party tonight?” Tommy asked. He’d almost said ‘your sister’ but it didn’t feel right. After all- she was technically sister to them both. Tommy was still trying to wrap his mind around that. He’d always wanted to be related to Oliver, always thought him a brother. He’d just never expected the chips to fall that way.

“If only to warn her against driving her new convertible too fast and to scare her new boyfriend.”

“Ray something, isn’t it?”

“Roy,” Oliver said, his voice straining to remain neutral. “Roy Harper I believe. Remind me to have Felicity do a work up on him?”

Tommy scoffed. “Let Thea be a teenager, Ollie.”

“In this world?” A beat. “In this town?”

He knew Oliver was right. A decade ago, Starling was a different place. But in the years since, it had become overrun with gangs and turf wars, corrupt businessmen and even dirtier politicians. A place where going outside the law seemed to be the only way to restore any sort of order among the ranks. Oliver, Felicity and Diggle proved that on an almost nightly basis.

“Do you ever miss what life was like before the Gambit went down?” Tommy sighed, idly twisting from side to side in Felicity’s desk chair. “It was so much simpler back then.”

Oliver was quiet for a long moment, his face a mask of calm. Only his eyes betrayed the storm that
wrenched beneath the surface. “Simpler maybe,” he answered finally. “But it was empty. I may
loathe a lot of the things that brought me to this point, but if they hadn’t, who knows what my life
would look like.

That much, Tommy understood. He may have hated how he joined ARGUS, and even some of the
things he was forced to do on the organization’s behalf, but the person that it forged Tommy into?
He could never regret that.

“I’ve seen how much a life of regret can eat at someone, how choices made can define and even
destroy a life - destroy a family.” Oliver’s attention and eyes were on the far wall of the Foundry, and
even his voice seemed far away, like he forgot Tommy was there at all. “I can’t let my life be filled
with that kind of regret. Nothing destroys so completely as the question ‘what if’.”

“And we can’t let that question plague Thea either,” Tommy breathed. “Robert will always be the
man that raised her. But Malcolm having this kind of ammunition to tear your family apart? We’ve
all seen the kind of regard he shows for family.”

The words felt bitter on his tongue, but he meant every one of them. The things that Malcolm had
done to him- as the Dark Archer, as his boss, even as his father- they were unforgivable. And
Tommy would not let him tear Thea apart that way too.

“Tonight,” Oliver said, blowing out a long breath. “After the party, we will tell her tonight.”

Tommy nodded in agreement. “I’ve got some paperwork to take care of upstairs,” he said. “I’ll see
you at the party?” He barely waited for a reply, the air in the vast open space suddenly feeling stifling
around him. Tommy pushed out of the chair, his face flushing, heart racing, vision dancing as he
made his way to the stairs. It wasn’t enough to knock him off balance, to tip Oliver off to the
discomfort. It wasn’t until he was out of the basement lair, the door securely shut behind him, that
Tommy collapsed against the thick steel door. The metal was cool under his clammy hands. Was this
some side effect to the drug his father had poisoned him with? No, he knew what this was, and even
if he didn’t want to identify it, he knew its name.

Panic attack.

Brought on by the secrets, the deceit, the revelation that the man that raised him, the one whose
blood ran through Tommy’s veins, that his father was truly and honestly a monster. Logically, he
knew that he should be able to handle this information. He told himself that he wasn’t surprised, but
the stinging in the corners of his eyes, the blurring, empty hallway before him, painted a different
picture.

Thoughts flooded his mind, memories of his father- ice cold, demanding, harsh. The Dark Archer
had been looming inside his father for years, always just below the surface, biding his time. But for
what? The man had cracked when Tommy’s mother had been killed, and the fissures of darkness
had seeped up through the years, molding him into the ruthless tyrant that now ran one of the biggest
companies in the city. It all tied together somehow, Tommy was sure of it. But the thoughts swirled
through his head faster than he could tie them down. The truth was just out of reach- he could feel it.

After a few steadying breaths, Tommy moved to the bar. He didn’t care that it was morning, or that
he’d been poisoned just twelve short hours ago. He needed a drink. To calm his nerves or cloud his
mind, he wasn’t sure. He grabbed a bottle and glass before taking up residence on a barstool near the
far end. The amber liquid pooled easily into the bottom of the glass, filling an inch, and then two,
and then three, before Tommy stopped. He took a long swallow, the familiar burn of alcohol
reminding him of the old days he still sometimes wished for. Oliver was right- those days were
empty. But maybe emptiness would be better than the weight of the world that felt like it might crush
Tommy at any moment.

He took another healthy swallow, the burn against the back of his throat almost refreshing. Anything to dull the ache in his chest, anything to calm his heart and empty his mind. In one final moment of clarity, he stood from the bar, grabbing the bottle and the glass and made his way to the office upstairs. He couldn’t let Oliver see him like this, not today.

The desk was covered in papers, bills that needed paying, payroll that needed to be approved, distillers and breweries that wanted their new blends stocked in one of the hottest nightclubs in the city. But Tommy didn’t care about any of that, not when so much of his life had become a mess. Oliver told him that he’d seen what the question ‘what if’ could do to a person. But Tommy still struggled with it every single day. What if he’d told Laurel about ARGUS sooner? What if he told her about Sara now? What if Malcolm had been with his mother that night all those years ago? What would have changed, how would things be different?

Tommy knew a little something about that question eating a person alive. Because it chewed away at his resolve on a daily basis. He tipped the tumbler back, draining the contents, anger rolling through every nerve, every vein. And then, Tommy slammed the glass down on the desk, shattering it into a thousand tiny pieces, each one fractured and sharp. Many of them dug into his palm, breaking the skin, drawing angry red blood. The pain was a dull throbbing, and he watched as the blood stained the papers on the desk.

His pulse still raced in his ears, drowning out everything and anything else around him. Somewhere, a voice called his name, concern laced through the tone of it. But Tommy couldn’t think about that, couldn’t see beyond the broken shards of glass, each one reflecting back a broken piece of himself. One piece held his relationship with Laurel. Another, the young boy standing over his mother’s grave, frightened and sad, still not realizing the depth of what was happening around him. On and on the glinting glass pieces taunted him, his eyes laser focused on the small rainbows refracting off their shards.

And then he was being yanked back. The movement felt slow, a heavy weight sinking to the bottom of a lake. Oliver’s eyes searched his, wild with panic.

“What happened?” Oliver demanded, his voice a low growl.

Tommy shook his head, the spell broken, the fog lifting, everything else coming back into focus. “I--I don’t know,” he stammered.

Oliver inspected his hand, pulling pieces of glass from Tommy’s palm before tightly wrapping a clean towel around it. “Are you drinking? Jesus, Tommy. It’s 10 in the morning.”

“Five o’clock somewhere,” Tommy muttered.

“We should get you downstairs so I can stitch that.”

“I’m fine,” he answered, yanking his hand out of Oliver’s grasp.

“Clearly you’re not,” Oliver said, concern still rolling off of him. “What happened?”

“Oh, didn’t you hear?” Tommy barked a humorless laugh. “My father literally painted a bullseye on my head. He had me shot, poisoned me. He’s planning on doing who-knows-what with an earthquake generator, and I’m supposed to just carry on like it’s business as freaking usual!” He was shouting now, raving like a lunatic. And maybe he was. Tommy knew mental disorders were hereditary. Maybe he was just biding his time until he snapped, just like his father.
“Tommy,” Oliver said, his voice intentionally quiet, a stark contrast to Tommy’s bellows. “No one expects you to act like this is normal.”

“Really? Tell that to my boss, a woman who has had me out on mandatory leave more often than not the last few months.”

“Amanda Waller isn’t exactly the best example by which to judge anything,” Oliver’s tone was steeled, but even.

Tommy slumped back in the chair, tightening his wrapped hand into a fist to help slow the blood loss. “Do you ever get tired of being right?” he asked, eyes narrowed, but with little malice.

“It’s a new sensation for me,” Oliver answered, a hint of amusement in his voice. “Still getting used to it.”

They were both quiet for a long moment. And then Tommy spoke. “Ollie?”

“Hmm?”

“Everything with my father,” Tommy said, letting out a shuddered breath. “I’m… I’m scared.”

“I know,” Oliver whispered. “Now let’s take care of that,” he gestured to Tommy’s hand. “It won’t heal until the wound is closed.”

Tommy swallowed hard against the lump in his throat, tears stinging at his eyes again. But it wasn’t from the pain throbbing through the cuts on his palm. No, it was because he knew that the wounds Oliver was talking about weren’t the ones on Tommy’s hand.

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“You’re quieter than usual,” Digg said as they finally pulled into the parking garage of Merlyn Global. “Wanna talk about it?”

Truth be told, Felicity wanted nothing more than to spill everything mulling over in her head. She couldn’t help the icy terror that coursed through her, settling as frozen knots in her stomach. But as much of a friend as Digg was, she wanted to be having this talk with Oliver and Tommy. But it would have to wait until they talked with each other. They needed it more.

“Let’s just say that my vacation was anything but relaxing,” she joked.

“I know we’ve been through a lot together,” his eyes were focused on her as he spoke. “And sometimes it’s easy to think you’re hardened to all the crap going on, but it’s okay to let things slip sometimes Felicity. Doesn’t make you weak.”

“John I appreciate it, but I do not have the luxury of falling apart right now,” she took a deep breath, throwing her gaze towards the door. “Malcolm was going to use that machine to do something bad, I know it. And I helped build it. So if I can stay close, and figure out his next move, it’s my responsibility to do that.”

“It’s almost scary how alike the three of you are,” he shook his head. “Always willing to take on the whole weight of the world until it buries you. This is why you work with a team, Felicity. So someone has your back when things get heavy. And we’re a team. I get that you, Oliver, and Tommy have this bond, but I was there too the first time around. So was Lyla. And we’re not letting you guys go through anything alone.”
“This is more than you asked for when you signed up for this.”

“I’ll tell you what I told my wife last week, though in a different context,” he paused. “I’m not going anywhere. I said I was in this and I’m not a guy who goes back on his word.”

“You said that to Lyla?”

“Of course you’re gonna pick up on that part first.”

“Sorry,” but she was smiling. “Thank you John. It’s good to know you’ve got our backs.”

“I only have a few friends Felicity, and I’d like to keep them around.”

She nodded, grabbing her bag as she popped open the door, Digg made a move to follow but Felicity reached for his arm, stopping him.

“Where are you going?”

“And with you?”

“Are you crazy? If I walk into that building with an armed bodyguard what do you think Malcolm Merlyn’s gonna think?”

“I don’t really give a damn. I told Oliver I’d come with you and keep an eye on things. I can’t very well do my job from out here.”

“And I can’t do mine if you’re in there. Look I promise if things feel off I’ll call you and come right back down,” she shifted her eyes back to the door, she could see movement just inside, and she feared it might be her boss. “I won’t be long. I’m still technically on vacation for a couple more days. I’ll make up some excuse and be back down in an hour.”

“I don’t feel right about this.”

“Yeah, but Malcolm knows you, remember? You worked for Tommy back in Russia and Monte Carlo. So if he sees you with me, when he knows Tommy works for ARGUS… It would be better if I go in there alone.”

She could see the reluctance play across his face, but to her relief he relaxed back against his seat, pulling his door closed again.

“One hour Felicity,” he held up one finger. “If you’re not back down here in that time or you don’t answer your phone, I will go in.”

“And I believe you. Thank you, Digg.”

“You can thank me by getting me out of here in enough time to make my dinner date.”

“Can do.” She winked before she got out of the car.

Stepping into the lion’s den. That’s the feeling Felicity got as she walked the halls of Merlyn Global. She didn’t know how she had talked herself into this. Coming here, it wasn’t right. But things would be. She just had to scrub the rest of the code from the security system. Then she would see if she could figure out exactly what Malcolm had planned for the device. She gave herself an hour, but honestly she didn’t think she could handle being there any longer than that. Promotion or not, Felicity was seriously gonna start looking for new employment.
“Ah Ms. Smoak, you’re here.”

Malcolm’s voice had a way of making her skin crawl on a good day, and in that moment she wished she could put an entire continent between them.

“Mr. Merlyn,” she swallowed down the bile. It would be terrible if she threw up on her boss’s shoes. “Hello.”

“I wasn’t sure you’d come.”

“You asked me,” she plastered a smile on her face. “And while I’m still on vacation, I thought it would be better to come and work on that security hack before the trail gets cold.”

“Oh, the guys in IT tracked that down while you were out of town.”

“They what?” She heard her heart stammering against her chest. She felt the air evaporating around her. Frak. Frak. Frak.

“I had them working overtime to crack it,” he explained. “I know you needed time away, but this was a top priority for the company.”

“Mr. Merlyn, I um—”

“I understand needing a vacation, especially after the stress of our tech being stolen. I just wish you had been here,” he walked around her, and Felicity fell into a stride next to him. “The downside to the boys in IT tracking the hack, is they were only able to isolate the code placed on the device. Tracked it to some hacker’s handle which apparently hasn’t been active for over three years.”

“They only got that far?” she took a deep breath, trying to hold it together. “I mean, I could take a look at it. But chances are if the handle’s been inactive that long, they’ll be nearly impossible to find.”

“She.”

“Excuse me?”

“Hacker’s handle was ‘ghostfoxgodess’. We discerned gender after that.”

“I mean you never know, with the internet.” The fact that the guys in IT had gotten that far with her code told Felicity that she may have done too good a job at helping hire them. But it also told her that there was no way they’d connect it back to her. She had done extensive work to make sure ghostfox could never be traced back to Felicity Smoak. And she was more than confident in that work.

“I suppose you’re right.”

“Mr. Merlyn, if you don’t need me for the security breach, may I ask why you asked me to come in?”

They had made it to Malcolm’s office, and he pulled the door open wide motioning her inside. She wanted to jump out a window more than step across the threshold, but instead of voicing that she tried to make it look like she wasn’t ten seconds from a meltdown.

“I wanted to tell you in person that the Dr. Markov and his team have left the city,” he said as he walked around his desk and took a seat. “So you will no longer be working directly with them, and until the next project you’re on gets up and running I need you to pull the Markov device schematics
from every server in the building.”

“You’re scraping the project? Why?”

“It’s a billion dollar paperweight, Ms. Smoak. I’d like to throw it in the sun and never see it again,” he folded his hands together as he looked at her. “But since I don’t believe that would be very feasible nor environmentally friendly, I’m stuck with making sure I never have to think about it.”

She watched him as closely as she could without feeling like he might notice. Malcolm wanted the project scrapped. Not just that, but he wanted it taken off all the computers. Why?

“Mr. Merlyn,” she let out a nervous laugh. “Not that I feel like it’s my place to say this, but if we pull the designs off the servers, aren’t we risking looking guilty?”

He smiled with the force of something powerful. “What would we be guilty of Ms. Smoak?”

“I don’t know,” she paused taking a step back. “But don’t companies only start destroying plans when they have something to hide.”

“The only thing I’m hiding right now, is the shame I feel about sinking so much money into something that will never work,” he went back to the papers in front of him. “If you could get started on scrubbing the server, I would greatly appreciate it. I know you have other places to be tonight.”

She froze at his words, her pulse racing again. “What do you mean sir?”

“Isn’t tonight Thea Queen’s birthday party? You two are friends, are you not?”

“Yes, we are,” she nodded, biting back the desire to shove a stapler in his face for even mention Thea. “I will get a jump start on pulling those files. Thank you.”

She was at the door when Malcolm spoke again. “Oh and Ms. Smoak, I’m glad to see your trip to Russia was not as eventful as your last one. It’s easier if you’re close by for the next few weeks. To oversee the removal of the project, of course.”

A thought hit her and she couldn’t seem to hold it in. “Why wouldn’t you ask Dr. Markov to be here to pull the device and it’s designs?”

“Because Dr. Markov and his team had a flight that could not be delayed, Ms. Smoak. And I assured him that it was in the most capable of hands. I wasn’t wrong when I told him that, was I?”

“No sir,” she ushered herself out of his office, trying to put at much distance between her and Merlyn as she could.

She didn’t know where Brion Markov and the rest of the team were, but Felicity had a sinking suspicion in her gut that told her they had not left on their own accord. She didn’t know what he was doing, getting rid of the team that had worked so hard piecing that thing together. But she did know that as long as she still had breath in her lungs, she would get to the bottom of things.

Checking her watch, she groaned. Twenty more minutes until she told Digg she’d be back. It didn’t give her enough time to go to her office and start pulling the data from the servers, or to make a copy of it for later. Because something told her that whatever reason Malcolm had for wanting the information gone, there was an even greater reason for her to keep it close. She would have to tell Oliver and Tommy. But that could wait until later.

After Thea’s party of course. Because they all deserved one night to be happy before things
imploded again. Tonight her, Oliver, and Tommy were going to put this all aside, and have some fun. She wasn’t taking no for an answer.
Hey lovelies! Happy Monday. I know, they're tough sometimes. But a new chapter helps... right? We sure hope so! The culmination of everything is on the horizon. We hope you enjoy!

xoxo,
Cassie

To say that Oliver was tired would be a vast understatement. In fact, he felt like he was a dead man walking, and for once, it wasn’t because anyone was actively pursuing him. No, it was more the fact that he hadn’t had more than ten total hours of sleep in the last three days, and it was beginning to hit him. Well, it had hit him that morning, and he’d planned on sleeping most of the day before Thea’s party- but after the state he’d found Tommy, he wasn’t about to let his friend out of his sight for the rest of the day.

Tommy, at least, had gotten some sleep. Oliver had taken his friend back to his apartment, letting him sleep off the who-knows how many shots he’d done that morning. On an empty stomach. With a sedative still in his system.

After dropping Tommy into his bed, Oliver took up residence on his friend’s sofa, with a stack of papers from the club to go through. He had barely made headway through the pile of bills when he heard the door to Tommy’s room click open.

“Ughhh,” Tommy groaned, stifling a yawn. “I slept like the dead.”

“Not to mention, most of the day,” Oliver answered, standing to stretch his own limbs. He’d been idle on the couch for too long, his muscles tense and ready for movement.

“You didn’t have to stay and babysit me,” Tommy sighed, raking a hand through his already unkempt hair. “This morning was just...”

Oliver eyed him carefully. What had happened that morning? One moment Tommy seemed fine, the next he’d drank way too much booze and smashed his hand through a drinking glass. Oliver was worried about his friend, and he’d stay as long as it took to convince himself that Tommy was alright. “It wasn’t a big deal,” he answered finally. “I got caught up on the bills for the club, deleted all my junk emails, you know, the important stuff.”

“I hope you don’t think I’ve been slacking with the club. I was just away the last few days and--”

“Tommy,” Oliver answered, cutting him off. “We’re partners in this place. I don’t expect you to take it all on by yourself. And if you need some--”

“I swear if you tell me to take some time off, Ollie, I’ll--”

He put his hands up in defense. “Okay, I will not tell you to take some time off,” Oliver laughed.
“Waller’s been enforcing the mandatory leave lately, huh?”

“That’s an understatement,” Tommy huffed, moving to the kitchen to grab a glass of water. He drained it in two large swallows. “And I’m technically on a desk until this heals,” he gestured to his shoulder. “Although my trip to Hub City ended up falling a little beyond the desk parameters.”

“What with the League of Assassins and all,” Oliver raised a brow.

Tommy shrugged. “I didn’t ask for the assignment. Waller gave it to me.”

“Amanda has always been obsessed with people who have unique qualities she can exploit,” Oliver sighed. “I’m not surprised to hear she’s got interest in an organization with a name like that.”

“Slightly more surprising, though, was learning that Sara was one of their members.”

Oliver nodded, that particular weight still sinking in the pit of his stomach. His mind had wandered there plenty of times as he sat in Tommy’s quiet living room. Sara was alive. She’d somehow made it off the freighter, off the island, and to a group called the \textit{League of Assassins}? Guilt slid into the hollowness in his chest. As much as he hated the question ‘what if’, he couldn’t help but wonder how different things would be if he’d never invited her on the Gambit. How different all of their lives would be. How much pain he could have saved her from.

“Ollie?” Tommy’s voice cut through the haze of pain creeping into his gut. The world, life, it was what it was. There was no use worrying about the past, because there was nothing they could do to change it.

“Yeah,” Oliver answered, clearing his throat. He rolled his neck, loosening the muscles stiff from disuse. “I should probably get going anyway. Get myself ready for Thea’s party.”

Tommy groaned. “I can not even think about going to a party right now.”

“Should have thought about that before you took to day-drinking,” Oliver smirked. “Because our sister’s” (he was proud that he barely stuttered over the word ‘our’) “birthday is today, and we both need to be there for her. Plus we have to tell her about Malcolm tonight.”

Oliver moved to the door, not letting his mind linger on the thought of Malcolm more than necessary. He might be the father of Tommy and Thea, but Malcolm Merlyn had been a thorn in his side for months. And Oliver was tired of him having the upperhand.

He hesitated at the door, still not sure it was safe to leave Tommy alone.

“Seriously,” Tommy said, rolling his eyes. “I promise I don’t need a babysitter to get me to the party in one piece.”

Oliver nodded, pulling the door open. “Call if you need anything,” he said, before heading out into the hall. He reached into his pocket for his cell phone as he made his way down the stairs and through the lobby. He was about to dial Felicity when his phone rang.

“Hey,” he smiled, answering the call.

“Hey back,” Felicity answered, sounding almost a little shy on the other end.

“I was just about to call you.”

“Yeah, I got your texts. What happened with Tommy?”
Oliver blew out a breath. “Minor meltdown. I think everything kind of sunk in after you and Diggle left. He got a little drunk and broke a glass in his hand.”

“What?!” Felicity said, panic coursing through her voice. “I have to see him. Is he home? Did you take him to the ER?”

“No,” he answered, making his way to his car. “I stitched him up in the Foundry and then brought him home. He slept most of the day while I worked on stuff for the club in his living room. He woke up just before I left.”

“Well I guess that’s why he didn’t answer any of my phone calls,” she sighed. “You think he’s alright?”

“I think he’s working through a lot. But he’s planning on coming to Thea’s party, so he could probably use a ride. His car is still at the club.”

“I’ll call him and let him know I’ll pick him up.”

Oliver settled into his car, letting his head rest back against the seat, closing his eyes as they spoke. It was strange, how quickly she eased the tension in him, just talking to her made him feel like they could figure out anything, like together they could tackle whatever life threw at them. And so far, that theory had proven true. He never would have made it out of Russia alive the second time around, had it not been for Felicity and her planning.

“Thank you, Felicity,” he said, meaning picking up Tommy and everything else. All the other little things she did for him, most of which she barely realized.

“I’ll see you soon?” she asked.

“Hey- how did everything go at work?” he’d almost forgotten where she’d run off to that morning, worry over Tommy had taken hold of his mind so soon after she’d left.

“We will definitely have to talk that one through face to face,” she said. “Hey, Tommy’s calling me back. See you at the party?”

“Yeah,” Oliver said quietly. “I’ll see you there.”

He ended the call before pushing the key into the ignition and starting the car, anxiety beginning to bleed back into his mind. How could they possibly take out Malcolm? The man was the father of his sister and best friend. Despite the truly horrible things that Malcolm Merlyn had done, could Oliver really kill him? He had to- anything short of putting that man in the ground and Merlyn would worm his way out of it. There was only one way to find justice for the lives Merlyn had already taken and the countless more he intended to with the earthquake generator. Oliver just hoped when the moment came down to it, his resolve wouldn’t waiver.

Several moments later he pulled back into the driveway at the Queen Manor, where every light in the house was already ablaze, and that said nothing for the strings of white lights that twinkled from the awning, and the strobe lights flanking the front door already causing brightly colored beams to dance across the facade of the place.

A woman with a clipboard stood near the front door, and beside her, Thea was the picture of teenage exuberance. Her eyes danced like the lights glittering around her when she spotted him and she ran to him as soon as Oliver was out of the car.

“Ollie!” she exclaimed, pulling him into a tight hug. “We expected you home hours ago. You and
Felicity decide to extend your trip for a little more romantic alone time?"

“Speedy,” Oliver scolded, but there was little malice in it.

“Okay, I won’t meddle. But will you at least tell me if you guys had a good time at the wedding? By the way, this is Stella, and she’s the best event coordinator in the state.” Thea leaned in a little. “She specializes in weddings,” she added with a smirk.

With a huff, Oliver withdrew from his sister’s side. “Just none of that to Felicity,” he said, a little more stern this time. He reached into his jacket pocket, pulling out an envelope. “Unless of course you don’t want your present.”

Thea launched at him again, but Oliver lifted the envelope over her head before she could snatch it. “I promise no marriage jokes to Felicity,” she vowed.

Oliver lowered the envelope, handing it over to his sister. He had no idea what the next several hours would hold for them, but he wanted Thea to know that no matter what, he and Tommy were there for her, they wanted to be in her life, regardless of what she learned about her biological father.

Her eyes went wide as saucers when she read the letter enclosed. And with a look that was akin to a child on Christmas, she turned her gaze on him. “Seriously?!” she beamed.

He nodded, feeling pride well within him. “Only if you want to,” he said quietly, pulling her back into his side and kissing the top of her head. “It would be great experience in the business world, plus you still get to hang out at the clubs you love to frequent, just on the other side of things.”

“Ollie! I don’t know what to say!”

“Just say that you’ll keep your grades up enough to warrant a position like this. Tommy and I don’t plan on going easy on you.”

“But a manager at the club?” She swallowed, like the gravity of it was finally settling in. “You really trust me that much?”

“We both do.”


“I know you won’t, Speedy,” Oliver said, giving her one more quick squeeze before letting her go. “I should run in and change before the festivities kick off. But be sure to let Mom know I definitely gave you the better gift.”

“Ha!” Thea barked. “Tell that to my Benz.” She grinned. “I know she got me one. It’s tradition. Besides, I’ll need something to get me to work and back, now won’t I?”

Oliver laughed, shaking his head as he left Thea and the event coordinator to talk about the remaining setup for the party. Oliver stretched as he made his way upstairs to his bedroom, hoping he had the mental strength to get him through the next few hours without passing out right there on the dance floor.

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His head still held a dull ache as he got ready for Thea’s party. His hand stung as he tried to get his tie right. But the more he bent and twisted his fingers, the worse the pain got. To the point where Tommy threw the thing across his bedroom. He would just have to go without
At least the aspirin he took had started to settled the sharpness of the pain, but it did nothing for the stupidity he felt.

He was better than that, better than someone who broke down just because life got hard. He had let it all get to him, it seeped in and attached itself to every sharp edge he had, then threatened to tear him open from the inside out.

“What’s wrong with you Merlyn?” his whispered as he met his eyes in the mirror. But he couldn’t help but see his father reflected back at him.

Maybe he had been wrong. Maybe he couldn’t separate his feelings on this. Malcolm had been absent though everything in his life, but Tommy still felt the pull to his father, to the man who had read him to sleep years ago. His dad could tear the city in two, and Tommy was sure that a part of him would still care. He just wanted to know why. Why the secrets, and the lies, why the deaths and destruction. But would he ever get the answers he was looking for, and if he did, would he be able to stomach them?

Tommy pulled himself out of his thoughts when he heard the knocking. And Tommy did what he did best, he pushed things down once more.

“Hey Felicity,” he said as he opened the door, throwing a smile on his face. “You know I still could have found my own way to the party right?”

If she had been thinking about holding anything in, her face betrayed her. Especially when her eyes landed on his hand. “Are you okay?”

“Ollie told you.” It wasn’t a question. In fact he had been more surprised she hadn’t mentioned it on the phone earlier. But he was starting to think it’s because it’s easier to guilt him in person. “You know for a guy who lives his life in secrets and shadows, he can’t lie to save his soul.”

“Wanna talk about it?” Felicity hovered at the door, watching his closely as he grabbed his wallet.

“Not you too,” he sighed. “I’m fine. I’ll be fine. I had one bad morning.”

“You know neither us would blame you if you dropped this tough act and let things go. We understand that everything that’s happened, happened fast. I get it if you need a moment to process—”

“What I need right now, Felicity, is one night where I’m not thinking about ARGUS, or the League, or earthquake devices,” he stepped closer to her, shaking his head. “I know you and Ollie are looking out for me, and I love you both for it. But can we put a pause on everything happening and just have some fun?”

A look crossed her face, and Tommy knew it meant she had something she wanted to talk about, but Felicity pursed her lips together and forced a smile back to her lips. “Okay, for tonight all that stuff has been put away. Besides we shouldn’t ruin Thea’s night with our own drama.”

“Exactly, we’re about to go to a party with a bunch of teens and young adults. They have more than enough drama to go around.”

They walked downstairs, and Tommy found them in front of his car.

“We’re taking my car?” he gave her a confused look as she dropped his keys in his palm. “So what if
you want to leave before I do?”

“I’m not leaving… early.”

She hopped in the car, but Tommy saw the faint red rise in her cheeks before she did. Oh this would be fun.

“So,” he smirked as he climbed into the car. “You and Oliver have fun in Russia?”

“We may have incited a mob war. Is that what you mean?”

“I think you know what I mean, Smoak,” he gave her a wink, which earned him a slap to the arm. Totally worth it by the way. “I’m just glad you two finally cut through all that tension.”

“It wasn’t that bad.”

“I thought I was going to have to hose you two down everytime you even looked at each other. It was bad Felicity.”

“Well what about you and Laurel? I know you two saw each other recently.”

“How do you know that?”

She shrugged with a grin. “I may have ran into her this morning when I stopped for coffee. We had a chat.”

“About me?” He knew how hopeful he sounded. And despite all the crap going on, he still wanted Laurel in his life. She had a way of calming him when nothing else could.

“I’m not saying,” she replied as they drove the streets of town. “I do think she said she was asked to show up to Thea’s party.”

“Let me guess, Thea made her an offer she couldn’t refuse.”

“More like strong armed into accepting an invite. Thea knows you two broke up right?”

“Yes she does.”

“And you saw what she was like getting Oliver and me alone together?”

Tommy recalled all of Thea’s attempts at matchmaking. It technically worked on Oliver and Felicity and he couldn’t help thinking it could work for him and Laurel too. But he was still keeping things from her, things she deserved to know. Sara asked him not to say anything, but did she really think that would be easy? Did she understand just how desperate her family clung to the weight of not knowing what happened? If she did would she change her mind, or did the League take that kind of kindness from her?

“I told him I love him,” Felicity let the words roll out with devotion and happiness. “I thought we’d wait until everything calmed. But then I realized I didn’t need a quiet moment when all the bad and danger was behind us. I just needed him to hear it, I needed him to know it and feel it. And I think it made us fight our way home even more.”

“That’s good Smoak,” he smiled taking a deep breath. “I hope that means he said it back?”

“Yes he did.”
“You two deserve to be happy.”

“So do you Tommy,” she replied, reaching for his hand and squeezing it. “And you’ll get there. I know it.”

“Lot of faith there.”

“I have it on good authority that Tommy Merlyn is a great guy, so why shouldn’t he deserve good things?”

They pulled up to the Queen mansion and everything seemed to be in full swing. Valets stood at the front steps ready to past cars as they drove up as music and noise streamed out the front door.

“Sometimes I forget just how rich the both of you are,” Felicity mused as they stopped in front of the steps. “I mean the private jets and lavish hotels rooms notwithstanding.”

“Yeah, I figured Moira would go all out for Thea’s birthday,” he replied, as they stepped out of the car. “You should have seen her eighth birthday though, that one had eight identical white ponies.”

“And I was worth each and every one,” Thea’s voice flitted towards them as she parted the crowd. “I’m so glad you made it.”

She pulled Felicity into a hug as Tommy handed his keys over to the valet. The kid looked eager to get behind the wheel, and as much as he wanted to warn him off fast speeds he let the kid go. You’re supposed to be relaxing and having fun. He reminded himself. Right, relaxing. That would be easy.

“Ollie told me about your hand,” she said coming up to link her arm with Tommy’s. “So soda or water for you only mister. You need to heal up.”

“And exactly when did you become the boss of me?” he teased.

“I’m eighteen now, a responsible adult,” she bumped her elbow into his ribs. “Thanks for the job by the way. I really appreciate you and Ollie trusting me like that.”

“Well if anyone can keep a club hip and fresh it’s you.”

“Why do you have to ruin a moment by sounding so old?” But she was still smiling. Good. He never wanted Thea to lose that smile.

“Happy birthday, Thea.”

“Thank you.”

“Thank you.”

Felicity had disappeared. Probably off to find Oliver and tell him they had made it. But Tommy was okay with that. He meant what he said. They all needed to have fun tonight. And that included his best friends. He’d make sure they all enjoyed themselves before anything else fell into their laps.

“So I know the job was kinda this joint present from me and Ollie, but I got you something else too,” he pulled the box from his pocket and handed it to her. “You don’t have to open it now.”

“Of course I’m opening it now,” she grabbed it from him, running her hands gently alone the seam of the velvet box, before she popped it open. Thea let out a small gasp before she looked at him. Tommy it’s beautiful.

“It was my grandmother’s locket. And I know you didn’t know her, but I think she would have loved you.” He had met his grandma Merlyn only a handful of times before she had died, but the
woman had been so soft and kind. He could hardly believe now that the woman in his memory had raised the man who became his father. “I had them put a picture of you and your mom and dad in there and then one of me, you, and Ollie.”

She pulled him into a hug. “Thank you Tommy. You didn’t have to do this.”

“I did,” he replied. “I wanted you to know that no matter what, you’ll always be family to me.”

“Back at you,” she smirked. “Speaking of presents I got you one.”

“Speedy, it’s your birthday.”

“Call it a late Christmas present or an early birthday gift, doesn’t matter,” she took him by the arm and lead him into the living room.

All the furniture had been removed, and in the center of the long room was a dance floor. But what had caught Tommy’s eye was the woman across the room speaking with Walter. Laurel had a way of taking his breath away without even trying. And in twinkling lights of the party she looked even more stunning.

“Go ask her to dance,” Thea nudged him, keeping their pace moving. “Trust me.”

“Thea I don’t think--”

“Hello Tommy,” Walter said as they stopped in front of the pair. “How are you?”

“I’m good, sir. Hi,” but his gaze was still transfixed on Laurel. “Hey.”

“Hi,” she replied, and if he wasn’t mistaken it was maybe just as dazed as his.

Thea pushed him a little more, and he was trying hard not to make it obvious. But honestly she was right. What did he have to lose?

“Do you wanna dance?”

He had no doubt she would say no. And maybe if there hadn’t been some sort of electric energy floating the room she would have done just that. But by some miracle Laurel smiled right back at him.

“I would love to dance.”

---

Felicity wandered through the main floor of the Queen mansion, her mind drifting to the different times she’d been there. Memories, both good and bad fueled her onward, hand trailing along the paneled hallway as she went. Hours spent with Tommy and Thea watching movies in the den, the morning a couple months ago in the kitchen with Raisa and Oliver. It had been great, right up until Sofia had shown up and blown their whole world to hell.

She wondered, idly, if Sofia, Ivan and Ana had gotten settled in Greece. It had been a strange turn of events, having Anatoly give them access to his house there. But it made Felicity a little more hopeful that perhaps Anatoly would be okay, even though he was losing his entire family.

“There you are,” Oliver mused from behind her.

Felicity turned, peering over her shoulder, and smiled. She loved when Oliver looked this way,
comfortable, relaxed, without the weight of the world on his shoulders. It happened so infrequently that she had to revel in it whenever it did. He had changed out of his earlier clothes into black slacks and a blue button down that made his eyes look like Caribbean water she’d only ever seen photos of. Oliver leaned lazily against the wall, and Felicity nearly scoffed at how he could have literally just stepped out of the pages of a magazine.

She wished she could force some semblance of his calm into her nerves. But she rolled her eyes, as if to ‘tsk’ him for being so nonchalant. Oliver pushed off the wall, moving toward her and encircled her in his arms.

“What’s got you so relaxed?” Felicity asked with a smile. “And where can I get some?”

Oliver shook his head. “Just exhausted. From the trip, this day, everything.”

“Ah,” she answered. “So it’s not relaxed as much as about-to-pass-out.” Felicity pulled herself against him a little more, running her hands up along his arms. “It’s kind of a shame, really. With so many teenagers around, I was thinking we could get away with sneaking off and making out in someone’s bedroom.”

Her tone was teasing, and Oliver leaned down, capturing her lips in a kiss. Felicity felt her pulse skyrocket in response. She pushed herself up onto her toes, leaning into and deepening the kiss. Oliver responded, moving to press her up against the wall. She grinned against his lips. Her brain told her she should feel self-conscious, acting this way in the middle of his sister’s birthday party, when anyone could spot them at any moment. But that’s what made it so exciting.

After a long moment, Oliver broke their kiss, resting his forehead against hers as they both caught their breath. “I feel much more awake now,” he said, bracing his forearm against the wall beside her head, caging her in.

A blush crept up her neck and her entire body thrummed with energy until she had to avert her eyes from the weight of his gaze. She wasn’t used to this, and as much as she was enjoying it, sometimes it still caught her off guard.

“I bet you do, Mr. Queen,” she said, barely above a whisper. “Maybe we should find that bedroom after all.”

Oliver grinned, placing a kiss on her forehead before stepping back, pulling her away from the wall. “I thought you’d never ask.”

“Liar,” she answered back, matching his cheshire cat grin with one of her own. He laced their fingers together as they made their way back toward the party. “You know the stairs in the kitchen would have been less conspicuous,” she breathed. The thump of the bass reverberated through her entire being as he led her through the common spaces on the main floor. But rather than head upstairs, Oliver pulled her toward the large room where lights flashed and a dancefloor had been constructed in the center of the space.

“Yes,” he replied, pulling her out onto the floor and spinning her to face him. He pulled her close, flush against his torso, with his arm tightly secured around her back. “But then I wouldn’t have a chance to do this.” His voice was low and husky in her ear. “Time to make new memories on a dance floor.”

Felicity rested her head against his chest, nodding at his words. Their last time dancing was so different, and it seemed like both a million years ago, and like it could have been yesterday. She let herself get pulled under by the memory, the emotion, the melody. Their last dance had been a
bittersweet goodbye. And this? This was possibly her favorite beginning. She didn’t know how their story would end, and she didn’t want to know. They’d vowed to take things one day at a time, to enjoy each moment as they came.

Her eyes slipped closed as they swayed to the tune, and she let the worry fall away. And for those few moments, she just enjoyed the feel of being pressed into Oliver, of his hand against the small of her back, the scent of his cologne that filled every inhale, intoxicating her. She pushed away the thoughts that tried to break her, problems itching at the back of her mind, worries that were too persistent to leave her be.

“I should tell you about the office,” she said finally, when she couldn’t push the fear and anxiety back anymore, try as she might.

“That’s what you’re thinking about right now?” Oliver chuckled, low and taunting in her ear. This close to him, she felt the vibrations of it rumble through his chest and a shiver went down her spine.

But she felt the worry wash over her anew, like a tidal wave on the ocean shore. She nodded, moving to look up into his eyes. “Something big is happening,” she said, biting her lower lip.

Oliver nodded, releasing his hold on her and running his hand down her arm to lock their fingers together again. He pulled her across the hall, back into the study where they were alone for the first time in two years just a few short months ago. Felicity closed the door behind them and Oliver perched himself on the edge of the desk.

“So what is Malcolm up to?” he asked, keeping his voice low enough that they wouldn’t be overheard.

“I’m not sure, exactly,” Felicity answered, worrying her bottom lip with her teeth. “But he’s retasked the entire team that was working on the Markov device and he’s asked me to scrub it from our servers. All of it.” She paced the floor, her mind still trying to make sense of her conversation with Malcolm back at the office. “I even told him that companies don’t do that unless they’re hiding something.”

“You did what?” Oliver asked, both eyebrows shooting up in surprise.

She shook her head. “He brushed it off,” she said dismissively. The last thing she needed him to worry about was how she was speaking to her boss. “He said he doesn’t want the reminder of the failure. But I don’t believe him.”

“What are you thinking?”

Felicity blew out a long breath, finding it hard to even put her thoughts into coherent form, let alone speak them aloud. But she needed to tell him, if for no other reason than to have him refute it. “I think he’s found a way to use the device,” she said. “And I think he wants to destroy the evidence so it takes longer to come back on him. He’s got some sort of blind spot where this machine is concerned. Whatever he wants it for, he’s been meticulous, and he won’t let anything get in his way. This plan is likely been many years in the making. Think about it, he brought me on two years ago but he’d been working with Markov even before that. He’s playing the long game here, and we just don’t have the rest of the pieces to see what his end goal is. But I know, in my soul,” she paused, meeting his eyes. “I know that his plan for this device isn’t over, no matter how much he’s trying to convince me that it is.”

Oliver just stared at her. He watched her carefully, and she could only imagine what she looked like. Probably half wild with worry and frustration. If only she could see the missing piece- the ‘why’ of
it all, she’d be able to better predict the where and when.

“Say something,” she pleaded. “Please. I already feel half crazy here.”

Oliver moved to her. He placed his hands on her shoulders. “We’ll dig in. We’ll go over his financials, his holdings, his movements. Whatever we have to, in order to figure this out.”

“We’ve done that,” Felicity answered, nervous energy flooding her again. “If Malcolm is careful enough to operate as the Dark Archer without me finding it until now, he’s smart enough to cover his other tracks too.”

“He might be smart enough,” Oliver said, lifting her chin to force her eyes to his. “But you’re smarter.”

Felicity nodded, wheels turning in her mind. “We need Tommy,” she said definitively. “I have an idea.”

And then her phone chirped with an incoming alert. The message had blasted across the emergency broadcast system for the whole state, and Felicity felt her blood freeze in her veins as she read it. A Merlyn Global jet, carrying Dr. Markov and the rest of the man’s entire team, recently assigned to a project in Kandahar, had just lost contact with air traffic control, and crashed into Mount Rainier.

Felicity swayed on her feet, phone dropping from her hands and clattering against the floor. If it weren’t for Oliver’s arms still on her, she would have landed right beside it. Her feet went out from under her, and she collapsed into Oliver, her stomach threatening to betray her.

“He…” she began, but she couldn’t find words. The rest of the team was gone. There was no explanation, and no making sense of it. Only one thought took root in her mind, chilling her to the very bone.

_I’m next._
Chapter 44
Chapter by foreverfelicityqueen (stydiarosedstring)

Chapter Notes

Hello loves,
That was a great cliffhanger last chapter right? I mean so much fun? No one's laughing are they? Anyway I'm sorry that it wasn't a longer fluff chapter. We all know how much Cassie and I love our trio, but we got a story to tell. And it requires us to break them down just a little bit more. ENJOY!.

love,
Kayla

“Felicity, talk to me.”

But she didn’t talk, she didn’t look at him either. And when Oliver placed a hand on her cheek, she seemed so far away. He had seen Felicity face down Waller and the heads of the Bratva, but whatever just happened had shaken her worse than either of those.

“Okay, come on,” he made sure his arm was secure around her waist, bent down and grabbed her phone. Felicity was hard to reach at the moment, but if anything happened to her phone she would freak later on, and set it on the corner of the desk.

The rest of the party pulsed outside the room, like a rushing current of oblivion. He almost envied them. Whatever Felicity had realized was much worse and he wanted nothing more than to push it from her mind.

Oliver sat her down in the open arm chair, a sense of irony washing over him. The last time they had been in this room emotions had been charged, and he had tried to bury them. But things had changed since he first came back. He had changed. Felicity brought him closer to the man he should be, she showed him he was worth being that person. And he couldn’t handle how broken she looked.

“Felicity,” he kept his voice low, barely a whisper above the pounding of the bass.

“I’m sorry,” she shook her head. In fact she looked like she was shaking all over. “I just, oh god.”

“What’s going on?” He moved towards her, reaching out to take her hand in his. “You can talk to me.”

“I--”

But the door opened and in spilled music, laughter, and his little sister wrapped in the arms of some guy. This day was getting worse by the second.

“Ahem,” he cleared his throat shooting Thea and the boyfriend a look. A guy who apparently
couldn’t find anything better than jeans and a red hoodie to wear to his baby sister’s birthday party.

“Ollie?” Thea stepped forward once as she took survey of the room. “Felicity, are you okay?”

“Yeah, I’m just,” but she was floundering, he could see she didn’t have it in her to lie.

“Felicity wasn’t feeling well. Jet lag probably just caught up with her,” he replied, smoothly. “Thought we’d take a beat from the crowd. And what are you two doing in here?”

“Taking a breather from Mom. Ollie this is Roy,” Thea replied. “Roy this is--”

“Thea’s disapproving older brother,” he leveled the kid with a glare. “And you’re the delinquent boyfriend.”

“Ollie!”

“It’s fine Thea,” Roy rolled with it, giving Oliver a grin. “It’s good to finally meet you.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Just that I’ve been around a few weeks and we’ve never seemed to run into each other.”

The kid was testing his patience, he could see it written all over his face. But what he could also see was the fierceness to protect Thea’s heart, and he reluctantly had to give Roy credit for that.

“Okay,” Thea stepped between them, pressing Roy backwards with the tips of her fingers. “I wanted you two to meet, but clearly this is not going well.”

“Sorry,” it came slightly forced, but his eyes softened to Thea. “It’s nice to meet you. Thea talks about you a lot.”

“Yeah she can’t seem to shut up about you either,” he replied.

The next thing he knew Felicity was next to him, her fingers tangling in his own, as she squeezed lightly. “What he means is, he’s glad Thea’s happy. Hi, I’m Felicity Smoak.”

“The computer tech friend,” he nodded. “Thea says you’re like the smartest person she knows.”

“I’m not that smart.”

“She’s being modest. She’s the head of the tech department at Merlyn Global. Oh my god, did you see that news report that blasted a few minutes ago?”

Felicity’s hand stilled in his, and he swept his gaze to make sure she didn’t lose balance again.

“I did,” she said the faintest waver in her voice.

Oliver looked at Thea. “What report?”

“Some MG jet crashed in the mountains. Early reports are saying no survivors,” she explained with a sigh. “Did you know anyone on the flight?”

Felicity nodded once, and it was all Oliver needed know what line of thought she must be on.

“Speedy, come on it’s your birthday,” he moved to her dropping a kiss to her cheek. “And if you hide in here any longer, Mom will start searching the house. Go have some fun with your friends.”
“I don’t want to leave Felicity--”

“I’ll take care of her,” he assured her with a smile.

“I just need a few minutes to collect myself,” Felicity added with what he thought was her best attempt at a smile. “Go drag Roy to the dance floor. We’ll be out soon.”

“Okay.” But Thea still pulled Felicity into a tight hug. “Birthday or not, if I don’t see you in fifteen minutes I’m emptying the party and you and I will have a girl’s ice cream party in my room. Got it?”

“You’re only young once Thea, go enjoy it.”

His sister took hold of Roy’s hand and led him from the library.

“The jet,” Oliver turned to Felicity. “Who was on it?”

“Dr. Markov and the team,” she was on the verge of tears. “Oliver it can’t be a coincidence that the very same day Malcolm asks me to scrub the device from MG, the entire team that worked on the project dies in a plane crash?”

“You think he did this?” But Oliver already knew it was true. He could feel the reality of it settling into his bones.

“I wouldn’t put it past him,” she took a seat in one of the chairs, her hands wringing together. “He’s gonna come after me.”

“No he’s not.”

“Oliver,” she met his eyes and the fear he had seen all those times they had faced down something together, echoed back tenfold. “I’m the last person there who knows what that device can do. I’m the only one left that worked on it. Tell me this, if it was a Bratva matter, what would they do to someone who knew that much?”

“It’s not happening,” he knelt in front of her, stilling her hands between his. “Okay Malcolm Merlyn, or the Dark Archer, whatever the hell he wants to call himself, will have to go through me if he wants to even try. I won’t let him get to you.”

“What if you don’t have a choice?”

“Stop,” he leaned in to pressed their foreheads together. “Okay this is not worse than Waller, or faking deaths and conning the Bratva. We will figure this out. We always figure it out. Together alright?”

“I’m scared,” her breath hitched as she spoke. “I don’t want to be, but I am.”

“We’re gonna get through this,” he didn’t know how. He wasn’t sure what moves they could make, not while trying to keep what they did for the city a secret. “I’ll go to Waller myself if I have to find away--”

“Don’t you dare,” and just like that her eyes snapped with laser focus. “I don’t care what we ever have to face, you are not allowed to sacrifice yourself to that woman just for me. Not after what we did to get you away from her.”

“We have to find a way to take down Malcolm.” The same Malcolm who happened to be his little sister’s father. God everything was blowing up on him lately.
“I know,” she placed her hands on his shoulders. “I had an idea before the alert came in. I think it’s our best chance to try and get intel into what he’s planning.”

“You’re not going in there again. I can’t risk it.”

“I was actually thinking someone else.” She bit her lip, before she caught his eye again. “When I discovered what the plans were building towards, it was because Tommy broke into his dad’s safe and stole them.”

“So you think we can break into Malcolm’s safe again?”

“No.”

“Okay? The what are you thinking?”

“I think we can’t break into Malcolm’s safe. But I think Tommy can.”

He shook his head. “We can’t ask him to do that.”

“He would want to help.”

“Felicity you didn’t see him this morning. This, Malcolm, his connection with the League and the plans. Hell the Dark Archer and killing that agent. All of it is killing him. He’s taking everything in and not getting anything out. He can’t go after Malcolm. I don’t think he can handle it.”

“I don’t think any of us have a choice,” she grabbed for her phone. He could see the news article as she scrolled through it. “I meant what I said earlier. I think Malcolm has been planning this for a very long time. And whether we like it or not, we all have a part to play in making sure whatever he’s planning doesn’t hurt anyone. I owe it to those people he just killed. And we both know Tommy would never sit back and let his father do this. Not if he can stop it.”

“Felicity…”

“I know you started the Hood as a way to atone for things, to right whatever wrongs your father had. And I know what that burden has put on you,” she stood again, tall and strong even with everything crumbling around them. “Tommy and you are a lot a like, Oliver. And I know you don’t want him to be burdened by Malcolm’s mistakes, but I think you need to let him decide that for himself.”

“What if it breaks him?” he didn’t want to doubt his best friend, and he wasn’t sure if it was even really doubt. But he did know he wanted to protect him from the destruction that was sure to come.

“It won’t,” she reached for his hand, and he took it. “He has us and between the three of us, we can figure this out.”

“You seem really sure about that.”

“I trust both of you more than anything in this world.”

“Okay,” he nodded. “Let’s go talk to Tommy.”

---

Tommy memorized it- the way he’d pulled Laurel into his arms- close, but not too close to make her uncomfortable with it. Even still, it was closer than he’d been to her in weeks. He had to hand it to Thea- she was nothing if not persistent. And he wasn’t sure when he’d get another chance to hold Laurel like this. He needed to commit every second of it to memory.
Laurel chatted amiably as they turned around the dancefloor. As much as they could chat over the loud music. But her shoulders were still tense at his touch. She was still guarding herself, and Tommy knew why. He knew that he’d hurt her, betrayed her trust, everything she had told him he had cursed himself for a hundredfold. But those thoughts held little purchase in his mind now. Not when, against all odds, Laurel was here in his arms.

“Why did you ask me to dance?” she questioned over the thumping bass.

“Why did you say yes?” he asked back, a hint of mischief in his voice.

Laurel rolled her eyes, not quite satisfied in the lack of an answer, but not willing to push it further. The song faded, a two second lull before another picked up in its place, but it was enough. She stepped out of his arms, dropping her hands to her side awkwardly. Tommy’s smile faltered, trying to gauge her intent.

“Should we get a drink?” she suggested.

Tommy nodded eagerly, snaking an arm around her back to lead her through the crowd. From the corner of his eye, he caught Oliver and Felicity leaving the dance floor and disappearing into the study across the hall. He’d be sure to steer clear of that room for the night. Just in case.

He ordered their drinks from the bartender before turning to face her.

“Laurel I—”

“I ran into Fel—”

They both began at the same time, and both broke off mid sentence.

“You first,” Tommy said. There was a giddy energy building in him, despite everything else that had happened that day.

Whatever she was about to say was still on the tip of her tongue. But Laurel’s brow furrowed, glancing down as he handed her a drink. “What happened to your hand? It wasn’t like that last night.”

“Last night. God, was it possible that was all it was? It felt like a year ago, not just the night before. So much had happened since then. The Dark Archer’s poison, seeing Sara and Nyssa, Ollie telling him about his father, the booze, the glass he’d smashed in his hand.

“I broke a glass,” he said, taking a long swallow of the water in his own glass. No more drinking for him, not tonight, not for a long time to come. He wanted to be fully alert, on guard for whatever his father had planned. Besides, if they were still going to tell Thea about the paternity test they’d done, Tommy wanted all of his wits about him.

“You okay?” she asked, taking his hand in hers to inspect it.

Tommy nodded, relishing in her concern. Warmth bloomed at her touch, spreading within him. Was it possible that what he’d asked of her the night before had taken hold of her heart? Was Laurel actually considering giving him another shot?

“Just some small cuts,” he said, enjoying the feeling of being truthful with her. He should have done it earlier, right from the start. He hated that they were backtracking now, but he would take what he could get.
“Is this why Felicity told me to go easy on you?” she murmured, tracing the lines of the bandages with her fingers.

Tommy’s brow furrowed. “She did what?”

“Sorry,” Laurel shook her head, darting her eyes up to meet his. “I probably shouldn’t have said that. It’s just, I ran into her earlier. At the coffee shop near the club.”

He wasn’t quite sure what Laurel was trying to tell him, what she was willing him to read between the lines. But she looked at him expectantly, as if waiting for something to click.

“I was there working on this case,” she said, blowing out a long breath. “Just needed a change of scenery.”

“And Felicity told you to go easy on me,” he repeated slowly, still not quite reaching whatever conclusion she’d hoped. She’d been at the coffee shop near the club working. All day. He thought back to the text messages he’d read through when he’d woken to earlier that afternoon. Felicity had sent a few, and had even mentioned that he should stop for coffee. Had Laurel asked her to send him over? Or at the very least, gone there with the hopes of running into him?

It certainly fit with the change in her demeanor tonight. And how she’d agreed to dance with him so quickly. But why the change? His mind flew to the worst immediately. Had his father gotten to her somehow? Was Malcolm using Laurel against him? Tommy shook the thought loose from his head. No matter how hurt she’d been, Laurel would never be that vindictive. Because, there would be no going back from something like that.

That left one option- seeing him the night before had been enough to make her second guess distancing herself from him. She might not be willing to get back together- but she had at least thought about giving him a second chance.

“She did,” Laurel confirmed. She’d moved closer to him, until they were just inches apart now. How easy would it be to lean down, to capture her lips in a kiss and remind her of how good they always were together? It would be easy enough. But the lie- keeping the truth about Sara from her, that was one thing he couldn’t do. Not when he’d just come clean about everything else.

“I need to tell you something,” he said, taking a step back from her. “But not here, not like this.” His voice had gone cool. He needed everything out on the table. He wouldn’t try to mend things with her while there were still lies between them.

“Tommy, you’re scaring me,” she breathed, eyes searching his.

He nodded. She should be scared; the world they lived in was dark and dangerous and scary. There was more deceit and lies than he’d ever imagined, and he’d worked for ARGUS for the last two years.

“Will you meet me at the coffee shop tomorrow morning?”

“Are you leaving?” she frowned. “Tommy what is going on?”

He shook his head. “I’m not leaving. I just can’t tell you here. Not with the music and the teenagers and—” And the countless people who could be eavesdropping as we speak, he almost added.

Promises or not, Tommy Merlyn had reached his breaking point. He had spent the last two years putting everyone else’s secrets above his own happiness. And he’d let it rot a relationship with the one woman Tommy had ever even considered spending his life with. Earlier that morning, with the
booze and the broken glass, had been a low point for him. A culmination of all the secrets and lies, all the things he’d had to keep hidden and buried for far too long. And he wouldn’t do it anymore. If there was even an inkling that Laurel was willing to give him a second chance, he would take it in a heartbeat. And that meant telling her everything.

“Are you in trouble?”

“No,” he answered, but even that felt like a lie. Weren’t they in trouble? All of them? When his father was planning who-knew-what?

Someone cleared their throat behind Laurel, and Tommy glanced up, finding Oliver and Felicity standing there. Felicity’s eyes were half wild, and Oliver’s jaw was set in a hard line. Tommy frowned.

“Tommy, can we steal you for a second?” Felicity asked, her voice strained.

Laurel turned. “Hey Fe--” but she cut off when she caught sight of Felicity, panic flooding Laurel’s eyes as she glanced back to Tommy. “What’s going on?” Laurel almost demanded.

Felicity swallowed hard, averting her eyes. She looked like she was either going to scream or cry, and Tommy couldn’t, for the life of him, figure out why.

“There was a plane crash,” Oliver said, keeping his voice calm. “It was a Merlyn Global jet and all of Dr. Markov’s team was aboard. All are presumed dead.”

Tommy’s stomach bottomed out. Dr. Markov’s team? The team responsible for the earthquake generator. His jaw clenched, if only to keep himself from wretching all over everyone’s shoes.

“Did you know them?” Laurel asked, looking at Tommy.

“I did,” Felicity cut in, swallowing hard. “I worked with them for two years.” She looked like she wanted to say more, but she refrained.

“I’m so sorry,” Laurel said, pulling Felicity into a quick hug. “If you need anything.”

Felicity nodded. “Thanks,” she said, finding her composure. “We actually need Tommy about the security system at the club. There’s a bug somewhere setting off random alarms and I need the phone number of the guy Tommy hired to install it.”

A lie. Felicity had installed that system herself. But Laurel seemed to buy it.

“Sure,” she nodded.

Tommy couldn’t imagine what Oliver and Felicity were planning, but it no doubt involved him, if they were pulling him away from Laurel. Before he could change his mind, Tommy cupped her face between his hands, pressing his lips to hers with all the feeling and passion he could muster. She didn’t react right away, seemingly stunned by the action. And even when she did react, it was only to pull back, out of his grasp, and then drop her eyes to the floor.

“Tomorrow,” he whispered, tucking her hair behind her ear. “Say you’ll be there.”

“I’ll try,” Laurel said back, her voice a little breathless.

He kissed the crown of her head, before following Oliver and Felicity out of the room and down the hall. Tomorrow he would tell her about Sara, about his father, about Thea being his sister. He’d tell
her all the rest of his secrets, and then, it would all be up to her.

---

They had moved outside, wanting as much distance from the party goers and eavesdropping teens as they could get. Felicity didn’t think they could leave yet, not without raising Thea’s suspicions or worse Moira’s.

“Are you sure your mother won’t come out here?” She could feel the shiver run through her, from the chill in the air or her nerves she wasn’t sure, but it hung around.

Oliver must have noticed, he shrugged out of his jacket, and placed it on her shoulders. “I haven’t seen her all night. We’re probably fine.”

“Buddy I think we are far from fine.” It was the first thing Tommy had said since they pulled him away from Laurel. He turned back to them leaning his back against a pillar. “Whatever my father’s planning, he’s clearly getting close to doing it.”

“Tommy we don’t know—”

“Ollie, we all know the only reason someone has to off a jet full of civilians is because they’re more of a liability alive. The living can talk, the dead on the other hand are not as chatty.”

She hated the pain and anger sitting in Tommy’s eyes. And more than that she hated Malcolm for putting it there, for not giving his son a second thought before he dived into whatever was going on.

“We should reconsider telling Thea. She doesn’t deserve this kind of burden.”

“We can’t.”

She had seen Oliver struggle over the last couple weeks with learning the truth about his sister. But this was the first time she saw him strong in his choice.

“What if Malcolm hurts her? He would do it. He’s a terrible person and a worse father.”

“Tommy if we don’t tell her, we know he will. And if that happens she’ll hate us for keeping this from her. We can control how this goes down, but only if we get in front of it.”

“What if we wait, just until we get our bearings?”

“The longer we wait, the worse it might implode.” He glanced at Felicity. “What do you think?”

“I think Thea is your sister, not mine.”

“Felicity, please?”

“You both make good points.” She paused, meeting Tommy’s gaze. “But Oliver’s right, Malcolm will use Thea against you if he tells her first.”

“Fine,” Tommy groaned. “But this will be bad. Considering we can only tell her half of what’s going on, and have no way of convincing her not to seek him out.”

“We’ll do what we can to keep her from Malcolm.”

“We also have to figure out what he had planned for the device,” Felicity said glancing between the two of them. “It’s the only way we can stop this before he goes any further.”
She knew Malcolm wouldn’t make another move until he was sure she had deleted the device from the servers completely, and by that fact alone she was safe until it was deleted. Safe, yeah right. She didn’t feel very safe. She felt like at any moment her insides would betray her and she’d crumble again. Somehow this felt worse than anything they had dealt with so far. Maybe it had to do with the not knowing. With Waller and the Bratva things were always clear. But against Malcolm they were still flying blind, and she couldn’t stand him being ten steps ahead of them.

“Do you suggest we call him up and ask him what his devious plans are? Because I’m not sure that will go very far.”

“Felicity has a plan that might get us some insight into what he’s got going on.”

“Great, wanna clue me in?”

Felicity bit her lip, because in theory she knew they couldn’t do this without Tommy. He wasn’t just their best chance to get into the safe, he was also damn good at what he did. But in practice, she didn’t want Tommy to have to choose the side against his father. She didn’t know anyone who could deal with that.

“Smoak come on, what’s the plan?”

“We need to get access to Malcolm’s files,” she said, taking a deep breath. “Whatever is going on he’s got to have a record of it somewhere. It’s not on the MG servers so it has to be--”

“In the safe,” Tommy finished with a slow nod. “Of course it is.”

“You don’t have to do this. We can find another way to get the information,” Oliver looked like he was barely holding back something more, his hand twitched beside him as his fingers rubbed furiously together. “You shouldn’t have to do this.”

“I appreciate the concern, Ollie. But I’ll do it.” He glanced up at her, the saddest smile she had ever seen sitting on his face. “I’m so sorry if I hadn’t told you to apply at Merlyn Global--”

Felicity placed her hands on his shoulders, effectively cutting off his sentence. “This is not your fault. Do not think for one second that I could ever regret or blame you for the choices I made. The only person to blame here is Malcolm.”

Her phone chirped in her purse, and Felicity pulled away from him to pull it out. She had a new text and the dread sunk back in quickly.

I need those servers scrubbed tonight Ms. Smoak.

Malcolm. He had just killed the majority of the team, and now he wanted the last bit of evidence tying him to the device gone.

Oliver was watching her carefully. “What is it?”

“Malcolm wants me to go in and delete the files. Tonight.”

“Absolutely not.”

“Oliver--”

“No, Felicity he’s trying to lure you to MG by yourself, you are too smart not to see what’s going on.”
Tommy looked wrecked, like everything around him was crumbling to ash. And he looked at her once more. “He’s right, you can’t go.”

“If I don’t go, he’s going to think I know something.”

“And if you do go you could…” But Oliver didn’t finish his thought. None of them really needed the words.

“He killed a plane full of people Felicity,” Tommy’s voice nearly faded into the night air. “You know he won’t stop until he gets rid of anyone who knew about the device and right now that just leaves you.”

“I know that,” she whispered back stepping into his space. The somersaults in her stomach had just subsided over the idea of Malcolm plotting her death, and now they came back in full force.

“I can’t lose you,” he shook his head, leaning forward until their foreheads touched. “You’re not just my best friend, you’re my family.”

“Tommy I’m not going anywhere.” She felt her words cement into place, her free hand reached back until she felt Oliver envelop it with his. “We can deal with Malcolm.”

She pulled back and met his eye, and at least some of the guilt had subsided.

“You’re still not going to Merlyn Global alone,” Oliver replied. “Give us a couple hours. Let us talk to Thea, and then I’ll go with you to your office. While we do that, Tommy can get into Malcolm’s safe.”

“We’re gonna need Lyla and Digg too,” Tommy added. “Lyla to talk me in through the new security measures and Digg to keep an eye out for guards. Plus they might kill us if we leave them out of this.”

“Felicity can call them while we talk to Thea,” he leaned into her side, kissing her cheek, and she realized some of the tension she felt seemed to melt away. “Let them know what’s going on, and what we need from them.”

“Of course,” she nodded. Just like old times. “As long as none of us go in there alone.”

“Together?” Tommy questioned, and despite the situation she couldn’t help but give him a smile. A smile for every single memory that word brought back.

“Together.”

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Heyyyy there lovelies! So it seems like you guys are getting the feeling that big things are on the horizon for our favorite trio... and you'd be absolutely correct. We hope you're ready (and super jazzed like we are!) because here goes! xoxo, Cassie

Oliver watched as Felicity retreated into the house- back into the flashing lights and blaring music. He’d offered the use of his bedroom for her to have some privacy to contact Lyla and Diggle. They would need all hands on deck for what came next. Even if he wasn’t sure what exactly that would entail.

“Five years ago, who woulda thought,” Tommy said, clapping a hand over his shoulder. “You’d be smitten with a girl like that, and I’d be the one pining over Laurel.”

“A girl like that?” Oliver repeated, eyebrows raised.

“Well yeah, aside from Laurel, your usual type was anyone who wouldn’t be expecting a call the next day. And Felicity is... well, let’s just say you’re lucky you’re my other best friend. Otherwise I might have to threaten to kick your ass if you hurt her.”

“I would never,” Oliver answered, with more fervor than he’d expected. But he quickly shook the thoughts off. They had more pressing matters, and it appeared that their timetable was running low. As much as he didn’t want to hurt Thea, she needed to know the truth, or at least what little truth they were able to offer her.

“We should find Thea,” Tommy said, heaving a sigh.

Neither of them were looking forward to this- to completely altering the girl’s life forever. Because that’s what it would be. It was bound to result in Thea questioning so much of her life growing up with Robert. But Oliver would do his best to convey to her that family didn’t end in blood. Robert was her father, her daddy. The man who threw a baseball to her in the backyard, who took her for ice cream when Moira said no, who picked her up from school when she was sick. He was still the man who raised her. And Malcolm could never take that away.

“I feel like we could have picked a better time than her birthday party,” Oliver sighed, but he moved toward the door anyway. Malcolm wouldn’t consider things like that when it came to telling Thea. If anything, he’d probably prefer to do it on a day like today, when it would make a bigger impact. “But we can’t give him the chance to break the news first. Not when the rest of his plan is falling into place. We can’t take the chance that whatever he’s doing doesn’t involve Thea too.”

That thought sent a chill down Oliver’s spine. He hadn’t actually considered that before, at least not consciously. But now that Malcolm was working so hard to disconnect his name from the Markov device, Oliver couldn’t say what else the man had planned. But if Malcolm even came close to Thea, Oliver would have no choice but to show that man what it meant to protect one’s own.
She wasn’t difficult to spot, not with a ring of teenagers surrounding her as she spun wildly on the dancefloor. Thea was nothing, if not the center of attention. She had always loved it, fed off it even. She was kicking and spinning in time to the music, some choreography she’d picked up from a favorite music video or something, no doubt. When she finished, everyone applauded, Oliver and Tommy included.

Thea spotted them on the outskirts of her friends and moved their way.

“Was that Backstreet Boys?” Oliver asked. Sometimes feigning ignorance from his time away was more fun than others.

“Eww, no,” Thea scoffed, wrinkling her nose. “I’ve got way sicker moves than those grandpas.”

Oliver laughed, despite himself. “Hey, Speedy. Can Tommy and I talk to you for a minute?” he asked, already gently taking her by the arm and leading her away.

“Is this about the job? Because seriously, no take backs. I can’t tell you how excited--”

“IT’s not about the job,” Tommy interjected. “That is yours, no matter what.”

Thea’s brow furrowed. “Okay,” she said, drawing out the word like she was completely unsure. “So, then who died? Oh god, was someone we knew on that MG plane?”

They’d found a quiet corner near the back of the house, off the kitchen. It was the only place—probably in the entire downstairs—that wasn’t crawling with people. Oliver had caught their mother’s eye as they passed through, and she no doubt knew what they were about to do.

Oliver cleared his throat, his mouth suddenly going dry. He couldn’t do this, couldn’t wreck his baby sister’s life again, not after everything she’d been through. How could he hurt her like this?

It’s the lesser of two evils. The words bitterly flooded his mind. Because Malcolm was certainly one very large evil to contend with.

“No, Thea,” he said finally. “Tommy and I recently learned something. Something about you, that we think you need to know.”

Her brow furrowed. “You guys are really freaking me out. What happened? What did you find out?”

Behind him, Oliver heard the kitchen door open behind them. He turned to find his mother standing there, annoyance crossed with frustration set into her face.

“This is not the time, Oliver,” Moira said, pulling her features into a demure mask.

He turned to face her, moving in close to whisper. “Did you hear about the plane tonight?” he asked. “That wasn’t an accident. And if you think he won’t similarly drop a bomb on this family, you’re fooling yourself, Mother.”

Moira’s eyes darkened, and the mask she wore slipped for just an instant, revealing unbridled fear. But when she moved around him to speak to Thea directly, she was the picture of calm.

“Mom?” Thea questioned, worry written all over her face now evident in her voice as well.

“This doesn’t change anything,” Moira said, moving to Thea and taking the teenager’s face in her hands. “But they’re right. It’s time you know the truth, and you should hear it from me.” She took a
deep breath before continuing. “Before you were born, Robert and I went through a bit of a rough patch. I didn’t want to tell you, because, well, I wanted your memories of him to always be good ones. But things happened, and I found out that he’d been seeing someone, a young intern at the office.”

Oliver felt anger rushing to the surface, but he bit back an interjection. Whatever his father had done, it was in the past. And it didn’t erase their mother’s sins, try as she might to downplay them now.

“In response,” Moira continued. “I found solace with someone. I didn’t expect it to happen, and if it weren’t for…” she trailed off. “If it weren’t for you, I would regret it.”

His mother searched Thea’s face for any sort of recognition of what she was saying. Oliver clenched his jaw, wishing she’d just spit it out and put them all out of their shared misery.

“Sweetheart, Robert isn’t your biological father,” Moira said softly.

Thea immediately pulled out of her mother’s grasp. Her eyes welled with tears, looking between Oliver and Tommy for confirmation. They both gave a minute nod in response.

“No,” Thea said, quiet but resolute. “He has to… he has…”

“We reconciled a few weeks later,” their mother continued. “We didn’t talk about it, but we both knew. Your father, he always wanted a little girl.” She smiled softly. “He was still your father, nothing can change that.”

“When is my father?” she said again.

Moira was quiet, head shaking furiously with unshed tears welled in her eyes.

“Tell me who my father is,” she said again.

Oliver swallowed hard. He knew this would be difficult, he hadn’t expected it to be this brutal, the wounds to be this pronounced so quickly. But then again, he remembered how he’d felt when he had learned the truth, and it wasn’t even his life that was turned upside down. It worried him, to see Thea so hardened. He had never seen her like this, and a sour spot in his stomach briefly brought a flash of Malcolm into his mind. Oliver almost retched, right then and there at the thought. He wouldn’t allow himself to see Malcolm in her. Thea was a great many things- she was compassionate and wild and reckless, the life of the party, a bit mischievious. But Oliver too, had been all of those things when he was younger. He wouldn’t compare his sister to that man, that monster. And he’d kill or maim anyone else who tried.

Another long moment of silence stretched between them, and it was clear Moira was not ready to share that particular bit of information with Thea. So she turned to Oliver.

“Ollie,” Thea said quietly. “Do you know who it is?”

He nodded and Moira turned to him, shooting him a glare that nearly knocked him backward with its ferocity. But Thea needed to know. They hadn’t come this far, hadn’t given her the information that they had, just for her to not know the truth. They might not be able to convey to Thea how
dangerous he was, but she needed to know.

Oliver met her eyes, feeling a pang of sadness in his chest. He knew, deep down, that this didn’t make Thea any less his sister, even if his mind tried to worm that thought into him.

“It’s Malcolm Merlyn,” he said quietly, after a long moment. “Your father is Malcolm Merlyn.”

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Tommy watched as the color drained from Thea’s face. She froze before them as Oliver’s words settled in. He wished they didn’t have to do this. He wished he could turn back the clock and keep himself from learning the truth. Because Thea of all people didn’t deserve this kind of pain.

No one moved between them, too afraid to break the dam any further. But he had to try.

He reached his hand out, but Thea pulled away.

“No.”

He couldn’t help but feel himself breaking for her. “Thea, I’m so--”

“It’s not true,” she shot a look to Moira. “Tell me it’s not true. Tell me he’s wrong. Tell me you didn’t sleep with Tommy’s father?”

“Sweetheart you have to understand--”

“I don’t,” she leaned back against the counter, trying to steady herself if he hand to wager. “God, how could you do that? To Dad, to Ollie? What the hell kind of person does that to their family?”

“You have to let me explain my side of things.”

“I don’t have to do a damn thing,” she turned on Moira, rage and power pulsing through her each word. But when she caught sight of Oliver for a second she faltered, and Tommy could see the cracks spreading through their baby sister. “How long have you known?”

“Speedy,” he glanced to Tommy with a heavy sigh. “We just found out ourselves. And we thought you deserved to know the truth.”

She shook her head, the tears heavy in her eyes but she refused to let them fall. The last time he saw her like this was at Oliver and Robert’s funeral. He was struck with the same thought that he had back then. She’s too young for this. He had always wanted to protect her from the bad things in the world. But the older they got the harder it became. Now it was near impossible.

“I can’t be here. I can’t talk to you right now.”

She tried to push past them, and while Moira and Oliver seemed resigned to let her go, Tommy couldn’t. He saw enough of himself in her to be worried about letting her.

“Let go,” she didn’t look at him, but he could hear how much she didn’t want this to turn into a fight.

“No, not until you understand something.”

“Tommy, please?”

“Look at me,” he pleaded and by some miracle she did. “This doesn’t change anything about who you are.”
“It changes everything.”

“Not if you don’t want it to,” he looked at Oliver but focused back on Thea. “I have spent my whole life knowing Malcolm was my father, and as sure as I’m standing here today, I can tell you that it is not the most defining thing about you. You are a great person Thea Queen, and nothing as stupid as a DNA test could change that.”

She pulled from his touch and the tears began to fall slowly down her face.

“I thought I was protecting you, by keeping this a secret,” Moira said as she reached for her. Thea backed away, letting herself fall against him. As long as she wasn’t pulling back. “Does he know the truth?”

“It’s complicated.”

“It’s actually not. Either my father knows about me or you’ve been lying to him too.”

Tommy watched Moira closely. So far she had been holding herself as if this secret had pained her from years, but Thea’s words flipped a switch.

“I will only say this once. Malcolm Merlyn has never done a damn thing for this family,” her words were sharp as she spoke. “Your father was Robert. He cared for you, he loved you, and he protected each and every one of you from Malcolm more than you will ever know.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Oliver had moved to stand next to Thea, all three of them together and watching Moira in confusion.

“It means,” she drew in a long breath, her gaze sliding over each of them before she continued. “I’m tired, and I’m going to bed. This conversation is over.”

“Mom,” Oliver called after her, but Moira didn’t turn back as she stalked away and up the back staircase.

“Unbelievable,” Thea turned to face them. “She lies to me for my entire life and makes it all about her?”

“Speedy, I’m sorry.”

“Save it Ollie,” she put up a hand using her thumb to wipe the tears from her eyes. But Tommy saw some of the recklessness had subsided in her demeanor. “You don’t owe me an apology.”

“I know but still.”

“Look I--”

The kitchen door swung open, and they all turned towards the newcomer.

Tommy had seen Thea with the kid earlier, dancing around when he was with Laurel. And there was something about the guy that scratched at the back of Tommy’s mind. And the way his eyes slid to Thea already had Tommy questioning if he was going to like the kid.

“Roy,” Thea pushed a smile on her face.

“I was wondering where you went,” he eyed Tommy and Oliver with equal amounts of apprehension. “The party’s pretty cleared out.”
Oliver looked like he wanted to strangle this Roy character, and Tommy let the realization dawn on him. This was Thea’s Roy. The boyfriend.

“Oh, I got held up talking to my…” she looked torn on how to address them. And he didn’t blame her. He was still struggling to wrap his head around it. “Roy this is Tommy. Tommy this is my boyfriend Roy.”

“Nice to meet you,” he greeted with a small nod.

“You too,” Roy wasn’t looking at him though. He was focused on Thea. “Are you okay?”

“I’m,” she looked at them again, finally meeting Tommy’s eyes for the first time in a while. “I’m gonna be fine. But I want to get out of here.”

“What?” Oliver’s gaze shifted to her. “Thea--”

“Roy and I are just going for a drive Ollie. I promise we won’t do anything stupid,” she moved towards Roy, and took his hand. “Come driving with me?”

“Always,” his voice barely whispered back.

They left and before Oliver could follow, Tommy grabbed his arm halting his movements. “Let her go.”

“Why?”

“Because her whole viewpoint just got a major shift in the last half hour. And as much as it might suck, we’re not who she needs right now.”

“You think she needs the punk who wore a hoodie to her birthday party?”

“I think without the people we care about to lean on, the world can feel pretty damn bleak,” he leaned himself against the countertop, letting the exhaustion from the day seep in. “It went better than I thought.”

“That was better?”

“She doesn’t blame you, she doesn’t hate me. I call it a win Ollie,” he said.

“Let’s hope it’s not the only one for the night. You sure you wanna do this? We can find another way.”

But Tommy knew they wouldn’t. The safe was the best option, the only option. And if it meant keeping his father from hurting innocent people he was going to do it. He just wished it had done more the first time he broke into it.

“We have to,” he was resigned in that fact. “We know how dangerous he is now. If we don’t find out what he’s up to, more people could die.”

“What about ARGUS?”

“I’m still riding desk duty for a couple more weeks,” he smiled. “What Amanda Waller doesn’t know won’t hurt me.”

“Tommy--”
“It’s my responsibility to figure this out, Oliver.” He hadn’t voiced it yet, not in so many words, but he thought his friend had suspected it. “You, me, Felicity. If we don’t do something to stop him, who is there? Sara and whatever the League has them doing here? No it’s us. It’s always been us.”

“I’m with you, brother, no matter what. You know that?”

“I do.”

The kitchen door opened once more and Felicity’s head popped in. “Okay so I just saw Thea and her guy leave so how did the talk go?” She paused as she looked between them. “Did I interrupt a guy moment here?”

Tommy rolled his eyes giving her a smile. “What did Lyla say?”

She walked up to them leaning in to Oliver’s side. “I left a voicemail. But we shouldn’t let it get too much later before we go. Malcolm will think something up if I don’t reply soon. And I’m afraid he might try and find me himself after that.”

“She’s right,” Oliver added. “We have one shot to do this, and it has to be tonight.”

“One question,” Tommy met Felicity’s eyes. “What happens after you delete the stuff from Merlyn Global’s servers. If we figure out what he was planning to do with the device how will be tie it to him with no evidence?”

Felicity smiled and reached around her neck. From under her collar she pulled out a heavy rectangular pendant.

“That necklace gonna take high resolution pics of the data?”

“No,” she said with an eye roll. But she pushed something on the side, and a piece of metal popped out. Metal that looked very much like a flash drive.

“I’m sorry you have a drive around your neck at all times?”

“What some girls like diamonds, some like being able to pull data off servers conveniently,” she shrugged, then leaned close to Oliver. “Have I told you today how much I love you?”

“Me or the tech necklace?”

“Both,” she kissed him quickly. “Always both.”

“Fantastic you two, but we should focus,” Tommy pulled his own phone out and sighed. He wasn’t supposed to use Lyla’s home number unless it was an emergency, but this was what he qualified as an emergency. “I’m gonna pull out the big guns.”

“The big guns?” Oliver raised his brow.

“Trust me,” he dialed Lyla’s number and waited.

Both his friends looked at him like he had lost it, but Tommy knew what he was doing. Sort of.

Finally the ringing ceased and the line picked up on the other end.

“So help me god Merlyn if you are not bleeding out I will make sure you are when I’m done.”

“Nice to chat with you too partner.”
“I’m off duty,” Lyla replied. “And I have company.”

“Tell Digg to put some pants on and both of you meet me, Felicity and Ollie outside MG in 20 minutes.”

Just like that the agent switch flipped in her. “What’s going on?”

“I’ll explain when I see you, just bring some repelling gear, and those comms I know you keep in your car.” he paused. “We’ve got a break in to achieve.”

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Twenty minutes later and Felicity, Tommy and Oliver were in the back of an unmarked van parked outside Merlyn Global. Oliver’s hood, bow and quiver sat beside him. He hadn’t suited up, opting instead to play the protective boyfriend during this mission, but he’d brought his gear just the same. Felicity wondered if it made him feel a little more confident, just having them with him. She couldn’t blame him, and they could use all the strength, perceived or otherwise, that they could get.

She finished coding an access card for the front security checkpoint and pulled the keycard from the cloning device. It wouldn’t get all of them into the building, but it was better than nothing. Felicity had created the card with Diggle’s photo on it, despite protests from both Oliver and Tommy. But when she’d explained that she was hoping Tommy and Oliver would be able to get in simply because of who they were, they’d calmed slightly.

And if for whatever reason the guards at the front wouldn’t allow Tommy and Oliver access to the building- well, they’d have to figure something else out when the time came.

A knock sounded on the sliding door of the van, and an instant later it slid open, Lyla and Diggle on the other side. They both climbed into the already-tight space, and closed the door behind them.

“Would anyone care to let us know what’s going on?” Lyla asked. “I don’t know how I feel about the five of us making a habit of things like this.”

“Sure,” Tommy said. “My father is the Dark Archer. He just killed a plane full of everyone who worked on the Markov device—”

“Except Felicity,” Tommy continued. “Who has been tasked with scrubbing all evidence of it from the MG servers, tonight. He was especially insistent that it was tonight. Oh, and not only is he the Dark Archer, but he’s also the League member that Sara and Nyssa are tracking. So there’s that.”

Lyla and Diggle both sat there, mouths agape, at everything he’d just disclosed.

“You seem to be taking this surprisingly well,” Diggle deadpanned.

“Except Felicity,” Tommy continued. “Who has been tasked with scrubbing all evidence of it from the MG servers, tonight. He was especially insistent that it was tonight. Oh, and not only is he the Dark Archer, but he’s also the League member that Sara and Nyssa are tracking. So there’s that.”

Felicity cleared her throat. “So our mission is two-fold,” she said, not really sure she should be the
one explaining things, although her nerves weren’t steady enough for waiting for someone else to explain it. “First, I need someone to stick with me and make sure Malcolm doesn’t try to off me after I’ve cleared out the servers.” Her leg shook involuntarily, knee bouncing to a beat of its own making and Felicity smoothed her hands down her jeans to try to mask the fear that was creeping through every nerve of her body.

“Second is the safe,” Oliver said, resting a hand over hers on her thigh. “Since Tommy first found information about the Markov device in Malcolm’s personal safe in his office, that’s our best chance of learning more.”

“Like where he plans to use it,” Tommy took over. “Seems like that’s the only big missing piece. Lyla, we’re going to do it the same way, repel down his personal elevator shaft. So we’ve got to get to the roof. Oliver and Felicity will go in through the front door. And Digg, you can provide backup wherever you think you can be of the most use.”

Could she do this? Walk through the front doors of that building, knowing what awaited her? Because she was absolutely, positively certain that Malcolm was there, waiting for the text from her that she’d wiped the servers. And once it was done, could even Oliver protect her? Her nerves were a frayed rope pulled taut, barely holding it together and on the verge of snapping at any second.

Felicity knew she didn’t have a choice. With a trembling hand, she offered Diggle the pass she’d made him. “This will access just about every door on the inside. But I didn’t have the chip for the exterior doors, so it will only work once you’re already in.” And then she passed out comms, making sure they were all on the same channel.

“Oliver and I will go in first. Digg, I’ve got a security uniform stashed in the back. Just tell them you were switched to nights, I already hacked the system and provided the necessary electronic trail.” She shifted her focus to Tommy and Lyla, who were already gearing up. “You two are going in from above,”

“I don’t have what we used last time,” Lyla said with a sigh. “So I’ll have to secure you from above myself.”

“Aw, come on,” Tommy said, nudging her shoulder. “You love this James Bond stuff.”

Dr. Markov’s face flashed through Felicity’s mind. She hadn’t liked the man, but he hadn’t deserved to die. And the engineers that she’d worked tirelessly with for the last two years. They were so young, full of such promise. Now they were gone.

“Felicity?” Oliver said, pulling her focus back. “You ready?”

Tommy and Lyla were already outside, heading around the back of the building. Oliver looked at her expectantly, holding out a hand. She wasn’t ready, not even close. But she had to do this. Her own life, along with the lives of countless people who might be in the path of the device, were on the line.

Felicity placed her hand in Oliver’s, letting him pull her from the van, along the sidewalk, up to the doors. She caught her reflection in the glass. Her eyes were a little too wide, like she’d just come from watching a horror movie, her belief still slightly suspended, dazed and unsure.

She tried to force a neutral expression onto her face as they made their way to the security checkpoint. She nodded to the two men on duty, pulling her badge out and swiping it across until it beeped green. Felicity laced her fingers back through Oliver’s pulling him along with her.
“I’m sorry, Miss Smoak,” one of the guards said. “No visitors after hours. Per Mr. Merlyn.”

Felicity swallowed hard. “We just left a restaurant in the middle of a date, so I could do something for Mr. Merlyn personally. I’d appreciate you making an exception for me. Just this once.”

“Any deviation from policy will result in immediate termination,” piped in the other, like he was reading directly from a memo. And knowing Malcolm, it was possible the guy was.

Oliver’s grip on Felicity tightened, keeping her from moving further into the building. Her eyes closed, willing him to not have this fight with her here. She turned, meeting his gaze.

“I can’t let you go in there alone,” he whispered, his voice panicked, insistent. They both knew what they were risking having he go in by herself.

“I’ll wait in the lobby until Digg gets in,” she said, her mind coming up with a deviated plan on the fly. “He can go up with me. We’ll copy the info, clear the servers, and be out before Tommy and Lyla are done.”

Oliver shook his head. “I don’t like it.”

“What do you want to do?” she asked, feeling the panic rise within her again.

He blew out a long breath. “I’ll meet you in your office. Does your window open?”

Felicity frowned, but nodded.

“Open it when you get up there. I’ll make my own way in.”

“Wait for me in the car,” she said, loud enough for the guards to hear. “I’ll only be a few minutes.”

Oliver mocked annoyance, which couldn’t have been hard, given his current mood, and turned and headed for the door. “Digg, Felicity’s waiting for you near the elevators,” his voice came through her ear a second later. “Tommy, Lyla- what’s your status?”

“Almost to the roof,” Tommy whispered.

Felicity moved back to the security checkpoint, tapping her badge again before moving through the partition and toward the elevators. She wondered if Malcolm was already in the building, waiting for her. Shit. If he was in his office, Tommy could be exposed even more than he already was to his father.

She spun on her heel, moving back to the two guards.

“Elevators take forever at night,” she said dismissively as they glanced her way. “Do you know if Mr. Merlyn is in the building this evening?”

“I don’t believe so,” the one seated closest to her said. “He left when I got here at six, and I haven’t seen him since.”

Diggle entered the building, and Felicity felt a bit of her doubt dissipate. No Malcolm, and Diggle coming to her rescue. It would have to be enough to keep her pushing forward. An elevator dinged behind her and she moved back toward the bank of them down the corridor. She walked slow, giving Diggle enough time to plead his case and meet up with her. Sure enough, a moment later, she heard his footsteps trailing her down the hallway.

“For security, those two aren’t especially bright,” Diggle said, as he came to stand beside her at the
“Perhaps you just look intimidating enough that they were afraid to question you,” Felicity said, cracking a hint of a smile. “But I’m glad they weren’t bright. I don’t think I could go up there alone.”

“We’ve got your back, Felicity,” he said.

A ding pulled her focus to the far end of the space and the doors slid open. Felicity blew out a long breath and steeled her nerves, moving toward the elevator with Diggle at her side. They rode up the floors in silence, only the dinging of passing each floor filling the quiet space between them. Even though she’d done the same thing just a few short hours ago, Felicity was still surprised at how different it felt. Yes, she had known before that Malcolm was evil, that he was most likely coming after her. But now? Knowing what he’d done to Dr. Markov’s entire team? It had broken something inside her, and all that was left in its place was sheer terror.

They stopped on the floor for her office and Felicity stepped out. How many nights had she spent in these halls? She used to find solace in the quiet halls after hours. Now the eerie silence had her seeing shadowy corners with different eyes.

“This is you, right?” Diggle asked gesturing to a door.

Felicity shook her head, forcing herself to focus. “Yes, sorry. I’m just…”

“I know,” he said, putting up a hand to stop her from walking in. Diggle pushed open the door, checking the space before flipping on the light.

Everything looked to be in place from where she’d left it just a few short hours ago. She moved to her computer, carefully pulling the necklace up over her head, flicking the lid open, and pushing the USB into an empty port on the computer tower.

“Can you open the window?” she asked, not looking up from what she was doing, her hands flying across the keyboard to copy the data as quickly as possible without leaving a trail that she’d done it.

“I don’t think that’s the best--”

“Apparently Oliver is planning on flying in through the open window,” she said. “Like a bat.”

Diggle huffed at that, and moved to the window to open it.

Different windows on the screen appeared and disappeared in rapid succession as she copied all of the files on the server related to the Markov device. Once they were copied, she removed her flash drive and put the chain back around her neck.

“Okay, let me just scrub this and we can get out of here,” she said, with a steadying breath. Computer problems were one thing she could do in her sleep. It calmed her frayed nerves and gave her a bit of strength. She held onto that strength as tightly as she could.

At least, until an arrow flew passed her head, embedding itself in the lightswitch by the door, sending the room into darkness.

“Oliver,” she whispered under her breath.

But the figure that came across the zipline, into the open window, sending Diggle spilling out onto the floor in the hallway, was most certainly not Oliver. Clad in black from head to toe, nothing but elevators.
his eyes visible, boring into hers in the darkened room.

“Have you finished, Miss Smoak?” he asked.

Enough light filtered through the room, from the light of her computer screen, that she actually recognized his eyes now, even if he still used the voice modulator. Terrified though she was, Felicity balled her hands into fists, forcing the fear away. She would be strong for Oliver, for Tommy, for all of them. No matter what Malcolm took from her. She wasn’t sure why, when faced with imminent danger, her flight or fight response was always the latter. Even when it shouldn’t be. Especially when it shouldn’t be. Diggle was motionless in the hallway, and Felicity narrowed her eyes. Not her friends- she would not allow Malcolm to claim any more lives tonight.

Felicity stood from her chair, defiantly. “Almost,” she spit back, voice cold as ice. “Mr. Merlyn.”
He hated letting her go in alone. And yeah he knew she wasn’t technically alone. Diggle had her back, and if there was anyone he trusted to keep Felicity safe more than himself and Tommy, it was John Diggle. But that didn’t mean he had to like it.

“You seem tense.” Tommy’s voice rang through his ear, almost mocking.

“Shouldn’t you be a little more focused on your B&E instead of mine?”

“I’m just saying I’m on an entirely different rooftop and I can feel the tension all the way over here.” He paused. “And this is not a B&E.”

Oliver shook his head. “What would you call it then?”

“Reconnaissance and intel extraction.”

“Reciting from the ARGUS handbook?” he joked. And wow did Oliver not believe there’d ever be a time when he could joke about ARGUS. They had come a long way over the last few months.

“Ooh the Hood’s got jokes tonight,” but Tommy quieted a moment. “She’ll be okay. She’s kinda a badass on her own.”

Oliver knew that. He knew better than most how well Felicity could handle herself against danger. But that didn’t mean she had to. She had a team backing her up. She had him. And he wouldn’t let anything keep him from getting in that building.

Shadows stirred around him. There was something remarkable about movement in the night. Long ago Oliver would have thought the darkness was still and calm, but years of training and hardship taught him better. Now he could feel the shift in the air as the other archer landed nearly soundlessly on the other side of the roof.

“Curious place for you to be,” the archer said as Oliver turned to face him.

He still couldn’t quite believe it. That Tommy’s father, Thea’s father, could be the person before him.
But with the Dark Archer standing before him now, Oliver started to see the similarities. The way the man stood, and held himself, the deep cadence of his voice, even through the modulator.

“Could say the same to you,” he shot back, his own voice distorted as well. About the only play they had against Malcolm was the fact that he didn’t know Oliver was the Hood. And he wanted to keep it that way. “You work on retainer for Merlyn or is it a case by case basis.”

“Oliver?” Tommy sounded alarmed. “Do you need backup?”

“Get it done,” he growled into his comm. “I got this.”

“You know that’s why I work alone,” the Dark Archer said. “No one to answer to.”

“Figured you just didn’t play well with others.”

He made a sound, it was almost like a laugh. “I warned you about staying on this trail. Apparently the innocent lives of Starling City don’t mean much to you.”

“You mean your threat against Tommy Merlyn and his friends?”

Oliver watched him closely, trying to see if anything at all slipped under the mask. A shoulder drop, a hesitant pause, anything that could be used for redemption. But Malcolm was a stone before him. And Oliver knew that there would be no reasoning with a man like that, not when he had become so resigned to hate.

“You clearly don’t take me seriously,” he replied. “I guess I’ll have to show you your mistake.”

Oliver pulled up his bow, drawing an arrow into place. “Last chance I’ll give you to surrender.”

Malcolm shifted, his movements like wind whipping around the rooftop. He should have guessed that the other archer had training beyond a bow. Training that could only come from something as ancient and mysterious as the League of Assassins. Though Oliver had never encountered one before, he had heard the stories. He knew that to meet a League blade and live to tell the tale was a feat reserved for only the strongest. He would not fall to Merlyn.

He let the arrow fly, catching only air as it did. While he reached for another, Merlyn charged forward, taking his own bow and pushing into Oliver.

The force knocked him off balance, but he tucked under Merlyn’s arm and twisted out of his space.

“As much as I want to finish this, I’m on a timetable,” Malcolm said, pulling something small from his pocket and throwing it against the rooftop.

Oliver took a step towards him, but the object began to smoke, clouding his vision and making it impossible to see anything in front of him.

Merlyn used that to his advantage. The next thing Oliver felt was the curved edge of a bow hard against his neck.

He fell, the rocks digging hard into his flesh as he hit his knees. He still couldn’t see, but he heard the arrow and then zipline shoot across the night.

“Get her out of there,” he said into his comm, but only static called back to him. Merlyn had to be jamming the signal.

He couldn’t wait for the smoke to clear. He didn’t have time to waste on the headache that bloomed
at the base of his skull. Merlyn was already in the room with Felicity. One arrow at the right angle
and… No. He could do this. He had to do this.

He made sure his bow was secure in his hand as he worked his way across the roof. The further
forward he moved the clearer things became, until he reached the building’s edge. Merlyn had
already cut the line. But Oliver had his own.

He steadied his bow taking in one deep breath, then let the line shoot across the night. Without a
moment to waste he jumped, focused on nothing behind him or below him, only what he’d find
when he landed in Felicity’s office.

He dropped with a thud against the floor. Overcome with fear that he would lift his head to see
Felicity’s body lying there motionless. But that wasn’t the scene before him.

Malcolm stood in front of Felicity’s desk, hood and mask pulled from his face, with an arrow trained
on her heart.

“I should have known all my trouble with the Hood traced back to you Miss Smoak,” Malcolm
tsked. “In fact I wouldn’t be surprised if I could guess the identity of your green leather friend.”

“Why did you do it?” her voice was insistent, as she stood tall and unwavering. Her eyes wouldn’t
meet the arrow’s head, she instead stared at Merlyn. “Why kill all those people?”

“Because they knew something they shouldn’t. And I don’t like loose ends.”

“Felicity,” Oliver edged towards her. “Back away.”

“You don’t want her to do that,” Malcolm said, turning his gaze to him. “See the only way you both
make it out of this room alive is if Miss Smoak deletes the files.”

“Like I believe a word you say. If I delete them you’ll kill us anyway.”

“I didn’t get to where I am by welching on my deals Felicity. I’m also not an idiot,” he replied. “I
know you well enough to know you made a copy before working on deleting the files. So finish
what you started, then give me the flash drive, or you die.”

“You’ll have to kill me then.”

“Fe-lic-ity,” Oliver needed her to back down. The only way he’d get a clear shot of Malcolm is if she
could get out of the way. He could see Digg just outside the office, and if it wasn’t for the rise and
fall of his chest he’d be worried. He was still out cold though, and they had no way to call for
Tommy.

“No she’s right,” Malcolm smiled. “I shouldn’t bargain with her life. See you’ve worked for me for
nearly three years, and I think I know what pressure points are better to hit than others.”

“What are you talking about?”

Malcolm motioned to her computer. “Check your email. Go on Hood, you can look too.”

Oliver didn’t trust Malcolm, but the distance between him and Felicity had him nervous. He bridged
the gap as she pulled up her messages. Only one unread among the bunch, with a video file attached.

Felicity clicked on it, and a bustling casino bar came to life on the screen. He kept his focus on
Malcolm, but he could feel her freeze next to him.
“No,” she whispered, shaking her head. “She’s not apart of this.”

“Do what I ask, or she will be,” he took one step forward. “Give me the copy.”

Oliver watched Felicity, her fists clenched at her sides, anger rolling off her in waves. But she reached into her pocket and tossed the flash drive across to him. Malcolm caught it in a blink as he lowered the bow.

“There. Happy now?”

“Now delete the rest of the files.”

Felicity went to work at her computer, pulling up a window as she typed. But something was off about it. He didn’t know anything about coding, but he did spend a lot of time watching Felicity work. He had sat next to her as she coded their comm units. She wasn’t deleting Merlyn’s files, she was trying to get the comms back up.

After a few minutes Felicity raised her head, pulling her hands off the keys. He could hear the crackle in his ear, and Digg’s steady breathing filtering in the small microphone. Hopefully the sound of their voices would wake him up.

“It’s done.”

“All of it?”

Her gaze shot more venom than he had ever seen before. “Yes.”

“I really am glad this is the outcome we reached Miss Smoak. Things could have ended much worse for you,” he said.

“Go to hell.”

“Not yet. I have work to do first,” he paused as he pulled out his phone, studying it. Oliver presumed he was checking to see if the documents were really gone. “By the way, I’m probably going to have to fire you for this.”

“Don’t bother, I quit.”

Oliver reached for Felicity’s arm, pulling her until she was behind him. But if Malcolm noticed, he didn’t care.

“Good, I do hate termination paperwork,” he smiled again. “It can get messy.”

Oliver saw his opportunity to end this slowly dwindle. If he was going to take a shot he had to act fast. He raised his bow, nocking an arrow into place.

The shift didn’t seem to phase Malcolm, in fact he looked almost serene as he met Oliver’s eyes. “You really don’t want to do that.”

“You don’t know me that well.”

He ignored Oliver’s reply. “More importantly I know you won’t shoot.”

“You seem pretty confident for a man staring down an arrow.”

“You see,” Malcolm cleared his throat. “I have a security deposit that says you won’t.”
“What are you talking about?” Felicity questioned, as her hand rested against his back. It gave Oliver the calm he needed to keep his arm straight.

Malcolm held up his cell punching a few buttons, until someone picked up on the other end, placing it on speaker phone.

“Sir?”

“Yes Jamesen, what was that message you just sent?”

“I said there’s a Thea Queen and a Roy Harper here to see you? I told them you weren’t in but they aren’t leaving.”

“Thank you Jamesen. I’ll be there as soon as I can,” Malcolm hit end and returned his phone to his pocket. “Now Oliver you wouldn’t shoot your own sister’s father, would you?”

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Tommy forced calm into his nerves—nerves that threatened to betray him at any moment. Oliver had told him to focus on his mission, and although he knew he needed to, all Tommy wanted to do was to face down his father and subdue him once and for all. But his father was on the adjacent rooftop with Oliver, and then there was nothing but silence.

There had been a second more of communication with Felicity, but even she had cut out before he could warn her that the Dark Archer was there.

And that left Tommy and Lyla alone to procure the secrets that his father had stashed in his office. Whatever type of jammer—at least Tommy assumed it was a jammer—that his father was using, was short range and only affecting his immediate vicinity.

“Perimeter alarm is off,” Lyla said, setting down her tablet and then popping open the vent cover. And then, “I should be the one going down there.”

“The deja-vous I’m feeling here is staggering,” Tommy answered dryly and then checked and double checked his harness. “And this isn’t a comment about your weight—but I wouldn’t be able to pull you up with my shoulder.”

“I vaguely recall you being injured last time we did this too,” she replied, leading the rope through the harness she wore.

Lyla had already tied the end to a fire escape ladder on the far end of the roof. Neither of them were looking forward to doing this the old fashioned way, but with such short notice, they hadn’t had time to gear up properly.

Taking the other end of the rope, Tommy looped it through his harness and dropped the rest of it down through the dark opening. He hated not being in contact with the others, but Oliver was right—they needed to get the information from Malcolm’s office, so he lowered himself into the opening and began his slow descent down the elevator shaft.

The rappelling device Tommy was using had an automatic lock function, which helped once he reached the level for his father’s office, as it allowed him to let go of the rope to pry open the doors. He quickly disconnected himself from the rope to move freely through the office.

“Harbinger, you still with me?”
“Roger.”

“I’m in the office. Should be done in here in just a moment.”

He moved swiftly to the safe, punching in the code he’d used to gain access before. It blinked red, beeping angrily at him that he’d entered the incorrect code. He had assumed his father had changed it, but he had to check just to be sure. Tommy went through a myriad of other numbers and dates, anything he could think of, but he was denied access every time. He had even tried Thea’s birthday, his parents wedding anniversary. And then, with a growing pit in his stomach, Tommy typed in the day of his mother’s death.

The safe clicked open, and Tommy swallowed hard. He wasn’t sure what to think. Thoughts swirled through his head, violent and raw. But he couldn’t focus on them, no matter how persistent they may be. Inside the safe was empty. He took a deep breath and let it out slowly, trying to remain calm. He should have assumed this would happen. Malcolm had always been ten steps ahead of them, so why wouldn’t he predict this?

How could they have all been so blind, so sure that the safe would hold his father’s secrets? Quickly, he pushed the safe closed, before turning his attention to the desk. Tommy rifled through the drawers, looking for false bottoms. He dug through papers, hoping to find anything useful, but there was nothing.

Tommy spun, glancing through the books on the shelves, moving vases and statues to see if anything was hidden inside them. He reached for a small warrior statue, and rather than picking it up, the statue shifted forward, and a panel of the wall near Tommy slid sideways, revealing a narrow hidden room.

“Boyscout?” Lyla questioned in his ear. “What’s your status?”

“Safe was empty,” he answered on autopilot, standing straight and tensing. “Doing a quick sweep of the rest of the room.” He didn’t take his eyes off the room, as if it might disappear before his eyes if he did.

“The guards will be notified of the perimeter breach in four minutes. And you still have to climb up, so make it quick.”

“Copy.”

Tommy moved to the opening, peering inside. A faceless mannequin stood before him, devoid of any clothes, but he assumed it typically held his father’s Dark Archer gear. The remainder of the room was dedicated to weapons, and there was everything from broadswords to arrows and grenades. And then something caught his eye on a pedestal near the back. It had been a glint from the light, and although he knew he was running short on time, Tommy knew he had to investigate.

As he moved closer, he found a bullet, recovered from what Tommy couldn’t be sure. It was spent, half smushed and dented at odd angles, meaning it had been fired and then recovered later. He picked it up, and then lifted the small, leather-bound journal that the bullet had been resting on. He flipped through the pages, examining it quickly. The pages were empty, but the front cover held a small circle emblem with different lines crossing through it. It meant nothing to Tommy, but he pulled his phone from his pocket and clicked a photo of it, and the bullet, before returning them to their stand.

“Boyscout!” Lyla yelled in his ear.
“I’m coming,” he sighed. As he moved toward the open, empty elevator shaft, Tommy bumped the statue back into place, closing the hidden door in the wall.

How long had it been there? And had his father built it explicitly for that purpose? Tommy couldn’t be sure of anything anymore. Once he was back onto the rope, Tommy closed the elevator doors behind him, and began his ascent back up to the roof.

They still hadn’t heard from the others, and that worried Tommy more than him climbing up an empty elevator shaft did. But then static filled his earpiece, and he heard breathing. There was nothing else for a moment, and then-

“It’s done.” Felicity’s voice came through his earpiece, and Tommy felt his heart leap into his throat.

Was she talking to his father? Tommy had no context for the words, and it made him anxious. But it did make him climb faster. They needed to get out of this building, off his father’s property, and figure out what— if anything— they could about the book and the bullet. If they were in his father’s secret Dark Archer room, they had to have some significance.

And the safe.

It wasn’t lost on Tommy that the two dates his father had chosen for it, had been his mother’s birthday and the date of her death. And although he should have factored it in earlier, for the first time since learning the truth about his father, Tommy wondered what his mother had to do with it all. The Dark Archer’s movements had been calculated, and the earthquake generator was an extreme measure clearly meant for something big.

One hand after another, Tommy climbed up the rope, barely noticing the conversation going on in his ear. He knew he should be paying attention, but the culmination of his father’s planned felt so close to realization, that Tommy couldn’t allow himself to focus on anything else.

The lock on the repelling device allowed Tommy a few seconds here and there to rest his muscles, but he kept climbing as much as possible, knowing they must be running short on time. He was only ten feet from the top when he heard Lyla swear. And then the rope dropped a foot.

“What’s going on?” Tommy asked, turning his gaze and his attention skyward, his pulse jumping to doubletime as adrenaline filled his veins.

“Johnny!” Lyla screamed into her comm.

“You only call me--”

“The bolts on the fire escape,” Lyla grunted. “They’re giving out--”

Shit. Tommy’s brain supplied. He glanced into the dark around him. Didn’t most elevators have some sort of ladder? Not this one apparently. Of course his father had to make it impossible to--

He slipped again. Another several feet down, and this time, when he cursed, it was aloud.

“I really need you to not drop me, Lyla.”

“Working on it.” Her voice was strained, and he knew that she was holding most, if not all of his weight, on her own.

“Thirty seconds,” Diggle answered.
“Might not have that long, Johnny.”

Tommy looked around again. The opening to his father’s office was still several feet below him, but maybe if he could get there, he could at least hold onto the ledge until Diggle got there.

“Lyla,” Tommy said, carefully working the device into the opposite direction, bringing him further down, rather than up. “I’m going to try to make it back to the office.”

“Merlyn, I swear to god, if you move, I will drop your ass.”

He drew in a shuddering breath. “Copy,” he said. And it wasn’t like the life he’d already lived flashed before his eyes, not exactly. But Tommy could see, with absolute certainty, the life he could have lived with Laurel. In a flash, he saw their wedding day, moving into their first house in the suburbs, sleepless nights with an infant, reading to a toddler at bedtime, taking pictures of their kids on prom dates and growing old together. And it was perfect.

Tommy couldn’t be sure how much time had passed. It could have been a moment, or it could have been an eternity. But suddenly he was being hoisted up. Ten feet, and then fifteen.

“Digg?” he questioned.

“Mmhmm,” the man hummed.

“I can make it the rest of the way,” Tommy answered. And he grabbed onto the rappelling device, reversing the direction again, before he began pulling himself upwards, toward the roof. After several more tense moments, he finally felt the lip of the vent under his fingertips. And then strong hands closed around his forearms, pulling him the rest of the way out of the hole.

With his feet back on solid ground, Tommy forced down the lump in his throat. He could have died. He almost had. And it was just the latest in a long line of almost-death moments that Tommy had experienced the last several weeks. He didn’t really like the habit he was forming here.

“I take it back,” he said finally, still a little breathless. “I’m over the James Bond stuff.”

Lyla narrowed her eyes at him, but then pulled him into a tight hug. “Next time we stop for the rest of the gear.”

Tommy nodded. “No argument from me.” And then, he glanced to Diggle. “Now, what kind of rescue mission are we looking at downstairs for Oliver and Felicity?”

---

Felicity reached for Oliver. She knew exactly how he’d react to the mention of Thea coming from Malcolm. As much as she wanted the man before her to cripple at the pain he’d been inflicting on dozens, it wasn’t the right time. They needed to be smart about things. Whatever Malcolm had been planning could already be in motion, and ending him before they discovered what he was up to wouldn’t stop things.

“Given the look on your faces,” Malcolm said, a slow smile crossing his face. “I assume you already knew that detail. I can’t say I’m surprised. What with the way Moira’s been hounding me the last couple weeks to keep my mouth shut. I figured someone had learned the truth. I am, however intrigued by the outcome of this night. Don’t get me wrong I had my suspicions on who was under that hood, but every time you crossed my mind something else distracted me.”

“If you go anywhere near her, I swear you’ll regret it.”
“Oliver a trick of the trade I’m going to impart here, don’t threaten someone who’s seen the whole board. It only makes you look weak.”

Oliver’s muscles tightened under Felicity’s fingers, and she could tell it was taking everything in him not to lunge across the desk. She half expected Digg to be standing behind Malcolm, gun in hand, but when she peered into the hall she didn’t see any trace of him. That settled like a rock in her stomach. Digg wouldn’t just leave them, not unless there was a reason.

“We’re leaving,” Oliver said his voice low and dangerous. But Malcolm just looked amused.

“I agree, but not out the front door,” he glanced at the window then back to them. “If you two were anyone else I’d kill you right where you stand, but my children are fond of you. So despite what you may think of me, I wouldn’t be able to end your lives anymore than you could end mine. So I’ll give you a gift. You have five minutes to vacate the premises or I’ll call the police and let them know exactly who’s been rounding up the corrupt city elite with arrows. It’s really your choice.”

Oliver moved towards the window, keeping Felicity behind him. She didn’t think he wanted to turn away from Merlyn, but it was the only way they were getting out of there.

“This isn’t over,” he all but growled to the other archer. “And I’ll be damned if I let you hurt her.”

“Thea is in no danger from me.”

Yeah no danger from the murdering psychopath, okay. But Felicity knew better than to piss Merlyn off right then. They had to be smart.

“Let me guess,” Malcolm watched with amusement. “You won’t leave until I do? Predicable Oliver. Maybe that’s why every time we’ve met you’ve lost.”

Felicity felt bile and anger bubble over. She wanted nothing more than to tear into Merlyn, cut him down where he stood and raise a hand in triumph.

“Okay, I’ll give you this,” he walked towards the vacant hall. “When you hear the elevator ding, you’ll know I’m no longer a threat to your safety.”

Neither replied as Merlyn left the room, turning down the dark hall and into the silence before him.

But that was just the thing needed to spring Oliver into action. As soon they lost sight on Malcolm he pulled his bow out, shot an arrow across the darkness towards the other building, and grabbed hold of her waist.

“Felicity hold on to me tight.”

She smiled, imaging him saying that under severely different circumstances. But now really was not the time to picture a naked Oliver. Maybe later, definitely later.

They stepped up to the open window, and jumped. It was like a rollercoaster, a handstand, and three energy shots all at once. Felicity clung to Oliver, welding her eyes shut as the night air cut around them. And as soon as the rush had started, they were landing on the street below.

“That was a one time only, no repeat performance type thing,” she said breathlessly as he released her. “On the brightside as couple activities go, that was a doozy.”

“We have to get back in there.” He made a move towards MG but she caught his arm. “Thea is in there.”
“Exactly, and you look like it’s Halloween,” she shook her head. “I don’t like Malcolm that close to Thea either, but I don’t think he’ll hurt her. Let’s get to the van, you can change, and we’ll go from there.”

Oliver nodded, however reluctantly. But it was enough for her. They just needed to gather the team, and go from there.

As if on cue, the van pulled up to them, Digg behind the wheel as he smirked. “Good you two made it out unscathed.”

“Where the hell were you?”

“Indiana Jones back there nearly fell down an elevator shaft.”

As Digg motioned the back door popped open to Tommy. He looked as exhausted as she felt.

“I need my pants,” Oliver said reaching around Tommy for his bag.

“Hello to you too, buddy.”

“Thea’s in there right now confronting your father,” he stopped long enough to hop into the back of the van pulling his jacket off.

“What? And you two left?”

Felicity sighed. “We didn’t have a choice Tommy.”

“We have to get in there,” Tommy was out of his seat and nearly past her when she caught his arm.

“Wait for us.”

“Right,” he groaned, rocking back on his heels. “You get a copy of the files?”

Oliver rolled out of the van, changed and grease paint rubbed from his face. He was really fast at that. “Merlyn took the copy.”

“Actually,” she lifted up the chain on her neck. “He thinks he took the copy. I happen to always carry a few extra flash drives on me. If he checks the content he’s going to love the complete catalog of Ms. Marvel digital comics.”

“If he checks that, he might come after you.”

“I dare him to try,” she hadn’t felt this confident a few hours ago, or even a few minutes ago. Not when she learned exactly the kind of man Malcolm Merlyn could be. But she wouldn’t let fear of a maybe keep her from doing what’s right. “He won’t though. He’s afraid of having this thing on the servers he won’t keep a flash drive with the information. He’ll destroy it as soon as he can.”

“Before or after he tries to destroy our sister?” Oliver questioned looking once at Tommy.

But for once their friend had no quip to counter with, Tommy shot a look at Digg and Lyla. “Go. We’ll call you in the morning.”

“I don’t like this.”

“Lyla, we’re fine. This is something we have to do without you guys. Just go. I promise we won’t do anything stupid.”
“Yeah that I believe,” she muttered but turned to Digg. “Let’s go Johnny.”

Before they rushed off Felicity took her necklace off and handed it to Digg. “Put this in the Foundry for me?”

“I’ll guard it with my life,” he replied and they were off.

“Then there were three,” she said, shooting Oliver a small smile.

He returned it, though the rigidity still sat in his shoulders. She understood it, but she also knew if they were going to get Thea and Roy out of Merlyn Global, Oliver needed to be calm.

As the three of them walked towards the front of the building, their pace slowed to match each other. She didn’t know which was drawing more strength from the other: Oliver or Tommy. But the pair looked to each other with silent resolution, and continued forward.

She thought she might have to explain to security how she possibly got outside the building without them seeing her, but before she could even concoct an excuse the front doors pushed open and out stalked Thea, followed closely Roy, still in his red hoodie.

Merlyn followed them out, and even from this far back she could see the anger rolling off Thea.

“You’re being dramatic.”

“Dramatic?” She spun on her heels pushing past Roy’s attempts to hold her back. “You’re the one acting like this changes a damn thing.”

“You came to see me, Thea. I didn’t seek you out.”

“But you would have, right? Because you care? Because my mother lied to me? Bullshit.”

“Thea,” Roy had assessed the situation, holding her arm and keeping them from getting too close to Merlyn. “Let’s just go.”

Malcolm must have changed from his DA garb. Donning a sleek suit instead of his quiver full of secrets.

It was either the shift in the conversation or a sound Felicity hadn’t caught. But Thea turned towards them, taking in her brothers. And if Oliver and Tommy had drawn strength from one another, Thea combined it into one.

“I came here to tell you I don’t give a damn about a DNA test. You’re not my father,” she spat the word like it could poison. “You’ll never be. So stay the hell away from my family.”

“One day you’ll see that I am your family.”

“No I won’t,” she stepped back with a shrug. “But Tommy is. And he always has been. So why don’t you stay away from both of us?”

Malcolm surveyed the group. His eyes lingering just a few seconds longer on his son than any of the rest of them. He cleared his throat and stood tall. “It’s late, and I’d like to return home. Our business is done here.”

Malcolm walked away first, back towards the building. And as he retreated Thea walked down the steps to them.
Oliver spoke first, meeting her eyes. “By the way coming to confront Malcolm, is the definition of doing something stupid.”

“We didn’t plan on coming, it just happened. What are you guys even doing here? Were you following us?”

“No.”

“Really? Because I don’t see Tommy’s car or your bike?” She had them there. “I just wanted to tell him off. He’s been nothing but a massive dick for as long as I can remember and I didn’t want him thinking this changed anything.”

Felicity would have applauded her friends actions if she wasn’t so worn out for the entire day. Seriously jet lag and missions did not mix at all.

“I’m gonna head home,” Roy said, pulling up to her side. He leaned in and kissed her cheek softly. “I’ll walk and call you in the morning.”

“Promise?”

He nodded with a smile, before the guys cleared their throats. Roy gave them both look, and then a small wave to Felicity. “Again nice meeting you all.”

“I swear I know that kid from somewhere,” Tommy muttered as Roy rounded the corner. “I can’t place it.”

“I guess since the three of you were just out walking in the middle of the city, I’ll have to give you a ride in my car.”

“That would be kinder than making us walk,” Tommy replied. “Though it’s up to you.”

“Of course I’m giving you a ride,” she rolled her eyes, but before they could move she stood in front of them. “After you tell me what you’re really doing here.”

Felicity’s mind floundered. She couldn’t think of a single excuse that would have them out, roaming the city streets in the middle of the night with no transportation.

But lucky for her Oliver spoke next, though what he said was nothing she’d ever have expected. “I have to tell you something.”

“I’m not sure I can handle another bombshell tonight Ollie.”

“I know and I’m sorry, but you need to hear it from me first,” he paused drawing in a long breath. “I’m the vigilante.”

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Chapter 47

Chapter by holysmoaksoliver

Chapter Notes

Hey lovelies! Sooo.... everyone enjoyed Thea finding out about Oliver last week, eh? We’re so glad to hear it. We’ve got more goodness on the horizon, and trust me when I say things are only getting crazier from here! Enjoy!

xoxo,
Cassie

The words were out of his mouth before he could stop them. And even if he’d intended on telling Thea the truth about being the Hood, it wasn’t the time, and it certainly wasn’t the place he’d planned on divulging that information.

Felicity shot him a look of shock and concern. And he knew immediately that telling Thea like that, out on the sidewalk in front of Merlyn Global on her birthday when she’d just found out that Merlyn was her biological father, was probably a mistake. But it was out now, and although he couldn’t predict his sister’s response, this was not what he had expected.

Thea’s mouth hung agape for a long moment. Long enough that, although he knew she had heard him, he almost asked her, just to be sure.

“Well, I can’t imagine you don’t consider that a bombshell,” she said finally, meeting his eyes.

“Speedy I--”

She frowned, running a hand down her face. “Nope,” she said, shaking her head. “No explanations, no excuses, just no.”

Oliver took a step forward, but thought better of it. He didn’t want to push Thea too far, especially after her argument with Merlyn just ended. But he needed her to know why, what Robert had left him in charge of doing, how he was going to save the city.

“So all the times you missed dinner, or didn’t answer a phone call? Every time you disappeared in the middle of a party?” Thea looked between him, Tommy and Felicity. “And you two knew?”

But he couldn’t let this fall on them. He needed her to know that his actions were his, and his alone. “Tommy found out a few weeks ago. Felicity has known since almost the beginning.” He dropped his voice low. “I will answer all of your questions. But we need to get away from here. You still okay driving us?”

Thea looked at him, and it was like she was finally seeing him, seeing the man he’d become since returning from his five years away, instead of the boy of a brother she’d lost all those years ago. “You’re kinda a badass, huh?”

Oliver’s face split into a grin. “Kinda,” he agreed.
“I’ll probably be pissed at you tomorrow, once everything sinks in. But I don’t have the energy to be mad at someone else right now.”

“Understandable,” he replied, pulling her into his side as they walked to Thea’s new car. Even if the cease-fire between him and Thea didn’t last forever, Oliver had to admit, it felt good to have things out in the open between them. And knowing that Malcolm had nothing left to hold over them, knowing that they’d all made it out of the building alive and with a copy of the files to boot, it made the night all the more sweet.

“Any chance you can bring us to the club?” Tommy asked as he and Felicity got into the back seat of the car.

Thea turned, giving him a strange look from behind the wheel. “Tonight hasn’t been enough fun for you?”

“Our cars are there,” Tommy said. “Stopped off there before coming downtown.”

She started the car and pulled away from the curb, quickly taking them nearer to the Glades. “Wait, if you guys didn’t follow me to MG tonight, then what were you doing there?”

Oliver should have expected this question, even long before she’d asked it.

“I was working,” Felicity said.

And at the same time, Tommy said, “Nothing.”

Thea slammed on the brakes, stopping in the middle of traffic as she turned to glare at all three of them in turn. “No. More. Secrets.” Her voice was low, reminding Oliver of their mother when she got angry. Most people thought that to convey emotion, one had to raise their voice. But Moira (and Thea apparently) was proof that if you really want people to know when you’re angry, make them strain to listen as you speak. “And no more lies,” Thea continued.

“We don’t think the plane crash tonight was an accident,” Oliver said, only because it seemed like the simplest place to start. Not to mention the only thing that had happened concretely. Everything else was smoke and shadows.

Car horns blared around them, but Thea didn’t move; she didn’t flinch, didn’t even blink.

“You think he had something to do with it?” she asked plainly. “But you didn’t even go in the building. How were you going to get proof?”

“We did,” Oliver answered. “We were done when we heard you were in the lobby.”

“We haven’t had a chance to go over the information yet,” Felicity piped in. “But we’re going to keep at it until we can find something that sticks. Something to bury him with, once and for all.”

“Jesus,” Thea breathed. “You knew all of this, and still told me that he was my father? Why?”

“I didn’t want to,” Oliver said, darting a glance in the rearview mirror to where Tommy sat. “We knew that Malcolm might try to use it to turn you away from everyone that actually cares about you. Make himself the victim and tell you how much he’s always wanted to be part of your life, but Mom wouldn’t let him.”

“And for good reason,” Thea said. “He’s one manipulative bastard, my father or not.” She paused, and then added, “But I meant when I said in there, Tommy. You are my family, and you always
have been. Since the day you came to stay with us after your mom died. I’ve always considered you another brother.”

“Ditto, Speedy.”

Thea took her foot off the brake, easing them back into traffic on the now-congested street. “So what do you need me to do? Get close to him? Pretend to be the good little daughter that wants to get to know him? Do you need the key to his office or--”

“No,” Oliver said, a little too loudly for the small space. “Thea, you’re not involved in this. It’s not safe. Malcolm is…”

“He’s unstable,” Tommy supplied.

“He’s dangerous,” Oliver added.

“But Thea should probably stick with us anyway,” Felicity said. Oliver opened the visor above his head and glared at Felicity through the mirror on it. “I… I just mean, we all know how dangerous Malcolm is. And now he’s got nothing left to sway Thea to his side.” She cleared her throat. “What if he decides to use brute force? Or… you know… his Dark Archer friend?”

“I’m not comfortable with that,” Oliver said. Too many people already knew about his secret, not to mention about the headquarters he’d set up in the basement of the club. Pulling anyone else into that circle could not come lightly.

“What’s the alternative?” Tommy asked. “He’s tried to take you out at every turn, he poisoned me.”

“Malcolm poisoned you?” Thea screeched.

“Yeah, last night. It was just a sedative,” Tommy said dismissively. “But Felicity is right, Thea should stay with one of us at all times until this all comes to blows. We can’t have him leveraging her against us. With, or without her consent.”

Oliver’s eyes went back to Thea. All of this information was coming at lightning speed, and he wondered how much more she could take before she cracked. And then he noticed the tremor in her hands, and the tear slip down her cheek. She bit down hard on her lower lip to keep it from quivering, and Oliver’s heart broke. She didn’t deserve this. She didn’t need to be worrying about psychotic biological fathers and vigilante brothers and whatever else was weighing on her mind.

“Speedy, we’ll keep you safe,” he said, covering her hand on the steering wheel with one of his.

“Okay,” she said quietly, her voice barely a whisper. “How… how do you all handle this? I mean it’s not normal. None of this is…”

“It’s not,” he answered gently. “And I know it’s not fair to you. You have had more bombs dropped on you in one evening than some people get their entire lives. But you’re strong, Thea. Not because of whose blood runs through your veins, but because of something that is uniquely you. Tommy and Digg and Felicity and Lyla and I will protect you, no matter what.”

“So I’m sticking with you, after all?” she asked, as she pulled up to the club’s front parking lot.

Oliver nodded. “Yeah,” he said. “But in that case, pull around back. There’s something else you need to see.”
Tommy hung back as they stepped out of Thea’s car. He watched as Oliver’s fingers moved nervously back and forth over each other, too scared to reach out to their sister again. And Thea had folded her arms, looking so much younger than eighteen. Somehow the night still clung to the sky. Tommy could barely believe the day still hadn’t ended. So much had happened. So many ideals had been shattered since daybreak. He didn’t think his heart could take another.

Maybe it was better to give Oliver this moment with their sister. He had already seen the lair. He didn’t think he could view it again from Thea’s point of view.

He had been thinking about Laurel off and on since the party. Her lips against his, the way she hadn’t quite said she’d meet him in the morning. But he knew above everything else she would come. Did he really have any right to follow through? With everything going on, with Malcolm and Thea, Oliver and the city, with Sara. Did he have the right to drag Laurel further into this?

“Tommy?” Felicity came over to him, and he realized she had broken apart for the rest of the group. “Are you coming?”

“I just…” He couldn’t do anything else. There would be no fixing the things that happened. His father was the Dark Archer, and had some kind of plan for the city. Thea now knew two secrets about her family, and before long he knew he’d have to tell her his own. Everything kind of just sucked. “I think I need breather.”

“What too much crazy for one night?”

“More like enough for a lifetime.”

“If you need to talk about anything, you know I’m here. I mean I know you and Malcolm weren’t close. But I also know what it’s like to have someone you care about disappoint you.”

“I’m fine,” In that moment he felt fine. He did. Or maybe he didn’t. Maybe the break down he had that morning clouded everything for him. He shouldn’t have let himself get so rooted in this. He knew the rules on agents letting personal feelings cloud their work. Hell he was benched once before for it. Things were worse now.

“Tommy you don’t have to lie to me.”

“I’m not,” he shrugged, the pull on his shoulder tensing into a dull ache. “It’s just we went through all that and we still have no idea what he’s got up his sleeve. We’ve brought Thea into this when we can barely keep ourselves protected. The damn League of Assassins is running around town. And I actually thought for a fraction of a second that I could tell Laurel the truth about her sister. But I can’t, can I?”

Felicity took another step towards him, leaning against Thea’s car until they were side by side. “I don’t think I’m the best one to offer advice there. I never knew Sara.”

“But you know Laurel.”

“I do,” she sighed. “And I think that if you really want to be with her, then secrets are kind of like poison to a relationship.”

“So I should tell her.”

“On the other hand--”

“You’re killing me Smoak.”
She laughed. “On the other hand, Sara asked you to keep her secret. She hasn’t given you much, but she did trust you enough to ask that.”

“Way to state both sides of the argument for me, and not give me any real advice.”

She nudged his ribs with her elbow. “I can’t tell you what to do Tommy. I can say that I’m sure you’ll figure things out. And that no matter what you decide, I’ve got your back.”

“Thanks,” he gave her a half smile.

“I do wish we had gotten something from Malcolm’s office though.”

He had been so distracted by everything with Thea that he had forgotten. He pulled his phone from his pocket, bringing up the photos.

“I did find these,” he handed it to her. “The bullet was resting on top of the book.”

“Tommy this looks like--”

“It was pulled from a wound. Yeah I thought that too,” he scrolled through the pictures showing her the book next. “It was all blank except for this symbol.”

Felicity studied it, zooming in and back out again. “This is all you found in the safe.”

“No the safe was empty.”

“What?”

“Yeah I found this in a secret room hidden behind a bookcase,” he huffed. “Because apparently he’s evil and a cliche.”

“Malcolm has a secret room in his office?”

“I assume it’s where he hangs his hood up. Considering the mannequin.”

“That’s how he was getting in and out of the building without tripping any of the security systems,” she almost sounded impressed. “I couldn’t piece together how he was doing it. But now we know.”

“Too bad we can’t blow it up and stop this whole mess.”

“I think I’ve had enough explosives to last a few thousand lifetimes,” she replied with a smile. “Mind if I text these to myself. I’ll go over them along with the data I pulled from the MG servers. Maybe I can put these puzzle pieces where they go.”

“That’s smart.”

As soon as Felicity finished she handed him back his phone. “I’m gonna head down and get to work on these. You coming?”

“Give me a few.”

Felicity nodded, but he could tell she was hesitant to leave him alone.

“I’ll be fine, Smoak. Trust me.”

“Okay.”
He waited until she went inside, before he pulled his phone back out, scrolling until he found Lexi’s number.

“Hey, Scout, how’s it going?” she said as she picked up.

“I suppose that’s an improvement on the codename,” he replied with a groan. Any other time and he would love to banter back and forth with Lexi, but he was on a time crunch. “I was wondering if you got anywhere with that task?”

“The impossible task you mean?”

“Yeah that one.”

“I managed to drop the list of League members you gave me down to six. But these are assassin’s Tommy. It’s their job to not be seen. I don’t even know how I’d narrow the list down further.”

“What if I knew that one of the names on that list was operating out of Starling City?”

He shouldn’t do it. There were too many people working on this already, And the last thing he needed was Waller sticking her nose further into this. But he had to know when Malcolm had started with the League. He needed to figure out just when his father stopped being the man he used to know.

“You came face to face with another LoA member?”

“I have a hunch is all.” He didn’t want to give too much away until he knew for sure. “I need you to pull up any surveillance of the Dark Archer, see if he matches the MO of any of the rogue League members.”

“That sounds like more than a hunch.”

“Just run through it please.”

“I’ll see if I can, but Tommy you should know Waller was sniffing around earlier. She told me that if I hear from you I should have you call her immediately.”

Tommy had a feeling he knew exactly how that conversation would go. But he couldn’t talk to Waller yet. He needed to have something more to go on first.

It was faint, the crunch of gravel under foot. The shift of the air enough that Tommy knew he was being watched.

“Tell her I’ll be in touch.”

Tommy slid the phone back into his pocket, as he pushed his jacket aside, his hand resting on his sidearm. He turned towards the sound, anger and surprise filled him.

“Don’t be stupid, son.” Malcolm walked out of the shadows. Dressed just as the last time he saw him on the street. “We both know you won’t pull the trigger.”

He ignored his father’s words pointing the gun directly at him. “What the hell are you doing here?”

“I want to talk to you.”

“I’ve got nothing to say to you.”
“You were willing to hear Oliver out after he terrorized the city in the shadows, but you won’t spare a few minutes for your own father?”

“You really want to play that card with me right now? Ollie maybe threatened a couple people with arrows, but you’ve been dressing up like some circus freak for months and killing them,” he shook his head as he kept his weapon up. “You killed those people on the plane too. Don’t deny it.”

“I’m not denying anything Tommy,” Malcolm put his hands up, a move of surrender. “But I think you deserve to know why I started all this.”

“Then enlighten me Dad. What’s with all the murders.”

“I can’t tell you like this. Not while you’re pointing a gun at me. And not while you refuse to listen.”

“Is this your way of asking me to put the gun down?”

“I’d like this conversation to at least feel level headed.”

His training told him to hold his position and not let Malcolm get the best of him. But there was still a part of him that thought he could do this without the violence. And if he could get through to Malcolm, they could stop whatever he had coming.

“Okay,” he put his gun back in his holster. “You want to talk, talk.”

But before Malcolm could speak a figure in black dropped down from above. Blonde hair spun around his field of vision, as a bow staff glinted in the starlight.

If Malcolm was surprised he didn’t show it. Instead he watched the newcomer with amusement.

“Malcolm Merlyn,” Sara spoke, an edge to her voice that caused Tommy to shudder. “By the power of the Ra’s al Ghul, I command you to stand down.”

“Is this the best that he has to send for me? Can’t say I’m impressed. You’re going to have to do better than that.”

“You think I won’t?”

“I think if you had the means to take me down we wouldn’t be talking right now.”

Sara turned to Tommy, a glare in her eyes. “Get out of here.”

“Not a chance,” he wouldn’t let anyone fight his battles for him. Especially not when they included his father.

“Good choice son.”

Malcolm moved like a shadow spreading through a room, vicious and calculating. Sara had only enough time to put on a defense at the forward motion. She sliced the staff through the air, but every time she did Malcolm seemed seconds ahead of her, moving just out of reach as he went for another attack.

He didn’t know how to help. Sara and Malcolm were as evenly matched as anything he had ever seen. And there was no way he’d ever keep up with either of them. They’d kill each other if he let thing continue.

His father got the end of Sara staff, shoving it hard against her stomach and sending her sliding
across the asphalt. Malcolm advanced quickly, the look of death hung in his stance with each movement.

So Tommy did the one thing he could think of. He pulled his gun once more, aimed towards the sky, and let one shot ring out.

Everything stopped. And even though Tommy leveled the gun back at him, Malcolm watched with an prideful smile.

Sara struggled to stand again. “Tommy you don’t--”

“Stop,” he cut her off, shaking his head. “You shouldn’t have come here.”

“I’m doing what I was sent here to do.”

“Poorly, I might add,” Malcolm said giving her the once over. “In my day Ra’s took better consideration in his members. He must have gone soft over the last few years.”

“If I go with you,” Tommy looked at his father, the energy of the day fading from his limbs. “You have to let her go. No more fighting, no more killing. Just stop.”

Malcolm took a second to consider things, barely looking at Sara before he turned his attention back to Tommy. “If you come with me, she can live. I don’t really want the weight of the League of Assassins to come after me if I kill one.”

“Tommy he’s a liar.”

“I know what he is,” lowered the gun, pulling the clip out before he tossed it aside. “But he’s also my father. You have to leave Oliver and Felicity alone too.”

“You have my word son.”

“Tommy, don’t do this.”

Sara’s hand cradled her side, most likely a cracked rib. But he couldn’t worry about that right now. She would be fine as long as he got Malcolm away from Verdant.

Malcolm reached in his pocket and pulled out a small dart. In a blink the thing was flying, hitting Sara in the neck.

Within seconds she collapsed back to the ground.

“You said you wouldn’t hurt her,” he glared at Malcolm.

“I said I wouldn’t kill her,” Malcolm clarified. “And I didn’t. That’s the same sedative I used on you. Perfectly harmless.”

“Yeah she looks fine.”

“I could have snapped her neck before your eyes, but you asked me to spare her. God knows why,” he shook his head. “I didn’t think ARGUS played well with other secret organizations.”

“She’s a friend,” he didn’t dare explain any further. If Malcolm didn’t know Sara Lance was a member of the League, then he refused to offer up that info himself. “You said you wanted to talk.”

“Not here.”
Malcolm pulled something else from his pocket.

“What’s that?”

“A diversion for the cameras.”

Malcolm threw the object as a thick, cloud of white smoke filled the alleyway. He felt his father grab hold of his arm and pull him away.

He looked back towards Verdant once. He hoped when Oliver and Felicity realized what he had done, they’d understand. But truth be told, he felt like he was walking towards his doom.

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It wasn’t like Felicity to feel the need to micromanage her friends, but after everything Tommy had been through the last couple days, she found herself unwilling to leave him alone, even if he needed space. But she did as he requested, and left him alone outside the club for a breather. Even still, the hair at the back of her neck stood on end, refusing to give her even a second of peace as she made her way to her desk in the center of the foundry and got to work on the photos she’d sent herself from Tommy’s phone.

Oliver and Thea were across the space, talking quietly as he led her around the place. For all the strength that Thea had inside her, Felicity knew that nothing could have prepared the teen for everything she’d learned over the course of just a few hours.

Felicity rolled her neck, hoping to ease the tension that still sat there, as she began to unpack the images and see what she could come up with. She pulled up image banks and maps, hoping to cross-reference the image from the front of the book and get a match. Would it be that easy to discover Malcolm’s plans for the Markov device? Felicity didn’t know, but it was worth a shot.

While the programs were running, she reached for the necklace Diggle had returned to the foundry before they’d gotten back. She’d noticed it first thing, sitting atop her desk when she’d entered, and once she downloaded all the information to her computer, she slipped the chain back around her neck, the cool metal calming her nerves a fraction. On another screen, she pulled up the plans and files again- everything that Malcolm asked her to erase, and ran a new search, scanning each document for any mention of usage or locations.

Before Felicity could start something new, or even just let her nerves get the better of her as she waited, a throat cleared behind her and she spun in her chair.

“It’s quite the operation down here,” Thea said with a weak smile.

Felicity nodded. “It’s been… interesting,” she said, blowing out a long breath. “But what Oliver is doing for the city in that hood every night. I really believe he’s doing good.”

“She is.”

“You doing okay? I mean, obviously you’re not okay, because of everything you learned tonight. But despite all of that… your birthday has been… okay?”

Thea laughed at the babble. “It’s been an adventure,” she said finally. “Not one that I’d ever care to repeat, but I’m glad I’m not in the dark anymore. And I’m still adjusting to the fact that everyone has been lying to me for months. But I understand why. I mean they’re called secret identities for a reason. It would be a whole new set of problems if the truth got out about who has been hiding under the hood.”
Felicity was a bit awestruck at the young woman before her. “You are surprisingly mature for your age,” she said.

“Eh, I wouldn’t go that far,” Thea said, wrinkling her nose. “But I’ve got a pretty level head.” Her phone buzzed in her hand and Thea rolled her eyes.

“Your mom?” Felicity ventured.

Thea nodded. “Fourth time this hour,” she answered. “It’s like she thinks I’m still a kid. I mean, she does realize she just bought me a car for my eighteenth birthday, right?”

Felicity stood, moving toward Thea and put a hand on her shoulder comfortingly. “I think she’s just worried about you. And she only knows about one of the bombs you got dropped on you tonight.”

“I just can’t talk about it anymore,” Thea said dismissively. “And she’s no doubt going to freak out about me not coming home tonight. But how can I, after everything you guys told me about Malcolm?” Her phone buzzed again and Thea held it up for Felicity to see. Moira’s picture flashed across the screen. “Seriously? I just declined the call thirty seconds ago.”

“What if I talked to her? Told her you’re staying with me for the night?”

Thea offered her the phone. “Be my guest.”

It wasn’t until Felicity answered the call and heard Moira’s frantic voice on the other end, that she realized exactly what she’d done, and gulped audibly. “Hi Mrs. Queen,” she said, clearing her throat. “It’s Felicity.”

“Felicity? Are you with Thea? Is she alright? She left after we had an argument and I’ve been worried sick about her for hours. Is she with you?”

She nodded her head along with Moira’s questions. “Yes, I’m with her. She’s… she’s okay. I think Thea just needed some time, and some space to get her head back on straight.” Felicity cleared her throat. “I’ve got her safe and sound at my place, and she’s planning on staying here tonight.”

There was a pause on the other end of the line, and Felicity wasn’t sure if Moira was relieved, or if she should be bracing herself for a verbal lashing from the mama bear.

“Thank you, Felicity.” Moira’s tone was cooler, more composed. It reminded Felicity instantly of the way Oliver switched his emotions off when things got too overwhelming. She’d seen it in Thea too, from time to time. At least they got it honestly.

“I’ll make sure she comes home tomorrow,” Felicity said. “I’m sure you two still have plenty to discuss.” And then she hung up the phone and handed it back to Thea.

“I’m impressed,” the teen said, pocketing her cell and crossing her arms. “You’ve learned to maneuver the murky waters of Moira Queen.”

Felicity shuddered. “I’m not sure about that,” she said, her voice a little shaky. “I meant what I said though. I’ve got a feeling we’ll be camped out at my place tonight with your brother and Tommy.”

“Speaking of Tommy,” Oliver said, moving toward them. “Where’d he sneak off to?”

“He said he needed some air,” Felicity said, spinning back around and pulling up the security cameras. “But I didn’t expect him to--” she broke off mid sentence when the cameras of the alley came into view.
Oliver was already on the move, making his way toward the garage door. Felicity and Thea just watched on in horror as Tommy stood between Malcolm and Sara. And then Sara went down, her hand at her neck, where Malcolm had thrown something at her.

“Oliver hurry!” Felicity said, and he disappeared into the garage.

An instant later white smoke filled the screen. By the time it dissipated, Oliver was on the screen, running toward the mouth of the alley, the only way out. Felicity watched as he turned back, and ran to Sara’s side, scooping her up in his arms.

Felicity was out of her chair and clearing off a table before he’d returned. He rushed in, setting Sara down as Felicity took the dart from Sara’s neck to analyze the compound. They had no way of knowing what Malcolm had given her, but if it was poison, they’d need to act fast.

“Is that…” Thea began, but then clamped her mouth shut quickly.

“Where did Malcolm take him?” Felicity asked angrily. She had to swallow down the lump in her throat. She should have known to trust her instincts. She never should have left Tommy alone, not with as dangerous as they knew Malcolm was. And now they were gone.

“I don’t think Malcolm took him,” Oliver ground out, hooking up machines to Sara to check her vitals.

“Don’t say that,” Felicity said back. She shook her head. “Tommy wouldn’t. He couldn’t.”

“He holstered his weapon Felicity.”

“No!”

“I’m not saying he’s on his father’s side,” Oliver said, his tone growing loud. “Just that I don’t think Malcolm hurt Tommy to get him to go.”

“Ollie….Is that?” Thea ventured again. “Is that Sara?”

“Yes,” he answered quickly.

“But you said… you said no one else…”

“How are her vitals?” Felicity asked.

“Stable.”

She nodded, and turned back to her computer, where the search for the compound on the dart was just finishing. Felicity let out a sigh. “It’s just a sedative.” She spun back around. “Sara’s going to be fine.”

Oliver braced himself against the metal table Sara was laying on, the muscles in his arms taut as he let his weight fall onto them, his head bowing forward. Emotions crossed his face in rapid succession, until finally he collected himself and stood, meeting both Felicity’s and Thea’s bewildered eyes.

“You said no one else survived,” Thea said quietly.

“Speedy…”

“So many secrets.” Thea’s voice was barely a whisper now. “Did Dad survive too? Is he off
somewhere living a new life with a new family?”

“I didn’t know that Sara survived, Thea.”

Even though Felicity knew that wasn’t completely true, perhaps it was the easiest thing for Thea to comprehend in that moment.

“And no,” Oliver said, meeting his sister’s gaze with hard eyes. “Dad did not survive.”

With that, he pushed passed them both, and headed upstairs to the bar.
Hello lovelies,

We have a great chapter for you, and by great I mean you might kill us, repeatedly. But it's worth it in the end. Or at least I think so. So without further ado, let's get to the chapter.

love,
Kayla

It was a couple hours later when Oliver finally wandered back down the steel steps to the foundry. He spotted Thea first, curled up on the cot shoved in the corner. The night must have finally weighed her down enough to sleep.

“How long has she been out?” He asked setting a mug of fresh coffee down next to Felicity. His own had grown cold, but he wasn’t willing to part with the cup just yet.

Felicity looked away from her screen just long enough to give him a quick smile. “I made her lay down a few minutes after you went upstairs. I figured you both needed some space to cool down.”

If he hadn’t been kicking himself already, he sure as hell was now. He should have come back sooner. But the second he got up stairs something in him just kind of broke. He understood how Tommy got drunk in the middle of the day, because he wanted nothing more than to drown himself in something expensive, and wait for the sun to rise. But instead he went to their office and wrote down everything they knew about Malcolm. Every detail laid out before him, and he tried to piece it into a coherent picture in his mind. If he could think like Malcolm, he could find Tommy.

“Any luck?”

“He didn’t take him to MG or the manor. I can’t find how he got into the alley, so figuring out how he left is gonna be a nightmare. And I just--”

“Hey it’s okay,” he rested his hand against her shoulder, the tension slowly easing out of her.

“Why do you think he did it? After everything we’ve learned about Malcolm in the last few days, why would Tommy go with him?”

He had asked himself that question a dozen times over the last hour. And the only answer that came to mind laid still on the metal table across the room.

“He did it for Sara. You know Tommy, always sacrificing himself for others.”
“When we find him, I’m punching him in the arm.” But he heard the hitch in her voice, and watched as she kept her head down.

“We are going to find him,” he whispered, finally setting the mug down next to hers. “I don’t know how, but we will.”

“I’ve combed over every second of the surveillance feed. I tried tracking Malcolm’s movements after we left Merlyn Global. All while scanning through the documents we took off the servers. The bullet Tommy found can only be matched if I could stop running one of these other programs for ten seconds but I can’t because I’m still trying to match this damn image to something tangible,” she let out a frustrated growl, tossing a print out at him. “It’s nonsense. I can’t find anything that it relates to, and it literally could save Tommy’s life right now and I just… I can’t do this Oliver. I can’t do anything to help him. And I can’t stop working for one second because if I do…”

Oliver reached for her hand, lacing their fingers together until it was like they could never part. He knew how she felt. Every word she said had wove itself through him. He couldn’t lose Tommy either. Not after everything they had been through.

“Malcolm won’t hurt Tommy. I believe that much.”

It didn’t feel like much though. He didn’t want to place his trust in the idea that if Malcolm wanted to hurt Tommy he would have done so already, but it’s all they had right now.

Oliver took the paper she’d thrown and moved to set it down when the image caught his eye. His heart stopped as his mind raced through a million new possibilities.

“Where did Tommy find this?”

He was already up, rushing towards his trunk.

“He said it was in a book,” he could heard her chair push out as she stood. “Why?”

“I never showed you,” he shook his head, hating that it felt like a secret. “It’s not that I didn’t want to, but I was ashamed of it. Like I was only using it as an excuse to sort through my own shit.”

“Oliver what are you talking about?”

He found the book, tucked underneath everything else. He pulled it out, flipping to the front cover. The image of a circle with intersecting lines stared up at him.

“This,” he walked towards her, handing the book over. He hadn’t let anyone touch it before, and giving it to Felicity was a whole other level of anxiety rippling through her. But he trusted her with his secrets, his life, he could trust her with his pain as well.

“That’s the same symbol.”

“Yeah.”

“Where did you get this?”

“Off my father, after he died.”

Felicity stared at it, her head shaking as something passed over her eyes. Then she spoke. “That’s why he wanted to know.”

“What?”
She met his eyes as she tried to fight back tears. “The night of the gala, Malcolm was so insistent that he talk to you. He had said something about your dad having information, something he didn’t want to see the light of day again. I was so worried he was going to blow your cover I told him Robert died when the Gambit went down. I told him his secrets died with him. But if this book is what Malcolm was worried about--”

“Then they survived.”

“I should have told you, Oliver I’m so--”

“Don’t be sorry,” he braced himself against the desk. “You couldn’t have known what Malcolm was up to then. This isn’t on you.”

“Tommy said the book his father had was blank,” she said flipping through the pages. “But this has names, hundreds of names.”

“They didn’t appear at first for me either, it’s like special ink or something.”

“Ghost ink.”

They both turned when the voice spoke. And like a miracle before him Sara Lance was sitting up, her eyes boring into his own. “It’s a League of Assassins trademark. Malcolm probably designed it that way.”

He didn’t know how to react. Not when a woman he used to care so much for, a woman he mourned, was sitting right in front of him alive.

“Hey Ollie.”

“Sara,” he whispered it. So many things from that year on the island came flooding. Ivo’s freighter, Anatoly, Shado, Slade. Feeling her slip from his grip for the second time ever.

“Long time no see.”

“Tommy said, but I didn’t really believe him. How are you alive?”

“How long was I out?” she pushed herself off the table, dodging his question. She seemed harder than the last time he saw her. She had survived as much as he had, and even after their paths diverged it looked like they journeys still lead them back home.

“Maybe we could talk first.”

“We don’t have time to talk,” Sara twisted to face him. “Malcolm has a window. From what we’ve gathered whatever he’s planning, he’s doing it in the next couple of days.”

“That’s impossible,” Felicity interjected, drawing in all of Sara’s attention. “Hi I’m Felicity, Smoak. And you’re Sara. Wow good genes don’t just run in your family they practically gallop. I mean because I know your sister too, and well she’s gorgeous Laurel. And even with the assassin get up you look--”

“Felicity,” as much as he loved hearing her ramble, he had to cut her off.

“Right, Malcolm doesn’t have a device so whatever he was planning has to be on hold until he can find out how to achieve it.”

“Then why was he on the phone with someone about a flight out of the country in two days time?”
One that only includes himself and two guests.”

Oliver cursed under his breath. Of course Malcolm wanted to split town.

He felt Felicity’s eyes on him. “You think he was planning on leaving with Tommy and Thea?”

“I think it’s a distinct possibility.”

“It doesn’t matter what he was planning,” Sara said catching both of their attention. “He has to be stopped. Which I could have done last night had Tommy not intervened.”

“You wouldn’t have killed him in the middle of an alleyway.”

“No offense Oliver, but you don’t know me. Not anymore,” her hand flexed into a fist, then slowly released. “My mission is to take Malcolm Merlyn out, before he does something that exposes the whole League.”

He could hardly believe what she was saying. The Sara before him sounded like a soldier in darkness, and so far from the girl he used to know.

“Well my job is to protect the people I care about,” he countered. “You want to take out Malcolm fine. But first we get Tommy. So where are they?”

“How would I know that?”

“You followed Malcolm here, you know his routes, maybe even where he’s hiding out. You’re gonna take us to Tommy.”

“I can’t.”

“Why? Because the League wouldn’t like it?” If that was the reason he wouldn’t listen to her. Not when it meant Tommy’s life. “I don’t give a damn about them. So if that’s the way this has to be you should leave. Go, get your friend, and leave town. We will deal with Malcolm on our own.”

“You don’t know what you’re up against.”

“I have a pretty good idea, since I’ve been dealing with him for months. But it doesn’t matter. We don’t leave people behind.”

“He left on his own, Ollie. I heard him.”

“Yeah he did, to save you,” he leaned himself against the desk, meeting her eyes. “Tommy’s always saving other people. I’ll be damned if I let him get himself hurt because of it. So you can either help us, or you can leave.”

“Oliver,” Felicity whispered beside him.

“If she’s not going to help she should go.”

“No that’s not,” she looked back at Sara for a second. “I mean I agree, but that’s not it.”

“What is it?”

She pointed to the screen, one of Verdant’s cameras was pulled up and they were looking at the inside of the club. At Laurel walking around the inside of the club.
“What is she doing here?” Sara sounded panicked as she backed away. “She can’t be here right now.”

Felicity pulled out her phone and cursed. “She’s looking for Tommy. They were supposed to meet for coffee this morning.”

“Damn it.” He didn’t want to have to have another thing to worry about. But he couldn’t have Laurel wander down there. “Felicity, call Lyla and Digg. She’s gonna be pissed we waited this long, but she deserves to know what’s going on. I’m gonna go talk to Laurel.”

“Is that a wise idea?”

“No, but it’s all I got.”

He made his way towards the stairs until Sara grabbed him. “Ollie wait.”

“I’m not telling her about you if that’s what you’re worried about.”

She pulled back, like his words had cut at something else. Maybe that wasn’t what she had meant. Maybe she wished she could be the one to go up there instead. But something or someone was holding her back. Like the night he had came back. Oliver had risked himself so many times when he wandered Starling, begging to be seen by someone who cared. Tommy had seen him. And Tommy fought to bring him home. Maybe that’s what Sara needed too.

“You can watch from the computers. Felicity will turn on the sound for you.”

“I’m sorry,” she whispered looking away. “This isn’t how I wanted to see you again.”

“You’re alive.” he paused giving her a smile. “It’s exactly how I wanted to see you again.”

She nodded, wandering back into the Foundry, and Oliver steadied himself before he reached the top of the stairs and headed out.

“Laurel?” he called.

She turned towards him, but instead of the usual anger he would see in her eyes, this time she looked concerned.

“Hey, sorry I just,” she paused looking around. “Is Tommy here? Because his car’s out front, but he’s not answering his cell. Or texting me back. And he said he’d meet me this morning and he never showed so…”

“Tommy’s not here.”

She slowly nodded. “Something’s wrong. I can’t explain how I know that, but I just do. I can feel it. And I need you to tell me that I’m crazy and that Tommy’s just run out for a sec and he’ll be right back. Because if I don’t hear something reassuring I might start freaking out.”

He tried to form a story, something that would calm her. But knowing what he did, he wasn’t sure he could tell her a lie. But he could get as close to the truth as possible.

“I don’t know where he is.” he felt the weight settle in the air and Laurel looked like she was about to crumble.

“Is he-- is it work? I mean I assume,” she rubbed at the tears forming in her eyes. “You know about his job, and what he does?”
“I do, and yeah it’s got to do with the job,” again not a lie, but not exactly the truth. “I wish I could tell you more. But I don’t when he’s coming back.”

“What aren’t you telling me?”

He shrugged. “I don’t know what you--”

“Oliver I’ve known you forever,” she watched him closer than she had in years. “Don’t lie to me, please. It’s not just work is it?”

He shook his head, because yeah he really couldn’t lie right then. “No, it’s not just work. It’s something else.”

She shook her head, turning away from him. He didn’t blame her, it wasn’t really his place to try and comfort her. “He told me he loved me, and I didn’t say it back.”

“Laurel--”

“I need to do something to help,” she spun back around looking at him. “I don’t know what I can do, but I need to do it.”

He shouldn’t be entertaining the idea of letting her help. He should have told her to go home and he’d have Tommy call her later.

“Laurel I don’t think you should be involved in this.”

“If Tommy’s involved then yes I should,” she looked at him with resolution. “I don’t know how you connect to this Oliver, but I’m trusting that you being calm right now, means you know Tommy’s coming back.”

He couldn’t argue with that. “I have hope.”

“Then let me do something to help,” she took a deep breath, as she walked back towards the door. “I need to bring him home safe.”

He should have said a flat out no, but he couldn’t. And even if he did Laurel never should have listened to him. “There might be something at his place. Maybe something that indicates where he was going.”

He hated having to lie to her like that. But he knew Tommy would be furious if he let Laurel wander around with information that could get her killed.

“Thank you Oliver.”

“Don’t thank me yet. If I see him, I’ll tell him to call you.”

She nodded with a sigh. “I’m sorry, for the way I’ve been treating you. You didn’t deserve all of that.”

“Yes I did.”

“Yeah maybe you did,” she smiled. “But still, you’re a good friend to Tommy. And I’m sorry that I haven’t forgiven you for what happened. Maybe it’s because you came back and she didn’t.”

“Laurel,” he paused biting back the truth he couldn’t tell. “Tommy’s gonna come home. I know it.”
“Bye Oliver,” she waved, then headed back out the door.

He didn't know if sending her to Tommy’s was the right call. But he knew she couldn’t stay around Verdant. It wouldn’t end well at all.

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Tommy couldn't be sure how long they’d driven around- long enough for the inky black night to give way to the soft grey of an overcast dawn. Long enough for him to question why he’d gone with his father enough times to last him the rest of his life. Long enough for him to wish for it all to be over, if for no other reason than it meant he could finally put the day from hell behind him and find some respite in sleep.

Malcolm had relieved Tommy of his phone and gun almost immediately after they’d left the alley. His phone was smashed, the gun tucked into his father’s waistband before they’d both climbed into the backseat of a town car. His father hadn’t spoken, save giving their driver directions upon first entering the car. Tommy had tried, a few times, to goad his father into conversation. But it was all to no avail.

City streets and buildings blurred by until finally, mercifully, they came to a stop. Tommy didn’t immediately recognize where they were, but he knew from the general dilapidation of the area, that the were in the Glades. Which meant Oliver and Felicity weren’t more than a few blocks from him. All he needed to do was get his bearings, and he could be back at the club in no time.

But first he needed to hear his father out. It may have begun as a way to protect Sara, but the more Tommy thought about it, the more he found himself genuinely interested in his father’s reasonings, however demented they may be. Besides, he didn’t think his father was likely to give him a choice.

“What are we doing here?” Tommy asked, after they’d both stepped out of the car and he’d followed his father into a narrow, dark alley. It smelled like garbage and piss, and Tommy fought to keep his gag reflex in check.

Malcolm was quiet for a long moment. “Do you know what this place is?”

Tommy shook his head. But the more he thought about it, the longer he tried to put the pieces together, the more sense it made. The code on the safe in his father’s office, the anger and hatred, the marked change in the man after Rebecca died. The bullet in the hidden room in Malcolm’s office.

“This is where she died,” Tommy said finally, his voice low and thick with emotion.

“Where she was murdered,” Malcolm growled. “Call a spade a spade, son. This is where she was gunned down, where the life drained from her eyes and her lungs filled with--”

“Stop.” Tommy demanded. He couldn’t hear anymore, couldn’t let his father put those images of her in his mind. He couldn’t allow that to be how he pictured her.

“Let the anger give you strength,” his father said, his voice taking on an eerie calm. “If Ra’s al Ghul was good for one thing, it was teaching me that.”

Tommy quieted, turning away from his father. All of this was about his mother? Malcolm had really allowed his own pain and grief to twist into something this grotesque and morbid?

“This vendetta you claim to have in her name,” he asked finally. “What did any of those people you killed have to do with this?”
“Everything,” Malcolm barked humorlessly. “Your friend, the Hood… he may have given them a nice little scare, he may have even gotten what he wanted from them. But I made them atone for their sins.”

“You’re mad,” Tommy breathed, turning to face his father.

“You may wish that to be true, son, but I assure you, I am very much in my right mind. I have been planning this for years. It will be an undertaking of the highest magnitude. I will cleanse this city of the parasite that is the Glades and her murder will finally be avenged.”

“They don’t deserve this,” Tommy said, feeling a cold chill shudder through his bones. The Glades. Half of the entire city, and that was what his father wanted to destroy? How many hundreds of thousands of lives at risk. His hands trembled, so he shoved them in his pockets.

Tommy swallowed hard, anger mixing with defeat in a bitter coil in his stomach. He didn’t know this man, not really. Had he ever? Had Malcolm ever been the father that Tommy believed him to be? Or was it always just a mask, hiding the venom underneath? He thought of the clinic in the Glades, the one his father pulled funding from just a few short weeks ago. And before that, Malcolm had moved production at MG out of the Glades and into a factory in Hub City. That had been two years prior. How far back did the poison in his father go?

*If Ra’s al Ghul was good for one thing, it was teaching me that.* The words echoed in his head. It had been when he was a boy, a few months after his mother passed. Tommy remembered the Queen’s taking him in, remembered Moira begging his father not to leave. She had fought for him then as, he supposed, one must fight for a child who didn’t know any better. Malcolm hadn’t been the same after that trip. And it wasn’t just that he’d been more secretive. There had been something else, something beneath the surface, something that made Tommy realize, even at such a young age, that his father would never again be the type for warm embraces or doting or fatherly advice. Malcolm had closed himself off, to anyone and anything, including his own son.

“There’s something I want you to listen to,” his father’s voice pulled him back from his thoughts. He pulled a small, round device from his pocket and held it up. “The night your mother died, she called me. I woke to a voicemail from her.”

“Dad…” Tommy began, his voice coming out in a broken, strangled whisper. He didn’t want this, couldn’t imagine what his father was about to do. He couldn’t hear her voice again, and as the recording started, Tommy closed his eyes, biting back the tears.

*Malcolm, I’m in trouble… I told him to take everything. My money… my ring…*”

Her voice was low and breathy, she was clearly in pain and Tommy clenched his jaw and both fists at his side.

“Turn it off,” he demanded.

But Malcolm let it play. Her labored breathing continued.

*He shot me. I screamed for help, but no one would come.*”

“No one would come,” his father said in time. And Tommy wondered how many times Malcolm had tortured himself with those words. How many times had Malcolm listened to his wife die?

*Oh god, Malcolm. I don’t want to die alone.*”

Tommy could feel his heart racing in his chest. He never wanted to hear this, never wanted to have
her voice in his head, begging for her life. It was too much, and he found himself looking away. But everywhere he looked, it was still the alley, still the same alley where she’d lost her life all those years ago. His father had always had a flare for the dramatic, but this? Bringing Tommy to the actual scene of the crime? It wasn’t fair, and it wasn’t right. No one should ever be subjected to a hell like that.

“She bled out onto the pavement as people passed by and did nothing,” Malcolm said. There was another few shallow breaths, and then the device went silent. “Your mother built her clinic here in the Glades, because she wanted to save this city. It can’t be saved, Tommy. Because the people here don’t want to be saved.”

“So you kill them all?”

“YES!” Malcolm growled angrily. It flared up out of him before he could stop it. “They deserve to die! All of them!”

Tommy flinched back and clenched his jaw, willing his mind to forget the hate and lies spewing from his own father’s mouth. What he was talking about was… genocide. His father had taken his own grief and turned it into something it was never intended to be. Rebecca wouldn’t have wanted this. Tommy’s mother was always full of love and life, of warmth and happiness and genuine concern for others. She was the opposite of everything Malcolm was trying to do as vengeance in her name.

“Don’t you see, Tommy?” Malcolm continued, once he’d regained his composure. “This is the only way to cleanse the cancer from the city. I only want to rid Starling of the filth that is the Glades.”

He shook his head, still almost in disbelief over what he was hearing. How could he stop his father, when the path he was on was years in the making? How could he ever change his mind or make him see that taking out the Glades would never assuage him of the guilt and pain he felt over losing Rebecca?

“I need to go,” Tommy said, trying to keep his voice neutral.

“I’ve secured a way out,” Malcolm said. “For you, and Thea and myself. I want us to start over, once the city is cleansed. I want us to be a family.”

Tommy fought the bile that rose in his throat. He could barely stand to look at his father, let alone want to be anywhere near him. “I don’t know if I can do that,” he said evenly.

Malcolm nodded, putting the small device back into his pocket. “Just make sure you’re out of the Glades tomorrow night.”

“Tomorrow?” Tommy asked, eyes flying to his father. “But I thought the device--”

“You thought Miss Smoak rid me of the only one?” A scoff. “I’ve learned to be better prepared than that. Although that was the first we tested, I had three others being built simultaneously across the country. By tomorrow they’ll be in place and the day after? We’ll all be waking to a brand new world.”

“I have to go,” Tommy said, moving toward the road. But Malcolm caught his arm, pulling him back with a hard yank. “Dad…” Tommy ground out. It was the shoulder he’d been shot in, and fire licked at the wounds from the bruising pressure. “You’re hurting me.”

“I will give you until tomorrow to decide, Tommy,” he said, his voice low. “But I assure you, son, you do not want to be on the wrong side of this.”
Malcolm released him and Tommy staggered backward, righting himself before he could fall over completely. By the time Tommy looked back up, his father was already getting into the town car. He watched in stunned silence for another moment as the car backed out of the alley, and disappeared.

Tommy doubled over, hands on his knees as he finally wretched up the contents of his stomach. He swiped angrily at his mouth with the back of his hand, feeling his skin crawl and anger churn within him. And then, he took off in a sprint, quickly finding the direction of the club. He didn’t slow until the bright green V came into sight, and even then, he attempted to keep pace. He needed to talk to Felicity and Oliver. He wasn’t sure how, but they needed to know that their already short timeframe for finding and stopping his father, just got a hell of a lot shorter.

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Things had not gotten any easier once Lyla showed up.

“You still should have called me the second you knew he was missing,” Lyla’s voice boomed through the small space.

Felicity was just glad that Thea had gone home with John. Because the last thing the younger Queen needed was more stress over her missing brother. They just had to regroup and figure out Malcolm’s next step.

“We were handling it.”

“That’s not your job, Oliver, it’s mine. He’s my partner.” She sighed as she leaned against the desk. “And if anything happens to him… We need to find him.”

“We’re working on that,” Felicity finally interjected, pulling their attention back to her. “Sara said that Malcolm’s been working out of a warehouse in Pennytown.” Sara who had also run off to update her league friend about what happened with Malcolm. “If I can triangulate his movements there, I might be able to figure out how he’s getting around the city undetected. And where he took Tommy.”

“Key word being might.” But one look at Felicity and Lyla stopped. “I’m sorry, that was a little insensitive.”

“Thank you,” she smiled, putting her focus back on the computer searches. So far nothing had come from the Pennytown lead, but she was hoping it would pay off soon.

In fact she thought that search could simmer in the background while she pulled up the documents from the MG servers. Her program had been running through them pulling out anything that looked suspicious. She just needed a second to comb through the data and find the missing piece in this hellish puzzle.

“I do need to inform Waller.”

“Absolutely not.”

“Oliver she’s his boss, and she’s the head of ARGUS. What do you think she’s gonna do if she finds out her agent was missing for nearly ten hours before someone told her?”

“I told you last time, I wasn’t working with her again,” the edge to Oliver’s voice was bordering on aggressive, but Felicity couldn’t blame him. Waller was a chaotic element at best. And she would fear more for Tommy’s safety if they leaned on the woman.
Felicity wanted to interrupt their argument, refocus their energy to being on the same side. But before she could her eyes caught something on the document on her screen. She scanned it four times before the words even began to make sense to her. But it wasn’t possible. It couldn’t be.

“Felicity?”

Oliver was in front of her, his concern practically pulsing out of his gaze. She must have looked shocked, grief stricken or something. But it paled in comparison to how she felt. Like her stomach had bottomed out. The device.. She should have known, should have anticipated this.

“Malcolm,” she managed to say, her hands shaking over her keys.

“You found him?” Lyla came to stand next to her, reading the screen.

“No,” she paused taking a breath. “That’s not it. It’s the Markov device. He um--”

“He had more than one made.”

They all cut their gaze towards the stairs, to Tommy making his way into the lair. He looked the same as when she saw him last. No visible bruising or blood. But he also looked like he’d been to hell and back.

She wanted to rush over and pull him into a hug, but when she stood Tommy held out his hand as if to stop them. Then he took a seat at the base of the stairs.

Oliver was the first to take a step closer, but she could see the caution in his steps. He was checking Tommy over for injuries as well. “How did you get away?”

“He let me go. Told me his big master plan, and gave me the day to think over leaving with him.” When he finally looked up Felicity could feel a piece of her break at the look in his eyes. “But I know what he’s doing and I know when he’s doing it.”

“What did you mean there’s more than one device?” Oliver looked between the two them, then focused on her. “Felicity?”

“According to the documents Malcolm had three other devices commissioned,” she explained, pulling up the schematics on her screen. “They were produced out of state with different teams. I had no idea he was making more than one. I should have known. I’m sorry.”

“This isn’t your fault,” Tommy said, but the guilt seemed to linger on him, as if he was trying to absolve himself for Malcolm’s mistakes. Or maybe it was a simmer of anger she couldn’t quite place.

“Why would he have that many devices made? It doesn’t make sense,” Lyla asked looking at the design. “I mean one of them is dangerous enough.”

“He wants to level the Glades,” Tommy spoke again, meeting Oliver’s eyes first but turning away quickly as he stood. “That’s what he’s planning, why he needs more than one. And he’s not waiting any longer. It’s happening tomorrow night.”

There was something else, something Tommy wasn’t saying. She wanted to push him, but he looked so fragile.

He turned to Lyla, running a hand down his face. “We need Waller to talk to local government, get as many people out of the Glades as we can. It’s the only way to insure their safety.”
“That’s maybe a 24 hour window,” she looked at him. “There’s no way she’d be able to cut through that much red tape to get it done.”

“Then we can get the word out,” Felicity replied with a nod. “A broadcast. I could hack the local new stations. Send it through the whole city.”

“Or we could go a slightly more legal route,” Oliver offered.

She couldn’t help but give him a smirk. “You realize how that sounds coming from you right?”

“Yeah I do,” then he focused on Tommy. “Laurel came by earlier looking for you. I sent her to your place. I didn’t tell her what was going on but, if you talk to her, and she talks to her father, maybe we could get the SCPD behind an evacuation.”

At the mention of Laurel a bit of Tommy eased, but something else passed over his mind. She could see him struggle with it. “She doesn’t need to be involved in this.”

“Tommy, she cares about you. Take it from someone who knows, you don’t want to push that away when your at your lowest.”

“I’m going to call Waller,” Lyla said walking around the table, she pulled Tommy aside, giving him another once over before she patted his arm. “I take it you lost your gun and your phone.”

“Yeah.”

“I’ll bring you another weapon.”

“I don’t need one,” he shrugged. “It’s not like guns will stop these things.”

“No but I’d feel better if you had one anyway,” she nodded to Oliver and then Felicity. “Let me know when you track a location for these devices, please.”

Felicity nodded and watched as she left. When the door clicked closed, the emotions seemed to shift around her. Tommy hunched himself over his head shaking repeatedly. And if it wasn’t for Oliver standing near him, she would have been afraid he’d fall.

The room was silent, save for the computer’s low hum in the background. But still everything Tommy did was amplified. She could almost hear the wrenching in his soul.

Then he spoke. “I can’t believe I didn’t see this coming.”

“Tommy, you couldn’t have known. Malcolm had a lot of people fooled. Felicity’s been working there for years and she didn’t see it either.”

“But he’s my father, and…” he let out a laugh, but there was no humor in his face. “And he’s using her to justify this crusade. My dead mother is the reason he wants to murder thousands of people. Why he’s already killed god knows how many others.”

Felicity and Oliver exchanged a look as she stepped forward. She took Tommy’s hand in hers.

“Tommy, I’m sorry.”

“That’s when he joined the League. After she died,” he replied raising his head. “He’s been planning this for so long. Just to get vengeance. And it makes me sick that he could think she’d want this. That he’s using her to do this to the city.”
“We will stop it,” she said, her voice more confident than she had felt all day. Something about seeing her friend breaking, pushed her own fears down. “We just have to figure out where he plans on placing the devices. I can get more copies of the code, as long as we get to the devices before they go off, we can stop this.”

“I don’t,” Tommy faltered as he looked up, meeting Oliver’s eyes. “He didn’t tell me where.”

“We still have time,” Oliver added stepping close to both of them. He placed one hand on Tommy’s shoulder, while the other came to rest on her lower back. “Felicity right, we will stop this.”
Chapter 49

Chapter by holysmoaksoliver

Chapter Notes

Hey lovelies! Who is excited about the Undertaking? (I mean if you are.... I may be a little worried about you... but still). Our heroes are ready for some action, so let's get right down to it.

xoxo, Cassie

Exhaustion still clung heavy to Oliver’s form, but he couldn’t let himself be pulled under by it, not yet. They had spent the day combing all the pieces of evidence they had in an attempt to locate the three devices—everything including Felicity tracking all outgoing payments of both Merlyn Global and the CEO himself, but there was nothing to indicate how the devices had been shipped or where. After hours of no new information, and over 36 hours of no sleep, Oliver was beyond frustrated. He hadn’t slept since the plane ride home from Russia. Was it possible that it was just a day and a half ago that they’d returned? His weariness was bone deep, but he pushed through, because honestly, it was the only choice he had.

“I’d like to go on record as saying, once again, that I think this is a bad idea,” Felicity’s voice cut through the otherwise quiet night.

“Noted,” Oliver answered, pulling his hood further up over his head. He usually relished her voice in his ear through the comms, but tonight he wasn’t interested in once again discussing the options that they didn’t have. He just wanted to stick to the plan and get through the night.

“I’m just saying, we probably could have found another way to-”

“Tommy didn’t want to bring Laurel in on this,” Oliver said back. They’d already discussed this, and he was already in place waiting for her to just press a button to summon Detective Lance. “So this was our compromise. He’s on duty tonight and is in the area. If we’re going to get people out of the Glades, this is the only way, Felicity.”

There was a long pause in his ear before she spoke again. “Detective Lance this is dispatch. I’m calling about a possible 10-32 in your area. Please respond.”

Oliver couldn’t hear the detective’s reply, but his fingers twitched on his bow just the same.

“10-4 Detective, will send backup to your location.” Felicity huffed. “He’s on his way.”

“I’m in position.”

“Do you know how many laws I just broke to get Lance to show up for a rendezvous for you?” Felicity went on. “Because it’s a lot. And-”

“What do you want from me, Felicity? We’ve got twenty-four hours to figure out where Malcolm has the devices hidden and stop him completely or who knows how many people will die. I’m sorry you have to break a couple extra laws so we can get people out of the Glades but that’s what we
needed from you today.”

“I’m not saying I wasn’t willing,” she ground out. “I’m just... sorry. I’m just exhausted and worried about Tommy and finding absolutely nothing today has me beyond frustrated.”

“I know,” he said back, a little softer. “Why don’t you take off and get some sleep? I’m going to try to do the same once I’m done here.”

“Lance just entered the building. I’ll head home when you do.”

The smallest bit of tension eased in Oliver’s stomach. Bickering with Felicity wasn’t something he was used to, at least, not since they’d first met in Russia. But that had been different, and he knew that the tension of everything going on around them was playing a big role in what was happening between them.

He opened his mouth to answer her, when the door to the roof access opened and Lance stepped out into the dark, gun raised as he looked around the space.

“SCPD,” Lance yelled.

From a dark corner, Oliver nocked an arrow in place and let it fly. It hit Lance’s gun, which knocked from his hand and skidded away into the dark.

“Detective,” Oliver said, using his voice modulator.

Lance seethed, turning to face him. It was the closest Oliver had come to the detective in months, and he didn’t miss it. He hated the revulsion that settled on Lance’s features.

“You,” the detective spat.

“You can hate me all you want,” Oliver said, keeping his tone steady. “But first I need your help to save the city.”

Lance barked a humorless laugh. “You’ve got to be joking.”

“This is no joke Detective. There’s a very clear and present threat to Starling City.” He took a step forward, out of the shadows, so Lance could get a better look at him, even if he was suited up. “Malcolm Merlyn has plans to level the Glades. And he’s doing it tomorrow. We’re emailing you all of the information we have. But we need you to clear the Glades out.”

“We?” Lance asked incredulously. “Wait, the dispatcher? I knew something sounded off with her.”

“The who isn’t important,” Oliver growled. “Can we count on you?”

Lance huffed again. “Why’d you come to me? Of everyone, why me?”

“Because I knew out of everyone, talking to someone who hates me as much as you do might mean that you’ll take me seriously.” Oliver took another step forward. He needed to convey to Lance exactly how important this was, exactly how many lives were at stake. “Merlyn has a machine. Three of them, that can generate earthquakes. He’s setting them up in the Glades as vengeance for how his wife died.”

“Geez,” Lance said. “You’re really serious.”

“I am Detective. Besides, I know how you feel about me, but I respect you, and if there’s one person I want on the right side of this, it’s you.”
Lance looked at him disbelieving me. “Don’t tell me the Hood has a conscience.”

“I have the city’s best interest at heart. But sometimes, you have to color outside the lines to get results.”

“And that’s why you’re in a hood and I’m in a uniform.”

Oliver raised his bow, aiming for the building beside him. “I’m counting on you Detective. Please, don’t let your city down. You’ll have our evidence on your computer when you return to the precinct.” And then he released an arrow into the night, barely waiting for it to make contact with the building before jumping from the roof and letting it carry him to the rooftop across the street.

“That could have gone better,” Felicity said into the comm in his ear, once he’d landed.

“Could have gone worse,” Oliver countered. “I think we should call it a night, come back to it tomorrow with fresh eyes once we’ve both gotten some sleep.”

“It’s driving me crazy not knowing how Malcolm is moving these things,” she huffed. “But I think you might be right.”

He took the fire escape down to the alley where his motorcycle was parked, and maneuvered through the streets until he was back at the Foundry. Felicity was there waiting for him, still sitting in her chair, the one she’d barely moved from in close to twenty hours. He knew she had to be just as exhausted as he was, but she kept pushing through. He knew how relentless she could be when she wanted to get to the bottom of something. But pushing herself to her breaking point wouldn’t help anyone. And if Lance followed through and the SCPD was able to start evacuating the Glades, then hopefully they could save as many as possible.

“Detective Lance has put out a city wide alert of a terrorist attack in the Glades. SCPD is starting a house by house campaign to alert everyone,” Felicity said, by way of greeting.

Oliver nodded, pulling off the hood and slipping a t-shirt on over his head. “Good. Hopefully that means we can actually get some sleep tonight.”

“Amen to that,” she answered, standing and making her way toward him. “I’m sorry about before. I’m more angry at myself for not having found these devices yet. And I took it out on—”

“No apologies necessary,” Oliver said, wrapping his arms around her. “We’ve all run ourselves ragged today and I know tensions can get high.”

“Good,” she said, pressing herself onto her tiptoes to kiss him. “But if we’re going to do the makeup sex thing, do you think we can schedule it for after we save the city?”

Oliver huffed a laugh, the smile coming easy, despite the circumstances. “Deal.” He kissed her forehead before releasing her. “Can I crash at your place? Not sure I can handle talking to my mother until after all this goes down.”

Felicity grinned. “Of course.” She pulled out of his arms and laced their fingers together.

“How’d you get Tommy to go home?”

“I asked Lyla to bring him home. For some reason he has a hard time arguing with her.” She pulled him toward the door, grabbing her purse and keys from the desk on the way. And then her computer chirped and Felicity stopped short, closing her eyes. “So close.”
“You could leave it for tomorrow.”

But she was already pulling out of his grasp and headed back to the computer. “I could,” she sighed. “But this could be the locations of the devices, or a ping on Malcolm’s cell phone or--”

“I understand,” Oliver answered, moving to stand behind her. His hands went to her shoulders, kneading the muscles there. “But after this--”

“All the spooning and all the sleeping,” she said, tilting her head back to meet his eyes.

Oliver smiled down at her. The tension coiled in him eased a bit and he felt himself exhale a little deeper. “So what was the alert for?”

Felicity leaned a little closer to the screen. “I don’t believe it.” She scrolled through the window that had popped up. “It was a long shot. I was running a search for any subsidiaries and offshore accounts that had money from MG funneled into them. One of them came up with a hit on a transportation company. There is an order here for three freighters for tomorrow morning. Pick-up and drop-off locations aren’t included.”

“But if we hack into the shipping company’s computers--”

Felicity spun to look at him. “We?”

“And by we, of course I meant you.”

“Mmhmm,” she said with raised brows, turning back to the computer. “Frack.”

“What’s wrong?”

“Of course Malcolm picked the one company in the country that’s old school,” she groaned. “They aren’t online. Or at least they have no servers I can hack into.”

“Meaning…”

“Meaning we’ll have to B and E it.”

“Good thing one of us has experience in that,” Oliver said, spinning her back around again. “What time do they open tomorrow?”

“That’s the thing they work on 11 hours shifts. Their night crew is still going strong, but they do happen to have an hour a day where the whole building shuts down for lunch. Looks like crime will have to wait.”

“That gives us at least a few hours for--”

“Spooning and sleep?” she asked with a grin.

“You get silly when you’re overtired, don’t you?”

“And/or cranky. I’m just really trying to stay away from the latter.”

Oliver pulled her to her feet. “Let’s get you home,” he said.

“Mmm,” Felicity hummed. “I like the sound of that.”

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Somehow the knowledge of who Malcolm really had become sat in Tommy like a ticking time bomb. He felt like the longer he let himself think about it, the more likely he was to explode. And he didn’t know how the shrapnel would land.

“Maybe I should stay,” Lyla said as she pulled up outside of his building. “We could watch movies.”

He turned to her. They had barely talked the entire way to his place, and he thanked the stars his partner wasn’t the type that needed to fill the silence with words. But now he felt like she might be trying to hover just a bit too much.

“I must look like shit if you think I need to be monitored in my own home.”

“Tommy that’s not it.”

“I’m not going to do something stupid.”

“Well that would be a first,” she replied with an eye roll. “Seriously I just want to make sure everything is okay.”

“It’s not.” Because he had to be honest about something. His mother’s voice played on a loop in his head and he couldn’t get it to shut off. “It’s not gonna be okay for a long time, but I can’t keep spiraling every time something remotely bad happens. I know what the job is. And we both need to be rested up enough to handle things tomorrow.”

“It’s okay to not be okay,” she said taking a deep breath. “And I know I’m not the prime example of healthy behavior, I mean I threw myself into work when Johnny and I seperated. I just wanted to cut the emotion out of things. But at the end of the day I knew that emotion and heart, it’s the only real reason we should move forward.”

“Who taught you that?”

She gave him a half smile. “You.”

“Well I’m an idiot.”

“Just because you didn’t see what Malcolm was up to?”

He shook his head. Because it was more than just his father’s plans. It was every little thing that lead to it. It was his mother’s death and how closed off Malcolm was at the funeral. It was each interaction they had after that.

“I didn’t see who he was Lyla,” he groaned. “I mean I knew that he wasn’t the same as before she died. But I didn’t see what that did to him. I didn’t see the grief twist into this ugly hatred for everything. And if I had maybe I could have stopped it.”

“Or maybe he would have poisoned you with it. Or maybe nothing at all would have changed,” she shrugged. “You can’t live your life comparing it to maybes. There’s only what is and what might be. Everything else is just stuff that makes us feel guilt for other people’s choices.”

On some level he knew she was right. But it didn’t ease the weight in his stomach. It didn’t wash his mother’s words from his head.

“Night Lyla,” he said stepping out of the car. “I’ll see you in the morning.”

“Merlyn,” she paused as Tommy pushed the door closed. She looked like she might say something
profound, but instead she shook her head. “Get some sleep.”

“You too,” he smirked. “Don’t let Johnny boy keep you up all night.”

“I’m telling him you called him that,” she said with a smile, waving as she pulled away from the curb.

Then he was alone again, and his thoughts surged with the memory of his mom. He couldn’t shake the image of her from his mind. The mom he knew, the one who smiled and loved, bleeding together with the terrified voice he heard on that recording. If Malcolm’s goal was to hollow out where his heart was supposed to be, his father had done a bang up job on that front. But it wasn’t anger and hatred that filled its place, it was an overwhelming sense of loss all over again.

He barely registered the climb up to his apartment. If he passed anyone he didn’t notice, which on any other night should have alarmed him. He was an agent, trained to be aware of his surroundings. But Tommy couldn’t care less about that right then. He just wanted to turn it off. To stop his mother’s voice from replaying in his head over and over. But it wouldn’t. It just repeated in his mind on a loop.

When he opened his door, his didn’t even register that the lights were all on. Not until he heard shifting from the couch.

Tommy’s eyes shot up, ready to be on the defense, but the only person his eyes landed on were Laurel. Right. Oliver had said she came here after talking to him.

“Tommy,” she whispered it, but it felt like it echoed.

He had seen her only the night before but it felt like lifetimes ago.

She rushed towards him, and he barely had time to react before her lips crashed into his. Tommy didn’t think as she wrapped her arms around him and pulled him closer. He let her guide him, his arms encircling her waist, and his mind washing out, until all his senses filled with only her. It was more than he could have ever dreamed for and it ended far too soon.

Laurel broke their kiss as she met his eyes. She backed out of his space a little as she spoke. “Sorry.”

“You’re apologizing for kissing me?” And he couldn’t help but laugh. He couldn’t tell if it was the right response, but he couldn’t stop himself. The day had dragged every ounce of normal from him.

She joined him, and that sound alone sparked something inside him. “I mean maybe not for the act of kissing, but jumping you when you first step through your door.”

“You can jump me whenever you want,” he teased, but finally let her slip out of his hands. “Not that I don’t appreciate it, but I didn’t think we were back to kissing again.”

“I was worried about you.”

“Right.” Because Oliver had alluded that something was wrong. But he had given Laurel enough to calm her and send her home. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to stand you up.”

“Are you okay? I mean I’ll understand if you can’t tell me,” she looked away, looked anywhere but his face, and he could see the tears wanting to form in her eyes. “I just had this feeling all day that something was wrong. And when you came through that door, all this relief flooded through me.”

“Laurel,” he stepped to her, close enough to feel the heat but not enough to touch her. “I want to tell
you everything.”

He wanted to push things from his mind, to let Laurel fill up the hole inside him. But things were bad, and he needed her to understand why.

He took her hand and led her to the couch. They sat next to each other, and Tommy couldn’t help but feel a cool rush of relief when her hand landed over his.

“Take your time,” she said and squeezed his hand lightly.

The problem was Tommy didn’t know where to start. There were so many pieces that came in from different angles, and he couldn’t even be sure which one he knew first. So he went with the only one he had no trouble focusing on.

“Did I ever tell you what the last thing my mother ever said to me was?” She shook her head, but still her gaze remained steady on him. “It was the afternoon, and I remember I had begged her all morning to go over to Ollie’s because he had just gotten this new game and I wanted to play it so bad. Well we were supposed to go, but she got a call from the clinic and I had to stay with the housekeeper until my dad got back. I was upset, but she crouched down and kissed my forehead and said ‘love we always have tomorrow’.”

Laurel moved her hand up his arm. “Tommy--”

“Those were the words I carried with me,” he said waving off her apology. “And it was sad, but nice in a way. Because she smiled and it was something that kept me going when everything else felt like it fell apart.”

“I don’t understand.”

“My father had a different experience,” he said and he could feel everything in him crumbling again. “Because my mom didn’t just die in the Glades. She was killed, and he, he couldn’t. He took all that-...”

He broke off into a sob. He didn’t realize he was on the verge of breaking until it happened. And Laurel was next to him, her hand rubbing circles into his back. And it made everything feel better and worse at the same time.

“Whatever it is, Tommy I want to be there for you. I want to help.”

He ran his hands down his face, feeling more tired than he had all day. And he looked at her. Laurel and her sincere kindness, her fierce conviction. How could he have ever allowed himself to lie to her, to keep himself at a distance, when she made him a better person just by being in his life?

“My father has a plan to destroy the Glades,” he said, releasing his hold on the weight. “And I don’t know if we can stop it.”

She looked at him in confusion at first, and he didn’t blame her for needing a minute to process. But as soon as his words settled her demeanor changed, and he could see that fierceness climbing to the surface once more.

“What are you talking about?”

“He had something built,” Tommy explained. “An earthquake generator. Actually he had four built, but one of them is a dead weight now thanks to the Hood and his team.” She eyed him at that but she didn’t speak yet. “He plans to use them tomorrow night to level the Glades.”
“Why would anyone want to--”

“Because that’s where she died. In some alley where no one stopped to help her, and he blames all of them for it,” he pinched the bridge of his nose as he let out a shaky breath. “And I can’t reason with him and I can’t stop him.”

“What are we going to do?”

“I can’t ask you to help me with this Laurel,” he shook his head. “In fact I need you to get out of the city, at least until we can stop this. I need you to get as far from Starling as possible.”

“No.”

“Laurel, this isn’t like the Triad sending gun toting gang members into your apartment. This is a threat to the very ground we walk on, and I can’t have you get hurt because of something my father has been planning for over half my life.”

“And I can’t just run and hide when I could help you with this.”

“Laurel--”

“I love you,” her voice rose as she cut him off. But there was no signs of regret on her face. “I love you Tommy, and I can’t leave you here to take care of this on your own. I won’t do it. And if you know me at all, I know you’ll understand that.”

He did know that. He knew that asking Laurel to leave would have been a long shot, but he had to try. “I love you too, and if anything were to happen to you...”

She shook her head. Then she leaned into his chest, her head resting over his heart as she leaned him back. It was the first time since he woke up on the floor at his father’s that he had gotten a chance to close his eyes.

“We’ll figure this out,” she said, her voice quiet enough to lull him to into a calm, “But I’m sticking with you, no matter what.”

“Okay,” he whispered, letting his hand rest on her back.

He wasn’t sure if everything would be okay. He didn’t know if he could let himself believe it. But it was the first time since he left his father that anything had replaced his mother’s voice in his head. And he wanted to believe in that. He wanted to believe in her.

He had been sure he’d be up all night, but with Laurel on his chest, he thought maybe he could sleep, and maybe in the morning things wouldn’t feel so hopeless.

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Waking up next to Oliver was still something that Felicity was getting used to. Not that she minded, because honestly, this was Oliver Queen and he was in her bed. In her bed, his body curled around hers protectively, his arm draped over her midsection and his soft breathing hot against her shoulder. It was almost enough to make her forget everything that had happened the last several days, and for a brief moment, Felicity wished they could just cancel everything else and stay in bed for at least a good two weeks.

Soft light filtered through the window, meaning it was likely still the early morning. Felicity yawned, carefully maneuvering herself until she was laying on her back. Oliver shifted beside her,
but didn’t wake.

At least not until a soft _thud_ came from her living room.

Oliver’s arm tightened around her reflexively and his eyes flew open. “Stay here,” he said, sliding out of bed and moving for the door before Felicity could even try to stop him.

She sat up, pulling the sheets up around her. “Baseball bat to your left,” she barely whispered. But she still saw him react, reaching for the bat and pulling it up over his shoulder. Not that he needed it, she’d seen first hand how deadly Oliver could be with his bare hands. But it made her feel a little better knowing he had it as he disappeared into the dark hallway.

Felicity’s mind churned as she sat there, watching shadows crawl across the walls. Her first thought was that Malcolm had come back for her, had wanted to finish off the job of eliminating everyone at Merlyn Global who knew about the Markov devices. He certainly had a flair for making things look like an accident. First a plane crash, now a home invasion gone wrong? She shuddered a little. Oliver hadn’t bested Malcolm yet in a fight. Should she call the police? Would it do any good?

A light switched on in the living room. “It’s safe to come out,” Oliver called, his voice sounding more resigned than upset.

Curious, Felicity slipped out of bed, grabbing a hoodie from the armchair near her bed and slipping it over her head. Her legs were still mostly bare, her pajama shorts barely covering her backside, but the large hoodie was long enough that she felt decently covered for whatever company happened to be breaking into her house.

She padded barefoot down the hall, completely unsure of what she’d find once she made her way to the living room. Had an animal snuck in somehow?

Nope. It was the previously-thought-to-be-dead Sara Lance, still clad in all black. Felicity narrowed her eyes questioningly.

“You should probably lock your windows,” Sara said, by way of explanation.

“Nice to see you again too,” Felicity quipped, stifling a yawn as she pushed her hair away from her face. Her limbs still felt weary although the adrenaline from having an intruder had cleared her head of any fog of sleep.

“I needed to talk to Ollie.” Sara looked at him expectantly.

“I know you were gone for five years,” Felicity said, pulling Sara’s gaze back to her. “But phones are still a thing. As are front doors.”

“I’m not really a front door kinda person.”

“She has a point Sara,” Oliver said, crossing his arms and leaning casually against the bar stool behind him. “What are you even doing here?”

Sara took a long moment to answer. And Felicity studied her in the silence of the early morning hours. She was pretty, with pouty lips and a dimpled chin, but there was a hardiness to her, an almost brokenness that Felicity could only assume had come from her years since the Gambit went down. Oliver hadn’t told Felicity much about those years away and even less about what had happened to Sara during that time. She wondered, briefly, if Oliver even knew.

“It’s about Al-Sa-- about Malcolm. Nyssa and I are here to--”
“To remove him,” Oliver supplied smoothly.

She nodded brusquely, barely looking up to meet his eyes. Sara was ashamed to be having this conversation with Oliver, Felicity could tell. Because she was no longer the girl he’d known. They’d both become something else in their years away, even if Sara didn’t know the extent of what the Bratva and the island had done to him. Felicity didn’t either, although she’d seen enough glimpses to put together a decent picture in her head. From his temperament to the scars to the casual way he strode into danger to save other people. She had seen interviews of Oliver before the Gambit and she knew of his reputation for being a mindless playboy. Sara was no doubt having trouble rectifying that image of Oliver with the man before her, even given her own changes.

“Be that as it may,” Sara said quietly. “We’ve been ordered not to interfere with his plan. We will do our best to take him out before, but he’s been evading us for days. He chose his moniker well.”

“His moniker?” Felicity repeated in question.


“Well that explains his affection for the disappearing in a cloud of smoke.”

Sara shook her head. “He has been trained in things you can’t possibly comprehend. In disciplines that defy the natural order of the world.”

Felicity raised her brows. “Sounds like you’re talking about…”

“Magic,” Oliver followed up.

Felicity scoffed. She was going to say supernatural, but either way, it didn’t just defy the natural order, it defied everything Felicity herself believed in. Science was making new leaps and bounds every day, but that didn’t mean she was ready to believe in something beyond it.

“All you need to know is that he’s dangerous. More than you can imagine,” Sara paused, meeting both their eyes in turn. “And I’m sure you’ve already seen for yourself exactly what lengths he’s willing to go to in order to carry out his self-declared mission.”

“If you’re trying to get us to back out of this,” Oliver said, giving Sara a pointed look. “Then you’re wasting your time.”

Sara shook her head. “Just… be careful. And sorry for barging in. Nyssa doesn’t know I’ve gone. She thinks being back here has--” she broke off suddenly, drawing in a ragged breath. “--weakened my resolve.”

“No one would blame you if it did,” Felicity piped in. “Sorry, I know I don’t know you. But it’s normal to feel something when you see people you love and people who love you.”

“Ra’s al Ghul would blame me,” Sara said back, but she offered Felicity a small smile. “When you join the league, you leave your old life behind. I wouldn’t have been here at all, except he thought my knowledge of Merlyn might help get an upperhand.”

“Well my door’s open any time,” Felicit smiled. “And apparently the window too.”

Sara’s smile widened at that. “You’re cute,” she said, shaking her head.

“So we shouldn’t count on you for taking out the devices,” Oliver said. “But Malcolm is fair game for everyone.”
Felicity watched as Sara shrugged. “I’ll do more if I can. But yeah, that’s about it.”

Oliver nodded.

“Anyway I should go.” Sara hooked a thumb over her shoulder at the window. “You mind if I--”

“Go for it,” Felicity said, and felt a sudden shudder sweep through her at the chilly winter air when Sara opened the window. And then she was gone.

Oliver moved to the window, quickly latching it behind Sara and pulling the shade down. Felicity could see something still churning behind his eyes, but she knew better than to ask. Felicity was sure that seeing Sara brought back plenty of memories that Oliver had been trying to keep locked up. Coming so fresh on the heels of their trip to Russia, she was sure, didn’t help matters either.

She moved to him, resting a hand on his arm. “Come back to bed?” she asked. And with those four words, she left everything else unsaid. It wasn’t often people woke up on Doomsday and knew it. But they did. They both knew that everything would be different in Starling, if they weren’t able to stop Malcolm. The club, the Foundry, how many hundreds or thousands of lives? If they couldn’t locate the devices, if they didn’t get them shut off in time. If Malcolm somehow slipped out of the city, if he got ahold of Thea and Tommy.

Tension coiled in Felicity’s stomach, but she didn’t let Oliver see it. They had time for all of that, they had to. Because in that moment, all she knew was that if this was their last day, they would spend it protecting the city they loved and everyone in it. But first, they would spend a few very needed, very precious moments hidden away from the war that was at their doorsteps. First, they would spend some time wrapped in each other’s arms reminding themselves of exactly what they were protecting. And that had to be enough to get through to tomorrow.
Chapter 50

Chapter by foreverfelicityqueen (stydiasredstring)

Chapter Notes

Hello loves,
Chapter 50! Holy cow. I am floored that we've made it this far. And I'm beyond amazed at all of you for continuing to read it and be engaged. I really love this chapter, there's some good character moments, and I think it really pushes everyone towards the climax in an interesting way. So without further ado. Let's do this.
love,
Kayla

He could tell he was dreaming. He knew it in the way things swirled and twisted around him. But this was a dream Oliver would relish falling into.

He could see Felicity smiling at him as he pulled her close. Her brightness shone vibrant around him, banishing the last of the darkness from his mind. A small child stood at their knees reaching to be lifted up. When Oliver looked at her, he saw everything he ever wanted. He saw a future with Felicity, and a beacon of hope out of tragedy. He saw beyond tomorrow, and it was something he never knew he wanted in the first place.

“Oliver?” Felicity’s questioned. But the woman in front of him hadn’t moved, hadn’t reacted. “Oliver.”

That time he stirred from his dream. The Felicity before him fading as he opened his eyes to the real thing. She was even more beautiful than what he could conjure in his mind.

“Hey,” he muttered, trying to shake the sleep from his voice. He reached up running his fingers down her arm. “What time is it?”

“Almost nine,” she replied, as she placed a kiss on his lips. “I’d let you sleep longer but…”

Everything tensed. Felicity’s pause was enough to shock the rest of him awake. “What’s wrong?”

“Your mom’s been calling,” she placed his phone in his hand. “Thea too. And I know we have a million other things to be worried about right now. But I think you should go and talk to them before we take another step forward.”

“We don’t have time for me to deal with my family drama.”

“Oliver,” she placed her hand against his chest, running her fingers lightly against his Bratva tattoo. She looked like she was fighting against the urge to pull him close. “We don’t know what’s gonna happen between now and sunrise.”
“I know that.”

“What I’m saying is,” she took a breath. “I don’t want you to regret not saying the things you need to say when you can say them.”

“We’re going to stop Malcolm,” he whispered, letting his free hand rest against her cheek. “I promise you that.”

“I know,” she gave him a half smile. “But on the off chance we don’t. Do you really want something your mother did years ago to be sitting between you two?”

“Felicity--”

“I just got off the phone with my mom,” she cut him off her hand curling into a fist as she pulled it back. “I know it’s not the same. The issues my mom and I have are nowhere near the telenovela I’ve seen played out in the Queen family name. But we have issues. And I didn’t want her to think I didn’t still love in spite of those issues. Family is… precious. And you’re right, come hell or high water, we will stop Malcolm. But I think you should see your mom first. I think you need it, Oliver.”

He nodded, letting her warmth soak into his skin. He did want to see his mom. If for no other reason than the fact that he knew he wouldn’t stay focus with all the tension still there. And if he needed anything today it was to stay focused.

“So your mom huh?”

“Yes. Wait until you meet her, you might just run for the hills,” she scrunched up her face, shaking her head. “Not that I am letting you meet my mother, like ever. Trust me I’m not sure you would survive.”

“I think I’d be fine.”

“Oh see hon you say that now, but which one of us has the benefit of experience here? My mother would either hit on you or ask you when you planned on knocking me up. Probably both, actually. And in that order.”

“Now I have to meet her,” he teased, before he cleared his throat. “But you’re right. I should go talk to my mom. I don’t know what I’ll even say to her though.”

“As close to the truth as you can get,” she ventured. “I wish we didn’t have to leave this bedroom though, you looked like you were having a good dream.”

He shrugged, the memory of it fading slightly, but it was still bright enough that he felt the glow from Felicity. “Just thinking about the future.”

“Anything good on the horizon?”

“Hopefully.”

“Good,” she leaned in again and it was Oliver’s turn to capture her lips in a kiss first, pulling her down against his chest. She laughed against his lips, and it was the purest thing he had ever had the pleasure of hearing. “You really should get going. I’m gonna head to the Foundry because as soon as the truckers leave the warehouse and the place clears out it will be much easier for breaking in.”

“A lot less fun though.”
“I think you’ve had enough fun with arrows as of late.”

“True,” He nodded, letting her slip from his lap. “I’ll send Digg over once I get to the mansion. That is if he survived nearly 24 hours with my sister.”

“Oh no, you should really go rescue him,” she joked tossing his shirt at him. “Also please put this on.”

“Okay I realize I’m leaving but why?”

“If you must know,” she made her way back to his side of the bed, leaning over him as she reached for her phone. Then she added in a whisper. “You are entirely too distracting shirtless.”

He let out a laugh as Felicity gathered her things and walked towards the bathroom. Waking up next to Felicity, feeling someone beside him through the late hours, it wasn’t something he ever thought he’d get to experience. But he wouldn’t trade it for the world.

It only took Oliver a short while to finish getting dressed and make his way towards the mansion. Though it was enough time to think. He didn’t know what he’d say to his mother, if he could even get past the thick layer of anger that still seemed to cloud his thoughts. But he had to try. Because Felicity was right. They couldn’t know for certain what tomorrow would hold. And he couldn’t go into the rest of this with what if’s on his conscious. He needed to clear the air.

As he walked into the house everything felt weighted in a different way. It hadn’t been that long that they were there for Thea’s party, or even his homecoming. So much destruction and pain had filled the last few months, nearly choking them with it. But they would endure this storm as well as they had the others. He believed it in his soul.

“There you are,” John stood perched against the living room archway. “You missed breakfast. Raisa made crepes.”

“I send you here to keep an eye on my sister and you talk yourself into breakfast?”

“For your information your mother insisted,” John cleared his throat and took a few steps closer. “Speaking of, she kinda sensed that something was going on. Thea didn’t spill but, she’s expecting to hear something.”

“I figured.”

“What are you gonna tell her?”

He shrugged. Because how honest could he be without putting her at risk too? He shouldn’t have told Thea, not in the middle of a street downtown. It had been the hardest thing he ever had to do, and he wasn’t sure he could repeat it with Moira. “I don’t think she could handle the truth.”

“I think you underestimate the woman,” Digg smiled as he clamped Oliver on the shoulder. “I’ll head to the Foundry, see if I can get in some reps before Felicity isolates that information.”

“You should go home and sleep, Digg.”

“Actually Lyla came over last night. We took turns watching the house.”

“Nice date night.”

“Hey when you’re as dedicated to your work as the two of us you take what you can get,” he
replied. “She headed to debrief Waller. See if she’ll lend any tactical support.”

“My money’s on no.”

“Maybe, but if it means saving the whole city, Lyla had to try.”

“I know,” he had considered going to Amanda himself, but Felicity would freak if he tried. “But I
don’t want to rely on Waller. If we have to we’ll spread ourselves out more, take a device each.”

“I don’t like the idea of any of us going without backup.”

“Yeah.”

“Oliver,” they both turned towards the staircase as Moira descended. The hesitation in her eyes left
him with a pebble of guilt. “I thought I heard you come in. Did you enjoy breakfast Mr. Diggle?”

“I did, thank you Mrs. Queen. I should get going. But I’m glad everything’s good here, and that the
intruder didn’t return.”

Oliver’s eyes shot up in alarm. “The what?”

Digg gave him a look that assured him it must have been a cover story.

“Oh it was nothing,” Moira said waving him off. “Your sister insists she saw someone lurking
outside and insisted Mr. Diggle stay. I reminded her we have a very thorough security system.”

“Regardless, I’m glad I could help,” Digg shook her hand and then smiled once more. “Oliver I will
see you later.”

“Later, Digg.”

As the front door closed, Oliver started to feel another wave of panic hit him. Because he really
wasn’t sure how to broach this subject with his mother. He felt closer to her when he was stuck on
that damn island.

“I was wondering if you were ever coming home.”

He nodded, not wanting to meet her eyes yet. He should have put this off until later. There was so
much to do, and he shouldn’t be wasting time at home.

“Mom just--”

“I want to apologize,” she cut him off as she folded her arms. “I tried to some extent to do so with
your sister, but she is refusing to talk to me. I can’t blame her for that, because I do understand. But I
need you to hear this too Oliver.”

He looked at her. “Okay.”

“When I let Robert believe he was Thea’s father, when I kept that to myself, I really thought I was
healing our family,” she paused. “I thought that a child would fix things between us. And it breathed
such a life into him again. I would watch him and you boys as you painted Thea’s nursery and put
together her furniture. I thought our troubles were over and we could just be a family. You, me,
Robert, Tommy, and Thea. It’s what I wanted. But Malcolm returned from his travels and he was
different. Angrier and full of a rage I don’t think I ever quite comprehended. He would only take
Tommy home on weekends and then he would go again.”
“Why are you telling me this?”

“When Malcolm returned for good, you boys were nearly sixteen. I remember because you had knocked over the mailbox twice while practicing to drive. He came storming up to the house after Robert had taken you boys for a lesson. And he was furious with your father. I didn’t understand at first, but he reached for Tommy and yanked him away from the car. Like he thought Robert was trying to steal Tommy from him. You both were visibly shaken and I was about to call SCPD when your sister came down the front steps, and ran to give Tommy a hug.

“Malcolm took one look at her and he knew,” she shook her head. “I could see it all over his face. And I panicked. I thought he was going to demand to see her, to be apart of her life.”

“But he didn’t,” Oliver said, swallowing hard. “We all grew up never knowing the truth.”

“He called me later in the week. I feared for the worst. I knew he would want something and I couldn’t bare the idea of Thea losing Robert. Of you losing your sister. I wanted a way out of the situation.” she paused, wiping at the corner of her eye. “But all he demanded was that Robert and I stop trying to parent his son. He told me that he wouldn’t even ask for a DNA test for Thea as long as I stepped back from Tommy. I love Tommy, I have always cared about him, but this was Malcolm offering to cut his ties with Thea forever. And I had to take it. So I’m sorry that I lied. And I’m sorry I threw Tommy back to that man. If I could have protected all three of you I would have, but I had to choose, and I have wondered for thirteen years if I made the right one. If maybe I had fought back, then things would have been different and you three could have grown up as siblings.”

“Or he would have lashed out,” Oliver whispered bracing his hands against the table. “How much do you know, about what Malcolm’s been up to with the city?”

“Oliver I--”

“Do you know about the list? About the devices or his plan? Do you know where he was all those years?”

“I have some ideas.”

“Mom this isn’t a game. He’s hurt people, he’s killed people. And he needs to be stopped.”

“He’s a dangerous man yes, but Oliver you can’t worry yourself with Malcolm. It’s better that way.”

“What?” He couldn’t have heard her right. “You don’t even know the half of what he’s done Mom.”

“I know enough. I know he roped your father into some plan to better the Glades, but all it did was cause a schism to settle in Robert. He was so distraught before he left on the Gambit. And I know whatever Malcolm has up his sleeve is nothing you can stop alone.”

*I won’t be alone*. He wanted to say. He wanted to tell her so much, to assure her that he would stop Malcolm and make sure the man never darkened their family again. But he couldn’t do that without telling her everything. And he realized he wasn’t ready for that.

“Okay,” he nodded, trying to look defeated. But only because anything else would raise Moira’s suspicion. He hated it but he knew he’d have to lie. “I’ll leave Malcolm alone.”

“Thank you,” she moved close to him, placing a kiss on his cheek. “It’s for the best.”

“Mmhmm,” he couldn’t let himself speak too afraid of what might come out.
“I don’t want there to be anymore secrets between us.”

He didn’t meet her gaze, but wondered where this was going.

“I need to tell you something,” she said taking a breath. “And I know you’ll be angry, but I want you to know that I know I shouldn’t have lied about this. I was just trying to protect you.”

That got his attention enough to look at her. What other secrets could his mother be hiding? In the shadow of Malcolm he didn’t think anything could top it.

His phone rang and whatever words Moira was poised to speak fell silent on her lips.

“One sec,” he pulled his phone out, Felicity’s face flashing on the screen before he clicked answer. “Hey?”

“I’m amazing.”

“You found it?”

“Obviously. How soon can you be here?”

He looked at his mother, but Moira no longer looked like she wanted to spill any more secrets. “I’ll head over now. See you in a bit.”

“Love you.”

“Love you too,” he replied before he hung up, and dropped his phone back into his pocket.

Moira was eyeing him. “You and Felicity have gotten close.”

“I have to head out,” he said ignoring the comment. “But we can talk again later.”

“You are my pride and joy,” she placed a hand on his cheek, with a sorrow filled smile. “And I want you to know what that’s like someday.”

“Mom?”

“Later,” she nodded pulling back. “We can talk later.”

“Okay,” but it didn’t feel okay to leave the conversation like that. He wished he could think of something more to say. But Felicity had called, and the longer he waited the more time would run out.

---

Oliver had made it back to the Foundry in record time, with his sister in tow. With Diggle having left for the day, and Malcolm still more than likely after Thea to give her the same offer he’d given Tommy, they needed to keep her protected at all costs.

Thea stayed in the underground bunker with Felicity while Oliver suited up and headed out to the trucking company Malcolm had used to put the final piece of his plan into action. Diggle, Lyla and Tommy would be joining them as soon as they had the addresses, so they could fan out and attempt to locate the machines.

The Foundry was silent as Felicity and Thea sat, eyes glued to the computer monitors. The
schematics of the trucking company building sat open on one monitor, Oliver’s body cam on another and Felicity held her breath as he moved through the warehouse on her screen. Thea did the same beside her and when he finally proclaimed that he’d found the right filing cabinet, they both collectively exhaled.

“This is harder than I thought it would be,” Thea said quietly, neither of them taking their eyes from the screen.

Felicity’s fingers sat poised on the keyboard, ready to jump into action however she could, should Oliver need it. “What is?” she whispered back.

“Watching helplessly while he’s in the field. Haven’t you ever wanted to be there in the midst of it all?”

“Nope,” Felicity replied. “My talents are much better suited right here.” She tapped a few keys and then activated her mic. “Security guard just started making rounds. You’ve got 40 seconds.”

“Almost got it,” Oliver said back, his modulated voice low.

“But seeing what he can do,” Thea continued. “It doesn’t put an itch in you to get into the fight?”

Felicity paused and glanced over at the younger Queen. She let out a quiet sigh and turned to give Thea her (mostly) full attention. “I’ve never been much of a fighter,” she said. “At least not physically. I prefer electronic warfare and using people’s technology against them. It’s kind of a specialty for me, which I’m sure you’ve noticed. But it doesn’t surprise me that you’d feel the same itch as your brother.” She paused, and then clarified. “As both of your brothers.”

Thea’s brow furrowed. “Tommy?”

“Hmm?” he hummed, coming up behind the teen. Felicity had seen him coming, and figured if he’d wanted an opening to telling his sister the truth, there was no time like the present.

“You work in the field with Oliver?” Thea asked.

Tommy looked over Thea’s head, giving Felicity a pointed glare. Felicity, in turn, shrugged and went back to monitoring Oliver’s progress on her computer screens.

“Got it,” Oliver’s voice came. “I’ll send you the info once I’m out of the building.”

“Good. And then come home.”

Felicity spun in her seat, to see Tommy and Thea having a bit of a staring contest at each other. She raised a brow curiously.

“What?” Felicity asked with a shrug.

“Thea just asked me what my alter ego was.”

Thea mock-cringed. “Is it that bad? I mean is it side-kick level, homemade costume kind of deal? I can totally hook you up with a kickass tailor if you need some help.”

“It’s a valid question,” Felicity grinned. She knew how much angst and pain and pressure they were all under, but sometimes it was necessary to take the little moments of amusement when they came.

“Thea, it’s not like that.” Tommy shook his head, and then sighed. “I work for a secret branch of the government called ARGUS. I’m kind of a spy.”
Thea barked out a laugh, but sobered when she realized that Tommy wasn’t joking. “Wait… you’re serious?”

He nodded. “When I was shot a few weeks ago, I wasn’t mugged. And I told Laurel and that’s why she broke up with me. I’ve worked for them for two years. Ever since—” he paused. “Ever since the gala in Russia. That’s where they recruited me.”

She turned her back on him, pacing the length of the room before turning to face him again. “So literally everyone I’m related to has been lying to me for years,” she huffed. “Not really sure how to take that.”

“It wasn’t about you,” Tommy said, taking a few steps toward her. “The way they recruited me,” he sighed. “They used something against me, blackmailed me into joining. I hated them for a long time, and felt like keeping it secret somehow gave me some control over it. It’s only been recently that I’ve realized that I can do some good working for them, despite how I got started.”

“What did they use against you?”

“Me,” Felicity piped in. “I built a program in college that was basically a backdoor key to get into any server. My college boyfriend and I used it to hack into the Department of Education. Cooper planned to erase the debts of thousands of students. He got caught for the hack and took the fall for me.” Felicity shuddered, the weight of that day coming back on her in full force. “ARGUS threatened to out me as the hacker. I would have been arrested, jailed and then who knows what. Tommy agreed to work for them to save me.”

Tommy turned, meeting her gaze. She’d never told him what it was that the program did that Waller threatened to release to the world, and she’d briefly told him about Cooper, about what had happened to him after he’d been arrested. Felicity broke their gaze, her eyes falling to her hands that still rested on the keyboard in front of her.

Her computer chirped with an incoming message. It was the trucker’s routes from Oliver. Quickly changing gears, Felicity went back into work mode, deciphering the origin and destination points before overlaying them onto a map. And then she frowned.

“This doesn’t make any sense,” she said quietly. “The delivery addresses. They’re just random coordinates in the Glades. They don’t correspond to fault lines or buildings. One of them is the end of a storm drain. Another is an abandoned warehouse.”

“What about the cover image on the book?” Tommy asked. “Is it just me, or does it look like a map?”

“I’ve been running a search on it for hours, overlaying it with every configuration of streets in the city. And the third device? It’s not even listed on the company’s manifest for delivery. It looks like that page was either removed, or never entered into their system.”

Tommy scrubbed a hand down his face. “We’re running out of time.”

“Have you tried just asking him?” Thea asked, reclaiming her seat beside Felicity. They both turned to look at her, and Thea just shrugged in response. “What? He told you about his master plan, didn’t he? Told you where to avoid? Maybe I can get him to be more specific.”

“No,” Felicity said.

And at the same time Tommy said, “Out of the question.”
“You all think he’s looking for me anyway. And my boyfriend lives in the Glades, so it’s a pretty good explanation for me being there.”

“You all think he’s looking for me anyway. And my boyfriend lives in the Glades, so it’s a pretty good explanation for me being there.”

“Thea, no.” That was Tommy, and his face was set into a hard glare. “He’s beyond dangerous. And if he thinks you know too much, there’s no telling what he might do.”

She shrugged, crossing her arms over her chest. It made her look more like a teenager than she had in a long time. “Just trying to help,” she said low.

“And we appreciate that,” Felicity said, putting a hand on her arm. “But I think the plan is that once Oliver, Diggle and Lyla get back, that they’ll go out looking for the devices. They’re all trained and know what to look for. The delivery points for the devices that Oliver retrieved are our best bet as far as where to start.”

“The third device is going to be the wild card,” Tommy sighed. “I wonder if Thea might be on to something after all?”

“We can’t let her go wandering around the Glades hoping he’ll come after her, Tommy.”

“No, not that,” he shook his head dismissively. “About getting him to tell us where it is. If he’s really leaving for good, I can bet he’ll be at the office, setting things up to continue on in his absence. Maybe I can get him talking and we can get him to tell us where it is.”

“That’s a whole lot of maybes,” a new voice said, pulling all their attention toward the door. Diggle came in, hand in hand with Lyla.

“You’ll need backup,” Lyla said.

“Not sure I feel comfortable with any of you going into the field alone,” Felicity said.

“We’ll have to double up,” Oliver agreed, coming in behind them. “In case Malcolm has anyone stationed to protect the devices.”

“Well simple math will tell you that’s quite a problem,” Tommy deadpanned. “Three devices and only four of us.”

“I think I may have a solution for that,” Felicity said with a smile. She spun back to her computer and hit a few buttons before speaking again. “Detective Lance, this is the dispatcher from last night,” she said, and then paused.

“You’ve gotta be kidding me,” Lance huffed, his voice coming through the speakers in the Foundry. “Your masked friend need another face-to-face?”

“No, not that,” she shook his head dismissively. “About getting him to tell us where it is. If he’s really leaving for good, I can bet he’ll be at the office, setting things up to continue on in his absence. Maybe I can get him talking and we can get him to tell us where it is.”

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“You’ve gotta be kidding me,” Lance huffed, his voice coming through the speakers in the Foundry. “Your masked friend need another face-to-face?”

“Not exactly,” Felicity said, sitting up a little straighter. “We’ve got a lead on possible addresses on the devices. Wondering if you and your partner may be able to take a look at one of them. It’s only about two blocks from you.”

“How do you know where--” he broke off. “Nevermind, I don’t want to know. Give me the address, we’ll take a look.”

Felicity gave him the address, before disconnecting the comm transmission and spinning back to face them all. “What?” she shrugged. “Now Oliver and Diggle can take the second device in the Glades, and Tommy and Lyla can go to MG to track down Malcolm and see about getting the third location. Thea and I will stay here. And I’ll transmit the virus to the devices as soon as I have a looped connection with them.”
“Sounds like you’ve got it all figured out,” Tommy said.

“I just do the easy stuff,” Felicity replied. “You all need to be careful. We’ve all seen how Malcolm likes to toy with people, especially when he’s had time to set up. And these devices are nothing, if not one masterful, despicable setup.”

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He cut the engine once they pulled into ARGUS and Tommy let out a deep breath. This was it. The last night before everything changed. It was like Russia all over again, the buzz of energy flowing through him in sickening waves. He didn’t know if they’d stop Malcolm, but he knew either way things would be different come morning.

“Hey,” Lyla cut into his thoughts and he pulled his mind back to the present. “Whatever happens, I’ve got your back.”

“Thanks partner,” he smiled and they both climbed out of the car.

Other agents milled around the building, but they didn’t pay him or Lyla any attention as they strode towards the armory. He hated the idea of it, but he knew if they were going after his father, he would need a weapon. Even if he hoped to hell he wouldn’t need to discharge it.

Lyla had run their intel past Waller the night before, but that didn’t mean their boss was happy about it. In fact Tommy was hoping they’d make it in and out before the director spotted them at all. They had too much to do to get caught up in a battle of politics over paperwork.

“You taking a second clip?” Lyla had one in her hand outstretched to him. “You don’t have to, if you don’t want to.”

He took it from her and placed it in his pocket. “Lyla this is about finding the last device and stopping Malcolm. I’m taking every precaution I can.”

“We should talk before we go there,” she stood up straighter her eyes boring into his. “You know I trust you with my life, but I need to know where your head’s at right now.”

“Ly--”

“Don’t tell me you’re okay if you’re not. Don’t lie to me right now. We’re a team and that only works when we’re both honest.” she paused as she added a gun to an ankle holster. “I’m terrified that the last time I saw Johnny was the very last time.”

He hadn’t expected that. “What?”

“We just got back to a good place Merlyn, and I don’t want to lose him before we figure out just how good we can be together.”

They usually didn’t talk like this, not about their personal lives. And if he had to guess he’d say that was the one flaw in their relationship. Maybe Lyla saw it too.

“I’m scared that if he makes a move I won’t be able to stop him,” he whispered it, as if the volume could hold back the weight of the words. But if the gravity of them pulled everything closer.

“Tommy if I know anything at all about you, it’s that you are a hell of a lot stronger than you give yourself credit for,” she moved closer to him, placing a hand on his shoulder. “If it’s a choice between protecting this city or letting Malcolm go, I don’t doubt what you’d do.”
He nodded, but he still wasn’t sure. He didn’t think he could make himself walk out of this building if he settled one way or another. And that was good, because nothing could keep him from the mission tonight.

“What exactly do you two think you’re doing?”

Tommy and Lyla turned towards the door where General Shrieve stood. He glared as he surveyed them and the weapons still in their hands. “I asked you two a question, and I demand an answer.”

“We’re gearing up,” Tommy retorted, barely biting back the sarcasm in his voice. “And you’re not our director so we don’t exactly need to run this by you.”

He could almost feel the anger seething off of Shrieve, but he didn’t care. Not considering what was at stake.

“You should watch your tone boy, insubordination isn’t something you can come back from easily. And you don’t want me as your enemy.”

“General,” Lyla spoke, and he could already see the venom working its way into her next few words. He would almost feel sorry for the man if it had been anyone else. “I think you would do well to remember that while you’ve been distracting Director Waller for the past few weeks with inane demands and ludicrous hoops for her to jump through, the agents here have done actual work. Myself and Agent Merlyn included. And while I’m sure your military input is useful under simple circumstances, we know people who only deal in extremes.”

“And it would be naive to think that anything less than extreme measures will stop them,” Waller finished from just behind Shrieve. As he turned her face was stoic, but Tommy could almost see a glint of satisfaction in her eyes. “Thank you for the reminder Agent Michaels.”

“Amanda, these agents are checking out weapons.”

Waller flicked a look over to them and folded her hands. “So you mean to tell me they are using the armory to arm themselves? Shocking.”

Shrieve’s tempered flared as he pointed to Tommy. “This one could be court martialed for the way he spoke to me.”

“That would be an amazing feat,” she moved past him, positioning herself between him and Lyla and the general. “Considering Agent Merlyn is neither under your command nor is he military. But I will follow up with him on this complaint you have, until then I think your work here is done.”

“You can’t just kick me out. I was sent here by our superiors.”

“Yes you were, and having you here has been… well time consuming.” she pulled a slip of paper from her pocket and unfolded it. “But I got an email from our superiors just today, and according to them, the DoD has reassigned you to Bialya. Effective immediately.”

Shrieve looked like he was ready to attack, but Tommy wasn’t worried. Waller had far more bit in her arsenal than he could hope for.

“What did you say to them?”

“I merely stated the facts,” she took a calculated step forward. “One of those being that none of the agents here respect you enough to follow your orders. See you’ve been making me rush after you as you’ve checked in with all my departments. And while you’ve done that, I’ve observed my agents. I
know how this place ticks Matthew. And when the world sets itself aflame, I’m the one they trust to know how to put it out. So please, don’t let us keep you. I’m sure you have a flight to catch.”

Much to Tommy’s surprise, Shrieve didn’t argue. He shook his head, almost as if he was surrendering the play to Waller, and walked away.

As soon as he was out of earshot Waller spun on both of them. “Update now.”

Lyla huffed out a laugh before she replied. “We know the location of two of the three devices. Our vigilante friends our taking care of those, while Tommy and I hunt down a lead on the third one.”

Waller shifted her gaze off Lyla and on to him. “What’s the lead?”

“We have reason to--”

“Not you,” Waller held up a hand to Lyla, and then spoke again. “Agent Merlyn, what’s the lead?”

“Malcolm told me he secured a way to get us out of the city,” he refused to bring up Thea too. He didn’t want her knowing about that. “I think he expects me to meet him at Merlyn Global.”

“What if you’re wrong?”

He had considered already consider just how terrible things would go if he was wrong. “I’m not. There’s a helipad on the roof, that’s how he would plan to get to the airstrip if he was leaving like this.”

“What are your friends going to do to the devices once they find them?”

“We’re going to destroy them,” he answered. “Because it’s the right thing to do Amanda. That kind of power, no one should have that.”

He expected her to argue, to give him one of her patented Waller looks and tell him to extract the device no matter the cost. But instead she just nodded. “I agree.”

“You do?” he and Lyla chorused.

“Don’t sound so shocked,” she said with an eye roll. “If you had spent half the time with Matthew Shrieve as I have over the last couple weeks, you would understand just how dangerous that kind of thing would be in government property. I’m not letting him gain any sort of leverage to strong arm his way back here.”

“We’ll make sure they all get disarmed,” Lyla said, as she put her jacket back on, situating her holster underneath it. “You have our word.”

She motioned for the door and Tommy was about to follow when Waller grabbed his arm, halting his movements. Then she whispered. “As for Malcolm Merlyn, I want him taken down by any means necessary. Do we understand each other?”

He knew what she meant, he could hear it in each word. Waller didn’t want his father to make it out of the night alive. And Tommy feared the outcome would be in her favor.

“Yes ma’am,” even if every fiber of his being was fighting against it.

“I’m glad.”

Before he could retort, a commotion rose from the hall. Tommy looked out the giant glass window.
“Fuck.”

Waller and Lyla followed his line of sight all the way to Lexi, Lexi who was trying her damndest to keep Laurel on that half of the building.

Then Waller turned back on him, ice in her eyes as she spoke. “You brought a civilian here?”

“Technically no.” They both shot him a glare, so he explained. “I had Lexi pick her up. Let me just go and talk to her.”

“Agent Merlyn--”

But he cut past both of them and down the hall.

“Tommy,” Laurel seemed to relax when she saw him, no longer fighting to get past Lexi’s small frame.

“Hey,” he came up to them, pulling Laurel in for a quick hug.

“Well now that my job is taken care of,” Lexi motioned and excused herself from the hall.

When they were alone Laurel pulled back a little. “Want to explain why you sent the nervous looking brunette to pick me up at your apartment?”

“Yes, Agent Meryn,” Waller and Lyla had come up behind him wearing nearly matching glares. “I would be eager to hear this as well.”

Laurel gave him a side glance. “Agent? Right, that might take some getting use to.”

“Yeah,” he felt entirely too trapped in his conversation, and not even Lyla looked likely to help him out. He turned to Waller and took a deep breath. “I realize I should have informed you before this, but Malcolm’s out there and he’s dangerous. And Laurel is important to me, I can’t allow him to use her against me. ARGUS is the only place I knew she’d be safe.”

“We’ll discuss this later,” Waller replied. “You and Agent Michaels need to get moving.”

Waller walked off towards her office and Lyla to stare down Tommy.

“Lyla I just need--”

“Five minutes Merlyn,” she cut him off. “I’ll meet you at the van.”

“Thank you,” he mouthed as she walked away.

He turned to Laurel, another wave of ease crashing into him.

“Are you okay?” she asked. “I told you I would wait for you at your place and then we could--”

“Laurel,” he took her hand and pulled her with him towards his desk.

He needed to find a way to get her to stay. And it wasn’t just for her safety either. He knew if she was out there, if she was with him he wouldn’t be able to do the things he might have to do.

“You’re scaring me.”

“You can’t come with me,” he whispered, shaking his head. “Tonight is going to be dangerous and I
can’t let my focus split- not for a second.”

“I can help.”

“You are amazing in a million different ways,” he let her settle into his desk chair as he smiled. “I am more than lucky to have you in my life, and I don’t want any secrets between us anymore.”

With his hand in hers it was easy. One second he was rubbing circles against her wrist and the next he snapped the cuff into place.

“Tommy!”

“You’re gonna be pissed at me for this, and I can handle that,” he said as he stood. “What I can’t handle is the thought of you dying because of my father.”

“So you’re locking me to a desk and leaving me to wonder what the hell is going on?!”

He took the top file from his desk and slid it in front of her. “I made a promise to a friend, that I would keep a secret for her. To protect someone. But I also told you I wouldn’t lie to you anymore. So I think this is how I can keep my promise to you, without really breaking her trust. Just read this please. And when I come back we’ll talk.”

“Tommy…”

“I love you,” he whispered placing a kiss to her forehead. “And I will come back.”

She was angry, he could see it rolling over her. But she fell against him. “You better come back.”

“I promise.”

As she picked up the file he stood. He didn’t have time to watch her read it, to see her reaction to the contents. But she had a right to know. And he couldn’t be the one who kept the truth from her any longer.

He got into the van and Lyla looked at him.

“Are you pissed at me?”

“No,” she shook her head. “But then again I’m saving my energy for another B&E.”

“Actually I was thinking about that,” he said giving her a smirk. “This time we should go through the front door.”

“All the subtlety of a brick wall. I like it.”

“Let’s go.”

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Chapter 51

Chapter by holysmoaksoliver

Chapter Notes

Hi lovelies... you'll probably notice there is finally no longer a question mark when it comes to number of chapters left. And I know that number looks surprisingly close. But the climax means the end is near, so I'm sure you were sort of expecting it, no? And again, we want to thank each and every one of you for taking this ride with us. We so, so appreciate it.

xoxo,
Cassie

It was quiet in the Foundry, which usually didn't bother Felicity. Except this was not an ordinary day, and Malcolm Merlyn was not an ordinary foe. Their usual team of three had been doubled to take on Felicity’s former boss, and as she sat at her computer, her fingers tapped on the desk in nervous rhythm. Now, the quiet of the big empty space below the club was making Felicity realize just how much she needed to hear someone’s voice in the comms.

“Want me to get you something?” Thea asked, startling Felicity enough to make her jump.

She also wasn’t used to having guests in the Foundry. Not that she minded the younger Queen’s presence. It was better than the alternative, and Felicity had to fight back a shudder at the thought of Thea out in the Glades, wandering around, hoping that Malcolm would find her. Yeah, having her there in the Foundry was definitely better than Thea’s plan.

“Water? Soda? A shot of something strong?” Thea continued, when Felicity didn’t answer.

This time, Felicity shook her head in response. “I’m okay, thanks.”

“You sure? Because all that tapping and you may just bore a hole into the desk.”

Felicity froze in place. “I guess it just never really gets easier. I know you asked me before if I’d rather be out there, and I wouldn’t. But sometimes it’s hard knowing that anything can happen out there, and while I can do a lot from here, there are some things I can’t.”

“Like drive an arrow into someone that your partner didn’t see coming?”

“Exactly,” Felicity pulled her bottom lip into her mouth. “Not that I’d be able to do that anyway, it’s just...”

“I get it,” Thea said, offering Felicity a reassuring smile. “If my brother—” she caught herself. “Brothers, I will get used to that eventually. If they wouldn’t have a heart attack or murder me for it, I’d like to be right out there with them.”

“Really?” Felicity asked, but she couldn’t say she was surprised. Thea Queen was as fearless as they came. And only part of that was the recklessness that came with being a teenager. The rest of it was something Felicity had personally seen in both Tommy and Oliver- something innate in all three of
the siblings—a fierce protectiveness and loyalty that was rare in the current day and age.

Thea nodded, but before she could reply, Felicity’s comm link crackled to life.

“Hey dispatch?” Lance’s voice filtered through.

“You can call me—” Felicity started.

“I think it’s safer if I don’t know,” Quentin interrupted. “Anyway, is there a reason you sent me to the middle of nowhere? I thought you said you had a lead on the devices.”

“We do. One of them was delivered to the address you’re currently at.” She quickly tapped into Quentin’s phone, sending him an image of the cover of the notebook Tommy had found in his father’s secret room in his office. “Let me know if you see this seal anywhere.”

“What sea—” he asked, and then his phone beeped through the comms. “How did you?”

“I think it’s safer if you don’t know,” Felicity said, repeating his words back at him.

Lance huffed in her ear, making Felicity smile a little. There was a long pause before he said anything else. “I don’t see this image anywhere. I’ll keep looking, but it almost reminds me of something.”

That caught Felicity’s attention. She’d been staring at that image for so long her eyes had gone bleary, and it hadn’t once hitched on a memory of anything. Oliver, Tommy, and the others had seen it too, and none of them had any spark of recognition.

“What does it remind you of, detective?” she asked, reclaiming her seat in an instant, her fingers already hovering over the keyboard, waiting for anything she could use to search against.

“It’s just, when I was a kid, they had this whole page spread in the newspaper once a month, detailing the plans. Fashioned after the one in Gotham, ya know? I used to take the paper when my father was done with it and drive my toy cars across the lines like roads.”

“Plans for what?”

“A subway system.”

“Subway system? Starling doesn’t have one of those,” Felicity said, but she was already typing, searching for plans, anything that she could use to validate what Detective Lance was saying.

“Used to,” he answered. “Fell into disuse when gangs took over the Glades in the 90’s.”

And then she got a hit. A 100 percent perfect match to the image from Malcolm’s book. It was exactly what Detective Lance had thought it was, and Felicity never would have found it on her own. Because she never would have thought to look under the roads.

“That’s it,” she said, leaning back in her chair and throwing a quick glance to Thea. “Detective, you found the missing piece.”

“Huh,” he gruffed back. “Guess you guys owe me one now.”

“The storm drain dead ahead of you used to be a maintenance tunnel. You should be able to follow it up through the whole route. There’s no telling where in the tunnel the device is—”

“Already on it,” Lance said.
Felicity switched her comm channel over, connecting with Oliver. “Arrow, do you copy?”

“I read you, Foundry,” he answered swiftly.

Felicity felt herself let out a breath she hadn’t realized she’d been holding. There was something different about having him out in the field now, and she wasn’t quite sure what it was. She was sure that it had to do with their romantic involvement and the fact that they’d exchanged ‘I love you’s’, but could that really make her breath hitch every time he was out in the field? Would it force her stomach to clench every time there was even the slightest delay in hearing from him?

She pushed the questions from her mind, there was no time to dwell on things like that, not when the whole city was at stake.

“The image is a map,” she said. “Just not of any roads. It’s of the old subway tunnels that run under the city.”

“They closed those up when I was a kid,” he said. “I’d forgotten all about them.”

“Look for anything that might be an old entrance. The detectives are following a storm drain that used to be a maintenance tunnel, but the plans I have are incomplete for your location.”

“Copy. Touch base with Lance, I’ll let you know when we’re in the tunnels from this side.”

She nodded, even though he couldn’t see her, and switched back over to the channel with Lance.

“How do you keep this all straight?” Thea asked, sounding a little bewildered as she looked between the screens.

“Years of practice,” Felicity grinned, patting the seat beside her. Once Thea sat down, Felicity pointed to one of the screens. “These are the traffic cams near where Oliver and Diggle are going to be. Want to keep an eye on them for me, and let me know when you see them?”

Thea nodded.

“Great.” She switched on her comm. “How’s it looking detective?”

“Like a dark, rat infested tunnel,” he deadpanned. “You sure this device is down here somewhere?”

“Fairly certain,” she answered.

“I’m guessing it looks like a giant, hulking piece of metal?”

“Did you find it?” Felicity asked, feeling her pulse uptick at the thought.

“Fairly certain,” he echoed. “Now, how do we stop it?”

Felicity had already prepped for that. After they destroyed the first machine, she’d built in a new piece of code that allowed remote access of the machine from anything with a cell signal if it was in range. She hoped that when the new devices were activated, Malcolm updated the processors to have the most up to date software. If not, then she was going to have to fly blind and walk Lance through something she didn’t even understand completely herself.

“That depends,” she said, blowing out a breath. “Is it turned on?”

“Hard to tell. Want to give me something to look for?”
Felicity closed her eyes, seeing the device in her mind’s eye. The panel was near the bottom of the thing, and there was a blinking green light when it was turned on. She relayed this information to the detective and waited for him to locate it.

“It’s on,” he confirmed a moment later.

With another deep breath, Felicity threaded the code from the device into Lance’s phone. “Okay, hold your phone near the device. I’m going to connect to it and try to shut it off.” A moment later, her computer pinged with the connected device. Her stomach clenched again, as if bracing herself for some impact that wouldn’t come. At least not a physical one. If, on the other hand, she wasn’t able to disarm the device remotely, that would be a whole different set of problems.

For a long moment nothing happened. And then a large black box popped up on Felicity’s screen with a blinking cursor. A command box, waiting for her to input whatever she wanted into the device.

“Okay, Detective, I’m going to need you to keep that phone near the device until I can get the code implanted inside.” She wasn’t sure how long it would take, but she knew it wouldn’t be instantaneous. When Oliver and Diggle had done it, it had taken several moments, and that was directly introducing the corruptive code into the device. Remotely transmitting the code was bound to take longer.

“Sure thing,” he said.

And then Felicity heard an incoherent yell through the comm, and their transmission was interrupted.

---

“Oliver!”

Felicity’s voice rang through his ear as the thug rushed him. Malcolm may prefer working alone, but he did a hell of a job recruiting pawns. Oliver took a punch to the jaw, before he used the guy’s momentum to toss him into the brick wall. The thud echoed back to him, as he smashed his bow into the side of the man’s skull.

“Sorry, I was distracted, what’s up?”

John had disposed of the other goon, dropping his body next to the first. And with a nod he was at the device.

“I lost transmission with Lance. I think they were attacked.”

Dammit. He shouldn’t have let the detective go out there without one of them as backup. If something happened to Quentin, neither of his daughters would take it well. And he wouldn’t wish that on the Lance sisters.

“Digg’s got the device, I’ll head that way.”

“Head on a swivel,” Digg said with a smirk. “I got this, take care of the detective.”

“Once that’s done get clear of here,” he instructed before he tapped his comm again. “Can you talk me to Lance from here?”

“Now that we have the tunnel schematics, yeah.” A pause. “But it’s gonna have to be Thea. I have to focus on this coding.”
He almost forgot his baby sister was in the foundry. “You think you’re up for it Speedy?”

“Reading a map? I think I can manage,” she replied. “Plus it’s kinda cool that I already have a codename. Like destiny or something.”

“Speedy.” He was sure he’d live to regret this. Thea sounded too interested in the vigilante life for his liking, but he couldn’t deny how calming it felt to know there were no secrets between them.

“Call down, Arrow,” she mocked. “Take a left at the next junction and then it should be a straight shot for a while.”

“Thank you.”

Oliver took off at a run. Fear stirred in his mind at what he might find once he reached his destination. Would the detective have had the strength and ingenuity to hold off whoever Merlyn had sent? He hoped Quentin had it in him to hang on a little longer.

“Take the next right and Lance should be at the end near a sewer offshoot,” Thea groaned. “You’re gonna smell absolutely terrible when you get back, don’t hug me.”

“Going silent,” he said, ignoring his sister’s snark. “Tell Felicity I’ll check in once I have Lance secure.”

“Ol-- Arrow?”

“Yeah, Speedy?”

“Be careful.”

He took a deep breath his heart warmed by her concern. “Copy that.”

As soon as Oliver reached the end of the tunnel he slowed his movements, pulling an arrow out and readying it. He wouldn’t be caught off guard, not when so many lives rested on him making the right choices in these moments. He could feel the stillness in the air, whomever had been in the tunnel wasn’t moving anymore. Not until a single shift caught his attention and he whirled on it, aiming the arrow into the dark.

“Careful where you point that thing. I think an arrow would stick better than drowning.”

The city lights cascaded through the grate above, and Oliver could barely make out Sara in the shadows. But she stayed knelt over something, and it took him a second before he figured it out.

Oliver lowered the bow, placing his arrow back in his quiver. “Is he okay?”

“He’s breathing,” she hissed, her eyes darting to him with a glare. “What the hell were you thinking getting him involved in this? If I hadn’t been… You had no right Ollie.”

“I was thinking we needed backup. You and your league buddy won’t help this city, our city. Lance was doing what he knew was right by the people here,” he shook his head feeling the weight of the last few days heavy on his mind as the prospect of that device activating loomed even more. “I don’t know what happened to you after the island, but the Sara Lance I knew wouldn’t let her city burn for some code.”

“You’re right,” she stood coming within inches of him. “You don’t know anything that happened to me. But you do know what Merlyn is capable of, so bringing my family into this, why would
“You said Quentin was fine,” his fear spiked again as his eyes darted over to the man laying still on the ground.

“He’ll wake up with a hell of a headache, but I stopped the men before they could kill him,” she paused dragging out a breath. “I was too late to save his partner.”

“I’m sorry,” he wished he could say something that would get through to her, something that might keep her close instead of pushing her further back into the darkness.

“I wasn’t just talking about him you know,” she turned away, her hands resting against her hips. “You let Laurel get involved in this too.”

“You let Laurel get involved in this too.”

“He’s safe,” he replied. “I trust that Tommy made sure of that.”

“But she’s with him, she loves him,” Sara whirled on him. “And what do you think Malcolm Merlyn would do if he really wanted to get to Tommy? You think he would shy away from using my sister to manipulate his son? You think Laurel is safe with Tommy as long as that man breathes?”

“Is that what this mission was for you then? Because I don’t get it otherwise,” he shrugged, bending down when he noticed Lance’s cell a few feet away. Felicity still needed to finish the transfer. They needed to bring this to an end. “You came here to find Merlyn. But ever since Tommy saw you in that airport, you’ve only been concerned with Laurel and Quentin finding out the truth. Following Tommy to make sure he didn’t spill your secret. Acting like it’s better to be some avenging ghost.”

“We’re both ghosts, Ollie,” she whispered. “We died on that island.”

“You’re wrong,” he hit his comm unit and spoke. “Foundry, I have Lance’s cell. Continue the upload.”

“Is he?”

“He’s alive,” he replied and he heard Felicity sigh in relief. “Sara found him.”

She looked at him again, even though she had found her way back over to her father. Even dressed in darkness, the blonde of her wig shocking in the dim light, Sara looked much like she had before the island. The kindness in her stance, and care she took as she drew her hand across her father’s forehead, it reminded him of the pull he felt when he had come back to Starling all those years ago. Hiding in the shadows and watching the pieces of his life try to live on without him. It threw a punch straight to his gut. How could he fault Sara for doing the exact same thing?

“I’m sorry,” he said, pulling her attention back to him. “I know how hard it is. Worrying about the people you love.”

“They deserve better,” she said, though he didn’t feel like the words were meant for him. “I can’t drag them into my mess. I spent so long in the darkness. I looked the devil in the eyes and I gave him my soul.”

He knelt too, until Sara’s eyes seemed to settle on him. “Then take it back.”

“It’s not that easy.”

“I didn’t think it would be,” he replied. “Malcolm Merlyn may have brought you back to Starling City, but it’s your family that gives you that pull to stay. And if there’s a chance that you can wade
yourself out of the darkness, you have to take it. Because you survived the island, and the freighter, and a million other things that I’ll never fully understand, but you survived it all. And you deserve a chance to remember life is more than surviving, you have to live too.”

His comm crackled to life again. “The code is uploaded, Arrow. Two down, one to go.”

“Copy that,” he said. “Any leads on the third device?”

“Not yet, let’s hope Tommy and Lyla get something soon.”

He was about to reply, but Lance stirred from his spot and Oliver found his words stall in his throat.

“What the hell happened?”

He clicked on his voice modulator before he spoke. “Detective, thank you for your help.”

His eyes darted between Oliver and Sara, more confusion settling in his features. “Where’s Andrews?”

“He’s dead,” she cut in to reply before Oliver could think of a way to word things. But instead of disguising her voice, all he heard was Sara. “I’m so sorry.”

Quentin looked at her then, his gaze focused as he tried to mentally peel back the years and the layers. He was trying to connect the things he didn’t know. “Who?”

“Da--”

But the road rumbled above them, breaking off Sara’s words.

“Foundry, what the hell was that?” They had turned off the two devices, he and Digg had made sure of that.

“The last of the evacuations from the Glades, everyone’s out.”

He looked to Lance and Sara with relief. “The Glades was successfully evacuated.”

“Good,” Lance said, shaking his head. “I wouldn’t have wanted any of them near here if that thing blew.”

“No, no no, dammit.” Felicity cursed.

“What happened?”

“The good news,” Felicity’s voice was high and worry filled each word. “I’ve figured out where Malcolm’s storing the last device.”

“And the bad news attached to that?”

“When we disarmed the other two, it triggered the third device. It turning on is what alerted me to its location. Oliver you have to hurry.”

“Where is it?” He spared another look at the Lances before turning away.

“It’s in Merlyn Global.”

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As they approached the building, Tommy felt his nerves begin to falter as the questions swirled in his mind. What if his father wasn’t there? Or if Tommy couldn’t force him to reveal where the device was? How would the night end, and who would be left standing when it did? Questions that Tommy couldn’t answer, and even more that he wasn’t sure he wanted the answers to. He stowed the questions for now, because he needed to focus all his attention on their only goal for the night-saving their city.

“You ready for this?” Lyla asked, giving him a sidelong glance.

Tommy nodded, not sure he could trust his voice.

“Okay,” she answered with a nod. “Then let’s do this.”

And with that they pushed into the Merlyn Global building, ARGUS windbreakers on and badges out as they approached the guards station. They had to get creative with the warrant, but Lexi had come through in the pinch with a good enough forgery to get them upstairs.

“You’ll need to buzz us through,” Lyla said, with as much authority as she could muster, holding up her badge and the warrant. “We’ve got a warrant to search Malcolm Merlyn’s office.”

“On what grounds?” The guard asked, sounding bored.

“As a matter of national security,” Lyla bit back. “Which means it’s none of your damn business.”

“I’ll have to talk to Mr.–”

But Tommy had already bounded over the turnstyle that kept unwanted visitors from entering. Lyla followed suit and despite the guard’s shouting, they made their way to the bank of elevators and waited. One arrived promptly and they were on with the doors closing, before the guard came around the corner, phone to his ear, both shouting at them and answering questions on the phone, with Tommy presumed was his father.

He relaxed when the doors closed, but only marginally, letting his shoulders slump from their rigid posture to lean against the back wall as they rode up to the top floor. Tommy kept his breathing even and steady, not wanting to let Lyla know just how worried he was about what they were about to do. He knew that Malcolm must have felt something akin to paternal care for him; he had asked Tommy to come with him, after all. But how deep those feelings ran or what Malcolm would do when cornered, Tommy couldn’t be certain.

The elevator dinged at the top floor and the doors slid open. The office was at the end of the hallway; they hadn’t taken Malcolm’s personal elevator, as it required a keycard that Tommy no longer had access to. Even from the distance, he could see that a light was on inside the office, the heavy double doors slightly ajar.

Lyla pulled her weapon, and Tommy followed suit, although he didn’t have it raised the way she did as they made their way down the hall. As much as he wanted to believe that he could end this without his gun, Tommy had a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach that it wasn’t just unlikely, it was impossible.

“Come in, if you’re going to,” Malcolm called matter-of-factly. “I didn’t raise you to skulk around hallways at night.”

Tommy pushed the doors open and then took a cautious step inside. His father had on his Dark Archer gear, and Tommy fought the shudder that threatened to roll through him. Even if he knew it was true, it was still hard to see. “You sure about that?” Tommy asked, gesturing to the get-up.
“Now is not the time for sarcasm and jokes.”

“Seems like the perfect time to me,” Tommy said with a shrug, as Lyla stepped into the office beside him. “Hope you don’t mind, I brought a plus-one to your little end of the world party.”

“Not Ms. Lance?” Malcolm said, collecting the last few stacks of paper from his desk and pushing them into a briefcase. “Based on your choice in companions, I’m assuming you’ve made your decision.” He huffed a breath and looked at Tommy steadily. “I can’t say that I’m surprised. Although I am disappointed.”

“That’s me,” Tommy said, rolling his eyes. “Ever the disappointment.”

“Perhaps if—”

“Just tell us where the device is, Merlyn,” Lyla interjected. “The third one. We already know where the other two are.”

Malcolm’s eyes went dark. “You couldn’t possibly…”

“Know about the shipping company you hired to move them this morning? It’s only a matter of time before the others find and disarm them. We’ve got teams dispatched to both delivery locations.”

At that, Malcolm grinned. “Doesn’t matter. They’ll never find them. Because you and your friends don’t know how to see.”

Tommy’s brow furrowed. “See what?”

“The big picture, Thomas. It has always been about the big picture. The endgame.”

“I think, perhaps, that you’re underestimating one thing.”

Malcolm sneered. “And what’s that?”

Tommy pulled his phone from his pocket, pulling open the text from Felicity that he’d just received.

 Devices in the old subway system.

“Felicity,” Tommy said, holding the message out for his father to see.

Malcolm’s face faltered for a fraction of a second. And then his phone beeped. “No,” he yelled, pulling the phone out and looking at it.

And then the woman in question was in Tommy’s ear. “Got the two devices offline but this is important.”

“Hit me, Smoak,” he said quietly, eyes never leaving his father.

“The other device is inside the MG building.”

“Shit,” Tommy breathed.

“Oliver is on his way. Just stall him…”

“Felicity, tell Laurel…”

“None of that. I’m not having this conversation with you. Not today, not ever. So tell her yourself
Merlyn, when this is all over.”

Tommy raised his gun, training it on his father now. “Why would you do that?”

Malcolm looked up from his phone, blinking, as if reminding himself that this was real and not a dream. “I should have killed that bitch when I had the chance,” he sneered.

“Hey!” Tommy said, unclicking the safety, his eyes shifting focus from the gun, back to his father, who was moving backwards, toward the elevator. “That’s my best friend you’re talking about. Now tell me why you’d put the final device inside this building.”

“Always have a backup plan,” Malcolm said, and then threw something onto the ground, which sparked and created a cloud of thick smoke.

Tommy and Lyla covered their mouths, not wanting to breathe in whatever the smoke was made up of. There was no telling with his father, and he wasn’t willing to take any chances.

“The roof!” Tommy yelled, just as the faint noise of a helicopter began growing steadily louder. By the time the smoke had cleared some, he could see that the emergency roof access door was still ajar. They ran for the door, taking the stairs two at a time.

Tommy burst out onto the roof first, just as gunshots rained down around him. He jumped for cover, finding an exhaust vent to hide behind as his father continued to shoot at him. Lyla came out right after him, moving to the opposite side of the door. In the distance, the helicopter continued to approach, and Tommy knew that his father was just buying time until it got there to pick him up. And Tommy could not let that happen. He peeked his head up, taking aim at the gun in his father’s hand and shooting back.

Malcolm glared at him, aimed for his head, and took a shot.

The bullet tore into the metal of the exhaust vent, less than a foot from where Tommy was crouched.

“Next one won’t miss,” Malcolm called.

Lyla stood and shot repeatedly, enough to empty her clip, enough to draw Malcolm’s attention away from Tommy. Malcolm shot at her next, shattering the glass skylight of the elevator, opening up a hole in the floor beside her. Tommy had repelled down that shaft twice now. But he couldn’t think about that. He moved to the next vent that could cover him, hoping to split Malcolm’s focus enough to get a drop on him. Sooner or later they were going to run out of bullets, and what would they do then? None of them could take on Malcolm in hand to hand combat. They’d all tried and they’d all failed.

Tommy activated his comm again. “Felicity, have Oliver go straight to the basement and get that device disabled. We’ll keep Malcolm occupied until he’s done.”

“But--”

“I mean it, Felicity. Getting Malcolm isn’t worth it if the device levels half of downtown.”

“Okay, I’ll tell him.”

Half of downtown. His own words repeated in his head. They’d evacuated the Glades, but there were still thousands of people downtown. Plus hundreds of buildings that would be destroyed. Tommy shook his head, they had to stop this. There wasn’t another choice.
He crept over to another vent, putting more distance between himself and Lyla. But she could hold her own. From the sounds of it, she’d already reloaded her clip and was emptying it in Malcolm’s direction.

“This is a lesson in futility, Son,” Malcolm called.

And then the shooting ended abruptly, and Tommy poked his head up, to see Malcolm with his gun raised in surrender. Except it wasn’t surrender, it never would be with his father. Tommy knew Malcolm better than that.

“You mean you don’t just want to keep shooting at each other?” Tommy called, standing and training his gun back on his father. He took a few steps out from behind the vent he’d been using as shelter, and then a few more toward Malcolm.

“We can still end this and leave together. We can collect Thea, reactivate my machines, and be on our way.”

Tommy shook his head. “That’s not how this is going to go,” he said with a sigh. “You saw what Felicity’s virus did to the first one. They’re all paperweights now. All except the one fifty stories below our feet. So unless you want to go up in a blaze with your own building, you should give me the phone and let me turn it off.”

“It’s too late for that,” Malcolm said, and it was his turn to shake his head. “Someone has to pay for what they did to her. And if it won’t be the Glades, then it will damn well be the rest of the city.”

As if on cue, there was a loud groan of metal on metal, and the entire building shifted and shuddered like it had been standing out in the cold for too long. Glass windows shattered below them, the *tink tink tink* of the pieces colliding as they rained down to the sidewalk far below.

“Dad!” Tommy called, unable to stop himself as he took a few steps closer. His chest tightened, constricted until he was sure he couldn’t breathe and his heart felt like it was literally ripping apart inside his chest. “Please,” he pleaded. “Don’t do this.”

Malcolm scoffed in response, glancing up at the helicopter which was looming close to the side of the building. “You’ve always been too soft, Tommy. Too much your mother’s son.” He sighed, raising his gun to point it at Tommy. “I’ll always regret not knowing what could have been with your sister. I suspect with Moira’s strength and my ruthlessness that Thea would be a thing to behold.”

Malcolm took a few steps backward. His back was to Lyla now, and she moved in silently, closing the distance between them. The building let out a mind-numbing shriek and the far corner of the roof crumbled inward. Tommy stumbled back, barely holding onto his footing. Lyla had fallen, and looked like the wind had been knocked out of her. Malcolm spun on her his gun trained on Lyla’s head.

“NO!” Tommy shouted, and pulled his own trigger.

The bullet sank into his father’s leg, high into his thigh, but it was enough to make him stumble and turn. Malcolm sank to one knee. “It didn’t have to be this way,” he said. And pulled the trigger.

Tommy reacted, shooting at the same time and it was like slow motion as the bullets whizzed by each other in mid air. He watched with dumbstruck horror as his bullet found home and his father’s black leather gear began to seep the color of dark red wine. Tommy had shot high, hitting his father in the chest. Malcolm tried to stand and shakily stumbled backwards a few more steps. He swayed
like he was drunk.

The rooftop shook again, more pieces of the roof crumbling. Tommy blinked his bleary eyes, realizing he was crying, but for what, he couldn’t be sure. And then it was him stumbling backwards, losing his feet and falling to his knees. The numbness of the moment began to fade and he realized that there was pain blooming across his stomach. His hands went there immediately and when he pulled them away, he realized they were red and slick with blood.

Another shudder of the roof pulled Malcolm off his feet. Tommy watched, blinking slowly, as his father seemed to disappear. But that didn’t make sense, Malcolm was fast, but not a real magician. And then Tommy remembered the skylight of the elevator. He pushed himself to his feet.

Tommy didn’t get far, the fire in his stomach was beginning to spread, pushing further, harder with every step he tried to take. Black filled his vision every time he blinked, and he fell, hard, onto his hands and knees. Tommy pulled himself forward, crawling toward the opening of the elevator shaft. And then Lyla was there, pushing him onto his back, pressing her hands to his stomach.

“No,” he coughed, sputtering blood with every exhale. “My dad…”

“My first priority is you,” she said harshly. “And getting you off this damn roof before the whole building comes down.”

Tommy pressed his hand to his ear, turning on his comm again. “Smoak,” he whispered. “I think we need to have that conversation…” But Tommy didn’t get to finish, because before the words would come, everything else went dark.
“Tommy?”

But silence reached back in an endless stretch of nothing. She couldn’t hear him breathing through the comm, she couldn’t hear anything. And the longer she went without a response the more she felt like she would lose it. Fear drew itself into her and seized hold.

“What happened?” Thea was next to her, concern etched on her face. “Did Tommy get the device?”

But the low rumbling from all around told the truth Felicity couldn’t fathom. They hadn’t stopped the last device from going off. And its effects, though contained to downtown, were trickling out in aftershocks throughout the city.

She clicked to another comm conversation, trying to push her emotions down. “Oliver? Digg? Someone answer me!”

“I’m alright Foundry,” John replied first. “I got Lance, and I’m taking him to Starling General. Oliver and Sara headed to MG to get the device.”

“But the device went off Digg,” she ground out panic sweeping again. Her call with Tommy was caught off, Oliver wasn’t answering. What if they both were… No she couldn’t think like that.

She shook her head. She wouldn’t lose them. Not after everything they had been through, not after how hard they fought to protect each other.

“As soon as I drop the detective off I’ll head that way, I promise.”
“Okay,” she clicked their comms off. But that wasn’t enough for her.

Felicity took to work at her keys. She brought up the wifi access points around Merlyn Global, and hacked into the power grid surrounding the business district. If she could generate enough of a signal, she could get Oliver’s comm back up and working.

“I have to go help them.” Felicity looked up from her screens as Thea wrung her hands together. The teen was pulsing with energy. “I can’t just sit here while they’re are in danger.”

“Thea I understand where you’re coming from,” she wanted nothing more than to summon both Oliver and Tommy before her. But she couldn’t let the younger Queen head out into the city. Not until she knew for certain where Merlyn was. “I want to help them too. But we have to stay here. It’s not safe out there.”

She turned her attention back to the camera outside the club. The streets were mostly clear, but there were still stragglers milling about. And Felicity didn’t need better lighting to see the glint of knives in their hands. “Let me get a hold of Oliver, and see what we can do next okay?”

“Fine,” she huffed as she reclaimed her seat.

Felicity pulled up their comm links on the screen and placed a search for Oliver signal. It took a couple minutes, but she finally heard the static click.

“Oliver?” she barely whispered, waiting for a reply.

“Felicity? We couldn’t get into the building,” he coughed and as she waited for him to continue she brought up all the working street cams from the area.

She could see him at least now. Before she realized it she found her fingers caressing the image on her screen, relief flooding her just a little. “Tommy and Lyla were on the roof when the device went off.”

“Is he okay?”

“I don’t know,” there was no point in lying to him. “His comm cut out, and I haven’t tried Lyla’s yet. But I need you and Sara to do something.”

“What is it?”

She finished up the code she was typing and hit send. “I just sent a message to the pilot of the helicopter Merlyn has circling MG. He’s gonna clear out of the area, but I need you and Sara to find a way close to the building. I don’t have eyes above ground level, and I have no way of knowing how long the structure will hold. So get as close as you can so we can turn this device off.”

“I thought I had to be next to it for the code to work?”

“I hacked into the Merlyn Global mainframe remotely, it’s generating enough of a signal to bounce the code from your phone to the device.”

“Is that safe?”

“It’s safer than allowing that thing to remain on,” she typed in a few more things before sending the new code to his phone. “You need to remain still for at least thirty seconds otherwise it won’t trigger the shut off.”
She ended up counting out each second, one after the other. She wished she could say it was filling her with calm. But it wasn’t. Not with Tommy still out there.

There was a loud crash through the comms and three video feeds cut out. “Oliver?”

“I think the worst of it’s over,” he replied. “Did it go alright on your end?”

“Yeah,” she swallowed down the lump in her throat. “But Tommy was out there and--”

“We’re gonna find him,” he replied, and she wanted to believe him. But the more the minutes stretched the worse her fears grew. She didn’t know what she’d do without Tommy in her life. She couldn’t fathom a world without him in it.

She scanned the remaining cameras for signs, something to show her things would be alright. And that’s when she spotted them. Rounding the corner from behind Merlyn Global. Two figures moving, it took her too long to realize it was Lyla with another woman, as they carried an unconscious Tommy.

“Oliver, north east,” she called out, and he was moving towards them.

He stopped before he reached them, and she didn’t need to see Oliver’s face to know why.

“Get the med supplies ready,” he said, moving to take up the slack on Tommy’s right side. “He might need blood.”

She glanced at Thea, who looked like she was on the verge of tears. But she didn’t cry. No Thea stood from her spot, and leaned forward. “Are we a match?”

“Yes,” Felicity said with a slow nod. “We found that out after the DNA test.”

“Good,” she cleared her throat. “We should get ready for when they get here.”

Felicity and Thea moved silently through the foundry, grabbing all the things they might need for Tommy. Oliver hadn’t told her what was wrong. He hadn’t given them any indication of what was wrong. That’s how she knew it must be bad, if Oliver was too scared to tell her over the comms.

Time was nonexistent and forever while they waited. Each noise sent Felicity up from her chair so many times she gave up sitting all together.

The back door finally opened and with the rush of night air, in came Oliver and Sara carrying Tommy. Tommy who looked pale and lifeless if their arms.

“Oh my god,” Thea gasped as she moved closer.

“He’s lost a lot of blood,” Oliver said as he laid Tommy down. He reached over for her hand, placing it on Tommy. “Felicity, I need you to put pressure here.”

She nodded, glancing down at Tommy. But she regretted it the second she did. Because he looked so helpless, so lifeless, lying there. She had seen him bleed before. It wasn’t that long ago she thought she was going to lose him, but this? In the basement of Verdant, it felt worse.

“We should have taken him to ARGUS,” Lyla said and Felicity realized she was standing by Tommy’s head, her fingers steady on his pulse point. “We have resources there--”

“Your friend would not have made a longer journey, I can assure you of that.”
Felicity looked across the room to the woman next to Sara. If she had to wager, she’d guess that was Nyssa. But she didn’t have the energy for introductions.

“Tommy, come on,” she whispered. “You have to wake up, you have to. Okay? Laurel’s gonna need you to wake up. I need you to wake up.”

Oliver reached and placed his hand over hers with a gentle squeeze. She knew he was trying to tell her things would be alright. But everything felt like it was spiraling. They couldn’t lose Tommy, not like this. Not ever.

“What do we need to do to give him blood?” Thea asked searching Oliver’s face for some kind of reassurance.

“He is well past that stage. You cannot save him with modern medicine.”

“Sara,” Oliver looked over at them, fury filling his voice. “Tell your friend, she either helps or she gets out of here. Because I am not losing him tonight.”

“There is a way to save him,” Nyssa said coming to stand next to the makeshift bed. “It might be his only hope.”

“Nyssa, no,” Sara was pulling on her arm. “That isn’t an option. What would your father say?”

“That a debt owed is a burden on the soul,” Nyssa replied. “He saved you from Merlyn. I owe him a life debt. And I intend to pay it.”

“What the hell is she talking about?” Felicity asked looking between Sara and Nyssa. “If you can save Tommy, do it.”

“It wouldn’t be saving him,” Sara said, looking from her to Oliver. “It would be damning him. Don’t ask for this Ollie, please.”

But Oliver had turned for Sara and focused on Tommy, he placed a hand on Tommy’s cheek, and for a moment she thought he would let their friend go.

But then Lyla spoke. “His pulse is getting weaker.”

“Do it,” Oliver whispered, then louder. “If you can save him, do it now.”

Nyssa pulled a vial from her coat pocket. She maneuvered around the table to Felicity’s side, and placed a hand next to hers. “I need you to move back.”

“Nyssa stop,” Sara made a move to reach for her, but Oliver pulled her back. “Ollie you don’t understand what this is.”

“I don’t care,” he shook his head. “Not if it saves Tommy.”

“If you do this, you’re risking losing the real Tommy in the process.”

“Sara,” Felicity could tell he was pleading. “If it was Laurel, what would you do?”

She backed away, throwing her hands up in surrender. And Oliver nodded at Nyssa to continue.

Felicity watched as she took the bottle with the clear liquid and poured it over Tommy’s wound. She muttered something Felicity couldn’t understand, and then stepped back.
“It may take some time, but he should survive this.”

Lyla gave her a look as she checked Tommy’s pulse once more. “His pulse is still weak. What the hell did you do to him?”

“I gave him a chance,” Nyssa replied, eying each of them closely. “With water from the Lazarus pit.”

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“Someone want to tell me what the hell a Lazarus Pit is?” Oliver growled, watching as it seemed the life still drained from his best friend. Now that he thought about it, he wondered if it was smart, letting a member of the League of Assassins give something to Tommy. She could be playing them all, with whatever that vial had been full of. Sara was even wary of the stuff, saying that it would damn Tommy, whatever that meant.

Despite them using the water on Tommy, Felicity and Lyla began hooking him up to monitors to keep an eye on his vitals. Nyssa may have believed that medicine couldn’t save him, but they could at least use modern technology to keep watch.

“It has mystical properties,” Sara said, meeting his gaze with steady eyes of her own. There was no hint of humor in her expression.


Oliver felt a growl crawl up his throat, and directed it at Nyssa. “Explain.”

The woman shot him a withering glare in response, not appreciating being called out. “It’s not up for explanation,” she said dismissively. “It should reverse the effects of the gunshot wound and heal him. As I said, I gave him a chance. The rest is up to the strength of his soul.”

Sara turned away, and despite everything else going on, he couldn’t help but want to know what she knew, to have her explain the things she’d seen, the way the water worked. But Oliver was never one to turn down a miracle staring him in the face. So he would take it, no matter the consequences.

“You don’t know what you’ve done,” Sara whispered, hands balled into fists at her sides. Now she glared at Nyssa. “Why would you even bring that here?”

Nyssa’s eyes darkened and when she spoke it was low, meant only for Sara. But considering the closeness of them all huddled around Tommy, they all heard anyway. “I knew how strong Al Sa-her was. I was not willing to lose you to him.” She put a hand on Sara’s arm, and everything else made a little more sense.

Sara put her hand on top of Nyssa’s, but then, as if she sensed they were being watched, snapped her head up quick to look at Oliver. But before she could say anything, all eyes went to Tommy. Because the heart monitor stopped beeping and instead let out an endless whine, denoting the lack of a heartbeat.

“No!” Oliver and Felicity shouted in tandem, moving to his side.

And then Tommy gasped, coughing and sputtering, his eyes flying open.

“Dad, no!” he cried, reaching out and then went limp again, his breathing strong and even. But even unconscious and with his eyes closed, tears spilled down Tommy’s cheeks.
“What happened to him?” Oliver asked, scanning until he found Lyla. Oliver could see the flutter of his pulse on the side of his neck, and breathed a sigh of relief. Hopefully that meant the worst of it was behind them.

“We were on the roof, they both shot at each other. Tommy to protect me, and Malcolm…” her words drifted off. “He staggered backwards and when the machine made the building shudder, Malcolm fell down the elevator shaft. The glass had been shattered previously and I guess he didn’t see it. Tommy tried to get there to help him.”

“So Malcolm is…” Thea began, but cut herself off, unable to say the word.

Oliver felt his mouth go dry. She’d only just found out who her biological father was, and whether or not she’d wanted to get to know him, now she was forever robbed of that chance. But he couldn’t let himself dwell on that now. They had so many other important things to worry about and Oliver needed to be matter-of-fact.

“Someone will have to go back and identify the body,” he said after a quiet moment. “Make sure he didn’t somehow cheat death again.” He might feel bad for Thea losing her biological father, but he wouldn’t lose any sleep over Malcolm no longer being able to draw breath. That meant the city was finally, mercifully safe.

“I’ll go,” Nyssa said. “I have paid my debt to his son. Now I must confirm for the Demonshead that Al Sa-her has been eliminated.”

“We’ll go too,” Diggle said, gesturing to himself and Lyla. “It’s a little crowded in here--”

“--and I’ll have to check back in with ARGUS as well,” she finished.

“Actually,” Oliver said, and felt like he’d regret the next words that were about to leave his mouth. “I think we should move Tommy to ARGUS.”

The outcry from Felicity, Thea, even Diggle, was immediate.

“You’re suggesting ARGUS?” Felicity asked.

“Why not just bring him to a hospital?” Thea said at the same time.

“You really think that’s a good idea, man?” Diggle followed up with.

Oliver let out a long sigh. Too many cooks in the kitchen, except in this instance, it was too many people who cared about Tommy wanting to do what was right for him. He raised his hands. “Enough!” Oliver said, silencing them all with one loud bellow. “You all know I’m the last person that would ever suggest something like that, so trust me when I say that I have good reason for it. ARGUS has doctors there that can look after him better than we can down here. Plus, they are a lot less likely to raise eyebrows over his… unorthodox treatments here.”

Lyla nodded. “I’ll arrange it.”

Thankfully, that was enough to silence the arguments from everyone else. Oliver scrubbed a hand down his face, walking a few paces away from the others for a breather. He was beginning to feel the weight of everything hit him. In all the commotion of the evening, he hadn’t had a chance to let it all catch up with him.

He was close to Felicity’s computer now, and saw that she had one of the screens tuned into the local news. A live breaking story was airing at the base of Merlyn Global. They were calling it an
earthquake, but only because they didn’t know the truth yet.

“...we’re taking you live to downtown Starling where several buildings have been affected by what appears to be an earthquake. So far fifty-six are confirmed dead, with another two hundred unaccounted for. Among the unaccounted for is Merlyn Global CEO Malcolm Merlyn, who was working late in his top floor office of the building right behind me when the earthquake began. We’ll keep you updated with more information but for now, it appears that whatever the police evacuated the Glades for earlier today, has managed to hit downtown Starling City instead…”

Oliver turned away from the computer screen, jaw clenching with the anger and frustration that was beginning to boil within him again. They’d spent so much time getting the Glades cleared out, only for the final attack to hit somewhere else, where no one was prepared for the destruction that came.

“Hey,” Felicity said, coming up beside him and putting a hand on his arm. “You did good today.”

“Tell that to the two hundred and fifty people that are dead or missing,” Oliver growled. “Tell that to Tommy, who—” he broke off suddenly, unable to speak the words that they were all thinking.

“You don’t think I’m thinking about those people?” she said, her voice a hoarse whisper. “I helped build that thing, Oliver. I turned a blind eye for months, because I didn’t want to know what it did. If I’d just been a little more proactive, I could have kept all of this from happening.”

Oliver’s stomach lurched at the thought. He’d always been so good at taking all of the blame onto himself, that he hadn’t considered Felicity might be doing the same thing. “Or Malcolm could have gotten suspicious and eliminated you the instant you went snooping,” he said, brushing a strand of hair back from her face.

Felicity shook her head, sadly. “I should have been able to stop it earlier,” she breathed. “All those people… all those lives lost…”

He saw, with absolute clarity, the moment that the weight of it finally hit Felicity. She went from sad to mortified, to a sickly shade of pale mixed with green, like she might vomit at any moment. She was on the edge of a cliff, he could see it in her eyes.

“Hey,” he said, drawing out the word slightly, long enough to pull her focus up to him. “This isn’t your fault. This is on Malcolm. It was his plan, his twisted, demented plan that was at the root of all of this. It’s not on you.”

“But—”

“No buts,” he said firmly. “As soon as you learned what it was, you did whatever you could to stop it. You did way more than any of us could. Tell me that you know it isn’t your fault.”

Felicity’s lower lip trembled, and she pulled away from him, turning her back toward him to hide her face as she cried.

“I’ve got this,” Thea’s voice said from behind him. “Lyla’s ready to move Tommy and wants you with her.”

Oliver hesitated, and not only because he didn’t want to leave Felicity when she was this fragile. But also because the thought of going anywhere near ARGUS again, made his skin crawl more than he thought possible.

“Diggle, Sara and Nyssa are getting ready to head back to Merlyn Global,” Thea confirmed. “I’ll stay here with Felicity.”
“You doing okay, Speedy?” he asked, putting a hand on her shoulder.

She shrugged. “Do I have a choice?”

Oliver pulled her into a tight hug. “You are one of the most fearless, bravest, most caring people I know, Thea Queen. I am so proud of the woman you’re becoming.”

Thea pulled back, scrunching her nose. “Don’t go getting soft on us now, Ollie. There’s still work to do.”

A laugh bubbled up, escaping Oliver’s lips before he could stop it. “Roger that,” he said, offering her a grin.

He caught motion in the corner of his eye, and Oliver turned, not sure what to expect. But he definitely didn’t expect to see Tommy Merlyn still hooked to monitors, crouched on the metal table he’d just moments ago been laying on a hair’s breadth away from death. And he really didn’t expect to see that same Tommy Merlyn with his arm snaked around his partner’s neck in a headlock, with a scalpel pressed to Lyla’s jugular.

“Tommy…” Oliver said, taking a cautious step forward. “What are you doing?”

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Tommy could barely keep his head above the murky water. A weight attached to his middle pulled him under over and over again, and it took all his strength to wade through the deep and reach dry land. He couldn’t tell where he was, or what had happened to land him there. But he felt a pull in two directions.

Forward he could hear his mother’s voice, kind and sweet as it tried to reach for him. He longed to go to it. To let the peace wash over him and settle the growing pain in his soul. But the other direction called out just as much. And as much as he missed his mother, he wasn’t ready to say goodbye to who awaited him.

And then it was blasted back into reality.

Everything shifted in the wrong way. Sound came to him seconds too late, and the burn through his veins was almost overpowering. But Tommy fought against it all. He pushed the blinding pain back as he tried to sort things out.

He didn’t know how the scalpel got into his hand. He didn’t remember grabbing it. But he had it and he had Lyla in a vice grip as well.

“Tommy?” Thea’s voice came through the fog. “It’s okay, you can put that down now.”

“No,” he growled. “He’ll come for me.”

Lyla twitched in his arms. “Who?”

Who? Who? Who was coming? Why would they come? What happened to him?

“I told you not to do this,” he heard Sara say. “Look at him. He’s not fighting through it, he’s succumbing. Dammit Nyssa.”

“Everyone shut up,” Oliver stepped past them all, and Tommy couldn’t help the wave of relief. But fear resurfaced immediately and he held the weapon tighter, until it felt fused with his skin.
“Ollie stop.”

“Tommy…”

“Stop!”

The world snapped into clarity, too many pieces came shattering into place. And he felt an
overwhelming desire to stop himself before he could do anything else.

“Tommy,” Oliver continued, pushing Thea behind him. “I need you to let Lyla go. You don’t want
to hurt her.”

He shook his head. He could never hurt Lyla. But still he held her. He needed to let go. Why
couldn’t he let go?

“What is happening to him?”

Felicity directed her words to Sara and the other league member. The surge in him to push Lyla
away and grab Nyssa grew exponentially. But he didn’t know why?

“It’s the effects of the pit,” she replied cautiously. “I assumed he would be able to fight it off
better. Considering his position and how he conducts himself. Clearly I miscalculated.”

John pushed past them all, his gun aimed forward at the wall… Not the wall, at him. Why couldn’t
he let go?

“Tommy, let her go.”

Oliver moved in front of him, “John stand down.”

“He’s the present danger, Oliver.”

Lyla moved again. “Johnny, listen to him. Stand down.”

John lowered his weapon, but Tommy saw the fight it took inside to do that. He couldn’t blame him.
He didn’t want to hurt anyone, let alone Lyla.

“Tommy,” Oliver spoke again as he took a step forward. “You have to talk to us. We’re your
friends, your family. Let us help you.”

“He’s coming.”

“Malcolm? Is that who you’re worried about?”

Tommy felt his hand cramp around the weapon, images of his father’s face pushing into his mind.
Malcolm? The dark archer? A League assassin? All three at once? His lungs burned in his chest.

“Yes,” he managed to get out as his arm dropped from Lyla, she pulled around, but didn’t move
away. “You have to go. He’ll come, and then…”

No. He wouldn’t let any of them hurt his friends. He couldn’t let anything happen to them. But as
long as he was there, he would bring the darkness right to them all.

“Tommy put the knife down,” Oliver looked at him. “I promise you Malcolm isn’t coming here. He
won’t.”
But Oliver didn’t understand. He couldn’t feel it. The rushing dread, the pull of something sinister just on the horizon. He couldn’t let that happen. He took the scalpel and moved it to his own chest, hovering over his heart. “He’ll come for me.”

The brokeness in Ollie’s eyes was the only thing that kept hesitation in his movement. “I won’t let that happen, Tommy. Please set it down.”

“I have to stop him from coming for you.” But more of the last few hours filled his head. The gun, his father falling backwards. Maybe he wasn’t scared of Malcolm coming for them, maybe he was terrified of himself.

“What about Laurel?”

His grip on the weapon lessened as he tried to bring her face to his mind. But there was something there, something dark that kept him from getting to her.

“He’s right.” Sara had come to stand next to Oliver. “Think about Laurel, think about seeing her again, holding her. If she were right here, what would you say?”

He could remember the feel of her hand in his, so much softer and kinder than what he held on to now. And her laugh filled his ears even though she was miles away. Where was she? Still at ARGUS? That’s where he left her. That’s the last place he had seen her.

“What would you say Tommy?” Sara asked again.

“I,” he felt the scalpel fall from his fingers, clattering to the ground. “I’m sorry.”

Everything went blinding white then, and seconds later he felt clear. Like a switch had flipped and suddenly all the turmoil and anguish inside him was gone. Everyone’s eyes were on him, and he turned away just enough to catch his reflection on the metal table. What had happened to him?

No one moved, and he didn’t blame them. He felt sick with what had just happened. He didn’t know what had come over him. But he felt more like himself. At least for the moment.

“Hey,” Oliver rushed over, helping him down from the table. “Are you okay?”

“I have no idea,” Because he didn’t know what had happened. “I don’t know what that was.”

Thea broke from Felicity’s side and rushed him, flinging her arms around his neck and pulling him into a bone crushing hug. “You’re alive.”

“Yes?” Tommy let his gaze flick around, from Felicity’s worry to Nyssa’s curiosity. Digg looked apprehensive and Lyla just watched him carefully. “I think I’m fine now.”

“Interesting,” Nyssa said. “I have never seen a reaction quite like that.”

“You knew something like that could happen?” Felicity turned on her in fury. “You could have said something.”

“Had I wasted time with words you would all be in mourning right now. A little gratitude would suffice.”

When Thea pulled back Tommy looked at them all in confusion. “What happened to me? Before I woke up all crazy.”

They all shared a look, before Lyla spoke “You don’t remember the roof?”
“I remember my father monologuing. And falling. The building started to shake.” Realization dawned on him. “The device it’s--”

“Off. We managed to deactivate it.” Oliver added.

“There were casualties?”

“Yes,” he said. “But it could have been worse. We could have lost you.”

“What about Malcolm? Did he make it after the fall?”

Oliver turned to Sara, clearing his throat. “You guys should go sweep Merlyn Global and the surrounding buildings. We need to know for sure.”

“Oliver…” John met his eyes, but he pulled Oliver back a little. “We need to--”

“Go see if Malcolm made it out.” Oliver gave their friend a look, but then turned to Lyla. “Call Waller. Tell her Tommy’s gonna need a full medical workup when we get there.”

“Yeah,” she said, but she wouldn’t look up. “I can do that.”

There was something else. Something they weren’t saying. “Guys you all are kinda giving me weird vibes here.”

“We’re just glad you’re okay,” Felicity said pushing a smile onto her face.

“What’s the last thing you remember?” Nyssa asked her eyebrows raised as she watched him.

“What?”

“You were crouching on a table, I just wish to know why?”

He tried to think back, to remember why he had gotten up there in the first place, but nothing. “I don’t remember. It’s like a gray fog over my head. I just remember the building shaking and then being here.”

Sara withdrew from Oliver’s side, as she went to Nyssa. “We’ll get back to you when we know something.”

“Sara,” Tommy called out before they all turned to leave. He couldn’t recall much, but something pressed against his mind. “Wait. Can we talk for a second?”

“You should rest,” Oliver insisted.

“In a minute,” he got pushed off the table, pulling Sara with him to the other side of the room. He could still feel everyone watching him, waiting for him to do something. But he didn’t know what.

“Ollie’s right, you shouldn’t be up and--”

“You need to come with us to ARGUS.”

“I have to go with Nyssa and make sure that Malcolm is… That he died.”

“Digg and Nyssa can handle that,” he wouldn’t dwell on the fact that everyone seemed convinced his father died. Sure Malcolm fell, but the man was like a cockroach. He could survive anything. “But you need to go to ARGUS, and you need to see your sister.”
“I can’t do that. I can’t bring her into my world Tommy. You’ve seen the dangers.”

He nodded. Not because he agreed with her reasons, but because the same fears plagued him too. But the truth mattered more. “Before I left, I gave her the file I was working on about the League. If she read it, she already knows what your world is like.”

“I asked you not to tell her.”

“I didn’t,” he sighed. “The file is about Malcolm’s involvement with the League, and how my informant didn’t want her family compromised by helping our investigation. I left your name out of it. But that’s only because I didn’t want ARGUS to use them against you. But the way I described things. Laurel knows you Sara. She’s gonna know there’s something familiar about the person I put in that report. And if she asks me I won’t lie to her, not again.”

“It could get her hurt,” she whispered.

“Nothing is hurting Laurel more than thinking her little sister died before she got a chance to really know her.”

Sara looked off to the side, her eyes unfocused. “What if she hates me? The way it happened. I wouldn’t blame her.”

“She won’t,” he said. “I know she won’t.”

“Merlyn,” Lyla came up behind them, clearing her throat. “We gotta go.”

He gave Sara another look. “Come with us?”

She found Nyssa, and the other watched her closely. But Sara pushed down whatever tension brewed between them and smiled. “Okay. I’ll come.”

“Sara,” Nyssa protested.

But Sara went to her side, placing a hand on her cheek. “I need to see my sister. Nyssa, if it was Talia, and you had a chance to see her again, wouldn’t you take it?”

“The Demon’s head will not be pleased,” Nyssa responded but she smiled at her. “But I think as long as Al Sa-her is no more, he need not know all the things we did while away.”

“Thank you,” she whispered, then to the group. “Can we all actually walk into ARGUS like this?”

“You’ll come with me and Lyla,” Tommy said. Then turned to Oliver and Felicity, who had moved to each other, their hands intertwined. “You should change buddy. I don’t think think you want everyone to know that secret.”

“Yeah,” he looked down at his leather jacket. “We’ll meet you there.”

“I’ll come by tomorrow,” Thea said with a shaky voice. “I want to go home and check on Mom and Walter.”

“Tell her we’re okay,” Oliver said as he patted her back.

“I will.”

Felicity gave Thea the keys to her car, but before she made her way up the stairs she pulled him into another tight hug. “I thought I was gonna lose you.”
“Never,” he whispered to her.

But as Thea pulled away Tommy thought he recalled a flash of something. Like a bullet being fired from a gun, and for the briefest of seconds he felt the weight of his weapon back in his hand.

“Merlyn?” Lyla’s voice pulled him out of his head. “Ready?”

“Yeah, let’s go.” But the image of the bullet wouldn’t leave his mind no matter how much he tried to push it away again.

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Chapter 53

Chapter by holysmoakoliver

Chapter Notes

Hey lovelies- Are we ready for what comes next? We're closing in on the end, so I once again want to say just how much Kayla and I both enjoy and appreciate each and every one of you. We love your comments and kudos and are so grateful that you're all taking this ride with us. xoxo- Cassie

Felicity fell into her desk chair as they parted ways, watching as most of them left the Foundry. Like it was just another day. Although it was anything but. The death toll still continued to rise and there was a hollowness in her chest that she couldn’t quite explain.

They’d won? She remembered back to her first trip to Russia when they’d finally bested Amanda Waller and gotten out from under her thumb. It had been an anti-climactic win then too. Something good but with little reason to celebrate. They’d taken out Malcolm, but not before his machine had leveled part of downtown Starling. Not before he’d shot and almost killed his own son and actually killed possibly hundreds more. Why did winning always come at such a steep price?

“Hey you,” Oliver said, pulling her attention from her own thoughts. He’d changed from his leather gear back into his street clothes, but he still looked beyond beat. They all needed sleep, but it wouldn’t come yet. “Whatcha thinking about?”

Felicity shrugged, not quite sure how to put it into words. The things they’d done, the lines they’d all crossed in the name of saving the city and saving Tommy- were they things they could come back from? She knew deep down there were some lines you couldn’t cross back over.

“Do the big wins ever really feel like wins?” she asked, straightening in her seat to stretch out her spine. “Because this…”

Oliver nodded in understanding. “They do sometimes,” he said, moving his hands to her shoulders to knead at the tense muscles there. “And sometimes they’re accompanied by losses. But at the end of the day, when you save as many lives as we saved today, that deserves to be celebrated.”

She turned in her chair to face him. “But we almost lost Tommy, and Lance’s partner. And there are still buildings downtown that could come down at any moment.” Felicity felt her eyes welling up with tears and she wiped angrily at her cheeks, brushing them away. “Plus… what if he somehow made it out of the building? He studied with the League, what if he has some of that water Nyssa used on Tommy?”

“Shh,” he murmured, pulling her to her feet and into his arms. Felicity buried her face in his chest, letting the rest of the emotion of the day drain from her. “It’s over,” he said softly. “You don’t have to worry about Malcolm anymore.”

But she did worry about him, about what he’d done, about what that meant for their city, for Merlyn Global, for Tommy and for Thea. They may have stopped the immediate threat, but the whole ordeal was far from over.
Something chimed on her computer, and Felicity detangled herself from Oliver’s arms. “I just want to check that before we go,” she said.

Oliver nodded. “I’ll grab my jacket and meet you at the car.”

Felicity turned back to her computer, reclaiming her chair, and began clicking through open screens to see where the notification had come from. After checking several, she noticed that she had two emails that had just come through.

The first had a blank sent from field and the subject simply said Job Offer. Her mouse hovered over the message, but her eyes snagged on the second message, the one that had just arrived, the reason for the chime she’d heard. And her blood went cold. It was from Malcolm Merlyn.

With trembling hands, she clicked the message open.

Miss Smoak,

If you’re reading this, then no doubt you and your friends have stopped me in my attempt to cleanse the city of the filth that is the Glades. This message is coming to you via another of Markov’s inventions, not that it’s important now. You should know, I’ve always thought highly of you, and knew that with the proper motivation, you likely could have followed in my footsteps and taken over Merlyn Global one day. I suppose now we’ll never know.

However, in attempt to afford you such motivation, I thought it best to advise you that you aren’t the only one who knows how to copy files off my servers. In addition to this message, I’ve also sent similar emails to several US Government heads with detailed plans for the Markov Device, as well as auctioning off another set to the highest bidder on the dark web. The latter was for my own amusement, but the former? Well, I can only imagine the questions that the CIA and FBI will have for you, once they see that you’re the only surviving member of the team that worked on the devices. Devices, that have now been detonated in a major metropolitan area in the country.

I’ve always found it fascinating to see what people will do to survive when their back is against the wall.

Best of luck to you, Miss Smoak.

MM

“No!” She shouted, shoving back from the computer screen as hot, angry tears streamed down her face. A string of expletives left her mouth next, and she picked up the nearest object to her, a heavy book on thermodynamics, and threw it into the metal table Tommy had been laid out on just a little while ago. It landed against a leg and sent the table sprawling back several inches, knocking into a smaller table filled with medical supplies, sending them crashing to the floor in a series of clattering noises.

“Felicity!” Oliver yelled, jogging back into the space. “What’s wrong?” His eyes were filled with panic as he searched the space for her. He closed the distance between them. “What happened?”

But she was already back at her computer. “Malcolm,” she growled.

“He’s dead,” Oliver concluded. “I just got off the phone with Digg. They found his body.”

“And he had some sort of dead man’s switch on him,” she said, typing furiously to backtrace the email and find the server it was sent from. If she could locate it, perhaps she could find the other messages and stop them. She could not have the CIA and FBI after her. Not for something that
Malcolm all but forced her into two years ago.

“What are you talking about?” he asked. “Hey, talk to me.”

Felicity pointed to the screen to her left, where she pulled the email back up and left for him to read. The message had pinged off several dummy servers, but she was better at this than Malcolm was, and she found his server quickly, back-tracing the message to his private IP address at Merlyn Global.

“That bastard,” Oliver spit, once he’d finished the message. “Can you scrub the emails?”

“Probably not,” she breathed. “But I can corrupt the server they came from so they can’t be authenticated. Thankfully the plans have been scrubbed from the servers at the company already, so that’s at least one thing in my favor. And the patents were all in Merlyn and Markov’s names.” She closed her eyes, forcing a deep breath to steady her. “But it will be enough for them to come sniffing around, enough for them to question my involvement.”

“They won’t have anything to charge you with.”

“With the Patriot Act it hardly matters. This will be considered domestic terrorism, and they’ll want a scapegoat. They’ll be able to hold me, without trying me, for I don’t know…. Seven years?”

Panic swelled within her as she traced the emails. She swallowed hard and stopped, her fingers freezing in mid-keystroke as an idea washed over her. “Unless…”

“I’m listening,” Oliver said, resting his hands on the desk and leaning over so that their faces were near the same level.

“If Tommy says I was an informant for him under ARGUS’s umbrella, it could shield me from the brunt of it.”

“There has to be another way.” He stood, towering over her again, and now he looked less than sympathetic. In fact, he used his height to his advantage, the look of disapproval fierce in his expression. “I’m not letting Amanda Waller get her hands on you too. I’d rather--”

“First- this isn’t your decision. And if it’s to save myself from being jailed for domestic terrorism, well there isn’t much of a choice, is there? Besides, I just spent the last two years working for Malcolm Merlyn. At least Waller is somewhat held in check by whoever pays her bills.”

A message box popped up on Felicity’s computer screen, startling her.

Is this ghostfoxgoddess?

Felicity blinked at it for a moment, unsure how to reply. She hadn’t used that handle in years, not since Cooper.

I assume it is, considering the code being used to hack internal servers at Merlyn Global is the same.

I’m not surprised you’re looking into the attack on the building, which is why we reached out with the job offer.

I think we can help you, Felicity.

This was wrong. Very very wrong. She’d never used her personal information anywhere near her
hacker alias. And also, job offer? Her mind flashed back to the email she’d seen, the one she’d almost clicked on before she’d seen the one from Malcolm.

“What is it?” Oliver asked, brow furrowed in confusion and worry.

“I… I’m not sure,” she said quietly.

Who is this, she typed back.

A friend.

Felicity swallowed hard. The timing felt too coincidental. Was this part of Malcolm’s setup?

I recognized your coding when you hacked into the power grid earlier tonight. I hacked Merlyn’s server before you did and tracked the emails he sent out. I put an encryption on them before they finished sending. It was the best I could do on short notice. But I think together we can corrupt the files and keep anyone else from seeing them.

A wave of relief swelled through Felicity, and even if she wasn’t ready to trust whoever was on the other end of the message box, for now, she would take what she could get.

“Someone, another hacker encrypted the files that Malcolm sent to the CIA and FBI.”

“And what do they want in return?” Oliver asked.

“I’m not sure,” Felicity said, quickly typing back a reply. “But I intend to find out.”

When and where should I meet you?

A reply came back almost immediately before the user logged off. The message included an address, a time for the following morning, and three final words.

Ask for Alena.

---

His muscles burned with need. A need that laced through him so thoroughly, that before Tommy even noticed, it was all he could think about. The problem was he couldn’t place it. It was there, it was strong, it consumed his thoughts as they rolled down the roads towards ARGUS, but he didn’t know what it was. And it terrified him.

“Boy scout?”

Lyla’s voice jarred him from his thoughts. But still they hovered just under the surface. He turned and saw Sara leaning forward, her focus solely on him.

“Sorry,” he muttered rubbing at his eyes. “I’m a little scattered.”

“Are you sure you’re okay?” Lyla’s concern freaked him out more than anything. Every look she threw him felt weighted with something else. Something he couldn’t reach.

“What happened?”

“What do you mean?”

Yeah they were definitely keeping something from him.
“You’re looking at me like I’m about to lose it,” he could feel something scratching to be acknowledged, but he couldn’t hold onto it long enough for it to focus. “What happened when I woke up or even before?”

“Tommy drop it,” she said with a firm stance. “You’re alive, and we stopped Malcolm. Isn’t that enough?”

He wanted it to be. He wanted to feel the weight of what could have been lift from his shoulders in relief. And maybe it had. But something else had taken up in its place, and he couldn’t help but feel this one crush him more than anything else had.

He turned back to face the window, because how could he really press anymore? Even if the voice inside him screamed that he deserved to know. It was his life, and it was as if everyone wanted to keep him on the outside of it. The more he dwelled on it, the more his head began to throb.

He caught sight of his reflection when the streetlights were spaced just enough to keep a ghostly image for him to focus on. The darkness made him look different. More of Malcolm sat in his features then he’d ever care to admit. And it felt like his father had a watchful eye on him, waiting to strike. But Malcolm just stared at him, his ever calculating eyes deep in thought.

“I’m going to go tell Waller we’re here,” Lyla said.

And that’s when Tommy realized the van had stopped moving. He had been so lost in thought he hadn’t realized they had made it to ARGUS.

He nodded, rubbing at his temple. “Tell her I said hi.”

“I’m sure she’ll let you tell her yourself,” she replied as she popped the door open. “Right after she throws you into a brick wall.”

He let a smirk grace his features as Lyla made her way to the building. He and Sara should at least follow her, he knew it would be better. But without the hum of the engine the voice in his head only got louder. It was almost enough to block everything else out.

“You gonna say whatever’s on your mind?” he asked shooting his gaze to the rearview mirror.

Sara still watched him, closer than she had when Lyla was in the vehicle. But the intensity of her gaze hadn’t changed.

“What do you remember?” she asked, her lips pursed. “From when you woke up?”

“Everyone watching me.”

“Is that it?”

He thought back to the foundry. What did he remember? There were shards of a hundred different things all cutting his mind to fit together. But he couldn’t make them work.

“Yes… no;” he shook his head. “I remember the feeling of a scalpel in my hand. I remember Ollie’s face. You asking me what I’d say to Laurel. But everything else is…” It was like someone had splashed white-out over his memory. He could see where things should go, he could almost sense what was meant to be underneath it. But he couldn’t make them out. “It’s there but I can’t reach it.”

“I’m so sorry,” she whispered. “If I hadn’t come back here. I-- This is my fault.”
He didn’t know which part she meant. What of the last few days Sara was trying to take on herself. But he wouldn’t let her.

“We all make our own choices. You’re not to blame for any of this.” He watched as she nodded, but she didn’t seem to believe him. And he didn’t know how he would get her to accept it either.

Tommy took the moment to open his door. He’d been motionless for too long. And the buzz in his system begged for movement.

Sara followed him and for a moment they stood in silence. An eerie, heavy silence. But at least his mind had quieted for a moment.

Tommy let his thoughts roam, he couldn’t help but settle on one question. He couldn’t ask when Lyla had been around, and he didn’t dare save it for when they saw Laurel. And even if the answer seemed to already cement itself in his mind, he still had to know. “How close was I to dying?”

“I’ve seen the waters from the Lazarus pit heal the worst of war wounds,” she said only pausing to meet his eyes. “I’ve seen flesh seal and look like new after it’s touch. But I’ve never once seen someone brought back from the brink. Not until tonight.”

“I should be worried.” It wasn’t a question. He felt it all night, solidifying in his muscles. Whatever this water had done to save him, it had left something else behind in its wake.

“I think you should be cautious,” she amended with a sigh. “But I know why Oliver agreed to it. He doesn’t like losing people. And I think as long as you keep the right people in your corner, you can get through anything.”

The doors behind them opened. And if he had to wager he’d say Waller was coming to talk to him. Tommy turned towards the sound, but as he did he caught another glimpse of himself in the side mirror. His face still contorted into the features of Malcolm. Though now a look of condescension on his face. Like his father was judging him. Nothing new there.

He rubbed at his temple to get the image to fade and focused on the door.

But Waller wasn’t standing before him. Instead Laurel stared at him, the floodlights casting an almost ethereal glow around her. The pain in his head and the heaviness of his limbs faded as he looked at her.

“Hi,” she said, and he couldn’t take the distance anymore.

Tommy rushed to her, pulling her into a tight embrace. He closed his eyes and breathed in the moment. Laurel. She was the reason he focused back at the foundry. The only reason he fought through whatever darkness had been clouding his mind.

“I love you,” he whispered into her hair. “I love you so much.”

She pulled back, placing a kiss to his lips. “I love you.”

He nodded, feeling his body recharge off their touch. “I’m sorry about earlier I just--”

“I saw,” she cut him off, shaking her head. “Your friend Lexi had the news on. What happened to Merlyn Global, that was your father wasn’t it?”

“It was,” he replied with a solemn look. “But we managed to turn it off before it could do more. And we stopped the other two from turning on.”
“Good,” she was smiling and crying, and god he found her so beautiful in that moment. “I’m glad you’re okay.”

“I’m glad you’re here,” he countered. Because he didn’t think he would have made it another step without her. “I need to tell you—”

“I read the file,” she finished in a rush, her head shaking. “And if you need to keep things secret I understand. I’m not gonna push you.”

Tommy heard the gravel crunch behind him, as the soft footsteps rounded the edge of the van. And he knew the second Laurel’s eyes landed on her.

She froze before him, every emotion played fast across her face, as Sara took another few steps closer. He stepped back far enough to see her approach, but he didn’t let his focus leave Laurel.

“I didn’t believe,” her words faltered as she watched Sara come into the light.

“Laurel,” Sara said, her voice breaking in a way he hadn’t heard in ages. “I’m sorry. I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to—”

Laurel reached for her, wrapping her arms tight around her younger sister and holding on as if Sara could blow away with the wind. It took her a few seconds, but Sara responded in turn, her hands clutching for purchase against Laurel’s jacket.

“You’re alive,” Laurel said, her voice bursting with happiness as she pulled away. “You’re my sister, and I love you. And those are the only things that matter.”

“I missed you so much.”

“Me too,” she laughed, brushing Sara’s hair from the side of her face. “So much.”

The longer he watched them, the more he felt like he was intruding on something that wasn’t meant for him. The Lance sisters needed time to themselves. And he still needed to see the doctor.

“I’ll see you inside,” he said, placing a hand on Laurel’s shoulder. “I just have to check in with the doctor.”

She gave him a smile, and he knew for the moment they were alright. All the lies and secrets he told, everything he tried to keep from her, they were no longer standing between them. And with that alone he felt like he’d be okay.

The further Tommy made it into the building though, the worse he began to feel. His head ached again, and an itch rose in his limbs for some kind of fight. He hadn’t a clue why, but it terrified him to think about how fast it came on.

“Agent Merlyn.”

His steps stalled as Waller stood before him, and the itch to do something was slowly rising into a burn. He needed a fight, but this wasn’t the one he should pick.

“Director Waller,” he plastered a smirk on his face, as he balled his fists at his sides. Keep it under control. He told himself. But something close to his father’s laugh ricocheted off his skull.

“Good work tonight,” she was looking at him in a way that told him that she didn’t actually believe what she was saying. “Although your methods have been scattered and chaotic at least they provided
results.”

“I should get that on a business card.”

“Amusing,” she replied.

“I should go see the onsite doc now,” he moved to get around her, but Waller planted herself in his path again. “Is there more?”

“I want to clarify things before you go.”

“Of course you do.”

“While protocol would dictate that I activate your mandatory leave over the events of the night, I’m willing to give you a week to decide if you feel you need it.”

“Mandatory leave?”

“I personally believe you’ll be fine,” she shrugged. “But I do know you have conflicting feelings where your father is concerned. And I would hate for what happened on that rooftop to effect the rest of your work.”

Waller was talking like whatever happened to Malcolm was a direct result of him being up on that roof. But that wasn’t what happened? His father fell when the building began to collapse. He had been standing there, gun raised at Lyla and then…

Oh god. The rest of the picture came into vivid focus for him.

His father. The gun raised towards Lyla, then again towards him. He shot back. And the bullet. The bullet landed in his father’s chest. As one from his father’s gun had lodged in him. He placed a hand over the wound that was no more than a dent thanks to the Nyssa. But they had shot each other. And that’s why Malcolm fell. Not because of the device, but because of him.

“Now you’re getting it son.” The voice was no longer in his mind. Tommy turned slightly, to see his father next to him, tsking as he did. “You really thought you could kill me that easily?”

“Agent Merlyn?” Waller pulled his focus back to her. “Are you alright?”

No. He wanted to shout. He was anything but alright. But he couldn’t tell her he was seeing things. Especially if what he was seeing, was his dead father. “I should get to the doctor. Maybe lie down.”

“We’ll talk more later,” she said with a nod. “I’m proud of the strength you showed tonight.”

But Tommy didn’t respond. He just let her walk off, as he closed his eyes and willed the vision next to him to go away. This isn’t happening. He chanted in his head. He’s not real.

“I’m as real as anything else in there,” Malcolm replied aloud. “And I’m not going anywhere again. I told you son, you’re weak. And I know just how to break you down now.”

His mind flashed to Laurel, and Malcolm’s face twisted into a smile.

“No,” he whispered, as he hit his fist hard against the granite slab of a wall. “You can’t.”

But he knew, he knew even as the words left his mouth, that if anyone could destroy his happiness from beyond the grave, Malcolm would be the one.
Oliver paced behind Felicity, watching as she concluded her chat with the nameless icon on the screen. He didn’t like this, not even a little. Oliver never really trusted coincidences, and this was bound to end badly, one way or another. They’d just gotten themselves out of a life-or-death situation, he wasn’t ready to let her go running back into another one.

“You’re meeting them?” he said, unable to keep the bit of disbelief from his voice. “In person? Tomorrow?”

“Well it needs to be before the government can decrypt the files,” Felicity answered, a little breathlessly. “Besides it’s not exactly like I had a choice. It’s either that or get rattled out and hunted down. And I soooooo don’t want to go to prison. Orange jumpsuits aren’t really my style and well, I’m not real great on the whole communal bathroom thing.”

“Felicity,” he sighed, because really, did she not understand how much danger she was putting herself in? It was likely a setup, and in the event that it wasn’t, who knew what this Alena would want from her.

“What?” she shrugged. “I had a bad experience in high school and no, I don’t want to talk about it. Suffice it to say, I really don’t see myself fitting in at Guantanamo Bay—”

“Don’t worry,” he said, shaking his head, a sad smile playing on his features. “They don’t send blondes there.” It still baffled him how easily she could get him to smile, despite whatever circumstance they found themselves in.

“I dye it actually,” she said back, not even glancing up from her computer screen. Then added, “I keep your secret.”

“Better than I do these days.” Oliver barked a bitter laugh. So many people knew the truth about him, more than he’d ever imagined telling, especially for as early on as it was. Still in the first year of his mission, a mission that he had no clue how long it would take to fulfill. He only knew that he needed to try- his father was counting on him.

He carefully turned her chair to face him. “I’m not comfortable with you going to this meeting tomorrow. But since I know that even if I ask you not to, you’ll go anyway, and without backup, I’m asking to please let me come with you.”

“I don’t need protection,” she huffed.

“And what if this is a trap? What if the person you just spoke to is actually someone in the FBI or CIA and they’re just trying to draw you out?”

Felicity worried at her lower lip with her teeth. “I didn’t think about that.”

“I’ll stay in the shadows, even outside if you want. Just after everything Malcolm has done, I wouldn’t put it past him to have more tricks up his sleeve, even after death.” Oliver glanced at the time- it was getting late and they’d told Tommy they’d follow him right over to ARGUS. Not that Oliver was happy about coming within a hundred yards of Amanda Waller again- but after what had happened to Tommy with the Lazarus Pit water, Oliver felt better about keeping an eye on his friend himself. “We should get going,” he said quietly, placing a quick kiss to the top of her head.

Felicity nodded, pulling herself out of her chair. He wasn’t sure if she was agreeing to leaving or to him coming with her the following day- with any luck, it was both.
They made their way upstairs- and Oliver took her hand at the top, reveling in the feel of her hand in his. It was strange, he knew it, the way just having her near made him feel strong and whole, like he could get through anything. But maybe that was what love was- giving each other the strength to be their best selves. And yeah fine, he’d never actually admit that aloud, especially not to anyone but Felicity, but it warmed him just the same.

Hand in hand, they moved down the hall and through the empty club, still shut down due to the mandatory Glades evacuations. They were almost through the vast empty space when Oliver felt it, a shift in the air around them, eyes following their steps in the dark. He tightened his grip on Felicity’s hand and pulled her close to him. She reacted immediately, tensing and placing a hand on his hip spurring him on in the darkness.

He saw her quizzical gaze in the darkness, but put finger to his lips, begging for her silence.

“You always said you hated working in the club,” a heavily Russian accent called.

Oliver relaxed, just a fraction, recognizing the voice instantly. He sighed, turning to face the older man he’d once called Pakhan in the darkness. “Anatoly,” he said, crossing the space to where the man stood, still shrouded in shadows.

“Hello Oliver,” Anatoly answered, and there was a weight to his voice that Oliver had noticed their last night in Russia. When the man had all but begged to be put out of his misery.

“I didn’t expect to see you again so soon.”

“I didn’t expect to come to Starling to find your city crumbling much the way mine was when you left.”

Oliver frowned at that. Because yes, they’d brought down a building in Moscow to save the lives of three people. People who were being used as pawns in an unwinnable war and wanted out. He wouldn’t feel bad for that, no matter how hard Anatoly may try to make him.

“We’ve had some… unfortunate… events the last few days,” Felicity said, coming to stand beside him. “Hello Anatoly.”

“Miss Smoak,” he said, bowing his head slightly. “I was sorry to hear of the fate of your employer.”

“Former,” she clarified. “I quit yesterday.”

“Yes, I see,” Anatoly said, as if he’d already been briefed on the situation. For all Oliver knew, perhaps he had, from some of the Bratva members in Starling. “You two have a knack for getting yourselves out of tricky situations.”

“That’s funny,” Felicity huffed. “Because I feel like we have more of a knack of getting ourselves into them.”

Anatoly shrugged. “Semantics.”

“Not to sound rude,” Oliver said. “But was there a reason you decided to break into my club tonight, or did you just miss me so much you flew all the way here to see me?”

Anatoly clucked his tongue. “Straight to the point. I’ve always liked that about you.” He sighed. “Being alone in a big house gives a man much time to think, Oliver.”

“I think you might be able to learn something about getting straight to the point.”
“I’m getting there,” the Russian said, the weariness even more evident in his voice now. “I’ve come to collect on the debt you owe me.”

Oliver fought to keep his emotions in check. It had only been a few days since Anatoly had asked him to take his life, and Oliver wasn’t about to do it now, any more than he was willing to then. “If this is about what we talked about last time—”

“It isn’t,” Anatoly said, taking a step forward. “You were right to deny me that. It would have been a cowardly escape done in emotional anguish.” He paused, glancing between the two of them and then rubbed a hand across his beard. “I have relinquished my claim on the Bratva to Kuznetsov, the man my brother had intended Sofia to marry. In exchange, the newest Pakhan has allowed me to leave, with the understanding that I am never to challenge for control over the Bratva again.”

Oliver’s brow furrowed, not quite sure how to handle the information. He didn’t know how to picture Anatoly living a life outside the Bratva, even having met him on the freighter off Lian Yu, Anatoly always seemed destined for the Brotherhood.

“What will you do? Where will you go?” Felicity asked, seeming just as confused at his side.

At this, Anatoly smiled. And Oliver found his mind already working through the answer.

“That is why I have come,” Anatoly said, his voice quiet, bordering on sheepish. “I have finally learned what my nieces knew from the moment they were born. That just because Bratva is called Brotherhood, it doesn’t make a family.”

“You want to be with them?” Felicity asked, delight warming her voice.

“Sofia has sent me ultrasound photo,” he said wistfully. “I am to have a great-nephew. They wish to stay at my house in Greece, and asked me to be godfather.”

“From one Godfather to another, eh?” Felicity jested, and then wrinkled her nose. “Too soon?”

Oliver shook his head. “So you came for paperwork,” he stated, rather than asked.

Anatoly nodded. “I know our deal was for a favor from you, not from Felicity. But I wondered—”

She grinned, nodding her head enthusiastically. “Anatoly, I would love nothing more than to help you reunite with your family, and leave your scary Russian mob days behind.”

“Thank you,” he said softly. He cleared his throat, his voice still thick with emotion as he spoke. “I shall take my leave. But here is my number while I am staying in the city. Please, call me when the papers are ready?”

“I will,” she confirmed.

He turned and headed for the door, leaving Felicity and Oliver standing together in stunned silence in the darkened club.

“Didn’t see that one coming,” Felicity said, a little breathless with surprise.

“Neither did I,” Oliver agreed. “I saw him that night… when I left after you told me the truth about Malcolm. I walked around until I ended up at the club and he was there, drunk beyond belief and looking for a way out. Mikhail died that day, after learning of the death of both his daughters, and Anatoly was just a wreck. I didn’t think he’d have the stomach to really do it. To get out and find a life beyond the Bratva.” Oliver swallowed hard, wondering if he’d be so lucky one day. To get out.
To have a life beyond the Hood, beyond his father’s mission. What would a life like that even look like.

“Guess he learned a thing or two from you,” she said, nudging his arm gently. “I think you showed him that there was another way. Leaving yourself, getting Ivan and Sofia out… it’s not something that they’re used to. But you proved to him, to them all, that it’s possible.”

“You think so?”

Felicity moved in closer, reaching up on her tiptoes to press her lips to his. “I really do,” she answered. “Now we really should get going. Who knows what Waller will do with Sara Lance inside ARGUS.”
“I still think this is a bad idea,” Oliver said, taking another drink from his coffee.

But they had been over this a million times from the night before. All she heard on the whole way to ARGUS and then back to her apartment after, was Oliver’s concern over this ‘Alena’ person. And yes she agreed with all his concerns, but she didn't have a lot of options. She could try and corrupt the files herself, but considering she hadn’t even guessed Malcolm would or could do something like this, she knew it was better to have a second set of eyes.

“If you can find me another hacker, as good as I am, who can trace where those files went and make it so no one can ever decrypt them then I won’t go in there,” she paused, giving him a look. “But you and I both know that this is my best option.”

“What about Tommy’s friend Lexi?”

“So ARGUS is out of the question but an ARGUS hacker is fair game?”

“Tommy trusts her.”

“He also trusts Waller,” she hated to make it sound so callous. But the facts were there. And as much as she loved and trusted Tommy, she couldn’t trust ARGUS or anyone related to it that she didn’t know. “So this is it.”

He looked passed her again, to the brick covered building just on the outskirts of the Glades. She looked around her as a shudder ran the length of her spine. If Merlyn had gotten his way the night before, the whole place would have been rubble. She couldn’t even imagine what the devastation would look like. How many homes and families would have been torn apart by one man’s selfish vedetta?

But then she thought of Merlyn Global, of the hundreds of lives that were lost because they hadn’t won last night. Not really.

“Oliver,” she pulled his hand toward her and placed a kiss on his knuckles. Still red from hitting a few of Merlyn’s goons from the night before. The night before was still so fresh for all of them. “I can’t let him win anymore.”
“I know,” he whispered, leaning in and placing a soft kiss against her lips. He pulled something from his pocket and held it out to her. “Please?”

She let her eyes flutter open and focused on the box. Of course he brought the comms. “Oliver I don’t think—”

“If you won’t let me come in with you, at least let me do this. Felicity, I don’t like feeling powerless to help you.”

She understood, probably better than anyone else. Knowing she could help him at a computer screen, it was the only thing that kept her sane most nights. So she nodded, taking the box and removing a comm. She placed it in her ear with a smirk. “If this is gonna involve hacking, it might take a few hours. You sure you want to sit out here and listen to me babble?”

“I would listen to you babble for an eternity,” he replied with a smile.

“Not a bad answer,” she gave him another quick kiss as she grabbed her messenger bag, and opened the door. “Wish me luck?”

“Good luck,” he whispered with a smile, but she heard it more in her ear piece.

Felicity took in a deep breath as she hitched the bag up on her shoulder. She could do this. No matter what waited for her, if she could handle Malcolm Merlyn, she could handle anything. And knowing Oliver had her back? It made it easier to take the steps forward.

She pulled out her phone as she got closer, checking the address again. She had assumed she’d find an apartment building or maybe some abandoned warehouse. Something sketchy? But the numbers before her were painted on a large pane glass window. And when she peered inside, she saw tables and computers, and a coffee bar. A cafe. Her mystery savior sent her to a cafe?

Some evil hacker genius. She couldn’t help but smirk at the thought. Then again she was a hacker, and she did love her coffee. So maybe this Alena person wasn’t that far off from her.

Felicity entered the cafe, and she took notice of its patrons, mostly 20 somethings, all with laptops in front of them.

“Hello?” Felicity said as she made her way to the counter. She didn’t like that she still felt nervous. And she did her pest to push it down.

“Welcome to Bits and Bytez,” the very bored looking barista said as he stood before her. “Can I interest you in a Lovelace Latte?”

“No thank you,” she replied with a smile. “I was looking for someone. Well I think I’m looking for someone. They told me to meet them here. To ask for Alena?”

The kid rolled his eyes and pointed towards the corner. A young woman sat with two tables pushed together and enough tech to make even Felicity a little envious.

“Okay Smoak, come on play it cool,” she muttered.

Oliver’s laugh vibrated in her head and she had to admit it did help calm her down.

She pushed herself towards the corner, towards the woman whose hair was tied into a side braid and whose glasses obscured her face with her head down.
She braced herself. Just because the girl looked nonthreatening didn’t mean she was. She found Felicity through the deep veins of the internet, and she knew first hand how ruthless those types could be. How something as simple as a hack could turn someone into something else.

As Felicity walked to the table, she readied herself for what came next.

As she stepped closer the girl popped her head up, a wide grin spreading across her face. “OMG, omg. You came, you really came. Wow this is so amazing!”

“Um hi?”

“Hi, I’m Alena,” she motioned to the seat next to her. “But you probably guessed that because why else would you be over here if you weren’t looking for me.”

Felicity looked around, to see if there was anyone else the Mr. Barista could have possibly meant to point to instead of the girl before her. Not that Alena couldn’t be a hacker, she totally could. But she wasn’t exactly giving off the whole ‘cloak and dagger’ contact vibe. Which is kind of what Felicity had been expecting.

“Sorry, yeah. I’m Felicity--”

“Smoak,” she finished with a shrug. “Yes, you are. And you actually came. I still can’t believe it.”

“Sorry I was just expecting someone… else.”

“Someone more intimidating? Don’t worry I get that a lot. But please sit, we can talk.”

Felicity took the open seat across from her, and couldn’t help it when the tablet before her caught her eye. It was her code, the one she created to punch a backdoor into any system. But it also wasn’t hers. She could see the subtle but impressive changes to it, and she found herself picking it up to examine it closer.

“I hope you don’t mind,” Alena said with hesitation. “It’s just my backdoor code is nowhere near as sophisticated as this, and well I did make a few tweaks, but only to extend the window of time in the root program. I just needed like ten more seconds. If you hate it I can--”

“It’s fine,” she cut off Alena. “Honestly I should be flattered. No one’s ever used my code as inspiration before.”

“But you’re not?”

“Excuse me?”

“You said you ‘should be flattered’. But you aren’t, are you?”

She was perceptive, Felicity would give her that. “This is all just a little weird. And I’m not exactly sure why I’m here or why you wanted to help.”

“Ah,” Alena nodded. “You can thank my boss for that one. He’s been monitoring your coding for a while now. Not in a creepy NSA kind of way, but in the ‘she’s so talented’ way. And when we saw you hacking the power grid around Merlyn Global last night, we knew something was up.”

“Yeah maybe we shouldn’t talk about this out in the open,” she couldn’t help the nervous glance she shot around the room.

“Them? Please,” Alena rolled her eyes. “They’re like NPCs, basically useless unless you need a
power cord. That’s why I wanted to meet here. Out in the open so you wouldn’t feel cornered or trapped, but very private people in their own little worlds.”

“Okay,” she took another deep breath, deciding to change tactics. “So you wanted to help because you saw my hack?”

“Look we already knew Merlyn was playing something dangerous. We kinda have our ears to the ground a lot, and there may have been some police scanner chatter about evacuating the Glades in reference to something he had cooking,” she split her focus as she began typing away on the keys in front of her. “So we decided to keep an eye on his building, see if we could stop a catastrophe before it started. I mean clearly you had that handled though. Truly brilliant on the fly coding. I mean like goddess level. Guess I know how you came up with your old hacker handle.”

“It wasn’t that amazing.”

“Are you joking? Like I’ve never seen anyone code that fast, not even my boss and he’s a genius. Seriously he puts so many people to shame. But you,” she paused almost in awe. “You’re something else entirely Felicity.”

“Thanks.”

“You’re welcome,” she cleared her throat, turning the laptop so it faced Felicity. “This is location of the files Mr. Merlyn sent. With your code and my tweaks, I could have them corrupted within the next twenty minutes.”

“Just like that?”

“You sound surprised?”

“No, I just mean that…” She contacted Felicity. She sent the messages, and encrypted the files. “If it’s that easy, why all the pomp and circumstance? Why bring me here?”

“I like you,” she said, bringing her screen back in front of her. “See the thing is, this is the pitch to that job offer. My boss wanted you to see what one of us could do on our own.”

“Why?”

“Because,” she stated with a smirk. “If you see what I can do, then can’t you just imagine what we could do together?” She paused, meeting Felicity’s eyes. “What do you know about the Church of Blood? Actually wait, don’t answer that. Not before you tell me if you’re in.”

“What kind of job is this?”

Alena kept typing, so intensely Felicity could see the code reflecting off her glasses. “The kind that can change the world.”

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To say that Tommy’s sleep was fitful would have been a vast understatement. He woke often, bits and pieces of the events that had unfolded replaying themselves like a broken reel across his mind. Waking seemed to break the spell, finding Laurel asleep in his arms each time was almost enough to make him forget. Almost enough to let him trick himself into believing the last several weeks hadn’t happened. But then something would shift in the dark room, he’d see Malcolm’s face, or hear his voice in the darkness, and the terror would flood Tommy’s veins again.
After several cycles of the same, Tommy resigned himself to not sleeping and tucked his arm under his pillow, staring at the ceiling as the light slowly filtered into his bedroom. Laurel was still curled into him and the constant rise and fall of her chest, her quiet, even breathing soothed him into a shallow doze.

When he felt Laurel stir beside him, Tommy pulled her close. Her hand slid across his stomach, wrapping her arm around him.

“Hey you,” she said quietly, her voice still thick with sleep. “Did you sleep?”

Tommy pushed out a breath. “Some,” he said, pressing his lips to her forehead.

“And Sara?”

“Not a dream,” he confirmed. “But neither is what my father did…” his voice trailed off. He couldn’t bring himself to say anymore about it.

Laurel sat up beside him, pulling her hair over one shoulder and looking at him with what Tommy could only describe as pity. He hated that look. He’d been getting it his whole life—ever since his mother died. He had never wanted to be someone worth pitying— it was why he’d started living the playboy life with Ollie when they were younger. It was easier to pretend not to care about anything, than to admit how much things affected him.

“I’m sorry,” she said, barely above a whisper.

Tommy slid out of bed, crossing the room and putting a shirt on. “Who knows what there will be to deal with today. Lawyers no doubt,” he sighed. “Maybe I can get ARGUS to send me out of town until things blow over.”

Her brow furrowed as she climbed out of bed and crossed the room to stand in front of him. “Tommy,” she said, and the pity was still there. But it stung less. Because it was mingled with genuine concern, genuine love. And because this was Laurel, back in his apartment, back in his life.

“Laurel,” he said back.

“Leaving town isn’t going to help.” She reached for his hand, taking it in hers and lacing their fingers. “But I do think we should talk about—” she broke off suddenly.

“What?” he asked, narrowing his eyes just a fraction.

A knock cut her off from answering. Tommy dropped her hand, moving through the apartment toward the front door. Ollie coming to check on him maybe? He and Felicity had stopped by ARGUS the night before and told him that they’d check on him in the morning.

But when Tommy opened the door, it wasn’t Oliver and Felicity he found on the other end.

“Mr. Merlyn, how do you feel about the accusations—”

“Reports are coming in that—”

“Tommy! Is it true your father—”

A dozen reporters crowded themselves in front of his front door, shoving recorders and microphones in his face, blinding him with the camera flash as they snapped pictures of him.

Tommy recoiled, feeling anger surge through his veins, raw and feral. His jaw clenched, hands
tightening into fists at his sides as his mind pieced together what was happening. He lunged for the nearest reporter, ripping the camera out of his hand and throwing it at the man’s head. Flashes blinded him again as the remaining reporters captured the moment on film.

“---crazy just like his father--”

“He’s snapped!”

Tommy whipped around, snaking his arm around the throat of another reporter, tightening his grip while the man struggled for breath. His body moved on auto-pilot, and by the time he realized what he was doing, his hands wouldn’t listen to his brain as it beckoned him to stop.

“Tommy!” Laurel's voice cut across everything.

His head whipped up at the sound of her voice, and he released the man instantly, letting him fall to the floor with a dull thud.

“I…” he began, but no other words would come. He didn’t know why he’d flown into a blind rage, or why he couldn’t stop himself from wrapping his hands around the guy’s throat.

She moved to his side from where she’d been corralling the other reporters. “Any of you post any of this and we’ll sue you and your outlet for defamation as well as stalking, trespassing on private property, and anything else I can make stick.”

“He broke my nose!” the first reporter said from his spot on the floor. Blood was running down his face as he held a hand over his nose.

Tommy shuddered. He glanced down at his hands, as if they might have an answer for him as to why they were acting of their own volition, but they were shaking just as much as the rest of him seemed to be. He looked back up, watching as the reporters filed down the hall, many of them glancing over their shoulder making sure he wasn’t coming after them too.

“I don’t know what happened…” he started, but something caught his eye. Down at the far end of the hallway, a shadow disappearing around the corner. Tommy wanted to follow it, to chase the darkness until it told him what it had done to him, but Laurel held him fast, keeping him from moving.

“She said you might have… episodes,” Laurel said quietly. “Some side effect to the drug they gave you?”

He nodded, because he wasn’t sure what else to do. But it hadn’t been a drug. It had been water rooted in some deep, dark magic that had brought him back from the dead. Or at least back from the brink of it. Even now, it felt like the darkness was threatening to swallow him whole.

“We should get you back inside,” Laurel said, wrapping a protective arm around him.

“There’s no escaping this, son,” a voice whispered to him. Tommy glanced up, his eyes finding his father’s eyes staring back at him from the reflective glass on a decorative painting in the hallway. “No escaping me, or what you’ve always been meant to be.”

“No,” Tommy said defiantly. “I won’t!”

“He’s gone,” Laurel said, more firmly this time.

He shook his head, and when he opened his eyes again, his father was gone. Laurel’s look of
concern had been replaced with something else, something almost akin to fear. Tommy felt his heart break in his chest, right then and there. Would he never be able to make things right with her?

“I’m sorry,” he said quietly. He hated this feeling, hated his mind and body both conspiring against him until he hated himself almost more than he hated his father. What could Tommy trust, if he couldn’t trust his own mind, his own hands?

Laurel led him to the couch, sitting him down while she went to get him a glass of water. He wondered if Sara and Nyssa could help, if they had some magic fix-all that would ease the tension coiled like a knot within him or get rid of his father’s ghost which was already haunting him more than he could bear. Tommy had never been one to believe in ghosts, but the way he was seeing Malcolm? It was hard to believe it was just his mind playing tricks on him.

“Did Sara say anything else?” he asked, taking a sip of the water Laurel brought back for him.

“Like what?”

Tommy shrugged. “When she was leaving?” he asked. “If there is anything else they can do for the side effects?” He scoffed. “I’m going to lose my mind if I keep seeing him everywhere. And this anger inside me? It feels like it’s going to boil my internal organs if I don’t do something to let it out.”

Laurel gasped in a breath, eyeing him with concern. He noticed how she angled herself away from him as she sat. His mind told him that it was so she could run, if his body decided to act of its own accord again.

“You’re seeing him?” she asked, keeping her voice quiet and neutral. “You mean your father?”

He nodded. “He’s taunting me. Laurel, I swear he managed to come back from the grave just to haunt me. I don’t know what to do to get him to leave.”

She swallowed hard, eyes focused on her hands in her lap as she seemed to wrestle with telling him something. “I never saw her,” Laurel said quietly. “But my dad did. At the bus stop, in a passing car on the highway, on a crowded street. He saw Sara everywhere after she disappeared. I think it’s part of why he fell into the bottle so hard, because he knew she was gone, but he couldn’t let himself believe it.”

“What did he do to stop it?”

Laurel bit her lip. “What I was about to suggest to you before the knock on he door.” She took a deep breath, meeting his eyes as she blew it out. “Tommy, I think we should have a funeral for your father.”

He scoffed, getting up from the couch to pace angrily across the room and back. “Are you joking? You saw those reporters. They’re already crucifying me for what he’s done. And now you want me to have a service for that man? The man who single-handedly pulled off one of the largest mass-murders in the history of this city?”

“It’s not for him,” she said, standing and moving to his side.

She placed a hand on his arm, her touch warming his skin and heart. Tommy wondered, briefly, why she was always the one to bring him back from the edge. Darkness still loomed in his mind, but with Laurel close, it was like a candle warmly glowing around him, keeping the darkness at bay.

“Then who is it for?” Tommy asked, a hoarse whisper.
“You,” she answered, taking his face in her hands. “So you can grieve and let him go.”

Tommy swallowed hard. It wasn’t that easy, it never would be. But for her, he could try. As if in response, his father’s laughter filled his mind, until it swallowed everything else, sending a cold shudder up his spine and straight into his heart.

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Oliver watched the cafe closely, waiting for Felicity to return. The pair had shifted into shop talk that went pretty much over his head, which at least meant Felicity’s wasn’t in immediate danger. But he still didn’t trust things.

It felt too convenient. Malcolm sets her up to take the fall and then seconds later this Alena girl swoops in to save the day? It felt like a Waller move, and that alone would keep his guard up as long as it needed to be.

He saw the movement from the rear of the car even before she finished crossing the street. Oliver clicked the car doors open and waited until Sara hopped into the backseat.

“Nice hat,” he said he gestured in the mirror to the Starling Rockets cap. “Going to a baseball game?”

“Funny,” and though her tone disagreed, he could see the smile hiding in her look. “How’s Tommy?”

“He was fine the last I saw him,” he twisted until he faced her. She was holding something back, something that he was sure to need if he wanted to help Tommy get through this. “What aren’t you telling me?”

She shook her head. “Just look out for him. He’s gonna need you in his corner.”

“I’m not going anywhere,” he paused as realization seemed to dawn. “But it feels like you are.”

“I can’t stay Ollie. No matter how much I want to,” she let out a shaky breath. “You can’t imagine the lengths Ra’s Al Ghul will go to if I desert the League. And they’d know right where to find me.”

“What about Laurel or your dad? Are you even gonna see him before you run off again?”

“It will be easier for him if I don’t,” he could see the walls she was throwing up on all sides. “Seeing Laurel last night, I just I can’t do that to him too. I can’t make him worry about me. He’s better off.”

He scoffed. “I thought the same thing once. I thought my mom and Thea were better off not knowing I survived. Because if they saw me, if they knew the things I had to do to keep breathing, they’d never look at me the same again. But I was wrong.”

“Ollie--”

“Sara you may think you’re sparing your dad from something, but take it from someone who thought you were dead for the last four years. Knowing is always better than wondering. It just is.”

“If I see him, I won’t be able to go back.”

“Then stay.”

“I can’t.”
“We can find a way,” he knew it was too much to try and take on himself. But he had to try to get her to stay. “If meeting Felicity taught me anything, it’s that there is always another way. You just have to be willing to look for it. Sara you deserve to come home.”

“You don’t have to do this.”

“Do what?”

“Try and absolve your guilt over what happened to me. It wasn’t your fault Ollie. I made my choices, and even though the road has been a hard one, I’m not sure I’d change any of them.”

“Sara…”

“I’ll think about it,” she leaned in and patted his arm. “I’m not making any promises. But I’ll think about staying.”

“Are you gonna see Quentin?”

“Bye Ollie,” she moved to the door. “Thank you.”

“What for?”

“Surviving,” she smiled, and with that she was gone.

He didn’t try and stop her, just watched as she crossed back the way she came. Hopefully headed to see her father. If anyone could get Sara to stick around it would be him. He knew from experience the draw to a parent. It’s why he hadn’t dared see his own mother at that gala in Russia. He knew if he had, he never would have been loyal enough to stay in the Bratva. And what would life have looked like then?

Felicity came into a view a second later, exiting the cafe as she waved a farewell to a brunette. Alena most likely. Then she made her way back to his car.

“Hey,” she said as she got in. “That did not take nearly as long as I thought it would. She really knows her stuff.”

“So it went well?”

“Yeah,” Felicity replied giving him a look. “I thought you were listening?”

“I was but Sara stopped by.”

“By the car?”

“Yeah.”

“Well I mean it beats breaking into apartments,” she mused. “How is the younger Lance?”

“Conflicted,” he sighed. “I get where she’s coming from.”

“Thinking back to the gala?”

“A little,” he picked up her hand and kissed it. “I’m thinking how different things would have been if I left with you and Tommy when you asked. Would Waller have gotten to him? Would Malcolm have been able to drag you down into this mess? How many thing could have changed if I had been willing to do more than just survive back then?”
“I think things happened the way they were meant to.”

“Malcolm just tried to sell you out to the government from beyond the grave, Felicity. And I know you think that went well, but what if this woman isn’t who you think she is? What if she’s working for Malcolm too? What if--”

“What if it rains tomorrow and the dams flood, and everything good gets washed away?”

“What?”

“It’s something my mom used to say when I would kind of spiral into this negative tailspin. We can’t control what’s gonna happen Oliver. But we can control how we react to it,” she placed a hand on his chest. “And I think this is a good thing. I think for once there’s a silver lining hidden in all the crap. I’m not saying I trust Alena, or the job she wants me to take. But I do trust that I’m not the same person who stepped into a deal with Malcolm Merlyn three years ago. I’m not gonna make the same mistakes I made then. So trust me.”

“I do trust you,” he whispered. “I just need you to be safe.”

“I know,” she replied with a smile. “I need you to be safe too.”

“I think that’s a good trade.”

He leaned in wanting nothing more to than to kiss her when his phone rang.

“Thea?” she questioned with a grin.

But as he pulled out his phone, his mother’s name flashed across it. He held it up for her to see.

“Damn I was close.”

“Hi mom,” he greeted as he answered.

“Sweetheart, are you alright?”

He wondered how much Thea had told her from the night before, and how much of it had been fed through a media outlet first.

“Yeah sorry mom. I just slept at Felicity’s last night,” earning him a smack from her.

“Do not tell your mother we slept together,” she hissed. “Are you crazy?”

“Ow,” he mouthed before he continued. “I left you a message.”

“I know.” she paused for a moment before continuing. “I just heard about Malcolm, and I was wondering if you were with Tommy. How is he taking the news?”

“Not well,” he replied, because it was as close to the truth as he felt comfortable with. “Laurel’s with him now. We were gonna go see him later.”

“Would you come to the office first, I need to speak with you and I’d like to do it in person. Please Oliver, this cannot wait.”

He couldn’t help but wonder if this has anything to do with the conversation they were having the other night, but he knew asking wasn’t going to result in an answer over the phone. “I’ll be there in a little bit.”
“Thank you. I will see you soon.”

He hung up and dropped the phone back to the cup holder. “My mom wants me to come to the office.”

“Maybe we’re both getting job offers today?”

“Ha, I think she knows what my answer to that would be,” he smiled. “But she sounded like she needed to speak to me alone. Is it okay if I drop you off at Tommy’s and come back?”

“Of course,” she moved in and kissed him softly on the cheek.

He thought back to what Sara said about keeping an eye on him. “Tell him to take it easy, okay?”

“Yeah he’s gonna listen to that.”

“It’s worth a try.”

After he dropped Felicity off it took him a few extra minutes to make it to Queen Consolidated. The destruction to downtown was harsher in the morning light. Traffic diverted and debris still filled the surrounding streets. It was a miracle they had shut the device off before it could do more damage.

He had no problem getting through security, as they waved him through. The elevator was full of executives in suits. Even with the family name on the side of the building, Oliver couldn’t make himself feel like he belonged there. It was not the legacy he would take from his father. But he was starting to think that crossing names off a list wasn’t it either. He still wanted to right Robert’s wrongs, to better the city. But there had to be a way to do it in the light as well as the dark.

“Mom?” he pushed open the glass door, as Moira pulled her gaze from the photographs lined across her desk. “Are you okay, you look like you’ve been crying?”

“Just thinking back to when your sister was little and how much different her life would have been if I had the courage to be honest.”

“I know I was hard on you when I found out, and for that I’m sorry,” he walked closer, taking the seat across from her. “You did what you had to. And I don’t know if telling the truth then would have been the best thing for all of us.”

“Maybe not, but it would decidedly been better than lying about it for years,” she pulled something from under a file, her gaze fixed on it. “The lies are what tear families apart. And having Thea look at me the way she has this past week. I would never have kept this from her had I thought I might lose her over it one day.”

“Mom you haven’t lost her. She’s upset and confused. But you’ll get past this. And she’ll forgive you.”

“But will you?” she looked at him and he could tell she wasn’t just talking about keeping Thea’s parentage from him.

“Mom?”

She took the paper in her hand and slid it across the desk for him. “I never wanted you to find out like this. I would have gone to my grave with this secret still inside me. But I think you deserve to know the truth, you deserve the chance at what I kept from you.”
He didn’t know what she was saying, but he drew his gaze down and read the paper. It was the check registry of his mother’s bank account. The date on the page read mid August 2007. A couple were written to charity organizations, one to Raisa. But the very last one on the page is the reason he felt his lungs begin to burn for air.

*Samantha Clayton.* He hadn’t seen her in over five years, but he couldn’t say he never thought about her in all that time. When he did, he wondered how differently life would have been had she not called and told him she had lost the baby… his baby.

“What is this?”

“She wanted to keep it,” Moira replied as if that answered more than it questioned. “She wanted to raise it. But you, you weren’t ready to be father. There’s no way you would have been ready for that responsibility.”

He felt his stomach drop, as the truth washed over him. But even with it staring him in the face he couldn’t accept it. He needed her to tell him he was wrong. “What did you do Mom?”

“Oliver I--”

“What,” he cut her off with a glare. “Did you do?”

“What I thought was right at the time,” she shook her head, the tears refusing to fall. “I offered her a million dollars if she told you she lost the baby. Then she took the money and never came back.”

Samantha hadn’t miscarried. Which meant, she kept the baby. *His* baby.

“You let me walk around, unaware of my own child for five years?”

“Oliver I thought I was protecting you. Besides you were gone soon after on the Gambit and I—”

“You don’t get to make those choices Mom,” he stood up, his anger boiling beneath the surface. How could she do that to him? “You should have let me… God why would you do that?”

“Oliver--”

“I’m not Malcolm, okay? You don’t just get to keep something like this to yourself.”

“I wanted you to have your best life. I wanted you to be who you were meant to be. And a baby, sweetheart that would have changed everything for you. You remember how you were back then. You weren’t ready for that.”

“You didn’t give me a chance to be.”

“I know you’re angry with me now,” she pushed herself away from the desk as she stood. “But I told you this because I don’t want there to be any secrets between us. Not anymore. I love you too much to lose you over my mistakes.”

“I can’t be here right now,” he took a step back. “And I think it would be better if you didn’t call me for a few weeks. I can’t right now Mom, I just can’t.”

“Wait,” she moved around the desk, coming close to him. He wanted to push her back, but something kept him planted in his spot. She held out a piece of paper. “I tracked down her number. If you want to call her, it’s up to you.”

He could just as easily get Felicity to do a search, but his head was spinning too fast for his thoughts
to hold still. And soon he found the paper in his hand.

“I know you won’t believe me, but I am sorry for lying about this.”

“You’re right,” he hated the venom in his words, but he couldn’t stop thinking them. “I don’t believe you. Goodbye Mom.”

He walked out of the office and tried to hold it together until he made it to the elevator. It had been a long while since he felt things begin to spin out of control. And this time he didn’t know how he’d handle this alone.

Felicity’s face flashed in his mind and with it a low level calm. He had to try and figure things out. If for no other reason than to keep hold on the life he was trying to build.

He pulled his phone from his pocket, and typed in the number his mother gave him. He didn’t know what would happen, if Samantha would even talk to him when she picked up. But he needed to hear it from her. One way or another he needed the whole truth.

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The next couple of days flew by in a blur. From police interviews to meetings with Alena to getting Anatoly’s paperwork ready and checking in on Tommy, Felicity’s life had been one of constant motion. But that was good, she told herself. At least, it was better than the alternative.

The alternative, of course, was idleness. It was letting herself dwell on what had happened and the two hundred plus lives that were lost. It was watching the heartbreaking interviews on tv of the people whose loved ones were ripped from their arms because of one man’s selfish vendetta. No, the busyness was necessary. Because the alternative was much, much worse.

“Hey,” Tommy said, as he pulled open his front door.

Felicity plastered on a smile, but then let it fall almost instantly. “Hey,” she answered. Sometimes it was hard to remember that she didn’t have to fake it for Tommy, that they could be not-okay together. It was a pact they’d made almost three years ago now, when they’d come home from Russia without Oliver—both of them trapped in jobs they hadn’t chosen to protect the ones they cared about. “How are you doing?”

“I’m fine,” he answered quickly, and she could tell it was a lie.

“And I said I’m fine.”

He turned his back to her, leaving the door to his apartment open. She followed him inside, closing the door behind her. Anger rolled off of him like a tangible force. Clearly he was tired of being asked if he was okay. She understood that, she was tired of hearing it too. But that didn’t mean he needed to lie to her.

“Okay, I’m sorry,” she said, following him into the kitchen.

Tommy handed her a cup of coffee and she wrapped her hands around the mug as if somehow its warmth could heal all the brokenness inside her.

He shook his head. “No, I’m sorry. Ever since… that night… I just feel off.”

“I get that,” Felicity answered. “A lot of stuff happened. A lot of it happened to you.”
His jaw clenched and his eyes fell closed. “It’s not even that,” he said, shaking his head again dismissively. “I think he’s…” Tommy’s voice broke off suddenly and he cleared his throat. “Laurel’s been pushing me to have this funeral for him.”

Felicity nodded. “I know.”

“Doesn’t it seem… I don’t know, disrespectful or like it somehow minimizes the deaths of all those other people, for me to mourn him?”

She took a long sip of her coffee while she contemplated his question. She had been wrestling with similar feelings, even though she hated Malcolm, even though he’d killed all of those people. It didn’t lessen the grief she felt for Tommy losing his father, or for Thea, losing a second father she’d never know. Despite the terrible things he’d done, could she justify her feelings of loss over him being gone?

“I think,” she started cautiously, meeting Tommy’s intense gaze. She could see the turmoil raging within him. Felicity sighed. “Tommy, you can’t tell yourself what’s the right thing or wrong thing to feel. You just have to deal with it. It isn’t about the person he was, or what he did. It’s about dealing with the fact that someone you loved for most of your life, is gone.”

He crumpled inward at her words, leaning heavily on the kitchen counter as he bent over. She moved to him, placing a hand on his back as he gulped in air, choking on the emotion that was threatening to overtake him.

“You should get out of here,” she said. “Being cooped up in your apartment isn’t doing you any good.”

“I don’t have anywhere to go,” he said, straightening himself up and meeting her eyes again.

“Want to grab some lunch with me?”

Tommy shook his head. “I don’t think being anywhere there are people right now, is a great idea.”

“They don’t blame you,” she said quickly.

“They do, but thanks for saying that.”

“The people of Starling will come around. Once things settle down and tensions aren’t so high. They’ll see the truth- that you aren’t your father, and you never could or would be.”

He looked like he wanted to say something more, but the words died on his lips. “Thanks Felicity,” he said, pulling her into an unexpected hug.

“Of course,” she answered, wrapping her arms around him.

Tommy released her just as quickly as he’d pulled her in. “I don’t want to keep you from whatever you’ve got going on today,” he said, voice still betraying some churning emotion inside him. “But I’ll see you later for the…?”

She nodded. “I’ll be there,” she confirmed. “Oliver too. We’re here for you, no matter what.”

“Oh hey, whatever happened with that hacker girl?”

Felicity shrugged. “Still in the process of happening. I’ll let you know when I know more.” She placed her now-empty coffee mug on the counter, and headed for the door. “We can go somewhere
else, if you want to grab lunch? Take a drive down the coast? Maybe see if the grass really is greener in Ivytown like everyone says?”

“I think alone is good for me right now,” he answered, following her back to the door. “Not forever, but definitely for now.”

She gave him a wistful smile. “But I thought our mantra was ‘together’?”

Tommy gave her a sad smile back. “It is Smoak. And always will be. But for now…”

Felicity nodded, hand stuck on the door, unable to bring herself to pull it open. Something felt off about this, about him. He was trying to hide how deeply this was affecting him, sure. But there was something else there, something that ran deeper than just hiding his emotions. She couldn’t quite place what it was, but it made her pause. Why? Why was standing there conjuring images of that day on the tarmac when they returned to Starling and left Oliver behind?

She pushed the feelings away, telling herself that she was just being silly. “I’ll see you later,” she confirmed again, and then headed out, closing the door behind herself.

She reached for her phone immediately, pulling it from her purse and quickly dialing Oliver’s number. It rang only once before he answered.

“Hey you,” he said, the smile evident in his voice. “Get everything we need for Anatoly?”

“Not yet,” she said. “I know we’re meeting him soon, but I had to stop in and see Tommy first.” She paused, blowing out a breath before continuing. “Oliver, I’m worried about him.”

“More Lazarus Pit side effects?”

She shook her head, even though he couldn’t see her. “No, it’s not that. It’s just… I don’t know how to describe it.”

“I’m sure he’s fine. It’s just going to take him some time to get over what happened. Malcolm was a psycho, but Tommy still lost his father.”

Rather than waiting for the elevator, Felicity took the stairs down to the first floor of the apartment building. She had too much nervous energy pent up now, and needed to burn it off. Especially if Oliver thought that perhaps this was just all in her mind. And maybe it was? She might not have lost family to this, but she’d still lost a good deal. She’d still lost the entire team she’d worked with for years, she’d still had a hand in all of those people dying, even if she knew deep down that Oliver was right, that it wasn’t her fault. It still felt like she was partially responsible.

“I’m heading to the shipping center now to pick up the package for Anatoly,” she said, answering his original question. There was no sense in arguing over what may or may not be wrong with Tommy. Oliver would see their best friend for himself in a few hours, and could make his own judgement then.

“Sounds good. I’ll see you back at the Foundry.”

“You mean you don’t want to explain another Russian friend to your mom and sister?” Felicity joked.

“You know, I really don’t.”

“Fair enough. I’ll see you soon.” She ended the call and climbed into her car, scrolling through her
phone for another number before starting the engine and heading to the shipping center where the
deadrop for the paperwork for Anatoly was. After a few rings, the call connected.

“Please tell me the world isn’t ending again,” Lyla said, by way of greeting.

“Thankfully no,” Felicity answered, maneuvering her way through the streets. “Sorry if it’s weird
for me to be calling you otherwise.”

“More like a relief.”

“Oh good. So you probably can’t tell me, but I was just calling to see if Tommy was currently
benched at ARGUS.”

“You’re right… I can’t tell you that.” Lyla paused. “Why do you ask?”

Felicity blew out a breath. “I just have this feeling that something is up with him. I think he’d be
less restless, less… lost? I don’t know. If he had a project to be working on. You probably think I’m
crazy. I know Oliver does. It’s just, I know Tommy. I’ve seen him low before, and this is not that.
This is something else.”

“Like what?”

“Manic, almost? Determined, definitely. I just don’t know what it means.”

The line was quiet for a long moment. “I’ll talk to the director,” Lyla said finally.

“Thank you,” Felicity answered. “I really appreciate it. And I’m sure Tommy does too. Just… don’t
tell him I said anything?”

Lyla huffed a laugh. “Trust me, with that one, I totally understand.”

“Thanks Lyla,” Felicity said, and then hung up the phone. She felt a little better about the situation,
whatever it turned out to be. At least she felt like she was doing something to help Tommy, small as
it may be.

With that, she turned her attention to the next task at hand—reuniting Anatoly with his nieces, and
getting him out of the mob life for good.

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He felt his nerves course through him as he sat in the empty bar. Felicity was bound to show up
around the same time as Anatoly but Oliver could barely focus on either of them. He had his phone
out in front of him, his finger poised over the talk button.

It had been days since his mother had given him Samantha’s number, and as many times as he pulled
his phone out to stare at it, he couldn’t bring himself to actually call her. The second he did
everything would change. And it wasn’t just his life, he had to think about Samantha and the kid.

He hadn’t brought himself to look her up, to see if he could find anything out about his kid. Part of
him wondered if it was selfish to want to know so much about a person who might not care to know
him. But the other part felt equally as much about the idea of keeping himself from his kid. He saw
what happened to Thea when she learned the truth about her father, and he didn’t want his child to
go through that.

But he was scared. He didn’t know how he could move forward without affecting everyone’s life.
Samantha’s, his, Felicity’s… He needed to find a way to tell her. Even if that darker part in his head told him not to. It kept whispering that this was the thing that would lose her. That after everything they’ve been through, this would be the breaking point. He didn’t know if he believed that voice. But it was insistent either way.

“It is a little early for drinking, no?”

Oliver turned towards Anatoly and gave him a half grin. “It’s water. I make it a rule not to drink before 3pm.”

“Good rule,” he said taking a seat next to Oliver. “I on the other hand have given up the drink. I want to live a long life, see my great-nephew grow.”

“Can I ask you something?” Oliver looked down at his glass.

“You can always ask, I may not answer though.”

“Why didn’t you ever have kids?” he couldn’t help the pain that seemed to seep into his chest. He had wondered a thousand times over the last few days about his own child. If he had a daughter or a son. If the kid looked anything like him at all.

“As much as the Bratva was family, I never wanted to bring someone into that life,” he shook his head. “I of course insisted I had time, but I never saw it in my future. And then when Sofia was born, I felt so much of my soul break off for her. I never felt like Mikhail shared the sentiment.”

“You love them like your own?”

“I do,” he nodded. “My nieces are the purest thing to come from that life, and I do hope that they got away before it could infect them too deeply. And perhaps if I was a strong man I could get out of the Bratva without bringing the reminder to their door, but I need them to keep me on this path.”

“I get it.”

The door opened again and Oliver turned his stool around to see Felicity headed towards them.

“Sorry I’m late,” she said as she came into the club. “There was traffic because of the detours.”

“It is no problem Miss Smoak,” Anatoly replied with a smile. “Thank you for all you’ve done.”

“I’m happy to help. Despite out complicated history, I know you’re a good man Anatoly,” she said as she pulled out the folder. “This is all the documents you’ll need for initial travel. A passport, and a valid visa for your stay in Greece. Plus I took that account number you gave me and transferred the funds into a new one under your new alias.”

“This is quite impressive Miss Smoak,” he said with a nod. “I can see why my niece and Ivan trusted you two with helping them.”

“We wanted to keep them safe,” Oliver added as he stood, taking a spot next to Felicity. “Family is precious, don’t lose sight of that.”

“Who would have thought all those years ago you would be the one to teach me so much?” he mused. “We have had quite the journey together Oliver Queen.”

“That’s one way to put it.”

“But I am glad to see it come to a proper end,” he held his hand out, and Oliver took it. “Be well my
“Take care of yourself Anatoly,” he said as he put an arm around Felicity’s waist. “And take care of your family.”

They watched as he left, and Oliver had the faintest feeling that it was probably the last time he’d see his old friend. But if it meant better things for Anatoly, he wouldn’t dwell on it.

“He’s come a long way since that time he threatened me in the back of a restaurant,” Felicity joked, as she turned to wrap her arms around his neck. “I’m glad we could help him.”

“Yeah me too,” he said with a grin, but he couldn’t help the thoughts that still crashed in his mind. All the what ifs and could have beens.

“Are you okay?” she was watching him with a careful look. “You seem distracted.”

“There’s a lot going on.”

“I know,” she pushed herself up to place a kiss on his lips. “And now we have to go to Malcolm’s funeral. I’m not sure how Tommy’s getting through this.”

Truth was he hadn’t been thinking about the funeral, and the pang of regret hung in him. “I’m not sure how Thea’s gonna get through it either. But she says she needs to be there.”

“I can’t imagine what she’s going through,” Felicity let her hands trail down his chest. “She just learned Malcolm was her father and she barely had time to process that before she lost him too.”

He nodded, thinking again of his own child. Their life was not a safe one. If the last few years taught him anything, it was the certainty that he wasn’t invincible. And he hated the idea that his own kid could one day learn about him and then lose him in the same sweep.

“Oliver, seriously are you okay?”

“No,” he said, letting the word slip out along with all the pain. There had been too many lies, too many half truths and deception. And he could only live with it for so long.

“What’s going on?”

“I talked to my mom a few days ago,” he couldn’t fathom how he was gonna tell her this, but he needed to get it out. “And she told me something, something she kept from me. And that’s why I’ve been staying at your place the last few days.”

“Moira Queen is just a vault of secrets huh?” she placed a hand on his cheek. “Whatever it is you can tell me.”

He knew it that moment that the voice that kept whispering doubts into his head was wrong. Felicity wasn’t going anywhere.

“Before the Gambit went down,” he started and then braced himself for the words he hadn’t been able to come to terms with himself yet. “She paid off a girl who was pregnant with my child to tell me she lost the baby.”

“Oliver…”

“I don’t know if she had the baby,” he could feel the tears gather in his eyes. “I don’t know anything.”
“You haven’t tried to contact her?”

“What if she doesn’t want me in their lives?” he looked away shaking his head. “I can’t… I don’t know what to do Felicity.”

“Hey,” she nudged his chin until their eyes met. “It’s okay.”

She pulled him into a tight embrace, and he felt the voice in his head not only fall silent, but shut down completely.

“I’m here,” she whispered. “I’m not going anywhere.”

He pulled back and let out a breath. “I’m sorry, I should have waited until after the funeral to spring this on you.”

“You never have to apologize for telling me the truth.”

He gave her a half smile. “This isn’t the typical stuff couples deal with in their first year.”

“Not really, but we’ve never really been typical have we?”

“I guess not.”

“Are you going to call her?” she asked taking his hand in hers. “I assume your mom gave you some kind of contact information, if not I can look her up if you want.”

“What if me getting involved in their life puts them in danger?”

“What if staying out of it does the same?” she looked away. “I’m not gonna tell you what to do Oliver, but as a kid who grew up without her father in her life, it might have been better if he had been there.”

“You don’t talk about your dad a lot.”

“No I don’t,” she shrugged. “But that’s only because there’s not a lot to tell.”

“I don’t want that for my kid,” he whispered. “But I don’t know how I’m gonna do this.”

“I know I’ve told you this before, but you’re not alone Oliver. And I believe that you can do anything.”

He smiled at her. “Thank you.”

She checked her watch as groaned. “We have to get to the cemetry. I don’t want to leave Tommy alone too long.”

He nodded. “I’ll call her later. But you’re right, we should be there for Tommy first.”

“Do you think he’s gonna be okay?”

“I don’t know,” he replied. “But I hope so.”

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Tommy stood at the graveside, watching with cool detachment as his friends and loved ones came up to him one at a time, offering their condolences. The funeral had been a small affair- not listed or
advertised anywhere, not after the horror his father had caused just a few days earlier. Tommy should feel something, he knew that he should, but the emotion refused to come.

“Thanks for coming Digg,” Tommy said, giving the man’s hand a firm squeeze.

“Not to cut and run but Oliver asked me to be at the club for a delivery.”

Tommy gave his head a quick nod, clearing his throat as he watched Diggle head to the car. Moira approached him next, somber and poised as ever.

“If you need anything,” Moira said, taking his hands in hers.

He nodded in response, unable to meet her eyes. The last several days had been some of the most difficult of his life, but that didn’t change the way Moira had treated him when she’d confronted him about Thea’s paternity. And despite all the admonitions that ‘times like these’ are the ones when people pull close and band together, Tommy knew that wasn’t what he was destined for today.

His cell phone buzzed in his pocket and he pulled from Moira’s grasp to check it. His chauffeur would be there in fifteen minutes. That didn’t give him a lot of time.

“Thank you for coming,” he said finally, before slipping past Moira to find her children. The few people that had been in attendance were scattering quickly, and Tommy couldn’t really blame them. Who wanted to be seen at the funeral of a mass murderer?

Lyla, Oliver, Felicity, Laurel and Thea remained. Tommy felt his chest tighten as he looked between them, his resolve waiving for the briefest of instants. He didn’t want this, but something deep inside told him it was the only way. He hoped it wasn’t his father’s voice, didn’t think that it was, but he couldn’t be sure. It had already become harder to distinguish between his thoughts and the ones that came from Malcolm’s ghost. Anger surged within him, his father’s face filling his vision again.

Let the anger give you strength, Malcolm’s voice echoed in his mind. If Ra’s al Ghul was good for one thing, it was teaching me that.

Tommy took a deep breath, pushing the anger down within him. He needed to keep himself composed, his eyes quickly finding Laurel. She was his anchor. But he needed a way to find that focus even without her beside him. How could he ever attempt to function in his day-to-day life, if he needed her there every second of every day?

“You holding up okay?” Lyla asked, as he met the group. They were his people. His family. They were all that he had left.

He nodded, even if it wasn’t convincing. The detachment he’d felt was slipping, a little more, every moment he looked between the five of them. And he was crumbling under the surface, just like the building with his family name had done downtown a few short days ago.

Lyla placed a hand on his arm. “I have to get back to the office,” she sighed. “With Shrieve gone… well, it’s not important.”

“You should go,” he said, giving her a tight smile. “I’ll catch up. Tell Waller… eh, nevermind.”

“She knows what today is.”

Tommy nodded again, not willing to say anything more. He’d already left word for the director. She’d know soon enough.
Lyla gave him a quick hug, before heading for her car.

“T’ll be right back,” Felicity said, moving to catch up to Lyla.

Tommy frowned, glancing after them, but didn’t ask. Instead, he turned back to Ollie, Laurel and Thea. Laurel moved to him next, positioning herself at his side, always his rock, solid and immovable when he felt like anything but.

“Can I get you anything?” she asked, linking her arm through his.

He hadn’t imagined how hard this would be. Not the funeral, or saying goodbye to his father, but this. But difficult as it was, he knew he needed to do it. It wasn’t just for himself, it was for the safety of everyone he loved. In the blink of an eye, Tommy had gone from being slightly reckless to an unhinged loose cannon.

“Nothing I can think of,” he answered, pulling her closer to his side. Her presence, her touch, was like a salve on his frayed nerves.

“How about some tea? There’s a cafe around the corner.”

“Maybe later,” he said, pressing a kiss to her temple. “But could you give me a minute to talk to Ollie and Thea?”

Laurel nodded. “I’ll be at the car.” She gave his arm a quick squeeze before she withdrew and headed for the car.

The loss of her heat, of her gravity was instantaneous. It was like he was spinning out of control, and it took him a moment to recover, to steady himself.

“Tommy?” Thea said, her voice laced with concern.

“I’m okay,” he answered, swallowing hard and holding his hand up to keep her from coming closer. His mind reminded him of the reporter from the other day, how he’d lost sight of reality, the anger within him taking hold and lashing out before he could stop it.

“You don’t look okay,” Oliver said, stepping forward to brace Tommy’s shoulder. “Is this from what Nyssa gave you?”

Tommy shook his head- a lie, but it was better than revealing the truth. “Haven’t eaten anything today,” he said swiftly. “Just a little lightheaded.”

Oliver narrowed his eyes, but didn’t press further. Tommy righted himself and gingerly moved out of Oliver’s grasp.

“Thea,” Tommy said, meeting his sister’s gaze. “I’m so sorry. When we told you about… Malcolm,” his father’s name stuck in his throat, almost refusing to come out. “I had no idea that it would all come to this.”

“It’s okay,” she said with a shrug, although her voice betrayed the emotion hidden under her teenage nonchalance. “I have better role models in my brothers. I don’t need…” but she broke off suddenly, as if unable to say that she didn’t actually need a father. They all knew that was a lie.

“I’ll tell you anything you may want to know about him.”

Thea nodded, tears glistening in her eyes. She swiped at her eyes refusing to let them stain her
cheeks. And then she launched herself into his arms, wrapping herself tightly around him, holding on for dear life. “I know what losing Ollie did to you, Tommy,” she whispered. “Don’t take Malcolm with you when you leave here.”

Tommy’s stomach clenched and his mouth went dry. Did she somehow know? No, she couldn’t. He hadn’t told a soul, for this exact reason. He couldn’t let anyone sway his decision, and he knew they’d all try.

She released him and looked into his face. “Leave him in this graveyard where he belongs.”

He nodded, smiling, despite the anxiety still building inside him. “When did you get so wise?” he asked.

Thea shrugged, smiling through her watery eyes. “It’s a gift.” She cleared her throat. “I’m going to wait with Laurel. Give you two a bromance moment.”

Both Tommy and Oliver scoffed, watching their sister walk away. When Tommy turned back to face his friend, Oliver’s eyes were hard.

“You’d tell me, right?” he asked. “If something was wrong? I mean besides the obvious. Something with what Nyssa did to… to save you.”

Tommy shook his head dismissively. “I’m fine.”

“It’s just that Felicity is worried about you,” Oliver continued. “And I just wanted to make sure—”

“Ollie, it’s been a long, exhausting few days. I shot my dad. I almost died. I think I have a right to be not okay for a while.”

“Of course.”

Felicity came up to them, wrapping an arm around Tommy’s back and pulling herself into his side. “He’s berating you on my behalf?” she asked.

“Something like that,” Tommy answered with a sigh. He was going to miss this- the three of them, working together, hanging out, living life. He wanted to tell them how much it meant to him that they’d brought him into their vigilante team. That they’d without question trusted him to put the needs of the city above his work for ARGUS. That they were more family to him than his own father had ever been. But Tommy couldn’t voice those thoughts, not without giving himself away.

“I’ve talked to some people about coming to my apartment for food,” Felicity said, releasing Tommy and turning to face him. “Not really a post-funeral reception, but I thought it might be good for you to be around people that love you.”

Tommy nodded. “That sounds good.” He swallowed hard, feeling his resolve diminish every moment he spent talking to the people he held most dear. They all moved to the remaining cars—Thea and Laurel stood beside Tommy’s, with Oliver’s car parked directly behind.

He paused a few paces away, his jaw clenched tight, a physical response to the determination he attempted to hold onto. “You all go ahead,” he said, his eyes falling shut. “I’ve got a car coming for me. I just need a few minutes alone.” He paused. “To say goodbye.”

Laurel’s brow furrowed and she took a step toward him. “I’ll stay with you,” she said.

Tommy shook his head, unable to meet her eyes. “I’ll catch up,” he said quietly. “This is just
something I need to do... alone.” He wondered if any of them could sense the duality in his words. Felicity and Laurel eyed him carefully, but neither said anything more. He stood, waiting for them to all get into the car. He waited, watching them drive off, before he moved.

He took the few steps back to the grave. He hated that the plot dug deep into the earth was situated beside Rebecca. His mother never would have wanted this, any of it. But it made Tommy’s stomach churn that Malcolm was so close to her now. Spitefully, he hoped his mother hated his father in death. If there was anything beyond their life on the earth, he hoped Rebecca could see exactly who Malcolm had become, and despised him for it.

Instead of any parting words to his father, Tommy found himself on his knees in front of his mother’s headstone. Tears welled in his eyes as the hollow ache he always felt at her memory returned.

“I swear to you, I will make this right,” Tommy whispered. “I will save as many lives as he’s taken in your name. I will spend every last dime to rebuild what he broke. I will not let your memory be tarnished because of his selfish vendetta.” He pressed a hand to her name carved in the cool stone.

An eye for an eye, Malcolm’s voice laughed in his head. A vendetta for a vendetta.

Tommy growled, pulling himself to his feet. “I will never be anything like you,” Tommy ground out to the voice in his head. “You left Starling with hate in your heart, seeking revenge and twisted it into something vile and destructive. I’m leaving full of the love of my family, knowing that I need to do whatever I can to keep them safe. Safe from the person you made me.”

A throat cleared behind him and Tommy turned. “I don’t like to be kept waiting, Agent Merlyn.”

“I’m not doing this for your benefit, Director,” he answered, finding Waller standing there, looking expectant as always. “The letter I left on your desk was simply meant to inform you of my intentions.”

Waller sighed, like she was bored. “If I’d known how much of a--”

“My father just died, Director Waller. I’m sure you can show a bit of restraint on your criticism of my usefulness to you.” Tommy fell in step beside her as they walked to the black town car.

“Usefulness that ceases to exist if they discover your ulterior motives.”

Tommy snapped his jaw shut to keep from a stinging reply of his own. “They won’t,” was all he answered. He climbed into the back seat of the car, Amanda Waller sliding in beside him. She gave the driver directions to the Starling private airstrip and Tommy felt his heart clench.

This was really it.

He’d made the decision not long after the events of that fateful night. He’d woken from a nightmare, only to discover that it wasn’t a nightmare after all, but a memory. A hazy, anger-filled moment when he’d first awoken from near certain death, and he’d held a scalpel to Lyla’s throat in the Foundry. Coupled with the memory of what he’d done to the reporter, Tommy knew that he couldn’t stay in Starling. He needed to find a way to cope, to live with himself before he could let anyone he loved near him again.

The last time he’d seen Nyssa, he’d placed a tracker on her. A tracker that she apparently hadn’t discovered, since it was still active, it’s beacon somewhere in the mountains of Tibet, the home of the League of Assassins- Nanda Parbat. Tommy knew that if he was ever going to gain control over the visions he was seeing, the anger coiled within him, threatening to break free every moment of every day, that the only place he could go was there.
The city blurred by him as they drove the streets, until they came to the airfield. Tommy imagined his friends at Felicity’s apartment waiting for him. How long before they began worrying about him? How long before Felicity pinged his phone, and discovered it was slipped into Oliver’s jacket pocket? Tommy’s eyes slid closed, imagining the shock, horror, anger on their faces. Would any of them guess the truth?

“You will be completely on your own there, Agent Merlyn. And I once again want to strongly caution you against this.”

“I’m touched,” Tommy mused, and then sobered quickly. “But I’m a liability until I learn how to control this… whatever this is that the water did to me. It saved my life, but at what cost?”

“I will expect a full report on your return. The field office in Kathmandu, Nepal will be on the lookout for your signal. They have word to contact me immediately.”

Tommy nodded as the car came to a stop. He popped his door open, needing to move. If he didn’t, he might lose his nerve and not go. And he needed to go. He stepped out of the car, and the trunk clicked open, revealing his small suitcase. The ARGUS jet was idling on the runway nearby and Tommy couldn’t help but think back to the last time he’d boarded a private jet on a tarmac. How different that day had been compared to this one. They’d left Oliver behind that day in Russia, not sure when they’d see him again. But Tommy and Felicity had been together, a team. He’d leaned on her for strength when he wasn’t sure he had enough himself to leave Oliver behind.

Now Tommy was alone, each step bringing him further and further from everyone he cared about. Even knowing that he was doing it out of necessity, didn’t make it any easier. Each step still weighed him down a little more, each breath carrying him further from the safety net of home.

_I will take everything you love_, Malcolm said, the haunting ghost matching him step for step toward the plane. _Even now, you leave them behind_.

Tommy gritted his teeth, blinking rapidly, attempting to rid his father from his vision.

_Soon all that will be left in you… is me._

“No,” Tommy whispered. “I never gave up on the people I love the way you gave up on me. I carry their strength with me, even now.”

Grasping the handrail, Tommy pulled himself up the steps of the airplane. He found a seat in the center of the plane, the window peering out to the tarmac where Waller now stood beside the town car. It seemed fitting, that the last two times he’d been on a plane, it was after a life-altering decision that included her. Although Tommy was a very different man than he’d been when he’d first offered himself to her to protect his friends.

The door to the plane closed, and the pilot asked Tommy to buckle and prepare for takeoff. He did, and then turned ready to pull the shade down on the window, to block out the city fading from view.

Motion caught his eye and Tommy leaned forward, seeing three cars racing up the tarmac. Tommy swallowed hard, tears pricking at his eyes, as he held his breath. He could see them clearly, Oliver behind the wheel, Felicity in the passenger seat. Behind them, Lyla’s look of determination as she swerved out, heading for the front of the plane, to stand in its way. The third car- his car- had Laurel behind the wheel with Thea beside her.

A sob escaped him. “We need to get out of here, NOW!” Tommy shouted, his voice thick with emotion. He wouldn’t be able to say no to them if they caught up to him, no matter how hard he
The plane lurched forward, picking up speed and Tommy pulled his shade down, unable to face them, unable to see the looks of hurt, of resignation on their faces. He would beg their forgiveness once he returned, once he no longer had to protect them from himself. And then the plane angled upward, pulling off the ground and into the air.

“I’m sorry,” he whispered.

The flight would take a day. 24 hours for him to debate his decision, not that he could or would go back. Nanda Parbat held the answers to the questions he needed to ask. Questions about his father, and questions about himself. Tommy couldn’t even consider going back until he sat face to face with Ra’s al Ghul and learned the truth.
Epilogue

Greetings Lovelies,

Here we are, the epilogue. It's be a journey with this story and we have gone above and beyond where I thought we'd be. I cannot thank you enough for all your love and support. It means the world to both of us. I don't want to keep you from the end for much longer. So without further ado... Here's the final installment of In the Wake of Yesterday.

love,
Kayla

With the weight of the blade in his hand, Tommy felt a calm fall into place. The arena was cast in the shadowed glow of the setting sun, and he knew what would come next, what had to come. He swung wide as his opponent jumped back. He had learned quick in his months away that waiting to attack only left him open.

*Strike fast.* His father’s voice hissed. And without hesitation he listened. He slashed through the middle, and the man before him barely found the strength to meet his sword before it touched skin.

He’d learned a lot since he left Starling. So much more than he hoped he would. And while the bile would rise later at the thought of listening to the voice, of giving in to its demand, he kept taking the advice. Pushing his opponent further back until the man fell to the ground.

Tommy circled, watching his face in the reflection of the blade, and an old part of him pleaded that he let the man go. But Tommy knew what crimes were listed on his soul, he knew of the awful things the man had done to the children of a nearby village, and they weren’t things either version of him could let go.

He glanced up once, his eyes landing on Ra’s. He gave Tommy a minute nod, and he knew he couldn’t wait any longer. End this, is what it meant. And Tommy would follow through.

*He fought a good fight.* His father said in his head. *He should feel honor in this.*

But Tommy didn’t want him to feel honor. The man was vile, and he wanted to send him straight to hell. But League rules were in place for a reason.

“You have one chance,” he said as he pressed the tip of the sword to the man’s throat. “You know what crimes you hold. Renounce them and join the League or this is where you take your final breath.”

The man began to ramble, his words coming too short and fast for Tommy to catch. He didn’t know the language either. But he knew it wasn’t Arabic, he’d been studying that enough.
He looked back to Ra’s for a moment and the man’s eyes shown with rage. Whatever his opponent said had not sat well with the Demon’s head.

End this. He could hear Malcolm say again. End him.

And so he did. He drove the blade down through the man’s throat, and watched as the blood spilled from him, pooling out behind his head. He hated the release that came when he did this, how taking a life somehow set his back into place.

As he let go of his weapon, Tommy searched his mind for his father’s voice. But he knew it would be gone too. Malcolm only showed up anymore just before he took a life, like some kind of twisted guide confirming he was on the right path. It was a sick sense of irony that he only started hallucinating his father after he killed the man, and now the only way to get him to go away was to take another life.

Maybe I am my father’s son. He shook his head as he exited the arena, pushing past the members of the League that had gathered for the fight. They all watched him close, waiting for something else to happen, he assumed. He knew they distrusted him, he wasn’t part of the League, and as much as Ra’s kept offering, he still refused to join. This wasn’t the life he wanted. And even if he never found a way to make it home, he didn’t feel right finding solace elsewhere.

“That was a quick battle.”

He heard her voice before he saw her, but even with the adrenaline kicking through him, he knew who it was.

“Nyssa,” he said as he faced her. “You’re back.”

“Not soon enough it would seem,” she watched him carefully as she moved closer. “You said you would not allow my father to use you like a weapon while I was gone.”

“I volunteered. Ra’s didn’t make me do anything.”

“You are still naive,” she shook her head. “My father has a way to make you do things while you feel like you are using free will. It is a gift he possesses.”

“I’m fine,” he replied, but even as he said it the feel of blood over his hands sent a wave of nausea through him.

“Then perhaps you do not wish to know what I found while I was away.”

She turned to walk away, but he couldn’t let her go. “Wait.”

“I thought so,” she smiled. “You are rather predictable.”

“Let’s go somewhere quieter to talk.”

Not that the narrow hall wasn’t quiet, but it also wasn’t secluded. And he didn’t think what Nyssa had to say should be overheard. If anyone knew what he had her searching for, if they knew what he was trying to do, things could end very badly for both of them.

He followed her away from the arena, as the cheers grew louder behind him. Another fight, another’s blood to stain the floor. And he hated the part of him that longed to watch and see who’s light was lost first.
He had come to the League a little over two months ago, and if he was being honest with himself, he
didn’t even recognize the guy who who left Starling City, and everyone he loved behind. They had
to be worried, angry, god Laurel was probably furious with him, but he couldn’t have stayed.
Especially not with what he learned when he got to Nanda Parbat.

Ra’s al Ghul had wanted to kill him instantly, but it was Nyssa who pleaded for his life. She told her
father how Tommy had eliminated Malcolm, how in doing so Tommy had been fatally wounded,
and how she saved his life with the waters from the Lazarus Pit. He noticed how she left Sara’s name
out of the story as best she could, claiming that she released Taer al Asfar from the League, and let
her return home. And Tommy got the feeling that if Ra’s knew Nyssa saved him because of Sara,
they both would have ended up dead.

Ra’s allowed him to stay, and the first few days, Tommy wasn’t sure Malcolm’s voice would ever go
away. No one was offering him any information he hadn’t already figured out for himself, and his
father seemed to grow louder and more vicious the closer to the Pit he was.

Then one night, about a week after he arrived, he woke to someone in his room trying to kill him. He
reacted on instinct, taking him down as fast as he could, Malcolm cheering in his head. And as he
stabbed the knife into the intruder’s neck, feeling his body go limp in his arms, he felt normal in a way
that had only come a handful of times since the night on the roof.

He learned later that Ra’s had sent the man in, a murderer they had captured. Ra’s wanted to see how
he would react. And that’s when he told Tommy what the Pit had done to him. How the blood lust in
him would only be sated with each life he took. He didn’t want to believe it, but as he tried to think
of another reason for feeling more like himself, he realized he hadn’t heard or seen his father since he
killed the intruder. The only person in his head was himself.

Nyssa had vowed after his first kill, that she would help him find a different way to combat the blood
lust, and she’d been in and out of the compound for weeks.

But now she was back. And she looked almost hopeful?

Once they made it took Tommy’s room, they stopped and he pulled the door closed behind him for
good measure.

“Tell me you found something useful?”

“I found,” she paused looking around the space. He didn’t blame her, he had scanned the room too
before they entered. Always on alert. She shook her head and continued. “I found the whispers.”

“Whispers? Nyssa I thought you had something,” he groaned. “I can’t stay here any longer. This is a
temporary solution, but the longer I’m here the less likely I’ll ever get to go--”

He bit back the word. He couldn’t say home, he didn’t want to taint the thought of them by speaking
it out loud.

“The whispers of the Crescent Order,” she continued as she gave him a glare. “The very same order
whose sole purpose was to find a way to battle the League many years ago.”

“Is this some kind of assassin bedtime story?”

“My father insisted the Crescent Order was decimated early in his rise to power,” she said and he
could sense she was growing more annoyed with him. “But I found them.”

“Okay so you found the enemies of your entire way of life, how does that help me?”
“The Lotus, it is an elixir that was believed to reverse the effects of the Pit, while still leaving the body healed by it’s waters. And the only ones who were ever in possession of such an elixir…”

“Were the Crescent Order?”

“Precisely.”

“So you got it.”

“Not exactly.”

He sighed. “What do you mean ‘not exactly’?”

“I mean I have a location for them,” she replied. “But I cannot go on my own. They will see me as a League member, and I will never get out of there with it, or without destroying what they’ve built.”

“What they’ve built is a way to take down your father.”

“Perhaps that time has come,” she muttered. “All I know for certain is that if you went, if you showed them what the waters did to you, they may just give us the elixir. We must go together, if you truly wish to be rid of this blood lust.”

A way to rid himself of the blood lust? A way to keep his father’s voice from his head for good? It sounded almost too good to be true.

“What’s the catch? Because I know there’s always a catch.”

She nodded. “It is not a close journey. We must do some traveling.”

“To where?”

“Japan eventually,” she said, and then after a pause. “But first we need something else, and there is only one place we can obtain it.”

“What do we need?”

“The vial I used to give you the water,” she said, with a sigh. “I gave it to Sara before I departed.”

Tommy heard her, but the words were having trouble sinking in, or maybe he just didn’t want to believe them. “So you’re saying that we have to go back to Starling?”

“Yes,” she replied. “We do.”

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Oliver fidgeted nervously with his helmet as he sat, straddling his motorcycle, half a block away from the address that was still burning a hole in his pocket. He’d had the address for a couple of weeks, even if he still wasn’t quite sure he could believe who lived there.

It had been two months since his mother had told him about Samantha, and he’d subsequently told Felicity. But after Tommy had left without a trace, Oliver had waited a while before calling Samantha and it was only recently that she’d consented to let Oliver meet his son. William. He had a son. A seven year old with a proclivity toward math and superheroes, at least, according to Samantha.

For some reason, what he was about to do made him nervous. Nervous in a way that jumping off
roofs and staring down the barrel of guns didn’t. Oliver huffed, trying not to think about what kind of person that made him.

He checked his watch and swore under his breath. He’d made himself late, and if there was ever a reason to be punctual, this was it.

With one last deep breath, Oliver lowered the kickstand on his bike and pulled off his helmet. He briskly walked the rest of the distance to the address, and then stopped short before taking the small path up to the house. There was a boy on the porch, action figures in hand. He was playing with them quietly, making one fly through the air while another stood at attention down below.

“You better run!” the boy said animatedly as the hero in the sky swooped down.

Oliver felt his mouth run dry as it hung agape looking at the boy. He cleared his throat and the boy stopped, turning his head to stare at him.

“Hello,” Oliver said, swallowing hard as he searched the small boy’s face. His features were so much like Samantha from his dark hair and eyes to the curve of his pout.

William didn’t respond. Instead, he turned toward the house and yelled, “Mom!”

Samantha appeared at the door almost instantly, as if she’d been waiting in the wings for his beckon call. “What is it honey?” And then her eyes landed on Oliver. She pushed open the screen door and stepped out onto the porch. William stood, nestling himself into his mother’s side. “I almost didn’t think you’d show,” she said. Her tone was soft, almost amused, but her eyes were steeled.

Oliver cleared his throat again. He wasn’t sure how he should feel just then, but his mind flashed back to Russia, to Akio and the time they’d spent in the small apartment on the run from ARGUS and Amanda Waller. And then, Oliver breathed a small sigh of relief. It was different, of course it was, because William was his own flesh and blood, but Akio had been good practice, at least when it came to what exactly to say to a kid.

“Honey, this is Mommy’s friend I told you about, remember?” she said, stroking William’s hair.

He nodded against her stomach.

“Hi William,” Oliver said, his voice thicker with emotion than he’d expected. “What superheroes do you have there?”

William looked down at the action figure in his hand and then up at Oliver. “It’s Thunder Hawk,” he said with a grin.

“Oh,” Oliver answered, drawing out the word like he’d just discovered something new. “He’s very cool.”

William nodded, and then held the toy out to him. Oliver’s heart leapt in his chest and Samantha’s mouth hung open for a moment.

“He doesn’t let anyone touch Thunder Hawk,” she said.

Oliver closed the distance between them, gingerly taking the toy in his hand and giving it a once over. “Is there anyone else you like?” he asked.

William rattled off half a dozen names and their corresponding abilities. “Oh,” he said after taking a breath. “Did you know that Starling City has their own superhero?”
“No I didn’t,” Oliver said.

“Yeah,” William grinned. “The Arrow. He wears this cool green hood and he shoots bad guys with a bow. And I heard that he stopped the whole city from exploding!” The boy’s voice grew louder and his hands started moving as he spoke.

“Wow buddy, that’s pretty cool.” Oliver’s heart swelled as he saw the excitement in the boy’s eyes. His son’s eyes. Over himself and his alter ego. “Did you know that I’m actually from Starling City?”

“That’s so cool! Have you ever seen the Arrow? Does he really save lots of people?”

Samantha laughed, ruffling his hair. “Will, that’s a lot of questions.”

“No it’s not,” he said back quickly. “It was only two.”

“Alright, well why don’t we ask Mommy’s friend Oliver to come inside. Remember what we made for him this morning?”

“Oh yeah!” he took off like a shot, pulling open the screen door and disappearing inside.

The door clattered shut and Oliver met Samantha’s eyes as she stood expectantly on the porch. “I didn’t tell him yet,” she said as soon as Will was out of earshot. “I know we’ve talked on and off for the last few weeks, but honestly, I just wanted to make sure you’d show before…”

“It’s fine,” Oliver answered. “Meeting is enough pressure in itself for now.”

She nodded, giving him a small smile before pulling the door back open. Dishes clattered down the hall and Samantha moved inside, leaving Oliver to follow her. “You better not be climbing on my kitchen counters, young man!” she scolded.

Down the hall was the kitchen and when Oliver made it to the doorway, he couldn’t help but smile. Will had climbed up onto the counter and was pulling cups out of the cabinet. Beside him sat a plate of cookies and a gallon of milk.

“What have I told you about climbing?” she asked, wrapping her arms around William’s middle and pulling him down, setting him on the floor.

“I know!” he said back. “But we forgot to do it before he got here, and I wanted to make sure he got some milk to go with the cookies.”

“Cookies?” Oliver said, leaning against the door jamb at the mouth of the kitchen. “What kind?”


“Then count me in,” Oliver said, moving to the kitchen table.

Will came and sat down beside him, Thunder Hawk in tow. Oliver’s heart clenched in his chest. His son called to mind countless days playing with action figures with Tommy. Tommy who didn’t know anything about William yet. Tommy who was still missing. Tommy who he hadn’t heard from in two months.

Samantha carried the cookies, milk and cups to the table. And then her phone rang and she looked torn between staying and answering it.

“We will be okay here for a few minutes,” Oliver said cautiously. “If you want to get that, I mean.”
She bit the inside of her lip, but nodded and turned back to find her phone.

Once she was gone, William looked at Oliver as he chewed on a mouthful of cookie. “So you and my mommy are friends?”

“Mmhmm,” Oliver answered, taking a bite himself.

“But how come I’ve never met you before?”

“Well, your mommy and I knew each other before you were born. I’ve been away for a while and I just found her phone number again.”

Will studied him carefully, in the way that only a small child can, like they’re trying to figure out the inner workings of something. They sat in silence for a few moments as they ate, and Oliver found that past the obvious similarities to Samantha, he could make out some to himself as well. They were smaller, like the way Will furrowed his brow when he dunked his cookie into his cup of milk, the intensity in the boy’s gaze. It wasn’t like looking in a mirror, but Oliver knew, without a doubt, that William was his son.

Samantha returned a few moments later, giving him an apologetic smile.

“William, I think you’re right,” Oliver said with an easy smile. “Your mom definitely does make the best cookies.”

Will beamed with pride as he looked at his mother. “I know.”

Oliver cleared his throat, not wanting to leave, but also not wanting to overstay his welcome. “Unfortunately I have a meeting to get to. But I’ll be in Central City for a few more days. Do you think I could come back and hang out with you again before I go?”

“Can he mom?” Will asked, giving her full-on puppy dog eyes.

Samantha nodded. “Dinner tomorrow?”

Oliver smiled. “I’d like that. And maybe you can show me the rest of your superheroes? What do you say buddy?”

Will grinned wide enough to show off his chocolatey covered teeth.

“Oh, I almost forgot,” Oliver said, reaching into his pocket. “Remember how I said I was from Starling City? Well, this is for you.” He held out his hand, and in it was a rubber casting of one of his arrowheads. “The Arrow asked me personally to give this to you.”

“Whoa!” Will said, taking it in his hand and inspecting it. “Cool! Mom look!”

“I see,” Samantha said, raising a brow and turning her gaze on Oliver. “What are you doing?” she mouthed to him.

Oliver shrugged. “That’s what his real ones look like,” he said to Will. “But this one’s safe for you to have.”

“How can I shoot it?”

“Whoa, hold up there buddy. The real ones go on the end of an arrow shaft. And you can’t shoot them without a bow.”
“Can I get a bow, Mom?”

“No,” she said sternly, but then softened. “It’s just like with Thunder Hawk and all your other superheroes, bud. They all have special powers that lets them use their tools. But without their powers, the tools don’t work right. The Arrow’s powers let him use the bow and arrows. But this one is just for fun.”

“Oh,” he said. “Okay. Thanks Oliver.”

“You’re welcome William.” He cleared his throat. “I should probably…”

“Yes,” Samantha laughed. “You probably should, unless you plan on answering a hundred more questions on how you came to get that thing from the Starling vigilante.”

“If tomorrow isn’t good for you--”

“It’s good,” she said with a smile as they made their way back down the hallway. “But don’t say you’re going to show up if you’re not.”

“I’ll be here,” Oliver said.

Samantha nodded. “You still like eggplant parm?”

He huffed a laugh. “How do you remember that? I mean why would you?”

She cleared her throat. “Because William can’t get enough of it, and I’ve never had a taste for it.” She let out a breath and met his eyes. “Please Oliver don’t break his heart. You have no idea how hard it was for me to agree to this.”

Oliver’s phone buzzed in his pocket. “I’m not the same guy I was back then, Sam. I need you to trust me on that, at least until you can see it for yourself.”

“I’m working on it,” she said, leaning against the doorframe as Oliver stood on the porch. “I can see there’s something different about you. I just hope it means that I can finally feel good about telling my son who his father is.”

“I hope so too,” he said. “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Samantha nodded and closed the door, and Oliver walked back to his bike. He pulled his phone from his pocket to see a text from Felicity.

CALL ASAP was all the text said.

Oliver couldn’t help it, his mind flew to his best friend. He wondered if perhaps Felicity had finally gotten a lead on finding Tommy.

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Felicity let her fingers fly across the keys, happy to be in her element. There were very few things in the recent months that made it so she could zone out from the world. With Tommy still gone, and the city in shambles over the Undertaking, she needed the time in her day to get away from it all.

She still woke at night, hearing the sound of steel and brick crumbling in on itself. And if it wasn’t for Oliver, she probably wouldn’t ever get back to sleep. He had this way of knowing exactly where her mind had gone before she could even form words. And he’d hold her until she calmed down again.
But sadly for her Oliver was out of town. Not that she wasn’t happy for him. He’d struggled for weeks over whether or not to call Samantha, and she knew for a fact he still wasn’t speaking to Moira. She wanted to be there for him in all the ways he was there for her. But she knew she had to let him go to Central City alone. Even if it meant late nights of work until she was too tired to do anything else but pass out.

“But then the code shifted into a diamond pattern.”

“What?” she shook her head, focusing back on Alena.

Her friend laughed. “See I knew you weren’t listening.”

“Sorry, I just kind of zoned out.” Even she had kept coding while said zoning happened. And damn had she made some leaps.

“Well we will never finish this hack on the NSA, without the brilliance that is Felicity Smoak,” Alena said with a grin. “What’s got you all a million miles?”

“Boyfriend’s away,” she answered quickly, even if she hated how that sounded. It’s not that she needed Oliver next to her every second to feel complete. But with him gone the dark thoughts sort of crept up into her brain and hovered. “I just guess I’m not sleeping well.”

“I suggest chamomile tea, does wonders for me when I’ve binged one too many horror films and need to sleep.”

“I will keep that in mind,” Felicity mused, turning to resume he code. Alena was right. The hack Helix was working on wouldn’t be ready in time if they didn’t put in the same amount of effort. And without it, they wouldn’t get to the bottom of the weird stuff that kept popping up in Starling City in the wake of Malcolm’s destruction.

She settled back in to work but the screens on the wall grabbed her attention and she was up before she even knew it.

“Someone hit the volume on that,” she said, and within seconds the new report was filling the room.

“If you’re just now joining us viewers, we’re about to go live to Alderman Sebastian Blood in the heart of the Glades. Alderman Blood has chosen the sight of the late Rebecca Merlyn’s free clinic for his special announcement.”

A small stage had been placed just our front of the clinic, and Felicity felt a stone drop in her stomach as she caught sight of the Merlyn name. It was barely visible under layers of graffiti and destruction. It was horrible, the things people were saying. That Tommy ran after what happened because he was involved. That the best thing for Starling City would be no Merlyn’s left to destroy it.

“Thank you ladies and gentleman,” Blood said from his podium, his smile as kind as the lies he had been spreading throughout the city. “Two months ago, something happened to our home that we cannot ignore. A man named Malcolm Merlyn tried to destroy the very ground we walk on.”

She hated that Malcolm’s plot had become so public, that the entire city knew his plan for the Glades, and how much it backfired.

“But we in the Glades were spared, and I believe we were spared for a reason,” Blood took a step back, as he pulled a cloth from the board behind him.

As it dropped Felicity saw the sign revealed in its place. The Glades Free Clinic. No mention of
Rebecca or the Merlyn name. Nothing to tie Tommy’s mother to her own legacy.

“The wealthy of this city take and they take. You see it, the Arrow sees it. And I see it too. Merlyn tried to end us. But we are still here,” he said with vigor. “They’re the ones who suffered in this destruction. And I think we can all agree that what this city needs, is a positive change. No more wealthy elite running things from their ivory towers. What Starling City needs is a hero that will defend them in the light. I stand up for the Glades, because I know what we can do together. And pretty soon, the whole city will know as well.

“That is why today, I’m announcing my campaign for mayor of Starling City. The Arrow cannot do it all, and I want to be the hero you deserve. Thank you for coming.”

The crowd clamored with questions, but Felicity had heard enough. All Blood had done for the last two months was spit in the face of the people who had been affected by Merlyn’s device. He acted like god saved the Glades just to turn around and punish the wealthy.

“I really wish we had found a connection between him and that hinky Church of Blood,” Alena said, as she rolled her chair back to her work space. “But apparently it’s not a crime to share a name with a cult.”

“Yeah,” Felicity sighed.

They had looked for a month for something that could link Blood to the Church. But Alena was right, just because the names and timing matched, didn’t mean anything. Except every time she saw Blood she still had this sinking feeling he was hiding something else. And that brought he back to the hack. If they finished it, if they got their hands on the cache from the NSA, she could do a thorough search on him. And maybe she could atone for the blood on her own hands as well.

“I think I’m gonna call it a day,” she said turning back to her work station and packing her things.

“Before Cayden comes back?”

Alena had been urging her for weeks to get in some one-on-one hacking time with their pseudo boss, Cayden James. But honestly Felicity wasn’t up for trusting another authority figure just yet. She liked Helix, she loved the work they did, but after Malcolm, she wasn’t ready to let go of the apprehension in her gut that told her to be careful.

“I promised my friend Thea I would do some work for her.”

It wasn’t a lie, she did need to get some work done at Verdant, or well correction under Verdant, but Alena didn’t need to know all the details of her life.

“See you tomorrow?”

“I’ll bring the coffee.”

“Why thank you.”

Alena gave her a small wave and Felicity was off before anything else could keep her glued to her computer screen. As much as she loved the distraction of a day job, there was still a city to protect. Oliver may be away, but Sara and Digg promised to watch over things while he was gone. Not that they knew why he was gone of course. Oliver had only told her, and Thea, but that had more to do with their new sibling ‘no lies’ policy. He said he wanted to wait until things were further along before he told their friends. And she understood. But it also left them a vigilante short.
The city seemed to be taking to Sara. She was the avenging angel of the Glades, taking down muggers and creeps who attacked girls. And Felicity was all for the girl power. She didn’t know how long the younger Lance planned to stay, but she hoped it was for good.

As she pulled up to Verdant, the first thing she noticed was the strange car parked out front. It wasn’t surprising, over the course of the last few weeks many reporters had tried to get statements for Oliver and Thea about what happened to Merlyn Global. Couldn’t get Tommy, so why not go through his close friends.

“Excuse me, can I help you?” she asked the man standing near the front door.

He turned, and what caught Felicity first was the eyepatch he wore.

“Pardon me miss, are you the proprietor of this establishment?”

The Australian accent threw her for a second, but she shook it off and smiled. “No, that would be my boyfriend.”

“Oh, shame,” he said, and something ghosted in his eyes. “I was hoping to speak with the owner about setting up a benefit for my associate’s candidacy launch.”

“Would your associate be Sebastian Blood?” she couldn’t help but prod. It would have been too much of a coincidence if the answer was yes, then again it felt like that was her lot in life.

“Guilty as charged, miss--”

“Smoak. Felicity actually.”

“Miss Smoak,” he repeated, almost like he was committing it to memory. “Mr. Bood wishes to hold his fundraiser in the Glades as part of his campaign to bring the politics back to the streets they usually neglect. And I agreed to find a location.”

“You must be new to his campaign then, because if you weren’t you’d know Sebastian Blood hates anyone in this town who the public would consider a one percenter, not to mention the co-owner of this club’s last name is Merlyn.”

“Ah, as in Malcolm Merlyn?”

“As in his son.”

Something crossed his face. “Sebastian wouldn’t be very pleased with me if this is the venue we chose is what you’re saying?”

“Probably not.”

“Well I should move my ventures elsewhere then,” he said moving back towards his car. “Thank you though, for all your help. I didn’t mean to intrude on your day.”

“What did you say your name was?” Even though she was sure he hadn’t said.

“Slade Wilson,” he replied with a glint in his eye. “I hope to see you again Miss Smoak.”

Before she could reply he was in his car, and drove away. And something inside vibrated at the wrongness of it. But she barely had time to focus on it before her phone was beeping in her pocket.

She pulled it out, recognizing the tone immediately. It was the alert tone she set up for news on
Tommy. But she tried not to get her hopes up. She had enough false alarms already.

When she clicked into it, she saw what the alert was for. The Paris paper, and a new sense of hope bloomed in her stomach.

She opened her texts and pulled up Oliver’s name. She knew how important today was to him, but this was important too. And he would want to know.

*Call ASAP.*

She hit send and headed inside.

When she entered the foundry she could hear the clatter of sticks against each other. The further down the steps she got, the more Thea and Sara came into view.

“What happened to ‘don’t worry big brother I would never go behind your back for training’?“ she called out setting her stuff down near her work station.

Her words distracted Thea enough that Sara got the upper hand, and the pair were in a stalemate.

“Hey he said no vigilante training. This is a meditative workout,” she replied, moving out of Sara’s stance. “Besides, he can’t expect me to come here every day after school and not do something with my time.”

“And I thought you came here for your job,” she joked, as she rolled her chair back to her computer.

“You know Felicity,” Sara said as she grabbed her water bottle. “We could always get you into a workout regime too. I’m sure Ollie would love to come back to that.”

“Okay ew,” Thea made a gagging sound. “Brother, line, no more crossing.”

“Says the girl who practically locked us in a bedroom while I was half naked.”

“Well if we waited for Ollie to make moves you’d still be in the friendzone.”

“Your brother moves plenty fast for me thank you,” she replied, logging into her system.

“Again, ew. What is wrong with you two? There are boundaries when it comes to one’s siblings.”

“Crap,” Sara groaned. “What time is it?”

“Almost 12:30, why?”

“I promised Laurel I wouldn’t be late to family lunch,” she grabbed for a shirt throwing it on over her sports bra. “Okay I will be back later for a patrol. When is Ollie coming back from this trip? Because I honestly have no clue how he did this for months alone while also going home at night.”

“Well sometimes he didn’t go home,” Thea supplied. “But that kinda made it worse.”

“Yeah not an option with the cop dad and new ADA sister.”

“How is Laurel liking her new job?”

“I think she likes the distraction more than the job itself,” Sara said. “I wish we could drag Tommy back so she could at least punch him in the throat for leaving like that. But I also get why he had to go. And I think Laurel does too, to some extent.”
“Yeah well hopefully he’ll come home soon,” Thea replied. “I mean he can’t run forever.”

“No, but he can try,” she said, placing her hand over Thea’s.

“I’ll see you guys later,” Sara said.

As she walked up the steps Thea turned to her own bag. “I should go get some stuff done for the club. I still need to call a few DJs about playing this weekend.”

“Thea,” she said, and the younger Queen stopped. “You know Tommy will come home when he’s ready. He just needs time.”

“Are you sure that’s it?”

The question didn’t surprise Felicity. In fact she had wondered just when he friend would bridge the subject.

“We don’t know that he left for any reason other than grief.”

“I appreciate that Felicity, but we both know that’s not true,” she shook her head. “Roy’s gonna be here any minute, and I don’t really want to explain coming up from the basement. We’ll talk later.”

“Okay,” she whispered as she watched Thea head upstairs.

She wanted to give Thea some peace about Tommy, Laurel too. And even though she knew the paper had to be him, she couldn’t tell them until she saw it for herself.

She pulled up the link she had saved years ago, to the paper’s home page and clicked over to the classified.

There nestled somewhere in the middle was exactly what she was looking for, and somehow despite the bad that had happened, and all the crazy still surrounding the city, she felt a wave of relief at the words.

*Seeking bandmates for trio.  
Must know Queen and Smoke on the Water  
If interested, meet @6pm on the 20th. 

The last place seen.*

Her phone rang, and she barely glanced at it as she answered.

“Is it real this time?” Oliver asked, and she couldn’t even fault him for the abruptness, she was too happy for that.

“It’s real,” she said, and she could feel the tears begin to slip. “He’s coming home.”
Hello all! Just wanted to drop a quick note to let you all know that Volume 3 (also known as Wake the Storm) is NOW LIVE and available to read. As the last two times, we'll be posting updates weekly on Mondays. Pop over and take a peek!

Wake The Storm

Much love and appreciation,

Kayla and Cassie

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!