strangers in the night (passing in the shadows)
by fbismoak (midwestwind)

Summary

Felicity doesn't know who the Hood is and, despite Curtis' curiosity, she really doesn't want to know. She just wants their paths to stop crossing.

Notes

Season one rewrite? With Felicity as a vigilante? Wow, super original. I don't know, guys, I got back into this show recently and this just kind of happened. It was supposed to be a one-shot, but then I really liked the idea of writing it in an episodic fashion and, well, here we are. I'm just doing my best, alright? I haven't really gone here in a while. Some tagged characters won't show up until the next chapter.

This is gonna play super fast and loose with canon as I need it to (but, as someone pointed out to me, doesn't canon kind of play fast and loose with itself?), but I'm enjoying writing Oliver and Felicity as their season one selves with some creative license. I hope you guys enjoy it!
I'm also trying to decide what my upload schedule will be on this. If I decide on a twice-weekly schedule, you'll see the next chapter on Thursday, otherwise watch for it on Monday (if you want). Yay!

See the end of the work for more notes.
Felicity’s gonna kill that Robin Hood wannabe one of these days, she swears.

Well, okay, not literally kill him because that’s more of his move than hers, but this is the third time this week alone he’s gotten in her way and Deadshot is not the kind of guy you slip up around.

When she was going after one-percenters and he’d already taken care of them for her, not a big deal. Annoying, sure, but it just meant an early night for her. The bastard had even used some, admittedly, sophisticated tech to take down Adam Hunt.

Which is her move, thank you very much!

She doesn’t even know how he did it yet. One minute Hunt was being targeted by the new Starling City vigilante and Felicity figured it was the perfect opportunity to hack into his bank accounts, let the Hood take the fall for it.

Except when she got in it was empty. Everything from his local accounts at Starling National to his overseas accounts.

Whatever. It was annoying to be outplayed, but she was still willing to call it a win. Her contact said all the money he’d stolen had been returned, so clearly the Hood had the same idea she did. Her hubris could take the hit if the bad guy still went down.

Tonight, though? Tonight was different.

She was going for recon. She just needed to get eyes on Deadshot before she formulated a plan. Felicity is a veritable genius, which means she’s smart enough to know she can’t take on an ARGUS-wanted master assassin on her admittedly limited physical abilities alone.

What she could do was tag Deadshot with a tracer and leave whichever federal agency came calling first a nice little present.

She was on the roof of the building across from his hotel. He’d rented it under a name she figured
was probably an alias, one a little less conspicuous than Deadshot anyway. She hadn’t been able to get deep enough into the files to figure out his real name without throwing up some red flags. Felicity is good and probably could have quietly done it in time, but she didn’t have time. Whoever Deadshot’s next target was, they weren’t going to have much time.

Instead she’d used facial recognition until she caught a glimpse of him and had been tailing him ever since. She just needed her opportunity to tag him and then she could leave.

Except then the Hood shows up, breaking down the door and throwing her entire recon operation into a tailspin.

Felicity has to drop down to the fire escape two floors below her roost to avoid the fallout from the ensuing shoot out. In the chaos, Deadshot leaps from the window following a burst of gunfire and manages not to splat on the pavement below. He takes off down the alley and Felicity loses track of him.

Cursing she runs back up the fire escape until she’s level with the now destroyed hotel room. Holding her breath and avoiding looking down, she climbs onto the railing and leaps towards the window, throwing out a small silver sphere at the last second. It connects with the frame and digs into the wood. A strong, slender rope attaches to Felicity’s wrist from the sphere and pulls her upwards to the window, allowing her to climb inside.

She can hear police sirens in the distance, but there’s no way they’re responding to gunfire in this part of town that quickly. It’s good timing on their part, but she figures they have a solid ten minutes before anyone makes it out here.

The Hood is still inside, his back to her as he moves towards the door. At the sound of her boots hitting the hardwood, he spins back around, bow and arrow at the ready. His stance is a little awkward as he holds something against his side with the arm that also holds the bow string taught. In the dark, Felicity can’t make out the object.

She knows he isn’t known for his restraint and that the chances of her getting an arrow in the chest are high. She should be scared, and she’s sure later that thought will hit her, but at the moment her anger restrains that fear.

“You let him get away,” she bites, throwing a hand out towards the window. “I could have had him!”
The voice modulator makes her voice sound ridiculous, but she figures her anger still comes across.

“Excuse me?” He growls, backlit by the light from the hallway, his features are almost completely obscured under the hood and he doesn’t lower his bow. His voice is low and gravelly in a way that isn’t natural, but also isn’t due to any tech.

“I had a plan,” Felicity says, her hands tightening into fists at her sides. “I could have taken Deadshot off the board if you hadn’t come busting down the door.”

“He shoots poisoned bullets,” the Hood points out, condescension dripping even under his attempt to disguise his voice. “How exactly do you think you were going to take him down.”

Felicity levels him with a glare. Her own dark purple hood doesn’t cover her face the same way his does, but that’s why she has the mask and the wig. His bow is still trained on her, but she turns away from him, heading for the turned over bedside table.

She doesn’t right it, that would be too much of a giveaway, but kneels next to it instead. She pulls a small silver square from her pocket and attaches it to the underside of one of the table legs.

“What are you doing?” The Hood bites.

“I need to know if he comes back,” she explains, not bothering to look up at him as she checks the motion sensor is working. A dull light on the side of it flashes green so she’s satisfied.

“He’s not going to come back.” Felicity sends another glare over her shoulder as she stands up. He’s lowered his bow, satisfied she isn’t an immediate threat, but his stance is still tense and she knows he’s prepared to change his mind at any moment.

She knows he’s right. Deadshot would know better than to return to this building - hell, this part of town - now that he’s been made. He’ll be itching to finish his job and get out of Starling as soon as possible. Which means that his target has even less time than she’d originally thought.

Still, she can’t take the chance she’s overestimated him and he does return.
“You shouldn’t be messing around with this,” he continues as Felicity crosses back to the window. The detached rope hangs in a small slip knot shape from where the sphere sticks out of the window frame. “Deadshot is dangerous.”

“Duh,” Felicity offers in response, looping her wrist through the loop in the rope. She turns back to meet his eye. He hasn’t moved from his spot and she figures he’s not interested in taking her down. “Lucky for me, I’m dangerous, too.”

The words make him tense further, his grip on the item in his hand tightening. She frowns at it, trying to make out the shape in the dark. When he takes a step forward, clearly trying to figure out how much of a threat she actually is, Felicity decides it’s time to go. She sits on the windowsill and tumbles backwards out of it.

Halfway to the ground, right when Felicity is sure she’s going to lose the Big Belly Burger in her stomach, the rope tightens at its connection point to the sphere and her momentum slows until she lands gently on the ground, letting the rope slip off her wrist.

She’s gonna get yelled at for leaving the device behind, but she’s tired and annoyed at having lost her guy. The wig on her head itches and she’s dying for a shower, so she figures she’ll save the lecture for tomorrow.

She doesn’t bother to look back up at the window.

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“Felicity Smoak?” She’s got a pen in her mouth and is checking a text on her phone - spoiler alert, Curtis is still mad at her for leaving one of his balls behind - and when she turns her, admittedly, super hot kind-of-boss is staring at her. And the pen in her mouth.

Where’s the Hood and his murder arrows when you need them?

“Hi, I’m Oliver Queen,” he says, like it’s necessary in a building that literally has his family’s name on everything. Seriously, she’s even required to use a specific QC branded lock screen on her work tablet.

“I know who you are,” she says, because duh. She basically works for him. “You’re Mr. Queen.”
Wait, does she work for him? It’s his family’s company sure, but she works for Walter Steele. Well, technically she works for Brandon, her supervisor, but he’s useless. Either way, he’ll probably be her boss eventually so a good first impression seems important.

“No,” he corrects, drawing the word out with a shake of his head. “Mr. Queen was my father.”

“Right, but he’s dead,” she offers. Except that’s not something you say so casually. To the person’s son. Who is or will be your boss. “I mean he drowned,” she corrects. Okay, not better. And he’s still staring at her with something like surprised confusion. “But you didn’t. Which means you could come down to the IT department and listen to me babble.”

So, that first impression thing? Definitely a bust. She blames very little sleep and far too much coffee. At least now Oliver Queen is looking at her with what she would almost classify as amusement. That’s probably good… she hopes.

“Which will end,” she assures him. “In three… two… one.”

This is why her job requires very little personal interaction. She’s the term secondhand embarrassment personified.

“I’m having some trouble with my computer,” he explains with a smile, which at least makes her feel a little better, as he lifts the laptop over the wall of her cubicle. “And they told me that you were the person to come and see.”

Having a piece of tech to focus on makes her feel a little better, even if it’s probably a simple problem. She rolls her chair closer to the computer and looks down at it. It’s a heavy duty thing, built for processing power and usability, not for aesthetic or portability. It’s not something she’d expect a Queen to use.

“I was at my coffee shop surfing the web and I spilled a latte on it.” Oliver says as way of explanation. Felicity is almost caught up on how adorable it is that he still thinks people use the phrase ‘surfing the web’. Except, the size of the laptop isn’t the strangest thing about it.

“Really?” She asks, not bothering to hide the disbelief in her tone. To his credit, Oliver doesn’t cave.
“Yeah.”

“’Cause, well, these look like bullet holes,” she points out, motioning to the laptop case before frowning up at him.

“My coffee shop is in a bad neighborhood,” he lies. And it’s definitely a lie. First of all, she doubts Oliver Queen knows what a bad neighborhood even looks like. She tilts her head and levels him with a look, but all it does is pull a smile from him. “If there is anything you can salvage from it, I would really appreciate it.”

The smile disappears and he staring stoically at her. Felicity figures any other questions she has won’t be welcome. So, she hums in agreement and goes to work.

She pulls out her repair kit and removes the casing from the bottom of the laptop to see the damage inside. None of the not-bullets hit the hard drive, which is lucky. The laptop’s casing was strong enough to keep the projectile from reaching it, unfortunately the same can’t be said for the screen. Sighing, she pops the tiny wires connected to the screen out of their connection port to the power supply.

Setting the computer back into the casing, she doesn’t bother to replace the screws yet. Instead she locates a connection cable from one of her drawers. She had expected Oliver to leave and that she’d give him a call when she was finished. She’s surprised when she looks up to see him still standing in front of her desk patiently, watching her.

“The screen seems to have taken the brunt of the, uh, latte,” she offers, raising an eyebrow at him in question but only earning an amused smile in response. “I can mirror it onto my monitor and make sure the data isn’t corrupted.”


She nods, plugging the cable into the computer and then into her monitor before booting up the laptop. Oliver pulls a chair from the empty cubicle next to hers and settles in beside her. It unsettles her and she shifts awkwardly in her chair, almost causing it to roll out from under her. Oliver either doesn’t notice or decides not to comment.

The laptop boots normally, pulling up the welcome screen on the large monitor in front of her. She taps the spacebar and it brings up the desktop. It’s pretty simplistic, a little outdated for her taste, but
if it’s Oliver Queen’s laptop that makes sense. There are a few start up icons off to the side but otherwise it’s pretty neat.

Felicity opens a program to check the status of his files, it’ll flag anything that seems like it’s been corrupted.

“Well, if it’s booting normally, the data should be fine,” Felicity explains, motioning towards the screen. “Like I said, it looks like the screen got the worst of it.”

Oliver’s eyes are trained on the screen. He points to a folder, tapping her screen. Instinct makes her reach out and bat his hand away. He looks as surprised at the movement as she feels. Feeling her cheeks turn warm, she focuses back on the screen and expands the folder he’d indicated.

“The fourth file down,” he says, keeping his hands to himself this time. “Can you open that?”

The file name is vague. If Felicity didn’t know better, she’d think it was coded. She double clicks the file and it opens into a PDF file.

“Looks like blueprints,” she says, a bit obviously. It looks like every blueprint in every movie ever made.

“Do you know what of?” Oliver asks. She wonders if it’s a test, but nods nonetheless. The building is recognizable, only because she’s been theorizing that it might be facing an attack this week which meant pouring over the blueprints.

“The Exchange Building.”

“Never heard of it.”

Felicity responds without thinking, “it’s where the Unidac Industries auction is scheduled to take place.”

Oliver gives her a confused look and it sends Felicity’s radar off. He isn’t quizzing her, why would he be? He genuinely doesn’t know what that all means. Except, this is supposed to be his laptop, but
the name on the origin of the file isn’t his.

“I thought you said this was your laptop,” she says and Oliver quickly responds in the affirmative, except it’s even less believable now. “Look, I don’t want to get in the middle of some Shakespearean family drama thing.”

Oliver’s confusion only increases as he looks between her and the screen a few times. “What?”

Felicity explains how eerily close his whole family situation comes to Hamlet. Except, Felicity still works for Walter Steele, it’s his signature on her paycheck. Well, not literally, because she does direct deposit and having to pick up a paper check every week would be ridiculous. Regardless, she’s still pretty sure she doesn’t technically work for Oliver Queen, whereas Walter Steele on the other hand could definitely fire her ass for helping his stepson mess with his CEO duties or marriage or whatever.

When Oliver is still confused, she explains, “Mr. Steele is trying to buy Unidac Industries. And, you’ve got a company laptop associated with one of the guys he’s competing against.”

“Floyd Lawton,” he says, like he knows what she’s insinuating. Except-


Oliver’s demeanor has turned considerably stormy and Felicity frowns at him as she waits for a response.

“He is an employee of Mr. Patel, evidently,” he explains, not explaining anything in the slightest. He’s definitely gone into a brooding mood now, though, staring at the blueprints like they’re hiding secrets from him. Felicity decides not to push it.

Once he’s done with what Felicity can only assume is an extremely long-winded inner monologue, he asks her to put everything she can onto a flash drive. She does so, offering to take the hard drive out and put it into a case with a USB port, but he declines. She unplugs the computer from her set up and hands it back to him.

“Thank you for your help, Felicity,” he says, stopping halfway out the door. Felicity nods.
“Anytime, Oliver,” she responds.

He disappears out into the hallway and she realizes that she now has three more texts from Curtis yelling at her for leaving his tech behind. Rolling her eyes, she promises to go back to the hotel and try to retrieve it tonight.

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“What do you mean it wasn’t there?” Curtis practically shouts and Felicity sighs, throwing him a dark look as she tugs her dark wig off of her head. It’s nice as an identity concealment measure, but it gives her flashbacks to a less-than-stellar time in her life.

“I mean, that it wasn’t in the windowsill or on the floor or in the alley outside,” Felicity explains, biting back a yawn. She’s been drinking way too much coffee today and it looks like she’s already due for another cup.

Curtis, on the other hand, is practically buzzing as he moves around the space. They set up camp in the basement level of an abandoned apartment on the edge of the Glades about six months ago. It’s set up with the best tech and computers they could manage between their meager paychecks. Most of it is of their own invention.

They haven’t ironed out all the kinks of their partnership yet, though.

“How could you just leave it there? What if someone took it? Do you think they’ll be able to trace it back to us?” He fires off questions in quick succession, pacing in a circle in front of her computers.

Felicity likes Curtis because they run on similar wavelengths. He works in Research and Development at Queen Consolidated and they’d met about a year ago at a function. He hadn’t initially been a part of Felicity’s modern take on her college-aged hacktivism, but she’d decided he was trustworthy enough and would definitely be useful from a tech standpoint.

Right now, though, she can understand why some people have a hard time talking to her. It reminds her of her conversation with Oliver Queen earlier, just another thing she really doesn’t want to have to worry about.
“I don’t know, Curtis,” she sighs, dropping into her comfy computer chair. She tosses the wig haphazardly onto the desk and pulls the elastic of her mask over her head. “It’s tech, so we can probably track it, but you invented it and I’m, well, me.”

“Right,” he nods, starting to calm down a little bit. “You’re right. They’d have to know how to hack into it to trace it back to us. Plus, there’s a lot of safeguards in my code to stop that. I’m sure it’ll be fine.”

Felicity hums in agreement as her eyelids slip closed. She swears she could fall asleep in her chair and stay there until the morning. Unfortunately, she can’t.

“I have to change,” she says, forcing herself out of the chair and back up onto her feet. She unbuckles the belt around her waist keeping the dark purple leather duster closed. It falls open revealing a black tank top and purple leggings underneath. Felicity tosses the hooded jacket onto the table, her purple gloves following after it.

Curtis clears his throat and points across the room to cabinet he’d picked out specifically for her gear. Felicity rolls her eyes but gathers the items up in her arms and carries them over to the cabinet. It’s nothing fancy, it looks more like a filing cabinet than anything else, but he likes it so she indulges him.

She places the gloves and their accompanying tech into the small drawer at the top before balling the coat up and shoving it into the drawer beneath. Curtis sighs behind her and she ignores him.

“Where are you going?” He asks as she toes off her boots. Her clothes from work are folded neatly on top of the cabinet and she pulls the bright pink blouse on over the tank top, buttoning it up.

“The Unidar auction,” she explains, shimmying into her skirt and tugging the leggings down underneath it, trying not to accidentally give Curtis a show. He raises an eyebrow.

“Why?” It’s not confusion in his tone, it’s warning. Felicity sighs.

“Something is going to happen, I’m sure of it,” she explains, stepping into her black flats. “Deadshot has been targeting parties interested in the auction. If he wants the bidders out of the way, this is his last chance for it.”
“Yeah, that’s why the cops are going to be swarming that place,” Curtis reasons. They’d heard it over the police scanner earlier, Detective Lance was covering the Exchange Building with a whole team of Starling City’s finest. “And, no offense, but what exactly do you think you can do to Deadshot that they can’t?”

“Look, Curtis, the police aren’t going to catch this guy, he’s too good,” she says, crossing the room towards the metal staircase that leads to the apartment’s lobby. “Once he shows up, all hell is going to break loose. All I have to do is find him and tag him.”

“Yeah, and try not to get yourself shot and poisoned,” he calls after her. She ignores him, stomping up the stairs.

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Her dress is an old one from some Queen Consolidated party or another. It’s a burgundy color with a halter top and a cut out on her lower back, but she doesn’t feel too out of place compared to the women around her so she figures it was a good choice.

She grabs a glass of champagne off of a passing waiter and tips it to her lips. The bidding is set to start in a little more than five minutes and her nerves are getting to her. Across the room, Felicity recognizes Walter Steele standing with an embracing Moira and Thea Queen. She’s been keeping an eye on him, mostly to make sure she stays on the opposite side of the room from him. She doubts he’d recognize her, but she doesn’t want him questioning why she’s here tonight.

A woman steps up to the family and says something that prompts them to move further into the room. Felicity averts her gaze and it lands on someone she recognizes, Detective Hilton. He moves with a purpose until he stops in front of one of the bidders, wrapping an arm around the man’s bicep and pulling him away.

She frowns as she watches the scene. She glances up at the balcony above her, spots Detective Lance creeping along the railing. She glances further around and makes eye contact with Oliver Queen at the top of the staircase. Eyes widening in surprise at being caught, she turns away quickly and prays that he doesn’t recognize her.

She tips the rest of her champagne back and is about to make a break for it, hoping to disappear into the crowd, when she hears his voice behind her.
“Felicity?”

She turns and attempts a cheery smile.

“Mister-,” she starts before catching herself and earning a look from him. “Oliver. Hi.”

“Hi,” he responds, his brow crinkling as he frowns at her. She shifts uncomfortably on her feet. “What are you doing here?”

She chuckles and tries to come up with a reason for being here. She’s always sucked at excuses, it was half the reason she let Curtis in on her secret. He never bought her shitty lies anyway.

“I’m a nerd,” is what comes out and she resists the urge to smack herself as Oliver’s features only become more confused. “I have an interest in applied sciences.”

He nods, though she doesn’t think he fully buys it. Although, she doesn’t think he has room to judge when it comes to obvious lies.

“I don’t know if you’ve seen the news, but someone is targeting bidders for Unidac,” he tells her and Felicity nods.

“Yeah, I did see that,” she says, although technically she’d heard it over the police scanner. And technically, she’d had a feeling about it before the police officially announced the connection. “Is Mr. Steele alright?”

“Yes,” he nods. “For the moment, anyway. I’m actually hoping to convince him to take some extra precautions.”

“Well, if this guy - the killer - were gonna do something, he’d want to do it before the actual bidding started,” Felicity points out, placing her empty glass of champagne on the tray of a passing waiter. Oliver tilts his head at her and she rushes to continue, “I just mean logically, now would be the time, don’t you think? The bidding starts in, like, three minutes.”

Oliver frowns but nods, glancing around the room. Felicity does the same, only she actually spots
something - or someone. Curtis, dressed in a suit and tie, making his way towards her. She gives him a wide eyed look and he just grins in response.

“Actually, I see my stepfather now,” Oliver says, pulling her focus back to him. Felicity nods in understanding. “If you’ll excuse me.”

He goes to step past her, making it a step behind her before he stops again.

“And, Felicity,” he says, making her turn to face him. “You look really nice.”

She falters for a moment, staring dumbly at him before managing a smile. “Thank you.”

He returns the smile before turning away to make a beeline for Walter. Felicity turns back to Curtis who has now reached her.

“Was that Oliver Queen?” He asks. “He is so hot.”

“Are you are so married,” she reminds him with a frown. “What are you doing here?”

“I thought you might like some company. And I brought you a change of clothes in case you need it, I stashed it in the alley,” Curtis explains, hooking his thumb over his shoulder towards the door.

“I thought you didn’t agree with me doing this,” Felicity points out.

“I don’t,” he nods. “But I still have your back.”

Felicity tilts her head to the side and gives him a big grin which he returns. It means a lot to know he’s still going to show up for her, even when they don’t agree. She prefers not to have him in harm's way, mostly due to the fact that she knows it’s the way both he and his husband Paul would prefer it. But, she’s glad to know he has her back.

That is, of course, when all hell breaks loose.
It starts with a shout and the sound of breaking glass. Someone yells for everyone to get down, but
the bullets keep coming. At least two more people fall that Felicity sees from her spot crouched on
the floor. Curtis has his hand on her back, shielding her, but she shoves him.

“Go for the doors, but stay low,” she says and he nods, following her direction. Felicity follows after
him, regretting her choice of black pumps for the evening. They make it out the front door and Curtis
leads her to the alley where he hid her gear.

She kicks off her pumps and digs the leggings out of the bag, pulling them up her legs and tucking
the front of her dress into them. Curtis helps her shrug the coat over her shoulders while she forces
the boots over her feet. She forgoes the wig, tying her hair up into a bun so it will be hidden
underneath her hood, but pulls the elastic of her mask over her head.

“Where did the shots come from?” She asks, buckling the belt on her coat. Curtis turns and closes his
eyes, replaying the moments prior in his mind. It helps that they’re both mathematically minded
people. He opens his eyes and points to one of the buildings with an eyeline into the Exchange
Building.

“There,” he says. “Would’ve had to have been somewhere between the fourteenth and seventeenth
floor.”

Felicity sighs. “I’m guessing there’s not an elevator.”

Not waiting for a response she takes off towards the building, her boots heavy against the pavement.
She locates the stairs and looks down at the tech connected to her wrist. She presses a command and
one of Curtis’ spheres jumps to life from inside her coat, floating upwards until it attaches to the
railing of the fourteenth floor. A rope drops from the bottom of it and Felicity loops her wrist through
it, closing her eyes and holding her breath.

It lifts her too quick and by the time she vaults over the railing, she has to stop to make sure she
doesn’t throw up all the champagne she’d been drinking earlier. The sound of gunfire from the floor
above snaps her out of it. She grabs the sphere as it retracts the full length of the rope into itself and
stuffs it in her pocket.

She runs up the last flight of stairs and stops in front of the door. The gunfire has stopped, but she
doesn’t feel confident just bursting inside. After a moment, it’s replaced by the sound of a scuffle and
Felicity pushes the door open quietly, slipping inside.
She spots Deadshot and the Hood’s familiar silhouettes as they fight. Deadshot, losing sight of the Hood for a moment, shoots blindly from the automatic weapon on his wrist. Felicity ducks behind a pillar to avoid the stray bullets. She’s not exactly equipped to help in hand-to-hand, but she doesn’t want to just stand around and watch either.

Glancing from her hiding spot, she notices the Hood’s bow on the ground a few feet from him and that Deadshot appears to have the upper hand. Reaching into her pocket, she pulls the sphere back out, pressing a different command on the small screen on her wrist.

“Please,” she murmurs, “don’t let Curtis have fixed this bug.”

Somewhat blindly she tosses the sphere and it connects with the concrete near the two men, exploding on impact and sending them away from each other. The Hood snatches his bow and ducks behind a pillar. Felicity moves from her own hiding spot, intent on dropping a tracer on a, hopefully, unconscious Deadshot.

He spots her, though, as he regains her footing and she just makes it behind the same pillar as the Hood as he lets off a few bullets in quick succession.

“What are you doing here?” The Hood growls lowly as she presses her shoulder against his bicep in an attempt to share the safety of the pillar.

“Not about to lose him again,” she bites back, clicking on her voice modulator at the last second.

“Drop your guns,” the Hood calls out, loud enough for Deadshot to hear.

She can hear Deadshot as he steps over broken glass and bullet casings. Felicity tenses up, suddenly realizing just how far out of her depth she is.

“I admire your work,” Deadshot calls in response. “Guess you won’t be extending me any professional courtesy.”

“We’re not in the same line of work,” the Hood debates and Felicity turns her head to look at him. He’s staring straight ahead, tilting his head just slightly as he calls to Deadshot. His features are no
more distinguishable now than they were the other night. “Your profession is murder.”

Felicity frowns.

“You’ve taken lives,” Deadshot says and the Hood tenses up, glancing over at her just barely. His grip shifts on his bow, tightening and then loosening.

“For the good of others,” he counters. That feels like one hell of a justification to Felicity, but she figures, at the moment, she can side with the person in the room that isn’t trying to kill her. “You’re only out for yourself.”

Deadshot goes quiet for a moment and Felicity wonders, incredulously, if that little speech really worked. Her answer comes in a spray of bullets towards their pillar. The Hood reaches back, knocking an arrow and ducking around the pillar for a moment as he fires it.

If she’s honest, Felicity could have gone her whole life without knowing what the sound of an arrow sinking into flesh sounded like. Regardless, Deadshot hits the concrete with a grunt. Still, the Hood moves cautiously as he rounds the pillar. Felicity follows him, stopping when she spots Deadshot’s prone form.

She gasps, pressing her hand over her mouth to stifle the sound. The Hood turns back to her, though, and there’s just enough light for her to tell he’s glaring at her.

“I told you not to mess around with this,” he growls. “You should have listened to me.”

“Excuse me,” Felicity responds, crossing her arms over her chest and glaring back. “But I don’t even know who you are, why would I listen to you?”

“Because,” he says, taking a threatening step towards her, “I have experience and an actual weapon and I know what I am doing.”

She refuses to back down, though, and takes a step forward of her own.

“You also have a higher body count than I do,” she says, her angry voice being warbled by the voice
modulator. “No matter how you justify it. So, excuse me, if my inclination isn’t towards trust.”

He opens his mouth to bite back but is cut off by a groan from the other side of the room. He spins, reaching for an arrow on instinct but halts at the sight of the man doubled over in the doorway.

“Oh my God,” Felicity gasps as the Hood runs towards the man. He wraps an arm around him, supporting him, and points at Felicity with his bow.

“You need to get out of here,” he calls. “Now!”

That’s a command she’ll listen to. With one worried glance back at the man in the Hood’s arms, she pulls another sphere from her pocket and heads for the window the Hood must have broken through. Felicity presses a command on her wrist and the rope shoots out of the sphere. Holding her breath once more, she loops it around the tether the Hood had used to get into the building and steps carefully out of the window, descending a bit too quickly to the concrete below.

Curtis meets her at the bottom, bag in hand, and she quickly pulls the coat and gloves off, shoving them into the bag. She tucks her mask inside as well, but leaves the leggings and the boots, untucking the front of her dress.

“What happened?” He asks as she adjusts her outfit.

“The Hood was already there,” she explains.

“And Deadshot?”

Felicity shifts uneasily, suddenly freezing without the comfort of her leather coat. She’d left her black peacoat inside the Exchange Building and isn’t in a big hurry to go back for it. She avoids Curtis’ eye as she answers.

“I think it’s safe to say we won’t be hearing from him again.”

He’s quiet for a moment, before she feels the soft material of his suit jacket come around her shoulders. “Let’s get out of here.”
Felicity nods, pulling the jacket tighter around herself and letting Curtis lead her back to his car. She’d left her car parked somewhere down the street from the building, but she figured she’d come back for it tomorrow.

“Yeah,” she agrees. “Let’s.”

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Felicity hates to admit it, but she’s shook up over the events of the night. She’d only managed to fall asleep because her adrenaline crash overpowered the amount of caffeine in her system. At work the next morning, she switches to tea completely for the day and promises herself and Curtis the night off from their second job.

She spends the morning working on a hole in the new firewall they’re developing. The release is set for two weeks and testing had come back with more errors than they would have liked. Felicity was happy for the task, a bit of problem solving that didn’t involve guns or arrows or a life-or-death situation.

Still, she can’t help thinking about the man from the night before. Leaving him with the Hood might not have been the best choice, but she’d been panicked. At the very least, the Hood seemed more interested in helping the man than hurting him.

She’d been keeping an eye on hospital admittance records, though, and no one had shown up with a curare laced gun shot wound that fit the man’s description.

Realizing she’s lost herself to thoughts of vigilantes and assassins once again, Felicity leans back in her chair and closes her eyes, taking a deep breath.

“Focus on what you can control right now,” she reminds herself quietly, glad no one else who shares the office space seems to be around.

“That’s a good attitude.”

The voice comes from the doorway and Felicity sits up so quickly she nearly topples out of her chair
in surprise.

“Oliver,” she greets, trying to ignore the embarrassment of the previous moment. He’s smiling at her in amusement, head tilted just slightly. “Hi.”

“Hi,” he says, returning the greeting with a chuckle. He steps further into the office so he’s standing in front of her desk. “I was in the building and I thought I would check in on you. I didn’t see you after the chaos of last night, I wanted to make sure you were okay.”

“Oh,” she says quietly, surprised at the gesture. She waves her hand dismissively. “Yeah, I’m fine. I pretty much hightailed it out of there once the shooting began, you know? How’s your family?”

“They’re fine,” he nods. “Thank you for asking.”

Felicity nods and an awkward silence descends over them. She shifts her feet underneath her, her kitten heels dragging against the matt beneath her chair. Oliver clears his throat and shifts.

“I’m glad to see you’re okay,” he says and she offers him a smile. “I’ll let you get back to work.”

Felicity nods as he turns and heads out the door.

“Bye, Oliver,” she says softly, watching him go. He looks back and smiles, putting a hand up in a wave, before disappearing around the doorframe.

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“You do know I have a limited supply of these things, right?” Curtis asks, using the smallest screwdriver Felicity has ever seen to futz with one of his spheres. They’d promised themselves the night off, but had ended up deciding to grab dinner together at Big Belly Burger and still talking about vigilante stuff.

“Yes, I know,” she sighs, picking at her fries. “I said I would pay for the whatever you need to make more. Do you really think you should be playing with that thing out in the open?”
Curtis shrugs. “No one knows what it is. It could be a new type of fidget device for all anyone here cares.”

Felicity glances around the small restaurant and is inclined to agree with him. Only a few tables are occupied and they couldn’t show less of an interest in what Curtis is doing.

“I was thinking about it though, and that explosive bug could come in handy,” she says. “I mean, it certainly did last night, but it’d be better if we could find a way to make it a feature I can control rather than a hail mary.”

Curtis stops what he’s doing to give her a look, his hands falling to the table with the screwdriver and the sphere in them.

“You want me to create a feature that lets you blow up my tech on purpose?” He asks incredulously.

“I’m just saying it could be useful,” she explains, putting her hands up, palms out in defense. “Maybe something that doesn’t destroy the tech after use. A controlled explosion or, like, a light grenade.”

Curtis is quiet for a moment before giving her a begrudging, “I’ll think about it.”

Felicity will call it a win. After a moment, he sets his toys down and leans forward conspiratorially. She raises an eyebrow at the action.

“So, tell me about the Hood,” he whispers.

“That’s a truly awful name,” she sighs. It’s how she’s been referring to him in her head, but honestly? Talk about a terrible codename.

“Seriously, Felicity, you worked with him last night,” Curtis enthuses. “You haven’t even given me any details.”
“I wouldn’t really call it ‘working with him,’” she points out. He wasn’t exactly happy to have her around and Felicity has to admit she’s not sure she added much to the fire fight. But Deadshot was off the board, so, mission accomplished or whatever. “Curtis, he’s a killer.”

“No, I know,” he nods. “I’m not saying we should be idolizing the guy. But, come on, how can you not think that teaming up with him, even accidentally, is pretty cool?”

“He’s kind of a jerk,” Felicity shrugs. “Very yell-y. I don’t think we’ll be getting his personal cell number anytime soon.”

“Do you have any idea who he might be?”

“No,” she responds without hesitation. “And we’re not going to try to find out.”

“Felicity Smoak turning down the opportunity to solve a mystery,” Curtis smirks. “I never thought I’d see the day.”

Felicity rolls her eyes. “The Hood isn’t a mystery, Curtis. He’s a death sentence.”

The statement wipes the smirk off his face. She isn’t trying to be harsh, but she’s not looking to form any sort of partnership with the vigilante. A killer is already dangerous, but one who can justify his killing as the greater good? That’s not someone she’s looking to get in bed with.

The Hood might be trying to do some good for the city, but he needs to seriously reevaluate his methods.

“Okay, no more questions about the Hood, then,” Curtis nods and Felicity gives him a grateful look. “Instead, why don’t you tell me about Oliver Queen?”

Felicity throws a french fry at him.
Chapter Summary

The Hood is trying to save Peter Declan, a man he believes to be innocent, from death row. Which means he's in need of a good lawyer to take on the case. Laurel just happens to know an excellent hacker. Meanwhile, Felicity can't seem to avoid Queen Family drama. (Episode 1.04 "An Innocent Man")

Chapter Notes

So, it occurred to me that you guys probably haven't rewatched s1 as recently as I have. This is based heavily on the presumption that we all know what the main plot of episodes are and it leaves out details that Felicity isn't involved in or wouldn't know. That said, it might be beneficial to read a plot summary for the episode a chapter takes place in if you're confused.

Or feel free to ask me! I'm always happy to clear things up, I am obviously not infallible.

Thanks for the comments on last chapter, hopefully you guys enjoy this one!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“You’re sure this guy didn’t kill his wife?”

Felicity has the newspaper spread out in front of her. The Declan murder has been leading the front page all week, with a brief pause for the shooting at the Exchange Building, and everyone seems pretty certain the husband did it. He was tried, convicted, and sentenced.

Well, everyone except-

“I talked to him,” Laurel insists, drenching a french fry in her chocolate shake. “He loved her.”

“Not to play devil’s advocate here,” Felicity says, folding the newspaper back up and setting it off to the side. “But, it’s not like no one has ever killed someone they claimed to love before. What makes you so certain?”

Laurel fidgets in her seat, avoiding Felicity’s eye.

“Laurel,” Felicity says, dragging the other woman’s name out suspiciously. “What aren’t you telling me?”

“Okay, okay,” Laurel gives in, leaning across the table towards Felicity and lowering her voice. “I had a visit from the guy in the hood.”

“What?” Felicity barks earning a look from Laurel and a gesture telling her to keep her voice down. “Sorry, but, what? He’s dangerous and quite possibly insane.”
Laurel rolls her eyes. “No offense, but you’re not really one to lecture on how someone spends their nights.”

Felicity huffs, leaning back in the booth and crossing her arms over her chest. She can’t deny it, though. She’s helped Laurel out on a few off the books things, nothing too crazy. Laurel still firmly believes in the letter of the law, but Felicity can get information easier from someone’s computer than Laurel can from their words sometimes. People keep secrets, computers don’t.

Laurel doesn’t know that Felicity has had her own run-ins with the Hood in the past week, though, and she kind of wants to keep it that way.

“He seems to really believe Declan is innocent,” Laurel continues. “And, after talking to him, I feel like he is, too.”

“Alright,” Felicity gives in. Laurel’s instincts are usually right and she’s not going to start questioning them now. “What do you need me to do?”

“Declan seems sure that Jason Brodeur had something to do with Camille’s murder,” Laurel explains, still speaking quietly enough to keep the conversation between them. “Apparently, she caught on to how he was disposing of his toxic waste and went to a supervisor about it.”

“What happened to the supervisor?” Felicity asks, brow crinkling in concentration. If Brodeur was dumping waste and it got out, investors would pull out, his board would probably riot. It would sink his company.

“He said he never even saw Camille that day,” Laurel says. “Look, maybe Declan is guilty, but if he is then digging into this a little can’t hurt.”

“And if he isn’t, it could save him,” Felicity sighs, prompting an enthusiastic nod from Laurel. “What do you need?”

“Just dig into Brodeur Chemical a little, maybe there’s something that will lead you to the dump site,” Laurel shrugs.

“And the supervisor?” Felicity prompts.

“Matt Istook,” Laurel supplies. “I’ll give his name to the vigilante, assuming he comes looking for me again.”

“That might not be something to hope for,” Felicity points out. “But, I’ll see if I can get into Istook’s computer and phone remotely. If he met with Camille four years ago, it may have been a scheduled meeting and it could still exist in his calendar.”

She checks the time on her phone and sighs down at her half eaten plate. She could get a to-go box, but it’ll just sit in her office all day until she heads home and by then she probably won’t want it anymore anyway.

“I have to get back to work,” she says and Laurel nods. Felicity reaches into her purse and pulls out a few bills, tossing them on the table before sliding out of the booth. “I’ll e-mail you anything I find.”

“Thank you, Felicity,” Laurel says, reaching for her hand to give it a squeeze. “It means a lot.”

“Anytime,” Felicity nods. “Just, please, be careful with the Hood, alright? I don’t think he’s as cute and cuddly as he looks.”
The joke earns a wide grin from Laurel as she nods in agreement and Felicity heads for the door. She makes a mental note to keep an eye on the traffic cameras outside Laurel’s apartment for a while.

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Felicity has rules when it comes to her hacking, one of which being that she doesn't do it on the QC server. So, when she promised Laurel she’d look into Brodeur, she hadn’t meant immediately.

She knows it’s shitty, a man’s life is literally in the balance, but the quicker she gets the firewall ready for the next stage of testing, the sooner she gets her supervisor off her back.

It means working well after the city has gone dark, not that she notices the change in the windowless office. She's certain her section of the code is flawless now, which means she can head to the base and put her full attention on the Declan case.

She’s packing up her things to go when she’s intercepted by Walter Steele’s executive assistant.

“Oh, Ms. Smoak, good. You're still here,” the woman chirps, grinning at Felicity. A heavy weight settles in Felicity’s stomach.

“Mr. Steele would like to speak with you in his office,” the assistant explains. “I’m on my way out for the evening, you can make your own way to the executive level, yes?”

Felicity nods numbly, stuck in place. Her feet won't move. The assistant takes the nod and leaves the office.

Oh, God. She’s totally getting fired.

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In hindsight, she’s kind of glad she didn’t tell Curtis about Laurel’s Declan hunch.

The only reason she hadn’t told him was because she’d barely had a moment to think about anything other than code since she left her and Laurel’s lunch. But now, coupled with this new task from Mr. Steele, she knows how Curtis would react. He’d tell her she’s overextending herself and try to take some of it off of her but, honestly, she’s better suited for it. Curtis is great and brilliant, but he doesn’t always thrive so well under pressure.

And a ticking clock to a man being executed or a personal task from your boss who is investigating his wife? Not exactly without pressure.

He would also yell at her because she definitely forgot to eat dinner. For a moment, she thinks longingly of the fries she’d left on her plate at the diner this afternoon.

The base is empty when she arrives. Felicity figures Curtis stopped in, realized she wasn’t there and headed home for the night. He knew she was swamped at work all day, so she doubts she’ll be seeing him tonight.

She takes a seat in front of the monitors and toes out of her black flats, trying to decide the best way to tackle both tasks. The Declan case has a more immediate clock on it, so that’ll be where she starts, putting Walter Steele on the back burner.

It’s a long shot that Brodeur or any of his employees would be stupid enough to leave something in the system about the dumping, but she promised Laurel she’d try so she boots up her system and attempts a remote log in to the Brodeur Chemical server.
It resists, heavily. With time, Felicity could probably break it, but time isn’t exactly a luxury Peter Declan can afford right now. The easiest and quickest way to get into the stored information she needs would be to be logged into the server directly.

“Fuck,” she sighs, jumping out of her chair to grab her gear from the cabinet. She changes into the leggings and duster and stuffs her tablet in a black messenger back, draping it over her shoulder. She takes the stairs two at a time up to the lobby while securing her hair under the wig and pulling the mask over it.

Her Mini Cooper is relatively conspicuous, but it’s not like she can take the bus to Brodeur Chemical. With care, she takes the back streets and avoids any traffic cameras or heavy traffic areas. It’s late enough that there’s barely anyone out and she makes it to the building in no time. She parks her car down the street and runs to the building, ducking into the shadows.

She presses herself flat against the building as a man exits, heading towards one of the few cars left in the parking lot. He places his briefcase in the backseat of a silver convertible and opens the door. He stills suddenly, reaching up to his neck and pulling something from it. Another second has him flat on the pavement.

“Oh my God,” Felicity gasps, leaving her hiding spot to run towards the man. She comes up short when a familiar silhouette makes itself known. The Hood towers over the man on the pavement and Felicity feels her blood boil. “What the hell are you doing?”

The Hood tenses, whirling around to face her, obviously startled by her presence. Good, Felicity thinks, let him be the one on edge for once.

“What are you doing here?” he growls.

“Not tranquilizing people,” she barks, glancing down at the man on the ground. At least, she hopes he’s only been tranquilized. “Who even is he?”

“His name is Matt Istook,” he says before seeming to catch himself. But it’s too late, Felicity recognizes the name. “And it’s none of your business.”

“Camille Declan’s supervisor,” she murmurs, more to herself than to him. When she realizes exactly what’s happening, she turns a glare on him. “What are you gonna do? Beat the truth out of him? I hate to see where this plan goes.”

“No one’s asking you to,” he bites back, glaring at her under the harsh glare of the parking lot’s lights. Felicity returns the glare, surprised at how well he hides his features even in the light, his head turned down and slightly away so it remains mostly in the shadow of his hood.

“There are easier ways,” she says. “Better ways!”

“No one’s asking you to,” he bites back, glaring at her under the harsh glare of the parking lot’s lights. Felicity returns the glare, surprised at how well he hides his features even in the light, his head turned down and slightly away so it remains mostly in the shadow of his hood.

“An innocent man’s life is on the line here,” he reminds her. “My way is quicker, I promise you.”

Felicity gapes at him for a moment, her eyes flicking between him and the man on the pavement. Istook isn’t a good dude, sure. Assuming Laurel and the Hood are right, the guy at worst sold Camille out to their employer, signing her death warrant, or at best agreed to lie on the stand. Or, you know, both.

Still, though, she can’t condone whatever is about to happen.

“Torture doesn’t work,” she points out, dropping down to a crouch next to Istook. She starts checking his pocket, looking for his phone.
The Hood grunts. “That hasn’t been my experience.”

Felicity rolls her eyes and ignores him. She feels a hard lump in Istook’s suit jacket and pulls his phone from an inner pocket. She holds it up triumphantly, feeling the Hood’s eyes on her as she fishes in her pocket until she finds the miniscule piece of tech she needs. She slips it under his phone case and returns it to his pocket.

Standing up, she turns on the Hood.

“Have you ever made a good first impression on anyone?” She asks, crossing her arms over her chest.

Instead of responding, he takes a threatening step towards her. Felicity’s body tenses, the sudden reminder that this is a killer she’s been arguing with sending ice through her veins. She refuses to let him see her fear, though, forcing her face to remain passive.

“I don’t know what your interest is in this,” he says, a low, threatening tone to his voice, “but stay out of my way.”

She scoffs as he bends down and tosses Istook over his shoulders like the fully grown man weighs nothing to him. Felicity glares after him as he disappears into the darkness. She doesn’t know what kind of information he’s going to manage to get from Istook, and she definitely doesn’t want to know how, but she has a bug on Istook’s phone now. If the Hood fails, Felicity will get Laurel what she needs.

She glances around, realizing she’s standing next to the abandoned car of a now kidnapped man in full gear. Taking off, she heads back to the safety that the shadow of the tall office building offers and pulls out her tablet. She forces her way onto the network with less grace than she would usually have, but she’s rattled and wants to find something - anything - that will prove Declan is telling the truth.

It takes a while, there’s a lot of data to sift through and eventually she decides to narrow it down to files that originated from Camille, Istook, or Brodeur himself. Security guards enter and leave the building as shifts change and Felicity tenses every time the doors open, but no one spots her in her dark attire, hidden in the shadows.

Eventually she finds it though, a file originating from Camille’s computer, but landing in Istook’s. The entire file had been purged, but it had left a shadow in the system. Which meant she could see that it exists and that it was a heavy data load, but she couldn’t actually recover it.

“Dammit,” she hisses. She doesn’t know if they’d be stupid enough to keep a hard copy of the file and, even if they did, she wouldn’t know where to begin looking.

“What are you still doing here?” She hears someone whisper angrily, accompanied by the sound of boots landing on the cement a foot or so from her. Felicity jumps, slapping her tablet closed on the attached keyboard and glares at him.

“You need a bell,” she snaps, clambering to her feet and stuffing the tablet into her bag.

“That would kind of defeat the purpose,” he says, a hint of amusement in his gravelly tone. Felicity figures that means it was a good night. She’s not ready to admit his methods are better than hers, though.

She ignores the comment. “I found a file on the server that originated from Camille before being transferred to Istook. It’s been purged, but if I figure whatever it was, it’s the proof you were looking
“I know,” the Hood nods, motioning towards the building with his bow. “Istook told me where it is. I’m going to get the hard copy of it now.”

“He actually kept a hard copy here?” Felicity balks. “I’d honestly given him a little more credit than that.”

“These guys aren’t criminal masterminds,” he says. “They’re just men with secrets.”

“What’s your plan? Walk in the front door and shoot anyone who gets in your way?” She asks. He inclines his head slightly like that had been exactly his plan. “You’re kidding. That’s a horrible plan!”

“It usually works for me,” he reminds her, any amusement in his tone from earlier a forgotten memory.

“Those security guards aren’t criminals,” she points out. “They’re just people, hired muscle, with friends and families. They don’t know the type of secrets they’re protecting.”

The Hood tenses up in front of her, fingers flexing around his bow, and Felicity knows this isn’t something he doesn’t know. It’s just something he usually lets himself ignore. She’s pretty sure that’s worse.

“Let me help you,” she says suddenly, not liking the idea of him running in arrows flying. He huffs.

“I don’t need your help.”

“I can get you inside without triggering any alarms,” she insists, taking a step towards him in her impassioned state. He towers over her and it makes him turn his head further to the side to keep her from seeing under the hood. “You know where the file is, so I can’t go alone, but I can keep you from needing to shoot any innocents.”

She’d told Curtis she had no interest in creating any sort of relationship with the Hood and she really doesn’t. But she knows she can get them past any security tech they encounter without needing to alert the security guards in the lobby.

He weighs her offer for a moment.

“I don’t do partners,” he growls and something about it makes Felicity thinks it’s a sore spot.

“Trust me, I don’t want to be your partner,” she tells him bluntly. “But you can’t tell me you’d be happy putting an arrow in all of those security guards.”

She remembers the way he’d reacted when Deadshot had tried to convince him they were the same. Felicity doesn’t agree with his justifications or his methods, and he’s definitely dangerous, but he truly believes he is or wants to be doing good. Appealing to that part of him is her best chance.

“Fine,” he acquiesces, pointing at her with his free hand. “But you follow my lead.”

“Sure, fine, whatever,” Felicity agrees, waving a dismissive hand at him as she pulls her tablet back out of her bag. She turns, shielding the screen from him as she unlocks it and types in her password. She really needs to buy a secondary tablet that doesn’t have her work ID as the login.

She hacks her way back into the system, targeting the security station in the lobby now. She finds the
feed for the cameras and creates a thirty second loop for their monitor.

“What are you doing?” The Hood asks. He’s closer now, right over her shoulder, clearly trying to get a peek at the tablet. She presses the button at the top, locking the device and turning the screen dark.

“I looped the security feed,” she explains. “There’s a loading entrance in the back we can use as our way in. Where’s the file?”

“Istook’s office,” he answers, turning to lead them around the building. They creep along the shadows the building casts. “Nineteenth floor.”

Felicity groans. “We’re gonna have to take the stairs.”

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The Hood follows Felicity directions surprisingly well as she leads him through the security. She keeps her tablet out in front of her, using blueprints she’d hacked into while they rounded the building to spot the likely security routes and hacks passed the locked doors they run into. He isn’t exactly patient as she works on each keypad, his presence behind her buzzing with the want to charge headfirst past the security instead, but he doesn’t rush her outright.

They make it all the way up to Istook’s office, Felicity struggling to keep up with the Hood’s fast pace up the nineteen flights of stairs, and pull the file from his desk drawer. It’s locked, but the Hood gives it a firm yank and it opens anyway.

Then the alarm starts blaring.

“What’s happening?” The Hood shouts over it.

Felicity looks around wildly, trying to figure out what she’d missed. By the door, she spots it.

“A motion sensor,” she points out in annoyance. “Who rigs their office with a motion sensor?”

She groans, looking down at her tablet and trying to locate the motion sensor on the server to override it. The damage is done, though, and the Hood isn’t about to wait for her. He throws the drawer he’d ripped out of Istook’s desk at the window and it shatters. Felicity flinches, covering her face and squeaks in surprise at the feeling of an arm going around her as he tugs her towards the now broken window.

He shoots an arrow through the destroyed window. It sinks into the building across the way, a few feet above the ground, with a tether he attaches to the frame of the window with another arrow.

“Hold onto me tight,” he says, his eyes on the tether connecting the buildings. Felicity starts to back away, not wanting to trust him with her life and heights. She hears the sound of feet in the hallway, security responding to the alarm.

“Probably a bad time to tell you heights tend to make me vomit,” she says, slipping her tablet into her bag as he drops down enough to let her get her arm around his shoulders. He wraps one arm around her waist and pushes them out the window, their bodies just missing the shattered glass. He catches the tether with his bow and instinct and fear makes Felicity wrap her other arm around him as well.

She’s pretty proud of herself for not screaming on the way down, thank you very much.

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Felicity isn’t sure what happens after she and the Hood go their separate ways. She heads back to the base to change and work on Walter Steele’s request that she look into the investment Moira Queen made.

It isn’t a hard money trail to follow considering the supposed investment doesn’t exist. What takes longer is tracking down the offshore LLC that the money had been used to set up and finding the warehouse it had been used to purchase.

It would have taken her less time if she hadn’t fallen asleep in front of her computers.

She wakes up to her alarm trilling and the realization that she is absolutely going to be late to work. She wears the same skirt from the day before and a blouse she’d left down in the base. She moves everything she’d found on Tempest to her tablet so she can create a file for Mr. Steele once she gets to QC.

It takes her longer than expected, since once she gets to work, she is immediately overloaded with a backlog of server issues. All of which she has to deal with before she can prioritize the CEO’s off-books side project.

She’s halfway through the stack of security concerns when someone knocks at the open door frame to the office. Startled, she realizes everyone else in the space must have gone to lunch already.

“Oliver,” she says in surprise when she looks up at the door.

He smiles at her, but it turns to a frown as he notices the stack of folders on her desk.

“You look busy,” he says, prompting a sigh from Felicity as she stares at the stack.

“Yeah, apparently someone broke into Brodeur Chemical last night with some pretty sophisticated hacking software,” she explains, pouting at the folders as if they’ve personally wronged her. “It’s got everyone in security worried our system isn’t protected well enough.”

“Well, you can never be too careful,” Oliver nods.

“Tell that to my workload,” she pouts before she can think better of it. Remembering who she’s talking to, she straightens up in her seat and puts on a smile. “Of course I’m happy for the work.”

He chuckles and shakes his head at her. “It’s alright, I understand. There’s a reason I’m opening up a night club instead of being prepped to become CEO.”

She raises an eyebrow at the casual statement and he offers her a lazy grin.

“Is there something you needed?” She asks.

“I was hoping you’d let me take you to lunch, as a thank you for helping me with my computer the other day,” he says, apparently forgetting that she knows it wasn’t his computer. Not forgetting, she thinks as she notices the sharpness in his smile, ignoring.

Oliver Queen is dangerous to her. There’s more to him than he shows, he’s a mystery. Felicity can’t resist a mystery.

Her instinct tells her to say no, but she knows she needs to frame it more delicately than that.

“That’s very nice of you,” she hedges. “But, it’s not necessary. I was just doing my job. And, as you pointed out, I have a lot of work I need to finish today.”
She makes a sweeping gesture towards the files on her desk and Oliver nods in understanding, his smile unchanging.

“A rain check then,” he says and Felicity fidgets, hesitating.

It could rain like the Old Testament and she still doesn’t think she should be letting him take her to lunch or any other meal. She doesn’t think it’s romantic interest, but there’s something behind the simple request. She doesn’t know what it is just yet, but she’s desperate to figure it out, a puzzle to be solved calling her like a siren.

It’s exactly what sets the alarm bells off in her head.

“Sure,” she agrees without any intention of following through. “Rain check.”

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“The file the vigilante gave me wasn’t enough,” Laurel sighs, the sound crackling over the phone ear piece. Felicity turns away from her computer monitor and frowns.

“What?” She asks. “How is that possible?”

“It only proved that Camille met with Istook, not that Peter didn’t kill her,” Laurel explains, sounding more frustrated than resigned, which Felicity figures is a good thing. “The judge isn’t convinced.”

“So, what now?”

Laurel lets out a long, morose sigh and Felicity wonders if she’d misread the fire in her voice.

“I’m not going to let Brodeur get away with this scott free,” she says. “But, I don’t know that I can do anything else for Declan at this point.”

Felicity almost hates that she has to ask the next question. “What about the Hood?”

“I’m supposed to meet him tonight, but I don’t know what else he could do either,” Laurel admits. “Time is limited, the only thing that could stop Declan’s execution at this point would be if Brodeur admitted to the whole thing.”

The line goes silent for a moment, Felicity isn’t sure what to say and Laurel is clearly losing hope. She wishes she had something positive to add, some way to fix the situation, but she’d dug as deeply into Brodeur’s system as she could. As far as his data would tell, the guy was a boy scout.

Some people were just very good at pretending.

“I’m gonna go see Declan again tonight,” Laurel says after a moment.

“What are you gonna tell him?” Felicity asks, unsure how she would even manage to look the man in the eye knowing she couldn’t stop what was about to happen.

“I have no idea,” Laurel admits. “How do you tell a dying man you can’t save him?”

“God, Laurel,” Felicity sighs, pressing her fingers to her forehead. “I am so sorry. I wish I could have found something, I wish there had been something to find.”

“I know,” Laurel assures her. “It’s not your fault. I have to meet you-know-who soon, though, so I should go.”
They say their goodbyes and Felicity sets her phone on her desk. She has the file ready for Mr. Steele, but now she has to muster up the energy to explain what she’d found to him. She doesn’t want to walk in looking like she was having the worst day.

She leans back in her chair and closes her eyes, taking a few deep breaths. She reminds herself to focus on the things she can control, which includes presenting this information to her boss. Unfortunately, Peter Declan’s fate is not on that list.

After a few minutes, she forces herself out of the chair. She packs her things up so that after presenting Mr. Steele with her findings, she can come back down here and just grab her things and leave.

It doesn’t take long to explain everything to him and hand over the file. He seems grateful for the information, but unsettled by it. Not that she can blame him. His wife had set up a secret company just to purchase a warehouse in the Glades. Those aren’t exactly upstanding citizen actions.

She could have shown less excitement over her findings, she supposes, but it had been so much easier to talk about what she had found for Mr. Steele than what she couldn’t find for Peter Declan.

On her way home, she sends Curtis a text telling him not to bother waiting for her at the base tonight. She’s not really feeling up to any more missions at the moment. It’s ridiculous, but she can’t help but feel like she failed Declan. Somewhere along the way, she started to truly believe the guy was innocent and that they’d free him and he’d get to see his daughter again.

She knows what it’s like not only growing up without a father, but knowing it’s because he was a criminal. No little girl deserves that. And his daughter will probably never know he was innocent.

Felicity needs to get out of her own head before her thoughts eat her alive.

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Drowning her thoughts in wine at some bar on the outskirts of the Glades, is not Felicity’s finest decision. She’d shut her phone off, in an uncharacteristic move, just to try to give herself one less thing to be preoccupied with. She’d drove out here because she figured the wine would be cheap and strong, but having to ditch her car at the bar and walk wasn't something she had planned for.

She thought the fresh air would be good for her, and she really doesn’t live that far away, but about two minutes into the walk she was jumping at every sound.

So, instead of walking all the way home, she figured she’d just go to the base and crash there for the night.

She's about five blocks away when she hears someone call her name and nearly topples over in fear. “Felicity?” The voice calls again, trying to figure out if it’s her. She decides to turn towards it, figuring a threat would sound more, well, threatening.

Oliver Queen is coming towards her at a brisk walking pace, crossing the street to reach her. She frowns as her eyes try to focus on him, rather than the fence or the warehouse behind him.

She really shouldn't have had that last glass.

“What are you doing here?” He asks, frowning at her. She must be swaying slightly, because he reaches a hand out and places it on her bicep to steady her.
The warmth of his hand through her coat suddenly alerts her to how cold she is.

“I’m walking home,” she says, throwing a hand out in the direction she’d been going. Except, wait, is that the direction of the base? Shit.

“You’ve been drinking,” he points out.

Felicity holds her hand up, her index finger and thumb nearly touching. “A lil bit.”

He chuckles at that and Felicity glances around him.

“Wait, why are you here?” She asks. “And where’s your, you know…”

She puffs up her cheeks and holds her arms away from her torso, trying to mime a muscled individual.

“My bodyguard?” Oliver offers and she nods, snapping her fingers and pointing at him. It earns her a laugh and Felicity grins because he has a really nice laugh. “He can't really keep up with me.”

“I get the feeling few can,” she says before she can stop herself, filter having disappeared two glasses of wine ago.

Oliver studies her for a long moment, head tilted and brow furrowed, before offering her a soft smile.

“Why don't you let me take you home?” He offers.

“Why, Mr. Queen, are you propositioning me?” She teases, poking him in the chest. He sways with the gesture but she can tell it's for her benefit and it makes her smile. Until she realizes exactly what she'd just said.

“Oh, my God!” She cries, her eyes going wide. “I didn't mean to imply- well, more than imply, I guess. Not that I'm saying you actually meant it like- I mean, of course you didn't mean it like, you know, that.”

He's outright grinning at her pain now, which Felicity thinks is incredibly unfair being that he's sober and also sort-of-kind-of-not-really her boss.

“Felicity,” he says gently and, God, does everyone always say her name like that? “Let me drive you home.”

Not trusting her mouth, Felicity just nods in agreement.

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He walks her back to where she'd left her car in the bar parking lot and she fishes her keys out, handing them over to him.

She tries not to giggle at the amount he has to adjust the seat just so that his large frame can fit inside her tiny car. It's a battle she loses as he tugs at the seat belt and it immediately locks up on him.

He shoots her a dark look and she covers her laughter behind her hand.

Oliver is silent as he navigates them through the dark, empty streets of the Glades and Felicity gets the feeling he spends a lot of time in his own head. He looks ridiculous behind the wheel of her car already, but the way he's staring out the windshield - all dark and broody - intensifies how silly he looks.
She doesn't dwell on it, the alcohol making it hard to concentrate. Sleepiness is settling over her mind, slowing it down even more than it's already been. It makes her feel sluggish and anxious. This was what she had been hoping for, wasn't it? To leave her heavy, dark thoughts behind for the night.

Sighing, she lets her head fall against the window and her eyes drift shut. It was a good effort, but the knowledge of Peter Declan’s fate still hangs over her head, heavy and ominous like a sword attached to a thread. She can't help but feel like she failed.

“Are you alright?” Oliver asks, startling her out of her dark thoughts. She opens her eyes to find them out of the Glades now.

She hums in the affirmative, hoping that if she keeps herself from forming the words they won't feel as much like a lie.

“What do you live?” He asks, seeming to accept her response. Felicity realizes she'd never given him her address and offers it up on instinct. Oliver clicks on the blinker and switches lanes.

Silence settles over the car again and Felicity drifts in and out of consciousness, glancing out the window periodically to recognize passing businesses or street signs. She feels the car settle into place as Oliver parks it in her driveway, he shifts the gears into park and Felicity pulls herself back to wakefulness.

“Thanks,” she mumbles, fussing with her seatbelt until it releases her. Oliver makes it out of his side of the car quicker than she does, making it around to her side by the time one of her feet hits the cement. He offers her a hand, steadying her on her feet. She gives him a sheepish but grateful smile.

He pulls his hand back and holds out the other one, her car keys settled in his palm. Felicity places her hand over his, scooping the keys up with her fingers. She turns to head for her porch, picking through her keys one by one until she finds her house key.

She startles at the sound of Oliver following her up the steps.

“Oh,” she says quietly. “You didn't have to walk me up here.”

He tilts his head, studying her, and his bright blue gaze makes her shift uncomfortably. She looks down at the keys in her hand instead of meeting his gaze.

“Felicity,” he says gently. “Really, are you okay?”

She takes a deep breath and shrugs, her focus still on her keys. “Just kind of a shitty day.”

He nods in understanding. “Are you gonna be okay on your own?”

“I always am,” she jokes, stare still focused on her keys as she fidgets them between her fingers.

“Felicity,” he says seriously, prompting her to finally meet his gaze. He doesn't say anything else, just stares at her for a long moment.

So, Felicity stares back. He looks tired, lines and shadows marring his face. They make him look older than he is, but maybe five years alone did that to him. She hasn't really given a whole lot of thought to what Oliver may have gone through during the period of time where everyone thought he was dead. She didn't know him before he left, she barely knows him now, so it's hard for her to contrast the differences in him.

There's something hiding there, though, behind lazy grins and half hearted excuses. Another piece of
that mystery.

“You look sad,” she points out, looking up at him under the soft yellow light of her porch lamp. “Is everything alright?”

He gives her a soft smile, but it isn't his usual easy grin in an attempt to set her at ease, it's a small, sad thing. It makes her chest ache for him.

“Not really,” he admits and she's surprised by his honesty. “But I'm working on it.”

She nods, looking back down at her hands. She isolates her house key again and slides it into the lock. It takes three tries but she gets it. Oliver doesn't comment.

“I think I've got it from here,” she says and Oliver nods, taking a step back.

“Goodnight, Felicity,” he says quietly as he backs down the steps of her porch.

“Goodnight, Oliver.”

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She wakes up only slightly hungover and remembers she'd never turned her phone back on the night before. It takes her a few minutes to locate her purse from the night before which she had apparently tossed haphazardly at her purple loveseat, missed, and had landed halfway under the coffee table.

When her phone turns back on it immediately lights up with news alerts from the night before. Apparently, while she was drowning her failures in cheap red wine, there had been a prison riot at Iron Heights.

She almost drops her phone in her haste to click on the notification. It's followed by one claiming that Peter Declan has been exonerated for his wife’s murder.

Felicity opens up her messages and sends Laurel a text asking if she’s okay.

No, but I will be, Laurel responds after a few minutes. Thanks for your help.

Feeling at least moderately better, even though she’d done almost nothing for either Laurel or Declan, she gets dressed. It’s her day off, blessedly, but she is running low on food in her house and if she doesn’t go shopping today, she won’t have time the rest of the week.

She’s in the grocery store, trying to figure out how to tell if an avocado is ripe enough when her phone starts going off in quick succession. Glancing around at the people around her, she digs the offending device from her purse and immediately switches the sound off.

“Dammit, Curtis,” she hisses when she sees that he’s sent her four text messages in the span of fifteen seconds.

TURN ON THE NEWS IF YOU CAN, the first reads, making Felicity frown as she quickly swipes so she can see the rest of the messages.

I HEARD IT ON THE POLICE SCANNER

THEY’RE SAYING THEY ARRESTED THE VIGILANTE

IT’S OLIVER QUEEN
Felicity drops the avocado.

Chapter End Notes

Comments are my lifeblood.
Oliver Queen has been arrested on suspicion of being a vigilante. Whether or not Felicity believes this or not is another matter. In the meantime, she and Curtis track a possible arms dealer.

I don't necessarily have any notes for this chapter? Other than just to thank you guys for all the positive feedback! It really means the world and I'm sorry I haven't been able to reply to every comment, but I do really appreciate every single one! This chapter takes place during 1.05 "Damaged". Enjoy!

This is insane. Like, genuinely bonkers. And for Felicity, who spent two days dressed in leather following around a master assassin who uses poison bullets, that's really saying something.

Curtis had questioned this decision for her already, but the answer for why she was here still held true. She just had to see for herself.

They’d arrested Oliver hours ago and had even managed to rush a bail hearing for him. She supposes when they finally catch the vigilante that has every cop and one-percenter in the city on edge, they don’t shuffle their feet. Or maybe Moira Queen has even more sway in this city than Felicity had realized.

Once she’d found out the time of the hearing, she hadn’t made it to the courthouse on time. She also wasn’t about to draw attention to herself by sitting in on the hearing. In truth, she didn’t really know why she’d come, except that she’d spoken to Oliver a handful of times and every time she got the sense there was something else behind that daft billionaire act.

Felicity’s just having a hard time believing it’s this.

She paces in front of the benches in the courthouse, earning annoyed looks from the people around her. Occasionally her phone buzzes in her palm, she's got a death grip on the device but has been ignoring texts from Curtis since she'd told him she was going to the courthouse.

The doors to one of the rooms open and Felicity whips around to see the group shuffling out. She recognizes the Queen family and Tommy Merlyn. Oliver is being shuffled out by two guards, but his wrists appear free. He must have one hell of a lawyer to have managed to be granted bail.

As if summoned by her thoughts, the lawyer in question files out of the courtroom following Oliver and his guards.

“Laurel?” Felicity calls louder than she intends to, surprised at the woman’s appearance. It makes the
rest of the procession look over in her direction and she resists the urge to fold in on herself in embarrassment.

Laurel turns and says something to Moira Queen before crossing the room to Felicity. She turns to the side hoping Walter at least won’t recognize her outside of the office.

“What are you doing here?” Laurel asks quietly when she reaches her. Felicity shrugs, feeling suddenly foolish.

“I heard about them arresting Oliver Queen,” she explains. “I just, I don't know, I needed to see it for myself, I guess.”

“Oliver isn't the vigilante, Felicity,” Laurel tells her. “Trust me.”

Felicity nods, glancing over towards the group. Moira and Walter have their heads bent, talking in hushed whispers. Tommy and Thea are talking to Oliver, clearly trying to create some levity, but Oliver isn’t paying attention.

He’s watching her and Laurel. As Felicity glances over them, she makes eye contact with him, his brow furrowing as he stares at her. Flushing she turns back to Laurel.

“And you're defending him?” Felicity asks, an eyebrow raised in surprise. It hasn't exactly been a secret how convoluted the relationship between the Lances and the Queens is.

“It’s just a favor,” Laurel insists. “Because I know he's innocent.”

Felicity chews on her lip, glancing back at the group just as Tommy breaks off and heads towards them. She lets out a sigh.

“Felicity, nice to see you,” he greets, offering her a genial smile. She hums noncommittally in response and he sighs, turning his attention to Laurel. “I’m going to stay with the Queens. Can I call you later?”

Laurel nods, her smile a little strained but Felicity can tell it’s due to the stress, rather than Tommy.

“Okay great,” Tommy smiles. He glances back over at Felicity, nodding in acknowledgment.

“Go home, Felicity,” Laurel says, once Tommy’s gone and the group has continued their progress out of the courthouse. “Try not to worry about this. Enjoy your day off.”

Felicity nods, her lip still caught between her teeth in concern, but Laurel seems to accept it. She pats Felicity’s arm before heading out of the courthouse herself.

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When she gets back to the base, Curtis is waiting for her. He’s standing in front of his work table, fidgeting with his tech. He turns at the sound of her shoes on the metal staircase, setting his tools down on the table.

“Did you go to the courthouse?” He asks. “Did you talk to Queen?”

“Yes,” Felicity says, crossing to her computer chair and pulling her coat off. “And, no. I did talk to Laurel, though, who is apparently defending Oliver.”

Curtis frowns, tilting his head to the side. “Why?”
“Old ties?” Felicity suggests, placing her elbows on the back of the computer chair and swaying from side to side. “I don’t know. She seems certain he’s not the Hood, though.”

“Do you think she’s right?” He asks, settling down onto the stool in front of the table with all his tools and gadgets on it. Felicity lets out a long breath and shrugs.

“Laurel knows him a lot better than I do,” she says, then frowns. “Or, at least, she did five years ago. Oliver Queen definitely has secrets, I just can’t say whether they’re of the running around in leather variety or not.”

“So, that’s it? You’re just going to let it go?” He asks, leaning back to rest his elbows on the table. “With how many times you’ve spoken to the vigilante, how can you tell me you’re not curious?”

“Of course I’m curious,” Felicity admits, throwing her hands out in frustration. “But, right now, I’m willing to trust Laurel about Oliver Queen. Plus, you and I have bigger fish to fry than a billionaire playing hero.”

That gets Curtis back on task. He sits up straight raising his eyebrows at her. Felicity has to stop herself from grinning smugly at being able to pull his focus so easily. He may say she likes to take unnecessary risks, but he loves all of this as much as she does.

“What are you talking about?” He asks. She circles her chair, dropping into it and booting up her system. It doesn’t take long to locate and open the file. She opens it on the center monitor.

“Leo Mueller,” she says, pointing to the screen. “He’s a German business man. A few military grade automatic weapons got stolen, and by a few I mean a hundred. He’s a suspect.”

“Okay.” Curtis drags the word out, raising an eyebrow at her. “And?”

“...and, he’s got ties to Starling City,” Felicity explains, pulling up a file with Mueller’s international flights over the past year. Starling comes up six times. “So, I went ahead and set an alert up so I’d know if he came back into town.”

“I’m guessing you’re telling me this because he did just that,” he surmises and Felicity nods excitedly.

“Flew back in last night,” she says, pulling up the manifest from the small private airline he’d used to enter the city. “My guess is he’s looking to sell his stolen weapons cache.”

Curtis slides off of the stool, crossing over to the computers to get a better look at the information Felicity is showing him. He frowns at the screen before turning the look on her.

“Felicity, I’m not sure if I’ve mentioned this,” he says. “But, we’re not exactly equipped to go up against bad guys with machine guns.”

“Relax,” she says, rolling her eyes. “We’re not gonna take on Mueller ourselves. I have his hotel, though, so I’m gonna track him for a while. In the meantime, I would appreciate it if you could work up a bug I could tag him with.”

“Tag him with?” He echoes incredulously. “How exactly do you plan to do that without him knowing?”

“I’ll just ‘casually’ bump into him,” she shrugs. “I doubt he’d attack me in broad daylight for shoulder checking him.”
“That sounds like a terrible plan,” Curtis deadpans. Felicity lets her head fall back against her chair and glares at him.

“No, a terrible plan is doing nothing while Mueller sells military grade assault weapons to the highest bidder,” she bites. Curtis looks a bit taken aback by her anger so she takes a deep breath, continuing in a calmer tone, “Look, I’m doing this. If you don’t want to build me something, then I’ll do it. But I need to know when and where the buy is happening.”

Silence descends over the basement while Curtis considers her. Felicity stares at the computer screen in front of her and tries not to feel like she’s being judged. She and Curtis are friends, but he makes this all difficult sometimes. They’re both under-trained for a lot of the stuff someone like the Hood can do, but she refuses to believe that means they can’t do any good at all.

God, is she actually starting to think a guy who put arrows in people is better at this than she is?

“What do you need it to do?” He asks finally and Felicity’s shoulders droop in relief.

“A tracker at least,” she says. “But something that we could use to hear his conversations is even better.”

“I will make it do both,” Curtis nods and she shoots him a grateful smile before he crosses back to his work table, getting to work with wires and small parts. Felicity looks back at the screen, staring at the grainy photo of Mueller getting off his plane.

She stands back up from her chair and pulls her coat on.

“I’ll pick us up some lunch,” she calls to Curtis who hums in acknowledgment. She chuckles, knowing she’s lost him to his tech and his mind. Good then, that means he can’t fight her on picking up Chinese.

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Laurel had told her to enjoy her day off. She can’t help but think about that as she waits for her food, scrolling through work emails. Somehow, no one else in the entire tech division knows how to make their portion of the firewall as strong as hers. Felicity is smart, objectively, but sometimes she wonders how her co-workers can be so incapable.

The clock is ticking down on the release of the new system and they have to be certain their impervious to attacks. With vigilantes and criminals targeting one-percenters, QC security seems convinced it’s only a matter of time before they’ll be hit. Felicity doesn’t necessarily think they’re wrong.

Maybe she should do a few tests of her own, really find the weaknesses in the system. If she can’t hack into it, no one can.

The bell above the door to the restaurant dings, signalling someone’s entry, but Felicity is too absorbed in the email she’s reading to look up.

“Felicity Smoak,” that pulls her attention, making her look up at the new customer. She resists the immediate urge to roll her eyes as Tommy Merlyn grins at her, crossing past the cash register to meet her.

“Tommy,” she sighs, locking her phone and crossing her arms in front of her.

“Oh, come on, Smoak,” he groans. “You can’t freeze me out forever.”
“I can try,” she smirks.

Tommy sighs and leans against the counter next to her, turning big pleading eyes on her. Felicity doesn’t resist the eye roll this time, giving him a bored look.

“It was like a year ago,” he points out. “Can’t we move on?”

“It was seven months ago,” she corrects. “And you ruined my new dress. And my evening. And my dates shoes.”

Tommy cringes. “I’m guessing there wasn’t a second date.”

“Good instincts.”

Tommy sighs again and a worker walks out with her food. She takes the box of containers from him and thanks him. Tommy eyes the box.

“Feeding an army?” He teases, before greeting the worker and ordering his own food, an order much larger than Felicity’s.

“You’re one to talk,” she comments.

“Well, I’m taking food to Ollie and Thea, too,” he explains. “Thea’s stressing out over the whole arrest thing.”

“And Oliver?” Felicity prompts, raising an eyebrow. Tommy pulls a face but quickly schools his features into an easy grin.

“He’s not too worried, apparently,” he says. “He’s gone into full-on party planning mode.”

“Party?” Felicity repeats. “Is now really the time?”

“Once Oliver sets his mind to something,” Tommy shrugs. “He seems to think the best way to show he’s innocent is to make a mockery out of it.”

Felicity tilts her head to the side. “Is that disapproval I hear? Tommy Merlyn, not in the mood for a party? I didn’t think the day would ever come.”

Tommy chuckles, shaking his head at her.

“I’m always up for a party,” he admits. “But, this… I don’t know. Ollie just seems off lately.”

Felicity shifts the box in her arms and studies Tommy for a moment. As much as she can’t imagine what Oliver must be going through, coming back after five years doing God knows what, she can’t imagine what his loved ones must be going through either. It’s one thing to have the miracle of your loved one returning from the dead, but the afterward, the moving forward, that’s where things truly get messy.

“He was gone for five years, Tommy,” Felicity reminds him. “None of you are the same people he left behind. You can’t expect him to be the same person, either.”

Tommy seems to consider this for a moment before his features melt into a wide grin which he turns on her.

“You’re warming up to me,” he says, earning a groan from her. She tightens her grip in the box containing her food and steps around him towards the door. “Hey, you should come to the party
tonight. It’s prison themed.”

Felicity gives another louder, more dramatic groan and pushes her way out the door.

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Curtis’ food has definitely gone cold by the time he finishes the bug for her, but it still takes less time than Felicity had expected. She’s been sitting in her chair, eating her lo mein and monitoring Mueller’s hotel through hacked security footage. He’s got guards in the hallway outside of his room, so she’s guessing he hasn’t left the hotel yet.

“Maybe he has jet lag,” she comments quietly to herself, imagining some big bad business man-slash-arms dealer napping the entire afternoon away.

Curtis gives a shout of triumph that almost makes her drop her entire food carton and she turns to glare at him. He’s already grinning in her direction, holding out a tiny square piece of plastic between his thumb and forefinger.

“It’s finished?” She asks, setting her food down on the corner of the table. He nods excitedly, hopping up from his stool and crossing over to her.

“Turn on the frequency scanner,” he says, gesturing to the computer. Felicity complies, pulling the program up on the computer and tuning it to the frequency he gives her. “Here, now, take this outside and press the little button at the top to turn it on. I want to make sure it works.”

She nods, slipping into her shoes and practically running up the stairs in excitement about the new tech. Once outside of the apartment building, she locates the miniscule button on the top and presses it in with her nail.

“Okay,” she breathes, cupping the little device in her hand. “This is a test. I really hope this is working because right now I just look like a crazy person talking to myself.”

She waits a moment and then holds the bug farther away from herself.

“I’m holding it at an arm’s length now,” she explains, really hoping Curtis can hear her in the basement below. “We should probably consider how much it can pick up from a distance. Mueller obviously won’t be talking right into it.”

She waits another moment and then, feeling incredibly foolish, turns around and heads back into the building. Curtis is sitting in her chair and spins around to smile at her when he hears her on the stairs.

“It’s perfect!” He declares. “Good idea testing the amount of audio it can pick up from a slight distance.”

Felicity nods, setting the device delicately on the desk. “What’s it range for transmitting?”

“Oh,” Curtis frowns, turning back to the computer and staring at the program in front of him. “Hard to say without further testing. It’s just a prototype, so-”

“Curtis, we don’t have time for testing,” she reminds him. “We’re just gonna have to hope it’s strong enough to get us the time and place for the buy.”

She leans over him and presses a command on the keyboard, bringing the security cameras back up to the forefront. The guards are still lounging in the hallway, so it doesn’t look like Mueller’s moved. She pulls her coat from the back of the chair, Curtis leaning forward so she can pull it from
underneath him, his eyes on the camera feeds.

“Keep an eye on him,” she says, pulling her coat over her arms. She reaches down and snags the bug, slipping it into her pocket. “Call me if he leaves his room.”

Curtis nods, but she’s already heading for the stairs.

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Felicity parks her car down the street from the hotel. It’s an upscale place, which makes sense from what she read about Mueller’s business dealings. She doubts guns are the only shady thing he’s selling. The lobby is busy with activity as guests check in and workers move around greeting them and moving luggage. Felicity slips off to the side, settling into one of the plush chairs in the corner and pulling her tablet from her bag, trying to look busy.

Mostly, she just halfheartedly checks her email and scrolls through social media, keeping an eye out for Mueller if he comes through the lobby. Her phone buzzes in her pocket and she digs it out.

I c u , Curtis writes with the emoji of the eyes looking off to the side. Rolling her eyes she sends a quick response reminding him to watch Mueller, not her.

She trusts Curtis will tell her if Mueller leaves his room, but it doesn’t stop her from feeling on edge. She jumps, her eyes flying to the elevator bay at the far end of the room, every time the arrival bell dings. It feels like ages waiting there for Mueller to leave his room. There has to be something a German businessman with a penchant for grand larceny could be doing in Starling City other than holing up in his hotel room.

A new email pops up on her tablet, pulling her focus. It’s from a coworker who’s been having trouble with her section of the firewall and Felicity almost ignores it. Except, the email title, just all-caps ‘weirdness,’ makes her click on it.

Hey Felicity,

I know it’s your day off, but I’ve been working on this stupid code for days. It should be working, there’s no reason why it wouldn’t, so I poured through it line-by-line and I found something strange. It was in a portion of the code that shouldn’t have even been affected and I definitely didn’t put it there. It’s code, but not in a language I recognize. I’ve included a .txt file of the raw code. Maybe you can figure out what’s happening?

Emma

She frowns down at the screen, tapping the corner to add a flag to the email. Emma is smart, which automatically makes Felicity like her, and typically really capable. If there’s something going on in the code she can’t figure out, then ‘weirdness’ is probably the right word for it.

The file is attached at the bottom of the email, and she makes a mental note to look into it later. If she starts pouring over the code, trying to isolate the error, she may not come up for air. Mueller has to take priority.

Her phone buzzes again and she looks down at it in her lap.

Heading downstairs .

Felicity lifts her tablet and opens a new email, typing in gibberish as she glances between the screen and the elevator. When it dings, presumably carrying Mueller, she gets up slowly, taking care to put
her tablet away and take slow steps to get her to the middle of the room, directly in the way of the front doors. She glances in the direction of the elevator, lifting her phone and pretending to type out a text to Curtis.

She recognizes Mueller from the grainy security camera footage on her computer and spins on her heel, keeping her head down as though she’s completely focused on her phone. She takes a few steps forward and slams right into Mueller.

“Excuse me,” he says gruffly in heavily accented english.

“Oh, I’m so sorry,” Felicity laughs, channeling Donna Smoak as best she can as she pats his chest, checking him for any injury. She slips the bug under the label of his coat. He bats her hands away, stepping away from her.

“Just pay attention, miss,” he tells her, already heading away from her. One of his guards eyes her warily and she tucks her hair behind her ear, letting out an embarrassed laugh. She calls out another apology, but Mueller and his men are already heading out the door.

She waits a few moments before following out after them, heading back down the street towards her car. Curtis answers the phone after one ring.

“That was not subtle,” he says in lieu of a greeting.

“Whatever, they seemed to buy it,” Felicity says, rolling her eyes and clicking the unlock button on her key fob. Her car beeps from down the road. “Just get the frequency set and pay attention to everything Mueller says. I’m heading back now.”

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Felicity has the sound from the bug playing over through a bluetooth speaker she’d connected to the monitors. It’s good she has an extra set of ears listening, because as soon as she opens the file Emma had sent her, she’s gone. There are some small errors in the code, but they’re little things that wouldn’t completely stop it from working.

Emma had said there was something weird in a specific section of the code, but she’d included the entire code without noting exactly which section it was. So, other than fixing small parts of the code, Felicity has yet to find the aforementioned something weird.

Curtis’ hand lands on her shoulder, jolting her out of her spiral. She looks up at him and he motions towards the speaker.

“You set it up?” Mueller’s voice comes over the speaker. It’s a little staticky, but Curtis’ tech is holding its range surprisingly well for something they hadn’t tested.

“Yes, sir,” someone else responds.

“Good,” Mueller says, the static increases as if he’s moving around whatever room he’s in. For a moment, Felicity is afraid she’s spoken too soon and they’re going to lose the feed just as Mueller is giving them the information they need. Reliefs fills her when Mueller continues, “When?”

“The Warehouse District,” the other man says. “10 o’clock tonight.”

Felicity and Curtis look at each other and she immediately reaches for the keyboard, pulling up all the security cameras she can find in the part of the Glades. That part of the city isn’t huge on security,
but there are some fuzzy security cameras and traffic cameras she manages to take hold of. She clicks off the feed from the bug and sends a kill code over the signal, frying the inside of the device. Without a working circuit, no one should be able to trace it back to her or Curtis.

“We have time and place,” he says. “So, what now? Do we tell the cops?”

“Tell them what, exactly? That we bugged someone suspected of stealing military grade weapons and think he’s planning on selling them in the glades tonight?” She asks. “I’m pretty sure this is a two-party consent state.”

“Well, what do you suggest we do, then?”

Felicity chews anxiously on her lip, staring at the camera footage in front of her. People pass down the street, dark figures in the fuzzy equipment. She wonders when the last time the city had bothered to upgrade the equipment in the Glades was. They could call the cops, but there’s too much of a chance they won’t take an anonymous tip seriously. Especially since they can’t tell them where or how they got the information.

“I’ll go,” she says. Curtis stares at her for a long moment.

“I’m sorry and do what exactly?” He asks, crossing his arms over his chest and staring down at her. Annoyed at being shorter than him, Felicity pushes herself out of her chair. It doesn’t really negate the distance, but she feels less like a chastised child.

“I’ll improvise,” she shrugs. It’s not like they haven’t been doing that most of their time here anyway.

Curtis falls back on his heels, studying her. Feeling like she’s a piece of tech under his scrutiny, Felicity turns back to the computers and gathers up her things. She sends a copy of the edited version of Emma’s code to herself, almost having completely forgotten about the task, and tugs on her coat.

“Ever since the Hood showed up, you’ve been taking more risks,” Curtis points out. “I don’t know what’s going on with you, but you’re not him, Felicity.”

“I know that,” she says, spinning on him in surprise. She doesn’t understand how he isn’t getting it. “He’s a killer and his methods are over the top. I’m not trying to be him, Curtis.”

“Then why are you going after assassins who use poison bullets and arms dealers?” He asks. “Why are you trying to rush this stuff all of a sudden?”

“We’ve been doing this for a while, Curtis,” Felicity sighs, leaning on the back of her computer chair. Curtis nods, confusion furrowing his brow. “You have to admit we haven’t made nearly as much progress as he’s managed to in just a few weeks.”

“That’s because justice takes time,” he insists. “Change takes time.”

“Maybe it doesn’t have to,” she counters, throwing her arms wide in frustration. “Doesn’t it all make you feel a little, I don’t know, obsolete?”

Curtis sighs. “Felicity, you’ve helped people. Like this. Without taking crazy risks.”

“I’m going,” she says with an air of finality. “Let me know if you think of a better plan.”

She grabs her bag of the table and heads towards the staircase.

“Where are you going?” He calls.
“I have a party to get ready for,” she explains, stopping when she reaches the bottom of the steps to glance over at him. “How does one dress for a prison theme?”

Curtis shrugs, palms up. “Shackles?”

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The Queen Mansion definitely lives up to its name. It’s twenty miles outside the city and she swears half of that distance is the driveway. Not that it matters because it’s literally packed with cars. Which is concerning being that by the time she gets there most of the party-goers are already drunk or enjoying other substances.

There’s a bar set up in the foyer and it’s the first thing Felicity sees when she walks inside. She asks the bartender if he’s seen Oliver and he points her towards the stairs. Most of the doors are open, so she peeks inside each as she passes, hoping not to see something she won’t be able to forget.

One of the doors is closed and she thinks she hears voices behind it, though it could just be hold over from the party raging below them. She lifts her fist to knock at the wood, but it opens before she can.

“Oh,” she says, startling as a man comes out of the door and nearly knocks into her. He seems frustrated but stops to apologize, frowning when he realizes she’s staring at him. He looks so familiar, but she just can’t place it.

“Can I help you with something?” He asks, a little gruffly and she shakes her head quickly.

“No, sorry, I just thought I recognized you,” she explains. He nods curtly and continues past her. Felicity cringes, turning back towards the bedroom and finding Oliver standing inside. She hooks a thumb over her shoulder in the direction the other man had just disappeared. “That is one very large, very angry man.”

Oliver chuckles, shaking his head at her. Felicity looks him up and down, taking in the “prison inmate” costume he’d chosen for tonight. She’s pretty sure it’s just an all-denim outfit ala 2001 Justin Timberlake with an inmate number slapped on the chest.

She is personally offended that he looks as good as he does in it.

“Nice outfit,” she comments dryly. He grins at her, like he’s proud of the joke he’s making out of his very serious situation. She tilts her head at him, raising an eyebrow, and he shifts uncomfortably, his grin fading.

“What are you doing here?” He asks, not unkindly.

“Oh, uh, Tommy invited me,” she explains, fidgeting with her hands in front of her. “I hope that’s alright.”

“Of course,” he nods immediately and she smiles.

“I won’t be staying long. It’s not really my scene,” she explains. “But, I wanted to see how you were handling everything. How are you doing?”

Oliver takes a step towards her, slowly closing the space between them.

“That’s not what you came here to ask,” he says, instead of responding to her question.

“Sorry?” Felicity frowns, surprised at him advancing on her. She doesn’t feel threatened, a thought
which surprises her considering he’s currently being detained in his house due to possible vigilante-
ism.

“You came here for the same reason you were at the courthouse this morning,” he points out. “You
want to know if I’m really this guy, the Hood.”

He says the name like a joke, but there’s something dark in his tone. She refuses to back down to
him, tilting her chin upwards so she can maintain eye contact as he towers over her.

“That’s not why I’m here,” she insists. Not completely, at least. Tommy had invited her and she
figured it was a chance to check on him, like he’d done for her after the shooting at the Exchange
Building. Except now, she feels like she’s in a battle of wits and she’s not sure who’s winning.

“Tell me, Felicity,” he says, ignoring her insistence that she isn’t here for this. He’s close enough
now that she has to look up at him, even on her heels, and his voice is low and playful. It feels
forced, the playful tone. “Do you really think I’m some vigilante?”

She tilts her head, studying him. He’s looking down at her, meeting her stare with stormy blue eyes.

“Honestly, Oliver, I don’t know you that well,” she says finally. “But whatever secret it is your
keeping, for your sake, I really hope it’s not this one.”

“What makes you think I’m keeping a secret?” He asks.

“Everyone has secrets,” Felicity shrugs and Oliver grins, leaning down a little and lowering his voice
even further. It feels intimate, it feels like a game.

“And what’s your secret, Felicity Smoak?”

If it’s a game they’re playing, Oliver should be prepared. Felicity Smoak does not like to lose.

She grins slyly up at him. “Wouldn’t you like to know?”

His smile is sharp and dangerous, but Felicity can’t bring herself to put distance between them. To do
so would feel like admitting defeat. She’s not even sure what she’s trying to win, but she knows
she’s not prepared to give up. Oliver is still studying her like he’s seeing her in a new light.

Her phone trills in her pocket, startling them both out of the moment. She pulls her phone out and
checks it, her privacy cover shielding the screen from Oliver. It’s an alert, she’s got a half hour until
Mueller’s buy is supposed to go down.

She slips the phone back in her pocket and looks back up at Oliver.

“I have to go,” she says and he nods, taking a step back and putting some distance between them. It
doesn’t feel like a win, it feels like a draw. She doesn’t think it’s the last time Oliver will challenge
her.

“Thanks for coming,” he offers as she backs out the door. She nods at him.

“I’m glad you’re alright,” she says and he gives her a soft smile. “Bye, Oliver.”

She turns and rushes out the door, conscious of the time it will take her to get to the base and change
and make it to the buy on foot.

“Bye, Felicity,” she hears behind her.
“Can I say something obvious?” Curtis asks, his back turned as Felicity strips out of her party dress and pulls the leggings on. She hums in the affirmative. “This seems like the kind of guy the Hood would go after.”

“Okay,” Felicity says, nodding to herself. “And?”

“Well, if he doesn’t show up tonight, then maybe Oliver Queen really is the Hood,” he explains. Felicity freezes, tank top halfway down her torso. She frowns, considering this. She hadn’t really been thinking about whether the Hood would show up tonight or not.

“And if he does show up,” Felicity continues for him. “It means it’s not Oliver.”

“Are you sure that isn’t just wishful thinking because you have a crush on him?” He asks. Felicity whips around at the question, glaring at the back of Curtis’ head as she buckles her coat closed.

“I do not have a crush on Oliver,” she argues.

“Okay, sure,” Curtis acquiesces, holding his hands up in defense. “Whatever you say.”

He spins around and Felicity realizes he’s been practically vibrating with excitement since she got down to the base. She eyes him warily, still aware of their earlier argument and curious what about her doing this has him so excited.

“I made you something,” he says finally. He holds out a new sphere, that same silver but larger than the ones she keeps in her gear currently. He crosses the room, holding it out to her. Felicity takes it from him, frowning and turning it over in her hand. “If Mueller’s guys or the buyers have guns on them, throw this and hit three on your wrist pad.”

She raises her eyebrows curiously, looking down at her wrist where the small tablet-like piece of tech rests.

“Isn’t that the explode-y command?” She asks and Curtis chuckles, nodding.

“Yeah, I fixed that bug,” he explains. “I’ll work on finding a more controlled way to use it, though.”

She tucks the sphere into her coat pocket and smiles up at him. She knows he doesn’t understand why she’s doing this, but he’s still willing to support her and help her. That means more than he’ll probably ever know.

“Thank you, Curtis,” she says seriously, reaching forward to squeeze his hand.

He returns the grin and then clears his throat, glancing around.

“Don’t you have a bad guy to catch?” He asks and Felicity laughs, nodding and pulling her hand back. Her boots are heavy on the metal as she stomps up the staircase, but she feels a lot lighter knowing Curtis has her back.

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So, Felicity may have been going back and forth a bit on whether or not she really believed Oliver Queen was the Hood, but she think she has definitive proof he isn’t now.

Mostly because, as she’s hiding behind one of the storage crates in the warehouse where Mueller is making his deal, he’s crouching at the top of the one across from her. Ridiculously, the knowledge
that he’s there makes her feel a little better.

She’d never tell Curtis this, but she had been somewhat questioning her decision to come out here by herself. It didn’t matter, though, she couldn’t take the chance of those weapons making it into the Glades. She did, however, call in an anonymous tip to the police once she actually arrived, pretending to be a concerned citizen having seen some men and a lot of guns.

Felicity glances back at the deal happening in front of her and then back to the crate above her. She can’t see the Hood anymore. When the lights cut out, she figures it’s his doing and clearly so does Mueller. It turns to chaos as Mueller and his men scramble to get away. Felicity does as Curtis suggested and tosses the sphere towards the group of men with guns just as the Hood takes out the first guy. She presses the command on her wrist.

It happens so quick in the darkness that she almost doesn’t see it. The sphere rolls into the middle of the group and triggers, pulling their guns out of their hands. They stick to the sphere, locked in place even as one man tries to pry one away. The Hood takes care of the gang members easily, felling them one by one.

Felicity hears the sound of an engine and realizes that Mueller is trying to make a break for it with the truck carrying the weapons.

“He’s getting away,” she yells at the Hood, but he doesn’t seem worried, taking care of the last gang member. Frustrated, Felicity runs after the car Mueller had climbed into and pulls a sphere from her pocket, whipping it at the back of the car. It hits the metal of the bumper and embeds itself inside of it the same way it had done to the windowsill days ago.

She turns and throws another at the tire of the truck carrying the weapons. It’s heading the other direction and her throw doesn’t cut it, but she presses a command on her wrist, taking over the propulsion of the sphere from within. It goes upwards at an unnatural angle and it takes a moment for her to get it on the correct path, but it hits the hubcap on one of the back tires and embeds.

She presses three on her keypad again, praying Curtis didn’t fix the bug in all of her gear yet. A second goes by and she stares after the truck as it gets further away, sure it’s not going to work, and then the tire explodes. The truck rocks ominously as the back corner of the cargo hits the pavement and skids, creating sparks. Losing control, the driver turns it into a ditch after a few moments of dangerous swaying.

“That was so cool,” she murmurs to herself, staring after the chaos she’d just created. She frowns. “Wait, no, I mean terrible.”

Shaking her head at herself, Felicity turns and looks down at the screen on her wrist. Switching to the control on the sphere she’d thrown at Mueller’s car, she enables the GPS within the sphere and grins down at the sight of the red flashing dot symbolizing Mueller’s car. Police sirens in the distance make her pause, worried about being seen.

When she turns, the Hood is staring at her, his head turned just slightly to the side. Felicity holds her wrist up for him to see the screen there.

“He’s heading down twenty-ninth,” she says, grinning. “In case you still wanted to catch him.”

The Hood shakes his head and takes off. She hears the sound of an engine starting and he goes whipping past her on his motorcycle, towards 29th street. She switches back to the control of the larger sphere and presses three again. The guns stuck to it clatter to the cement and she reaches down to pick the sphere up, tossing it up and down a few times.
“So, cool,” she grins. The police cars come from the same direction the Hood had gone and she figures they probably saw him. She hopes he got Mueller.

Pocketing the sphere, Felicity runs in the opposite direction of where the police are coming from, ducking into the shadows just before they pull up to the warehouse.

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Felicity sends Curtis home to have a late dinner with Paul after assuring him that his new device worked perfectly and thanking him once more. She has to admit, her spirits are much higher knowing that those weapons are off the street.

She decides to treat herself to a late dinner as well, walking to the 24-hour diner a few blocks over from her house. Her grocery shopping had been cut short this morning, so it looked like she’d be eating out for a while.

She orders a grilled cheese and a strawberry shake, eating with one hand while she scrolls through Emma’s code on her tablet with the other. There’s still a lot to go through, and she hasn’t reached whatever has Emma worried yet.

Deciding it’s fruitless when she doesn’t know where to start, Felicity locks her tablet and resolves to just ask Emma which line the code starts on tomorrow at work. Considering it’s nearing midnight and she’s only halfway through her meal, Felicity figures tomorrow will be a tiring day anyway. She’ll need a puzzle to solve to keep herself awake.

The bells over the entrance ring and she glances up at the new customer, tilting her head in surprise. Oliver must feel her gaze on him, because he turns and meets it almost instantly. He gives her a warm smile, the furrowing of his brow showing he’s just as surprised to see her.

“I hear you’re a free man once more,” she comments as he crosses to her table. He chuckles and nods. “Did you decide to cut your inappropriately themed party short?”

She gestures towards the booth across from her and he slides into the seat.

“Actually, someone tried to kill me and it put a bit of a damper on the mood,” he jokes. Felicity sits up stiffly in her chair, her hand reaching across the table to land on top of his instinctually.

“Are you alright?” She asks. “Don’t you have a bodyguard for exactly this reason?”

She glances around, half expecting him to be surrounded by a veritable S.W.A.T. team of large, angry looking men. It’s ridiculous, she watched him come in alone, but that only leaves her with more questions.

“I did say ‘tried,’ didn’t I?” He points out, glancing down at her hand on top of his. “I’m a little bit tougher than I look.”

Felicity tilts her head at him. “That’s not funny.”

“How are you doing?” He deflects and Felicity slowly pulls her hand back, disguising the movement as she reaches for a french fry. “I wanted to check in after last night, but…”

“You’ve been a little locked up,” she supplies, earning a surprised laugh from him. The sound makes her body feel warm and she remembers what Curtis had said early. Alright, fine, maybe she has a slight crush. “I was just dealing with a problem, but it worked itself out.”
It doesn’t feel like just a night ago that he drove her drunken ass back to her house. She looks down at her plate and grins remembering his tall frame in her driver seat.

“I’m glad,” he offers. “You look like you’re in much better spirits.”

She looks up at him, settling her elbows on the table and resting her chin on her hands. Oliver tilts his head to the side slightly, seeming to submit himself to her scrutiny. She studies him for a moment. For a man who just got told he isn’t being tried for multiple counts of murder, he still seems weighed down.

“I talked to Tommy today,” she says, surprising him. He frowns at her her.

“I didn’t realize you knew him and Laurel,” he comments, a little leadingly. Felicity offers him a coy smile.

“Yeah, it’s a long story,” she hedges. “He thinks you seem a little off lately.”

Oliver sighs, averting his gaze to the table in front of him. Felicity lets him stew on it for a moment before continuing.

“I can’t imagine it’s easy for you, having everyone just expect you to be the same person you were before your father’s boat went down,” she starts gently, his gaze coming back up to meet hers. “If you ever need to talk to someone who doesn’t know you, you can talk to me. I know I talk a lot, but I’m pretty good listener, too.”

He gives her a soft smile that makes her cheeks feel warm. It’s a stupid thing to offer, he has plenty of other people to talk to, but she can’t help but feel like he needs something else. Someone who isn’t expecting anything from him. It might not be her, but she’s willing to offer anyway.

“Wouldn’t that kind of negate you not knowing me?” He questions, frowning teasingly at her logic. Felicity shakes her head at him as the waitress comes by dropping off her check. She puts her tablet into her bag, pulling a twenty out of it and setting it on top of the bill.

Oliver watches her as she slides from the booth, standing at the end of the table to look at him.

“It’s just an offer, but,” she starts, a little haltingly and shrugs. “You know where to find me.”

He nods and Felicity offers him one last smile and an awkward wave before passing by him towards the door. She doesn’t know if he’ll take her up on the offer, she’s not even sure she should have offered, but there’s something about Oliver Queen that makes her want to help him carry whatever burden he’s holding onto.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter 4 will be up Thursday. In the meantime, why not hit that comment button? ; )
Chapter Summary

The Royal Flush Gang starts robbing banks in Starling. CNRI is facing the prospect of going under. Felicity decides to put her focus on fixing that strange code.

Chapter Notes

Two things about this chapter; 1) I didn't want to mess with the canon A-plot too much here because, honestly, this is probably one of my favorite s1 episodes and I really like Oliver's story in it. 2) I work in tech support so I spend most of my time surrounded by digital & computer sciences majors. That said, I'm a journalism student. Hopefully the tech stuff in this chapter doesn't make any actual tech workers cringe. I am so sorry <33

Takes place during 1.06 "Legacy"

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It’s weird going back to work. Yesterday had felt like the longest day of her life, and not necessarily in an enjoyable way. After her late dinner, it had taken her ages to fall asleep, but she’d managed to put some time into Emma’s code. Not that she’d found the weird part the woman had mentioned, but she’d corrected a lot of faults in the code that could have left them vulnerable. Now she’s sure she needs to do her own, less than upstanding tests on the firewall before it goes up. If Emma’s code was this vulnerable, Felicity is afraid to see how the rest of the department’s sections look.

She’d fallen asleep with her tablet still cradled in her lap and nearly overslept.

Ever since she got to work, Felicity’s been drinking coffee like it’s the only thing keeping her alive and, still, her body is resisting the mere action of being awake. She’d sent an email to Emma when she’d arrived, asking her to come and speak with her about the code when she had time, but she’s still waiting for the other woman to be free.

In the meantime, she has other things to work on. It’s a weekday, so someone somewhere in the building has downloaded a virus or clicked on a phishing email. There’s always at least a half dozen support tickets in her queue at any given time.

There’s a knock at the door to the office and Felicity looks up, expecting to see Emma, but surprised to find Laurel lingering in the doorway. She usually avoids Queen Consolidated like the plague, so her presence makes Felicity’s features furrow in confusion.

“Hey,” she greets. “What are you doing here?”

“Can we talk?” Laurel asks, looking around at the other cubicles in the shared office space. Ben is absorbed in something to Felicity’s left and she can’t see Jesse in the corner, but she can hear the clicking of her keyboard. Laurel adds, “In private.”
Felicity nods, clicking on her screensaver and grabbing her phone. She leads Laurel to the staircase around the corner from the elevator bay. The staircase is usually pretty private, there’s security cameras but they don’t pick up sound.

“What’s up?” Felicity asks as the door clicks shut behind her. Laurel turns, her arms crossed over her chest and a look on her face that tells Felicity she’s in trouble.

If only she knew what she’d done.

“Have you completely lost your mind?” Laurel bites and Felicity frowns, her arms going out from her sides in confusion. “I thought we agreed the vigilante was dangerous.”

“We did,” Felicity responds slowly, trying to figure out where Laurel’s anger is coming from.

“Really?” She asks. “Because the vigilante took down an arms dealer and a group of gang members in the Glades last night and, apparently, they told SCPD the vigilante is working with a woman in purple.”

Felicity blanches. “I wouldn’t call it working with.”

“Felicity!”

“Alright, we’ve run into each other a couple times while we were working on the same thing,” she explains, folding her arms over her stomach. “I helped him keep Mueller from getting away with the guns.”

Laurel sighs, frustration and disappointment radiating off of her. Felicity did keep this from her, so she can understand why Laurel might feel a bit lied to, but she keeps a lot of what she does from Laurel. It’s not exactly like Felicity wouldn’t be wanted by the SCPD if they knew she was the mastermind behind most of the hacks across the city over the past year or so.

“You were the one telling me to be careful,” Laurel reminds her. “And you’re working with him?”

“I’m not!” Felicity insists. “Really, I swear, it’s not like we coordinate it, okay? We just happen to have a lot of the same targets.”

“This is why you showed up at the courthouse, isn’t it?” Laurel accuses. “Why you were so curious about Ollie, why you needed to see for yourself? You wanted to see if you could spot it.”

Felicity sighs, shrugging her shoulders. Laurel isn’t necessarily wrong. She didn’t know what she expected to happen at the courthouse. It was ridiculous to think she might be able to recognize him suddenly.

“Since when are you even going after arms dealers?” Laurel asks, concern coloring her tone more than anger.

Felicity feels her own annoyance flare, tired of having this fight with Curtis already. She gets it, she’s small and untrained. She’s not the Hood. But, she helped last night! If not for her, the guns and Mueller would have gotten away.

“I knew Mueller was in town, I knew when and where the buy was going down,” she huffs. “What was I supposed to do?”

Laurel straightens a little, her features softening. She takes a step forward, reaching out to place her hands on Felicity’s biceps.
“I know you want to help,” she says gently. “And you have been, with the way you’ve been doing things. You don’t have to try to be like him.”

Felicity schools her features, but she doesn’t think it really takes because Laurel tilts her head to the side, studying her. Felicity just doesn’t understand how Laurel and Curtis don’t seem to get it. She doesn’t want to be the Hood. But it’s hard to look at what he’s accomplished and compare it to her own successes. It’s hard to feel like she’s managed any good in the city.

Maybe if she had been willing to get her hands a little dirty from the get-go, the Hood wouldn’t have felt like the city needed him.

“Laurel, is something else going on?” Felicity asks, trying to redirect the conversation away from herself. “I mean, I have a hard time believing all that frustration was just because of a rumor I was working with the Hood.”

“Yeah,” Laurel sighs. “One of CNRI’s biggest donors pulled out. Without them, they’ll go under in months.”

Felicity gasps, reaching for Laurel this time, her hand falling on the other woman’s forearm. Laurel has spent years working her ass off at CNRI, defending people without the resources to defend themselves. If it goes under, it will just be one more victim to the Glades.

“Is there anything I can do?” She asks.

“Did you become a billionaire overnight?” Laurel jokes, though her heart doesn’t seem in it. “No, we’re gonna figure it out.”

Felicity’s phone buzzes and she fishes it out of the pocket of her dress, frowning down at it. Emma is waiting for her at her desk. She’d almost forgotten about sending out that email.

“I have to get back,” she tells Laurel, dropping her hand. “Let me know if anything changes.”

Laurel nods and Felicity leads them back out of the stairwell, leaving Laurel at the elevators and heading back to her office. Emma is leaning against one of the walls around her cubicle, scrolling through her phone.

“Hey, Emma,” Felicity greets, rounding her to take a seat in her chair. She glances over at her coffee mug and figures she’s probably due for a refill.

“Did you hear about this?” Emma asks, following Felicity around to the other side of the desk and holding out her phone. “A buncha guys robbed Starling Trust this morning. They shot a cop.”

“Is he okay?” Felicity asks, looking at the phone screen. Fuzzy security footage shows three men with automatic weapons wearing playing card masks.

“He’s in critical condition,” Emma tells her, pulling the phone back towards herself. “They’re calling them the Royal Flush Gang.”

“God, that’s terrible,” Felicity sighs, shaking her head. She turns her attention to her computer screen, pulling up the .txt file of Emma’s code. Emma tucks her phone away and pushes in, looking over Felicity’s shoulder.

“Okay, so it’s, like, part of the base code,” Emma explains, taking control of Felicity’s mouse to scroll down through the file. “But it’s kinda far down. Ah, yeah, here we go!”
She uses the mouse to highlight the specific portion of the code and Felicity frowns at it. It’s definitely not average coding language, not for something like creating a firewall anyway. It’s familiar somehow, though, like a forgotten language.

“Do you recognize it?” Emma asks.

“Not sure,” Felicity murmurs, tilting her head to the side as she studies it. She takes over control of the mouse and copies the section, pasting it into her own .txt file. “Could you rewrite the part how it’s meant to be?”

“Sure,” Emma shrugs. “I’m just not sure how it got there in the first place.”

“It seems distinct, like someone’s personal script,” Felicity says, more to herself than to Emma. Shaking herself out of it, she turns in her chair and Emma stands up straight. “I’ll send you back the original file. I made a few edits in places, just for the sake of security.”

Emma nods, thanking her before heading out of the office. Felicity saves the edited file once more, for posterity, and sends an email to Emma with it attached before she forgets.

After she sends it, she picks her coffee mug up and finds the drink inside has gone cold. Sighing, she gets up to go fetch a refill.

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“Hey,” Felicity greets as she descends the steps into the base. Curtis is already there, working at his table. “I was thinking we call it an early night tonight. I didn’t get much sleep last night.”

As if to punctuate the point, she has to hide a yawn behind her hand as she reaches the bottom of the steps. Curtis spins on his stool to look at her.

“Too much adrenaline from risking your life?” He asks dryly. Felicity give him a glare as she crosses to her computer chair, dying to get out of her heels.

“No more lectures, okay?” She says, dropping into her chair and kicking her black pumps off haphazardly. “I already got an earful from Laurel this morning.”

“How does Laurel know?” He frowns.

“Apparently, some of the guys we took down last night told the police that the Hood has a partner,” Felicity explains, leaning back into her chair and resisting the urge to pull her feet up and curl into it. She has a feeling Curtis wouldn’t appreciate the nice shot of her ass he’d receive from the action.

“That sucks,” he says succinctly. Felicity laughs. “I guess it was only a matter of time before the SCPD found out about us.”

“Us?” She asks teasingly, grinning at him. He rolls his eyes.

“Well, us,” he insists. “You’re out there with my tech, aren’t you?”

Felicity shrugs, willing to accept this. She kind of likes the idea that when she goes out after someone, Curtis is with her in the spirit of his tech. They have saved her life more than one time, quite literally.

“So, speaking of your recent life-risking tendencies,” Curtis directs, hopping off of his stool. Felicity gives him a dark look from her chair. He ignores her look and continues, “I’ve been thinking I
should work on some new tech for you.”

“New how?” She questions, raising an eyebrow at him.

“Well, if you’re gonna be going out there you can’t just be on the defensive all the time, right?” He asks. Felicity shrugs again. “So, maybe I should work on more offensive uses for the spheres.”

“Like weapons?” She asks warily.

“I was thinking a little more pacifist than that,” Curtis frowns. “I mean, nothing to the level of shooting people with arrows or anything. Just, ways you can take guys down before they can come at you with their guns or their fists.”

Felicity pouts, considering his offer. It would be handy, for sure, to be able to knock the bad guys out without having to rely on her extremely limited self-defense abilities. If he’s offering, it also means Curtis has been thinking about her decision to take more initiative and he’s coming around to the idea. Or, at the least, he’s willing to accept it and help keep her safe.

Finally, she nods. “That sounds like a really good idea.”

Curtis grins, nodding at her and bouncing on his toes in excitement. She considers the third option that he just really wants an excuse to test the limits of his spheres.

“This is gonna be awesome!” He enthuses and Felicity laughs, pushing herself out of her chair. The crime fighting can wait for one night, she decides. If she doesn’t get some sleep, she won’t make it through another day anyway.

“I’m gonna head home,” she tells him, crossing back to the stairs. “Try not to stay here all night playing with your balls.”

“They’re not balls, Felicity,” Curtis calls back in annoyance. “They’re spheres!”

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When she gets home, Felicity microwaves a frozen meal and goes to bed. She manages to sleep for a good twelve hours and feels much better when she gets to work. It doesn’t stop her from going right for the coffee machine when she gets there, but it’s less of a necessity today.

There’s already ten items in her queue when she settles in at her desk and three files from security in her inbox. She works on the tickets first, aware of how quickly she will start receiving phone calls from the users if she doesn’t fix their problems.

Most of them are easy, small things, so she sends emails through the system giving the users steps on how to fix the issues. For two of them, she has to actually call the users and get further details. One makes her trek all the way up to a conference room on the fourteenth floor for what ends up being an unplugged A/V adapter.

All in all, she’s had worse mornings.

When she gets back to her desk from going upstairs to plug in a wire, there’s an email from Emma waiting for her. The same kind of weird code has been popping up in some other team member’s code as well. Emma’s included three attached .txt files with the isolated code for Felicity to see.

*You said it seemed distinct, so I figured you’d want to know*, Emma concludes.
Felicity opens the files one by one and compares them to the section of code from Emma’s. It’s definitely the same language. She creates a new folder and puts them all inside, uploading it to her online storage so she can access it in the base later.

She turns her attention to the security folders in her inbox which preoccupies her all the way until lunch time.

The Royal Flush Gang, if that’s seriously what they’re calling them, hits another bank while she’s absorbed in her work. Felicity doesn’t see the news alert on her phone until she’s heading out for a late lunch. She stops in the lobby to scan the news article.

“She’s definitely not here?” She hears a familiar voice ask.

“I’m sorry, sir,” a woman replies. Felicity looks up, recognizing Oliver and Walter Steele’s assistant standing near the security desk in the lobby. Oliver sighs, his shoulders drooping.

“Alright, thanks for checking,” he says. He turns and spots Felicity watching the exchange, a surprised smile lighting his features. He crosses towards her and she meets him halfway, pocketing her phone.

“We’ve gotta stop running into each other like this,” he jokes.

“Well, I work here,” she reminds him. “And, you own the building, so.”

He chuckles, shaking his head at her. His smile doesn’t fully reach his eyes, though, so Felicity tilts her head at him, frowning.

“You okay?” She asks. He lets out a long suffering sigh, kind of rolling his neck like he’s trying to decide whether or not to tell her. She resists the urge to reach out and prod his chest, annoying it out of him the way she might anyone else.

“I was hoping my mother was here,” he explains. Felicity raises an eyebrow. “I think she might be avoiding me.”

“Uh-oh, what’d you do?”

Oliver huffs, like he’s offended she’d immediately assume it was his fault. She tilts her head, raising her eyebrows at him and he gives in.

“I kind of blew off a brunch this morning to deal with something at the club,” he explains. “It was really important to her.”

“Maybe she just needs a little space, you know?” Felicity suggests. “And then, you can make it up to her somehow.”

“Yeah, I think giving her space is sort of the problem,” he says, offering her a self depreciating smile. “Were you headed out?”

Ignoring the obvious deflection, Felicity nods.

“Yeah, I was heading out for my lunch break,” she explains, pulling her phone out of her pocket again to check the time. Between stopping to read about the bank robberies and talking with Oliver, she’s lost ten minutes off her break.

“Can I walk you out?” He offers, angling his body so he can motion towards the front doors. Felicity
nods.

“I mean, if you’re heading that way,” she says. Oliver gives her a smile, his hand landing on the small of her back as he guides her out of the building. He starts some small talk as they walk, asking her about her day so far. She shares a little more than she intends to, complaining about the fiasco on the fourteenth floor and execs apparent inability to plug in wires on their own. She halts, remembering who she’s talking to and starts to apologize, but Oliver is grinning at her.

“You don’t have to censor yourself around me, you know,” he tells her, his hand still warm and firm against the base of her spine. “I know most of the people in that building are probably insufferable to you.”

Felicity shrugs, biting her lip and still feeling embarrassed at so easily spilling so much to him.

“Hazard of the job,” she says simply. Oliver nods as they reach the curb. His body guard is waiting by a town car at the curb and Felicity offers him an awkward wave. He smiles, looking to be in a much better mood than the last time she saw him.

“Well, good luck with your mom,” she says, halting at the sidewalk. Her plan was just to walk to the diner down the street, her car parked in the garage beneath the building.

“Thank you,” Oliver says sincerely, giving her a warm smile. Felicity is momentarily caught up in it, smiling back at him. It takes her a moment, but she shakes herself out of it and spins on the ball of her foot. She glances back to wave at him before heading down the sidewalk.

She gets her lunch to-go and heads back to the office carrying enough styrofoam containers to last her both lunch and dinner. She stops at a convenience store on the way and buys a few energy drinks. Her plan is to dig into the strange code popping up in the firewall, despite no one having apparently written it.

When she gets back, there’s an email on her personal account inviting her to a benefit for CNRI being hosted by Merlyn Global. She rolls her eyes lightheartedly, knowing exactly which Merlyn man would have had the idea.

She sends her RSVP back, CCing Laurel so she knows she plans on coming. She can’t do much in the way of donating, but she can at least go and talk CNRI up to the people who can. She’d hate to see the non-profit go under, knowing how many people it’s helped that this city has abandoned.

After eating her lunch and clearing out her ticket queue once more, Felicity opens the folder she’d created and opens the files inside side by side for comparison. For a few moments, she just stares at the code. It feels incomplete.

On a hunch, Felicity sends out a mass email to the entire team working on the firewall, suggesting that if they’re having problems they can’t explain, to check their base code and asking that they isolate any anomalies in the code and send them to her.

In the meantime, she continues to try to make sense of the code in front of her, sending portions of it through a simulator to show her what it does. It just keeps returning errors, like parts of it are missing. As other people begin to email her more portions of the code, she adds them to the folder and runs them through the test program.

The program keeps returning errors, so she tries different tests to try and read the code and figure out its function. The more it fights her, the more she digs her heels in, determined to solve whatever it is.

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She doesn’t know how long she spends fighting with the code until Walter Steele’s executive assistant comes looking for her. The woman clears her throat, startling Felicity and causing her to knock an empty Red Bull can to the floor. She frowns down at it for a second before remembering herself and looking up at the woman.

“Sorry,” she gasps. “Sorry. You startled me.”

The woman looks amused, smiling warmly at her. Felicity figures she should probably learn the woman’s name, if they’re going to keep meeting like this. Although, she has no idea why she’d be seeking her out right now. Mr. Steele isn’t even in the country.

“It’s alright,” the woman assures her. “I was asked to come find you and escort you to the executive floor. Mr. Queen needs some help and he asked for you personally.”

“Mr…?” Felicity frowns, before standing up and slipping her feet into her heels. She kicks the can on accident reminding herself that it’s still rolling around on the floor. She stoops to pick it up and then glances at her computer monitor, catching sight of the time.

She’d spent the entire night working on the code. It is now late morning. God, she really doesn’t want to check her phone. She grabs the device and a company laptop from her desk and follows the woman out of the office.

Putting off checking the notifications on her phone, Felicity spends the elevator ride trying to make her clothes look like she hadn’t spent the entire night awkwardly bent over her desk in a computer chair. Her skirt is relatively unwrinkled, but the same can’t be said for her pink blouse.

She’s really glad she was wearing a coat over her outfit when she saw Oliver yesterday.

He’s waiting inside the executive office when she steps out of the elevator, looking to be having an intense conversation with his bodyguard. Yet another person whose name she really needs to learn. She resolves to introduce herself when she enters the office, pushes through the glass doors and opens her mouth to do so.

“Are you alright?” Oliver asks, beating her to it. Her jaw snaps shut, frowning at him, so he clarifies, “You look a little ruffled.”

She glances down at herself, cursing the shitty cotton blend of her shirt for holding so fast to its wrinkles.

“Just kind of a long morning,” she explains. It’s not totally a lie. Just because she didn’t know it was morning doesn’t mean it wasn’t a long one. That stupid stubborn code just will not reveal its secrets to her. She turns her attention to the other man in the room. “I’m Felicity, by the way. Felicity Smoak.”

“John Diggle,” he says, crossing the room to shake her hand. “Sorry about the other night, nearly trampling you. It had been a trying day.”

“Oh, it’s fine,” she assures him, waving her hand dismissively. “I was staring at you like I’d never seen another human being before.”

John smiles at that, the corners of his eyes crinkling in a warm, genuine way that makes Felicity smile back at him.

“I was hoping you could help me find someone,” Oliver says, pulling her focus back to why she’d been brought up here in the first place. She looks back at him and he motions towards the black
leather couch in the corner of the office. Felicity moves towards it, taking a seat and setting the laptop on her knees. Oliver sits in one of the chairs across from her while John leans back against Walter’s desk.

“I should add personal internet researcher for Oliver Queen to my job title,” she comments glibly, glancing over at John. Across from her, Oliver does a little head shake, like he’s trying to decide how to react to her and she corrects herself, adjusting her glasses, “Happily, I mean.”

John chuckles at her, but Oliver doesn’t seem all that amused. She wonders if he still hasn’t fixed things with his mother or if this is about something else. Either way, she needs to remember not to get too comfortable around him.

“His name is Derek Reston,” he says, rather than responding to her comment. Felicity immediately looks down at the laptop, pulling up the desktop and starting a search. “We were close before I… went away. And, I want to get back in touch.”

Went away, she thinks, holding back the scoff she wants to let out at the words. There’s one way of putting it.

“Guess you didn’t have Facebook on that island,” she jokes.

“Nope,” John answers for him, smirking at her. “Not even a Myspace account.” He turns the look on Oliver. “It was a very dark time.”

Felicity pauses to grin at him, looking back at Oliver and commenting, “I like him.”

Oliver doesn’t seem sure which one of them he should be directing his dark glare at, alternating between the two, so she goes back to her search.

“Well, there’s not much here that’s recent,” she tells them. “No credit activity. No utility bills.”

That’s not usual for someone who isn’t dead. And there’s no death certificate or notice for Derek Reston, it’s like one day he just decided to stop existing. He did a good job of it, too. If she had more urgency, she could probably seek him out. Few people really disappear altogether. But, if Oliver’s friend has dropped off the grid, maybe he has a good reason for it.

An image of his Queen Consolidated worker badge pops up and Felicity stares down at it.

“Oh, I guess you guys must have met at the factory,” she says, punctuating the statement with a frown as she looks back down at the information in front of her. Seems odd Oliver would be seeking out a friend who his father screwed out of a job and a pension just a few months before they left on that boat.

“Wait,” Oliver stops her, leaning towards her suddenly in confusion. “What... what factory?”

“The Queen Steel Factory,” she explains, adjusting her glasses again and frowning at him. How could he not know this? The factory still hangs over the Glades like a spectre, the first of many buildings to be closed up and emptied out in that part of the city. Until now, at least. If she remembers correctly it’s where Oliver plans to build his club.

Oliver is still staring at her, so she continues.

“Derek Reston worked there for fifteen years until it shut down in ‘07,” she recounts, tilting her head at him, trying to read his face. For their part, Oliver and John seem troubled and surprised at this news. If they don’t like this, they’re definitely not going to like the rest.
“Derek Reston worked for my father?” Oliver asks.

“You weren’t really close friends, huh?” She asks, sitting up a little straighter and staring him down. She shouldn’t expect an answer, but she’s tired and not in the mood to deal with Oliver Queen’s secrets.

When all he does is stare back at her, she holds his gaze for a moment. She wants to challenge him, to push and prod until he breaks open, all his secrets flowing forth. But, despite their constant running into each other at vulnerable moments, they’re not friends.

She breaks first, looking back down at the laptop and retelling the rest of the story.

“It looks like Derek was the factory foreman until your dad outsourced production to China. About fifteen hundred employees got laid off.” Here comes the real punch to the stomach. She can’t even look at Oliver as she says it. “Looks like the finance guys even found a loophole in the union contract, so, they didn’t have to pay severance packages and pensions to their employees.”

She doesn’t mean to sound so accusatory and when she looks up Oliver is staring back at her. She’s just imagining what it must have been like to be those workers, to give everything for a company that didn’t care about you.

She averts her eyes to John on the other side of the room, unable to hold Oliver’s gaze for long.

“They all pretty much lost their homes,” she concludes, glancing back at the screen before meeting Oliver’s steely gaze once more. “Including your friend.”

This time he’s the one who breaks the stare, looking down at the floor, then over at John. She can’t tell if it’s guilt or anger at his father’s sins being aired in the open. She may have just ruined whatever professional or personal relationship has been building between the two of them.

She knows Oliver isn’t responsible for the actions of his family. He definitely wasn’t five years ago. But it’s hard to reconcile the man that Queen Consolidated memorializes every year, dedicated a building to, and the one who left fifteen hundred workers in the dust.

Oliver gets up, thanking her for the information before rushing from the room. John sends her an apologetic look as he follows after him. And then it’s just Felicity, sitting on the plush leather couch with the sun coming through the window reminding her of her lack of sleep.

She doesn’t know exactly how she feels about the information she’s encountered, but something rolls uncomfortably in her stomach. Or maybe it’s the five energy drinks making a reappearance.

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After throwing up the contents of her stomach in the surprisingly bland executive level bathroom, Felicity heads down to the Research and Development labs in search of Curtis. She finds him bent over a work table working on a simple silver device about the size of an old iPod.

“Curtis,” she calls, attempting to pull his attention. He doesn’t even flinch, so she pokes him on his shoulder blade with her index finger. He jolts, sitting up straight and spinning around on her. She stumbles back a step.

“Oh, Felicity, hey,” he greets, then frowns. “Wait, what are you doing here?”

“Can I talk to you for a minute?” She asks and he nods, leading her to a lab with a door. He closes it behind her.
“Is this about the Royal Flush Gang?” He asks as soon as the door clicks shut. Felicity frowns in confusion. “I figure they’re probably gonna try to hit another bank, right? Two robberies in two days, that’s momentum. Do you think we should go after them?”

Felicity blames the lack of sleep and the energy drinks leaving her system so suddenly and all at once for the sluggish pace her brain is moving at. When she realizes what he’s asking, she shakes her head at him.

“The Hood was at the second robbery, right?” Curtis nods in confirmation. “Both he and SCPD are all over the robberies. A cop was shot, so they’re not going to be pulling any punches… or, bullets? Whatever. The point is, I don’t want to give the police any more reason to think the Hood has a partner than they already have.”

Curtis frowns at her answer but nods. They don’t really have any tech ready that could help take these guys down anyway. It’s better if they sit this one out, she’s sure between the vigilante and the police the Royal Flush Gang won’t make it out of Starling.

“So, what’d you need to talk about?” He asks.

“There’s a benefit at CNRI tonight and I was hoping you and Paul might want to be my dates,” she explains, pressing her palms against each other in the prayer position in front of her chin and giving him a winning smile. “I was gonna tell you about it yesterday, but I got busy and actually haven’t even slept.”

“Are you sure you should be going to a benefit then?”

“I’m gonna take an early day to go home and sleep, I promise,” she assures him. “But, I think we should be there to support Laurel.”

Curtis considers her for a moment before nodding.

“I’ll text Paul to make sure he doesn’t have plans, but I don’t think he does,” he says, giving her a smile. “We’ll be there.”

His agreement makes Felicity feel a little lighter. She’d already RSVPed for herself, but knowing she wouldn’t be facing the stuffy event alone made her feel better. Bouncing a little on her toes, she thanks him before heading out of the office towards the elevators.

Back at her own desk, she sends her supervisor an email telling him she’s come down with some sort of stomach bug and that she’ll be heading out early. It’s not the truth, really, but she did throw up so it’s close enough. She also sends an email to Laurel informing her of the extra two guests for tonight, just in case.

In her email, she finds more instances of the strange code, so she copies all of them into the file and uploads it. She also saves it to a thumb drive, just in case. It seems like the entire team besides herself is encountering the code, there’s only a few team members she hasn’t heard back from yet.

Once the files have moved to the drive and she’s tossed out all the garbage from the night before, Felicity finally heads home for some much needed rest.

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She wakes up a good thirty minutes before the benefit is set to start and resigns herself to being a little late. She texts Curtis to let him know and jumps in the shower, realizing she’s got yesterday’s makeup smeared under her eyes and probably across her pillow.
She rushes through her beauty routine, lining her eyes thicker than she intends to and making herself a bagel before putting on her lipstick.

There’s a dress in the back of her closet she’d bought as an impulse buy a few months back, after a lot of overtime pay. It’s a black cocktail dress that falls just below her knees, with pleats in the skirt that have a peek-a-boo of deep purple in them.

Putting it on, paired with loose curls and a deep purple matte lipstick, she feels almost as confident as she does in her gear.

When she gets to the venue, Curtis and Paul are waiting outside. Paul is straightening the bow tie around Curtis’ neck and Felicity stops to admire them, tilting her head and smiling at the exchange. Curtis bends down to place a kiss on Paul’s cheek.

“Look at you two hotties,” Felicity comments, crossing the last few steps to them. “I knew I picked the right dates.”

Curtis shakes his head while Paul laughs at her. She waves her hand towards the doors, music and light spilling from within the venue.

“Shall we?” She asks. The two men nod, following her lead into the party. They stop at a table to check in and hand their coats over to coat check. Felicity spots Laurel and Joanna across the room talking to Tommy. Curtis spots the hors d’oeuvres going around on trays.

“Oh, mini quiches!” He points out, following after a waiter. Paul gives a long suffering sigh and smiles apologetically at Felicity.

“We’re going to lose him to finger foods,” he says. Felicity laughs, waving him away.

“Please, go, go,” she grins. “Save him from himself.”

Paul chuckles, shaking his head at his husband’s antics and following after him. A tray passes by Felicity with a glass of champagne and she snags it, smiling thankfully at the man carrying it. Laurel notices her from across the room and smiles, so Felicity crosses towards the small group.

Tommy thanks her for coming, before seeing someone back the way she came and excusing himself.

“So?” Joanna asks, turning to Laurel.

“You were right,” Laurel says. Felicity tilts her head curiously.

“I usually am,” Joanna grins.

“Okay, what am I missing?” Felicity asks, looking between Laurel and Joanna. The two women glance back over their shoulders to where Tommy is talking to Thea Queen.

“Joanna convinced me to let Tommy throw this benefit,” Laurel explains, watching Tommy with a small smile as he talks to the younger Queen. “Turns out, he may have grown more over the last few years than I’ve realized.”

Felicity nods, considering this. Tommy has never been subtle about his interest in Laurel and it’d be ridiculous for Laurel to act like there’s nothing there for her. But, it’s hard to have a relationship with all that baggage, trying to reconcile who someone was with who they’ve become.

“Well, don’t expect me to forgive him for my dress any time soon,” she comments, tilting the
champagne glass to her lips. Laurel laughs, clearly remembering the incident, as Tommy crosses the room back towards them.

“Ladies, could I introduce you to some people you might want to schmooze?” He asks, clearly directing the question at Laurel and Joanna. They nod, but Laurel shoots Felicity a concerned look.

“Oh, I’ll be fine,” she assures her, waving them away. Tommy smiles at her, working overtime to win her over as well, apparently, before leading them towards a group of older men.

Felicity spins awkwardly, sipping from her champagne glass and trying to find something to occupy her attention. Knowing Curtis, Paul has yet to tear him away from the food and she wanted them to come out tonight to have some fun. She knows she has a tendency to occupy Curtis’ time with their night time activities - God, she’s gotta stop referring to them as that - and figured the couple deserved a night out.

She spots Laurel and Tommy again for a moment, talking to a man who seems vaguely familiar but she can’t place him. She feels like she’s seen him in a photo or something and spends a rude amount of time staring at him before he leads Laurel away from a tense looking Tommy.

“Twice in the same day,” she hears behind her, spinning to find Oliver watching her. He’s in a nice suit, his hands tucked into his pant pockets as he smiles warmly at her. “How’s that for luck?”

“Well, I don’t know about luck,” she teases, earning an amused head shake from him. She remembers their earlier conversation, though it feels like a day ago after her much needed nap, and frowns at him. “Listen, I wanted to talk to you about earlier.”

Oliver frowns. “What do you mean?”

“Well, I hadn’t actually gotten any sleep and wasn’t feeling very good, which I know is a shitty excuse, but,” she heaves a sigh. “I just wanted to apologize for how I acted.”

“Felicity, what my father did,” he starts, trailing off and breaking eye contact with her. “I can understand being angry about it.”

She gets the impression she isn’t the only one who the news had bothered. She knew it would affect him, had almost not told him because she didn’t want to hurt him. Finding out terrible things about your parents, though, it’s a different kind of disappointment. She knows that well enough.

“I shouldn’t have taken it out on you,” she says. “You’re not your father, and you shouldn’t have to pay for his sins.”

His brow furrows at that, like he’s trying to reconcile the statement with something else. Felicity wonders just how much Oliver has been taking on his father’s burdens ever since he returned. She’d heard about his drunken speech at the opening of the Applied Sciences building, and maybe the expectation that he could just become like his father was still weighing on him.

“Felicity,” he says, drawing her name out like a question. She raises her eyebrows at him. “Would you like to dance?”

She stares at him for a moment too long before nodding jerkily. “Yeah, yes. Sure.”

He smiles at the overt response, holding his hand out to her. She slips her palm into his, placing her glass on the bar behind her, and he begins to lead her towards dance floor, but spots someone over her head and frowns. Felicity glances around, noticing Moira Queen near the bar speaking with another woman.
“You haven’t fixed things yet?” She asks, keeping her tone light. Oliver sighs which is enough of an answer for her. She pulls her hand from his, tilting her head in his mother’s direction. “Go.”

“I’m sorry,” he apologizes, but she waves him off.

“It’s fine, really,” she assures him, giving him a soft smile and shrugging one shoulder. “Rain check.”

He nods, returning the smile, before crossing past her towards his mother. She watches the exchange for a moment, it doesn’t appear to be going well. John joins them, murmuring something into Oliver’s ear, before leading him away.

Alone once more, Felicity glances around the room. She spots Tommy leaning against one of the tables, stewing and nursing a scotch. Sighing, she heads across the room towards him, snagging a glass of white wine on the way. She leans against the table next to him.

“What’s got you all dark and gloomy over here?” She asks, following his line of sight to where Laurel is dancing with the man from before. “Ah, gotcha.”

Tommy lets out a heavy sigh, tilting his glass to his lips and taking a large swig from the dark liquid. Felicity follows his lead, drinking her wine and letting him brood a little longer. What it is with the billionaires around here, honestly?

“Did you know,” Tommy starts, mockingly, “that as a doctor, I was able to diagnose myself as a giant tool?”

Felicity frowns, watching Laurel laugh at something the man says, swaying on the dance floor. Admittedly, they’re pretty close, but isn’t this exactly what she’s supposed to be doing? Convincing people with more money than they know what to do with to throw some of it at CNRI? This had been Tommy’s idea, after all.

“Green is not a good look for you, Tommy,” she comments, earning a dark look from him. “You know Laurel doesn’t care about any of that stuff. Actions, she likes actions.”

He’s still frowning and staring down Laurel and the doctor, but she can tell he’s listening to her.

“I’d say this,” she says, gesturing to the event happening around them, “is a pretty big action.”

Tommy sighs, drinking from his glass. Felicity rolls her eyes, she can be silent, too. She’s not great at it, but she can try. Usually, this would lead to her babbling until someone either stops her or walks away, though. She feels the urge coming on the longer the silence persists. God, where is Curtis when she needs him?

“How about a dance, handsome?” Someone asks, saving her from the very real nonsense that was about to spill from her mouth. She glances over to find Thea Queen leaning on Tommy’s shoulder, clearly inebriated.

“Hey, uh, I thought we agreed that you were going to call me before you did something stupid?” Tommy asks, standing up and setting his glass down on the table.

“You’re no fun,” Thea responds, laughing at Tommy’s attempt at brothering her. Her arms come up, her hand going to the back of Tommy’s head. “I’m gonna show you how to have some fun.”

Felicity doesn’t think Thea has noticed her, laser focused on Tommy, and she uncomfortably sips from her glass, trying to ignore them. Her discomfort only increases when it becomes obvious
exactly what Thea thought was happening. She gets a little mean, telling Tommy that Laurel doesn’t even like him. Felicity feels for the young girl, smitten with her brother’s best friend, an older guy who gave her attention. She figures they’ve all been there at some point.

Tommy lowers his voice, leading her away from the party, but Thea turns and knocks into a waiter with a tray of empty wine glasses. Felicity stands up, setting her own glass down next to Tommy’s abandoned one. He grabs Thea by the waist, leading her more firmly out the door. Laurel passes by her, following the pair and Felicity does the same, if only to see if she can help.

“Is Thea okay?” She hears Laurel ask, Felicity coming out the door to the alley a few seconds after her. Tommy makes up an obvious lie about bad crab cakes. “Are you sure it wasn’t something she drank?”

Thea is still throwing up against the wall, so on instinct Felicity passes by Laurel and Tommy to reach her. Neither of them really seem to notice her, as Tommy makes a comment about Laurel’s company for the evening.

“Hey,” she greets Thea, reaching out to place a hand on her back. “You okay?”

Standing up and tugging Tommy’s jacket further around herself, Thea looks her age. She always has a presence in photos of looking older than a teenager, but right now she looks exactly like a scared, heartbroken seventeen-year-old. She nods, wiping the back of her hand across her mouth and watching Tommy and Laurel’s exchange with curiosity.

“Can you call me a cab?” Thea asks, turning towards Felicity. Tommy hears her, turning to look at her.

“Absolutely not,” he says. “I am taking you home.”

Thea hesitates and Felicity jumps in without thinking.

“I can drive her,” she offers, looking between both Thea and Tommy for confirmation. It may be overstepping, but she couldn’t imagine being Thea right now and having to drive the twenty miles back to her home with the guy she just tried to kiss before throwing up in front of. If she were Thea right now she would be finding a nice, cozy hole to crawl into.

Tommy seems unsure, opens his mouth to refuse, but Thea beats him to it.


“You know where you’re going?” Tommy asks, still looking unsure about the whole deal. Felicity nods.

“I’ve been there before,” she says. The response earns a frown from Laurel. Felicity had never actually told her about dropping in on Oliver during his prison party. She figures there’s a lot of things she doesn’t tell Laurel and it’s not a big deal anyway. She looks over at Thea. “My car’s just down the street.”

Thea nods before glancing over at Laurel and Tommy. “I apologize for making such a scene.”

It sounds like a canned response, something she learned in her upbringing. The Queens always seemed to be causing scenes, though, so it was hard to feel surprised at it. She’s sure Thea does feel genuinely bad, figures she’ll feel even worse in the morning.

“Just feel better, okay?” Laurel assures her, reaching out as Thea walks past her. Her hand brushes
Thea’s arm and the younger girl attempts a smile, nodding. Laurel glances at Tommy and excuses herself to head back inside.

Thea steps up towards him.

“Please don’t hate me,” she begs. Felicity continues forward a few steps towards the mouth of the alley, trying to give them some privacy.

“Never,” Tommy replies resolutely. “Never.”

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Felicity had texted Curtis to let him know she’d left early due to an emergency and made him promise that he and Paul would enjoy their night. In the car, she’d actually introduced herself to Thea, explaining that she was a friend of Laurel and Tommy’s. The girl had leaned her head against the window and appeared to be drifting off, though, so she wasn’t sure she’d remember it.

She’s heading out of the Queen Mansion when her phone lights up with an alert and she stops on the stone steps outside the front door to read it. The Hood had stopped the Royal Flush Gang during another attempted robbery, but a security guard had shot one of the members and he’d died by the time police arrived on the scene. They hadn’t released the robbers names yet.

“Is this a win?” She murmurs to herself.

“Is what a win?”

She looks up to find Oliver standing at the bottom of the steps looking up at her. It’s weird, she realizes, to be the taller one for a moment. He looks tired, worn out. Once again, sad. She locks her phone and tucks it away in her coat pocket.

“Oh, sorry, just talking to myself,” she says in lieu of an explanation. Oliver nods, accepting the response.

“Were you here looking for me?” He asks, frowning at the realization that she’s standing on his front steps.

“I was dropping your sister off, actually,” she explains. “She wasn’t feeling very well, something she ate.”

The stolen lie doesn’t seem to sit with him any better than it did Laurel and he frowns, concern crossing his features. Felicity steps down one of the steps, putting them at eye level.

“She’s fine,” she assures him. “She’s asleep.”

He nods, but it’s accompanied by a sigh, so she doesn’t think he feels any better.

“You want to talk about whatever has you looking like modern day Atlas?” She asks. When Oliver just stares at her, she explains, “He’s a titan in Greek mythology tasked with holding up the sky for all eternity to keep it from crushing the world. My point is, you look like you’re carrying quite the burden there.”

“Yesterday, my mom asked me and my sister to be at a brunch with some old friends,” he begins. “This guy I went to high school with, Carter Bowen.”

Something clicks in Felicity’s mind and she snaps her fingers, cutting Oliver off on accident.
“That’s who he was!” She exclaims. “I knew I recognized him, but I couldn’t place him. I’ve read his book.”

He had been so familiar because his face was plastered all over the damn jacket of his book. Oliver smiles ruefully, shaking his head.

“Oh of course you have,” he comments.

“I mean, I was just curious about his take on the subject,” she explains. “It was surprisingly opinionated and kind of preachy for a scientific study, in my opinion. But, sorry, I cut you off. Go ahead.”

Oliver laughs a little at her and it makes Felicity’s cheeks heat, averting her gaze from him.

“I just am having a little trouble figuring out how to be my old self,” he continues. “The person people expect me to be.”

Felicity considers him for a moment, turning her face back towards his to see his expression. He looks so tired. The Atlas comment had been mostly a joke, but the more she comes to know about Oliver, the more sense it seems to make.

“Well, maybe, instead of trying to figure out how to be the old you, you should try to figure out how the new you fits with the people you care about,” she suggests, shrugging at him. “Stop trying to go back and focus on moving forward.”

He gives her a soft smile, considering the advice. She figures when everyone expects you to be the person you were, it’s easy to convince yourself that’s the person you need to be.

“The present changes the past,” Oliver says, quoting something. “Looking back you don’t find what you left behind.”

At Felicity’s frown, he smirks. He’s bested her on this one and he knows it, she’d be annoyed if it wasn’t bringing some genuine happiness back to his eyes.


Felicity smiles, stepping down another step so she can begin to head back to her car. The energy from her nap is starting to wear off and she’s imagining crawling into her warm bed. If the image in her mind mingles with the current moment and pulls Oliver into that bed as well, then Felicity is going to blame it on lack of sleep.

“Not bad for a guy who didn’t know Hamlet,” she teases, drawing a chuckle from him. She moves past him, patting his arm gently in comfort and heading down the driveway. She stops after a few steps.

“And, Oliver,” she calls, turning back. He stops at the top of the steps to look back at her. “For what it’s worth, I don’t think you’re the only one trying to reconcile the past with the present. Try to go a little easier on yourself.”

He smiles at that before calling back to her, “Goodnight, Felicity.”

She gives him a wave and he disappears into the house as she continues her walk to her car. She’s really starting to question the logic behind this ridiculously long driveway.
Thank you guys so much for all the positive feedback! It's really so nice to know people are enjoying this!
Chapter Summary

Someone takes a shot at Moira Queen and Felicity finds herself going up against the mob.

Chapter Notes

One thing I've been meaning to mention - because someone mentioned it in a comment and I totally forgot - is that Felicity's costume/tech are definitely heavily based on her appearance in the Doomworld episode of Legends of Tomorrow. So, just in case you needed a visual reference for it.

This chapter takes place during 1.07 "Muse of Fire". Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Felicity thinks it's pretty impressive how dedicated she is to her nails. She doesn't keep them very long - it messes with her typing - but they're healthy and she paints them every Sunday to prepare for the week ahead.

She can't explain it, but it makes her feel in control.

There's a basket in a drawer within her vanity filled with nail polish bottles in almost every hue. She'd started the collection in college, but it had been mostly blacks, blues, and dark purples. Now, it's dominated by warm, vibrant colors.

Tonight, she picks out a bright red and paints one hand at her coffee table. While it dries, she stands her tablet up and sets it into the keyboard addition. She'd decided to take the weekend and focus on something that wasn't Queen Consolidated related. So, she'd finished her grocery shopping finally, done some laundry, and gotten lots of sleep.

She and Curtis had also spent a whole afternoon in the base, brainstorming tech ideas. It had started with serious ideas, but after a while they had ended up in stitches as they threw nonsense thoughts around. When they'd started imaging specs for a sphere that releases a boxing glove from within to knock out enemies, they decided they wouldn't be getting anything more done.

Curtis had left promising to focus on creating more of the super magnet spheres and creating a more controlled explosive one. Felicity was tasked with creating a form of communication for them for while she was out in the field.

The strange code has been in the back of her mind, though. Mingling with whatever familiarity she reads in it all weekend. Her to-do list and her need to make up sleep has helped her keep her promise, but now, she can't help it.

She pulls up the folder and opens the master file where she's put all the code together. At this point,
she feels like she has every line memorized. She can't shake the feeling that it's like a jigsaw puzzle and she's missing some of the pieces.

In another file, she's listed each of the team members who sent her a section of the code and the lines of the code that came from them. Besides herself, there are three members whose names aren't on the list. In fact, she hasn't heard from them at all. She had sent the email out on a Thursday, so it's possible they just didn't have time to check the code before the weekend.

Sighing, she taps one of her painted nails lightly with the index finger on her other hand. When it comes away dry, she sets to work painting the other hand.

Glancing back and forth between her nails and the code on the screen, something Oliver had said a few nights ago comes back to her. He'd quoted something, a book she doesn't remember the name of right this moment. He'd said the present changes the past, that when you look back you don't always find what you expect.

The language of the code feels like a forgotten memory, something she’s locked away. Felicity has spent so much time trying to leave the past exactly where it is, between her father’s absence and her time in college. Something about this makes her uneasy, like it'd be better if she left it well enough alone and forgot about it.

If she did that, though, she wouldn’t be Felicity Smoak.

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When she gets to work the next morning, she stops to wonder how exactly she could have a queue of tickets two pages long when they’re coming off of the weekend. She’s beginning to think people are escalating things to her so they don’t have to do them. It wouldn’t surprise her, everyone knows her portion of the firewall is finished, so they probably think she has the time.

It’s not that she doesn’t have the time, per say, it’s just that she does have other things she could be doing.

She puts off the tickets for a little bit, still caught up in the strange code. She hadn’t managed to figure out anything new last night, but that hadn’t kept her from thinking about it all morning. Tired of waiting on other people, she decides to be productive and send out a follow up email to the team members she hasn’t heard from yet, knowing they should all be at their desks by now.

Trying not to be too pushy, she just lets them know that every team member seems to be having the same code appear where they didn’t write it and reminds them to check their code. If she can get the full code, she may actually be able to figure out what it does. Her frustration at the mystery is mounting.

She starts to work on the tickets in her queue, calling or emailing the users with follow up questions about the problem. The most common issue she sees are problems connecting to the QC server, which usually is because the user forgot their personal login information or changed their password without updating their saved one.

For the most part, she can solve issues with a canned response, rather than actually having to talk to the user. Not that she minds talking to people all the time, but it can get exhausting when someone who makes twice your salary and can barely boot up their machine talks down to you.

When she takes a break, she finds email responses from two of the three team members she’d sent the email to. They hadn’t had time to check or admit to having forgotten, but the code has popped up
for them as well. Felicity adds their attachments to her folder.

She’s still missing one person, though. Checking to be sure, Felicity lets out a heavy sigh and leans back in her chair. Of course, it’d be Charlie who isn’t responding to her emails. That’s because Charlie hates her, because Charlie likes to be the smartest person in any given room. Except he isn’t, when Felicity is in said room. Or, really, anyone else in the IT department.

Preferring just not to have to deal with him at all, Felicity usually leaves Charlie alone. She’ll go out of her way to leave a room when he’s in it. He isn’t just arrogant and underqualified, he’s insistent that he knows more than anyone else in the department.

“Great,” she sighs, trying to decide if sending another email would even do any good.

Her drama takes a bit of a backseat when news of the shooting out front of the building spreads within it. Security sends out a mass alert, informing employees that the shooter has fled and that no Queen Consolidated employees were shot. They ask everyone to remain where they are and not cause a panic until the SCPD arrives.

Felicity gets a news alert a few moments later that Moira Queen has been taken to the hospital due to a possible concussion and that a man, Paul Copani, was dead on the scene.

When the police arrive, each department head gives its employees the option to take a half day and head home, but assure them that the building is secure and the shooter is no longer nearby. Her office mates take the option and head home, but Felicity decides to stay.

The shooter probably had a specific target in mind, which means it was either Copani or Moira Queen. She hopes that, if it’s the latter, the SCPD offers the family protection. She almost wishes she and Oliver had exchanged numbers at any point so she could check in. For a moment, she almost considers texting Laurel to ask for his number, but decides against it.

She doesn’t want to overstep with Oliver and she definitely doesn’t want to make Laurel uncomfortable.

Finishing up with the rest of her tickets, she decides it will probably be a slow day from here on out, most people taking the excuse to go home. Charlie, though, he’d probably have stayed just to prove he isn’t scared. Felicity decides to pay him a visit.

Charlie’s desk is in a separate office down the hallway from hers. It’s empty except for him. He’s leaning forward at his desk, squinting at the computer in a way that can’t possibly be good for his eyes, clearly caught up in whatever he’s working on.

She waits a few moments for him to notice her before finally knocking lightly on the open door behind her. He looks up at her and sighs when he realizes who it is.

“I got your email, Felicity,” he tells her, leaning back in his chair and looking up at her. “Isn’t the whole point of email to negate you having to come talk to me?”

“It would be,” she says, “if you had bothered to reply to either of them.”

He gives her a smug grin, holding his hands up in a ‘whoops’ gesture. She doesn’t roll her eyes at him, but it’s a herculean effort to keep the reaction tamped down. Charlie lets his hands fall, crossing an ankle over the opposite knee and folding his hands together on his stomach.

“I don’t need you to fix my code for me, Felicity,” he says, a hostile smile playing at his features. “I’m capable of doing my own job.”
Felicity huffs a little, lacing her fingers together behind her back and trying to keep a neutral tone. If Charlie gets a grasp on how important this is to her, he definitely won’t let her see his section of the code.

“Everyone else on the team is seeing some weird code,” she explains, trying to affect a bored tone. “I’m just trying to figure out where it came from.”

Charlie hums, mulling this over. She’s sure it’s an act to bother her, rather than him actually considering it. He tilts his head at her, uncrossing his legs and leaning forward a little bit.

“Did it show up in your code?” He asks.

“No,” Felicity frowns. “Emma brought it to me and then a few other people realized they had the same problem.”

“Weird how that would happen,” Charlie muses. “Everyone gets this mysterious code implanted in their work, except you. And now you’re the one who’s tasked yourself with figuring it out.”

“What’s your point, Charlie?” She asks, tired of the leading responses. She just wants the section of his code, without it she can’t solve this.

“You wouldn’t happen to be up for a promotion, would you, Smoak?” He asks, shrugging innocently.

Felicity glares at him for a second, before schooling her features. She can’t tell if he think he’s being clever or if he’s actually trying to imply she may have implanted the code into the firewall so that she could fix it, be the hero, and earn herself her own office. Charlie may be a snake, but that doesn’t mean she has to be.

“Can you just check your base code, please?” She tries once more. Although, Felicity isn’t above hacking into his computer remotely and finding the file for herself if he continues to test her. She knows how to cover her tracks, he’d never even know it was her. At least, not in any way he could prove.

“Oh, I suppose,” Charlie sighs, sitting up and returning to his work, clearly dismissing her. When Felicity doesn’t budge, continuing to stare at him as he pretends to be productive, he looks back up.

“What? Now?”

“Yes, Charlie,” she bites, crossing her arms over her chest. “Now.”

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Down in the base, Felicity waits for Curtis and stewes in front of the computer. It had taken Charlie forever to do it, even with her standing there, but eventually he’d located the inserted code within his own code and sent it to her. Felicity now has, as far as she can tell, the entirety of the code. It’s not in the right order, so right now it doesn’t say much of anything, but it’s an important step.

As much as she hates to admit it, Charlie wasn’t wrong when he’d said it was weird that the code had shown up in everyone’s section but her own. There also hadn’t been any red flags about a hack on the QC server. Whoever implanted the code, would have had to have made it onto the server and hacked into each person’s computer without leaving a trace.

Well, no trace besides the code itself.

Curtis coming loudly and quickly down the stairs pulls Felicity from her musings and she spins the
chair around to face him.

“Hey,” he greets, reaching the concrete floor of the basement. “What a day, huh? I don’t know about you guys, but the whole R and D department was buzzing all day. I mean, crazy stuff has been happening in this city on pretty much a constant basis, but it hasn’t been so close to home.”

“Yeah,” Felicity agrees. “People were pretty shaken up. Most of the IT department took the option to take a half day and head home. It was kind of a slow day after that, though.”

“Have you heard anything about Moira Queen?” Curtis asks, reaching where she’s sitting at the desk and leaning against the hard surface. Felicity tracks him, spinning in her chair so she can keep up eye contact.

She nods in response, pulling up the updated news article she’d been reading before she got distracted by the code. It says that the Queen matriarch was admitted to the hospital with a mild concussion, but was discharged into her family’s custody within a few hours.

“Good,” Curtis nods, scanning the article. When he’s finished he looks back at Felicity. “So, is this a job for the girl in purple?”

Felicity groans. “Don’t call me that.”

Curtis chuckles, but shrugs.

“We can workshop the name later,” he insists, ignoring Felicity’s look. “But, seriously, do you think the Queens should be worried about the shooter? I know the police haven’t caught them yet.”

“Not sure,” Felicity admits, feeling a little guilty that she’d allowed herself to become so distracted, she hadn’t really thought about whether the Queens were in danger. She pulls the keyboard towards her and begins to look up the man Moira had been meeting with, Paul Copani.

Curtis recognizes what she’s doing and pushes away from the desk, giving her space to work. She hears the sound of his metal stool scraping across the concrete floor. Copani’s name comes up in all the worst places, especially once she really starts digging. The SCPD has a file on him, but haven’t been able to pin any actual evidence on him.

“Uh oh,” Felicity says, earning Curtis’ attention again. He moves quickly to rejoin her. “Copani wasn’t just a businessman. The SCPD had him pegged for mob ties, but they hadn’t been able to make anything stick.”

“Mob?” Curtis asks, voice a little high.

“The Bertinellis,” she explains, pulling up information on the family’s patriarch. “Frank Bertinelli is the CEO of Bertinelli Construction, but that’s just his public persona. Looks like he’s got much worse on his hands than concrete mix. Copani is the third associate of his to wind up on the business end of this assassin’s gun.”

“Felicity, I don’t want to question your skills or anything, but,” Curtis frowns, “I don’t think we’re equipped to take on the mob.”

Chewing on her lip, Felicity stares at the photo of Frank Bertinelli on her screen. It looks like every other professional CEO photo ever. You could swap Bertinelli out for Walter Steele or Malcolm Merlyn. Even Robert Queen. Looks can be so deceiving.

There’s another photo, attached to a news article, of Bertinelli and his daughter Helena dressed in
black and standing at a distance. Three men back Bertinelli, looking mean and large and definitely armed.

“You’re right,” she concedes. They’d be crazy to just jump right in on a possible mob war when they only just decided to start going more on the offensive a few days ago. She can’t know who the shooter’s next target is, but she can keep an eye on Bertinelli’s movements, they might give her an idea of who’s most vulnerable within his organization.

“I’ll work it from here,” she continues, already typing furiously at the keyboard. “We’re not just gonna jump into it if we aren’t prepared.”

Curtis seems appeased by this, nodding at her. He starts explaining what he’s managed to work up for what they’d talked about over the weekend, Felicity half listening as she tries to nail down Bertinelli’s location and the members of his organization.

The only other major player in Starling’s mafia scene is the Chinese Triad, but Felicity is having a hard time believing they’d mow down one of his men in broad daylight on a busy street. Isn’t organized crime supposed to be more subtle than that?

She hacks the files on Bertinelli and the Triad from the SCPD’s system, backtracking carefully to cover her steps. It’s bad enough they may know that she exists as another vigilante within the city, she doesn’t need them tracing a hack back to her system.

While she’s doing so, she manages to intercept a bug. Curious, she hacks the frequency and plays it over the speaker attached to the monitors. The sound of Curtis’ tinkering stops behind her as he focuses on the voices coming from the speaker.

Felicity assumes it’s Bertinelli speaking, warning a member of the Triad that he’ll be coming for them if these attacks don’t stop, despite the member’s assurance that it’s not their doing. He makes a comment about his family’s lifeblood and Felicity frowns.

“Whoever it is, when I find out who’s behind this,” he tells his associate, now that the Triad members have departed, “there will be blood.”

Felicity closes out the hack, backing out the same way she’d entered and leaving no trace.

“If Bertinelli thinks the Triad is behind this and goes after them,” Curtis points out, matching Felicity’s concerned frown. “He could start a war in Starling City.”

The room goes quiet at the realization, as if even the damp, concrete walls know the danger of that possibility.

Felicity had said they weren’t equipped to go after the mob, and they aren’t. But, she’s not so sure this attacker is connected to a mob or if they’re just trying to fulfill a vendetta. Either way, she can’t imagine just sitting back and waiting while Bertinelli starts a mob war.

She spins back to her the computers, frowning at one of the monitors. It has a map of the city pulled up and she’d created a program that ran alongside the police scanner, lighting up with little red dots at locations where calls have been made.

“Nick Salvati,” she says. She can practically feel Curtis’ frown. “He’s Bertinelli’s enforcer. Dollars to donuts, if Bertinelli wants to do something tonight, he’ll send Salvati. I’m gonna try and track his movements.”

“Felicity,” Curtis intones, trepidation coloring his tone.
“I’m just keeping an eye on him,” she insists. She’s pretty sure it’s a lie.

If Bertinelli is worried about money, he’ll start going after people who pay him for protection. Pulling up street cameras, she finds any license plate numbers associated with Bertinelli or Salvati, running them through a program that will alert her if one of the cameras picks it up. While one monitor does that, she focuses on trying to figure out who Bertinelli might be most likely to try to work second monthly payments out of.

She also keeps an eye on the map to her right, but she doubts anyone who pays Bertinelli for protection is going to make a 911 call.

It takes a long time, too long in Felicity’s opinion, for a camera to pick him up. From there, the program does its work, tracking the car through cameras. Felicity keeps an eye on it, while still trying to pin down an actual target. It’s hard to try and find everyone that might be involved with the mob in a city like Starling.

There’s one possibility, though. An Italian restaurant on the corner of Adams street. It’s family owned, but Frank Bertinelli uses it as his unofficial dining place for any business dealings. If Felicity had to make an educated guess, she’d say Mr. Russo probably pays a good deal to keep his restaurant and his family safe.

“I think I have a target,” she announces. Curtis’ stool scrapes against the concrete again as he comes to look over her shoulder. “The owner of a restaurant Bertinelli frequents. He’s worried about money, so he’s probably trying to collect.”

She hops out of her chair, abandoning her heels under the desk and running barefoot across the cold concrete floor. She slides the cabinet open, pulling the leggings and tank top within out and tugging her sweater over her head.

“Are you sure that’s a good idea?” Curtis asks, following her and abandoning any pretense of modesty. Felicity doesn’t have time to care right now as she shimmies the leggings up her legs under her skirt. “Didn’t you just say that we’re not equipped for this?”

“I can’t just sit by, Curtis,” she insists, pulling the coat and gloves from the cabinet as well. “We’re close. I could potentially get to Russo’s before Salvati and get the Russos out.”

She buckles the coat into place and tugs the gloves over her fingers, shoving Curtis’ spheres into her pockets. She buckles the small tablet device onto her wrist.

“And what happens if Salvati shows up and you’re still there?” He posits, staring at her with wide eyes as she secures the wig over her hair. “This is the mob, Felicity. I don’t think they’re big on fair fights.”

“I have to do this,” she tells him. “Just keep an eye on the cameras tracking Salvati, alright?”

She doesn’t wait for his response, shoving her feet into her boots and running for the stairs. Pulling the mask from her pocket, she secures it over her face and pulls her hood up. Salvati will be making the rounds and he wasn’t far from Russo’s last she checked. If she’s going to make it before he does, she’ll have to take a creative route.

God, she really hates heights.

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They say that to conquer a fear, you should immerse yourself in it. Felicity doubts that jumping
between fire escapes and roof tops with only Curtis’ tech as a safety net will ever not be terrifying.

She’s just glad that she’s stopped throwing up from it.

She gets to the corner of Adams street, sights set on the side of Russo’s. Soft light is spilling from inside, but it’s right about closing time. She drops from the fire escape of the apartment building next to it, bending her knees when her feet connect with the pavement. She’s made the mistake of dropping from a height and keeping her legs stiff. It had landed her in bed with ice packs on her knees and a lecture from Curtis.

Once on the ground, Felicity sprints around the corner and into the mouth of an alley that leads to the restaurant. She turns the corner and nearly slams into a body, coming up just short as the person spins around.

Felicity stumbles back a few steps, trying to put herself in low light, and tilts her head down. She remembers how the Hood does it, tilting his chin down and just slightly away to conceal his face.

“Oliver Queen,” she gasps, tacking on his last name at the last second and trying not to appear to familiar. Thank God for the voice modulator.

He’s staring at her in shock, his jaw slightly slack. He’s on the phone, but has dropped it away from his ear in surprise. Felicity can’t think of anything cool or mysterious to say the way the Hood always manages to. Instead, she goes to sprint past him, remembering the prominent threat to the Russos.

“Who are you?” He calls out as she moves to pass him. She resists the urge to turn her face and look at him, continuing a few more steps to put distance between them. She stops, glancing back at him over her shoulder for just a moment.

“You need to get out of here,” she says, trying to sound commanding. “Now!”

She doesn’t have time to wait to see if he listens to her, when she looks back to the building in front of her, a dark car has pulled up. It has to be Salvati’s. Three men get out, slipping around the side of the building to the front entrance.

Felicity runs after them, trying to stay on her toes and keep from making too much noise. She creeps around the corner of the building just as the men force their way into the restaurant. Felicity isn’t proud of it, but it takes her a moment to psych herself up to follow them.

When she does, she can see Salvati inside, trying to intimidate Mr. Russo. Felicity slips in through the door just as Salvati makes a quip about Russo restocking his bar and shoves an armful of bottles to the floor. They shatter and Felicity tuts.

“What a waste of good alcohol,” she comments. Salvati and his men spin, surprised at her entrance. She’s pretty proud of herself for managing to startle them.

“Who are you supposed to be?” Salvati asks, raising an unimpressed eyebrow at her. “She-Hood?”

“Really?” Felicity asks, frowning in disappointment. “That’s the best you can come up with? And you were being so clever a minute ago.”

Salvati stares at her for a moment before waving a dismissive hand and returning his attention to the Russos.

“Kill her,” he says easily.
Felicity’s blood runs cold at the words, making a split second decision as his goons reach for their guns. She dives, overturning a table in front of herself as it gets peppered with bullets. She reaches for the large sphere in her pocket and tosses it over the table, pressing the command on her wrist.

She hears the sound of metal against metal and peaks over the table to see Salvati’s men have lost their firearms, as well as Salvati himself. She resists the urge to fist pump in excitement and jumps up from the cover of the table.

The men seem dumbstruck for a moment, until one of them pulls out a plastic hunting knife and advances on her. Felicity plants her feet and puts her arms up in a defensive stance. She manages to parry his first swing, knocking his wrist off course, but he comes back quick. While she’s still focused on cutting off the momentum of his arm, he tosses the knife between his hands and swings with the other arm.

The knife connects with her bicep, slicing through leather and flesh and making Felicity cry out. She stumbling back from the blow, but the man continues to advance. An arrow flies between them, just barely missing the man’s nose before connecting with the power box in the corner. The lights cut out and glass shatters. Lightning quick, the Hood takes down the man with the knife.

He shoves Felicity towards the Russos, none too gently, and advances on the other man.

“Get them out of here,” he barks. More glass shatters and bullets are flying, another shooter coming into the restaurant.

Felicity presses the command on her wrist, disarming the sphere. The guns fall from it, clattering to the floor, and she scoops it up before ushering the Russos towards the back of the restaurant. She drops the sphere in her pocket and presses her hand against the wound on her arm.

“Back entrance?” She asks the shaken-looking Russos. It takes a moment, but Mr. Russo nods and leads them through the kitchen out the back into an alley. Felicity tells them to get out of here and they don’t wait to be told twice.

Under the street lamps, she pulls her hand away from her arm to get a look at the cut there. It’s bleeding, but not profusely, so she doesn’t think she’s in danger of blood loss. It hurts like a fucker, though, and tears sting her eyes as she presses her palm back to it.

She stays like that for a while, trying to breathe and make her heart calm down. At the sound of a car starting, Felicity rounds the building back to the alley where Salvati’s car was parked. It’s pulling down the alley, away from the restaurant at a surprising speed.

“Shit,” she hisses, the word disappearing under the sound of a motorcycle engine revving. It heads in the opposite direction of her, and Felicity assumes it’s the Hood.

No such luck, though. Tall, dark, and vigilante himself comes down the alley towards her. He spots her, still holding her wounded arm and adjusts his course to head towards her. Her stomach rolls in trepidation at the stiffness in his shoulders.

“What exactly did you think you were doing in there?” He barks, his voice so low it’s more of a growl than words. Felicity stiffens, resisting the urge to curl into herself. Usually, her instinct would be to bark back at him, but tonight she doesn’t have it in her.

“I thought,” she starts, her voice faltering. God, she’d almost died tonight, like, for real died. What was she thinking? “I just wanted to help.”

“By becoming another body?” He asks harshly and Felicity flinches. If she were paying more
attention, she might have realized quicker that he’s seems shook up about something other than lecturing her.

“No, I just-”

“You’re untrained,” he growls. “That tech of yours won’t always save you. You need to stop this before you really get hurt. Or worse.”

He doesn’t wait for her response, stalking past her into the alley, using the wall to leverage himself up onto the fire escape she’d jumped from earlier.

Felicity takes a shaky breath and heads back in the direction of the base.

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She doesn’t exactly run back to the base the same way she’d flown towards Russo’s in her misguided attempt to help. She doesn’t cry, but she thinks that might be shock.

Her pride is hurt and her fingers shake where they press against the wound on her arm. The black leather sticks to her skin with the blood and she doesn’t know how she’s going to repair the jacket yet.

It was stupid, she knows that now. It was stupid to think she could do this, that she could save anyone else when she can’t even save herself. Her hubris had almost been her downfall and she hates to admit it, but if it weren’t for the vigilante that knife probably would have wound up gutting her.

She shivers, the thought or the shock or the weather making her suddenly cold. The apartment building is within view now, but she doesn’t want to go inside so she slows her pace a little more. Curtis is going to give her an ear full and Felicity thinks she’s just about hit capacity on lectures for the night.

She can’t avoid it, though. She needs to change and patch her arm up. There’s no hiding this from Curtis, not since she’ll have to pull out their shoddily put together medkit from the cabinet from where she keeps her clothes. Her fingers tighten on the cut unconsciously, causing a sharp pain that makes her stomach roll.

Felicity hisses at the pain, leaning against the building next to her. She’s lucky it wasn’t a bullet, if this is how she’s reacting to a cut. Turns out, Salvati didn’t need his men to beat her up, she’s perfectly good at doing it herself.

When she gets down into the basement, Curtis is sitting in her computer chair and spins at her entrance to look at her. She avoids his eyes, moving towards the cabinet and pulling the drawer open. She unbuckles her coat and wrist tech, removing them and setting them on top of the cabinet. Now exposed to open air, the pain in her arm is sharp, but she can’t tell if the blood around it is all dried or if it’s still bleeding.

Curtis moves slowly towards her, not being able to see the injury on the arm turned away from him. She’s sure he can sense something, though. Letting him creep closer, like she’s a cornered animal he doesn’t want to spook, Felicity bends over to pull the medkit from the drawer. She spins, giving Curtis a nice look at the cut on her arm, and goes towards his work table.

He sucks in a breath at the sight of her arm and his movements become more urgent as he follows her. Felicity hops up onto his stool, settling herself and setting the first aid box on his table. Her wig and mask come off and she tosses them uncaringly onto the work table. She digs around inside of it
until she finds an alcohol pad.

“What happened?” He asks, stepping closer to get a better look at the gash as she wipes at it with the alcohol pad. It doesn’t sting any worse than the wound itself.

“Not all knives are made of metal,” she offers, hoping he doesn’t hear the way her voice shakes. Curtis just stares at her for a moment and she prods the now cleaned wound with her finger, trying to decide if it’s still bleeding or not. Dried blood sticks to her nail beds, dark red standing in contrast to the bright paint now that her gloves have been removed.

When she’s confident that the cut has mostly clotted, she grabs a piece of gauze and folds it twice, pressing it against the wound. Shaking himself out of his stupor, Curtis reaches for the medkit. He bats her hand out of the way.

“Let me,” he insists. Felicity is too tired to fight him. He finds the roll of self-adhesive elastic bandage she’d been looking for and directs her to hold the gauze tightly against her arm. He wraps it once and she lets her fingers fall away, dropping them into her lap. He wraps it a few more times until he’s confident it’s tight enough and rips it, pressing down on it to make sure it sticks.

Felicity picks at her fingers, trying to scrape the blood off of her nails, and avoids his eyes. He leans back against his work table, arms crossed over his chest and studies her.

“Are you alright?” He asks softly and Felicity nods, keeping her eyes trained on her lap. “Did you get cut anywhere else?” She shakes her head. Curtis sighs. “This is exactly why we agreed we weren’t going to take on the mob. I know you want to help people, so do I! But, if you get yourself killed, you can’t really help anyone.”

“I know,” she bites, trying to remember that she’s mad at herself, not at Curtis. Although if there was ever a bad time for an ‘I told you so,’ this would be it. She feels like she’s going to throw up and being under Curtis’ microscope isn’t helping.

She slides off the stool and stalks over to the cabinet, pulling on the coat she’d worn to work that day. She doesn’t bother with the rest of her clothes, she just wants to leave and at least the leggings and tank top are comfortable. Her heels are still abandoned underneath the computer desk, so she just sticks with the heavy boots.

“Look, can we skip the lecture tonight?” She asks, buttoning up the coat over her torso. “I promise you don’t have to worry about me going into the field again.”

As she heads towards the stairs, resisting the urge to run from the room and hide for awhile, she hears Curtis call her name behind her and ignores it.

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Felicity doesn’t like to park her car near the apartment. It just seems like a mistake, considering her Mini Cooper is considerably recognizable and she knows how easy it is to look up a license plate number. She doesn’t need anyone wondering why there’s a car hanging out by an abandoned apartment building almost every night.

So, she usually just parks on the street a block over. They’re far enough on the edge of the Glades that she isn’t really worried about leaving the car for a few hours. Most of the people in this part of the city are just trying to get by, feeling abandoned by the city’s elites. She used to be nervous about spending so much time here, but working with Laurel actually opened her eyes a lot.

Tonight, though, she’s on edge and she jumps at every sound. At one point, the sound of her own
footsteps echoing behind her makes her entire body go cold. When she realizes what has just startled her, she has to stop for a moment, leaning against a building while she lets her racing pulse calm down.

It’s just started to return to a normal speed, when she hears footsteps again. This time, she knows they aren’t her own and tenses up. A figure moves towards her, but doesn’t seem to have noticed her yet. They step into the light of the street lamp and she sags a little in relief.

“Oliver,” she says, pressing her palm to her chest. It pulls his attention and he looks over at her, frowning when he spots her. She laughs a little, feeling ridiculous for reacting the way she had. “You startled me.”

It doesn’t take him long to reach her and she pushes off of the building. The movement strains the muscles in her bicep and pulls at the cut in her arm making her flinch. Oliver doesn’t miss it, reaching for her on instinct. His hand lands on her uninjured upper arm.

“Hey, are you alright?” He asks, concern furrowing his brow. He’s changed out of the suit she’d seen him in earlier, sporting a sweater and a brown leather jacket.

“Yeah,” she nods, her hand coming up unthinkingly to wrap around the wrist of the hand holding onto her. He tilts his head at her and she shakes her head, laughing a little at herself. She hopes he can’t see how affected she really is. “Just a little jumpy.”

“What are you doing out here?” He frowns, squeezing her arm just a little before dropping his hand. Felicity’s hand lingers, dragging down his wrist and over the back of his hand, before she shoves it in her coat pocket.

“Oh, I was meeting a friend,” she lies quickly, looking down at her shoes. When she glances back up, his raised brows tell her he doesn’t buy it. She doesn’t give him the chance to question her further. “What about you? We’re not exactly in your neck of the woods, either.”

“I had a meeting at the club,” he explains. It’s a valid explanation, but it’s pretty late for a business meeting, in her opinion. He’s a better liar than her, though, so she decides to let it go. He drops his head a little so he can meet her eyes better. Her boots are pretty flat and it puts her at an even shorter height compared to him than usual. “Are you sure you’re okay?”

Felicity hesitates. Her face goes warm and she looks away, taking a slow breath. She doesn’t know why this simple exchange is about to make her cry. Maybe the shock is wearing off, in which case she’d rather get home before she breaks down.

She hears Oliver say her name again, stepping so close she can feel the heat of him. She sucks in a long, slow breath and forces herself to calm down before looking back up at him. He’s standing so close, focused on her, and she realizes he’s reached for her again, his hands wrapped around her forearms. Her stomach flips at the intimacy of the gesture.

“Rough night,” she answers simply. Oliver frowns at her, clearly unsure how to comfort her in this moment. “Sorry, I don’t want to keep you. My car is just around the corner.”

“Let me walk you,” he offers, voice low and soft.

“It’s okay,” she insists, trying not to let herself be affected by him. “I’m sure you have other stuff to do.”

“Nothing that can’t wait,” he assures her, looking down to where his hands rest over the material of her coat. He squeezes just so, looking back up at her pleadingly. “Let me make sure you’re safe.”
Normally, she might bristle at the thought that he could protect her from whatever big bad he thinks lingers in the shadows of the Glades. On any other night, she might roll her eyes and pull away from him, showing him she isn’t afraid. But, tonight, Oliver has managed to find exactly the words she needs to hear.

“Yeah,” she whispers before clearing her throat and speaking a little louder. “Yeah, okay.”

He steps back and Felicity thinks she must be imagining how suddenly cold she feels. She did lose quite a bit of blood tonight. Oliver swings his arm out for her to lead and she starts them in the direction of her car. His hand falls on the small of her back the same way it had last week at Queen Consolidated, but it’s firmer this time, steadying. She appreciates it.

“So,” she starts, desperate to get her mind off of her own night. “You seem a little more broody than usual.” Oliver huffs out a surprised laugh, shaking his head at her, and Felicity smiles at the sound. “Meeting not go so well?”

Oliver sighs, his free hand moving in a nervous tick that Felicity spots, the pads of his index and middle finger rubbing against his thumb.

“Actually, I think a partnership is a good idea in this case,” he explains. “But, my friend thinks I’m aligning myself with a bad person.”

“Are they a bad person?” Felicity asks, turning her head to frown at him as they walk. She doesn’t like the idea that Oliver might align himself with someone sleazy or dangerous, another Frank Bertinelli of the world.

“Is a bad person still bad if they think what they’re doing is right?” He asks after a moment.

“If not,” Felicity considers, “that’s one hell of a justification. I think, maybe, we’re all doing our best to do what’s right, but how long can the ends justify the means until there are only means without an end?”

She can’t help but think of the vigilante. He thinks he’s doing good, and maybe he is to an extent, but does that really justify his body count? What does that say about the soul of a man like that? She’s sure Oliver isn’t talking about something quite so harmful, but it’s all connected in this city. And, she’d prefer not to see Oliver do something that lands him on the business end of an arrow.

Oliver seems to consider this for a while as they walk in silence. She can see her car now, the lone vehicle parked on the street, and digs around in her pockets for her keys. She clicks the button on the key fob to unlock it.

“Just, do what you think is right,” Felicity says, stopping in front of her car and turning to face him. “I’m sure you’ll make the right decision.”

He reaches past her to pull her car door open for her and Felicity slides inside. She lifts her arm carefully, as not to irritate the bandage, and buckles her seatbelt around her. Oliver watches her, smiling when she looks back up at him.

“You gonna be alright?” He asks and she nods, which must be enough for him, because he ducks his head in acknowledgement, pushing her car door shut for her. He stops before it shuts, though, pulling it open far enough for him to hold his hand out to her. She stares at it dumbly. “Can I see your phone?”

“Oh,” she says, surprised at the question. She digs it out of her pocket and holds it out to him, before pulling it back suddenly, remembering she needs to unlock it. “Uh, why?”
She types in her passcode and Oliver gently takes it from her hands, tapping away at the screen. Panicked, Felicity tries to remember if there’s anything incriminating on it.

“\textcolor{red}{I know you said you’ll be fine,}” he tells her, holding the phone back out to her. A new contact bearing his name lights up the screen and it makes her feel suddenly warm. “\textcolor{green}{But, if you decide you’re not, call me, okay?}”

“\textcolor{blue}{I-}” Felicity starts before cutting herself off and just nodding at him. “\textcolor{purple}{Thank you.}”

“\textcolor{green}{Drive safe,}” he responds, placing his hand on the door and going to push it closed once more.

“\textcolor{blue}{Night,}” she says in response just before the door closes fully. Oliver waits as she puts her key in the ignition and pulls away from the curb. She glances back out of her rearview mirror and sees him turn and head back the way he’d come.

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It was easy to forget her own problems while talking to Oliver, but now that she’s alone in her house, Felicity is starting to spiral. Everything is beginning to feel out of her control and she’s suffocating. She needs something she can focus on, something within her control.

She pulls out her tablet and sets it on her coffee table, sitting cross legged in front of it. Turning on her TV across the room, she mirrors the screen of her tablet onto the large TV monitor and pulls up the folder with the code.

The pain in her arm has turned to a dull throb and she removes her coat, giving her arm a little more free movement in just the tank top. The bandage has rolled a little from tugging the sleeve of her coat on and off, but otherwise it’s holding. Curtis did a good job.

She just plays around for a bit, distracting herself by dragging bits of the code around and switching the order. When two sections feel like they read properly, she leaves them. It isn’t until she creates a chain of four sections that she realizes what kind of code it is.

“\textcolor{red}{Oh my God,}” she breathes, moving the rest of the code into their proper order. Saving the whole thing, she gets up and runs to her bedroom, pulling down a box from the top shelf of her closet. It’s been there since she moved in, mostly untouched in the last three years. Digging around inside, she ignores the photos and various trinkets until her fingers close on a thin silver rectangle about the size of her palm.

In the living room, she plugs the old external drive into her tablet and locates the Linux emulator she’d programmed. She opens the code in the emulator, watching as the TV screen goes black. Three white dots appear across it for a moment before being replaced by a single line of white text in a sans-serif font.

You are standing in an open field west of a white house, with a boarded front door, the text reads. There is a mailbox here.

With shaking fingers, Felicity reaches out and types her response.

Open the mailbox .

The screen goes dark and less than a moment later, her cell phone rings. Blocked ID. She stares at it for a long moment, almost lets it go to voicemail, but answers at the last second.

“\textcolor{blue}{I knew you’d figure it out eventually,}” the voice on the other end greets, smug but the same mostly.
Felicity’s voice shakes.

“Cooper.”

Chapter End Notes

Cliffhanger! And finally an answer about that code. Hopefully all that coding nonsense I'd written makes sense? Because now, I wash my hands of it.
Chapter Summary

While Oliver establishes a new relationship, Felicity experiences a crisis of confidence and Tommy struggles to deal with life without his father's money.

Chapter Notes

I really like this chapter, you guys! It deviates /a lot/ from canon in that Felicity has her own stuff going on while canon is just kind of happening in the background. Also, ahem, take note of the rating. Hope you all enjoy!

Takes place during 1.08 "Vendetta"

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Felicity wakes up to the sound of her alarm, groggy and aching all over. She tries to remember why her body would hurt so much, the events of the night before coming back to her, and she blames the adrenaline crash for her soreness.

She sits up, turning off her alarm, and more of last night comes back to her. She freezes, remembering the code, the phone call, the familiar voice.

“I knew you’d figure it out eventually,” the voice on the other end greeted, smug but mostly the same.

Felicity’s voice shook.

“Cooper.”

“Honestly, you kind of took your sweet time about it,” he pointed out. She could hear the grin in his voice and tears sprung to her eyes at the thought of it. With shaking fingers, she gripped the phone tightly, as if holding on to it would keep him on the line. He’d continued, “But, then again, you are quite the busy bee lately, huh?”

“Coop,” she started, fully aware she probably wasn’t talking to Cooper Seldon, but someone trying to fuck with her head. Or maybe she’s losing her mind. “How?”

“All in due time, Felicity,” he said, voice soft the way it used to be when they’d lie in bed, talking about their pasts or their futures. “I need you to meet me. I’ll text you the place, just come. I’ll explain everything.”

Had that been a dream? It felt real, but… Cooper is dead. She’d mourned him. The experience had changed her, forged her into the person she is. Well, she didn’t want to credit Cooper with all of it. Maybe this is just who she was always supposed to be, maybe she had some input and choice along the way.
Either way, she’s sure she’s being duped. By someone good, sure. But, there’s no way it’s actually Cooper and there’s no way she’s going to meet them when they summon her. Felicity Smoak doesn’t get played, she does the playing.

Or, whatever.

She realizes suddenly she’s spent too long contemplating the reality of last night. If she spends any more time on it, she won’t have time to shower. In her closet, she picks out a sleeveless dress, tossing it on the bed, and heading for the bathroom. She catches sight of her bandaged arm in the mirror, remembering the nasty gash there.

Carefully, she peels the bandage away. The gauze has some blood on it, but not enough to warrant concern, and the wound seems to have clotted well enough, scabbing over in some places. She cleans the area carefully in the shower and uses a large adhesive band-aid to cover it when she gets out.

When she spots the dress she picked out, she sighs and decides to layer a light blue blouse underneath it. She doesn’t think she’ll be going sleeveless for a while. As she gets dressed, pulling her hair back into a ponytail and picking out a lipstick, she can’t help but think back to the conversation from last night.

Maybe she’d been hallucinating, from blood loss or shock or whatever. Maybe the phone call had never even happened, she could check the recent calls on her phone and see if she’d actually taken a call. That would negate that it had been a dream or a hallucination.

And, if it wasn’t one of those, then what? It’s not impossible to create a falsification of someone’s voice from recordings. Weren’t prison phone calls and visitations recorded? Could someone have used tapes from Cooper’s short time in jail to create a voice modification system that seemed so realistic?

Felicity doesn’t want to entertain the other possibility, mostly because it doesn’t feel like a real possibility. It feels like a fantasy, something that only happens in science fiction. That Cooper could actually still be alive.

No, she tells herself. Cooper Seldon is dead and someone is trying to use him to gain your trust.

It feels naive to believe anything else. Felicity has been naive about enough lately, she won’t be fooled on this.

She checks the clock and realizes she’s definitely going to be late.

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At work, she finds out Walter Steele has returned from his trip to Australia. It reminds her of Tempest, the LLC Moira Queen had used to divert funds from the company. There had been something strange in the money transfer, and she had intended to dig into it further, but then Walter had left and she got swept up in strange code and crime fighting.

With Walter back, though, the LLC puzzle gains traction in her mind, becoming prioritized once more.

She clears out her ticket queue first, to give herself the ability to focus on the money, rather than being interrupted by irate users to whom she has yet to respond. It only takes her a little over an hour to clear out all the problems, and she opens the folder with the information on Tempest. She’d decided against labeling it after the LLC, not wanting to be too obvious, and when she realizes
someone else had been in the system tracking Moira’s movements as well, she’s glad she hadn’t.

Whoever it was, they were good. Like, government-level good. They had shadowed Moira’s money transfer the same way Felicity had, but they’d done it sneakier. Felicity had been tasked with doing it, so she hadn’t covered her tracks as well as she could have, she could still see traces of herself in the system.

But whoever this was, they’d left almost nothing. Without major hacking skills, no one would even have been able to tell they were in the system in the first place. Felicity just happens to have major hacking skills.

She follows their tracks, but they’re almost miniscule and lead to nothing. She keeps trying, following different paths, trying to trace back to the source. Nothing leads anywhere. It’s like they’d popped into the system and popped out, without any sort of source. If she didn’t know better, she’d think they had access to the system directly.

It takes forever. Felicity spends over two hours tracking their trace, losing it, and backtracking until she finds it again. In the end, it doesn’t lead anywhere, but she does find one thing.

An image.

Calling up to his executive assistant, Felicity asks for a meeting with Mr. Steele, due to an important matter. His assistant informs her that he’ll have time in the evening, if she can keep until then. Felicity agrees.

When she hangs up, she sends the image she’s found to the office printer and picks it up, sliding into a spare file folder in her desk. She stares at the image for a long time, trying to make sense of it. It’s a grid of some kind, but it doesn’t make any recognizable shape.

Her meeting with Walter means she’ll need to stay at QC for longer than she’d intended today, but she doesn’t mind. There’s still work to be done in other areas, and in the time she’d spent trying to find the source of the trace, her queue has filled up with tickets again.

She decides to order lunch to the office, picking it up from the lobby when it arrives, and settling herself in for a long afternoon.

Once she dives into her work, at least, it doesn’t take long for her to lose track of time anyway and before she realizes, it’s the end of the day and everyone is starting to trickle out of the office.

Sighing, she checks the time and realizes it’d be best if she heads up to the executive suites now. When she reaches Walter’s floor, his assistant waves her in, offering her an apologetic smile with her phone pressed to her ear.

“How was your trip to Australia?” Felicity asks as she pushes through the doors. She didn’t want to just start with ‘so, I was investigating your wife’s shady money transaction.’ Except, now that she’s started talking she’s having trouble stopping.

“I’ve always wanted to go down under,” she continues, affecting perhaps the world’s most embarrassing attempt at an Australian accent. “It’s just, I have this thing about kangaroos. More of a phobia. They wig me out. They look evil, and I’m sure their picture’s up on like everything everywhere in that country.”

She can see his annoyance at her babbling and, yet, the words will not stop flowing. Finally, mercifully, he cuts her off.
“You had something important to tell me, Ms. Smoak?” He asks.

“Yes, I did,” she confirms with a smile, thankful for the interruption. “It’s about Tempest. Your wife’s mysterious LLC, the one she diverted company funds to.”

Walter seems confused for a moment, but quickly turns dismissive. He goes back to the file he had been perusing before she’d walked in, going on about kangaroos of all things.

“I appreciate your diligence on this, but, uh, it was a simple misunderstanding between my wife and I,” he explains and Felicity frowns at him. “Everything’s been resolved.”

“No, see, it hasn’t,” she insists, maybe a little more forcefully than she intends to. It makes Walter return his attention to her, though, so she continues. “There was something about the money transfer that felt hinky to me. The money your wife withdrew from the company, I wasn’t the only one who tracked it.”

Walter tilts his head at her, looking unimpressed by this. Felicity can’t stop though, because she knows this is important. She can feel it.

“She was being shadowed by another entity, and whoever it is, they’re good,” she goes on, determined to get all of the information out. Determined to make him see how important this might be. “NSA good.”

Walter flounders for a moment, looking around his desk and searching for something to say. Felicity beats him to it.

“But, as you know, I’m good, too,” she states, not a brag, a fact. She opens the file in her hands, picking out the printout with her fingers. “So, even though they left almost no trace of their presence in our system, I did manage to find one thing. Well, one image.”

She holds it out to him, and Walter looks at the image, his jaw working. Felicity doesn’t miss the recognition in his face.

“Does that symbol mean something to you, sir?” She asks.

Walter sits back, staring at her for a moment. This isn’t the response Felicity was expecting. Not that she was expecting praise, but at least interest, curiosity. Something other than this hard-lined annoyance she’s receiving.

“No,” he snaps, taking the printout from her. Felicity pulls her hand back, startled at his reaction as he stands from his chair and rounds his desk towards her. “What means something to me is one of my employees prying into my wife’s private business without authorization. And, should it happen again, I’ll have you suspended.”

Felicity tenses, suddenly aware of how tall Walter Steele is and how terrifying he can be. He’s always seemed so gentle and kind, not a cutthroat businessman, so much as a well-to-do friend, holding down a family business.

She sees it now, though, the way Walter Steele must negotiate to get the job done. He’d asked her to look into this, but all he has to do is say he hadn’t and she’s out on her ass. She’d be lucky if she didn’t end up part of a criminal investigation into her unauthorized hacking of private banking.

“Is that clear?” He asks, surprisingly gentle for a man who’s just threatened her livelihood.

“Crystal,” Felicity assures him, the folder bending under the clenching of her fingers. She turns and
heads from the office, determined not to look back through the glass walls as she waits for the elevator, not to show weakness or fear.

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After the encounter, Felicity packs up her things and heads home. When Curtis calls, she sends it to voicemail. She’s not ready to go back to the base yet and she doesn’t need Curtis trying to convince her or, worse, agreeing that she isn’t cut out for it anymore.

Her conversation with Walter has her on edge, teetering between shaken at the threat of losing her job and angry at being threatened for doing something he’d asked her to do.

He’s protecting his wife’s secrets, whatever they may be. She’s sure of that. It’s not like she can really blame him for wanting to protect his family, but she doesn’t appreciate being threatened.

She unlocks her phone and pulls up the newest contact. Momentarily, she contemplates that maybe it’s a good thing Walter ordered her to drop this. It’s probably not a good idea to be building some sort of relationship with Oliver while she secretly investigates his mother.

Groaning, she locks her phone and tosses it to the other side of the couch, thinking about the unopened Pinot in her kitchen. As soon as the phone hits the cushions, it buzzes with an incoming text. Felicity stares at it with wide eyes for a moment, surprised at the timing.

She reaches for it, finding a message from a blocked number. It’s a grouping of numbers and she figures they’re coordinates. Glaring down at them, Felicity tries to make a decision about whether to ignore it or not. If it’s someone trying to trick her using Cooper’s voice, she could end up in serious trouble.

But, if it’s not…

She long presses the message, copying the numbers, and inputs them into her browser search. They lead to the edge of the water, right at the docks. There’s a small pier there, and no security or traffic cameras.

Making a decision, Felicity snags her coat and buttons it around her as she heads out the door.

When she gets to the pier, it’s empty. Her arm is starting to throb again and she’s already on edge. She doesn’t intend to wait for whoever it may be for long. Anxious, she paces on the pier, the wood creaking beneath her. She can hear the waves lapping against the posts holding it in place.

She stops at the sound of footsteps, spinning to face their direction. A figure approaches, hands in their jacket pockets and collar pulled up. They’re sporting a baseball cap, like they’re trying to conceal their identity.

“Felicity Smoak,” they call and Felicity bites down hard on her lip. It’s still Cooper’s voice, but she can’t let herself believe it, not yet. “I gotta admit, the hair is throwing me off.”

They step closer, allowing the single street lamp at the beginning of the pier to illuminate them. They pull the baseball cap off and Felicity takes a step back, feeling like the world is shifting beneath her.

Her chest constricts at the sight of him, older maybe but the same. It’s like seeing a ghost. Except, he isn’t a ghost, he’s flesh and blood and standing only a few feet from her now. She reaches out to him instinctively, her hand coming up towards the empty air between them.

Cooper notices the movement, but his eyes are hard now. He only glances at her hand before moving
to circle her on the pier. Felicity follows him with her eyes.

“I don’t understand,” she says, finding her voice. “You died.”

“The NSA needed a hacker with game for cyber espionage,” he explains. “And I needed to avoid a life sentence. It was advantageous for them if I was dead.”

Felicity had been devastated when Cooper died. She had mourned him for what felt like ages, unable to let anyone in for a long time. It wasn’t until Curtis and Laurel that she started to trust people again, to believe that she wasn’t a curse to those who loved her. She hasn’t even managed a real relationship since Cooper.

“About a year ago, I was contacted by an anonymous benefactor,” Cooper continues, still circling her. Felicity turns when he disappears behind her, keeping her eyes on him as if he might disappear otherwise. “They were good. To be able to break through the NSA’s server like that to contact me, it was incredible. Honestly, I thought it might have been you.”

“Who was it?” Felicity asks, frowning at him. Cooper stops circling her finally, turning to look at her.

“I still don’t know,” he says. “But, they helped me get out of my deal with the NSA.”

“They got you out of the NSA?” she asks, disbelievingly. “A deal like that usually comes with one hell of a repayment plan.”

Cooper chuckles, nodding at the suggestion that his benefactor had wanted something in return. Not a savior, someone in need of him.

“At first, they just wanted my help,” he says. “Little things, really. The same kind of small hacktivism we did in college. I figured it was a win-win, you know? I got out of my bum deal with the NSA and I got to continue to cause some civil distress.”

Felicity frowns at the turn of phrase. She knows now that what they did wasn’t helpful. It wasn’t heroic. There are ways to help, real ways. What they had done back then, it had existed in a bubble. They weren’t saving lives or changing the world. They were arrogant kids playing with fire.

“And now?” She prompts.

“Well, after a while, their focus shifted. They were only interested in one person.” Cooper points at her. “You.”

Felicity’s pulse begins to race. Nothing good can come from that sentence. People with good intentions don’t go to this amount of trouble, they just pick up the phone.

“Me?” She repeats, her voice shaking a little. She straightens a bit, trying to seem stronger than she feels.

“I always intended to find you, you know, after I finished my time with the NSA,” he sighs, looking away from her. “I loved you. It broke my heart to see you’d become some corporate lapdog.”

That stings, she’ll admit. Maybe she had sold out, become exactly the type of person they had always said they hated. She has a 401k and a leased car. But, dammit, she became what she needed to become to keep her head afloat.

“Well,” he grins, a wicked thing that makes her stomach turn. “That was before I figured out how
you spend your nights, anyway.”

“I don’t know what you mean,” Felicity hedges, trying to play innocent. Her nerves are fried, though, and the lie couldn’t fool anyone.

“Don’t play dumb, Felicity, you’re no good at it,” Cooper says, turning serious and taking a step towards her. “I’ve been keeping an eye on you for months. The code was my first attempt at contact, once I was given permission. I knew you wouldn’t be able to resist it.”

Felicity wraps her arms over her stomach. The movement pulls at the cut on her arm and she sighs, the pain just making her even more tired. She feels played with, her emotions and trauma being used against her. Like she’s been split open and dumped out, laid bare in her misery.

She resents Cooper for allowing this to happen to her, for being complicit in it.

“So, what does this benefactor want from me?” She bites, her finger gripping her coat sleeves tightly. “Why make contact now?”

“Patience, babe,” Cooper says, the petname grating at her, further pushing her emotions to their breaking point. He pulls the cap back over his hair. “Once I know, I’ll reach out again.”

Felicity goes to argue, tired of feeling like a pawn in all of this, but he’s already walking away, disappearing back into the shadows of the docks. She lets out a frustrated breath and stalks back to her car.

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When she wakes up the next morning, she has a half dozen texts from Curtis and three missed calls from Laurel with one voicemail. She realizes Curtis probably told Laurel that she’s been avoiding the base and him.

“Such a tattle tale,” she grumbles to herself, tossing her phone back onto her bed and heading to the shower.

She resigns to doing her work and keeping her head down, trying to disappear from Walter Steele’s mind. In fairness, he probably hasn’t even thought about her since their interaction in his office, but she can’t help but feel fearful.

It’s something she can add to the growing list of reasons why she is feeling a complete loss of control over her life at the moment.

“Focus on what you can control,” she murmurs to herself like a mantra as she brews a fresh cup of coffee. Her phone buzzes in her hand and she nearly drops her coffee mug. Panic flares at the realization that it might be Cooper, could he really be ready to meet up again already?

It’s just another text from Curtis. She feels a little silly for getting so immediately worked up at her phone going off. Who knows how long it could be before she hears from Cooper again? His mysterious benefactor might not even have a plan yet.

Though, that thought doesn’t really settle her considering whoever it is seems to be fixated on her.

It’s hard to focus on much in the way of work all morning. She’s too worried about, well, everything else. It takes her ten minutes to close out a simple ticket. Her brain is working overtime to worry about things out of her control and it’s making her a terrible multitasker.
Around one in the afternoon, she gives up and decides to take a long lunch. Which means she intends to go further than she normally would and get Big Belly Burger. It’s busy due to the lunch rush, so she stands in line for a while. Her phone doesn’t seem safe, since she’s avoiding pretty much everyone who would be trying to get a hold of her, so she just glances around the restaurant.

She spots Tommy sitting by himself in a booth in the corner, picking at a plate of fries and looking solemn. After she orders, she joins him.

“Hey, Mopey,” she greets. “Where are the other dwarfs?”

He turns a dark look up at her and she smirks at him. Rolling his eyes, he waves a hand towards the booth across from him and she slides into it.

“Nothing better to do than kick a man when he’s down, Smoak?” He responds, lacking his usual flair. Actually, Felicity is genuinely kind of worried.

“What’s going on, Tommy?” She frowns. “Seriously, is everything alright?”

Tommy sighs, picking up a fry, staring at it for a long moment, and then tossing it back on his plate. Felicity waits, raising an eyebrow at his sullen behavior. It takes him a minute before he lets out another, more dramatic sigh, and leans back against the booth.

“My dad, he kind of, uh, cut me off.” He says the sentence like the words physically pain him. Felicity stares at him for a second, surprised at the revelation. She tries to imagine a money-less Tommy, but the images are either too silly or too sad, so she focuses on the present.

“That’s,” she starts, trying to find the right adjective. Tommy tilts his head at her, annoyed. She rushes on, “it sucks! I’m sorry, Tommy. What are you gonna do?”

“I don’t know,” he admits, shrugging in defeat. “I’m almost thirty and I’ve never really had any responsibility. And then there’s Laurel.”

“You know she doesn’t care about the money, right?” Felicity asks immediately and it earns a small smile from Tommy at the thought of her.

“No, of course not,” he agrees, shaking his head at the thought. “But, she thinks I should ask Oliver for a job at the club.”

“It’s not a bad idea,” she considers. “He’s your best friend, so, I’m sure he’d be happy to help out.”

Tommy gives this half annoyed look, like he wants to roll his eyes but he’s restraining himself. She frowns at him, trying to understand where his head may be at. If it’s a pride thing, then, well, she’s not really one to judge this week. But, still, they’re friends. Tommy shouldn’t be embarrassed to ask.

“Yeah, I know,” he says, frustration coloring his tone. “It’s just that he’s…”

He trails off, his gaze going somewhere behind her head and Felicity frowns. After a moment, his lips turn up in a smile and he lifts a hand to wave. She turns in the booth, trying to get a look at who he’s staring at. Oliver waves back, waiting in the line to order food.

“He’s everywhere, apparently,” Tommy finishes through clenched teeth. Felicity twists back around, giving him a confused look just as a waitress brings her food over. She sets the plate down in front of Felicity, who thanks her as she walks away.

“Is there something else going on with you and Oliver?” She asks, curiously, picking up her burger
and taking a bite. Tommy shakes his head, though she’s unconvinced.

“Look, he doesn’t know yet, okay?” He says, pleading with her. “So, please, don’t tell him.”

“I won’t,” Felicity assures him around her bite of food. It’s not her secret to tell anyway, even if she doesn’t understand why Tommy wouldn’t want to tell Oliver. She has her own problems to worry about.

Oliver appears at the end of their table, looking between the two of them in confusion. She can’t help but smile up at him, endeared by the look on his face.

“Hi, Felicity,” he greets. “I didn’t realize you two were lunch buddies.”

Felicity pouts at the strange phrase, shaking her head at him.

“Felicity and I just happened to run into each other,” Tommy explains for her. “Wanna sit?”

Oliver nods, choosing to slide in next to Felicity. She scoots over hastily, pulling her plate with her down the table. Oliver apologizes when his side knocks against hers. She clears her throat and focuses on her plate.

He seems in much better spirits than when she’d seen him two nights ago, which she figures is good. It was nice of him to offer for her to call him if she needed someone, but she’s glad she didn’t. Whatever he was dealing with seems to have worked itself out.

“Are you feeling better?” He asks, leaning towards her just a bit and lowering his voice. Felicity looks up at him and nods jerkily, humming in response and stuffing a whole french fry in her mouth. She feels Tommy frowning at her and raises an eyebrow at him.

“Are you, though?” He asks and Felicity frowns, chewing on her fries in annoyance. “Because Laurel mentioned that Curtis is worried about you and you’re not answering her calls.”

“Yeah, well,” she shrugs, swallowing her mouthful. “I wish everyone would stop worrying about me.”

She knows she sounds like a petulant child, but she just needs to be alone for a while. There’s too much going on right now for her to try and explain that to Curtis or Laurel. She knows they want to help, she’s just not sure there’s any way that they can right now.

“Hey,” Oliver says softly, his hand falling over her wrist where it rests on the table. She bites down on her lip. “Is something going on?”

She doesn’t mean to snap, but she hasn’t really talked to anyone who wasn’t a coworker or a boss or a not-so-dead ex boyfriend in that past 48 hours. So, it just kind of happens.

“Yeah, a lot,” she snaps, it all coming out in a rush. “I was threatened with suspension at work, I haven’t been sleeping well, my ex just showed up in town, and Curtis and Laurel just want to lecture me for choices I made that already bit me in the ass. So, excuse me, if I’m not exactly in a big hurry to return their calls.”

Both men just stare at her in surprise at the outburst. It sinks in after a moment what she’d just done and Felicity’s hand flies to her mouth, her cheeks warming in embarrassment.

“Oh, my God!” She gasps, looking between Tommy and Oliver. She’s sure her face must match the red of her nails at this point. “I am so sorry!”
Tommy laughs at her, not meanly, just in surprise. Oliver blinks at her a few times, his fingers squeezing her wrist. She glances down at the contact.

“What happened with your job?” He asks, concern coloring his tone. She really wishes she hadn’t said anything. There’s nothing Oliver can do for her, even if he could she wouldn’t want him to meddle like that. Not to mention, she really doesn’t want him to know she was investigating his mother.

“I made a stupid mistake,” she explains vaguely. “I just have to be more careful.”

“And the ex?” Tommy asks, his eyes dancing with interest and amusement at that part of her outburst. She gets it. He doesn’t know anything about her and Cooper, no one in her life currently does, so it just seems like some relationship drama.

Oliver’s hands slips off of hers, falling to his lap instead.

“I just thought I’d seen the last of him,” she sighs, picking at her fries once more. “He showed up out of the blue yesterday and I’m trying to figure out how to deal with it.”

Tommy nods in understanding and Felicity focuses in on her food. He and Oliver chat next to her, but she can’t focus enough to actually pick up on the conversation. When her phone vibrates in her pocket, her food is almost completely gone.

She isn’t expecting it this time, so her stomach flips uncomfortably when she sees another message from the blocked number light up her screen. It’s another set of coordinates and the word ‘now.’ Feeling suddenly sick to her stomach, Felicity pushes her plate away on the table.

“I have to go,” she says, still staring down at her phone. She forgets that Oliver is blocking her from getting out of the booth and bumps into his side when she tries to leave. She apologizes and he frowns at her as he slides from the booth.

“Everything alright?” He asks and Felicity nods, stuffing her phone in her pocket. She looks back at the table just as waitress comes out with a to-go bag of Oliver’s order and bills for both her and Tommy. She pulls a couple bills out of her purse and hands it to the woman.

“For both of us,” she explains, motioning between her and Tommy. “Keep the change.”

“Felicity, you don’t have to,” Tommy says, sounding suddenly nervous. She remembers his insistence that Oliver not know about his financial situation.

“It’s fine. I make more money than you,” she offers dismissively, which only earns her a wide eyed accusatory look from Tommy. She looks between him and Oliver and clarifies, “Technically, I make more than either of you. It’s one of the benefits of actually having a paycheck.”

Oliver lets out a soft chuckle as Tommy shakes his head.

“Tell Laurel I’m fine,” she says in parting before turning and heading for the door.

Outside, she types out an email to her supervisor, informing him an emergency has come up and that she can’t come back to work right away. She promises to work the late shift tonight to make it up. Pulling the message from Cooper back up, she copy and pastes it into her browser and waits for the coordinates to give way to an address.

When they do, she recognizes the address and feels her stomach drop. Huffing, she rolls her eyes at Cooper’s dramatics and heads for her car parked across the street.
“Son of a bitch,” she murmurs to herself.

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Felicity doesn’t bother parking her car around the block, leaving it across the street from the apartment building. She would wonder how Cooper knows where the base is, but if he’d been trained by the NSA and had been stalking her for months, it isn’t hard to imagine.

It bothers her that he’s in her place, though, somewhere she had considered sacred. Sure, she’d been avoiding it because she’s too afraid to deal with whether or not she’s cut out for it all, but it’s still her place. It’s ridiculous but something about him being in it feels like corruption.

“Your friend Curtis seems really worried about you,” Cooper says in lieu of a greeting. He’s sitting on Curtis’ stool and she feels a weird relief at seeing he isn’t in her chair. “What are you hiding from, Felicity?”

“What do you want, Coop?” She asks, ignoring him and his leading statements. She doesn’t need to explain or justify herself to him. “Or did you just miss me?”

He smirks at that, but hops off the stool, becoming all business. Felicity can play. She leans against the cabinet with her gear inside.

“The benefactor and I had a little chat,” he tells her. She frowns at the way he says it, like a title. She doesn’t like it, it sets her on edge. Cooper obviously idolizes whoever it is he’s working for, but he doesn’t even know who it is. “They’re prepared to give both of us their name in exchange for someone else’s.”

Felicity’s brow furrows in confusion. “Whose?”

She can’t think of anyone she knows that might be valuable enough to whoever this ‘benefactor’ is. She doesn’t even know why she’s valuable. Cooper offers her a smirk, tilting his head at her like he thinks she’s trying to play him. She really isn’t, though, so she just stares at him.

“The guy in the hood,” he says finally. Felicity blanches for a moment, surprised at the response. It’s not like she knows him, they’ve crossed paths a couple times, but that was bad luck. Or, good luck, in the case of the other night with Nick Salvati.

“What? No,” she insists, finding her voice. “I mean, I can’t. I don’t even know who he is.”

“Oh, come on, Felicity,” Cooper sighs. “You’ve helped him out a couple times.”

“Yeah, by chance,” she explains. “We’re not partners or friends, Coop. I really don’t have his name.”

Cooper sighs, shaking his head at her in disappointment. He circles her computer desk, tapping his fingers across the desk.

“Even if that’s true, and I highly doubt it is,” he says. “You’re the smartest person I’ve ever met. I’m sure if you really wanted to, you could figure it out.”

Felicity crosses her arms over her chest and stares him down. He comes around the other side of her computer desk and moves towards her.

“And what if I don’t want to?” She asks as he closes the distance between them. He seems to contemplate this for a long moment, only answering once he’s fully placed himself in her space.
“Well, we might not have *the* Vigilante’s name,” he warns her. “But, we do have *a* vigilante’s name.”

Unimpressed by his threat, Felicity turns away from him and heads back up the stairs. She hears him call behind her.

“Do the right thing, Felicity.”

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She gets stuck in traffic on the way back to work and ends up arriving even later than she’d intended. The rest of her office mates have left by the time she gets back and her mind feels even more cluttered now than it had been before.

Cooper’s completely lost his mind if he thinks she’s just going to sell out the Hood to protect her own secret. Not that she’s worried about it, the police barely even know she exists because she doesn’t go around putting arrows in people. She doubts the girl in purple is high up on their list of priorities at the moment.

She has no interest in trying to find out who the Hood is, and Cooper and his faceless employer won’t be bullying her into it.

She’s almost done with the work she’d let pile up on her this morning when her desk phone rings. When she answers it, she’s surprised at being summoned up to the executive level again. Her stomach churns in anticipation for the entire elevator ride.

One way to motivate her might be to use her job, something already hanging by a thread, as leverage. Cooper had gotten into the system before, it wouldn’t be hard for him to plant something that led back to her. If he’s been watching her, he might know about the stuff with Moira Queen and could have made it seem like she hadn’t given up.

Or he could have planted something even worse.

Felicity stops to take a deep breath, gripping her employee badge with one hand, and steeling herself for whatever is about to happen before she pushes through the glass doors.

“You wanted to see me, Mr. Steele?” She asks. He looks up at her and she continues, “Did I mentioned, it’s almost the holidays, and many of the suicides this time of year are due to sudden and unexpected joblessness?”

He takes a deep breath, looking down at his desk, and slides a small book towards her with both hands.

“I want you to find out all you can about that notebook,” he explains. With renewed courage, Felicity crosses to his desk and reaches for the book. “Where it was made, how it was purchased, and what it could mean.”

“Yes, sir,” she nods, picking the notebook up.

“Felicity,” he says, pulling her focus away from the book and back to him. He looks almost worried. “I asked Josiah Hudson, our head of security, to look into the same subject matter. He died the next day under questionable circumstances. What I may be asking of you, this mystery, are you sure you want to do this?”

Felicity barely has to think about it. She knows for sure that she’s tired of being afraid. Her fear has
been keeping her out of the things she loves doing, caused her to push away the people she loves. She’s done being bullied and pushed around by it.

“I hate mysteries,” she tells him. “They bug me. They need to be solved.”

She heads back to her office, turning the notebook over in her hands. On the inside cover is the image she had found left behind by whoever tracked the money transfer. She runs her fingers over the blank pages, but they don’t feel blank. The texture changes, like there’s writing there and she just can’t see it.

Felicity starts with what Walter had asked for, searching down the manufacturer and trying to find their old records. Once she gets into the server, there’s a lot to work through. It’s really just a higher end stationery supplier. They pride themselves on “hand bound leather products made tough and durable.”

Nothing throws up any immediate red flags, but she decides to run all of the names through any criminal databases she has access to and wait for something to come up.

In the meantime, she switches her attention to her tablet. If Cooper wants to play hardball with her secrets, than she can sure as hell do the same to his. Hacking into the NSA from QC’s server is probably the most risky thing she’s ever done - and, yes, she’s including going up against the mob. She hooks up to a VPN which spoofs her IP address, dropping her at random spots every five minutes.

It takes her a little while to get inside, mostly because she’s trying to be as careful as possible. She could just kick down the metaphorical door, but that would send alarms blaring. She needs to sneak in a window, instead. Unfortunately, because it’s the NSA, all their windows are locked up tight. She’s always wanted to do this, though, and it’s actually pretty fun. Every move she makes has a counter in their system, it’s like a game of chess. She just has to beat the computer.

When she finally makes it through, she starts looking for Cooper’s files. She starts with three years ago, figuring the file will have originated the year she graduated college. She could just search for his name, which would be quicker, but she’s positive that it would set off flags in their system.

The employment files are locked up under another level of security that she has to break through. That takes a good chunk of time, but she manages it. It takes her forever to find him and the file is mostly redacted, but she makes a copy of it anyway.

She’ll go through it later, when she has more time, and see if there’s something she can use as leverage.

Checking the time, Felicity contemplates heading up to the R&D level. She’s sure Curtis is still there, he tends to stay late. Especially now that they haven’t been going to the base, she doubts he’s eager to rush out. Swallowing her pride, Felicity checks that her computer is still running through the notebook manufacturer’s records, locks the notebook up in her desk drawer, and heads for the elevator.

Curtis is working on something with a group when she walks into the lab. They’re all hunkered over something, talking over each other. She can’t see what the project is and her curiosity isn’t piqued enough for her to try at the moment. Instead, she calls to Curtis.

“Can we talk?” She asks as he stares at her in shock for a moment. He nods, then, leading her back into a different lab area and closing the door. She fidgets uncomfortably, ringing her hands together.
“Sorry I’ve been avoiding you,” she starts and Curtis shakes his head, reaching out and pulling one of her hands into his.

“I’m just worried about you,” he says. “When you left the other night, you weren’t in a good place.”

“Yeah,” Felicity agrees, nodding. She squeezes his hand in reassurance. “I was scared and my pride was hurt. I needed time to clear my head and figure out where to go from here. Curtis, I was almost ready to just call the whole thing off, let the Hood do all the heavy lifting from now on.”

“Almost?” Curtis asks, hopefully. Felicity lets out a laugh and shrugs.

“That was fear talking,” she explains. “And, I don’t want to be ruled by my fear. I need more training and to be able to defend myself, and I think it’ll be a while before I’m ready to go up against mob guys again, but what we’re doing? That’s important and it’s good. So, I’m not ready to quit just yet.”

Curtis grins at her, bouncing a little on his toes in excitement. Felicity laughs, shaking her head at his antics.

“You know,” he starts, taking his hand back and crossing his arms over his chest, “there’s another woman in purple that’s been running around with the Hood the last couple days, going after Bertinelli’s men. The police think she’s the woman they heard about from Mueller’s guys.”

“Good,” she responds immediately. “Let her have that mantle then. I much prefer it here in obscurity.”

“Yeah,” Curtis chuckles. “It wasn’t a very good name anyway.”

Felicity grins, shaking her head at him again. She feels ridiculous for avoiding him. If they had just had this chat earlier, maybe she would have come to terms with her fear sooner. She figures it’s probably something she needed to handle alone, though.

She startles at the sound of an explosion, turning to look out the frosted glass doors. The techs in the next room are scrambling away from the table, she can see their blurry shapes moving in frantic directions. She pushes the door open to get a better look, Curtis right behind her.

“What the hell was that?” She asks, looking around the room. There’s no damage, it certainly doesn’t look like an explosion went off. It had sounded like it, though, and the workers had stumbled away as if there’d been a blast.

“We’re working on something with Applied Sciences,” Curtis explains behind her, sighing. “They trying to create more efficient light grenades, developing non combatant deterrents for riot squads.”

Felicity frowns, staring at the cylindrical device on the table that had formed a crack down the center of it’s casing in the explosion.

“It’s a little touchy right now,” he concludes.

It’s not the light grenade that has her mind running, though, it’s what Curtis had said. UV light. She spins on him and he startles at the movement, staring down at her.

“Does Applied Sciences have anything that can pick up sub-visible variations in the UV spectrum?”
She has to admit, she’s riding pretty high on having solved the mystery of the notebook. Of course, it had just led to another mystery, the names in the book, but she’s still calling it a win. Walter had given her the notebook back and asked her to take down all the names in the book.

Feeling confident, Felicity is the one who reaches out to Cooper this time.

She meets him at the pier again, not liking the idea of him having access to the base whenever he wants. She’ll have to work up some sort of security system for the basement door, a passcode is nice but easy to get through. Maybe a fingerprint scanner.

“That was quick,” Cooper comments as she joins him on the pier. He’d beaten her here this time. “Even for you.”

He’s leaning against one of the railings, looking out into the dark waves. Felicity joins him, leaning back against the railing and facing towards the street.

“So, do you have a name for me?” He asks.

“No,” Felicity says easily, folding her hands together in front of her. She can feel Cooper’s eyes on the side of her face, questioning.

“Then what are we doing here?” He asks, frustration evident in his tone.

“I have something else for you,” she explains, pulling a folder out of her purse and holding it out to him. He stares at it for a moment before taking it from her, flipping it open. He goes pale. “The NSA doesn’t really like it when people leave without permission, do they?”

“How’d you get this?” He bites, gripping the edges of the folder.

“Keep up, Coop, I’m the best,” she offers, shrugging. Finally, she turns to face him. “You overplayed your hand, and I’m a better gambler than you are. You were right, though, your benefactor is good. I don’t know how they made the NSA believe you were dead.”

Cooper is positively seething now, shaking with anger next to her. Or maybe it’s fear. She hesitates, just for a moment, trying to find anything of the boy she loved left behind. He’d started this, though, with his elusive methods and threats. He should have known her well enough to see this coming.

“What I do know,” she continues, looking back at the street rather than his face, “is that all I have to do is mention your name over an unsecured phone line and the NSA will start searching for you.”

“If you think this little threat-” Cooper starts, trying to sound like he’s still in control of the situation. He isn’t, though, and he knows it. She can see it in his eyes.

“It’s not a threat, it’s a promise,” she says, cutting him off. She looks back at him, hoping he can see her sincerity on this in her face. “If you or your benefactor come after me or anyone I care about again, I will make sure the whole world knows you’re alive.”

She waits a moment and then pushes off of the railing, the wood creaking beneath her heels. Heading away from him, Felicity can’t decide if this really feels like a win. She’d had Cooper back, for one moment the boy she loved was alive. But, she thinks maybe he really did die in that prison.

“We loved each other once,” he calls out, like a hail mary, mirroring her own thoughts. Felicity pauses, looking back at him.

“We did,” she agrees, her cheeks feeling warm as tears sting at the back of her eyes. “But, you’re not
that boy anymore. And, I am definitely not that girl.”

With that, she walks away.

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She’s calling today a win. Emotionally, she might be pretty drained, but she’d solved the notebook, controlled her fear, and handled Cooper. So, it might have been a lot, but she’s feeling like she’s regaining control over her life.

Plus, she finally opens that Pinot that’s been sitting on her counter. Pouring herself a glass, she leans against her kitchen counter and flips through the pages of the notebook. She’d borrowed the glasses from Applied Sciences, under Walter’s authority, and brought them home.

She recognizes some of these names, she’s sure of it. She just can’t place them just yet.

A knock at her door, makes her toss the glasses and notebook into one of the drawers and cross the room, peering through the peephole. She’s surprised to see Oliver on the other side, glancing around her hallway as he waits.

“Oliver, hi,” she greets when she tugs the door open. He tries to offer her a smile, but it looks more like a grimace and she resists the urge to reach out to him. “Is everything alright?”

“Is that offer to talk still on the table?” He asks and she nods, waving him inside. He steps through the door, looking around her living room. She moves back towards the kitchen, offering him a glass of wine. He settles awkwardly on her couch while she pours him one.

She joins him, handing him the glass and cradling her own in her hand.

“What’s going on?” She asks. “Everything seemed fine this afternoon.”

Oliver shakes his head, looking down and not responding right away. Felicity waits patiently, drinking her wine and watching him struggle. He stares down at the dark liquid in his own glass, taking a drink after a moment of contemplation.

“You seem better,” he points out, deflecting from her question. She’s willing to let it pass this time. “Everything turn out alright with work and your ex?”

“Yeah, it turns out my mistake at work wasn’t actually a mistake,” she offers vaguely and then thinks of Cooper. “As for my ex, I don’t think I’ll be hearing from him again.”

“Is that good?” Oliver asks. Felicity opens her mouth to answer, but has to think about it for a second. She lets out a quiet laugh.

“I think so,” she says, shrugging. Oliver turns on the couch so he’s facing her, his arm resting on the back of it. “It’s weird. I think I had turned our relationship into this gold standard for relationships, but I don’t think it was, you know? I think I’m finally ready to let him go.”

Oliver nods in understanding. He reaches over, setting his glass on her coffee table. Felicity tips back another sip of the glass before doing the same. She twists a little more on this couch, to face him fully, and pulls her legs up under her.

She’s surprised at how comfortable she feels talking with him about this.

“What about you, Oliver?” She tries again. “Are you alright?”
“You remember that partnership I was considering?” He asks and Felicity nods. His friend had thought it was a bad idea, but she’d been sure he’d make the right decision about it. She wonders if maybe she’d been wrong. Oliver avoids her eyes. “I gave it a trial run and it turned out my friend was right. There was no justification for it.”

“I’m sure you’ll find another partner,” Felicity assures him and he lifts his eyes to meet hers. “With your name attached to it, the club’s gonna have tons of interest. Morbid curiosity.”

Oliver smiles at her again, but this time it seems genuine. He still seems sad, though, like the dissolved partnership is weighing on him more than she’d expect.

“Actually, Tommy is gonna be working on it with me,” he tells her and Felicity nods, smiling a little. Looks like she’s not the only one who’d managed to swallow their pride tonight.

“Good,” she says, nodding to herself. “We have to let our friends help us sometimes.”

Oliver nods, but he’s silent for another moment. Felicity waits him out, watching the wheels turn in his mind. She puts her arm on the back of the couch, resting her head against her closed fist.

“A lot of bad stuff has happened to me, Felicity,” he starts and she sits up a little straighter. He’s never mentioned this stuff to her, probably because they haven’t really gotten this personal before. “I guess I just thought, I deserved a little good, too. Like, the universe was trying to make it up.”

“Oh, Oliver,” she sighs, lifting her head and letting her hand fall over his. He looks at their hands on the back of the couch as she talks. “I don’t think the universe keeps some cosmic tally like that. I think sometimes you just have to make your own good.”

He turns his hand over, letting their palms fall against each other. Felicity looks over at their hands at the movement. Her body goes suddenly warm and she realizes how close their various moving has put them on the couch, her knees nearly pressing into his thigh.

“And how do I do that?” He asks quietly, his voice low and gentle. She forces herself to meet his eyes again, but immediately realizes what a mistake it is.

“Start by figuring out what you want,” she suggests slowly, her mouth suddenly dry. She resists the urge to reach for her wine glass on the table, not wanting to break this moment. Oliver nods, his eyes trained on her face.

They’re quiet for a moment, just watching each other try to navigate the moment. She sees the moment Oliver makes a decision in his face. He wraps his fingers in hers and tugs gently at her hand. She lets him guide her closer, her eyes closing as he kisses her.

The first kiss is gentle, but it escalates quickly and she ends up on top of him, her fingers dragging through his hair. Her glasses push uncomfortably into her nose and she pulls her mouth away from his to remove them. Oliver takes the opportunity to drag his mouth down her neck, the short hairs of his beard scratching against her skin.

He stands suddenly, taking her with him and causing a surprised squeak to fall from her lips. He laughs at the noise and Felicity buries her face in his neck, embarrassed. Oliver coaxes her away from his shoulder, urging her to look at him again.

She bites her lip, staring at him, wondering if he’s about to end whatever this is. Instead he leans forward, pulling her lip out of her teeth’s grip and kissing her again.

“Bedroom?” He asks, his hands under her ass supporting her weight. Felicity pulls away, kissing his
jaw and waving in the direction of the hallway. Oliver takes the hint well, leading them towards the bedroom. He stops at one point in the hallway to push her up against the wall. His mouth trails down her neck again, as he uses one hand to work the buttons on her blouse.

Felicity gasps as he sucks lightly at the juncture of her neck and shoulder and helps him unbutton her shirt. He pushes it off of her shoulders, but it catches at the wall. Unconcerned, Oliver focuses his efforts on the newly uncovered skin. He places kisses at the top of one of her breasts, using the hand not supporting her weight to massage the other through her bra.

“Shirt,” she commands on a gasp, surprising herself. She hadn’t meant to say it aloud, but she tugs at the hem of the sweater he’s wearing and Oliver helps her, pulling it over his head along with the shirt underneath.

Her hands drag over his chest and she’s surprised for a moment at the feeling of scar tissue. She pulls back to get a better look, Oliver tensing once he realizes. She trails her fingers over the large mass of scar tissue on his shoulder, one hand still wrapped up in his hair.

Oliver waits patiently. When she meets his gaze again, she can tell her interest had made him nervous. She just stares at him for a long moment, trying to decide how to proceed. Finally, she points at the door directly behind him.

“Bedroom,” she explains, moving her hand from his chest to his jaw and pulling his mouth back to hers.

Her back leaves the wall, her shirt still hanging off her shoulders, and he backs them into her room. He eases them down onto her bed, Felicity knees falling on either side of his hips. Her tight pencil skirt has bunched up her thighs and Oliver’s hands trail up her legs, pushing the skirt further up until he reaches the edge of her underwear.

Felicity sits back, pulling her shirt the rest of the way off and releasing the clasp on her bra. Oliver watches her, his hands warm on her thighs and she forces away her natural instinct to feel self-conscious. Instead, she places her hands on his chest and pushes lightly, urging him backwards into the mattress.

She trails her fingers down his chest, reaching the buckle of his belt. Oliver’s eyes drift shut, his fingers flexing where they rest on her legs. She undoes the buckle and slides his zipper down, palming him through the material of his underwear.

“Felicity,” he says quietly, his fingers tightening almost painfully on her legs before he lets them fall away. She realizes suddenly how much she loves the way he says her name. Grinning, she leans down, capturing his mouth with hers once more while she continues to work him through the fabric.

His hands land on her back, trailing up her spine. He reaches up, gently releasing her hair from it’s ponytail, following the fall of her hair back down her back, his hand stopping at the top of her ass. He flips them suddenly, surprising her as she lands on her back underneath him. His mouth drags from her jaw, down her neck, to her breasts and Felicity gasps as he takes one in his mouth.

His hand drifts down between them, stroking her through her underwear. Felicity moans, rolling her hips and trying to create more friction. She feels Oliver grin against her skin and realizes he’s playing with her. She huffs in annoyance, tightening her grip on him. He groans, tensing against her, his fingers pressing against her clit.

“Fuck, Felicity,” he groans and she grins.
“Yeah, I’m trying ,” she teases, earning a breathy chuckle from him. She urges his pants down his thighs and Oliver helps her, lifting himself off of her with one arm and using the other to push his pants and boxers the rest of the way down.

She reaches for him again, her fingers wrapping around his hard cock, moving slowly at first. He pushes her underwear to the side, slipping a finger inside her. She sighs at the contact and Oliver kisses her again.

“Condom?” She pants. Oliver goes still, dropping his head against the pillow next to her. Felicity almost laughs at the response.

“Shit,” he sighs. “It’s in my pants.”

Rolling her eyes good naturedly, Felicity pushes him off of her. He rolls, landing on his back next to her. She slips off of the bed, finding his pants and fishing in the pockets for his wallet. She find it and pulls the little foil packet out, tossing it at him. It lands on his chest and he tears it open while Felicity shimmies out of her skirt and underwear.

She stops to admire him splayed out on her bed, rolling the condom over himself. He catches her watching and grins smugly. He returns her gaze, his eyes roving over her body in a way that makes her feel warm all over.

“What’s that?” He asks, tapping his upper arm. Felicity looks down at the band-aid on her arm. She’d actually forgotten about it, which probably boded well for it’s healing. She shakes her head, climbing back onto the bed.

“Just a scratch,” she explains, straddling his hips. He sits up, his arms coming around her back again, and nods.

When he slides into her, she stops breathing for a moment. They still, adjusting to the change.

“You good?” Oliver asks. Felicity’s eyes have drifted shut, but she nods in response to him.

“So good,” she breathes, earning a breathy laugh from him. She opens her eyes, meeting his gaze and rolling her hips into his. He sucks in a breath through his teeth, meeting the movements of her hips with his own. Felicity’s fingers tangle in his hair, dragging through the short strands and trying to find purchase as she rocks against him.

He tilts his head forward, nipping at her shoulder before soothing the bite with his tongue. She hums in pleasure, letting her head fall back. It’s admittedly been a while and Oliver feels amazing. He laughs again and she realizes she’d said that aloud.

He lifts his head, his lips brushing the shell of her ear.

“You feel amazing,” he replies, practically growling the words into her ear. A shiver runs through her and he punctuates the statement by flipping them again, gaining the upper hand. He thrusts his hips against hers and Felicity decides she’s happy to give it to him.

He snakes his hand down between their bodies, his fingers circling her clit. She doubts either of them have much longer and he picks up the pace of his fingers, creating delicious friction against the bundle of nerves. His mouth returns to her breast, circling her nipple with his tongue before taking it between his teeth.

She comes with a sharp gasp, her hips bucking upwards into his while her fingers grip his biceps, the muscles there corded and tense. His movements become sloppy as he follows her over the edge a
few seconds later.

He rests his forehead against her collarbone for a moment, trying to hold himself up and keep his weight from crushing her. He rolls off of her, flopping back into the comforter next to her. They’re both panting a little as they come down from their respective highs and Felicity laughs a little, pressing her hand to her forehead.

“So, that happened.”

Chapter End Notes

Also, a lot of you seem to think Oliver knows, but have you considered that Oliver Queen is an oblivious little shit? xx
Chapter Summary

Felicity tries to navigate the changes to her world over the last two days.

Chapter Notes

This chapter is kind of a weird one in that it doesn't actually belong in s1 canon, but instead it takes place in the s1 flashbacks that happen in 5.09 "What We Leave Behind." I needed some space between last chapter and the next chapter for Felicity to figure things out.

Also, see below for a note about a change to the posting schedule.

Enjoy!

Felicity wakes up to her alarm trilling, but her pillow is really warm and her bed is extra comfortable this morning, so she lets it go for a little longer, turning and pressing her face into her pillow. Except, nope, not a pillow. It shifts, moving underneath her and the alarm stops before it settles back. Felicity keeps her eyes squeezed shut tightly.

Did she really sleep with Oliver Queen last night?

His fingers tighten at her hip and he says her name quietly. She ignores him for a moment, keeping her face pressed into his chest and trying to calm her sudden panic. He says her name again, with a little more force, and tucks her hair behind her ear with his other hand.

Finally, she looks up, propping her chin up on his chest.

“That was not a dream,” she states, earning a chuckle from Oliver that she feels vibrate through her own chest.

“No, it wasn’t,” he agrees, smiling softly at her. He’s still playing with the ends of her hair and she’s suddenly aware of the intimacy of the situation. She breaks their shared gaze, looking over at the clock next to her bed. She pulls the sheet from him, wrapping it around herself as she slips from the
“I have to get ready for work,” she says, looking around the room at the disarray of clothes they had made. His sweater and undershirt are noticeably missing in the mess, discarded in the hallway where he’d had her pressed against the wall. The memory makes her cheeks warm and she turns away from him.

“Oh,” he says gently, trying to pull her attention. When she doesn’t turn, he tries again. “Felicity.”

She takes a deep breath and turns back around. He’s sitting up now, the comforter pillowed around his waist and she is so, so glad he isn’t just sitting entirely naked in front of her. Honestly, she might never actually breathe normally around him again.

“Are you alright?” He asks, frowning now. She’s sure he can sense her panic, she’s not exactly being chill about it. “I mean, I know last night was kind of sudden, and if you’re regretting it—”

“I’m not,” she says, cutting him off. It’s the truth. Regret isn’t the word she’d use, maybe a little embarrassed or stressed, confused even, but not regretful. She takes a hesitant step towards the bed. “Last night was great, really. Unless, you’re regretting it. I mean, you came here to talk and, oh my God, I just plied you with wine! I hope you don’t think I was expecting this or anything, because I swear, I—”

He’s grinning at her again and she’s glad one of them is finding the humor here, because right now she’d like very much to be swallowed up by the floor, never to be seen or heard from again.

“You didn’t take advantage of me, Felicity,” he teases and she huffs out a breath. Stepping closer, she drops onto the corner of the mattress. “I’m glad last night happened.”

“You are?” She asks warily. Oliver nods, his smile turning gentle and she can’t help but return it. She has a lot of questions, like where they go from here and how the hell she’s supposed to act normal around him again. Not that she’s ever acted normal around him, per say, but, you know. Her brand of normal.

Her alarm starts blaring again, the second warning she sets for if she decides to snooze a little. She lets out a distressed yelp, hopping up from the bed again and nearly dropping the sheet. She is going to be so late if she doesn’t get in the shower right now.
“I have to get ready,” she says again, more urgently this time as she practically sprints to the bathroom. She hears Oliver laughing behind her.

In the shower, she discovers that Oliver likes to leave his mark apparently. She’s got beard burn on her shoulder, but it’s faded and barely there, and a bright red hickey on the top of her breast. She makes a mental note to yell at him for it, because he’s lucky it’s in an easily coverable spot.

Although, scolding him might give the impression that she thinks that it’ll happen again, that they’re a thing now or whatever. So, maybe she’ll keep her annoyance to herself until she figures out where they stand.

She wants to let the water calm her nerves and ease her muscles, but she has to keep it short. She doesn’t even bother to wash her hair, pulling it up and away to keep it out of the spray of the water. Oliver is dozing again when she gets out of the shower, wrapped up in a towel. She stands in the middle of her room, studying him for a moment.

Even in sleep, he doesn’t seem completely care free.

She picks out an outfit, picking up her clothes from last night and tossing them in her hamper, before heading back to the bathroom to change. Oliver is asleep, so she could probably dress in the room, but she feels awkward all of a sudden. It had been so comfortable and natural last night, but now she feels like she’s standing at the edge of a precipice and dangerously close to fucking everything up.

He wakes up to Felicity coming back into the room, securing her hair in a ponytail at the base of her skull.

“Hey,” he says, his voice rough with sleep. She wonders if he’d been awake for a while before he switched her alarm off for her. “I fell back asleep. You heading out?”

“Yeah, I have a lot to do at work, sorry,” she explains, trying to remember where the last place she’d left her phone was. Oliver waves off her apology, understanding that she can’t just blow off work, and sits up in her bed again. The comforter slips with the movement, pooling low on his hips. Her nerves return in full force.

“Uh, okay, so. There’s a coffee maker in the kitchen, if you drink coffee. Do you drink coffee?” She doesn’t wait for him to answer, awkwardly waving her arms around. She speaking too fast for him to get a word in anyway. “Well, if you do. I don’t know that there’s much to eat, I think I have some
Oliver nods, looking bewildered by her nervous energy. Felicity stares at him for a moment, chewing on her lip.

“Right,” she says, suddenly, shaking herself out of it. “Okay. I’ll see you later, then.”

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Felicity gets stopped at the security desk when she checks in at Queen Consolidated. It trips her up, because she knows her badge is up to date, she’d just taken a new photo a few weeks ago. She feels like everyone in the lobby is watching her be held back, even though she’s sure no one could really give a crap this early in the morning.

“Is everything alright?” She asks one of the burly looking security guys. He turns a genial smile on her and it does make her feel a little bit better.

“Everything is fine, Ms. Smoak,” he assures her. “We were just asked to inform Mr. Steele’s office when you arrived.”

Okay, that makes her feel worse. She knows that there’s almost no way Walter Steele could know she’d spent last night screwing his stepson but, dammit, that doesn’t stop the panic flaring in her chest. She focuses on breathing normally, trying to remind herself that Walter could need to speak to her for any number of reasons. They are trying to figure out what the names in the notebook mean or maybe there’s an issue with her portion of the firewall. They’re days from its release, so he could be taking a personal interest.

Or maybe he’s decided that employing a woman to investigate your wife at her family’s company is a bad idea.

Felicity is on the edge of a panic attack, trying to look calm on the outside, but sure she looks just as panicked as she feels, when Walter comes striding out of the elevator with his assistant in tow. They stop outside the elevators and Walter turns, saying something to the woman. She nods, tapping away at her cell phone.

The woman is always nice when she’s sent to fetch Felicity, and probably incredibly good at her job,
but Felicity does not envy her for it. She’s sure it’s not all bad, but the idea of following someone around, taking notes and making dinner reservations. God, she doesn’t think she could ever handle it.

Walter nods at her, thanking her and dismissing her. The woman turns back to the elevators, stepping back inside, while Walter crosses the room to Felicity. Her nerves are fried from the wait already and she twists her hands anxiously behind her back.

“Ms. Smoak, good morning,” he greets. “Sorry for the unorthodox means, but I have some good news for you. As of this morning, you have been promoted within your department.”

“Promoted?” Felicity chokes. Sure, she’d stepped up with the firewall and been helping him with this side project. But, a promotion seems a bit much. She must be staring at him like he’s got two heads because he gives her an amused smile and waves her towards the elevators.

“Don’t get too excited,” he jokes as Felicity forces her feet to move towards the bay of elevators. Walter presses the call button. “It’s not much of a change, I assure you. You’ll take on a bit more responsibility, but you’ll still report to your normal supervisor. It’s really just a change in title.”

“I don’t understand,” she admits quietly as they step into the car. Walter presses the floor for the IT department. “I didn’t apply for a promotion.”

“Yes, I know,” Walter agrees, nodding his head. “However, I felt that your overtime work and personal dedication more than warranted it.”

Felicity doesn’t know how to respond to that so, for once, she keeps quiet. The doors open and Walter leads her from the elevators, in the opposite direction of her office. They reach a set of doors and he waves his hand towards them. Felicity pushes through, finding a relatively small office backed by the server.

“Your promotion,” Walter explains, “does come with the perk of your own office, though.”

Felicity stares around the room in wide-eyed shock. It’s darker than her old office, but being that they’ve clearly converted one of the server rooms into an office, that’s hardly surprising. The walls are a soft blue and the light that spills through the doors is blue. The room certainly has a theme.

She likes it.
“Felicity,” Walter says, gaining her attention again. She straightens, turning to face him. “I thought that, due to the private nature of the project I assigned you, it might be beneficial for you to have a more private workspace.”

“Oh,” she says, understanding now why he’d gone out of his way to give her the promotion. It makes sense, and she’s still grateful, but it makes it feel a little less like earning it. Still, no more smelling Ben’s weird leftovers a few feet from her? A definite plus. “Thank you, sir.”

“As you said, you are one of the most valuable members of our IT department,” he says, the praise somehow sounding even better in his accent. She offers him a gracious smile and he switches gears. “Have you had any time to begin creating a digital copy of the names in the book?”

She remembers the notebook and glasses stashed away in her bag and shakes her head.

“No, sorry, I was busy last night,” she explains, avoiding his eyes and hoping he can’t see the sudden guilt she’s feeling. “I can get started on it right away.”

“Of course, we all have to have lives outside of work,” he says in understanding. “Please, let me know once you’ve finished. And, it should go without saying, but I appreciate your discretion on this matter. The less people who know about our interest in that book, I believe the safer we’ll be.”

Felicity nods quickly, understanding the risk of the book. Walter nods once before turning and heading out of the office. Felicity turns back towards her new desk, staring at the fresh monitors and the server behind them. She circles the desk and realizes that Walter must have had her things moved from her old desk.

She sits down in the chair, shifting a little to try and get used to it, and places her hands flat on the desk. She looks down and realizes her nail polish is starting to chip.

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It’s nearing lunch time when Laurel calls her, asking if she has time to meet up and chat. They decide to meet at a coffee place halfway between CNRI and Queen Consolidated. Taking down every name in the book is proving a longer feat than Felicity had been expecting, but she figures she owes Laurel the time and an explanation of why she had been blowing her off the last couple days.
It isn’t until after she agrees that she begins to wonder if she should tell Laurel about last night. Laurel and Tommy seem to be sort of making a go of it, so she might not even care. It feels like lying to keep it from her, but Felicity doesn’t even know what ‘it’ is. So, if it was a one night thing, then does it really matter?

The question of whether Felicity wants it to have been a one night thing is something she can’t even begin to unpack.

She decides to stick with tea and orders chamomile, hoping it will calm her anxious nerves and restless thoughts. Part of the reason it’s taking her so long to work through the list of names is that she’ll find herself staring at a name, lost in thought, without really taking it in.

When she gets back to work, she resolves to buckle down and really work on the list. It’s long, but she’s confident she can get it done in the next two days, alongside her other work. It’s easy to get distracted when there’s no one around to judge you, though. She needs to get used to the new office.

Felicity is waiting for her drink at the counter when Laurel comes in. She spots Felicity and waves, before getting in line. When the barista hands her her tea, Felicity catches Laurel’s attention again and points to a table. Laurel nods at the silent explanation and Felicity takes her seat.

She pulls the lid off of her cup and blows lightly on the hot drink. When Laurel joins her, a large and steaming coffee in her hands, she replaces the lid and takes a cautious sip.

“So, what’s up?” Felicity asks, twisting the sleeve around her paper cup.

“Nothing’s up, Felicity,” Laurel laughs, shaking her head and pouring a packet of sugar into her cup. “Curtis had me worried about you yesterday, though, so I wanted to check in. How come you were avoiding us?”

Felicity sighs, shrugging her shoulders and leaning back in her chair. “How much did Curtis tell you?”

“Just a little,” Laurel assures her. She reaches across the table, pulling one of Felicity’s hands from her cup and squeezing it. “Just that there was some sort of incident. Are you okay?”
Felicity thinks of the cut on her arm. She’d taken the band-aid off before her shower this morning and the wound is healing nicely. She doubts it’ll scar and she thinks it’s believable that she managed to do it to herself, if someone were to ask. She’d still put another band-aid over it afterward, just in case.

“Yeah, I just had a run in with some guys with guns,” she explains quietly, not wanting to go into grand detail about what happened. Laurel’s fingers tighten around hers and it gives her the confidence to continue. “It shook me, Laurel. Like, bad. I just needed some time to figure out if I could even do this stuff, you know? I mean, I’m not trained or anything and Curtis’ tech can’t protect me from everything. He and I agreed that he’d work on more offensive tech and I wouldn’t put myself in danger until I’m better equipped to handle it.”

Laurel sighs, pulling her hand from Felicity’s and leaning back in her seat. She picks her cup up and sips from the lid, contemplating Felicity. She squirms under the scrutiny.

“I can’t convince you not to do the whole full-fledged vigilante thing, can I?” Laurel asks, keeping her voice low. There’s music playing from overhead and the space isn’t exactly quiet, but discretion is pretty important here.

“Probably not,” Felicity admits, picking at the sleeve on her cup.

“Okay,” Laurel nods, though she stills seems at least mildly conflicted. “Then at least let me help you.”

Felicity frowns, confused.

“Daughter of a cop, remember?” Laurel grins. “I’ve been taking self defense on and off since I was in junior high. I can train you, at least on the basics. How to throw a punch, disarm someone, use an attacker’s weight against them.”

Felicity knows she must be staring wide eyed, because Laurel laughs at her expression, but she’d never realized the other woman was such a badass. Well, sure, in the courtroom. But, it makes sense. And if Laurel is offering to train her, Felicity isn’t gonna say no.

“Yeah,” Felicity nods, feeling better already. She bounces in her seat a little. “That sounds like fun!”
Laurel laughs at her enthusiasm, pulling a napkin from the dispenser at the table and a pen from her purse. She scribbles something down, sliding the napkin towards Felicity.

“I know a gym. It’s in the Glades, but I figure they’ll ask less questions there,” she explains, tapping the address with her pen. “Can you meet me there tomorrow after work?”

Felicity nods. “Sounds great.”

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She’s beginning to think she’s taking on too many projects and she’s just not as good a multitasker as she thought. On her way to the base, she’d stopped at an electronics store and picked up some pieces she’d need to start working on comms for her and Curtis. At the moment, with her not going out in the field, they don’t really need them, but she’d rather be prepared when the time comes.

The notebook is still tucked away in her purse, along with the borrowed glasses. Applied Sciences is going to start wondering why she needs them soon and they’re making working on the list difficult. There has to be a more sustainable way of making the invisible ink in the book, well, visible.

First, though, the comms. She’d prefer not to work on the list with Curtis around. She doesn’t like keeping secrets from him, but she has the feeling that the further he stays from this, the better. For right now, her looking into the notebook can stay between her and Walter.

“Did you hear about this?” She asks aloud, pointing to the news article on her computer. It details the information coming out of Lamb Valley, that there appears to have been some sort of tuberculosis outbreak.

“TB?” Curtis reads, coming around her to see the screen better. He scans the article while Felicity waits. “Damn. That’s scary.”

“Yeah,” Felicity agrees, frowning at the screen. “Most of the people in Lamb Valley, they’re working class. They aren’t gonna be able to afford the hospital care or the cure for this.”

Curtis goes quiet, unsure how to respond. She doesn’t blame him. It’s probably a random outbreak, totally out of anyone’s control, but somehow that’s worse. No hero or vigilante could have stopped it. Isn’t enough bad stuff happening already without adding outbreaks and natural disasters?
“How are the comms coming?” He asks, looking down at her work. Right now it’s a mess of black rounded casings and tiny wires. It’ll take her a little while to get a working prototype up, but she’s happy with the specs she’s created.

“Good, I think,” she responds, clicking a key on her keyboard that makes the news article minimize. “Still a ways to go, but it’s gonna take some time. I might be able to have a working prototype up by tomorrow night.”

Curtis barks a laugh, leaving her side to head back to his work table.

“Oh, you would think taking more than two days to create something is ‘some time,’” he teases, taking a seat on his stool. His long legs stretch out in front of him and Felicity rolls her eyes.

“What about you?” She asks, eyeing the mess of metal, plastic, and wires on his table from her chair. She grins. “Working on anything that’s gonna make me a total badass?”

“I’ve got a few pretty neat things in mind,” he admits. This is why she loves Curtis. He says things like ‘pretty neat’ unironically. “But I actually got an idea from QC the other day.”

Felicity hops out of her chair, intrigued by his tone of voice. She crosses to him, leaning against his table and meeting his eye.

“Do tell.”

“Remember how our light grenade went off in the lab yesterday?” He asks and Felicity nods, urging him to continue. “It was like an actual bomb went off, well, without the consequent property damage and personal injury. But, the way the guys in the lab reacted, you’d think they’d been blasted. After you left, a bunch of them were still disoriented.”

“Oh,” she nods again, excited by where this is heading. “That’s good, right? It is being developed for riot squads to use as a dispersal method. Definitely better than tear gas or actual bullets.”

Curtis hums in agreement. “I was thinking we borrow the idea. I add some flair to it, figure out how to pack it into a sphere and make it reusable. Right now, the grenades still use explosives to set off,
making them both dangerous and single use. But if they used some sort of trigger—"

“Like a command from my wristlet,” Felicity suggests and he nods, excited at her understanding.

“Then, maybe we can make them reusable,” he continues. “It saves us the waste of materials and negates the need for an explosive within the device.”

“That sounds awesome, Curtis!” She enthuses, practically bouncing with interest. The flashbangs that riot squads currently use can still be lethal, but if Curtis is working on a way around it, she’s sure he’ll figure it out.

“Well, actually it’ll release a sound of at least 170 decibels so,” he shrugs. “It’ll sound loud.”

Felicity gives him an unamused look and turns away, dropping back into her chair and spinning away from him.

“And, you ruined it.”

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The notebook and the constant switch of her glasses is really starting to grate on Felicity’s nerves. There has to be a more efficient way of getting the names out of the notebook and onto her computer. She could scan the pages, but that would create a digital footprint and she doesn’t like the idea of leaving a copy of the notebook on the server.

Copying each name one by one into a Word document that isn’t connected to the cloud is probably the most secure way to do it. But, that doesn’t mean she’s enjoying it.

It’s also taking longer than she’d like. The list is longer than she’d initially realized and there’s a plethora of distractions, even in her new private office. Between the constant filling of her ticket queue and her new apparent task of server czar - she supposes it’s fair, she is sitting literally right next to it - she’s constantly busy.

And then there’s her mind, which will let her neither rest nor chill about anything. But, especially,
about Oliver.

He hasn’t called or texted. Not a peep since she’d left him in her apartment yesterday morning. She’d come home to find he’d tidied up a bit, putting her sheet and comforter back on the bed. She wouldn’t call it *made* necessarily, but he’d definitely made the effort. He’d also moved their abandoned glasses into the sink and disposed of the bottle she’d never corked. The real tragedy of the evening was that she’d barely had any wine.

Although, now that she thinks about it, she never did return the gesture of him giving her his phone number. She’d never texted so he could save her number or called or anything. So, maybe the ball is a little more in her court than she’d like to admit. But, what if he’s fine with that? Maybe it was what it was and he’d be more than happy never to hear from her again.

Groaning, she places her head in her hands and tries to force herself to focus on something, anything, else.

She scrambles at the sound of one of the glass doors to her office opening and knocks the notebook off her desk. It lands next to her feet on the floor, but she figures at least it’s out of sight there. God, she needs to get her shit together and stop being so jumpy.

“She’s right in here,” she hears Ben’s voice as he pushes the door open. He appears in the open doorway, frowning at her in clear confusion. “Felicity, Mr. Queen is here for you. I figured I’d show him to your new office.”

“Oh,” Felicity squeaks, clearing her throat and offering Ben what she hopes is a calm smile. “Thanks, Ben.”

He nods, waving Oliver into the office, and disappearing. The door shuts softly behind him. Oliver isn’t looking at her, instead he’s surveying her new space. Felicity uses the moment to scoop the notebook up and toss it into one of her desk drawers.

“You moved,” Oliver comments, finally, a bit obviously. Felicity nods, frowning.

“Yeah, I sort of got a promotion,” she explains, though she says it more like a question. Oliver raises an eyebrow at her. “It’s been a weird week. Did you need something?”
He seems maybe a little put off by her direct approach, but she’s a little on edge. She picks up her pen and twiddles it idly between her fingers. She’d repainted her nails a dark blue last night, she couldn’t stand the sight of them chipping.

“I… yeah,” he nods, stepping closer to her desk. There are no other chairs in the room yet, so he just stands, hands in pockets. “A friend of mine just got a new job and I want to send over a singing telegram.”

That’s a new one. She’s not sure where exactly her expertise comes in on this. Five years away or not, she’s pretty sure Oliver is capable of a simple Google search.

“A singing telegram?” She repeats, not bothering to hide her amusement. Oliver hums in assent. “Okay.”

“My friend loves them, and I thought that I would surprise her,” he explains.

“Her?” Felicity echoes, holding the pen up towards her mouth and clicking the top. She hadn’t really meant for it to come out, but there it was. Yeah, that was definitely a level of jealousy.

“Just a friend,” he assures her, smiling in amusement at the slip. She sits up a little straighter, feeling the point coming at any second now. “But, I don’t know where her office buildings are. She works at the AK Desmond group.”

She reaches immediately for the laptop in front of her, typing into the search field while she repeats the words back. And… nothing. Okay, normal companies aren’t just not on the internet. So, this isn’t just a normal Oliver Queen request, this is a weird Oliver Queen request. She should have guessed.

“They’re not on the internet, like at all,” she tells him, pointing to the laptop screen and looking up at him. “That’s really weird.”

“It’s super weird,” he agrees, his features scrunching adorably in confusion.

“Alright, well, lucky for you,” she grins, spinning a little in her chair. Oliver watches her with amusement. She motions towards the monitors to her left. “There is the internet, and then there is the internet. And these magic fingers can pull things out of it even Google can’t find.”
She goes to turn back to her laptop and then starts, realizing exactly what she’d said.

“Not that I believe in magic,” she laughs, trying not to sound crazy. Except, she’s pretty sure she’s making it worse, because he’s still just staring at her. “Or that I have magic fingers. I just- I’m really good at- I’m- I can, uh.”

Mercifully, he cuts her off.

“Felicity,” he says softly and her whole body goes warm. She stops abruptly looking up at him as he tilts his head. “Please.”

“Right, uh,” she nods, turning back to her laptop. It’s not that difficult to find, once she types in the name. If the company is trying to hide, they aren’t trying all that hard. She wonders what his friend does exactly.

She reaches for her discarded pen again, pulling a notepad towards her and reading the address aloud as she writes it down.

“Great,” Oliver says as she rips the paper from the pad, standing to hand it to him. She hadn’t realized she’d set her pen down on the pad, so that goes flying as well, just barely missing his leg. She lets out a surprised noise.

“Uh, just- I meant to put it there,” she covers, but Oliver is already looking down at the pen on the floor. She thinks her face probably matches the color of it. She holds the paper out to him again. “Just leave it there.”

He takes the address from her, thanking her, before bending down to retrieve the pen. She stutters, trying to assure him that he can just leave it and she’ll get it later. Instead, he plucks the pen off the floor and looks up at her.

“Felicity,” he says her name again, smiling up at her now as he holds the pen out. She just stares at him for a moment and he moves to stand back up. He places the pen in her hand, still holding onto the other end. “I do believe in magic.”
He releases the pen, turning to leave and Felicity stays frozen in place for a long moment. The door shutting behind him snaps her out of it and she drops back down in her seat, letting out a short breath.

She waits another moment before grabbing her phone and pulling up his contact. She sends him a text so he knows who it is.

*Now, you have my number*, she writes. *In case you need it.*

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“Keep your arms up,” Laurel says, watching Felicity’s form as she lashes out at the punching bag. Laurel stands behind it, holding it steady and advising. “You want to keep one about level with your jaw and the other low enough that your elbow is protecting your stomach.”

Felicity adjusts, stepping one foot back behind her for balance and moving her arms into the position Laurel had suggested. She throws out another punch, landing the blow on the punching bag. The contact stings her knuckles even through the padded, fingerless kickboxing gloves.

“Can’t I just avoid having to throw a punch?” She pouts and Laurel lets go of the bag, standing back to cross her arms over her chest. She’s dressed for the workout, but other than showing Felicity some moves, she hasn’t been exerting herself much.

“Sure, if you’d rather take a beating,” She comments, not pulling any metaphorical punches. Felicity’s pout deepens as she glares at the bag in front of her. “I promise a punch to the ribs is gonna hurt a lot more than a few bruised knuckles.”

Felicity sighs. She knows Laurel is right. There’s no way she can keep going the way she has been. It’s a miracle she hasn’t been injured worse than the knife cut on her arm.

“Here,” Laurel says, dropping her arms and gently urging Felicity away from the bag. They head towards the mats in the corner. A few pairs throwdown, tossing each other onto the padded surface. Felicity watches with trepidation. “The most important thing for you is gonna be to learn to use an opponent’s weight against them. You and I, we’re pretty small, so it’s important to have a balanced base and be able to throw off the other guy.”
Felicity nods and Laurel steps onto the mat. She undoes the velcro on her gloves and tosses them aside and Felicity does the same before stepping up to join Laurel on the mat.

“Okay,” Laurel says, getting into a ready stance. “Come at me.”

Felicity hesitates, but Laurel nods encouragingly, so she puts her arms up as well and charges at her. Laurel side steps, Felicity missing her completely, and grabs her wrist, twisting it painfully. Felicity lets out a yelp, twisting with the motion of her wrist, and Laurel lets her go. She waves one hand towards herself, encouraging Felicity to try again.

This time, when Laurel side steps, Felicity is expecting it. She swings around easily, coming at Laurel from behind. Laurel spins at the last second, using Felicity’s momentum to toss her onto the mat. Felicity lands heavily on her back and stares at the rafters of the gym for a few moments, the wind knocked out of her.

“Admit it,” she pants, trying to pull air back into her lungs. “This is your way of trying to get me to give this up.”

Laurel laughs, coming to stand over Felicity. She holds a hand out to her, helping her off the floor. Felicity takes the outstretched limb gratefully, allowing Laurel to pull her to her feet.

“It’s not,” she promises. “But anyone you come up against out there, they’re gonna be a lot stronger than I am and have a lot more training.”

Felicity frowns, but nods at this, rubbing her shoulder blade where it had connected with the mat. She knows all of this, of course, but Laurel is right. If Felicity wants to learn, she can’t pull any punches. If she really wants to go after bad people, she has to be prepared for it. They won’t show Laurel’s level of restraint or mercy.

“Wanna take a break?” Laurel asks, generously. Felicity nods, bending down to grab her gloves. Laurel does the same, following Felicity over to the corner where they’d left their things. She flops down onto the floor, her muscles aching already. Laurel lowers herself with a bit more grace.

“Hey, so how are things going with Tommy?” Felicity asks after a few moments of silence as they drank from their water bottles. “He told me about his dad.”
Laurel shrugs, but she can’t hide the upturn of her lips. “They’re alright.”

“Alright?” Felicity teases, knocking her shoulder against Laurel’s.

“Okay, they’re good,” she laughs. “Really good. He totally freaked out about the money thing. We ran into Oliver and his date at dinner the other night and when I mentioned it to Ollie, Tommy got really upset.”

“Ah, yes,” Felicity nods sagely, trying not to get tripped up by the words ‘Oliver and his date.’ “None so fragile as the male ego.”

“He came over later and apologized,” Laurel continues. “So, things are good.”

Felicity looks away, sipping from her water bottle. It’s ridiculous that the thing she’s hanging onto from that is the knowledge that Oliver had been on a date. It’s not like she expects him to have been celibate up until two days ago. But, she can’t help but do the math.

Tommy had told her about his financial situation two days ago and then Oliver had shown up looking more chipper than usual. And then, that night he’d shown up at her apartment looking way too distraught over the end of a business partnership.

“So, are you two, like, together-together now?” She asks, trying to focus on Laurel rather than herself.

“We’re taking it slow,” Laurel explains. She tucks her water bottle back into her bag and stands, hands on her hips, looking down at Felicity. “Ready for another go?”

Felicity lets out a long suffering sigh, but stands as well. She drops her water bottle on top of her bag and trails after Laurel back across the gym.

“Can you show me how you did that flip thing?” She asks.

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After she leaves the gym, she tries to decide what to do about Oliver. Felicity doesn’t like not knowing where she stands, or if he’s going to keep coming into her office asking for weird favors and pretending they haven’t seen each other naked.

So, she decides to text him to see when he’s free. They need to talk and the sooner they do, the better it will be for her fraying nerves. He responds quickly, which makes her feel a little bit better, and tells her he can come over tonight, but it won’t be until late.

That’s good, though, she decides because she was heading to the base anyway. She hits the bottom of the steps and realizes how empty the space is. Besides the few tables, the computers, and the cabinet holding her gear, there’s not much in it. Maybe they could get some mats and training equipment down here, really commit to the whole thing. She could show Curtis what she’s learning.

She’s settled in, working on the comms, when Curtis arrives. He tries to chat, but realizes she’s absorbed in the tech and lets her work. It doesn’t take her long to finish the wiring and pop it into the casing once she puts her entire focus on it.

“I believe you ordered two working prototype communication devices,” she announces, sweeping her hand out over the desk. Curtis grins at her and she scoops the small earpieces up in her hand and crosses to him.

“Nice!” He comments as she drops one of them in his palm. “What do you think the range is?”

“Hard to say,” Felicity admits with a shrug. “I was thinking we’d test them out.”

“Cool,” Curtis agrees, nodding. “You planning on gearing up?”

She shoots a wary glance at the cabinet across the room and shakes her head. She holds out her palm, her own comm still resting in it and points to it.

“On-off button is a gentle press,” she explains, pointing to the slightly raised part of the plastic casing. “So, keep that facing out of your ear, the speaker is on the other side, and the mic also faces out.”
The mic spot is a tiny pin-sized hole in the casing, but she’s confident it will pick up their voices well enough. She crosses back to the table and slips her feet into her heels.

“I’m gonna go for a walk,” she says, slipping her arms into her coat. “We’ll just check in every block or so and if the range cuts out, I’ll head back.”

Curtis nods, fussing with trying to find the right way to fit the comm in his ear. Felicity chuckles at him and slips her phone into her pocket, not bothering to take her purse with her. She waits until she’s outside to turn her comm on and do the first check.

“Curtis, can you hear me?” She asks. The earpiece crackles a bit before his voice comes through.

“Loud and clear,” he answers. Felicity feels a swell of pride at how well her tech picks up his voice. She starts walking away from the apartment building, heading towards where she parks her car. When she reaches it, she checks in again and receives an affirmative response from Curtis.

“So, did you hear about the Hood last night?” He asks as she turns a corner, heading further away from the apartment building.

“Yup,” she responds, popping the P. Apparently, while she and Curtis were trying to figure out tech that involved less explosives, the vigilante was out starting fires at a pharmaceutical manufacturing plant. He makes it harder and harder to be on his side.

“Why do you think he’d go after Claybourne Pharmaceuticals?” He asks and Felicity sighs, tucking her hands into her coat pockets. At least she knows the comms work.

“Why does he do anything he does, Curtis?” She responds, not waiting for a response. “Maybe we should stop trying to find a method behind his madness.”

Curtis is quiet for a moment, contemplating this. Felicity turns another corner, passing by the bar she’d gone to last week.

“I thought you thought he was actually trying to help,” he points out and Felicity stops for a moment, chewing on her lip.
“I do,” she admits finally, starting to walk down the sidewalk again. She can see the old Queen factory now, taller than most of the buildings in the Glades. “I just think his methods leave a lot to be desired. I’m not sure you can save a city through fear.”

Curtis hums, and Felicity is impressed that the comms pick the noise up. Another rush of pride rolls through her, ill-timed as it may be.

“I’m gonna keep walking,” she tells him. “I’ll check in. Text me if you lose me.”

Curtis agrees and Felicity continues her path, turning randomly and without much thought to where she’s going, checking in every now and then. It isn’t until she realizes she’s deep in the middle of the Glades that she realizes what a mistake that was. She’s only a few blocks over from the Queen steel factory, which means she’s not in a good place.

She checks in and Curtis can still hear her, so she feels good knowing he’s got her back. Still, she tells him she’s turning back and they’ll run another test on the comms tomorrow. He agrees and she begins to backtrack.

She passes by a dive bar and hears someone call out from the alley next to it. Glancing over, she spots a man leaning against the building, smoking a cigarette. She decides to ignore him, figuring he wasn’t talking to her.

“What’sa matter, blondie?” He calls, dropping the cigarette and grinding it into the cement with his foot. “Can’t hear or something?”

Rolling her eyes, Felicity keeps moving. She hears footsteps behind her and her heart races a little.

“Everything alright?” Curtis asks over the comm, clearly having heard the man’s shouting. Felicity hums the affirmative, stopping to turn back to the guy.

“Look, dude, it’s a bad night,” she says. “Why don’t you just go back to the bar?”

He’s trying to look menacing, but he’s not particularly large or threatening. He’s just a drunk asshole trying to compensate for something. Felicity doesn’t feel all that worried. Until she sees a glinting at his wrist.
“Tryina tell me what to do?” He asks, taking a menacing step forward. The knife in his sleeve slips down into his palm, revealing itself fully, and Felicity tenses. “Gonna wanna rethink that move.”

He’s advancing, but Felicity holds her ground. Laurel had showed her a disarming technique for knives earlier, after Felicity had explained the whole ordeal with Salvati. It wouldn’t hold up against a skilled knife user, but this guy? She felt relatively confident she could get the upperhand here.

She doesn’t have the chance to find out, a dark shadow dropping seemingly from the sky and landing between her and the man. With one swift punch to the nose, the guy falls like a ragdoll. The knife skitters to the pavement and the Hood reaches down to retrieve it.

“Hey,” Felicity calls, trying to keep her voice low to avoid gaining attention from anyone else. “I had that!”

The Hood straightens back up, standing sideways and keeping his face even more cloaked under his hood and the darkness.

“Excuse me?” He asks and, apparently, he’s got his own voice modifier now. That’s good for him, but Felicity is too annoyed to pay it much attention.

“I could have handled that,” she says, crossing her arms over her chest. “I didn’t need you to save me.”

So maybe it’s a holdover of bitterness from the last time he’d saved her life, at Russo’s, but still. She doesn’t need him to keep saving her, thank you very much.

“You could just say thank you,” he says gruffly and Felicity thinks he might be pouting. She holds her ground, glaring at him and he shakes his head. He disappears into the alley, vaulting up onto a fire escape.

Annoyed, Felicity basically pouts all the way back to the base. Curtis looks like he wants to say something when she gets there, but thinks better of it at her mood. She leaves the comm next to her keyboard and heads home.
When she gets home, she still has some time before Oliver is supposed to come over, so she takes the chance to change out of her work clothes and eat something. Pointedly, she avoids the wine in her cabinet and has water with her dinner.

He texts her to let her know he’s on his way and her nerves immediately rocket up again. She sits restlessly on her couch, unable to focus on anything on her tablet or her TV, and waits for him to knock. She doesn’t know where he’s coming from, so she has no frame of reference for how long it’ll take him.

It feels like both too much later and too soon when he knocks at her door.

“Hi,” she says when she pulls the door open. Oliver smiles at her and her stomach flips.

“Hi,” he echoes. She just stares at him for a long moment, dressed in the same outfit she’d seen him in earlier. She’d been too preoccupied and stressed to admire how good he looked then. Now, it’s all she can think.

She starts when she realizes she’s just been staring at him and apologizes, opening the door further and waving him inside. Oliver chuckles, shaking his head at her as he steps past her into the house. She pushes the door shut behind him and takes a moment to close her eyes and breathe. When she turns back around, Oliver is watching her.

“Is everything okay?” He asks, a concerned crease forming in his brow.

“I just thought we should talk,” she explain, fidgeting with her hands. “About the other night.”

Oliver nods, recognizing the serious tone in her voice and leans back against the back of her couch. Felicity stays by the door, unsure how to have the conversation. He’s patient, waiting for her to organize her thoughts. She almost wishes he’d jump in, say something, assure her that what happened hadn’t been just a fluke.

“When you came over,” she starts, deciding what she needs to ask, “you were upset about that partnership falling through.”
Oliver nods, slowly. “What’s the question, Felicity?”

“Was that partnership actually business or was it pleasure?”

Oliver frowns, confusion crossing his face as he shakes his head at her.

“I don’t understand,” he says. Felicity sighs, frustrated that he’s either acting oblivious or genuinely just being this obtuse. She pushes off of the door, crossing to stand in front of him as she speaks.

“I was with Laurel today and she mentioned having run into you on a date,” she explains, holding her hands out in front of her and watching as realization dawns on his features. “Which would have been only a few hours before you showed up here, surprisingly upset over some business dealing.”

“Felicity,” he says gently, reaching for her. She pulls back, on a roll now that she’s found the words.

“The way I see it, that means one of two things,” she continues. “Either you came over here and cheated on someone *with me*. Or, I was a really fast rebound for you.”

Oliver pushes off of the couch, standing up straight and giving her a pleading look.

“Neither of those,” he tries to assure her. When he reaches for her hands again, Felicity lets him take them this time. He steps a little closer, emboldened when she doesn’t push him away. “The woman I was seeing, it was complicated and unsustainable.”

She frowns, looking down at her hands in his. He squeezes gently, his fingers laced through hers, urging her to look up at him. She does, meeting his gaze as he tries to convey his sincerity.

“I don’t know what brought me here afterwards, honestly,” he admits, quietly. “But, I’m glad it did. There’s something about you. I can’t explain it, I just feel drawn to you.”

Felicity sucks in a deep breath at the admission. It’s similar to how she’s been feeling, the strange comfort he brings her and the ease with which they fall together. She hadn’t really wanted to
entertain a possibility, a *real* possibility, of ‘them.’ But, now…

“You know, I’m not usually a one time thing kind of girl,” she comments, looking up at him questioningly. She needs to know this, to know where they stand. She doesn’t want to be another notch in his bedpost, but if that’s the case, she needs him to be clear with her.

“Do you want it to be a one time thing?” He asks, frowning down at her.

“No,” she admits, earning confidence from the way he’s looking at her. His mouth turns up in a slow, soft smile and he leans down to kiss her. She presses up on her toes, meeting him halfway.

“Then who says it has to?” He mumbles, pressing his forehead to hers.

Chapter End Notes

So, you guys may have noticed there wasn’t an update on Monday. My posting schedule has become to fast for the speed I'm writing chapters at. I'm still ahead, but I don't want to fall behind, so I'm going to be posting once a week - on Thursdays - for a while. On my end, I'm about halfway through this story, but I've been doing about a million things lately and haven't been able to dedicate my time to it as much.

I hope you guys understand!
Chapter Summary

A new archer rolls into town, prompting Felicity to return to the field.

Chapter Notes

This might be one of my favorite chapters I've written so far? It's certainly one I've had in mind since I first began brainstorming this story. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Felicity wakes up in the middle of the night with Oliver half on top of her. He’s laying on his stomach with one arm over her waist and his face pressed into her shoulder. Who’d have known? Oliver Queen is a cuddler. She doesn’t mind, smiling a little to herself and rolling onto her side to face him. He shifts a little, adjusting to her movement, but doesn’t wake.

She snuggles up to him, basking in their shared warmth trapped beneath her plush duvet. She’s not sure what triggers it, but the thought strikes like lightning. Some invisible substances that use the variations in the UV spectrum have been known to respond to heat.

“Oliver,” she calls quietly, checking to make sure she hasn’t woken him. She waits a moment and, when he doesn’t respond, slips carefully from his hold.

The cold hits as soon as she breaks the warm seal of the bed. She searches the floor in the dark and eventually locates his sweater from the night before, pulling it over her head. Tiptoeing down the hall, she finds her bag with the notebook inside and takes it to the kitchen. She clicks the burner on her electric stove to high and opens the book to the middle, holding it over the slowly warming burner.

It takes a few minutes for the stove to heat up, but sure enough the ink starts to show. Felicity feels a little dumb for not having thought of it earlier, but she’s been dealing with a lot, in her defense. Feeling triumphant at the find, she returns the notebook to her purse and heads back to the bedroom.

Oliver shifts as she slides in next to him, his arms seeking her out.
“Where’d you go?” He asks, surprising her. She didn’t think she would have woken him.

“I needed some water,” she explains and he hums in acknowledgement. After a moment, when she thinks he’s drifted back to sleep and begun to follow him, he speaks again.

“What were you doing tonight?” He asks, the question confusing her. She frowns.

“You mean besides you?” She responds, half joking as her hand slips from his side to his back, pulling herself closer against him. He gives her a look, but can’t hide his amusement.

“Yeah, before I came over,” he explains. Felicity doesn’t understand where this line of questioning is coming from, but she shrugs and ducks her head, curling into his chest.

“Oh, I was working on a project with a friend from work,” she explains, hoping he won’t hear it for the half-truth it is. She’s allowed him all of his weird secrets, so she’s hoping he’ll allow her her own. She feels him nod, his chin moving against the top of her head.

“Is that friend Curtis?” He asks and Felicity raises her head to frown at him. “You and Tommy had mentioned him.”

“Yeah, Curtis works in research and development,” she explains. “He’s just a friend.”

Oliver still seems concerned, though, and she doesn’t know why. She pulls her hand from under the blankets, reaching up to smooth the wrinkle forming in his brow. He smiles a little at the gesture, capturing her wrist and pressing a kiss to her fingers.

“What are you worrying about?” She asks. He seems conflicted, like he wants to ask her something but he doesn’t know how. Felicity waits him out, watching his expression as he chooses his words.

“This project, it’s not anything dangerous is it?” He finally gets out and she frowns at him again, confused by the sudden concern. She can’t figure out where he’d be getting that idea from. He explains, “You seem to spend a lot of time in the Glades.”

She blanches, before countering, “I could say the same about you.”
“I’m opening a business there,” he argues. Felicity pulls back, sitting up in bed and looking at him. He pushes up onto his elbows.

“I don’t understand where this is coming from,” she says. “No offense, Oliver, but I don’t really need to explain myself to you.”

“No, I know,” he insists, sitting up a little further and reaching for her. “I just want to make sure you’re not getting into anything you can’t handle.”

She stares at him for a long moment, surprised by the turn the conversation has taken. She’d be worried he knew about her nightly activities, except barely anyone knows that her alter ego even exists, so she doesn’t know how Oliver could know. Even still, if he knew, she feels like he would just come out and say it. Maybe he’d seen her in the Glades earlier but, again, why not just say that?

She doesn’t know what’s given him the impression she’s doing something dangerous, but she doesn’t think he knows exactly what it is.

“I promise,” she says softly, trying not to be annoyed with him for caring. The sooner they put this argument to bed, the better. “I’m not doing anything dangerous. We’re just working on some tech.”

Oliver seems to accept this, finding her hand and pulling her back towards him, laying them both back into the pillows. Felicity gives in easily, resting her head against his chest. He keeps his hold on her hand, lacing their fingers together.

She doesn’t think either of them fall back asleep for a while.

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On her way to work, she stops and buys a cheap desk lamp and a heat lamp bulb. She sets them up on her desk and opens the notebook underneath the heat. She’s not sure if it’ll be warm enough, but she figures she can work on other work while the lamp heats up.

After about an hour of clearing out her queue - it always gets extra busy right before the weekend - she checks the book. The ink has started to reveal itself on the first few pages, so she flips further into
the book, letting the new pages rest under the heat and watching as, now heated to its full potential, the lamp does the work much quicker.

Excited, she thumbs through the pages, waiting until the heat reveals all of the names on one set before flipping further into the book. Having the list revealed in full will make digitizing it much quicker and negate the need for the UV glasses. She leaves the book and the lamp for a few minutes while she returns the glasses to the R&D floor.

Once the book has fully revealed itself, she unplugs the heat lamp and sets it off to the side. From there, she spends the day balancing between her actual work and copying the names into a file. Between the two projects, she ends up spending the whole day working with only a short break for lunch, that turns out really to just be coffee.

Some of the names strike a chord with her as she copies them, feeling familiar but she isn’t sure how just yet. For each one, she adds an asterisk next to their name in the document. When she comes across a name she definitely recognizes, Doug Miller, the head of Applied Sciences, she highlights his name in the document.

When she gets to Adam Hunt’s name, she stops completely. Thumbing through the pages, she scans each page, no longer copying the names into the document. She spots Frank Bertinelli and Justin Claybourne and alarm bells start ringing in her mind.

Scrolling back to the names she’d previously recognized on her tablet, she opens a search tab on one of her monitors and types in each name, scanning the news articles that come up. When the pattern comes together, she frowns.

Seven names. There are seven names in this book that are people that the Hood has gone after. Chewing on her lip, she scrolls back to Doug Miller’s name, highlighted bright yellow within the document. She switches tabs and pulls up the employee directory, a little surprised that Walter’s personal number is listed.

Reaching for her cell phone, she dials the number.

“I’m in the middle of a dinner party, Ms. Smoak,” he says when he picks up, skipping a greeting all together. “So, I hope this is of some importance.”

Well, okay, that’s a little rude. Sure, it’s later than she’d realized and she has called him on his
personal phone. But, he made the choice to pick up. And he’s the one that asked her to play Harriet the Tech Nerd, so he could be a little grateful, in her opinion.

“I guess that depends on how you define important,” she responds, unable to tamp down the small level of snark. “See, most people would consider finding a list of names written in subsonic ultraviolet invisible ink important.”

“But then I already know that, now, don’t I?” He says and, yeah. Sure, okay, whatever. Still, he could realize she’s not just calling for a light chat.

“Did you know seven of the names on the list are guys the vigilante’s had in his crosshairs?” She tries instead, hoping to convey the right amount of urgency in her tone. She pauses. “That is, if bows had crosshairs. Which they don’t.”

“Well, it is a rather long list, Felicity,” he comments, still not biting. “So, I would expect there to be some overlap.”

Honestly, she feels like slamming her head against the desk. If this were a favor she was doing for a friend and she was receiving this level of animosity, she’d hang up. Except, it’s a favor for her boss, for which she’s getting paid overtime. So, she jumps to the most concerning part.

“Like Doug Miller,” she points out, looking down at the book in front of her.

“Head of Applied Sciences at Queen Consolidated,” Walter says, unnecessarily. He’s finally giving it the appropriate amount of interest, though. “What of him?”

“Mr. Miller may end up getting an arrow in his stocking, because he’s on the list,” she explains, unable to keep herself from adding a slightly snide, “So, important or not?”

Walter is silent for a moment on the other line and Felicity feels her phone vibrate with a notification, she frowns and resists the urge to check it.

“Thank you for bringing it to my attention, Felicity,” he says sincerely and she starts to feel kind of bad for being so sarcastic. “I’ll deal with it.”
He barely gives her a chance to respond before making his goodbyes and hanging up. Felicity pulls the phone away from her ear and stares at the ended call for a moment before remembering the notification. She swipes down on the screen and finds a text from Curtis.

The Hood went back for Adam Hunt, apparently. And this time, Hunt wouldn’t be getting back up.

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“Are you sure you want to be gearing up for this?” Curtis asks as Felicity buckles her coat around herself. It’s the first time she’s taken the gear out since her run in with the mob. Apparently, Curtis had patched up the tear in her sleeve with some sloppy stitches.

“I’m just gonna go to the crime scene,” she explains, adjusting the wig on her head. “I want to see what the cops are saying.”

“They’ll release a statement in a few hours,” he comments, holding his palms up and looking unsure of her decision. Felicity sighs, tugging the boots up her calves before turning to him.

“That’ll be what they want the public to know,” she says. “I want to know what they know.”

Curtis seems to consider this for a second before nodding. He crosses to her computers and scoops up the small communication devices she’d made. He holds one out to her, adjusting the other in his own ear.

“Guess it’ll be an in-the-field test, then,” he comments and Felicity gives him a small smile in reassurance as she puts the comm in. This isn’t dangerous, it’s just gathering information. She may have her misgivings about the vigilante, but she’s having a hard time believing he’d go back for a man he’d already left completely broke.

Hunt’s apartment isn’t in the wealthy part of town anymore, straying closer to the Glades than the man had probably ever been in his life. It doesn’t take Felicity long to get there, the crime scene still locked up by police. She recognizes the police commissioner exiting his car and climbs the fire escape on a nearby building.

It takes a few stomach churning leaps, but eventually she finds herself across from Hunt’s building. She drops down the fire escape until she’s level with his floor. A window is open and she can hear
activity from inside.

She almost doesn’t see the vigilante where he stands on Hunt’s fire escape, just to the side of the window, making himself invisible to the people inside. Felicity stares at him for a long moment, trying to decide if he’s stupid enough to stay at or return to his own crime scene. She’s sure he’d heard her drop onto the fire escape, but he isn’t paying her any attention.

Instead, he’s listening intently to the conversation going on inside.

“These black arrows aren’t consistent with his M.O.” Felicity recognizes Detective Lance’s voice from within the apartment. “And neither is the fact that the Hood took Hunt for forty million dollars a few months ago.”

Hunt had been the Hood’s first blood, for lack of a better term. He’d used some sophisticated tech to return the entirety of Hunt’s bank accounts to the people he’d swindled it out of. It had been the first job he’d swept out from underneath Felicity with more brute force than she liked to use.

“It doesn’t make sense to kill him now. Something doesn’t add up,” Lance continues. “We’re dealing with a copycat.”

The Hood tilts his head upwards, looking tense, before turning to face her. He leaps, silently, over to her fire escape and begins to climb up to the roof she’d come down from. Felicity scrambles after him, following him to the roof. He’s waiting for her, facing away from Hunt’s building.

“Is he right?” She asks, aware of the bustle of activity happening a few stories below them. “Is this a copycat?”

“I don’t kill for sport,” is his answer. Felicity frowns at him, waiting for a better explanation. “Whoever did this, they’re an experienced archer. The grouping of the arrows is precision tight.”

“That doesn’t exactly exonerate you,” she argues.

“Hunt already lost everything,” he points out. “If I was gonna kill him, wouldn’t I have done it the first time?”
Felicity considers this, watching him for a moment. If Lance believes it’s a copycat, that’s definitely something. The man has made it his personal mission to take the vigilante down. And, the Hood’s right. What would be his motivation to go after Hunt again?

He seems to tire of her scrutiny quickly, turning to leave, but she stops him.

“I’m gonna give you the benefit of the doubt on this,” she says and he stalls, turning back to her. “But, if this is a copycat, what would their motivation be to go after Hunt? They’re calling you out, looking for your attention, not just the police or the press.”

“I figured as much,” he agrees, turning back towards the other side of the building. He takes a few steps, coming right up to the edge. “In which case, you’re going to want to stay far away from this.”

With that, he vaults to the next adjacent building and Felicity watches him disappear into the dark. Her comm crackles in her ear and she starts, having forgotten it was there.

“Uh, are we gonna stay away from this?” Curtis asks, sounding nervous. Felicity turns and heads back for the fire escape she’d been eavesdropping on.

They don’t need to get caught in the crossfire between the archers. Most likely, it’s a battle of pride, an interest in each proving themselves as the best. She doesn’t know if the Hood would engage in something so petty, but she doubts the other archer will give him much of a choice.

“Definitely,” she tells Curtis.

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Felicity meets Laurel at the gym again after work the next day. She’s still not sure what to do about the Oliver-of-it-all or how to handle telling Laurel. She kind of wants to wait until it’s more than a three day relationship before telling anyone. She’s not exactly up for broadcasting it from the rooftop.

There’s like a million reasons she shouldn’t be engaging in any kind of relationship with Oliver - her friendship with Laurel, her job, his history with relationships - but, it all kind of seems overwhelmed by the one very good reason she should give the relationship a go; she genuinely likes him.

It doesn’t matter too much, though, because she doesn’t get much time for talking in between
beatings from Laurel. Her body bruises, sure, but it’s her pride that’s taking the biggest hit. She’d imagined herself relatively good at defense, she’d taken a few classes right after moving to Starling. Laurel’s lessons keep reminding her she’s not nearly as well-off as she’d thought.

And, Laurel isn’t some kung fu guru. She’s got a decade or so of self defense classes under her belt, sure. But, that’s not nearly the same level as the guys Felicity is going to be going up against. If Laurel can kick her ass so easily, it doesn’t give her much hope.

“Hey, don’t beat yourself up,” Laurel says, holding out a hand to help Felicity off the mat. She rubs her bicep where it had contacted with the surface.

“I think you’re doing that well enough,” she pouts, unable to contain the bitterness in her tone. Laurel sighs, urging her towards the corner where their stuff has been discarded.

“I’m serious, Felicity,” she says gently, picking Felicity’s water bottle up for her and tossing it to her. “It takes people years to learn this stuff, you’re trying to pick it up in a few weeks. You just need to be patient with yourself.”

She knows Laurel is right. She’s pushing herself too hard, expecting too much. She’s been hoping to get back into her gear as soon as possible, but that may be asking too much. If she wants to go out there at night and feel confident she isn’t going to get herself killed, she needs to give herself the time it takes her body to learn.

“Come on,” Laurel encourages, giving her a teasing smirk. “Let’s switch to the bag for a bit. Give you a chance to hit something instead.”

Felicity rolls her eyes at the jab, but pulls her kickboxing gloves from her bag. She tugs them on as they cross the gym, securing the velcro straps in place.

“So, do you and Tommy have any plans for the holidays?” She asks, getting into a ready stance in front of the bag. Laurel stands behind it, holding it steady as Felicity throws her first punch.

“I actually told him I want to spend them with my dad,” Laurel explains, stopping to compliment Felicity’s form. “It’s a hard time of year for us.”

Felicity nods, understanding the way loss can mess with every part of your life you’d considered
good. There were so many things she couldn’t enjoy due to the guilt or the grief after Cooper ‘died.’ She barely remembers her college graduation, everything a blur of stress and pain, knowing that Cooper should have been up there walking across the stage, too.

“I get that,” she says, panting a little from the constant motion of her fists connecting with the bag. She stops for a moment to look at Laurel. “But, are you sure you’re not just still keeping Tommy at an arm’s length?”

Laurel shrugs and Felicity returns her focus to the bag.

“Maybe,” Laurel hedges. “But is that such a bad thing? I’ve known Tommy for a long time and, honestly, I’m not sure he’s ready for a full relationship.”

“Yeah, but, he’s changed a lot, Laurel,” Felicity points out, shifting her back foot to give her a stronger base. “And so have you. You don’t owe him anything, but you might owe it to yourself to decide once and for all if you want to really try to make it work?”

Laurel is quiet for a few moments, holding the bag steady still while Felicity throws punches. Her knuckles are beginning to hurt even through the padding of the gloves. Finally, she steps back and Laurel lets go of the bag.

“Maybe you’re right,” Laurel admits. “I just need to figure out what’s holding me back.”

Felicity nods, peeling away the velcro on her straps.

“Call it a day?” She suggests, pulling the gloves from her hands. “My everything hurts.”

Laurel laughs, but nods in agreement. Felicity leads them back to their things, daydreaming about her shower. Outside, her phone starts to ring as she and Laurel part ways. She tries to tamp down the smile on her face at the caller ID.

“Hi,” she greets, opening the door of her car and sliding inside. She tosses her gym bag in the back.

“Hey, what are you up to?” Oliver asks, his voice warm and friendly over the phone. She can hear
his smile and it makes her feel warm.

“Just leaving the gym,” she explains, hoping he’ll think of ellipticals and weights, rather than punching bags and sparring mats. “What’s up?”

“I wanted to see if you were free tonight,” he answers, sounding cheerful. Felicity doesn’t know what’s got him in such a good mood, but she’s willing to reap the benefits of it. “I was thinking we could get dinner.”

Felicity hesitates, sliding her key into the ignition and starting her car. The heat immediately kicks on and she reaches forward to turn it off, still overheated from the workout. Dinner with Oliver sounds amazing, but she’s not really into going to a fancy restaurant where anyone could recognize them just yet. She also doesn’t know how exactly that truth would make Oliver feel.

“How about you pick up some takeout and meet me at my place?” She offers instead, sidestepping the possibility of a public outing all together.

“That sounds nice,” he agrees and she grins, pulling her seatbelt around her and buckling it.

“Great,” she enthuses. “Two hours?”

He agrees and hangs up. Felicity pulls out of the parking lot of the gym, feeling better already.

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Oliver comes over with a large pizza and a new bottle of wine. They push her coffee table to one side of the living room and sit in front of her couch with the pizza box between them. Felicity brings plates, napkins, and wine glasses in from the kitchen while Oliver uncorks the wine.

“You’re in a good mood,” she comments as he places a slice of pizza onto her plate. He’d played it safe, going with plain cheese, but it works. He shakes his head, sliding a slice onto his own plate.

“You say that like it’s a surprise,” he laughs. Felicity just tilts her head at him, reaching over to fill his wine glass. “You know, I didn’t even realize it was almost Christmas?”
“Really?” She frowns. Between the storefronts and the TV specials, she’s hardly been able to ignore the upcoming holiday, and she doesn’t even celebrate it. “How is that possible?”

“There are no decoration up in the house,” he explains. “Which I thought was strange, because my dad always used to go all out for the holiday. A tree in every room, a huge party, the whole nine yards. When I asked my sister about it, she told me that they stopped celebrating after my dad and I disappeared.”

“It’s hard to celebrate the good things when you’ve lost someone,” she shrugs, picking up her wineglass and taking a sip. Oliver hadn’t cheaped out on the wine and she just holds back a moan at the taste. He frowns at her statement, but she isn’t ready to open that particular wound for him yet.

When she doesn’t elaborate, he continues, “Yeah, I understand that. But, I think it’s high time we got back in the tradition.”

“What does that mean?” Felicity asks with a frown, worried about where this is going.

“I decided to host the Queen Christmas party this year,” he explains, looking proud of the idea as he takes a large bite out of his slice of pizza.

“Are you sure that’s such a good idea?” She asks, trying not to sound too much like a Scrooge. Oliver seems really excited by the idea, but just throwing his family back into the Christmas cheer deep end might be too much all at once.

“I think my family needs it,” he shrugs, frowning at her lack of enthusiasm. “Didn’t you have Christmas traditions growing up?”

“I’m Jewish, actually,” she tells him, picking at the crust on her pizza. “And, yeah, of course we had Hanukkah traditions, but I just think you should be careful.”

“Careful?” Oliver echoes, his frown deepening. She knows she’s definitely stepping on his mood and she doesn’t mean to, so she reaches for his hand around the pizza box. He lets her take hold of it and she gives him a gentle smile.
“I’m just saying that family is tricky and your situation is a special kind of complicated,” she explains, squeezing his fingers. “Just make sure that you won’t be doing more harm than good.”

“It’s a party, Felicity,” he teases, pushing the pizza box out of the way and leaning towards her. “How much harm could it do?”

She lets him distract her with the press of his lips, slightly greasy from the pizza. She hums against his mouth, her other hand coming up to wrap her fingers in the material of his sweater.

“You’ll come, won’t you?” He asks, pulling away from her. Felicity’s eyelids flutter, trying to remember their previous conversation.

“Not just from a kiss,” she teases, earning a bark of surprised laughter from Oliver at the innuendo. She opens her eyes, grinning at the smile on his face.

“To the party,” he emphasizes.

“Oh, that,” she says, playing innocent and shrugging her shoulders. “I suppose I could make an appearance. I’m very in demand during the holiday season, you know.”

He tries to contain his grin, nodding at her. Felicity chews on her lip for a moment, debating kissing him again, but their pizza is gonna get cold and she isn’t about to waste another good bottle of wine. Oliver Queen can wait.

She returns her attention to the food in front of her and Oliver does the same. They chat about her work and Oliver tells her about meeting some boy Thea’s been spending time with. He certainly slid into the overprotective brother role easily after returning.

The pizza is almost gone and their glasses have been refilled and emptied again when they finally push it all aside and focus on each other. Oliver hovers over her on the couch, his kisses gentle and slow, lacking the desperate edge of their last two encounters. Her hands rove over his back, muscles taught keeping himself from smothering her with his weight. She slips her hands beneath his shirts and he nips at her lower lip in response.

She nearly rolls them both off the couch in surprise when his phone starts trilling loudly from his pocket. Sighing, he gives her an apologetic look as he pulls it out and checks the caller ID.
“Sorry,” he says, helping her into a sitting position. “It’s about the club. It’ll just take a minute.”

She waves him off, assuring him it’s fine, and he disappears down the hallway to take the call. Felicity locates her own phone abandoned on the kitchen counter and checks it. Curtis had sent multiple texts about ten minutes ago, but none of them said anything. Just a bunch of exclamation points and acronyms.

Giving up on trying to decode them, she texts him back.

*Words pls*, she types. Almost immediately the dots indicating Curtis typing out a response light up the screen, so Felicity waits. Eventually, what amounts to nearly a paragraph comes through and she frowns as she reads it. Curtis heard it on the police scanner, apparently Nelson Ravich had been found in an alley, shot through with an arrow.

Before she can respond, Oliver comes back down the hallway and she locks her phone. He looks to the living room, but doesn’t spot her, so he turns towards the kitchen. Felicity can see what’s coming before it happens from the look on his face.

“Hey, I’m sorry to cut this short, but I have to go deal with something at the club,” he explains and Felicity shakes her head.

“No, it’s fine,” she assures him, leaning back against the counter. He steps into the room to join her. “Thanks for dinner.”

“Thanks for having it with me,” he responds, his hands landing on either side of her on the counter. He ducks his head and Felicity presses up on her toes, meeting him for the kiss. He lingers, but only for a moment. “I’ll see you later.”

She nods and he grabs his jacket from the back of the couch before heading out the door. It isn’t until she’s boxing up the leftovers and corking the wine that she realizes how easily they slid into something so domestic.

She’s not entirely sure she minds it.
The next day, she asks Curtis to meet her in the base first thing. The police commissioner had given a press conference formally pinning the murders on the vigilante, and the whole thing was making Felicity sick to her stomach. Renewed effort to find the vigilante isn’t really a concern, the police haven’t been able to bring him in so far.

What’s troubling her, is that it means they won’t be working to find the person that’s actually responsible for these deaths. Which means leaving a highly skilled and dangerous someone trying to initiate a pissing contest with the Hood. All they’ve done is ensure the possibility of more bloodshed.

She explains all this to Curtis, who seems just as troubled by it as she is.

“I know I promised we’d stay out of this one,” she starts slowly.

“But, if the police aren’t looking for this other archer, someone needs to be,” Curtis nods, surprising her. She stares at him for a moment.

“The vigilante is looking for him,” she offers, wondering why he isn’t trying to talk her out of this.

“Yeah, but how many people could die in the crossfire of those two?” He asks, looking impassioned by the possibility of more death, more loss.

She’s reminded why she’d involved Curtis in this whole thing in the first place, besides his helpful tech. It would have been easy to use specs from the QC server to build her own tech, but she’d chosen to ask Curtis for his help. Because, like her, Curtis knew the pain of losing someone you loved. He had lost his brother and grown from it.

And, also like her, he just genuinely wanted to help make people’s lives better.

“So, where do we start looking for this guy?” Curtis asks, but Felicity stalls, her head falling into her hands.

“I don’t know,” she groans. “I honestly didn’t expect you to agree so easily.”
She looks up to find Curtis smirking at her and spins around in her computer chair, pulling the keyboard towards herself. Accessing the local grid, she pulls the feed for any security camera footage from outside Hunt’s apartment or around the alley where they’d found Ravich.

“The police probably already pulled any useful footage,” Curtis points out, coming up behind her.

“The police have decided that the vigilante is guilty,” she counters, hacking into the SCPD system to look for Hunt’s time of death. Ravich was found relatively quickly, but Hunt had been alone in his apartment for about a day.

She isolates the footage from the hour before and after his estimated time of death and watches carefully. It’s grainy and almost useless, it’s not a rich part of town, so the cameras haven’t been updated in God knows how long.

“Is that a Lexus?” Curtis asks, pointing at the screen. A black car is pulling into the alley next to the apartment. Felicity frowns and zooms in, but the footage only gets grainier. She makes a mental note to work up a program to fix that.

“I can’t see the license plate,” she frowns, trying to adjust the filters on the camera. It doesn’t seem to be giving, the camera just not capable of that high quality of an image. “You really think the other archer is just rolling up to Hunt’s apartment in a Lexus?”

“I think weirder things have happened in this city,” Curtis comments and Felicity nods in agreement. She can’t get the license plate number, but she can run the image of the car through an algorithm to try and figure out the make and model. Then she can set up a program to look for any cars matching it in the city. It’s a long shot, but it might be worth trying at least.

Not to mention, it’s all they’ve got.

While she works on writing up a program, she pulls the footage from the alley up on another monitor and instructs Curtis to watch the footage. It’s not a good angle, they can’t actually see into the alley. But the traffic camera from the intersection is the only option they have.

Curtis speeds through the two hours of footage while Felicity writes the program, but it’s a bust. He doesn’t manage to get a glimpse of the archer or the black car.
“Alright,” Felicity sighs, spinning in her chair. “Go home. Enjoy your day off. I’m gonna send the car’s image through a program to work out the make and model and then I’m gonna head out, too.”

“Are you sure?” Curtis asks warily. Adam Hunt’s autopsy report is still up on one of the monitor’s and he stares at it, looking queasy.

Felicity nods. “There’s not a lot we can do right now, but we’re not admitting defeat.”

Curtis agrees, gathering up his things and heading out. She’s glad he understands her motivation for getting involved with this, and especially that he wants to help, too. But, they still need to be careful. She has little doubt that the archer would come after both of them if they did anything that alerted him to their search.

Felicity sets an alert for if the program finds a match for the car and heads home herself. She’s heating up leftover pizza from the night before and reading over the list on her tablet again when her phone rings. She fumbles, locking her tablet, and answers the call.

“Hello?” She answers, setting the tablet aside and reaching for her plate in the microwave.

“Hey,” Oliver greets and she smiles at the sound of his voice. “Is now a bad time?”

“No,” she assures him. “What’s up?”

“I have kind of a weird favor to ask you,” he says and Felicity smirks, picking up her plate and heading towards the living room.

“Do you ever have any other kind?” She jokes and Oliver chuckles.

“My buddy Steve has a birthday coming up,” he explains, ignoring her teasing. “He’s super into archery. Apparently, it’s all the rage now.”

“I don’t know why,” she comments, licking sauce from her finger tip and thinking of the vigilante.
“It looks utterly ridiculous to me.”

“Mm-hmm,” Oliver hums, going quiet for a moment. “Anyway, I wanted to buy him some arrows. The thing is, he gets these special custom-made arrows, and I have no idea where he gets them.”

Felicity frowns, confused. “What’s the favor?”

“I was hoping you could walk me through finding the manufacturer,” he says. “I have one of his arrows.”

“Oh,” she says, sitting down on her couch. It’s kind of hard to do without knowing what she’s looking for, and the path of least resistance would be to just ask his friend. But, she supposes, that would ruin the surprise. “Well, if it’s custom-made, chances are there’s a patent. Is there anything on it that looks like a serial number or logo?”

Oliver is quiet for a moment, before announcing there’s a grouping of numbers and letters raised lightly in the composite of the shaft. She gives him the website where he can look up patents and walks him through the steps to find it.

“Sagittarius,” he reads aloud.

“That’s latin,” Felicity comments. “For the archer.”

“What about where and when it was purchased?” He asks and Felicity considers it for a moment. He was right about an odd request.

“You’re gonna have to pull up the company’s records,” she explains. “They might be public, I’ll walk you through finding them.”

She does so, going slow and waiting for him to follow her instructions. He takes to it relatively well, but she can hear how slow he’s typing over the phone. If she didn’t like him so much, that might have otherwise been a turn off. Five years on an island doesn’t exactly improve one’s typing speed, though, so she’s willing to give him the benefit of the doubt.
“Felicity,” he says once he’s found what he’s looking for. “You’re remarkable.”

“Thank you for remarking on it,” she smiles, feeling her cheeks warm at the compliment. The line goes silent for a moment, neither of them hanging up just yet.

“You’re still coming tonight, right?” Oliver asks, breaking the moment. She frowns, chewing on her lip and staring down at her quickly cooling slice of pizza.

“Are you sure it’s such a good idea?” She asks, nervously. “I mean, I work for your family’s company and Walter is gonna recognize me. Plus, if Tommy is coming he’ll probably bring Laurel and I don’t know how to-”

“Felicity,” he cuts her off and she sucks in a grateful breath at the interruption. “I understand if you’re not comfortable coming. But, I’d really like it if you did.”

She contemplates this for a moment, knowing already that she’s a goner. He isn’t trying to guilt her, she knows, but it’s nice to know he really wants her there.

“Then I’ll be there,” she promises.

He thanks her again for the help and says goodbye. Felicity tosses her phone onto the couch and stares down at her pizza. Now she has to find a dress.

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She shows up late to the party, but not so late she thinks it’s rude. Her nerves had been getting the best of her and she wanted to make sure she wasn’t going to spew leftover pizza all over the Queen’s foyer before actually going inside. Once she feels confident that the contents of her stomach will be staying where they are, she lets herself into the house.

Not that house is an appropriate descriptor for the building she enters. Estate, mansion, manor, any synonym for the type of house she could never in a million years afford seems better apt. She hadn’t really dwelled on it too much the night she’d dropped Thea off. She’d been in and out of the place so quickly and had had so little sleep, she barely remembers it.
Now, though, she feels like she has something to prove to the house. Which is ridiculous, because it’s a house, but still. She’d run out after her call with Oliver and found a relatively cheap, royal blue dress. She knew the house would be coated in Christmas colors and wanted to show at least a mild silent protest by wearing Hanukkah colors instead.

She spots John Diggle standing sentry at the foot of one of the staircases and waves. He offers her a warm smile and tilts his head towards the room behind him where she can hear music and conversation spilling from. She heads towards him, murmuring a thanks, but stops outside the entryway to the room.

It’s filled with people, but she spots Oliver easily, standing at the far end of the room in front of a fireplace and talking with Laurel. It seems like a serious conversation, so she decides not to intrude. Tommy is at the bar, getting drinks, so she avoids there as well, skirting around the edge of the room instead.

Oliver had really gone all out with the lights and the decorations. Photographers move around the room, shooting pictures of guests as they chat and drink. She can imagine how Oliver would romanticize his memories of the holiday, if this was the type of shindig his father had thrown every year.

Or maybe it was his memories of his father he was romanticizing.

She glances back over at the man in question as he leans down, placing a kiss on Laurel’s cheek before she walks away, crossing the room to join Tommy. Oliver watches them for a moment, but he must feel her eyes on him. He turns his head and spots her immediately, tilting his head and smiling at her.

“You came,” he says as he reaches her.

“You asked me to,” she shrugs. He ducks his head, pressing a gentle kiss to her cheek, lingering for just a moment.

“Thank you,” he says quietly, just for her, before he pulls away. She stares at him for a moment, her stomach doing strange flips. She doesn’t know how to respond, so she looks instead out into the room.

“So, this is the famous Queen Christmas party, huh?” She asks, holding her small silver clutch in
front of her with both hands. Oliver hums, nodding as he surveys the room as well. She wrinkles her nose a little. “It’s very… protestant.”

Oliver shakes his head, giving her a look. She smirks at him, prodding his bicep with her index finger.

“I’m kidding,” she assures him. “It’s amazing.”

“I suppose I can see how it might be a bit overwhelming,” he says, his hand slipping into hers. “You wanna go somewhere with a little less Christmas cheer?”

She fakes an indignant gasp. “What kind of a host are you, Mr. Queen?”

“Come with me and I’ll show you,” he promises, his grin a little dangerous as he leans towards her. She nods, excitement fluttering in her chest, and lets him lead her by the hand out of the room. They pass guests in the foyer and John, caught in conversation with other security personnel, heading up the staircase on the other side.

Oliver takes her down a long hallway, which turns and becomes another long hallway, until he stops them in front of a door. He turns the knob, leading her into the bedroom. It’s large, with wooden furniture and an expansive window on one side. A desk with an old laptop, that physically hurts her to look at, sits a few feet from a large bed with gray bedding.

“Is this your room?” She asks, looking around, suddenly intrigued by the glimpse into Oliver’s life. He hums in response as she moves towards the desk, setting her clutch down. She turns again, going instead toward the photos on one of the dressers. He trails after her as she picks up one of the frames.

Two young boys in suits, arms wrapped around each other as they mug for the camera. She grins, recognizing the teenaged versions of Oliver and Tommy, even with their truly unfortunate hair choices.

“Oh, please, let me have a copy of this,” she laughs, holding the frame up and spinning for Oliver to see it. He gives her a dark look, but can’t hide his amusement at her antics.

“You know, this isn’t why I brought you up here,” he points out, stepping forward and boxing her in
against the dresser.

“And why did you bring me up here?” She asks, looking up at him.

“To tell you how nice you look,” he says softly, taking the photograph from her hand and placing it back down on the dresser behind her. His hands fall to her hips and she hums at the compliment.

“Nice isn’t really what I was going for,” she tells him, leaning up to kiss him. Oliver meets her halfway, still just a little bit taller than her, even in her heels. She brings her hands up, draping them over his shoulder and dragging her fingers through his hair.

His hands slip lower, cupping her ass through the pleats of her skirt, and he lifts her. She responds easily, wrapping her legs around his hips. He moves them, stopping when they reach the desk and setting her down.

She gasps in surprise at the cool surface against her skin. He drops his head, kissing her neck instead. His hands move to her thighs, moving up them slowly, dragging the hem of her dress with them. Felicity cups his jaw, encouraging his mouth back to hers.

“I’m gonna get lipstick on you,” she warns, thinking of the dark burgundy shade she’d picked out for the evening. That ship has probably already sailed, but there is a party going on downstairs. His family is running around somewhere and she’d hate to have someone walk in on this scene.

“I don’t mind,” he assures her, pressing his mouth against hers, as if to make the point clear. Felicity can’t convince herself to pull away, easily forgetting the festivities happening elsewhere in the house.

She scoots forward on the desk, shifting her skirt up higher and bumping her hips against Oliver’s. She reaches between them, undoing the buttons on his suit jacket and urging it off his shoulders. He takes his hands off of her legs to remove the jacket and she misses the contact immediately.

His hands fall to her bare thighs again and she wraps her legs around him, the back of her heels pressing against the back of his thighs. He uses one hand to draw the strap of her dress down her shoulder, his mouth covering the skin it reveals.

She hears a loud buzzing sound and the desk vibrates beneath her. Oliver pulls back, raising an eyebrow at her. The smirk on his face is downright dirty and it’s doing awful things to her stomach,
especially smudged with the color of her lipstick.

“It’s my phone,” she informs him, pulling his mind from the gutter and reaching for her purse as it continues to vibrate. Oliver takes advantage of her distraction, placing himself more fully in between her legs and pressing his lips to the sensitive skin just below her ear. She reaches into her clutch and blindly hits ignore on the call.

Once the vibrations have stopped, she moves to sit straight again, but Oliver adjusts her hips, leaning her back onto the desk. She definitely hears something fall to the floor, but he doesn’t seem too concerned. He’s hovering over now, bent over the desk, his mouth trailing from her neck down towards the neckline of her dress.

The desk starts vibrating again. Felicity lets out a frustrated noise, reaching above her head for her clutch. She pulls it out and sees Curtis’ name on the caller ID. Frowning, she sits up, taking Oliver with her. He doesn’t let it break his stride, continuing to explore with his mouth.

“Not a great time,” she says, answering the phone and trying to keep her voice even.

“Yeah, supervillains don’t usually bend to our schedule,” Curtis responds, sounding freaked out. Felicity stills, turning down the volume on her phone. Oliver seems to sense her unease, pulling back to look at her.

“What happened?” She asks and Oliver frowns at her.

“The other archer just took hostages,” Curtis explains and her chest goes tight with concern. “He’s gonna start killing them unless the vigilante shows up.”

This is exactly what Felicity had been afraid of. Even still, hostages and threats is an escalation for someone who had been sticking to the shadows up until now. She promises Curtis she’ll be right there and hangs up, turning an apologetic look on Oliver.

“I’m so sorry,” she says, tucking her phone back into her clutch. Oliver frowns in concern, reaching forward to pull the straps of her dress back up onto her shoulders.

“Is everything alright?” He asks.
“It’s just kind of an emergency,” she tells him as he helps her off of the desk. She wonders why they’re always running out on each other.

Oliver assures her that he understands and she promises to be back as soon as she can. She runs out of the room, practically flying down the stairs in her haste to leave. She doesn’t have time to worry about who might see her, too concerned with finding the other archer.

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It turns out he’s not exactly hiding.

“The cops are already on site,” Curtis explains while Felicity changes. Her lipstick is more or less ruined from her encounter with Oliver, so she wipes the rest on a tissue. “I checked satellite imagery and the perimeter is rigged with explosives.”

Felicity freezes. The news plays on one of the monitors behind Curtis, the feed covering the ongoing crisis as it replays the hostage message. She looks at Curtis.

“Could you disarm them through the network?” She asks. He seems to consider this.

“Yeah, maybe,” he says uncertainly. “If they’re all connected to a network I can break into, yes. If they aren’t that high tech, though, no.”

Felicity doesn’t have time to consider the negatives. Instead, she pulls her gloves on and attaches her wrist tech. She opens a different drawer in the cabinet and pulls out a laptop.

“We’ll take your car,” she instructs. “Put yourself within range of the explosives’ network and no closer, alright? I’m gonna try to get into the building from an adjacent roof.”

Curtis seems unsure still, but takes the laptop as she holds it out to him. She stops, maintaining her grip on the laptop and gaining his attention.
“I don’t know what this guy has planned,” she admits. “But, we have to try and help.”

Curtis nods in agreement and follows her lead back up the steps. He drives them to just outside the police perimeter and stops. Felicity leaves him to work on disarming the explosives and heads for the buildings adjacent to the warehouse.

As she scales the fire escape, she looks down at the tech on her wrist, keeping a count of the time since the announcement had gone live. If the Hood were gonna show up before any hostages are killed, he’s running out of time for it.

“I told you to stay away from this,” a voice calls as soon as her boots touchdown on the roof of the building. She looks up to find the vigilante already there, looking for a way into the building. She jogs the distance between them to reach him.

“Yeah, well, I wasn’t gonna stand by while this pissing contest got people killed,” she tells him. There’s a window dead across from their position that she’s sure he’s set his sights on as a point of entry. “My partner’s working on disarming the explosives.”

“We don’t have time to wait,” he reminds her and she nods. He shoots a line to the other building. It sinks home just above the window she’d noticed and he holds his arm out to her. She reaches for him, holding onto him. Just before they collide, he lifts his legs up in front of him, going through the window feet first.

He lands with grace on one knee, but Felicity rolls, unused to the landing. She scrambles to her feet quickly, not wanting to seem like she still can’t do this. The Hood heads immediately for the hostages and Felicity follows. He tosses her one of the small barbs from his wrist and they cut the hostages’ ropes.

“Where is he?” He asks the first woman, the one Felicity recognizes from the video.

“I don’t know,” she stutters out, her voice thick with tears. The Hood assures her it’s gonna be okay and instructs them to follow him. The hostages trail after him through a narrow hallway, Felicity bringing up the rear and keeping an eye out for the other archer.

“Get them up to the roof,” he instructs her as they reach a door that leads to a staircase. The group doesn’t hesitate, running up the stairs without much prompting from her. Felicity stalls at the bottom, turning back to him. “Once your partner gets the explosives disarmed, the police can move in and
extract them."

He goes to leave, but she reaches forward, grabbing his arm. He turns back halfway, waiting.

“What about you?” She asks.

“I’ll be fine,” he assures her gruffly before turning and heading back down the hallway. Felicity watches him for a moment before turning and running up the stairs after the group of people. They’re grouped up on the roof, shaking and startled, when she reaches them.

“Where are we on the explosives?” She asks, turning away from the group. She can see the police perimeter, its flashing lights reaching all the way up to the roof. She figures that means they can probably see her, too.

“We are very stressed out and need a few more minutes,” Curtis responds, sounding panicked. Felicity squeezes her eyes shut, remembering Curtis’ tendency to freeze under pressure.

“Hey, just breathe, alright?” She tells him. “The hostages are safe. It’s tech, so, if anyone can break through it, it’s you.”

She waits, hoping she’s helped at least a little bit. She can hear the sound of the keys as Curtis types away at them. After a few more minutes, he gives a shout of victory.

“They’re down!” He announces and Felicity steps closer to the edge of the building. She looks down at the line of cops and police cars waiting in front of the building and presses a command on her wrist to amplify her voice modulator.

“The explosives are down,” she announces. “We’re gonna need a ladder over here.”

She feels a little silly, giving them directions through the voice changer. It only takes them a few minutes to confirm the disarming of the bombs and call for a firetruck. Curtis, hooked into the police’s frequency, lets her know that they’ll be coming to get the hostages.

She turns back to the small group, instructing them to wait for the police. She steps to the edge of the
roof and throws a sphere at the building she and the Hood had jumped from. The tether hangs to her wrist as the sphere wraps around the rope connected to the Hood’s arrow and Felicity leaps from the build, swinging across the distance before being pulled back up to the roof.

She runs back to Curtis’ car and tells him to start driving.

“That was awesome!” He enthuses.

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“Seriously, no wonder you don’t want to give that up,” Curtis laughs, pacing around the base. Felicity laughs as she strips out of her gear and pulls her party dress back on. “What a rush!”

She shakes her head at him, finding her lipstick inside her clutch and reapplying it blindly. She has to admit, she feels bad having left the Hood behind, even if he’d told her to. They didn’t know what this other archer was capable of and so far she hasn’t heard anything about either of the archers being brought in, dead or alive.

Curtis is still pacing and grinning at her.

“That’s not what it’s about for me,” she admits with a shrug. “I just want to help people.”

Curtis stops.

“No, yeah, of course,” he nods, like he’s trying to prove he isn’t suddenly addicted to the rush. Felicity chuckles, shaking her head again. “Helping people is the most important part, but, come on, that was pretty awesome.”

“Okay, it was pretty awesome,” she admits, turning to grin at him and they both just take a moment to bask in the awesomeness. Remembering where she needs to be, Felicity shakes herself out of it. “You did great tonight, Curtis. Now, go home. Enjoy your holiday.”

He nods, still clearly a little in awe or shock over the events, and she turns to head for the stairs.
“You know,” he calls, stopping her. “The police definitely know you exist now. No more living in obscurity.”

“Yeah, I know,” Felicity nods, continuing her ascent up the stairs. She just doesn’t know exactly what that means yet.

She makes it to her car when her phone starts to ring. She fishes it from her purse, frowning down at the unknown number. For a moment, she considers ignoring it, but something churns uncomfortably in her stomach, convincing her to answer.

“Hello?”

“Felicity?” The voice on the other line asks. “This is John Diggle. I wanted to let you know, something happened.”

She barely hears much of the conversation after John tells her that Oliver was in a motorcycle accident. Her heart stops for a moment as John explains that he’s alright, he’s in the hospital and he’s already been checked out by a doctor.

She asks him to text her his room information and tells him she’ll be there soon.

“And, John,” she stops him before he hangs up. “Thank you for calling me.”

One of the downsides to no one really knowing about her and Oliver’s relationship, is that no one would have even thought to call her. If John hadn’t, she would have heard about the accident in the news or from gossip at QC. Maybe Oliver would have called her himself eventually, but what if it had been worse?

She definitely speeds a little to get to Starling General.

Felicity reaches his hall just as Thea is coming out of his room. The younger girl spots Felicity, tilting her head in surprised confusion. She meets Felicity halfway down the hallway.
“Hey, Felicity, right?” Thea asks and Felicity nods. “Are you here to see Ollie?”

“Yeah,” she responds, nodding and swallowing against the thickness in her throat. “Yeah, I heard and I just wanted to make sure he’s okay.”

“It’s gonna be a long healing process,” Thea sighs, glancing back towards the room out of concern for her brother. “I didn’t realize you two were friends.”

Felicity isn’t sure how to respond, not ready to try to classify her and Oliver anyway, so she just nods.

“Listen, I never got the chance to thank you for getting me home after the benefit,” Thea says, shifting a little uncomfortably. Felicity waves off the thanks, offering her a small smile.

“I’m just glad you’re okay,” she assures Thea who smiles gratefully. She waves her towards Oliver’s room, telling her that he’s okay to have visitors, but he’s gonna need to get some sleep soon. Felicity nods, thanking her and heads towards the room.

She hesitates outside the door, looking in. Oliver is sitting up on the edge of the bed, looking towards the large glass windows that make up the far wall. His hospital clothes are bland, a white t-shirt and blue scrubs, but she can see nasty gashes on his elbows.

She knocks lightly at the door frame and he turns carefully.

“Hey,” he greets, a soft smile lighting up his features.

“Hi,” she responds, hesitant to step further into the room. She startles when John stands from his chair next to the door. She hadn’t noticed him sitting there.

“I’ll give you two a minute,” he offers, sidling past her out the door and offering her a reassuring smile as he does so. Felicity takes a deep breath and steps into the room, crossing carefully to the bed.

“John called me,” she explains, hooking her thumb over her shoulder in the direction he’d
disappeared. Oliver nods. “Why had you even left the party?”

“Turned out I wasn’t really feeling the Christmas cheer,” he explains and she frowns.

It doesn’t actually tell her anything and she intends to press him on it, but she rounds the bed, coming to stand in front of him. Up close, the scratches and bruises on his face and neck are even worse and Felicity can’t contain her gasp at the sight, her fingers coming up to steeple in front of her mouth.

“Hey,” Oliver says, reaching for her slowly. His hands land on her elbows, his thumbs rubbing gently over her skin. She can’t believe he’s the one comforting her right now. “Hey, I’m gonna be fine.”

She reaches for his jaw, hands ghosting but not quite touching, afraid to hurt him. His hands fall from her elbows, dipping inside her open coat to find her hips. He sits forward a little, pressing into her hands where she’s afraid to touch him.

“That was a really scary phone call to get,” she admits quietly, her fingers moving gently through the short hairs of his beard. He hums, his eyes falling shut at the feel of her fingers. He drops his head forward, pressing a gentle kiss to her lips.

“I promise,” he assures her. “I’m gonna be taking it easy for a while.”

Chapter End Notes

Guys. Writer's block is no joke. I'm just gonna say that now. We should be set to keep this story week-to-week for a few more weeks at least, but I have fallen short of all of my writing goals, so just a heads up on that.

I hope you're all still enjoying this, though!
Chapter Summary

Someone starts killing firefighters and prompts the vigilante out of his six weeks of hiding. Felicity begins to feel a lack of faith.

Chapter Notes

I know y'all are jonesing for Felicity and Oliver's many secrets to come out, but I'm gonna need you to bear with the narrative for a bit longer. Does the domesticity make up for it? Hope so!!

Takes place during 1.10 "Burned"

“You look really good,” Felicity comments, prompting Oliver to stop what he’s doing and turn to look at her. He’s standing at the end of her bed in low slung jeans that make her stomach do strange things and he gives her this smug smirk. She tosses a pillow at him, which he dodges artfully. “I meant in terms of your healing!”

He chuckles and nods, picking his shirt up off the floor and tugging it over his head. His accident had left him with three broken ribs, a concussion, and a collapsed lung. Amazingly, though, Felicity couldn’t find any new scars on his body. She supposes he didn’t have doctors on that island.

The hospital hadn’t kept him admitted long before releasing him to his family’s care. Only a portion of his lung had collapsed, so the doctors had monitored him for about a week with a series of x-rays until they were certain it would expand again on its own without need for more invasive procedures. He’d still had to keep his chest wrapped for the first few days he was home to protect his ribs, but it hadn’t covered the dark purple bruises covering the area.

Felicity had been afraid to touch him at first, sure anything she did would cause him further pain. Oliver had had to coax her out of those fears, asking her to help him ice his ribs and gently ensuring her that she wouldn’t hurt him. Eventually, he’d just pressed her back into the couch and removed the worries with more hands on methods.

It’s been six weeks and he looks as good as new.
“Yeah,” he shrugs, buttoning up the front of his shirt as she watches him from the bed. “I’ve got my last day of rehab tomorrow, but they’ve more or less given me a clean bill of health.”

“Good,” Felicity nods as he ducks down to scoop the pillow she’d tossed off the floor. “When is it? I could pick you up on my lunch break.”

He smiles, rounding the bed to meet her where she sits, the comforter wrapped around her. He tosses the pillow down next to her and leans down, meeting her lips in a short kiss. She wraps her fingers in the collar of his shirt, encouraging him to linger.

“That would be great,” he says, pulling away. She lets go, smoothing down his collar where she’d wrinkled it. “Thank you.”

She hums in response, nodding and tugging at his collar again, urging him back towards her. He laughs, resisting her just as her doorbell rings. She groans, flopping back onto the bed dramatically as Oliver looks towards the hallway.

“And that would be the food,” he announces, turning back to her. “Get dressed.”

He turns and heads from the room while Felicity shakes her head, tutting at him.

“Oliver Queen telling a woman to put her clothes back on,” she jokes and he glances over his shoulder to give her an unamused look before disappearing through the door.

She huffs, pushing the comforter off herself, her muscles aching in all the right ways. She pulls on a pair of pajama pants and an old college sweatshirt. Oliver’s voice drifts down the hallway, chatting politely with the delivery guy. She stops at the end of the hallway, leaning against the corner and watching the exchange.

Oliver finishes up, closing the door and turning back to her. He stops when he catches her observing him, the bag full of Chinese cradled in his arm.

“What?” He asks, frowning at her. Felicity shakes her head at him, stepping forward to take the food from him. She drops it on the kitchen counter and he opens a cabinet behind her, pulling down plates. They move around each other, pulling out cartons and scooping the contents onto plates. Oliver pulls two beers out of the fridge and pops the caps off.
“How’s your family doing?” She asks as they settle in on the couch. He moves towards her TV, looking over her small collection of DVDs that she keeps out on display. He picks one out, holding it up for her. She nods.

“They’re holding up,” he tells her, setting the disk into the player. Felicity frowns, nodding and biting into a dumpling. “I’m worried about my mom, though. She’s barely even left her room in over a month.”

Walter had gone missing the same night of Oliver’s accident. He’d left the hospital and told Moira he was going to stop by the office to deal with some paperwork and never came home. The police had said they’d need to wait 48 hours before filing an official report, but their questions had geared more towards Walter just picking up and leaving.

The Queens didn’t think that was likely and Felicity had a hard time imagining Walter doing something like that either. Officially, the investigation was still ongoing, but she doubted the police weren’t doing much. There aren’t many leads to go off of.

Felicity has been doing her own digging, but even she has been coming up short. Security cameras from the company showed Walter leaving his office and entering the elevator, but there’s no angle facing into the car or cameras inside of it. She couldn’t find an angle that showed him leaving the building.

“I’m sure she just needs time,” she assures Oliver, rubbing his arm. He nods, scooping some noodles from his plate. “I can’t even imagine what she’s going through.”

It’s not a lie, necessarily. Assuming Moira Queen didn’t actually have anything to do with Walter’s disappearance. She hates that she even needs to consider it, but a couple days after she told Walter her thoughts about the list being connected to the vigilante, he’d disappeared. A notebook that he just so happened to have found in his wife’s things. She doesn’t want to believe Moira would have had anything to do with her husband’s disappearance, but she can’t shake the nagging feeling that the woman knows more than she’s letting on.

Not that she’s mentioned any of this Oliver, or anyone for that matter.

“Yeah,” Oliver agrees, nodding at her. “Unfortunately, it’s not the first time her husband has disappeared.”
After dinner Oliver heads home, hoping to spend some time with his mom. He’s been trying a lot during his recovery, having dinner or lunch with Felicity most days, but spending a lot of time at home. He hasn’t spent the night in a while, but Felicity doesn’t mind. They’re still seeing a lot of each other and it gives her time to go out at night without having to kick him out or make up an excuse.

She’d installed a lock on the door leading down to the basement of the apartment that she and Curtis operate out of, deciding against a keypad and going with a fingerprint scanner instead. Curtis had built it and Felicity had programmed their prints into it. She’d also set it up so that they each had their own unique override code to lock down the doors from inside.

It’s a little overkill maybe, but it had been a fun project.

She presses her thumb against the pad and it beeps, the lock in the door clicking open. Downstairs, she can hear the sound of a keyboard. Curtis is sitting in his chair - a new computer chair pulled in next to hers because she’s not great about sharing - and she can see the grid of the city that runs through emergency calls lighting up.

“What’s going on?” She asks, heading straight for the cabinet with her gear. Curtis stops what he’s doing and spins in his chair. She’d changed into a tank top and leggings after Oliver left, so she doesn’t need to strip down tonight.

“Robbery at a convenience store a few blocks from here,” he tells hers. “I’ll send the address to your wrist tech.”

She nods, shoving her feet into her boots and adjusting her mask. She pulls her hood up over her head and heads towards Curtis. He holds out a comm for her.

“You got eyes on?” She asks, slipping the comm in her ear and heading for the stairs without waiting for his response.

“Yup,” he assures her. She hears him through both the comm and behind her as she races up the steps. Petty criminals don’t usually stick around long and she needs to get there quick. Sure enough, the address for the store shows up on her wrist as she heads out of the building.
She shows up just as the man is running from the store. There’s light pouring from the shop, but Felicity can’t see anyone through the front window. She gives chase, following the thief into an alley and tossing a sphere towards him. She rolls it low and it bounces across the concrete, shooting out a web of tethers that wrap around his legs, binding them together and dropping him to the pavement.

She smirks, walking slowly towards him.

“Who are you supposed to be?” He snarls, reaching down to tug at the cords. They don’t give under his fingers. “The green guy’s replacement?”

Felicity grins, pressing a command on her wrist. The sphere, still attached to the guy’s ankles, seeks out the closest large mass of metal. It loops around the fire escape above them and begins to retract, pulling the man from the ground and suspending him upside down. He gives a shout of surprise.

“Maybe,” she says, lazily shrugging her shoulders at him. With a swift punch, she sends him into unconsciousness.

She turns and heads back down the alley, pressing another command. The sphere severs itself from its tethers, now wrapped securely around the railing of the fire escape, and flies through the air back to her.

“Why don’t you leave an anonymous tip for the police?” Felicity asks into her comm, snagging the sphere from where it hovers next to her and pocketing it. “Let them know there’s a present waiting for them.”

“The Purple Pixie gets another one,” Curtis whoops and she shakes her head at him. He’s been trying out nicknames for weeks, trying to get her to commit to some sort of codename.

“I’m not a nineties punk band,” she tells him. “That’s a definite veto.”

He gives a long suffering sigh, but she can hear him typing. Probably hacking into the emergency alert system to send any cops in the area the message. At least, that’s how she’d do it. It does feel a little weird relying on Curtis to be her hacker while she’s on the streets.

“You should be hearing sirens any minute now,” he informs her.
“Great,” she says, scaling a fire escape on the side of an apartment building. “I’m gonna patrol for a bit. Let me know if any calls come in.”

Curtis agrees and Felicity’s boots hit the concrete of the roof of the apartment. She walks to the edge, looking out over the Glades. She’d swear she’s actually getting pretty good at this. Between her training sessions with Laurel and spending most nights patrolling, she thinks she’s figuring the whole thing out. There haven’t been any heavy attacks and crime has definitely been down in the past few months, so she doesn’t think she’s ready for another run in with the mob or anything.

But, still, she thinks this is working.

“Do you think he’s gonna come back?” Curtis asks, surprising her with the question. He expands, “The vigilante, I mean.”

Felicity hesitates, tossing a sphere at an adjacent fire escape, one on a talling building, and using it to swing between the buildings. She drops onto the fire escape and begins to climb its stairs.

No one had seen bow nor quiver from the vigilante since Christmas. She’d actually probably been the last one to see him, besides the Dark Archer. He’d told her he could handle it and she’d trusted him, left him to deal with the other archer himself. She doubts she could have been of any help, the last thing she needed was an arrow through the chest.

Still, she couldn’t shake the guilty feeling. The police hadn’t recovered any bodies from inside the warehouse, but that didn’t necessarily mean anything. Maybe the vigilante had just decided to leave Starling or had suffered some kind of injury. Felicity knew the most likely scenario was that he hadn’t been able to beat the Dark Archer, which meant he was probably dead.

She shook the morbid thought from her head.

“He’ll be back,” she assures Curtis.

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Felicity takes a long lunch to pick Oliver up from his final appointment with his physical therapist.
Naturally, his family had hired the best one which means the practice is at least close to downtown, so it’s not too far out of the way to pick him up. They let her wait inside when she gets there and tells them who she’s picking up. The therapist walks him out, leading him into the waiting room where Felicity sits, reading the news on her phone. There have been a string of fires recently that are uncommon for the time of year.

He spots her and smiles, thanking the woman and shaking her hand. While he finishes up, Felicity drops her phone inside her bag and stands, pulling her coat back around her shoulders. Oliver meets her at her chair, still in workout gear from the session, but with his jacket over his t-shirt.

“Hey, thanks for picking me up,” he greets, placing his hand on the small of her back and leading her back out into the brisk afternoon.

“Of course,” she nods, directing them towards her car. She adds, offhandedly, “Your therapist seemed nice. Pretty.”

Oliver chuckles, wrapping his arm around her waist fully to stop her and pull her around to face him. She turns easily, smirking at him.

“It’s cute that you’re jealous,” he teases, leaning down to kiss her. She grips the collar of his jacket, causing the kiss to linger and Oliver hums against her mouth. She’s really only teasing him about the therapist, anyway. Maybe, with his history, Oliver cheating on her should be something to worry about. But, she doesn’t think he’s that kind of person anymore.

“So,” she says, finally pulling away and clicking the unlock button on her key fob, “I was thinking that diner by my place for lunch.”

It’s a bit out of the way, but she doesn’t expect to run into anyone there. She’ll probably be late getting back to work, but considering all of her overtime over the past few months, she doubts anyone will say anything.

“Sounds good,” Oliver agrees, halting before he slides into the car to look at her over the roof. She knows he hates her tiny car, but he puts up with it every once in a while anyway. He frowns at her. “You’re buying, right?”

He grins at his own joke and Felicity rolls her eyes at him, ducking down and sliding into the car. He’s still smirking when he pulls the door shut and she reaches over and whacks his arm lightly. He
responds by catching her hand and pressing a kiss to her knuckles.

“Suck up,” she accuses, taking her arm back and pulling out of the parking lot.

At the diner they choose a booth towards the back and Oliver sits across from her. A waitress comes over and takes their order. Oliver reaches for her hand across the table as they wait, lacing their fingers together. Felicity smiles a little at the gesture.

“How was your morning?” He asks and she shrugs, thinking of the amount of tickets still in her queue when she’d left work.

“Same old,” she offers, halfheartedly, changing the subject. “How was therapy?”

“Good,” he nods. “My lung is back to normal, my ribs fused right. Clean bill of health.”

“You could sound more excited about it,” she frowns, tilting her head to the side and studying him. By all accounts, he’s in peak physical condition. No worse off than he’d been before his accident. Yet, he’s acting like that’s a bad thing.

He grimaces, shaking his head and looking down at their joined hands.

“I’m just still worried about my mother,” he admits. Felicity allows him the clear deflection from whatever is actually going on. She knows his concern for his family is genuine, though, so she’s willing to ignore it. “Thea’s holding up fine, but mom’s borderline catatonic. I’m not sure how to break her out of it.”

She frowns, squeezing his hand and releasing it just as the waitress comes back with their drinks and places them in front of them. She wants to tell him about the notebook, about the names and the possible connection to the vigilante. About the feeling she can’t shake that his mother knows more than she’s saying.

“She probably just needs time,” she assures him instead, unwrapping a straw and sticking it into her soda.
“Maybe,” he sighs, stirring his straw through his iced tea. “I’m thinking I’ll pick up dinner for the three of us tonight, rent a DVD, try to convince her to come out of her room.”

Felicity rests her elbow on the table, cradling her chin in her palm and smiling at him. He tilts his head in question.

“It is so cute that you think people still rent DVDs,” she teases.

He gives her a dark look and tosses his balled up straw wrapper at her.

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After work, she heads back to the base. She’s reached a decision not to work on matters of Walter’s disappearance at work. That includes the notebook, which has become a permanent resident of her bag. Sometimes, she pulls it out and sets it in front of her and just stares at it. It’s ridiculous, because it’s an inanimate notebook the size of her palm, but she’d swear the thing is evil.

Like a horcrux or the One Ring.

Curtis still doesn’t know about it or the extra hours she’s been logging to try and get a lead on Walter. Besides Oliver, he’s the person she wishes to tell most. There’s little doubt in her mind that the notebook’s contents is dangerous, though, and she’s invited enough danger into Curtis’ life already. She can’t involve him in this.

It’s not her only project, anyway. While Curtis has been redesigning his tech and giving it new uses, Felicity has been continuing her hunt for the Dark Archer. She doubts they’ve seen the last of him, Hood or not, and the only legitimate lead she has is the black Lexus. Her program had isolated the make and model, but it was still proving difficult to find it within the city.

Turns out Starling has a lot of billionaires driving around in high end Japanese sedans.

She hears the lock on the door beep and Curtis comes loudly down the metal staircase. His quick steps make her spin her chair in concern, thinking something is wrong. He points at her, grinning excitedly.
“Turn on channel fifty-two,” he instructs. Frowning, Felicity spins back around and pulls up the news feed on her computer. “There’s a roundtable talking about the vigilante.”

Still missing the relevance, Felicity surrenders control when Curtis drops into his own chair next to her and reaches for the mouse and keyboard. He scans the feed backwards about twenty minutes before leaning back for Felicity to see.

A woman is on the screen, gesticulating to her co-hosts. The infamous sketch of the Starling City vigilante is in the corner, accompanied by a banner that reads ‘WHERE IS THE STARLING VIGILANTE?’

“So, what strikes me is that this vigilante was actually making a difference,” the woman insists. “In the four months that he was active assaults were down, muggings down. The murder rate dropped by sixteen percent! So, in a very quantifiable way, this man in the hood had been a positive force in this city. So, where has he been for the past six weeks?”

Curtis is practically vibrating in his chair, but Felicity feels like she’s missing the point. They’ve been doing these “civilian dispatch” segments for the past two weeks, ever since it became clear that the Hood had disappeared. They always ended the same way, impassioned people yelling over statistics and beliefs, refusing to cowtail to each other.

Another person at the table speaks up.

“True enough,” a man responds, the camera switching to him. “But, are we really wishing for the return of a man who seemed to have no hesitation in killing people to get what he wanted?”

“You can’t deny the impact of his work, though,” the woman insists. “Not just with regards to numbers, but inspiration. Look at the woman we’re seeing reports of in the Glades, putting away thieves and muggers. How can you ignore the good he’s inspired?”

Felicity frowns, leaning forward to pause the feed. She mildly resents the implication that the Hood had created her, but moreso she’s worried about what the public knowing about her means for her. It’s been fun and satisfying running around rooftops and dangling criminals from fire escapes these past few weeks, but she hadn’t considered the impact of the rumors of her.

“Come on,” Curtis enthuses, catching sight of the worried expression on his face. “You’re a hero, Felicity. That’s pretty cool!”
She tries to appease him with a smile and he must buy it because he spins in his chair, hopping out of it and heading towards his work table. Of course Curtis is excited at the appreciation of their efforts. It’s nice to be considered a positive force, no matter who’s saying it.

But, Felicity knows how fickle public opinion can be. All she has to do is slip up once and she’ll no longer be a hero. She’ll be a menace.

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She wakes up to someone knocking insistently on her door. The clock on her nightstand tells her it’s well into late morning and she’s slept in longer than she’d intended to. She grabs her phone off of the nightstand and heads down the hall. The knocking hasn’t stopped, so she checks the peephole before pulling it open.

“Why?” She groans, leaning against the door and yawning.

“Were you still asleep?” Laurel asks, a small bit of judgement in her tone. “It’s almost noon.”

“Late night,” Felicity answers shortly, waving the other woman through the door. She closes the door and heads towards the kitchen, sights set on the coffee maker. “What’s going on?”

“Joanna’s brother died in a fire two nights ago,” Laurel tells her, setting her purse on the counter. Felicity turns to her in surprise, holding a used coffee filter in her hands.

“Oh, my God,” she says, remembering herself and tossing the filter in the garbage. Giving up on the coffee for the moment, she leans on the counter across from Laurel. “I’m so sorry. How is she doing?”

“As well as she can be,” Laurel gives. She reaches into her bag and pulls out a file, setting it on the counter between them. Felicity frowns down at it. “But, she doesn’t think that Danny’s death was an accident and neither do I.”

“I assume you two have a reason to believe that,” Felicity says as she pushes away from the counter, pulling a new filter from a cabinet and setting it into the coffee maker. She opens the fridge, and pulls
“Someone in the coroner’s office gave her a copy of the incident report,” Laurel explains, opening the folder in front of her. “Danny’s coat was doused in turpentine, which shouldn’t have been in the factory. Those coats are built to withstand fires that burn more than five hundred degrees, but the fire didn’t exceed two hundred and fifty.”

Felicity frowns, taking the report as Laurel holds it out to her. She flips the pages, skimming for the information Laurel had already told her.

“So, how did her brother burn in it?” She asks quietly. The coffee maker gurgles behind her as it brews her coffee.

“Exactly,” Laurel nods. “So, I looked into it. Another firefighter, Leo Barnes, died last week under the same circumstances. There were traces of turpentine and ignition temps hotter than the fire itself.”

“You think someone out there is targeting firefighters while they’re putting out fires?” Felicity asks, setting the incident report back into the folder. There’s another one beneath it, probably with Leo Barnes’ death catalogued in its pages.

“Maybe,” Laurel shrugs. “It’s definitely not normal. I talked to my dad to see if he could encourage the fire marshal to look into it, but he doesn’t really have the authority.”

“So, you want me to dig into it?” Felicity asks, pulling a mug down from the cabinet and filling it with the freshly brewed coffee. “See if I can find anything that would force the fire marshal’s hand?”

“Actually, I was thinking of something a little more drastic,” Laurel says, pulling a non descript black smartphone from her bag and holding it up. Felicity lifts her mug to her lips, raising her eyebrows in confusion.

“What’s that?” She asks.

“Apparently, it belongs to the vigilante,” Laurel explains and Felicity burns her tongue on her drink, setting the mug down to stare at the phone in Laurel’s hand. “I kind of swiped it off my dad’s desk.”
“Laurel,” Felicity hisses, stepping up to the counter again. “You stole evidence? Are you crazy?”

“Look, I don’t know what else to do, okay?” She admits, holding her hands out in a helpless gesture. She sets the phone down on the counter between them and Felicity can’t help staring at it. She reaches out and presses the unlock button and it lights up with a bland screen with only a telephone app. “It only has one number on it and maybe, if he picks up, he’ll be willing to try and find this killer.”

“No one’s even seen him in over a month,” Felicity reminds her, looking up from the phone to frown at her. “Just let me work on it for a bit, okay? I might be able to find something that will force an investigation.”

“What if more people die in the meantime?” Laurel asks, picking the phone back up and tossing it back into her purse. She leaves the file for Felicity, though. “I appreciate you looking into it, but I just can’t take the chance.”

She turns, heading back towards the door.

“Laurel,” Felicity calls after her warily.

“Keep the file, I have a copy. Do some digging if you can,” Laurel tells her. “But, if I have the chance to get his help, I have to try.”

She pulls the door open, disappearing out onto the porch and pulling it shut again. Felicity glares down at the file in front of her, stomach churning with anxiety. She turns and dumps her coffee mug into the sink.

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Laurel and Joanna are right about the weirdness of Danny’s and Leo’s deaths. The amount of turpentine found on their clothes or in the vicinity is strange enough, but even stranger is the fact that neither of the fires were in places where turpentine should have even been.

So, at the least, she thinks they’re definitely looking at arson.
It’s somewhere to start, at least. Only a few places in Starling sell turpentine in large quantities and if she can hack into their records, she can isolate anyone who purchased the accelerant recently.

Curtis shows up at the base a few hours after her, while she’s deep into store records and pouring through names. She explains the situation to him.

“Are you sure you want to be taking this on?” He asks, raising an eyebrow at her. “If Laurel is trying to call in the Hood, maybe you should just let him handle it.”

Felicity blanches, surprised at the response. And maybe a little bit offended.

“What exactly can a man who disappeared a month and a half ago do about this that I can’t?” She questions, leaning forward in her chair.

“I’m just saying,” Curtis says slowly, raising his hands in defense, “that this may be a little more dangerous than you’re ready for. No matter how much fighting skill you’ve honed, you can’t exactly punch a fire.”

“But you can shoot arrows at it?” She points out, spinning away from him and going back to her search. She copies all of the records onto a drive. She continues, sarcastically, “I appreciate your confidence in me, Curtis, but I’m not looking for a fire. I’m looking for a person.”

He sighs, recognizing the hurt in her voice, “Felicity.”

She disconnects the drive from the computer in front of her and drops it into her purse, pushing out of her chair. Curtis watches her warily as she turns back to him.

“If you don’t want to help,” she tells him, walking past him towards the stairs. “Then don’t.”

Maybe it’s petty or childish to just walk out on Curtis, but she’s beginning to wonder what exactly it’ll take to make him believe in her. Between Laurel’s insistence on calling the vigilante and his lack of faith in her, she isn’t really feeling the confidence.
It’s hurting her feelings, honestly.

She sits in front of her laptop at home, plugging the drive in and focusing in on the records from the stores that sell turpentine in large quantities. Nothing has popped up at her so far, and her waning confidence has her questioning if it’s even the right move.

Losing track of time, Felicity doesn’t realize how late it is until someone knocks on her door. She frowns at the time and checks through the peephole first, just in case. Oliver mills on the other side, a bag emblazoned with Big Belly Burger’s logo on it in one hand and a drink carrier in the other.

“Hey,” she greets, tugging the door open. “I didn’t think you were coming by tonight.”

“I thought you might be free for a late dinner,” he explains, holding the paper bag up. “Is it a bad time?”

“No, it’s perfect timing,” she assures him, unable to contain her smile as she waves him inside and towards the living room. She moves past him, closing up her laptop and setting it aside. He takes a seat on the couch and Felicity joins him as he holds out a wrapped sandwich for her.

Eating makes her feel a little better and Oliver’s good timing makes her feel a lot better. Still, he must notice something is going on, because she can feel him studying her. She refuses to be the one to break, though, focusing on her burger instead.

“What’s wrong?” He asks once she finishes, balling her wrapper up and tossing it into the empty bag. She still has fries left and she cradles the container in her hands. “And, don’t say nothing, because I can tell it’s something.”

She considers it for a moment, shoving a couple french fries into her mouth. Oliver sees it for the delay it is, raising an eyebrow at her in amusement.

“You remember that project I was telling you about?” Felicity asks, setting the carton of fries aside. He nods, shifting to face her on the couch. “Well, I’ve got this team, for lack of a better word, that I’m working on it with. We’ve been making a lot of progress lately, but it just feels like it’s not good enough. I feel like they’re starting to lose confidence in me and it’s making me question my own abilities.”
He reaches for her arm, dragging his hand down it soothingly before lacing their fingers together, squeezing gently.

“Felicity, you’re the most capable person I know,” he assures her softly and she gives him a gentle smile, but he isn’t finished. “I’ve seen how you dive into projects and whatever it is you’re working on, I’m sure it’s no different. You just need to remind your team, and yourself, why they put their faith in you in the first place.”

She swells at the compliments, leaning forward to kiss him. He doesn’t have the full story, and if he did, he’d probably tell her to stay far away from the fires and the vigilante. But, his belief in her helps soothe the wound to her pride even still.

“Thank you,” she says softly, her forehead pressing against his. He ducks in for another kiss before pulling away completely. Felicity returns her attention to her fries.

“Glad I could help,” he tells her.

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She wakes up to the feeling of the bed shifting and reaches out automatically for Oliver. Her hand glides over his shoulder, not finding purchase as he slides from the bed.

“No,” she whines, pulling his abandoned pillow towards her instead. “It’s so early.”

Oliver laughs and she can tell he’s across the room now, probably getting dressed. She pouts, flopping onto her back and opening her eyes to watch him. He catches her eye, winking as he pulls his boxers over his hips. He disappears through the door to the bathroom and she glances over at the clock, discovering it’s earlier than she’d realized.

Sighing, she shifts over towards Oliver’s vacant spot, curling into the warmth of it and begins to drift again. She wakes to Oliver prodding her gently.

“Hey,” he says softly, rousing her out of sleep. “I have to go to the club and meet the contractor.”
She huffs, annoyed at his early departure.

“What contractor actually starts this early?” She argues, locking her fingers around his wrist. He smells good, like he’d showered, and when she opens her eyes she realizes his hair is still wet.

“The whole problem is that his workers haven’t started yet,” he explains, leaning down to brush a kiss over her temple. “I didn’t want to leave without saying goodbye.”

Frowning in protest, Felicity sits up enough to press a lazy kiss to his lips. She only half-misses, kissing the corner of his mouth instead. He chuckles, taking hold of her jaw to adjust the angle and kiss her fully. She sighs into him.

“Well, now you definitely can’t go,” she tells him and he smiles at her, shaking his head.

He extracts himself from her hold and stands from the bed. He promises to call her later before leaving. Felicity snuggles back into the bed and drifts off before she even hears the door close behind him.

She wakes up again a couple hours later, searching for Oliver before she remembers that he’d left earlier. Moving slowly around her apartment, she makes herself scrambled eggs and reads the police report from the fire on her tablet.

Multiple eyewitnesses placed a pickup truck, a 1972 Ford, on the scene right before the fire started. It’s not a lot to go on, but the truck is at least sort of distinct according to the witnesses and had a unique bumper sticker on the back. She decides to write an algorithm to run through security and traffic cameras in the city that will pick up a car matching that description.

Putting her dishes in the sink, she figures it’d be easier and quicker to do it from the computers in the base, rather than on her tablet. By the time she showers and changes, it’s well into the afternoon. She heads back to the base, wondering if Curtis will be waiting for her.

He isn’t there when she arrives, which is good because the good feelings that Oliver’s compliments had given her last night have faded and she doesn’t want to argue with Curtis again. It also gives her the chance to focus fully on rewriting the algorithm she’s been using to try and find the Dark Archer’s Lexus to look for the Ford instead.
It doesn’t take long to do and she finishes just in time apparently, because the emergency line lights up with a call about a fire at the same time the code isolates the truck. She pulls up the camera and zooms in as best she can until she can see the bumper sticker. It’s definitely the same car.

Felicity jumps out of her chair and runs for the cabinet, hearing the lock at the top of the stairs beep as the lock slides open to allow entrance. She’s changing into her gear as Curtis comes down the steps.

“What’s going on?” He asks, noticing her rush to get changed.

“Stagg Chemical just went up in flames,” she explains, in such a rush to get her feet into her boots, she shoves her left foot into her right boot on accident. “Witnesses put a pickup truck at the scene of the last fire and Stagg’s security shows the same truck outside of the plant.”

“You think that’s our arsonist-slash-killer?” Curtis questions warily, looking over her monitors. She huffs, tucking her hair under her wig.

“I can’t take the chance that it isn’t,” she explains, looking at him pleadingly, needing him to understand. “I can’t just do nothing, Curtis.”

He looks away from the monitor’s to meet her gaze, holding out his palm. Her comm sits in the center of it and she reaches for it like an olive branch.

“Then, you’re gonna need some backup,” he says.

She almost laughs with relief, but she doesn’t have time. Stagg Chemical is on the other side of the Glades, nearly outside of the limits. If this is their killer, he’s not going to wait. Emergency services will have nearly made it there by now and she’s sure that they’ll be waiting.

The fire is blazing by the time she gets there. There’s a fire truck in front of the building and a police line set up to keep people back. She finds a way up to the roof and enters the building from there, breaking down through a skylight.

She drops down to the catwalk beneath her and hears someone shouting. Searching for the source, she finds two firefighters. One of them has lost his mask and is dangling from the arm of the other man over the railing of the catwalk. Fire licks at his boots.
She hears a noise above her, the Hood sliding along one of the rafters and avoiding the flames. She looks back at the fire fighters just in time to see the one in full gear drop the one without his mask. Felicity acts on instinct, throwing a sphere at him. One end of the tether connects to her wrist and the other loops around the man’s arm as he falls. She tugs as hard as she can, hoping he hasn’t reached the flames beneath.

Pulling the tether towards her, she moves towards the railing and finds him hanging just above the flames, his coat protecting him from the heat. He’s got the sphere gripped fiercely in his palm, the tether looped around his arm a couple times. She presses the command on her wrist to retract the tether and it pulls him slowly towards the railing.

Beside her, she can hear the Hood and the other firefighter fighting. Chancing a glance, Felicity can tell the Hood doesn’t have the upperhand in this one. The tether continues to retract, digging into the skin of her wrist through her glove, and finally she hefts the firefighter over the railing. They both fall into a heap on the catwalk at the same moment the Hood comes tumbling down beside them as well.

The other firefighter advances, looking focused on the man she’d just saved. Felicity pushes herself to her knees, putting herself between the two. The firefighter hesitates, reaching into a pouch at his waist and pulling something out. He tosses it, stepping back as he does, and it explodes with light, creating a whole new level to the blaze.

He disappears behind the flames.

Next to her, the man she’d saved scrambles to his feet, shouting at them to get out of the building before running off. She figures it’s for the best, he’s without full protection since he’s missing his mask. He’s alive, at least.

The Hood seems struck, still on the ground beside her. Felicity pushes herself fully to her feet, aware that the new blaze is blocking her from exiting the way she’d come in. She turns and holds her hand out to the Hood.

“We have to go,” she shouts, shaking him out of his stupor. He looks at her hand, his head ducked low, and wraps his gloved fingers around her forearm. She yanks him to his feet and leads them towards another skylight on the opposite side. He doesn’t miss her cue, shooting an arrow attached to a tether up and through the window.

She doesn’t know where it finds purchase outside the building, but trusts him enough when he holds
After two showers, Felicity still doesn’t feel like she can get the smell of smoke from her hair. Curtis had been a lot more in favor of her intervening when he learned that she’d saved a firefighter. Apparently, the man had sung her and the Hood’s praises after making it out of the building. She can’t deny that it feels pretty good.

Her phone rings on the counter next to her while she’s smearing cream cheese on a bagel. She wipes her hands on a dish towel before answering it, frowning down at the contact.

“Laurel,” she greets, unable to help that she’s still a little annoyed at the other woman’s lack of faith. “What’s up?”

“Hey, I have some more info on our killer,” Laurel says, sounding rushed. “Although, I heard you had a run-in with him last night.”

“I didn’t want to take the chance your other friend wasn’t interested,” Felicity shrugs, sounding a little bitter. Laurel sighs.

“Probably good you didn’t.” She admits. “He gave me the information and then basically washed his hands of it. So, it’s just us.”

Felicity frowns, surprised that the vigilante would only pursue this so far. He seemed like the ride or die type. Though, he hadn’t seemed in peak condition last night when he’d been fighting the fireman. She wonders if her hunch about an injury had been right and maybe he isn’t fully healed yet.

“What did he tell you?” She asks, picking up one half of her bagel and taking a bite.

“There’s a scar on the guy’s left wrist from a severe burn and a tattoo of a firefly,” Laurel explains. The Hood must have gotten closer to the killer than she’d realized, if he’d managed to see those small details. “Apparently, all the men in Engine Company fifteen had firefly tattoos.”
“You think one of them is our guy?”

“Three of the men are dead. The guy you saved last night would have been number four,” Laurel explains and Felicity chews thoughtfully on her bagel. “I did some digging on it and the first one to die was a victim of the Nodell Tower tragedy.”

Felicity hisses out a breath through her teeth. The Nodell fire had happened just after she moved to Starling, but it was a huge thing for the city. The construction company that had built the twenty-two story building had skimped on materials to save money. A gas line blew resulting in one of the worst fires the city had ever seen. Thirty-four civilians and six firemen died.

“I’m about to head to the fire station and press the chief on this,” Laurel continues. “I was hoping you might be up for coming with me, seeing if you can find anything on the station’s server.”

“It’ll probably be quicker than a brute force hack from here,” Felicity agrees nodding. Laurel tells her she’s halfway to her place and will be there in about ten minutes. Felicity hangs up and finishes off the rest of her bagel before changing.

Laurel pulls up to the curb down the street from the station when they arrive and they walk down the sidewalk towards the open garage doors of the firehouse. She reaches out, stalling Felicity at the corner.

“Hey, listen,” she says, her hand landing on Felicity’s arm and prompting her to turn towards her. “I don’t want you to feel like I didn’t trust you with this. What you did last night was amazing. I don’t know why, I just thought the vigilante would put more legwork into this than he did.”

Felicity nods, understanding Laurel’s thought process. It had hurt her feelings that it seemed Laurel trusted the Hood more than her, but she can also understand it. She hadn’t cut Felicity out entirely.

“You want to help Jo,” she points out. “If I were you, I would have been exploring every possible avenue, too.”

Laurel gives her a smile, squeezing her arm gently, before continuing towards the firehouse. Felicity follows after her, feeling better at having had the exchange, but falters as she spots someone coming out of the garage doors on one side.
“Hey,” Oliver calls, spotting Laurel first and then Felicity trailing after her. He frowns, glancing between them. “What are you doing here?”

Felicity shoves her hands behind her back, fidgeting with them uncomfortably. It’s striking her just how hypocritical it was for her to be angry with Laurel while she’s still keeping this, considerably large, secret from her. Oliver doesn’t miss her discomfort, his eyes glancing over her and offering a smile.

“I told Joanna I’d clean out Danny’s locker,” Laurel explains. Oliver’s eyes glance over to Felicity again, questioningly this time.

“I’m helping out,” she offers with a shrug. Clearly Laurel had come more prepared with a lie to explain her presence than Felicity had. Laurel glances over at her, giving her a strange look. “I’m gonna go find out which locker was Danny’s.”

General discomfort usually leads to babbling for Felicity and she’d really rather not find out just how much trouble this awkward and tense situation could get her into. She thought things were relatively okay between Laurel and Oliver, but now she’s not so sure.

Laurel nods at her suggestion and Felicity goes to step past Oliver. He follows her, turning towards her as she passes.

“Bye, Felicity,” he says nicely and she resists the urge to glare at him. This is definitely a conversation they need to have later. She gives him a wave as she passes and hears Laurel ask him what he’s doing here.

She slips inside of the station doors, trying to look like she knows where she’s going. All she needs to do is find a quiet area to connect to their network and see what files she can find. Trying to look casual, she steps into a corner, hidden mostly behind equipment, and pulls out her tablet. The network is protected, but relatively easy to break into. From there, she searches for anything that might give her information on the Nodell Tower fire, Engine Company 15, or the man who had died first, Garfield Lynns.

There’s something buried, due to time rather than secrecy, originating from the chief’s server. She can hear Laurel talking with the man toward the front of the station and he sounds like he’s ready to be done with her. Felicity works quickly, copying the files she’s found onto her own drive and logging out of the network.
She comes around the fire truck, finding Laurel talking to the chief with Oliver next to her.

“Now, do you need anything else, Ms. Lance?” The chief asks, snidely. “Other than reminding me of all the friends I’ve lost and buried?”

Laurel doesn’t even flinch at the comment, but Felicity does. She comes up to them as the chief walks away. Laurel raises an eyebrow at her and Felicity gives a miniscule nod. Oliver doesn’t miss the exchange, frowning at Felicity. She avoids his eyes.

“We should go,” Laurel says, turning and heading back for the doors. Felicity moves to follow her, but Oliver catches her gently by the wrist.

“Hey,” he says softly. “What was that all about?”

She plans to lie, she really does. Except she lies about so much, especially to Oliver, and this is something she doesn’t have to lie about. She could just tell him the truth - Laurel is looking into Danny de la Vega’s murder and asked for her help.

“It’s a long story,” she tells him, glancing back at the doors to make sure Laurel hasn’t stopped. “I’ll tell you about it later. I really have to go.”

He nods and lets go of her wrist. She offers him a soft smile before heading back out the doors after Laurel. She’s waiting at the corner and frowns as Felicity catches up to her.

“I got the files,” Felicity says before she can ask about the hold up. “There was stuff about Nodell on the chief’s computer. I’ll have to comb through it, see if I can find anything helpful.”

“Alright,” Laurel nods. “I’ll drop you at home. I need to head back to CNRI.”

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The files she took off of the chief’s computer include the official report on the Nodell Tower fire, which was mostly public record anyway. Everyone knew that the fire had resulted from poor construction and the broken gas line. The structure had basically melted to the ground. Many of the
victims had been burned so far beyond recognition that even dental records couldn’t ID them.

What’s more interesting is the report on Garfield Lynns’ death. He’d been the only one in his company who perished in the fire. The chief had made a call to pull them out, but Lynns had resisted. He’d only been IDed by his coat, but no remains.

That seems inconclusive.

A knock at her door pulls her away from the files. She locks her tablet and heads to the door, having a pretty good feeling about who’s on the other side. Oliver is waiting, changed from his casual outfit she’d seen him in earlier into a nice suit. It fits him nicely, obviously tailored and expensive, and the collar of his button up hangs open.

“You look fancy,” she comments, waving him inside. He nods, ducking down to press a kiss to her lips. He lingers and she wraps her fingers in the lapel of his jacket.

“Yeah, I didn’t really get a chance to tell you,” he says, pulling away. Felicity pushes the door shut behind him. “We’re hosting a benefit for the firefighters and their families at the club tonight.”

Felicity nods. She’d seen some stuff about the event online, but figured Oliver and Tommy were too busy actually planning it and Laurel was pretty caught up in the fires, so she wasn’t surprised no one had mentioned it.

“I wanted to stop by before it, though,” he continues and Felicity leans back against the door. “And ask about what was going on today? With you and Laurel.”

Felicity hums, unsurprised by this. She’d been expecting him all afternoon.

“Joanna doesn’t think her brother’s death was an accident,” she explains and if this surprises Oliver, he doesn’t show it. He nods, still looking confused as to how this includes her. “She asked Laurel to look into it and Laurel asked me to help out.”

“She asked you?” He asks, frowning.
“Don’t sound so surprised,” she shrugs, pushing away from the door and passing by him. He follows her to the kitchen. “You’re not the only one who asks me for weird favors.”

He laughs at that, reaching for her as she pulls a glass down from a cupboard. She sets it on the counter as he steps into her space, his hands on her hips. She turns into his embrace, leaning back against the counter and looking up at him.

“Well, you are brilliant,” he comments, smiling as he tries to flatter her. She hums in agreement, nodding at him. He winks at her before going back to his serious mood. “I just want to make sure you two aren’t doing anything dangerous.”

“All we’re doing is asking some questions and looking at some files,” she assures him, rolling her eyes playfully at his concern. It’s not wholly a lie, it is all they did today. He doesn’t need to know that she spent last night trying to get the smell of smoke out of her clothes.

Oliver doesn’t seem entirely convinced, studying her for another moment, before nodding. He squeezes her hips lightly.

“The other reason I’m here,” he starts leadingly and Felicity cuts him off.

“Uh oh,” she teases, pulling another laugh out of him as he shakes his head at her.

“I was hoping you might want to come to the benefit tonight,” he continues. “As my date.”

Felicity hesitates and Oliver must feel her tense up at the offer, because he steps back, tilting his head and frowning. She straightens, fidgeting with her hands behind her back. She had kind of thought, since he hadn’t invited her yet, that she had managed to avoid this.

“I’m not sure that’s a good idea,” she admits. His frown just deepens in confusion as he gives her a questioning look. “I’m sure Laurel will be there and I haven’t told her about, you know…”

She motions vaguely between the two of them and Oliver seems to understand. He shrugs at her, though, like he doesn’t agree with her.
“Laurel and Tommy are happy,” he tells her. “Do you really think she'll care all that much?”

“Do I think she’ll care that I, a friend, have been screwing around with her ex boyfriend for the past two months?” Felicity asks with a frown and Oliver sighs. “We need to tell her, especially if this is actually going to progress.”

“I’d like it to,” he assures her and she can't fight the smile at the insistence in his tone.

“Me too,” she nods. “But I'd like to control the possible fallout of it as best as I can. And going with you to this incredibly public event? That's not the way to do it.”

He nods, understanding and knowing better than to push her on this, and steps back towards her. His hands fall to her hips again and she lifts her arms to place them on his shoulders.

“Can I call you later?” He asks and she nods. He dips down, pressing a slow, soft kiss to her mouth, before disentangling them and heading for the door. She watches him leave, waiting for a few minutes before grabbing her tablet off the table and slipping into her shoes.

The main reason for not going to the benefit with Oliver is definitely the Laurel thing. However, there's also the fact that if she’s there as Felicity Smoak, Oliver’s date, she can't really scope it out as the girl in purple.

If the killer really wants to take down firefighters, she can't think of a better place to do it than at a benefit entirely dedicated to them. Which is actually terrible, because people she cares about are going to be there and she can't ask them not to go, because then she’d have to explain why. So, instead, she’s going to hang out across from the factory and keep an eye on things.

She texts Curtis on the way to the base, letting him know her plan. She’s changed into her gear and heading out of the basement when he shows up.

“So, how sure are you this guy will be there tonight?” He asks, coming down the stairs as she reaches the bottom of them.

“Too sure to leave it to chance,” she shrugs. “Not sure enough to call in an anonymous bomb threat.” Off Curtis’ look she adds, “And, yes, I considered it. I am not proud of that.”
Curtis shakes his head at her, crossing the room to drop down into his computer chair. Felicity already has her comm in her ear, figuring Curtis would have shown up.

“Alright, well, I’ll stay here and keep an eye on the street cams for the pickup truck,” he offers and she nods in agreement. “If I see anything I’ll let you know.”

“Be prepared to call 911 if anything goes down,” she instructs. It’s a given, but she’s nervous. This guy is dangerous and he took down the Hood easily last night. She’s not willing to risk the lives of a bunch of people on a screw up.

The steel factory-turned-soon to be nightclub is only a few blocks from the apartment where her base is, so she just decides to get there on foot. She’s still got some time before the event is set to actually begin, which will give her time to pick out the best vantage point.

Once she’s set up, on the rooftop of a low building across the street from the club, she settles in for her watch. The factory is different under its construction, but she can understand now why Oliver and Tommy are having trouble with the contractors. From what Oliver had told her, they should be much farther along by now.

The front of the club is essentially just a giant open space with beams rather than actual walls. It’s working for the event, though, allowing people to see the whole party going on inside from the street. Unfortunately, it also makes basically the entire building an entry point for a possible arsonist-slash-murderer.

From her vantage point, she can make out Laurel as she walks down the street and towards the entrance to the factory in a deep blue dress. She disappears into the crowd within and it makes Felicity anxious. It’s not better when the people she's trying to protect are strangers necessarily, but the knowledge that Oliver, Laurel, and Tommy are all inside makes her stomach churn.

So, when she sees people running from the building in swarms, screaming and terrified, she doesn't hesitate to run to the fire escape and take the steps in leaps. She turns her comm on, telling Curtis to call 911. It's hard to see the fire from outside, but once she gets to the ground, it's easy to see the flames within the building.

She breaks through the crowd, trying to keep her head down as she pushes past scared and shocked people, clinging to their loved ones and trying to get away from the building.
She hears the sound of metal creaking and sliding as she enters. Turning toward the noise, she spots Laurel and Tommy sprawled beneath a collapsed beam, clutching one another. The beam must have fallen, but caught against the wall behind them. The flames are still licking towards them, though, so she rushes over.

Tommy looks shocked by her appearance, but Laurel reaches out to her, allowing Felicity to help pull her to feet. Laurel turns and helps Tommy before looking back at Felicity.

“Oliver is still in there,” Laurel cries, holding fast to Tommy. Felicity’s blood runs cold and she urges them to get out onto the street. They don’t hesitate.

Felicity eases into the building, careful to cut a path that avoids the flames. She doesn’t think her gear would protect her from the fire. Her eyes rove the room, trying to find either Oliver or, if she suspects right, Lynns.

She doesn’t spot Oliver, but she does find Lynns and the Hood facing off. The Hood looks to be pleading with him, but before Felicity can even get any closer, Lynns turns and steps into the flames, letting them engulf him.

She gasps as he falls and looks across the room to where the Hood stands. He’s turned away from her now so she’s seeing him in profile.

“You need to get out of here,” he calls. Felicity plants her feet.

“There might be other people in the building,” she responds, trying not to sound panicked. She didn’t mention Oliver by name, but she doesn’t need the Hood to know she might have an emotional connection with someone tied to the club.

“The building is clear,” he assures her. “Emergency services will be here any minute. You need to leave.”

She hesitates for another moment, looking around the flames as if Oliver might be hiding out somewhere. Feeling conflicted, she takes the Hood’s word and turns, sprinting back out of the building.
She changes at the base and heads back to the club, assuring Curtis that the case is over and he should head home. She hadn’t seen Oliver as she’d left the building and she can’t stop the sick feeling in her stomach. When she reaches the club, the fire seems to be mostly out and there’s a police line barring people from the area.

Felicity presses up against one of the yellow barriers, searching the crowd for familiar faces. She spots Laurel and Tommy speaking with someone and sags with relief when she recognizes Oliver. She rounds the barricade, slipping past a patrol cop and runs for them.

She comes up short, realizing her instinct to get to Oliver would probably lead to some confusion. Laurel spots her anyway, lifting her hand in a feeble wave. She picks up her pace again, grabbing Laurel’s arm when she reaches her.

“I saw it on the news,” she offers as an explanation, looking around the group. Her eyes linger on Oliver, her fear still sitting heavily on her. “Are you guys okay?”

“Yeah,” Laurel assures her, her hand tangled in Tommy’s. “Yeah, they think everyone made it out without injury. Except the guy who started the fire.”

Felicity is steadfastly trying not to think about the sight of Lynns turning and walking into the flames. She could have gone a lifetime without that image in her brain. She knows she couldn’t have stopped it, but that doesn’t make it feel any less like a level of failure.

She doesn’t know when she’d done it, but she finds her fingers gripping the edge of Oliver’s sleeve in a death grip. He’s standing close behind her, the gesture hidden between them, and it makes her feel better knowing that he’s there.

“Good thing we just updated the insurance,” Tommy comments, looking back at the building behind them. Oliver laughs behind her and Laurel gives Tommy a tired smile. Someone calls for Laurel and Felicity spot Detective Lance at the edge of the police line. Laurel goes to meet him, taking Tommy with her.

She watches them as Laurel embraces her father and he leads them away. Spinning around, she practically throws herself at Oliver, lifting up on her toes and wrapping her arms around his neck. He responds, squeezing her tightly to himself.
“Are you sure you’re okay?” She asks again, leaning back to study his face. He nods at her.

“Yeah, I’m fine,” he says, giving her a soft smile. “Actually, I’m really glad you turned me down for tonight.”

She whacks him lightly on the arm, giving him a dark look for the joke. He laughs, leaning forward to press a kiss to her hair. She grips his collar, easing up when he pulls away.

“You smell like smoke,” he comments, frowning at her.

“That’s you, remember?” She deflects. “I thought you promised no more life threatening situations after the accident.”

“You can’t live in fear,” he shrugs and Felicity gives him a look. She’d much prefer never having to deal with the fear she’d felt tonight when Laurel had told her Oliver was still inside. He steps back from her, her arms falling from his shoulders, and laces their fingers together. “You wanna go home?”

Felicity nods, letting him lead her away from the club.
Felicity is leaving work when Oliver calls her to invite her to breakfast at the mansion. It's been a week since the fire and he’s been even more doting than he had been after the accident. Now that Moira has taken over Walter’s position as CEO, Oliver seems less concerned about her mental state. He spends most nights at her place unless she’s working late, like tonight.

The whole thing would freak her out more if she weren’t enjoying it so much.

“Come have breakfast at my house tomorrow,” he says after she answers the phone.

“I’m sorry?” Felicity blanches, stopping in the middle of the parking garage. She doesn’t get the best service down here, maybe she’d misheard him.

“Breakfast, tomorrow,” he repeats. “I was thinking it’d be a good opportunity to introduce you to my family.”

Wait, are they at the whole bringing home to mom stage? Because, Felicity figures she can put off Oliver meeting her mother for years, maybe forever, if need be. But, Donna Smoak lives in Nevada which is a good distance away, whereas Oliver’s mother and sister live under the same roof as him.

“I’ve already met your sister and I work for your mother,” she dodges, leaning against a beam in the garage. Her car is in sight, but she doesn’t think she should have this conversation while driving.

“Felicity, you know what I meant,” Oliver insists, sounding a little put out by her avoiding it. “I’d just really like them to have the opportunity to get to know you.”

“You would?” She asks, surprised at the sincerity. Things have been really good between them, but they haven’t even had a talk about their relationship. Sue her if she’s a little surprised at this progress.

“Yeah,” he says softly and she can hear the smile in his voice. She grips the phone a little tighter, something fluttering around in her stomach. “Plus, Tommy’s coming by tomorrow morning and he makes a great buffer.”

Felicity pouts, considering the offer. She already likes Thea well enough and, despite her teasing, she
doesn’t really hate Tommy. It’s his mother that’s making her hesitate. It’s one thing to believe she
knows something about Walter when she doesn’t have to interact with her in person. She can’t slip
up.

But, breakfast? A breakfast where Oliver announces their relationship, no less? That might be
pushing the limits of her ability to compartmentalize.

“Felicity,” Oliver sighs into the phone, pulling her attention back once she’s zoned out for too long,
“please.”

Dammit.

“Okay, yeah, breakfast,” she agrees, nodding a little erratically to herself. “I’ll stop over in the
morning.”

“Thank you,” he says and her chest warms at his gratitude. He continues, in a more teasing tone,
“You know, if you wanted to you could just come over and spend the night here.”

“I’ll see you tomorrow, Oliver,” she says pointedly, ignoring the suggestion. He laughs.

“Bye, Felicity.”

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She changes three times before she decides on an outfit the next morning. She’s not proud of it, but
she has no idea what one wears to a breakfast at the Queens’ and she really wants to make a good
impression. Which will probably depend far more on her ability to keep her mouth shut than it will
on the length of her skirt.

To be safe, she just goes with dark jeans and a dressy, double breasted jacket she rarely gets the
chance to wear.

Oliver meets her in the entryway when one of the house workers lets her inside. She thanks the
woman, trying to be as gracious as possible. Oliver shoots her an odd look and she knows she’s
already being weird. She can’t help it, though. It’s a stressful situation.

“Breakfast is kind of casual this morning,” he assures her, leading her towards the sitting room that
branches off of the foyer. Thea is sitting on one of the couches, her phone in her hands and her feet
up on the coffee table in front of her.

Behind the couch, there’s a small buffet-esque table set up with breakfast fixings spread across it.
Felicity can see pastries on trays and baskets of fruit. Her stomach churns with anticipation. Thea
likes her, or at least, she thinks Thea likes her. Their interactions have been limited, but Felicity had
done her a favor the first time they met and Thea hadn’t seemed to hold any grudge or hostility
towards her at the hospital after Oliver’s accident.

He clears his throat, calling his sister’s name and pulling her attention from her phone. She looks up
with a frown, looking between the two of them. Oliver places his hand gently on Felicity’s back and
opens his mouth to speak, but Thea beats him to it.

“More than just friends, then,” she comments succinctly, returning to her phone. “Cool. Nice to see
you, Felicity.”

“You too,” Felicity responds, looking over at Oliver in surprise. He shakes his head, amused at his
sister’s reaction, and leads her around the couch towards the food. He grabs an apple while Felicity
eyes the muffins, trying to isolate any that may have nuts in them.

“Tahitian green or midnight black,” Thea says, attention locked on her phone. Felicity glances at Oliver, assuming he knows what she’s talking about. “What do you think?”

“I think that you’ve been dropping hints all week, Thea, and mom still isn’t buying you a car for your birthday,” Oliver responds, winking at Felicity before taking a bite out of his apple. She shakes her head, amused at the banter, and settles on a chocolate muffin.

“I could not have said it better myself,” Moira comments, coming into the room. Any calm Felicity has managed goes out the window and she nearly crushes the muffin in her grip as she turns to face the woman. She tosses a coat down next to Thea on the couch, her own draped over her arm, and doesn’t seem to notice Felicity.

“Oliver got a car when he turned eighteen,” Thea argues, pouting down at her tablet. Oliver smirks, leaning towards her over the back of the couch.

“Yeah, but I could back it out of the driveway without hitting a tree,” he teases, earning a dark look from Thea that she turns around to shoot at him.

Felicity watches the exchange with mild fascination. She doesn’t have any siblings and her upbringing always left something to be desired, but she figures this is how normal families act. She doesn’t know why, but she somehow expected the Queens to be something other than normal.

“That’s true,” Tommy adds, coming into the room. He pulls Moira’s attention as he comes up next to her. “But, I do remember you taking the paint off the side of your dad’s Maserati.”

Felicity looks over at Oliver who shrugs a little and smiles at her. She shakes her head at him. The exchange must pull Moira’s attention, because she realizes that they have company over other than Tommy and straightens a little.

“Oh, hello,” she greets, pulling her coat on the rest of the way. She glances questioningly at Oliver who steps over to Felicity’s side once again. “Who are you?”

“This is Felicity,” he introduces and Felicity tries desperately not to fidget, aware of the half squashed muffin still in her hands. “My girlfriend.”

“Oh,” Moira responds, her eyebrows going up in surprise. Felicity notices Tommy frowning at the announcement as well. “Well, then, it’s nice to meet you. And, I’m very sorry to run off like this, but our party planner is waiting.”

She says the last part with a pointed look at Thea, who sighs and pushes herself up from the couch. Moira turns and embraces Tommy, pressing a kiss to his cheek as she says goodbye.

“And we have a convertible to go buy?” Thea asks leadingly, coming up behind Moira. She leads Thea from the room, shooting a tired look back at Oliver who calls good luck as they leave.

“How’s she holding up?” Tommy asks once they’re gone, crossing the room to meet Felicity and Oliver. He has a long, rolled up document which Felicity assumes is some sort of plans for the club which he tosses down on the couch.

“Oh, she’s okay,” Oliver says, his eyes straying to the TV which Thea had left on. The news is playing at a low volume. He turns back towards Tommy. “Thea thinks she’s actually a little bit too okay.”
“What do you mean?” Tommy asks. Felicity spins away, putting the mangled muffin back on the table and trying not to seem too invested in the conversation.

“Just, behaving erratically,” Oliver explains as Tommy pours himself a cup of coffee. Felicity frowns, staring at the orange juice inside of its glass pitcher. “Shut-in one minute, running the company the next.”

She reaches for the orange juice, stewing on Oliver’s words as he and Tommy talk. It’s not totally unusual for someone going through a trauma to behave erratically, but Moira’s sudden and miraculous turnaround had surprised her as well. Within the span of a few days, she’d gone from barely functioning to CEO of Queen Consolidated.

She almost overfills her cup with orange juice and sets the pitcher back down, hoping neither of the men noticed. She glances around, finding Oliver’s interest has returned to the news. Tommy steps closer to her at the table, nudging her lightly.

“Girlfriend, huh?” He asks quietly, glancing over his shoulder at Oliver a few feet away. “When did that happen?”

“Officially, just now,” she hedges. Off Tommy’s look, she continues, “It’s been a few weeks.”

It’s a downplay considering ‘a few’ in this context means nearly two months, but she’s willing to plead the fifth on this one if he tries to press her. When he doesn’t, she turns to him, speaking in a quiet rush.

“Don’t say anything to Laurel, alright?” She begs. “I’d rather it come from me. We’re having lunch today and I’m gonna tell her.”

Tommy frowns, but nods. He picks his coffee up and turns around, facing the TV. Oliver grabbing the remote and turning the volume up prompts her to do the same. If he’d heard any of her and Tommy’s conversation, he doesn’t show it.

On the screen, Detective Lance speaks to the camera and avoids giving a comment on the armored car robberies that have been happening. There have been three already, the third happening just last night. Felicity frowns at the screen as they show fuzzy footage of the attackers taking down the vehicle with a grenade launcher and tear gas.

“That’s why you keep all your money offshore,” Tommy comments glibly. Felicity and Oliver both turn to him and he shakes his head at the footage. Felicity crosses her arms over her chest as they announce the status of the two guards; one had been pronounced dead at the scene and the other had died on the way to Starling General.

“One of the guards was only twenty,” she comments just as the man on TV announces that the guards identities hadn’t been released yet. Both of the men turn to look at her this time and she shrugs. “I have my ways.”

Oliver looks back at the screen, picking the remote back up and clicking it off.

“Bad breakfast conversation,” he comments, to which Tommy agrees. Felicity frowns, tipping her orange juice to her lips.

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Felicity doesn’t think she’s ever been so stressed out in her life. Ziplining between roofs with the vigilante? No problem. Facing down the Queen women and telling Laurel about her relationship
with Oliver? Yeah, she thinks she’s going to pass out.

She doesn’t work until later today, having signed up for the late shift, and she’d made plans with Laurel to get lunch today. Since she didn’t have any pressing need to be near Queen Consolidated, she’d agreed to meet at a diner near the law office.

All in all, breakfast had gone well. Mostly because she hadn’t even really had a chance to talk to Moira. If things are going to progress with Oliver, though, she’ll need to find a way not to be terrified of his mother. Which would probably start with figuring out her level of knowledge of her husband’s disappearance.

Laurel comes into the diner, spotting Felicity and sliding into the booth across from her. She looks stressed out and Felicity figures it’s been a busy morning.

“I am so glad you wanted to get lunch,” Laurel says. A waitress wastes no time in coming over with a coffee pot and Laurel lets her fill her mug. Felicity gives her a smile and refuses a top off. “I needed a break today.”

“What’s going on?” Felicity asks as Laurel stirs cream and sugar into her coffee.

“I overloaded myself on cases this week,” she explains, reaching for one of the menus on the table. Felicity does the same, moving her coffee mug to spread the folded menu out in front of her. “I didn’t realize the court dates for a bunch of my cases all fell in the same week.”

Felicity cringes, looking over at the other woman.

“Could you split the work with someone?” She asks.

“Normally I’d just ask Jo to help out,” Laurel sighs, looking sad at the reminder of her absent best friend. “But, with her moving back to be with her mom for a while, we’re a little short staffed as it is. Not to mention, I just signed on for dinner with Tommy’s dad.”

“Really?” Felicity asks, her eyebrows going up in surprise. She folds her hands on top of the menu and leans forward a bit. “The same dad who he hasn’t spoken to since he cut him off?”

“Mmhmm,” Laurel hums in acknowledgement, her eyes scanning her own menu. “I convinced Tommy his dad might actually be looking to mend fences. Which means I now have to go to dinner with them. And, Malcolm Merlyn, on top of being far from father of the year, is actually very intimidating.”

“Laurel,” Felicity laughs, “you’ve faced down vigilantes, corrupt businessmen, and murderers. Are you really telling me you’re afraid of Tommy’s dad?”

Laurel shrugs, laughing a little at the absurdity of it as well. Felicity’s never met Malcolm Merlyn, personally, but she’s sure he can’t be that bad. Not to mention, Tommy is so clearly head over heels for Laurel, Malcolm couldn’t possibly disapprove.

“Yeah,” Laurel admits, “I guess he’s just always given me a weird vibe, you know?”

Felicity concedes the point with a nod. Laurel’s known Tommy for a long time, which means she’s probably interacted with his father on more than one occasion. If she has weird feelings about the man, who is Felicity to reject those feelings?

Laurel moves on to explain some vague details about a case she’s working on after they order. Despite her stress over the situation, she still clearly is giving all the cases her all. Felicity has no
doubt she’ll make sure her clients each get the best possible deal they can.

“So, you’ve been quiet,” Laurel points out, halfway through their meal. Felicity had ordered something light, knowing she wouldn’t be able to each much with her nerves. “Was there a specific reason for this lunch?”

“I can’t just get lunch with a friend?” Felicity asks, spearing a grape with her fork. Laurel gives her a look that tells her she isn’t buying it and Felicity sighs. “I have to tell you something, but I’m afraid you’ll be mad at me.”

“Is it vigilante related?” Laurel asks with a frown, dropping her voice.

“Actually, no,” Felicity says, setting her fork down on her plate. She reaches up and adjusts her glasses. “It’s, uh, actually about Oliver.”

“Oliver?” Laurel asks, tilting her head to the side. She narrows her eyes at Felicity. “Is something going on with you two?”

“Sort of,” Felicity shrugs before deciding that’s definitely not the truth if he’s introducing her to his family. She amends, “Yeah, there is. I wanted to tell you, but I wanted to make sure it was something real first. And I totally get it if you’re mad. I mean, I’d probably be mad in your situation and this probably makes me a terrible friend—”

“Felicity.” Laurel says, cutting her off. Felicity goes rigid in her seat, unable to read the other woman’s face. “I’m not mad.”

“You’re not?” Felicity asks cautiously, surprised by how well Laurel is taking this.

“No, Oliver and I have been over for a long time,” Laurel assures, but she’s still frowning. Felicity doesn’t think she’s completely out of the woods on this one. “I actually kind of suspected with the way you were acting after the fire. I just want to make sure you’re careful.”

“Careful?” She echoes, confused.

“Oliver is different now, I know that,” Laurel says, sighing and shaking her head a little bit. She picks at the potatoes left on her plate with her fork. “But, I just want you to be cautious about being with him. I’d hate to see you get hurt.”

Felicity lets that settle over her for a moment before nodding jerkily at Laurel. She turns her attention back to her plate, pushing the fruit around it with her fork.

“Thanks for telling me,” Laurel says, smiling softly at her. Felicity returns it, hoping Laurel can’t see through it. Laurel checks the time and sighs, telling Felicity she better get back and waving down the waitress. After she pays and heads out, Felicity slouches in the booth a little.

She’d really thought finally telling Laurel would make her feel better.

---

Going into work actually has somewhat of a calming effect on her. Surrounded by servers and diving into code, even fixing menial issues, it’s all stuff she can control. This is her element.

The simultaneous pro and con of the late shift is that there’s not a whole lot of work to do. There are still people left in the building, people at the executive level burning the midnight oil, techies in the R&D labs testing out pet projects. But, all in all, it’s usually pretty quiet. Which, of course, means
that the night drags on.

Felicity orders in Chinese food and works on ironing out any bugs in the new firewall. It’s been released now, all of Cooper’s code washed from the system, but Felicity has been running her own tests on it to check it’s weaknesses. She’s been starting with low-level hacker stuff, but it’s holding up pretty well. She’s only run into a few problems when she tried some fringe methods to break into it.

She’s about to take a bite of her sesame chicken when Oliver comes swinging through the doorway with more exuberance than normal, rapping lightly on the open glass door with his knuckles. She looks up, surprised to see him, and sets her food aside. Despite his cheery entrance, she can tell he’s using it to mask something.

“Uh oh,” she sighs, watching him warily. “What’s wrong?”

He stops, standing in front of her desk and frowning at her. She raises her eyebrows at him.

“How do you do that?” He asks. She tilts her head to the side in confusion. “How do you just know when something’s wrong?”

“You have an expressive face,” she shrugs. There’s still no second chair in her office, so he has to stick with standing in front of her. “What’s going on?”

“I just had a surprisingly honest conversation with my mother about my father,” he explains. When Felicity frowns, he continues, “Thea thought our mother might have been having an affair. When I confronted her, she told me that our father had been consistently unfaithful.”

“Yeesh,” Felicity breathes, wishing he was close enough that she could reach for him. Instead, he keeps his hands folded behind him. She knows he’s trying to seem unaffected by the news. “That’s a lot to drop on your kid.”

“No, I’m glad she told me,” he admits, sighing. “I knew my father wasn’t perfect, but the more I learn about him…”

“It’s easy to idolize your parents,” she says, picking up one of the chopsticks and jabbing at the chicken within the container. “What’s hard is finding out that they’re not worthy of it.”

Oliver frowns. “You speak from experience.”

It’s not a question, but a statement. He’s not wrong, of course. There are plenty of reasons why her parents were about as far from perfect as they could be. She doesn’t like to talk about it though, about the reality of knowing you weren’t enough to make someone stay. Of spending your entire life trying to understand why they’d left. It’s not a good story.

But, she feels like Oliver has shared so much of himself with her over their time together. Surely, she can share some of herself in return.

“My mother is… well, she’s my mother,” she starts, unsure how to even get into the ride that is Donna Smoak. “And, my father left us when I was seven. I tried to find him once when I was in high school and instead I learned that he’s wanted by pretty much any government agency you can name and even some of the ones you can’t.”

Oliver’s the one who reaches for her, stepping towards the desk and taking her hand into his. She smiles at the gesture, looking at her fingers laced between his. It feels nice to share it with someone, to trust someone enough to share it. Oliver brings that out of her, oversharing when she shouldn’t.
But, this is different. This is being open with someone about something that’s been locked up for years.

“The worst part is that I so desperately wanted to be just like him as a kid,” she continues, laughing a little ruefully at the memories. “He made so much of who I am and I just, I don’t think he really deserves the credit for that.”

Oliver squeezes her hand and it brings her back to the present. She forces herself to meet his eye, irrationally expecting judgement or disgust. Her father is a criminal after all and even he hadn’t wanted her. Instead, he smiles sadly at her, warmth in his eyes.

“I like who you are,” he says. “Maybe you’re the only one who deserves the credit for it.”

Felicity returns his smile, her whole body going warm at the compliment. He has a tendency to say these things and completely blindside her with his interest in her. Obviously, he’s interested. They’ve been sleeping together for almost two months, but that doesn’t mean it doesn’t still surprise her sometimes.

She breaks the moment, pulling her hand from his and pressing the pads of her fingers to her forehead, willing away the flush.

“So, I’m assuming you didn’t just come here to have a heart-to-heart about our daddy issues,” she says and Oliver laughs at the turn of phrase.

“Actually, I need a favor,” he admits.

“And here I was beginning to think my days of being Oliver Queen’s personal computer geek were coming to an end,” she jokes, straightening out her desk.

“Is that your way of saying you miss it?” He asks, winking at her.

“No,” Felicity smirks, liking the teasing atmosphere they’ve transitioned into. “But, if it works for you go with it.”

He laughs again and she revels in the sound, proud of herself for bringing that joy back to his eyes. She’s sure the realization about his father is going to continue to sting, but she’s hoping she can help him ease the pain some.

“A friend of mine is running a scavenger hunt,” he explains and she frowns because this is the first he’s mentioned it. They haven’t spoken since breakfast, though, so she figures it could have just happened this afternoon. “And there’s a case of Lafite Rothschild 1982 waiting at the end.”

“Oh,” Felicity sighs, forgetting the weirdness for a moment and focusing instead on the prospect of the case of wine. “I love red wine.”

“I know,” Oliver grins and her cheeks go a little warm again. “But, if it works for you go with it.”

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“I know,” Oliver grins and her cheeks go a little warm again. “But, in order to find it, I first need to get through this.”

He pulls something from his pocket, holding it out to her. She reaches across the desk, taking the thin device from him, and turns it over in her hands. Oliver circles the desk, coming up next to her.

“Security fob,” she comments, popping the cap off of it to reveal a USB output. There’s a keypad on the side of it. It’s a high tech thing, which isn’t totally surprising for one of Oliver’s assumedly rich buddies. She plugs it into the reader connected to her monitor. He leans forward, one hand on the back of her chair and the other on her desk, peering over her shoulder.
“It’s pin protected,” she points out when the drive pulls up a login screen. “Challenge response goes back to a company called Black Hawk Squad Protection Group.”

“Yeah, my friend had his bodyguard set it up for him,” Oliver explains, affecting a slightly put out voice. “Personally, I think it’s cheating. But, whatever.”

Felicity frowns, pulling up the coding behind the security and trying to look for weaknesses where she could break through. It doesn’t exactly strike her as something one of Oliver’s friends would be capable of. Although, it makes sense if his bodyguard used his agency’s security, but how does his friend expect anyone to get through it?

“This is a military-grade cryptographic security protocol,” she tells him as the terminal program loads the code behind the device. She leans back, looking over to meet Oliver’s gaze. “Your friend really went to all this trouble?”

“The idle rich are hard to entertain,” he says. Felicity will concede that point. She’s spent enough time around Tommy at least. “Listen, you get through it and half that case is yours.”

He lifts his arm from the back of her chair, tapping her once on the shoulder with his index finger before swooping down for a kiss. She’d yell at him for kissing her at work, but he doesn’t linger long and she doesn’t really mind that much. She’s just glad she no longer has office mates.

He pulls away, rounding her desk and heading back to the door. He stops at the threshold, looking back at her.

“You in for a late night?” He asks and she sighs, nodding at him. Even without this new project, she’s got a few hours left here and then plans to patrol tonight with Curtis. “I’ll call you tomorrow.”

She nods in agreement, smiling at the promise, and Oliver leaves. Looking back to the computer, Felicity frowns at the code in front of her. One day maybe she’ll even meet one of Oliver’s strange friends.

---

“Have you seen the stuff about those armored car robberies?” Curtis asks over comms.

Felicity is out patrolling, sitting on the steps of a fire escape a few blocks away from the base. So far, it's been a quiet night. She’d broken up a drug deal, scaring the crap out of some rich kid and really pissing off his dealer, but they’d gotten away from her. She’d had Curtis send in a call to the police with the dealer’s description.

There’s been some new crap running around the Glades lately. She’d heard the police refer to it as Vertigo and it’s definitely spreading. The dealers have been racking up the price as it’s been growing in popularity, spreading from junkies to rich kids looking for a good time.

“Yeah,” she says, tugging at the wig on the crown of her head. It’s been itching lately with how much she’s been wearing it and might be time to order something a little more high quality. “I looked into it a bit this morning.”

“They’re running pretty organized heists,” he points out and she nods, remembering the video they’d shown of the robbery on the news that morning.

“Yeah, they definitely know what they’re doing,” Felicity agrees, pushing herself up to her feet and climbing back up the fire escape. “The equipment they’re using is no joke, either. Grenade launchers and tear gas? I mean, it seems like overkill.”
“It’s impressive that they knew exactly how to break through the windshield,” Curtis says.

“Yeah,” she agrees, reaching the roof of the building and crossing it. She can hear cars below, the quiet din of shops closing up. “The real question is where they’re getting the routes of the cars.”

“Well, if they can get them,” he considers. “Then maybe we can, too? At least, if we could, we could try to figure out the next likely target.”

Felicity hums, considering it as well. It probably wouldn’t be hard to find the records detailing the routes and times of the shipments. But, these guys are no joke. They’re not just organized and meticulous, they’ve showed no hesitation in gunning down the guards to get to the trucks. She’s not sure if they should be going after people that deadly.

Except, isn’t that exactly why they should be going after them?

“Maybe I could even come up with something to counteract the tear gas,” he continues after her silence.

“It’s getting pretty late,” she points out, standing at the edge of the roof. Looking down still makes her stomach flip uncomfortably, so she looks out across the skyline. “It seems like a quiet night. You should go home, spend some time with Paul.”

“And you?” Curtis asks.

“I’m just gonna keep watch for a while longer,” she says.

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“Do you want to order in or should I go pick something up?” Oliver calls from the kitchen. She hears drawers opening and closing and knows he’s looking for her stash of take out menus.

“I’m up for whatever,” she calls back, admittedly unhelpfully. “The menus are next to the microwave.”

She hears him sigh dramatically, grumbling about her constantly moving the menus around. She ignores him, focusing instead on her laptop in front of her. The security fob is plugged into the side of it and she’s trying to break through the security. She’d gotten swamped at work and had forgotten about the favor Oliver had asked for.

When he’d called about an hour ago asking if she wanted to have lunch before Thea’s birthday party later, she’d remembered it and started working on it. It’s a heavy-duty system, for sure. Nothing compared to the NSA’s security, but she needs to be careful about it. Someone could still track the hack back to her if she left her prints behind.

“How about Italian?” He asks, coming into the living room. Felicity glances over and he’s holding the take out menu for Belleria’s.

“I’m always game for pasta,” she shrugs, looking back to the laptop. Oliver shakes his head at her, setting the menu down and taking a seat on the floor next to her. He peeks at the screen over her shoulder.

“You know,” he says, leaning back against the couch behind them. “If I’d known I was gonna completely lose you to this, I might not have asked you to break through it.”

“You shouldn’t have motivated me with wine, then,” she teases, pausing to lean back and kiss him.
“Besides, I feel bad for kind of forgetting about it and I figure it’s time sensitive.”

“Yeah,” Oliver frowns, looking back to the screen. She reaches for the laptop again, continuing where she’d left off in the code. He waits patiently while she works at it, food taking a backseat for the moment.

When she finally breaks in, files start popping up on the screen that give her pause. She tenses and Oliver must notice because he sits forward, looking over her shoulder.

“What did you get?” He asks.

“I think your friend’s bodyguard gave him the wrong security fob,” she says, clicking through the files and getting more worried about what Oliver may be getting himself into. “There isn’t anything about a scavenger hunt.”

“What is there?” He presses and she frowns at the screen.

“I think you stumbled onto, or got me to stumble onto something pretty illegal,” she explains, looking back at him over her shoulder.

He looks surprised, his brow furrowing in confusion.

“Define illegal.”

Sighing, Felicity looks back to the screen, pulling up the files that had concerned her. Blueprints and route details spread through multiple files with different details. She leans away, giving him a better view of the screen.

“Oh, you know,” she offers glibly, shrugging. “Robbing an armored car with grenade launchers and tear gas.”

“Whoa, what?” Oliver leans forward more to see the computer better.

“Someone at Black Hawk was using their system to store detailed routes and schedules for each of the city’s seven major armored car carriers, including the three that have already been hit,” she elaborates, clicking onto the file with the routes outlined in different colors She leans to the side further, angling so she can look at him fully.

“Oliver, I think we should provide this information to the police,” she tells him. Oliver looks surprised at the suggestion. “With it, they should be able to predict the next heist.”

“Hold on, Felicity, I don’t want to get you in trouble,” he insists and she opens her mouth to protest, but he continues, “Make me a copy of the directory and I’ll get it to the police personally.”

“How are you gonna explain where you got it or how you broke through the encryption?” Felicity asks, pushing up onto her knees and turning towards him fully.

“I’ll send it in anonymously or something,” he shrugs, using the couch to leverage himself up off the floor. She watches him, surprised at how calmly he’s taking this information. She looks back at her laptop, saving the files into her own system before copying the originals and putting them onto a drive for Oliver.

She stands, holding it out to him. She’s not happy about this plan, it’s going to lead to more questions for him. But, it’s probably for the best that the police don’t start looking at her as a hacker anyway. He takes the drive from her, leaning forward to kiss her.
“Thank you,” he says seriously and she nods. “Rain check on lunch, alright? I’ll see you tonight.”

“So, no wine then?” She calls, watching him leave and waiting until the door closes fully before turning and grabbing her phone and her laptop. She calls Curtis and tells him to meet her in the base, shoving the laptop in a bag and heading out of the house.

---

“How did you get this?” Curtis asks, looking over the files on the laptop. She’s set it up in front of her monitors on the computer desk, pulling up the documents for him to look at while she changes.

She hesitates at the question, thinking of Oliver. She doesn’t know how to explain that yet or what exactly he’s getting himself into. She thinks it’s safe to say that there probably wasn’t actually a scavenger hunt. Which is a lie she’s going to have to deal with later.

“It’s a long story,” she hedges, pulling her hair up into a bun. “What’s important right now is that we figure out which route is most likely their next target.”

“Right,” Curtis nods, pulling the laptop towards him. Felicity tugs her boots on before moving back to the desk, leaning over his shoulder to see the screen. He points at one of the routes, lined in bright green.

“This one is set to cross through the same part of the city as the last one they went after,” he says. Felicity frowns, scanning the routes.

“Yeah, but it’s not scheduled for another two days,” she says, reaching past him to point at a different route lined in magenta. “This one’s tonight. Even if it’s not the next target, I could try to intercept the car. At least, I could keep a watch on it, see if they show up.”

“You’re sure you wanna take these guys on?” Curtis asks, apprehensively. She can tell it’s not a lack of confidence this time, though, but the same concern she’d had when he’d brought it up earlier. Whoever is orchestrating these heists, they’re dangerous.

“Did you come up with anything to counter the tear gas?” She asks, instead of answering his question. The truck is set to leave soon and she needs to get to it before these guys do. At least, maybe she can try and deter them.

Curtis stands, crossing over to his work table. His messenger bag sits where he’d dropped it when he’d come in.

“It’s just a prototype,” he says, pulling a device from within his bag. It’s bulkier than the slick spheres, a black rectangle about the size of a door stop. “It needs testing.”

Felicity reaches for it, taking it from his hand gently and turning it over in her hands, studying the hard plastic casing. It’s seams are almost nonexistent, welded together into smooth plastic. There’s a thin opening at one end.

“It’s gonna have to be a field test,” she tells him, slipping it into her pocket and crossing back to the cabinet with her gear. “Send the program for it to my wrist tech and tell me how it works.”

Curtis fumbles, running back to the computer as she pulls the wig over her hair. He starts typing at one of the computers, sending her the code for the program. She tugs on her gloves, snapping the small tablet into place on her wrist.

“It’s kind of like a vacuum,” Curtis explains, spinning in the chair to face her. The tablet chimes,
alerting her to the installation of the program. “It’ll test the air for the gas and then suck it inside. Once it detects a manageable amount in the surrounding air, it’ll create an airtight seal.”

“Really?” Felicity asks, pulling the device back out and examining it again.

“Theoretically,” he shrugs, looking nervous about it.

“Cool,” she says, dropping it back into her pocket. She grabs her comm, slipping it in her ear and pulling her hood over her head. “Guide me to the route.”

She runs up the stairs, taking them two at a time. Curtis guides her through the streets, leading her down the route the truck would have been taking. He tracks the truck’s GPS and finds that the truck has stopped along the route.

When she reaches the site, chaos is already reigning.

One of the guys is on the ground with an arrow in his shoulder, the truck driving away from the scene. The Hood is taking on the other two guys, both of whom have automatic weapons. Felicity throws a sphere at one of them, the tether wrapping around the barrel of his gun, and yanks. It clatters to the cement, skittering along it towards her.

The guy comes towards her, extending a baton in his hand. She steps forward, kicking the gun away from them. He swings at her and she parries, using the same tether to wrap around his arm. He spins, coming at her again and she yanks the tether, pulling him off balance. He stumbles towards her and she meets him with a punch to the jaw.

An arrow whizzes past the second guy and he throws himself to the ground to avoid it. Felicity looks back at him, but the one still attached to her tether yanks at it, unbalancing her this time. She falls hard, rolling to avoid connecting with the man.

A loud sound pulls her attention. The one with the arrow in his shoulder had reached the grenade launcher, turning a pile of garbage into a smoking mess. The man she’d been fighting scrambles to his feet, running to retrieve his friend. He drags him towards the van as Felicity pulls herself to her feet. She tries to throw her sphere at the van, but the tether is tangled around her arm and it doesn’t reach the vehicle as it speeds away.

Cursing, she shoves it and the tether back into her pocket, running towards the pile of garbage where the Hood is already pulling himself out of it. If having a grenade launched directly at him affected him, he doesn’t show it.

She lifts her hand to her ear, pressing the on/off button lightly.

“Please tell me you have good news,” Curtis says immediately. Felicity sighs. One truck had gotten away, at least. That’s two lives they saved. Cosmically, that has to count for something.

“We interrupted the heist,” she tells him, using the voice modulator. She glances over at the Hood. “They’ll be looking for another target.”

He nods in agreement.

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Felicity gets to the Queen Mansion late. Thea’s birthday is in full swing, the long driveway filled with cars. She’d felt terrible leaving Curtis in the base alone to figure out the next target, but he’d assured her it was fine. She thinks he’s just still feeling smug about having called her and Oliver’s...
When she steps into the house, she suddenly feels incredibly old. The foyer and sitting room have turned into a rave, teens covered in glow sticks jumping around to the music the DJ is playing from his station. A hand on her back startles her and she turns to find Oliver.

“You know,” she offers conversationally, trying to be heard over the music, “for my eighteenth birthday, I took a solo trip to Roswell, New Mexico.”

Oliver tilts his head at her in surprised amusement and she shrugs, her cheeks heating up.

“I was really into aliens.”

He opens his mouth, like he has some sort of follow up, but a shout from within the crowd of dancers cuts him off, pulling their attention to Thea as she practically runs towards them.

“Check it out! Check it out,” she sing-songs, holding up her hand and showing off the set of car keys clutched within her fingers. “Convertible!”

“You must be so surprised,” Oliver taunts as Thea practically buzzes with excitement in front of him. Felicity smiles at the exchange and Thea returns it.

“Thanks for coming, Felicity,” she says. Felicity nods.

“Happy birthday,” she responds.

“Oh, isn’t everything absolutely perfect?” Thea asks, surveying the party around her and clutching the keys to her chest. She goes a little somber, falling back on her heels and looking at Oliver. “Except for, if dad were here.”

Oliver leans forward, saying something into Thea’s ear that Felicity can’t hear before kissing her on the apple of her cheek. It must do the trick, Thea’s face lighting up in a sentimental smile as he leans back. He glances over her shoulder, spotting someone. Felicity follows his gaze to find John Diggle standing in the doorway across from them.

“Excuse me for a moment,” he says, placing his hand back on Felicity’s back for a fleeting moment before stepping away. She watches him cross the party to reach John. When she looks back at Thea, the younger girl is studying her, arms folded over her chest.

“You know, I didn’t even know my brother was seeing anyone,” she comments, frowning at Felicity. “I didn’t think he had the time to.”

Felicity shrugs, suddenly feeling like she’s under interrogation. Her chest tightens with apprehension, maybe she hadn’t made a good enough impression the other morning. She’d been so concerned with talking too much, but maybe she’d talked too little. That’s never been a problem for her before.

“It’s kind of recent,” she says. She tries to stand tall, look confident, but she’s not sure how well she’s managing.

“Is it?” Thea asks, raising an eyebrow. “Because I remember seeing you at the hospital after his accident. You looked pretty shook up.”

“Uh, I,” Felicity flounders, frowning. She doesn’t know how to tell Thea that, at the time, she really thought she and Oliver were just screwing around. She hadn’t expected him to stick around this long. “We hadn’t really defined anything yet.”
Thea nods, contemplating this. Felicity shifts uncomfortably under her scrutiny, surprised at how much the young girl has managed to unseat her. She thinks people probably underestimate Thea Queen.

“Well, look, I like you,” she says finally, surprising Felicity. “But, I know my brother. He’s got this total unaffected, tough guy thing down, but he’s been through a lot. I don’t want to see him get hurt.”

Felicity deflates, understanding Thea’s sisterly concern isn’t about her, it’s about Oliver. He hasn’t really opened up to her much about what he was doing while the rest of the world thought he was dead. His scars tell stories she can only imagine, and has actually gone to great effort not to imagine. She hasn’t wanted to pry, but she doubts he’s opened up to Thea either. It’s easy to imagine he might be more damaged beneath the surface than he lets on.

“The truth is,” Felicity starts, knowing her honesty could make or break this situation. She needs to say this. “The truth is that it’s been a really long time since I felt like I could trust someone completely romantically. But, Oliver, he… I don’t know. He just makes it really easy for me to trust him.”

After a beat, Thea grins and Felicity can’t help but feel like she’s passed some kind of test. She nods once at Felicity, before looking over her shoulder and seeing new arrivals. She excuses herself to greet them and Felicity lets out a long breath. She looks up to see Oliver coming back to her from across the room. He reaches her, bending down to reach her ear.

“Wanna go somewhere a little quieter?” He asks and she nods, allowing him to lead her past the party and down the hallway. The partying teens and flashing lights disappear, the music turning to a dull base drifting through the walls.

“Hey, no funny business,” she says, tugging on his hand to stop him once she feels like they’re far enough away. The last thing she needs it to get lost in his maze of a house. He stops, turning back to grin at her. “I know what happens when Oliver Queen pulls you away from a party.”

She remembers Christmas, his hands on her bare legs as he laid her out on the desk in his room. They’d never recreated that particular encounter, keeping their rendezvous to her house rather than the one he shared with his mother and younger sister.

His hands land on her hips, smiling down at her. He presses a lingering kiss to her lips.

“You look beautiful,” he comments in between kisses and she hums in response, moving her fingers through the short hairs at the back of his head. They stay like that for a few minutes, wrapped up in each other, before he pulls back.

“So, I never asked,” he says, moving his hands from her hips to the small of her back, wrapping his arms around her more fully. “How did your conversation with Laurel go?”

“Better than expected,” she frowns, remembering the conversation. She strokes her fingers down his biceps. “She just told me to be careful.”

“Can’t really blame her for that,” he sighs, looking down at her collarbone, rather than meeting her eyes. She squeezes his arms gently. “I never treated Laurel the way she deserved. I guess, I was more like my father than I realized.”

The somber allusion to what he’d learned about his father the other day surprises her. He’d seemed so fine with it after their conversation. She thinks about what Thea had said, about his unaffected, tough guy act. She moves her hands from his arms to either side of his face, cradling his jaw.
“Hey,” she says, trying to force him to look at her. He does, meeting her eyes. “I know you’re not that same guy anymore.”

He nods, but he stills look conflicted. She guides him towards her, pressing a firm kiss to his mouth as if that alone will convince him. She feels his body relax at the gesture at least, so she’ll call it a win. He responds to the kiss, tugging her closer to him and she lets her hands fall from his face to wrap around his back.

He pulls back suddenly, frowning, and she tilts her head at him. He seems a million miles away all of a sudden, and she can’t help but feel like she’s done something wrong.

“Sorry,” he says, shaking his head and pulling away from her completely. She lets her arms fall. “I just remembered something I promised to deal with. Why don’t you head back to the party and I’ll come find you?”

Felicity hesitates, but Oliver is already dropping a kiss to her temple and heading in the opposite direction. She stares after him, surprised at his sudden change in mood. She turns to head back to the party, but feels her phone vibrate in her bag. She pulls it out of the small purse and finds Curtis has narrowed down the next likely target for the heist.

She considers waiting to see if Oliver comes back, but ultimately decides she can’t waste any time. Her gear is waiting in her car and she can change on the way. She backtracks down the hallway to where the party is still in full swing.

Once she’s outside, she calls Curtis.

“Where am I going?”

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When Felicity makes it to the heist, she watches the guy with the grenade launcher shoot it at the rest of his team. He yells for a woman - who Felicity swears she recognizes - to run and she takes off. Two of the men are down, one struggling to his feet, and the third gives chase after the woman.

Felicity drops down from the fire escape, rolling to lessen the impact.

The man in the gas mask grabs a handgun from one of the fallen men and pulls the mask from his face. She stares in shock, recognizing John as he runs after the fleeing woman and her pursuer. Her feet feel stuck to the ground, her mind fuzzy as she tries to assemble pieces that seem just out of reach.

An arrow whizzes by her, the sound of metal clattering to the ground behind her following it. She turns to find one of the fallen men back on his feet, presumably with the gun pointed at her back before the Hood arrived. He’s running down the street towards them, but the man pulls out two extendable batons from his belt.

Felicity pursues from behind, his focus on the Hood running towards him. She throws a sphere at him, the tether looping around his arm, and tugs it, spinning him around to face her. With another tug, his baton goes clattering to the pavement.

The Hood reaches them, pulling the man’s focus and using his bow as a combat weapon against the remaining baton. He gains the upper hand, using his leverage on one of the man’s arms to twist him around, his other arm going around his neck.

“Don’t!” Felicity yells, instinct taking over. She tosses the sphere at the Hood’s leg, watching it wrap around his boot. He must feel it, because he shifts his stance to counter it. She doesn’t think she has
the leverage to pull him down anyway.

“He would have killed you,” he reminds her. The man gasps in his arms, grasping at his forearm in an attempt to break the hold. It’s steadfast.

“Then he can rot for it,” she says, her voice dripping venom. He’s been complicit in how many murders, she doesn’t know. But, wouldn’t death be too simple? Let him be tried and punished. “But, if you kill him, how does that make you any better?”

The Hood is quiet for a moment and she thinks he’s going to ignore her. He releases his grip, using his hold to spin the man into his waiting fist. He falls like a ragdoll. Felicity stares at the Hood, his face cloaked in the shadows. She doesn’t know if this show of humanity is enough.

“Watch him,” he growls, retrieving his bow and running in the direction of the rest of the group. She steps up to the man on the ground, giving him a kick to his shin. It’s not much, but try to shoot her, huh? She looks back in the direction the Hood had run, remembering John Diggle appears to have had some involvement.

She hopes the Hood gives him more time to explain.

Sirens break the silence of the dark street and she decides, content with the man’s unconscious state, that it’s time to go. As she climbs the fire escape, she realizes she’d never even had the chance to test Curtis’ device.

It doesn’t take her long to get back to the base, losing her wig and coat in the car on the way. She shoves them into the duffle bag in the backseat, along with the dress she’d worn to Thea’s party, and carries it towards the base.

“So,” she says, coming down the steps heavily in her boots, “turns out I had you make the anti-tear gas thingy for no reason.”

Curtis spins slowly in his chair, watching her descend and looking anxious. She frowns. He realizes they just won, doesn’t he?

“Felicity,” he says cautiously. Felicity pulls her phone out of the duffle bag, pulling up her messages with Oliver. They clearly need to have a talk about how he really got that security fob and what the hell is going on with him. As cheery as she’s trying to be for Curtis, she’s a ball of nerves about Oliver’s involvement tonight.

“I know, I know,” she sighs, dropping the duffle bag on top of the cabinet and grinning at him. “It’s not a ‘thingy.’ I’m sure it’s got some ridiculously complex and scientific name.”

“Felicity,” Curtis says again, more forcefully, gaining her attention. She looks up in surprise, raising her eyebrows at him. He shifts in his chair so she can see the news article on the screen behind him.

“Thea Queen was in a car accident.”
Chapter Summary

Thea’s DUI charges go to trial and Felicity works to make sure the Count goes down without dragging Thea with him. Oliver's lies begin to threaten their relationship.

Chapter Notes

Takes place during 1.12 "Vertigo"

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Morbid curiosity is probably Felicity’s least favorite basic human trait. She’d be surprised that every single TV on her floor is tuned to the news covering Thea Queen’s pre-trial hearing, but she knows supervisors down here are just as enamored by the fall of the Queens as any of the low level employees. She gets it to an extent - they really are the family that just keeps on giving.

That doesn’t mean it doesn’t annoy the hell out of her.

“Vultures,” she grumbles as she refills her coffee mug. There’s not much work being done, most people around her are watching the news on their monitors or cell phones. She can hear the man on the news narrate the details of Thea’s arrest, as if everyone here doesn’t already know.

She’d left her party a little under a week ago and took her new convertible for a joy ride that ended in a ditch. Thea had been lucky to walk away from it with barely a scratch, but Felicity knew from Oliver that the car hadn’t been so lucky.

The real trouble had come when she’d been released from the hospital and had been arrested for driving under the influence of drugs. Vertigo, specifically.

“Have you talked to Oliver?” Curtis asks as she sets the coffee pot down. He’d said there wasn’t much work happening up in Research and Development either and had come down to check in with her.

“A little,” she shrugs, keeping her voice down. “Just enough to check in, but his plate it pretty full right now.”

She frowns, hoping to hide her concern behind the coffee mug. Unfortunately, with Thea’s accident and subsequent legal trouble, she hasn’t had a chance to talk to Oliver about Black Hawk and his bodyguard’s involvement with them. It seemed selfish to pry while he’s dealing with so much, but she can’t shake her concern that he’s hiding something from her.

Well, something bigger than the dumb lies he’s told her since they met. But, Black Hawk’s armored car robberies? That’s big.

“I talked to Laurel, though,” she says, leading Curtis back towards her own office. She really needs
to get her own coffee machine, but she probably shouldn't be making it easier for her to be totally antisocial. “She says she thinks the DA’s office will let Thea off on a light plea with community service, but it’ll rest on what judge she’s assigned.”

Laurel had told Felicity she planned to go to the hearing and had invited her along, but she needs to stop leaving work without explanation. Plus, she doesn’t want to be a distraction for Oliver and she isn’t sure how to reconcile the lies he’s been telling her with how much she still longs to trust him.

“Well, with Thea’s status, I doubt they’d really manage to get her to do hard time,” Curtis shrugs as they turn the corner into her office. He pauses, looking back at her. “That wasn’t meant to sound like an indictment, I just meant-”

“No, you’re right,” Felicity sighs, waving off his explanation. “The Queen family has never really done the whole culpability thing.”

“Wellcome to Starling City,” he says, more resigned than bitter. “Money will get you everywhere.”

She nods, pushing the doors to her office closed behind them and setting her mug on her desk. She pulls her monitors out of sleep and opens a livestream for the local news. As much as she hates the way the office is buzzing over this, she feels like if she can’t be there for Oliver and his family, she at least should be paying attention to it.

The camera is still on the news anchor, stalling until there’s something more interesting happening. She’s surprised they’ve allowed him so much airtime, but she doubts viewers are tuning out. The camera swings suddenly as a town car pulls up to the curb. Moira Queen leads her children toward the courthouse steps as reporters rush down them, microphones at the ready.

The Queen matriarch looks the picture of calm, shoulders held high and dark sunglasses hiding her eyes. Felicity can’t say the same for the visibly shaken Thea. She reaches for her brother who practically wraps himself around her in an attempt to separate her from the reporters shouting questions. Felicity’s heart aches for them.

“At least she’s not alone in it,” Curtis points out, watching the footage over Felicity’s shoulder. She nods reaching for her phone on the desk and pulling up her messages with Oliver, tapping out a short text.

Tell Thea I’m rooting for her.

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“The judge is trying to make an example of someone,” Laurel tells her over the phone. She’d given Felicity a call to tell her how the hearing went. “He wants to force the DA’s hand into dealing with Vertigo by making it a public focus.”

“Which means taking Thea down with it,” Felicity sighs, pouting at her computer screen. She’d been tracking the local news websites, waiting for an update on Thea’s trial, but only so much of it is public. “Thanks for calling, Laurel, I appreciate the update.”

“No problem,” Laurel assures her. “But, why didn’t you just call Oliver? Is everything alright with you two?”

Felicity holds her breath for a second, closing out of the browser window on her computer. “Alright” might not be the right word. Although, she doubts Oliver even knows something is wrong. She doesn’t know how to broach the topic at the moment, or if she even should with everything he’s dealing with.
“Yeah, no, we’re fine,” she says, probably laying it on a little too thick. She’s just glad this conversation is happening over the phone. “I just figured with everything I should give him some space. His family has to come first, right?”

“Yeah,” Laurel agrees, though she sounds skeptical. “Just don’t give him too much space, alright? He’d probably appreciate the support right now.”

Felicity nods at the advice, knowing Laurel is right. She doesn’t want to tell anyone about her Oliver-related concerns until she’s talked to him, though. She owes him that. Thanking Laurel again for the call, she hangs up and sighs, leaning back into her chair.

“Hell of week for me to take a vacation,” Curtis comments from his seat. Felicity figures he’d managed to grasp the gist of Thea’s situation from her side of the conversation and her mood. “You know, Paul and I can reschedule.”

“Absolutely not,” she insists, expecting the response already. “You guys deserve a good trip. There’s not a whole lot we can do for Thea right now anyway.”

Curtis frowns, but Felicity stares him down. She points towards the stairs, giving him a hard look.

“Go,” she instructs. “I’m perfectly capable of holding down the fort without you.”

“Are you sure?” Curtis asks teasingly, grinning at her. She rolls her eyes, kicking at one of the wheels on his chair. It urges him up out of his seat and he pulls his messenger bag over his head.

“What could happen?” She jokes, shrugging at him. He shakes his head, telling her to have a good week and text him if she needs anything - which she assures him she won’t - and heads up the stairs.

Once he’s gone, Felicity turns back to her computers. There really isn’t a whole lot they can do for Thea, but maybe if the SCPD can find Vertigo’s supplier, she doesn’t need to be the singular public face of the drug. Thea deserves some form of punishment for her dangerous choice, but Felicity isn’t convinced hard time is the right call.

At the least, Felicity might be able to help the SCPD nail down the real problem before Thea’s trial. First, though, she needs to know what kind of information the police already have on the supplier of the drug. Vertigo is being pumped out like a business. Over just the past few weeks, she’s seen it rise in popularity within the Glades, having broken up a handful of deals.

For every dealer she took down, though, it was like two more popped up. The world’s most depressing game of whack-a-mole.

Waking her monitors from sleep, Felicity gets to work hacking into the SCPD’s server. If they’re working on a case on Vertigo, then it’ll likely be in their system. She can at least use their information as a jumping off point, hopefully. She can’t help but try and force some optimism into her thought process. Maybe the police are close to catching the guy.

It doesn’t take her long to break into the system, mostly because she’s done it so many times by now. What takes the most time is finding the appropriate case file. There are multiple cases involving Vertigo - from overdoses to possession charges - but the Vertigo case file itself is buried in the Vice files.

And it’s the smallest case file she’s ever seen.

All optimism goes out the window as she scans the information within the record. The police know basically nothing about Vertigo’s supplier, except that it’s definitely only one person and that he’s
cornered the market, all of his dealers answering to him while simultaneously knowing nothing about production or distribution.

Really, the only helpful thing the police have is a name - The Count. And even that is more of a nom de plume than it is an actual searchable record. Felicity doubts she’s gonna find a birth certificate or place of residency based on the vague, but sufficiently ominous, title.

Frustrated with the lack of information, an idea strikes her. A probably terrible, potentially crazy, and definitely illegal idea. Felicity spins in her chair, eyeing Curtis’ workstation.

“Do it for Thea,” she says quietly, attempting to psych herself up. She pushes out of her chair and moves towards the table, sifting through the tools and wires.

“I am totally going to jail.”

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After work the next day, she stops by the police station. It takes her a few minutes to work up the courage to actually go inside. She’s basically a criminal at this point, especially when one considers that hacking is a crime, and she’s been doing a fine job of avoiding any police attention so far. Yet, here she is, standing outside of the police station and trying to force herself to go inside.

She reminds herself that she’s being ridiculous, it’s not like they can just smell guilt on her, and finally heads inside. There’s a uniformed officer standing in the door to the bullpen and she smiles at him, pulling his attention.

“Hi,” she greets and he dips his head in acknowledgement. “I’m looking for Detective Hall from Vice.”

She’d pulled the detective’s name from the miniscule file she’d found on the Count. McKenna Hall was the lead detective on the case and if the SCPD had any information that wasn’t enclosed in the electronic file, Detective Hall would be the one to have it.

The beat cop nods, leading her over to a desk. A nameplate on the side of it tells her it’s Detective Hall’s and the officer says Felicity can wait there for her before leaving, presumably back to his own work. Felicity fidgets idly, glancing over the things strewn over the detective’s desk. There aren’t a lot of personal items, which Felicity figures might be due to department regulations, but there is a photo in the corner of the desk.

Two dark haired women with brown skin smile beautifully at the camera, arms around each other. One sports a cap and gown, proudly holding up a diploma, while the other wears a simple pink dress. Their features are similar enough that Felicity figures they must be related, most likely sisters.

“Can I help you?” Someone asks, startling Felicity enough that she teeters dangerously in her heels. She shoves her hands in the pockets of her trench coat and looks over at the woman. The same one from the photo, with the grad cap and diploma, is standing in front of her. She’s more intimidating in her blazer, her badge clipped at her hip.

“Hi, yes,” Felicity says, nodding quickly. She pulls one hand out of her coat pocket and holds it out towards the woman. “You must be Detective Hall.”

“That’s right,” McKenna says warily, shaking Felicity’s hand firmly. “And you are?”

“I’m Megan,” Felicity lies, her middle name the first that comes to mind. If McKenna notices the lie, she doesn’t show it. “I was hoping to ask you a few questions about the Vertigo case.”
“I can’t discuss an open investigation,” the detective says dismissively, turning away from Felicity to grab one of the files off of her desk. Felicity can tell she’s about to lose her window of opportunity for getting anything out of the woman, so she just starts talking.

“Oh, right, of course,” she nods, trying to remember the details she’d read from the files the night before. “I just know that there’s only one supplier, the Count, right? And he’s basically monopolizing the drug market at the moment. There’s been an increase in overdoses in the Glades, but the media hasn’t really been reporting on those deaths. And no one really seems to have any lead on the Count, none of his dealers have any information on how he actually manufactures the drug, or where.”

McKenna turns back to her, eyes narrowed as she considers her words. Felicity stops speaking abruptly, surprised at the amount of scrutiny she’s suddenly found herself under. In her haste to get McKenna to take her questions seriously, she may have overplayed her hand some.

“Who did you say you were again?” McKenna asks, frowning at Felicity. She’s just the slightest bit taller than Felicity and, when she tosses the file back on her desk and crosses her arms over her chest, she’s far more intimidating.

“Megan,” Felicity supplies, but the answer doesn’t seem to satisfy McKenna who continues to stare her down. “I’m, uh, I work for Starling National News. I’ve been trying to write a piece on Vertigo, but addicts don’t make the best sources, right? So, I was thinking-”

“You were thinking you’d come down here and pry a quote out of me,” McKenna finishes for her and Felicity tenses up at the annoyance in her tone. “If you’re press, then you know I definitely can’t discuss an open case with you.”

“I know, but I was just hoping-,” Felicity tries, but McKenna cuts her off again.

“If you’d like an official quote, you can go through our media liaison,” she says, picking the file back up off her desk. Felicity doesn’t even have a chance to try again before McKenna is turning and heading away from her.

“Right,” Felicity sighs to the woman’s back, looking back at the detective’s desk. Excitement flares when she spots the woman’s phone abandoned on the desk, revealed to her by the folder McKenna had taken with her.

She glances around, aware that she’s standing in the middle of a police precinct, and slips the device off the desk. It’s got a black rubbery case on it and Felicity peels back a corner, pulling the small bug she’d made last night from her coat pocket and slipping it between the case and the hard metal of the phone.

Leaving the phone where she’d found it, she makes a hasty retreat from the station, feeling like maybe the trip hadn’t been a total bust.

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As lucky as it was to have an opportunity to actually plant the bug on Detective Hall’s phone, it’s not really revealing much as far as the Vertigo case goes. Mostly, she’s been listening in and out, trying not to eavesdrop on McKenna’s personal calls.

She’d slipped up when McKenna had received a call from her sister and she didn’t immediately mute it, busy working on some new programming for her wrist tech. She’d mostly tuned the conversation out anyway, until she heard McKenna mention Oliver. That had caught her attention, she’s not proud
McKenna just mentioned that she’d run into him at work because of his interest in Vertigo. Her sister had almost immediately launched into a lecture, reminding McKenna that she isn’t in high school anymore, that she can’t still have a crush on him.

“Oliver Queen is dangerous,” McKenna’s sister says.

Felicity clicks mute on the bug, suddenly realizing how personal of a moment she’s intruded on. McKenna’s interest, or past interest in Oliver, isn’t what bothers her, though. It’s her sister’s belief that he’s dangerous. Felicity knows she’d meant dangerous in the way young men with trust funds and clubs are dangerous, looking for the next thrill and dragging whoever they can down with them. Anyone can tell that’s not really who Oliver is anymore.

But, still, Felicity thinks McKenna’s sister might be right. Oliver is dangerous, just maybe not in the way she thinks. Either he’s dangerous or he’s spending his time around dangerous people and neither of those options make Felicity feel any better.

She really needs to talk to him about it.

Felicity reaches for her own phone, intent on doing just that. While she’d been lost in her own dilemma, the phone call between McKenna and her sister had ended. She pulls up Oliver’s contact and stares down at it, trying to work up the nerve to make the call. It shouldn’t be this hard, she just needs to call him and ask what’s going on.

Except, she’s scared. Because this thing with Oliver, it’s been so good. He’s been so wonderful and easy to trust, even before they were together. But, if he’s doing something dangerous, if he’s thrown in with bad people? She doesn’t know how to reconcile that with the Oliver she knows.

The screen monitoring the bug on McKenna’s phone lights up with an incoming call, pulling Felicity’s attention away from her own phone. The number is unlisted, which seems odd. With a sigh, she sets her phone aside and unmutes the feed on the bug as McKenna answers the call.

Felicity half listens to the call, her program keeps returning an error when she tries to run it and she can't figure out why. It's one of McKenna’s Criminal Informants, telling her about a big deal going down.

He says it's between the Russian mob and the Count. Felicity's fingers freeze over her keyboard, her eyes training on the monitor tracking the call as she listens intently.

The buy is supposed to go down at the docks on the west side of the Glades. McKenna hangs up, calling out from her phone to Detective Lance and requesting to mobilize a task force. Felicity doesn't wait around, listening to the phone call while she strips in front of the cabinet and changes into her gear.

She hesitates at the thought of going after the Count without Curtis as backup. At the very least, it always makes her feel a little better knowing he has her back. By now, he and Paul are probably enjoying French cuisine in Paris or laying on a beach in the south of France.

She'll have to do it without him.

With any luck, she won't need to engage anyway. The SCPD will be bringing in the big guns - a euphemism she figures is more literal than she'd like - but if something goes wrong, maybe she can at least get eyes on the Count. At best, she could plant a tracker.
At the thought, she opens another drawer and pulls out a tracker like the one she'd planted on Mueller a few months ago. She slips it into her pocket and moves back to the computer, turning off the bug on McKenna’s phone.

She pulls the location the CI had given the detective up on the computer and stares at it, psyching herself up before she turns and bolts for the stairs.

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Felicity reaches the docks, skirting the perimeter and scaling the fire escape of a nearby building. She isn't interested in breaking up the deal, the cops can do that. She's only here to make sure the Count goes down. The gap between warehouses is small here and she leaps from the tall roof she's on to the shorter one next to it, rolling when she reaches it to lessen the impact.

Stepping carefully, she crouches at the edge of the building and looks down to where the men have congregated. There's a town car on one side and a black SUV on the other. She barely has time to take stock of the men involved, trying to isolate which one is the Count, before the police roll up.

All hell breaks loose after that.

The men scatter, ducking behind their respective cars. Two with automatic weapons return fire, clearly protecting one man. Felicity figures that must make him the Count. She rushes to find a way down from the building and, by the time she hits the pavement, the Count and one of his guards is making a break for it.

They run towards a stairwell that disappears into the cement and leads to the basement of one of the warehouses. Cursing, Felicity acts on instinct. She pulls out a sphere and whips it at the Count, hoping to distract him or at least slow him. She needs a chance to plant the tracker.

The sphere hurtles towards the Count’s back, but at the last second someone else jumps in front of it. The sphere collides with his shoulder blade and he spins around at the contact, his gaze meeting hers. Felicity stumbles backwards a step in surprise.

“Oliver,” she breathes. It isn't loud enough for him to hear, but he's already turning back around. The Count’s guard has stopped at the top of the stairs, noticing their pursuer. He aims his gun at Oliver’s chest and Felicity’s blood runs cold. She reaches into her pocket for another sphere, wondering if she can throw a magnetic sphere fast enough.

She doesn't need to, though. Oliver disarms the man easily, taking him down with a swift punch to the jaw. He tosses the man aside, running down the steps in pursuit of the Count. Felicity forces her own feet to move, dread making her limbs feel like lead. She takes a step but stops again at the sound of a gunshot, the police still trading bullets with the Count’s men.

Oliver disappears into the stairwell and Felicity gets trapped behind a pillar, trying to avoid being caught by a stray bullet. Her stomach churns with fear, not for herself but for Oliver.

She knew he was into something bad, but Vertigo? The Bratva? Those weren't even on her list.

The Count’s men flee in their SUV and the bullets stop. Felicity doesn't wait, running for the stairwell Oliver had chased the Count into, but it's empty by the time she gets there. She takes her chances, pulling open the door to the basement of the warehouse. It’s quiet and she takes care as she moves about the empty space, hoping not to run into the barrel of a gun.

Once she's sure it's empty, she leaves. She dodges the cops, sticking to the shadows and running back towards the base.
She changes back into her outfit from that day in record time, calling Oliver repeatedly while she does. He doesn't answer any of the calls, which only increases her stress levels. Looking over at her monitors, she considers tracking his phone, but decides to try the rational approach first.

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When she reaches the mansion, she presses the doorbell button twice in quick succession, forcing herself to pull her hand back before she can wail on it. Her nerves are fried. Oliver still hasn’t called her back which is not making her feel any better. She shouldn’t have put off this talk for so long. Whatever he’s been doing is clearly worse than she’d imagined.

Felicity is expecting one of the workers to answer the door, but instead it’s Thea who opens it. She frowns at Felicity, clearly confused at her appearance so late at night. The girl looks tired, the concealer under her eyes not able to fully hide the bags there. She looks older than her years.

Felicity pushes her urgent concern for Oliver aside for a moment to focus on the younger Queen.

“Hey, Thea,” she greets, trying not to sound as nervous as she feels. “How are you doing?”

“Oh, you know,” Thea shrugs, trying for nonchalant but only managing bitter. “Really looking forward to finding out if orange is my color.”

Felicity frowns, surprised at the anger in Thea’s voice. Either she’s hiding whatever fear she’s dealing with really well, or she’s actually this angry at the world. Things must be happening in her life for her to have made the decision to ditch her own birthday party and turn towards Vertigo and a joyride. Felicity doesn’t really know her well enough to pass any kind of judgement.

“What are you doing here?” Thea asks, crossing her arms over her chest and tilting her head at Felicity. Her face scrunches in confusion, so similar to her brother’s mannerisms. “Oliver isn’t here.”

“Oh,” Felicity says, her stomach dropping. She was really hoping he’d just gone home. She can’t shake the feeling that something is wrong. Well, something other than him cavorting around with known felons.

“He tends to pull his disappearing act regularly,” Thea comments, leaning against the doorframe. She sounds more tired than put out at this point. “Lately, I’ve just assumed it meant he was with you.”

“Yeah, I, uh,” Felicity swallows thickly, clearing her throat and trying to sound in control. “I actually haven’t seen him much lately.”

Thea frowns, straightening up and dropping her arms. She seems like she might reach for Felicity, but hesitates, clasping her hands in front of her instead.

“I’m sure he’s just busy with the club or whatever,” Thea says, trying for assurances, but Felicity can tell she doesn’t really believe them. “I wouldn’t worry about it.”

Felicity figures Thea probably thinks she’s worried about the prospect of Oliver being with someone else, another woman. Oliver is different than he was before he disappeared, but old habits tend to die hard. Felicity isn’t concerned about it, but it’s better than Thea knowing what really has her rattled.

“Yeah,” Felicity nods. “I’m sure you’re right. I’ll just…”

She moves to turn away from the door, already knowing what her next move is. Thea calls her name, though, stopping her. She looks back at the girl.
“Ollie showed me the text you sent him yesterday,” Thea explains and Felicity frowns before remembering the text she’d sent before Thea’s trial. “It meant a lot. Thank you.”

Felicity nods, thanking her as well and wishing her goodnight before turning away. She hears the door close behind her and pulls her phone out. She really never wanted to be the type of girlfriend that tracks their significant other’s cell phone to see where they’re hanging out. But, she figures, this is an extreme event and it calls for an extreme reaction.

She walks as she runs Oliver’s number through the program, leaning against her car door while it processes. After a moment, it drops a small red dot at the spot where it’s located his phone. It isn’t moving, which she realizes could be a very bad sign, but when she zooms into the area she realizes she recognizes it.

It takes her longer than she’d like to get back to the Glades from the Queen mansion. She doesn’t know how they can deal with living so far away from everything. In terms of construction, not much more seems to have happened to the club since she’d seen it the night of the fire. She figures the damage probably set the construction back even more.

Venturing inside, she flinches at the loud sound of her heels clicking against the cement. The sound echoes in the empty space, signs of the construction crew littering the building. She probably shouldn’t actually be in here, but it’s where her trace had placed Oliver’s phone.

She circles the open floor plan, avoiding the staircase which appears to be in mid-construction, and determines that there’s no one here. Just to be sure, she calls out into the darkness, but the only thing that comes back is her own voice, echoing off the cement and metal.

Frustrated, she exits the building and circles around it instead, searching for signs of life. There’s no one. No Oliver, no lingering builders, not even a single loiterer. What she does find is a town car parked in the back alley. She brushes her fingers over the hood and it’s cool, it’s been parked here for a while at least.

On a whim, she pulls out her phone and calls Oliver one more time. It begins to ring on her end and she cups her free hand, around the side of her face and peers into the tinted windows of the car. In the back seat, she can make out a faint light. Oliver’s phone.

“Dammit, Oliver,” she hisses. The call goes to voicemail and the light from within the car disappears. Felicity waits for the voicemail greeting to end, leaning back against the car. “Hey, it’s Felicity. Look, we need to talk. It’s important. So, just, call me back. Please.”

The sight of Oliver’s abandoned phone isn’t making her feel any better, but she’s out of options on how to find him. She looks back up at the quiet factory and sighs, feeling a little hopeless.

“Where are you?” She murmurs, receiving no response from the empty building.

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Going to work in the morning is a feat in and of itself. Felicity ends up spending the night in the base, scouring street cameras throughout the city in an attempt find Oliver. She’d finally given up around five in the morning when she could no longer focus on the monitors in front of her.

She had gone home and managed a two and a half hour nap before waking up and immediately having to leave for work. She hadn’t had time to shower or do much of anything but pull on a simple black dress and tie her hair back.

Her concern extends to full blown anxiety in her sleep deprived state, eating away at her insides
every time the thought of Oliver comes up. And, considering she works in a building plastered with his name, it comes up a lot. Her only respite is her ability to focus on menial tasks she knows she can accomplish.

It’s how she ends up on the executive floor, setting up a monitor for a conference. Apparently, the room wasn’t equipped with proper cables to run the multi-country conference. Felicity revels in it, though, knowing exactly which ports to use. It’s nice, for a moment, to have a problem she can solve.

She gets stopped by one of the assistants on her way out, wondering if Felicity could show her what she’d done at some point, so they don’t need to trouble her in the future. Felicity agrees, giving her the gist of what she’d done and offering to give the woman a full demonstrative walkthrough once they were finished with the room.

She freezes at the sound of her name from behind her, spinning around to face Oliver. He looks… not good, necessarily. But, in one piece. Alive. Certainly capable of returning a phone call, in her opinion. John is with him, which makes her wary. The police had cleared him of any wrongdoing in the Black Hawk case, but the man is even harder to read than Oliver.

“Hey, they said you’d be up here,” he says in greeting, offering her a smile. It’s forced, she can tell, not nearly the kind she’s used to from him. He stands stiffly, arms away from him sides, leaning on one leg more than the other. She narrows her eyes at him.

“You look like something the cat dragged in,” she comments, her concern turning to annoyance at seeing him alive and well, if a little worse for wear, right in front of her. He could have returned her phone call, clearly, but didn’t. She deals with the emotion the way she deals with most emotions; talking.

“Not that there are cats in this building,” she continues, before remembering one very specific incident. “Well, once a cat did get in, but a guard tased it. It smelled like fur and static in here for, like, a week.”

When she looks back at him, Oliver seems to be having trouble focusing on her. He blinks a few times, looking past her towards the wide windows that look out over the city.

“Would you mind stepping away from the window?” He asks, teetering a little unsteadily. Felicity wonders if maybe he’s less okay than she’d realized. “I have a little bit of a hangover.”

“Sounds like you need a bloody mary and pretzel,” she says, recognizing the lie. He’s not even trying at this point, she thinks. Maybe he’s something, but she doesn’t think it’s a hangover. Either way, he doesn’t miss her tone.

“Is everything alright?” He asks, frowning at her as she steps around him so he’s no longer facing the window. She glances around, uncomfortable trying to have this exchange in public.

“Let’s talk in private,” she says quietly. Oliver nods, glancing back at John who nods once in understanding. Felicity leads Oliver past the elevators, to the stairwell. She holds the door open, waving him into the empty area before following. She waits until the door clicks shut completely behind her.

“Where were you last night?” She asks, crossing her arms over her chest. Oliver frowns at her. “I was trying to get a hold of you all night. I went to your house, the club.”

“Oh,” he says, sounding surprised. His brow furrows as he pats his jacket pockets and then his pants.
“I must have left my phone somewhere. Is everything okay?”

She stares at him for a long moment, trying to find the words. She knows exactly where his phone is, but she doesn’t want to play that card yet. She needs answers, not him dodging out because she seems like some crazy stalker.

“No, it’s not,” she says finally and Oliver steps towards her at the words, concern coloring his features. It’s ironic. “Oliver, how did you really get that Black Hawk security fob?”

“What do you mean?” He frowns.

“I mean, I know it wasn’t a scavenger hunt and I know that Mr. Diggle was somehow involved in the last robbery,” she explains in a rush, gesticulating wildly. Off Oliver’s look, she amends, “I saw it on the news.”

Oliver stares at her for a moment, but she doesn’t give. She holds his stare, arms crossing back over her chest, and waits him out.

“The truth is,” he starts and she leans forward a bit, interested in his explanation. She realizes suddenly that, no matter what he says, she wants to believe him. Maybe that’s been her problem all along. “I stole the security fob off of my body guard. I thought he might be getting himself into some trouble and it turned out I was right.”

“When I told you what was on it, did you actually give it to the police?” She presses.

“I told John about it first,” he says. “And then, I dropped it off to the police anonymously.”

She studies him, trying to decide whether to believe him or not. It’s not the truth, but she thinks it’s as close to it as she’s going to get out of him right now. It doesn’t make her feel good, but she forces herself to move on to the more pressing topic.

“And Vertigo?” She asks. She doesn’t miss the surprise that flickers over his face, whether at the question or at the knowledge it hints at. She knows she needs to tread carefully if she intends to keep her own secrets while finding out his.

Maybe she shouldn’t, though. This is how relationships work, isn’t it? Both sides need to be honest and how can she expect it from him if she isn’t giving it in return? The moral dilemma is something to be dealt with later. Maybe, subconsciously, it’s even the reason she’s let all of his obvious lies and stories slide. Because, who is she to judge?

“What do you mean?” He asks. Felicity tilts her head, trying to find the right words, choosing them more carefully than she ever has before. She knows the police visited his house this morning, she’d heard it on the bug on McKenna’s phone. Felicity wasn’t the only one who’d spotted him there last night.

“I know the police made you at a drug bust last night,” she explains slowly. “I sometimes listen to the police scanner when I’m bored. The point is, what were you doing using the Russian mob to try and buy Vertigo?”

“Felicity, I don’t” Oliver tries to deflect, shaking his head at her. She holds up a hand, stopping him.

“Look, I’m worried about you,” she says. “So, please, just tell me the truth.”

He seems conflicted for a moment, still tense and unsteady in his stance. She wonders at that, too, his supposed hangover. She wants to trust him. It’s been so long since she’s placed this level of faith in a
person and Oliver has pulled it from her so easily. She doesn’t want to believe it was misguided.

“I was trying to help Thea,” he says finally, sighing. “I thought I could meet with the supplier and get something for the police to work with. I paid some guy with a Russian accent a lot of money to set up a meeting.”

“Oliver, are you crazy?” She asks. “Drug dealers like the guy selling Vertigo aren’t people to be messed with in this city. He could have killed you.”

“I know,” he nods. “And, the whole thing ended up being a bust anyway. Afterwards, Tommy called and he and I went to scope out a club downtown. It’s why I didn’t get any of your calls.”

“And, thus, the hangover,” she summarizes, eyeing him. He grimaces, nodding gently in assent. Felicity decides suddenly that she doesn’t believe him. Which is pretty much a wrench in that whole trust thing, because she can’t trust him if he can’t even tell her the truth.

So, maybe he shouldn’t trust her either.

“That’s actually why I’m here,” he pivots suddenly and she raises an eyebrow. “The hangover, I mean. Could you do a spectral analysis on a sample of something and find out where exactly in the city it’s made?”

Felicity frowns as he reaches into his pocket, pulling something out of it carefully. He holds the double syringe out to her, grasped carefully in his fingers. She stares down at it, trepidation causing her stomach to churn. She reaches out and takes it from him, turning it over in her hands.

“Wanna tell me what it is?” She asks, looking up and meeting his gaze.

“Energy drink,” he answers easily. Felicity shifts, tilting her head and glaring at him.

“You wanna try the truth?” She asks, staring him down. He blinks at her, not giving an inch. At least he has the decency to look regretful about it. Or maybe that’s the so-called hangover. She waits him out a minute, before shaking her head in disappointment. “Okay.”

She feels his fingers graze the inside of her elbow as she turns away, pushing the door to the stairwell back open, but she refuses to look back. He had his chance for the truth and he decided to pass it by. Now, she’ll have to find it on her own.

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Felicity decides that Oliver either thinks she’s an idiot or genuinely does not care that she knows he’s lying. It takes about three seconds for her to figure out what the sample he’d given her actually is once she’s run it through the mass spectrometer. Sure, she’d had an idea before she’d sent it through the machine, but she honestly didn’t think he was this obtuse.

Or this careless.

She decides to take a long lunch when she’s done. In her mad dash of apparent misguided concern over Oliver’s safety the night before, she hadn’t had time to sleep much or shower. And, the latter is really starting to bother her. She’d be worried about her amount of late lunches lately and her job security if her promotion hadn’t been handed down directly from the CEO. With Moira Queen stepping into the position, no one on the executive level is paying her any attention.

Her lack of sleep is screwing with her and this latest installment in the enigma that is Oliver Queen
has her emotions all messed up. She’s convinced herself she wants the truth, some unbridled honesty from him, but what if that’s the last thing she needs?

Except, her curiosity is stronger than her self-preservation. Since she was a kid staring up at the stars in the Nevada desert wondering about aliens and the mysteries of the universe, she’s ached for answers. That little girl won’t let her rest on this. Even if it means the end of everything, she needs to know the answers.

As she’s leaving the building, she sends Oliver a text asking him to meet her at her house. The conversation is a long time coming and, even if she wanted to put it off a while longer, today’s events can’t be ignored.

She arrives home before Oliver gets there and decides to shower while she waits for him. He knows where she keeps her spare key - has chastised her for the security risk of leaving a key outside - and she’s sure he can let himself in. He’s done it before when he got to her place with take out before she’d made it home from work. There was something warm and comforting to coming home to a barefoot Oliver spooning food onto plates, two wine glasses at the ready. Something about him made the place feel more like home.

It’s hard to ignore the pressing weight of her own secrets on her shoulders. She doesn’t know how to expect the truth from Oliver without being a hypocrite, so she’s just resigned herself to that label. Besides, her secrets are for his protection and she doesn’t flaunt them in front of him, expecting him not to ask.

Over the sound of the water, Felicity hears her front door close and she realizes she’s spent longer in the shower than she’d intended. She finishes up, turning the water off and stepping out of the tub. She hears the squeak of the springs in her old mattress as she slips back into the black dress she’d worn that morning, twisting her wet hair in her towel.

Oliver is sitting on the edge of her bed when she leaves the bathroom. Even now, knowing what’s coming, the sight of him there seems right. Like, they belong here in this exact moment together. She catches sight of something clutched in his hands and the calm comes crashing around her.

“Felicity,” he says, looking up at her and holding out the small leather bound notebook, “What is this?”

She drops the towel onto the carpet, not caring that the hamper is only a few feet over. She looks from the book in his hands up to his face.

“Did you go through my bag?” She asks, instead of answering, knowing the notebook had been in her purse when she’d left work. Oliver stands, turning to face her, still clutching the notebook. She narrows her eyes at the death grip he has on it, nearly missing the conflicted look on his face.

“Your phone was ringing when I came in,” he explains, motioning towards the offending device where it rests on the bed. She steps around him to grab it. “I thought you’d want to know, so I grabbed it. What is this?”

He repeats the question, holding the notebook up for her to see. She looks down at the screen of her phone instead, two missed calls from her supervisor light up. That’s probably important, but so is this. Oliver steps towards her, ducking his head to try and get her attention. She grants it, twisting her phone in her hands anxiously.

“Have you seen it before?” She asks this time, noting how shaken the book seems to have made him. Hangover or Vertigo or whatever he’d gone through last night, it might be really messing with his
He shakes his head, looking back down at the notebook. He flips it open, paging through it and scanning the names. Felicity holds her breath.

“Where did you get it?” He asks and Felicity reaches for the book, taking it from his hand gently. He doesn’t resist, his grip easing and allowing her to pull it from his fingers.

“Oliver,” she says slowly, unsure what to even tell him. A lie would be stellar, but unfair. A half-truth, that she can’t tell him for his own safety, lingers at the tip of her tongue. She doesn’t know why she says, instead, “From your stepfather.”

“Where did he get it?” He frowns. Felicity closes her eyes, pressure building behind them that will either amount to a killer headache or, more embarrassingly, tears.

“If I tell you,” she says, blinking quickly and looking away from him. “You may never speak to me again.”

“Felicity,” he says softly, stepping closer to her. Her anger at him has melted with the revelation of her own sins and when his hands come up to rest on her biceps she nearly breaks. “That’s never going to happen.”

Choosing to believe him, because she has to or she’ll never get this out, she decides to pony up. She looks back up at him, chewing on her lip. Her wet hair has created a dark splotch on her dress, over her shoulder.

“Walter found it in your house a few months ago,” she explains, deciding that if she’s going to tell him, she might as well tell him everything. “It belonged to your mother. He had asked me to look into some weird investment she’d made using company funds and it led him to this. He wanted me to look into it, but then he vanished. I think this list may have cost Walter his life.”

“You were investigating my mother?” He asks, sounding confused, but not angry. His hands fall from her arms. “For how long?”

“It started before I even really knew you, I swear,” she tells him. “And, then, we got together and I thought about telling you, but then Walter disappeared. I realized that it was safer if I was the only one who knew about it.”

“Felicity,” he says, sounding exasperated. He presses his fingers to his temples, spinning away from her. “Safer for who? If this book is dangerous, why would you hold onto it?”

“I can take care of myself,” she insists, glaring at his back. Her anger suddenly flares again at his tone, reminding her that he’d spent last night totally unreachable after being part of a drug deal between the Bratva and the Count. “And, I don’t really think you’re one to lecture on dangerous liaisons at the moment.”

“You’ve been hiding this from me for months,” he accuses, spinning back around. She holds fast, crossing her arms over her chest. The corner of the notebook digs into her ribs, but she ignores it.

“To protect you,” she insists. “Do you really want to compare lies here, Oliver? I don’t think you’re an authority figure on honesty.”

“I told you the truth this morning,” he tries, reaching towards her. She holds up a hand to stop him, taking a step back.
“I don’t believe you,” she tells him. He looks at a loss, staring at her with one hand reached out towards her. The words linger in the air, the truth of them settling over them both. Her phone trills in her hand, startling them out of the moment.

“It’s work,” she explains, looking down at the screen. She steps towards the dresser, setting the notebook down with her phone on top. She snags a hair tie and ties her wet hair back, knowing she’ll regret it later. “I have to get back.”

“We need to finish talking about this,” Oliver says, surprising her. She scoops the items back up and turns back to him.

“I figured out where that Vertigo you gave me came from,” she tells him. He doesn't even startle at the word, doesn't try to deny it. It seems like defeat. “I’ll email you the info so you can do… whatever you're gonna do with it.”

She shrugs and that feels like defeat, too. She leaves him in her bedroom, surprised at how numb she feels.

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After work, Felicity avoids her house and goes to the base instead. She doesn’t know if Oliver would have stayed in an attempt to work things out and she can’t decide if she wants him to have or not. Instead, she takes all the information she’d sent to Oliver on where the sample of Vertigo was made and sends it to McKenna Hall anonymously, masking herself as the same CI who had called about the drug deal.

Vertigo is too dangerous to be on the streets and if they take down the Count, that ends the supply of it. It’ll fade once the supply that is already out there depletes. But, Felicity knows she can’t take the Count on herself. She needs back up and the Hood taking down small time dealers lately doesn’t leave her confident he knows about the Count.

Then again, there aren’t many criminals in this city that he seems not to know about. As she changes, she stares at the empty desk, wishing she had back up in the form of Curtis on comms on this one. It’s better she doesn’t, though. There’s a conversation she needs to have that is better left in private.

She pulls the notebook from her bag and slips it into one of the pockets of her leather duster before she leaves the base.

There’s really only one building capable of holding a whole drug manufacturing operation in the area of the Glades where the Vertigo sample came from. She arrives before the police, but she knows they’re close. Inside, she expects guards with guns, steps inside with a sphere in hand. Instead, Felicity finds the trail of destruction special to the vigilante. Arrows stick out of the guards that litter the floor and Felicity forces herself to press on, following the path of death and injury.

Sounds of gunshots lead her into the heart of the factory, but by the time she reaches it the Hood has nearly finished it. She drops from the platform she’d come in at, tossing a sphere at one of the leftover guards that knocks his gun from his hands. She dispatches him easily, surprised at the lack of skill the Count seems to expect from his men.

The vigilante’s in the middle of the room where the Count holds a gun on him, prattling on about providing a public service. It happens before Felicity even realizes what he’s done. The vigilante throws a dart that knocks the gun from the Count’s unsteady grip and he dispatches him easily in hand-to-hand, stabbing him in the chest with a double syringe.
“Don’t,” Felicity gasps, stepping forward. The Hood looks over, noticing her for the first time and she freezes, watching his gloved fingers tighten on the syringe.

“Freeze!” Someone shouts and Felicity looks over to see the cops pouring in. She’s off to the side and they seem focused on the Hood, but she spins and finds McKenna’s gun trained on her. She must have slipped into the room on the other side. Lance is more focused on the vigilante. “Put down the needle or I will shoot you!”

The vigilante is ducked behind the Count, using him as both a hostage and a shield. Felicity raises her hands slowly, McKenna’s gun holding fast even as she splits her focus between Felicity and the vigilante.

“He deserves this,” the Hood calls. Felicity spots her discarded sphere on the floor between Lance and the vigilante.

“Not according to the law,” Lance counters. Carefully, Felicity moves her hands closer together, seeking out her wrist tech. “The people that think you’re a hero, people like my daughter, if they could see you now. You’re no hero, you’re what I always said you were. A killer.”

She reaches the button, tapping it and bracing herself for the sound. The sphere explodes in a burst of light, a loud bang assaulting her ears. She expects it, recovering easily to run towards the vigilante. He reacts quickly as well, taking advantage of the distraction and tossing the Count towards the reeling detectives. The Hood bolts towards the back of the warehouse and Felicity follows closely on his heels.

He finds a back stairwell and they take it up to the roof. When he breaks for a neighboring building, leaping the distance, Felicity pursues him. She hits the roof of the building awkwardly, her knees jolting in pain at the impact, but she ignores it.

“What the hell was that?” She shouts, stopping him in the middle of the roof. He spins, his hands clenching into fists.

“Excuse me?” He growls.

“You are not judge, jury, and executioner,” she says, pointing accusingly at him as she stalks towards him. He tilts his face downwards, but it’s nearly pitch black this high up anyway. “You don’t get to make the decision of who deserves death, alright? People like the Count, they deserve to pay for their crimes, but not like this!”

“If you disapprove,” he starts and she’s pretty sure he’s glaring at her. “Then, why help me get away?”

She deflates a little, because her instinct had been to admonish him for his destructive tactics, but now she needs him to answer her questions and he’s probably less likely to do that after being lectured. Still, she holds her ground, crossing her arms over her chest.

“What’s your relationship to Oliver Queen?” She asks and she sees him tense up. Her eyes narrow at the change. “You saved him when you he first came back to Starling.”

“I was at the right place at the right time,” he tells her, but she shakes her head. Not good enough. It doesn’t take a genius to figure out how the Hood would have gotten here before both her and the cops. If he’s got some sort of way to know what the police are doing, it would have taken him longer. No, he knew before she sent it to the police.

Which means he got the information from Oliver.
“No, I am done with being lied to today,” she says, anger at Oliver overflowing to point itself at the vigilante. He tilts his head at the comment. “You are going to give me some straight answers, and we’re going to start with this.”

She reaches into her pocket, pulling out the notebook. The vigilante’s eyes land on it as she holds it out for him to see, just far enough to keep him from reaching for it. He takes a step back, the reaction doesn’t necessarily surprise her.

“I figure you should recognize it,” she points out. “Since I’m pretty sure it’s the same list you’ve been working off of.”

The vigilante lifts his head fully, staring at her. She can’t see his eyes under the hood, but can feel them trained on her. She suddenly feels like her own hood isn’t enough, like the darkness isn’t doing for her what it does for him. Her stomach churns anxiously.

“Felicity?” He asks and her blood runs cold. He’s not using the voice modulator anymore and she stumbles backwards at the familiarity of it. It’s like having blinders removed. Her heart races and her mind rejects it a moment longer, forcing out words she doesn’t want to hear the answer to.

“How do you know my name?”

He lowers the hood. “Because you know mine.”

Chapter End Notes

So, at the risk of bringing hostility upon myself, I might be taking a weeks hiatus after this chapter. I like to stay a few chapters ahead and I’ve just managed to fall behind. Plus, this next week is the start of classes for me, so I need to figure out my rhythm with the new semester. (I do, like, a ridiculous amount of stuff at my university because I hate myself apparently.)

I know this is a shitty time to take a hiatus considering the cliffhanger I’m leaving it on - and it's not a definite. I'm just preparing you for the possibility and I hope you can understand. On the upside, I'd say this is about the halfway point of this story! I'm really excited about the stuff to come and I hope you guys will enjoy it! Maybe, if I end up taking a week of hiatus, I'll release a shorter one shot within the universe with Oliver's POV during a couple scenes? If you guys would be into it? I just want to make sure I don't overwhelm myself because I want to make sure this story gets finished.

Thanks guys!!
Chapter Summary

Felicity has always heard that tragedies come in threes, but this week is really testing her beliefs. Her boyfriend is the vigilante she kind of hates a good majority of the time, QC is under cyber attack, Curtis’ sphere is in police custody, and a deadly criminal has been released from prison. Is there a handbook on healthy coping for any of this?

Chapter Notes

SO. This chapter is going up unexpectedly, but basically here’s the deal for the foreseeable future of this fic; As far as I can estimate, I have 6-7 chapters left to write before the end of this. (There’s more for you guys to read, but I like to be chapters ahead.) Until I’ve finished writing the story, chapters are going to go up as I finish writing a chapter. That might mean once a week, it might mean once every week and a half, etc. Once I’ve finished writing it, I’ll return it to it’s normal posting schedule.

I wasn’t prepared for the reality of how busy this semester is going to be - it’s only been a week and I’ve had two breakdowns over my workload and that doesn’t even include my job and the magazine I manage so. It’s gonna be a busy few weeks, but I hope to have the rest of this written within the next two months.

In the meantime, enjoy the angst, y’all!!

Felicity is a genius. That’s not a brag, it’s just a proven fact. She was the youngest graduate in her program at MIT and was offered positions all over the country after graduating. She’d chosen Queen Consolidated because it was close to Nevada without being close to Nevada and it was the most low key position she’d been offered. Just programming and support, no hacktivism.

So, certified genius and all that, she’s not sure how she managed to be such an idiot for months.

Oliver pulls down his hood and the world stops spinning for a moment. It’s like being washed over with cold water. The blinders are removed and she realizes suddenly just how well he’d played her.

“All about you just became so unbelievably clear,” she says, the words slipping out before she can even think of them. Her own voice modulator clicks off and she pulls her own hood back. The wig holds fast under her mask.

For a long moment, they just stare at each other. It’s jarring, to suddenly realize how easy it had been to lie to him, how easily he had lied back. What’s worse is how complacent they’d both been, how they’d allowed the lies to fly under their respective radars.

Felicity is freezing suddenly. Oliver takes a step towards her and instinct has her taking a step back. He looks hurt at the reaction, but doesn’t attempt the move again. Remembering the reason she’d
chased him down in the first place, Felicity looks down at the book in her hand.

“Here,” she says, holding it towards him. He frowns down at it. “You probably know more about it than I do anyway.”

He reaches for the notebook slowly, taking it from her gloved fingers with his own. Once she’s certain of his grip on it, she pulls her hand back towards herself. It shakes at her side, so she squeezes it into a fist.

“I’m right, aren’t I?” She asks, unable to stop herself from seeking out the answers to her questions. “This is the list you’ve been using. Did you write it? Why did your mom have it? Does she know?”

“I don’t know,” Oliver says, shaking his head. He squeezes the notebook in his hand, unzipping the closure on his chest with the hand holding his bow and slipping the book into an internal pocket. Felicity watches the move, tracking the grace of his arms as he manages not to knock himself in the face with his bow.

“Don’t know which?” She asks when he doesn’t continue.

“Any of it,” he huffs, his shoulders slouching. He turns his head away from her and, if he still had the hood up she’d think he was trying to hide his face, but now she knows he’s avoiding her gaze. “I don’t know who wrote it or how many copies there are. I don’t know why or how my mother had it.”

“Maybe someone should ask,” she points out, raising an eyebrow at him. His eyes cut back to hers, disbelief at the suggestion shining in them. He seems harder in his gear, or maybe that’s just her perception of him. Oliver is her gentle, affectionate boyfriend. The Hood is a dangerous man with a track record for dropping bodies.

The reminder makes her sick to her stomach.

“She’s not involved in this,” he insists, the growl she associates with the vigilante dropping his tone low. She glares at him.

“You can’t be sure of that,” she insists, gesturing to his chest where he’d hidden the notebook. “You just said you don’t really know anything about that book!”

“Neither do you,” he reminds her, meeting her look with one of his own. “That’s why you seeked me out tonight.”

Admittedly, this isn’t really how Felicity had imagined their first fight. Of course, considering her interactions with the vigilante over the months since he became active, this isn’t really their first fight anyway. And it’s not particularly unusual for them.

Feeling suddenly out of her element, she knows they won’t accomplish anything with a screaming match on top of a rooftop. Especially since the police probably haven’t cleared the area below. She’s reminded of the destruction they’d left in their wake, bodies and bombs and drug lords left with a taste of their own medicine.

Her stomach jolts at the memory of the Hood - of Oliver - pressing the needle into the Count’s side. Turning away from him, she moves towards the edge of the roof and peers over the side. One of the uniformed officers is outside the warehouse, talking into his radio. She hears sirens in the distance, probably an ambulance for the Count.

“We shouldn’t stay here any longer,” Oliver comments, noticing where her focus is. Felicity nods
silently, tugging her hood back up over her wig. When she glances back, Oliver has done the same and it unsettles her. How had she missed it before?

She passes by him to the opposite end of the building, away from the warehouse and the police within, where the fire escape starts at the floor below her and descends towards the street below.

“Felicity,” Oliver says and she resists the urge to turn back to him.

“I won’t tell anyone,” she replies, stepping up onto the lip of the roof. He hasn’t followed her, so she figures he must have another plan of escape. Good. She doesn’t think she can handle this much longer right now.

“That’s not what I was gonna say,” he insists and she can hear the frown, the slight hurt in his voice. She gives in, turning back to face him. Her heels dangle at the edge of the building and her stomach rolls at the feeling.

“I need time,” she tells him, hoping he can’t hear the way her voice shakes. She’s sure he does, but he doesn’t comment. He stares at her for a moment before nodding once. Taking a deep breath, she turns back to the open air in front of her and drops down to the fire escape below. Her knees bend, but still scream in reminder of the hard landing she’d made while chasing Oliver between rooftops.

Behind her, she hears the sound of an arrow sinking into concrete.

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She doesn’t get much sleep. Mostly she just sits in silence, trying to process what she’d just learned. It doesn’t escape her mind that Oliver might be doing the same thing, that he might be having trouble accepting this as well. That doesn’t make her feel any better about it, though.

She wakes up feeling like she has a hangover, but she hadn’t had any alcohol the night before. Trying to figure it out, Felicity remembers the pint of mint chip ice cream she’d processed her way through last night.

Her alarm is going off on her nightstand and she rolls over to glare at it, confused why it’s going off so early. When she remembers her plans for the day, she groans and forces herself into a sitting position. Her knees ache from her poor landing the night before and she’s already regretting the early morning workout she and Laurel had planned.

It’ll be good to work off all of that ice cream she’d eaten last night, though.

She packs a bag with a pair of shoes and an outfit for work before changing into a set of workout clothes. She’s locking up her front door behind her when Laurel texts her that she’s running late and will meet her at the gym.

It gives her a chance to warm up as she waits for Laurel once she gets to the gym. She straps her gloves on and attacks one of the training dummies with a vengeance. It feels good, the sting of her knuckles against the hard surface is something she can control. She manages to put thoughts of Oliver and vigilantes and drug lords out of her mind for a while, focusing instead on her form and the twist of her hips.

“What did that dummy do to you?” Laurel asks, pulling Felicity out of her daze as she drops her bag next to Felicity’s feet. Felicity pulls away, panting a little from the exertion. She’d lost track of time and doesn’t know how long she’s been wailing on the dummy but her knuckles and biceps burn.

She tries to laugh at the comment, but it comes out wrong and bitter. Instead of replying, she clears
her throat and bends down to grab her water from her discarded bag. Laurel raises an eyebrow at her but doesn’t press as she ties her hair up.

“Warmed up?” Felicity asks, wiping the water from her mouth with the back of her hand. Laurel nods.

“Yeah, I left my car at CNRI and jogged here,” she says. She hooks a thumb over her shoulder towards the large boxing ring in the center of the room. It’s usually in use, but this early there’s hardly anyone else in the gym besides them. “Up for getting whatever has you frustrated out?”

Felicity can’t help but smile gratefully at the comment. Laurel’s acknowledging that something is wrong with Felicity, but she isn’t pushing for details, which Felicity appreciates. Felicity nods and Laurel moves towards the ring. There are sets of boxing gloves hanging from the ropes and she grabs two pairs while Felicity removes her kickboxing gloves.

Laurel tosses her a pair of gloves and Felicity follows her into the ring, pulling the gloves on and securing the velcro around her wrist. Laurel doesn’t wait for her to be ready, surprising Felicity with her first swing. Stepping back, Felicity just dodges the jab to the stomach, darting forward again to respond with a swing of her own which Laurel ducks under.

They had agreed, once Felicity’s skills improved, that a fair fight wasn’t really something she should expect out on the streets. They’d dropped the pretense of civility and started fighting a little dirtier. Their one real rule had been to avoid the face, mostly because neither of them want to have to explain a bruise.

She lands a blow that leaves Laurel stumbling back and Felicity pursues, backing Laurel into a corner. Laurel puts her arms up, protecting herself from Felicity’s continuous blows. She ducks down, swiping out at Felicity’s knees. The blow makes Felicity fall and gives Laurel a chance to gain the upperhand, but Felicity reacts quickly, swiping her own leg out from the floor. She knocks Laurel onto her back and scrambles to her feet, standing over the other woman.

They both pant heavily for a moment, waiting for the other woman to make a move. Finally, Laurel taps the floor with her gloved fist, lifting the other one to her mouth and using her teeth to pull the velcro apart. Her hand slides out of the glove and Felicity holds out her arm. Laurel grabs her wrist and uses it to leverage herself off the floor.

They remove their gloves silently, both still winded from their respective falls, and head back towards their bags. After drinking from their water bottles and catching their breath, Laurel elbows Felicity gently.

“You’re getting good,” she praises and Felicity grins at the compliment. “Pretty soon we’re gonna have to find you a trainer with more experience than me.”

“I don’t know if I’m there just yet,” Felicity shrugs, but the thought of it brings her to Oliver again. Clearly he has more skill than her and now that she knows who he is, she could take advantage of that, ask him to train her. She’d spent so much time trying to show the vigilante she was cut out for this, but Oliver? She doesn’t know if she can do that.

She doesn’t know if he’d even want to.

“Don’t sell yourself short,” Laurel says, pulling her back to the moment. She studies her for a moment, frowning. “You look exhausted. I heard the vigilantes had a late night last night. Did you get any sleep at all?”
“A little,” Felicity admits, though she doesn’t need Laurel to know the real reason for her sleeplessness. “The adrenaline makes it hard to sleep sometimes.”

“Wanna give me a ride back to CNRI?” Laurel asks, packing her things into her bag. It was a short workout, but Felicity’s muscles burn from it and she’s glad Laurel is ready to call it a day as well. “We can grab coffee on the way.”

“Coffee would be heaven,” Felicity comments and Laurel shakes her head at her, pulling her bag onto her shoulder. Felicity follows suit, trailing after Laurel to the gym doors.

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“So, you should probably know,” Laurel starts, swirling her coffee cup a bit before setting it down on her desk. “The police aren’t particularly happy with the woman in purple’s performance last night.”

“Yeah,” Felicity sighs, pouting down at her own coffee cup, “I expected as much.”

After grabbing coffee, Felicity had come back to CNRI with Laurel. She doesn’t have to be at work for another hour or so. Laurel lets her hair out of it’s ponytail and somehow her curls still look flawless. Felicity stares at them jealously.

“You need to be careful,” Laurel reminds her and Felicity resists the urge to roll her eyes. She knows Laurel is just worried about her, but she doesn’t need to be told that. “What happened to obscurity?”

“Obscurity wasn’t getting the job done,” Felicity says. Laurel gives her a look, like she’s about to argue the point, but a voice cuts her off.

“Juvenile delinquent reporting for duty.”

Laurel smiles over Felicity’s shoulder at the newcomer and Felicity turns, surprised see Thea and Oliver entering the room. Oliver laughs at his sister’s comment, smiling at her and shaking his head. It’s the same kind of response he gives Felicity when she surprises him with a joke and it makes her chest constrict.

“Since you lost your driver’s license, I’ll pick you up at five,” Oliver tells Thea. His eyes cut to Felicity for a moment and she ducks her head, lifting her coffee cup to her lips.

“Six,” Laurel corrects, scooping up an armful of folders from her desk. “We have a lot of work for her to do.”

“Well, then, let’s say seven, just to be safe,” Oliver says and Thea freezes, looking terrified at the thought.

“Is it too late to choose jail?” She asks.

“Yes,” Oliver and Laurel respond simultaneously, laughing at the suggestion. Felicity feels out of place in the moment, but she can feel Oliver’s eyes on her periodically. He edges towards where she’s leaning against Laurel’s desk as Laurel gives Thea her task for the day, handing her the stack of files.

“Hey,” he says quietly.

“Hi,” Felicity responds, annoyed at herself for feeling nervous around him all of a sudden. He must notice, because he frowns at her, but becomes distracted by Thea and Laurel’s conversation.
“I know I messed up,” Thea says, holding the folders to her chest. “I really appreciate this, Laurel.”

“We are going to make an upstanding citizen out of you yet, Speedy,” Laurel tells the younger girl. Thea nods, turning with the folders and heading towards an empty table by the windows. She gives Felicity a smile as she passes which Felicity returns.

“Thank you,” Oliver says as Laurel returns to her desk and scoops up her coffee. “And this will be good for her, having a role model, somebody better than me.”

“Oh, you’re not so bad,” Laurel teases, smirking at him. “And, besides, it’ll be nice to have her around.”

Feeling suddenly suffocated by Oliver’s closeness and his easy banter with Laurel in light of last night, Felicity pushes herself off of Laurel’s desk. She drops her mostly empty coffee cup in the trash can next to it.

“I should go,” she says, pulling Laurel’s focus. The other woman nods at her, but Felicity can feel Oliver frowning at her. “I want to change before I have to actually be at work.”

“Yeah,” Laurel sighs, glancing down at her own outfit. “I should change, too. Same time next week?”

Felicity nods and someone grabs Laurel’s attention, pulling her away from the conversation. She offers Oliver and Felicity each a goodbye before heading away from them. Felicity turns, heading towards the front of the room and the hallway that leads outside.

“Hey,” Oliver says, following behind her. She stalls, looking back at him. “I can walk out with you.”

It comes out more as a question and she knows he’s testing her boundaries, trying to understand where they stand now. If he figures it out, she hopes he’ll let her know. After a moment of hesitation, she nods. They continue towards the doors and Felicity can feel his hand hovering at the small of her back, unsure as to whether he should place it there or not. He doesn’t.

“We should talk,” he says once they reach the parking lot. Felicity nods, silently, and he gives her a look. She sighs, shrugging at him and glancing around the empty parking lot. There’s a sleek, black car parked next to her Mini Cooper which is probably why he wasn’t surprised to see her when he came in.

“I’m just not sure what to say right now,” she explains. “It’s just a lot to process.”

“For me, too,” Oliver admits and she looks back at him. He’s studying her, his eyes roving over her face, but his gaze stops to meet hers when she turns to him. “I’m not thrilled to know you’re the one who’s been out there risking her safety.”

“Me?” She frowns, annoyance flaring. She hasn’t forgotten some of the things he’d said to her under that hood, ways he’d made her doubt herself. Ultimately, she’d gotten stronger from it, but she doesn’t need him to turn that on as Oliver, too.

The irony that when the Hood had made her doubt herself, Oliver had made her feel capable doesn’t escape her.

“In comparison to the things you’ve done over the past months,” she comments, “I might as well have been rescuing kittens from trees.”

“Felicity, I have experience and training,” he tells her and her chest constricts with anger.
“I don’t know if you’ve noticed, Oliver, but I’m not exactly helpless out there,” she says, trying to keep her voice down. The parking lot is empty and it’s too cold still for there to be open windows around them, but she still doesn’t want to shout.

He looks her up and down, his eyes roving over her body, but the look isn’t heated. He’s examining her and it makes her feel suddenly self conscious. She doesn’t like feeling like she needs to prove herself to him, that’s never been their dynamic.

“Is that what you and Laurel were doing this morning?” He asks. “Does she know about this?”

Felicity narrows her eyes at him. She doesn’t want him to know that Laurel is even adjacently related to her activities, mostly because she can’t imagine it would go down well. Then again, this is the same man who took on the Declan case at Laurel’s request and helped out with the firefighter killing arsonist after Joanna’s brother died.

At least those things make sense now.

“I really don’t have time to do this right now,” she says, turning away from him. Her workout clothes leave something to be desired in terms of warmth and she’s starting to chill standing out in the open. “I do actually have to get to work.”

He catches her hand, his fingers looping around the exposed skin of her wrist and sliding down to her palm. The warmth of him sends a shiver through her that she suppresses, squeezing her eyes shut.

“I don’t want to start a fight,” he says and she takes a deep breath, nodding. Her car is in sight, a few feet away. She knows if she pulled from his grip he wouldn’t stop her again. Still, she turns back to him. “I actually wanted to thank you.”

“For?” She frowns, confused.

“Last night,” Oliver explains, looking down at their hands. “I got us backed into a corner and you got us out of it.”

It’s actually kind of nice to hear the appreciation. She doesn’t think it’s something she could have gotten out of him under the hood and he’s offering it up willingly now. It’s nice, but it’s really only confusing her more. The line between Oliver and the vigilante is already murky at best, and she doesn’t know how to reconcile them as the same person yet.

She thinks about last night, how willing he’d been to put the Count down if the police hadn’t barged in and she hadn’t used the sphere to give them an escape. The memory clicks something in her a mind and she blames the amount of stress this has all been giving her for not realizing it sooner.

“Oh, my God,” she gasps, pulling her hand from his to cover her mouth. Oliver stares at her in confusion, his face scrunching as he tilts his head at her. “The sphere! Oh, my God. I left it there! This is so bad.”

“So,” Felicity starts, a little annoyed that he’s not understanding the problem. “Your arrows can’t be traced back to you, right? Well, those spheres are one-of-a-kind, custom made with top of the line tech. If the police took it, and have someone who knows what they’re doing, they could potentially trace it back to the system it’s connected to and the person who made it.”
“You mean they could trace it back to you?” Oliver asks, understanding her dilemma now. He sounds concerned, but she can hear hints of the vigilante in his voice again. It throws her off and she turns away from him.

“Not me,” she says, shaking her head. Oliver catches on quickly.

“Your partner.”

She had told him before they’d gone after the hostages over the holidays that she had a partner. Right before Oliver’s motorcycle accident that, clearly, wasn’t actually a motorcycle accident and - God - can the realizations of huge lies he’d told her please take a damn break?

Felicity groans, running a hand over the crown of her head. Curtis is going to kill her if he has to explain to the police why tech he made is being used by a vigilante. She’s confident that her server is safe guarded enough that they’d never trace the device back to that, but the tech inside of the sphere had to be bought by someone. Which means there’s a record.

“I really have to go,” she says, practically jogging to her car and leaving Oliver behind in the parking lot.

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The problem with alter egos is that most of the time she’s still Felicity Smoak. And, Felicity Smoak has a rent payment and a retirement fund, both of which she needs a paycheck for. So, she actually does have to get to work. Her long lunch, which was more of a break time to argue with Oliver over the notebook and his lies, yesterday had been cut short by an emergency call from her supervisor.

Apparently, much to security’s expectation, Queen Consolidated had fallen under cyber attack. The upside was that they’d gotten their firewall up and running just in time and Felicity had tested it out herself. It wasn’t un hackable, but she felt fairly confident that it would take someone with considerable skill to break through it.

Which is why it was so strange that someone had made significant headway with it. Her first thought had been of Cooper, but the code didn’t look anything like the stuff he’d dropped into it before the holidays and ultimately tracing the footprints back led her nowhere.

She couldn’t shake the feeling that it was more than just some hacker looking to boast on the internet. Security had managed to shut the hack down and the team working on the firewall had thrown up a few extra safeguards, but she doubted it would be the last time they saw something similar. It felt too pointed, too well-timed.

A knock at her door pulls her out of the thought. She looks up, expecting to see her supervisor or maybe Oliver, hoping to continue their previous conversation. The misplaced sphere still weighs on her conscious, but she hasn’t decided the best way to handle it yet.

She’s surprised to find John Diggle standing in her doorway. Straightening out her desk, she offers him the best smile she can muster, but she knows it looks false.

“John,” she greets. “Did Oliver send you down here to lecture me about safety?”

“No,” he says, frowning at that. He steps further into the room, pulling the doors closed behind him. Felicity narrows her eyes at the move. “He doesn’t know I’m here, actually.”

“Are you in need of technical assistance?” She asks warily.
“Oliver told me what you told him about his mother yesterday,” he explains, coming to stand in front of her desk. If Oliver’s form makes Felicity feel small, John’s makes her feel miniscule. She doesn’t even think he’s trying to be intimidating, but he’s definitely managed it. Hell, she’s seen the man wield a grenade launcher! Caution is probably key in this interaction.

“And, you came down here to - what?” She asks, trying to feel in control of the situation. “Threaten me? Tell me not to say anything to anyone else?”

To her surprise, John smiles at her in amusement. It’s warm and his eyes crinkle at the corners, but it doesn’t make her feel better.

“You don’t have a very high opinion of me, do you, Ms. Smoak?” He asks, the formality almost mocking in tone. Felicity frowns.

“Actually, Mr. Diggle,” she says in response, meeting his mocking with some of her own, “I don’t know enough about you to have much of an opinion at all. What I do know is that you and Oliver have been lying to my face for months and that a week ago you were involved in at least one armored car robbery.”

“You were there that night,” he reminds her. “Did it look like I was on the wrong side?”

Felicity stares at him for a moment. She’s a little hurt but not entirely surprised that Oliver told John about her. She wonders, if Curtis had been at the base when she’d returned last night, if she would have told him about Oliver. In a reminder to herself to be fair, she considers that this is all probably just as difficult for Oliver as it is for her.

She folds her hands in front of her on her desk.

“So, what can I help you with?” She asks.

“Oliver has somewhat of a blind spot when it comes to the people he loves,” he says, pausing to give her a pointed look that she isn’t sure she wants to interpret. “He doesn’t believe his mother could be involved with the list or Walter’s disappearance.”

“He said as much last night,” she says, recalling their pointed conversation on the roof. She tilts her head, studying John. “I take it you disagree?”

“Don’t you?” He challenges. Felicity only answers with a small shrug. “I think it’s something to look into. The fact that she had the notebook is enough of a reason to at least tail her for a few days.”

“Sounds like you have it handled,” she frowns. “So, what exactly do you need from me?”

“Support,” John says. “Oliver’s not going to like me digging into this despite his insistence Moira is innocent. I’ve arranged to take over for her driver for a few days.”

“I’m already more involved in this than I ever wanted to be,” she tells him, looking over at the computer monitors next to her. “I gave Oliver the notebook so that I could wash my hands of it. Stupidly, I thought confronting the vigilante would help me protect him.”

“So, you’re just going to abandon your search for Walter?” He asks and Felicity bristles at the judgement in his voice. They both know Walter is most likely dead and, yes, she wants to find him, but she hasn’t found any leads this far. Moira was her last lead and, in light of her revelations about Oliver, she figures he can handle it from there.

“Last night I watched Oliver nearly kill the Count,” she offers bluntly, looking back around at him.
She makes a conscious effort to keep her voice from shaking. John stares back at her calmly, not reacting to her cold tone. “So, I’m kind of dealing with a lot right now.”

John holds her stare for a long moment, eventually prompting her to be the one to break first, looking down at her desk. She sees him nod to himself out of her peripheral and move towards the doors. Sighing, she reaches down next to her chair for her purse, digging around inside of it.

“Hold on,” she says, stopping him as his hand lands on the door handle. He turns back, raising an eyebrow at her as she holds out a small rectangular device along with an earpiece that looks like a hands free bluetooth device. “Take these.”

John moves back to her, taking the items from her palm and giving her a questioning look.

“It’s a listening device,” she explains. “Just a prototype, but it should amplify sounds through walls, like conversations. It’ll only work from an adjacent room, but…”

She trails off, shrugging. Curtis had been working on the tech before he’d left for his trip with Paul. They’d intended to test it out, but hadn’t had the chance. She’d almost forgotten that she’d been carrying it around with her. John slips the items into his coat pocket and thanks her.

“Good luck,” she says as he pushes open one of the doors. He glances back, offering her a smile that’s warmth surprises her, considering how she’d reacted to his request for help. The door closes slowly behind him and Felicity leans back in her chair, exhaustion taking her over.

Her phone chirps and she reaches for it, hoping for a nice photo of a beach in France from Curtis. Instead, it’s a news alert. Due to a lack of evidence, Cyrus Vanch is being released from prison. She frowns, swiping the alert to pull up the full article. From talking to Laurel, she knows Vanch is connected to a whole slew of badness - from human trafficking to actual murder.

If they’re releasing him, Starling is about to become even less safe.

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There’s a belief that catastrophes come in threes, but Felicity is balancing four of them and can’t seem to catch a break.

On top of the Oliver-of-it-all, which she’s really not processing in a good or healthy way, she’s also dealing with the hacker at work. Whoever it is, they’re working at night almost invisibly. By the time security or someone in the IT department closes the door on them, they’ve already found themselves another. They’re working slowly, though, so they’re either not as good as she’d initially believed or they are trying to make a point.

Then there’s Cyrus Vanch, which she admittedly doesn’t really know what to do about. She’d spoken to Laurel, but she’d said that she didn’t want Felicity involved with Vanch. Felicity would have been offended, but Laurel had sounded genuinely shaken at the news of the man’s release. Vanch is not someone to be trifled with. The whole reason he’s being released is because no one is brave enough to testify against him and the prosecution’s entire case is reliant on circumstantial evidence.

And, the most pressing for her at the moment, Curtis’ sphere which is definitely in police custody. She’d shut down the tech inside of it remotely, using her own system, but they can still use serial numbers on the tech within to figure out who bought the parts. A lot of Curtis’ equipment is handmade, but even that requires buying materials from a regular store. It’s not her identity that is in danger here, it’s his.
Between time spent at Queen Consolidated and in the base trying to figure out the best way to get the sphere back, she’s barely even been home for more than naps and showers in two days. She’d hacked into the SCPD’s server and located the evidence number for the sphere and had considered just having the evidence destroyed or changing the label. But, the chances that it could still end up being processed left her uneasy.

Her best chance would be to break in and steal the sphere back herself. The problem with that plan is that she’s never really done a stealth operation like it. If she were to get caught as a vigilante, inside the precinct, trying to steal evidence… well, the results wouldn’t be good for sure. Which means she’s going to need to ask for help from someone who knows how to break into a police station.

So, she has to hunt down her vigilante boyfriend so he can help her break into the SCPD and steal back her own vigilante tech. Felicity honestly has no idea how this became her life.

Since she’s already in the Glades, she decides to start at the club and see if he’s there. There’s a car parked in the alley when she gets there, but it’s not the same one Oliver had been driving last time she’d seen him. Although, she’s not going to try and estimate how many cars may be hidden around the Queen property. Instead, she heads inside.

The club is nearing completion, the signs of construction faint but still there. It smells amazing as soon as she enters, the smell of food assaulting her nose and making her stomach growl with hunger. She tries to remember the last meal she’d had and, embarrassingly, it takes a minute.

There’s a line of chefs moving around behind the bar, but the man sitting on one of the stools isn’t Oliver. Tommy turns at the sound of her heels on the concrete, his grin falling when he sees that it’s her. She tries not to feel offended, but it’s a feat.

“Oh, hey,” he greets with a sigh.

“Am I interrupting something?” She asks, raising an eyebrow at him as she continues across the room towards him.

“No, I just thought you were Laurel,” he explains and Felicity nods in understanding. Tommy waves towards the bar stool next to him and she hops up onto it. “She was supposed to help me with this tasting, but work called. She said she’d only be an hour or so.”

He lifts his arm, twisting his wrist to check his watch, and frowns deeper.

“It’s been almost two,” he comments and Felicity shrugs.

“I know she’s been working overtime dealing with the fallout of Cyrus Vanch’s release,” Felicity assures him. “I’m sure she’s working to get here as soon as she can.”

“Yeah,” Tommy nods, still seeming torn by her tardiness. He shakes it off, smiling over at Felicity and waving his arm out, gesturing to the plethora of food laid out in front of them. “How would you like to fill in until she gets here?”

Felicity looks over the food, pouting a little to herself. She really needs to be looking for Oliver, not letting Tommy talk her into stuffing herself with free food.

“I was actually trying to find Oliver,” she says, unable to look away from a particularly tasty looking appetizer a few plates over.

“I haven’t seen him today,” Tommy shrugs. Traitorously, Felicity’s stomach grumbles loudly and she glares down at it as Tommy laughs. “Yeah, you’re definitely eating some of this.”
Felicity gives up trying to protest as Tommy pushes a plate towards her as a starting point. He tells her just to be honest about which dish is the best, they are trying to pick someone to hire. The chefs have disappeared at this point, milling around in the kitchen rather than watching over them as they eat. She appreciates the gesture of Tommy inviting her stay, especially with her mind so muddled lately. It’s nice to sit and eat with someone who isn’t connected to vigilantes or crime-fighting for a little while.

Mostly they eat, breaking up bites with comments on how good the food is or what is better than something else. Tommy chats excitedly about plans for the club and Felicity is happy to listen. Oliver has never shown so much enthusiasm when talking about the club, but Tommy practically bounces in his seat while he tells her what they have planned for the opening in a few weeks.

It occurs to her that Tommy has taken on the brunt of the decision making for the club and is probably overcompensating a bit due to it being his first actual job. She hopes Oliver realizes how important it is to him.

Tommy’s phone starts buzzing erratically on the bar, lighting up with a barrage of texts. He frowns as he reaches for it, wiping his fingers on a napkin before tossing it aside. Felicity checks the time and realizes she’s spent longer chatting and eating with him than she’d intended. He’d gotten her to forget about the mess with Curtis’ tech, which is probably a bad thing.

“Everything alright?” She asks, watching him swipe through the texts with a concerned furrow to his brow.

“No sure,” he murmurs before locking his phone and sliding off of the stool. “Something is going on with Laurel. She’s at the police station. I don’t know, she didn’t really give details, but something to do with her dad and the vigilante.”

Felicity raises her eyebrows, surprised at that. She considers that she probably shouldn’t be, though. If Laurel still has the phone that the vigilante had given her father and the vigilante is actually Oliver, then she should have know he would have jumped at the chance to help with Vanch.

“She wants me to pick her up,” Tommy concludes, looking over the leftover food spread across the bar. Felicity waves her hand at him, dismissing him towards the door.

“Go,” she tells him. “Laurel needs you. I can tell the chefs there’s been an emergency and that you’ll call them tomorrow to make it up. I’m gonna need some leftovers for my trouble, though.”

“Thank you,” Tommy says gratefully, already heading towards the door. “Take whatever you like!”

Felicity waits until Tommy has left to pull her tablet out of her bag. The club has wifi, but it’s questionable at best. She makes a mental note to suggest Tommy upgrade the service as she goes through the motions of hacking into the SCPD’s system, stepping even more carefully than normal to keep from implementing the club in her cybercrimes. She finds an incident report from tonight and her jaw actually drops as she reads it.

She doesn’t know who she’s more angry with; Laurel for playing with fire, her father for using his daughter’s belief in the vigilante as bait, or Oliver for being so incredibly stupid.

She dismisses the chefs, trying to keep her emotions in check and not be short with any of them. They haven’t wronged her, in fact if it were up to her to pick a chef she’d hire all of them. Which is exactly why she should never be trusted to run an eating establishment. Once the chefs have started to pack up and clear away the dishes and forgotten food, Felicity hears the sound of a motorcycle outside.
It reminds her of her previous annoyance and she stomps outside, following the noise to the alley on the east side of the building. Sure enough, Oliver is sliding off of his bike in full vigilante gear. He goes tense at the sound of her heels against the pavement, leaving his helmet on as he turns to face her. When he realizes it’s her, he takes it off and sets the helmet and his bow on the seat of his bike.

“Are you crazy?” Felicity asks, stalking towards him. He frowns, surprised at her anger. “It’s one thing to have some super secret vigilante cell phone, but meeting Laurel on some dark rooftop? She could have been hurt, you could have been hurt!”

“Felicity,” Oliver says, meeting her stride to meet her in the middle of the alley. His voice is a layer of false calm over barely hidden annoyance. She doesn’t remember it ever being directed at her outside of the hood. “You need to keep your voice down.”

She concedes the point, knowing there are still chefs packing up inside and people probably milling about on the streets. That said, he’s the one who just drives around in his gear. Clenching her hands into fists, she tries to temper her annoyance at the whole situation. As much as she doesn’t want to take her frustrations out on Oliver, it’s hard to ignore his part in them.

“Do you know how dangerous Cyrus Vanch is?” She asks, keeping her voice low. Her anger has brought him right up into his personal space and she has to look up at him. The grease paint around his eyes makes them look brighter than usual.

“I do my homework, Felicity,” he growls. “Laurel asked me to find evidence on Vanch and I did.”

“Yeah and then you nearly took her over the side of a building,” she reminds him. He rolls his neck, clearly annoyed at the suggestion. “Talking over the phone, dropping anonymous tips, that’s one thing. But, meeting with her? Not only is it a risk to your identity, but last time that ended with a prison riot.”

“I wouldn’t intentionally put her in danger,” Oliver says, frowning at her. “You should know me well enough to know that.”

“I don’t know you,” she says, the words falling from her lips without thought. It’s the truth, though, one she’s been trying to deny to herself since he’d pulled down his hood. They’ve been doing all of this together, both sides of them, for months, and they had both lied and concealed themselves so easily. It shouldn’t have been that easy to keep each other in the dark. So, maybe, the truth is neither of them really know each other at all.

The words hang uncomfortably in the air, neither of them expecting them. Oliver frowns, taking a half step back from her. She takes a deep breath, wishing she could take them back but knowing to do so would be just one more deception.

“Oliver, how can we say that we know each other?” She asks, her nails biting into the skin of her palms now. “How can we trust each other when there’s been so many lies between us?”

“Felicity,” he says quietly, staring at her. He doesn’t seem to have a follow up, though. She waits a moment, part of her wanting him to convince her. She wants him to make this better, to make her feel like her world hasn’t slid out from underneath her.

Logically, she knows the truth is better, but damn if she doesn’t ache for the sweetness of the lie.

“I actually came here cause I need your help with something,” she says, breaking the gaze and looking past him at his bike.

“Anything,” he says and the sincerity behind the word stings.
“I need to get my sphere back from the police before they figure out how to trace it back to the person who made it,” she explains. “My usual tactics aren’t going to cut it.”

“You want me to help you break into the police department?” He asks, raising an eyebrow at her. He seems hesitant, but she shrugs. “Okay, let’s come up with a plan.”

“I can shut down any security cameras for a limited amount of time,” she tells him, already thinking about how she would do it on site. “I know what case number it’s labeled under, so we should be able to find it pretty easily. I just need the tactical support in case of emergency.”

“Sounds like you barely need me,” he comments, his voice soft with pride the way it is when she’s done him some sort of favor or explains a particularly interesting problem she’s solved at work. Usually, the sound fills her with warmth, but now it tastes stale.

“I’ve been doing this for a while,” she reminds him with a shrug. “Probably not a good idea to engage with the police tonight, though, considering.”

“Tomorrow night?” He asks, like they’re making dinner plans rather than breaking into a building full of cops. Felicity nods, stepping backwards.

“I should probably . . .” she trails off, hooking her thumb over her shoulder to indicate her exit. Oliver nods and she twists on the ball of her foot, heading down the otherwise empty alley back towards the front of the club.

“Felicity,” Oliver calls, stopping her after she’s made it only a few feet. She pauses, turning halfway to look back at him. “For what it’s worth, you do know me.”

She offers him a sad smile at the effort before she leaves.

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Technically, Felicity has been dating Oliver for nearly three months. Yet, somehow, when he texts her asking her to meet him the next night, it springs the same type of anxiety she’d gotten waiting for him to come over after the first night they’d slept together. They’re supposed to get her sphere back and he sends her an address for where to meet him.

She packs a messenger bag with her tablet and a few gadgets Curtis had been working on. Everything is still in an untested prototype stage, but she’s confident in his tech. The address is for an apartment building a few blocks over from the police station. Unsurprisingly, Oliver waits for her on the roof.

“I can’t believe I never realized how dramatic you are,” she comments, unable to keep herself from teasing him, as she reaches the roof. She crosses towards where he stands at the edge, looking over the city.

“Me?” He asks, turning to grin at her. It’s a little shocking to see under the hood, but it’s filled with a familiar amusement. “The first night we met you literally tumbled out a window to get away from me.”

She groans, remembering falling backwards out of the window of Deadshot’s hotel room.

“God, don’t remind me,” she says, shaking her head. “I was trying to look cool and instead I almost threw up all over that alley.”

“You did look cool,” he comments easily, charming her into a state of complacency. It feels so
unbelievably normal that it unsettles her somehow. Felicity looks away from him, towards the cityscape in front of her. Oliver must notice the change, his shoulders tensing in her peripheral.

“So, what’s the plan?” She asks.

“You keep watch outside and keep the security cameras down,” he explains, turning all business. His voice drops an octave, which she thinks might just be a response to being under the hood. “I’ll go in and retrieve your tech.”

“Oliver, I’m not gonna let you risk getting caught alone because of a mistake I made,” she argues, turning towards him with a frown. He sighs, his shoulders moving with the exhale of breath, and tilts his head at her. She’s reminded of the way he reacts when she tries to pay for dinner or insists on taking her car somewhere rather than one of his, admittedly much nicer, ones.

This is a little more serious than takeout or Oliver stuffing his large form into her Mini Cooper, though.

“It’s easier if I go in by myself,” he insists. “It minimizes risk of detection and you’ll be right outside keeping eyes off of me. I promise, I can do it without getting caught.”

Felicity wants to fight him further, but they don’t necessarily have the time. She opens her mouth to give it her best shot anyway, but Oliver frowns at a quiet buzzing coming from his chest. He unzips his leather and reaches in, pulling out his phone from an internal pocket.

“We need to be quick,” he sighs, looking over the phone. “Dig wants me to meet him. He’s been tailing my mother.”

Felicity raises an eyebrow at his tone, studying him under the shadow of the hood. He isn’t standing creatively anymore, trying to create as much darkness over his face as possible and she realizes she can read him more easily like this.

“You disapprove?” She asks.

“Of him spying on my mother?” He responds, looking surprised that she needs to ask. Felicity had told John she wasn’t going to get in the middle of it, but she’s surprised how naive Oliver is acting with regards to his mother.

“No offense, but someone needs to be looking at her without blinders on,” she says and his jaw moves, ticking in annoyance. She’s not done, though. He’s being obtuse, acting like his mother is innocent without a doubt. In her experience, there aren’t any coincidences in this city. “In light of recent events, how can you act like you don’t have a blind spot for people you care about?”

He stares at her for a long moment and she holds it, challenging him. She’s not going to back down on this. They’d both ignored obvious signs for months about each other, Oliver had nearly gotten caught by the police due to his blind spot for Laurel, and now he’s ignoring the signs pointing towards his mother. Even if Moira isn’t involved, they can’t just ignore the evidence indicating her involvement with the notebook and Walter’s disappearance.

He looks like he’s going to respond, but another set of vibrations stops him. The phone in his hand is still dark and Felicity realizes he must have a separate one stashed on his person. Sure enough, he swaps the Android in his hand out for a black iPhone from within his jacket. Oliver frowns in annoyance at the screen before lifting it to his ear.

“You have three seconds before I have this line permanently disconnected,” he growls into the receiver, surprising Felicity with the venom in his voice - more vigilante than the Oliver she knows.
Felicity watches his face change as the person on the other end speaks.

“I have to go meet Lance,” he says when he hangs up. Felicity blanches as he turns to leave, reaching out and grabbing his arm to stop him. He halts, looking back at her. “Laurel’s been kidnapped.”

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Naturally, they argue over whether or not Felicity is going to go with him to meet Lance, but they eventually settle that she’ll be there, just not on the rooftop with him in case it’s another trap. It’s the best deal either of them are going to get and they don’t have the time to dedicate to arguing further. Felicity gives him an extra comm she’d packed for breaking into the police station.

It doesn’t take a genius to figure out that it was Vanch that took Laurel, even without the arrow Lance provides, knowing what Laurel had been working on and that Oliver had made himself - and by proxy her - a target for Vanch when he’d attacked his compound. Oliver tells Lance as much, asking why he’d come to him with this rather than going in with the police.

“It’s a pretty tight circle that knows about you and my daughter working together,” she hears Lance explain over the comm. “If Vanch knows, it’s because someone at the precinct talked. There isn’t anybody else I could trust.”

Felicity frowns at that from her roost on the fire escape a few stories below. If there’s a mole in the police, that puts everyone inside and all of their loved ones at risk. If someone was willing to sell out to Cyrus Vanch, what’s to stop them from selling out to any lowlife that asks about the vigilante? It’s bad, to say the least. But, it also creates an opportunity.

“Vanch is holed up in a mansion,” Oliver tells Lance, his voice modulator making the comm buzz in her ear. She wonders if it does the same when she talks to Curtis and makes a note to fix it. “It’s a heavily fortified position. I was there. I can’t take it by myself.”

“I need your help,” Lance pleads, taking Oliver’s information as a rejection. Felicity knows he didn’t even need to ask. She wonders who Lance would hate asking for help from more - the vigilante or Oliver Queen.

“Then I need yours,” Oliver says.

Felicity listens as Oliver lays out a tactical plan. She’s mildly impressed. She probably shouldn’t be, she’s seen him do this kind of stuff a handful of times since the vigilante had turned up. But, it’s different now, knowing that it’s Oliver behind it.

It sounds like a good plan to her. She’s not a solider or a tactician, but most of it is really just logic. She lacks the experience Oliver seems to have, though. She doesn’t miss the fact that, in his planning, he doesn’t plan for her or mention having a partner. So, she isn’t really surprised when he leaves Lance and meets her on the fire escape to tell her she shouldn’t be involved.

She stops him before he can say it, though.

“I’m going,” she says immediately, standing from where she’d taken a seat on the metal steps and turning to face him. He halts, a few steps above her, and the even larger height advantage annoys her.

“Absolutely not,” he says with a sense of finality. She crosses her arms over her chest and he must recognize the gesture for the defiance it is because she can see his grip tighten on his bow. “Vanch isn’t some typical criminal. He’s too dangerous.”
“It’s Laurel,” she says simply, because Oliver may have whatever lingering attachment to her - something Felicity has successfully tabled until this mess is over - but she’s also Felicity’s friend. “Besides, I’ve never asked for your blessing before.”

“I can stop you,” he growls, stepping down a step. Felicity steps up one, planting herself firmly in his space. She still has to look up at him under the hood, but she refuses to back down.

“Try,” she bites. Oliver holds her stare, both of them refusing to blink. She knows, despite everything, that he wouldn’t hurt her and she’s not sure how else he would plan to stop her. When he doesn’t do anything besides glare down at her, she takes a step back and shoots him an unimpressed look.

“How do we get there?” She asks.

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Felicity contemplates the things she’s learned tonight as she and Oliver take cover on the roof of the police station. For one, she really does not like motorcycles. Give her one of Oliver’s stupidly fast and expensive cars any day of the week.

The other is that sometimes criminal masterminds are really worthy of that title. And, Cyrus Vanch? At least he worked to earn it. He’d done his homework on the vigilante, learned how many arrows and fletchlings he carried, planned accordingly. He wasn’t messing around. Luckily, neither were they.

Vanch had planned to have a count of men just over the count of weapons Oliver was carrying. What he hadn’t planned for was her or Detective Lance. Oliver had run out of arrows and Vanch had seized the opportunity. Felicity had surprised him with a light grenade sphere, giving Lance and Oliver the opportunity to take down the remaining men.

Felicity had taken great pride in being the one to knock Vanch out on her own before untying Laurel. She’d whispered questions, checking on Laurel’s state, but Laurel Lance is nothing if not resilient. Felicity is unconvinced many other people could have sat in her position and stayed as level headed, herself included.

Now, she and Oliver linger on the rooftop, silently. The air isn’t filled with their usual banter and Felicity tries to ignore the sadness that settles over her. She knows where this is going, even if she wants to pretend she doesn’t.

Laurel comes out of the building below them and heads away from it. Oliver stands, telling Felicity he’s going to go check on her. Felicity nods, unsurprised and only half-listening. She’ll take coffee and pastries over to Laurel’s in the morning and check in on her again. Right now, she has her sights set on a different Lance entirely.

He comes out of the building not long after Laurel, heading in the opposite direction towards the employee parking lot. Felicity stands from her roost, following him along the edge of the building. She drops from the fire escape as he fumbles with his car keys. He stiffens at the sound of her boots hitting the pavement.

“Relax, Detective,” she says, clicking her voice modulator on. She hasn’t had many interactions with Lance personally, but she figures better safe than sorry. “We’re on the same side.”

He turns, frowning as he looks her up and down.

“I don’t think we are,” he argues.
“I helped you tonight,” she reminds him, crossing the pavement to speak with him, but keeping her distance enough to stay in the shadows. “And, I’d like to help you again.”

“What?” Lance asks, looking tired of the conversation already.

“You have a leak,” she explains. “I can find out who it is.”

“Oh, yeah? Just out of the goodness of your heart?” He mocks, throwing his arms out to the side. Felicity frowns, she’d like to say yes, but she can’t. Lance must sense her hesitation. He glowers at her. “What’s in it for you, then?”

“I can find your mole,” she says slowly. “All I want is the safe return of my tech. Untampered with.”

“You mean that ball? Do you know how much trouble I could get in for just handing over evidence?” Lance asks, raising his eyebrows at her. Felicity waits him out and eventually he takes a step towards her. “If you can find the leak, I might be able to get it back to you.”

Felicity gives him a stiff nod, turning and vaulting back up the fire escape. She looks around the roof, but doesn’t spot Oliver. Which sucks, on one hand, because he had been her ride, but on the other, she didn’t really want a repeat of the motorcycle experience.

It takes her an absurd amount of time to get back to the base on foot. She decides she really needs to figure out an alternate form of transportation, but a Vigilante Motorcycle is definitely out of the question. She thinks about it as she changes, but no immediate solution comes to her. As she’s pulling her purple henley over her head, her phone starts to ring.

Her supervisor’s work number lights up the screen and she knows what’s coming before she answers. She tells him she’ll be in in twenty minutes.

When she gets to the lot on the next block where she’d parked her car, Oliver is leaning against it. She takes a deep breath, buttoning her peacoat up and walking towards him. He looks up at the sound of her heels against the concrete.

“How’s Laurel?” She asks as he pushes off of her car, straightening up in front of her.

“Okay, I think,” he sighs. “It was stupid of me to put her harm's way. The vigilante has officially cut off contact with her.”

Felicity studies him for a moment, tilting her head to the side. He stuffs his hands into the pockets of his jacket, the brown leather one she’s always been fond of, and waits her out.

“You still have feelings for her,” she says, not a question. Oliver’s shoulders tense up as he sucks in a deep breath. She shrugs, holding up a hand to keep him from trying to explain. “It’s okay. It’s just one more thing I should have noticed sooner.”

“I don’t want you to think it means I can’t have feelings for you,” he says quickly, taking a step towards her like he thinks she’ll bolt. She frowns. “Laurel and I have such a complicated past and she’s one of my closest friends.”

“I don’t want you to think it means I can’t have feelings for you,” he says quickly, taking a step towards her like he thinks she’ll bolt. She frowns. “Laurel and I have such a complicated past and she’s one of my closest friends.”

“Honestly, I get it,” she tells him, shoving her hands in her own pockets. “You’re lingering feelings for Laurel aren’t the most pressing issue in our relationship right now.”

“You still think you don’t know me?” He asks, his lips twisting in sad irony. She had just called him out on his feelings and known what he was going to say to her tonight before he’d said it. But, it’s bigger than that. She hesitates, trying to figure out the best way to explain it.
“When Joanna’s brother was killed,” she begins finally. “Laurel and my partner, they thought I should stay out of it. They thought it was too much for me and that I should let the vigilante handle it. It made me doubt myself. But, without even knowing what was wrong, you made me feel capable of anything. You believed in me.”

Oliver’s brow furrows in confusion, but she can tell he recalls the conversation at least. She imagines he’s going over it, trying to figure out how he’d missed it. Felicity’s been doing the same thing almost constantly over the last few days.

“You didn’t make me feel that tonight,” she says. “You didn’t want me to go after Vanch with you because you didn’t think I could handle it. I know the man who makes me feel safe and confident. I don’t know that person who you are when you’re under that hood.”

“I’m the same person,” he insists, frowning at her. “I’m the most me I’ve been since I got home when I’m with you.”

“I want to believe that,” she admits. The words are raw and she knows he at least believes them to be true. But she doesn’t want portions of him, she wants to know all of him. She deserves that much, at least, and he deserves the same. She continues, “In all fairness, you probably don’t know me as well as we both thought, either.”

They’re quiet for a moment, Oliver looking down at the cement and Felicity studying him. Instinct tells her to reach out to him, to smooth the frown from his face and lighten them both up somehow, but she resists.

“So, what does that mean exactly?” He asks finally, looking back up at her with bright blue eyes. She forces herself to maintain eye contact, to be brave.

“I need some time,” she tells him. “And, some space.”

He nods, but his poker face hasn’t improved in the time she’s known him and she can’t miss the hurt he’s feeling. He steps away from her car, realizing he’s blocking the door and murmurs a goodbye. Felicity unlocks the car and slides into the driver’s seat, watching through the windshield as he walks away.

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Moira Queen is burning the midnight oil, which apparently means everyone else must be as well. Actually, that’s not true, it just means that Felicity has to. Her supervisor had been gone by the time she’d gotten to QC, but he’d left her an email with instructions for what he needed from her. At the least, it made for a nice excuse to table all of her emotions following her conversation with Oliver.

Apparently, security had been monitoring the hackers movements as he continued to try to break down the firewall and realized a common tie in the code he was targeting. It was hers. Which was exceedingly frustrating because she built a digital wall to rival that of Fort Knox. If Fort Knox were cybersecurity rather than an actual, physical army post.

The point was, no ordinary hacker should be able to break her security down like this. With Moira Queen finishing up a merger upstairs, security and her supervisor had decided this should become a top priority for the IT department. Which apparently only consists of her.

She’d run diagnostics on the hacked code and all of the information security had sent her and compiled it onto a separate drive. With someone specifically targeting her code, she doesn’t feel safe keeping it on her work computer. She also no longer believes in coincidences, so she’s pretty sure
this is a targeted attack on her.

Her mind keeps bringing up Cooper, but she thinks this is too sophisticated and subtle for him. Cooper had always been the go big or go home type, it’s what had gotten him locked in prison in the first place.

She decides to take the information home with her. If this is specifically targeting her, even her home wifi may be unsafe. The base, though, is even more safeguarded than QC. She pays the internet payment through a separate bank account set up in a different name - a feat that had been her first foray into creating an alias for herself. The safest place to look into the hack would be from there.

She’s waning, exhaustion beginning to build as she walks through the employee parking garage. Her car is feet from her and she’s dreaming of getting home, getting out of her heels, and sleeping for thirteen hours straight. The car beeps as she presses the button on the key fob to unlock it and climbs inside. In fact, she’ll blame the exhaustion for not noticing him sooner.

She starts the engine and turns in her seat to begin backing out and gasps in surprise at the prone figure in her backseat.

“Oliver, oh my God,” she gasps, pressing her hand over her heart and glaring at him. He adjusts, pulling the hood down over his head and shifting in the seat. She realizes his breathing is labored and panic spikes. She spots the bloom of red on he chest. “You’re bleeding.”

“I don’t need to be told that,” he tells her. She doesn’t think his attitude is entirely warranted in this situation, but she’s never been shot before so she’ll let it go.

“You need a hospital,” she says, turning back to the steering wheel and reaching for the gear shift. Oliver stops her.

“The club,” he gasps out. “My father’s old factory.”

“No, you need a doctor, not a steel worker,” she insists, staring at him like he’s lost his mind. She doesn’t care what he’s got hidden in that club, there’s no way it’s a better option for medical care than a real hospital.

“Felicity,” he pants and her chest constricts at the pain in his voice, fear rushing through her. “You have to promise me that you are gonna take me to my father’s factory and nowhere else.”

Judging by the blood quickly staining his chest, they don’t have time to argue over this. She concedes this once.

“Yeah, promise,” she says and he nods at her, breathing heavily from the energy the exchange had cost him. He settles into her backseat as she pulls out of the parking spot. “Something tells me blood stains are not covered under my lease.”

Chapter End Notes

I'm also terribly sorry I haven't been able to respond to comments lately! It's one more thing I have to budget my time for, so I hope you all understand and know how much I appreciate the continued enjoyment of and support for this story!! <3
Chapter Summary

Felicity and John work to keep Oliver alive. Felicity receives an olive branch.

Chapter Notes

So, I'm cheating a little bit. I was eager to post and I'm pretty confident I'll finish the chapter I'm working on by tonight, so here's a chapter a little earlier than planned. I like this one a lot! It ended up much longer than originally intended, but I also hadn't expected to spend so much time within the actual confines of the canon episode.

Also, see further notes on the feedback from the last chapter at the bottom.

Takes place during 1.14 "The Odyssey"

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Felicity doesn’t have much experience with gunshot wounds, or really most traumatic wounds, but she’s pretty sure you’re not supposed to let the person fall asleep. Coma risks and all that. So, on the way to the club, she tries to keep Oliver talking to her. She asks what happened and he explains, with some difficulty, that he’d paid his mother a visit.

“She shot you?” She barks in surprise. Oliver groans in the backseat and she can hear the sound of his leathers shifting against the fabric of her interior. “Sorry, dumb question. Clearly she shot you. She did shoot you, right?”

He huffs and she glances up at the rear view mirror, worried he’s in worse condition than she’d realized, but he’s smirking through the pain, clearly amused at her. She rolls her eyes, a little annoyed that her being so flustered is making him feel better.

“Yes,” he answers finally. “She shot me.”

“I still think you need a hospital,” she tells him.

“Felicity,” he says in warning, but the effect is lessened by the way his eyes are fluttering when she chances a glance at him again. She frowns in concern, afraid that he might slip into a coma in her
When they reach the club, he’s barely hanging onto consciousness, but rouses at her trying to lift him out of the car. She can feel the stickiness of his blood coating her collarbone and staining her shirt. He must feel her struggling under the weight of him, because he encourages her towards the door, telling her the code to the keypad.

It takes her three tries to put the number in correctly; her fingers are shaking and slick with blood and slide against the buttons. She stops, taking a deep breath, and inputs the code with firm movements before rushing inside. She can hear the sound of the news from within the building and follows it deeper into a basement level she’s never seen.

“Excuse me,” she calls, seeing John sitting in front of three poorly set up monitors. He spins, pulling his gun with a killer instinct and aiming it at her, clearly startled by her appearance. “Can you help me? He’s really heavy.”

John lowers the gun, taking in her appearance, before jumping from the chair. Felicity leads him outside to her car and John lifts Oliver easily from her back seat. Between the two of them, they manage to get him inside and onto a medical table with a rag covering the wound in his shoulder.

John examines the wound, explaining that it’s a zone two wound, just missing the carotid artery. He clearly has more medical training than her, but she knows enough to know that anything ending in the word ‘artery’ is not a place you want to get injured. He coaches her, moving her hand to the rag and instructing her to press down.

“I should have taken him to a hospital,” she says once more, more to herself than to John at this point. If Oliver bleeds out on this makeshift medical table in the secret basement of his club, she’s going to kill him.

“No, Felicity,” John assures her as he moves around the basement, collecting supplies. Oliver’s face is slack and there’s still blood seeping from the wound underneath the pressure of her hands. Her stomach rolls. “That’s why he asked you to bring him here. Because he knew the police would want to know how and why he got that wound.”

“I’m guessing ‘how’ and ‘why’ are Oliver’s least favorite questions,” she comments, amazed at the way her voice stays steady, her hands no longer shaking now that they’ve been given a specific task.
“Yeah, well, there’s also ‘when’ and ‘where’ he’s not too fond of,” John quips, but the concern in his voice keeps it from lightening the mood.

He continues to move around her, placing supplies on the table next to her. Eventually he opens a refrigerated drawer and pulls out a sealed bag of blood and Felicity nearly throws up. John explains that Oliver had stored it for a rainy day and gently urges her out of the way so he can work on the wound. She flails a bit, trying to pull on the gloves he supplies her. No longer pressing down on Oliver’s wound, her hands have begun to shake again and the blood is making it difficult to pull the latex over her fingers.

John reaches out, his own gloved hand wrapping around her wrist and grounding her.

“Hey, Felicity,” he says gently, prompting her to look over at him. “Listen, trust me. He’ll be fine. He’s been through a lot worse than this.”

She nods and John returns his attention to Oliver, but she doesn’t necessarily feel better. She’s beginning to think she and Oliver have been living in two separate vigilante worlds.

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“Good job,” she compliments as John pulls the needle through skin one last time. She frowns. “I think.”

John cuts the end of the suture and she sets the forceps she’d been holding into the small metal tray he’d supplied. It’s full of bloody gauze and she pulls her gloves off, tossing them on top just so she can no longer see the fallout of Oliver’s emergency surgery.

“His heart rate’s elevated, but at least the bleeding stopped,” John points out, pulling off his own gloves. “Thanks for your help. You kept your head on.”

She thinks if he knew exactly how many different dark turns her mind had taken while he was sewing Oliver up, he wouldn’t say that. But, it’s probably a testament to her ability to compartmentalize. A skill she didn’t actually think she had mastered.

“Well, I always wondered how I’d react if I found my boyfriend shot and bleeding inside my car,” she shrugs, moving away from him to explore the basement a little more. She stops, looking back at
John. “Not that I helped because he’s my boyfriend. I’d help anyone who was shot and... bleeding in my car.”

She frowns at herself, considering her sentence. Ex-boyfriend? She supposes semantics don’t really matter in this case. Besides, had they really broken up in a technical sense? She’d told him she needed space, which was typically a lead up to a break up if not actually one.

Those are conclusions for another time, after Oliver wakes up.

She feels John’s eyes on her as she roves the room, studying their setup. She can’t help but compare it to her own. Her computers are set up better, but Oliver’s display is better. His arrows stand at an angle in a ribbed display and she circles them.

“Can I ask you something?” He calls and she glances over at him, raising her eyebrows. He’s leaning against a metal table a few feet from where Oliver lies. “You really didn’t know?”

Felicity frowns at the question, turning away from him. Her eyes land on the computer setup he’d been sitting at when she entered. She doesn’t even need to look hard to tell the wires are set up poorly, the light of the monitors too yellow for her liking. Her mind starts cataloguing ways she could fix it.

“I should have,” she says finally, her back still to him. “I mean, with all of the fairly ridiculous lies the two of you have dropped on me. But…,”

She trails off, turning back towards him and shrugging. She’s been going over it in her head for a days, thinking of all of the signs she’s missed, all the times she’d let Oliver’s lies and deflections slide because she thought he’d tell her eventually. For someone so smart, she’d been so incredibly stupid. She’d allowed herself to get lost in him and had ignored so much that didn’t make sense.

“I just didn’t,” she finishes, chewing on her lower lip and looking down at her hands. “I wanted to believe I knew him well enough.”

It’s quiet for a moment, only the sound of the machine monitoring Oliver’s rapid heartbeat. She looks over at him, sprawled on the table. She’s seen every scar on his body, stroked and kissed and soothed them, but never pressed too hard. She told herself it wasn’t her place to make him relive it and that he’d tell her about them when he was ready.
Memories from the past months keep striking her, filled with new layers and ways she’d ignored the obvious. Had she done the same to him? Has he been walking himself through their interactions, looking for the deception the way she has?

“We all have blind spots for the people we love,” John comments, breaking her from her reverie. She looks over at him, considering his words.

Before she can respond, the beeping of the heart monitor picks up, startling them both. Oliver’s body jolts, lifting itself off of the table and falling back to it with a loud thud as the seizure takes over. John moves at the same moment she does, both of them running for the table and coming up to either side.

“What’s happening?” She asks as John reaches for Oliver’s arms, trying to limit his movement. Her heart races along with his, fear freezing her for a moment. Swinging between rooftops is nothing compared to this.

“There’s a syringe labeled Ativan,” John instructs, holding Oliver’s biceps down. “It should stop the seizure. Go!”

Felicity moves to follow his instructions, familiar with the drug name, but stops short at the sound of the heart monitor cutting off. One long, drawn out beep turns her blood cold and she doesn’t need John to tell her what’s happening.

“His heart stopped.”

“I’m calling 911,” she tells him, moving for the chair where she’d left her coat.

“No, wait, you can’t,” John calls, stopping her. She glances back, prepared to ignore him, Oliver’s secret be damned. He’s pulling a defibrillator towards the table, separating the paddles and holding them out towards Oliver’s still form.

“You know how to use one of those?” Felicity asks, coming back to the table. John doesn’t look confidant as he places red sheets on Oliver’s chest.

“We are about to find out,” he says, his voice steadier than she expects. He’d spent time in the military, he’d told her as much and she knew already from her own research, and it’s clearly given him a level head. That doesn’t keep her from jumping away from the table as he holds the paddles
out, pressing them over the sheets on Oliver’s chest.

“You didn’t say clear,” she squeaks, irrationally. The paddles beep and she hears the charge as John presses down. Nothing happens. She moves immediately towards the machine. “I heard the charge. That’s good news.”

“How’s that?” John asks, watching her as she pulls a tool from one of the drawers and pries the back cover off of the machine.

“It means it might not be the machine,” she explains. “It could be the wiring.”

The casing pops off easily and she surveys the circuitry inside, feeling suddenly much more in control even with Oliver not breathing a foot away from her. One of the wires is loose, disconnected from its necessary circuitry and she prods at it, checking for fraying. When she finds none, Felicity presses it back into place as John chants ‘come on’ behind her.

“Try again,” she says, pulling away from the machine and motioning at John. He says clear this time as he presses down on Oliver’s chest. The electricity lifts his body off the table, trying to shock his heart back into functioning. Felicity holds her breath. John gives it a second attempt and the heart monitor kicks back to life, a rapid beeping denoting Oliver’s continued existence.

Felicity rounds the table, coming right up next to Oliver’s head, and watches the lines move on the monitor in tandem with Oliver’s heartbeat. Avoiding the IV connected to his arm, she wraps her fingers around his wrist, feeling his pulse for herself. She squeezes, letting her eyes close for a moment as her own frantic heart slows.

“What the hell did you do?” John asks, looking impressed, but still harried at the close call. He leans on the table next to Oliver, bending towards her.

“I’ve been building computers since I was seven,” she tells him, waving her free hand towards the screen next to Oliver’s head. “Wires are wires.”

John’s head drops in relief and Felicity frowns. She still doesn’t like that Oliver isn’t going to see an actual doctor. The wound in his shoulder is nasty and his heart had literally just stopped beating for almost a minute. She looks at John.
“What do we do now?” She asks.

“Pray we don’t have a heart attack ourselves,” he says, pushing off of the table. He lifts a hand, patting Oliver’s chest twice. Felicity tracks the movement of his hand, surprised at the familiarity there. She’s grown so used to John as Oliver’s shadow, but she had never noticed the bond between them. One more thing she’d missed.

After a moment, she pulls her fingers away from Oliver’s wrist, satisfied with the continued beat of his pulse. She moves away from the table, venturing instead towards the monitors set up a few feet away from him. Fixing the wires in the defibrillator had given her a sense of control, but now the anxiety creeps back in. The sound of the monitor registering the stop of Oliver’s heart echoes in her mind and her stomach rolls. She gets the idea to upgrade the computer setup mostly out of need for something to occupy her.

But also because it’s so poorly set up she cringes every time she looks over at it.

“What are you doing?” John asks as she begins shutting the monitors down and pulling wires from the back of them. She can hear the frown in his voice, but she doesn’t stop to turn to him.

“Your system is one of the worst setups I’ve seen in decades,” she explains, yanking a video cord from the back and frowning at it. It’s old and fraying in spots, which probably explains the yellow-tinged picture on the monitors. “And, I mean that literally, because this adapter hasn’t been used in a system since the eighties.”

John chuckles and she doesn’t need to look to know he’s shaking his head at her. He doesn’t press the issue further, so she figures he either realizes she needs to do this to keep herself from falling apart or that they seriously need their system upgraded.

She goes back out to her car, grabbing a stash of wires and adapters she keeps in her trunk. Laurel had made fun of her once for calling it her emergency stash, wondering when exactly she could be in emergency need of an HDMI cable. Honestly, she hadn’t expected the word “emergency” to be so dead on either.

John lets her be, silently watching over both her and Oliver. She can tell he’s keeping a concerned eye on her as much as he is Oliver, probably trying to make sure she isn’t going to freak out and bolt or have a breakdown or something.
The monitor flatlines again and Felicity hears John jump into action at the same moment she does. She reaches Oliver first from her close proximity at the computers. John heads for the defibrillator instead.

“He’s going into cardiac arrest again,” he announces, a bit unnecessarily. Felicity spots the lead meant to be attached low on Oliver’s chest hanging loosely from his skin.

“Nope,” she assures John, pressing the lead down and making sure it’s properly attached now. “The lead just came loose.”

The beeping returns to normal and John lets out a frustrated shout as he moves away from the table. Felicity glances back at him, but looks back down at Oliver, rubbing her hand over her neck and rounding the table.

“It’s less stressful when he’s jumping off rooftops,” John says and she can’t helped the small chuckle the statement pulls from her. It’s so normal for them all and so ridiculous at the same time. She spots Oliver’s bow on a table behind him and heads towards it.

“This bow has put arrows in quite a few people,” she comments, trying to sound casual, as she picks it up. It shakes in her hand as she lifts it, drawing the string back with her other hand. It resists her pull at first, the tension strong to accommodate Oliver’s strength and experience. She lifts it to head level and tugs hard on the string, drawing it back as if she were going to shoot it. It feels wrong in her hands.

“Yeah, bad people,” John reminds her and she knows he’s right. She had decided long ago that the vigilante wasn’t a bad person, but she’d never managed to justify the collateral damage he left in his wake. Knowing that collateral damage was Oliver’s had made it even more difficult.

“That doesn’t bother you?” She asks, looking from the bow over to where John leans against the table with the computers on it. She releases the bowstring slowly, placing the weapon back down on the table. “Because, and I mean this in a good way, you seem like the kind of guy it would bother.”

She doesn’t know what she expects him to say. Except that she needs to hear something, she needs to know how to justify what Oliver has been doing. Because, she wants to still believe in him, but she’s not sure how to yet. John clearly does.

“When I was in Afghanistan, my unit was tasked with protecting this local war lord,” John starts.
The tone in his voice prompts her to turn to him and his eyes have taken on a far off quality as he recalls the story. “Gholem Qadir. Qadir was less than human, sold opium. Sold children.”

He looks directly at her with the words, trying to drive home the type of man he had been ordered to protect. Felicity tilts her head, waiting for him to continue. He does, looking away from her again.

“One day, we were accompanying him to Mosul when my convoy was ambushed by insurgents,” he says. “We had them outgunned. Fire fight didn’t last more than a minute. When the smoke cleared, I moved in on their position. They were all dead. I knew which one I had killed.”

Felicity moves towards him slowly, wrapping her arms around herself. His tone is detached, but she knows it’s a manufactured detachment. It’s the way he has to talk about it or he won’t be able to tell it at all.

“When I pulled off his Keffiyeh, I could see it was just a kid, no more than eighteen,” he continues as she crosses towards him. “Shot him in the throat. I killed this kid to protect this human piece of garbage, and I thought, ‘am I still good? Am I still a good man?’”

He pauses and Felicity studies him, the catch in his voice, the sadness in his eyes. It’s an old wound, maybe, but it hurts all the same. It haunts him all the same. He pushes off of the table, closing the lingering distance between them, his eyes on Oliver’s prone form behind her.

“Doing this with Oliver,” he concludes. “Doing what we do, I feel good again for the first time in a long time.”

Felicity turns her head, looking back over at Oliver as her fingers tighten their grip on her own biceps. His heart rate is coming down, slowly but surely, and it eases some of her worry. She looks back at John.

“And that’s worth all the collateral damage?” She asks.

“I haven’t killed anyone, if that’s what you’re asking,” he says, his hands in the pockets of his dress pants.

“But he has,” she reminds him, the first time she’s acknowledged Oliver’s sins aloud since she found out. She turns, stepping closer to where he lays and resisting the urge to reach for him, clasping her
hands together and setting them just next to his arm instead.

“Unfortunately,” John says and she feels him move up right behind her, looking down at Oliver over her shoulder. “There are always casualties when you’re fighting a war.”

She thinks the difference is that she’s never seen it as a war.

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Oliver wakes up with a quip about supposing he didn’t die again. Cool. John shakes his head and Felicity moves away from him, trying to be annoyed over her relief at his return to consciousness. She takes a seat in front of the computers, which are now set up properly and no longer look like they’re shining through a film of dust. John helps Oliver up into a sitting position and gives him a blanket while she hacks into the SCPD’s system.

The men banter about how Oliver will explain his scar behind her and she flinches at John’s suggestion of a hickey gone wrong.

“The police collected a sample of your blood at Queen Consolidated,” she announces, typing a command into the keyboard. A dialogue box comes up on the screen and she presses confirm on the touch screen. “I just hacked the crime lab and ordered the sample destroyed. Oops.”

She laughs a little, grinning in pride at her own hack and the working system. Oliver and John had been using the high-definition touch screen monitors without any touch compatibility. It was really a travesty. She spins in the chair to find Oliver staring at her in something akin to confusion.

“I hope it’s alright,” she says, standing from the chair that is definitely not hers. Her hands move in flailing movements, unable to stay still. “Your system looked like it was from the eighties, and not the good part of the eighties, like Madonna and, well, legwarmers.”

“It’s a lot of work,” Oliver says, laughing at her rambling. Her stomach flutters at the bright look on his face. With everything that’s happened with them, it’s been days since she managed to make him smile. There’s something hopeful there. “Does that mean you’re in?”

“You mean ‘in’ as in I’m going to join your crusade?” She asks warily, knowing her answer already. They hadn’t discussed this yet, their inevitable working relationship. But, she supposes it’s different
now that she’s been in his space, upgraded his system, helped save his life.

“Well, you’re practically an honorary member of the team already,” he tells her. She frowns, taking a deep breath.

“No,” she says. Oliver deflates and her stomach sinks. Even John’s brow furrows behind Oliver.

“Then why’d you upgrade my system?” He asks.

“First, because seeing a network that poorly set up hurts me,” she explains, pressing her hands over her heart. Oliver takes a step for her, like he intends to cut her off, but she doesn’t let him. “In my soul. And second, I want to find Walter. He was nice to me and since that notebook seems to be connected to all of this, I’ll help you rescue him, but that’s it.”

Oliver frowns, looking down at the floor. She knows she seems harsh, but if the past few hours have showed her anything it’s that she and Oliver aren’t living the same kind of life. They both have secrets, but their methods, their motivations are different.

“I have my own team and we’re not fighting a war,” she tells him. “We’re just trying to help people.”

“Okay,” Oliver nods after a long moment of silence. She chews on her lip, looking up at him. It takes her a moment to break the gaze, glancing around the room instead.

“So, I’ve been meaning to ask,” she starts and Oliver seems to brace himself for whatever question she may have. She fidgets, hoping to sell it. “Is there a bathroom? Because I’ve had to pee since I got here.”

Oliver chuckles, tilting his head towards the metal staircase behind him. She isn’t familiar enough with the layout of the club to know where the bathroom is, having only been inside a few times. He gives her directions and she follows them, heading upstairs in search of the restroom. She doesn’t really need to pee, but the excuse for a moment to breathe is the best she can come up with.

She takes a minute to collect herself, scrubbing the blood off of her collarbone and from under her nails. It still makes her feel a little sick to look at, but the panic is at bay now that Oliver is up and walking around. She comes back down the stairs, stalling at the sound of John and Oliver fighting. John grabs his jacket and leaves through the door to the alley as she continues her path down the
steps. Oliver looks up at the sound of her footsteps on the metal.

“That sounded intense,” she comments, glancing over at the door as it closes behind John. Oliver is sitting in the computer chair she’d previously vacated. He shakes his head at her, clearly not interested in repeating the argument he’d had with John. She’d heard enough of it to know it involved his mother and his continued insistence of her innocence. She knows better than to press the issue at the moment.

“So, I kind of already screwed up on giving you some space, huh?” He jokes, but she can hear the tension in his voice, the concern that he’s pushed too far by coming to her. She tilts her head at him, giving him a soft smile.

“It’s okay,” she assures him. “I appreciate that you trusted me enough to come to me.”

“I’ll always trust you,” he says easily and her chest expands at the words. She holds his gaze for a moment, trying to decide how to move forward from here. She needs to know if he and John have done any of their own digging on Walter’s disappearance. She gets the feeling that John still isn’t convinced of Moira Queen’s innocence and, frankly, neither is she. She did just shoot Oliver.

She opens her mouth to ask about it, knowing it runs the risk of leading to a fight, but a strange alarm starts coming from her coat. Oliver tenses at the sound, looking around the room, but Felicity realizes it’s her phone. She crosses the room, pulling it out of the pocket of her coat.

When she’d set up the lock on the door to the base, she’d added a connection that would alert her to any attempt at tampering with or hacking the lock. The tamper alert flashes across her phone and she stares down at it in surprise. It had been a precaution, but she didn’t ever really expect to need it.

“I need to use the computer,” she says, moving quickly back towards Oliver. She tugs at the arm of the computer chair, pulling it away from the desk without making Oliver get up. She can feel his eyes on her as she leans over the keyboard, typing furiously.

“What’s going on?” He asks, leaning to get a better view of the computer screen around her. She hears him hiss in pain and sit back.

“You have you’re super secret clubhouse, I have mine,” she explains, pulling up the feed from the security camera she’d installed over the basement door. “And someone is trying to break into it.”
The feed comes up and she can see a figure standing over the automatic lock, a device plugged into the circuitry. She frowns at the screen just as he looks up at the camera, winking like the smug bastard she remembers.

“Son of a bitch,” she hisses, closing out of the feed. “I have to go deal with this.”

“Hey,” Oliver stops her as she’s pulling her coat on and she turns to look at him. He’s standing now, his grip on the blanket around his shoulders falling slack. “Is it dangerous?”

“No,” she tells him, thinking of how she’d had the upper hand the last time she’d seen Cooper. “It’s just a little pest control.”

“How about some backup anyway?” He asks, sounding like he doesn’t believe her. She gives him a look. “We’ll get there faster on my bike.”

Figuring she doesn’t really have time to argue, and that there’s no winning this one anyway, she agrees. Her reservations about riding Oliver’s bike again are overcome by the anxious feeling Cooper’s return is giving her. She’d left him with no uncertainty of what would happen if he showed up against last time.

Oliver pulls a sweater on, flinching at the pull on his stitches, and his brown leather jacket. He’s still wearing the leather pants, but she doesn’t have time to wait for him to change out of them and he doesn’t seem to intend to. He leads her out to his parked bike and she holds her breath for most of the ride to the apartment.

It’s early morning now and the streets are still dark and empty. Oliver’s bike is quicker because he has a looser belief in the laws of the road than she does in her car. They make it to the apartment in record time and Felicity leads him into the lobby.

“Hey,” she says, stopping him before they enter and motioning towards the helmet tucked under his arm. “Keep that on.”

He follows her instructions, pulling the helmet back over his head. Felicity doesn’t know why Cooper is back, but she knows he’ll peg Oliver as the vigilante easily if he shows up with her. Better to keep his identity secret for now.
Cooper is waiting for her in the lobby, turning and leaning back against the basement door when he hears them enter.

“You’re not gonna get through my safeguards,” she tells him, crossing her arms over her chest and glaring at him.

“Come on, Felicity, I know I can’t outhack you,” he grins. “I just needed to get your attention.”

Felicity can feel Oliver at her shoulder, which makes her feel moderately better, but she doesn’t really see Cooper as a threat at this point. Except that he still works for some unknown sociopath, at best, with a definite fixation on her.

“Pretty risky, considering the way our last conversation went,” she comments. Cooper lets out a heavy sigh, like she’s the one being difficult, and pushes off the wall. He takes a step towards her and she feels Oliver close in behind her. Cooper eyes him warily. Even with the motorcycle helmet, she figures he cuts a pretty intimidating figure.

“So, you do know who the vigilante is,” Cooper says, raising an eyebrow at her. She doesn’t give, staring him down instead of confirming or denying. With the intimidating stance and green leather pants, it’s hardly a leap, though. “Look, I know you don’t trust me, but I’m actually here with good intentions.”

“You’ll understand if I don’t take your word for it,” she bites. Cooper nods in understanding, chancing another step towards her. He shoves the device he’d been using to try and hack the lock into his jacket pocket.

“After you threatened to dox me, the Benefactor decided I was too much of a risk to keep around,” he explains, sounding bitter. Felicity frowns at his tone. For someone who is trying to convince her they’re not here with malicious intent, it sure sounds like he's about to blame her.

“That's probably a good thing, Coop,” she offers and he gives her a dark chuckle, nodding in agreement.

“Sure,” he says. “But, I’m still me, Felicity. It really pissed me off. So, I decided to do some digging of my own.”
Felicity watches warily as he digs around in the opposite coat pocket, searching for something. Oliver is so close at her back that she can feel the tension flowing off of him. She chances a glance back at him, hoping to convey her relative relaxation at the situation. She can't tell through the dark visor of his helmet if it works.

“This is all I could find,” Cooper says, pulling her attention back to him. He holds out a small drive towards her. “It’s not much, but you were always better at this part than I am.”

Hesitantly, Felicity reaches out and takes the drive from him, turning it over in her hands. It’s small and black, nondescript and unlabeled. For all she knows it’s a virus or a trojan, but Cooper should know better than try to play her.

“Why are you giving this to me?” She asks, looking back up at him.

“Look, whoever this is, they have something big planned next,” he explains, taking another step towards her. “I want you to know that I’m not part of it.”

“Why?” She asks again on a whisper, aware of the way her voice shakes. Cooper offers her a sad smile.

“I don't know if there's anything of the boy I was left inside me,” he says. “But, I’d like to have the opportunity to try and find out.”

She nods in understanding. Despite everything, she hopes he finds out who he is and she hopes he's someone worthy of a second chance. Maybe it’s the part of her that will always love him, the way people love their first loves, but she really hopes he finds a life now that he has the chance.

He gives her one last look, a sad but hopeful thing that reflects her own emotions. Glancing warily over at Oliver over her shoulder, Cooper steps around them towards the door to the apartment building. Felicity turns suddenly, a thought occurring to her.

“Hey, Cooper,” she calls, stopping just as he reaches the door. He looks back at her. “Have you been hacking the QC firewall?”

“Not this time,” he answers, frowning at her for a moment before pushing out of the doors. Behind him, she can see the early morning sun beginning to color the horizon.
She looks back down at the drive in her hands, wondering how much Cooper really could have found on his mysterious benefactor. Oliver’s leather jacket squeaks against itself as he pulls his helmet off his head and frowns at her.

“You gonna tell me what that was about?” He asks. Felicity sighs, nodding at him in response. She turns and walks towards the door to the basement, pressing her thumb against the reader. Her hesitance at bringing Oliver into the space is tempered by the reminder that he’d brought her into his.

Telling him the story of her and Cooper, though? That’s a bit harder.

She decides to skip right to the important information, rather than her time in college, and details the events of a few months ago as she leads Oliver down the stairs. He moves slowly, clearly still in pain from the bullet hole in his shoulder. She watches him warily as she reaches the bottom of the stairs and his attempt at a reassuring smile turns into a grimace.

“And this benefactor, if that’s really what we’re going with, is fixated on you?” He asks once she’s finished her story. Felicity nods and he frowns at her, worry creasing his brow. “Why?”

“Your guess is as good as mine,” she shrugs, moving away from him towards her computers. There’s no sign of Curtis in the base, which is a little surprising. She hasn’t heard from him yet, but maybe he and Paul are sleeping off the jetlag after their flight back. “Cooper didn’t seem to know why either.”

“Do you think there’s actually anything useful on that drive?” He asks as she drops into her computer chair. She spins Curtis’ chair around, offering it to Oliver. He accepts the gesture gratefully and she considers that maybe she should check his stitches. The base isn’t exactly equipped to deal with it if he’s popped one, though.

“Only one way to find out,” she says, popping the drive into the USB bay connected to the computers. It pulls up a folder marked with a handful of upper- and lowercase letters. Knowing Cooper, each one probably has some form of relevancy, but she doesn’t have time to decode it.

“You think it’s connected to a hack at QC?” Oliver asks. Felicity begins opening the files from the drive, but there’s an encryption on each one and it’s gonna take her some time to break through them. As eager as she is to see what Cooper has found, the encryption is gonna take concentration and her adrenaline rush from finding Oliver in her backseat is crashing.
“I don’t really believe in coincidences anymore,” she sighs, sitting back in her chair. It bounces a bit with the movement and she rolls her head to look over at Oliver. He’s frowning at the screen, but looks at her when he feels her eyes on him. “You know, Cooper and whatever mess this is, they’re my problem. You don’t need to get involved.”

He raises an eyebrow at her and she doesn’t need him to say anything. She knows it’s his problem, too.

“I need to go home for a bit and see my mother,” he says, standing from the chair. Felicity nods in understanding. “Are you gonna be okay? I don’t like the idea of you being here alone.”

Felicity rolls her eyes, giving him a dark look. No one is breaking through the building lock and, even if they did, she is capable of defending herself. Besides, she doesn’t plan on sticking around for long. She had things to get done today and she really needs to get some sleep. She’s running on fumes at the moment.

“I’ll be fine,” she assures him, a little more forcefully than necessary. He sighs, tilting his head at her in a mix of contrition and frustration. She knows he’s trying not to push, but she doesn’t need him to start handling her with kid gloves. “I’m just gonna run a program to break the encryption on Cooper’s files and then head home for some sleep.”

Oliver nods, looking pleased with the plan. She frowns up at him, studying his face. Dark shadows mar his eyes and something tells her that a near comatose-state, laid out on the hard medical table for a few hours isn’t the kind of rest his body needs.

“You should sleep, too,” she says softly earning a gentle smile from him, just the slightest upturn at the corners of his mouth.

“I will,” he promises. He moves, stooping just a touch before halting in an awkward slump. Felicity recognizes the move as an instinctual motion to lean down and kiss her goodbye. Her own body had reacted, pushing her back up straight to meet him.

They hang there awkwardly for a moment, neither sure how to make the motion seem different. Eventually, Oliver gives up. He straightens, placing his hand on her shoulder and squeezing gently. When he pulls it away, Felicity ducks her head towards it, watching him leave over her shoulder.
“Let me know if you find anything,” he says and she nods silently. She watches him climb the stairs and disappear through the door, her chest tight with a held breath she doesn’t release until she can’t see him anymore.

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Felicity sleeps for almost a full seven hours. Which is a long nap that she needed, in fact she probably needed more after how long she’d been awake. But, she didn’t actually make it to bed until after five in the morning, which means it’s well into the afternoon when she wakes up.

Despite the pressing seriousness of the information Cooper had left her, she had really intended to go check in on Laurel today. It hadn’t been a hard and fast plan, and she knows Laurel won’t be expecting her, but she can’t imagine how she’d be holding up if she’d been the one kidnapped. She stops at a Big Belly Burger and picks up enough food for herself, Laurel, and Tommy, just in case.

It turns out to be a good plan, because it’s Tommy that answers the door when she gets to Laurel’s apartment. She holds the two bags of food up, clenched precariously in one fist with a drink holder balancing on the open palm of the other hand.

“You guys eaten yet?” She asks, shooting him a wide grin. Tommy shakes his head, laughing at her, and reaches to take the bags from her. She hands them over gratefully and follows him into the apartment as he calls out to let Laurel know it’s her.

“You brought us food?” Laurel asks, taking one of the bags from Tommy and peering inside. She digs out a fry and pops it in her mouth, winking at Felicity. “My hero.”

Tommy snatches the bag back from Laurel, giving her a teasing glare at her fry theft, and offers to go grab plates from the kitchen. Felicity holds the drink holder out to Laurel, denoting which of the three shakes is which flavor. Laurel takes the chocolate so Felicity grabs the strawberry and leaves the vanilla for Tommy.

“I wanted to come by sooner, but you would not believe how my night ended up,” Felicity says, joking enough that Laurel won’t try to ask for the story. They sit on the couch and she studies the other woman carefully, trying to read her face. “How are you doing?”

Laurel gives her a tired look and Felicity figures she’s grown sick of the question over the past day. Still, it’s all fine for her to put on a brave face, but Felicity doubts even Laurel is back to one hundred
percent after what she’d gone through.

“I’m fine, really,” Laurel insists and Felicity raises an eyebrow at her. Laurel laughs at her disbelief and sips milkshake through her straw. “Really, I’m okay. I mean, I wasn’t immediately and, yeah, it was terrifying being in that situation. But, between you and my dad and, even to an extent, the vigilante, I knew I had people in my corner.”

Felicity reaches across the cushions to squeeze her hand.

“I’m always in your corner,” she promises. Laurel smiles with gratitude and squeezes back.

Tommy comes back into the room with the bags of food and plates. He dishes out burgers and fries and they lapse into a comfortable chatter while they eat. Laurel pops the lid off of her milkshake and coats fries in the ice cream as she eats them. Tommy, pretending to pout over the vanilla shake, steals sips from Laurel’s drink.

“Hey,” Tommy starts suddenly as Laurel bats his hands away from her cup once more. He’s looking at Felicity, who of course has just taken a whopping bite of her burger. “Have you talked to Oliver today? How’s his mom doing?”

“Uh, yeah, I don’t think anyone was injured,” Felicity shrugs, wiping mayo off her fingers with a napkin. She doesn’t want to give anything away, like how she knows Moira gave worse than she got in her encounter with the vigilante last night. “But, I haven’t really heard from him today.”

“Uh oh,” Laurel intones, frowning at Felicity. When she raises an eyebrow at her, Laurel continues, “I know an ‘Oliver trouble’ look when I see it. What happened?”

They’re both looking at her now and she suddenly feels cornered. She can’t exactly tell them why she and Oliver haven’t been talking much. She takes another bite of her burger to stall and Laurel tilts her head, seeing through the gesture.

“We’re just taking some time, is all,” Felicity shrugs, covering her mouth with her fingers to hide the food on display. “I don’t really want to talk about it, though, okay?”

She can see on both their faces that they want to press the issue. The couple shares a look and Felicity feels her entire body tense in anxiety, but Tommy reaches for Laurel’s shake again and the
two start bickering like the topic was never even brought up. Felicity laughs at their antics, grateful for the understanding.

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After dinner with Laurel and Tommy, Felicity feels better knowing that the pair have patched things up and Laurel is going to be fine. She heads for the base, a renewed interest in combing through Cooper’s information. The data size alone had been large and that was before unencrypting it, so she doubts it’ll be a walk in the park. Even then, it’s not like Cooper is going to have left her the benefactor’s name, he’d said himself he couldn’t find it.

The encryption is easy to break through once her program has run through its weaknesses and figured out the key to make the data readable. She settles into her chair and prepares for a long night. Most of it isn’t much at the beginning. Cooper had collected news articles about hacks he knew had been done by his benefactor. Most of them had been claimed by random hackers on message boards and he’d also made a record of each user’s IP address.

Most of it seems basically useless. The IP addresses lead nowhere and, most likely, the users are just amateurs who took credit when no one else did. After an hour of staring at text and following dead end leads, she feels like slamming her head repeatedly against her keyboard.

A call coming through to the emergency line pulls her out of the fog. She switches to the program monitoring it and finds a flashing red dot at a familiar address. The flag next to it reads ‘Robbery in progress’.

She knows she shouldn’t be excited about crime, but it vastly beats staring at the information on her computer screen a moment longer. She changes as quickly as she can, still zipping up her boots as she hops up the stairs. She’s pushing through the doors when she hears the sound of a motorcycle rumbling loudly around the corner.

Oliver stops the bike in front of the apartment and flips his visor up. His eyes shine even in the darkness and she realizes suddenly how much he enjoys this too. He reaches behind him and holds out a second helmet.

“You coming?” He calls over the roar of the stalled bike. Felicity bites her lip, trying to hold back her grin as she runs towards him. She tosses her hood back, glad to know there are no cameras on this street, and pulls the helmet on, wrapping her arms around Oliver’s torso.
She’s getting used to the bike, though she’s still not a fan, and it definitely takes far less time to get to Queen Consolidated than it would have if she’d been on foot. Most of the crime she deals with happens in the Glades or just outside of it. Queen Consolidated is clear on the other side of town.

“Are you sure you should be back here again?” Felicity asks as she dismounts the bike. They’ve parked it in an alley a few streets down and the dark hides them as they swap their helmets for their hoods. Oliver gives her a look, though the question had been half serious.

“We won’t have long before the police show up,” he says, leading her towards the fire escape that leads into the alley. “There’s a building next door we can use for access.”

Felicity follows after him as he vaults the wall, scurrying up it onto the fire escape. She can’t help but notice he does it with much more grace than she’s ever been able to manage. He holds an arm out for her as she follows his moves, helping lift her onto the metal platform.

She begins tapping at the small tablet on her wrist as they climb the fire escape. The emergency alert system is connected to run through her tablet as well, but she usually doesn’t need it with Curtis in her ear.

“Security pegged the intruder on the R and D floor,” she frowns. Oliver glances back, raising an eyebrow at her. She rolls her eyes. “It’s the fifteenth.”

They break through a window the same way they had at Christmas. Felicity holds tightly to Oliver and he uses his feet and momentum to break through window. It puts them a floor higher than they need to be, but Felicity immediately begins hacking the security cameras, searching for the intruder.

“You ever done that and not had the window break?” She asks offhandedly as she flips through the feed. There’s a trail of downed security guards and she figures that’s probably the best path to follow.

“Yes,” Oliver says and she can hear the smile in his voice. She lifts her wrist, holding it out for him to see, and directs him towards the stairwell. They descend, Felicity keeping an eye on the security feeds on her wrist. There’s no sign of the intruder, other than the path of destruction left behind by them.

When they reach the R&D floor, the hallway leading towards the labs is littered with security guards. Their chests move up and down and one of them groans, startling Felicity, so they’re still alive. They
just look to have been knocked out, which is a better outcome than she’d been expecting when she saw them on the cameras.

“What are they working on that would be worth this kind of assault?” Oliver asks on a gruff whisper. His body is tense, ready for a fight. His fingers flex against the staff of his bow.

She shrugs, frowning up at him. The research and development people take their confidentiality agreements very seriously. They’re really not supposed to discuss ongoing projects, even with people in other departments. Usually, she can weasel information out of Curtis, but he hadn’t mentioned anything that would warrant a break in.

He leads them down the hallway, following the trail of bodies. Felicity eyes each person on the ground, looking to make sure they appear to be breathing. There’s no obvious sign of what knocked them out, no external injuries showing themselves, no blood. It makes her even more uneasy.

Oliver holds his hand up, fingers curled into a fist, and they stop outside one of the labs. The doors are frosted, but there’s sound coming from inside. She peeks around Oliver and can see a silhouette moving around inside the lab. Oliver turns his head, meeting her eyes, and she knows what he’s gonna say before he says it. She shakes her head at him, shooting him a glare, and he sighs.

Like hell is she staying put.

He jerks his head towards the door, lifting his bow. She takes the cue, moving in front of him to grab the handle. Off his nod, she tugs the door open and he enters first. She fishes a sphere from her pocket, gripping it in her palm in preparation.

The figure stills at the sound of them entering and Oliver raises his bow, aimed at his back. Felicity freezes next to him, her grip on the sphere nearly going slack before she catches herself. The man turns slowly, holding his hands up. A device is clutched in one hand, a sphere almost identical to the one she holds in the other.

“Curtis,” she says slowly. His hands shake where he holds them, but he doesn’t back down. He looks nervous, his eyes jumping back and forth between them and his brow lightly sheened with sweat. She takes a step towards him.

“Don’t,” he says, his grip tightening on the sphere in his hand. Felicity hears Oliver draw the string on his bow back. She holds her hands up, to calm Curtis and hold Oliver back.
“Curtis, what’s going on?” She asks carefully, her gaze narrowing on the sphere in his hand. It’s one of his, but it isn’t one from her supply. The materials used to make the casing look different.

“Look, this is a modified sphere, okay?” He tells her, his voice shaking. “You come any closer you, you try to stop me from leaving, it blows us all to hell.”

Felicity frowns at him, trying to understand. It doesn’t sound like a threat. He says it the same way he does when he’s talking her into a dangerous situation over comms, laying out the threats he can see on cameras and satellite signals.

She pockets her own sphere, showing him her empty hands. Curtis is still shaking, but he lowers his hands somewhat, slipping the stolen device into the pocket of his jacket. Felicity looks back at Oliver, signalling for him to lower his bow. He hesitates, looking like he wants to argue, but knowing they don’t have time. He lowers the weapon, pulling the knocked arrow from it and shoving it back in his quiver.

“Let’s talk, okay?” Felicity says, looking back at Curtis. He frowns at her as she takes another wary step towards him. “Tell me what’s going on.”

He opens his mouth to respond, but the large glass window behind him shatters. Curtis flinches, curling into himself and Felicity turns her head, using her hood to protect from any glass. Oliver advances towards her and Curtis, but Curtis doesn’t wait for them to react.

He grabs something off a nearby table and tosses it between them. The black box hits the floor and explodes in a flash of light and a loud noise. Felicity stumbles back, slipping on the broken glass and falling. She catches herself with her palms, feeling small shards of glass embed themselves into the heels of her hands. Curtis backs towards the window, squeezing his eyes shut before jumping backwards out of it.

“Curtis!” Felicity shouts, pushing herself to her feet and running towards him as he falls. She reaches out, but he’s gone before she can grab for him. When she looks over the edge of the broken window, there’s no sign of him. Oliver comes up next to her, looking over the edge as well.

“What the hell was that?” He asks. Felicity turns to him, eyes wide.

“I have no idea.”
Felicity convinces Oliver to go back to her base rather than the club. She reminds him that she has all the information from Cooper and a better system than he does. She strips out of her coat, tossing it onto the cabinet haphazardly along with her mask and wig, and goes to Curtis’ work table.

“What are you doing?” Oliver asks as she digs through scraps of wires and computer chips. It’d be hard to tell even if something were missing. Curtis doesn’t appear to have an obvious system for his materials, at least not one that makes sense to Felicity.

“That sphere he had, it didn’t look like one of mine,” she explains, picking through pieces. There’s a cabinet next to his desk that stores larger materials and she moves to it, pulling open drawers and picking through them. “The casing wasn’t made from any material I’ve ever seen Curtis use.”

“Felicity, he broke into Queen Consolidated and threatened to kill us,” Oliver reminds her, sounding frustrated. “Are you really surprised he may have used materials you don’t know about?”

“I don’t think he was threatening us,” she says, crouching down to check the bottom drawer of the cabinet. Still nothing that resembles the material Curtis’ sphere had been made of.

“So, threatening to blow us up was - what?” Oliver bites sarcastically. “A joke between friends?”

“I don’t know,” Felicity groans, standing back up. She presses her hands down on top of the cabinet in frustration and hisses at the glass digging into her skin through her gloves. Oliver doesn’t miss the sound, coming up behind her.

“Let me see your hands,” he instructs, gently tugging her arm to turn her to face him. She pouts down at her hands, still covered by her gloves.

“I’m fine,” she says, earning a look from Oliver. He takes one of her hands in his, peeling the leather glove off of her hand. Most of the glass hadn’t broken through the heavy material, but she feels the pull of larger pieces being removed from her skin along with the glove. Inspecting her bare palm, Oliver switches to the other hand and removes that glove as well.
“Do you have a first aid kit?” He asks, lifting her hands to inspect the specs of blood beginning to form now that the glass has been removed. More of the glass had broken through than she’d realized and she figures, along with a new wig, she’ll need to order a new pair of gloves soon.

“Top drawer,” she says, indicating to the cabinet where she’d tossed her gear. Oliver retrieves it, picking through it as he walks back to her. He sets it down next to her on Curtis’ table and pulls out an alcohol wipe.

“You need a better one,” he admonishes, frowning down at her, admittedly small, first aid kit. Felicity closes her eyes, trying not to be annoyed with his priorities at the moment. Her hands will be fine, what she needs is to get into QC’s system and delete the footage of Curtis before the police can get to it. She needs to figure out why her best friend almost blew them up and jumped out a window.

She hisses as Oliver wipes the pad over her hands, pulling her back to the present. He offers a quiet apology, using gentle swipes to clear the blood from her skin. More forms again in its wake and she sighs. Tossing the used alcohol pad aside, Oliver fishes out a cotton wrap and begins to wrap the heel of her hand with it.

The gentleness of the gesture shouldn’t surprise her, Oliver has never been rough with her when she didn’t want him to be. But, he’s still decked out in his suit, the hood pulled back and grease paint smeared over his eyes. Expecting this gentleness from Oliver is one thing, but expecting it from the vigilante? She hasn’t gotten used to that yet.

He secures the bandage, the pads of his fingers stroking over her palm. Felicity can feel the familiar callouses there. She’d never questioned them, too wrapped up in the feel of him, but now she knows they’re from the string of his bow. He must not use gloves all the time.

She pulls her hands away from his, the warmth of his hands leaving hers cold even with the wrapped bandages. She murmurs a thank you, looking down at her hands rather than up into his face. She can feel his eyes on her as he steps away from her, taking himself out of her space.

“I need to delete the security footage from tonight,” she says, stepping away from the table and around Oliver to reach her computers. He follows after her.


“Because chances are someone would be able to ID Curtis off of them,” she says, like it’s obvious,
and drops down in front of her monitors. She moves all of the information from Cooper onto one screen and works on hacking into the Queen Consolidated security’s server. Being that she helped build most of the security, it’s not hard to do.

“Isn’t that a good thing?” He asks, clearly frustrated with her. “Felicity, you’re acting like he didn’t just commit a crime.”

She spins in her chair, giving him a hard look. He still has a bullet wound in his shoulder from his mother, and is convinced of her innocence, so he doesn’t get to be annoyed that she’s trying to protect her friend.

“You don’t know him, Oliver,” she bites. “This isn’t Curtis and he wouldn’t be doing this by choice.”

“You can’t know that for sure,” he argues. She ignores him, spinning back to the computers and pulling up the security feeds. She scrolls through the data lines, looking for the timestamp from earlier that evening.

“That’s weird,” she frowns, pulling the feeds up through a different channel and double checking. She feels Oliver at her back, leaning over her chair. “Someone else already deleted the footage.”

It could have been Curtis, potentially, but it’s unlikely he could have done it so quickly. Felicity had helped build a lot of the server’s security, so she knows its weaknesses and entry points. Curtis is a good hacker, but he wouldn’t be as familiar with the system as she is. It would have taken him longer.

Unless, someone had already made themselves a path into the server and was prepared to use it to delete the footage. They’d have left a trace, no matter how good they are, and she can find it. She follows the trail, locating their entry point. She rolls her chair, grabbing her purse from under the desk and pulling out the drive she’d saved all the information about the hack on the firewall onto.

“Son of a bitch,” she hisses as she pulls the data up. The information from Cooper is pulled up on the screen to her left, the entry point from the security footage on her right, and the info security had given her after the hacks to her portion of the firewall in the center.

“What?” Oliver asks, frowning and leaning in closer. She scans her gaze across the three monitors, noting the similarities between the three different sets of data.
“It’s a common signature,” she says quietly, more to herself than him. Shaking herself out of it, she indicates the different screens as she explains it to him. “This is the code from whoever hacked the security feed earlier, this is the information Cooper gave me, and that’s the information security at QC gave me after someone orchestrated a targeted hack on my portion of the new firewall.”

“Okay,” Oliver says slowly, nodding. “And?”

“It’s all the same person,” she says. She prods at one of the screens a little rougher than she means to her in her excitement at having cracked something. It’s not really an answer, but it’s a start. “All of their code was written in a distinct way. Like an accent. It’s surprisingly old fashioned.”

“Can you find the person from it?” He asks. Felicity shrugs, chewing on her lip and staring at the center screen.

“Maybe,” she sighs. “But, first, we need to find Curtis.”

Oliver’s expression tells her he disagrees, but she can see defeat there as well and knows he’s not going to fight her on it any further. He sighs, grumbling about needing to head back and check in with John. She waves him away, a little dismissively, already burying herself in searching for Curtis. She barely registers it when he leaves.

Tracking his phone seems like the obvious option, which is why she figures it’ll be a bust. Still, she tries it just in case. When it doesn’t lead anywhere, she uses a description of his car to check street cameras and hacks the S.T.A.R Labs satellite to use facial recognition to look for him throughout Starling.

In the meantime, she buries herself further in the information Cooper had given her. Knowing that, whoever the benefactor is, they’ve now gone after Curtis, which officially puts them at the top of her shit list. The facial recognition lights up with a match just as the emergency alert system starts flashing at her.

Flipping between the two, she spots Curtis on a street camera outside of the address lighting up on the emergency system. The doors to the building are on an automatic lock, but they open for him and he disappears inside. Switching tactics, Felicity looks up the address and finds the company. She works on breaking into the server and accessing the security cameras inside. Instead of tracking Curtis’ movements, she searches for the tracks of a second hacker.
“They’re watching him,” she murmurs to herself, scrambling to find her phone. She runs over to Curtis’ work table, a plan forming in her mind as she waits for Oliver to pick up. She wraps a wire around her finger and searches for a power source, something moderately heavy duty.

“What did you find?” Oliver asks when he picks up. Felicity sets the items aside and crosses to her own cabinet instead, pulling her coat back on.

“A break in at Kord Enterprises,” she explains, tugging her gloves on over the bandages Oliver had applied. “It’s Curtis.”

“I don’t know that you can see objectively on this one,” he comments and she nearly drops the phone, surprised at the hypocrisy in the statement.

“Like how you could see clearly with your mother?” She bites back, but pushes on before he can respond. “I have a plan, okay? It’s just not a good one.”

After a beat, Oliver asks, “What is it?”

“I need you to kill him.”

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Felicity can’t help but feel bad as Curtis slumps to the floor, an arrow protruding from his shoulder. He’s definitely going to have a hard time forgiving her for this one, but she figures it could have been worse. He’s lucky, frankly, that she knows who the vigilante is now. He could have ended up with a real arrow.

She runs to him as he falls, shouting for him and falling to her knees on the floor next to him. Firstly, she wants to make sure he’s fully knocked out, but she also really needs to sell his death. Bending over him, she keeps her back to the camera behind them and presses a command on her wrist. The feeds cut out and she falls back onto her heels.

“They’re gonna be trying to get the cameras back online,” she says and Oliver nods crossing over to her and Curtis’ prone form. “We need to get him out of here quickly.”
Oliver doesn’t really need her help to lift Curtis, so instead she focuses on keeping the cameras down. She’s sure the benefactor will want to confirm Curtis is down, so she knows the cameras will come back up eventually. She just wants to make sure they use the path that will lead them into the trojan she’d hidden.

John waits in the alley next to the building in a large black van. Oliver loads Curtis into the back, a matt waiting on the floor which Felicity had insisted on. She’d like to avoid Curtis sustaining any injuries as best she can. She directs John to the base, keeping an eye on her wrist tablet.

She’s blocked all other access points, so the only way back into the system is through her well placed trap. Hopefully, the benefactor cares enough about Curtis’ status to keep trying. They went to a lot of trouble to specifically pick Cooper and Curtis in an effort to target her. She doubts they’d give up now.

She presses her thumb against the keypad and waves Oliver down the stairs, carrying Curtis to the basement below. John ventures after, but Felicity doesn’t have time to worry about him. He’s kept Oliver secret this long, at least. Her focus is still tied to her tablet and only shifts once she reaches her computers in the basement and can take over from there.

“So, this dude is…,” John starts leadingly and Felicity figures he’s indicating to Curtis who is still knocked out, now laying across his own work table. She doubts Oliver took the time to move the wires and leftover casings from it.

“Fine,” Oliver says, sounding at least a bit offended by the question. Felicity finishes what she’s been trying to do and spins in her chair to face them.

“We should wake him up,” she says, pulling her hood down and pulling her mask over her head. “Any ideas on how to do that?”

Oliver releases a heavy sigh, pulling his hood back over his head. Felicity frowns at the move, surprised Curtis’ ability to keep her secret isn’t enough to make Oliver trust him. He’d told John about her, after all. He presses two fingers against a spot on Curtis’ neck and he sits up suddenly, gasping awake.

Felicity pushes herself out of her chair and crosses to him. She wraps her hands around his forearm, squeezing gently and hoping to help ground him in his new surroundings. He looks around wide-eyed, his eyes falling on Oliver who has moved away, trying to conceal his face under his hood.
“He shot me,” Curtis accuses, whipping back around to look at Felicity.

“Yes, technically, but it was actually the electrocution that knocked you out,” she explains, cringing at Curtis’ expression. “Which, I realize now, does not… does not sound better.”

“You should have just let me finish what I was doing,” Curtis bites, trying to get off of the table. Felicity puts a hand on his shoulder, trying to keep him in place, but he bats her away.

“Hey, you could show a little gratitude,” she frowns. “We were trying to save you.”

“It’s not me I’m worried about,” he counters, looking back around the room. His eyes land on John, but quickly jump to Oliver instead. He frowns at him. “And, we?”

“It’s a long story,” she deflects, her concern more on Curtis’ suggestion that he wasn’t the one in trouble. “When you say you aren’t the one you’re worried about…, Paul?”

Curtis nods, worry creasing his brow as he looks back at her instead of Oliver. He lifts his hand to the spot on his shoulder where his shirt is torn from the arrow and rubs it gently. There’d been no way to keep it from piercing his skin altogether, so she figures he’s probably got a wound of some sort.

“We were coming back from France and, I’m not sure what exactly happened,” he recalls, frowning at the gaps in his memory. “One minute we were in the back of a cab, the next thing I knew, Paul was gone and I had some guy in my ear telling me to do what he said or he’d kill him.”

“Sounds like you were drugged,” John comments, arms crossed over his chest. Curtis swings around at his voice, eyeing him warily.

“Sorry, who are you?” He asks. John raises an eyebrow, but Felicity cuts him off before he can answer.

“Curtis, we’re gonna get Paul back, okay?” She assures him, reaching forward to wrap her fingers around his wrist and squeeze it. “I need you to trust me.”
“No, no, Felicity, the best way for us to get Paul back is for me to do what this guy says,” Curtis argues.

“You mean go back to robbing companies with high end security and armed guards?” She asks.
“Absolutely not. Look, I tagged the guy, okay? He walked right into a trojan when he tried to get the cameras back on. I can track him.”

She turns from Curtis, crossing back to the computer. She’s already got an approximate location for the source of the signal, which means she can narrow it down further while she and Oliver are in route. She pulls up the map, a green triangle shrinking on the screen in the area of the signal and motions towards it for Curtis to see.

“John’s gonna stay with you while, uh,” she halts, looking over at Oliver, catching herself at the near slip. “While we go find this guy. We’re gonna bring Paul back, I promise.”

“I’m going with you,” Curtis says, hopping fully off the work table this time. A few wires go skittering to the floor as he drags them with him. Felicity shakes her head, holding out a comm for him.

“Stay here,” she insists. “Watch the system and let me know if anything changes.”

He looks like he’s going to argue, but Felicity doesn’t give him a chance. She places the comm on the table next to him and crosses to Oliver, leaving Curtis behind with John.

“Have we met before?” She hears Curtis ask John as she and Oliver head up the stairs.

“No,” John replies shortly.

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When they get to the building, it’s just an empty warehouse. There’s the remains of a computer system, hastily removed, left on one of the walls. In the middle of the room, Paul is slumped in a metal chair, his arms tied behind him. Felicity runs towards him, pulling off one of her gloves to press her fingers against his pulse point, searching for a beat. When she finds it, she falls back on her
“Curtis, I’ve got Paul,” she says, pressing her finger to her ear and clicking the comm on. “He’s knocked out, but.”

“Don’t worry,” a heavily modulated voice booms, startling Felicity back to her feet. “He’ll be fine. It’s not your friend’s fault you intervened. Seemed harsh to punish him for it.”

Felicity stumbles back from Paul, satisfied when she sees his chest lift and fall with breath. Oliver is behind her and she feels him moving, searching for the source of the voice. He prods her arm, pointing towards a speaker left connected to the ceiling in the corner of the room.

“Can you track it?” He asks. Felicity is already tapping at the tablet on her wrist, working to isolate the server the speaker is working off of.

“Oh, don’t bother with that,” the voice contests. “I won’t be fooled twice. Though, I must admit, that was very clever leading me right into your trojan like that.”

“Why don’t you come out of hiding and I’ll show you how I did it?” She comments, ignoring his suggestion that she not try to track him. He laughs at the comment, the sound too loud in the empty room.

“All in due time, I’m sure, Felicity,” he says and she flinches at the use of her name. Oliver tenses behind her, shooting her a look. “In the meantime, you should probably get your friend’s husband home.”

As if on cue, Paul groans behind her. There’s a sound of feedback as the speaker cuts out and she doesn’t need to check the wires to know it’s been fried. She turns to Paul instead, clicking on her voice modulator. Oliver pulls a barb off of his wrist and cuts through the ropes.

“You’re safe now,” she assures him. Curtis says he’s calling for an ambulance to meet them in her ear as Paul blinks up at her, trying to get his bearings. She looks over at Oliver who tilts his head in indication they shouldn’t stick around. “An ambulance will be here soon.”

She moves to step away from him, already feeling awful for leaving him there. Paul stops her.
“My husband,” he rasps, voice sore from disuse. She wonders if the benefactor had kept him in a permanent drugged state this whole time. The hospital will need to check him for lasting damage.

“He’s fine,” she assures him, wishing she could say more to ease his mind. Instead, she lets Oliver lead her from the building and back to his bike. Curtis tells her he’s going to wait for Paul at the hospital. She figures it’s for the best he isn’t at the base when she gets back, she has a few things to figure out.

One thing she knows for sure, the Benefactor is going to regret coming after people she loves.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, you all know I love the feedback on this fic. It's officially my longest fic as well as my most reviewed/kudos fic. Which is awesome!!

But I couldn't help but feel a bit of lack of faith at the response to the last chapter. This fic still exists within the confines of s1, which means that, yes, Oliver and Laurel are both still dealing with their unhealthy (imo) lingering feelings and their lack of closure. There's a line in this chapter about Felicity loving Cooper in the way that people always love their first loves. That's true for Oliver and Laurel as well. (If it wasn't clear from the narrative I've been trying to build, this is a very pro-Laurel story and I'll never forgive the writers for how dirty they did her.)

That said, Oliver's feelings for Felicity are progressing much quicker than in canon - something the story will deal with in the coming chapters. So, trust me just a bit. I wouldn't do you guys dirty! <33
A hostage taking jewel thief rolls into town as Oliver and Felicity butt heads over their methods.

Guys, I love this chapter. Is that egotistical? It's probably because Dodger is easily one of my favorite season 1 eps, but this chapter also took on a bit of a life of its own as I was writing it. I think those are my favorite chapters. I don't want to hype it up too much, though, I just really hope you guys enjoy this chapter too. (Like, I'm definitely gonna kick myself for publishing at 12am, but I wanted to publish asap.)

Takes place during 1.15 "Dodger"

When Felicity gets back to the base it's empty. Curtis has left for the hospital and John probably took off not long after. Oliver had offered to go to the hospital with her, but she'd told him he should go home.

Now, the silence is deafening in the wake of her decision. She'll have to get used to the empty base. Curtis isn't going to like it, but she's not going to risk him or Paul anymore.

She changes and heads to the hospital, bracing herself the whole way. It takes her longer than she'd like to find someone who actually knows where Paul's room is. Curtis is inside, sitting next to Paul with one of his hands held between both of his own. Paul snoozes, an IV attached to his arm, but otherwise he doesn't seem any worse for wear.

Felicity lingers in the doorway, not wanting to intrude, but Curtis spots her anyway. He lets go of Paul's hand, placing it gently on the bed, and leaves his chair to meet her. He waves, leading her back out into the hallway rather than into the room.

"Sorry," he apologizes, shooting a glance back into the room. "They said to let him sleep."

"No, it's fine," Felicity assures him, waving a hand dismissively. "How is he? He seemed out of it when we got there. I thought he may have been continuously drugged to keep him unconscious."

"Yeah," Curtis nods, frowning down at his shoes. He hasn't changed out of his ripped shirt from earlier, but a jacket covers the tear left behind by Oliver's arrow. "They said it was just a run of the mill sedative in his system. There shouldn't be any lasting damage. He's mostly just dehydrated, so they wanted to keep him overnight to get fluids into his system."

Felicity nods, looking through the doorway to where Paul lies. He looks small and pale framed by the hospital room and her stomach churns at the thought of how much worse it could be. A thought
occurs to her, and she figures she should ask about it now before she upsets Curtis.

“That sphere you had,” she starts and Curtis is already nodding. There’s trepidation in the movement, but also a level of excitement. Leave it to Curtis to be excited about some tech that could have killed them all.

“I don’t know how he got it,” he explains. “It was one of mine, but completely modified. It must have been an older one, because he modified the explosive glitch to make it lethal and under his control. It also worked like a taser, that’s how I took out all of the guards. It just zapped them.”

Felicity frowns, worried that maybe she’s been underestimating this guy. If he could take Curtis’ tech and turn it against them, it didn’t bode well. It meant he wasn’t just devious, he was smart. She’d seen his hacking skills and, old fashioned they may be, they got the job done.

Worse, she knew how he got the sphere. If it was one of the old ones, there was only one explanation. It was the one she’d ditched at the hotel the night she’d gone after Deadshot. She’d been in such a hurry to avoid the police and the vigilante’s ire at the time, she’d just left it in the windowsill. It’s hard to say how the benefactor would have known, but he’s been one step ahead of her this entire time. First with Cooper and now using Curtis. It was only a matter of time before he decided to go to more extreme measures to get her attention and she wasn’t going to wait around for him to do so.

“Listen, Curtis, I’ve been thinking,” she starts quietly, glancing around furtively. She wants to be sure they won’t be overheard, but she also can’t look him in the eye at the moment. “Tonight was all my fault and it could have ended much worse.”

“Yeah,” he agrees slowly, looking like he already knows what she’s going to say. “But it didn’t.”

“But it could have,” she repeats. “And, I’m not willing to risk you or Paul again just because I decided to play hero. I know the risks and I signed up for this, but I didn’t expect it to extend to you.”

“I signed up for it, too,” Curtis frowns, his brow furrowing in annoyance. “I chose to help you and you don’t get to rescind that invite just because things get scary.”

“Curtis, this isn’t up for debate, okay?” She bites, wishing he would just understand where she’s coming from. “You have so much more to lose than I do, don’t you understand? This is my burden, my vigilantism, my choice.”

“That’s not how this works,” he argues, but she steps back. She’s tired and the guilt is sitting on her chest, from the night’s events, from the need to do this. She’d rather he be angry at her for making this decision for him than dead.

“It is, actually,” she sighs, pulling away from him. “I’m hoping you’ll understand eventually, but this is for the best.”

He’s fuming, she can tell, but the guilt is eating away at her and she can’t stand to continue the conversation. Instead, she turns from him and heads down the hall. The urge to look back, to beg him to understand, is nearly overwhelming, but she doesn’t.

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Felicity hasn’t subsisted on this little sleep since college. After her conversation with Curtis, she’d had trouble actually giving into her exhaustion and then had had to be up the next morning for work. It’s put her in a bad mood.
She wishes she hadn’t agreed to come work in the foundry with Oliver and John on Walter’s disappearance rather than in her own base. At the time, the idea of sitting in the empty base without Curtis’ consistently excited energy had been so unappealing, she would have agreed to work at Big Belly Burger if it had been offered. Now, though, the idea of some time to herself sounds like paradise.

Oliver has been training on a dummy for the past ten minutes and every slam of the bamboo stick against the wooden dummy is overly loud in the dark basement. She tries to keep her focus on the computer screens and not Oliver’s sweaty, half naked form a few feet in front of her. She doesn’t know if he’s doing it on purpose, but she knows at the moment she’s more annoyed than turned on.

“You might want to take it easy if you plan on taking someone off that list tonight,” John comments, a few feet from Oliver. He’s got his own bamboo stick in his hands, but had bowed out of the workout before Oliver.

“This is me taking it easy,” he responds, breaking the bamboo stick over one of the arms of the dummy. Felicity just resists the urge to roll her eyes at the move, focusing back in on the information on Walter’s disappearance she has up on the screen.

“So, who’s our lucky guy tonight?” John asks as Oliver pulls a black t-shirt on.

“Ken Williams,” he says and Felicity immediately latches onto the name. She begins a search for the man as Oliver continues, “His pyramid scheme stole millions. People didn’t just lose their homes, their lives were ruined.”

She finds the basics, driver’s license, commencement letter from Starling City University. His dating profile gives her pause as she skims the information. He talks about how he spends most of his time with his son and she frowns.

“Why don’t you two call it in early tonight,” he suggests, grabbing his green leather jacket off one of the tables. “I’m not expecting much trouble.”

Felicity spins slightly in her chair as he passes her, watching as he grabs his bow and quiver. He pulls the hood on as he heads for the door that leads out into the alley and she spins back to the computer. She glances furtively at Diggle, but he isn’t paying her any attention, and hits the command to lock the door and override the keypad.

She doesn’t know what she expects to happen, exactly, but she hears Oliver try the code twice, the metal of the door shaking as he tugs at it.

“Felicity!” He calls and she flinches. She can hear his footsteps against the concrete as he comes back to the main area, towards her. “Did you just-”

“Computer override your lock,” she supplies, spinning in the computer chair to face him. It’s one thing for him to tower over her in a normal conversation, but dressed in his gear and clearly annoyed, it makes her feel tiny. “Maybe a little.”

“What are you doing?” He asks, sounding more surprised than angry. She supposes that might be a good thing. Maybe he’ll actually listen to her.

“I pulled up some information on Williams,” she explains, sitting up a little in her seat. She shifts forward so she’s on the edge of the chair and gestures towards the computer behind her. “Did you know he’s a widowed father of a ten-year-old boy?”

Oliver gives her an exasperated look. She doesn’t understand how he isn’t getting this. She isn’t here
for his war or his crusade, or however he’s classifying it. She’s not going to be party to him taking parents away from their children, no matter how bad of people they may be.

“I told you,” she says. “I’m only in this to help Walter, not to be an accessory to orphaning little kids.”

“I’m just giving him a warning,” he argues, but Felicity has seen his warnings and she’s seen what he’s capable of when people don’t take them seriously. Nothing good has ever been accomplished by use of fear and intimidation, they have to be better than the people they’re fighting, don’t they?

“Has it ever occurred to you that you could do some real good in this city?” She asks, moving her hands around passionately. “Beyond just recovering people’s stock portfolios and their saving accounts.”

Oliver leans forward, putting himself squarely in her space. He’s radiating with annoyance as he reaches around her to press a key on the computer. She hears the sound of the lock sliding back into place as he leans close to her.

“You’re not the only one who knows how to reboot my system,” he reminds her in a low voice. It’s an intimidation tactic, not an intimate gesture, and she resents that he’d even attempt it on her. She shakes her head, breaking eye contact with him.

“I made a mistake,” she says slowly and Oliver cuts her off.

“Getting in my way?” He asks. “I don’t disagree.”

“No,” she bites, leaning forward in an attempt to use his own tactic against him. He leans back as she leans forward, giving a small amount of space. She pushes herself out of the computer chair, but he doesn’t move any further and now she’s firmly in his space, her heels putting her nearly eye level with him. “Signing on with you. Even provisionally.”

She rounds him, heading instead for the door that he’s just unlocked. Behind her, she swears she hears John chuckle, but she doesn’t look back to check. Instead she tugs the metal door open and heads out of it. Her Mini Cooper is parked next to the town car Oliver and John had arrived in, Oliver’s bike in between the two vehicles.

Once she’s outside, she realizes that in her annoyance she’s left her jacket in the club. Her pride refuses to let her go back for it, so she heads instead for her car. At the least, she’d managed to grab her bag from under the desk before leaving.

She heads for the base, happy to get some time alone. The anger and adrenaline are mixing in her system and making her feel restless. She itches to get into her gear and find some low-life to take to task.

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Felicity is honestly wondering if her ability to get a full night of sleep is something she’s given up entirely. Work the next morning is an exercise in the world’s most boring form of torture. She’s spent more time walking back and forth to the coffee machine than she actually has at her desk. A book she’d ordered on cryptology a while back - before she’d realized what the names in the book were and had thought they might be a form of code - finally shows up.

She’d ordered it to Queen Consolidated and, though it seems useless now, goes up to the lobby to sign for it. It’s the only thing she’s ordered, so she knows what it is even before she sees the small package. She tears it open in the elevator as she heads back to her office, pulling the book out and
discarding the packaging. She leafs through it as she walks down the hall, pausing at the sound of voices coming from her office.

She sighs, returning to her leisurely pace. She can’t say she didn’t see this coming.

Felicity rounds the corner into her office and finds John and Oliver standing on either side of the open door. She gives Oliver a look as she passes between the men, closing the book in her hands and setting it down when she reaches the desk.

“I had a bet going with myself on how quickly you two would visit,” she comments, rounding her desk and giving them a dark smirk. “Looks like I won.”

“Actually, Felicity, I was hoping that I could get you to change your mind,” Oliver explains as she takes her seat. He crosses the room so he’s standing in front of her desk and she frowns up at him. Before she can ask which part of this whole mess, exactly, he was hoping to change her mind on, he continues in what would almost be an apology if he were actually trying, “I was worked up on adrenaline last night, and I didn’t exactly put my best foot forward.”

“You’re going with adrenaline?” She asks incredulously, because she’s seen him worked up by a lot of different brain chemicals, but they’ve never made him snap at her before. Then again, the Hood had snapped at her plenty.

“I was hoping you’d give me a second chance,” he presses on, ignoring the bite in her words. It’s an effort of herculean strength to keep her mouth shut and not comment on the different kinds of second chance he could mean. He must see it, though, because he amends, “Give the team a second chance.”

“How about you start with Ken Williams?” She suggests. “Did he also get to enjoy your adrenaline last night?”

“No, he returned the money that he stole just in time to put his son to bed,” Oliver says, pausing to give her a meaningful look. “Like I said, Felicity, just a warning.”

John nods behind him and she remembers what he’d told her after Oliver got shot. How helping him makes John feel like he’s doing something good, something worthwhile again. A familiar voice coming from one of her computer monitors pulls both her and Oliver’s attention. McKenna Hall is on the screen, speaking to reporters about a current case. A jewel thief who’s brought his charms to Starling City.

“At this time, we’d like to remind the public that we are coordinating our efforts with Interpol, as the Dodger operates primarily in Europe,” she tells the grouping of reporters, managing to avoid looking directly at the camera. “And they have advised us to warn the public that he is to be considered armed and extremely dangerous.”

“You know, I heard about this guy,” John says, speaking over the volume of her monitor. Felicity presses the volume controls, lowering it for him. “They call him the Dodger because he avoids getting his hands dirty. He uses hostages to do his stealing for him.”

“How?” Oliver asks, frowning. Felicity gets the feeling she doesn’t want to know the answer to that question.

“Puts a bomb collar around their necks,” John explains and she stares up at him in surprise and horror. She can feel Oliver’s eyes on her as he listens to John’s explanation. “Last year, a guy in Madrid didn’t steal what the Dodger told him to, and it took his head off. Literally.”
“And now the psycho’s in Starling City,” Felicity comments, looking back to the monitor where the news continues on the story quietly. She can’t help her mocking tone as she continues, “It’s too bad his name’s not in your notebook.”

Oliver leans forward a bit, pulling her attention to him, and gives her something like a pleading look.

“You should know that not all the people that I target are on the list.” he reminds her and she feels a little contrite at it. They’ve been working together for a while without knowing it and she knows he’s trying his best, even if it’s not in ways she approves of. “Every once in a while, I make an exception. A hostage-taking jewel thief, for example.”

He and John share a look that gives her a tone of approval. This is how Oliver is going to apologize to her, she realizes, by trying to show her that he does some good, too. She tilts her head at him as his eyes return to her.

“So, how about you help us take him down?” He asks.

She looks back to the monitor where the news has switched to a commercial for a local mattress store. She sits up in her chair and looks between the men instead, nodding.

“Where do you two usually start?” She asks.

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They convince her to let them take her to lunch. It’s probably a good thing because she hasn’t been the best at remembering to eat lately, with everything else going on she’s been having more late night snacks than she’s proud of. They end up at Big Belly Burger and she makes a mental note to buy a lot of vegetables the next time she goes grocery shopping. All of this fast food is definitely going to catch up to her.

Oliver waits until they’ve ordered their drinks before he starts talking about the case. Felicity is still waiting on sugar for her coffee, but Oliver usually drinks it black and John seems to be content with just some cream. Felicity barely likes coffee to begin with, but it’s necessary for her to function, so she needs to at least make it taste good.

“So, to catch this guy,” Oliver starts from his side of the booth. Felicity had squeezed in first and, after a short non-verbal conversation, John had slid in next to her. She’d decided not to comment. “We need to either figure out where he is, or where he’s going to be.”

“How is this really how you guys figure out how to get your target?” Felicity asks, looking towards John next to her. They need to stop treating her like she’s never done this before. “Over burgers and shakes?”

Oliver gives her look and she smirks at him, John’s attention pulled by the waitress as she returns. Felicity recognizes her suddenly - the woman from the armored car heists. That answers that question, but also brings up about a billion more about her relationship to the heists or John. She’d introduced herself to Felicity when they’d sat down, but the recognition didn’t hit until now.

“Sorry it took me so long,” she apologizes, setting the sugar dispenser down on the table. Felicity gives her a smile, reaching around John to grab it. “I’m waiting on a bunch of particularly rowdy customers.”

John is looking back at the table in question where Felicity can hear what she’s sure is teenagers shouting and screwing around. He looks back at Carly as Felicity puts her focus on pouring an unhealthy amount of sugar into her coffee mug. She feels the familiar burn of Oliver’s judgement -
the same way he reacts every time he watches her make herself a cup of coffee.

“You need me to handle that?” John asks.

Felicity looks up, meeting Oliver’s eyes and raising an eyebrow at him as she stirs her coffee. He shakes his head at her, amusement tilting the corners of his lips. The last time they’d bickered playfully over her coffee habits, he’d spent the night at her place and gotten up early to make them breakfast. She’d woken to the smell of pancake batter and found him standing shirtless in front of her stove.

“I appreciate it,” Carly says, breaking Felicity out of her memories. She breaks her gaze with Oliver to look over at the exchange happening next to her instead. Carly is grinning brightly at John’s offer. “But I’m a pro by now.”

“I’ll be here if you need me,” John tells her as she turns to leave, giving him one last appreciative smile.

“Girlfriend?” Felicity asks once she’s out of earshot.

“No, it’s my sister-in-law,” he corrects which makes Felicity frown. That was definitely flirting. She may have been a little rusty before she met Oliver, but she’s still pretty good at spotting it when it doesn’t involve her. “Sort of.”

Felicity’s eyes widen at the addition and she’s about to press for more information, because she’s still her, when Oliver fills her in for John.

“Carly was married to Dig’s brother,” he explains. “And, he passed away.”

“Well,” she starts, hoping she isn’t overstepping her bounds. She nudges John playfully with her shoulder, just in case. “Looks like she’s hot for you.”

His head shoots up as she clicks her tongue and gives him a teasing wink. He looks at Oliver with a smile that lets her know she hasn’t pushed too far.

“Can we get back to crime fighting, please?” He asks, turning his head to give her a look. It’s not too serious, though, so she laughs a little to herself, lifting her coffee mug to her lips.

“Actually, Dig,” Oliver says. “I was thinking, you probably should ask her out.”

“Really?” John responds, leaning forward on the table on challenge. Oliver hums in the affirmative. “You two are gonna try and give me relationship advice?”

He glances between her and Oliver with the statement. She knows he doesn’t mean it rudely, his tone is still playful, but that doesn’t mean it doesn’t feel like salt in the wound. Oliver ducks his head, avoiding both of their gazes, but Felicity turns herself almost fully to face John.

“You don’t pull punches do you?” She asks and, from his expression, she can tell he’s going to try and apologize, so she continues instead, “You know, it’s kind of a testament to our relationship that Oliver and I made it work for as long as we did while both secretly running around behind each others back with each other.”

John grins at her in surprise and she even hears Oliver give a quiet chuckle. It’s the most any of them have acknowledged the tension between her and Oliver since she started working with them and it lifts something from her chest. It’s not like it’s all magically going to fix itself, but there’s something cathartic about joking about it.
“So, maybe you should listen to us,” she concludes, lifting her mug back up and taking another sip of her coffee. She raises an eyebrow in challenge at him and John looks to Oliver as if for help dealing with her. Instead, Oliver smirks at him.

“I don’t see you asking Carly out,” he points out. After a second of final contemplation, John slides out of the booth. Felicity watches him head over towards where Carly is moving about behind the bar, clearing plates and glasses.

“Felicity,” Oliver says softly and she jerks back around to face him. She sets her mug down and laces her fingers together under her chin. “This guy, he’s targeting a very specific type of jewel. We figure out why and that’ll give us the how to catch him.”

“I have an idea,” she says and he nods, prompting her to continue. “You know Mckenna Hall, right?”

“The detective on the Dodger case, yeah,” he nods, frowning at her.

“Potentially,” she says, leadingly. “We could slip some tech onto her phone, turn her phone into a micro transmitter so we’ll learn everything she knows.”

Oliver seems to consider it for a moment.

“I know McKenna,” he admits, and Felicity decides not to mention that she already knows that. “I could probably make up an excuse and get something onto her phone.”

“That’s the funny part, actually,” she says, hiding her mouth behind her hands sheepishly. “I kind of already bugged her phone about a week ago.”

“You bugged a police detectives phone?” He asks, raising an eyebrow at her. She drops her hands to the table, leaning forward towards him.

“Is that judgement I’m hearing?” She asks and Oliver surprises her, grinning at her.

“I’m impressed, actually,” he tells her and she meets his smile with one of her own. “And a little bit scared of you.”

She knows he’s teasing her, but she shoots him a wink anyway.

“Oh, you absolutely should be.”

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After work, Felicity changes into a pair of workout leggings and a tank top and heads to CNRI to meet Laurel. They had made plans to workout after they were both finished with their work days and, after the realization that she’d eaten fast food almost exclusively all week, Felicity felt like she really owed it to herself.

She parks on the street across from the law office and heads inside. Towards the back of the main room, she spots Laurel and Thea chatting over a large stack of files in Laurel’s arms. She holds them out to Thea who looks less than enthused to take the work on.

“You know, I was robbed today,” Thea says, the words directed at Felicity as she joins them. She takes the files from Laurel with a measure of attitude. “Somehow that was only the second worst part of my day.”
Felicity gives her a sympathetic grimace while Laurel directs a tired look her way. Clearly the women’s ideals are clashing. Laurel sighs as Thea starts to head away from them, the files wrapped in her arms.

“It’s been an interesting day,” Laurel tells her and Felicity nods in understanding. Laurel redirects her attention to Thea, calling out to stop her. “Thea, listen, I’m heading out for the day, so I can’t really expect you to stay. Why don’t you go ahead and call Oliver to pick you up?”

Thea nods, excitement coloring her features at the prospect of getting to go home. Laurel asks Felicity to hang out while she changes clothes, so she lingers by her desk. She can hear Thea chatting with Oliver on the phone behind her.

“So, what’s going on with you and Oliver?” Thea asks, coming around Laurel’s desk and startling Felicity. She frowns in confusion and the younger girl rolls her eyes. “I’m not stupid. One day he’s all smiley and lovestruck, a week goes by and suddenly he’s back to his dark, broodiness. What gives?”

“It’s kind of complicated,” Felicity sighs. She had been hoping to avoid this conversation. Within a week of promising Thea she wasn’t planning to hurt Oliver she’d broken up with him. Sort of. They still really haven’t discussed their relationship limbo.

“That’s just what people say when they don’t want to talk about it,” Thea points out, crossing her arms over her chest. “Lucky for me, I’m terrible at doing what people want. So, what did he do?”

“He didn’t,” Felicity starts, trying not to be frustrated at Thea’s prodding. “We both kind of screwed it up. I’m not just saying it’s complicated because I don’t want to talk about it, I mean I don’t, but it’s also just genuinely complicated. And, honestly, I’m still trying to figure it out.”

“What happened to all that stuff you said at my party?” Thea asks, frowning sympathetically at her. “All that gross, romantic crap about trusting him.”

Felicity pouts at Thea’s characterization of her words. She hadn’t seemed to dislike them when she’d said them at her party. The woman’s been having a long few weeks, though, so she’ll cut her some slack. She gets it, too, Oliver may be a little overprotective when it comes to his younger sister, but Thea can be protective of him, too. She doesn’t want to see him get hurt and had told Felicity as much. And then Felicity had gone and hurt him.

“I really don’t want to hurt him,” she sighs, twisting her fingers together. She looks down at her hands rather than up at Thea. “And I know he doesn’t want to hurt me, but we’re just still figuring things out.”

She picks at the nail polish near her cuticles, but can feel Thea’s gaze as she studies her. She figures Thea’s probably trying to suss out the sincerity of her words. Out of the corner of her eye, Felicity sees Thea’s arms fall to her sides.

“I hope you guys figure it out,” she offers gently and Felicity looks up, surprised at the understanding response. She would get it if Thea decided she wasn’t worth her brother’s time.

“Me too,” Felicity admits, offering her a smile. Thea returns it just as Laurel rejoins them. They bid Thea goodbye and head out of the office, having agreed to jog to the gym as a warmup. The exercise makes Felicity feel better almost instantly, though she imagines it’s more psychosomatic than an actual instant fix.

They slow as they round a corner and the gym comes into sight and Felicity decides it’s probably her
only opportunity to broach the subject. She’s been talking herself in and out of it since lunch. It’s probably the wrong way to go about asking the question, but it’s been eating her.

“Hey,” she says, reaching out for Laurel arm and stopping her as they reach the doors. “Question, do you know McKenna Hall?”

Laurel frowns at the odd question, but seems to think about it for a second.

“Uh, yeah,” she nods. “We went to high school together and she’s with the police now. I see her around the courthouse sometimes. Why?”

“Just something I’m working on,” Felicity shrugs. “She was on the news and Oliver mentioned that he knew her, so I was just wondering…”

She trails off uncomfortably, not sure where the line of questioning is even going. She knows what she wants to ask, but her pride won’t let her. Laurel tilts her head and Felicity knows she can tell what she’s thinking regardless.

“Are you worried about McKenna and Oliver?” Laurel asks slowly. “Because, I think she had a thing for him back when they used to party together, but I wouldn’t worry about it. Does this mean you guys worked things out?”

As tired as Felicity is of having this conversation, she can’t really deny she’d walked into it in this case. It doesn’t make it any easier to explain. She and Oliver are still spending almost the same amount of time together as they were before it all hit the fan, just in a different way.

When she doesn’t give a response right away, Laurel presses on.

“Because, Tommy’s birthday is coming up and we were planning on doing just a small, intimate dinner at my apartment,” she explains, twisting the end of her braid between her fingers. “I wanted to invite you, but Tommy wants to invite Oliver. I mean, he is his best friend, but I didn’t want to make you uncomfortable.”

“Oliver and I are working through things,” Felicity says, the best explanation she can give at the moment. “I think we could make it through one dinner with no more than my usual amount of awkwardness.”

Laurel laughs, shaking her head at Felicity, but her assurance that she and Oliver can be around each other without ruining Tommy’s birthday seems to make Laurel feel better. She urges Felicity into the gym, excitedly telling her all about the gift she plans to get Tommy.

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Felicity heads to the foundry after she leaves Laurel back at CNRI. She doesn’t see the point in changing back into her work clothes, her skin still warm and sticky from the exercise, and she’d rather get through the phone calls recorded from McKenna’s phone as quickly as possible, before the Dodger sells his stolen gem and leaves town.

John is already there when she arrives and, when he realizes she’s scrubbing through the calls recorded from McKenna’s phone, he pulls a tall, metal stool over to the computers to help her. They mostly skip around, trying to find anything that sounds related. A lot of it is about other cases, some of it is personal calls, but it takes them a while to yield anything useful.

Oliver comes down the stairs from the club after a while. He picks up his bow and tosses tennis balls into the air, pinning them to the concrete walls with arrows. Felicity tries not to get distracted by the
sight of him, in one of his dark blue sweaters she’s become so fond of, with his quiver strapped over his chest.

“Hey,” she calls, looking back to her computer and gaining both men’s attention. “This is an outgoing call to Lance. Could be important.”

Oliver frowns, setting the bow down and pulling the straps of his quiver over his head. He stands behind her and John as she hits play on the call, leaning back in her chair once the tones from McKenna’s dialing start playing over the speaker.

“Lance,” he answers shortly on his end.

“Sergeant, it’s Detective Hall,” McKenna greets and Felicity wonders if either of them know that their phones do have caller ID. “I have an update on the Dodger case. A body was found in an art gallery shot point blank. There were three other men, all rendered unconscious by a highly focused electric current to the heart.”

“Same M.O. as that guard at the museum,” Lance comments. “Got an ID on the vic?”

Felicity kind of always assumed that cops only talked in mostly acronyms and shortened words on TV. She supposes chasing down criminals all day doesn’t leave time for multiple syllables. Maybe she and Oliver should start developing their own shortened lingo.

“He’s name is Cass Derenick,” McKenna answers, pulling Felicity’s focus from her own musings.

“Pause,” Oliver instructs. Felicity does so, pressing a key to halt the audio and considering maybe Oliver has found his own way to cut down on syllable usage by speaking in commands instead of requests. She likes the snappy acronyms better. She’s typing into the computer before Oliver even continues. “Who’s Cass Derenick?”

She pulls up press photos, police reports, a wrap sheet. He looks like a smug son of bitch if she had to guess. Still, that’s probably not what Oliver is looking for.

“Arrest, possession of stolen goods,” she reads off as Oliver circles the desk she’s working at. “Arrest, conspiracy. Conviction, attempted sale of stolen goods.”

“This guy’s a fence,” John explains succinctly, his eyes skimming over the information Felicity has up on the screen. “The Dodger’s looking to unload the Sherwood Ruby.”

“Which means he’ll be in the market for a new fence,” Felicity concludes, looking up at John for confirmation. “One he hasn’t, you know, killed.”

“So, we find the fence and we find the Dodger,” Oliver says, facing the wall that is now pincushioned with tennis balls. He turns back to face them, nodding to himself. Felicity nods, turning her attention back to the computer. She can dig into SCPD’s files, try and find out who’s mostly likely to be the next person the Dodger would meet with.

She feels safer about hacking into the SCPD from the foundry now that she’s upgraded their security and added her own safety measures for backtraces. She doubts the police would have anyone on payroll capable of hacking through her security.

“Maybe I should reschedule with Carly,” John says, pushing off of the stool to stand. Felicity spins in her chair, glaring up at him.

“Absolutely not,” she says, shaking her head and pointing up at him. “Girls do not like to be
cancelled on. Especially since you are terrible at coming up with cover stories.”

He opens his mouth to argue, but Felicity raises her eyebrows at him, daring him to challenge her on the assertion. Instead, he sighs, shaking his head at her in amusement.

“You’re kind of pushy, aren’t you?” He asks with a smirk. Felicity hears Oliver let out a laugh behind her and whips around to glare at him. He doesn’t bother to hide the amusement on his face. She looks back at John, tilting her head and smiling innocently up at him.

“You’ll learn to love it,” she assures him. John laughs, but gives in. He grabs his coat and instructs them to tell him if they hear anything. Felicity returns to her data dump while Oliver tries to convince John to focus on his date, not the case, for the evening.

Once he’s gone, the foundry goes silent. Oliver retrieves his bow and quiver again, strapping it on and pulling the skewered tennis balls from the far wall. Felicity watches as he attempts to bounce one, the large holes in it making it rise crooked after hitting the floor. Oliver catches it easily anyway.

The data is compiling on the computers, so Felicity leans back in her chair and watches him. He tosses the tennis balls into a trash bin and catches her eyes on him. He frowns at her, crossing towards her.

“You look like you’re thinking too hard,” he comments, setting his bow back down. He leaves his quiver strapped over his chest.

“Have you ever known me to do anything else?” She asks, deflecting. He gives her a soft smile, shaking his head in the negative. “So, you knew McKenna in high school, huh?”

Subtlety has never been her strong suit. Oliver frowns again, confusion scrunching his features at the change of topic. She’d been trying to figure out how to wade into it casually, but they need to have this conversation eventually. Better to just get it over with.

“Yeah,” he nods, rounding the desk to sit on the stool John had vacated. It puts them closer to eye level and Felicity adjusts her chair so she’s facing him completely. “We were pretty good friends back then and I ran into her when I was looking into Vertigo.”

Felicity nods, chewing on her lower lip.

“And you two never…?” She asks, trailing off and gesturing vaguely to try and get her point across. Oliver’s face lights up with understanding and then amusement. Oh God, she already regrets asking.

“No, we never,” he assures her, smirking and raising an eyebrow at her. “Felicity, are you jealous?”

“No,” she says immediately. He tilts his head at the lie and she glances at the computer, pretending to check the progress of the files she’d been loading. It’s been done for a few minutes now at least.

“Good,” he says. “Because, if you were, I would remind you that you’re the one who asked for space.”

“No, I know,” she agrees, nodding jerkily and shrugging her shoulders. She can feel her ponytail bouncing around erratically. “I just wasn’t sure if ‘space’ meant seeing other people or…”

“I think you’re the one who gets to define the terms of it,” he offers gently, ducking his head in an attempt to get her to meet his eyes. She does and the amusement has disappeared, replaced by a sad seriousness. There’s something hopeful there, too. “But, I wasn’t planning on seeing anyone else.”
“You shouldn’t have to wait for me to figure things out,” she says quietly. The words taste like ash in her mouth, but she wants to be fair to him. If she’s asking for space, shouldn’t he be allowed to do with that space what he pleases?

“I’m not going anywhere,” he promises and Felicity bites down on a smile at the comment, nodding at him. She spins her chair back towards the computers and hears Oliver sigh next to her. “I do have to go meet Tommy, though.”

She nods again as he pulls the straps of his quiver off again. She realizes he’d put it back on for nothing, or maybe he just knew it was doing weird things to her stomach. He’d always been good at reading what struck a chord for her. Bastard.

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Her search is kind of fruitless, because ultimately she doesn’t know exactly what to be looking for. There’s a startling amount of black market art sellers in Starling alone, not to mention the transients who’ve passed through to get arrested and then disappear. Felicity finds herself getting frustrated at the lack of progress and trains her eyes on one of Oliver’s wooden training dummies.

She pushes out of the computer chair and moves towards the dummy cautiously, eying the odd design of it. She’s much more used to a typical punching bag and she’s seen Oliver use this. She knows there’s a technique to it and she knows she doesn’t know it. Still, something to punch is something to punch.

After a quick run to her car for the kickboxing gloves stashed in her gym bag, she gets into position and starts a steady movement of punching at the dummy. Rather than clearing her mind, it brings on the opposite. She feels herself begin to focus on the frustrations of her life at the moment, her punches becoming quicker, more frantic.

Each jab is accompanied by a thought of how things feel like they’re spiralling out of her control. She’s been avoiding Curtis since telling him he couldn’t work with her anymore. Not that it would even matter, because Curtis hasn’t really tried to reach out past the initial few angry texts. Oliver and John are out having lives while she’s sequestered herself down here, cut off from most of the people she even likes.

Oliver gets his own category of frustrated. It’s not all his fault, she’s the one who can’t seem to get her head straight. Oliver’s done nothing but be patient and wait for her to figure it out. Unless he’s in full vigilante gear, when he turns into an angry asshole who only seems to be interested in whatever kind of vengeance or penance he deems necessary.

“Shit,” she hisses, her fist slamming into the wood particularly hard. She shakes her hand out, her knuckles stinging with the contact. Frowning at the dummy, she unstraps the glove and pulls it from her hand. She flexes her fingers, examining her knuckles, before flipping her hand over. Small scabs marr the heel of her palm where the glass had dug in two nights ago.

She sighs, twisting and leaning back against one of the arms of the dummy as she removes her other glove. Mostly, she knows, she’s frustrated with herself. She’s trying to make the best choices she can, she really is. Pushing Oliver away, cutting Curtis out of this, they’re hurting her, sure. But, how is she supposed to know the best way to deal with all of this? There isn’t exactly a handbook.

Embarrassingly, the frustration brings tears to her eyes. She squeezes them shut, trying to will the emotions back down. She’s just glad it didn’t happen until she was locked up down here alone. Her phone starts ringing on the computer desk and she shakes her head, taking a deep breath as she moves towards it.
“Hello?” She greets, swiping at her eyes with the back of her hand rather than checking the caller ID.

“Felicity,” Oliver greets, surprising her. She blinks a few times, pressing the back of her palm against her nose and sniffing, hoping he can’t hear it over the phone. He must, because she can hear the frown in his voice as he asks, “Are you alright?”

“I’m fine,” she answers shortly, keeping her voice neutral. She can hear loud music on his end and frowns herself. “Where are you?”

“It’s a long story,” he deflects. “Listen, I need you to activate the bug in McKenna’s phone. I think the police just got a lead on the Dodger.”

“Oh, yeah,” she says, shaking her head and hurrying to reach the keyboard connected to the computers. She starts pulling up the program and scrubbing through to find McKenna’s most recent call. “I’m on it.”

“Okay,” Oliver says. “I’m on my way back to the club.”

After listening to the call, Felicity changes into her gear, which she’s been moving between lairs, and waits for Oliver. She pulls the address McKenna’s CI had given her up on her wrist tablet and tries to narrow down the number of entrances. Street cameras in the area don’t seem to cover any of them.

Oliver bustles in wearing a suit he definitely hadn’t left in. Felicity narrows her eyes at it, but he begins stripping out of it to change into his gear. He asks about the call and Felicity gives him the information McKenna’s CI had given her. She tacks on the amount of entrances to the warehouse that she could see and the relative busyness of the surrounding area.

“There’s no way we’ll make it there before the police on this one,” Oliver points out as he straps his quiver on over his green leathers. Felicity nods, they don’t have a head start on this one. “But we can play back up, try and make sure that if they don’t get the Dodger, we do.”

“And if we do get him?” Felicity asks, leaning back against one of the tables and crossing her arms. Oliver gives her a tired look, like it’s a conversation he’s already grown weary of having. She raises an eyebrow at him in challenge.

“Felicity,” he says slowly and she doesn’t appreciate the berating tone of voice. “I promise, we will give him the chance to surrender.”

It’s not a good answer. In her experience, guys like this don’t come quietly just because you ask once. She’s not worried about Oliver’s first warning, she’s worried about what comes after. Oliver moves past her, bow in hand, and it reminds her they don’t have time to bicker about it right now. She’s going to have to trust him.

It doesn’t take them long to reach the warehouse on Oliver’s bike, but they still make it only moments before the police take the building. They hear, rather than see, the chaos of the scene from outside the plated windows. Oliver spots the Dodger from the roof as he charges out of one of the exits. He shoots an arrow that whizzes past him, embedding itself in the side of the dumpster a few feet in front of him.

The warning shot does its job, the Dodger coming to a stop as he spots the arrow. He spins, spotting her and Oliver where they stand on the corner of the roof.

“Come quietly,” Oliver calls in his gruff vigilante voice. The Dodger seems unaffected, smirking up at them.
“I’m afraid I’ll have to decline,” he says, shocking absolutely no one. Honestly, people should listen to her more. She’s very smart and it doesn’t take a genius to know that bad guys don’t typically want to go to prison.

“Then I’m afraid you won’t be going to jail,” Oliver counters, nocking another arrow and sending it flying before she can even react. It misses his target, just barely, as the Dodger, well, dodges it. Oliver wastes no time, dropping from the ledge to the roof below. Felicity follows after him, bending her knees on impact.

The Dodger flees, ducking behind a dumpster as she and Oliver run the length of the roof, leaping to another shorter one. It gives them the safest height to jump from, landing on the pavement below. Oliver sticks it, but Felicity’s knee gives under her, connecting with the hard ground. Oliver shoots her a concerned glance, but she pushes herself up quickly.

He pulls his bow from where it straps against the sleeve of his jacket and moves again, trying to get an angle on the Dodger. Felicity reaches for his arm, grasping it and trying to force him to lower his bow. He glares at her, bowstring pulled taut as he aims at the dumpster.

Before she can snap at him, something connects with the pavement a few feet in front of them, exploding with the impact. It’s too far to be damaging, but it sends them both backwards onto the pavement. Oliver rolls backwards and Felicity lands heavily on her shoulder, groaning with the impact.

They scramble quickly to their feet, but the Dodger is gone, leaving a pile of flaming destruction in his wake. Felicity rubs her shoulder with her hand, prodding it with her fingertips, and shoots Oliver a dark glare. He huffs and she knows he’s just as annoyed at her for questioning him as she is at him.

The sound of boots coming from within the warehouse alerts them to the presence of the police. Setting aside their anger for the moment, Felicity and Oliver circle the building to where he’d left his bike and head back to the foundry.

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“I heard on the news the Dodger got away,” John says as he comes into the foundry. Oliver is still in nearly full gear, but Felicity has ditched her coat, wig, and mask. She drops into the computer chair, spinning to face him as he arrives.

“Hopefully the night wasn’t a complete waste,” she comments. “Your date. How’d it go?”

“Awesome,” he lies, taking a seat on one of the metal stools and spinning away from her. She rolls her eyes.

“You suck at lying,” she tells him. At the least, she’d been hoping John’s evening had gone well because it’s been nothing but tension since she and Oliver got back to the foundry. He’s half-sitting on the table with his arrows, his bow resting next to him, and they’ve been avoiding talking.

“We and the police busted it up before the Dodger could get himself paid,” Oliver explains, while Felicity spins back towards the monitors. All business tonight, apparently. He directs his next question at her. “Is your hacker chip still working?”

She checks the program, though she doesn’t know that she needs to. It’s been working consistently for over a week at this point. Still, it’s better than continuing her glare-off with him.

“Yeah,” she nods. “Still getting a strong signal.”

“You should pull up the police records,” he tells her and she bites back a nasty comment because she
already did that. She’d pulled everything related to art theft, black market goods, and the Dodger she could find that evening while he was off clubbing or whatever. “Everything the Dodger’s stolen so far.”

Still, she pulls the files back up, moving them around on the desktop so she can compare the items.

“What are you thinking?” John asks as he moves to the stool he’d pulled over to her workstation earlier.

“We know the Dodger has a taste for a very specific type of antiquity,” Oliver explains, pushing off of the table and crossing past them at the desk and pulling a stool over next to John. Felicity finds the common link as he takes his seat.

“Yeah,” she says, lacing her fingers together under her chin. The leather of her gloves is cool against her skin. “These all look like they’re from the ominous decade. The last ten years of King Ferdinand’s reign.”

John scoffs next to her.

“And she says we have no lives,” he comments, clearly dealing with some frustration of his own from the night. She turns her head, glaring at him for the barb. She’s a nerd, okay? One day that’ll stop shocking people. Oliver ignores the exchange.

“Are there any other places that sell or display items from the ominous... thing?” He asks, earning himself one of her looks.

“Decade,” she bites, correcting him and pulling up a search for local ominous displays. “Not really. I guess people in Starling City prefer the Elizabethan Era.”

A brightly colored flyer lights up part of her screen and she skims it.

“The Starling City Cancer Society,” Oliver reads aloud, spotting the flyer. “It says right there they’re holding a fundraising auction tomorrow night. We could lure him out into the open.”

“With what? A fake?” Felicity asks dubiously. She doubts this guy is going to be fooled by a fake, no matter how good it looked.

“No,” Oliver says, shaking his head. “The Dodger clearly has a trained eye for this sort of thing. He’s not going to fall for anything less than the genuine article.”

It’s Felicity’s turn to scoff this time, frowning at the computer screen.

“Where are we going to get our hands on a rare Spanish antiquity?” She asks, raising her eyebrows at him. It’s John who answers the question with one of his own.

“You really have no idea how rich his family is, do you?” He asks, ending the comment with a sarcastic smile. Felicity looks past him, deciding to ignore his attitude because she’s sure it’s been a long night for everyone, towards Oliver who shrugs.

Felicity rolls her eyes, returning her attention to the details on the auction. She shrugs, leaning forward and resting her chin on her hand tiredly.

“Bring me an antique and I can put a tracker on it,” she offers.

Oliver drifts off to get in contact with whoever is in charge of his family’s vault - a sentence Felicity
really can’t linger on at the moment - and she works on getting in touch with the host of the auction to offer the Queen family’s generous donation. They’re probably going to fuck up everyone’s night by making them squeeze in another auction item at the last minute.

Once they have it worked out, John decides to take off. Felicity tries one last time to press for details about his date, but he snaps at her so she leaves it be. She balls up her clothes from earlier along with her gear, wrapping it all up in the leather duster, and prepares to head out as well. The day has sapped her of energy.

“Felicity,” Oliver calls, before she can make it more than a few steps. Her shoulders fall as she sighs.

“How can we finish our fight tomorrow?” She asks tiredly.

“No, I think we should finish it now,” he says and she turns, holding her ball of fabrics loosely in front of her. At least he isn’t denying it’s a fight. Better to call it as it is. “I’m trying here, Felicity. I’m trying to be patient, I’m trying to understand. But, I don’t know how to fix this or how to be the person you want me to be.”

“I don’t want you to be anything,” she insists.

“Really?” He asks disbelievingly. “Because every time we are out in the field together, you end up pissed at me. This is part of who I am and I would think that, of all people, you would understand that.”

“You think this about understanding you?” She asks. Oliver’s hands go out from his sides, the frustration clear on his face. “Oliver, you would have killed him if you had the shot. He’s not the first person I have watched you nearly kill.”

Oliver seems to deflate at that. She’s never been subtle about her disapproval at his methods, even before she knew who he was. It’s not the way she’s always done things and she refuses to believe it’s the only way to help the city.

“I know you think it’s who you are and that it’s the only solution but,” she shrugs helplessly, her grip on the coat tightening. “I think we could be doing better. I think there’s another way. I’m just not sure if you’re willing to budge on that and it’s not what I signed up for. With the team or... with us.”

He frowns at her and she turns to leave again, but stops herself this time, a question burning at the back of her mind.

“Hey, how did you know about McKenna’s phone call tonight?” She asks, turning back to him. He sighs, looking caught.

“Tommy and I were checking out a club across town and we ran into her and we all decided to get a drink,” he explains. Felicity closes her eyes, chuckling bitterly to herself. Oliver reminds her, “We’re all old friends.”

“Right, old friends,” she nods. She’s tired and frustrated and the day has taken its toll on her. She’s always been kind of a petty person, but it just gets the better of her and she can’t stop the words that fall from her lips. “Just like you and Laurel.”

The words linger in the air and, as awful of a person as they probably make her, she’s not ready to take them back. To his credit, Oliver seems to understand they’re born of frustration rather than truth, and he doesn’t give her a reaction. She shakes her head, finally turning and heading out the door.
The sleep she gets is restless, but at least it’s sleep. She stays in bed long after she wakes up, regretting her argument with Oliver from the night before. She’s going to have to apologize eventually, but her pride is making her want to put it off. She’s the queen of saying the wrong thing, but last night had been something else entirely.

From her bed, she poses as Oliver’s personal assistant and works to get the brooch he’d pulled from his family’s vault moved around. She needs to place a tracker on it before it reaches the venue where the event is being held.

She asks the team transporting the brooch to meet her outside of the club on the way to the auction so that she can inspect the brooch. The man she speaks with tries to insist that the brooch has been inspected time and again by the city’s best, but Felicity insists that Mr. Queen just wants to make sure the charity can definitely get a good price for it.

She finds a pencil skirt and a nice, double breasted white jacket in her closet and decides it looks nice enough to sell her role. On the way to the club, she stops by the base and finds a tracker she and Curtis had worked up a while back.

The man who presents the brooch to her handles it with a pair of gloves and seems indignant when she lifts it up with her bare hand. He retrieves it from her almost immediately, but the tracker is already secured onto the back of the large gem in the middle. The brooch is, while austentatious, admittedly beautiful.

She assures them it’s in perfect condition, a fact they already knew without her manhandling the priceless jewelry, and they leave for the venue downtown. As they pull away, she checks the program on her phone to make sure the tracker is functioning. A blinking red dot moves on a path away from the club.

Satisfied with the tech, Felicity texts Oliver and John to let them know that it’s working and the brooch is en route to the auction now. Then she heads home to change into something more appropriate for the event. As she curls her hair, she can hear How To Steal A Million playing from the living room and ignores the irony of it. She picks out a sparkly, gold cocktail dress she wore on a date about a year ago and small matching gold purse.

The event is bustling by the time she gets there and she keeps her eyes mostly glued to her phone. It would be a true testament to the week she’s having if the Dodger stole it out from under her while she was too busy stuffing her face with h’orderves. Her anxious nerves probably wouldn’t let her eat anyway.

She reaches a small set of stairs and stops, glad to have noticed them rather than fallen down them. When she looks up, Oliver and John are heading towards her and she shoots them a smile, masking her nerves behind a cheery facade.

“So, I’m getting a good signal from the GPS I put in your family’s brooch,” she says as they reach her, Oliver angling them to continue walking around a corner. “I can track it on my phone.”

Which is all well and good, and Felicity’s instinct is always to trust her tech, but there’s a lot of human error to be had on this one. There are about a million different variables that could go wrong. There are all these other guests, the possibility of hostage taking, she’s pretty sure the police are here. And, that’s only what she can name off the top of her head.

“Speaking of,” she starts, though she supposes no one really was. “Have you given any thought to what might happen if this doesn’t work and the Dodger absconds with your family jewels?”
Both John and Oliver stop to give her a look, Oliver dipping his head towards her in barely concealed amusement. It takes her a second to realize why and she cringes in embarrassment.

“I’m sorry, that came out very wrong,” she says, shaking her head. Oliver straightens up, glancing between her and John both, trying to fight a smile at her complete inability to speak properly.

“Let’s just keep our eyes open, Felicity,” he instructs and she nods, looking between the men. They seem to share a look at her expense, but she elects to ignore it, looking back down at her phone instead.

“Hey, isn’t that…?” John asks, trailing off. The questions makes Felicity look up to where he’s indicated McKenna Hall is chatting with someone, but breaks off when she spots their group and heads towards them. Oliver hums in the affirmative and Felicity wishes she could disappear into the carpet.

“Uh oh,” she mumbles, feeling both men’s eyes on her at the interjection. McKenna smiles as she reaches them, greeting Oliver, and then seems to recognize Felicity. Her eyes narrow the same way they had in the police station and Felicity immediately feels under interrogation.

“Megan, isn’t it?” She asks with a sharp smile. Felicity nods, willing Oliver and John to go along with it.

“Detective Hall,” she greets. “Nice to see you again. I was just getting a quote from Mr. Queen about tonight’s event.”

McKenna nods, her focus returning to Oliver. Felicity can see question in her eyes, probably a million questions constantly buzzing around her mind. She spends her days trying to connect dots and answer questions, Felicity imagines that kind of thing would spill over into her personal life as well.

“Yeah, I heard your family made a last minute donation,” she says, looking to Oliver for confirmation. “That’s very generous.”

“Just trying to give back a little,” he says with a charming smile. It’s see-through to Felicity, but she thinks McKenna must buy it because she nods. A man comes up behind her, leaning in and murmuring in her ear. Her expression shuts, returning to business, and she offers them a farewell before heading away.

“Megan?” John asks, raising an eyebrow at her.

“She thinks I’m reporter for SNN,” Felicity admits, grimacing sheepishly. Oliver shakes his head at her, but John seems caught between amused and impressed. She thinks she’s beginning to win him over. She points towards the room where the auction items are on display. “I’m just gonna go keep a look out.”

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Everything else that night kind of happens in a blur. One minute she’s following the signal of the moving GPS, the next she’s pressing herself back against a wall with a bomb collar strapped to her neck, trying to keep John and Oliver from getting too close. Oliver convinces her to talk him in, lead him to the Dodger so he can disarm it. Despite her internal terror, his calm is infectious. Still, he hesitates to leave them until John tells him to.

John pulls the metal casing from the bomb pressed against her throat with part of a dismantled pen, but she can tell from his face he’s overwhelmed. It isn’t helping her calm, but he encourages her to
move instead to a table in the room they’ve hidden in while she tracks the brooch on her phone.

She talks to Oliver over the speaker while he chases after the Dodger on a borrowed bike.

“There’s this thing looks more like a computer than a bomb,” John comments in frustration. Felicity frowns, the words settling in. He sounds worried, like he isn’t sure how to disarm it, which means it’s down to Oliver managing to convince the Dodger to do so. Unless…

“Give me your phone,” she instructs John, holding her hand out. He stares at her for a moment, surprised by the turn, but hands the device over. She taps a number into the keypad, keeping one eye on the small map on her phone.

“Curtis, don’t hang up,” she says, lifting the phone to her ear as he answers. “I need you.”

She uses the video chat function on John’s phone to show Curtis what they’re dealing with and hands the conversation off to John. She takes Oliver off of speaker, pulling the GPS and traffic cameras up on her tablet instead. Curtis talks John through trying to disarm the bomb while she directs Oliver on the Dodger’s path.

Curtis stresses out, afraid to encourage John to do much at the risk of Felicity’s head. He’s indecisive, unsure without being able to examine the bomb himself, but he pulls it together enough for John to prod carefully at the computer chip inside.

Ultimately, though, it’s Oliver that saves her neck, literally. He announces that he’s severed the Dodger’s median nerve, rendering his fingers useless. The beeping of the collar speeds up suddenly before falling from her neck. Her hand goes to her throat on instinct.

“Oh, thank God,” she gasps. Curtis whoops from John’s phone and John helps her carefully remove the choker from her neck. She can hear the Dodger still talking to Oliver, trying to convince him they’re the same. Oliver must take him down, because he cuts off.

“I’m not Robin Hood,” she hears Oliver comment.

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Felicity is going to fight whichever one of them suggested going out for margaritas after the auction and near decapitation. Except, she thinks it might have been her. Honestly, after the second drink, the conversation that got her to that point started to get a little fuzzy. And then she’d gone and had a third.

Oliver had offered to drive her home, much more sober than she was, and she wasn’t exactly in the position to argue. Plus, it meant seeing Oliver drive her car which was one of those small delights that she’d seriously been lacking in lately.

“You’re enjoying this too much,” he comments grumpily when he realizes she’s sitting in the passenger seat with her back almost entirely facing the window and her gaze trained on him, watching with smug amusement as he drives her car.

“But you look so adorable all squished up in my car,” she teases. A wave of dizziness hits her and she blinks a few times, gripping the door handle. “Ugh, why are you not as drunk as I am?”

“Because I am much larger than you,” he smirks. “And I stopped drinking after one.”

“Cut me some slack, I almost died tonight,” she reminds him, pouting. He looks over at her seriously as he pulls up to a red light. He lifts one hand off the steering wheel, beginning to reach for her. His
hand falls short, landing instead on the armrest between them.

“Felicity, you know I wasn’t going to let that happen, right?” He asks and she stares at him for a moment, caught off guard by the sudden sincerity. The light changes before she can respond, bathing the dashboard of the car in bright green light. It pulls Oliver’s focus and he looks back to the road, pulling through the intersection.

“Yeah,” Felicity says quietly, finding her voice. “I know.”

They manage the rest of the drive in silence. She feels herself beginning to sober up, but tequila always leaves her feeling bubbly and light, as opposed to wine which usually makes her sleepy. The thought reminds her of the last time Oliver had driven her home after she’d drank too much.

He uses her car keys to unlock her front door when they reach her house, leading her inside. She trails after him, dropping her purse on the couch as she passes it. She hears him turn the tap on and follows the sound into the kitchen where he’s filling a glass with water. A little unsteadily, she hops up onto her counter, swinging her legs back and forth.

“Hydrate,” Oliver instructs, holding the glass out to her. She forces herself to take a small sip to appease him before setting it down on the counter next to her. She scoots toward him on the counter and he tilts his head at her.

“Do you remember that time we ran into each other in the Glades?” She asks and he frowns in confusion at the turn in conversation. “It was right after we helped Laurel with the Declan case.”

“Yeah,” he nods, smiling fondly at the memory. She reaches for him, her fingers cradling his jaw, stroking over the short hairs of his beard. He leans into the touch. “I remember.”

“You looked so sad and you barely knew me but you were being so nice to me,” she recalls quietly. He blinks at her, trying to figure out where this memory is going. “I wanted you to kiss me.”

His lips part slightly and she hears his intake of breath. His hand comes up to her wrist and she thinks he might be about to pull away from her touch, but instead he wraps his fingers gently around her wrist and holds it there.

“I thought about it,” he admits and she frowns in question. “I wasn’t ready yet. I’m glad I didn’t, because I wouldn’t change any of our time together.”

“Me either,” she admits, stroking over his cheek with her thumb. Her mind jumps, courtesy of the alcohol. “You didn’t kill him. You could have, he wasn’t going down without a fight. Why didn’t you?”

Oliver watches her for a moment, like he’s maybe trying to find the words. Her fingers continue to move over the skin of his cheek habitually.

“There was another way,” he tells her quietly, finally, and her chest swells in surprise at the use of her own words. His eyes close for a moment and she uses the leverage of her hand on his jaw to pull him towards her. He doesn’t resist as she slats her lips over his. It feels like it’s been eons since she’s kissed him. It feels like it’s been seconds.

She realizes with sudden clarity that she misses him. They’ve spent more time in each other’s immediate orbit consistently since their secrets came out and somehow she’s never been further from him. The realization sets off a deep ache inside of her, even as his lips move gently against hers, his hand cupping the side of her face. She raises her other hand, wrapping it firmly in the lapel of his suit and holding on with a death grip.
“I’m sorry,” she gasps, pulling away from him enough to make the confession. Letting him go any further from her seems impossible, though, and she holds fast to him. His warm hands fall to the bare skin of her thighs, revealed by the short golden dress.

“Felicity, don’t,” he tries, his fingers stroking her skin soothingly. She shakes her head, curls flying. “No, let me, please,” she pleads, needing to explain herself, needing him to know where her head has been at. “I’m sorry for being such a jerk last night. I know that no matter how much time passes, a part of you will always love Laurel. And, I get that, really. I was just scared.”

“Scared of what?” Oliver prompts, tilting his head. “That I’d leave?”

“No,” she sighs, shaking her head again, softer this time. “Scared that there wouldn’t be enough room left for you to love me.”

She wills herself to look up at him as he studies her silently. The confession is news, maybe even to herself, but it’s there all the same. Felicity thinks maybe she’s loved him for longer than she’s realized.

“Felicity,” he says, dragging her name out softly, the sound sweet in her ears. “You don’t have to worry about that.”

“I don’t?” She asks, her voice shaking with emotion. He tilts his head towards her, a soft smile lighting his features. She suddenly wishes to freeze the moment, capture it and live within it. He doesn’t need to say anything else as long as he keeps staring at her like that forever.

“I love you,” he says and it immediately changes her mind, the moment before paling in comparison to this one, the words making her heart leap in her chest. She feels suddenly lighter as she smiles widely at him.

“You do?” She asks and he laughs, nodding at her. “Okay, good.”

She doesn’t want to say it back right now. She feels it, she knows, but there’s tequila on her tongue and too much risk she could forget this in the morning, or he’d think it’s a trick of the booze. She wants to say it sober and loudly, she wants to say it over and over. He doesn’t press her and she thinks he understands. He has a tendency to understand her better than she does herself.

“I should go,” he says, surprising her. She tightens her grip on his suit jacket once more. “What?” She frowns. “No. Stay.”

“You’ve had a lot to drink,” he reminds her, but she still doesn’t understand. “And you need to get some sleep. I’ve got a lot of self restraint, but if I have to stare at you in that dress any longer, I might break.”

She grins at the insinuation, his hands tightening on her thighs even as he says he’s going to leave. It’d be a lie if she said she hadn’t picked out this particular dress with him in mind. His thumbs stroke the insides of her thighs before he pulls away fully, gently detaching her fingers from his collar.

“You know that talk we keep putting off?” She says softly as he pulls away and he nods, stalling in front of her. “Let’s have it. Soon.”

“I’m looking forward to it,” he says, grinning at her. She bites down on her lip, wishing he would stay, but knowing why it’s better for both of them if he doesn’t. He wishes her a good night as he leaves, pulling the door closed behind him.
For the first time in almost two weeks, Felicity feels hopeful about the future.

Chapter End Notes

Listen, my original plan for this story was to leave them broken up for much longer, but this felt like the most organic moment for them to start to work things out. Plus, I'm not an actual Arrow writer, so I don't want to unnecessarily drag out a breakup that could have been solved within in a few episodes but... that's just me. : )

Also, sorry that the time between uploads has definitely become much longer. At this point, I'm working on this story every spare moment I get, but I don't get a lot of them. I hope the time between updates isn't causing a loss of interest and I really appreciate the patience with this. I'm hoping these longer chapters (most of them have been between 10-12k) make up for it. Thanks, guys!!
An assassin for hire comes to town and Oliver and Felicity find themselves up against an old foe.

Felicity looks up at the sound of a knock on her open office door. She half expects it to be Oliver, she hasn’t heard from him since he left last night and she hasn’t had time to reach out, but they had agreed to have that conversation.

Instead, Curtis lingers in the doorway, fidgeting nervously with his hands. She offers him a smile, standing from her chair and circling the desk. She waves him into the office, closing the door behind him. He turns to her once it’s closed, placing one hand on her bicep and squeezing.

“Are you okay?” He asks, looking at her like she might still have the bomb strapped to her somewhere. She laughs a little at the concern and nods.

“Yeah, I’m fine,” she assures him. “I don’t think I’ll be getting back into the choker trend anytime soon, but it could have been worse. Thank you for helping out last night.”

“I don’t know that I helped much,” he sighs, shaking his head. “You know I’m not the best in a crisis.”

“You did fine,” she says. “We were all a little freaked out, don’t worry about it. How’s Paul doing?”

“He’s good,” he says as she moves away from him, rounding her desk again to take her seat. She’s finally got another chair in the room and Curtis pulls it over to the desk, taking a seat. “They released
him from the hospital not long after he woke up. He’s a little sketchy on the details, but he’s good. He doesn’t know anything.”

“I’m sorry that I pushed you away and that I tried to make your decision for you,” she says in a rush, needing to get it out. She had planned to visit him last night after everything with the Dodger, but then margaritas happened and Oliver. She was gonna seek him out today, but she’s glad he came down to see her.

“I understand why you did it,” he says gently. “And you were right about risks I hadn’t signed up for, like Paul getting in the middle of it. But, you were wrong, too.”

“Well, okay, doesn’t seem necessary to kick me when I’m already apologizing,” she comments and Curtis smiles at her.

“You were wrong when you said this is your burden and not mine,” he continues, giving her a meaningful look. “You’re my family, too, which makes it my burden. So, if it’s a choice between being safe or helping you help this city. It’s not a choice I have to make.”

Felicity bites down on her lower lip, her eyes going misty at Curtis’ words. She doesn’t know how she got so lucky as to end up with such good people in her life. He doesn’t know much about her past or her family life, but somehow he’s stumbled onto the right words. He’s assured her that he’s not going to leave.

Which makes her even more sure of her next words.

“Maybe you should tell Paul,” Felicity frowns, considering it. She knows that it might mean outing her secret to Paul, which could lead him to hate her for putting him and Curtis at risk. But she and Oliver had risked their relationship to keep their secrets and when it came out it nearly destroyed them. She doesn’t want Curtis to do the same.

“What, like, everything?” Curtis asks. “Like, everything -everything? No, no way! I can’t, not now.”

Felicity takes a deep breath, tilting her head imploringly at him. There’s only so much detail she can go into to explain why she thinks he should do this, but she’ll tell him what she can for the moment.

“Oliver knows,” she tells him, watching as his eyes widen in surprise. “About me, obviously, and it kind of threw a wrench in our relationship for a while. We’re just getting back on track.”

“Felicity, I’m so sorry,” he says. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I was just processing for a while,” she explains, waving it off. “But, my point is that secrets are hard in relationships and the longer you keep them, the more it’s gonna hurt both of you when it comes out. So, I think you should tell him - at least, as much as you can.”

Curtis goes quiet, considering this. She’s going to tell him about Oliver soon, she thinks. But she can’t without talking to Oliver about it first. It’s not her secret to share and after how their secrets affected them, she wants to make sure she goes about all of this the right way from now on.

“Yeah,” Curtis nods eventually. “I gotta get back to work, but I’ll think about it.”

“Thanks again,” Felicity says as he pulls open the door to her office, shooting him one last smile before he disappears, letting the door fall shut behind him.
She gets to the foundry late, caught up by an executive holding a late phone conference who needed her help setting it up. The woman had been incredibly grateful and offered to go on a coffee run to thank Felicity for helping, so she hadn’t minded so much. But, she had been supposed to show up to spar with John.

“I’m here, I’m late, I know, but I’m here,” she says in a rush as she runs inside from the alley. John spins on his stool and crosses his arms, watching her in amusement.

“You planning on sparring in heels?” He asks, looking down to her shoes. She glances down at them as well, realizing she’d left her change of clothes in the car. She tells him she’ll be another minute and runs back outside, using her backseat as a changing room to switch to a pair of tight running pants and a tank top.

John hasn’t really seen her out in the field much, so when he’d asked her to spar and said he wanted to see her abilities, she hadn’t really been offended at his need to test her. He seems the protective sort, so she figures he wants to make sure that she can really take care of herself. Plus, she’s been meaning to find someone with a little more experience than Laurel to work with. Something tells her Oliver wouldn’t be into it.

“Where’s Oliver?” She asks as John meets her on the mat he’s set up in front of the computers. She doesn’t think he and Oliver usually set the soft padding out when they go at it, but she’d like to avoid any bruises from the concrete floor, so she appreciates it.

“Crossing someone off his list,” he says, like Oliver’s the world’s most terrifying Santa Claus. She raises an eyebrow at him as she slides her feet into position beneath her, trying to be aware of her own weight. “You still don’t approve?”

He shifts back, straightening in a way that shows her he isn’t about to attack just yet. Still, she doesn’t relieve herself of her stance as she shrugs at him.

“It’s just not my idea of helping the city,” she admits. “I know that it’s important to Oliver, but that doesn’t mean I really understand it.”

“Have you asked him about it?” John asks, crossing his arms over his chest and raising an eyebrow at her. She frowns, her shoulders falling from their tense position. It’s a good question. She hasn’t really directly asked Oliver about the notebook. In between all the questions she’s had lately, it hadn’t really been at the top of her list.

John must be able to read as much on her face, because he says, “You should.”

His feet shift into a ready stance that Felicity recognizes and she braces for his attack. She deflects his fist with her upper arm, though he still lands a decent blow to her radius. So much for avoiding bruises. Shetwists away from him, ducking under another swing. He puts her on the defensive immediately, keeping her moving and unable to throw a punch of her own. She lets out a grunt in frustration and gives up the defensive, charging him.

It takes him almost no effort to throw her to the mat, knocking the wind from her chest. Her face presses against the cool vinyl as she pants from the exertion. John holds a hand out to her and she grasps it, letting him lift her back to her feet.

“The trick is to keep your weight evenly distributed,” he tells her, dropping her hand and crossing to where a towel sits next to her bright pink water bottle. He holds them out to her, offering them over. Annoyed at how easily he’d bested her, she waves him off, returning instead to her ready stance. He looks surprised.
“Go again,” she says, putting her arms up. He glances around her, looking hesitant, but she stares him down and he gives in with a shake of his head.

She’s ready for him this time when he advances, using her small size to her advantage. She darts around him, making him swing out and follow her around the mat in attempt to land a blow. She waits until she feels confident that he’s no longer keeping his stance balanced. He swings at her, a targeted blow aiming for her stomach, and she catches his fist in her hand. His hand is twice the size of hers, but she moves quickly, before he can pull it away from her. Twisting his wrist, she deflects his attention to removing himself from her grip, and drops to the floor. She swings her leg out, taking him out at the knees.

He catches himself before he falls fully, dropping to his knees on the mat. Felicity hops back to her feet, wanting to keep the upper hand, but John looks up at her with a grin. He’s panting and she can tell he’s impressed by her ability to drop him, even momentarily. She bites down on her lower lip, swelling with pride.

“You adapted to his technique,” Oliver says from behind her, startling her. She spins around to face him where he watches them. She must not have heard him come in, too caught up in trying to prove herself. He, too, looks impressed and she can’t stop herself from grinning. “Keep your wrist straight when you throw a punch.”

To demonstrate, he steps up to her, lifting her arm up by the elbow. She makes a fist, as if she were going to throw a punch, and he urges her to extend her arm. His gloved fingers skim along the skin of her arm until they reach her wrist. He adjusts the angle of it, from the slight bend to a straight line. She nods, staring at the way he’d adjusted her wrist and trying to remember it.

“Well, I, for one, will sleep a lot easier knowing that you can handle yourself,” John comments and she shrugs at him. She’s been handling herself for a while now, but she’s glad to have convinced him of her abilities anyway. He turns his attention to Oliver. “How’d it go?”

“Badly for him,” he answers, setting his bow down on the table hosting his arrows. Felicity looks between the two of them.

“Who him?” She asks.

“An assassin for hire with an affinity for knives,” Oliver explains, moving past them towards the computers. This time, Felicity accepts the towel and water bottle when John holds them out to her, wiping her forehead as she follows Oliver. “His name was Guillermo Barrera.”

“Was?” She echoes, stopping as Oliver continues across the room.

“So we can’t ask him about his intended target?” John points out instead. Oliver leans over the desk, scratching a name out of his notebook with a pen. He stands, unzipping a pocket in his jacket as he turns back to them.

“No,” he says, lifting his hand and showing them the phone within his grasp. He holds it out to Felicity. “Which is why I need you to hack his phone.”

She frowns, examining the phone in his hand.

“Barrera’s world class,” he explains to her. “He kills high profile targets, and whatever job he was hired for isn’t finished. We need to figure out who he was here to kill and fast. They are probably still in danger.”

He lowers his hand finally, placing the phone in her palm. She flips it in her grasp, examining the
crushed screen. There’s a large circular hole in the glass, clearly the work of an arrow, and she gives him a tired look, holding the phone up at him.

“You know this physically pains me, right?” She asks. Rather than answering, he looks her up and down, examining the workout clothes she’d changed into after work. She’s surprised at the move, especially in front of John, but it’s lacking his usual smugness. Instead, he frowns when his eyes reach her face again.

“Are you planning on changing?” He asks.

“Oh,” she says, surprised at the reminder. She hadn’t planned on letting her sparring with John exert her too much, knowing she wouldn’t have time to shower before heading for Laurel’s. She nods. “Yeah, I’m gonna run home and change. I’ll get a program working to pull any salvageable data from Barrera’s phone first.”

He nods, stepping around her to head out of the foundry. She crosses to the desk, hooking the phone into a cord connected to the computer. She hears Oliver and John exchanging quiet words behind her, but she is more interested in getting the information off of the phone than she is in eavesdropping.

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Despite the fact that she had needed to go home, redo her makeup, and change, Felicity still somehow only makes it to Laurel’s building right after Oliver. He’s lingering in the hallway with a paper gift bag dangling from his fingers.

“You left before I did,” she points out quietly, aware of the doors around them, stepping up to him and jabbing him lightly in the chest. He chuckles at her. “How did you just get here?”

“I didn’t,” he tells her, pushing her hand away from his chest gently. “I was waiting for you.”

“Oh,” she says, surprised at that. They hadn’t said they would be coming to Tommy’s birthday dinner together - together. They’d just both agreed that they could go and make it through dinner without being awkward. Which, was before last night when she’d kissed him and he’d told her he loved her…

Making it without any awkwardness at all might be asking a bit much.

“You look amazing, by the way,” he says lowly and she recognizes the look in his eyes even before he ducks his head down to kiss her. For a moment, she laments the destruction of her freshly applied lipstick, but quickly forgets the woes of her makeup as his free hand snakes around her back. His fingers press gently into her spine, urging her closer to him.

“We’re already late,” she reminds him, pulling back far enough to take a breath. He nods, his nose brushing against hers.

“We should probably head inside,” he agrees, barely finishing the sentence before covering her mouth with his again. She grins into the kiss, her fingers coming up to stroke over his jaw. She doesn’t know how Oliver always does this to her, makes it so easy to fall back into a rhythm. Even their first night together hadn’t felt like a first night. It’s always just felt so comfortable.

When he knocks the gift bag against her hip on accident, the contents heavy and painful, she pulls away with a hiss. He cringes, apologizing and tucking the bag at his side.

“Mr. Graceful,” she teases, surprised at the clumsy move from him. He gives her a dark look, but the
way the corners of his lips tilt in amusement lessen the effect. Sighing, she pulls away from him fully and digs in her bag for her lipstick, using her phone screen to reapply it. Oliver hangs back patiently.

“Should I have brought a gift?” She asks suddenly, spinning to face him with a frown. Laurel hadn’t mentioned any gifts other than her own for her boyfriend, but that seemed normal. Even if she was supposed to bring one, she’d have no idea what to bring Tommy.

“I don’t think Tommy will care,” Oliver assures her. She nods, reaching towards him to wipe a smudge of her bright pink lipstick from the corner of his mouth. He ducks, allowing her better access, smiling at the gesture.

They finally knock on the door to the apartment and it’s Tommy who pulls the door open to greet them.

“Welcome,” he booms with an air of performance to it. Felicity grins at him while Oliver steps forward, holding the gift bag out to Tommy.

“Happy birthday, buddy,” he says as Tommy takes the bag from him, thanking him. Felicity watches the exchange as they embrace, warmed by the easy friendship between the two. She doesn’t have any childhood friends that stuck around and she almost envies the closeness they’ve created. The thought of Curtis and Laurel cools it, though. She’s still getting used to having constants in her life again.

She thinks she can add Oliver to that list, too.

“Oh,” Tommy says, pulling away from the hug and weighing the gift bag teasingly with his fingers. “This feels like a Chateauneuf de Pape.”

“It’s gonna taste like one, too,” Oliver assures him as they step inside the apartment.

“You are a true friend,” Tommy comments. “Thank you.”

Oliver pushes the door closed behind him as Tommy pulls Felicity in for a hug. She pinches his arm as she pulls away, making him hiss dramatically and pull a face. She winks at him before looking at Oliver.

“You know I, too, have a birthday coming up,” she tells him. “And, I love red wine.”

He chuckles shaking his head at her. Tommy turns to lead them further into the apartment, Felicity stepping after him to follow. Oliver’s hand falls to the small of her back and she feels him duck down close to her ear.

“I think I can do better than wine for your birthday,” he whispers, the gruff, low tone of his voice making her shiver. He doesn’t miss it, winking at her as she glances back at him. She’s so screwed.

Felicity rushes to catch up to Tommy, hoping he hasn’t noticed them falling behind. In the dining room, Laurel is finishing lighting candles on the table. She straightens at their entrance, shaking the flame off of a match. Tommy joins her, his arm wrapping around her to rest on her back.

“Ollie, hi,” she greets, stepping forward for an only slightly awkward hug with him. Felicity glances around the room, surprised at the number of candles strewn about it. Does having an in with the SCPD mean shirking fire codes?

“Felicity, I’m so glad you could make it,” Laurel says, pulling Felicity from her musings about candles. Felicity smiles as Laurel pulls her into a hug as well, arms wrapped tightly around her. She
returns the hug, chuckling.

“Please,” she jokes as Laurel pulls back. “And miss a chance to see Tommy here squirm with guilt? No chance.”

Laurel laughs, turning back to look at Tommy for a counter. He shakes his head, giving Felicity a tired look. She catches Oliver’s eye off to her side, frowning at the exchange.

“Honestly, Smoak, can’t we put this aside for one night?” Tommy asks on a sigh. “It’s my birthday.”

Felicity pouts, tapping her lip with her index finger, considering the request. She hums.

“Nope,” she answers shortly finally. Tommy huffs dramatically, turning to head into the kitchen. He grumbles something about cracking open the wine. Laurel gives Felicity a teasing pout at Tommy’s expense. She isn’t worried about ganging up on him, though, knowing he knows she’s kidding. Mostly.

“I’ve missed something,” Oliver comments as Tommy disappears into the kitchen. Felicity steps closer to him, brushing his arm consolingly.

“I promise it’s not as interesting of a story as it sounds,” she assures him, but Laurel is already shaking her head at them. She’s not getting out of this without rehashing the story.

“That’s such a lie,” Laurel accuses and Felicity feigns offense, pressing her hand to her chest. Laurel rolls her eyes lightheartedly, looking to Oliver instead. “It was like, I don’t know, almost two years ago. Felicity had finally agreed to go out with this guy from work-”

“Excuse me?” Felicity interrupts. “‘Finally’? He’d asked, like, twice.”

“Yeah, and then you spent a week talking about him and talking yourself out of it,” Laurel reminds her. Felicity huffs, rolling her eyes. Fine, so maybe she’d been really into the guy, but they worked together and she doesn’t like to let things get messy in the one area she has a semblance of control over. Which is probably ironic considering who she’s currently seeing.

“Whatever, you’re a terrible storyteller, just let me,” she says. Laurel waves her hand, relinquishing the floor and Oliver, for his part, just seems amused at their back and forth. “So, I go out with this guy for dinner, whatever. Turned out he was super boring anyway, like, I know you’re monosyllabic, but this guy…”

At Oliver’s amused look, she forces herself back onto the point, waving her hands a little dramatically.

“Anyway, the date is a dud and I’m already planning my escape, when who should walk in but one Thomas Merlyn?” She continues. Like he’s been summoned, Tommy comes swinging through the door with four glasses of wine dangling between his fingers. He groans at the sound of the story being shared. “Drunk as a frat boy on spring break and yelling to me across this arguably nice restaurant.”

“And then nothing else happened,” Tommy finishes, handing Laurel a wine glass. “Wine?”

“And then ,” Felicity persists, taking a glass from Tommy as well. Oliver is smiling at her in amusement as she tells the tale. “After informing my date that he looked like a nerd, he promptly threw up all over my very new, very expensive dress.”

Tommy punctuates the end of her story with a loud groan. Laurel hides a laugh behind her hand,
stepping closer to him and pressing into his side. He wraps his arm around her again. Felicity tilts her head, smiling at the picture they make as Laurel drops a consoling kiss on Tommy’s cheek. She really just likes to tease Tommy, but even if she didn’t, she’d be hard pressed to try and ignore how happy he makes Laurel.

She feels a warmth against her back, Oliver’s hand pressing lightly against it. Felicity sends a furtive glance his way as he takes the smallest of steps closer to her. Laurel and Tommy are too caught up in each other to notice the exchange, which Felicity is thankful for. It’s definitely not a conversation she wants to have right now.

“A toast,” Tommy says, his attention returning to the room at large. He raises his wineglass and the rest of them follow suit. “To the first birthday that I have enjoyed in a long time. I got my best friend back.”

Oliver raises his glass in agreement and Felicity slips her free hand behind her back, lacing her fingers with his on her back. It’s an awkward movement, but he squeezes her fingers. Tommy looks back at Laurel, a soft smile on his face.

“And,” he continues. “I have finally figured out why poets have been in business for the last few thousand years.”

“Happy birthday, baby,” Laurel says, the sappy sentiment making her smile. Tommy thanks her as she presses a short kiss to his lips. They turn, holding their glasses out and Felicity and Oliver meet them. The clinking of glasses fills the apartment and Felicity, finally, tilts the wine to her lips. She hums at the taste of the expensive drink. She feels Oliver’s fingers squeeze her own again before they fall away.

A knock on the door pulls Laurel away, assuming it’s the food being delivered. Oliver and Tommy joke about being glad that she didn’t cook and Felicity gives them each a dark look. She’s about to out their teasing to Laurel when she comes back in, but she’s not holding food and there’s someone trailing behind her. The room goes immediately tense as Malcolm Merlyn enters.

Tommy’s father greets Oliver first, surprisingly Felicity. The man cuts an imposing figure and Felicity has only heard stories of him. It’s weird to think that he and Oliver could be close at all, considering how his own son seems to think of him. He turns his attentions to Tommy, telling him he’s been trying to get in touch with him.

“What are you doing here, dad?” Tommy asks, ignoring the jovial tone his father is attempting. Malcolm pulls a small blue box with a white bow from behind his back, holding it up in front of his chest and wishing Tommy a happy birthday.

“Just give us a second,” Tommy says, looking over them. Laurel nods and he turns to lead his father out of the apartment. Malcolm tosses the box to Oliver who catches it easily. He pulls a face once Tommy and his father are gone, turning to face Laurel.

“Have they spoken since Malcolm closed down the clinic?” He asks and Laurel frowns, shaking her head in response. “That clinic meant a lot to Tommy. Did he explain why he was closing it?”

“Not in any way that really explained it,” Laurel says. Felicity frowns, looking between them and sipping from her wineglass uncomfortably. She can hear the low tones of Tommy and his father outside of the slightly open apartment door.

“Clinic?” She prompts.
“Tommy’s mother used to run a free clinic in the Glades until she died,” Laurel explains. “Do you remember a few months ago when his father invited us to dinner? He wanted Tommy to sign off on closing it down.”

“Because the Glades has too much affordable medical care?” She asks sarcastically. Laurel shakes her head in remorse, but Oliver makes eye contact with Felicity, his brow creasing. She can tell the decision doesn’t make sense to him either.

Tommy comes back inside, the apartment door slamming behind him and startling them all. He comes back into the dining room, but the air is still tense. Laurel meets him, handing him his wineglass and wrapping her arm around his back. He drinks deeply from the glass. It’s clear no one knows what to say, so Felicity does what she does best. She just talks.

“Dads, man,” she comments lightly, shaking her head and taking a drink from her own glass. Tommy laughs, shaking his head at her. It breaks the atmosphere and Oliver and Laurel let out relieved laughs as well. Tommy gives her a grateful nod and she shoots him a wink.

The next knock at the door actually is the food.

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“Jeeze, this is one paranoid assassin,” Felicity sighs as her fingers fly across the keyboard in the foundry, code scanning across the screen faster than she can read it. John and Oliver bracket her on either side. “Barrera’s got cobalt-level encryption on his phone.”

Felicity doesn’t even have cobalt-level encryption on her phone and she occasionally texts people about vigilante business. Wait, should she put better encryption on her phone? On the one hand, it seems like an oversight not to. On the other, it kind of makes her seem like a paranoid weirdo if she does…

“It’s not going to be easy to break,” she announces, shaking herself out of the thoughts. Her fingers are moving on instinct at this point, but it’s going to take more than her usual tricks to get through the security. She hasn’t really encountered something this protected before. Even the Black Hawk security fob had been easier.

“But Codebreaker is my middle name,” she continues, smirking a little, noticing Oliver’s attention turn to her out of the corner of her eye. She pauses. “Actually, it’s Megan—”

“Felicity,” Oliver calls, pulling her focus back. It’s probably fair of him, considering the way her brain is moving at the moment. They don’t really have time for her to start contemplating the origins of the name Megan. “Can you get anything off of it?”

Oh, ye of little faith.

“Just the last number he dialed,” she says, isolating the data on her screen.

“Which was?” Oliver prompts. She presses a few keys and an address comes up on screen, accompanied by a street photo of the front of the address.

“A restaurant in Chinatown, Jade Dragon,” she reads aloud, turning to John because she knows Oliver won’t appreciate her jokes right now. “I guess even hired killers enjoy the city’s best chow mein.”

“Yeah, Jade Dragon is a front,” John tells her, frowning at the screen. God, she misses having Curtis around sometimes. “For the Chinese Mafia.”
Oh. Well, now she’s going to have to find a new restaurant to order from. No wonder Oliver had always suggested somewhere else when she’d tried to get him to order Jade Dragon with her. Dammit, is nothing in this city sacred?

“Call the restaurant, make a reservation for two for tonight,” Oliver instructs and Felicity doesn’t know if he’s giving the command to her or to John, though she’s fairly certain he’s capable of using a phone himself. He looks over at her, pointing so it’s clear who he’s addressing. “You need to decrypt that phone.”

She frowns as he spins out of his chair, assignments given. Though, she’s pretty sure it’ll end up being her who has to make the reservation while also trying to decrypt the phone. Her head is starting to hurt and she’s remembering the wine from last night fondly as she spins back towards John. He’s still frowning at the screen, arms crossed over his chest.

“I’m kind of in the mood for Chinese now,” she admits, thumping her fists against the metal desk and ducking towards him.

“Mm,” he hums, nodding in agreement. She immediately starts a search for somewhere other than Jade Dragon to order from.

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“So, the boys are going out tonight.”

As odd ways Laurel has greeted her over the phone go, this is probably the one with the least segue. Felicity can’t help but laugh, even as she cradles the phone between her face and her shoulder. She wasn’t going to answer, but since she knew Tommy and Oliver were going out, she figured it might be important.

“Ah, so I hear,” she responds.

“I think that means we should go out, too,” Laurel continues. “Nothing too ridiculous, but maybe shopping and drinks?”

Felicity sighs, her hands balling into fists as the phone continues to block her attempts to break into it. She drops them tiredly onto the table, rattling the items scattered about it and pulling John’s attention to her. He crosses the room to look at the screen over her shoulder.

“Rain check?” She asks apologetically. “That sounds like fun, but I’m working on something and I can’t put it off.”

“Something vigilante related?” Laurel asks in a hushed tone, though Felicity figures she’s probably in her apartment by herself. She doubts Tommy hasn’t left to meet Oliver yet. “Do you want to tell me about it?”

Felicity knows Laurel has always been really interested in her work as a vigilante and she’s definitely been kind of cut out of it lately. Mostly because Felicity is afraid to let anything slip that could tip Laurel off to Oliver’s identity, but also she’d been kidnapped due to her ties to the Hood. She figured it was best to keep Laurel away from all this, at least for a while.

Except, that’s exactly what she’d tried to do with Curtis and look how that had turned out. Things just keep getting more and more complicated and Felicity’s entire life has become more gray than black and white.

“I’ll tell you about it once I’ve finished with it,” Felicity promises. It’s probably the truth. She can tell...
Laurel the barebones of it, it’s not like it hasn’t become obvious as of late that she and the vigilante are working together more often than not at this point.

Laurel sighs dramatically, but accepts her excuse. Felicity promises to make it up to her before hanging up and returning her attention to the code in front of her. John places a hand on the back of her chair, leaning more fully over her to see the screen as she types at the keyboard.

“Any luck?” He asks and she resists the urge to snap at him.

“Trust me,” she says instead. “The minute I break through it, you will know.”

“Well, don’t try to shut yourself down here all night, alright?” He insists, pulling away from her to drop onto the stool on her right. She nods in appeasement, though that’s basically her exact plan. Someone’s life is at stake, so if that means she forfeits some sleep, she’s willing to do that. He must realize that she isn’t really listening to him, because he continues, “Hey, you’re not gonna be able to get through it if you’re sleep deprived and frustrated.”

Sighing, Felicity glances over at him. Her fingers don’t halt over the keyboard.

“Don’t you have a girlfriend you should be meeting?” She asks, smirking at him. He smiles, but shakes his head in response.

“I’m not gonna let you lock yourself down here all night without some company,” he says and she smiles at the friendliness of the gesture. John makes her feel comfortable in the space, even when she feels out of place. She appreciates how warmly he’s welcomed her into the fold.

“That’s incredibly sweet,” she tells him. “But, no way. If I promise I’ll go home at some point, will you please uncancel on Carly?”

“Some point tonight,” he emphasizes. “Meaning before twelve a.m.”

Felicity nods in agreement and, after some more hesitation, John finally grabs his coat and heads out. She appreciates the gesture of him wanting to stay and keep her company, but he can’t exactly help with the code and it’s going to be consuming all of her concentration. For him, it’d be like he was sitting down in the foundry alone all night.

After he leaves, she kicks her shoes off under the desk and commits fully to breaking the encryption. It’s probably a bad idea, but she even mutes her phone on the desk next to her. If it’s important, she’ll see the notification coming through, but the fewer interruptions she has to deal with the quicker she’ll manage to get into the phone.

Feeling bad at the prospect of breaking her promise, she does force herself to leave at exactly 11:59 on the dot. Her program continues to run in her absence and she’s barely able to keep her eyes open anyway. She still only allows herself to sleep for a few hours before heading back to the base and starting the day all over. John shows up around ten in the morning, shaking his head at her and the three cups of coffee she’s brought with her.

Her change of clothes must tell him she made it home, though, because he doesn’t try to press her on it. Even still, he’s in and out of the foundry throughout the day as she works, even bringing her lunch at one point. Oliver hadn’t really found out anything at the restaurant last night and hasn’t been back to the foundry today either. She’s beginning to realize just how hard he and John work to keep up appearances - listless billionaire for Oliver and his driver-slash-security guard for John.

Just from the amount of time she’s spent around John, before and after learning Oliver’s secret, though, she knows he is incredibly dedicated to the safety of the Queen family. He’s taken over as
head of security for the whole house, so even when he isn’t carting Oliver around, he’s making sure his family is safe.

Felicity isn’t entirely sure how she loses track of time as badly as she manages to, but suddenly she checks her phone and it’s nearly seven at night. Her fingers ache a little from continuous use and John watches her from his perch on the stool next to her. She actually doesn’t even remember him coming back in. Another line of code hits a digital brick wall and she presses her fingers to her eyes, shifting her glasses off of her nose. She hears the sound of feet coming down the steps behind her.

“How’s it going?” Oliver asks as he descends the stairs. Felicity sits up, returning her attention to the screen and inputting another stream of code.

“Great,” she bites, frustrated at the encryption. “If you ignore the fact that all I’ve managed to do today is find out how not to break through a cobalt encryption. Everything I do just brings me to another level of security.”

The room goes quiet for a moment and she doesn’t have to look around to know that Oliver and John are exchanging looks over her annoyed state. Stubbornly, she ignores them.

“You need a break,” Oliver says, a statement rather than a question. What she needs is to figure out who Barrera was hired to kill. She feels Oliver’s fingers wrap around her elbow as she ignores him, tugging gently to turn her in her seat. It pulls her fingers away from the keyboard, but her latest attempt is still running through the system.

“I don’t have time for a break,” she reminds him, looking up at him from her chair.

“Felicity, you’re not going to be able to break through it if you’re exhausted and frustrated,” he says, his hand slipping down her arm to wrap around hers. He pulls her from her seat as she barely resists. “Give me twenty minutes.”

After another moment, she gives in, nodding at him. Glancing back at her screens, John assures her that he’ll keep a watch over it and let them know if anything changes. She really can’t do anything until her latest code runs its course anyway.

She lets Oliver lead her upstairs into the club. He drops her hand, leaving her in the wide open space, and heads towards the bar. She notices he has the gray blanket from down in the basement folded over his arm. He ducks behind the bar and surfaces with a bottle of wine in one hand and two glasses dangling from the fingers of his other hand.

“Oliver,” she sighs, folding her arms over her stomach. Maybe he’s right about her needing a break, but can they really justify having a drink while someone’s life is in danger? He rejoins her, leading her further into the open area of the club. She imagines the goal is to fill it with dancing bodies.

“Oliver,” she sighs, folding her arms over her stomach. Maybe he’s right about her needing a break, but can they really justify having a drink while someone’s life is in danger? He rejoins her, leading her further into the open area of the club. She imagines the goal is to fill it with dancing bodies.

“Trust me, alright?” He asks, holding the hand with the glasses out to her. She takes them from him and follows him as he sets the wine bottle on the floor and shakes out the blanket, laying it flat across the concrete. He takes a seat on the blanket and looks up at her imploringly. Rolling her eyes playfully, she joins him, glad she’d gone with jeans today.

Oliver pulls a corkscrew from his pocket and pops the cork out of the wine bottle. He holds his hand out and she hands over one of the wine glasses, watching him fill it. She waits until both glasses are filled and Oliver has clinked the lip of his against hers gently before she takes a sip.

“The place is almost finished,” she points out, once she’s given in and allowed herself to relax a bit. Oliver nods, looking around with pride.
“Yeah,” he says. “Tommy’s done a great job. I couldn’t have done it without him.”

“Well, he’s not using it as a cover for his super secret clubhouse,” she points out teasingly. Oliver cringes playfully, nodding in agreement. He reaches for her, grabbing at her legs and pulling them towards him. Felicity shifts so that her legs are draped over his lap.

Oliver starts telling her the plans for the club, pointing out different aspects they have planned for the place once it opens. It’s the first time she’s heard him talk about it with genuine excitement and pride. She thinks Tommy’s affections for the future club have rubbed off on him.

“So, that’s a stage, right?” He says, pointing with a sweeping motion towards the raised platform across from them. “And, most nights we’ll have a band. Somebody cool.”

“You should consider a DJ,” Felicity says, shrugging. “I feel like mixes are super in right now.”

Oliver frowns, nodding at this as he looks around the club. The previously unfinished staircase now leads up to a second floor balcony. There’s rooms for an office and storage space on one end and she imagines tables and chairs set up on the other. She studies him for a moment, a tightness to his jaw she’s come to recognize.

“It’s hard for you, isn’t it?” She asks. “Keeping half of yourself from people - Tommy, Laurel, your family.”

“You,” he supplies when she doesn’t. She nods, though, because this is just one more thing they haven’t talked about yet. “It’s incredibly hard. Almost impossible. But, I still think it’s for the best.”

“Do you think you’ll ever tell them?” Felicity frowns, pulling her knees up so they’re tented over his legs and leaning forward onto them. She turns his face towards him and he’s got this soft, tired look that makes her want to reach for him. Her hands dangle over her knees, one hand cupping the wineglass as the liquid inside sloshes around gently.

“No,” he admits. “For me, this ends when that list does. Can you really tell me that if I told them, they would ever look at me the same?”

Felicity drinks guiltily from her glass. It’s not like she hadn’t given him a hard time, and she ignored obvious signs for months. She is also a vigilante. It’s hard to imagine Tommy or Laurel or Thea taking the news any better right now. Public debate on the vigilante is still ongoing as to whether he’s a nuisance or a God send.

“What is it with you and that list anyway?” She asks as he pulls the glass from her grasp, setting it on the blanket and refilling it with one hand. “Do you know who wrote it?”

“I thought it was my father, but I’m not sure anymore,” he explains, handing the glass back to her. She takes it, but focuses on him instead of the drink. “Before he died, he gave it to me and told me I needed to use it to save the city.”

“No pressure,” she comments, lifting her glass to her lips. Oliver chuckles, nodding at the comment. Appreciative of his honesty, and knowing how hard it is for him to talk about his father, she decides to reward it with some of her own. “You know, even before I found out your secret, I was having some trouble balancing everything - work, vigilantism, friends, you.”

She punctuates the sentence by lifting her free hand and poking him gently in the chest. He rocks backwards slightly with the gesture, feigning injury, and it pulls a quiet laugh from her. He smiles at her, sitting up again and nodding.
“I think I can relate to that pretty well,” he says.

“I think a big part of that was that we were both so dependent on secrecy and lies,” she continues, shifting to set her wineglass down behind her before leaning back into his space. He nods again, agreeing and urging her to continue. “I think the best chance we have is if we’re just really honest with each other and trust each other. Do you think we can do that?”

“I think I’m willing to try if you are,” he agrees, tilting towards her further. He wraps an arm around her shins, pulling her legs against his chest. She meets him for a kiss, soft and lingering, promising of things to come.

“Good,” she says, smiling as she pulls away from him. “Because, I love you and I’d like to make it work.”

Oliver’s smile is nearly blinding, but she only gets to see it for a moment before he’s pressing in for another kiss, firmer this time. She wraps her hand around the back of his neck, stroking her fingers through the short hairs there.

A throat clearing on the other side of the space, startles them out of the kiss. Felicity feels her cheeks heat slightly when she spots John standing just within the club space, clearly having come up from downstairs. Oliver leans back from her so that he can look over in concern at John.

“Sorry to interrupt,” John says. “But, your program turned something up.”

Felicity nearly knocks her forgotten wineglass over in her rush to get up. Oliver catches it just before it topples onto the blanket and follows after her. She offers John a thank you as she runs past him into the basement. She drops into the chair, the wheels rolling, and has to catch herself on the desk to keep from rolling away from it.

“Neither of you happen to speak Spanish, do you?” She asks, hearing the men coming down the stairs as well. The data on the phone had, of course, been in Spanish rather than English.

“Arabic,” John offers unhelpfully, but somewhat interestingly. Felicity pouts to herself.


“Oh, sigh,” Felicity huffs, working to run a translator over the code. She feels Oliver and John crowd in over her shoulders as it runs and she works to isolate the information on his target. She smiles to herself as she finds it, but it fades as the name listed sets in.

“Oh, my God,” John says.

“Malcolm Merlyn,” Felicity reads aloud.

“The awards ceremony,” Oliver puts together, remembering that Malcolm had pulled Tommy away at dinner to invite him to his award ceremony. He’s already pulling away from the table to grab his gear. “Tommy’s there.”

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By the time they reach Merlyn Global, the building is quickly being evacuated. Oliver’s call to Detective Lance seems to have been taken seriously, at least. Through the large glass windows, the atrium seems empty of people, but they spot a fire fight on the second floor. Oliver breaks through the window, rolling to keep a low position and taking out one of the shooters. He dives for the other side of the hallway, dipping behind a post in the wall as the second gunman fires off automatic
Felicity sticks to the side of the wall with the broken window, pulling a sphere from her pocket and tossing it down the hallway. She hears the metallic clang of guns colliding with the sphere and peaks around the corner. The second gunman is unarmed now, but moves quickly for Oliver.

“Get somewhere safe,” Oliver barks, looking back to where the Merlyn men are hidden behind a post of their own. The gunman approaches, engaging Oliver in hand to hand. “We’ll hold them off.”

Felicity watches Tommy and his father run for the elevator at the far end of the hallway while Oliver dispatches his combatant. She pulls from her own hiding spot as the man falls unconscious to the floor. Oliver turns to look back at the closed doors of the elevator.

“We need to follow them,” he says and Felicity nods, watching the numbers tick upwards on the display.

“They’re headed for the penthouse,” she deduces, knowing Malcolm’s office is located on the top floor of the building. With wide glass windows and vantage points from all the surrounding buildings. “We need to-”

She stops at the sound of heels against the floor behind her. She and Oliver turn, coming to face a Chinese woman with white hair, a dark wig dangling from her fingers. Felicity frowns, but Oliver tenses. He steps in front of her, approaching the woman.

“Go after them,” he instructs as the woman moves to meet him. “I’ll handle this.”

Felicity moves with urgency, doubting the Merlys know the amount of danger they’ve found themselves in. She hears the violent clash of Oliver and the woman behind her as she pushes through the stairwell doors. She’s going to have to trust that he actually can handle it. She tries to hack into the Merlyn network, looking for security cameras on the top floor or a way to shut down the elevator before the men can get off, but as far as the system is concerned, the penthouse level doesn’t even exist.

When she reaches the stairs at the top, she’s winded and doubting her ability in a fight, but tugs at the door to the stairwell anyway. It holds fast under her hands and she realizes it’s locked with an electromagnetic lock.

“That’s weird,” she murmurs, pressing her finger to her ear to turn her comm on. As she does, the building shakes beneath her, the sound of shattering glass and shouts coming from the other side of the door.

“Oliver,” she calls as the floor steadies under her feet. “Oliver, something’s wrong. Did you feel that?”

He doesn’t answer for a long moment and her pulse jumps at the silence. What if he’d overestimated his ability to take on the mystery woman downstairs? What if the explosion hadn’t just hit the top level?

“I felt it,” he says finally, his voice coming through fuzzy. She thinks he might be running. “Can you get into the office?”

“No, I mean, eventually yeah, but,” she huffs, already typing at the tablet on her wrist. “The office is sealed with electric locks and exists on a totally separate grid from the rest of the building. I just don’t know if we have the time it would take-’”
“It’s fine,” Oliver tells her and she hears the sound of air rushing past the comm. “I’m heading up to the office from the outside. I’ll get a handle on the situation and let you know.”

Felicity waits, still looking for a way into Merlyn’s super secret server. It all seems a bit overkill for a corporate office. Even if he’s worried about corporate espionage, electric locks and secret networks? It seems like a lot of effort to go to. She hears more shouting from within the office, but it’s muffled and she can’t make out words, just a panicked voice.

“Malcolm’s been shot with a bullet laced with curare,” Oliver explains to her over comms, once the shouting and panic has stopped within. She recognizes that from months ago. The man they’d both been after when she first met the Hood and Oliver, separately.

“Deadshot,” she says, the name coming back to her. “I can go to the roof, look for the most likely vantage point. That’s mostly math and trajectory, so.”

“Listen, if you spot him, do not engage,” Oliver says, his serious tone making her nod even without him there. “He’s an expert marksman and he won’t hesitate to—”

“Yeah, I remember,” she says, cutting him off. She’s already moving, her feet carrying her up the last set of stairs to the door labeled as roof access. She remembers the last time they’d trifled with the assassin and how shaken it had left her. She’s not eager for a repeat performance.

It’s pretty easy to figure out which building the shots had come from once she notices the gaping hole in the side of the Merlyn Global building. Not wanting to waste time with the stairs again, she uses a tether to move between the buildings, clearing the one Deadshot must have used floor-by-floor.

She meets Oliver back on top of the roof once he’s finished with helping Malcolm. He looks surprisingly shaken, but she can’t really blame him. She holds out a hand and bullet casings roll around on the leather covering her palm.

“He was probably gone the minute he saw Malcolm fall,” she says, closing her fist over the small pieces of metal, the only thing left behind. “Efficient.”

An ambulance sits in front of Merlyn Global on the street far below them, a group gathered around a stretcher that Felicity assumes carries Malcolm Merlyn. Oliver nods next to her. She frowns, thinking about Malcolm.

“Malcolm was pretty prepared for this, huh?” She comments, looking over at Oliver. “I mean, bulletproof glass for the windows, electromagnetic locks. A whole office set up on a separate grid.”

“Malcolm became somewhat of a paranoid eccentric after his wife died,” Oliver considers, meeting her gaze. She raises an eyebrow at him. “I wouldn’t be surprised if that extended to his office.”

Felicity turns back to the wreckage left behind in Malcolm’s office, nodding at Oliver’s assessment. It doesn’t quiet the questions in her mind, but, like Laurel, Oliver has known the man longer than she has. Maybe she’s become a bit paranoid herself.

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“Looks like Malcolm Merlyn’s gonna be okay,” John tells them as they come down the stairs from the club. Oliver has been mostly silent, disarmingly silent, even for him. It’s starting to worry her. “They took him to Starling General. Good thing he was wearing a bulletproof vest.”

“He’s not in the hospital because he was shot,” Oliver says, setting his bow down on the table and
looking up at John. John tilts his head, frowning at Oliver’s tone. “He was poisoned by curare.”

Felicity watches the exchange, seeing realization dawn on John’s face. It’s not the same as her own, though, placing the name of the drug to a man she’d heard of once over six months ago. There’s a horror to it, even if John covers it quick. He schools his features, but she’d seen it.

John steps past them, towards an external wall where piping for the club above lines the concrete, exposed due to the lack of construction in the basement area. He releases a heavy breath as Oliver cringes slightly.

“Lawton’s alive,” he says, more to himself than to them. Felicity remembers the last time they’d come up against Deadshot. John had been shot right before Oliver took him down with an arrow, of course Felicity hadn’t know it was John at the time. The name rings a bell, too. Floyd Lawton had owned the laptop Oliver had brought her all those months ago.

“I’m sorry, John,” Oliver says, nodding at the statement. John turns, heading away from them. He follows the piping along the wall, backlit by a work light left behind. Felicity steps close to Oliver, watching John’s silhouette.

“Lawton kick his dog or something?” She asks, purposely picking an outlandish offense. She braces herself for the answer.

“No,” Oliver says quietly, shaking his head. He seems unsurprised by John’s response to the situation, but even more rattled than before. She wants to force him to talk to her. “He killed his brother.”

Felicity sucks in a breath at the response, her chest tightening. Oliver had mentioned that John’s brother had passed, but they hadn’t talked about the circumstances and she knew it was impolite to ask. For months, John thought that his brother’s killer was dead and now he’s finding out that Lawton is still walking around, shooting more people.

“Fuck,” she breathes, because it’s the only word she can really find at the moment. Oliver nods in silent agreement with the sentiment as they both watch John battle internally with the news. When he doesn’t show signs of returning to them, and the appropriate response seems to be to leave him to himself, they break off to change out of their gear.

“Are you gonna tell me what else has you so shaken up?” She asks, once she returns from the corner where she’s taken to changing in and out of her gear. She tosses the clothes and various devices down next to his bow. Oliver raises an eyebrow at her, but doesn’t bother to argue over her assessment of his state.

“The only way to save Malcolm was to get fresh blood into his system,” he explains, closing the lid of the wooden truck where he stores his hood when he isn’t using it. “And, the only way to get Tommy to trust me was to tell him who I was.”

“Tommy knows?” Felicity asks, eyes widening at the revelation. “That’s… Is that good?”

Oliver shrugs helplessly. It’s kind of a dumb question on her part, she supposes. Tommy is probably in shock and hadn’t even really processed the news by the time Oliver had had to leave him at Merlyn Global. There’s no way of really knowing how he’ll react and it’s not like she had even reacted all that well.

“You should go to the hospital,” she says, letting her question remained unanswered. Oliver is already nodding before she explains. “You need to talk to him now that his dad is gonna be fine.”
“Yeah,” he says, stepping towards her. “I know, I need to, I just… Will you come with me?”

He’s looking at her imploringly, but the question has an easy answer. They’re a team now, after all, and teammates don’t leave each other in the lurch. Whether that means facing down deadly assassins or finally dealing with the consequences of the truth, she wants to be there for him.

“Yes,” she nods easily. “Of course I will.”

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It doesn’t take them much time to find Malcolm’s room once Oliver starts using his name with the doctors. She’s sure they’ve been trying to stave off reporters and onlookers alike, looking to get the grim details of the night’s events from Malcolm or Tommy themselves. Most people are familiar with the close friendship between the Queens and the Merlyns, though, so once people begin to realize who Oliver is, they’re happy to lead him through the hospital.

On Malcolm’s floor, the nurse directs them down the hallway to where his room is. Oliver hesitates, taking slow steps, and Felicity laces her fingers through his and urges him forward. When they round the corner, they spot Tommy coming from within a room. He stops and leans back against the wall outside of the door.

Felicity lets go of Oliver’s hand when they reach Tommy to embrace him. He lets her hug him, stiff in her arms, and she rubs his back only semi-awkwardly.

“How’s your dad?” She asks as she she pulls back. Tommy lights up with a false smile, his eyes flickering over her to Oliver behind her.

“He’s gonna be fine,” Tommy says, looking back to her. “Listen, do you mind if I talk to Oliver alone for a minute?”

Felicity frowns, glancing back at Oliver. She doesn’t want to leave him to the fire by himself, but she doesn’t know if Tommy finding out both their secrets in one night is such a good idea. Oliver nods, almost imperceptibly, and she looks back to Tommy with a soft smile.

“Yes, of course,” she nods. “I’ll go try and find you some coffee.”

She turns, finding Oliver’s hand once more to give it a fortifying squeeze, and heads off in the direction of the coffee machine she’d seen on the way to the room. She’s sure Oliver can handle whatever Tommy might throw at him while she’s gone, but she still worries. Oliver’s tough act is so fragile at times and she knows that his family and friends are the easiest way to break through it.

She doesn’t know how Tommy is going to react, but just going by his demeanour, she doubts it will be good.

The coffee machine gurgles to life as she presses one of the options and begins to churn a coffee-colored sludge into the small styrofoam cup under the spout. She frowns at the consistency, picking the cup up and sloshing it around within once it’s finished. She turns away from the machine and heads back the direction she’d come.

Tommy passes her as she rounds the corner, moving in quick steps. He keeps his head down and doesn’t even seem to notice her as he passes by. Oliver is still in the same spot she’d left him, his shoulders stooped and tense. Her steps quicken to reach him and she wraps her free hand around his arm. He takes a shaky breath before turning to her, but she can still see the devastation in his face.

“Hey, he just needs time to adjust,” She tells him as she slips her hand down his wrist and wraps her
fingers around his. Oliver nods, though he seems unconvinced. She tugs lightly at his hand, tilting her head down the hall. “Let me drive you home, okay?”

“Yeah,” he breathes, letting her guide him back down the hallway without resistance. “Yeah, okay.”

She tosses the untouched coffee into a trash can as they pass and wraps both her hands around his, as if she can hold him together by sheer force of will alone.

Chapter End Notes

I know time between chapters has been getting pretty long (god, what is this? Two weeks? Ugh!) but I'm spending basically every free moment working on this. I just don't have a lot of free moments.

Also, if you missed it, I posted in small-ish oneshot from Oliver's POV set during his time of healing after the Christmas debacle. I added it to the series page for this fic, so go check that out if you're interested!!

OH OMG also the-silverforked-sky made an awesome edit for this fic which you can check out on her tumblr: https://the-silverforked-sky.tumblr.com/post/166080407991/another-poster-for-a-fic-ive-been-really-enjoying

(Also you can follow me on twitter/tumblr if you want. ya know just sayin. @fellicityqueen)
Chapter Summary

Curtis finds himself on the receiving end of an anonymous gift. An old friend of Oliver's rolls back into town.

Chapter Notes

It's a late night update because I have no chill yay! I really wanted to get an update out yesterday, but I ended up just being so busy. Anyway, here's a chapter and I'm not gonna talk forever!

Takes place during 1.17 "The Huntress Returns", Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Taking Oliver back to his house in his current state feels wrong, so she offers to take him to the club instead. She doesn’t know how that would help, except maybe they could suit up and patrol. Just the act of patrolling often helps to soothe her.

“Can we go to your place?” He asks instead, surprising her. She nods, clicking on the blinker in his car to switch lanes. She hadn’t thought to offer it up as an option, figuring he’d want to go somewhere comfortable to him. It warms her that he might consider her home to be that for him.

She unlocks the door and waves him inside first. He only makes it two steps, waiting until the door clicks shut behind her, before he pushes her up against it, his mouth seeking hers out hungrily. Her stomach jumps with the suddenness of it, but her hands move quickly to his shoulders, wrapping behind his neck and urging him further towards her until she’s firmly squashed between him and the door.

“Missed you,” he murmurs, the words slurred as he drags his lips from the corner of her mouth, down her jaw. She shoves his coat backwards and Oliver pulls his hands away from her to help get it off, tossing to to the side. Felicity moves her hands back to his shoulders, her fingers digging into his shoulder blades. He pulls away from her to pull his sweater and undershirt over his head.

“Ditto,” she breathes, her eyes roving over his chest and abdomen. He gives her a dirty grin, placing his hands on her waist and twisting her. She spins with the force of the move, Oliver pressing her against the door again. His lips rove the groove of her shoulder, her ponytail giving him easy access to the exposed skin. His fingers tug at her own coat, pulling it gently down her arms.

His cool palms slide under her shirt, moving over the smooth skin of her stomach. She sucks in a shaky breath as his fingers play at the waistband of her jeans. She spins with the force of the move, Oliver pressing her against the door again. His lips rove the groove of her shoulder, her ponytail giving him easy access to the exposed skin. His fingers tug at her own coat, pulling it gently down her arms.

She lets out a small whine in the back of her throat and Oliver’s fingers flex against her, pulling her
backwards. Pressed fast against him, she can feel the gradually growing hardness of him. His hands move upwards, opposite of the direction in which she needs them, and take her shirt with them, pulling it over her head.

Felicity turns back to him as he tosses the shirt aside. She palms him through the rough material of his jeans. Oliver groans quietly, his head falling forward to thump against the wood of her front door, just over her shoulder. She grins at the reaction, turning her head to nip at his jaw. He moves his hands to her hips, his fingers digging into her flesh through the waistband of her own jeans.

“I love you,” he murmurs roughly against her ear and her fingers tighten in response. He tucks his face into her shoulder and pants against her skin. She moves to the button of his pants, popping it open and pulling down the zipper. Oliver drops his head further, stooping over her to reach the top of her breasts where he presses wet kisses. One of his hands moves up to massage her nipple through the fabric of her bra.

“Love you so much,” she responds, her head falling back against the door behind her. Oliver’s hands drop to the backs of her thighs, urging her to wrap them around his waist. She does, leaping with his hands on her thighs helping lift her up against him. They move to her ass, squeezing. Oliver grinds against her as he pushes her back against the door again. She gasps, pulling lightly at the short hairs at the back of his head.

“Pants,” she pants. “Off.”

Oliver nods, urging her mouth back to his. His kisses are hot and urgent, she feels them all the way down to her toes. He holds her with one arm curled underneath her butt while he shoves his pants down his legs. He stumbles a little, the garment obviously caught on his shoes, and Felicity laughs.

He huffs in annoyance and she urges him to put her down. He does, bending to pull his shoes off his feet. Felicity takes the initiative to step out of her own heels before removing her pants. She drags her hands over the muscles in his stomach as he steps out of his jeans, eyes dark and hooded as his eyes rove over her.

It surprises her when he softens suddenly, hand reaching forward to skim along the outside of her arm. He wraps his fingers just under her elbow and lifts her arm, tilting it and frowning at the bruise there. Felicity frowns as well, not having noticed the bruise previously. It had been hidden under the long sleeves of her shirts for the past two days.

“Where’s this from?” He asks, concern in his voice that nearly makes her laugh. She’s staring at the evidence of years of abuse and he’s worried about the bruise on her radius.

“Must’ve been when John and I were sparring the other night,” she shrugs. Slowly, she pulls her arm from his grasp to raise it to the crook of his shoulder. The bullet wound she’d helped patched up is still bright red in it’s healing, but there are no longer any stitches holding the skin together. The pads of her fingers stroke over the wound and Oliver’s eyelids flutter shut at the touch.

“This is healing surprisingly well considering your feeling on hospitals,” she points out and he chuckles, leaning towards her to press his forehead against hers. His hands land on her hips again, no longer separated from her skin by the thick material of her jeans, and he urges her back against the door once more.

“Ask me,” he mumbles, eyes still closed, lips inches from her own. She frowns at him, confusion creasing her brow. He must feel it, because his eyes open and all he does in nod encouragingly. It hits her, suddenly, exactly what he’s telling her to ask, and she sucks in a breath. Earlier tonight she’d told him they needed to trust each other, to be honest with each other.
She searches out a scar, unsure where even to begin, and gently strokes her fingers over it. She goes with the mottled skin on his chest, the one that extends back onto his back and looks like a starburst pattern. He swallows as her fingers move over the puckered flesh.

“How’d you get this one?” She asks quietly, scared to be too loud, scared to break the moment. There’s no one else around to hear, but she doesn’t want to share him right now. Not even with the empty air around them.

“Shot with an arrow,” he explains and, okay, that one probably should have been obvious. But, it wasn’t an assumption, something she’d had to put together with context clues - the entry wound in the back, the exit in the front, the way the skin is torn as though the arrow was ripped back out in violent fashion. This is something he’s telling her and it makes her feel heavy and light at the same time.

“This one?” She prompts, moving her hand downwards to the sloping scarring that starts above his hip bone and descends down beneath his waistline over his pelvic bone.

“Shark bite,” he says easily, as though he’s passing the weight off. She’s happy to carry it for him for the moment. When she laughs at the sheer absurdity of the answer, though, she doesn’t think it’s the response he’s expecting. Oliver raises an eyebrow at her as she giggles, pressing her hand to her mouth to suppress them.

It’s not funny, she knows. Nothing will ever be funny about the time Oliver was away, no matter how much of it he tells her. But, they’re standing mostly naked in her foyer and Oliver is telling her about a shark bite and - she doesn’t know why, but it’s so absurd that she can’t help but laugh at it. And she can tell it’s becoming infectious.

“It’s not funny,” Oliver insists, but his eyes give away his own mirth. He moves her hand away from her mouth and covers it with his own, effectively stopping the giggles. She wraps her arms under his, looping them over his shoulders and pulling him closer. His hand slides between them, moving smoothly down her stomach to the waistband of her underwear as her stomach muscles tighten.

He continues downwards, stroking her through the thin material of her panties, catching her quiet moans in his mouth. Finally, mercifully, he slips his fingers past her underwear, pressing his thumb to her clit. She sucks in a breath, pulling away from him to drop her head back against the door, and his mouth moves down to her exposed throat, leaving wet kisses as it travels downwards. He nips at her shoulder at the same time he slides two fingers inside of her and she nearly comes immediately.

He swipes his tongue over the bite, soothing the sting, as he starts a gentle rhythm with his fingers. Felicity rocks her hips against his hand, aching for him to increase the speed, the friction, but Oliver holds her off, continuing his tauntingly slow stroking. She bites down on her lip, refusing to cave to him.

She should know better than to doubt him, though. Just when she thinks it’s too much, that she’s going to bite right through her lip before he ever gives her what she’s craving, he curls his fingers inside of her and increases the pressure against her clit and suddenly she’s seeing stars. She pants his name with an embarrassing mixture of ‘love you’s, ‘need you’s, and expletives as Oliver wraps his arm around her waist, helping keep her on her feet while his other hand strokes her slowly, working her through the orgasm.

Once she can breathe again, Oliver ducks his head, kissing her gently. She brings her hand to his jaw, stroking over the sharp jut of the bone and holding him fast to her. He pulls back enough to place another, softer kiss at the corner of her mouth.
“I need you, too,” he murmurs.

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Felicity wakes up wrapped around Oliver from behind. The light coming through the curtains is more gray than yellow, still too early in the morning for the sun to have broken through. It washes his tanned skin out, the pink scars turning silver and standing out on his back. She drags the pads of her fingers over one softly.

“Knife,” Oliver murmurs sleepily, surprising her. She grins to herself, because of course he’s awake, and presses a soft kiss over the scar in question. Shifting just a little closer to him, she wraps her arm around his waist and presses her nose into his spine. Oliver finds her hand with his own, lacing their fingers together and pulling it up to his chest.

She drifts again, starting to fall back asleep, when a loud knocking at her front door startles her. Oliver tenses as well, the person knocking now wailing on the doorbell instead. Felicity huffs, flopping onto her back and checking the time on the clock next to the bed.

It’s not nearly late enough to justify a visitor, but it does remind her she definitely didn’t sent an alarm to wake herself for work. The noise hasn’t stopped and she feels the bed shift with Oliver’s movement, but she puts out an arm to stop him.

“I got it,” she grumbles, snagging her glasses off the nightstand and forcing herself out of the warm bed. Cold air assaults her naked body and reminds her that their clothes from last night are scattered around her front entrance. She pulls out a pair of shorts and a sweatshirt from a drawer. She hesitates in front of the door, adjusting the shorts on her hips and peering through the peephole. She drops her forehead against the door, sighing.

“Dude,” she calls through the wood. “We gotta talk about boundaries.”

“Come on, Felicity, let me in,” Curtis calls. He’s stopped pressing the doorbell, but she hears the light rapping of his knuckles against the door, urging her to let him inside. Glancing around the destruction she and Oliver had left the night before, she steps away from the door and begins kicking articles of clothing towards the couch.

“Just give me a minute,” she calls, unsure if Curtis can even hear her as she gathers all the clothing up and tosses it haphazardly onto the couch. She tosses a throw pillow on top of it, deciding it’s well hidden enough. Curtis doesn’t need to know that Oliver had brought her to orgasm twice in the doorway last night.

“Okay, what is so important that it couldn’t wait the three hours until I got to work?” She asks, pulling the door open finally. Curtis is bouncing anxiously on the balls of his feet and she frowns at him. He pulls a plain, brown box from behind his back.

“This is,” he says, moving past her into the foyer. She waves her hand sarcastically, inviting him inside despite the fact he’s already taken the initiative. She pushes the door shut and turns back to him. He moves to the kitchen, placing the box on the counter. It looks like a typical shipping box, but there’s no stickers or tags attached.

“And this is?” She prompts, joining him at the counter and examining the box. It’s already been opened, probably by Curtis, and she peels the flaps back carefully. Curtis has a tendency to overreact, sure, but his general demeanor at the moment is freaking her out.

With good reason, she realizes, as she peers inside the box. A sphere the same shape and size as the
one she uses sits inside. It’s got a darker metal casing than her own, though, and she recognizes it as
the one Curtis had used while he was being blackmailed. With careful fingers, she pulls it from
within the box and stares at it.

“It just showed up outside my apartment this morning,” Curtis explains. “I’m lucky Paul wasn’t
feeling up to our usual morning run or he would have been the one to open it.”

“And you don’t know where it came from?” She asks, twisting the sphere in her fingers. It’s
weighted the same as her own and it puts her off, like it shouldn’t feel so natural. It’s sinister, which
isn’t an attribute she should give to an inanimate object, but she doesn’t like it.

“Well, I have a guess,” Curtis comments, a little more attitude than she deems necessary seeing as
he’s the one who’d just pulled her out of bed. “But, no, he didn’t leave a return address or anything.”

Setting the sphere on the counter, Felicity picks through the rest of the box carefully. There’s some
generic padding within to keep the sphere from bouncing around the cardboard, but otherwise there’s
nothing else. She chews on her lip anxiously and studies the box. She’s still glaring down at it, as
though the answers to the mysteries of the universe lie in the cardboard packaging alone, when she
notices Curtis tense up across the counter from her.

“What’s going on?” Oliver asks from the hallway. She spins to face him where he stands, halfway in
the room and halfway out. There’s pretty much no way for him to look disheveled with his short hair
and lack of a shirt, which Felicity thinks is incredibly unfair, because he’d broken her ponytail holder
last night and she knows she looks like a disaster.

His sweatpants are familiar, left behind in her room after he’d told her his secret and she’d asked for
space, but she hadn’t realized just how low they hang on his hips until she realizes Curtis is definitely
checking him out. He’s still nervous, though, which makes her frown.

“I told you,” she says, directing her words back at Curtis. “He knows.”

Oliver crosses the room to join them, nodding at Curtis. Felicity waves a hand between them and
says each of their names in turn, realizing they’d never technically been introduced and Oliver grips
Curtis’ hand in a firm shake. She carefully lifts the sphere and holds it out for Oliver to see.

“The Benefactor left Curtis a present this morning,” she explains and Oliver’s frown deepens as he
looks down at the sphere. When he looks back up at Felicity, she flits her gaze to Curtis. Oliver,
understanding the look, sighs and gives her a look. She tilts her head imploringly.

“Am I missing something?” Curtis asks, watching the exchange.

“I trust him,” Felicity says, still looking at Oliver rather than Curtis. “And you told John about me.”

Oliver huffs, giving her a tired look. He doesn’t seem particularly surprised by her pushing and she
figures he knew it would be coming sooner or later. Part of trusting her means trusting her
judgement, and Curtis has kept her secret up to this point.

“Fine,” he gives in, reaching for the sphere in her hand. He takes it from her, examining it, as she
turns back to Curtis. He’s still staring at them like they’ve been speaking another language, which
she supposes is fair since most of their conversation had been silent.

“Curtis, I’m gonna tell you something, but you have to be chill about it, alright?” She says and Curtis
nods at her like she’s being obtuse. She takes a deep breath and hooks her thumb out towards Oliver
next to her. “Oliver is the vigilante.”
Felicity gives him a dark look.

"Okay, sure," he chuckles, shaking his head. When he looks back at them, he must see the seriousness on her face. His eyes flicker over to Oliver who also stares silently at him. "Oh. Oh! You’re serious! He’s…"

He looks back over at Oliver, like he’s seeing him for the first time. Oliver sets the sphere back on the counter and crosses his arms over his chest. Felicity waits as Curtis processes it, picking the sphere up and setting it back inside the box. She folds the flaps over each other, sealing the box back up.

"Wow, okay, yeah," Curtis is saying, speaking more to himself than either of them. "Sure, I mean I guess that makes sense. I’m being chill about it, totally chill. Nothing crazy about that at all."

Felicity can practically feel Oliver becoming agitated next to her. She rounds the counter, grabbing Curtis by the arm and leading him out of the kitchen.

"Curtis," she says, stopping his rambling. "Go home. I’ll see you at work. I’m gonna take the sphere to the base and we’ll deal with it tonight, alright?"

"The sphere, right," Curtis nods, pulling the door open and stepping onto her front porch. "I wonder if my life will ever go back to normal."

Shaking her head, Felicity pushes the door closed behind him and turns back to Oliver where he leans against the counter. He’s frowning at her still and she sighs, pushing away from the door and crossing to him. She wraps her arms around his waist, tucking herself closely against him.

"Stop worrying," she says, pushing up onto her toes to kiss him. He hums against her lips, wrapping his own arms around her in return.

"I’m very worried," he says, pulling back. "This guy is clearly fixated on you and Curtis."

"And I’m working on it," she reminds him. "He’s good, but so am I. He’s gonna slip up and lead us right to him. This guy has been creeping around in the shadows for months."

"Yeah and now he’s kidnapping your friends and leaving packages on doorsteps," Oliver points out. "He’s escalating."

Felicity nods. It’s not like she isn’t freaked out about this, too, but if she loses her head in fear over it, she’s not going to be able to find him. She has to keep some level of calm, especially since Curtis clearly isn’t. There’s nothing to say this guy is going to escalate to violence immediately, though. After all, he could have killed Paul as soon as he realized he’d lost Curtis, but he didn’t.

"I know," she nods, tightening her arms around him slightly. "But, I’m not scared of him. You know why?"

"Why?" Oliver asks, but he’s smiling just a touch and it makes her feel better.

"Because I’m not alone in it," she says. Oliver nods, leaning down to brush another kiss over her lips.

"Never," he assures her and Felicity presses upwards again, kissing him more firmly. She pushes at him, gently urging him back towards the hallway and the bedroom beyond. She doesn’t have time for any more sleep, but she does need to shower and she wouldn’t be opposed to a little company.
Before they can make it down the hall, a phone chimes from the living room. Felicity groans as Oliver pulls away from her apologetically. She waits, dragging her fingers through her hair and trying to work out some of the knots while he digs through the pile of clothes she’d hidden in search of the device. Oliver liberates his phone from the pocket of his inside out jeans. He reads the screen as he crosses back towards her, frowning down at it.

“Rain check,” Felicity sighs, leaning against the wall next to her. She reads it on his face before he says anything.

“It’s John,” he explains, his face scrunching adorably in remorse. She nods in understanding.

“It’s probably important then,” she comments, dropping the side of her head against the wall. “You probably would have just made me late for work anyway.”

He grins, leaning down to kiss her, lingering a moment more than he probably should. She places a hand on his shoulder and pushes him away gently, but he continues to hover in her space.

“I’ll call you later,” he promises and she hums in agreement. “I love you.”

Somehow the words still make her go warm inside, like it’s the first time he’s said it. She doesn’t think she’ll tire of hearing it, no matter how many times he says it. It’s stupid and sappy, which never really used to be her style, but she figures she must love him a lot, too.

“I love you, too,” she says, pushing off of the wall. Oliver crosses the room to retrieve the rest of his clothes from last night from where she’d stuffed them into the couch. He pulls his undershirt over his head and she spins to head back to her bedroom. “But, also, you smell like sweat and sex, so please take a shower.”

She hears Oliver’s surprised laugh before she closes the door behind her.

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“So, what should we do?”

Felicity frowns at the question. The sphere sits between her and Curtis on his work table, the surface cleared out as if contact with the dark metal ball would corrupt his tech, and they’ve basically just been staring at it for a good five minutes. She thinks they’re both afraid to touch it, which is ridiculous because they’ve both done so before.

“Should we, I don’t know, try to find fingerprints on it or something?” Curtis continues when she doesn’t answer. Felicity sighs, leaning back from the table and crossing her arms over her chest.

“Something tells me the only ones we’d find would be yours,” she says, considering their options. It couldn’t hurt to try and find prints, but she doesn’t have the tools to do it at the moment and she doubts it would lead anywhere. “But, he has to have put his own tech into it right? I mean, even if he started with your sphere, it’s got a different casing and a taser, so he must have added to it.”

“If I take it apart, I might be able to trace the added tech,” Curtis finishes, realizing what she’s thinking. Felicity’s phone begins to ring next to her keyboard. She nods at Curtis as she crosses over to it.

“Use gloves,” she instructs. Curtis’ fingerprints may be on the outside, but they won’t be on any tech the Benefactor added. If he left his fingerprints on anything, it would be the inside of the tech, or there might be a serial code she can trace back to him. Curtis nods and she picks up her phone, pressing the answer button.
“Wanna be my date?” Oliver asks and she can hear the smile in his voice. She drops down into her computer chair, spinning away from Curtis.

“Always,” she grins. “Did you have somewhere specific in mind?”

“The club opening tomorrow night,” he explains. Felicity sits back in her chair, frowning in surprise.

“Wow, really?” She asks. “It didn’t exactly look ready for it yesterday.”

“Well, I appreciate your faith,” he comments, a jokingly dark tone to his voice. She chuckles, shaking her head. “Tommy swears it’ll be ready by tomorrow night. They just have to get some signs installed and move in a few more tables, I guess.”

“How are things with Tommy?” She asks. “Did you talk to him?”

“No,” Oliver says, a false easiness to his voice that she recognizes. “He, uh, actually told me all of that in a surprisingly professional email.”

“Are you okay?” She prompts.

“He’s gonna come around,” he insists and she nods to herself. She knows Oliver needs to keep telling himself that, but she genuinely hopes Tommy will come around. It’s a lot to swallow in the beginning, though. She makes a mental note to check in with Laurel later and make sure Tommy isn’t pulling away from everyone all at once.

“Right,” Felicity agrees, spinning her chair again so that she’s facing the computer monitors on her desk. There’s a news alert pulled up on the screen, a vague picture of a police line outside of a strip club. “Onto the next order of business, then. Have you heard about Frank Bertinelli’s lawyer being killed last night?”

The line goes quiet for a long moment and she can just picture the dark look that must be on Oliver’s face.

“I take it you have,” she comments. The line crackles with Oliver’s sigh.

“John and I are dealing with that,” he says, an air of finality that says he doesn’t want her involved. She frowns, annoyed at the unspoken ban of her from helping out. Not that she doesn’t have her own stuff to deal with, but, still. “You and Curtis should focus on that sphere. The sooner this guy is off the board, the better I’ll feel.”

“And that doesn’t have anything to do with wanting to keep me away from the mob?” She asks.

“I just need you to trust me on this one,” he tells her, which isn’t really an answer. She’s not feeling up to an argument, right now, though. She’d rather talk about it in person. “You’ll let me know if you find anything on this benefactor guy, right?”

Felicity hums in response, a little bitter that her problem is his, but he won’t let his problems be hers. He must notice, because he sighs and offers to stop by the base with food. She rejects it, only because Curtis is going to be taking the tech apart and she’s planning on running out to get some rudimentary stuff to check for fingerprints.

“You’re mad at me,” he points out and she sighs, but he continues before she can assure him she’s not. “I get it and I promise I’ll explain, I just can’t right now.”

Felicity pouts, considering this. They’re working on the trust thing and she knows Oliver wouldn’t
do something to jeopardize that so soon. Plus, he sounds genuinely worried which, admittedly, makes her even more worried. As much as he doesn’t want her involved in anything too dangerous, she doesn’t want him to be involved with it either.

Right now, though, she’ll have to give him the benefit of the doubt.

“What time tomorrow?” She asks.

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She and Curtis spend most of the night in the base, picking through the tech from inside of the hijacked sphere. Curtis knows his own tech well enough to pick it out from what was added to the sphere and Felicity searches for serial numbers, patents, anything that could lead her to the Benefactor. So far, nothing has turned up.

“I’m so tired I swear I can see through time,” Curtis comments, pressing the heels of his hands to his eyes. Felicity nods in agreement, staring at the dismantled pieces of metal, plastic, and wires strewn across the table.

“Really gotta stop underestimating this guy,” she sighs. She lets her eyelids drift shut, reaching up to pull off her glasses and set them down on the table. When she rubs her eyes, her hands come away smudged with eyeliner and she decides to call it a night.

“Okay, I’m officially out of steam,” she sighs, opening her eyes. Curtis is a little blurred around the edges, but he nods in agreement. She slips her glasses back onto her face. “Let’s call it a night, get a fresh start tomorrow.”

Curtis agrees. He separates the parts of the sphere that are spread across the table into a pile by itself while Felicity packs up her things. It’s been a while since she’s come down here and just patrolled. She misses it. Frowning at the cabinet where she usually stores her gear, she makes a mental note to retrieve it from the foundry and go out by herself one night this week.

She and Curtis leave, dragging their feet as they climb the stairs, and she assures him she’ll pick up some materials to make a rudimentary fingerprinting kit on the way home. She still doesn’t know if anything will come from it, but she needs to at least try.

When she pulls into her driveway, there’s a light on in her place that she can see through the front window. She tenses at it, knowing she hadn’t left any lights on when she’d left that morning and Oliver had left before her. Felicity’s never noticed how loud her house keys are until she’s trying to slide them into the lock on her door silently.

She pushes the door open and cringes as it creaks quietly. There’s a light on in the kitchen, but the space is empty. She grips her phone in her hand, moving slowly through the area and down the hall towards her bedroom. The lamp next to her bed is on and the bathroom door is closed.

She stalls, considering calling Oliver or Curtis. It could be nothing, though, and she certainly doesn’t need either of them to come rescue her. Of course, every scary movie she’d ever seen throughout her entire life is invading her mind at the moment. She jumps as the water turns on within the bathroom and finally tugs the door open.

“Oh, my God,” she groans, pressing both hands to her chest. The corner of her phone digs into the top of her sternum and she glares at Oliver. “You scared the hell out of me! I thought you were a murderer or something.”

He raises an eyebrow at her, turning off the tap and shaking his hands out over the sink.
“And your response, rather than call someone, is to follow a possible murderer into a small room with only one way in or out?” He asks, pulling the hand towel from its hook and drying his hands off. Felicity frowns, considering this. It’s a good point, she supposes. Oliver has more awareness of his surroundings than she does, something she’s sure has come from training and experience she lacks.

“What are you doing here?” She asks, deflecting away from her less than ideal response to danger. She turns and sets her phone next to the bed, unbuttoning her coat and tossing on top of the comforter.

“I could tell you were still mad at me,” he says and she turns to argue the comment, but he presses on. “And I wanted to explain.”

“I’m not mad at you,” she insists. Oliver raises an eyebrow. “I’m not. It’s just frustrating that we just had this whole talk about trust and honesty and I thought we were headed in the right direction-”

“We are,” Oliver assures her, stepping forward and rubbing his palms up and down her upper arms. “Felicity, we are. But the person who went after Frank Bertinelli’s lawyer last night has a personal vendetta out for me. She knows who I am and she threatened my family. I would just prefer not to give her the chance to threaten you too.”

“That’s still incredibly vague,” she points out and he tilts his head imploringly at her. Sighing, Felicity nods at him. “But, I suppose, you can tell me more about it once the immediate danger has passed.”

“Thank you,” Oliver says softly. He retracts his hands and Felicity steps away from him to pull her blouse over her head. The springs in her bed shift as Oliver takes a seat on it. “Did you and Curtis figure anything out?”

“Nothing yet,” Felicity sighs as she pulls a sweatshirt out of a drawer along with a pair of sleep shorts. “This guy is crafty. It was naive to think he would just give himself up.”

“He’s playing a game,” he points out. Felicity shrugs, pulling the sweater over her head. She shimmies out of her skirt and steps into the shorts. It’s not something she hadn’t considered. Whatever reasons this guy has for dropping the sphere at Curtis’ doorstep, they can’t be friendly.

“I know,” she agrees finally, dropping down next to him on the bed.

“I don’t think you should play along,” Oliver says warily. Felicity looks over at him with a frown.

“I don’t know that I have much of a choice.”

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Felicity decides to stop by the base on the way to Verdant for the opening. Oliver had offered to pick her up, but he’d needed to be there before people started arriving and she knew she wouldn’t have time to get ready after work.

“Shouldn’t you be partying right about now?” Curtis calls, not even turning around at the sound of her heels on the stairs. She moves across the room, setting the plastic bag dangling from her fingers down on his table.

“Shouldn’t you?” She counters, eyeing his well-tailored maroon suit as he unscrews a miniscule screw from a piece of the dark colored sphere. They both look a little ridiculous, dressed to the nines down in their dingy basement. She really needs to update it, move some more furniture in. Oliver
really had the best idea when he actually chose a building he already owned for his secret lair.

“I’m meeting Paul there,” Curtis explains and Felicity frowns at him. After Oliver had invited her to the opening, she’d extended the invite to Curtis and Paul. She’s still trying to convince Curtis to tell Paul the truth. It’s better if it comes out now, of Curtis’ own admission, than later when it’s spiraled beyond his control.

“Does he know you took a pit stop for some light crime fighting?” She presses, trying for casual as she pulls the items she’d bought from the bag and sets them on the table. He looks up from his tools to give her a dark look. “I’ll take that as a no, then.”

“I’m just not sure it’s a good idea,” he says, looking back down to the screw. He pops it out with his fingernail and sets it on an upside down piece of tape with a few other screws stuck to it. “Besides, I don’t even know how to tell him. Do I tell him about you? About Oliver?”

Felicity sighs, pulling a ceramic dish and a candle lighter out of the plastic bag. She knows it’s expecting a lot of Curtis to tell Paul the truth. She and Oliver had stumbled onto it and it had still hurt them. Now, watching Tommy react to Oliver’s secret, she’s even more sure it’ll be better if Curtis is just honest.

“Well, you definitely shouldn’t tell him about Oliver,” she says, mostly because she doubts Oliver would be okay with it. There’s a difference between being honest and being too honest. “But you could tell him about me, about how this started and why we’re doing it. He might be more understanding than you expect.”

“Yeah, I’m sure he’ll be incredibly understanding about me doing something that literally got us drugged and kidnapped a few weeks ago,” Curtis offers scathingly, removing another screw. “Not to mention the amount of times you’ve nearly been killed. So, you can understand if I’m bit hesitant to- What are you doing?”

Felicity looks up at him as he cuts off. He’s frowning down at her hands where she’s pulled on a pair of latex gloves and is holding the rounded side of the ceramic bowl over the candle lighter. She looks down at it, the white ceramic turning black under the heat of the flame.

“Don’t change the subject,” she says, looking back to the bowl in her hand. The bottom of it has turned almost completely black so she clicks the lighter off and sets it aside, digging a pocket knife from within the bag. “I’m just warning you that if Paul has to find out about it on his own, it’s going to be a lot worse than if you just tell him.”

“Who says he has to find out at all?” Curtis asks as Felicity starts chipping away at the black soot, scraping it off the bottom of the bowl and into a small measuring cup. She sets the knife down, looking at Curtis and trying to convey the sincerity of her words.

“Secrets this big,” she says, “they don’t stay secret for long.”

The basement goes quiet as she returns to chipping the soot off of the bowl and Curtis absorbs her words. He watches the flakes fall from the bowl into the cup, clumping into a mountain of black ash. Felicity finishes, the bottom of the bowl nearly white again now that the charred bits have been scraped off, and shakes the cup to even out the mound and measure it.

“I’m gonna use the soot to try and get a fingerprint from the tech inside the sphere,” she explains finally, frowning at the amount of ash in the cup. “I’ll have to do it later, though. There’s not enough at the moment.”
Curtis is still silent, a state she’s not used to from him, but he nods in understanding. Felicity pulls the gloves from her hands, the fingertips black from her science experiment, and offers him a reassuring look.

“I’ll see you at the club?” She asks warily. Curtis nods again, picking his screwdriver back up and returning to the small piece of tech he’d been dismantling. She hopes he makes the right decision for him and Paul, but she doesn’t want to force his hand. Chewing on her lip, she moves the used items back into the grocery bag and ties it off before she leaves the basement.

By the time she reaches the club, the music is so loud it reaches down the street. She wonders how the surrounding building’s dwellers feel about the introduction of the club into their neighborhood. She loves Oliver and knows he probably thinks it’ll put some money back into the Glades, but he may not have considered the big picture on this one.

The lower floor is packed with bodies, the DJ spinning on the stage with bright green letters declaring the club’s name. Oliver had mentioned they’d managed to get Steve Aoki for the opening and she’d been mildly touched that he’d taken her advice on getting a DJ rather than a band. He must see her from wherever he is, because she gets a text informing her that he’s upstairs.

She picks her way around the bodies on the dance floor towards the metal staircase that leads to the balcony above. It wraps around the entire place, overlooking the floor below with tables and stools. Spotting Oliver at one of the tables, she heads towards him.

“Hey, sorry I’m late,” Felicity says, prodding his back gently to alert him to her presence. She falters only slightly at the realization that Thea and Moira are standing on the other side of the table. “I left work late.”

“No problem,” he assures her, pressing a kiss to her temple. He’s holding a champagne glass in one hand and lifts another off the table to hand to her. She takes it gratefully.

“Work,” Moira repeats, speaking over the music. “What is it that you do, Felicity?”

Oliver must feel her tense, because he wraps his arm around her back and places his hand against her spine. She knows that it’s a typical question for someone to ask, but something about Moira Queen makes her forget everything she’s sure she knows. Abject terror probably isn’t the best feeling to have towards your significant other’s parent.

“Felicity works for Queen Consolidated,” Oliver says, when she doesn’t. “In the technical division.”

Felicity has a very active imagination, but she doesn’t think she imagines it when something like disapproval flashes over Moira’s face. She doubts it has to do with her firmly middle class status so much as her position at the family company. She never did decide if that technically made Oliver her boss or not.

“How about a toast?” Moira says, any semblance of a negative emotion wiped from her face as quickly as it had come. It doesn’t make Felicity feel any better as she lifts her champagne flute to knock gently between Oliver’s and Moira’s. “To Verdant. I know I haven’t always been supportive of this venture, but I have to admit this nightclub is quite an accomplishment.”

Felicity glances over at Oliver, wrapping her own arm around his waist and squeezing gently. He’s smiling at his mother, a little flush with the praise, and she can’t help but echo Moira’s sentiments in her mind.
“I’m proud of you,” Moira continues with a gentle conviction. “You’re father would be, too.”

“Thank you,” Oliver says and Felicity can feel the way he swells at the words. For a man forever trying to live up to an impossible legacy, she’s glad he’s able to revel in the small victories. It’s not the one he wants, she knows, but it’s the one he’ll take for now. He lifts his glass to his lips and Felicity follows suit, the toast complete.

“Yeah, congratulations, Ollie,” Thea offers in a gentle mocking tone, holding out her own martini glass. Felicity assumes it’s something nonalcoholic, but she’ll be surprised if it stays that way. “Your club doesn’t totally suck.”

“Thanks, Speedy,” he responds, not even Thea’s teasing enough to kill his mood. His hand slides to Felicity’s hip and his fingers tighten against it gently. “Thank you very much, all of you, for coming.”

“Oh, no, I don’t really dance,” Felicity starts, attempting to reject the offer. Thea gives her a look that informs her that the girl wasn’t asking. She looks to Oliver for help, but he’s too amused to offer any. “But I guess tonight I do.”

Thea grins, a little evily in Felicity’s opinion, and reaches for her arm. Felicity tips back the champagne in her glass, downing nearly all of it as Thea tugs at her. She sets the glass down on the table and points at Oliver.

“Ten minutes,” she states clearly, earning another tug from Thea. Oliver laughs, nodding in understanding at the call for a rescue. When she glances over, even Moira is smiling at their antics. Finally, Felicity lets Thea pull her away towards the staircase on the opposite side of the building from where she’d entered.

Felicity trails after the younger girl as she moves gracefully down the stairs and forces her way into the throng of dancers. She wraps her fingers around Felicity’s wrist and helps her break through the dancers as well. She laughs as Thea turns, throwing her arms up in the air and bouncing and swaying to the booming beat. Infected by Thea’s enthusiasm, she follows her movements. It’s a lot easier to dance when it’s mostly just bouncing up and down to the beat.

After a few minutes, Thea stops as her eyes lock somewhere past Felicity. Twisting, she follows her line of sight to where Tommy and Laurel are standing in front of the bar. Their conversation looks serious, but before Felicity can stop her, Thea is cutting through the crowd towards them. Felicity pursues, using Thea’s path to break past the packed together people.

“Tommy, Tommy,” Thea calls, knocking her purse gently against Tommy’s bicep. “Did you call Roy yet?”

“I left him a message,” Tommy assures her. “He starts tomorrow.”

Thea looks incredibly proud and Felicity frowns, confused and lacking context for the exchange. Oliver hasn’t mentioned Thea seeing anyone, which probably means he doesn’t know. Of course, Roy could just be a friend, but with the way Thea is suddenly glowing, she doubts it.

Tommy glances over Felicity, his face turning unreadable. She bites down on her lower lip, nervous about what exactly that reaction could mean. She really should have called Laurel to check on him sooner.
“Uh, which reminds me,” he says, clearly referencing the phone call to Roy. “I have to go check in with the office. Excuse me.”

Laurel looks like she’s going to argue, but Tommy is heading away before she even has the chance. She stares after him, frowning and Felicity steps closer to her.

“Is he alright?” She prompts gently, watching Tommy disappear past the crowd towards the staircase beyond.

“I have no idea,” Laurel sighs.

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Thea gets Felicity back out on the dance floor, even pulling Laurel with them. There’s an easiness between them that comes from years of companionship. Laurel’s talked about her hopes for Thea at CNRI before and Felicity thinks she’s come to see the younger woman as a sister. It’s nice. Felicity figures Thea could use Laurel’s influence in her life.

She spins, spotting Oliver near the bottom of the stairs watching them all. She winks at him, tilting her head in an attempt to encourage him onto the dance floor as well, if only because she’d love to see him try. He chuckles, shaking his head as his attention is pulled by a passing waiter who hands him a note. Felicity heads towards him, watching as he frowns down at the paper.

“Everything okay?” She asks, reaching him as he folds the note back up and stuffs it in his inside jacket pocket.

“Dig needs something,” he explains lowly and Felicity nods.

“Want me to come with?” She asks, tilting her head at him. He offers her a gentle smile, taking her hand and ducking down to kiss her quickly on the lips.

“He probably just found something he needs to show me,” he says. “I’ll be right back.”

Felicity hums in acknowledgement and Oliver pulls away from her, heading in the direction of the hidden basement door. She sighs, turning back towards where Thea and Laurel are still dancing. Laurel looks to be in higher spirits than she had been after Tommy disappeared. Rather than head back to them, she turns for the bar instead.

“Can I get glass of white wine?” She shouts to the bartender, digging a bill out of her small clutch purse. He nods, moving down the bar to grab a glass from where they hang behind him and a bottle of wine. She’s glad he just chooses one rather than offering her options. Her voice is already beginning to hurt from trying to conversate in the loud club.

He sets it in front of her and takes the money she’s placed down. Felicity tells him to keep the change and he thanks her before moving on. She twists, leaning back against the bar and surveying the people around her.

Leaning back, she glances at the door Oliver had disappeared through, wishing he would return. The whole club thing was never her favorite way to spend an evening. She’d tried it a few times in college and it had just ended in her drinking too much vodka and ending up with a lot of social anxiety.

Instead of Oliver, she spots a different familiar face stumbling through the basement door. Tommy is cradling one of his wrists in his other hand and moves quickly towards the stairs. Worried at what exactly might have just happened in the basement, Felicity follows after him up the stairs and into the
private office above the stage.

“Tommy, hey,” she calls, catching the door as it swings shut and following him into the office. He starts at her voice, looking back at her in surprise. “What’s going on? Are you alright?”

“Nothing,” he answers. “Fine.”

Felicity raises an eyebrow at him, closing the door behind her and mostly cutting out the sound of the music below. She can still feel the bass pulsing beneath their feet. Tommy is digging through the desk, clearly looking for something, and she takes slow steps towards him.

“What’s wrong with your arm?” She asks, frowning at the way he still holds his left hand close to his chest. It’s unfair to worry that he and Oliver got into it downstairs, but with the way they’ve been acting it wouldn’t necessarily surprise her. What would surprise her is if Oliver actually hurt Tommy.

“Felicity, no offense, but I didn’t invite you to pry,” he snaps and Felicity settles back on her heels, trying to recognize that his anger isn’t really meant for her. She crosses her arms over her chest, glaring at him. He looks away from her, returning to his search and finally finds what he’s looking for. The First Aid Kit is bright red and not dissimilar to the one she keeps down in the base.

“Do you need some help?” She asks finally, after watching him struggle to wrap his wrist with one hand. He gives her a dark look, like he might fight her on it still, but finally gives in. His shoulders fall in defeat and he nods at her.

“Take off your jacket and roll up your sleeve,” she instructs, holding her hand out for the bandage. He slaps it into her palm before pulling his jacket off, gingerly moving it over his left arm, and rolling up the sleeve of his dress shirt. She wraps his wrist in silence as he stares darkly out the window that makes up the front wall of the office.

“You need to be careful,” he says finally and she’d think it sounds almost like a threat, but there’s a darker tone there. He’s trying to warn her. She frowns at him. “I know you think you know Oliver, I thought I did. But we’re both wrong.”

“What are you talking about?” She asks, her gaze locked on his wrist as she secures the end of the bandage underneath itself, making sure it won’t fall off. Tommy ducks his head, forcing her to make eye contact with him.

“He’s dangerous, Felicity,” he insists and she bites back any retort her stupid, stupid brain may make. “Trust me. You don’t know him.”

She steps away from him, pointing at his wrist and ignoring his words. She doesn’t know what happened in the basement, but she knows Tommy can’t handle anymore secrets right now. It’s better if he doesn’t know that she knows about Oliver.

“You should probably get that checked,” she says instead, turning and leaving the office. Tommy doesn’t call after her and she doesn’t look back at him, pulling the office door shut behind her.

She stops at the top of the stairs, taking a moment to compose herself before she heads back down. She’d been worried about Tommy’s reaction before and he didn’t just come out and tell her the truth, but trying to warn her away from Oliver is concerning.

She moves quickly down the stairs, priding herself on her ability to maneuver them in her heels. She circles the crowd of dancers, hoping to go unnoticed by Thea and Laurel as she slips down the hallway and through the door to the basement. She nearly begins talking as soon as she’s halfway down the stairs, but cuts herself off at the sound of Oliver’s voice.
“I haven’t been able to locate the safehouse where the FBI is keeping your father,” he says and Felicity takes the last few steps a little quicker. She’s sure the sound of her shoes announces her before her voice can.

“I can help with that,” she announces, momentarily forgetting the trouble with Tommy. “I’ve been dying to hack into the FBI security system.”

Oliver turns at her words, a dark look on his face that stops her short. John pushes himself out of his chair and rounds Oliver towards her while a woman she doesn’t recognize watches on. Oliver puts a hand up to stop her.

“Get out,” he says and Felicity frowns at him, offended by the sharpness of his tone. It’s John that moves towards her, offering a gesture of reassurance. “This is a private thing, Felicity. Please.”

“Oh,” she says shortly, glancing over at the mystery woman who seems to be studying her now. Something about her seems sinister and Felicity meets her searching look with one of her own.

“Okay.”

John is the one that follows her as she spins on her heel, leaving through the door to the alley rather than climbing back up the stairs. She doesn’t much feel like returning to the party, anyway. He stops her, catching her elbow gently once they reach the alley.

“Hey, listen, trust us on this one, okay?” He says, stopping her from storming off. She takes a deep breath before turning to him. John lets his hand fall away from her elbow.

“I want to, but,” she gestures frustratedly towards the door and the basement beyond it. “Seriously? It’s private? And, who even is that?”

“That’s Helena Bertinelli,” John answers, surprising Felicity. She hadn’t expected him to be so forthcoming.

“Frank Bertinelli’s daughter,” she says, the name striking in her memory. “But, how does she know about Oliver?”

It strikes her before the question even finishes leaving her mouth.

“Oh,” she realizes. “She’s the other woman in purple, the one people thought was me, isn’t she?”

“Yeah, and she’s also Oliver’s psycho ex-girlfriend,” John says, nodding. Felicity frowns, ignoring the somewhat offensive turn of phrase for the moment and deciding to focus instead on what that means. “Which means she’s incredibly dangerous and has a vendetta that she’d do anything to see through.”

“And Oliver’s helping her?” She asks, frowning.

“He doesn’t think he has a choice,” he explains. “Which is why he wants to keep you as far from it as possible.”

Felicity sighs and John squeezes her shoulder gently before disappearing back inside the club. She can still hear the music pounding from within and groans, pressing the heels of her hands against her eyes. She’s still frustrated with Oliver for putting himself in danger while refusing to let her help, but she understands it a bit more.

She decides to go find her car and head back to the base. Maybe tonight won’t be a total bust and she’ll manage to pull a fingerprint from the tech. Hopefully, Curtis isn’t still there or she’ll definitely
Felicity thinks maybe she has a tendency to shut down entirely when she hits a wall. Like, maybe, when she hits a block in one aspect of her life, she just starts projecting that block onto all of the parts. Her job really isn’t that difficult considering she’s an expert with qualifications beyond her position, and yet when she’s feeling put out by Oliver and can’t seem to get a lead on the Benefactor, she just starts making dumb mistakes at work.

Her plan had been to go out on patrol tonight, but repeated small errors at work end up making her stay late. It doesn’t help that she’s been frustratedly following the arrest and subsequent jailbreak of Helena Bertinelli a few hours ago, something she has little doubt Oliver had a hand in. It’s not exactly helping her concentration.

Her phone rings on the desk, rattling against the surface as she stares blankly at a code she’s been trying to edit for an hour. She sighs, happy for the distraction, and grabs at the phone swiping at the screen to answer the call.

“Hey,” she greets, sitting back in her chair.

“Hi,” Oliver responds a little awkwardly. The call lapses into silence for a moment and Felicity feels like banging her head against the desk. Finally, Oliver asks, “What are you doing?”

“I’m at work,” she sighs, leaning forward again to rest her chin on her hand.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” he says and she notices the sadness in his tone now and frowns. “I’m sorry, I shouldn’t be bothering you if you’re working.”

“Hey, no, it’s fine,” she insists, suddenly on alert now that she’s realized what kind of mood he’s in. She wishes he’d come to see her, but he wouldn’t even have known to come to the office. “What’s going on?”

“It’s been a rough night,” he says quietly, his voice rough with emotion. She chews on her lips, the sound of him upset tugging at her heartstrings. “And, I know you’re upset with me for last night. I’m sorry, I just don’t want to put you in anymore danger than you already are.” He pauses, a deep, rattling breath crackling over the line. “Cause I don’t think I can lose you.”

“Oliver,” she sighs. “I understand because that’s the same way I feel about it when you put yourself in these situations and won’t let me help you. I don’t think I can lose you, either.”

The line goes quiet again, the silence more comfortable this time. Felicity can tell that’s not the end of it. She waits him out.

“I feel like I’m letting everyone down,” he says, finally. “My family, Tommy, you. I don’t know how to protect all of you from the danger I keep bringing onto you.”

“You’re being too hard on yourself,” she tells him. “Not every bad or dangerous thing that happens is your fault. We all make our own decisions.”

“I just can’t help but wonder if it’s worth it when I keep hurting the people I love,” he considers. Felicity lets her eyes drift shut, leaning heavily into her palm. Sometimes she worries about Oliver’s sense of culpability, if he’s able to take responsibility when he causes harm. She’s beginning to realize that he doesn’t always show it because he’s taken on the weight of the world.
“What we’re doing is important,” she reminds him, sure of that at least. “It’s just about finding balance.”

“How?” He asks, still sounding despondent but a hopeful tone is returning to his voice.

“Start by letting people help you,” she says, smiling a little to herself. “For example, your brilliant vigilante girlfriend.”

“Right,” Oliver laughs and she sits back, feeling better about having helping him out of the funk. She’s gonna ask if he wants to come over after she leaves work for a late dinner when a chime from her computer stops her. She frowns, switching between programs to find the alert.

“Oh,” she comments. “Weird.”

“What is it?” Oliver asks.

“I was multitasking and intercepted a police report,” she explains, scrolling through the information. “A local sporting goods store just got robbed of one high-powered crossbow.”

She hears Oliver sigh over the line, but presses on.

“Now, could be a crazy coincidence or your psycho ex-girlfriend,-” she flinches at the unthinking use of John’s words. “-Dig’s words, not mine, is still in town.”

“Yes, that sounds like Helena,” Oliver agrees. Felicity looks away from the screen, spinning in her chair to face the wall next to her.

“I’ll let you know if I learn anything more,” she tells him, spinning back in her chair restlessly. “In the meantime, just watch your back.”

She trails off at the realization that someone is standing in her doorway. Helena grins at her, crossbow held menacingly next to her head, not quite pointed at Felicity, but the intention clear enough. She hears Oliver call her name over the phone as it falls away from her ear.

“Hi, I don’t think we had a chance to be properly introduced last night,” she greets, sounding surprisingly friendly for someone who is very clearly about to threaten Felicity’s life. She sets her phone facedown on the desk, not ending her call with Oliver. “You are Felicity Smoak, aren’t you?”

“Helena, right?” She asks. “Did you need some technical support?”

“Actually, I think I’m in need of a hacker,” she smirks and Felicity feels herself tense. “And haven’t you just been dying to hack the FBI?”

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There’s something incredibly embarrassing about finding yourself hogtied and gagged in your own office. The thin scarf Helena had found in Felicity’s desk drawer doesn’t really do much in the way of muffling her voice, leaving her able to respond when Oliver calls her name from the doorway.

“I’m here,” he says gently as he cuts through the zip ties on her wrists first and then her ankles. She sits up and he reaches for her, cradling her jaw and checking her over. “Hey, hey, you okay?”

Felicity nods, her hand wrapping around his wrist. Footsteps come down the hallway and Oliver reacts on instinct, jumping up into a defensive stance and Felicity uses her desk to leverage herself to her feet. It’s John that comes around the corner, his gun out, and both men relax at the sight of the
“I got your call,” he explains. “What happened?”

“Helena,” Oliver answers as Felicity unwraps the scarf from around her neck.

“She wanted the address to the safe house where her father’s being kept,” she tells them, pulling the scarf fully away from her neck and tossing it down on her desk in frustration. “Her skill trumped mine, even if she didn’t have a high-powered crossbow. I’m sorry, Oliver.”

“Hey, it’s not your fault,” he assures her and her fingers wrap themselves around the corner of his sleeve in an instinctual reaction to his closeness. He pulls away, walking away from her and John towards the entrance to her office.

“Oliver, what are you gonna do?” John asks, turning as Oliver passes him.

“What I should have done in the first place,” he says darkly, stopping in the doorway to face them. John sighs as Oliver disappears, heading down the hall. Felicity frowns at the exchange, looking at John.

“We’re not really gonna let him go after her alone, are we?” She asks and John raises an eyebrow at her.

“You ready for another round with Helena?” He questions, looking more proud than skeptical. She appreciates it.

“She had the advantage of surprise and a weapon,” she points out. “I’d rather it be a fair fight.”

“Then we should probably go after him,” John says and Felicity nods. She gathers her things quickly and follows John out to his car. She doesn’t know exactly what Oliver’s plan is with regards to Helena. He can’t let the police have her without risking his own identity and he can’t kill her because…

Well, Felicity just really hopes he isn’t planning to kill her.

They catch him in the foundry as he’s zipping up his jacket. He turns, looking unsurprised that they’ve followed him, but shakes his head at her. Ignoring him, Felicity pulls her blouse over her head, glad for the tank top she’d layered beneath it that morning.

“No,” Oliver says, as if that’s actually going to stop her. John averts his gaze in an attempt to provide her with some modesty as she shimmies out of her jeans.

“Oliver,” she says, trying to sound like she has some authority over this. And, damnit, she does! He can tell her no until he’s blue in the face, that doesn’t mean she won’t follow him to the safehouse anyway. “We’re partners now. Partners have each other’s backs.”

He doesn’t argue anymore as she tugs her leggings up over her hips and pulls her leather duster on, buckling it in front of her waist. When she turns, Oliver is holding her wig out for her and she twists her hair up under it, setting her glasses to the side. He helps her secure the mask over her face.

“Are you sure?” He asks, still looking hesitant at the decision, but he isn’t fighting her on it anymore. She’ll take that as a win. Felicity turns to John, instead.

“I’ll text you the address of the safehouse,” she says. “Can you direct us there?”
John nods and she turns back to Oliver. He nods once, an attempt to make them both feel better, and leads her back out into the alley. His bike is waiting for them, the engine still warm from his trip from Queen Consolidated as she mounts the seat behind him. She uses her wrist tech to send John the address and hears his voice come through the comms.

When they reach the safe house, there are marshals downed across the grass, barbs sticking up from their chests. Felicity leans over one, pressing her gloved fingers to his neck and searching for a pulse. She doesn’t feel one and stands back up, joining Oliver as he approaches the house. The sound of gunshots comes from within.

“Stay out here,” he instructs. “We need eyes outside the house if she tries to run.”

Felicity nods and Oliver vaults side of the house, using the gutter to scale upwards towards an upstairs window. He disappears through it and Felicity circles the house towards the backyard, one hand gripping a sphere, on alert.

She startles at the sight of a body dropping from the window overlooking the backyard. He’s wearing an orange jumpsuit and Felicity chases after him as he hits the grass, taking off for the far side of the yard. It’s not hard to figure out that it’s Bertinelli, either seeing his chance for escape or running from his murderous daughter.

She hears the sound of another body hitting the grass and spins, spotting Helena decked out in her gear and carrying a weapon even worse than her deadly barbs. She gives up her chase of Bertinelli to focus instead on his daughter.

Felicity readies her sphere just as Helena raises the shotgun in her hands. She whips around at the sound of Oliver calling her name. He comes running down the small hill that makes up the backyard, bow raised and ready.

“You won’t shoot me,” Helena says as she and Oliver move incrementally towards each other. “You’re not a murderer, remember?”

“But you are,” Oliver counters. “And if I let you go, that blood will be on my hands.”

“Oliver,” Felicity says quietly. She knows this is what John had wanted, what they had both been convinced was the only option left to them. But she refuses to accept that it’s the only option in any case. Oliver’s gaze doesn’t move from Helena, but the other woman chances a sideways glance at Felicity.

“I’m sorry,” he offers quietly.

Oliver loses the arrow and her blood runs cold. Helena stumbles backwards a step, the shaft of the arrow clenched in her fist, inches from puncturing her chest. Oliver looks surprised at the move and chuckles a little, holding the arrow up for him to see.

“I practiced that move,” she tells him, a dark humor to the comment as she advances on him, but emotion lies beneath it, reminding Felicity that the two had once had a connection. “I had a feeling I might need it someday. You would have killed me.”

When she launches at Oliver, Felicity doesn’t give her the chance to complete the attack. She knocks the bow from his hands and Felicity throws her sphere, the tether wrapping around one of Helena’s legs. She tugs, pulling her leg out from under her and dropping her to the ground.

Felicity moves forward a few steps, looking to use the leverage, but Helena shakes off her surprise quickly. She wraps her hand in the tether connected to her ankle and tugs, pulling Felicity down
towards her. Felicity rolls out of the way as Helena aims a blow at her face and Oliver catches her
around the chest, pulling her back.

Helena dispatches Oliver, tossing him easily over her shoulder and reversing their position. Felicity
moves to her feet, eager to help, but Oliver tosses Helena away. He grabs for his bow again, pulling
himself off the ground and pulling an arrow from his quiver. Both Helena and Felicity freeze as he
shouts enough.

Felicity is standing behind him and watches Helena’s face, an anger still teeming underneath the
surface. She reaches for him, her hand falling warily on his arm.

“Oliver, don’t,” she tries. Even through the leathers, she can feel his muscle flex, indecision eating at
him. A new voice joins the mix and Felicity feels herself tense as well.

“Freeze!” They shout and Felicity recognizes the voice as McKenna Hall, timely as ever. “Put it
down. Turn around. Slowly.”

Oliver hesitates and Felicity pulls her hand back from his arm slowly. After a moment, he lowers his
bow slowly, separating the arrow from it and releasing the bowstring. Helena moves before either of
them can react, grabbing for the abandoned shotgun. Her aim is wild, more of a distraction than a
precision shot, but McKenna is right in the line of fire.

“No,” Felicity shouts, lunging at McKenna behind her. They hit the grass, McKenna knocking
against the ground harder than Felicity intends. Felicity rolls away from her, her arm flaring with
pain. She presses her hand against the pain in her bicep and the pressure makes it worse.

“Felicity!” Oliver shouts, rushing to her. She catches him hovering over her and then her vision
fades.

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She wakes up on a hard surface and immediately tries to sit up. Her eyes aren’t even fully open, but
she knows this isn’t where she fell asleep and she doesn’t want to be on the cold surface anymore.
Gentle hands press her down onto the table beneath her, encouraging her to stay put.

“Hey, hey,” a low voice says. She recognizes it as Oliver and finally forces herself to look up at him.
“You’re okay. I’m here.”

She reaches for him, her fingers wrapping tight around his forearms. The green leather of his suit still
covers them, but his gloves are gone. When her fingers tighten, the flexing of her muscles sets off a
sudden dull throbbing in her left arm and she gasps in surprise at the pain.

“Oh my God,” she groans, laying back and pressing her right hand to her forehead. Her mask and
wig are noticeably absent, along with her coat. The tank top underneath is still on, though, and she
feels the strap on her left arm pulled low on her shoulder. She frowns down at it and realizes it’s not
the strap, but a large swathing of wrapped bandages. “Did I seriously get shot?”

“Afraid so,” John comments as he comes into view behind Oliver. Felicity groans, pushing herself
up into a sitting position and batting away Oliver’s hands this time as he tries to keep her prone.

“Helena?” She asks. Their faces tell her as much as she needs to know, the woman getting away to
continue her vendetta another night. Another thought strikes her and she looks between them
urgently. “Detective Hall?”

“She’s fine,” John assures her. Oliver’s hand skims over the top of hers where it rests in her lap. She
frowns at the gesture, not used to him being so touchy down here in the foundry. “The fall knocked her out and she was taken to the hospital, but she’s alive. You probably saved her life.”

Felicity can’t help but smile a little at that, pride swelling in her chest at the statement. It’s good to know McKenna’s alive, even if she is part of the people hunting down Oliver and probably her, by proxy. Knowing Helena is still out there makes her nervous, but she doesn’t think the woman had cared enough about anything outside her narrowed focus to have sussed out her identity.

“I think that makes you a hero,” Oliver comments softly and she’ll blame the blood loss for the way her whole body flushes at the praise.

Oliver looks over his shoulder at John and Felicity knows she’s missing out on an unspoken conversation between the two men. John nods once, turning and heading away from them. He grabs his suit jacket from the back of the computer chair and makes an excuse to leave, calling for Felicity to get better. She waits for the sound of the door shutting behind him before she looks back up at Oliver, chewing on her lower lip.

“Is this the part where you tell me you can’t be with me and be in the field with me?” She asks quietly. His hand is still on top of hers and, emboldened by John’s absence, he skims it up and down her arm. Goosebumps break out over her flesh at the light touch from his warm skin.

“No,” he says, shaking his head. “I don’t think it’d keep you out of the field and, if there’s one thing tonight showed me, it’s that I know I can’t lose you.”

“I’m not going anywhere,” she assures him, catching his hand in her own as it slides down her arm again. She laces her fingers through his, squeezing for affect, and he looks down at their joined hands, blinking a few times. She realizes she must have really scared him.

“Just, do me a favor?” He asks and she raises her eyebrows. “No more jumping in front of shotguns.”

“I wasn’t planning on making a habit of it,” she deflects and he gives her a look, silently admonishing her for trying to be funny.

“I’m serious, Felicity,” he tells her in a sober tone. “You were lucky this time. Most of the buckshot just missed you, only a few fragments caught your arm, and even so if it had been just a few centimeters over it would have shattered part of your femur.”

Felicity sobered at the thought, nodding at him. She looks down at the bandages covering her arm and picks at the edge lightly with her nail. She knows she shouldn’t, but she kind of wants to see the damage. Oliver stills her hand with his own, pulling it away from the expertly wrapped bandage.

“I know you’re not gonna want to hear this, but you’re gonna need to take it easy for a little while,” he continues. “Once the painkillers John gave you wear off, you’re gonna be in a lot of pain. Give yourself time to heal.”

“Like you always do?” She comments. He gives her an unamused look and she lifts her hands, carefully on her left arm, and sets them on his arms, just below his elbows. “I will, I promise.”

“Thank you,” he says gently, pressing forward to kiss her softly. She holds onto his arms, keeping him in place and making the kiss linger for a moment before he pulls back. He steps back and holds out a hand for her. She takes it, hopping down from the table carefully.

He presses another kiss to her temple as she leans against him.
“Let’s go home.”

Chapter End Notes

I will say real quick, I added a set number of chapters. This story is gonna be 22 chapters and I only have 3 more chapters to write! Woohoo! Once I've written all of the chapters, we'll return to a weekly update system. I'm thinking maybe Fridays or a return to Mondays? Definitely not Thursdays anymore. Let me know what you guys think!
Injured and out of the field for the foreseeable future, Felicity commits herself to playing Q to John and Oliver's Bond for the time being. Meanwhile, kidnappings in the Glades take a deadly and very public turn.

Takes place during 1.17 "Salvation"

“You got shot?!“ Laurel squeaks in surprise. Felicity flinches, glancing around the crowded outdoor patio. There’s music playing from speakers decorating the kitschy restaurant seating, but still Laurel seems to realize what she’s done, lowering her voice. “Sorry. But, Jesus, that’s not the answer I was expecting.”

Felicity shrugs with her uninjured shoulder, the other one still hurts when she moves it around too much and John had insisted she keep it in a sling for a few days at least. It’s making movement and typing and really just about everything difficult. But it’s better than the searing pain she feels every time she moves the muscles too much.

“Young, it’s not great,” she sighs, prodding at the rice on the side of her plate with her fork. “I’ve had to tell everyone I dislocated my shoulder, but it turns out I’m not a good liar.”

“That’s true,” Laurel comments with a smirk, earning a dark look from Felicity. She chuckles, resting her elbow on the table and resting her chin in her hand. She frowns after a moment, a thought occurring. “What about Oliver?”

Felicity scoops up a chunk of rice and shoves it in her mouth before she answers, giving herself a moment. Oliver has been treating her with kid gloves since the injury, something that is really getting annoying. It’s nice, though, that he’s at her place most nights and can help her change the bandage.

“Same thing,” she lies, focusing on moving the rice into a singular pile. “I’ve been wearing a lot of
“Yeah, but what about when you two,” Laurel starts and then decides to approach it differently. Felicity can already feel herself flushing at the line of questioning. “Well, I mean, you two are sleeping together aren’t you?”

“She asks, instead of furthering the discussion of how she and Oliver are having sex. Mostly they aren’t, not in the technical sense. Most movements make her arm hurt, but the man does wonders with his mouth.

“Probably not,” Laurel admits, sitting back in her chair. Felicity thinks they can agree they might not ever be comfortable talking about her relationship with Laurel’s ex. “It’s still better than dealing with my mom right now.”

“Your mom?” Felicity repeats, frowning. “Wait, she’s back?”

Laurel grimaces, nodding. She lifts her glass, taking a sip of the wine she’d ordered.

“She showed up the night Tommy’s dad got shot,” she explains once she’s set the glass back down. Felicity is surprised it’s the first she’s hearing of it. The emotion is quickly replaced by guilt as she realizes she hasn’t been putting forth much of an effort to stay in touch with Laurel over the last week or so. In her defense, she’s been pretty busy.

“Why now?” She asks. Laurel had mentioned a bit of her family life. She’s more open with it than Felicity is, but a night of martinis and sushi had helped. She knows that Dinah Lance blew town not long after Oliver and Sara’s ship went down.

“She thinks Sara is still alive,” Laurel says and the rice falls from Felicity’s fork, her hand tipping slightly in shock. Laurel nods at her expression. “Yeah, I know. She’s got all this research she thinks proves it.”

“You don’t believe her?” Felicity asks, frowning. She can’t imagine how Laurel must be dealing with this. It’s not necessarily that far-fetched, though. Oliver did come back, after all.

“It’s not that I don’t want to,” Laurel insists and Felicity nods in understanding, trying to assure Laurel she doesn’t need to be defensive. “It’s just that… You know, Sara and I always had such a
complicated relationship. We were so close in age that we hung out with all the same people and we couldn’t help but be competitive. I’m sure we would have gotten over it and it’s not like I wouldn’t give anything to have her back. I just don’t want to commit myself to it just to be disappointed. I don’t think me or my dad could take that again.”

“I get it,” Felicity assures her. She reaches across the table and squeezes Laurel’s hand, still wrapped around the stem of her wine glass. “Sometimes no hope is better than false hope.”

Laurel nods, sighing. Felicity pulls her hand back and scoops the fallen rice back onto her fork. She can’t help but feel like the Lances, of all people, deserve a break. She doesn’t know Dinah, but she also doesn’t think it’s fair for her to drop back into Laurel’s life and drop this crazy bombshell. She can’t see it ending well one way or another.

Her phone trills from her purse and she fumbles for it, feeling bad for not having turned the ringer off. At her apologetic look, Laurel waves her off. She motions to the waiter for the check as Felicity swipes at her screen, checking the notifications. She’d been running a program on the code she’d acquired of the Benefactor’s to try and put together a signature and it’s alerting her that it’s finished.

“Duty calls,” Laurel says, smirking a little when Felicity looks back up. She chuckles, appreciating the understanding. “Please tell me you’re not gonna be chasing down bad guys with that sling, though.”

“Nah, just some light housekeeping,” Felicity says, stuffing her phone back in her purse and shaking her head. She pulls her wallet out to leave some money for the check, but Laurel holds a hand up to stop her.

“Dinner’s on me,” she says. “Maybe if you owe me one, it won’t take us another month to get together again.”

Felicity rolls her eyes at the dramatics, but assures her they’ll find time to make it a regular thing. She finishes off her glass of wine and heads out of the restaurant, remembering Laurel had driven them and calling for a cab.

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Felicity goes to her own base first, planning to work on it there. She’s more understanding of Oliver’s list now, but it’s still more of his project than hers. Besides, it’s not like he can’t handle
lowlife one percenters without her - especially since she’s been barred from gearing up until her arm heals. Either way, she’s spent more of the past few days in her own base than in the foundry.

She’d missed it.

Which is why when she sits down to run through the results of the code and her network starts acting up, she considers just powering through and trying to get it to work. The problem doesn’t respond to her go-to tricks for fixing it and she doesn’t have the time to wait on a full diagnostic. She sets up the diagnostics anyway and leaves it running when she leaves for Verdant.

“Aren’t you supposed to be taking it easy?” She hears John ask before she’s even made it all the way down the steps. She startles at the question, before realizing he must have heard her shoes against the metal staircase.

“Aren’t you supposed to be having dinner with Laurel?” Oliver asks. It takes Felicity a minute to find him within the basement, hanging from a bar suspended from the ceiling. She raises an eyebrow at his shirtless state.

“Okay, Spanish Inquisition, yes,” she answers, crossing between John on the ground and Oliver’s dangling legs over to the computers. “Both of those things are true. I just had some work to do.”

She drops into the computer chair, stuffing her bag underneath the desk and pulling up the code data from her program.

“Something on Walter?” Oliver asks, pulling his legs back up so his body is parallel with the ceiling.

“No, that’s still slow-going,” she says, because she refuses to admit that it’s basically a cold trail. It takes her longer to pull the program up than it should because it’s nearly impossible to type with her hand in the ridiculous sling. Huffing, she releases the strap and tugs it off.

“Hey, hey,” John admonishes, noticing the move. “You’re not gonna heal if you keep taking that thing off.”

“Well, I can’t get anything done with it on,” Felicity grumbles, shoving the fabric of the sling to the side and pulling the keyboard closer to her. The move tugs at the wound in her arm, but she grits her teeth, refusing to admit defeat.
“She’s almost as stubborn as you are,” John calls up to Oliver. He’s shaking his head at Felicity and she shoots him a look for talking about her while she’s right there. He’s smirking at her, though, and the realization that he’s messing with her makes her soften. She likes to believe she’s grown on him.

“Preaching to the choir,” Oliver grunts, doing an extreme version of pull ups above her. She rolls her eyes, deciding to ignore them both and focus on what her program pulled from the code. “Pull up the news.”

“A please wouldn’t hurt,” she says, ignoring his instruction and instead continuing her own task. She hears him sigh above her.

“Please,” he amends and she smiles to herself, clicking into the browser and pulling up a livestream of the local news. It cuts in on the middle of a story about a promotional event at Big Belly Burger and she and John share a look of confusion. Oliver huffs. “Just, wait.”

Felicity smirks at his attempt to be mysterious and returns to the code on the right monitor. There’s definitely the same signature to all of it that she’d picked out the first time. A little old fashioned, but still smooth. It’d have to be for the hacks to have been as well done as they all were. She isolates the key elements and sets them aside as the segment on the news ends.

“Lawyers for John Nickel spoke to the press today,” the anchors says, speaking clearly to the camera. A small, blurry photo of a man that Felicity doesn’t recognize sits in the corner of the screen. She’s been so busy lately, she hasn’t even been watching the news. “They say they’re pleased the DA declined to indict their client on charges stemming from the recent fire in one of Nickel’s buildings.”

“John Nickel is one of the wealthiest real estate developers in Starling City,” Oliver explains as Felicity looks up at him, still hanging from the ceiling. “He’s also one of the dirtiest. That building that burnt down last night? The wiring was not up to code.”

“Maybe he didn’t know that,” she suggests as John moves around her side and takes a seat next to her at the desk. Oliver drops one arm, dangling from the pipe and looking down at her.

“I guess he also didn’t know about the seven people who’ve frozen to death in his other buildings over the past three years,” he offers glibly.
“Yeah, he’s a real man of the people,” John adds, leaning on the desk to look at the screen in front of Felicity, watching the conclusion of the news story. Oliver grunts, dropping to the floor and catching himself in a crouch. Felicity flinches, sure he’s hurt himself in the landing. He stands up easily though, no pain showing on his face when he turns to her.

“Not for long,” he says, looking at the screen as well. The image of Nickel is gone now, but the anchor continues to explain the details of the case for those who’d missed it. “The DA ignores this, and the police can’t do anything because all these slums are in the Glades.”

He steps past her, grabbing his notebook from the desk next to her and flipping it open with practiced ease as he looks at her.

“So, tonight, Felicity, we cross Mr. Nickel’s name off the list,” he continues, tilting his head just so as he holds the notebook out to her, open to the page where John Nickel’s name is scribed in black ink. He continues as she takes it from his hand, “You okay with that?”

She’s surprised by the softness of his question, looking up from the notebook and instead towards the screen where the news continues to play. The anchor explains the scene outside the courtroom after the verdict while footage rolls of Nickel as he rounds his sports car and shouts indistinctly at the protesters and media waiting for him before climbing inside.

“One hundred percent,” she says, snapping the notebook closed.

Oliver moves past her, grabbing his gear and heading out of the room. The news switches focus, moving on to talk about local stock prices, and Felicity closes the browser. She isolates the specific parts of the Benefactors code that make the signature and runs it through a search program, looking for public or high profile hacks with the same coding.

The program runs on its own, needing little input from her once she’s started it, and she quickly becomes restless. She hadn’t realized how used to being out in the field she’d gotten until she’d suddenly had to stop. The past few days have been busy, sure, but boring. It reminds her that there’s something else she needs to finish up.

She switches over to the information she’d pulled from the SCPD’s server over the past few weeks. The mole within the department has been difficult to find and she doubts Detective Lance is going to wait on her for much longer. The night before she’d narrowed down the prospects and she hopes it’s enough for Lance. She saves it all onto a drive and drops it in her purse, pushing herself out of her chair.
“Where are you going?” John asks, raising an eyebrow at her sudden departure. She stalls, shrugging her good shoulder at him.

“I have to run an errand,” she explains. He doesn’t look like he’s buying it, tilting his head to the side and giving her a look. “It’s nothing dangerous, alright? I promised I’d take a break, and I am.”

“You know, just because Oliver is prone to running around bruised and battered doesn’t mean you need to,” John says, misreading her reasoning for running off. She gets it, she supposes, it’s not like she hasn’t been insistent that they stop trying to baby her. “You don’t have anything to prove.”

“I’m not trying to,” she assures him, offering a soft smile of appreciation. “I’ll be back before you can miss me.”

John hums, unconvinced and she shoots him a wink before turning and heading out of the basement.

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Felicity waits on the fire escape in the alley next to the back exit of the police station. Most of the workers park in the back lot and come out of this exit. Felicity knows for a fact that Lance is one of those people.

Her arm is starting to get sore from use and she regrets not putting the sling back on before she’d left. She didn’t think it would help her cause much if she showed up injured to talk with Lance, though. Not to mention, she would have looked so ridiculous all decked out in her gear with some stupid, bright blue sling.

She doesn’t really handle being injured well.

Finally, she spots a familiar figure coming through the door and drops from the ladder of the fire escape to the cement beneath. The move tweaks her arm and a sharp pain shoots through it. Felicity lets out a high squeak of pain. Lance startles at the sound, spinning around to face her.

“Jesus Christ,” he growls, pointing accusingly at her as she stands from her crouch. “You know, you picked a hell of a week to try to give me a heart attack.”
Felicity is willing to concede the point. She hadn’t considered that, if Laurel is dealing with the ramifications of her mother’s return, it probably means her father is as well. She takes a cautious step towards him, holding her hands out in defense.

“Sorry, Detective,” she says, her voice modulator making her voice sound grainy. “I didn’t mean to startle you.”

“Have you considered using a front door?” He asks. “Or daylight?”

“Something tells me either of those things would get me arrested,” she comments. Lance gives her a dark smirk, so she ignores him and presses on to the reason she’s here. “I have something for you.”

She fishes the small drive out of her pocket and holds it out to him. Lance considers it warily before finally reaching forward and snatching it from her. He turns it over in hands with a huff.

“What’s this?” He asks. She bites back the remark on the tip of her tongue, because she’s pretty sure he knows what a flash drive is.

“I went through the backgrounds, emails, and reports for every employee in the department,” she explains instead. “Three of them have a background that makes them a red flag. All of it is on that drive.”

“Three?” Lance asks, raising an unimpressed eyebrow at her. “I thought our deal was that you would bring me the name of our guy.”

“One of them is actually a woman,” she comments, before shaking her head at herself. “You’re the detective, right? Detect. Take the files, figure out who your mole is and get back to me.”

“I don’t have your sphere, or whatever, on me and I can’t exactly go back and sneak it out of the busy station,” he tells her, giving the drive one last look before pocketing it. Felicity takes a step backwards, trying to emulate Oliver’s ability to disappear into the shadows.

“Consider it a show of good faith,” she says. “You get the bad guy, I get my tech.”
Felicity heads back towards her own base to change back into her clothes from earlier, but a text from Oliver has her speeding back to Verdant instead. It’s vague, but clearly urgent, and she’s surprised that Oliver’s returned to the club so soon.

“Where were you?” He asks as soon as she rounds the corner from the entrance in the alley to the open area of the basement. Her wig and mask are already off, dangling from her fingers. There’s a frustration coloring his tone that she honestly can’t be sure isn’t actually aimed at her.

“I was dealing with something,” she offers, figuring there’s something bigger going on than her deal with Lance anyway. “What’s wrong?”

She peels her coat off and Oliver must catch the way she flinches with the movement. He swipes the abandoned sling off of the computer desk and tosses it to her with a pointed look. This time, Felicity doesn’t argue as she snaps the buckle in the strap together and pulls it over her head. Her arm starts to feel better almost as soon as it’s resting in the basket of the sling, no longer forcing her bicep to bear the brunt of the weight of her arm.

“Nickel wasn’t home,” he explains. “When I got there, it seemed like there’d been some sort of struggle.”

“What?” Felicity asks, crossing the basement as Oliver paces past her. “He was just gone?”

“No, not gone,” he says. “Taken.”

“Looks like Nickel was on somebody else’s list too,” John comments, joining Oliver in his pacing. They cross each other while Felicity watches.

“After the fire last night, it’s not entirely surprising,” Oliver admits. He stops pacing, bringing his fingers up to his forehead and pressing down at his brow ridge. “Felicity, I need you to get me everything you can on Nickel. Focus on his tenants, and anyone who might have filed a formal complaint against him or people that lost something in the fire.”
“Well, it’s gonna be some list, I mean, slum lords aren’t generally known for their popularity,” she comments, leaning against the back of the computer chair. There’s already information on Nickel up on the screens, but it’s gonna take more digging for what Oliver is looking for. “Plus...“

She trails off, waving her hands in dismissal of her own comment. She knows how well it’s going to go over and she should have known better to start it in the first place. She’s still learning to toe the line of how candid she is with Oliver when he’s in this kind of state.

“What?” He snaps, which is exactly what she means. One minor frustration and he’s about ready to bite her or John’s head off for the smallest show of defiance. As much as she loves him, he’s hardly without flaw.

And, she knows she should let it go, but his attitude tends to bring out the worst in her as well.

“Nothing,” she bites. “It’s just you went over there to be all ‘grr, stop being bad or I’ll arrow you’ and now you want to rescue him.”

“I don’t like the idea that somebody dangerous is out there,” he explains, a little ironically, as she drops into the computer chair. She spins around to give him a look and he offers her a tired sigh. “Somebody else.”

Felicity is ready to let it go. Nickel is a slime ball and maybe he deserves whatever this person has planned, but admittedly Oliver is right. They should save Nickel so he can pay in a way that might not end in his demise. Maybe it’s proof that Oliver is growing as a person.

“Because typically,” Oliver continues in a low voice, stepping to meet her at the desk. He’s towering over her in the chair again, which is a pet peeve of hers. He snags the notebook from the desk. “They don’t show my level of restraint.”

Or maybe he just likes to be right.

“So you’re gonna cross Nickel off anyway?” John asks as Oliver flips the book open. Felicity rolls her eyes at her boyfriend’s dramatics and focuses in on trying to find a list of tenants from Nickel’s burnt down building.

“No,” Oliver responds. “I’m finding somebody else who needs a talking to.”
Even Felicity considers Oliver may be overworking himself lately, especially now that John is pointing it out. It’s not something she’s brought up with him, though maybe she should. Behind her, John insists on taking Oliver to dinner, ignoring Oliver’s protests. If John can talk him through whatever is going on, she might not need to, but she’d still like to know where his head is at.

She feels Oliver come up behind her, his hand smoothing over her shoulder as he looks at the computer screen in front of her. She stops for a moment, to glance up at him.

“You want us to bring you something?” Oliver asks as a list of tenants appears on the screen, her code scrolling through each name and pulling records for each person. Felicity spins her chair a little so she can face him better while her code does its work.

“I already ate,” she reminds him. “I have a lot to sort through, but John’s right. You need a break. I’ll call you if I find anything.”

He nods, glancing again at the screen and she knows he’s hesitant to leave before the job is done. There’s not much he can do about Nickel right now, though, and just mindlessly chasing down low lifes is just going to wear him out. She shoves at him lightly, silently telling him to go, and he shakes his head at her in amusement before ducking down to press a short kiss to her lips.

After they leave, she delves fully into the records and works to highlight anything that might throw up a red flag. There’s no shortage of complaints and reports filed against Nickel, but most of them don’t seem to have gone anywhere - statements either thrown out or recanted. She doubts Nickel is beyond scaring tenants out of trying to sue him.

She’s knee deep in a long list of people with priors, grievances, or who lost more than property in one of Nickel’s faulty buildings when a stream pops up on all three of her monitors. It startles her backwards as the sound comes through, no more than shaky breathing and a rhythmic noise she can’t nail down. It’s the face on the screen that has her scrambling to trace the source.

John Nickel hangs from his wrist in front of plastic sheeting, blood coloring his pale face and dripping down the silver duct tape over his mouth as a bright light shines on him.

A trace isn’t coming through, but she does realize that the signal hadn’t targeted her specifically. It’s targeting anyone who lives or works in the Glades. She fumbles for her phone, pressing Oliver’s contact and putting it through to her Bluetooth.
“Yeah?” He answers softly.

“Found Nickel,” she says, blowing past the unconventional greeting. She rolls between monitors, trying to nail down the signal. “Click the link I just sent you. This came up on every screen with an IP address originating from the Glades.”

The line goes quiet and Felicity figures Oliver is probably doing as she’d instructed. As it does, a voice comes over the speakers from the computers and she freezes at the garbled tone of it.

“If you make the Glades your home, you know who this man is,” the disembodied voice announces. Frozen, Felicity stares at the screen, unable to look away. “John Nickel. He owns your tenements, manages your slums, provides the leaking roofs over your heads. The lead in your pipes, the asbestos in your walls. Basically, he makes money off our suffering.”

Nickel struggles against his bonds, shouts muffled behind the duct tape. The camera shakes as it records, an unsteady hand or unsteady surface holding it up in Nickel’s face. It sets Felicity back into motion, working to find the source of the signal.

“But the police aren’t interested in helping us,” the voice continues. “They may have let us down, but I won’t. John, I want to give you the chance to state your case. Why shouldn’t you be punished?”

A hand appears in front of the camera and rips the tape away from Nickel’s mouth without remorse. She’s sure most of his short, kempt beard comes off with the adhesive. Nickel pants, blinking at the camera, his blue eyes watering against the bright light.

“I knew there was bad stuff in my buildings,” he says off the bat, which Felicity doubts is the way one should start when they’re begging for their life.

“Track him, Felicity.” Oliver growls, coming back to the phone. She huffs, swinging between keyboards and working to find the signal.

“I’m looking,” she tells him, her eyes firmly focused on the code running through her screen rather than on the shaky footage of Nickel.
“Okay, yes, I made a little profit!” Nickel continues, really not doing his best to convince anyone of his innocence. “At least they had a place to live. Without me, people like that would end up on the street.”

Almost violently, the taped is shoved back over Nickel’s mouth, cutting him off from any further attempt of proving himself. Felicity catches it from the corner of her eye and she focuses harder on trying to find the signal location. She doubts Nickel has much time left.

“People like that,” the voice repeats, echoing Nickel’s words with disdain. “That’s all we are to guys like this.”

The video goes quiet, save for Nickel’s grunting and muffled begging. The text on Felicity’s screen blurs as she takes another stab at the signal. She barely hears the voice’s indictment of Nickel, but the sharp bang of the gun over her speakers startles her. Her hands shake over the keyboard as she freezes and she squeezes her eyes shut, refusing to look to the screen with the feed.

“There are plenty more who need to answer for their crimes against us,” the voice says, softer now as it addresses its audience rather than Nickel. “So, who’s next?”

She fumbles for the other keyboard, jabbing at the F4 button blindly and waiting for the shaky leftover sound of the video to cut out before she looks up again, taking a stilted breath. Oliver’s voice comes soft in her ear, anger over the footage restrained for her benefit.

“I’m sorry,” she says, forcing a steadiness to her voice she doesn’t feel. “I didn’t find it.”

“Just keep trying,” he instructs, his own emotions being kept under the surface. Sometimes she thinks they’ve both become too good at hiding themselves.

Felicity nods to herself and ends the call. She pulls the keyboard back towards herself, desperate for the distraction of the code.

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She spends the night in the foundry trying to trace the signal. John and Oliver stop back after Nickel dies, but mostly leave her to her own devices. She thinks they may have tried to talk to her, but she hadn’t been much for conversation - a rare feat for her. They hadn’t tried to dissuade her when it
became clear she wasn’t planning to leave the foundry any time soon.

John had headed out before Oliver. He’d moved restlessly around the basement, trying to keep himself busy as an excuse to stay with her. She could see him running out of reasons to hang around eventually and encouraged him to go home.

“I’ll call you if I find him,” she promises, barely looking up from the screens. Her eyes are beginning to hurt, but she ignores it. Oliver’s hand lands warm on her shoulder and she stalls, her eyes drifting shut at the feeling of his calloused fingers against the skin revealed by her tank top.

“Call me if you need anything,” he insists, dropping the pretense that she need only call if it’s important. She looks over, giving him a soft smile and nodding. He still seems hesitant to leave her there, but she thinks it’s become clear she has no intention of moving.

She thinks she dozes for a few minutes here and there as she waits for code to run its course, but otherwise she spends the night staring at the screens. A phone call from Laurel goes unanswered and she feels bad, but figures Laurel would understand.

Oliver comes back at what must be morning with a drink carrier in one hand and a greasy looking paper bag in the other. The coffee is enticing, but it’s the bag she reaches for first.

“I knew I loved you for a reason,” she comments, unrolling the top of the bag and pulling out a greasy wax-paper bag full of seasoned hash browns shaped into circles. Her stomach growls at the sight and Oliver laughs at her. She splits her attention between the breakfast food filling up the bag and the screens in front of her.

“Tea,” She comments darkly when she finally reaches for one of the steaming beverages. He shakes his head at her, sipping from his own cup. She figures he’d gotten himself the same thing, knowing she isn’t above stealing it from him. Pulling the lid off of the cup, she shakes her head at him. “Caffeine after an all-nighter, Oliver. These are things you learn when you don’t drop out of every college you attend.”

She smirks at him as he rolls his neck and gives her a look. She’d feel bad for teasing him if she didn’t know he could take it. And if it weren’t so much fun to do. His lips twitch and she can tells he wants to smile at her, so he changes tactics instead.

“Anything new?” He asks, nodding towards the computers. She groans, sipping lightly at the hot
drink in her hands. He’s wearing his heavy carhartt jacket which makes her nervous about the weather outside. She’d left her other clothes at the base and doesn’t really have anything besides the tank top and leggings she’s wearing.

“This guy’s definitely got more than a subscription to Wired,” she tells him, setting the drink aside and returning her warmed fingers to the keyboard. “His website’s protected by some very serious encryption.”

“Well, use that air magnet thing,” he suggests and Felicity bites down on her tongue. She knows he’s trying to help, but it’s frustrating that he thinks she wouldn’t have already tried that if she thought it would work. “You said that it could trace.”

“Oliver,” she cuts him off, snapping a bit more than she means to. She softens as he looks at her in surprise. “No offense, but do I tell you how to sharpen your arrows?”

He settles back on his heels, sipping from his tea and Felicity figures she hadn’t really softened the blow at all. She’ll apologize once they’ve caught this guy and she’s gotten more than fifteen minutes of sleep.

“Spoke to my friend at the NSA,” John says, his entrance pulling Oliver’s attention and depleting any tension from her outburst. “The website code matches a cyber crusader who’s been on their radar.”

Felicity stops for a moment to consider if that had ever been a descriptor that could have, at one time, been used for her. She shakes the thought off, figuring it’s probably not the best time for the question.

“He hacks into fringe sites under the username The Savior,” John continues and Felicity frowns, considering just how truly terrible of a pseudonym that is. Bad guys should not be allowed to name themselves. “NSA believes he’s a former resident of the Glades.”

“Former?” Oliver prompts.

“Yeah, well, a year ago he hacked himself right off the radar,” John explains and Felicity stops what she’s doing, spinning in her chair to frown at him. “He erased all traces of his existence.”
It takes serious chops to completely drop yourself off the radar while still continuing to use technology. This guy is some hobbyist. She taps her hand against the desk and spins back towards the computers.

“So what happened a year ago?” She asks, frowning at the screen with the code running over it. She startles at a sudden white noise coming through the speakers, a windowed video appearing on the far screen.

“We’re back,” the voice announces with no lack of showmanship. She feels Oliver come to attention next to her as well. “I have with me assistant district attorney Gavin Carnahan.”

The man bound to the twin poles this time, Carnahan, struggles for the camera which offers a wide angle of his predicament. He wears a suit, nothing as well tailored and cut as the ones Oliver usually sports, but still nice enough that she figures he was taken from his office.

“Now, DAs are supposed to go after the bad guys,” the voice continues. Felicity sits shock still, her eyes glued to the video as it shakes. Oliver and John react similarly behind her. “But this one can’t even be bothered to bring them to trial. Like the ones who killed my wife in a bodega.”

Even through the modulator, Felicity can hear the emotion that wells up. She pulls the keyboard towards her, switching to one of the other monitors.

“She’s dead,” Oliver reads aloud, skimming the article with a more clear focus than Felicity.

She finds the article in the Starling City Sentinel, double clicking to pull it up. ‘Local Woman Killed in Bodega Heist’ the headline proclaims and she leans back enough that Oliver and John can see it past her. The woman, Emma Falk, had been shot in the stomach. The police hadn’t even shown up until an hour after the initial call of shots fired.

“Emma Falk,” Oliver reads aloud, skimming the article with a more clear focus than Felicity.
“Grieving husband is Joseph Falk. What do we have on him?”

“Not much,” she says as she works to pull up everything on the man. It doesn’t take long and it’s a short list. His employment records are the only substantial thing. “Forty-two, former city worker. Department of transportation, computer technician. Left his job when she was killed. One year ago today.”

“No current phone, no current address,” John picks up for her, looking to Oliver.

“Gavin, you’re a lawyer,” Falk says, pulling their attention again. Felicity keeps her attention split, though, working to trace the signal backwards to the origin. Now that she has an idea of what she’s working with, it goes quicker. “You’re used to making a case. So go ahead. I’m gonna give you ten minutes to deliver the closing argument of your life.”

It’s more than he gave Nickel, but she doesn’t feel like ten minutes is enough time to convince someone who’s already sure of your guilt. Oliver leans one hand on the desk and bends towards her, unhelpfully forcing her to make eye contact with him, as if she doesn’t already know the urgency of the situation.

“Come on,” he prompts and she shakes her head at him, continuing her attempts.

“I’m trying to get a lock on his wireless signal,” she explains. Now that there’s a live broadcast happening, it leaves the channel more open to her hacks. With Falk distracted by Carnahan, she doesn’t need to worry about him countering her attempts.

“Ten minutes to convince me not to blow you away,” Falk concludes before setting the camera down on some sort of surface and places a watch face in front of it. The video continues to shake. Felicity’s pulse jumps at the clock he’s put on both her and Carnahan.

Oliver and John wait, shuffling around her, as she works. Her shiny blue nails stand out against the black keys, reflecting the light from the monitors. Finally, a map on one the screens locks in on the wireless signal, a red square showing the area before a flashing dot appears on the exact address.

“I got him!” She announces.

“Shut it down,” Oliver instructs and she grimaces.
“Can’t,” she answers shortly. “He has a firewall protecting his wireless signal, but he’s working off of an IPX located at 23rd and Mira.”

Oliver is moving before she even finishes speaking.

“You’re gonna hood up?” John calls, spinning to follow Oliver’s path across the basement. He doesn’t stop, snagging his motorcycle helmet off of the table and running for the door.

“It’s middle of the day,” he shouts as he runs up the steps.

Felicity keeps her focus on the wireless signal, listening for the sound of Oliver’s comm clicking on. She’d made more of them for Oliver and John once it became clear she’d be doing most of her work with them for a while. Curtis has been dealing with the Benefactor, but otherwise mostly uninvolved in the process. When she suits up to go on patrol by herself, though, it’s Curtis’ voice in her ear.

“Where am I going?” Oliver asks, the comm in Felicity’s ear crackling with the sound of his bike roaring down the streets. She directs him around turns and down a few alleys that offer a quicker path to the address.

Falk picks the camera up again, moving towards Carnahan. He pulls the tape from the lawyer’s mouth and gives him his opportunity to speak for himself. Felicity looks away from the screen with the signal on it to watch the video.

“Look! Listen. Listen to me, okay,” Carnahan pleads. “I have fifty-three cases on my desk right now. I don’t always have time-”

“You should have made time,” Falk bites, cutting him off. Carnahan flinches at the harsh tone and starts crying, agreeing with Falk.

“How’s Carnahan?” Oliver asks.

“Not making a very persuasive argument,” Felicity tells him, hoping to hurry him a little bit more to his destination. The way the encounter is going, they don’t exactly have much time to find Falk. She glances back at the screen with the signal, hoping Oliver is close.
“I’m almost there,” he says, as if reading her mind. Less than a minute later, she hears his bike cut off and figures he’s made it to the address. She holds her breath for a moment, hearing the sound of glass breaking.

“See anything?” She prompts after a moment, her nerves getting the best of her.

“I’m only on the first floor,” Oliver tells her, biting a little bit. It’s a high stress situation for everyone.

“Just six more to go,” she says, unhelpfully. She can hear the crashing sounds of Oliver’s destruction as he searches the building. From city records, it looks unoccupied. One more abandoned building left behind in the Glades. It seems like the right kind of place for Falk to set up base.

“There aren’t resources,” Carnahan presses, begging Falk to understand. “I tried.”

Falk isn’t biting. Unimpressed with the argument, he presses the barrel of the gun to Carnahan’s chest and he cries out, praying and apologizing. Felicity grips the arm of her computer chair, resisting the urge to press down on the comm in her ear, as she flinches at the scene.

“Oliver, hurry,” she bites, watching Carnahan shake and pull at his bindings. The camera is almost uncomfortably close to his face now, shaking around as Carnahan does.

“Can’t find him,” Oliver responds, his voice echoing. Felicity thinks he may be in a stairwell, but her focus is locked on Carnahan as he begs for understanding, for a second chance. It’s becoming difficult to tell whether he’s pleading to Falk or to God.

“He’s not here, Felicity!” Oliver shouts and she startles at the sound.

“What?” She asks, frowning at the screens in front of her.

“I searched every office on every floor,” Oliver continues and she reaches for the keyboard again. Her fingers shake against the keys. “He’s not here! Is this the right place? Are you sure?”
“Yeah, I-” Felicity cuts herself off, staring in shock at the monitor to her right as the signal location blinks out and pops up in a different location. “Oh, crap!”

“What?” Oliver prompts.

“How is this possible?” She asks, more to herself or her computers than to John next to her or Oliver in her ear. “This can’t happen! He’s…”

“Talk to me,” Oliver snaps when she goes silent for too long. Next to her, Carnahan continues to whimper and beg from the speakers connected to the monitor. She closes in on the new location that the signal is giving her.


“On my way!” He sounds like he’s already moving, so Felicity spins back to the screen with Carnahan on it, transfixed by the video. Irrationally, she feels that if she takes her eyes off of it for too long, Falk will make his decision. She knows it doesn’t work that way, but she doesn’t look away regardless.

“I took on cases that were- that I thought I could-,” Carnahan tries again, composing himself somewhat. He voice still shakes with the tears tracking his cheeks, but he’s holding himself together.


“Yes,” he says, looking into the camera lens. Next to her, John straightens from where he’d been bent towards the screen, lifting his hands to his head. She’s glad to know she’s not the only one the nerves are affecting. Carnahan continues, “I’m sorry.”

“Gavin Carnahan,” Falk begins after a moment and Felicity feels her entire body tense up. She sits forward in her chair, just a bit, as if she’s the one on trial. “I find you guilty of crimes against the Glades.”

“Don’t do this!” Carnahan starts shouting while Felicity quietly mouths ‘come on’ to herself, as if just the thought will actually push Oliver faster.
“And I sentence you to death,” Falk continues calmly, ignoring Carnahan’s shouted pleas.

“I’m at Ocean and Grand, Felicity, and it’s just a vacant lot,” Oliver says, startling her just the slightest bit. She blinks rapidly and leans towards the keyboard again, looking back and forth between the monitor with the map and the video footage.

“How is this possible?” She asks, becoming desperate along with Carnahan in the video. “This can’t happen! He’s-”

She’s cut off abruptly by Carnahan’s shout coming through the speakers, filling the basement and bouncing off the concrete walls. This time, when Falk puts three rounds into his captive’s chest, Felicity is staring at the screen. She rolls backwards in the chair and tries to form coherent sentences as Oliver yells in her ear. When she can’t, she pulls the earpiece out and tosses it onto the desk, stumbling away from it.

John must pick it up. As she’s heading away, shakily punching in the code to open the door to the alley, she hears him tell Oliver that it’s over.

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She doesn’t remember much about how she ends up in her own base, which is mildly concerning. But, she’s pretty sure she’s read that shock can mess with your memory. It’s a little ridiculous maybe, to be this shaken after everything she’s seen. Except, she doesn’t think she’s ever actually seen someone die.

And she doesn’t think it’s ever been her fault before.

It’s shockingly cold outside, but she doesn’t notice until she’s down the street from the apartment building in the thin strapped tank top she wears underneath her gear. Her fingers are numb as she presses her thumb against the pad on the basement door. Her clothes from the day before, which she’d ditched in favor of her gear to go meet Lance, are balled up on the metal cabinet.

She sorts through them, finding the blue cardigan she’d been wearing and pulling it over her shoulders. The basement itself is cold, too. There’s no heat running through the building, because that would be suspicious if anyone ever bothered to check. Before the worst of the winter, she’d done her best to find a solution to the problem which amounted to a strategically placed array of space heaters. All of which are currently turned off.
John had followed her out of the foundry and into the alley, trying to calm her down. She’d snapped at him, insisting she wanted to be left alone. Maybe she wanted him to fight with her a little bit. She wanted to be convinced of whatever it is she needs convincing of. John had been frustratingly understanding, refusing to rise to her bait. He’d let her walk away.

The space heaters kick on one by one as she turns the knob on each, warm air blowing against her cold skin and causing goosebumps. She rests on her haunches in front of the last one, letting the warmth begin to seep into her.

Still, her fingers don’t stop shaking as she holds her hand out in front of the heater. She wraps them instead around her own biceps, holding herself together. The sound of the gunshots, of Carnahan’s anguished yelling, echoes in her head. She feels all at once too heavy and too light, her bones feel like they are straining against her skin.

A rapping on the basement door pulls her from the near spiral and she sighs as she she stands, regretting it as soon as she moves away from the heater. She presses a few keys on her keyboard and the feed from the camera above the door comes up. It doesn’t surprise her to find Oliver shuffling in front of the door, hand poised to knock again.

She hits the command to unlock the door and waits. His steps are quiet against the staircase, an easy grace despite his weight. Felicity picks up a bright red pen from the desk as he crosses the basement towards her, twisting it between her fingers. He moves carefully, stopping a few feet from where she leans against the desk, as if she’s an animal he might startle.

“Diggle said you tried to pick a fight with him,” Oliver says and she shrugs, neither confirming nor denying.

“I asked him to leave me alone,” she says, glancing over at him. Off his look, she concedes, “In my loud voice.”

Oliver takes another careful step forward, knocking his knuckles against the computer desk she leans against. Felicity chews on her lip, focused on the pen in her fingers. She twists the grip on the pen hard enough to begin twisting it apart and then twists it back.

“This wasn’t your fault,” Oliver says after a moment of silence. She sucks in a painful breath, her chest tight with the words.
“I was the one who was supposed to find Carnahan,” she reminds him. She wants to be flat and emotionless the way Oliver manages to fake it, but she can hear the thickness of her own voice. “And I was the one who sent you to the bogus location.”

He shifts, like he wants to argue with her but knows it would be pointless. It might not be her fault. She didn’t kidnap Gavin Carnahan, she didn’t tie him up. She certainly didn’t pull the trigger three times. But, she didn’t stop it either.

“I’ve never seen anybody die,” she says. In all her time doing this, she really hadn’t. Not like this, at least. She must have, she figures, seen someone fall and not get back up when Deadshot attacked the Unidac auction. But she can’t remember a face, didn’t hear them beg for their lives.

It wasn’t until Oliver showed up that she even started chasing down murderers.

“Hey,” Oliver says softly, pulling her attention back to the present. She jerks her head up to look at him as he takes another step towards her. “This is the thing with what we do.”

She wants him to say something inspiring. She wants him to fix it, even though she knows that’s too much to ask of him. She knows he can’t fix this.

“Sometimes we lose,” he concludes.

She feels herself deflate, looking away from him again. She nods once, twice, because she knows he’s right. They can’t always win because the odds are stacked against them. The pen moves erratically in her fingers, the twisting motion almost soothing if it keeps her fingers from shaking. Oliver waits out her silence, but she doesn’t think it’s patience so much as not knowing what else to say.

Finally, she’s the one who breaks it.

“Maybe it’s better to not feel all of this,” she says quietly, looking down at the pen. “To lock those parts of myself away when we’re out there.”

Oliver shifts next to her and she looks over at him again, frowning.
“Is that what you do?” She asks. She doesn’t mean it as an indictment. When he’s out in the field, he’s someone else and if this is why? Well, then maybe she can finally understand. Maybe she can learn to be something else, too.

He shifts uncomfortably, looking like he’s unsure of the right answer. Instead of giving her one, he shuffles closer, reaching over and gently pulling the pen from her restless grasp. He’s standing in front of her now and Felicity doesn’t know if the space heaters have finally kicked in or if she’s feeling the warmth of him. Oliver leans around her to set the pen down on the desk, so close but not touching her. Hovering just far enough away to give the illusion of space.

She thinks maybe he understands that if he were to hold her right now, to touch her and whisper pretty lies about good guys winning, it would be altogether too much and not enough.

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Felicity takes a few hours to herself after Oliver leaves. He’d done so hesitantly. She knew he didn’t want to leave her in her current state, but also knew that she needed to be left alone for a while. The solitude isn’t her best move, she knows, but it’s better than trying to act normal and tough for John and Oliver.

She uses the time to work on the issue she was having with her network, solving that almost too easily. The task soothes her, though. It gives her something to do that she know she can’t fail at.

Curtis stops in at one point and must notice something isn’t right. He asks about if they’re working on the Glades murders and she stumbles over her answer. Her throat closes up, unable to recount the story. He sits silently with her for a while as she works. She figures it’s for the same reason Oliver hadn’t wanted to leave. People don’t like to leave those in turmoil alone.

He heads out again after getting a call from Paul.

“Are you gonna be alright?” He asks gently after he stands from his chair. Felicity takes a shuddering breath and nods. She doesn’t know if it’s the truth or not, but it’s what Curtis needs to hear. He hesitates for a moment before sighing quietly. She knows he doesn’t believe her. “Call if you need anything.”

She nods again, a little more steadily this time because she knows she won’t need to call.
About an hour after he leaves, she gets the network working again. It makes her feel better to have fixed something instead of broken it. It’s a harsh indictment of herself, she’s sure Oliver would tell her, but she can’t help but feel it. What shakes her is having to go back to the club and face it all over again. She changes back into the clothes she’d left in the base from the night before before heading out.

On the way out of the base, she notices a leather jacket on Curtis’ work table and reaches for it. She recognizes the brown leather once it’s in her hands and realizes Oliver must have brought it for her and she hadn’t noticed earlier. She feels like a kid as she slides it over her arm, tucking the arm still held in the sling beneath it. It’s too big for her but warm from the air coming out of the space heaters. It smells like Oliver’s aftershave and reminds her that she doesn’t have to face this alone.

On the walk back to the club, two thoughts occur to Felicity. The first, is that she definitely shouldn’t have traded the black leggings that accompany her gear for the dark purple skirt she’d been wearing yesterday. The second, is sound. She notices the distinct ambient sounds that make up her walk from the apartment to the club. How she could close her eyes and know where she is from them alone.

She stops at her car, still parked in the alley next to the club, and grabs a pair of headphones from the center console. When she keys in the code for the basement level and heads inside, she finds it empty. Falk’s website still lingers on one of the screens, a leftover code running on another, but there’s no video playing from it this time. The gaudy font that reads “Glades betrayed” taunts her.

But she is Felicity Smoak, God dammit, and she has faced down worse than Falk’s roving eye of justice.

Taking a fortifying breath, she crosses to the computers and drops into the computer chair. Forcing herself to pull the videos up again takes a little more time, but she does and from there it’s mostly playing with the audio levels. Once she’s removed Falk, Carnahan, and Nickel’s voices, the audio becomes a lot easier to listen to. She doesn’t really need to watch the footage, just the levels that make up the sound.

John drops in about a half hour after she starts working on it and settles in silently next to her. Felicity stops what she’s doing and pulls the headphones away from her ears.

“Hey,” she offers sheepishly and John smiles at her in easy amusement. He lifts his arm from where it’s hidden beneath the desk and sets a greasy fast food bag on the desk. The Big Belly Burger logo shines at her and her stomach growls in response.
“Olive branch,” John declares, reaching into the bag and holding a wrapped sandwich out to her. Her chest swells with emotion, grateful for his understanding. She realizes with sudden clarity why John and Oliver work as partners.

“I’m sorry I snapped at you,” she says anyway, because John is the type of person you don’t have to apologize to which makes him exactly the person you should apologize to. He shrugs it off, unwrapping the paper from his own sandwich.

“I’ve spent the last six months working with Oliver Queen,” he reminds her. Felicity laughs a little at the statement and that’s that.

Felicity loses track of time as she works on the audio. It’s not her expertise, but it’s mostly just trial and error as she drags the different levels of things in and out, looking for any type of background sounds that might give away a location.

She startles as a new batch of audio comes through the headphones and realizes that Falk has started another broadcast. A young man hangs from the bindings this time, looking more beat up and bruised than Nickel or Carnahan had. She figures that means he’d put up more of a fight.

Falk introduces him as Roy Harper, a gangbanger out of the Glades and starts his usual spiel. She sends the audio through the speakers, keeping the sound she’d been working on to her headphones, and focuses back in on pulling up the location of the signal. She doesn’t really trust it, though.

Cold fear spikes through her as the video continues to play. John has come to her side again, alerted by the sound of the video. Felicity takes a deep breath, holding it for a moment and trying to force her emotions down. She hears the sound of Oliver coming down the staircase behind them and pulls one headphone off of her ear.

“Falk’s got another hostage,” he announces unnecessarily before noticing the video playing over the speakers already. “And, apparently, he’s a friend of Thea’s.”

Felicity frowns at that, looking back at him over her shoulder. He looks tense, the lines on his face deep with his frown.

“Is she okay?” She asks.
“She was with him when he was attacked,” he explains, crossing the room towards her. “Anything?”

“I’ve been going through all of the video we got trying to see if there’s anything that’ll tell us where this guy is,” she explains, taking the headphones off of her head and setting them down on the desk next to her. Oliver leans forward, resting his hands flat on the desk. “I got nothing, except a sound. Buried in the ambient noise. Almost rhythmic. Here, I’ve isolated it.”

She switches the audio so that it’s playing through the speakers as well as the headphones next to her. The sound waves move on the screen in a near perfect rhythm, but she doesn’t know how to explain the sound. John picks up the headphones from next to her and holds one against his ear.

“What is that?” Oliver asks, frowning down at her. “Sounds like a car driving over lane markers.”

“Yes, but bigger than a car,” she tells him, having already ruled out that possibility. Oliver turns in place, frustrated by the lack of an answer.

“Bigger than a car,” he repeats, searching for an explanation. “What, a bus? Uh…”

He trails off as John cuts him off, listening intently to the sound playing through the headphones. He moves with the rhythm, bouncing his head along with it as if that might help trigger the memory.

“I know this,” he says, more to himself than to her or Oliver. “I know it.”

“Come on! Guys!” Oliver barks, looking between them as though they’re not trying. She shoots him a look. John ignores him, setting the headphones down and pointing at the screen where the audio waves move.

“Felicity, show me a map,” he says and she pulls the keyboard towards her with one hand, awaiting a better description. “Sites of the abductions and where we’ve seen the signal so far.”

She pulls it up easily, the map already something she’d input to keep track of things. Oliver turns and moves away, not seeing where John is going with this. John points at the screen as dots appear to show the places he’d asked for.
“Right there, right there,” he says, pointing to each spot individually. “23rd and Mira. Locksley and Adams. Wells Street down by CNRI. Those are all subway stops!”

“Starling City doesn’t have a subway,” Oliver points out, returning to Felicity’s side. She frowns, looking between them.

“No, but they used to,” John explains, leaning on the desk next to her. “When I was a kid, my dad used to take me down to the Rockets game by subway. For fourteen minutes I leaned against the window feeling the rhythm of the train moving.”

“That’s how he did it,” Felicity says, the realization hitting her as she turns back to the computer.

“What?” Oliver prompts.

“He was at 23rd and Mira, but he was underground,” she explains, looking up at him. “He used to work for the Department of Transportation so that’s why he knows all the old subway stops.”

Oliver straightens up, already unbuttoning his suit jacket and pulling it over his shoulders. Felicity spins excitedly back towards John.

“That’s why I couldn’t trace the signal,” she continues. “He was moving, he was in a subway car!”

“Where is he now?” Oliver calls, already across the room and reaching for his gear. Felicity spins back to the computer, pulling up the location of the signal.

“He’s on the old cross town line,” she calls back to him, turning to look at him on the other end of the basement. “If he continues on this route, he’ll be at the Spring Street stop in fifteen minutes.”

Oliver doesn’t hesitate, hood already in hand as he heads for the door.

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Felicity listens anxiously as Oliver tries to talk Falk down from shooting Roy, telling him he needs to
give him a second chance, an opportunity to change. Like Deadshot months ago, Falk tries to paint an equivalence between him and Oliver.

“You’ve killed people for this city, so have I,” Falk shouts, loud enough that the muffled speech comes over the comm in Felicity’s ear. “What’s the difference between you and me? Emma never got her second chance. You have no idea how lonely it is.”

Oliver calls his name twice and Felicity assumes his attention had switched back to Roy. She hates not being able to see what’s happening and only being able to hear parts of Falk’s responses.

“I understand being alone,” Oliver says, and even through his gruff voice, Felicity can hear the emotion there. “But it doesn’t give you the right to kill people in cold blood.”

There’s a few moments where she can’t hear anything and then Oliver shouts and she hears the sound of a gunshot. She and John share a look, shaken by the sound. There’s another moment or two of silence and Felicity holds her breath.

“Felicity,” Oliver says finally and she sits up straighter in response to the softness of his voice. “Send an ambulance to the next stop. Can you tell me how to stop the train?”

Felicity walks him through the process after looking up a manual for it. He tells them that Roy is gonna be fine and he’s on his way back to the club. She sits back in the chair, pulling the comm out of her ear and looking over at John. He offers her a smile and a pat on the shoulder.

Oliver gets back to the club in about ten minutes and changes quickly.

“I’m gonna go check on Thea,” he tells them, not waiting for a response as he heads upstairs. Felicity pulls up the feed from the security cameras spread throughout the club, frowning as Oliver seems to avoid his sister all together, heading up the stairs instead.

Roy comes in a few minutes later and surprises Thea who wraps him in a tight embrace. Felicity feels suddenly like a creep for watching them and switches the cameras, already sliding her feet into her heels. The lack of sleep from the past few days is catching up with her and she’s ready to head home and get some real rest.

Glancing back at the cameras, she spots Oliver ducking out the front door of the club and onto the street beyond. She glances over at John, who doesn’t seem to be paying her any attention, and pushes herself out of her chair. Offering a goodnight, she grabs her things and heads out the door
“Hey,” she calls softly, not missing the breath he takes before he turns to her. She knows he’s pulling himself together and she wishes he wouldn’t. “Whoa, you’ve got broody face. You know tonight was a win, right?”

He offers her a feeble smile. It emboldens her to step closer and reach for him, dragging her hand down the soft material of his sleeve. He takes a shaky breath, watching the movement of her hand.

“You wanted to save Falk,” she says for him. His eyes are stilled trained on her hand as it skims over the back of his. He flips it over, sliding his fingers in between hers.

“Is it wrong that it just doesn’t really feel like a win?” He asks and Felicity shakes her head. The movement finally makes him look back up at her.

“I think the fact that you wanted to see him get a second chance just means that,” she hesitates for a moment, squeezing his fingers and shrugging her good shoulder. “You’re hoping that you’ll get one.”

Oliver lets out a soft chuckle, shaking his head at her.

“You know, you might know me a little too well,” he deflects and she gives him a serious look.

“Oliver, you’re a good man,” she tells him. “You give people more of a chance than Falk did. But, there’s a very distinct difference between the two of you that you’re overlooking.”

He frowns, tilting his head at her and Felicity takes another step closer, leaving only a small amount of space between them. Her sling knocks awkwardly against his chest, but he doesn’t seem to mind, focused on her words instead.

“You’re not alone,” she says, shifting her weight to one foot and offering a joking smile. He slides his free arm around her back, pulling her further into his warmth. “You have me.”

It’s not just her, she knows. He has John and his family, despite their lack of knowledge about what
he’s doing. She hopes Tommy will come around, but she knows that’s been weighing on his mind. Oliver’s smile grows a little bit. Not enough that she thinks he’s suddenly better, but she thinks he’s getting there.

“I love you,” he says quietly, leaning forward to kiss her softly. She hums in response, squeezing his fingers again and using the leverage of their interlocked fingers to pull him further towards her. When he pulls away, he’s frowning down at her and she shifts uncomfortably, unsure of the reason for the look.

“Don’t ever feel like you have to change yourself to do this,” he says and she realizes he’s thinking about what she’d said earlier. It feels like days ago. “The way you empathize makes you a better hero than I could be. Don’t lose that.”

She nods, surprised by the sentiment. Oliver doesn’t use the word ‘hero’ to describe what they do, but she thinks maybe that’s because he doesn’t seem himself as one. She suddenly wishes she could make him see himself better.

“When’s the last time you slept?” He asks, surprising a soft laugh out of her. She rolls her eyes at him teasingly.

“I was just about to head out,” she assures him. “Want to come with?”

“Let me say goodnight to Dig and I’ll meet you there,” he offers and she nods, disentangling herself from him. She fumbles with her bag, trying to find her keys with one hand. Oliver takes it from her, holding it up and allowing her to peer in to locate the key ring. She thanks him before taking the bag back and stepping away.

“I’ll see you at home,” she offers without thinking, hiding a yawn behind the fist holding her keys. Oliver stares at her for a moment before nodding and she heads away, rounding the building again until she reaches her car.

It isn’t until she slides into the driver’s seat that she realizes that she’d made it sound like his home as well.
I should not be posting this chapter, but since it's been almost 3 weeks since the last update, I felt I owed you all an explanation; I'm not giving up on this story. It's actually only 3 chapters away from completion on my end! However, my muse and confidence have taken a hit on it. And, coupled with my near constant lack of free time, I've barely been able to work on this story.

So, this is a slight hiatus note. It's hard to say when I'll break it, I'm hoping getting a break from classes and work soon will help. For updates on progress, feel free to message me on tumblr (fellicityqueen.tumblr.com) or follow me on twitter (@fellicityqueen) where I talk about the writing process (but mostly about Arrow). I've also set up a curious cat account to make anonymity easier (curiouscat.me/fellicityqueen).

I really love this universe and the story itself, so I'm always happy to talk about it! It might help the muse, even! But, for now, I can't guarantee when the next update will be. I'm sorry, everyone!! <33
Chapter Summary

An old foe makes a reappearance and tests the strength of Felicity and Oliver's trust.

Chapter Notes

Takes place during 1.19 "Unfinished Business"

Sweat dries on Felicity's skin, exposed to the open air of her bedroom, and leaves a light chill in its wake. Oliver reaches around her, dragging the comforter over her waist and tucking it around her. He's warmer bodied than she is, content with the sheet covering most of him.

“How’s your arm?” He asks, the backs of his knuckles skimming along the appendage in question. Felicity tucks her other arm under her pillow, propping her head up a little further.

“It’s good,” she shrugs as his fingers move back up her arm. They catch on the adhesive bandage she’s still got covering the area. Most of the pain has faded, which she thinks is a testament to John’s training, and the wounds left by the shrapnel of the buckshot have almost healed.

Oliver picks gently at the edge of the bandage, glancing at her for confirmation. At her nod, he peels the adhesive away slowly, revealing the scabbed spots. She twists her head a little as Oliver leans closer, both of them trying to get a better look at the injury. He lets go of the bandage, pushing up on one arm to lean across her and turn the light next to the bed on.

“How have you been cleaning it regularly?” He asks, grimacing at her bicep. She rolls her eyes, pressing the bandage back down onto her skin now that he’s gotten an eyeful.

“Yes,” she says, patting the bandage lightly and making sure the adhesive hasn’t been spent. Oliver gives her a tired look, the same as he does every time she shows annoyance at his babying of her. He’d argue over the term, but she knows what it is.

“I just want to be sure it doesn’t get infected,” he explains, settling back onto his side. He bends his arm under his head and rests his cheek on his bicep. Felicity doesn’t bother resisting the urge to reach
forward and drag her fingers over the line of his jaw.

“I’m more worried about it scarring,” she admits, sighing and adjusting her head back down on the pillow. “Goodbye short sleeves.”

She means it mostly as a joke. It’s healing really well and, even it does scar a little, makeup exists. She’s not willing to give up her dresses and tank tops just because of a few scars. There are other solutions. Still, she sees the moment Oliver’s face shutters, a dark shadow coming over his features.

She knows what he’s thinking before he can say anything. Rolling her eyes again, Felicity shoves lightly at his shoulder, pushing him onto his back. She lets the comforter fall off of her as she tosses a leg over his waist and climbs on top of him. Oliver grunts at the change, but rests his hands on her hips, the response natural.

“Don’t go all grumpy Oliver on me, alright?” She says, giving him a serious look. There’s amusement in his eyes at the turn of phrase and his hands move up her back, pulling her down so her chest is flush against his. She hovers over him, refusing to drop it. “I mean it. I chose this life and I chose you. Two choices I made independent of one another. What happened is not your fault, got it?”

“Got it,” he says quietly and Felicity lets herself drop a little further, pressing her lips to his. His fingers drag down her spine as he returns the kiss, barely touching and leaving goosebumps in their wake. Sleep is beginning to catch up with her, his presence coupled with the delicious ache he’d created in her muscles earlier making her think she could fall asleep just like this, every inch of available skin pressed against his.

He rolls them over, startling her, and pulls away with a groan. She reaches for him, her fingers dragging across his biceps and trying to leverage him back into the bed. He pulls out of her reach, the sheet dropping from his hips as he pushes himself out of the bed.

“I have to go,” he explains, grabbing his discarded boxers from the floor. Felicity huffs dramatically, flopping backwards into the middle of the bed and spreading her arms out wide.

“That club of yours is becoming a problem,” she pouts, mostly joking.

The criminal element has been relatively quiet the last few days, but it hasn’t lead to quiet nights spent at her place with Oliver the way she had hoped it would. Instead, he’s actually been putting in
effort to be at the club most nights. She thinks it’s his way of sucking up to Tommy, showing him that the club can be a priority, even if it isn’t Oliver’s number one priority.

“I’ll be back before you can miss me,” he assures her, pulling his sweater over his head.

“Too late,” she interjects, earning an amused grin from him. Oliver swoops down towards her again, leaving a swift kiss on the apple of her cheek and retreating before she can attempt to coax him into staying again.

“I’ll make it up, I promise,” he says, grabbing his wallet and keys from where he’d placed them on the nightstand and slipping them into his pockets. He rounds the bed, coming over to her side.
“Tomorrow night, we’ll order Italian in and then…”

He clicks the light beside her bed off suddenly and her eyes work to adjust to the darkness. Felicity can feel him as he ducks towards her again, warmth flowing off of him as the short, course hair of his beard scrapes over her ear. A shiver runs through her.

“I’ll eat out,” he finished on a gruff whisper that’s almost more vigilante than she’s used to. Her stomach flips and she hears the shifting of his clothes as he pulls away from her. She groans and he lets out a self satisfied chuckle that tells her he’s already halfway across the room.

“Promises, promises,” she calls after him, listening for the sound of her bedroom door clicking shut.

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She startles awake to the sound of an alarm that is definitely not coming from the clock on her nightstand. Felicity groans, groggily trying to ignore the sound by pulling her pillow over her head. It reveals her phone tucked beneath the pillows and the sound amplifies as she realizes that’s where it’s coming from. The sound of the alert, coupled with the fact that it’s definitely not just coming from her phone, finally forces her to check it.

When she sits up and clicks the light on, she realizes the alarm is coming from where she’d left her purse after dinner with Oliver, the tablet within lighting up with the alert as well. Which is bad, to say the least. Because if there’s an alert coming from all of her devices at once, that means something bad has happened.
She grabs her glasses off the nightstand and pushes them clumsily onto her face, flipping her phone over. What she reads seizes her chest and she’s suddenly wide awake as she tosses the comforter off of her. She clicks the alert off and the room goes suddenly quiet. Felicity doesn’t give herself the time to dwell in it, instead climbing out of bed and beginning to rummage through her drawers for clothes.

By the time she reaches the club, it’s nearly dawn and the skies have turned light gray. The street lights are still on, dull in the gray morning, but the club is quiet and almost empty. She’d expected it would be, the partiers having left hours earlier. She heads through the front door, rather than the alley.

Which is how she runs into Tommy. He looks a little surprised at her appearance this early, but shakes it easily. Felicity watches his expression turn hard and she realizes that he’s putting the pieces together. She stalls a few feet in front of him, unsure what to say, if she should say anything.

“Hey, Tommy,” she starts finally because she doesn’t like silence and has a tendency to fill it with useless chatter. “I was just looking for Oliver and I thought-”

He cuts her off, holding out a manilla folder towards her. She looks down at it, raising an eyebrow in confusion at him.

“Oliver asked for this, but I figure it’s probably for you anyway,” he explains, a bite to his tone. She takes the folder, flipping it open to the printed list within. It’s mostly names she doesn’t recognize, but she spots Tommy and Oliver’s names towards the top. She closes the folder, figuring it can wait until this uncomfortable interaction is over.

“Tommy, I-,” she tries, but he cuts her off again, waving his hand at her. Much like her own injury caused by Helena Bertinelli, his wrist seems to have healed fine. He’s no longer wearing the brace, at least.

“I should have expected,” he says, shaking his head. Felicity chews uncomfortably on her lip. “So, you’re just a part of all of it now?”

She opens her mouth to answer, but she doesn’t know how to. She and Tommy have always had a strange relationship. They weren’t really friends, so much as they tolerated each other because Tommy liked Laurel and Laurel liked having Tommy around. That’s changed over the last few months, though. One more change she can attribute to around the time Oliver returned. Still, Felicity figures it must feel like one more betrayal from someone he’d considered a friend.
Tommy’s face darkens as a thought occurs to him and she feels herself tense up before he can even ask the question.

“How long have you known?” He asks and it takes some mental gymnastics for her to even remember. It feels like she’s known for weeks, but it feels like she’s known forever. She’ll blame the near constant lack of sleep.

“How long have you known?” she sighs finally.

“That’s why you ignored me when I warned you about him,” he comments, his eyes narrowed like he’s seeing her for the first time. She sighs, letting the folder fall to her side.

“To be fair,” she says tiredly, “you’re hardly the first person to tell me that Oliver Queen is dangerous.”

“Are you telling me he’s not?” He bites, challenging her to debate him. She frowns, unprepared for this combative, angry Tommy. She knows he’s still feeling a sting of betrayal or whatever emotion Oliver’s secret has stirred up in him, but this is someone other than the Tommy she thought she knew.

“He’s doing his best to help the city,” she reminds him, trying to tamp down the urge to defend Oliver. It’s not like his secret hadn’t shaken her, but she’d gotten over it. It’s time Tommy figure out how to do the same. “Maybe you should give him the benefit of the doubt. Have you even talked to him about it? About why he’s doing it?”

He ducks his head to the side, breaking away from her gaze and it’s all the answer Felicity needs. Oliver hasn’t talked to her about Tommy’s reaction much and clearly this is why. She can’t blame Tommy for taking time to deal with it, but she’d assumed he’d given Oliver a chance to plead his case by now. She knows the distance between them is hurting Oliver.

And, when it comes down to it, Tommy just isn’t her top priority.

“Thanks for… whatever this is,” she says, lifting the folder back up and twisting it in the air. “You should probably get some sleep. You seem like you need it.”

She doesn’t wait for him to respond. He’s still avoiding her gaze and she hopes he feels the
appropriate amount of shame. It’s a little spiteful, maybe, but Tommy has known Oliver longer than anyone else - longer than Laurel or Thea - and she thinks that earns Oliver something. The chance to explain at the least.

Felicity punches in the code for the door to the basement and heads down the stairs, unsurprised by the sound of voices already below her. John and Oliver are having a conversation, but she can’t make out the words. She decides it doesn’t really matter to her right now, because she’s remembered the reason why she’d rushed all the way down here to begin with.

“Good, you’re here,” she comments as she hits the bottom of the steps and crosses towards them, waving her arms and the folder around. The flats she’d chosen are silent across the concrete and she can see on their faces that her appearance has startled them. “Of course you’re here. Where else would you be? You clearly love it down here.”

She moves between them, ignoring Oliver’s dark look for the moment. She doesn’t know exactly what she might have interrupted, but she wouldn’t be surprised if it relates to her own news. She glances up at John next to her as she slides into the computer chair, trying to convey her urgency.

“You gotta see this,” she says, clicking easily into the now saved page containing the local news livestream. The banner at the bottom reads “The Count escapes mental hospital” and the anchor explains the situation, backlit by the flashing lights of police cars.

“I’m here at the scene where police say a disturbed patient escaped only hours ago,” the woman announces. The statement must gain Oliver’s attention because he comes up behind Felicity. “Authorities issued an immediate lockdown at the Starling County Institute for Mental Health following the breakout. Police are warning people to avoid contact with the drug dealer known as the Count.”

“Not so crazy after all, huh?” John comments, turning to follow Oliver’s movement as he stalks away from them. Felicity frowns, looking between the two men and feeling as though she’s missed something. Rather than responding, Oliver very suddenly overturns a table, the items on it scattering across the concrete.

“What the hell?” She barks, spinning her chair around fully to face her irate boyfriend. She doesn’t like the dark look on his face as he turns from the flipped table and moves further away from them. She can read the tension in his shoulders and knows she won’t be getting anything from him, so she turns to John instead, raising an eyebrow at him.

“There’s a new kind of Vertigo on the streets,” he explains. “A girl in the club tonight died because
“I thought you guys didn’t allow drugs in the club,” Felicity comments as Oliver finally moves back towards them, a determined look on his face.

“We don’t,” he says. “We need to find the Count. Right now.”

Felicity sighs, turning back to the computers. She turns off the stream of the news and instead works on hacking into the SCPD files to find what they might have already logged on the event.

“I can try,” she tells him, frowning at the screens. “But, honestly, I’m not sure where to begin. His base of operations was seized after he was caught last time and there hasn’t been any movement there. He doesn’t have any family to contact.”

“If he’s supplying again, he’ll need dealers,” Oliver points out.

“Which means there has to be a hand off somewhere,” John finishes and Oliver nods. Felicity puts her focus into hacking the cameras around the mental hospital, checking each one for the time when the breakout occurred, but there aren’t many good angles from the street.

“The street was too busy for him to have left through the front doors, so he must have left through a side exit,” she explains, flipping through the cameras she’s managed to hack into. “But none of the street cameras have a view of the alleys.”

“Keep trying,” Oliver instructs. “See if the hospital has their own security system that might have seen what happened.”

“I can get in touch with some of my contacts,” John offers, already reaching for his jacket. “They might have intel on the new Vertigo.”

Oliver nods as John departs and Felicity spins in her chair to face him, tilting her head to the side. He frowns at her.

“Back before I could miss you, huh?”
Having to leave for work stalls her efforts to find the Count. She considers offering to call out, but she’s been finding excuses to do it too often lately. Eventually, her relationship with Oliver is going to come to light and she doesn’t want anyone thinking she’s receiving preferential treatment. Not that Oliver really holds the reigns there, and Felicity doubts Moira Queen is going to be giving her any special treatment anytime soon.

Still, she does what she can while she’s at work, but there’s still little for her to find. The official reports filed by the police say that the Count threatened his doctor, forcing the man to take him out the maintenance exit. The exit is at the back of the building and there’s no camera facing that side of it, which means she can’t even start a trace of which direction he’d gone.

Basically, she’s still got bupkis by the time she gets back to the foundry after work.

She stops on the way to the club and picks up food, deciding to splurge a little on something healthier than Big Belly Burger, and she doesn’t expect anyone else to be there when she arrives. It’ll give her a chance to put her focus on trying to hack into the hospital’s security cameras while she eats.

Not wanting to risk another run in with Tommy, she parks her car down the street and uses the alley entrance instead of walking through the club. It’s a few hours still before the place will open for the night, but she’d rather be safe than sorry. The risk of spilling her own secret to Tommy may become overwhelming if she gets caught up with him again, and she’s pretty sure he’s not in the right headspace to find it out.

Felicity hadn’t really expected the sound of arrows sinking into concrete to become a recognizable sound, but somehow it has. When she makes it deep enough into the basement to hear it, she knows immediately it means Oliver is still here, stewing most likely.

“Please tell me you have not been down here all day,” she comments, setting the bag holding her dinner on the computer desks. Oliver is a few feet in front of it, quiver strapped over his dark gray henley. A handful of arrows litter the far wall making kabobs out of tennis balls.

“I went home,” he assures her, crossing the room to begin removing the used arrows from the wall. “I had some stuff to do at the club, though. Who’d have thought a girl dying a few streets over would be such a PR nightmare?”
He finishes the joke on a grunt as he tugs the last arrow free and Felicity gives him a look, seeing through the deflection.

“I’m the funny one, remember?” She says, slipping into the computer chair as Oliver shakes his head at her. She adjusts the chair, which Oliver had clearly used at some point, and removes the container with her veggie wrap from the bag. She asks warily, “Did you tell Thea about Vertigo?”

“I didn’t think I needed to,” he frowns. Felicity raises an eyebrow at him and he sighs. “She’s doing really well. Working with Laurel, making new friends.”

Felicity snorts, remembering Thea’s response to Roy’s return. “Friends, right.”

“My point,” Oliver continues, giving her a dark look for the comment, “is that I don’t want to risk telling her something that might make her backslide.”

“She’s gonna find out,” Felicity points out. “The Count’s escape is headlining every news channel. Not to mention, her brother’s club is being investigated in relation to that woman’s death.”

“I’m working on it,” he says with an air of finality as he rounds the desk. She would argue, but he steals one of the tortilla chips out of her takeout container and, as she’s moving the food away from his greedy hands, she spots the folder Tommy had given her that morning. She’d completely forgotten about it.

“Speaking of the club,” she says, reaching over her food to grab the folder and flipping it open. “Is there a reason Tommy gave me a list of your employees this morning?”

“I was wondering why that was taking him so long,” he comments, more to himself than her, unstrapping the quiver and setting it on the desk behind one of the monitors. “I need you to look into their backgrounds and isolate anyone with drug offenses. We want to figure out how that girl got Vertigo in the first place.”

“Sure, okay,” she agrees, bobbing her head as she skims the list. Oliver and Tommy’s names are sitting at the top, their titles of owner and general manager next to their names. “I’ll see what I can find.”
“My contact in the DEA came through,” John announces, coming through the alley entrance himself. Felicity sets the folder to the side, spinning in her chair to face him. “He gave me the address of a suspected Vertigo dealer in the Glades. They haven’t been able to move on him yet, but they’re reasonably certain he’s the main dealer at the moment.”

“Good work,” Oliver comments. John rounds Felicity, taking his usual seat in the stool next to her. He reaches over, grabbing a chip out of her takeout box, and she glares him down as she slaps the lid closed. He chuckles at her before biting down on the chip.

“I have an address,” he continues, rubbing his fingers together to clear them of the salt from his pilfered snack. “You planning on hooding up?”

“If we take down one dealer, another one is just gonna pop up,” Oliver says, shaking his head. He frowns thoughtfully, spinning in a slow circle while he considers whatever plan Felicity can see building. She pulls the takeout container close to her chest and opens the lid just enough to pull her wrap out.

“The dealer might be able to lead us to the Count, though,” he continues as Felicity bites down on the wrap. “There has to be a handoff point. At some point, whatever money the dealer accrues has to make it’s way to the supplier.”

“So, what do you want to do?” Felicity asks from behind her hand, mouth still full with the food. “Follow the money? I doubt they keep books.”

“No, but we might be able to literally follow the money,” John says, seeming to understand where Oliver is going. Felicity looks between the two men and realization dawns.

“Did we just become buyers?” She pouts and Oliver turns to her, shrugging one shoulder. She sighs, spinning back to face the desk and dropping the wrap into the container. “Alright, where is this drug den exactly?”

“It’s not Breaking Bad, Felicity,” John teases, but he pulls a torn piece of notebook paper from his pocket and unfolds it for her. She pulls the keyboard towards her, pulling the address up on the satellite image she likes to use.

She sends John a glare, poking her tongue out at him, and he smirks back at her. Oliver joins them, leaning on the desk at Felicity’s other side and looking over the area where the dealer is set up.
“There’s no way I’d make it into the house without being recognized,” he sighs. “The Count sets his dealers up well, security and all. Someone would recognize me and, after my very public relationship to Vertigo a few months ago, they wouldn’t let me get close. Not to mention, I’m already a person of interest because of the girl being here before she died.”

Felicity glances over to find him looking at John expectantly and frowns.

“Sure, send the black man to buy the drugs,” John comments and Oliver gives him a tired look, pushing away from the table. He’s right about being recognized. After Thea’s ordeal, the Queen family has been very publicly anti-drug. They’d probably tag Oliver as a snitch. Of course, there’s something they aren’t considering here…

“I could go,” she points out, already trying to figure out how far from the club the dealer is set up.

“No,” John and Oliver say at the same time. Felicity sits up indignantly.

“What?” She asks. “Are you saying I couldn’t have a substance abuse problem?”

Oliver cringes and John raises his eyebrows at her. Felicity sighs, holding her hand up to keep them from commenting.

“Yeah, I hear it,” she says. “But seriously, racist connotations notwithstanding, I am just as capable of going in and buying the drugs as John is.”

Oliver stares at her for a moment before turning to John.

“So, you’ll go?” He asks. Felicity throws her hands up in the air, dropping them back down onto the arms of the chair with a loud slap. They do remember that she’s just as much of a vigilante as Oliver is, do they not?

“Yeah, man, I got it,” John agrees, hopping off the stool. Felicity pouts, spinning back to the computers. She knows that means it’ll be her job to make up something to tag the money with that can’t be traced. She can’t help but consider that this might be the perfect use for nanite technology. Which she does not have any of.
“You guys suck,” she grumbles, already working up a program to work with a bug she can stick on the money. There’s still gonna be a dependency on the hope that the dealer doesn’t actually examine the bills or offer change, but she thinks Curtis has something back at the base she can use.

“You should probably change,” she comments to John, pushing herself out of her chair. “You look like a narc.”

She doesn’t miss the look the men share, clearly recognizing her annoyance and the fact that she’s lashing out. Which, she is, to be fair. But, also, John looks like a cop in his suit and tie, so if they’re worried about Oliver being pegged as snitch, then John should probably bother to look the part.

“Where are you going?” Oliver asks, when he realizes that she’s closing up her food and returning it to the bag. Her stomach grumbles in protest of the move, but the wrap is cold anyway. She can eat it when she gets back.

“I have some tech we can use for this back at my base,” she explains, pulling her jacket over her shoulders and patting the pockets, trying to remember if she’d put her car keys in her jacket or her purse. She finds them, pulling them triumphantly from within her right pocket.

“Do you want me to go with you?” Oliver offers.

“For the three minute drive from here to my base?” She frowns and he shrugs. “No, that's okay. Just work on getting the money and I’ll get the tech.”

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It actually takes her four and a half minutes to get from the club to the apartment where her own secret basement is filled with vigilante gear. There are less pointy objects than Oliver’s, but it more than makes up for it in dangerous tech. Especially since she’s pretty sure they still have some explosive spheres hanging around.

She’s surprised to find Curtis in the basement, sitting silently at his work table. They hadn’t had plans to come down here tonight, had mostly been out of commission while her arm healed. Felicity had been willing to take a break on patrols until she felt back to one hundred percent.
“Oh, hey,” she chirps, crossing by him to the cabinet next to his table. “I didn’t think you’d be down here.”

He nods quietly and Felicity pulls open the drawers in the cabinets next to him one at time, digging through the odds and ends within. Each drawer proves less organized than the last, which is a little frustrating. She knows Curtis has his own way of organizing things, but it would be nice if she could find things as well.

“Have you seen that tiny little tracker you made?” She asks, pushing the bottom drawer closed once she’s ruled it out. “You know, the one that’s like a piece of tape?”

Curtis slides off the stool, crossing instead to another cabinet near her own work station. He pulls out a small plastic container and digs around inside until he finds what he’s looking for. Another thin plastic container, about the size and shape of an SD card holder, contains a thin piece of film inside with a small computer chip visible on its surface.

“Ah! Perfect, thank you!” Felicity enthuses, hurrying over to take it from him. She twists it around in her fingers, examining the new toy. “We’re trying to follow some money, literally, and find a drug dealer. Did you hear about the Count breaking out of his hospital? I’m sure you have, it’s huge news. So, we probably won’t get this tracker back, but I promise I’ll pay for any materials you need to make another.”

“Sure, yeah, that’s fine,” he shrugs, passing by her again to take a seat on the stool once more. Felicity frowns, spinning in a slow circle to track his movements.

Here’s the thing. Felicity likes to think herself a pretty empathetic person, as in she’s able to read people’s moods pretty easily. And she is, for the most part. But, sometimes, she gets so wrapped up in her own stuff and she just sort of…

Well, clearly Curtis is less than okay.

“What’s going on?” She asks, watching him warily. He picks up an unused bit of wire, twisting it around his fingers.

“I told Paul,” he says and Felicity tries to contain her shock. She had more or less given up on convincing Curtis he needed to be honest with his husband.
“Wait, really?” She asks, rounding the table to stand next to his stool. He shuffles around until he’s facing her. “What did he say?”

“Well, he’s pissed,” he explains, reaching up and adjusting his glasses on the bridge of his nose. “And that’s putting it lightly, really. I had to explain everything that happened with the kidnapping and with what you and I have been doing. Paul freaked. He kind of gave me an ultimatum, you know? This or him.”

“What?” Felicity barks, reaching for him and squeezing his wrist in her fingers. “Curtis, I’m so sorry. This is all my fault!”

“No,” Curtis says, looking impassioned for the first time since she’d come down to the basement. “Let’s not have that argument again. He just doesn’t understand the good we’re doing or why I have to keep doing it.”

“He loves you,” she reminds him, releasing his wrist from her grasp. “Don’t lose that over this.”

“Felicity, what you and I do, it’s helping people,” he says, holding her gaze steadily. “This city is hurting and with you and even Oliver, things are changing. Being a part of this, it gives me purpose. I just have to make Paul understand that.”

Felicity nods, unsure what else to say. She knew Paul would be upset, especially since only a month ago he’d been taken hostage by a crazed hacker with some sort of vendetta against her or Curtis. But she gets why Curtis can’t walk away. She wouldn’t be able to either.

“Don’t you have an escaped drug dealer to catch?” Curtis asks, the light returning to his eyes as he tilts his head playfully towards the tracker he’d just given her. Felicity startles at the reminder, looking down at the small plastic case in her palm.

“Right, yeah,” she nods. “I’ll call you if we need any help.”

Curtis hums in acknowledgement and Felicity slips the plastic case into her coat pocket, trading it for her car keys. She heads towards the steps, hearing Curtis call out behind her.

“And you will definitely be paying for a new tracker!”
Oliver doesn’t have a hard time getting her a ridiculously large wad of cash. Like, rolled and everything. Felicity had always been under the impression people only did that on TV. She picks out a twenty and adheres the thin stripped tracker to it. The green of the computer chip blends almost perfectly into the bill. Oliver re-rolls the stack and John, complete with a somewhat stereotypical outfit, heads out for the dealer’s store.

Once he’s gone, she finally gets to eat her wrap and start working on the list of employees that Oliver had wanted her to run checks on. She flips the folder open and stares for a moment at the two names on top. Out of curiosity, she runs her usual methods for a background check on Oliver’s name.

“You know,” she says, folding her hands under her chin and staring at the surprisingly long list of previous offenses. The mugshot is more current, left behind in the system after Oliver had been arrested on suspicion of being the vigilante. “The police aren’t really wrong to be looking into you and Tommy. Objectively, I mean.”

She doesn’t miss Oliver’s sigh from behind her and spins her computer chair around to face him. He’s sitting on the table he’d overturned earlier, now righted with everything that had scattered returned to it.

“You’re right,” he nods. “But, we’ve both changed a lot in the past five years.”

“I know that,” she agrees. “But I also know that sometimes the two of you hide behind who people expect you be.”

He frowns at that, but doesn’t respond. Felicity gives it a moment before spinning back to the screens. She grabs a pen and strikes both Tommy’s and Oliver’s names off the list.

She thinks that Oliver can be a little blind to the changes in the people around him, in the same way she’d been so blind to Curtis’ mood when she’d gotten to the base. Much like her, he can get caught up in his own world view. She wonders if he’s even noticed the way Tommy battles with the man he’d been and the one he’s becoming.

He and Oliver aren’t much different in that way.
“We should probably focus on the lower paid employees first,” she announces, focusing back in on the list. “It’ll be easier to notice something strange in their bank accounts that way. Large deposits, spending beyond their means, that kind of stuff.”

“You’re good at this,” Oliver comments, a pride in his voice that warms her cheeks.

“I was doing this for a while before you came along, remember?” She reminds him and he hums behind her. The basement goes quiet while she works and they wait for John to return with the Vertigo. She works her way through the list of employees from the bottom up, but no red flags stick out to her.

Oliver’s phone chirps after a while and he announces that John is on his way back to the club and he’s going to change to get ready to go out.

“You want me to come with?” She offers. She’s actually been itching to get back in her gear, but hasn’t felt one hundred percent confident with her arm’s healed status. Even still, she doesn’t, but she’d like to offer nonetheless.

“No, keep looking for anyone who might be dealing out of the club,” he says, shaking his head. “This is mostly recon anyway.”

She nods, willing to concede the point. Literally following the money is Oliver’s skillset and figuratively following it is hers. It’s a good dynamic. It works. Oliver pulls his sweater over his head as he moves towards a corner to change into his leathers and Felicity rolls her eyes at the show of modesty. As if she’s never seen him in his underwear before.

She balls up the wrapper from her food and stuffs it into the take out container along with the unfinished chips and stands to throw it in the bin they’ve been using as a trash can. They really need to make this place more livable considering how much time John and Oliver, and she supposes now her, spend down here.

The door to the alley beeps as the lock slides open and John enters the basement. Oliver comes out of the shadows, changed into his green leather pants and his black shirt. Felicity glances around and realizes his hood is on the table next to her computers. He snags it as John comes into view, slapping the Vertigo down on the computer desk.
“Alright, the person of color has successfully purchased your drugs,” he announces, stepping away from the table as Felicity rounds it. She holds a hand up, pointing at him.

“For the record,” she reminds him as he crosses behind Oliver to set the flat-brimmed hat he’d been wearing down. “I offered.”

“How will we know when the tracker is active?” Oliver asks, pulling the jacket on over his shoulders. Felicity slides into the computer chair, clicking into the program following the movement of the bug they’d planted in the bills.

“It already is,” she says. “I’m getting a good signal off of it. Which is unsurprising since Curtis is the smartest person I know, besides myself.”

She leans back in the chair, grinning up at Oliver who shakes his head at her, the corners of his lips twitching with amusement. She can tell he’s trying to keep his stoicism, so she relents, returning to the keyboard.

“Drug money’s like a pigeon,” Dig comments, changing out of his hoodie behind them. “It always finds its way home.”

“We can follow the money all the way back to the Count,” Oliver says and Felicity nods, watching the little dot on the screen flash, but otherwise stay in place. He turns and heads for the door, calling back, “Keep tracking it.”

Felicity spots the green and purple pills on the desk, encased in a small zipped plastic bag. She grabs them, holding them up to the light of her monitors.

“So, what are you going to do with all the Vertigo you bought?” She asks John.

“Plan on having a party, Felicity?” He asks, grinning as he pulls his dress shirt back over his black t-shirt. She grins, dropping her hand and pushing out of the chair once more.

“My only experience with drugs was an encounter with a pot brownie my freshman year,” she tells him as she crosses to her bag, intent on seeking out her tablet. She quickly tacks on, “By mistake. Which could have been fun, except I’m allergic to nuts, so.”
John pulls out a newspaper as she finds her tablet and heads back to the desk. She thinks he might not have been listening to her at all, but she can’t say she’s surprised. This is where their conversations have tended to go anytime they’ve found themselves alone, absent of Oliver’s presence.

“Alright, Deadshot,” he says, holding the paper out for her to see the headline. “Kills again. This time a U.S. senator. Where are you at tracking him?”

He sets the newspaper down on the desk as she slides into the chair, propping her tablet up on it’s stand. John had asked her a few weeks ago, after she’d gotten hurt and started spending most of her time with them as what amounts to high-grade tech support, if she could look into tracking the assassin. But the thing about international assassins is that they are very good at hiding.

“Not very far,” she admits as she unlocks the tablet and brings up everything she has managed to find. She begins moving it into the silver flash drive connected to the side of the tablet. “I ran his Floyd Lawton alias through every conceivable law enforcement database. He’s made a series of calls to an Alberto Garcia. According to the NSA, Garcia’s a reputed underworld talent scout. He books all of Deadshot’s hits.”

She pops the drive out and holds it out for John, admitting, “It’s not much to go on-”

“Yeah, but it’s something, Felicity,” he says, taking the drive from her. “Thanks.”

She hesitates, reaching for her tablet and flipping the stand shut, futzing with it a bit as she looks up at John.

“Don’t you think Oliver should know?” She asks. They’re doing so well and she hates keeping secrets from him. They’re not supposed to have to keep secrets anymore, they’re teammates. But, John answers easily.

“No,” he says and Felicity deflates. “This is personal. Lawton is my problem to deal with.”

He takes the drive and the newspaper and heads out, leaving Felicity with the silence of the basement and the slow flashing of the unmoving tracker. She frowns at the computer screens, trying to make a decision. She’s building a trust with John, which means she wants to keep his confidence on this. So, until it reaches a point where it’s affecting Oliver, she won’t tell him.
Felicity just hopes Oliver would understand that.

Her phone vibrates against the metal desk, startling her out of the thought. She decides to table it for now. Secrets have done nothing but cause her problems lately. She'll have to hope John will realize that on his own. She checks the caller ID before swiping across the screen to answer it.

“Hey, what’s going on?” She answers, straightening up in the chair and checking on the tracker again, just be certain it hasn’t moved without her notice.

“I need a weird favor from you,” Laurel says, her voice low as if she’s trying to keep their conversation private. Felicity almost laughs at the statement, but holds back.

“You’d be surprised how often I hear that,” she jokes, but recognizes the seriousness in Laurel’s tone. “Is everything alright?”

“Oliver told you about what happened at the club, right?” Laurel asks.

“The girl that died?” Felicity clarifies. “Yeah, but she wasn’t at the club when it happened, right? So, it shouldn’t be too big of a deal.”

“My father just came by looking for Tommy,” Laurel explains quickly. “Apparently, the girl had texted Tommy, which isn’t unusual. His phone blows up constantly with texts from people looking to cut the line or get VIP access.”

“Did he explain that?” Felicity asks.

“Yeah, but that’s not good enough for the police,” Laurel continues, sighing. “Look, I know this isn’t Tommy, but someone must be dealing out of the club. There’s a decent amount of money missing from the books. Could you, I don’t know, work your magic? Figure out who at the club has access to its profits and maybe has some drug charges in their background?”

“Besides Tommy and Oliver, you mean,” Felicity comments, looking over the list she’d been supplied with. Laurel lets out a quiet noise of distress on the other end of the line.
“After what happened with Thea,” she says. “There’s no way Tommy nor Oliver would be doing this.”

“I’m not arguing with you, trust me,” Felicity assures her. She’d been looking at low-level employees, but if they had access to the club’s accounts, they would have to be higher up the food chain. She’ll have to switch tactics. “I’ll look into it.”

“Thank you,” Laurel says, breathing out a sigh of relief. “I gotta go. Tommy’s really upset.”

“It’ll be fine,” Felicity chirps, trying to sound more confident than she feels. At the least, they’re working on tracking down the Count, which will solve the root problem. “We’ll find whoever it is, I promise.”

Laurel hangs up just as Felicity notices movement on the computer screen in front of her. The tracker starts moving and she texts Oliver to let him know which side of the city it’s heading towards. It continues on its route for about fifteen minutes before it finally settles again.

“What have you got?” Oliver asks as he picks up the call. He hadn’t taken a comm with him tonight, so they’ll be going old school bluetooth for the evening.

“The end of the money trail,” she tells him. “Sending the dealer’s location to you now.”

“Got it,” he says after a minute.

“Call me if you need backup,” she says with a little bit of force behind her words. Oliver gives her a half hearted platitude before he hangs up.

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They really should not have assumed that catching the Count would be so simple.

Oliver had come back looking worse for wear than Felicity usually prefers he be. Apparently, he’d
run out of arrows and nearly found himself smeared along the underside of the Count’s car. This is why they need to institute a rule - no matter how rudimentary a mission it may seem, no one goes out without backup.

A rule Felicity is positive she’d get pushback on if she were to voice out loud. It’ll be up to her, then, to make sure her boyfriend stays in one, not-dead piece. Whether he likes it or not.

She’s almost a little grateful to use work the next day as an excuse to focus on something, anything, other than blurry street cam footage, which she’s been tearing through to try and find the car the Count had disappeared in. A car which was a basic sedan for which Oliver didn’t manage to get a license plate.

Listen, she’s good- No, she’s remarkably good, to use Oliver’s own word, but she’s not a miracle worker.

There’s also the problem of the club’s employees. If one of them is dealing out of the club, they’re much better than she anticipated. She hasn’t been able to find any strange transactions. It’s hard to imagine one of them would be hiding ten thousand dollars in their mattress or something. So, that’s been pretty much a bust as well.

Curtis stops in while she’s at work to talk about Paul, which is so not something she needed added to her conscious tonight. He’d come by around lunch to chat and share his leftovers with her. She’d appreciated the gesture, but the guilt had been so bad she hadn’t managed to swallow more than a few bites.

She also hasn’t mentioned the missing ten thousand dollars to Oliver yet, or John’s own secret vendetta. It’s not that she’s really keeping either of them from him, but she doesn’t want to add to his list of problems. She can see the way this reintroduction of Vertigo into the city is affecting him, but she’s also starting to feel suffocated under the weight of it all.

Something he must be able to read in her.

“Are you alright?” Oliver asks, startling her out of her own head as she pulls her leggings up her thighs. It’s just the two of them in the basement tonight and she doesn’t bother with modesty. “You seem distracted.”

Honestly, she didn’t realize she was this transparent. Then again, she’s barely said more than a few
words since she’d arrived which would raise anyone’s suspicion if they knew her. She doesn’t really know what to tell him, so she just shrugs, pulling her tank top over her head.

“I’m just eager to get back out there,” she deflects. It’s the first time she’s planning to join him on patrol since she’d been shot and it is making her antsy. She misses it.

Oliver crosses to her, half dressed in his gear. He’s got his long sleeved shirt and green leather pants on, but his coat rests on a table next to his bow and quiver. She shifts under his gaze, lifting her own jacket up and picking at the half-assed patching she’d added to fix the tears from the buck shot. The line might work on anyone else, but Oliver knows better.

Damn him.

“It’s more than that,” he says softly, frowning at her. “What’s going on with you?”

An easier question would be what isn’t going on with her at the moment. Felicity sighs, leaning back against the table behind her. She hears the sound of one of her spheres rolling across the metal surface and Oliver reaches out, stalling it with his hand. He stays like that, almost wrapped around her but not touching. She doesn’t know when they’d made an unspoken agreement to put their relationship aside when they’re down here, but they both seem to, don’t they?

The duality of their lives reminds her what had her worked up in the first place.

“Curtis told Paul,” she explains, picking the easiest one to talk about. The weight of it is heavy on her shoulders. Despite whatever Curtis may say, she can’t help but feel at fault for the problems in his marriage. She presses on, “About all of this, I mean. Well, not all all of it, I told him to leave you out of it.”

“I thought you wanted Curtis to tell Paul,” Oliver comments and she nods, knowing that she’d mentioned her pressing Curtis to come clean to him once or twice. If anyone should understand what secrets can do to a relationship, it’s them.

“I did,” she says. “And I still think it was the right move. I knew Paul would be upset, but Curtis said he isn’t even coming home when he is there anymore. He checked in, so Curtis wouldn’t worry, but he told him he needed to choose.”
“He’ll come around,” Oliver says, like he has any frame of reference, like that isn’t an obvious line to make her feel better. Felicity gives him a dark look for trying and his face softens as he shifts closer to her. “It’s not your fault.”

The way he sees through her sometimes feels like it can leave her winded without ever taking a step. She thinks it’s a product of the ways in which they understand each other, at a fundamental level that shouldn’t be possible. He shouldn’t be able to know her this well, to peer into her and come out with all the answers.

And yet, here they are.

“I started all of this, I brought Curtis into it,” she argues, wrapping her arms around herself. With her leathers on, she’s usually warm enough, but it’s perpetually cold in the basement of the club and her tank top isn’t offering her much in the way of warmth. Oliver notices the move, stepping even closer to her. She can feel the warmth coming from him.

“You have to remember,” she continues. “Curtis and I have been doing this for a while now and, yeah, neither of us really expected it to go much farther than hacking one percenters bank accounts. But we also didn’t stop to question it when it did go beyond that. We didn’t consider how it would affect the people in our lives.”

She scratches her nails along the goosebumps crawling up her arms and he catches her hand, halting the movement and wrapping it up in both of his own. She looks up at him, chewing on her lower lip.

“I didn’t really have anyone in my life to consider when this started,” she admits, not missing the way he ducks just slightly towards her, as if he wants to wrap her in his warmth, doesn’t want to miss a word. “But Curtis did. And I should have considered that more.”

“Felicity,” Oliver sighs, leaning forward to leave a feather-light kiss on her temple. “Curtis is an adult who can make his own choices. You may be giving yourself too much credit on this one.”

She nods, though she can’t really bring herself to agree with him. Curtis’ choices aside, she can’t help but feel as though she’s only managed to make so many things worse over the last few weeks. The Benefactor is her mess and they’re no closer to finding him than they were a few weeks ago.

Without her, none of this would even be happening.
An alert lights up one of the computer screens from sleep and she reluctantly pulls away from Oliver to examine it. The police radio has a call coming in about a hostage situation at the aquarium, complete with eye witness reports from those who managed to make it out. She makes quick work of hacking into the security feed within the facility.

Vertigo. At least that’s one thing she can’t possibly be at fault for.

The voice on the police scanner continues to repeat her message as Oliver pulls his jacket on and meets her at the computer screens.

“I hacked the aquarium security system to get a better look,” she explains.

She mutes the sound of the police radio as audio from the aquarium comes through instead. A man shouts gibberish at his hostages, holding his head with both hands, the butt of the gun pressed up flat against his temple. The hostages are huddled against a spiral stairwell and she can’t get a count on how many people are trapped within.

The man shoots suddenly, erratically, up into the air. A bullet strikes the camera and the feed cuts out to static.

“Bystanders said they saw him pop some green and purple pills,” she continues. Oliver moves away from her and she nearly scrambles, thinking he’s about to take off without her. Instead he grabs something from his trunk, slamming the lid shut.

Felicity grabs her coat from the table, stuffing the loose spheres into the pockets, and follows after him. Oliver pours something from a pouch into small, metal bowl and follows it up with some water.

“There’s a lunatic high on Vertigo who’s taken hostages,” she reminds him, rounding him where he sits at the table displaying his arrows. He pours the mixture into a water boiler. “And you’re making… making tea.”

“They’re medicinal herbs from the island,” he explains, rotating on the stool to face her. “They counterbalance the effects of certain drugs and poisons. They should counteract the effects of Vertigo.”

Magical island herbs. Yeah, there’s a good chance she’ll never fully understand this man. Still,
there’s a more important part of all of that which catches her attention.

“Then you aren’t going to…,” she trails off quietly.

“What?” Oliver asks.

“You know,” she presses, moving her hand in a slicing motion over her own throat. He frowns at her.

“My sister got high on this garbage,” he reminds her needlessly as he uses a syringe to transport the now finished tea into one of his arrows. “Could have killed someone. She didn’t deserve an arrow in the heart. This guy didn’t fail the city. The city failed him.”

He looks back up at her before finishing, “And so did I.”

“What’s happening now isn’t your fault,” she tells him, not missing the irony of their role reversal from just a few moments ago. “You didn’t make him take drugs.”

“No, but I did fail to put the Count in a grave so deep that he couldn’t come back and hurt anyone again,” he argues, a bite to his tone. It’s his words that make her freeze, though. Because, technically, he hadn’t been the one to make that decision.

“Are you mad at me for stopping you?” She asks quietly and tries not to feel betrayed by his silence. He doesn’t look at her, instead laser focused on the table in front him, as if it contains the answers to the universe. “We caught him. They locked him up.”

“And now the city is on fire,” he bites, finally looking at her. She refuses to wilt under his look, knowing him well enough by now. It doesn’t stop the hurt building in her chest, though. “So clearly, it wasn’t the right decision.”

They stare each other down for a moment, anger and resentment teeming at the surface. The Count may have found a way to break his bonds, but she doesn’t agree and she knows Oliver can see that. This is the one issue they’ve never been able to put to bed. They’ve just become very good at ignoring it.
Oliver pushes away from the table, crossing away from her. She uses the moment to pull her coat on and tie her hair back enough to conceal it under wig. He spins back to her as she’s adjusting the cheap wig on her head.

“Where’s Diggle?” He asks, voice soft with regret. She knows he hates picking fights with her, but it’s his nature. Oliver Queen does not like to be wrong. “We need to get in touch with him. With the security feed out, we’re gonna need another set of eyes at the aquarium.”

“I’ll reach out to him on the way,” she agrees, adjusting her hood over her head as Oliver grabs his bow.

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The junkie at the aquarium dies, despite Oliver’s efforts. Felicity had made sure the hostages made it out of the building before following Oliver and the fleeing man down to the basement of the facility. He was dead before she even reached them.

It’s a blow to Oliver, she knows. It doesn’t exactly make her feel great either, but Oliver is so convinced that they’re the ones who’d failed him. Failed the city. It still grates her that he thinks putting an arrow in the Count would have solved all of this. As if anything they’ve done over the past few weeks has really changed anything.

Sometimes, Felicity wonders if the unending nature of what they’re doing is their real failure. That no matter how many bad guys they take down, lock away, there’s always someone new to take their place. If not the Count and Vertigo, it would have been some new player with another dangerous drug.

Maybe that’s a dark and pessimistic thought, especially for her, but it’s their reality. They take on someone new every week. Are they even making a difference?

Yes. Felicity has to believe they are. That despite the cyclical nature of their efforts, they aren’t fruitless. That doesn’t mean that each time someone gets hurt, each time someone else shows up looking to cause trouble, that it’s their fault.

There are people that are still alive because of them. People got to go home to their families, they’ve gotten the chance to try again, be better.
Oliver takes every small failure and straps it onto his back like a weight. She’s felt those knots, driven them from his muscles, but she can only do so much. Her words and her hands are only temporary fixes until Oliver actually lets himself believe them.

In the meantime, she doesn’t really feel like riding the bitter train with him tonight.

She wants to believe that he isn’t really angry with her from stopping him from killing the Count. But she also doesn’t know that he isn’t. It sure as hell feels like he resents her for it. Maybe he’s projecting, it’s hardly out of character for Oliver, but she’s already dealing with enough. She doesn’t want to take his silent anger for longer than absolutely necessary.

Which is why she ends up sleeping alone - like, really sleeping alone, not falling asleep alone and waking up with Oliver or vice versa - for the first time in a month. She spends most of the night shifting uncomfortably and cold. Is her bed really always this cold without Oliver? She finds that highly suspect.

All in all, Felicity would rate her night as a definite zero out of ten. No stars, no thumbs up. She would not like to experience it again.

It probably doesn’t help that she stays in bed most of the day that follows. She’s working on stuff, sure, but being off of work and pouring through the list of employees at the club just gives her a ton of free time to stew over everything that currently has her on edge. Really, Oliver’s mood is just the tip of the iceberg.

She forces herself to do something productive at one point and finally does some laundry she’d been putting off and makes a grocery list - which she sticks to the fridge for Oliver to inevitably make changes and additions to once they work through this. Felicity kind of can’t think anymore negatively than that.

Ultimately, she loves him, flaws and all. So, she has to believe they’ll work it out.

Once it’s late enough, she eats a quick dinner before heading out to the club. She’s sure Oliver is there and she wants to get her hands on the autopsy report from their deceased addict. Her plan is to use the alley entrance, since the club seems to be busy with activity as the workers get ready for the night, but the sight of Detective Lance getting out of his unmarked car, makes her change directions, following him into the club instead.
“Bad night,” Felicity hears Oliver say as she trails after the detective and his crew of uniformed officers.

“It’s about to get worse,” Lance announces, a smugness to his tone that almost makes her roll her eyes. Oliver halts, catching her eye and she shoots him a quick shrug. He spins, following the detective as he continues on his path, focused on Tommy.

“Mr. Merlyn,” he greets, holding up a piece of paper at eye level for Tommy to see. “As requested, a warrant to search these premises.”

It’s Laurel, standing next to Tommy, who snatches the document out of her father’s hand. Felicity watches as her eyes scan over the printed text there, before looking accusingly up at him.

“I can’t believe you’re doing this,” she says.

“Believe it,” Lance responds, unaffected by his daughter’s anger.

“Detective,” Oliver calls as Lance moves away from the group. He follows after him and Felicity steps closer, raising an eyebrow at Laurel. “I’m not an attorney, but on what grounds are you searching my club?”

He’s using his best bothered billionaire voice. Laurel looks up from the paper in her hands, shooting Felicity a solemn look and shaking her head. Not good. Tommy glances between them, a dark look taking over his features, and moves away.

“Your general manager bribed a government official to keep him from inspecting the entirety of your building,” Lance explains, pointing accusingly at Oliver.

“What?” Oliver sighs and Felicity doesn’t need to see his face to know he’s giving the detective his best ‘I-couldn't-possibly-I’m-just-a-bored-rich-boy’ look.

“Because he’s selling Vertigo out of this club,” Lance continues, piling on the accusations. Bribing a city official? Bad. Doing it so you can host some sort of underground manufacturing plant? Very bad.
“Ollie, it’s valid,” Laurel says, finally cutting into the conversation between Oliver and her father.

He gives her a disbelieving look, but Lance is already moving on, thanking Laurel and walking away from Oliver. Felicity catches a look between Tommy and Oliver, but is quickly much more interested in the fact that Lance is taking quick strides directly towards the hallway with the entrance to the basement.

“A sub level is not listed on the inspection’s floor plans,” the detective explains, continuing down the hallway. “However, I pulled the county records. There’s something down there. I wanna see for myself what it is.”

Felicity itches to follow after him, stop whatever is about to happen from happening. But she’s pretty sure her doing so would end worse for everyone. Oliver passes her, following after Lance, and grabs her wrist gently. It’s an excuse for her to follow, at least, but his fingers grip a little too tightly to convince her that he isn’t just as panicked as she is. Tommy and Laurel bring up the rear as they all head down the hallway.

“Oh, look at that!” Lance announces gleefully, knocking his fingers against the metal basement door. “Open the door.”

Oliver lets go of her wrist, leaving her standing with the officers as he steps between Lance and the door. He puts on his best attempt at looking unaffected, but Felicity doubts even Lance is buying it. She resists the urge to chew on her lip.

“You’re making a mistake,” he says.

“No,” the detective counters, offering Oliver a dark look and turning to him fully. “You are. If you don’t open that door.”

Oliver hesitates, looking past her and Lance to Tommy. Felicity glances around and realizes Tommy might actually be the only one in the situation who isn’t worried. Even Laurel looks on edge. A small, dark part of her can’t help but wonder if he wants Oliver to get caught.

“I said, open the door,” Lance repeats himself once more. Oliver finally concedes, turning slowly to face the door and Felicity hears the telltale sound of the three-digit code being pressed before the door swings open. Lance nods, offering sarcastically, “Thank you.”
After the detective, Tommy leads the rest of them down the stairs. Felicity tempers her instinctual urge to move, to see what happens, and waits instead as Oliver lets everyone enter first. She brushes her hand across the sleeve of his leather jacket as she passes him, trying to be reassuring.

She’s sure he can read her fear on her face.

Once they’ve all reached the cement floor, Tommy flips the breaker and illuminates the room. Felicity reaches out and squeezes Oliver’s forearm in shock, the foundry they know transformed into a storage space filled with crates.

“The place is kind of a mess,” Tommy announces into the open space. “I’ve been using it to store the bulk of our inventory.”

Felicity barely registers it as Lance asks what’s in the boxes - without even a touch of irony, she might add, it’s like she’s the only one here who’s ever seen a movie - and digs within to pull out a bottle of rum. Oliver, she can tell, is just as surprised as she is. So, this was Tommy’s doing then.

“If prohibition were still in effect, you might actually have the basis of a criminal complaint,” Laurel taunts, earning a dark glare from her father.

“Would you like to open the rest of the crates?” Tommy goades. Felicity glances around the room. She wonders, somewhat inappropriately, if Tommy had taken the time to handle her computers with care.

Lance takes Tommy up on the offer, opening another box. It must satisfy him because he drops the bottle back into the box, bouncing it slightly off of the cardboard, and turns back to face them with a heavy sigh. He’s disappointed, Felicity can tell.

She wonders if it’s that Tommy is innocent or that Laurel might not forgive this.

“So if you don’t have anything to hide, why didn’t you want the inspector down here?” Lance asks, stalking closer to Tommy. He shares a look with Oliver before offering some explanation about the ventilation not being up to code, that the club shouldn’t even be open.

Lance seems to accept this answer, even if he doesn’t seem to believe it, and leads everyone back upstairs. Felicity lingers at the entrance to the basement, wondering where they go from here. Oliver
catches her hesitation, letting Laurel and Tommy get a few feet ahead of them before turning back to her.

“The ethernet cable still works,” he says, like she wouldn’t know that already. “Plug your tablet into it. The hostage taking junkie. He is the only lead to the Count we have left.”


Oliver does an awkward little shift at that, breaking their gaze, and Felicity frowns.

“And here I was hoping you’d come to talk to me,” he admits quietly and Felicity feels herself go warm, looking down at her own shoes. She shrugs a little and can feel him looking at her again.

“The work comes first, right?” She says, looking back up at him, because that’s how they’ve always done this. They barely touch down in the basement and when they’re under their hoods, that’s who they are. Mostly, she’s been following his lead on this end of things.

But he looks like he wants to argue with her, the briefest flash of disagreement on his face.

“I’ll be down in a few minutes,” he says instead and Felicity nods, turning back to disappear behind the door before anyone can notice.

She takes a minute to collect herself before heading down the steps, already digging her tablet from her bag. They’re lucky she’d had her tablet custom made to include ports from HDMI and Ethernet, because that is definitely not standard issue.

It takes her a bit of digging to find where the ethernet cable has been tossed to the side, left in between plastic covered crates, and actually get it plugged into her tablet. She starts working through the reports on the incident from the night before until she finds the autopsy report. It comes up just as she hears the sound of Oliver’s heavy footsteps against the metal staircase.

If she can hear him coming, that means he’s stomping. Which is bad.

“What happened?” She calls, deflating a little at the reminder of his bad mood.
“It’s a long story,” he sighs, joining her where she leans against one of the crates. He spies a stack of metal chairs at the end of a row of crates and moves for them.

“Have you heard from Dig?” She asks instead, realizing she’d never heard back from him after she’d sent the details of the situation last night.

“It’s a long story,” Oliver repeats, grunting a little as he lifts the chairs over his head. He grabs one of the stack and sets it down separately, offering it to her. Felicity sighs as she lowers herself into it, scanning through the autopsy report. “Check the toxicology to see if there’s something related to the Vertigo he was on.”

“He didn’t die from Vertigo overdose,” she says aloud as she reads through the report. Oliver stops where he’s continuing to unstack chairs and move tables to give her a meaningful look.

“I saw it, Felicity,” he says.

“According to the coroner,” she continues, reading aloud. “Cause of death was severe anaphylaxis. He died of an allergic reaction to chlorpromazine.”

“That’s an antipsychotic,” he frowns. “Pull up the Veronica Sparks autopsy. Did she have chlorpromazine in her system?”

Felicity is already moving, pouring back through the case file on Veronica Sparks. She’d been a relatively stable, relatively well-off young woman, so her file is twice the size of the homeless junkie from the aquarium. Wow, the system really does stink.

“Yes,” Felicity says slowly, finally locating the information. She pushes out of her chair as Oliver moves away from her again. “How did you know?”

“The Count must have added it as a new ingredient in his latest iteration of Vertigo,” he explains, pushing a table back into it’s proper place. She’s pretty sure it’s the table her computers are meant to stand on. Once it’s in place, he taps his fingers across the surface thoughtfully and she sets her tablet down on it.
“But wouldn’t the amount he’d need to manufacture enough for circulation be huge?” She considers, spinning in a slow circle as Oliver moves around her. “Where would he get that much?”

“The mental institution,” he says without missing a beat. He leans back against the edge of the table next to her and considers it for a moment. “What if we’re looking at this all wrong?”

“How so?” She presses, frowning at him.

“Everybody is looking for him outside the asylum, but what if he never left?” He explains. “What if… what if he faked his escape? The same way that he faked being insane.”

She’s already moving before he asks her to pull up the schematics for the mental hospital. She gets it up on her tablets and spots the tunnels on the plan, running beneath the building. They’re a holdover from when the building was initially built, she’s sure, back when mental hospitals were more pseudoscience than real treatment facilities.

They’d be the perfect place to hide out.

“Can you find us an entry point?” Oliver asks, already moving to pull their gear from the crates it had been stashed between. Felicity scans the plans, reaching up to turn the ponytail at the back of her head into a more manageable bun.

“Should I try to call Dig?” She offers, spotting a steam grate on the outside of the building that would give them access to the tunnels. Oliver sets her things down on the table next to her.

“No,” he says shortly, pulling his gray t-shirt over his head. Felicity sighs, turning to give him a look.

“Oliver, having the city plans is one thing,” she says. “We have no idea what we might be walking into.”

“You and I can handle it,” he insists, moving away from her to fully change into his costume. She huffs, grabbing her own things to change as well.

Before they leave, she texts John.
She’s really glad sometimes that she doesn’t take orders from Oliver.

One minute, she’s keeping watch in what has to be the creepiest hallway she’s ever been in, made worse by the garish green glowsticks Oliver had used to enlighten it. The next, she’s got her bad arm wrenched behind her and the definite feeling of a knife pressed against her kidney.

He’d snuck up on her and before she could get herself off the defensive, he’d had her in a vice grip. If it was her other arm, or the knife wasn’t already slicing through her leather, she might stand a better chance. As it is, she’s at his mercy as he leads her through the doorway Oliver had disappeared through. The first thing she sees is the Count, vacant and hooked up to wires and IVs. The second is Oliver, sprawled across the concrete floor.

She lets out a soft cry at the sight of him motionless on the floor, biting down on her lip to try and temper it. Another man, bigger than the one breathing down her own neck and dressed in the white monochrome of an orderly, stands over Oliver.

The man behind her shoves her at the orderly who catches her easily, his large hands wrapping around her biceps in a tight grip and holding her in place. When the other man, she recognizes him now as the doctor assigned to the Count, crouches over Oliver and reaches for his hood, she lashes out.

The orderly holds fast as she kicks out at the doctor, struggling against her captor, and he doesn’t seem to even notice her, focused in on unmasking the Starling City Vigilante instead.

“Oliver Queen,” he announces, but also like he’s talking to the unconscious vigilante. Felicity struggles harder, shoving her arms behind herself and trying to reach her wrist tech. “All those years on that island. Guess you really did go crazy.”

“Pretty sure mental health professionals aren’t supposed to use that word,” she bites, drawing his attention to her. “Then again, pretty sure you’re not supposed to illegally manufacture and sell drugs either.”

“And how about you, huh?” The doctor says, straightening back up and grinning as though he’s amused by her. “Who’s under that mask?”
“Why don’t you come over here and find out?” She goads, feeling bolder as her gloved fingers finally press against the screen of her tablet. The doctor stalks towards her and she stabs blindly at the screen, hoping her muscle memory will be good enough.

As he reaches for her, hands coming up to touch the edges of her mask, a sphere floats up from within her pocket. Felicity ducks, squeezing her eyes shut and, before either of the men can react, the sphere explodes with a blast of light and a bang.

It sends them reeling backwards, the orderly losing his grip on Felicity. She uses the distraction to dart from the room, unsure what her plan is from here. She’s not going to leave Oliver behind, especially now that they know his secret, but maybe she can buy them both some time.

“Find her!” She hears the doctor bark, the sound of telltale footsteps behind her. She ducks into a room, leaving the illumination of Oliver’s glow sticks behind, and tries to quiet her breathing. Pressing one hand over her mouth to cover the sound of her short breaths, she uses the other to pull her phone from within her coat and send out an SOS to John.

She hears the sound of heavy footsteps coming close, her heart ramming against her ribcage, before fading as the orderly continues past her door. Checking to make sure he’s gone, she darts out and heads back for the room she’d left Oliver in.

She feels reasonably certain she could take the doctor down, but the orderly is like three of her. If they’re going to get out of this, she’s gonna need Oliver to wake up. She glances around the corner, spotting the doctor hauling Oliver onto a gurney and strapping him into restraints.

She acts quickly, spinning around the doorframe and tossing another sphere at the doctor. The tether wraps around his wrist and she yanks, pulling his hand away from Oliver’s wrist. He lets out a shout of surprise, attempting to pull back on the tether. Felicity has better leverage than him and she yanks harder, using the line to spin him away from the gurney before she advances on him.

Before she can get more than a cursory blow in, two large arms wrap around her center, lifting her from the floor. She kicks out, aiming for any body part she can find, the heels of her boots striking against his thighs and bouncing off harmlessly. For a big guy, he’d snuck up on her easily.

“Don’t worry, sweetheart,” the doctor bites, swiping blood from where she’d struck his nose off of his upper lip. “You’re next.”
She continues to struggle, trying to use her slight size to her advantage and worm out of the giant’s grip. He seems wise to her tricks, though, keeping his grip tight and her arms trapped uselessly at her sides.

The doctor finishes securing Oliver’s binds, belting them together just before Oliver comes thrashing back to consciousness, tugging at the tight leather straps. His eyes land first on her and then on his quiver on the other side of the room.

He struggles for a moment before going worryingly calm. Felicity takes his lead and, at that, the orderly allows her feet to touch the cement floor again.

“So the Count didn’t fake losing his mind, did he?” He asks, his eyes on her as he addresses the doctor. Unfazed, the doctor pulls a pair of latex gloves onto his hands. “This was you the whole time. How’d you get him to give you the formula for Vertigo, huh? Chemistry doesn’t seem like his best subject right now.”

Felicity realizes with sudden fear that he’s improvising. This isn’t hooded-up-and-in-control Oliver, this is up-shit-creek-without-a-paddle Oliver.

“He couldn’t tell me if he wanted to,” the doctor explains, so at least his stalling seems to be working. “I ordered a biopsy on his kidneys. The tissue was suffused with the narcotic after his OD. When I got the results, I realized I could reverse engineer the chemical compound of the drug. Produced a synthesized version myself using the facilities here.”

“And made a few improvements, like adding chlorpromazine,” Oliver interjects.

“A good use of city funds,” Felicity growls, struggling a little against the orderly again.

“That’s how you found us,” the doctor says, ignoring her. He’s moving around his makeshift chemistry set on the table and she doesn’t like the looks of whatever he’s putting together.

“Cops came around, started asking questions,” Oliver continues, putting it all together more for himself. “You faked the Count’s disappearance to draw attention away from yourself. It’s clever.”
“I wasn’t trying to be a criminal mastermind,” the doctor says, lifting a clear beaker filled with a sickly looking green mixture up and examining it against the light. He rounds the end of the gurney where Oliver’s head rests. “I just needed the money. Something I’m sure a billionaire wouldn’t understand.”

“Believe me,” Oliver growls. “I understand you perfectly.”

“Strap her down,” the doctor commands, looking instead towards Felicity and the orderly holding her. Her eyes widen in surprise and she starts struggling again, kicking out out against her captor. Oliver is tugging at his own restraints again.

The orderly is unaffected by her, dragging her over to another gurney pressed up against the far wall. He uses one strap to bind her hands together, tethering her to the bed. He turns to step away, before spinning back to her with a smug look and tugging the tablet roughly from her wrist, the strap giving under his harsh pull. She glares after him as he steps away.

The doctor’s next words send an icy chill through her veins, stilling her.

“Open his mouth.”

Oliver begins thrashing against his restraints again, attempting to wrench himself away as the orderly’s large hands land on his jaw, forcing it open. Felicity struggles against her own restraints, kicking out her free legs as if that’ll matter at all. She tugs at the bar she’s strapped to, hoping to pull the gurney’s rusted wheels across the concrete, her eyes locked on Oliver as his attempts to resist are subdued. The drug goes down his throat easily at the angle he’s lying.

“Oliver,” she cries out on instinct, knowing it hardly matters anyway. His limbs are already slowing, reacting to the drug taking quick control of his system. She tugs harder at the restraints, leather and fabric grating at her wrists.

“From what I’ve read in the tabloids,” the doctor says, smugness returning to his voice as he stares down at Oliver, “no one will be surprised to hear Oliver Queen died of a drug overdose.”

Felicity doesn’t see Oliver move, but she hears the beeping coming from the quiver on the table behind the men. It draws their attention as it draws her own. They move towards it, looking to examine the blinking light.
The difference between her explosives and Oliver’s is that his pack a considerably larger punch.

When the arrow explodes, the room shifts. Tables topple and glass shatters. Felicity instinctively ducks into herself, hiding from the fallout. The orderly, closest to the blast, stumbles backwards away from it, knocking Oliver’s gurney onto it’s side.

Felicity flinches as he hits the ground, but he bounces back, jiggling his wrist until the rusted and damaged chains give way. He unstraps the rest of his restraints. He manages to tug a barb from his wrist and slide it across the floor towards her before scrambling for his quiver.

The doctor darts past her out of the room. Felicity uses her boot to shift the barb as close to her waist as she can get it. She pushes her leg up against the front wheel of the gurney and tugs, hard, moving quickly to keep it from toppling onto her. She drags it until she can reach the barb and cut through her own restraints, nicking herself on the wrist in the process.

She cuts through the leather just as Oliver reaches the table with his quiver. The orderly looms over him, lifting an IV pole as a makeshift weapon. Before Felicity can even call out John is coming through the door, landing a kick to the orderly’s side that sends him reeling. Trusting that John can handle himself and Oliver, she takes off after the doctor.

She realizes once she’s got him cornered in the tunnel that she doesn’t have her tech. The doctor pulls the same knife he’d had pressed into her back, small but ominous, from his coat pocket. She charges, unconcerned with the weapon now that it isn’t pressing against her kidney.

He’s not a stellar fighter, or maybe Felicity’s actually getting better at all of this, and she sends the knife skittering across the concrete easily. She lands an extra blow just to make herself feel better, jabbing him in the gut. He hunches over at the blow, but uses the movement to duck away from her, sprinting in the opposite direction.

“Oh, come on!” She groans, ready to chase after him. Instead, Oliver’s voice bounces through the concrete tunnel, echoing off of the walls and metal pipes, loud and forceful.

“Freeze,” he shouts, pulling up a step in front of Felicity. She flinches as she watches him, knowing where this ends as the doctor spins in a slow half-circle back to face them.

“You don’t look so good,” he calls, examining Oliver as he wavers where he stands, hood still pulled down. He’s emboldened now, advancing on them. “I doubt you could aim a single arrow.”
Oliver knocks three arrows and one sinks home.

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Felicity sits at the bar, spinning listlessly from side to side on the bar stool and examining the small slice on the side of her wrist. It’s harmless really, shallow and already healing, but it’s bracketed by the red marks left behind by the restraints. Her wrists are ringed with wide, red circles.

Oliver almost sneaks up on her, coming from the hallway to the basement and quiet as a cat even on a bad day. He takes her wrists in his hands, examining them. They’d left her at her own base to change, preferring stashing her gear there rather than in the disassembled foundry.

“That looks bad,” he frowns, stroking his thumbs over the abrasions. Felicity shrugs, pulling them gently from his grasp and tugging the sleeves of her sweater down over them.

“It could have been much worse,” she reminds him, studying his face. He seems steadier now, no longer swaying on his feet, but she can see the exhaustion under his eyes. “How are you?”

“I’ll be alright,” he says, brushing off her concern. “It’s not the first time I’ve nearly OD’d on Vertigo after all.”

She whacks him swiftly in the chest, leaving the back of her palm pressed against his leather jacket.

“Don’t joke,” she pouts. He wraps his fingers around her wrist, offering her a meaningful look.

“Thank you for texting Dig,” he says. “You were right and I should have listened to you about it.”

“Sounds to me like he’s the one we should be thanking,” she shrugs, waving off the thanks. She knew he was frustrated with John when he’d told her not to call, which is why she’d done it anyway.

“Yes, you are just the first stop on tonight’s apology train,” he assures her, absently stroking his fingers over the burns on her wrist again.
“Apology train?” She asks cautiously, unsure where the conversation is headed.

“I had to kill him,” he says, surprising her because that’s not where she expected him to start and it’s certainly not an apology. “He knew about me and it was only going to be a short hop to you once he told the right people, and Dig, so-”

“I know,” she cuts him off, frowning at him.

“You do?” He asks, his eyes widening slightly in surprise.

“Oliver, we’re a team, right?” She asks and he nods, frowning in confusion. “That means we have to trust each other, so I trusted you to make the best decision possible tonight. Plus, you are, sometimes, on very rare occasions, right.”

He chuckles at that. “I am, huh?”

“Oliver,” she starts quietly, looking down at their hands, still entwined and pressed against his chest. “I don’t want you to resent me for doing what I thought was best in the moment.”

“I don’t,” he says and, off her disbelieving look, presses, “I don’t. I was angry when I thought the Count was back, but you were right that night when you stopped me from killing him. And it was the right choice tonight to let him live.”

His own eyes fall to their hands and she waits him out.

“I don’t want you to look at me differently after tonight,” he admits quietly. “After seeing what I did.”

“Hey,” she calls softly, ducking her head a little to get him to look at her again. “I’m still here. I love you and you’re not gonna scare me away.”

He smiles, nodding in understanding, and Felicity pulls her hand from his finally, hopping off the bar
stool. He steps back giving her the space to stand.

“Like it or not, you’re stuck with me, pal,” she teases, pressing up and pecking his cheek lightly. “I’m gonna head home and get some sleep. You coming with me tonight?”

“Is it okay if I come by in a bit?” Oliver asks and she nods. “I want to check on the club and, as you mentioned, I owe John a thank you.”

“I’ll leave a light on for you,” she promises, stepping past him and heading towards the entrance to the club. She spots Tommy as she’s leaving, but decides not to test those waters. She’s far too tired and hungry for that emotional turmoil.

It feels like it’s been ages since she’s been home, even though she knows it’s only been a few hours since she’d left for the club. Walking in the door immediately makes her feel more at ease, like she’s back on steady ground. Maybe it’s knowing that she and Oliver are going to be fine, or that Oliver now knows about John’s vendetta. Either way, she feels lighter.

Which is why it can’t last.

She’s heating up some leftover pasta in the kitchen when she hears a knock at the door. She frowns, leaving the kitchen to answer it, but hesitates. Oliver knows where the key is and usually lets himself in, and she hasn’t been home long enough for him to be here already. An ominous feeling in her stomach, Felicity presses up onto her toes and checks the peephole.

Her stomach sinks at the sight of the man standing on the other side.

“Paul,” she greets, pulling the door open. “Hi.”

“Hi,” he says. And then nothing, for like a solid minute. Which Felicity is pretty sure is the most awkward minute of her entire, already astoundingly awkward, life.

“Um, do you want to come inside?” She offers finally, remembering that they are just standing uncomfortably on her porch.
“No, thank you,” Paul says, shaking his head. He seems to remember what he’d come here for. “I just want to ask you to do something for me and, honestly, I think it’s safe to say you kind of owe me.”

“Paul, I,” she starts quietly, but he cuts her off.

“Felicity, you need to keep Curtis out of whatever it is you’re doing,” he says with a little force, not wanting to hear her excuse. Felicity frowns at him. “He’s gonna get hurt or worse. I won’t sit around and watch the man I love die because of some misguided sense of nobility or heroism or whatever this is. So, just stop or tell him to stop, I don’t care. I just want him left out of it.”

“That’s not my call,” she tells him. “Trust me, I tried to make it. But Curtis, he’s good at what he does. He’s saved people. He’s saved me! If he’s going to stop, it’s gonna have to be his own decision.”

Paul frowns at her for a long moment, clearly unhappy with the response. She thinks he must know, though, that come hell or high water Curtis Holt won’t turn his back on the opportunity to help people.

“I don’t know how you could bring him into this,” he says finally, shaking his head at her. “But I’m never gonna forgive you for it.”

With that, Paul turns and walks away, heading back to his car parked on the street. Felicity watches him go, closing the door once his tail lights are out of sight. She leaves the pasta in the microwave and heads to bed instead.
Chapter Summary

When Deadshot shows up at the same time Laurel finds herself in trouble, John begins to doubt Oliver's loyalties.

Chapter Notes

I haven't abandoned this, y'all, I swear!! I just wanted to work on a couple other things (like my holiday fic and a long distance au, in case you haven't seen them... ahem). But I'm almost finished writing chapter 21 and then I only have one more chapter to write and then we're home free! Anyway, this chapter has some of my absolute favorite scenes I've written for this fic - which is shocking because.. I do not enjoy this episode... Aaanyway, I feel like you could say the theme of this chapter is "trust."

Takes place during 1.20 "Burned"

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Oliver is frustratedly checking his email with her laptop while she buttons up the pink blouse she’s picked out for the day. He’s struggling more with running the club now that Tommy has quit. He’s trying to find a new general manager, but needs someone who won’t ask many questions and won’t need much hand holding to get used to the job.

It’s going poorly to say the least. He’s trying to balance too much at once now that he’s also had to take on the job of managing the club. She wishes she could help somehow, but it’s not like she has connections in the club scene. If you need a juvenile record erased? That’s more her neighborhood.

“Hey, so,” she starts hesitantly, pulling his frustrated gaze from the laptop screen to her. His face softens as he watches her finish closing the front of her shirt. “Things are good, right?”

He frowns at her, confused, but she rushes on before he can answer. Unable to stop herself.

“I mean, not things, obviously,” she amends, throwing her hands about without abandon. “There’s the city and Deadshot, of course. And, you know, Tommy quitting and Paul. But, I mean, more specifically…, us.”
She waves her hands vaguely between them. “We’re good, right?”

“Yes,” Oliver says cautiously, looking like he’s unsure if that’s the right answer or not. He closes the laptop, setting it down on the bed next to him. “Felicity, what’s going on?”

“Well, I just have been thinking, you know,” she starts again, wishing she hadn’t started this now. Her stomach is fluttering with nerves and she kind of feels like she might throw up. “You’re here practically every night and when you’re not it’s usually because we’re both down in the foundry. So, I was thinking maybe you could move some stuff in. Like, clothes or toiletries, you know, whatever.”

Oliver’s face is still scrunched in adorable confusion, but she can see understanding dawning. Her stomach flips as he climbs out of the bed, sweatpants hung dangerously low on his hips, and moves towards her.

“Are you asking me to move in with you?” He clarifies, though he looks as nervous by the prospect as she feels.

“It’s too soon, right?” She laughs, trying to cover her anxiety. “It’s crazy.”

“Maybe,” Oliver agrees, but he’s smiling now and her stomach is flipping for a totally different reason. “But we already do so many crazy things, what’s one more?”

“Really?” She asks, unable to stop the smile that breaks out across her face. “Are you sure?”

“Yes, I’m sure,” he says easily, reaching for her. His own grin is wide and beautiful and she can’t resist the urge to press forward and cover his mouth with her own. He continues, pulling away from her after a moment, “You’re right I practically live here anyway. Why not make it official?”

“I love you,” she says and he ducks down, kissing her again. He wraps his arms around her lower back, lifting her a little so she’s up on her toes now, her fingers curling around the back of his neck. When he pulls away again, he’s frowning at her. Her stomach sinks.

“What?” She asks.
“I’m gonna have to tell my mother,” he says, cringing playfully.

“Oh my God,” Felicity groans, pulling away from him. “Please don’t ask me to do that with you.”

Oliver laughs, shaking his head at her. When she’d decided she was going to ask him - and then promptly chickened out at least five different times - she hadn’t considered that he’d have to tell Moira. Like, obviously. He can’t just move out without saying anything. But she’s still not convinced his mother fully approves of her.

“I can’t believe you run after criminals at night, but you’re afraid of my mother,” he teases.

“Hey, you do remember that she literally shot you once, right?” She asks, jabbing him in the shoulder in question. He rolls his eyes at her, pressing a quick kiss to the corner of her mouth before pulling away to let her finish getting dressed.

“I’m gonna take a shower,” he tells her, heading for the bathroom. She reaches up, smoothing out her hair and adjusting her ponytail. “You coming by the club tonight?”

“Curtis and I are gonna patrol tonight so it’ll probably be a late one,” she calls back once he’s disappeared into the bathroom. She hears the water turn on, starting to heat up. “You might make it home before I do.”

Oliver appears in the doorway again, leaning against the frame.

“Hey, don’t overextend yourself, alright? You have to sleep sometime, too,” he tells her and Felicity tilts her head to the side, angling a look at him. He turns, disappearing into the bathroom again and calling back to her, “And, yes, I know I should take my own advice.”

She laughs, shaking her head at him and listening for the sound of the shower door closing behind him.

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“He just showed up at your house?” Curtis asks, his voice crackling in her ear. She sighs, skirting
along the edge of the rooftop she’s on. It’s weird to think that a few months ago this would have had her throwing up her dinner. Her stomach still flips as she glances over the edge to the concrete below so… maybe she hasn’t come that far.

“Kind of wishing I hadn’t told you,” she groans, looking down at the tech on her wrist. She tugs experimentally at the new strap holding it together. After the orderly had manhandled the small tablet, she’d had to replace the screen and attach a new, stronger strap.

“Well, you did,” Curtis huffs. “I can’t believe he would go behind my back like that.”

“Curtis,” she whines. “I shouldn’t have told you, but I did because you guys need to figure this out. He shouldn’t be showing up at my house to yell at me. You two should be talking this through.”

She’d held off on telling Curtis about Paul’s visit for a few days because she wasn’t sure if it was her place. Ultimately, though, Paul coming to see her was practically the closest thing to a call for help he could send her. Neither Paul nor Curtis want to be apart, but they’re both too stubborn to compromise.

It’s oddly familiar, to say the least. Maybe that’s why she’s so desperate to make them work.

“How did you and Oliver figure it out?” He asks after a moment. Felicity bites down on her lip and contemplates it. It’s not like she hadn’t been hard on Oliver, but their situation was still different. They’d both been lying to each other, which made it easier to move past.

Still, there may be some kind of a learning experience for Curtis there.

“We took some time,” she starts slowly. “We talked about our fears and what was keeping us from being honest with each other. And then we agreed to be completely honest with each other from then on. It’s about rebuilding trust.”

“It’s that easy?” he asks dubiously. Felicity shrugs to herself, shaking her head at the question. A few days ago she and Oliver had been arguing about the Count and this morning they’d agreed to move in together. They’re not perfect.

“It’s not like everything is awesome all the time,” she explains. “We still disagree about our methods. The difference is that, now, instead of yelling at each other from under our hoods, we talk it out.”
Curtis goes quiet for a moment and Felicity takes the opportunity to drop from the ledge down to the fire escape below. Her boots land loudly on the metal and she cringes. Her stealth capabilities have not improved along with her stomach strength.

“Yeah, well,” Curtis says finally, sound a little huffy. “You guys are weird.”

Felicity rolls her eyes, deciding to ignore the slight because she knows it’s not her Curtis is upset with. Probably more Paul and definitely himself. The men are acting like children, avoiding each other instead of dealing with their problems. She’s willing to be understanding because she and Oliver had more or less done the same.

“Alert coming through on the emergency line,” Curtis tells her, once she’s run out of fire escape to move along. She drops from the edge of the platform, landing on a closed dumpster before sliding to the pavement.

“What’ve we got?”

“Robbery in progress,” he says. “Fifth and Grant.”

“On it,” she says. She’s only a few blocks over. She spins and bolts down the alley, heading in the direction of the intersection.

“Wait, no,” Curtis says, pulling her up short. She stops, looking down at the tablet on her wrist where there’s no alert lighting it up. “It moved. Cherry and Rogers.”

Felicity pauses. “Are you sure? That’s the opposite direction.”

“Uh,” he stalls. “Yes?”

“Curtis, that doesn’t sound sure,” she frowns, glancing along the street she’s at. She ducks into the shadows, hoping not to run into any bystanders. Nothing seems amiss, but nothing would. She’s still two blocks from the original location and four from the new one.
“Now it’s reports of gunshots,” Curtis murmurs and she knows he’s talking to himself rather than her. “This doesn’t make any sense. The alerts are bouncing all over the place.”

“Okay, even in the Glades that’s weird,” she comments. A sharp sound of feedback cuts through the comm suddenly and Felicity flinches away, pulling the small device from her ear. She waits for it to stop before putting it back.

“Curtis?” She calls, worried when she gets no response. “Curtis!”

“Hey, sorry, I’m here,” he says finally, sounding rattled. “The alerts all stopped at once.”

“What the hell was that?” Felicity asks, already spinning and heading back towards the base at a sprinting pace. She sticks to the now familiar alleys that cloak her as she makes her way back towards Curtis.

“That was a very well done hack of our entire system,” Curtis concludes. She can hear the frantic clicking of keys on his end. Felicity pulls up short, her stomach dropping.

“That’s not possible,” she argues, picking up speed. “I built that system myself. It should be completely unhackable.”

“‘Should be,’” Curtis parrots, “being the operative phrase. You better get back here.”

“I’m already on my way.”

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Felicity’s angry. It’s a feeling that doesn’t seem to want to go away until she figures out exactly how the Benefactor had managed to hack her system. She doesn’t feel safe in the base, she doesn’t feel safe in the foundry. She isn’t going to feel safe anywhere until she deals with whoever this asshole is once and for all.

“You need to sleep, too,” Oliver had chastised when it became clear that she had no intention of leaving the work. He’d squeezed her shoulders gently and urged her from her seat at the kitchen
“He broke through my system, Oliver,” she had argued, letting him pull her from the chair and down the hall towards the bedroom. “He may as well have been in my home.”

It felt violating. Which, Felicity realizes, may be a bit dramatic, but security is what she’s good at. Maybe not in the way that John is, with entrances and vantage points, keeping every inch of the Queen estate manned at all times. But the way John conceptualizes a client’s house, or Oliver takes stock of his surroundings the moment he enters a room, Felicity sees cyber security.

The Benefactor may not have literally been in her base, but it sure as hell felt like he had been.

If he can break through the security at the base, he can break through any of her systems. Which means that he has immediately moved himself to the top of her “to catch” list. Not that he hasn’t been on her list since the whole debacle with Curtis and Paul, but she had felt relatively secure until now. Now, knowing that he’s capable of breaking through her systems, he’s capable of more than she’d thought.

The sound of John and Oliver behind her brings her to the present and she switches gears. She and Curtis are both working on tracing the hack that had been used on their system, but John and Oliver have made Deadshot priority number one. Their lair, their rules, she supposes.

The two men are sparring behind her, at Oliver’s suggestion. He’s taking the beating rather than delivering it and Felicity thinks he’d suggested it as a way to let John blow off some steam. Deadshot has been galavanting around Europe putting poisoned bullets in people, which has left John antsy for an opportunity to go after him.

“You feel better?” Oliver asks between the sound of blows hitting padded vinyl.

“I’ll feel better once we end Deadshot,” John barks, more from the exertion of his quick punches than with any real malice. He follows the answers up with more swift blows, grunting with the impact of each one.

“We will,” Oliver says placatingly as the sound of the hits cease. Felicity clicks through her systems, looking for the ones keeping an eye out for Deadshot’s known aliases. John must remain unconvinced, because Oliver insists, “Diggle, we’ll stop him. I promised you I’d help take him down and I keep my promises, but he’s on another continent.”
“Not anymore,” Felicity announces, scanning through the information her program tracking ARGUS had pulled. “I thought it would be helpful to track ARGUS’s manhunt for Floyd Lawton a.k.a Deadshot, so I decrypted their communication logs.”

She grins proudly to herself as the men cross the room to join her. John pulls on a t-shirt as he comes up next to her and she looks over at him.

“Which means I just hacked a federal agency,” she explains and then considers it for a second, frowning to herself at the declaration. “Which kind of makes me a cyber terrorist which is bad because I really don’t see myself fitting in well at Guantanamo Bay.”

“Don’t worry, Felicity,” Oliver offers as she runs a hand over her ponytail. “They don’t send blondes there.”

“I dye it actually,” she says offhandedly, reading through the logs she’d managed to decrypt. She freezes at the admission, looking up at Oliver seriously. “I keep your secret.”

Oliver is smiling at her, but her computer beeps and pulls her attention.

“Hey, what’d you find?” John asks, sounding exasperated with the both of them. Clearly he’s not in the mood for her wit and charm tonight. Fine then.

“Deadshot is scheduled to meet with a potential new client here in Starling City,” she explains. “Except the potential contract is bogus. Your friend Lyla is setting a trap for him. Lawton took the bait.”

John nods, looking either impressed or vengeful. Honestly, she hasn’t been able to get a read on his emotions lately. Something which she can understand, at least. She doesn’t know how she’d react to the type of news he keeps getting. If anyone has an excuse for a little bit of irritability and erratic behaviour, it’s probably him.

“Great,” he says, so it’s impressed. Good. “I’ll talk to Lyla, see if I can suss out any details.”
“Good,” Oliver nods and Felicity clicks out of the logs, returning to the program combing through her system in the base, looking for any leftover traces of the hack. She refuses to be beat by this guy. No matter how good he is, she’s better. And she’ll prove it.

“I gotta have lunch with Laurel,” Oliver continues, knocking his knuckles against the desk. He’d told Felicity about the lunch plans that morning, but she feels John’s gaze on her so she looks over at him. He narrows his eyes and she raises her eyebrows in confusion. Instead, he looks to Oliver.

“So when did you become, uh, lunch dates with Laurel?” He asks, shifting to half-sit on the desk next to her. Felicity returns her attention to the code in front of her.

“We’re friends,” Oliver reminds him.

“Friends are good,” she comments, trying to be helpful while also absolutely not being a part of this conversation. She’d made her peace with Oliver and Laurel’s relationship a long time ago.

Laurel is pretty much as in love with Tommy as you can be without actually saying the words - which she thinks is more to do with fear than with Oliver. And Oliver. Well, she trusts him. Isn’t that what she’d told Curtis last night? She’d be a pretty big hypocrite if Oliver having lunch with their mutual friend bothered her.

“Couldn’t you be friends with someone less complicated than your ex-girlfriend who’s your ex-best friend’s current girlfriend?” John presses. Oliver gives him a tired look over Felicity’s head.

“I wear a hood and I put arrows into criminals,” he says, before nodding down at Felicity. “My girlfriend wears a hood and hacks federal agencies. So, when it comes to complexity…”

He pauses, leaning onto the desk with one hand, the other on the back of her chair, to kiss her quickly. She rolls her eyes, shoving him away playfully because she knows the kiss is more for dramatics. He doesn’t go easily, tugging gently at one of the curls coming out of her ponytail before grabbing his jacket.

“I grade on a curve,” he finishes, heading out of the basement. Felicity keeps working at the code, watching her program run and glaring at the failed attempts of the diagnostic tool. It hasn’t been able to find anything strange in the system so far. After a moment, she realizes John has definitely been staring at the side of her face.
“Why are you looking at me like that?” She asks, spinning slowly in her chair and frowning at him.

“You’re really okay with that?” He asks, not bothering to clarify what ‘that’ is. Felicity lets out a long suffering sigh, leaning back in her chair.

“Oliver told me about it before he even invited Laurel to lunch,” she explains. “Not to mention, he invited me to come along. I may not ever fully understand everything about them, but I’m not going to torture myself worrying about it either.”

John seems skeptical, so she turns back to her computers as he asks, “Really?”

“I trust him,” she shrugs, beginning to feel like a broken record.

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She doesn’t sleep much. Between her efforts to keep digging into ARGUS’s plans for capturing Deadshot and trying to trace the Benefactor’s drive-by of a hack, she knows she’s overtasking herself. Curtis is also working on the hack and John was supposed to be talking to Lyla. But Felicity is a bit of a control freak and she doesn’t really trust other people to get things done as well as she can.

Not to mention, if the Benefactor knows enough about her to send Cooper, capture Curtis, and now hack her security system, then who’s to say he doesn’t know everything about her? Like where she lives, who she loves. Everything from her credit score to Oliver’s safety is on the table.

So, sleeping doesn’t come easily.

She does manage it eventually, though. It’s much later than she’d realized, because she’s still working on her tablet in bed when she hears Oliver come inside. He’s quiet enough that she barely hears his key - formerly the spare key hidden on her porch - in the lock, but loud enough that she hears him at all. It’s a calculated choice, to make sure she knows it’s him so he doesn’t scare her, but quiet enough not to wake her if she’s asleep.

Not looking for a lecture on her sleeping habits, she locks her tablet and stows it, sliding down under
the covers and trying to at least look like she’s pretending to sleep. For his sake. If he notices that she’s awake, he doesn’t say anything as he strips out of his suit, changing into the sweatpants he’d left in the bathroom.

He slides into the bed next to her, his warm arm coming around her waist and squeezing just so as he settles against her back. She hums contentedly, her eyes drifting shut.

“Have you slept at all?” He asks softly and she smirks to herself. No fooling him anyway.

“I’ll sleep better now,” she says instead of answering. She feels his lips press against her shoulder in a soft kiss and laces her fingers through his near her stomach.

And she does, actually. Which is probably one of the sappiest things she’s ever thought, but she woke up wrapped around Oliver, with her face pressed almost uncomfortably into his back, and realized she’d actually managed to sleep for longer than she’d intended. Which is good and bad, she supposes.

Still, when Oliver feels her stirring - because of course he’s awake - and rolls over to kiss her softly and pat down her tangled curls, it definitely feels like a win.

Felicity lets him distract her for a while with gentle hands and lingering kisses, but eventually he gets up to take a shower and her need for coffee reaches a tipping point. She waits for the coffee pot to brew and allows her mind to wander over Oliver’s touches rather than the problems she still needs to solve.

Behind her, the news plays softly from the living room TV. She can hear the familiar voice of the morning anchor talking about plans for the Festival of Lights Exhibition. He changes tones swiftly, not missing a beat as he announces a more somber subject.

“In other news, the bodies of Eric and Nancy Moore were found early this morning,” he announces and she turns, watching the screen from across the half wall separating her kitchen and living room. “The couple were being represented by Attorney Laurel Lance of CNRI in a lawsuit against financier Edward Rasmus.”

Her chest tightens and she rounds the wall, snagging the remote from where she’d left it on the couch and pausing the TV. She hears the sound of the water cutting off from down the hall.
“Oliver,” Felicity calls. “Come out here.”

He must sense the urgency in her voice because he moves quickly, appearing around the corner to the hallway with one of her fluffy burgundy towels wrapped around his waist. She holds the remote up, motioning towards the TV and rewinding to the beginning of the segment before playing it back for him.

“Miraculously, their seven-year-old son, Taylor, survived the horrific attack,” the anchor concludes, picking up from where Felicity had paused it initially. She sets the remote down and turns to face Oliver, the same horror on his face that she’s sure is on hers.

“I met them yesterday,” he explains, sounding shaken by the news. Felicity is a little surprised by the reaction, but if he’d met them than that means he’s going to take a personal interest in this. Not to mention…

“Oliver, I’m sure I don’t need to say this,” she starts. “But, if Rasmus has anything to do with this and Laurel was their lawyer…”

“Then he might go after her, too,” he nods, already on the same page. “Or the kid.”

Felicity looks back to the TV where the news has moved on again, but she can’t get the photo of the smiling couple out of her head. Horrific attack, the anchor had said. What does that mean? Something tells her she doesn’t want to know, but the police records will have the answer. She’s already heading back into the kitchen where her tablet is plugged into the wall.

Her phone chimes behind her and Oliver must pick it up, because he calls from the living room, “Laurel texted you.”

Felicity is already opening her usual door into the police department’s records when he joins her in the kitchen, holding her phone out.

“She’s at the police station,” he explains, reading the content of the text. Normally, he doesn’t read her messages, but he must notice her focus is elsewhere. He prompts, “She needs your help?”

“You knew that Laurel knew about me,” she reminds him, even if it had been more that he suspected and she’d never said one way or another. They’d never really discussed it.
“Yeah, but if this has something to do with Rasmus, he wouldn’t get his hands dirty like this,” he says, setting her phone down on the counter. The coffee maker gurgles with the last dregs of coffee dripping into the pot. “He’d hire someone.”

“You’re right about that,” she agrees, pulling up the autopsy of the husband. “Two bullets to the chest at close range. Efficient, clean. Definitely someone who knew what they were doing.”

“Felicity, if this guy is a hired gun that means he’s skilled,” he continues and she turns to frown at him because, duh. “And he won’t hesitate to kill anyone who gets in his way.”

“I know what a contract killer is, Oliver,” she says, a little put out by the way he’s describing it to her. “What I don’t know is why you’re telling me this.”

“Because I’d prefer if you didn’t end up in his way,” he says, finally getting to the point. She shifts her weight, crossing her arms over her chest and leveling him with a dark look. “I know you can handle yourself, I do. But guys like this aren’t someone to mess with. I’m not saying we shouldn’t help, I’m just asking you to, please, be careful with this.”

She frowns at him, trying to understand why he’s suddenly not on board with her handling this. It’s not like Floyd Lawton or the Count or any of the handful of crazies they’ve dealt with since they’d started working together were any less dangerous.

Her phone chirps again and she glances down at it, sighing at the sight of John’s name joining Laurel’s on the screen. She picks up, swiping to check the unread messages.

“John’s meeting with Lyla,” she explains. “He wants me to meet him at the club to go over what I have on the sting operation.”

“I’ll go check on Laurel at the police station,” he says, nodding. “You need to prioritize Deadshot for now.”

Felicity doesn’t disagree. She knows how important this is to John, but she doesn’t want Laurel to feel like she’s blowing her off either. Oliver heads back down the hall to get dressed and she texts Laurel back, telling her she knows about what happened and is working on it.
“What did Lyla tell you?” She asks as she comes through the alley entrance to the foundry. She knows John is waiting for her because his car is parked in the alley. Oliver had left for the police station before her and she figures he’ll be by soon.

“Essentially?” John answers, sitting in her computer chair and spinning to face her. “To go to hell.”

“ARGUS isn’t keen on outside help I take it,” she comments. He’s already lifting himself out of the chair, offering it to her. She drops into it, spinning to face the computer and depositing her bag next to her feet. “Lucky for us, I don’t usually ask for permission.”

“What have you figured out?” He asks, leaning against the desk next to her. She rolls through the programs running on the computer until she finds the trojan she has in the ARGUS system. Frankly, she’s shocked no one in their cyber security department has noticed it yet. Not that it would matter, her system’s so locked down they’d never be able to trace it back to her.

Of course, that’s what she’d thought about the base.

“Lyla’s mission profile,” she says, shaking herself from that dark thought and pulling a flashdrive out of the computers. She grabs her bag from beneath the desk and pulls her laptop out of it, booting it up and popping the drive in. She hands it off to John with the profile pulled up for him to see.

“Do I want to know how you got this?” He asks, scanning through the files on the screen.

“I am very good,” she offers offhandedly. “They’re using the Plaza mall as the meeting place.”

“Wide open space,” John nods. “Public. They can dress agents up as customers, staff. It makes sense.”

“Lawton is set to meet the fake employer at eight o’clock tomorrow night,” she continues. “From there the team will arrest him and… bob’s your uncle. No more runaway assassin.”

John hums in acknowledgement staring down at the computer screen balanced on his forearm. She
raises an eyebrow at him but quickly realizes he’s too absorbed in the profile to notice her. Instead, she turns her attention back to her own computers, pulling up information on Edward Rasmus. She sets an alert on his name, bank accounts, credit cards, anything that might throw up a red flag.

“What’s this?” Oliver asks as he comes in, bringing her back to the mission at hand.

“Lyla’s mission profile on the trap they’ve set for Deadshot,” she explains as he joins her at the desk. John has drifted away, probably memorizing every plan and schematic in the mass of files she’d pilfered from ARGUS’s server.

He comes back at Oliver’s entrance, reiterating everything that she had told him from the profile, admittedly with more technical words than she had managed.

“Lyla will then swoop in with her team and arrest him,” John concludes and the basement goes quiet for a moment as Oliver considers him.

“Do you want Lawton arrested?” He asks, making Felicity frown up at him. She hadn’t even thought of a secondary option, but she can read it on John’s face. He’d considered it enough for the three of them.

“No,” he admits after a moment.

“Then tomorrow night, we cross Floyd Lawton’s name off your list,” Oliver says and John nods, looking relieved at the understanding. Oliver switches gears, his hand brushing lightly over her arm resting in front of her keyboard. “What have you got on Rasmus?”

“I’ve got alerts on all of his accounts,” she says, pulling the information she’d pulled back up. John looks between them frowning. “He won’t be able to buy a coffee without me knowing about it.”

“Two of Laurel’s clients were murdered last night,” Oliver explains for John’s benefit. “Their seven-year-old son barely escaped.”

“That’s terrible,” John frowns, snapping the laptop shut.
“Edward Rasmus, the financial advisor Laurel was taking to court, may not have pulled the trigger but he probably called in the hit,” Oliver concludes and Felicity nods along with him, still pouring through anything that comes up under Rasmus’ name.

“I’m still looking for anything that can lead me to any secret bank accounts,” she explains. “Guys like Rasmus, they don’t usually keep their money in one place. I’m betting on at least one Caymans bank account.”

“Look for anything in his phone records or accounts that may link him to the killer,” Oliver suggests and she nods again because this isn’t her first rodeo… or one-percenter hack, anyway. “Laurel is taking the kid home with her.”

Felicity pauses, letting her head fall back and gives him a long suffering sigh. He chuckles at that, nodding at her.

“Yeah,” he agrees, because of course Laurel would let the kid come stay with her. That woman is too soft hearted for her own good. “We should patrol her apartment tonight. Lance has a patrol car there, but with something like this…”

“Yeah,” she nods. “I understand.”

His use of ‘we’ makes her feel better about their near argument that morning. She understands his concerns, especially now that she’s back in the field, but she doesn’t try to stop him from going out. She knows he’s just worried, but she thinks she deserves the same courtesy.

“I have to deal with a vendor,” he sighs, clearly bogged down by the thought of heading back upstairs to work. Felicity reaches out, squeezing his forearm and offering him a fortifying smile. He returns it, ducking down to press a gentle kiss to her lips before he heads upstairs.

John is off staring into the information about Deadshot again. Felicity rolls her shoulders, wishing she’d brought a coffee with her, and dives back into Edward Rasmus’ records.

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“Maybe I should just order a whole new ensemble,” Felicity considers, pouting as her finger pokes up through the thin slice in the back of her leather coat. She’d forgotten about the tear in the back of
the coat left behind by the drug dealing doctor’s knife.

Oliver frowns at her as she wiggles her finger around. They’re getting ready to head to Laurel’s and he’s practically fully dressed while she’s messing around with the tear. Offering an apologetic look, she pulls the coat on and buckles it up.

“Sorry,” she says, securing her mask over her eyes. Oliver reaches forward, adjusting it for her to even it out.

“Do me a favor tonight,” he says and she’s already nodding. “Take my lead on this one, alright?”

She frowns at him, remembering the conversation they’d never finished that morning. He gives her a pleading look, clearly seeing her hesitation, and she turns to grab her wig off the table next to her. She sighs as she pulls it over her hair.

“Oh, I agree. Because I know you have better strategy for this kind of stuff than I do. But, just to be clear, I can handle myself and I wouldn’t do anything stupid or reckless.”

“I know,” he sighs. “I just really need you to be careful on this one, okay?”

She stares at him in confusion because she just doesn’t know what it is about this one specifically that has him so worked up over her safety. They work well together and she knows he’s aware of how capable she is, so she doesn’t know where this is coming from.

“Okay,” she agrees, because what is she going to say? No? Of course she’s going to be careful. They have to be careful every time they step out in these clothes. He nods at her once, pulling his hood up over his head and grabbing his bow.

They roost on the building across from Laurel’s, watching the closed drapes with a determination that would probably be considered creepy if they weren’t here in a protection capacity. It’s cold, so Felicity deals with it by staying in motion, pacing at the lip of the rooftop. Oliver is so still she could mistake him for a statue if she didn’t know better.

“‘You’ve gotten more comfortable with heights,” he comments and she glances over, catching his eyes on her.
“Or better at faking it,” she shrugs, looking up towards the night sky rather than the ground below. The lights of the city are too bright for any stars to shine through. Felicity considers that, between Las Vegas and Boston and Starling, she’s never lived anywhere with stars.

The sound of shots ringing out startles them both and Oliver is moving before Felicity can react, an arrow connecting with the brick of Laurel’s building, just above her window. He wraps his arm around Felicity’s waist, hers wrapping around him instinctively, and they leap from the edge of the roof. His bow catches on the tether connected to the arrow, pulling them towards the window.

Oliver shoots an arrow as soon as they land in Laurel’s dining room. It connects with the wall and the hitman startles at it. Felicity spots Laurel with a shotgun in her hands and the other woman uses the distraction to dive out of sight.

Oliver overturns the table, pulling Felicity down to the floor behind it with him as the gunman peppers it with bullets. She folds into herself, trying to keep herself as hidden behind the table as possible. The gunshots continue until she hears the sound of crunching glass and glances around to find the assassin fleeing through the window they’d just broken.

Felicity moves to follow him, noticing Oliver standing up behind the table. He hesitates, looking over to the couch where Tommy’s head pops up from behind it. Felicity doesn’t wait, climbing through the broken window and onto the fire escape after the shooter. She has to duck out of the way as he levels a shot up at her from where he’s running down the metal stairs.

She presses against the brick of the building, covering herself from his wild shots. He hits the pavement and she knows she’s lost him. Oliver climbs through the window after her, spotting the man sprinting down the alley.

“That went poorly,” she sighs, studying Oliver’s tense form. He doesn’t respond, his hand wrapping around her bicep and urging her towards the stairs of the fire escape. She follows his lead, flying down the steps into the alley. His bike is parked a block over and they need to disappear before the police show up.

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“You shouldn’t have gone after him without me last night,” Oliver says over a late breakfast, startling her. She stares at him for a moment, trying to adjust to the change in attitude. Everything had been mostly fine, losing the hitman had been a blow, but he wouldn’t return to Laurel’s right away. They
had time to plan.

Bringing it up now means he’s been stewing on this.

“I don’t want to fight before I’ve finished my waffles,” she sighs, dragging the prongs of her fork through a dab of butter melting onto the breakfast food.

“I’m not trying to pick a fight,” he counters, setting his own utensils down and focusing on her. It forces her to do the same, willing to give as much attention, as much effort, as he will. “But I asked you to take my lead and you didn’t.”

“Oliver, I thought I was, okay?” She says, frustration coloring her tone as she throws her hands up in front of her pleadingly. “In any other situation, the response would have been to pursue. I didn’t realize you weren’t with me until I was already on the fire escape.”

“Felicity, it’s not about what I would do,” he argues, his own frustrating coming to the surface. “It’s about what I wanted you to do which-”

“Which was what?” She huffs, cutting him off. “Hide behind you and do nothing?”

He purses his lips, staring at her, and she knows he wouldn’t put it in those terms. But, yes, that is more or less exactly what he wanted her to do. She looks down at her food and picks the plate up, sliding out of her chair. Oliver calls her name softly, but she sets her plate down by the sink before turning back to him.

“I don’t know what’s going on with you, but I’m not here to play second chair behind you, okay?” She says, leaning against the counter and crossing her arms over her chest. She really didn’t want to fight and yet here they are. “We’re either partners or we’re not.”

He’s quiet, his shoulders tense. She can’t tell what might be going through his head with his back to her. After a moment, she realizes he isn’t going to say whatever he needs to say, whatever she wants to hear, and she turns back to the sink. She’s scraping the leftover breakfast off her plate and into the garbage can, no longer hungry, when Oliver’s phone rings.

She listens to his side of the conversation as the syrup slowly dribbles off the edge of the plate and into the drain of the sink.
“I’m at Felicity’s,” he says to the person on the other end. “I can be back at the house in an hour.”

Felicity sets the plate in the sink, turning the warm water on low enough that it won’t disturb his call. It doesn’t go on for much longer before he hangs up with a clipped goodbye.

“That was Tommy,” he announces and she hears the frown in his voice before he turns in the chair to face her. She stops what she’s doing, turning the tap off and turning back to him. “He wants to bring Laurel and Taylor to stay at the mansion.”

“It’s not a bad idea,” she admits with a shrug, wrapping her arms around her stomach. “That whole place is locked down like Fort Knox.”

He nods thoughtfully before sliding out of the chair and stepping experimentally towards her. When she doesn’t stop him, he grows bolder, crossing towards her until he’s standing in front of her. He reaches out slowly, his hands landing on her hips, just below where her own rest.

“Are we okay?” He asks, which would almost be laughable because they haven’t talked about anything yet, except he’s completely serious. Felicity sighs.

“We will be,” she says. “Once you tell me whatever is going on with you.”

His hands fall away, but he steps just a tad closer and presses a kiss to her forehead. She lets her eyes drift shut as he lingers there.

“I love you,” he says and it’s a deflection, clear as day, but he’s staring at her so imploringly, begging her to let him get away with it.

It’s her phone that breaks the silence this time, nearly vibrating itself off of the counter. She reaches for it, checking the message from Curtis.

“Saved by the cell,” she offers glibly, her heart not really in it. Oliver notices, sighing.
“Please tell me you have something,” Felicity says, coming down the stairs to the base. She’s starting to get a headache from arguing with Oliver and her lack of appetite earlier is catching up with her. Oliver had left to meet Laurel and Tommy not long after she’d gotten the call from Curtis.

“If by something you mean a hole in the Benefactor’s code that I should be able to trace back to him,” Curtis says, spinning in his computer chair and grinning at her. Her own chair is pushed slightly off to the side, probably to give him more space to move around. She grabs it and rolls it over next to him, sitting on the edge of it to lean towards the screens.

“Seriously?” She asks, scanning through the code that Curtis has isolated. She spots the mistake almost immediately, just a tiny one, but big enough to let them set a trace on him. She frowns. “How did I miss that?”

“You’ve been a little busy,” he reminds her, raising an eyebrow at her. She knows he’s right, but it feels like this should have been her priority. This is her home and it’s been compromised. “I heard Laurel’s place got attacked last night. It was on the police scanner.”

“Yeah,” Felicity sighs, resting her chin in her palm and continuing to stare at the code in front of her. “Oliver and I didn’t manage to get the guy, but we’re working on it. Laurel, Tommy, and the kid they’re watching are gonna stay at Oliver’s place for a little while.”

Curtis nods, but his eyes narrow at her. She can’t take one more person asking her how she feels about Oliver’s proximity to Laurel. If she’s being honest, that’s hardly her biggest concern with regards to Oliver at the moment. She’s more worried about his lack of faith or trust, or whatever has him jumping between moods these past two days.

Ignoring Curtis’ look, she rolls closer to the center of the computer desk, nudging him out of the way gently. He gives, rolling backwards to give her space to work.

“I’ve got a program we can use to keep an eye on him,” she explains, pulling the keyboard towards her. “I’ll set it up to alert us the second he logs into his server and trace it. I’m gonna need you to keep an eye on it for me.”

“Where are you going?” Curtis asks.
“I promised John I’d help him with something,” she offers evasively. Curtis doesn’t know about Deadshot or his connection to her new partners. After the way she’d handled it the first time she’d gone after him, Felicity wouldn’t necessarily blame Curtis for being skeptical of her involvement.

She had agreed when John and Oliver suggested she take point on comms for the sting. Deadshot may still be slightly above her skill level and she knows her tech would just get lost in all that ARGUS firepower anyway. She’d been more than happy to stick to the computer screens for this one.

“Call me the second we get any activity,” she instructs, once the code is setup and using the hole as an entryway to the Benefactor’s system. All they have to do is wait for him to open it.

“Will do,” he nods, moving back towards the screens as she stands from her chair. “Felicity, maybe this is obvious, but this is a pretty big oversight for a guy like this. What if this is a trap?”

Felicity hesitates. She’d considered it, of course. It’s a huge misstep for someone who’s clearly so good at what they do. There’s only two options; either he really did just make a mistake or he’s setting them up for something.

Either way, they can’t let the opportunity pass.

“Curtis, you and I are the smartest people I know,” she reminds him. “So, let’s outfox him.”

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When she gets to the foundry, the place is empty. She figures John probably headed to the Queen house to make sure security was up to snuff with Tommy and Laurel coming to stay. Which means it’s just Felicity, alone with her thoughts and John’s notes about the sting operation. She goes over what he’s left for her, specifics meant mostly for Oliver and exactly what position John wants him in.

John texts Felicity in the late afternoon that he’s heading to the plaza, which she feels might be a little premature, but he wants to get himself to the plaza before ARGUS to avoid the risk of bumping into Lyla. He’s already got his comm and change of clothes with him. Oliver, on the other hand, is decidedly without his hood.

She’s not surprised when he shows up, rushing to get changed out of his sweater and jeans and into his suit.
“How are Tommy and Laurel?” She asks as he pulls his black shirt over his head. “And the child, Taylor, right?”

“They’re holding up,” Oliver says, opening his trunk and pulling out his hood and bow. “Tommy’s pissed at me for not being there, but they’ll be fine.”

Felicity nods in agreement, turning back to her computer and pulling up the schematics of the plaza, marked with notes by John of exactly where he’d like Oliver to roost.

“I’m uploading a satellite overview of the plaza to your phone,” she tells him.

“Thanks, but I know the place,” he says and she hears the sound of his jacket zipping up.

“Dig was pretty specific about where you should perch,” she explains as he leans back against one of the tables behind her. “You know, what position gives you the best shot at Lawton, I think.” She shakes her head to herself, frowning. “He used a lot of military jargon.”

The foundry is quiet for a second and she can’t help herself.

“So you’re sniping a sniper,” she considers as he crosses over towards her. “Kind of ironic, don’t you think?”

Oliver leans on the desk next to her, giving her a tired look and she amends, “Me neither.”

Her computer chimes, pulling both of their attentions to the message popping up on the screen, telling her a Trojan is active. Her pulse jumps at the thought it might be the Benefactor, but she remembers it’s not setup to send an alert to this system.

“What’s that?” Oliver asks and she rolls her chair slightly, switching over to the monitor it’s on.

“I had a remote access Trojan scouring the internet for Edward Rasmus,” she explains, pulling up what the program had found on the screen. “His name just popped up on a flight manifest. Eight-
“He’s running,” Oliver deduces.

“That’s good, right?” Felicity asks, looking up at him. “If he’s leaving town, he won’t be after Laurel and the child anymore.” The look that flashes over Oliver’s features is almost missable, but she knows what it is. “But, if you did want to stop him, looks like it’s now or never. Deadshot or Rasmus, your choice.”

Oliver doesn’t respond, but he grabs his bow before leaving. Felicity doesn’t quite know what that means, but she has a pretty good idea. She sighs, staring at the flight manifest and cursing Rasmus’s terrible timing.

“Felicity!”

She nearly falls out of her chair in shock at the sound of Curtis’ voice coming through the speakers connected to the computers. The incoming communication comes up on one of the screens and she presses a button to respond.

“Curtis, what the hell?” She barks, pressing her hand to her chest.

“Sorry, sorry,” he says, clearly hearing her annoyance. “But the Benefactor just logged into his system and your program picked him up. I figured you’d want to know right away.”

Felicity hesitates, looking to the plans for the Deadshot sting on the other monitor and frowning to herself.

“I have a location,” Curtis adds.

Felicity moves. She heads for the other side of the room where she’d left her gear after the attack on Laurel’s apartment. She’s already shimmying out of her red skirt when she calls back to Curtis.

“Text me the address.”
The Benefactor’s server lights up at a location just on the edge of the Glades. Felicity makes it in minutes, Curtis tracking the system and making sure he stays online. The building is an empty office space, left abandoned and decrepit by whoever had owned the building. It’s not an unusual sight, many businesses in the Glades have gone under in the past few years.

Felicity picks her entrance carefully, trying to keep her footsteps silent, not wanting to alert anyone within to her movements. The building is quiet, most of the offices empty. Wallpaper peels and curls away from the plaster beneath, air moves through the rooms from the broken windows.

“Are you sure this is the place?” She asks quietly.

“Signal’s holding strong,” Curtis assures her. “He’s there.”

She moves down the hallway, glancing between empty offices until she turns a corner and spots the glow of lights pooling out of a doorway at the end of the hall. She holds her breath as she moves down the hall, anticipation turning to anxiety at finally coming face to face with the anonymous presence that has been manipulating her for months.

She pauses outside the door, just at the edge, and reaches into her pocket for a sphere. She rolls it into the room and presses the command on her wrist, turning away from the sound of the flashbang going off. She gives it a moment before entering the room.

There’s an elaborate setup of computers against the wall, but only one is still powered on. There’s an empty computer chair pushed up against the desk. No windows or doors besides the one she’d come through.

“Curtis, he’s not here,” she bites, bending down to scoop up the sphere and return it to her pocket.

“What?” Curtis asks in surprise. Felicity moves towards the computer that remains on, pulling a drive from her coat and plugging it into the computer. “That’s not possible! His system is still running. It still says someone is running it.”
“Well, he’s not-” Felicity starts, but the sound of static cuts her off. She looks around the room for the source, finding two medium sized speakers settled on either side of the monitors.

“Don’t blame him, Felicity,” a voice says, coming from the speakers. She spins towards the sound, the blood pounding in her ears competing with the man’s voice coming through. “Technically, my system is in use.”

He’s not using a voice modulator anymore and there’s something gratingly familiar about his voice, something pulling at her memory. Felicity frowns, glaring at the speakers as if her gaze alone could transfer to the man speaking through them.

“Did you really think I would be so sloppy as to leave that back door to my system on accident?” He asks, humor marring his voice. “I just wanted to make sure you would find it. The two of you, huh? Quite the team. Which one of you is the Steve Jobs, though? You, I’d imagine. I never knew you to take a backseat.”

“Who are you?” She bites, unsure if he can even hear her.

“Really, though, I hadn’t expected you to take such obvious bait,” he sighs, and there it is. That familiar tone of disappointment sending a sad tremor through her. Her chest tightens. “Doesn’t matter much, though.”

“Why’s that?” she asks, quieter than she means to. Her voice shakes with the words.

“I’ll see you soon, Felicity,” he says instead of answering her. “I promise.”

The computer that’s still on clicks off suddenly, plunging the room into darkness. Felicity Snags the drive out of it before it crackles, the wires within frying on their own. It’s impressive and terrifying to an extent, but it’s hardly the worst thing about tonight.

“Felicity,” Curtis says slowly, pulling her attention. She stuffs the drive into her coat pocket and leaves the office, heading back down the hall the way she’d come. “What did he mean ‘see you soon’?”

“I don’t know,” she lies.
She tells Curtis that it’s important that she get back to the foundry and turns off her comm, removing it from her ear, before he can argue. She runs back to the club, trying not to think about what had just happened. When she enters through the alley, the sight of John gets her mind to clear.

“Oh, my God,” she gasps, moving towards him.

John is leaning against one of the tables, attempting to clean up a wound just over his temple. Blood drips down the side of his face, coloring the line of his jaw and pooling in the ridge of his eyebrow. His fingers are stable where they work to clean up the wound, but he cringes at the sting of it.

“Where were you?” He snaps and Felicity flinches.

“I was…,” she starts, hooking her thumb over her shoulder, but cuts herself off. She continues, pulling her wig and mask off, “It doesn’t matter. What happened?”

“Oliver didn’t show up,” he says, clearly still angry but allowing her to take over cleaning up his wound. “You weren’t on comms. Deadshot knew what was happening and took out four ARGUS agents before leaving me with this parting gift.”

“Shit,” she breathes, examining the wound on his head. It’s still leaking blood and she reaches for the medkit next to him, pulling out a cotton swab, dipping it in alcohol, and handing it to him. She moves, finding the small flashlight she keeps in her purse.

“I just hope whatever you two were doing was worth it,” he says grumpily. Felicity doesn’t answer, using the flashlight to illuminate the wound on his head and dabbing lightly at it with the cotton swab.

She feels stupid. She feels like she’s been played. They fell for such an obvious trap and let themselves get shown up. So, no, she can’t say that what she was doing was worth it. Maybe if John knew what was going on, why she’d left, he’d understand. But she isn’t sure she deserves his understanding right now.

She’s gotten the gash on his head to stop bleeding at least by the time Oliver comes back.
“What happened?” He asks, crossing to them with quick steps. Felicity shoots him a look, knowing she’s not the only one who fucked up tonight. John sighs.

“You didn’t show, things didn’t go well,” he offers succinctly. Oliver pauses, looking between her and John, but Felicity can’t bring herself to focus on anything but the wound in front of her.

“Rasmus was skipping town and I had to reprioritize,” Oliver explains, trying to justify his reasoning for not being at the plaza. Felicity bites down on her lip.

“Thanks to your new priorities, four agents are dead, Oliver,” John says. She thinks it’s worse, maybe, that he isn’t yelling. She doesn’t miss Oliver’s reaction to the news, glancing over at him and feeling it as well. John isn’t finished, though.

“You could have stopped this guy,” he continues. “Ended this maniac once and for all.”

“Lawton got away?” Oliver asks, somewhat obtusely. John freezes before turning his head to look at Oliver. It pulls him away from Felicity’s hands and ruins the angle she’d had on the wound.

“You seriously think a man who goes by the name Deadshot was going down without a fight?” He asks, anger mounting as he slides off of the stool he was sitting on, pulling away from Felicity completely. He advances on Oliver instead. “I needed you there, man.”

“Taylor Moore was relying on me, Diggle,” Oliver argues.

“This was never about that kid,” John counters. “He is safe under armed security at your house. This is about Laurel.”

“Diggle, I made a choice,” Oliver says, keeping his voice deceptively calm. Felicity busies herself with cleaning up the used cotton swabs, too many emotions swirling around her stomach. She’s suddenly glad she hadn’t had time to eat dinner.

“I know and you chose Laurel,” John says, cutting off whatever other argument Oliver may have had. Felicity gives in, looking up at the two men. “Always her. Everybody else be damned.”
Felicity flinches, not missing the way John glances back at her briefly before shoulder checking Oliver on his way out of the base. Felicity reaches for him, knowing his head wound isn’t cleaned up enough, but Oliver’s look pins her in place.

“Where were you?” He asks, noticing her dressed in her gear. She knows the animosity in his voice isn’t directed at her, but she waits a moment, cleaning up the mess from John’s wound. He says her name softly, like an apology, pulling her attention back to him.

“Remember I was patrolling the other night,” she begins, picking up the small metal bowl with the blood stained cotton swabs and carrying it to the other side of the room. “I told you someone hacked my system.”

“The Benefactor,” Oliver prompts and she stops, turning back to him and nodding.

“Curtis and I found a way to track him,” she continues. “After you left, Curtis found a location so I went after him. It ended up being a trap.”

Oliver frowns, stepping towards her and studying her as if she might be hiding an injury. She holds a hand up, shaking her head at him.

“I’m fine,” she assures him. “It was a bust.”

It feels like she’s lying to him, not telling the truth at least, but she’s not ready to process what she thinks she knows. Oliver steps towards her again, his hand landing gently on her shoulder and squeezing. He must be able to read how affected she is.

They stand like that for a moment, Felicity ducking her head towards his hand on her shoulder before he pulls it away.

“Do you think we made the right choices tonight?” He asks quietly and her stomach rolls at the openness in his voice, the need for her to tell him what he wants to hear. She can’t this time, so she shrugs instead.

“I’m honestly not sure what the right choices are anymore,” she admits.
They change back into their clothes in silence, Oliver lingering nearby as Felicity returns her hair into its usual ponytail. She turns to him once she’s finished, adjusting the hem of her skirt below her crop top. Oliver reaches forward, pushing a wayward curl off of her shoulder and back to join the rest of her hair.

“I have to go back to the house,” he tells her and she nods understandingly. “Wanna come with me? I could use some backup.”

“Do you mean backup with the possible threat of a hired killer,” she asks, smirking at him, “Or with Tommy?”

“Both,” he admits, offering her a soft smile. She gives in, nodding in agreement. Oliver turns away from her, grabbing his leather jacket off the table behind him, and Felicity snags the drive out of the pocket of her coat, stashing it in her purse instead.

Oliver holds out her coat for her and she slides her arms into it before he takes her hand and leads them out of the basement.

Felicity still feels awkward every time she finds herself at Oliver’s home. Not that she’s there often, even less comfortable with the thought of having sex with him under the same roof where his mom and sister are sleeping. No matter how considerable the size of that roof is.

He leads her inside with the ease of someone coming home and she wonders if it had been difficult to acclimate after he'd returned. His hand on her back is warm and steady, which makes her feel better as they move towards the voices coming from the sitting room off the foyer.

Laurel and Moira sit comfortably on the couch, chatting over what looks like an old photo album. Felicity can see smiling faces staring up from the photos, Laurel and Oliver and Tommy in simpler times.

“Hey, the police just called,” Oliver says and maybe they did but he certainly wasn't here for it. His hand falls from her back and Felicity feels herself tense up, folding her hands in front of herself. “Edward Rasmus was arrested.”
“Really?” Laurel asks, standing from the couch. She looks between Oliver and Felicity. “What happened?”

“Apparently, he confessed to everything,” Oliver explains and Laurel frowns, trying to understand the news. “He’s gonna go to prison for a long time and won’t be able to hurt anyone ever again.”

“Why would he confess?” Laurel asks. It’s one of the things she and Felicity have in common - they both long for answers, for the truth.

“The vigilante was involved,” Felicity says before Oliver has the chance. He glances over at her, but she’s focused on Laurel. She doesn’t miss the look that passes over her face, gratefulness or pride maybe.

“Good for him,” Tommy says, coming into the room and startling Felicity. She glances over her shoulder at him as he comes up behind her and Oliver. His presence seems to shake Laurel out of her thoughts and she glances down at Moira still seated on the couch.

“So I guess it’s over,” she says.

“Yes,” Oliver agrees, nodding slightly. “Yeah.”

“Great,” Tommy says eagerly. “I’ll go wake up Taylor.”

“No, Tommy, please,” Moira argues, standing from her own seat finally, pulling Tommy back from where he’d already turned to leave the room. “He’s sleeping. He’s been through a lot. Now you all are welcome to stay. We certainly have enough room.”

Moiras pauses for a moment, her eyes moving from Tommy to Felicity, who tenses at the scrutiny. Sensing her discomfort, Oliver takes a step closer to her and slides his hand into hers.

“For everyone,” she says a little pointedly, but Felicity thinks it’s something like a blessing. She offers the woman a small smile, though she doubts Oliver was going to wait for his mother’s permission to have her stay the night. Laurel is looking at Tommy, though, who sighs.
“It’s your call,” he says.

“Thank you, Mrs. Queen,” Laurel says after a moment, looking sideways at Moira. The formal address makes Felicity feel a little better. She’s not the only one who isn’t on a first name basis with the woman. “I guess we’ll stay then.”

“Good,” Moira nods.

Laurel announces that she’s still going to check on Taylor, just to make sure he’s doing alright, and heads upstairs. Oliver tugs gently at Felicity’s hand, offering her to show her around a bit. She’s been to his room before, but she doubts she would be able to find it again on her own.

“Eventually you have to stop being so afraid of my mother,” Oliver comments quietly as they climb the stairs. She glares at his back, knowing he’s smirking at her expense.

“I’m not afraid of her,” she argues before giving up the goat and sighing. “I’m totally terrified. I just want her to like me, you know? But I just get this feeling that...“

She cuts herself off, unsure if she should really be telling him all of her insecurities right now. Oliver stops as they turn a corner in the hallway, making her stop as well, and turns to face her.

“A feeling that what?” He prompts. Felicity shrugs nervously and glances up at the ceiling above her rather than at her boyfriend.

“That maybe she thinks I’m not good enough for you,” she admits finally. Oliver’s hand lands on her shoulder, thumb stroking along the hem of her shirt. She stucks in a breath, looking at him again.

“Felicity,” he says softly. “If there’s any concern of who is good enough for who, it’s the other way around. I know that my mother can be a bit formidable, but just be yourself and she’ll fall in love with you. Take it from a leading source in loving Felicity Smoak.”

She can’t contain her grin at the words, exactly what she needed to hear. It shouldn’t really matter whether or not Moira Queen approves of her, and maybe it doesn’t usually. But when she’s standing in this insane house, staring the woman down, it really, really feels like it matters.
Oliver steps forward, pressing a soft kiss to her lips. She hums against his mouth, wrapping her fingers in his sweater. Her phone vibrates in her pocket and she groans, pulling it out and checking the caller ID.

“It’s Curtis,” she sighs, knowing him well enough to know he’s gonna keep calling if she ignores him.

“I’ll give you a minute,” Oliver says, nodding understandingly. He continues down the hall as she answers the call and Felicity watches him, keeping an eye on which direction he turns when he disappears out of sight.

“Are you gonna tell me what happened tonight?” Curtis asks in lieu of a greeting.

“It’s not a great time, Curtis,” Felicity huffs, hoping he’ll take the deflection and let her get away with it. She’s not ready to talk about how easily they had gotten played, or what’s been stewing in her mind since she spoke with the Benefactor.

“I’m sure I don’t need to remind you of this, but this guy kidnapped me and threatened the man I love,” he says and Felicity flinches, gripping the phone a little tighter.

“I promise you, I am going to do everything in my power to find him,” she swears and that, at least, is the truth. “I just can’t do it right now.”

She knows Curtis doesn’t appreciate the brush off, but he accepts it nonetheless and lets her hang up. She sighs, tucking the phone away again and heading down the hallway after Oliver. Her mind is elsewhere as she turns corners, trying to figure out which direction Oliver had gone once he’d disappeared from her sight. She nearly smacks right into Tommy’s back around a blind corner and frowns at him.

“What are you doing?” She asks. Tommy whips around, holding his index finger up to his lips and shushing her. More intrigued by his weird behavior, she glances around the corner he’d been hiding next to and spots Oliver and Laurel chatting. Laurel steps forward and Oliver wraps her in a hug.

“How are you just okay with them?” Tommy asks quietly and Felicity pulls herself away from the corner before they get caught spying. “Knowing what you know, knowing that Oliver always goes out of his way for Laurel. How are you just fine with it?”
“Since he came back to Starling, Oliver has gone out of his way for all of us at one time or another,” she reminds him. “Your father is living proof of that.”

Tommy frowns and Felicity gives him a moment of quiet to chew on that, but she isn’t finished.

“You need to figure out how to trust her,” she tells him. “Or the two of you are never gonna last.”

He looks struck by the assessment, but Felicity doesn’t know what kind of shock she’s fostered. Tommy is so obviously head over heels for Laurel and Felicity understands the way love can be scary and maddening. But he needs to move on from his leftover fears about Laurel and Oliver. Felicity has.

Before he can respond, the lights in the house suddenly cut out. Felicity looks around, frowning, and hears Oliver call her name quietly from around the corner. She turns it easily, meeting his concerned look with one of her own.

“Can you two stay here with Taylor?” Oliver asks, looking at Tommy. It’s more of a direction, though, and Tommy doesn’t seem eager to argue.

“Where are you guys going?” Laurel asks, frowning at him. Oliver looks over at Felicity, tilting his head towards the bedroom behind him where he’s sending Tommy and Laurel. She returns the look with one of her own; No chance.

“It’s an old house,” Oliver explains, looking back at Laurel in front of him. “Fuses blow all the time. It’s probably nothing.”

“I can help,” Felicity says and Laurel spins around to her, eyebrows raised. She gives her a small nod. “Wires are wires. If it’s the fuse box, I might be able to get it fixed.”

“Just please,” Oliver adds, pushing the bedroom door open and ushering them inside. Laurel looks to Tommy who nods in reassurance before they both disappear inside the bedroom. Oliver pulls the door quietly shut behind them before rearing back and kicking the door knob off.

“I really wish you’d have stayed with them,” he grumbles quietly, wrapping his hand around Felicity’s and leading her down the hall, back the way they’d come.
“I’m staying with you,” she says resolutely. Oliver’s hand squeezes hers before falling away completely. “We don’t actually think this is a blown fuse, right?”

“Stay close,” he murmurs instead of answering. She doesn’t need to be told twice, nearly pressed up against his back as they move through the dark hallways. Oliver knows the space better than she does, moving easily around corners. Felicity realizes that she’s not nearly as confident out of her gear as he is, her heart hammering against her ribs.

“Head on a swivel,” he says, his voice so low she barely hears it. “This guy won’t hesitate to take a shot if he has it.”

“My bag is in the foyer,” she says, remembering leaving her purse at the bottom of the stairs. If they can get to that, at least, she won’t feel completely helpless.

Oliver stops suddenly and she smacks right into his back. A flash of lightning illuminates the wide hallways they’ve found themselves in, accompanied by a clap of thunder, and he wraps his arm around her suddenly, bringing them both to a crouch just as a bullet pierces the wall where her head had been a moment earlier.

He pulls her around the corner and through a set of frosted glass doors at the top of the stairs. Oliver motions to her, waving for her to stand to the side and she complies. With the lightning, she can see the silhouette of the man moving towards them through the frosted glass, like a scene out of a horror movie. He tugs the door open and Oliver is ready, charging him with a kick to the chest.

Felicity uses his distraction to dart from the room and down the stairs into the foyer. She nearly trips over the body of one of the security personnel, but forces herself to press on. She can hear the sound of Oliver engaging with the man behind her, but her bag is in sight now and if she can just reach it…

Suddenly both Oliver and the other man come tumbling over the railing, smashing into the round table in the middle of the foyer. Felicity dodges out of the way, grabbing her bag and digging around within for the sphere she knows she stashed. Oliver moves sluggishly, disoriented from the fall, and the hitman moves for him. Felicity lashes out, tossing the sphere with an instinctual movement and watching the tether wrap around his wrists in a hold.

She tugs, feet planted, and yanks him away from Oliver on the floor. He scrambles towards the fireplace as the hitman realizes what’s happening. Felicity doesn’t see what the other man is doing until it’s too late. He tugs on the tether uselessly, her stance too stable for him to get any good
leverage, but at the last second he swings out with his legs, aiming for her high heels and knocking her feet from beneath her.

Felicity crashes to the floor, landing on her back with the air knocked from her chest. Ignoring the burn in her shoulders and her lungs, she moves to get back up, but the man is already standing over her, pistol aimed at her chest.

Her blood runs cold as he stares down at her, unimpassioned even in this moment, his finger twitching on the trigger of the gun. He goes rigid suddenly, the sharp end of the fire poker slicing up and out through his chest. He falls to the floor, gun slipping from his slack fingers, and Oliver is on his knees behind him, panting.

Felicity stares at him, eyes wide, neither moving for a long moment. At the same second, they both scramble to their feet, reaching for each other on instinct. She feels no shame in the way she clutches onto him because he does the same, arms wrapping around her and fingers pressing into her skin.

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It takes them a few moments to gather themselves enough to call the police and Oliver goes to try and get the lights back on while Felicity returns upstairs to let Laurel and Tommy know what’s happened. She falters over a lie, but Laurel grips her arm and assures her she doesn’t have to talk about it.

She wishes so suddenly that there weren’t so many secrets between all of them.

Quentin’s first instinct is to check on his daughter when he arrives, seeming to bypass easily over the dead men in the foyer. The rest of his team cleans up the foyer, taking statements from those lucky enough to still be alive. She and Oliver are the only ones with anything worthwhile to say. Felicity takes her lead from him as he comes up with a lie.

“Death by poker,” Quentin comments, once he’s sure of Laurel’s safety and the uniformed officers have already taken their statements. He zips up the body bag with the skewered assassin inside. “That’s a new one.”

“He was gonna shoot me,” Felicity says, telling the story again so Oliver doesn’t have to. Her voice shakes with a leftover fear as she wraps her arms around herself. She motions towards one of the other fallen men being wheeled out in a black bag. “And then, uh, Mr. Robbins grabbed the poker
“Mr. Robbins was a real hero,” Tommy tacks on from behind them. Felicity glances back at him where he leans against the banister at the bottom of the stairs. “If it weren’t for him, we’d all be dead.”

She feels the breath Oliver lets out, as if the words alone could heal his mottled conscience. She reaches for him, unconcerned with Quentin’s gaze, and wraps her arms around his waist. He turns into her slightly, his arm coming around her in return as he presses his lips to her temple.

“I’ve got enough details for my report,” Quentin says, breaking the moment. “I’ll clear my boys out of here.”

He turns to leave, calling for his men to follow him, and Oliver pulls away from her enough to lead her back towards the stairs. He stalls in front of Tommy and Felicity looks between them, squeezing Oliver’s hand gently. This is a conversation they need to have without her around.

“I’m gonna go get changed,” she offers quietly, glancing over at the stairs. Laurel is leading Taylor back up the staircase to the room he’d been sleeping in. She pulls away from Oliver, knowing that if she can catch Laurel, she’ll be able to lead Felicity to Oliver’s bedroom. His hand stays with her as she pulls away, squeezing her fingers gratefully before he finally lets her go.

She catches Laurel outside of Taylor’s temporary room, waiting for her to settle the boy back into bed and softly close the door behind her. Laurel turns once the door is closed, pulling Felicity into an embrace.

“I don’t know what you did,” she says, pulling back from the hug and offering Felicity a grateful smile. “But thank you.”

“I didn’t do much,” Felicity admits. “I just didn’t want Oliver wandering around by himself.”

Laurel nods in understanding and Felicity can’t be sure if she knows that the whole story they had told was a lie. She doesn’t know how they could be getting away with this, how they’ll manage to get away with it much longer. Secrets and lies, they all have weight. Felicity is beginning to wonder if she’s strong enough to carry it.
Laurel leads her to Oliver’s bedroom and leaves her there for the guest room she and Tommy had picked out. Felicity stands awkwardly in the middle of the room, feeling off kilter and a little lost. It’s hard to ignore how close she’d come to dying tonight - both her and Oliver.

She spots the door leading to the en suite bathroom and decides to start there. Her hands shake as she turns the knobs in the shower, seeking the warmth of the water. The water pressure is ten times better than her own, so Oliver must really love her to spend so much time at her place. She smells like him when she gets out, toweling off with a dark gray towel.

She spies a t-shirt of his on top of the laundry basket and picks it up, sniffing it experimentally. It smells like his cologne, but otherwise clean, so she pulls it on. Oliver is sitting on the edge of the bed, waiting for her, when she comes back into the room.

“Hey, I hope it’s okay that I took a shower,” she says as she comes to stand in front of him, twisting her wet hair over one shoulder. He doesn’t respond, reaching for her instead. His hands land on her hips and urge her closer until he can wrap his arms around her waist, his face pressed against her stomach.

She strokes her fingers through his hair, letting the silence of the room settle over them for a moment. She knows where this is going and she’s just not ready to talk about it, not right away. Instead, she focuses on a different part of the night they haven’t discussed yet.

“Do you think Dig is gonna forgive us?” She asks quietly, her fingers still moving in a rhythmic motion at the back of his head. He hums against the material of her stolen shirt.

“He’ll come around,” he says. It’s not convincing, but she’ll take it. “I still think we made the right choices.”

Felicity frowns, unsure whether she agrees with him or not. She was so sure she wanted the truth, that not having it was worse than whatever answers she found. Now, though, she doesn’t know that she believes that anymore.

Oliver sighs, sitting back so he can look up at her. “Do we need to talk about Laurel?”

“Do we?” Felicity echoes, surprised by the question. She pulls away from him to sit next to him on the bed instead. He reaches for her hand immediately, as if he can’t stand not to be in contact with her right now. She understands the feeling.
“I know what John thinks,” he says, his eyes on her fingers as he laces his own through them. “And I know what Tommy thinks. But, I haven’t heard what you think.”

“I have a tendency to think a lot,” she offers with a shrug, squeezing his hand. “You wanna narrow it down for me?”

“I don’t want you to be unsure of my feelings for you,” he explains.

“I’m not,” she assures him, not missing a beat. If there’s one thing she’s remained confident of in her constantly shifting world, it’s that Oliver loves her. And she loves him. “We talked about you and Laurel. I know that there’s always a part of you that loves your first love. It’s human nature. But if you’re still in love with her, if you think that-”

“I’m not,” he says, cutting her off. He’s looking at her now, bright blue eyes holding her gaze so she knows how earnestly he means his words. “I’m not still in love with her. I haven’t been for a very long time.”

If it’s a lie, it’s much more convincing than any of his previous lies. Her heart stutters in her chest, not that him being in love with her is new information, but the clarity in his words. She believes him.

“Then there’s nothing to talk about,” she shrugs, leaning towards him. He meets her easily, pressing a kiss to her lips. His free hand falls to her bare thigh and she curls her fingers in his sweater. He pulls away after a moment and she moans in frustration, chasing after him.

“There is one more thing,” he tells her and she sighs, sitting back from him.

“Is that thing why you’ve been so weird the past few days?” She asks.

“You almost died tonight,” Oliver sighs and she goes to argue, but he rushes on. “I know you didn’t, but you could have. After you asked me to move into your place, it occurred to me how important you’ve become to me. How you snuck up on me and changed everything. And that every time you put on your gear, it could be the last time.”

“I have the same fears sometimes,” she admits, looking down at where his fingers are still wrapped
around her own. “But I know that this is a part of who you are, who we are.”

“I decided something tonight,” he says and Felicity tenses, concerned that he may try and convince her not to go out in the field anymore. Oliver continues, gesturing to make his point, “I need you out there, just as much as I need you in here. So, whether we’re under hoods or not, I am always going to do everything in my power to make sure you come home.”

Logically, she knows it’s not up to him. She knows that anything can happen, especially when it comes to how they choose to spend their nights. But hearing the words, as trite as they may be, it makes her want to believe him.

“Ditto,” she offers quietly and he smiles at her, pressing forward for another, firmer kiss. She urges him backwards onto the bed, pulling him with her up towards the dark gray pillows. They settle into the bed on their sides, Oliver pulling away from her enough to get the duvet untucked and pulled over them.

Felicity tucks herself against him, arms wrapped around his waist and engulfed in his warmth. He’s still in his jeans and sweater, but he doesn’t make any moves to separate himself from her to change. She feels safe, even in this scary, unfamiliar space where so much pain and death has occurred. Oliver makes her feel almost invincible in his hold.

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She waits until she’s certain Oliver is asleep, his chest rising and falling in a somewhat calm rhythm. She knows he’s still plagued with nightmares, never fully relaxed even in sleep. The bed shifts beneath her as she slips from under the covers and her feet hit the cold hardwood floor of Oliver’s bedroom. She waits, listening for any sign of a change in state from him.

When she doesn’t hear anything, she tiptoes across the room to where she’d stashed her bag. For an old house, she manages to avoid much creaking of the wood slats beneath her. She grabs her bag and crosses for the bathroom, locking the door behind her.

She fishes the drive out from where it’s slipped to the bottom of the bag and plugs it into her tablet as she seats herself on the edge of the jacuzzi tub. Sidenote, she’s beginning to think she should have asked Oliver if she could move in with him because… damn.

Her tablet pulls up the files the drive had managed to copy from the Benefactor’s computer before
he’d fried it. She knows it’s here, knows he wouldn’t have given her nothing after their encounter. Nothing on the drive is encrypted, which seems like a dead giveaway. No one as good as him would leave all of his files open for anyone to see. Not without a purpose, anyway.

She doesn’t know exactly what she’s look for, but when she finds it her whole body goes cold. A video file pops up on her tablet, hidden within the drive.

“Well done, Felicity,” he says, speaking from the recording so clearly meant for her. “I knew you’d find me.”

“Dad.”

Chapter End Notes

I know, I know. A lot of you saw this coming. I did basically steal the plot from season four and twist it just a bit. I hope it’s satisfying anyway!

I’m so excited for this to conclude and I hope you guys are still enjoying it enough to hang around during my small hiatus. Things are about to get a little crazy again as the new semester starts next week, but I’m gonna try to get this finished before then. Thanks, guys!!

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Chapter Summary

Felicity makes contact with an old, familiar face, the Hood takes down an underground casino. Neither of which are the worst parts of their week.

Chapter Notes

I am posting this against my better judgement ah! I just really like this chapter and I’m antsy to share it. I hope you all enjoy it and where we’re heading! Heads up, it’s kind of a long one - clocking in at just over 14k. Whoops!

Takes place during 1.21 "The Undertaking."

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Felicity isn’t sure the last time she’s gotten a full night’s sleep. If it’s affecting her, she hasn’t started to notice it yet. Oliver has, though. He hasn’t acknowledged it, but she knows his interest is piqued. She’s managed to evade talking to him about it because they both have their own work they’re dealing with. She likes to patrol by herself with Curtis while he tracks down names on his list. She thinks maybe he’s chalking it up to her trying to balance her workload.

The thing about it is that she wants to tell him. It’s actually killing her not telling him about what she’d discovered, but there’s still a chance it’s not real. However slight it might be, there’s the possibility she’s being screwed with.

Her gut tells her that’s not the case but, even still. She can’t bring herself to voice the words.

“You’re distracted tonight,” Curtis comments, startling her a little. She shakes her head to herself, her surroundings coming back to her, and eases away from the lip of the building. She probably shouldn’t drift off while standing that close to the edge.

“Just got a lot on my mind,” she deflects, reaching up to tug at the wig where it rests at the crown of her head. She’d finally gotten around to ordering a new one. It’s better quality this time, but she’s still adjusting to it and it feels awkward on her head. “What were you saying?”

“Paul,” he says and Felicity waits, because that doesn’t actually tell her anything. “He wants to talk.
“We’re getting dinner tonight.”

“Did it sound like a ‘let’s work through this’ talk or more of a ‘here’s your stuff’ kind of talk?” She asks, heading towards the other side of the building where she’d climbed the fire escape in the first place.

“Well, I hadn’t really considered it could be the latter so, thank you for that,” Curtis pouts and she flinches. “But, I think he wants to understand, maybe.”

Felicity smiles to herself, glad that Curtis sees it as something they’re capable of working out. She’s been keeping herself out of it for the most part, she’s caused enough trouble as it is, but she doesn’t want to see them lose each other over her secret.

She pauses on the fire escape, frowning to herself.


“Yes,” he says slowly, before continuing at a speedy pace, “It’s a late dinner. Paul had to work late anyway. But it also means I have to cut it short tonight.”

“It’s fine,” Felicity assures him, dropping to the pavement below. The sound of her boots on the ground startles something out of a turned over trash can, but it’s gone before she can see what. “It’s been quiet tonight. Oliver is moving some stuff in anyway, so I should probably help out.”

Curtis lets out a long, high pitched ‘ooh’ over the comms and Felicity flinches, rolling her eyes at his dramatics.

“Y’all really doing the whole move in thing,” he says and Felicity shrugs to herself, feeling stupidly self conscious about it even over the comms. He sniffs, pretending to tear up, “I’m so proud of you.”

She huffs, shaking her head at him. It’s early for her and Oliver to be moving in together, maybe. At least, it feels early for her. It’s her first long term relationship since college and that hadn’t exactly ended well. It feels right, though. Things are working so well between her and Oliver, both as a couple and as vigilantes.
“In all seriousness, though,” Curtis continues at her lack of response. “I’m glad things are going so well for you two. It gives a little hope to the rest of us.”

“Dinner with Paul is gonna go great,” Felicity assures him, dismissing the praise for her and Oliver’s relationship. “I’ve got a good feeling about it.”

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When she pulls into her driveway, Oliver’s car is parked on the street in front of her house. The trunk lid is open and Felicity watches through her rearview mirror as he pulls a box from within before closing the lid.

“What can I help?” She asks as she climbs out of her own car. He shakes his head, coming up the driveway towards her.

“This is the last of it,” he tells her, stopping in front of her. He shifts the box to his side and bends down for a quick kiss in greeting. “But you could open the door for me.”

She does, leading him up to the porch and pushing the door open for him. He stops just within the entryway, setting the box down near the door. Felicity frowns, entering behind him and pushing the door shut. She surveys the mess he’s made of her living room.

Boxes are stacked up throughout the room and on the coffee table. Despite the amount of boxes, they’re moderate in size and it’s admittedly less than she had expected. Honestly, she thinks she’d had more when she’d moved to Starling from Boston.

“Yeah, there’s not a lot I’m really attached to,” he admits, sensing her thoughts and fidgeting with his hands in a familiar way. “I didn’t want to just start moving things around without your input.”

Felicity relieves herself of her coat, tossing it over the back of the couch before stepping up towards him. She wraps her arms around his waist, pressing herself close to him, and he reacts immediately as his own arms wrap around her.

“It’s your home now, too,” she reminds him, squeezing him lightly. He looks over her head, grinning
instead at the room behind her and nods. When his gaze returns to her, he’s already curling towards her and she presses up further in her heels to meet him as he kisses her.

“What did you bring?” She asks, pulling far enough away to get the words out. Oliver sneaks in one more kiss before he answers.

“It’s mostly clothes,” he explains, pulling away. “Some stuff from my room, books. I was thinking I could get some movers to bring over the desk from my bedroom, but I’m not sure where we would put it.”

They are literally moving in together and somehow his use of the word “we” makes her go all warm inside. She crosses the room to open one of the boxes and peek inside, but the box is taped to perfection with packing tape.

“Here,” Oliver offers, pulling a pocket knife from his jeans and holding it out for her. She thanks him, sliding the blade out and slicing through the tape carefully. Inside, she finds a familiar stack of sweaters.

“Well, we could probably reorganize the guest room to fit the desk,” she considers, standing back up and trying to imagine how the room would need to change in order to accommodate the large wooden desk. “If we pushed the bed against the windows and moved the dresser, we could give it kind of a home office feel.”

When she turns, Oliver is leaning against the side of the couch, watching her. Her chest tightens at the soft look on his face.

“What?” She asks, self consciously running a hand over the top of her ponytail.

“Thank you,” he says softly, “for making room for me.”

“Thanks for wanting the room,” she smiles, shrugging a little. His grin grows, just a touch, before he shakes his head at her and moves to her side. He takes the pocket knife from her and begins expertly slicing through the packing tape.

Felicity grabs the box of sweaters and carries them to her bedroom. She’d been re-organizing her closet and drawers in her spare time since Oliver had agreed to move in, not wanting him to feel like
he didn’t have space. Ultimately, it had meant moving a lot of her things into the closet in the spare room, but she rarely has guests anyway. Even then, it’s usually just her mother who never stays more than a day or two, mostly due to Felicity’s admitted lack of hospitality.

She pulls the sweaters out of the box one by one, shaking them out and refolding them before filling the middle drawer in her dresser with them. Oliver comes into the room with two more boxes, garment bags draped over top of them.

“Half of the closet is yours,” she tells him, waving towards the sliding doors on the wall next to the bathroom. He sets the boxes down on the bed and lays out the garment bags across it, unzipping them and pulling the suit jackets and folded pants from within.

“You didn’t have to park on the street, by the way,” she comments, tucking the last sweater away and tossing the empty box aside. “The driveway is big enough for two cars.”

“I can’t stay for long tonight,” Oliver explains, smoothing out one of the suit jackets on a hanger before hanging it up in the closet. Felicity pauses to admire the sight of his suits lined up next to her dresses. “I didn’t want you to block me in.”

“Who is it tonight?” She asks, unfolding the flaps of one of the opened boxes Oliver had brought in. T-shirts are rolled up within in a large stack. She starts the process she’d done with the sweaters over again, filling in the space in the second drawer of the dresser.

“Harold Backman,” he says, sliding the door to the closet shut. Felicity doesn’t recognize the name. “You got off patrol early. Quiet night?”

“Yeah,” she nods, moving out of the way as he takes over putting the t-shirts away. He rolls them different than she does, so she sits down on the bed and watches. “Curtis wanted to call it an early night anyway. He’s having dinner with Paul.”

“I told you it’d work out,” he comments, smirking over his shoulder at her. She rolls her eyes, pulling out a t-shirt and folding it idly. She hopes he’s right, but with the way things have been going lately it’s hard to believe.

“So, how did your mom and Thea take you actually moving out?” She asks, holding the shirt out to him. He takes it from her and tucks it into the drawer before sliding it shut.
“Thea could care less,” he shrugs, smirking fondly at the thought. She doubts the younger Queen is as unfazed by his departure as she’s playing it, though. “Mom handled it surprisingly well. It’s not like it wasn’t time.”

“She missed out on five years,” Felicity says, though she’s sure he doesn’t need to be reminded. “I’m sure she’d be happy if you stayed forever.”

Oliver hums in consideration as he settles onto the edge of the bed next to her. She leans into him a bit, nudging his arm with her own.

“I know we haven’t really talked about this,” she starts cautiously, “but if you ever want to tell someone about those five years, you know you can tell me, right?”

He nods, gaze focused on his hands in his lap, but looks over at her with a soft expression that makes her chest feel warm and tight.

“I’m sure someday I’ll be ready,” he admits quietly and Felicity understands what he’s saying. Not now, not today, but eventually. “Do you mind being patient with me?”

“I have all the time in the world,” she promises.

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Oliver leaves not long after their conversation. They’d finished the boxes he’d moved into the bedroom and decided to try adjusting the guest room the way she had suggested. When he leaves, Felicity stands in the extra room for a few minutes, trying to decide if they can fit the large desk into the small space.

She thinks it will fit, but she isn’t sure how they’ll get it through the door.

In the living room, she moves the boxes that haven’t been unpacked yet into stacks in front of the TV so the couch and coffee table are clear. She’s created a precarious tower when she hears her phone trilling from the pocket of her coat.
“Hello?” She answers, hurriedly digging it out of the pocket at the last second.

“She, Felicity,” the person on the other end says and she feels herself tense up. She reaches over gripping the phone against her ear with both hands and squeezing her eyes shut.

“Dad?” She asks, a shaky breath stumbling out of her. She hates it, the affect just his voice can have. How she feels seven-years-old again. A lost and lonely girl trying to understand why her father hasn’t come home in days.

“Did you get my message?” He asks, but before she can answer, “I knew you wouldn’t give up. Now’s the time. Can you meet tonight?”

Felicity hesitates, her stomach turning over with nerves. She wants to say no, to curl up under the covers and hide from the world, from him. But she knows, she knows, that it’s not an option. This could be the only chance for answers she’s been waiting on for sixteen years.

“Yeah,” she chokes out finally. “Yeah, I can meet.”

He rattles off the address of a coffee shop she recognizes before hanging up. She considers changing, looking down at the sweater and jeans she’d worn to work that day. It shouldn’t matter. She shouldn’t be trying to impress him. So, why does she want to so badly?

Frustrated with herself, she tugs her jacket on and heads out of the house. The lights are still on, but she remembers to lock the door behind her. She considers, for a moment, texting Oliver or Curtis about what she’s doing. But what would she say? She hasn’t told either of them about this yet.

After, she decides. She’ll tell them both about it once she figures out what he wants.

She reaches the coffee shop first, which leaves her to order far too large of a cappuccino and fiddle aimlessly with her phone. Her fingers hover over her messages with Oliver, aching for some level of support but knowing that he likely wouldn’t see any message she sends right away anyway. He rarely checks his phone when he’s in his gear.

Noah slides into the chair across from her at the same moment a waitress sets her coffee in front of her. He orders a second cappuccino while Felicity scrapes some of the sweet foam off the top with a spoon and eats it.
“You know, it’s strange,” he says suddenly, making Felicity look up at him, “watching your baby girl drink coffee.”

He’s older, obviously, and grayer. But somehow the same, somehow unmistakable. It makes her chest ache suddenly with a longing for the father he could have been, he should have tried to be. She drops the spoon fully into her mug, stirring the cappuccino.

“Yeah, it would probably be a little less strange if you’d seen your baby girl in the last sixteen years,” she comments, not bothering to temper the bitterness in her voice.

“You’re right,” he admits, not missing the tone. “I don’t suppose it helps that I thought staying out of your life was the best thing for you. I was protecting you and your mother.”

It really, really does not help. Especially knowing that just a few months ago she’d tried to pull the same crap on Curtis. The last thing she needs is a reminder of how similar she and her father are. The difference, an important one in Felicity’s opinion, is that she’d tried to do it to spare Curtis the fallout of her decisions. Noah, on the other hand…

“Yes, you were protecting yourself,” she tells him bluntly. “You were wanted by the police and you didn’t want to go to jail. That is why you stayed away.”

Noah doesn’t say anything for a long moment and Felicity can feel all of the anger, the hurt, the resentment from the past decade and a half building in her chest. She continues before he gets a chance to defend himself.

“And, judging by the reason you’re even here now,” she bites, “I’m guessing that neither your instinct for self-preservation nor being wanted by the police are things you changed about yourself. So, do you want to tell me why, exactly, I shouldn’t call the police?”

“Because you and I are the same, Felicity,” he says easily, clearly buying his own bullshit. Her chest tightens up at the words, her whole body rejecting them instinctively. “Short-term legal mischief for long-term societal gain. Is that not what you’ve been doing?”

“I don’t go around kidnapping people and blackmailing their loved ones,” she argues in a hushed whisper, leaning forward and placing her hands on the table.
“You work with the Hood,” he reminds her. “He’s hardly what one would call an upstanding citizen.”

Goosebumps break out over her skin at the thought that Noah might know Oliver’s secret on top of her own. He couldn’t out her without outing himself, but she’s not willing to take the same risk with Oliver’s identity.

“I know Cooper gave you a list of some of the work we did together before he left town,” her father continues, moving away from the subject of the Hood altogether. “All I’m asking for here is a chance to prove to you that I’m not the bad guy you think I am.”

“Right, I’ll be sure to tell that to the friend of mine you kidnapped, drugged, and threatened to kill,” Felicity snaps.

“An empty threat, I assure you,” he insists. “All I’m asking is that you look through the record of some of the hacks I’ve done, see that I’m closer to a hacktivist than any real criminal mastermind.”

Felicity sits back in her chair, her entire body tense with the conversation. Her phone vibrates where it rests next to her untouched coffee. She can see Oliver’s contact lighting up the screen with the call and reaches for it.

Noah’s hand lands on top of hers, keeping her from answering. She looks back up at him hesitantly.

“I want to be back in your life, Felicity,” he says and she bites down on the inside of her lip. “I know that doing that will require earning your trust back. I hope this is a first step down that very long road.”

Her phone stops vibrating beneath her palm, the call going to voicemail, and she pulls it out from underneath Noah’s hand. There’s a missed call notification, followed by a text that comes through from Oliver asking her to meet him at the club.

“Just think about it,” he finishes, realizing that she’s about to leave.

Felicity stares at him for another moment before sliding out of the chair. She fishes a bill out of her
purse to cover her untouched coffee, not wanting to owe her father any tiny thing. She leaves without giving him an answer, but she doubts she’ll manage to think about much else.

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She tries to gather herself together by the time she gets to the club and she’s actually feeling pretty confident in her ability to compartmentalize. Until Oliver takes one look at her and that worried crease forms in his brow.

“What happened?” He asks before she can divert his attentions. It’s a Herculean effort to keep the words from spilling out of her, but she just manages as she bites down on her lower lip.

“It’s a long story,” she deflects, crossing past him to the computer chair and sinking down into it. She swivels to face him as she continues, “And I will tell you all about it, I swear. Can I just have some time first?”

He studies her for a moment and she thinks he might say no, continue to push for answers. But where she’s dogged and persistent to a sometimes annoying degree, Oliver is quiet and understanding.

“Of course,” he nods finally. “Just remember that you don’t have to deal with everything alone.”

She almost laughs at the irony of the statement, but it’s not the moment for it. Instead she spins back to the computers and boots them up. Oliver followers her, placing a slim laptop down on the desk next to her.

“Let me guess,” she says, reaching for it and flipping the lid open. “Some bad guy missing his fancy new laptop.”

“Harold Backman,” Oliver says and she recognizes the name from earlier that night. She pulls the video adapter cord towards the laptop and pops it into the base. “He’s who Starling City’s worst call when they want to launder money in the Caymans.”

“Shouldn’t we just turn this over to, I don’t know,” she considers, pouting at the screen in front of her as it mirrors the laptop, “the IRS?”
“We will,” he assures her as she looks over at him, “just as soon as you return the money to the rightful owners.”

Easier said than done. She sighs as the computers in front of her beep, informing her the laptop is completely locked down exactly to avoid people like her.

“Well, it sounds like a very nice idea,” she says. “Backman’s files are all protected with an asymmetric encryption algorithm.”

“Really?” Oliver asks and, maybe it’s the stress from the day, but she thinks he might be mocking her. “So it’s gonna take a while to break in.”

“Days, at least,” she murmurs. She almost startles at the feeling of him leaning in towards her, his hand on the back of her chair steadying her movement.

“Better get started, then,” he suggests, teasingly, as he brushes his lips over the curve of her ear. She turns to glare at him as he pulls away, trying to figure out where his head is at. He’s not normally so playful when he comes back from a mission, even one well-done.

He pulls away from her turning to one of the tables behind her and removing the weapons still strapped to his leather jacket. She spins, following his movement, before pushing herself back out of the chair.

“At the risk of ending up with an arrow in my eye,” she broaches cautiously, joking but somber, as she crosses to him and he turns to face her. “Can I ask; When are we going to make peace with Dig?”

They’ve been toeing around that particular elephant in the room for a couple days, avoiding the topic but feeling John’s absence nonetheless. Felicity knows how important John’s trust and friendship are to Oliver, even if he thinks she doesn’t. It’s weighing on her that he still thinks they had prioritized their own problems over him after he had asked for their help.

“He’s the one who left, Felicity,” Oliver reminds her, shaking his head a little. His eyes go past her, looking to the monitors she’d left behind rather than her face. “We did everything we could to stop him.”
“Except apologize,” she insists. “We promised we’d help him track down Floyd Lawton and we-”

“Made our choices,” he cuts in, his gaze cutting back to hers. “And I can live with mine. If he can’t, then we don’t need him.”

She opens her mouth to argue, saying his name softly, but he beats her to it.

“I need to get back to the club,” he says, his hand falling consolingly on her bicep. She knows he doesn’t want to fight about this, but John deserves something from them. If not an apology, an explanation, an assurance that he’s a priority. Oliver continues, his hand skimming down the sleeve of her sweater, “Let me know when you break in.”

He gives her a look that conveys the end to the conversation and pulls away, turning to change out of his gear. Felicity huffs and spins back towards the computers, glaring at the screens.

“I wish someone would send me off to the Caymans,” she pouts.

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It’s a few hours later when the club finally quiets for the night - or morning, more succinctly. One thing to be said for the bouncers Tommy had hired before he left, they sure made certain everyone left as soon as the club closed. Felicity can hear it the moment the pounding beat cuts off completely and the lights must go on.

Not long after, she hears Oliver coming down the steps, footsteps heavy with exhaustion. He leans against the back of her chair, planting a gentle kiss at the top of her head as she looks up at him. He’s changed into a gray suit, the shirt underneath unbuttoned at his clavicle.

“How’s it going?” He asks.

“Tediously,” she admits, still feeling a little grumpy. There’s a lot of data, hidden under a lot of security, and she wasn’t exaggerating earlier when she’d guessed it would take days. Oliver hums in response, his hands roving from the back of her chair to her shoulders instead. He rubs them up and down her biceps.
She pauses for a moment, her fingers stilling over the keyboard to really look at him. His eyes have drifted shut and Felicity would not be surprised if he were the type of person to fall asleep standing up. She spins in her chair and it shakes him, making him look down at her.

“When are you planning on getting some sleep?” She asks, frowning at him in concern. Ever since he started running the club by himself, he barely has the time to sleep. At night he’s either out hunting down bad guys or managing the club. Or, on nights like tonight, he’s doing both. Felicity knows he spends his days trying to split time between his mother and sister and herself.

“Whenver you are,” he offers slyly and she figures her own insomnia hadn’t slipped past him. She sighs, spinning back to face the computers, knowing it’s a losing battle for the both of them. Oliver seems more awake now, squeezing her shoulders before moving away from her. “I just wanted to change before I head back upstairs to help the staff clean up.”

She sighs, nodding. They’re both too stubborn to admit what’s wrong, but she wishes she could help him. Ideally, she’d lock him away in her room for a few days, force them both to sleep and talk and forget about the outside world for a while. It’s a fantasy they can’t afford right now, she knows.

Felicity resolves to spend no more than another hour on the files before forcing him to come home with her, knowing Oliver won’t leave if she doesn’t.

Unfortunately, it takes less than an hour for her to find the needle in the haystack that has her flying up the basement stairs to the club, keying the code in wrong twice in her haste, before turning the corner to the bar area. She can see Oliver standing behind it, changed into a simple gray t-shirt and tidying things up.

“Oliver, I need to show you what-”

She cuts off as she rounds the corner and spots Laurel sitting on the other side of the bar, hands cradled around a coffee mug. Sucking in a breath, she looks between them as Oliver turns to her.

“I just totally walked in on a thing,” she says, gesturing between them and the very serious looks on their faces. “Didn’t I?”

“We were just talking about,” Oliver starts, but trails off and looks to Laurel for guidance or permission. Felicity frowns between them.
“Talking about the fact that Tommy broke up with me,” Laurel finishes, her fingers wrapping a little tighter around the mug. Felicity deflates, thoughts of hacked files leaving her mind for a moment as she takes a step towards Oliver, joining them at the bar.

“Oh, Laurel, I’m so sorry!” She says, reaching forward to place her hand on top of the other woman’s wrist. “What happened? I mean, you don’t have to tell me. I’m just confused because I thought you two were doing so well and, well, what did he say? I mean, did he-”

Oliver clears his throat behind her and she promptly stops talking, noticing the overwhelmed look on Laurel’s face. She grimaces at the situation she’s walked into again. This is why she needs to be sleeping regularly.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to pry,” she tries again, shaking her head a little.

“It’s fine,” Laurel assures her. “I was gonna call you, but I know you’ve been busy with…”

She trails off with a small, vague gesture and looks towards Oliver. Felicity isn’t sure if it’s because Laurel still doesn’t know that Oliver knows about her secret or if it’s because she thinks Felicity’s been busy with Oliver. She supposes either way, she’s right.

“You can always call me,” Felicity insists, squeezing her wrist gently before retracting it. “But, I’m actually upgrading the router for the club and I need to show Oliver something very important related to it.”

“I’ll let you go, then,” Laurel says, looking back to Oliver. He nods. “Thank you for the coffee. And the advice.”

Oliver moves away from the bar, his hand falling to Felicity’s lower back as he leads her back down the hallway towards the door to the basement. She remembers why she’d come up to retrieve him in the first place, buzzing with excitement at the reminder as she leads him down the stairs to the basement.

“Tell me you got in,” he says as they hit the cement floor.
“Better,” she says, reaching over to grab a print out from the printer as they pass by it and hand it off to him. “I hacked Cayman Fidelity and put together a list of all the deposits Backman made last year.”

“Felicity, what good does that do us if we don’t know whose money it was?” Oliver asks, barely looking at the list she’s handed him. She will blame his tone on his lack of sleep and let it slide.

“Look at the biggest deposit Backman made last year,” she instructs and Oliver obliges, glancing over the words and numbers listed. “Bottom of the page.”

“Two million dollars on December…” he trails off and she knows his mind has done the same thing hers had. “December 12th… that’s-”

“The day Walter disappeared,” Felicity confirms. It’s not an easy date to forget. It was the night she’d gone after the dark archer, the night she’d thought she’d left the Hood to his death, the night of Oliver’s accident. “What if one of Backman’s clients was paid two million to kidnap Walter?”

“Then we find out which client it was,” he says, following her as she moves back towards the computers. “And we use them to find Walter.”

Felicity looks over at him and he meets her gaze with a steely nod. She drops into her chair and starts working as he hovers next to her.

“Okay, backtrace the account, follow the money,” he instructs. She knows what she’s doing, but she also knows how important this is to both of them. If he’s being a little pushy, she can forgive him on this. “Hopefully it will lead us to whoever kidnapped Walter.”

That’s the general idea and Felicity is, for maybe the first time in months, cautiously optimistic about their chances. But, there’s still a dark cloud hanging over it that she can’t shake.

“After all this time, do you think Walter might still really be alive?” She asks, looking up at him next to her. He turns to her and the look on his face is enough of an answer.

“I don’t know,” he admits. She takes a moment before nodding once and looking back to the computer in front of her. It’s almost surprising how quickly she manages to pull up a name.
“Got it,” she announces. “Dominic Alonzo.”

Oliver groans, shuffling next to her.

“Name ring any bell?” She asks.

“Yeah, Alonzo runs the biggest underground casino in Starling City when he’s not busy kidnapping,” he explains. Felicity considers that for a moment, Alonzo’s smug face staring up at her from the screen.

“He looks like the kind of low life someone would hire to kidnap Walter,” she says. “How many arrows do you think you’ll have to put in him before he gives up Walter’s location? Say a lot.”

“It’s not that simple,” Oliver admits. “That casino has its own private army. We need to access Alonzo’s computer, but without setting off any alarms.”

So, it’s a stealth mission then. Nothing they’ve never done before. It would take her no time to get a bug put together to plant on Alonzo’s computer. But, it might be nice to have more than just the two of them working on it.

“Looks like we’re gonna need all the help we can get,” she says, straightening up in her chair and looking over at him pointedly. “It’s too bad there’s not someone else we could call.”

“That’s enough,” Oliver says softly, but with an air of finality. “We can do this on our own.”

“Well, then, looks like someone is going gambling tonight,” she points out, looking back to the screen.

“Those guys would make me the minute that I walked in there,” Oliver argues, shaking his head and gesturing towards himself. “Oliver Queen would never be caught dead in a place like that.”

Felicity is choosing to shelve her concern over his use of third person in light of the more pressing
concerns.

“I wasn’t talking about you,” she says, looking back up at him. He frowns at her.

“Absolutely not,” he says and she actually kind of just thinks it’s instinct at this point for him to disagree with her. Sure, it’ll mean going in without any weapons or him as backup, but he’ll be on comms. It’s not like she can’t defend herself in hand-to-hand, she’d been working with John more and more before he left.

“I can count cards,” she tells him. In fact, it’d been most of how she spent her time as a teenager. Counting cards in the casinos her mother worked at and, inevitably, getting caught and banned from accompanying Donna to work. “It’s all probability theory and mathematics. Have you met me? Bottom line, I know my way around a casino.”

“I know you do but, Felicity, I’m not letting you walk-” he tries to argue, but she talks over him as she pushes herself out of her chair.

“Oliver, the reason I joined you in the first place was to find Walter,” she reminds him. “Things may have changed, but for the first time, we have a real chance of finding him.”

He still looks hesitant, his jaw working as he looks over her head and then back at her face, so she adds, “You have to let me do this.”

He turns away from her to look instead at the computer screen with a news article about Walter’s disappearance pulled up.

“Alright,” he says softly, finally, before turning back to her. “But we do it my way.”

“Do we ever do it any other way?” She asks, smirking at him before flinching. “By ‘it’ I mean missions. Not, you know, the other thing we do a lot.”

Oliver chuckles, shaking his head at her. He still looks tired, but lighter maybe. Not that this news is good in any way, but it’s something. It’s more than they’ve had for months. Either way, Felicity can’t help but focus on the shadows growing under his eyes, still not enough to mar the handsomeness of him.
“Okay, you go home and get some sleep,” she instructs, pressing up on her toes a bit to press a kiss to the corner of his mouth. His hand lands on her hip for just a second as she’s pulling away from him.

“Wait, where are you going?” He asks as she crosses away from him back towards the stairs. She can hear the frown in his voice.

“To see if Laurel’s up for a little dress shopping,” she calls back before climbing up the stairs.

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After shopping with Laurel, Felicity feels better about most of her friendships ending up on the back burner lately. Laurel doesn’t really have much of an explanation for the split between her and Tommy, but Oliver had given her some solid advice that she needed to just talk. Felicity shouldn’t be surprised, but she’s glad he’d been able to offer Laurel some comfort.

It’s early afternoon when she makes it home and every muscle in her body feels like it’s being pulled towards the floor. She leaves the garment bag with the dress she’d picked out on the kitchen table and heads for the bedroom.

Oliver is already there, shirtless with the blankets half over his body as he snoozes. Felicity crosses to the windows and draws the curtains, blocking out the light shining into the room, before toeing off her boots and finally sliding into the bed next to him. She doesn’t bother with changing out of her sweater and jeans.

Not a heavy sleeper, Oliver reacts to her almost immediately, shifting both to make more room on the bed and to angle his body more towards her. She presses into his side and his arm comes around her, his lips brushing clumsily over her temple.

“I’m glad you listened to me and got some sleep,” she says quietly. The room is covered in a dark gray light, her thin curtains unable to block out all of the afternoon sun. Oliver hums sleepily in response and she hides her smile against his chest, pressing a soft kiss to the skin there.

“Your turn,” he replies after a moment of half-awake consideration, his arm tightening around her as if she might be trying to leave. Instead, she nods against him in agreement. “Unless you want to talk about whatever had you worked up last night.”
Felicity takes a deep breath. Oliver must feel the way she tenses at the reminder, his fingers tightening against her side even as he pulls away enough to look at her. The shadows under his eyes are less pronounced, thanks to the much needed sleep and most likely a shower. He’s frowning at her, though, and she gets the feeling he’s not the only one who can’t hide their exhaustion.

“Felicity,” he says softly, worry straining his voice. He’s awake now, tuned in on her reactions. “What’s going on?”

She wraps her arm over his stomach, pulling herself nearly on top of him in her effort to be close to him.

“My dad came back,” she admits quietly, the words stilted with how wrong they feel in her mouth. Heavy and ash-like, as if they don’t belong together. She never thought she’d say them anyway. “I was having coffee with him when you called.”

He shifts under her, trying to sit them both up enough that he can look at her. She gives in after a moment, shifting so they’re propped up against the pillows and Oliver is scanning her face, trying to read her.

“Did he say why he’s here?” He asks, frowning. Felicity lets out a small, bitter laugh and looks away from him. There’s a loose thread on the comforter where it’s draped over her lap that she sets her sights on.

Oliver doesn’t even know her father and he knows Noah can’t be here without a reason. He’s probably figuring it’s something less sinister than what it is, though. Felicity isn’t even sure what his endgame is, but she knows she’s no longer interested in playing. Mystery solved. Dad was the Big Bad all along.

God, she wants to throw up.

“Turns out he’s been in Starling for a while,” she explains. The thread wraps around the tip of her finger and she pulls it tight, watching the digit turn red with the trapped blood beneath the surface. “He’s just been going by a different name. The Benefactor.”

“What?” Oliver nearly barks and Felicity doesn’t need to look up to see the surprise in his face. She tugs at the thread, letting go and watching it unravel around her finger, leaving a red spiral trailing up her skin towards her nail.
“Well, I don’t know if that’s his preferred hacker-slash-bad guy name,” she goes on, shrugging to
herself. “I just kind of got that from Cooper months ago and it stuck. Who knows what my dad
actually goes by?”

She might. If she looked into Cooper’s files better, the way her father wants her to. He’d said they
were the same and, shit, she almost wants to believe him. Months ago, she’d told Oliver how much
Noah had shaped her, fundamentally made her into the person she is. Is it crazy to want to believe
him when he says he’s not a bad guy?

“No,” Oliver answers and she realizes she’d voiced the question aloud. “He’s your dad.”

“There are about a million reasons why I shouldn’t let him sweet talk me into thinking he’s
changed,” she says quietly, looping the thread back around her finger and yanking at it. “The top of
which being that he threatened my friends’ lives.”

“You don’t owe him anything,” Oliver tells her, his fingers unwrapping the thread from hers. “But
you might owe it to yourself.”

He gives one firm yank and the thread breaks free. He holds his hand off the side of the bed and it
drops from his fingers, drifting slowly to the floor beneath. Felicity sighs, leaning against him.

“Right now, the only thing I owe myself is a nap,” she says. Oliver hums in agreement shifting under
her until they’re both laid back against the pillows again. His hand moves up and down her back,
shifting the material of the sweater as it goes.

They only have a few hours, so it’s hardly the “locked in her room and forgetting the rest of the
world” fantasy she’d been having earlier. But, for the moment, just having Oliver wrapped around
her in the warmth and comfort of her bed… it’s enough.

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She only allows herself a few hours of sleep before getting up. Oliver tries to fight her, but she
knows he wants to prep for the casino tonight as well. He’s already showered, so he leaves to deal
with making sure the club can manage itself for the night while she showers and changes out of last
night’s clothes.
Felicity doesn’t tell him what the last errand she needs to run is, but she doesn’t think it’ll go over well if she does. The stubbornness in the people surrounding her is astounding and if they need a little more nudging to make things right, then nudge she shall.

And apparently that nudging also means walking up six flights of stairs in her heeled boots. The things she does for the men in her life.

“What do you want?” John asks once he realizes who’s knocking and, okay. Rude.

“Is that any way to treat a girl who just walked up six flights of stairs?” She asks, hooking her thumb back down the hall towards the entry to the stairwell. God she is so grateful she found that cheap rent price on her townhouse because, honestly? Fuck walkups.

He tries, he really does, but she doesn’t miss the break in his unamused facade. She knew she was growing on him.

“No, it’s not,” he agrees, waving her inside. “Where are my manners? Come on in.”

She grins at him as she crosses the threshold. “Thank you.”

John closes the door behind her and gestures to the apartment at large by throwing his arms out with a “welcome.” He crosses to the small kitchen area where he pulls the fridge open as she surveys the small space. It’s cozy with warm yellow light filling every inch of it. The walls are covered in paintings and she studies them for a moment.

“Did you do these?” She asks, more interested than surprised at the thought that he may have. Instead of answering, he holds out an opened beer bottle towards her.

“You know, Felicity, Oliver and I don’t need a relationship counselor,” he tells her as she takes the drink from his hand. He settles onto the couch behind him and she gives him a look.

“That hasn’t been my experience,” she comments, continuing before he can argue with her, “We have a lead on Walter. I need you to come back and help us find him.”
She drops down onto his couch as she speaks, offering one of her patented ‘I’m-just-an-innocent-IT-girl-I-couldn’t-possibly’ looks. She can tell by the way that he looks at her that he isn’t buying it.

“Oliver put you up to this?” He asks.

“No,” Felicity says, turning and setting the untouched beer down as she cringes a little to herself. “He doesn’t even know I’m here.”

She adjusts on the couch, turning to face him fully and hoping to really drive home her point.

“Look, I know Oliver and I didn’t help you find your brother’s killer and that hurts, it sucks,” she starts. John reacts with a heavy breath, turning away from her a bit. “And I’m sorry, I really am. If I could go back and remake the choice I…”

She trails for a moment, thinking about the conversation with her father. Seeing him for the first time in so long. Would she trade that? Even if it’s not the reunion she wanted, would she really give it up?

“I honestly don’t know if I made the right choice or not,” she admits and John frowns at her. She figures it’s not the best apology she’s ever given, but it’s honest at least. “But, you gotta know that if it was your life on the line and not just your, very understandable, vendetta, we would be there for you. Oliver would be there for you. No hesitation.”

“I don’t want a partnership with those kind of qualifications, Felicity,” he tells her, sitting back against the arm of the couch behind him.

“Look, I know Oliver is religiously against admitting he’s wrong,” she tells him. He’s trying, but his stubbornness and pride are hard barriers to overcome. “The truth is, he needs you.”

She waits a moment as John seems to contemplate that point. Felicity doesn’t always understand the relationship between the two men, but she knows the importance of it. John was keeping Oliver grounded, keeping him from disappearing under all that leather, before she was. Losing John is just as much of a blow as losing Tommy for Oliver.

“Yeah,” he says after a moment, pushing himself up off of the couch. She watches, reading his
stance well enough to know the trip has been futile. “And when Oliver is ready to say that, he knows
where I live.”

He shrugs, leaning against the beam separating the living room area from the kitchen area. She
frowns, feeling herself deflate a little at the words, and stands from the couch herself. She sighs as
she moves towards the door, recognizing the dismissal for what it is.

“Sorry for bothering you,” she offers and John shakes his head.

“It’s no bother,” he tells her, though it doesn’t feel entirely truthful. “I hope you find him.”

Felicity unlocks the door and crosses the threshold once more, stopping to risk a glance back, hoping
he’ll somehow change his mind but knowing him well enough to know he won’t. It isn’t her that he
feels betrayed by. It isn’t her visit that he’s waiting on.

She pulls the door shut behind her.

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The dress she’d picked out earlier is bright red and floor length. She’s got a pair of silver, strappy
heels she almost never wears that she digs out of the closet in the guest room. Oliver is at the
foundry, getting his own gear together before he picks her up.

They’d agreed that she’d go in alone, but he’d be close by in case anything goes wrong. She’s
hoping he won’t be needed, but things don’t usually go their way so it’s good to have a backup plan.

The door opens and closes down the hall and Felicity finishes securing the last pin in the back of her
hair, holding her specially done curls to one side of her head where they fall over her shoulder. She
thinks she may be overcompensating a bit by going all out in an attempt not to be made.

She swipes a finger under her lower lip, catching any smudged lipstick, and heads down the hall
where she can hear Oliver fussing with his duffle bag.

“How do I look?” She asks, coming into the living room area. Oliver is standing in front of the
kitchen table, zipping the bag closed, and turns to her. It’s hard not to feel vindicated by the look on
his face and the way it takes him a moment to form words.

“You look amazing,” he gets out finally and she drops her head at the praise, fiddling with her hands.

“Thanks,” she says quietly. “But would you peg me as an underground gambler?”

The question sobers him and he takes a worried step towards her, his hand falling to her hip as an
easy comfort for them both. She clasps her hands behind herself to hide their shaking. It should be
easy; sloppily count cards and get taken to the manager’s office.

Except anything could go wrong.

“Everything is ready to go whenever you are,” he says gently, offering her an out without saying the
words. Allowing her to take her time. She doesn’t need time, though. She needs to find Walter.

“I’ll get my jacket,” she says instead of taking the out, turning and heading back down the hallway to
where she’d left the beaded, black jacket she keeps in the back of her closet for outings like this.
Well, not this exactly. But, you know, things that require something more formal than a cocktail
dress and a peacoat.

She is Donna Smoak’s daughter in some ways at least.

Oliver holds out a thin gold clutch for her when she comes back down the hall. She opens it to slip
her phone inside and runs her finger over the stack of bills already inside. He also holds out the bug
she’d asked him to pick up from the base in the palm of his hand. Felicity drops that inside as well.

“I borrowed that from Thea,” he explains of the small purse. “That should be enough money to make
the right people take notice.”

Felicity nods as he turns away to lift the black duffle bag off of the kitchen table and hitch it over his
shoulder. He gives her a look that lets her know he’s going to offer again to let her off the hook, so
she doesn’t give him the chance. Instead, she turns and moves towards the door, pulling it open for
him.
“Better not keep our bad guy waiting then.”

It’s not entirely shocking that the casino is only a few blocks away from the apartment where her base is located. If there’s something nefarious to be found in Starling City, one rarely needs to venture outside of the Glades to find it. There may be darkness all over the city, but something about the desolate segment of it makes easy pickings for men with too much money and no good intentions.

Oliver parks a street over and they walk down an alley towards where the entrance to the casino is. The building doesn’t look like much, a poorly kept warehouse that blends into the ones around it. Felicity knows better than to let it fool her.

“You ready?” Oliver asks as they come up next to a town car on the side of the building. If he sticks with her much longer, they’re both going to get made before they intend to.

“I think so,” she says, but even she can hear the tremor in her voice, the lack of conviction. This is always her trouble. Oliver is just as confident outside of his gear as he is inside of it, but she’s not. Without the leather and the tech, she’s just Felicity Smoak. That’s terrifying.

“Just to be clear,” she presses on more for herself than for him, “the plan is for me to get caught counting cards in an underground casino filled with hardened criminals.”

“So you can get a friendly warning from Alonzo,” Oliver finishes for her reassuringly, “and plant a bug on his office computer.”

“Right,” she nods and she feels him shift closer as they walk, his hand landing on her back just below where her jacket ends. “Which will hopefully lead us to Walter.”

She shoots a look back at Oliver and he nods once. Her stomach still churns uncomfortably as he slows behind her, reminding her that they need to part ways so that she can do this alone.

“That is assuming I get the friendly warning and not a bullet,” she admits, turning to face him as they both stop. Okay, so maybe she’s feeling kind of negative tonight. So, sue her.

“Hey,” he says softly, his fingers wrapping gently around her arm just below her elbow. “You don’t have to do this.”
Okay, admittedly, she might be being a little bit of a baby about this. She’s done way more dangerous things without having him by her side - she even has a scar or two to prove it. But, there was always something, right? Curtis on comms or the tech in her pocket. This time, it’s just her and her poker face. Ironic, considering she’ll be playing blackjack but, not really the point.

He’s wrong, though. This isn’t about her or her fear. It’s not about letting one shady business man go. It’s about Walter and the suddenly very real possibility that they might find him.

“Yes, I do,” she tells him. Her voice no longer shakes with the words, a sense of conviction settling in her for the moment.

“Okay,” Oliver says, recognizing it. “If anything happens, I’m right outside.”

His hand drags down her arm and she releases her white knuckled grip of the clutch she’s been holding with both hands to allow his palm to slid over hers.

“Okay,” she echoes, squeezing his fingers and taking comfort in the feeling of him squeezing back. After a second, she pulls her hand away from his and turns to round the building. She still has to wait for him to get in position in order to give her the password to get inside.

She idles at the corner of the building. She can see two armed guards at the front door. It’s nicer on this side of the building, with frosted glass windows set into large wooden doors. There’s a hooded porch-like structure that keeps the guards from the rain that is currently threatening her styled hair.

A town car pulls up and a man in a suit steps out. Felicity presses closer to the building.

“Password is snapdragon,” she hears Oliver say in her ear. Felicity nods a little to herself and finally rounds the building, stepping up onto the porch and offering the guards a steely gaze.

“Password,” the one guard instructs rather than asks. She thinks of Moira Queen staring down reporters outside of her daughter’s drug trial. She thinks of Donna Smoak taking the verbal abuse of drunken gamblers and never giving an inch.

“Snapdragon,” she says, surprising herself with the easy way she manages it, not fumbling over the
sylables in her nervous state. He waves his hand towards the door and the other guard opens it for her, granting her access.

Another door separates her from the party within, another nondescript guard standing at attention in front of it. She pulls her jacket off, draping it over her arm as he opens the door for her. Sound immediately hits her; soft music and the chatter of people with money to burn or cravings to satisfy.

A man waves her further within and she takes the prompting, searching for a table with an empty chair.

“What do you see?” Oliver asks and she spins in a half circle as she moves, overwhelmed by the amount of activity within the building.

“Six armed guards, two pit bosses and a floor man,” she starts, knowing what he’s asking. Her mind quickly goes off the rails as her nerves settle back in her stomach. “No slot machines. I mean, how do you call yourself a casino without any Lucky Sevens?”

She hadn’t really liked slot machines as a teenager. There was too much risk there, built into the machine itself. The programming isn’t designed to create winners. Poker is skill. Blackjack is statistics. But, slots? That’s all chance.

“Stay focused, please,” he instructs, which is good because he knows how she gets. Now is probably the worst time for her to go full Felicity. “I’ll be with you the entire time.”

“Thanks,” she says quietly, letting out a long breath and trying to control her anxiety. “It feels really good having you inside me.”

It takes a second but she cringes at the realization of what she’s said. What had she just been thinking about not going full Felicity?

“And by you, I mean your voice,” she tries, but that conjures up a whole other image that is, honestly, just as bad. “And by me, I mean my ear. I’m just gonna stop talking. Right now.”

There’s an empty chair up ahead and she beelines for it before someone else has the chance to sit down. She doesn’t miss the tense, choked tone of Oliver’s voice as he responds, his mind clearly having conjured up the same images hers had.
“That would be my preference.”

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It takes almost no time for a surly looking guy in a cheap suit to less than politely remove her from her chair. It’s not surprising considering she wasn’t trying to be sneaky. She was giggling and drinking champagne and making about as much of a fuss as she could each time she won.

Still, getting manhandled down an unfamiliar hallway flanked by large men with guns? Not the most enticing way to spend a Friday evening. At least her nerves give her an excuse to subtly give Oliver hints to where the office is, just in case.

Oliver wasn’t wrong. A friendly warning from Alonzo, or as friendly as she could hope for, where she prattled about what the term “eighty-sixing” means and he was ready to let her go. Well, keep all of her - by which she means Oliver’s - money and let her go. But, whatever, the bug was planted, mission accomplished.

Until he stops her at the door and has one of his men sweep her for bugs.

“You’re gonna be really upset when you meet my partner,” she warns him as he smashes the comm beneath his shiny, polished shoe.

It doesn’t take long to hear all hell break loose outside on the casino floor. Maybe she should be more nervous now, knowing that she’s been caught and hearing the chaos outside of the office. Maybe it says something about the person she’s becoming that knowing it’s Oliver, that he’s the one who always has her back and is coming for her, actually makes her feel better.

Alonzo’s hand suddenly wraps around the back of her neck, pulling her back towards his desk. She kicks out, catching him in the shin with her heel and dropping him to the floor. He comes back up with a gun pointed at her, pulled from a hiding spot in his desk. He aims at her chest and she tenses up.

She really hates guns.
Alonzo reaches forward and yanks her by the arm, pulling her up in front of him just as the door to his office is kicked open. His hand moves to grip her by juncture where he shoulder meets her neck, the barrel of the gun dangerously close to her temple. Oliver already has an arrow nocked, bow at the ready. He doesn’t say anything as he releases it, the sharp metal point of the arrow sinking into the dart board next to Alonzo’s head.

“I heard you never miss,” Alonzo says tauntingly.

“I don’t,” Oliver growls in response. The arrow beeps menacingly.

Felicity’s elbow in Alonzo’s gut is what makes him release her, doubling over with the sharp blow, but it’s the explosion that knocks him to the floor, hitting his head on his desk on the way down. She ducks out of the way as Oliver stalks towards them, lifting Alonzo easily by the lapels of his suit and pressing him up against the wall behind him.

“Where’s Walter Steele?” Oliver barks in his best growling Hood voice, not bothering with the modulator just for Alonzo.

“What?” Alonzo asks, words slurred from the blow to his head. “What are you talking about?”

“Six months ago you had him kidnapped,” Oliver shouts, refreshing Alonzo’s memory.

“It was just a job,” Alonzo says in a rush. Felicity listens, dawning horror settling over her. “I was given a name. I didn’t ask any questions.”

Oliver shifts his hand, gripping Alonzo’s throat now rather than his tailored suit. Felicity can’t make herself look away, dreading and still somehow transfixed by Alonzo’s next words.

“Last chance,” Oliver bites in a menacing whisper. “Where is he?”

“Below ground,” Alonzo huffs out and Felicity’s blood runs cold. Tears burn at the back of her eyes and her mouth goes dry.

“You’re lying!” Oliver argues, giving Alonzo a shake for good measure.
“I’m not,” Alonzo insists and Felicity moves towards them, hanging on the words she doesn’t want to hear, can’t let herself believe. She can hear her own shaky breath in between Alonzo’s sentences. “I delivered him and they killed him. I heard the gunshot. He’s dead.”

Oliver rears back and Felicity thinks he might fall, just for a moment, before his fist comes up in a hook that drops Alonzo to the floor. After a moment, he reaches up and pulls his hood down as he turns to face her behind him.

She wishes she wasn’t shaking, wishes there weren’t tears threatening the eyeliner she’d meticulously applied a few hours earlier. It makes her feel better to see her own horror, her own sadness and disappointment, her own feeling of failure reflected back at her in Oliver’s gaze.

Felicity sniffs, unable to stop the tears from beginning to fall. They don’t reach for each other, too lost in their own misery to be of any comfort to one another in this moment. Instead, they stay like that for a minute, up until they hear shuffling outside.

Oliver moves first, spotting a window to the alley outside and motioning her towards it as he pulls his hood back up. Felicity leaves the bug she’d planted in place. It might not lead them to Walter, but she can still use it to burn Alonzo’s operation to the ground. There’s probably no hope for her getting her jacket back at this point.

He helps her out the window, her dress snagging on a splintered bit of the frame. She tugs at it angrily, no longer caring about the money she’d spent or the nice material, but Oliver removes it gently and without tearing it.

Once they’re safely down the alley, cloaked in shadows, she spins towards him. Felicity presses herself against his chest, a desolate sob escaping her throat, rattling her chest. Oliver’s arms around her are tight, fortifying for the both of them, but it doesn’t fix it.

She doesn’t know that anything can.

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Oliver takes her home once he’s changed back into the casual outfit he’d been wearing initially, but she knows he’ll need to tell his family before the night is over. This isn’t her loss to feel maybe, not in the way it’s his or Moira’s or Thea’s. Still, she feels heavy and somehow empty at once.
The porch light is on, giving her the needed light to fit the shaking key in the lock and turn it. Neither of them reaches for the light switch once they’re inside, navigating through the dark instead. Felicity doesn’t realize she’s even made it to the bedroom until she’s sitting on the corner of the bed and unstrapping her heels.

“You should take a shower,” Oliver suggests, idling just inside the doorway. Her jacket is gone and her hair is wet from the rain outside. She must look like a shivering cat.

She nods silently, standing from the bed and looking to him again. Without her shoes, he’s got nearly a foot of height on her. There’s still some green greasepaint left in streaks on his skin. She reaches for him, stroking her thumb over the paint but not managing to do anything other than smudge it further.

“You should, too,” she says. It’s selfish, probably, the sudden and overwhelming need for him to touch her. For his soothing hands to move over her skin while he whispers pretty lies.

His eyes drift shut as her thumb strokes over the apple of his cheek again, his jaw cupped in her palm. Maybe she’s not the only one looking for some tender comfort, sugary falsities about a fair world and the good guys always winning.

He nods after a moment and Felicity drops her hand, spinning around for him. He moves warm fingers over the chilled skin revealed by the back of her dress before reaching the zipper. It moves slowly downwards until reaching the catch and Oliver reaches back up, undoing the clasp at her neck as she pulls the pins from her hair.

The dress pools at her feet, silk material sliding easily over her hips, and she steps around it. Her underwear beneath is a matching bright red and she doesn’t think she imagines the way Oliver’s eyes darken as he spots the nearly nonexistent lace that does nothing to cover her ass.

He steps towards her, wrapping his arm around her waist to pull her up against him. The brown leather of his jacket is cold against her bare chest and she represses a shiver as his mouth descends on hers. Felicity forces enough space between them to work the zipper of the jacket down and push it from his shoulders.

He leads them backwards in the direction of the bathroom as she pushes his shirt upwards, urging him to remove it. He drops it to the floor just outside of the bathroom.
Inside, he manages to find the light switch without letting go of her. He drops to his knees in front of her, leaving gentle, open mouthed kisses in a trail down her stomach. He leaves a final kiss just below her belly button before stopping suddenly.

Oliver presses his face into her stomach, his arms wrapping around her back. Felicity squeezes her eyes closed and buries her fingers in his hair. She feels the shuddering breath he takes as it shakes his lungs and vibrates against her.

She steps away from him after a moment, turning to turn on the hot water in the shower. She can hear him undoing his belt, stepping out of his shoes and jeans. His fingers on her hips startle her as he eases her underwear down until they can fall to the floor.

The water is almost painfully hot when she steps under the spray, but it soothes her chilled skin. Oliver presses in behind her, arm wrapped around her stomach as he presses soft kisses into her shoulder.

She turns them, easing Oliver under the water instead. She reaches around him for the washcloth hanging off the faucet as the water flattens his hair. With gentle strokes, Felicity wipes the leftover streaks of green from around his eyes. Oliver’s hands rest on her hips, his fingers tightening against her skin as she washes his face.

Once she’s satisfied with the job she’s done, Oliver steps forward so he’s no longer directly under the water and takes the cloth from her. She closes her eyes for him as he cleans the smudged eyeliner and mascara from them.

Blindly, her fingers stroke over his chest and the lines of his stomach, seeking out the now familiar scar tissue. His stomach muscles bunch and move under her ministrations. Oliver surprises her, tossing the washcloth to the floor of the shower and taking her face in both of his hands before kissing her.

“Thank you for being here,” he says quietly as he pulls away just a touch. His hands release her jaw, instead trailing in dangerously slow movements down her body.

She thinks about repeating the sentiment or thanking him for letting her be here. Felicity finds herself suddenly overwhelmed with affection for him, her chest tight with the vastness of it. He could have closed her out, grieved on his own or with his family. Instead, he’s here, touching her like she’s a precious lifeline. Or maybe she’s projecting.
Either way, the chances of her managing to articulate all of it well enough right now seems nearly impossible.

She presses up on her toes to kiss him and decides to show him instead.

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Once they’ve finished their shower, there’s nothing to delay the conversation Oliver needs to have. He doesn’t ask her to go with him and Felicity doesn’t offer. Instead she wraps herself in her robe and climbs under her comforter with all the lights off as he dresses and leaves.

She stays like that for a long time, cold again now that her hair is drying and Oliver is no longer pressed against her under the hot water. She’s too numb to cry, or if she does she doesn’t notice before falling into a short, awful sleep. The nightmares her mind conjures involve gunshots and slot machines and the very vivid image of bloody and injured loved ones.

It’s enough to unsettle her to the point of no longer being tired. Her heart rattles anxiously against her chest and she wishes Oliver was back. Even if it’s a selfish thought, she wonders why he isn’t yet.

There’s a text typed out on her phone, asking if he’s coming back and ready to be sent, but she stops herself. If she’s handling Walter’s death this poorly, who knows how his mother and sister must be reacting. Instead, she walks out to the kitchen and retrieves her tablet, wrapping herself up in the purple knit on the back of the couch.

The tablet glows eerily in the dark house, illuminating her face with its pale light. The information on Noah that Cooper had given her is still on a drive stashed in the Base, but there’s a copy of the unencrypted files on her tablet.

Maybe it’s the thought of the Queen family once again losing a patriarch, or maybe it’s the sudden intense need for some good news, but she wants to be convinced of her father’s goodness. There’s a voice in the back of her head, one that sounds much like her mother, warning against such naïveté. This would be the one case where Donna Smoak discouraged her to be blindly trusting.

Felicity owes her mother a call, probably, before she moves in any direction with Noah. But, she figures she knows what the woman will say and right now she doesn’t want to hear it. Right now she wants to believe the world is good, that the bad guy will always lose and the good guys never get hurt.
It’s about an hour later when her phone chirps from where she’d left it on the kitchen counter. Despite looking through the files, she still doesn’t have a feeling one way or the other on her father. She leaves the tablet and the blanket on the couch as she moves to check her phone, surprised by the text from Oliver asking her to meet him at the foundry.

Finally she turns the bedroom light on to trade her robe for a sweater and jeans. She feels confident enough in her ability to drive though so she makes it to the club in good time. It’s late enough that she doesn’t have to battle much traffic to get there.

His bike is in the alley, but she figures he must have left it there when all the lights are off inside. She flips the breaker, illuminating the basement and startles at the sight of him sitting on the floor in full gear with his hood pulled down. His legs are bowed, bent at the knee and pulled up just enough that the soles of his feet press together.

“I’ve been sitting in the dark all night, too,” she admits, her nerves getting the better of her when Oliver doesn’t say anything, doesn’t move. “All these months I kept thinking if I could find a clue, get a lead on him… Guess it wouldn’t have mattered.”

She sets her small purse down on one of the tables and waits on him. Oliver blinks a few times, his jaw works, but he’s still silent. It’s unsettling her.

“I can’t imagine what your family’s going through,” she says leadingly instead, hoping he’ll tell her what happened. He certainly wasn’t wearing his gear when he left her to go talk to his family. He tilts his head and she can see him trying to form words, to tell her whatever is happening.

“Walter’s alive,” he says finally and Felicity freezes. Is this denial? It sure set in late. She knows only fragments of Oliver’s experiences, but she can read that he’s not a man unfamiliar with death. So, why refuse to accept this? Except he seems so sure.

“What?” She asks. “But, Alonzo said he was-”

“I need you to pull up Malcolm Merlyn’s phone records,” Oliver instructs, cutting her off. Felicity realizes with sudden concern that he hasn’t looked at her once since she came in, not even a cursory glance. “He made a call from his office to wherever Walter is being kept at ten-thirty p.m.”

“Malcolm Merlyn?” she echoes, dread forming a weight in her stomach. It’s outweighed by her need
for answers. “Tommy’s father? Why would he kidnap Walter?”

“Felicity,” he says, the syllables of her name falling in a broken plea from his lips that creates a small fissure in her heart. He finally looks up at her and he doesn’t need to say it. She moves for the computers.

The phone records for the city are already pulled up, running in the background of her system. With the exact time, it takes her seconds to pull the information from the call up on the screen.

“LUDs show he made a call to a tenement complex located in Bludhaven,” she reads off, looking over at him. Oliver is up from the floor in a flash, coming over to join her at the computer.

“Can you pull up a satellite view?” He asks, standing at her shoulder.

“Uh, yeah,” she nods, sending the address through the satellite she’s hacked into. It zones in on the tenement, highlighting the warm bodies moving around outside of it in red boxes. “That’s a lot of security for low-income housing. There’s two guards stationed at all access points.”

“There’s just one on the roof,” Oliver points out.

“Exactly,” Felicity agrees. “There’s no other buildings in that area. If you want to get onto the roof, you’re going to have to jump off of something.”

“I’ve got something,” he growls in response.

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There are a lot of things about Oliver Queen that Felicity may never understand. How he survived even half of the altercations that are mapped in the scars across his body. The duality of the justice obsessed vigilante and the clueless, unobservant rich boy. How and why he knows someone with a small plane willing to allow him to parachute out of it over a random tenement in Bludhaven.

She doesn’t go with him, preferring to play tactical support using the satellite. Also, she might have gotten better about heights, but she’s not at the level of jumping out of a plane. Either way, he’s right.
Walter Steele is alive and probably a little dehydrated and underfed, but otherwise fine.

“I’ve got him,” Oliver says over the comms and Felicity’s entire body sags back against the chair. “Call an ambulance to meet us.”

Oliver gives her an address where he intends to leave Walter and Felicity sends an emergency alert through the system. He stops by the foundry to change, but he needs to be at the house with his family when they get the call about Walter being checked into Starling General.

“I’ll meet you there,” she promises and Oliver grips her hand for a moment longer before nodding and heading out.

She drops back into the computer chair once he’s gone, trying to figure out why she doesn’t feel entirely better. The war may still be on, but they won this battle. Walter is alive and he’s going home. Malcolm Merlyn clearly had something to do with his kidnapping, along with Moira, which only leaves about a billion more questions than they’d had before, but…

This is a win. So, why doesn’t she feel like it is?

There’s an obvious answer she’s overlooking. Walter is going home, solving one patriarch problem she’d been dealing with. But it’s only one more reminder that she needs to decide what to do about her own father. The answer should be obvious. Noah is not just her father, he’s a criminal who left her without a word to avoid having to face consequences for his actions. He kidnapped Curtis, he broke Cooper out of the NSA and tried to blackmail her.

And yet, she’s hesitating.

She spends too long stewing over it, surely the Queens have gotten the call about Walter’s admission to Starling General by now. Felicity stumbles out of the computer chair, grabbing her purse from where she’d left it and heading for the door.

It takes her about twenty minutes to get from the club to the hospital and she stops in the gift shop to buy a bouquet of flowers for Walter’s room. She doesn’t know what gift says “glad you’re not being held captive by an evil villain-slash-family friend anymore,” but she’s pretty sure Walter wouldn’t appreciate a stuffed penguin.
Still, she figures she somehow only makes it to the hospital room shortly after the Queen family. Thea is wrapped up in Walter’s arms and Moira is staring at him like she needs to memorize his features. Oliver is standing at the end of the bed and she feels suddenly like an intruder.

“This is totally a family thing, isn’t it?” She asks, trying to laugh off her own discomfort. It occurs to her that Walter wouldn’t know about her relationship with his stepson. Moira and Thea shift to face her, but it’s the gentle, appreciative look on Walter’s face that has her caught in her tracks.

“Oh, Felicity,” Moira says, emotions at Walter’s return coloring her voice. “Walter, this is-”

“Ms. Smoak, yes,” Walter nods. “She’s a friend of mine.”

Moira turns back to Walter, frowning, as Oliver crosses the room to join her at the door, his hand pressing against the small of her back. He offers her a grateful look and she can’t begin to imagine the emotional rollercoaster he must be going through. She presses against him just a bit, but it’s enough for Walter’s eyes to widen in understanding.

“And, evidently, a friend of Oliver’s as well,” he offers somewhat glibly and Felicity feels her cheeks go warm. He doesn’t linger on it, though, instead giving her a nod. “It’s good to see you.”

“You, too,” she smiles before looking between Moira and Thea. “Uh, I’ll let you guys get back to your hugging.”

The Queen women don’t hesitate, throwing themselves back into Walter’s embrace. She sets the vase of flowers on the table next to the door. Oliver turns to her as she turns back, studying her and she knows if she gives him the opportunity he’ll read her like a book. She ducks her head and presses into his embrace, feeling better at the way his arms tighten around her.

“Oliver,” Moira says softly and her voice pulls them both out of the embrace. She’s holding her hand out, reaching for him. Oliver hesitates just for a moment before detangling his arm from around Felicity to take his mother’s hand. She tugs gently, pulling him towards the rest of the family and Oliver brings Felicity along with him. The feeling of intrusion amplifies, but she won’t leave Oliver in this moment.

“We’re all together again,” Moira declares. “Everything’s gonna be alright.”
Felicity’s chest tightens and Oliver’s fingers flex against her hip. He looks over at his mother and says nothing.

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They spend longer in the small hospital room than Felicity initially expected to, but Oliver’s arm around her never lessens and she’s not going to pull away until she doesn’t think he needs the backup anymore. It’s Oliver who eventually makes excuses for them, telling his mother that he will be back tomorrow to help however Walter needs.

If Moira catches the sharp way he says it, she doesn’t let it show.

He pulls the door open, letting Felicity leave through it first. She takes a deep breath as she crosses the threshold into the hallway, feeling more exhausted by the time spent with the Queen family than she’s ever felt after a night in the field. She doesn’t miss the matching intake of breath from Oliver behind her.

“That was…,” she starts, searching for the words. Before she can find them, someone calls Oliver’s name from behind them and she spins to face the source. Felicity feels Oliver tense up next to her, recognizing the voice, and she grips his forearm anxiously.

“Ah, what a miracle,” Malcolm Merlyn says, taking quick steps to join them. Oliver composes himself and finally turns to face the older man, Felicity’s hold switching to his other arm as he turns. “How’s Walter?”

When neither of them answer right away, Malcolm presses on, “The police are saying that he was rescued by the vigilante.”

“Yes, he was,” Oliver nods. If it weren’t for her hand still squeezing his arm and her knowledge of both Oliver’s and Malcolm’s activities, she might miss the bite in his voice.

“Has he said anything about his ordeal?” Malcolm questions, frowning at them. His gaze barely moves to Felicity and she wouldn’t be surprised if he doesn’t recognize her. He only cares about the information Oliver may be able to provide. “Was he able to identify any of his captors?”

“No,” Oliver says softly, shaking his head and Malcolm hums in consideration.
“That’s too bad,” he says finally.

“They’ll get what’s coming to them,” Oliver assures him and Felicity averts her gaze to her shoes, unsure she can continue to stare at the man in front of them without giving them both away with her disgust. Even Malcolm doesn’t completely miss the threat in Oliver’s words. “I’m just glad that my family is back together.”

“We all are,” Malcolm agrees and Felicity looks back up at him, biting down on her tongue and working overtime to utilize her filter for once in her life. As much as she’d like to tell Malcolm Merlyn exactly what she thinks of him, they need the whole story. And they need to keep their own secrets to get it.

“We should go,” she says instead, looking over to Oliver and squeezing his wrist. Malcolm seems to notice her for the first time. She ignores his surveying look, focusing on Oliver instead. Oliver nods, excusing them from the conversation with Malcolm.

They head down the hall, away from the man, rounding two corners and reaching the elevator bay. Felicity steps forward, pressing the call button three times in quick succession.

“I think it’s time I pay Dig a visit,” Oliver admits and Felicity nods. John had been the first one to suspect Moira of some sort of wrongdoing. Which means Oliver may owe him more than one apology.

They wait in silence as the elevator moves, the lights above tracking each floor it reaches. The car is empty when it reaches them and they step inside.

“Malcolm Merlyn kidnapped Walter,” Oliver says finally. “And whatever he has planned, it’s something terrible.”

It’s not new information, but it’s sobering all the same. It was one thing to have a phone call, a possible location. But they found Walter and Malcolm had had the gall to stand in front of them and feign concern over his well being.

Felicity presses the button for the first floor and the elevator doors slide shut.

“Then let’s take the son of a bitch down.”
Chapter End Notes

Only two more chapters to go ahhh!!

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Chapter Summary

An unknown assailant causes a massacre at UNIDAC Industries. Oliver and John work to pry Moira's secrets out of her. Felicity suggests there may be otherwise of getting the information they need.

Takes place during 1.22 "Darkness on the Edge of Town".

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Rain falls in heavy plops against the widows, the roof, filling the otherwise quiet room. It doesn’t feel like it’s stopped raining since before they’d left for the casino last night, the sky a murky gray where she can see it through the curtains. Not that the precipitation outside is keeping much of Felicity’s focus as Oliver hovers over her on the bed, weight held just above her by his forearms bracketing her head.

“I love you,” he murmurs just before his nose brushes hers softly, his lips descending to cover her own in a slow, languid kiss. Felicity drags her fingers over his jaw, reveling in the scratch of his stubble over the pads of her fingers.

She’s almost uncomfortably warm, wrapped up in both him and the blankets of their now shared bed. They’d nearly crawled into it last night, knock down tired from the events of the evening. Oliver had wrapped himself around her, clinging to her like a lifeline, and she hadn’t managed to fall asleep until she knew he had.

“I love you,” she echoes back once he pulls away, her fingers stroking over his cheek. She’s still startled by how easily the words fall from her lips, how openly they’ve both managed to say them despite all of their fears and trauma.

Oliver dips forward again, skimming his jaw against her cheek to press a kiss to the shell of her ear, her earlobe, trailing down her neck. His beard scrapes deliciously against her skin as his mouth moves down the column of her throat. She lifts one of her legs, hooking it over his waist where he’s cradled between her thighs.

She knows what this is, what they’re both doing.
She gasps as he rocks against her, the ridge of his hardening erection brushing against her through the underwear she’d worn to bed after ridding herself of the nearly non-existent red thong she’d worn to the casino with the hope that they’d find time for him to strip it off of her later. Preferably, slowly and followed by the press of his mouth, without death hanging heavily over their heads.

But then the news about Walter had happened, followed by the other news about Walter and… well, there were more important things to deal with. Oliver moves one arm, resting all of his weight on the other to keep from crushing her, and places his hand on her waist. His thumb strokes over the skin between her tank top and the waistband of her underwear, bringing her mind back to the present. His palm begins to move upwards, dragging the tank top up with it.

She moves her hands down to his shoulders, gripping them for leverage as she rolls her hips against his. His mouth falls hot and open against the pulse in her neck, teeth scraping against her skin before his tongue darts out to taste her.

It’s just a distraction, she knows. A delay of the inevitable. As long as they’re here, in this moment, safe in the house they now share, then everything can fade away. The reality that their world has just become a lot more complicated than either of them had been prepared to deal with. Oliver’s mother, Felicity’s father, Malcolm Merlyn.

Oliver had gone and seen John last night, after the hospital, and Felicity had waited anxiously for him to return. His apology must have gone well, because he didn’t tell her what they’d said to each other, but John had agreed to meet them at the foundry the next morning. A meeting they were almost certain to be late for.

He sits up, putting more room between them to allow Felicity to sit up. She follows his lead, feeling his hand join the other against her skin beneath her tank top before he lifts it over her head. Oliver ducks his head again, swiping his tongue over one of her exposed nipples before taking it fully into his mouth. Felicity sighs, curling her fingers in his hair and dipping forward to press a kiss to his head.

“Oliver,” she breathes, without anything else to say.

They can delay it as long as they want to, pretend it doesn’t exist as long as they’re safe within these four walls, but it can’t last. Eventually, they’ll have to leave and be honest with themselves about what’s changed, about how out of their depths they’ve really found themselves.

Oliver switches his attentions to her other breast and Felicity scratches her nails against the back of his head gently. The truth is, after this, it’ll be hard to say when they’ll even have a moment to
breathe, let alone revel in each other the way they’re long overdue for. They have no idea what kind of danger they’re going to be wading their way into and Oliver could…

She stops the morbid thought abruptly, tugging at Oliver’s hair and pulling his mouth back to hers. A hot wave of affection towards him, mixed with fear for him, rushes through her chest and he must sense the change, his fingers coming up to cup her jaw as he lingers in the kiss for a moment longer before pulling away.

She doesn’t want him to see her fear, doesn’t need to add it to his conscious right now, but it’s useless trying to hide it. Oliver studies her for a moment and she waits for the moment to shatter, for him to realize that they need to put the city first and they’re only wasting time.

She braces herself for him to pull away.

He surprises her instead, tilting her head just slightly towards the gray light managing to break through the curtains and saying gently, “You are so beautiful.”

Felicity tugs him towards her again, easing them back against the pillows before her emotions can turn, embarrassingly, to tears in the middle of their foreplay. Oliver doesn’t need to be told twice, happy to take her cue. His hands move down, playing at the waistband of her underwear.

One hand moves further south, stroking her slowly through the cotton fabric and Felicity lets out a quiet sound of impatience. She wiggles her hips, encouraging him to create a little more friction, to disregard the item of clothing all together.

“I’m trying to go slow,” he chides, sounding far too smug for her liking.

“I don’t want slow,” she argues quietly, taking hold of his jaw with both of her hands this time. “I want you.”

He holds her gaze for a heavy moment, dark and heated and finally understanding. When he kisses her again it’s not soft and slow. It’s a messy, hot, open-mouthed thing that leaves her whining into his mouth with need for something more.

His fingers slip past the band of her underwear, stroking gently through her folds. Felicity moans against him, nipping at his lip as he pulls back from her. His fingers move upwards, finding her most
sensitive area and moving against her in slow circles. She huffs in annoyance, rocking her hips into his hand.

“Oliver,” she pouts, aware of how she sounds, panting against him and pleading for more. “Please.”

He slips two fingers past her folds and Felicity would be more embarrassed by how wet and wanting she is if he hadn’t been teasing her since they’d woken up. The heel of his hand presses against her clit, keeping pressure against it but refusing her any friction as his fingers move inside of her.

Once she’s panting and shifting her hips restlessly underneath him, Oliver replaces the pressure of his palm with his thumb, finally creating friction where she needs it.

“Is this what you want?” He asks in a gruff whisper, his head dipping down next to her ear. Felicity moans and grips his shoulders, her nails digging into the skin. His hand goes still suddenly as he nips at her ear, his tongue coming out to soothe it. “Talk to me, Felicity. Tell me what you want.”

“I want,” she bites out, shifting against him and trying to create the release she needs, teetering so close to the edge. Her whole body flushes, hot with the need to come apart. “I need to come, Oliver, please.”

The words end with a sharp gasp as Oliver moves against her suddenly, dropping his head further to suck on her neck just below her jaw. She cries out quietly when the orgasm finally hits her, rippling through her muscles and making her buck up against his hand. He kisses her neck softly now as he works her through it, letting her come down from it.

He sits up between her legs as he removes his fingers from her underwear. Felicity is still splayed out on the bed, one arm draped above her head now that she no longer has his shoulders to hold onto, panting as her body settles. Oliver, very deliberately, watches her as he lifts his slick fingers to his mouth and licks them clean.

“So,” he starts, smirking down at her. “What do you want now?”

Felicity presses up onto her elbows and looks him over, naked torso and those damned, evil sweatpants. She sits up fully, pushing up onto her knees and looping her arms around his neck. Oliver seems surprised by the gentle move, but she uses the leverage and his disarmed state to flip their positions and push him back into the pillows.
“For starters,” she says, fingers bunching in the waistband of his sweatpants as she leans down to nip at the sharp edge of his jaw in retaliation, “I want you to lose these pants.”

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Once they’re down in the foundry, it’s back to business. John has Felicity pulling up the files from his surveillance of Moira. He’s clearly been doing his own job of things while he had pulled away from the team. All for the best, she supposes, now that his suspicions about Moira have actually been confirmed.

“I’ve been watching your mother for days now, Oliver, and nothing,” he says, leaning back against one of the metal tables behind her. Felicity’s focus is on the entirely innocuous surveillance photos of the Queen matriarch as he pushes off of the table and crosses around her, leaning on the desk next to her. “She goes to work, she comes home. Occasionally, she goes out to dinner. She seems to particularly like the salmon tartare at Table Salt.”

John glances back towards Oliver, seated a few feet behind them, and Felicity resists the urge to do the same. She knows she won’t like whatever expression she finds there, however he’s schooled his features to look unaffected. The broken, betrayed feeling he can’t hide from her.

“I’m linked into her home and office phone,” she says instead, looking over at the call log she’s been working her way through. “Nothing out of the ordinary. No mention of Walter’s abduction or the Undertaking. Just a few innocuous calls to Malcolm Merlyn.”

She says the last part with a tone of disbelief as she spins in her chair to face Oliver now. In her own watching of Moira and, by extension, Merlyn, all she’s managed to come up with is that they have a strange relationship. Chuminess turns to intensity and back in no time flat during their conversations, but it’s always subtle. No word choices or usage that would give her any clues, tip off anyone who might hear the conversation.

Oliver is toying with his bow, held in his lap as he listens to their break down. He looks off into the foundry, unseeing, and takes in what she’s told him. She sees a twist in his lips, dark humor that flickers and fades back into the emotionless state he’s trying to cultivate for them. She wishes he didn’t feel the need to hide.

“Why wouldn’t she call him?” He asks, turning the dark smirk on Felicity as he shakes his head. “They’re old friends. We’re all old friends.”
His grip tightens on his bow, jaw working in a familiar way, and Felicity pushes herself out of her chair on instinct. She doesn’t know what to do. There’s no making it better and she resists the urge to reach out to him, fidgeting with her hands as she crosses towards him. He notices the movement, following her with his eyes as she comes close.

“Are you okay?” She asks quietly, flinching as soon as the words are out. She knows the answer, but she doesn’t know what else to ask. How else to remind him that he’s human and he doesn’t need to hide that from anyone in this room.

“My mom and my best friend’s dad are involved in a conspiracy that may have dire consequences for the city and I’m pretty sure they murdered my father,” he says, in an excellent example of nutshelling with a side of attitude that, frankly, she can’t blame him for right now. “I’m not planning on using the word ‘okay’ again any time soon.”

She can’t stop the instinct this time, her hand falling over his where it grips the staff of his bow. Oliver’s shoulders move, just enough that she sees a bit of the tension fade. John crosses the room again to join them. They all move around each other like moving parts in a machine, centered around the man whose entire world has shifted beneath his feet.

“Listen, all we know for sure is that Malcolm and your mother are planning something for the Glades,” John summarizes and Felicity frowns, trying to remember when they all decided to take up nutshelling as their main form of communication.

“And that Walter and I were getting too close to it,” she tacks on anyway, “That’s why they had him kidnapped.”

“We have to find out what this Undertaking is,” John continues.

Oliver’s stare has gone a little bland again, but he sits up straighter. Her hand falls away from his as he tugs the bow towards himself.

“I’ve gotta ask her,” he says, surprising Felicity. He pushes up off of the stool he’d been perched on, flipping the bow in his hand and moving across the room to return it to where he’d picked it up from. Felicity follows after him, looking to John for backup.

“Whoa, no, the last time the Vigilante paid your mom a visit, you got shot and I got to play doctor with you,” she reminds him, before the words she’s just said, in mixed company no less, sink in. She
squeezes her eyes shut, forcing away images of this morning, and presses her hand to her forehead.
“Ugh, my brain thinks of the worst way to say things.”

“This time it’ll just be me asking,” Oliver assures her, unfazed by her inability to properly use the English language. “Friendly mother-son chat.”

Except the way he says it, and the return of that dark smirk, make her feel it’ll be anything but.

“Oliver, no offense, but after everything we’ve learned over the last few days - which, yes, I realize is almost nothing in terms of actual substance - what makes you think she’s going to tell you anything?” She asks, reaching forward to wrap her fingers around his forearm, holding him in place. She’d never particularly thought Moira Queen seemed like a forthcoming and open person, but now? God, they are in so far over their heads.

He hesitates and Felicity knows it’s because he doesn’t have an answer. He shakes her grip from his arm, but uses the moment to squeeze her fingers gently with his own before he pulls away.

“I have to be at the mansion,” he explains, needlessly, as he heads for the stairs. “Walter’s coming home.”

Felicity watches him climb them before turning back to John, hoping for some solidarity. The look on his face as he watches Oliver leave is enough. She sighs, moving back towards her chair and settling heavily into it. Mindlessly, she pulls up the feed for the news channel she has running almost constantly and unmutes it.

“A break in at UNIDAC Industries took a grave turn early this morning, ending in the deaths of multiple personnel,” the familiar anchor announces, pulling Felicity’s focus. She waves, getting John’s attention, and he joins her at the monitors. “Details about the victims have not been released yet, but a representative for UNIDAC says a comment is forthcoming. We’ll keep you updated as more details about this massacre arise.”

John straightens, crossing his arms over his chest as the anchor moves on to the next news story. Felicity decreases the volume and spins in her chair to face him.

“A few months ago, Queen Consolidated acquired UNIDAC at an auction,” she reminds him, because it’d been a big night and, if memory serves, he’d been shot and poisoned by the man who killed his brother on the same evening. So, if he’s forgotten the name of the company, she’d
“You think it’s connected?” He asks, reading her well enough by now. Felicity frowns, biting down on her lip and spinning back towards the monitors. The news has shifted to a commercial break now.

“There are no coincidences in this town.”

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Walking into work is like entering another dimension. One where no one else has felt the world shift, no one else knows that the woman they work for - the family legacy that signs their paycheck - is tainted with more than just shady deals and probably some tax evasion. Her stomach churns as she makes her way to her office, the one Walter had basically gifted her so she could continue her search for his wife’s dirty secrets.

It feels like ages ago that he’d shown her into the room, speaking in veiled words about the notebook he wanted her to decode. She stands in the middle of the room for a minute, trying to remember what normal felt like. Her eyes drift shut and she lets her memory take her back to her safe, warm bed, her boyfriend hovering over her. It was stupid to feel safe and normal in that moment, when things were so unequivocally not safe and normal, but it steadies her for a moment.

Then her phone pings with an email informing her a ticket has been assigned to her queue and she gets to work.

It almost seems trite going back to her daily work, trying to restore files for clumsy users or talk upper level workers through removing viruses from their personal computers, with everything crumbling around her. She doesn’t know how Oliver does it, just manages to press on and pretend for his family and friends.

Maybe she should have offered to go with him to the house, but he seemed determined to speak with Moira and Felicity can’t keep dodging work, as much as it feels ridiculous. A return to something normal is a nice breather, at least.

Curtis finds her in her office not long before she’s planning on knocking off for the day. She needs to head back to Verdant and check in on whether or not Oliver got anything from his mother. Curtis knocks at the frosted doors, pushing them open enough to see if she’s inside.
“Hey,” he greets. “Long time, no see.”

“Yeah,” she frowns, realizing she hasn’t seen him since the night before she and Oliver had infiltrated the casino. She finishes, lamely, “It’s been busy.”

“I heard Walter Steele was saved by the vigilante,” he comments and Felicity nods, humming in assent rather than offering any details. “Six months is kind of a long time to keep someone hostage without making any demands. It’s strange that they kept him alive.”

It’s a morbid thought, sure, but it’s not wrong.

“Yeah,” she agrees. “Very strange.”

Unless, your spouse knows the kidnapper and is conspiring with them. She resists the urge to bury her face in her hands and never come up again. She knows Curtis is doing his best to ask questions without asking questions, but she’s not ready to go into the details just yet. Especially in a building owned by the aforementioned spouse.

“How did things go with Paul?” She asks, instead, remembering that he had been supposed to meet up with his estranged husband. “Did you guys work it out?”

“I wouldn’t call it worked out, per say,” he shrugs. “But working on it, sure.”

“That’s good,” she nods. “I’m glad.”

“Speaking of,” he says in a leading way that makes her think they absolutely were not speaking of, “Whatever happened with the Benefactor? Did you hear from him again?”

Felicity fidgets with the things strewn across her desk. She picks up her red pen and drops it into the pencil cup in between her monitors, straightens out her keyboard and mouse. The reminder of her father creates a weight in her stomach as she remembers that she doesn’t have a plan for that yet, either.

“I haven’t been totally honest with you,” she starts, clasping her hands on the desk in front of her to
stop her restless fingers. “But, I need you to know that it’s only because I’ve been dealing with so much and the emotional weight of everything was so heavy that I just… I didn’t know how yet.”

“Okay, you’ve got me sufficiently worried,” Curtis says, leaning forward as a crease forms between his brows. “Felicity, just tell me what’s going on.”

“Well, it turns out that the guy who’s been bankrolling all of this… mass amount of suck we’ve been dealing with over the past few months,” she starts, throwing her hands out a little wider than she means to, “is actually my father.”

“I’m sorry,” he says, leaning back in his chair and closing his eyes for a moment, before his face scrunches up in confusion. “What?”

“Yep,” she nods grimly, popping the P. “Noah Kuttler, making his bid for father of the year.”

“How did you find out?” Curtis asks, leaning forward again. His confusion has turned towards concern.

“He left me a message in the data dump I managed to salvage from his computer the night he trapped us,” she explains, flinching because it’s another thing she hadn’t told him. So much for keeping less secrets. “He wants to convince me that he’s not a quote-unquote bad guy.”

Curtis lets out a long, low whistle. He settles back into his chair across from her again, letting what she’s told him sink in. Felicity waits, adjusting her keyboard again.

“What are you gonna do?” He asks eventually, which was not really the response she was expecting.

“What do you mean?” She frowns. “Curtis this is the same guy who exploited Cooper, kidnapped you and Paul, threatened his life, and blackmailed you-”

“Look, I’m not saying he’s my favorite person, okay?” He cuts her off, holding his hands up defensively. She senses a but coming and right on cue, he continues a little slowly. “But, he’s still your dad.”
Felicity sighs, leaning back into her chair heavily and pouting. She wishes people would stop saying that.

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“What do you mean she blew you off?” She asks, settling into her computer chair in the foundry and twisting it to look at Oliver where he’s leaning back against one of the tables.

“Just that,” he huffs, frustrated at not being able to get any answers out of his mother. “She spooked over something on the news and ran out of the house before I could even get more than a few words out.”

“Spooked?” She frowns, glancing over at John. He’s frowning over at Oliver. “Over what?”

“There was a story about a massacre at UNIDAC early this morning,” he recalls, frowning at the memory. Felicity is already spinning around in her chair. “A couple scientists and security guards died.”

She’s already pulling up an article about the massacre. More details have come out since she’d left for work this morning, but she hadn’t had the mental capacity to keep up with it along with everything else she’s been juggling.

“Six scientists and three security guards, to be exact,” she reads aloud, skimming through the article she’s pulled up. “Apparently, the hot ticket name is Brion Markov. He was a seismologist.”

“Can you dig up whatever you can find on Markov and UNIDAC Industries?” He asks and she nods.

“Well, we know that Queen Consolidated acquired them seven months ago,” she comments off-handedly, glancing over at Oliver. “That’s when we met.”

He gives her a soft smile and shakes his head, “I need information about what I don’t know.”

“I will work on it,” she assures him, turning back to the computer. Oliver nods once and she feels his
focus shift away from her.

“I need to have another go at talking to my mother,” he says, addressing John behind her now. Felicity frowns, spinning in her chair again to face them fully. “But I don’t think just asking is going to yield the results we need in the time frame we have.”

“What are you thinking?” John asks, folding his arms over his chest.

“I’m thinking it might be time for the Hood to crash our friendly mother-son chat,” Oliver explains in a way that is not an explanation at all. Felicity glances over to John and thinks maybe she’s the only one his subtlety hasn’t completely missed.

“What does that mean?” She asks with a frown.

“It means Dig is gonna put on the Hood and kidnap my mother and I,” he offers, looking over at her. Felicity pushes herself out of her chair, already shaking her head. “My mom is not a monster. If she thinks I’m the one in danger, she’ll tell us what we need to know.”

“I’m sorry, this doesn’t scream ‘bad idea’ to you?” She asks, whipping around to look at John who shrugs. “The mansion is fortified better than most federal buildings by personnel you hired yourself. Not to mention, I would prefer that Oliver come out of his encounter with Moira relatively unscathed.”

“It’s not the best idea,” he hedges, “but it’s the only option we’ve got. Don’t worry, Felicity, I know how to pull my punches.”

There doesn’t appear to be anymore room for debate from her, Oliver moving to supply John with some tranq darts and explaining the best place for a quick takedown. Felicity drops back into her chair, pouting only a little bit. Sue her if she doesn’t love the idea of staging a kidnapping in order to extort information out of Moira by way of causing Oliver further injury.

Sometimes she swears she’s the only one with any modicum of sanity left around her.

Oliver leaves first to establish his place in the mansion and make sure to get Moira alone while John pulls on the suit. Felicity eyes him in the leather jacket as he tugs the zipper up, wondering how they ever manage to convince people it’s the same guy. John’s larger arms strain the green leather. His
jaw is wider than Oliver’s and his dark skin and clean shave contrast with the only part of the vigilante anyone can ever see.

What a farce.

Once they’re gone, leaving her alone once more in the basement of the club, her nerves start to get the best of her. She’s got information on UNIDAC pulled up, but she can’t make much of what’s important if she doesn’t know what Moira knows first. Instead, she turns her focus to the info dump her father wanted her to go through. She’s been making her way through her files in her spare time - something that’s become a lot easier to do when she doesn’t feel like she’s hiding it from Oliver.

She knows what Curtis and Oliver had both said, that he’s still her father. But, is he? Because, sure, he contributed one-half of her DNA to the equation and maybe that’s the half that’s led her on this path - computers, MIT, hacking, vigilantism. What is that worth, though, if the man had never bothered to show up when it counted? If the first time in years that he does show up, it’s at the expense of her friends and relationships, of the safety of those she cares about?

Her stomach is uncomfortably tight and she considers it all, but when she makes her decision it’s like a sudden calm. She reaches for her phone, pulling up information from the SCPD files she keeps on her computer.

“Hi, Detective Hall?” She greets, once the line stops ringing and the other woman answers brusquely. “I don’t know if you remember me, my name is Megan. We’ve met a couple times. I know this probably seems strange, but would you be able to meet me?”

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Felicity manages to stop home and change after meeting Detective Hall and it isn’t until the sun is turning the sky over the docks a murky gray, the stars disappearing behind cloud coverage and creeping sunrise, that she realizes once again they’ve all gone a full night without sleep. She presses on, slipping through the back entrance of the club as the crew cleans up for the evening.

John shows up not long after her, stripping out of Oliver’s gear and changing into a spare set of clothes.

“Did you get what you needed?” She asks, pushing herself out of her computer chair and moving over to the stool in front of the worktable housing Oliver’s arrow display. John finishes buttoning his
“Merlyn wants to level the Glades,” he explains, hands tightening around the edge of the table. “Moira says he has a device that can do it. Something UNIDAC Industries created.”

“Markov,” she murmurs, frowning to herself and trying to make the pieces fit in her mind. She’d pulled up information on UNIDAC, but hadn’t looked as deeply into Markov’s background. Maybe she should.

Felicity looks worryingly over the bruises on John’s knuckles, but decides not to comment. Until Oliver comes stumbling into the basement, looking worse than he does after a night out on the streets.

She moves for him immediately.

“Oh my God,” she cries, shooting an accusing look in John’s direction. “You said you were gonna pull your punches!”

“I did,” John insists, crossing towards Oliver and putting a defensive hand up towards Felicity. She reaches for Oliver’s jaw, fingers ghosting along the redness that is quickly turning to bruising, but not quite touching.

“Let me get you an ice pack for…,” she trails off, looking over him. He’s holding himself lopsided and she hadn’t missed the way he’d limped into the basement. “Everything.”

He turns his jaw, just enough that her fingers finally make contact and gives her a serious look. She frowns, resisting the urge to cup his jaw more fully, stroke her fingers over the reddened skin.

“I’m fine,” he assures her, but she doesn’t feel any better about it. He sends a look towards John as well, assuring him non-verbally that he’d done a good job. Oliver pulls away from her as he continues, “What did you find on UNIDAC?”

Felicity lets him retreat, turning to head back to her computers where the information on Noah has been wiped clean and replaced with her research into UNIDAC.
“UNIDAC is a small research and development technology company that specializes in seismic infringement,” she tells him as she settles back into her chair. Oliver joins her, leaning on the desk next to her. She switches over to the police report on the massacre. “Their head scientist was Brion Markov, a well-known seismologist who, early yesterday morning, found himself on the business end of an arrow.”

Oliver pauses and, when she glances up at him, Felicity can see the information settling in as the wheels turn in his head.

“Merlyn plans on leveling the Glades,” he starts slowly, “with a device that triggers a man-made earthquake.”

“You’re kidding,” she says, tensing up in her chair. It was one thing to make an educated guess, but to have Oliver confirm it is a whole other level of terrifying. What use could even come from a thing like that except for evil?

“What else does it say?” He asks, rounding the desk. He stops just in front of her, the monitors between them as she looks back at the information she’s gathered.

“More information on the stock auction and, you know, the latest on what the media’s calling—”

“The UNIDAC Massacre,” he finishes for her.

“There’s no way this timing is a coincidence,” John says, standing behind Felicity now. He shoots her a meaningful look, remembering their conversation from yesterday.

“Oliver, the police reports say all of the deaths were caused by an arrow to the chest except for one,” Felicity reads out, looking over the information. Black arrows. That sounds scarily familiar. “And there’s a website claiming the police suspect the copycat archer.”

“What?” He breathes, frowning at her.

“So, the other archer works for Merlyn?” John asks, looking up at Oliver in surprise. They should have seen this coming, probably. At Christmas, the archer hadn’t just been trying to call Oliver out. He’d been tying up loose ends, punishing those on the list who had given into the Hoods demands. And now, with UNIDAC...
“He’s tying up loose ends,” Oliver says, echoing her thoughts. “Erasing all evidence this device exists so no one can trace the devastation back to him.”

“So, you’re gonna have a pointed conversation with Mr. Merlyn,” John says, pushing off from where he’d been leaning with his palms on the desk next to her. She pivots in her chair, following the conversation.

“Well, even if I take out Merlyn, the other archer is still out there,” Oliver points out and Felicity spins back to the computer, mind already moving onto the next option. “He can set off the device. We need to find it. Then Merlyn can get his.”

“Well, maybe there’s another way to get Merlyn to tell us,” she offers, rolling between monitors.

“What do you have in mind?” John asks.

“As I keep proving,” she says as Oliver rounds the desk again, coming up on the other side of John, “people keep secrets. Computers don’t.”

“Felicity,” he says in a warning tone that is so not warranted in this moment. “Are you hacking into the Merlyn Global mainframe?”

“Hacking is such an ugly word,” she shrugs, rolling her eyes playfully. In her element once more. “No, I’m….” except yeah, she can’t really think of a better word for it. Plus, this is who she is. “Yeah. Totally hacking into the Merlyn Global mainframe.”

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She spends over an hour trying to break through. Which, for her, is longer than she’d usually take on just about anything. Merlyn Global, much like the top floor and Malcolm’s office, is locked down tighter than most federal agencies. And she knows.

“Anything?” Oliver asks, rejoining her at the desk where she’s been working. She wishes he’d go home and sleep off some of the damage inflicted by his and John’s stellar plan to get information from his mother, but it hadn’t gone over well when she’d suggested it. John lifts his head from where
he’s laid it on his arms at the desk beside her.

“Just for the record, I will pump my fist in the air and scream ‘yes,’” she says with a little more bite than necessary, lifting her arm in an approximation of the fist pump she means, “if I get in.”

“You know, you can just say this isn’t working,” John tells her, matching her tone with one of his own. Maybe they all should have gone home and gotten some sleep.

“This isn’t working,” she bites, pushing back from the desk. John pushes himself up from his kneeling position next to her chair.

“Alright, there has to be some other way we can find out where he’s keeping this device,” he comments as Felicity slides out of her chair and turns away from him and Oliver, frustrated at having struck out.

“Unless I can waltz up to Merlyn’s mainframe and plug in my tablet directly,” she says, rounding her chair to lean against the back of it and face Oliver, “there’s no way of getting that location.”

“Then we waltz,” he says, which - what? Felicity blinks at him, trying to understand the sentence because she’d never really taken Oliver for much of a dancer in the first place.

“Excuse me?” She says lowly, face scrunching in confusion.

“You need direct access to the mainframe,” he explains. “So we get you direct access to the mainframe and we figure out where the device is being kept.”

“Oliver,” she starts in her best ‘I-love-you-but-that’s-ridiculous’ voice, leaning forward on the chair towards him. “I did mention that the mainframe is located inside Merlyn Global Group’s main headquarters on the twenty-fifth floor. It’s only accessible through a restricted access elevator.”

“I know,” he nods once. “We’re gonna have to break in.”

“Okay,” Felicity says slowly. “And as great and dramatic of an exit line as that is, how exactly do you see that happening? Because Merlyn Global’s security is no joke. You need permission and a
security pass just to use the elevators. Even then, we have to get from the general public elevator to
the restricted access elevator that would allow us - or me, at least - to reach the twenty-fifth floor.”

“Well, it helps that the Queens and the Merlyns have a public relationship,” John comments and she
twists to face him where he’s half-seated on her desk. Clearly he, at least, understands whatever
Oliver’s plan is. “That’ll get Oliver in the building.”

“John can take out a security guard,” Oliver takes over, pacing as the plan formulates in his head. “If
he gets a uniform and badge, he won’t need to check in with security to get up to the security office.
We knock the remaining guards out and he can turn the cameras off in the elevator.”

“Which just leaves me,” she points out, placing her index finger against her clavicle. “The one who
actually has the know-how on hacking into the system.”

It’s John who answers her, an amused smirk in his voice and she turns to find it confirmed on his
face.

“How do you feel about a stint in fast food?”

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“I hate this plan,” she bites, waiting around the corner from Merlyn Global with a full bag of Big
Belly Burger clenched in her fist. She tugs self consciously at the bright yellow polo she’s been
forced into, courtesy of Carly. “Almost as much as I hate this stupid uniform.”

“You look cute,” Oliver comments quietly over the comms, amusement clear in his voice. She glares
at the wall next to her, pretending it’s him.

“No flirting over comms,” John tells them in a gruff whisper. Felicity smirks and the discomfort in
his voice. “Heading into the security office now. Two minutes, then follow.”

Felicity fidgets nervously, tugging the zipper on the jacket she’d been supplied up and down. She
waits for her signal, wishing they had come up with a better cover for her than this. What if she runs
into Tommy? She doubts he’ll buy that she’s moonlighting at Big Belly Burger. Worse, with his
current animosity towards Oliver, if he thinks they have an alternative motive for being in his father’s
company, he might have them removed.
“I’m heading in now,” Oliver says, pulling her from her anxiety spiral. “Follow me.”

It’s a bit unnecessary as an instruction. They’ve gone over the plan a dozen times, mostly because Oliver knows her well enough to know that her nerves require it. Once again, she’s heading into the field without her gear and her confidence is suffering due to it.

She gives it a solid thirty seconds before rounding the corner of the building and pushing through the glass doors into the lobby. Oliver, dressed in a nice black suit with an open-collared light blue shirt, is standing at the security desk. He’s holding a briefcase that anyone who knows him would question the point of.

“I have an 11:30 with Tommy Merlyn.” She catches the end of his introduction as she joins him at the desk, firmly on the other side of it. She resists the urge to make eye contact with him as she drops the greasy paper bag on the nice, reflective surface of the desk.

“I have a super deluxe Big Belly Buster for a Mr. Andrews, I think he’s in security,” she says, a little loudly, pulling the security guard’s attention away from Oliver’s ID. He frowns at her as she leans forward on the desk, conspiratorially. “He a good tipper?”

The security guard ignores her, turning back to Oliver and returning his ID.

“You can go on up, Mr. Queen,” he says and Oliver takes back the plastic card, turning away from him. He heads past Felicity as the guard returns his interest to Felicity. “You can wait a second.”

She does, glancing back at Oliver as he passes. It’s an amateur move, but she’s counting on it just looking like another girl checking out Oliver Queen’s ass, which is really almost as famous as he is. Not that Felicity is complaining. It makes her feel better that he glances back at her as well.

The security guard makes a call, presumably to the security office, before sending her on her way. The security office is down the hall from the elevators on the ground floor and it takes her almost no time to hand John the food. He gives her a couple of folded bills, the security card for the mainframe hidden within. Now, they wait.

Oliver is still standing at the elevator bay when she reaches it, pressing the call button. It arrives almost immediately, a stream of people pouring out from within. Oliver steps inside first and Felicity follows. She presses the button for the twenty-fourth floor as someone calls out for them to hold the
elevator. Her fingers move subtly, pressing down on the door close button.

A moderately skeevy looking guy with slicked back hair and a cheap suit slams his hand against the door, sliding into the car at the last minute. He glances over at Felicity, stepping into the space between her and Oliver, and she focuses her gaze on the wall in front of her, pressing her tablet to her chest.

“Where you heading, sweetie?” He asks and she resists the very visceral urge to roll her eyes.

“Nineteenth floor,” she answers easily, staring at the lit button for the twenty-fourth and hoping he doesn’t call her on it. He clearly has other things on his mind as he leans forward and presses a different button.

“Too bad,” he says, “I’m going to thirteen.”

Felicity doesn’t need to look to see the subtle movement of Oliver’s hand, flicking the folders easily from where they’re tucked against the guy’s hip. Papers fly, spilling out of the elevator, and the guy gives a shout and runs out after them. Felicity leans forwards again, pressing the close door button, and the doors finally slide home.

“Jealous,” she smirks, watching Oliver in his fuzzy reflection in the elevator. Predictably, he doesn’t respond to her teasing.

“Mr. Andrews got his lunch?” He asks instead and she looks away from his reflection, watching the numbers tick upwards on the elevator instead. The light for the thirteenth floor has ticked off and Felicity figures John has done them a favor.

“One Belly Buster with benzodiazepine,” she nods, hoping they’d added enough of the tranquilizer to knock out the security guard sharing the room with John. So far, they hadn’t heard anything to the contrary. “Hold the mayo.”

The elevator halts suddenly at the twenty-fourth floor, but the doors remain closed.

“Mainframe’s on twenty-five, guys,” John reminds them, his voicing coming through their comms. “This is as close as I can get you.”
Oliver glances up at the ceiling above them where the emergency hatch is located, handing his briefcase off to Felicity. He hops, his fingers hooking in the lip around the hatch, and dangles a foot off the ground as he pushes the hatch upwards. It lifts, falling on its hinges and knocking into the metal top of the elevator car. He lifts himself out first before reach back inside. Felicity reaches up and he takes the briefcase, setting it to one side before reaching for her. She grips his forearm and he lifts her up through the hatch with one arm.

He’s up on the edge of the cement gridding that makes up the elevator shaft while she’s still trying to get her bearings. He holds out his hand to her and she takes it, letting him help her up onto the ledge. Her stomach turns as her toes land dangerously close to edge.

“Don’t look down,” he instructs slowly, but the sentiment is lost on her already.

“Too late,” she murmurs. “Such a bad time to find out I’m still afraid of heights.”

“Felicity, you run across rooftops almost every night,” he reminds her, lips turned up as he tries to fight his amusement at her ridiculousness.

“Yeah,” she breathes, trying to keep her chest from tightening up. “With my gear and tech. I don’t have any of that here. It’s a little daunting.”

Oliver stoops slightly, his arm coming around her waist and Felicity takes the cue, wrapping hers around his shoulders and pressing herself against his side. His arm tightens almost painfully to support her weight for what comes next.

“Hey,” he says gently, pulling her attention to his face, which is so close to hers, rather than the ground, which seems further and further away by the second. “You still have one thing here.”

“Hmm?” She hums, her arm tightening around his shoulders anxiously as he fires the rigged up grappling gun and the hooks sink home in the cement ledge above them.”

“You have me.” And then they’re swinging across the distance.
“Are you alright?” Oliver asks as he comes back into the foundry. His run in with Thea and her boyfriend - Felicity’s pretty sure it’s the proper title for him, even if Oliver is insistent on resisting the moniker - had delayed him behind her and John.

So, the whole break in wasn’t without it’s missteps, but all in all it went well. She had gotten the data they needed and managed to place a trojan on Merlyn’s system to keep herself in the loop of any new shadiness.

She spins in her chair from where the download is uploading itself to her own computers to face Oliver. He’s frowning at her, surveying her like he expects she might be bleeding from somewhere or something. After he’d left her at the mainframe, security had decided to cut it’s ten minute rotation down to eight and a half and Oliver, caught up in an encounter with Malcolm Merlyn himself, had been unable to rescue her. Luckily for them both, John Diggle is nothing if not a knight in shining armor.

“I’m fine,” she assures him. “John saved me just in time. What were Thea and Roy doing there?”

“Looking for the vigilante,” he bites and despite her assurances and his grumpy attitude, he still crouches in front of her, dragging his hand down her arm to reassure himself.


“Apparently, Roy has developed some sort of hero worship since I saved him from Falk,” he explains and Felicity looks down at where his hand is still placed over hers. Roy digging into the vigilante isn’t going to end well for anyone. Oliver glances around the empty basement, frowning, “Where’s Dig?”

“Returning my borrowed uniform,” she explains, pouting a little at the reminder of the oversaturated outfit. Oliver, noticing this, places his hands on the arms of her chair and pulls himself up enough to kiss her lightly on the corner of her mouth. She softens, just a little bit.

As if on cue, John returns and Oliver moves away from Felicity’s chair. She spins back to the computer. John settles against one of the tables, checking in on Oliver’s encounter with Malcolm as she checks the status of the upload.

“In addition to the download,” she announces, once there’s a lull in conversation, “I also took the
liberty of uploading a trojan to Mr. Merlyn’s system. Figured it might come in handy.”

“That’s smart,” John comments, offering her a smile. “If Merlyn thinks he’s been compromised it’ll help if we know first.”

Oliver lets out a heavy breath and she turns to him.

“Can you locate the seismic device?” He asks, looking off towards the far wall, and she nods.

“I’m working on it, but there’s at least a terabyte of data to go through,” she explains, leaning onto the desk to try and make eye contact with him. Oliver doesn’t give, turning and heading back towards where his trunk sits, displayed on one of the tables near the stairs. Both John and Felicity turn to follow the movement.

“You alright?” John calls as Oliver leans over the trunk, pulling the familiar leather bound notebook from within.

“My father, he told me that he failed the city,” he starts, rounding the table with the trunk and holding the notebook aloft. “Asked me to right his wrongs, but I never knew what he meant until now.” He stops in front of his display of arrows. “It’s the Undertaking. I promised myself that when I crossed all these names off the list, I’d be done, but…”

Felicity’s chest tightens as the realization of where he’s going with this settles in. She pushes up out of her chair on an instinct to cross to him, but holds herself in place. John shifts next to her and she knows he’s made the same connection she has.

Oliver continues, oblivious to their reactions, “Taking down these people, it doesn’t honor him. I was just treating the symptoms while the disease festered. I stop the Undertaking, I wipe out the disease.”

“What are you saying, Oliver?” John calls, beating Felicity to the punch. “You would hang up the Hood?”

Oliver turns back, crossing towards them again as he answers.
“Merlyn’s plan is what I returned from the island to stop. Once we do, I can…,” he trails off, his eyes flicking over to meet hers. “I can have a normal life again. A real future beyond all of this.”

Her chest tightens almost painfully at the hope there, the real chance of a winning outcome making his eyes shine. The possibility of a future, and the almost staggering thought that he wants her to be part of it, makes her go warm. Because she wants that, too, more than she’s prepared to vocalize, but…

“Merlyn’s not the only bad person trying to keep the city under his thumb,” she reminds him. “Just because we stop the Undertaking, doesn’t mean the city is safe.”

“This was never about taking down every bad person in Starling for me, Felicity,” he says gently. “It was about fixing the damage my father had helped prosper.”

“And you think that stopping the Undertaking accomplishes that?” She asks quietly and Oliver shrugs like he thinks it should be enough. “If you want to quit, Oliver, it’s your choice. But I can’t and I’m worried that I don’t know how that plays into your normal life.”

He hesitates and she realizes that he isn’t sure either. She can feel John’s eyes on them, ready to intervene in the event of an argument, but Felicity knows there won’t be. If Oliver wants to do normal so badly, he might have to do it without her.

The computer chimes behind her and she turns to look at it.

“The upload finished,” she announces, breaking the silent tension that’s settled over the foundry. She twists her chair, settling down into it to work through the mass amount of data. “It’s gonna take me some time to work through it.”

“I’m gonna check in on Thea,” Oliver says and Felicity nods to herself. “Call me when you get something.”

Felicity resists the urge to turn back to him as she hears him grab his suit jacket and head for the door. The sound of metal hitting metal alerts her to his departure and she focuses on their main problem. John drops a stool down next to her chair and settles onto it. She can feel his eyes on the side of her face.
“Can we save the pep talk for later?” She asks, knowing where this is going. She’d seen how he reacted to Oliver’s suggestion he could stop helping the city, though. She knows she’s not the only one here who thinks it’s a little ludacris.

“No, I think now’s the best time for it,” he says. “Always treat a wound before it has a chance to scar.”

Felicity sighs, setting a program to auto search the files for anything mentioning earthquakes or Brion Markov. She squeezes her eyes shut for a moment before giving in and twisting in her chair to face him.

“Oliver started this because of his father,” she points out needlessly. “But I chose it. I wanted to help people and make a difference. I don’t have much of a family legacy to atone for, but doing this? It’s worth doing, sacrifice and all.”

“And you think you’ll have to sacrifice Oliver for it?” He asks, tilting his head and studying her. Felicity considers the question, because she really, really doesn’t want to. They’ve weathered so much and grown from each other but, if he doesn’t want to be a part of this life anymore, how can she force him to do so by association?

“Oliver wants things to go back to the way they were before he became the vigilante, at least to an extent,” she starts slowly, trying to put her jumbled thoughts into words. “I know he loves me and we’ve been building something so good, but even if he’s ready to hang his hood up - I’m not.”

“And do you think he’s willing to sacrifice you?” John asks, leaning back on the stool a little bit and folding his arms over his chest. Felicity frowns to herself, because it’s not an answer she can give him and he knows it. “Sounds like something you two should talk about.”

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It takes almost two hours for her to find the device’s location from the data dump. John’s the one who calls Oliver, bringing him back to the foundry. Felicity clears away the leftover trash from the dinner John had gone out to grab for them. Oliver comes down from upstairs, dressed in his suit and bringing the sounds of the club above with him.

“Where is it?” He asks, already moving for his leathers.
“Merlyn’s keeping it at a warehouse his company owns in the Glades,” she explains, spinning in her chair and hooking her thumb towards the monitors behind her. “I’ve got satellite imagery up.”

“Good,” he nods, working at the buttons on his shirt. “Coordinated attack. John, you take the device, I’ll go after Merlyn. Do we have a location on him?”

“According to the trojan I dropped in his system, he’s logged onto his computer from his office,” she tells him. “Are you sure you want to take him on solo? If the other archer works for him, he might have him on call.”

“I’m not scared of Merlyn,” he says easily, pulling his hood on and zipping up the front. He’s still lacking the leather pants. “Do you want to back me up?”

She appreciates him asking, even though she would have insisted anyway, and pushes out of her chair. Her phone chimes on the desk as she does and she twists back around to snag it from the desk as it lights up. She skims over the incoming text.

“Oh no,” she sighs, turning back to find both Oliver and John frowning at her. “In the world’s best show of terrible timing, I actually have to go do something. Right now.”

“It can’t wait?” Oliver asks, stepping towards her.

“No,” she admits, shaking her head and wrapping both hands around her phone. “It’s about my dad.”

“Deal with it,” he says, giving her one nod. “John and I can handle this.”

She turns back to her computer, leaning over the desk to type in a command on the keyboard. John’s phone chimes behind her.

“I’ve just sent satellite imagery to your phone,” she says addressing John. “If there are hostiles, you’ll know.” She pivots, pointing at Oliver. “Merlyn’s still logged into his computer and according to phone records he’s just made a long distance call. If he’s burning the midnight oil, you should be able to corner him in his office without much trouble, but the whole top floor office is fortified.”
“We’ve got this,” Oliver assures her with a nod towards the door. “Go.”

With a gentle squeeze of his arm, she does. The notification on her phone goes off again, reminding her of the alert and she opens it fully once she’s in the alley next to her car. The phone number is still blocked, but she doesn’t need a name to know it’s Noah.

Got your message. Can meet tonight.

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Felicity paces nervously in the lobby of Queen Consolidated. It’s mostly empty at this time of night, one security guard positioned behind the lobby desk eyes her curiously. She knows Dave and he won’t question her appearance this late at night.

She wonders vaguely if she should warn him about what’s about to happen, give him the opportunity to not be a part of it. There’s very little chance it won’t make the papers tomorrow in some capacity. It would seem strange for her to do so, though, and she also doesn’t actually have the authority to dismiss security personnel.

She lets out a quiet groan, pacing back towards the elevators behind her. The click of her heels against the marble floor is almost obnoxiously loud in the otherwise silent lobby. The doors open behind her and she spins back, spotting Noah coming into the building. He offers Dave a disarming smile and the security guard’s suspicious seems to fade when he realizes Felicity knows him.

“Hey, thanks for meeting me,” she says, crossing the room to greet him. “I don’t have long. I have something else I need to get to.”

“Sure, no problem,” Noah nods, his hands coming up to rub her arms in some approximation of familial affection. She tenses. “Does this mean you had a chance to look over the files like I suggested?”

“It does, actually,” she nods. “And I just wanted to get some things off my chest first.”

He frowns, tilting his head to the side. “First? I thought—”
“When I was a girl, I hated myself,” she says evenly, cutting him off. He doesn’t deserve her emotions, but she can’t stop the thickness in her throat, the heavy feeling building in her stomach. “I thought that I was broken. I mean, how messed up do you have to be that your own father can’t even stick around for you? I never thought that anyone would or, even could, love me. Textbook abandonment issues, right?”

“Felicity,” he sighs, at least having the decency to seem ashamed of his actions.

“All I wanted to know was why,” she admits quietly, aware of prying ears in the form of more than just Dave the security guard. “What was so wrong with me that you would leave?”

“There was nothing wrong with you, sweetheart,” he insists. “But a life running from the police and the FBI? You didn’t deserve that, your mother didn’t deserve that. I wanted to do the right thing and give you a chance at a normal life.”

God, if Felicity hears the word normal once more tonight she might actually throw up. Instead, she steps past him, positioning her back towards the entrance and placing him between herself and the elevator. It’s a calculated move and she turns back to face him.

“I waited my whole life for that explanation,” she sighs, “and I don’t even believe it. Because here you are, trying to make a space for yourself in a life I created on my own, and you are exactly the same person you were back then.”

“Honey, I’m trying,” he insists, the pet name burning like acid in her chest.

“No, you’re not,” she says forcefully, taking a step towards him in her anger. “And you’re never going to. Because, despite what you just said, you can’t change. No matter how much I wish you could. The only thing I know is true in everything you’ve told me is that you’re wanted by the police.”

In a spectacular show of timing, McKenna Hall chooses that as her entrance line. The door opens behind Felicity and she doesn’t need to look around to see the detective striding into the lobby with two uniforms in tow.

“Felicity, what-” he starts, faltering at the sight of the uniformed officers moving towards him. His gaze darts wildly, scanning for an exit she know he won’t find. She’d chosen this spot with a purpose, after all.
“I became a whole person despite you,” she tells him. “And I am nothing like you.”

She turns to leave, McKenna’s reading of her father’s Miranda Rights fading quietly into the background as she pushes out of the lobby doors. The tips of her fingers have gone cold with nerves and she aches to be in the field with Oliver and John rather than where she is now. She turns the corner, stopping to lean back against the side of the building next to Queen Consolidated, hidden away from the glass walls that make up the lobby.

When she lets herself cry, it’s just for her. A release of things she’s been building up inside herself and refusing to let break her. Her sobs shake through her chest and only stop when her phone begins to vibrate in her purse. She fumbles for it, grabbing the device and wiping at her eyes as she slides to answer the call.

“What’s wrong?” She asks, in lieu of a greeting.

“The device wasn’t where you sent me,” John explains, sounding like he’s running. Felicity frowns. “Malcolm must have moved it at the last minute.”

“Alright, well, I can go over the specs on the device from Malcolm’s computer,” she offers. “Maybe there’s something there than I can use to track it.”

“Felicity,” John says and the shaken tone of his voice makes her whole body go cold. “Something must have gone south during his run in with Merlyn. I can’t reach Oliver on the comms.”

“Maybe he just lost the link,” she tries. “He could still be at Merlyn Global.”

“I’m just coming from there,” he explains. “His bike is parked next door, but there’s no sign of him. I think Merlyn may have taken him somewhere.”

Chapter End Notes

So, on my end, this fic is finished. If I have time over the weekend, I'll try and get the last chapter edited and posted on Monday. I'll probably have a lengthier, more emotional note for you then. 'Til then, I hope you enjoyed this chapter!
twitter: @fellicityqueen
tumblr: fellicityqueen
Chapter Summary

John searches for Oliver and Felicity finds herself in Detective Lance's sights. Malcolm moves up his timetable for the Undertaking, leaving them all in a race against time.

Chapter Notes

So. Here we are. The final chapter in what has been eight months of work, nearly every moment of free time devoted to this monster. I'll save the emotional note for the end, but for now, I'll just say the important stuff: Note the addition of a new tag to this fic. I want you all to be prepared for the death in this fic, but it's probably not who you're expecting.

Anyway, onto the chapter.

Takes place (obviously) during 1.23 "Sacrifice".

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

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“I’m just coming from there,” he explains. “His bike is parked next door, but there’s no sign of him. I think Merlyn may have taken him somewhere.”

Felicity shivers, wrapping her arms tightly around her torso and trying to force herself to think rationally. Even if Malcolm has the other archer on retainer, it’d be hard to just take Oliver down. Lucky for them, her boyfriend is a bit of a stickler when it comes to personal security.

“The tracker in his boot,” she says suddenly, pushing off of the wall and heading back towards Queen Consolidated. “I can access it from my office at QC and send you a location.”

She hangs up on John as she runs back towards the building, regretting the decision not to change out of her heeled boots from earlier. Dave looks shocked to see her coming flying back through the
lobby, McKenna and her father long gone by now, but she doesn’t spare him more than a passing glance as she runs for the stairs.

Once in her office, shaking fingers pull up the remote login to the system running in the foundry. A flashing light shows Oliver’s location - an empty shipping depo on the docks - and she texts John the address. He responds, telling her he’s on his way. She knows she should move, leave the building and head back to the foundry where she can manage things better.

But her feet feel glued to the floor and she’s afraid that if she takes her eyes from the flashing dot that symbolizes Oliver, he’ll disappear. So, she stays, chewing anxiously on her thumbnail until she realizes she’s going to end up eating nail polish chips. Once John texts her that he’s moving on the location and the dot suddenly starts moving, she feels like she can breathe again.

She waits another moment before realizing there’s something much more productive she could be doing. She navigates into the data dump from Merlyn’s computer, scouring the files for anything that might give her an idea of how the device works or where it might be.

“Bingo,” she exhales quietly, clicking onto a file. The screen fills with schematics of the device, which means she might be able to find a way to shut it down. Assuming they can find the thing… One problem at a time. She looks back over at Oliver’s tracker and realizes it’s moving at a clip that must mean John has him.

Felicity is heading quickly back out of the lobby, nervously dialing John’s number.

“Yeah, Felicity, I got him,” John offers instead of a greeting and her step falters as relief floods her. It’s one thing to see it on the computer, something else to hear John confirm it.

“Thank God,” she breathes, tugging her coat around her as she heads down the sidewalk. “Is he okay?”

There’s a shuffling on the other end of the line and she pauses, waiting for a response.

“I’m fine,” Oliver says, taking over the phone, and Felicity really doubts that’s entirely accurate. But she’s willing to let it go until she gets back to the foundry and can assess the damage for herself. “Did you find anything in Merlyn’s files?”
“I found the schematics for the device,” she tells him, continuing on her path back towards her car. “So if we can find it, I can shut it down.”

“First we need to figure out how to find it,” he huffs and Felicity nods in agreement.

“I’m on my way back to you,” she says, feeling at least moderately better, even if they haven’t solved any problems. Oliver isn’t dead, so at least that’s something. “I’ll be there as soon-”

“Ms. Smoak,” someone calls and she frowns, spinning to face the voice. The phone hovers next to her ear as she spots Detective Lance crossing towards her, red and blue lights flashing from the visor of his car.

“What’s that?” She hears Oliver call through the phone, but she doesn’t answer him.

“Where you off to in such a hurry?” Quentin asks, a knowing smirk twisting his lips. All the lightness Felicity had been feeling a moment ago fades, replaced with a new kind of weight in her stomach. And something like her father’s voice saying ‘like father, like daughter’ in her head. She glances down at her phone, aware of John’s name lighting the screen above the number pad.

“Detective Lance,” she greets as casually as she can. “I’m actually on my way to meet my boyfriend.”

“I’m afraid he’s gonna be waiting a little while,” he says and Felicity frowns.

“Is something wrong?” She asks, the confusion on her face real. If this is about her alter ego, she doesn’t know how he could have connected it to her. Unless her father really is sick enough to sell her out minutes after getting arrested himself.

“I’m gonna need you to come down to the station with me,” he tells her, pivoting to direct her towards his car parked on the curb. “I’m hoping I won’t need to break out the handcuffs.”

Felicity glances down at her phone again, finally ending the call with Oliver, and nods at Lance. She steps forward, letting herself be led to the car and loaded into the backseat. Her phone buzzes repeatedly in her hand and she stuffs it into her bag. The last thing Oliver needs is to be dragged into whatever she’s gotten herself into. Not when he’s so close to that normal life he wants. She’s not going to put him or his secret at risk.
Whatever this is, she’ll deal with it on her own.

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She blames her nerves for the fact that the first thought she has as she’s being led towards the interview room inside the police station is that she really wishes she’d had a chance to go home and change.

It’s just that she’s been wearing the same jeans and blouse since they’d finished breaking into Merlyn Global and she’d given John back the Big Belly Burger uniform. Which, judging by the morning sun coming through the windows, was actually yesterday afternoon. Not to mention, she hasn’t showered and probably smells like sweat and the musty scent that they can’t seem to get out of the club basement. So, all in all, she’s not at her most confident when Lance leads her into the interview room.

“Take a seat,” he offers as she hovers awkwardly just inside the door.

“You know, I think I’d rather stand,” she says quickly, turning back to him. Lance gives her a look that informs her that it wasn’t offer so much as a direction. Right. Because this is a police interrogation. He slams the door shut and she drops down into the cold metal chair.

“You’re not exactly a hardened criminal, are you?” He asks, rounding the table to get to the chair on the opposite end from her.

“No, I’m not any kind of criminal,” she answers, knowing it’s a lie but hoping he’ll chalk anything out of the ordinary up to her, almost immeasurable, nerves.

“What do you call computer hacking?” He clarifies and she frowns, because that isn’t the questions she’s expecting. Unless this isn’t about her alter ego at all.

“A hobby,” she answers without thinking, the question having thrown her. He seems surprised at her candor and Felicity flinches. “That I do not engage in.”

Her face scrunches up in a spectacular show of her lack of poker face. That was not better and not
even remotely believable. Jesus, she’s gonna get arrested. Actually, she’s forgotten what the penalty for computer hacking is in this state. She thinks it depends on what they had caught her hacking. Government agencies are a pretty big no-no everywhere, but she’d be talking to an FBI agent. Not Detective Lance of the Starling City Police Department.

“Well, I’ve got a whole mess of computer gobbledygook that I don’t understand,” he continues. He still hasn’t taken his seat, choosing to stand in what is probably meant to be a show of intimidation. “But it says otherwise.”

Felicity takes a long, deep breath, trying to force her heart and lungs to behave normally.

“I had my tech guys go through your computer at Queen Consolidated,” he goes on and Felicity blinks, surprised at the news. He must have done it before she’d gotten there this evening. Which isn’t terrible, because she’s got a general rule about hacking from her work computer and only uses the remote access to the foundry computers in very extreme cases.

Lance finally lowers himself into his chair as he continues, “You used it to try and hack into BlackHawk Squad security and to analyze a water sample to tie back to a Vertigo drug lab. Two cases involving the Hood.”

She holds very still, her hands tucked into her lap to hide the shaking. She had finished off the BlackHawk hack from her home computer months ago, but she’d started it at work when Oliver had dropped the security fob off. The Vertigo sample was just sloppy. She knew going it what it would lead to and she’d still chosen to do it at work.

In her defense, at the time, she didn’t know her boyfriend was the vigilante.

“Tell me, Felicity,” he says, almost gently which she figures is also a tactic. “What am I thinking?”

She tries to answer, come up with something, anything, that doesn’t make her look guilty as hell. But the one time she can’t come up with a single word, she needs them the most. Lance stares at her with something like a gotcha look and a cell phone begins to trill.

Belatedly, she realizes it’s his, the blood pounding in her ears making it sound distant and muffled. He tilts his head, offering her a lopsided grin.
“Saved by the bell,” he teases a little maliciously as he pulls the device from his pocket. He answers without checking the ID, leaning back in his chair. “It’s funny you should call. I got your trusty sidekick sitting right in front of me.”

Felicity resists the urge to take offense at the suggestion, squeezing her fingers together and hoping to God Oliver has a plan of some kind. She can hear the sound of his voice modulator through the phone, but can’t make out the words. Something he says must affect Lance, because his eyes dart around before he turns carefully and slides from the chair.

“What?” He almost laughs, rounding the table again and crossing behind Felicity. “Well, now you’re just trying to have some fun with me.”

Felicity twists in her seat to follow his movements, but he stops in the corner behind her with his back to her. She can’t read his face, but she sees the moment he lowers the phone slowly, absorbing whatever Oliver has told him. If it’s what she expects, his shock is warranted to say the least.

“Sounds like you have bigger problems than me.” She can’t help herself from the slightly self-satisfied tone in the words. Lance can have a narrow field of vision when it comes to the vigilante, but she hopes he’ll see the bigger picture here.

His shoulders move as he sighs before turning back to her.

“Don’t leave town,” he says, tilting his head towards the door in a clear dismissal. Felicity doesn’t need to be told twice. She slides from the uncomfortable chair and moves quickly for the door, tugging it open and moving to step into the hall. She stops, suddenly, unable to let the opportunity pass.

“You know, I used to think the vigilante was a criminal, too,” she starts, earning a surprised look from the detective. “But it seems to me, whoever he is, he’s willing to sacrifice an awful lot to help the people of this city.”

Lance’s gaze moves from her but she knows he’s listening. And she isn’t finished yet.

“Kind of makes him a hero, doesn’t it?”
She texts Oliver to let him know she’s been released and thank him for the save and then finally, blessedly, heads home for a quick shower and a change of clothes. She tosses a fresh set of clothes into the duffle bag she’s seen Oliver use a handful of times for him as well. He keeps some clothes at the foundry, but she figures he might want something fresh and non-musty smelling.

The club is closed down by now, venturing well into the morning and long after the patrons have been kicked out and the crew has finished its cleaning. Felicity enters through the front doors, left unguarded by a bouncer who still probably got more sleep than she has. Her flat, brown boots are quiet as she crosses the concrete.

The figure standing at the bar stops her in her tracks and she tenses up at the sight of him. She hasn’t seen Tommy since the night at the Queen’s, before he broke up with Laurel. She still doesn’t know the circumstances, but if he’s hanging around here at nine in the morning, it can’t be with good reason.

“Tommy,” she calls warily. “What are you doing here?”

He spins, suddenly, a short tumbler gripped in his hand. Brown liquid sloshes around inside of it with the movement and Felicity momentarily worries for the freshly cleaned floor. He throws his free hand out widely and sends her a grin that’s a little too sharp to be real.

“There she is!” He calls, his voice rough with what she assumes to be a lack of sleep and an abundance of whiskey. “Should have known you’d be here. Where goes the shadow, the sun follows. Or is it the other way around?”

He glances around towards the hallway with the door that leads to the basement, as if he’s expecting Oliver to come upstairs at any moment. Felicity figures that’s probably why he’s here. Brave enough to come through the doors, too cowardly to walk downstairs and confront the man of the hour. So he waits. And apparently drinks.

“That’s what he told me, you know?” He says, still not answering her question as he ventures away from the bar and towards her instead. She deflates, watching him with morbid curiosity, wondering where this will go. “Some truly poetic nonsense about you helping him find his light or whatever. How you saved him. What I’m wondering is, if he’s so saved or whatever, how is he still…?”

He trails off, throwing his arms wide once more and turning in a slow circle. It looks like he’s gesturing to the whole club, but Felicity knows he really means the hidden floor beneath their feet.
She heaves a sigh, tugging the light material of her pink cardigan tighter around her body with her free hand.

“He’s just trying to do some good, Tommy,” she tries, knowing it’s going to fall on deaf ears anyway. “His methods are—”

“Murderous,” Tommy interjects, leaning forward a touch and Felicity worries he might just topple over.

“Unsavory,” she finishes, squeezing her eyes shut. “But he’s trying to do better. He’s been through a lot and he’s broken in ways that you and I will never be able to fully understand. He wants to do good, he just sometimes doesn’t know how to.”

Tommy huffs out a sound of disbelief as he spins away from her again, lifting the tumbler to his lips as he glares at the bar. She takes a cautious step forward, unsure what exactly his endgame is here. He’s known about Oliver for a month and she knew he wasn’t responding well to the surprise. Then he’d gone to work at Merlyn Global and broken up with Laurel and, now, she just doesn’t know where his head could be at.

“Tommy,” she says gently, trying to regain his attention. His shoulders tense, but he doesn’t turn back to face her. “What happened with Laurel?”

He lets out a dark chuckle, but she thinks it’s more surprise than anything else. Like he hadn’t expected that to be her first question. Oliver’s secret may be the root of his problems, but she knows Tommy well enough to know that his emotions rule him. He didn’t start showing up stumbling drunk in the morning until after he’d broken up with Laurel.

“Turns out it’s incredibly hard to be in love with someone when you know they’re in love with someone else,” he comments, finally spinning back around towards her. Felicity sighs, letting her eyes drift shut for a moment, but she fears that if she does so for too long she might just succumb to her exhaustion.

“Oliver and Laurel—” she starts after a moment as Tommy takes a deep drink from his glass. He swallows quickly, flinching at the burn of the dark liquor, and cuts her off.

“I know he’s not in love with her,” he says in a rush, almost apologetically, and Felicity frowns. The dark demeanor doesn’t fade, though, and he continues with a pointed look, “He’s been very clear
about who it is he’s in love with.”

“So, why are you still torturing yourself over it?” She asks.

“Because it doesn’t mean she’s not in love with him,” he answers harshly and Felicity lets out another sigh. She feels heavy and tired and so damned sick of hearing the same angry argument over and over again. Tommy presses on, not noticing her response or not caring, “I’ve seen it, Felicity. It’s not just Oliver, but the Hood. There’s something there, some connection for her. She doesn’t even know it.”

“Tommy, stop,” she bites, snapping a little as she presses her fingers to the space between her eyebrows for a moment. He goes silent, surprised at the response, and she turns a somber look on him. “You can’t do this to yourself or her. You can’t just hide out under your father’s legacy while you drink yourself into numbness. You need to either move forward with Laurel or let yourself move on.”

He blinks at her, glass held by the tips of his fingers bumping idly against his thigh as he absorbs the words. His eyes turn dark suddenly, an angry twist to his lips as he takes a step towards her. Maybe she should feel threatened, but this is Tommy and she’s not going to be afraid of her friends.

“And what about you, huh?” He asks. She thinks he probably needed to hear what she’d said, but doesn’t appreciate it. “What is it about the great and, apparently, killer Oliver Queen that has you running around after him?”

She resents the implication, annoyance flaring and almost pushing her to rise to the bait he’s waving in front of her. He’s aiming to hurt, wants to make her feel a semblance of what he’s feeling. The only reason it’s been directed towards her is because he’s too much of a coward in this moment to seek out Oliver.

“I won’t do this with you again, Tommy,” she says, tempering her defensive reaction. She’s not even sure who she wants to defend more; herself at the insinuation that she’s become some lapdog to Oliver’s criminal activity or Oliver who she’s been defending all morning anyway. Tommy turns suddenly, hearing Oliver’s approach before she does, surprisingly lucid for what she imagines is not his first drink of the morning.

“Look who it is,” he calls, a dark humor coloring his voice. “My best friend in life.”
“Won’t do what?” Oliver asks, coming from the hallway behind him and ignoring the sarcasm in his friends voice. He edges carefully into the room, movements calculated around the unknown variable that his best friend.

“Nothing,” Felicity lies, uninterested in letting Tommy’s harsh words hurt Oliver right now. It’s her first look at her boyfriend since he’d been rescued from his short stint as Malcolm Merlyn’s latest kidnap victim. There are telltale bruises on his face, different than the ones he’d had after John’s turn in the Hood. She resists the urge to reach for him, search him for wounds she can’t see.

“No, go on, Felicity, tell him,” Tommy says harshly and she shoots him a glare. “Tell him how you were just about to try and come up with a new defense for the fact that he’s a murderer.”

He spits the word and she doesn’t miss the way Oliver tenses. He gives nothing, strategic as always, as he rounds Tommy to place himself between them. When Felicity continues to glare at him rather than saying anything, Tommy scoffs and turns away. He sets his glass down on one of the metal bar tables and it meets the surface with a loud noise.

“Tommy, there’s something you should know,” Oliver starts, earning a dark look over Tommy’s shoulder.

“So now you’re the sharing type, huh?” He bites.

“Something’s happening and it involves your father,” Oliver says and she frowns behind him, surprised he’s going to drop this on Tommy with him in his current state. She considers stopping him, but Tommy beats her to it.

“Keep my father out of this,” he says, voice low in anger as he points at Oliver’s chest. Felicity thinks if they were standing close enough he would jab him in the sternum.

“**Our** fathers,” Oliver presses with a little more force, stepping forward. Unconsciously, Felicity reaches for him, her fingers dragging over the back of his sweater as if she can hold him back. He goes on, “They aren’t the men we thought they were. They made a plan together to destroy the Glades.”

Tommy frowns, shaking his head and taking his own step forward to close the distance between them. He’s in Oliver’s face now, not saying the word ‘crazy,’ but Felicity hears it nonetheless.
“Do you have any idea what you sound like right now?” He asks.

“Your father’s gonna do it,” Oliver insists, not backing down. “Because he thinks it will avenge your mother’s death.”

“Do not talk about my mother,” Tommy growls, anger rising. Felicity sees the punch coming just after Oliver does. Tommy lifts his arm, swinging clumsily and Oliver ducks easily under it. She gasps, stepping out of the way just in time as Tommy stumbles forward and falls to the ground.

She takes a few steps back as he flips over, staring up at Oliver from his back. Oliver takes a slow breath, turning around to look at his friend. He gives Felicity a reassuring look as he drops carefully to a crouch in front of Tommy who pushes up into a sitting position.

“The difference between us, Tommy,” Oliver starts again, softer this time, “is that I didn’t find out the truth about my father until it was too late. But you’ve always known, deep down, you have always known the man he is.”

Tommy glares silently at Oliver for a moment, shaking his head as he refuses to let the truth of his words set in. Felicity wraps her free arm around herself, tugging her cardigan tight over her stomach, as he sits up fully to push himself clear into Oliver’s space.

“I wish you would have died on that island,” he spits in a harsh whisper. Felicity feels the blow for Oliver as he nods quietly, moving his gaze towards the floor rather than facing Tommy’s anger.

“Tommy,” she hisses, stepping forward. Oliver holds out a hand towards her, stopping her before she can fully admonish Tommy for the words.

“It’s okay,” he says quietly, looking over at her. She sees the hurt in his eyes, the pain at the realization that there may be no fixing this rift. He looks back towards Tommy, repeating, “It’s okay.”

He straightens up out of his crouched position, leaving Tommy still sprawled across the cold concrete floor. When he steps towards her, Felicity expects him to reach out but he doesn’t. A hardness has settled over his features, tempering the emotions he’s feeling, and she aches for him.

“We need you downstairs,” he says quietly and she nods, moving past him to head for the basement
door. She can’t find it in herself to feel bad for leaving Tommy there.

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Oliver changes into the clothes she’d brought him while Felicity studies him from her computer chair. It’s a testament to the situation they’ve found themselves in that neither of them has made an unsavory comment as he strips down in front of her. He’d told her that John went home to change and shower and Felicity had intended to get to work studying the device schematics again, but she finds herself distracted.

If she wanted to talk to Oliver about what he’d said yesterday - though, it doesn’t feel like yesterday. It feels like hours ago. Somehow it feels like days ago. If she does want to talk to him about it, this would be her window.

“Oliver,” she says softly, figuring the best way to do this is just to rip the band-aid off. “We need to talk.”

She doesn’t miss the way he tenses in the middle of pulling his sweater over his head and she feels bad. As if the encounter upstairs hadn’t been enough, now she’s going to make him deal with the tenuous future of their relationship. But, John had been right. They need to discuss it, even if they’d rather ignore it.

“I know it’s bad timing,” she sighs and Oliver turns finally to frown at her. “But if we stop Malcolm and you decide to stop all of this,” she motions vaguely around herself, unable to sit still, “we need to discuss what that means for us.”

“Us,” he repeats, not a question. He moves to join her, standing in front of her in her chair.

“With everything you’ve been through, if you want to give up the hood and try for something normal, I can’t begrudge you that,” she explains, gripping the armrests of her chair nervously. Oliver drops to a crouch in front of her, confusion scrunching his features. “But I don’t know if I can give that to you.”

The basement goes quiet for a moment and Felicity avoids Oliver’s gaze. She’d told him yesterday that if he wanted to hang up the hood, he could, but she wouldn’t hang hers with him. She startles as Oliver’s hand falls over one of hers, his fingers gently prying her death grip on the armrest free.
“Felicity,” he says gently, linking his fingers through hers. “What are you talking about?”

“My dad told me that he left me and mom because he wanted us to have a normal life,” she says, trying a different approach. She squeezes her eyes shut at the reminder of Noah’s face when he’d realized exactly what she had done last night. “The problem was that he didn’t ask me if I wanted a normal life. I just wanted my dad.”

“I’m not going anywhere,” Oliver says, squeezing her fingers and she shakes her head because he isn’t understanding.

“I know that,” she sighs. “But maybe you should.”

The confusion on his face only grows as he tilts his head at her, frowning. Felicity lets go of the armrest with her other hand and sits forward, wrapping both of her hands around his.

“I love you,” she says. “But if you want to get away from this life, then I can’t blame you if it means getting away from me, too.”

“Felicity,” he says again and she doesn’t know what she wants to hear. She doesn’t want to lose him, but she won’t force him to keep doing this if he has a chance to put himself back together. He’d come home from the island and immediately put himself onto a battlefield. If he wants to just be Oliver Queen again, she doesn’t want to be the person who stands in the way of that. But if he agrees with her, if he says that the end of the Hood means the end of them, it might break her.

Before he can say anything else, the door into the alley settles loudly into its metal frame as John enters the basement. He comes around the corner and Felicity releases Oliver’s hand as he straightens back up.

“So, what’s the plan?” John asks, shooting a concerned look over them. He can read the room easily, but Felicity appreciates his ability to ignore the mood and focus them back on the real problem. She spins in her chair, pulling up the schematics of the device.

“Right now, I need to have another conversation with my mother,” Oliver says, moving back to the table where the bag with his dirty clothes rests. His brown leather jacket rests on top and he pulls it on.
“You think she knows where the device is?” John asks, crossing his arms over his chest.

“She’s the best option we have at the moment,” Oliver sighs.

“Do you want some backup?” Felicity asks, spinning back in her chair to look over at him. He shakes his head, zipping his coat halfway up and grabbing his helmet off of one of the other tables.

“No, I need you here working on trying to figure out a way to locate the device if I can’t get anything from her,” he says and Felicity nods, turning back to the computer. She doesn’t hear him cross the room, but she hears the alleyway door close behind him and then John is hovering next to her at the desk.

“Wanna tell me what I walked in on just now?” He asks, frowning down at her in concern. She takes a deep breath, her fingers stilling over the keyboard, and shakes her head.

“Later,” she offers. “Right now we have bigger problems.”

John lets her get away with the deflection, probably because she’s right. As of right now, all she has is extensive blueprints for a device made for leveling a city and no actual way of finding the damn thing. She glares down at the desk in front of her, trying to force some sort of solution into existence.

Oliver’s notebook sits on the desk in front of one of the monitors, abandoned now that they no longer need to worry about each person on the list. She reaches for it, frowning down at the leather binding, and flipping it open to the front cover. The emblem is stamped into it, dark ink creating an intersection of lines that don’t seem to create any sort of logo or image.

Unless they do…

She rolls her chair and it grabs John’s attention once again, prompting him to frown down at her and her laser focus on the small book in her hands.

“What is it?” He asks, his hand on the back of her chair as she leans towards the screens, pulling up the map of the subway tunnels they’d used to track down Joseph Falk.
“I’ve been thinking that the emblem in the book is a logo,” she explains, holding it up in front of the monitor for John to see as she looks over at him. “What if it’s a map?”

John looks between the two images for a minute before breaking out into an impressed grin. He squeezes her shoulder gently, already reaching for his phone to text Oliver about what she’s found.

“Felicity, you’re a genius,” he says and she shakes her head.

“Don’t give me too much credit,” she sighs. “We still have to find the damn thing.”

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Oliver returns after a little over an hour, more frustrated than he’d been before he’d left, which makes Felicity figure he hadn’t managed to get anything more out of his mother. She resists the urge to reach out to him as he joins them, reminded of the shaky ground both their relationship and the city have now found themselves on.

“The Undertaking is happening tonight,” he announces to the room and Felicity tenses at the sudden clock that begins ticking in her mind. He looks between her and John, his eyes landing on hers as he continues, “What did you find?”

She grabs the notebook again, flipping it open to the image within and holding it up for him.

“This symbol,” she says. “It’s a map of the old subway tunnel system.”

“That makes sense, now that we know it’s all connected to the Glades,” Oliver says, but he’s frowning like there are wheels turning in his own head now, too.

“What if it’s more specific than that?” She suggests as he continues towards her, coming up next to her to examine the subway map still up on one of the monitors.

“What do you mean?” He asks, gesturing for her to go on.
“If I had a machine that could trigger an earthquake in an otherwise geologically stable area,” she posits, “Where would I position it?”

“Underground,” Oliver realizes and she nods, leaning back towards the monitor with the map on it.

“Yeah,” she says before switching out of the subway map and pulling up a geological survey of the area instead. She explains, “This is a U.S. geological survey of the tectonic plates running underneath Starling City. This red line here is a known fault that runs right below the Glades.”

The simulated survey moves across the screen as she taps at the arrow keys on her keyboard with one hand, the other gesturing to the fault line she’s highlighted for him. John leans towards her, pointing at the screen as well.

“For about a mile, the fault runs underneath the old Tenth Street subway line,” he picks up for her.

“Dollars to donuts, the seismic device is somewhere along there,” she concludes, looking back up at Oliver. His eyes widen slightly, like something has just occurred to him and she frowns.

“I know where it is,” he says, surprising her. Felicity blinks at him, startled at the certainty of his words. Before he can offer anything more, his phone begins to buzz from his pocket and he fishes it out, checking the ID and moving away from them before answering.

“Now is not a good time,” she hears him answer. Felicity spins back towards the monitors, sharing a look with John. Just like Oliver to leave them dramatically hanging in the moment.

Her whole body buzzes with anticipation. This is the closest they’ve been in months and now there’s a clock hanging over their head. Felicity’s fingertips feel cold where they rest on the keyboard uselessly. Any mistake they make from here on out, any misstep or miscalculation, could be irreversible. If Malcolm succeeds in leveling the Glades, thousands of people might die. But if they beat him, if they can find and disable the device, they could save thousands.

She’s been trying to be optimistic all this time, to continue her place as the team’s hopeful one. What had Tommy told her earlier? That Oliver had called her his light. It’s one more reminder of the possibility of their separation, one more role she feels the need to fulfill. And it’s hard, being positive when the world feels like it’s collapsing.
It’s a lot to ask of one person.

“Felicity, pull up the local news, please,” Oliver says, pulling her out of her own thoughts as he returns to her side. She does as he’s asked, frowning when the feed comes up to reveal Moira Queen herself standing behind a podium. The familiar walls of the Queen’s sitting room act as a backdrop.

“My name is Moira Dearden Queen. I am the acting CEO of Queen Consolidated,” she announces, like everyone in Starling City doesn’t know the Queens by now. “And God forgive me, I have failed the city.”

They watch with dawning horror as Moira lays out the intricacies of Malcolm’s plot, dragging herself under the bus along with him. Oliver is tense and rigid next to her and, one again, Felicity resists the urge to reach for him.

Once Moira finished, the flashing of cameras becomes nearly blinding, camera crews from the news stations catching it as she tries to make her way to Thea before being stopped by uniformed officers with handcuffs at the ready. Felicity turns the video off as they begin to read her Miranda Rights and Oliver backs off from them again, returning to the other side of the room.

Felicity spins in her chair to follow his retreat, unable to stop the pull to comfort him as her legs pull her out of her chair to follow him. He stops in front of his trunk and she halts as well, waiting a moment as his hands glide over the familiar wood.

“Oliver, I’m sorry,” she offers quietly, unsure what else to say, unable to fully reach for him in this moment. He shakes his head, surprising her with the sureness of the movement.

“Don’t be,” he says clearly, no tremor or emotion to his voice. It’s worse, she thinks, than if he’d been breaking down. He lifts the lid of the trunk as he continues, “She gave those people a chance.”

John moves, coming up behind her. “I thought Merlyn broke your bow.”

Oliver reaches into the trunk, lifting out a second bow. It’s more rudimentary than the one Merlyn had snapped in half - simple wood and fiber - but he holds it reverently, twisting his wrist to raise it the way she’s seen him do a million times.

“I have another,” he says softly, his eyes moving along the curve of the bow as he clutches the grip
of it in his fist. He turns back to them, lowering the weapon to his side, and his eyes land on her. Felicity tenses under the gaze, wishing they had a moment to breathe, a moment to talk.

If this is the last time they’re ever going to do this together, she just wishes she had the ability to savor it - not the looming threat of death and destruction, but they way they work as a team, partners. The way they’d done so even before she’d known who he was. They move around each other like they can anticipate the other, smoothly and efficiently. She doesn’t know that she’ll ever find a connection like this again.

She’s afraid it’s going to destroy her if he decides he can’t be with her once he’s no longer the vigilante.

“I was going over the device schematics,” she says, a little haltingly. It’s not what she wants to say, but it’s the best she can offer right now. “The device can be set for a timed detonation or can be remote activated by a mobile transmitter.”

“Something Merlyn could have on him,” Oliver paraphrases, understanding. Felicity nods and John takes another step forward, coming up next to her.

“Listen, Oliver, if we could just get our hands on this transmitter, maybe we don’t need to track down the device,” he suggests, but Oliver is already shaking his head.

“It’s too big of an if, Diggle,” he argues, too calm for the conversation they’re having. Felicity can see him retreating, shoving all the things he should be feeling aside to focus on what needs to be done. “I need you in the subway. Find the device, disarm it.”

“So you can take on Merlyn by yourself?” John asks, his voice relaying how terrible of an idea it is. Felicity is hard pressed to disagree on that one. Merlyn isn’t someone to be trifled with, especially now that they know he’s the other archer.

“I have to,” Oliver says quietly and Felicity nearly jumps in to remind him that Merlyn had disarmed him, knocked him out, and kidnapped him for an unknown amount of time.

John puts it a bit more bluntly than she can, “No, he’ll kill you, Oliver.”

Oliver blinks, looks up at John for a moment and then his eyes land on her. Felicity bites down on her
lip, hard, as he stares at her. All that emotion he’s trying not to show mixed in his gaze and her body goes cold with fear. All of her worry about him no longer wanting to be with her had been unfounded, because he has no intention of making it out of this alive.

“I know,” he agrees finally, his eyes moving back to John who takes a deep breath at the response. “He’s beaten me twice. And I don’t know how to stop him.”

Felicity takes an instinctive step forward, his name falling from her lips like a broken plea. John’s warm hand falls on her arm in comfort, stepping past her to take over the situation. She’s never been more grateful for John Diggle than she is right now.

“Well, how about this time, you bring along something you didn’t have last time you two fought?” He suggests and Oliver tilts his head slightly, curiosity outweighing his self sacrificing tendencies. John continues, resolutely, “Me.”

“I can’t let you,” Oliver says immediately.

“And I can’t let you do this by yourself, man,” John insists, taking another step towards him. “Oliver, you are not alone. Not since you brought me into this.”

He twists suddenly, looking back at her where she stands frozen and mute. Felicity has whiplash from the changes in tone of the conversation, but she’ll be damned if she’s letting either of them walk out there alone. She gives a nod.

“Us into this,” John amends and Oliver’s gaze finds hers again. She holds it with certainty this time, hoping she can pour as much into a look as he’s always managing to do for her. His attention returns to John when he continues, “Besides, army regulations. A soldier never lets a brother go into battle alone.”

He holds up his arm, waiting on Oliver’s reaction. Felicity holds her breath for a moment until Oliver’s free hand comes up to wrap around John’s in a firm handshake.

“I’m out of bows,” Oliver reminds him, almost teasing.

“I got my gun,” John assures him.
It changes something in the air, charging it with a sudden hopefulness it had been lacking, and Felicity feels suddenly emboldened as she steps forward.

“I guess it’s up to me to do the dismantling,” she says, pulling both men’s attentions back to her.

“This whole area is ground zero,” Oliver says, needlessly. “But I suppose it would be pointless to try and tell you to get out of the Glades.”

“If you’re not leaving,” she says resolutely, taking the last few steps forward to reach him. He stares down at her, something like pride and gratefulness shining in his eyes, and she can’t help the way it makes her smile just slightly up at him as she finishes, “I’m not leaving.”

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“Just sit here,” she instructs, reaching up to press down on Curtis’ shoulders and lower him into her chair, “and talk me through disabling the device.”

His eyes move excitedly around the foundry, taking in all the new sights, but she doesn’t have time for his wide-eyed wonder. She needs him to focus on the device and the, very specific, outline she’s made for him to follow. She doesn’t have time to memorize the plans and it’s too risky to try improvising. Curtis at least knows his way around a mechanical system and can talk her through the process.

“Right,” he nods suddenly, focusing in on the schematics she has pulled up on the monitor. Felicity doesn’t wait, turning and heading out of the foundry. John and Oliver are already in the alley outside, waiting on her to be ready.

“You sure he can handle this?” John asks, a little skeptical of Curtis’ abilities to keep it together in a crisis. She doesn’t blame him, considering he’s had very little interaction with the other man, but she nods nonetheless, sure of her friend. He nods as well, trusting her enough to trust her judgement, and angles a look at Oliver, “I’ll see you there.”

Felicity moves anxiously on the balls of her feet as he heads down the alley, leaving for Merlyn Global first to make sure they haven’t lost Malcolm yet. Oliver is set to follow him on his bike, but he hesitates. She can feel his gaze on her and it makes her warm all over.
“Are you sure about this?” He asks and she nods, her dark hood shifting against the crown of her head with the movement.

“I’ll enter the subway a few blocks over and head towards where Merlyn’s wife was killed,” she says, repeating the plan they’d created more for her own benefit than his, using the words to calm her nerves. “The system is abandoned, so I should be able to avoid all the looters and scared people. Curtis can walk me through disabling the device and you guys will take down Merlyn. It’ll be fine.”

“Felicity,” he says quietly, taking a step towards her. She shifts as well, pulled towards him like a magnet, and his gloved fingers wrap around her own, squeezing reassuringly. His other hand comes up to her face, cupping her jaw in a familiar gesture and she leans further towards him.

When he kisses her, it’s a movie kiss. Not the happy ending, roll credits type. It’s the bittersweet moment of goodbye, before the hero runs off to fight evil or sacrifice himself or something equally noble and stupid. She releases his hand, reaching up to cup his face in her palms and pour as much of herself as she can into the kiss. Oliver gives as good as he gets, prolonging the kiss for as long as they can get away with without seeming entirely selfish.

“Be safe,” he says gently as he pulls back from her. Felicity’s fingers slip against his jaw, catching on his stubble before falling away.

“Come home,” she responds, her voice shaking just the slightest bit. Oliver doesn’t respond as he slides onto his bike and starts the engine. Once he’s gone, Felicity reminds herself to stay on task. She clicks on the comm in her ear and begins running in the direction of the closest subway entrance.

It’s boarded up and she has to break it down to get inside, but once she does it’s only a short walk before she finds the device. Left exactly where Oliver thought it would be, underneath the parking lot where Rebecca Merlyn had bled out. A chill runs through her, like she’s wandered into a cemetery. Felicity doesn’t believe in ghosts or an afterlife, but there’s something charged about standing here.

“Did you find it?” Curtis asks, reminding her that she doesn’t have time to dwell on it.

“Yeah,” she breathes, staring at the intimidating device in front of her. It’s lit up with blue lights, a metallic whirring filling the space as she falls to her knees in front of it. She pulls her gloves off and uses her fingers to pry the casing from the circuit board. “Okay, I’ve got the wiring in front of me. Tell me what to do.”
While Curtis looks over the schematics she’d left him, she leans around the device. An LCD screen ticks away the time and she sucks in a breath.

“We’ve got seven minutes to disarm this thing,” she tells him and he lets out a distressed noise on his end. “The good news is, it’s going to be a paperweight in three.”

“Okay, there should be three wires. A green one, a yellow one, and a blue one,” Curtis reads off and Felicity finds them, pulling the pocket knife Oliver had given her from within her jacket and sliding the blade out. “Cut the blue one.”

She slides the blade beneath the wire, holding it steady with her fingers as she slices cleanly through the copper connectors within. The whirring turns to a loud buzzing and something inside of the device audibly shifts. She drops back onto her heels and looks around wildly before her eyes land on the screen with the timer.

“Oh, Curtis,” she says, trying for steady but her voice wobbles. “What are the chances this thing has some sort of anti-tamper safeguard? Because our time just dropped to two minutes.”

She stumbles backwards, falling onto her butt in the gravel, as the whole machine begins to move, lowering itself further towards the ground. Oh, shit. She pushes back up onto her knees, scrambling back towards the machine.

“You need to figure out how to override it,” she snaps, reaching for the wiring within again. “Now!”

“I’m working on it,” Curtis assures her, sounding harried. She shouldn’t have brought him down to the foundry and asked him to do this. If the device goes off, he’s going to find himself a permanent fixture in Verdant’s basement.

Her fingers fumble for the comm at her ear, but she stops herself before she can switch channels. If this thing does what it’s intended to do, Curtis isn’t the only one who’s going to be crushed. She looks upwards towards the ceiling of the tunnel, the parking lot and abandoned clinic above her. Her instinct almost has her reaching out to Oliver, wishing to say goodbye, to tell him everything she always assumed there would be time for later.

She thinks of how she’d left things with her father. When was the last time she’d even called her mother? So many people she had so much more to say to and now, instead, she might find herself a
casualty of some rich asshole’s vendetta. Anger burns through her at the thought, that she could have survived all she has just to be inadvertently felled by Malcolm Merlyn.

“Curtis,” she bites, moving her hand away from her comm and focusing in on the device in front of her. “Now!”

“Oh, I’ve got it, I’ve got it,” he says, “but you need to be careful.”

“I don’t have time for careful,” she reminds him. “Just tell me what to do.”

He does. Walking her through the connections to sever until eventually she’s able to pull apart a junction in the power source. The lights die out, dimming until there’s no longer anything to lighten the tunnel but a yellowed bulb left abandoned in the darkness. She drops back down onto the floor, letting out a short laugh as she stares at the useless device.

“Like I said,” she offers. “Paperweight.”

This time, when her fingers move for her comm, she doesn’t stop herself from switching the channels over. There’s a short beep in her ear to let her know it’s changed.

“Oliver, we did it,” she says, trying not to sound too gleeful in their apparent victory. He doesn’t respond, so she pushes herself back up off the ground and begins to head out of the tunnel, back the way she’d come. She never knew Rebecca Merlyn, but she hopes the end of this atrocity can bring her some peace.

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She’s coming up out of the subway, back over the scattered boards that she’d broken down to get into the blocked off section, when Oliver’s voice finally returns to her through the comms.

“Felicity,” he says and she nearly sags with relief just at the sound of him - tired and probably worse for wear but alive. Her body runs cold at his next words, “There’s another device. There’s two of them!”
“No, that’s not-”

Possible. She was gonna say it’s not possible that Malcolm could have played them so easily, but the earth shudders beneath her and she catches herself on the lamp post next to her. People around her, still running in fear, fall against walls and onto the pavement. The building next to her shudders and Felicity worries for a moment it may come down all together.

It happens the way earth-shattering events often do; Quick and with little warning. And then it’s over. The building next to her is still standing and a man a few feet in front of her pulls himself from the where he’d stumbled down onto a storm grate.

“I thought you deactivated it,” Curtis calls in her ear and Felicity flinches, curling into herself on instinct. Fear grips her entire body, telling her to stay still, telling her to run.

“Merlyn had a second device,” she whispers, the words barely breaking the din of scared and angry people around her. “Are you alright?”

“Yeah,” he says, though he doesn’t sound anything close to it and she can’t blame him. He composes himself, pressing on, “The damage looks to be contained on the east side, past Wells street.”

Felicity blinks, taking in the information as another, dark thought hits her.

“CNRI,” she says. And then she’s running. The earth rumbles again as her feet pound the pavement, tracing the familiar path to the law office. Moments like this she considers the practicality of Oliver’s bike. The ability to smoothly glide around cars and between buildings, assuring quick arrival at one’s destination. Really, maybe she should give the whole biker chick thing a second thought.

When she reaches the street, she spots Laurel and Tommy. He’s got an arm wrapped around her stomach as she fights against him, trying to pull from his grasp back in the direction of the building. Joanna is standing about a foot behind Tommy as he struggles to hold onto Laurel, she’s shouting something but Felicity can’t hear it and it doesn’t seem like Laurel is listening.

Her eyes land on Felicity as she ventures closer. Her lungs burn from the run, but she’s relieved to find Laurel and Tommy both safely outside of the building.
“My dad’s in there,” Laurel cries, pointing at the building and Felicity looks over at it. Every muscle in her body tells her to stay where she is. The building looks like it’s barely holding up, dust clouding around it as it continues to shudder on its supports.

Laurel gives an anguished cry, spinning in Tommy’s hold to press herself against him now, and Felicity knows she can’t do nothing.

“I’ll get him,” she promises. As soon as she makes it through the fallen doorway, she finds herself assaulted by a heavy cloud of cement dust. It’s everywhere as she moves, forcing its way into her hair, her eyes, her lungs. It takes a while to spot Lance.

“You are a gigantic pain in my ass,” she calls. “But I am not leaving you in here.”

“Then give me a hand, why don’t ya?” He snaps, motioning towards where his leg has become trapped underneath a heavy looking shelf made for supporting boxes of files. Some of the boxes have fallen onto the shelf, packed so tightly with files that they managed not to fall out in the quake.

Between her and Lance, they manage to shift the shelving unit off of him enough that he can scramble out from beneath it, limping slightly as he stands back up. He shoots her a begrudgingly grateful look and the building shudders around them again. Felicity glances up, cement and plaster shaking down from the ceiling and continuing the build up of dust in the air.

“We need to get out of here,” she says, a little needlessly.

“You read my mind,” he agrees, which is probably the closest she’ll ever come to approval from him. He takes the lead, heading back for the doorway she’d come through. When they cross beneath the entryway into the large office space, she doesn’t expect the supports to come down on them.

The building gives another, grander, shake and the ceiling collapses onto them. Felicity cries out, a large chunk of cement pinning her down into the cement slab beneath her. Somewhere Quentin is breathing in rapid, shuddering breaths, but the cloudiness of the air has increased tenfold with the latest collapse and she can’t see him.

“Detective,” she calls out, shifting in an attempt to tug her legs free from where they’ve been crushed beneath the part of the ceiling. “Are you alright?”
His answer isn’t words so much as a strangled cough and she doesn’t think that’s a good sign. She struggles a little harder, but the more she pulls at her legs the more pain she creates and her vision begins to swim with a murky blackness. She has to take a few deep breaths before she can call for him again.

“Detective Lance,” she tries, a little firmer this time, trying to sound in control. “Can you hear me?”

“I hear ya,” he chokes out and she would feel better knowing he can respond if it didn’t sound like he was doing so from underwater. He coughs again and she wishes she could see him. “Listen, uh, I need you to do something for me.”

“Do you think it could wait?” She asks, renewing her efforts to get free. The room goes dark for a few seconds and she stills as her vision returns. Fuck. “I’m still kind of in the middle of the last favor.”

He gives a chuckle, surprised and heavy.

“I get the feeling there isn’t much time left here for me,” he says a little morbidly and Felicity frowns. She tries to ask him what he’s talking about, but he cuts her off with a little force. “Listen, listen, all right? I don’t know about you and that hooded weirdo you spend your time with, but, uh, you tried, didn’t you? That’s gotta count for something. Might not make you heroes, but it makes ya somethin’.”

“Detective,” she tries again, because her leg is going numb with the pain and her chest is tight from breathing in concrete, but she doesn’t like wherever he’s going with this.

“If you make it out of this, I just need you to talk to my daughter, okay?” He presses on, his words becoming weighed down with heavy breaths as he works his way through them. “My baby girl. Just tell her I’m sorry and that I want her to be happy. Tell her I love her and, uh, tell her not to be like me too much, alright? You tell her I told you that.”

“Tell her yourself,” Felicity grunts out, pulling harshly at her legs with her free arms. She can hear the scream of ambulances and fire trucks on the streets outside, but she doesn’t think any of them are coming for them.

“No, no,” Lance huffs, really struggling to get the words out now. “You gotta tell her for me. Someone has to look out for her or she’ll just,” he cuts off with an affectionate laugh that turns into a
bad sounding cough, “she’ll never stop trying to prove she’s tough enough.”

“Quentin, please,” she says softly, feeling a tear roll down her cheek as her hands, trying to pull at the thin material of her leggings, fall away uselessly. They’re gonna die here.

“Just tell her for me,” he says quietly, barely loud enough to break the noise coming in from outside, lazy like he’s falling asleep. The building gives another quiver and Felicity thinks it may just topple completely on top of them. Maybe they’ll be trapped here for years before the city puts money into cleanup. They’ll find her, a nameless vigilante, and no one will ever know.

Her leg gives another sharp pain as the concrete shifts on top of her with the shaking of the building and she cries out, the pain taking over her until her vision goes suddenly, fully dark. She swears she hears the distinct sound of a motorcycle engine revving right before the world fades around her.

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“Felicity.”

She comes back to at the sound of her name, the word said close to her face as smooth, cool fingers stroke over her face. With a groan, she forces her heavy eyelids to open, startling at the closeness of Oliver as he leans over her. His hood is drawn and something in his eyes clears as she blinks up at him.

“Hey,” he says softly. “Hey, you’re gonna be okay. I’ve got you.”

“You’re hurt,” she says quietly, the only words she can come up with as she notices the slick spot of drying blood creating a stain against his leather. The wound looks deep, but shakes his head at her as she reaches for it, tilting her jaw upwards to look at him again.

“It’s nothing,” he assures her. Felicity doesn’t believe him, but finds herself lacking the energy to argue.

He backs off and she feels the concrete pinning her legs down shift. She glances down at her newly freed legs and her stomach rolls, threatening to toss whatever contents are within out onto the carpet of the law office. Oliver’s hands hover over her knee, a shiny, slim piece of rebar sticking up through her skin. The flickering lights catch on it and it shines with what she realizes must be her own blood.
“Fuck,” she whimpers, instinctively trying to move her leg. Oliver reacts quickly, pinning her shin down against the concrete and encouraging her to be still.

“I can lift your leg off of it,” he tells her, his voice hardening in that firm way it does when he wants her to think he has control of a situation. “But I need you to be very still so it will come out cleanly, okay?”

“Oh, okay,” she whispers, nodding at him. He moves one hand to the back of her calf and slides the other arm just under her butt. He gets her to sit up and put her arms around his shoulder before he lifts her upwards in one smooth motion. Her fingers dig into the back of his neck and her stomach rolls in a whole new way as the metal rebar slides out of her leg.

“Good,” he says encouragingly. “That was great, honey. Can you support yourself on one leg for a second?”

She nods and he lets her down gently. Felicity holds onto his shoulder as she keeps her weight on one leg. The other dangles uselessly, toes scraping the ground, but even that sends a fierce pain through her entire body. Oliver undoes the belt holding her coat together and kneels in front of her. He wraps it twice around her thigh, tightening it until it hurts and tying it off in a hastily-made tourniquet.

“What about Lance?” She asks suddenly, looking around wildly in search of the trapped detective. Oliver raises himself back up slowly, taking her face in his hands just as she catches sight of Quentin Lance, lifeless beneath a heavy portion of the ceiling. Oliver turns her back to look at him instead, holding her gaze.

“We need to get out of here,” he says with a practiced calm as he pulls his hood back up. Felicity’s heart feels like it’s going to burst out of her chest, tears stinging at the back of her eyes and trying to battle the cloudy air. The sight of Lance is burned into her mind.

She doesn’t want to leave him there to be found by rescue crews or, worse, his daughter. But they can’t stay here. The sirens are getting louder and they don’t have much time before someone will come looking for the detective or the masked vigilantes who’d run in after him. So, she nods numbly and let’s Oliver lead her from the building, supporting her weight as she struggles to move on one leg.

Once they get outside, the air clears enough that she takes her first breath and immediately coughs in
surprise at the lack of plaster and concrete being pulled into her lungs. He’s led her out a side door, away from the front street entrance, but as they round the corner of the building she sees Laurel, Tommy, and Joanna again. Laurel is still clinging to Tommy and Joanna looks shell-shocked.

Tommy looks over, the only one to spot them as they leave. He frowns and Oliver shakes his head. It’s all Felicity can do just to stay standing. She sees the shark intake of breath Tommy takes, his arms tightening around the still distraught Laurel.

Oliver shifts them, looking out towards the rest of the chaos of the city. There’s still so much to be done, more people they won’t be able to save. The substitute tourniquet is only a temporary fix and she needs to get changed and checked into an emergency room. She’s sure they’ll all be packed to the brim.

“What do we do now?” Oliver asks quietly, his calm demeanor breaking for her as he looks over at her. Under the hood and the grease paint, she sees her own fear and guilt reflected back at her. Unable to hold the gaze, she looks out at the city instead, her leg beginning to shake with the weight of holding herself up.

“We rebuild.”

END.

Chapter End Notes

So... yeah. That happened.

I guess I could start with an apology? My intention with this story was always to save Tommy and the original plan was for Felicity to get injured by herself. But I started thinking about it and, honestly? This way leaves a lot more doors open for if/when I return to this universe -- something I hadn’t intended to do but there seems to be at least moderate interest for that? So, we'll see where things land.

In the meantime, I just want to thank everyone who stuck with this story! It was a labor of love, of frustration, and ultimately of pride. It's the longest thing I've ever written. I went back and checked and I created the document for the first chapter on June 25th, 2017. So, that's about 8 months of nearly every moment of free time spent on this. It's my most reviewed fic, it has the second most hits, the fourth most kudos. It's shocking, but I'm really really proud of it! And so grateful to all of you who have continued to read it, continued to comment. It means the world!

I'm in a little bit of shock that it's finished, but I'm looking forward to whatever comes next and I hope I'll see you all there! Thank you! <33
End Notes

Comments are my lifeblood.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!