A Dance with the Devil

by cfcureton

Summary

A Season Five re-write, thanks to an idea from a Nonny, an elaboration by jules85, and a push from a very bossy SmoakingGreenArrow. ;)

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Character: Oliver Queen, Felicity Smoak, Adrian Chase, John Diggle
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Felicity shifted from foot to foot in front of the receptionist’s window. The woman was behind a wall of glass; she had the feeling it was bullet-proof. This was certainly the right neighborhood to test that theory.

She was here because, well, because she didn’t know what she was looking for. The girl who could find a person on the other side of the earth with a keyhole satellite and tell you what color their eyes were needed help finding the right support group. The irony would’ve made her smile, if she wasn’t biting her lip hard enough to draw blood.

There didn’t seem to be any therapy groups for People Who Inadvertently Did A Bad Thing. She’d Googled it. So here she was, standing in front of the world-weary employee of a community counseling center, hoping to get answers. A direction. Anything.

“What kind of therapy are you looking for?”

“I don’t know. That’s why I’m here. Something...bad happened.” Felicity couldn’t elaborate further, so she just stood there, twisting her fingers together. “To my friend,” she added suddenly, almost cringing at the obvious lie. The woman sighed.

“Unless your friend”—the word was barely emphasized—“wants help, there’s not much we can do, you know.”

A single tear escaped out from under Felicity’s lashes, and she blinked furiously. The woman’s face softened in pity as she looked away.

“Private sessions or group therapy?” she asked. It wasn’t meant to sound brusque, Felicity was pretty sure, but she couldn’t help feeling like she was taking up this lady’s valuable time or something. It was adding another layer to her anxiety; she felt her chest tighten.

“Group,” she said softly but clearly. One-on-one sessions, with her suitcase full of secrets and her penchant for babbling, was a terrible idea.

“There’s a PTSD group that meets three evenings a week in the Glades,” the woman offered, her eyes flicking up from her computer to gauge Felicity’s receptiveness.

“Not nights...my, ah, my friend works nights.”

“There’s also one on Tuesday mornings and another on Friday afternoons. They’re in the Glades too. The group was started for victims of the Undertaking, but there always seems to be a need to keep it open.”

Felicity swallowed hard; she had a flash of Oliver, his hands covered in Tommy’s blood, stumbling into the Foundry like a dead man. Oliver, composed entirely of exhaustion and despair as he watched his city burn under Slade Wilson’s control. The look on his face when she’d guessed that he had planned to go down in the plane crash with Ra’s. Lying back on the sparring mat with her in his arms, just last night, and then surging up again to attack her mouth like a man dying of thirst.

“Is there one in, um, Bludhaven?”
The church that housed the therapy group had seen better centuries. The basement was musty and
dark, the paint blistering over ancient plaster, full of cluttered, forgotten corners; it suited her just fine.
Felicity didn’t think she could’ve faced the brutal honesty of fluorescent lighting and modern
furniture. The linoleum under her feet was stained and cracked in a thousand places; it felt like her
soul.

The first week she had sat in a cold metal folding chair, rusty at the joints and tippy. The next week
she got there early enough to have her pick of seats but she’d chosen the tippy one again. It was
penance for her and a gesture of kindness to the chair that nobody else wanted.

She never spoke, rarely smiled. She hoped she might heal just by listening to the stories of others;
how the hell, exactly, was she supposed to say her name and then tell everyone that she was there
because she was an accidental mass murderer?

Some of the stories broke her heart. Some made her admire the storyteller. And a couple reminded
her so much of Oliver it made her stomach hurt. But she came back every week, a silent ghost in a
wonky chair, her efforts to keep it level and quiet a metaphor for her life.

The fifth week Felicity almost didn’t go. It was the third straight day of cold, relentless rain, she was
grumpy from PMS—though this was good news, further confirmation that the salmon ladder
indiscretion didn’t leave her pregnant—and she could feel a cold coming on. But she did it anyway,
slipping into a chair in the badly-lit circle just as they were starting.

She didn’t like to make eye contact, but aftershrugging out of her raincoat and stowing her purse her
eyes raised as she sat up, and she caught a new face looking at her. He was unconventionally
handsome—she acknowledged that her metric was a little skewed, thanks to Oliver Queen—with
beautiful, piercing eyes, and something else; a swagger, even motionless. He didn’t smile, but his
expression was soft, and he didn’t look away from her gaze.

He also never spoke, and as the minutes ticked by Felicity caught herself glancing at him more often,
waiting to see if he would share. He was always focused completely on whoever was talking, intent
and interested. As far as she could tell, he never looked at her again.

There was always coffee after, surprisingly good stuff, considering the surroundings. She hovered on
the edges of the crowd, waiting her turn to grab a cup to go, hyper aware of anyone who might be
approaching to try to start up a conversation. So it was a complete surprise when he appeared off her
left shoulder, close but not crowding, as she worked the coffee urn.

“Hi,” he said gently, his hands coming up in defense when she jumped and nearly spilled her cup.
He chuckled softly and—despite her usual instincts—so did she. “Sorry,” he continued. “Didn’t
mean to scare you.”

Felicity turned halfway toward him, shaking her head enough to make her ponytail fly.

“It’s fine. I’m just...I’m fine.”

He stuck out a hand and she took it automatically.

“Adrian Chase. Nice to meet you.”

“Felicity. Smoak.” A part of her brain was screaming at her to stop with the introductions already,
Miss I’m-at-an-anonymous-meeting, but it was out before she could stop it. Never meet a stranger,
her mother always said.

The corner of his mouth lifted in the smallest of smirks, and he squeezed her hand just a little.
“See you around, Felicity Smoak.”
Chapter 2

Over the next two weeks, the new guy—Adrian—was in attendance but didn’t approach Felicity or say anything to her. He would smile the first time their eyes met, but that was it. She began to think that the first time had been a fluke; or maybe he’d introduced himself to everyone in the group and she just hadn’t noticed. Not that it should make a difference either way; Felicity was there for therapy, not a date.

The third week after their introduction he approached her again at the end of the session, crossing the no-man’s-land inside the circle of folding chairs the way he might enter a boxing ring. He had a roll to his gait that traveled up through his shoulders and made him carry his elbows slightly away from his body, like he was prepared to use his fists at any minute, but the smile on his face was positively angelic.

“Felicity. It’s good to see you again,” Adrian said warmly, as if she had been absent the previous two weeks. The skin around her eyes crinkled slightly as she tried to get a read on him. She licked her lips and glanced to the other side of the room, reassuring herself that there were still plenty of people around. Situational awareness, Oliver would call it.

“Um, hi.” Felicity clasped her hands in front of her, but stopped herself from rocking back on her heels; Donna always told her it made her look guilty.

He stood a little closer than was maybe necessary, and from this distance she had a front row seat to those startling eyes of his; they reminded her a lot of Oliver’s in that they seemed to take in everything at once while they focused solely on her. The difference was, when Oliver did it she felt protected; with Adrian she felt weirdly like prey.

“I noticed you haven’t shared in the group yet,” he said. Felicity dropped her gaze to her shoes, willing them to stay in place and not start tapping out her anxiety. “Talking in front of a crowd of strangers can be difficult.” His voice was kind of breathy, like he was letting her in on a secret.

She risked a glance up at him; Adrian had dropped his chin in an effort to catch her eye, and his hands were stuffed in his pockets a little bashfully.

“I just mention it,” he continued, “in case you want to talk one on one. I’m a good listener.”

“I don’t think so,” Felicity replied, keeping her tone soft but firm.

Adrian nodded his understanding, but his eyes were telling her a different story: He was daring her to take a chance on letting him in.

Their conversation was interrupted when another group member approached them, slapping one hand on Adrian’s shoulder and holding the other out for a handshake. The two men clased hands warmly, and Adrian even reached up and hugged him briefly.

“Hey man, thanks for the talk last week. It really helped.” Felicity guessed that the speaker was a veteran—considering most of the group members were—because he had that combat-weary look about him. It was easy for her to spot; she’d been in love with a look like that for five years.

Adrian lowered his eyes modestly, but his smile was a mile wide.

“All time, Ryan. Any time.”
“You comin’ to Rosa’s for lunch?” the man continued, canting his head toward another knot of people waiting near the basement stairs.

Adrian’s eyes shifted that direction, and Felicity instinctively turned her head to follow the action.

“Looks like a lot of characters to me,” Adrian joked, and Ryan chuckled.

“Yeah, it’s the usual suspects.”

Adrian’s eyes slid back to Felicity and pinned her to the spot. They didn’t leave her, even as he answered his friend with a friendly jerk of his head.

“I’ll be there in a minute.” His eyebrows flicked up infinitesimally at her; the smirk was back.

“How about you? Rosa’s has great food.”

Felicity broke eye contact with him and reached for her coat as she shook her head.

“No thank you.”

The sound of several sets of feet clomping up ancient wooden steps echoed back at her, and she suddenly had a panicky fear of being left behind—in the dark? With Adrian? She couldn’t tell, but he seemed in no hurry whatsoever to follow them. Felicity gathered her purse and coat off her chair and walked away from him without another word.

It was business as usual in the bunker—like every day had been that summer—which meant hectic and tense. Oliver stalked behind her like a man waiting on a verdict (he was), Felicity cracked borderline-inappropriate one-liners to hide her unhappiness and break the tension (it didn’t work), and Curtis rambled semi-coherently until all three of them wanted to scream, just to have something to listen to besides snark and angst.

Between the Mayor gig and vigilante duty, Oliver was absent a lot of the time; he was currently in his above ground office, which made it easier for her to breathe and concentrate, knowing that he was not in danger. Or standing behind her, his hands in his pockets and his heart on his sleeve. Felicity rubbed furiously at the crinkle on her forehead and sighed.

Curtis suddenly spun his chair toward her and leaned into her line of sight, propping his head against his fist and completely blocking the view on her screen.

“So whatever happened between you two? You know, that night..with the Chinese food.” Subtlety and Curtis were not well acquainted.

“Nothing happened, Curtis. It didn’t work out.”

“But..the wine…”

“Curtis, drop it. It’s over.”

He leaned back silently when she shooed him out of her way, looking a bit put out and confused.

“So...now what, like, you both just...move on?”

Felicity shook her head to clear it, making her ponytail swing wildly; she refused to make eye contact.
“I guess so,” she sing-songed.

“But how will that work, exactly? Because clearly you’re both still crazy about each other—“
Felicity slammed both palms onto the desk.

“Stop! Alright? Just, stop. I don’t want to date Oliver or anybody else at the moment.”

There were exactly three beats of silence.

“And...Oliver?”

“I don’t know. You’d have to ask him.”

The next time Adrian asked her to join them for lunch, Felicity accepted.
Chapter 3

He wasn’t exaggerating about Rosa’s: The food was fantastic. Felicity let her shoulders low-key wiggle in time with the background music and sipped her soda through a straw.

This was her second lunch outing with the group post-session. There were nine of them scrunched around a table meant for six, but everyone seemed to be having a good time. It was impossible to follow all the conversations going on, so Felicity let the sounds swirl around her and drown out her own thoughts.

“So listen,” Adrian began, leaning closer to be heard over the general noise of the room, “I won’t be able to come to daytime meetings anymore.” Felicity’s eyes flicked to him and she took another pull on her straw, waiting for him to continue. “I’ve been hired to be the new District Attorney for Star City.”

She would’ve appreciated a little warning; as it was she narrowly missed choking, covering it by wiping her mouth with her napkin.

“That’s great,” she answered as encouragingly as she could, under the circumstances. Adrian leaned even closer, confiding in her; she found herself mesmerized by his eyes.

“I’m kinda nervous. I’ve heard stories about Mayor Queen. They say he’s a real ball breaker. Have you ever met him?”

Time froze around Felicity as she tried to decide how to answer. Her instinct to deflect was strong, but she was sick of lies. No more lies. She rearranged her napkin on her lap and let a smirk settle on her face.

“You mean Mayor Queen, my ex-fiancé?” A humorless laugh left her. “Yeah. We’ve met.”

Adrian’s eyes widened in surprise and his mouth fell open.

“For real?” he breathed, looking like he couldn’t tell if she was joking. Felicity nodded with a “Yep” as he whistled a single sweeping note of surprise.

“Wow. So you could put in a good word with him...” he kidded, trailing off and nudging her arm with his elbow to let her know it was a joke.

“You don’t need my endorsement,” she assured him wryly. “I’m sure you’ll be great.”

They finished their meals in silence, Felicity mulling over how, if at all, this news would affect her nightly activities. So far Adrian had made no move to ask her out, and she wasn’t sure how she felt about that. The fact that everyone at the table genuinely liked and respected him was beginning to overcome her reluctance to trust him, and there was definitely something about him that attracted her.

She had learned that he attended their meetings as a counselor, making himself available to listen and to give advice on any legal matters that might come up during the session. He did this strictly as a volunteer, and many of the group members had come to rely heavily on him for emotional and practical support.

Felicity watched him interact with the people around them; he was impossibly laid back and cool, singing along unselfconsciously—and well—with the Cuban music playing in the background whenever there was a lull in the conversation. Oliver stalked, but Adrian glided, his body moving to
an inherent rhythm that it seemed only he could feel.

She shook her head quickly to remind herself not to do that: Whether or not there was potential with Adrian, she refused to let herself make comparisons with what she’d had—and lost—before.

The crowd at the table thinned after Adrian called the server over and insisted on paying for everyone. He waved off the protests, announcing triumphantly to raucous laughter that he finally had a paying job and was going to make the most of it. Soon it was only the two of them left, gazing at each other over the remains of the lunch that had become an impromptu party.

“Well,” Felicity said quietly, balling up her napkin and setting it on the table, “I’d better get going too. Thank you for lunch, Adrian. And congratulations on the new job.”

His eyes sought and held hers, unblinking.

“When can I see you again?”

Felicity’s breath caught; after his cool behavior these last few weeks, she truly hadn’t been expecting this. Her eyes dropped to the tablecloth and she brushed absently at it, formulating an answer.

“Adrian, I don’t—“

“Is there someone else? God, I never asked. I’m sorry. Of course there is. A beautiful woman like you would only go on to bigger and better things after dating the mayor of Star City.”

Her eyes snapped up to his; for just a second there was an edge to his voice, a flash in his eyes that she had all but missed. The space between her eyes crinkled without her permission.

When Adrian spoke again, his voice was soft and deep, like the sea on a calm day. His eyes were the color of the sky.

“There’s someplace I want to take you.”

Felicity was only half-listening when Curtis filled her in on the latest threat to Star City. Her mind was swirling around the events of the day, parsing through all the looks, replaying all the conversations. Could Adrian really be interested in her? And, more importantly for her to figure out, was it mutual?

“Hello. Earth to Felicity.” Curtis snapped his fingers at her and she dragged herself back to the present.

“Sorry, what?”

“Where have YOU been? And why do you smell like Mexican food?”

“It’s Cuban,” she corrected, hearing the elevator doors open to let Oliver out.

“What’s the difference?” Curtis pushed. Felicity felt her anxiety ramp up as Oliver crossed the room and took the steps to her Lair two at a time, very sure she didn’t want him in on this conversation.

“It comes from Cuba,” she clarified unhelpfully, just to shut him up.

“What do we know about this...Throwing Star Killer?” Oliver came to a stop just behind and between them, his stupid, beautiful hands in his stupid, beautiful pockets.
Felicity’s eyes darted left and right, caught off guard: So THAT’S what Curtis had been rambling on about. Luckily he jumped to her rescue and repeated everything he’d just been telling her, which gave her a chance to cover her ignorance by running internet searches on the keywords he was throwing out.

Ultimately their plan was the usual plan: Felicity and Curtis would continue to monitor police scanners, street cams, and satellite feeds, and Oliver would run himself ragged, (literally) chasing down leads while also attending to his day job, all on hours of sleep he could count on one hand, thumb not included.

Felicity turned her chair to face him, fingers squeezing her temples in an effort not to use her loud voice.

“This would be easier—“

“Felicity,” he warned.

“—IF WE HAD SOME HELP.” So much for not using the loud voice.

They stared each other down, a new development in whatever stage their relationship was currently in; it had been full steam ahead on the furtive glances and fake smiles for weeks now. She had been going toe to toe with Oliver Queen for years—right from the get-go, actually—but it had never been like this.

He used to hide pain and secrets behind his anger, infuriating her when she couldn’t batter through his defenses. But now, after everything, when she could use a good wall between them to protect herself, Oliver had decided to fight with all his cards on the table; every time they disagreed she got to see how hurt he was that she still couldn’t talk, how difficult it was for him to keep from reaching for her. For once in his life all his goddamn emotions were laid out in front of her: An offering. An indictment.

He turned and crossed to the other set of stairs and down, to where his work table sat covered in arrowheads. Something else perpetually on his to-do list. Felicity followed, angry strides that ate up the distance between them until she was just off his left shoulder; closer than she’d intended, but she had too much pride to step back.

Oliver was retreating, choosing to busy his hands when he knew he should be using his words. Typical.

“Oliver, we need help.”

He swiveled toward her, his hands making their Mayor Queen Explains His Position for the Umpteenth Time motions.

“This—what we have—works. We’re fine.”

Felicity didn’t know if it was possible to roll your eyes so far into your head that you died, but right now seemed as good a time as any to find out. Even Oliver managed to look embarrassed at the absurdity of his statement. His head dropped to study his shoes.

“It doesn’t, and we’re not,” she practically whispered.

He looked up at her from under his lashes, really looked at her, and she sighed.

“We’re not,” she said again, totally deflating in front of him. Oliver nodded once, a tiny
acknowledgment, but he wouldn’t look at her again.

His phone chimed; City Hall needed him.

“I have to go.”

Curtis was busy looking busy when she returned to her spot, the elevator doors closing out of the corner of her eye.

“I need you to handle things here tonight,” she informed him, leaning over to start up the usual computer searches.

“Where are you going to be?”

Felicity punched the final keys and straightened up to grab her purse.

“Out,” was all she would say.
Chapter 4

Felicity checked her phone again, still uncertain she was in the right place. The Glades she knew like the back of her hand, but Bludhaven was another story; this address was on the other side of town from the church and Rosa’s, the only landmarks she would recognize.

His message had given little direction, just to meet him here at 9 o’clock sharp and to wear what she had on at lunch. She smoothed the swingy skirt of her blue dress down with one hand, suddenly self-conscious.

Felicity turned the last corner as instructed by Google maps, and there he was: Leaning against a car—presumably his—under a streetlight, perfectly illuminated. It looked like a movie set, or a Rembrandt. El Greco, she corrected herself, when Chase tipped his head and called out, “Hola, chica,” as she approached.

“Hi,” she said, her sweater draped over her entwined hands, a talisman to ward off the possibility of cold. Or whatever might befall her tonight. “Is this where you kill me and hide the body?” she joked, badly.

Adrian’s mouth turned up into a faint, closed-mouth smile, and he leaned back just a bit in amusement.

“You’re funny,” he said softly.

Felicity spared a glance at the alleyway and the buildings on either side; everything looked shabby, but that was sodium vapor streetlights for you. She shifted her focus back to Chase, who looked...smug.

“What are we doing here, Adrian?” She was not above turning around and marching back to her car if she didn’t like the answer: John Diggle’s baby girl was no fool, she reminded herself. Despite current evidence to the contrary.

His head tipped to his right, indicating a plain, windowless door, the paint peeling in places to expose the steel underneath.

“Follow me.”

He shifted his weight off the car and led the way, raising one hand to rap his knuckles on the door. Felicity’s mind flashed back to a memory of giving a password to get into an underground casino, and a little thrill ran through her. Except that time she’d had backup.

The door opened from the inside and Chase said something in Spanish to a face she couldn’t see, then passed through the entrance. Felicity suppressed a desire to glance back at the rooftops behind her; no one was there anymore.

Oliver used the elevator ride down to collect and center himself. It was not unlike preparing to go into battle, except the battle ahead wasn’t Slade, or Darhk, or even City Council. It was Felicity. He made his hands unclench before he punched the control panel out of frustration.

If he’d ever needed John Diggle, it was now. Losing a limb couldn’t be worse than not having his brother at his back, by his side, in his ear. Providing a buffer, and a shoulder, for both of them. Oliver
had fucked up, spectacularly, and then made it worse over the summer, with Chinese food and two bottles of wine. The fallout might shatter him for good.

The doors opened and his eyes immediately searched for her; it was a habit he would never be able—or willing—to break. But Curtis was the only one he saw.

“Where’s Felicity?” he rasped, sounding pissed, though he wasn’t. Or maybe he was.

“Out.”

Curtis somehow made it sound like a lot more than a three letter word, and Oliver’s heart rate increased.

“Out where, Curtis.” It wasn’t a question.

The chair spun to face him and the big man gave him a long measuring look.

“That’s all she said.”

Oliver let an explosive sigh out through his nose and turned away before he hit something.

“I’m suiting up. Find me somebody to beat the hell out of.”

“Wha...okay.” Curtis spun back to the computers and wisely kept his head down.

The hallway was dark, but there was light ahead on the left. Felicity stayed right off Adrian’s shoulder, just a step behind. He didn’t offer her an arm, or his hand; she kept hers clasped together under the sweater, her phone clutched within all of that. Her backup plan—if she needed it—was to phone Oliver for help, and suffer his wrath later.

She was willing to go a long way before she executed the backup plan.

The light turned out to be a restaurant kitchen; they received several curious glances as they passed through the hustle and bustle, and if Adrian didn’t know these people he covered it well. He acted like he owned the place.

Just before he pushed through the swinging door he turned to wink at her. Felicity could hear music now, and for the first time all night she was excited.

The room was dark and smoky and loud. Tables ringed a dance floor; one end of the room was anchored by a stage holding a collection of musicians, everything from guitar players to brass to percussionists. The dance floor was full; Felicity stopped dead to watch, mesmerized, and had to run a couple of steps to catch up to Chase, who had moved on into the room.

He went directly to a table at the edge of the floor, and leaned down to whisper something in the lone occupant’s ear. The man’s eyes flicked up to him, slid to Felicity, and then he got to his feet and moved away. Adrian took his seat; Felicity hesitated a step before shuffling around behind him to sit in the remaining chair. Her hands messed with the phone in her lap while she made up her mind; she slipped it into her purse and set the purse on the table.

The Cuban music was loud, but not overwhelmingly so. Couples crowded the dance floor, dancing close with gyrating hips and flowing arms, and Felicity’s feet couldn’t keep still. Adrian sat back in his seat with a smile on his face. A server passed by the table, and the new Star City DA held up two
fingers; shortly thereafter, two bottles of Cristal appeared.

They sat through two or three songs, the audience joining in on the choruses, before Adrian seemed to remember she was sitting next to him. He leaned forward to rest his elbows on the table, took a swig of beer, and shifted toward her.

“You want to try?”

Felicity froze: Tapping her toes was one thing; getting up in front of people was another entirely. She shook her head ‘no’ very quickly.

Adrian didn’t seem bothered by her reluctance. He shrugged his shoulders lightly and got up from his chair, gliding around their table and out onto the dance floor. He waited along the edge, swaying gently with the rhythm of the music, until a couple he apparently knew passed by in each other’s embrace.

Chase put up a hand in greeting, and the next thing Felicity knew she was watching him on the floor, the girl in his arms. His hips flowed and snapped to the Latin rhythm, pressed chest to chest with his partner. He led her in turns, but always brought her back to his body. He was kind of breathtaking, she had to admit.

Felicity sipped her beer and watched through the next song, swaying along from her seat and enjoying the view. Adrian and his partner suddenly broke apart as the music changed again; now they were dancing side by side, two gliding steps forward and one back, and then two steps back and one forward. As the song went on they added turns and side steps, always keying off each other and staying in sync. At the end of the song Felicity clapped.

Adrian’s face was lit up by a smile as he left his partner and returned to her, grabbing the beer off the table before he even sat down. Another couple had already taken his spot on the floor; Felicity wondered what time it was, but then decided she didn’t care.

“Dance with me,” he said, suddenly in her ear. It was the closest, most intimate thing he had done to date, and it made her shiver.

“Adrian...” She was ready to say no again, but his hand was out for her, finally offering himself, and she couldn’t resist. Why is it always the standoffish ones, she chided herself with an internal eye roll as she put her hand in his.

The band announced a break just as she stood, and Felicity pulled back on his hand, both disappointed and relieved. The dance floor would empty, no doubt, and she was not prepared to be the room’s only entertainment. He tugged her hand again, a little more insistent.

“It’s getting late,” she pointed out. Adrian stared at her until she wanted to squirm, the pleasant smile on his face clashing with the intensity of his gaze. He finally looked down and nodded, dropping her hand and putting his own in his pockets.

“Next time, then.”
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Today is the one year anniversary of my first story post to AO3! Hugs, kisses, and many thanks to everyone for the hits, kudos, and comments on all my stuff!

“So you’ve met the new DA—Adrian? Whatta ya think?”

Oliver sat back in his office chair and eyeballed his sister, so sure of herself and on top of things. Sometimes he thought she might make a better mayor. He scrubbed a hand across his chin and considered.

“He’s intense.” The hand fell to his desk and he focused on his tapping fingertips as he continued. “But I have no problem with intensity, if it’s channeled properly.”

“Does that mean you like him?”

He shrugged diffidently and then gave Thea a tight smile.

“I don’t have to like him, I just have to work with him.”

“Well, speaking of working, we both have a lot to get back to.” She pushed up out of her chair and strode to the door in her impossibly high heels, sliding up the sleeves of her blazer as if to illustrate her point about all the work.

“Oh by the way,” she added, turning as she was halfway out the door. “That Susan Williams called again. She really wants an interview. Want me to head her off at the pass again?” Thea looked more than eager to do just that, but Oliver sighed.

“No, put her on the books and I’ll get it over with.”

“Okay, try it again. The count is one, two, three, five, six, seven.”

“Wait. Where’s the four?”

“What?”

“You didn’t say four. There has to be a four.”

“There is no four. Don’t worry about the four. It’s not important.”

“Adrian...” Felicity sighed, dropping her hands in resignation and making him chuckle. She looked away, out over the crowd of dancers who obviously knew the whereabouts of the damn four. “Maybe I should’ve carried a watermelon instead.”

Adrian’s eyes lit up and he laughed out loud, and Felicity went warm all over knowing that someone finally got one of her pop culture references. The warmth was immediately followed by an ache for Oliver and his big, dumb lack of Trivial Pursuit-quality knowledge. It was exquisitely painful.
“Hey, you want another beer?” Adrian was already waving to Jimmy. Jimmy was the server, Esteban watched the door. The front door: After that first time Felicity insisted the alley entrance felt too much like a drug deal.

“God no. No more beer. Unless it’ll make me a better dancer. Could it?”

“It might,” he conceded, grinning again. He only ordered a beer for himself.

She reluctantly went back to trying to learn the Cuban basic, stubbornly keeping her eyes on her feet and hoping if she didn’t see anyone else, they wouldn’t see her.

Jimmy returned with the beer, and on his way back to the kitchen stopped to tap Felicity on the shoulder.

“Phone,” he said; it was in his hand, her phone, with Oliver’s picture lighting up the screen.

“Frack,” she swore softly, taking it from him and clutching it to her chest as if Oliver could hear the noise of the band before she’d even answered.

“Be right back,” she mouthed with motions, already moving off the dance floor. Adrian tipped his chin up in acknowledgment, ready to knock back the new bottle.

By the time she made it outside the ringing had stopped, and Felicity swore under her breath; Oliver would be losing his shit with worry that she didn’t answer.

He picked up on the first ring.

“Are you alright?”

“Oliver, I’m fine,” she sighed. “It was just...loud, and I couldn’t get to you in time. What’s up?”

“I just heard from John. He’s on his way home.”

“What?? Oh my God, is he okay?” It came out as one long word, but Oliver was fluent in Felicity.

“He was injured, but he’ll be fine. It was enough to get him discharged, though. He’ll be stateside tomorrow, back in Star City by the end of the week.”

Felicity let out a big sigh of relief; the OG were getting back together.

“You know I don’t like it when you call us that,” he said, with maybe just a tiny smile in his voice.

“Sorry. That wasn’t supposed to be out loud.”

Oliver chuckled. The man chuckled. For just a second it felt like old times.

“You sure you’re okay? Do you need me to come get you?”

Felicity sighed again.

“I’m fine, Oliver. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

There was the slightest hesitation before he said good night. Not goodbye, like normal phone-talking people, good night. Like they were headed up to bed.

Felicity massaged a headache of frustration and longing with her fingers as she walked back inside
4:30 on a Friday afternoon for an interview felt like a dirty trick. Never work with family, somebody said. Oliver stood and buttoned his suit coat as he stepped around his desk to extend his hand.

“Good afternoon, Ms Williams,” he offered, along with an assortment of fake Mayor gestures and expressions.

“It’s Miss,” she corrected. “Susan, actually. Please.” Oliver nodded affably, resuming his seat and smoothing his tie.

“I understand you’re interested in knowing more about my administration’s efforts to bring affordable housing to the Glades.”

Susan’s eyes dropped to her lap for just a second, the beginnings of a smirk on her face.

“Well, that’s the request that got me through the door. What I’d like is an exclusive on the inner workings of the Queen administration.” She met his eye boldly, a challenge. “I want to shadow the mayor for a few weeks. To learn what makes him tick.”

Oliver let one humorless laugh escape him.

“I’m afraid that won’t be possible. Susan.”

She shrugged lightly, apparently not put off in the slightest.

“You got in to office the first time without being elected. Running for mayor of Star City has—historically—been a dangerous job, but that doesn’t mean you won’t have opposition in the next election.”

Oliver started to interject, but she plowed on.

“The Queen family was once well-loved in this city—and could be again—but voters need to know how hard Oliver Queen is working as mayor to right the wrongs committed over the last few years.”

Oliver kept his face serene, despite the trigger, and leaned forward enough to rest his forearms on the desk.

“I appreciate your...concern for my re-election chances, but it’s going to be a hard no from me. Thank you for coming, Miss Williams.”

Susan stared him down, her brow arching in an aggressive curve.

“What are you afraid of?” she challenged, very softly.

“Not a damn thing.” Oliver didn’t blink.

She chuckled as she reached into her purse, extracted a business card, and slid it across his desk with a perfectly-manicured hand.

“Let me know if you change your mind.”
Felicity had her shoes kicked off under her desk, her bare feet tapping and moving in what looked like some kind of pattern. Oliver studied her from under his lashes, a frown of concentration furrowing his brow and his chin practically resting on his chest in order to watch.

“What...are you doing?” he finally asked, too curious to let it go.

Her head whipped around, one hand holding a pen in her teeth. Oliver’s stomach swooped and dropped at the assault of memories.

“Um, what?” Her feet had stopped moving as soon as she turned, which made bringing it up now kind of pointless and...weird. He shook his head quickly and shifted off the rail that ran around the platform of her Lair, advancing on her with his arms crossed over his chest; he cleared his throat.

“Nothing. What do you have?”

“On the Throwing Star Killer? Bupkis. On things you refuse to talk about? This.” Felicity pushed a stack of files to her right, tapping the top with one blue painted fingernail in case he wasn’t paying attention.

Oliver flipped the cover of the top file open: It was a dossier. They all were, presumably.

“Fel—“

“DON’T ‘Felicity’ me. We need help.”

He threw his hands up, because Here We Go.

“John’s back. You’re here. Curtis is here. We—”

“—ARE NOT FINE! God! Is this how you’ve lived so long? Pure stubbornness?” She was up, toe to toe with him, unafraid even though he towered over her and her bare feet. “John is injured. We don’t even know how badly. Maybe he’ll never be able to get back in the field. What are you going to do, train Curtis to fight?!” She snorted at the idea.

Oliver dropped his gaze, disengaging, because if he started yelling...God. He’d either throttle her or take her on the desk, and right now both options were equally appealing.

“Oliver, look at me.” Her voice had dropped to barely above a whisper, the fight gone out of her tone; he was defenseless against that attack, and she knew it.

“We need a new Canary. Laurel...it’s what she wanted, Oliver. She asked you.” Felicity’s hand drifted up to rest on his chest, the lightest of touches that sent a thrill through him, took his breath, and made his gaze fly to hers.

He didn’t nod in agreement, but he really didn’t have to.

His phone chimed with a text, and he fished it out of his pocket without taking his eyes off of her; she’d been a breath away from being kissed, and didn’t even realize it. He had to break eye contact to check the screen, and what he saw made him sigh deeply, torn between his need for five more minutes with her and his relief at the message.

“John’s here. I’ll go meet him.”
John and Oliver hugged it out upstairs in the former campaign office—Lyla looking on, as misty-eyed as Lyla ever got—so by the time the elevator doors opened the big man could turn all his attention to Felicity. She’d put her shoes back on, the only way she’d have a chance of getting her arms around him; she threw herself at him as soon as he stepped out.

John scooped her up in a monstrous bear hug, bum arm and all, breathing in the unforgettable scent of her. She trembled against him; it felt like something she’d been holding together for months was beginning to unravel. Oliver had followed him out of the elevator and circled around them, and John watched his smile turn brittle at his friends’ reunion. Christ, was anybody keeping it together down here?

“You okay?” he whispered in her ear. Felicity squeezed a little tighter but then nodded, her cheek pressed against his.

“It’s just been...a lot,” she whispered back.

John lowered her to the floor and she swayed for a second, getting her balance in those heels. Oliver’s hand automatically came out to steady her, but she recovered and pulled away before he could make contact.

“So it’s just been you two down here all these months?”

“Curtis too,” Oliver corrected, and John couldn’t miss the look of glaring disapproval Felicity shot their fearless leader. Or his less-than-fearless reaction.

They updated him on Star City’s latest Psycho of the Week, then quizzed him on his injury.

“Shrapnel,” he said shortly, half sitting on the desk next to Felicity’s chair. His good arm pointed out the bad one, encased in a huge soft cast with a bumper to hold it away from his body. “Docs say there’s nerve damage. Progressive.” He paused and leaned into the heavy silence, wanting to remember the last few seconds of their blissful ignorance. “I’ll never aim a gun again.”

Oliver took it like he took most everything, stoically. He looked at his shoes, probably already searching for some way to blame this turn of events on himself.

Felicity...Felicity’s soul cracked a little, John could see it in her eyes. She’d been counting on him to come back and fix things, or at least help her shore them up, and this news crumbled her resolve. John knew—better than anyone—what she went through night after night, listening to Oliver take on the world when the only help she could give was her voice in his ear.

The two of them being apart was only temporary: John knew this at a bone-deep level. But Oliver had to stay alive long enough for them to find their way back to each other, and that was the message burning loud and clear in Felicity’s eyes as she looked at him, the tears just beginning to glisten.

“Look,” John said, scrubbing a hand over his face, despising the obvious false hope, “they can do a lot of crazy things these days.” The elevator doors opened and Curtis stepped out. “Maybe Curtis can come up with another miracle chip,” he finished, with an attempt at a smile.

Felicity blinked once, shuttering all the emotion, then popped up out of her chair to give John a kiss on the cheek.

“I gotta go.” She patted the stack of files and eyed both men. “Neither of you leaves here tonight until you’ve read through these.”
She passed Curtis with a wave and was gone before John could say good night.

“Where is she off to?”

Oliver ran both hands up over his face and into his hair.

“A class. She said she’s taking a class. I don’t know.” He paced three steps each direction before continuing. “Something is going on with her, John.”

Diggle studied the elevator doors across the room in thought, conscious of Oliver and Curtis waiting on him to give them some words of wisdom.

Except, at the moment he was all out.

The Vigilante crouched on a rooftop and watched her walk determinedly to her car, heels a mile high, her blonde ponytail swinging behind her in defiance of the darkness.
Chapter 7

The commotion the three of them made—Curtis, being half dragged, half carried by Oliver and Diggle through the bunker—was enough to wake the dead. Felicity popped up from her desk and crossed to the stairs at a half run.

Oliver ducked out from under the taller man’s arm, leaving John to support him while he hurried to the exam table to unchock the wheels and roll it over to them.

“When I asked if you were going to train him to fight, I was being sarcastic,” Felicity hissed at him, diving into the med cabinet for supplies. Oliver threw an Arrow-worthy glare at the back of her head but said nothing.

“Easy does it,” John intoned, lowering Curtis onto the table and then helping him lift his legs up. He glanced at Oliver and the two made eye contact, each reassuring the other that this was, after all, only a minor injury with a side of major drama.

“I think this is the end of the road for me, guys,” Curtis groaned weakly.

“You’re going to be fine,” Oliver growled in a tone that implied he’d better not push it.

“No, I know. I mean, being out in the field. I can’t keep going home to Paul night after night in this condition. There are only so many times he’ll believe an Olympic athlete fell down the stairs.”

Somewhere behind them Felicity snorted: Oliver tried to ignore it.

“Well, while you three play doctor, I”—she over emphasized the “I”—“will fill you in on our newest problem: There’s a new vigilante in town.” She threw the security camera screenshot of the person in question up onto the big screen opposite the med station for their viewing pleasure. Oliver’s eyes flicked up to it once in that way he had of taking in every pertinent detail at a glance.

“He left two career sex traffickers gift wrapped for the SCPD this evening,” she continued, adding a photo from the police station alley cam. “And by gift wrapped, I mean dead and posed like bad Cirque du Soleil.”

John paused in his work over Curtis to gaze at the photo of two bodies hanging in mid-air, trussed together in the shape of the letter V. He swore under his breath.

Oliver left Dig to finish up with Curtis and mounted the steps to the Lair, coming to a stop at Felicity’s shoulder. He still had the hood up and the mask on, which was unlike him down here.

“I don’t like the look of this,” he gritted out quietly, and from his tone Felicity figured he meant any of a number of things.

“I think it’s time for you boys to go on a road trip to Hub City for a Meet and Greet with a certain Meta.” Felicity’s tone was confident; they had been studying the Black Canary dossiers for a week now, and had narrowed their search to a former police officer with a sonic cry and a bad attitude towards men. All that was left was first contact.

Safe behind the mask, Oliver let himself look at her—really look at her—for the first time in weeks, and what he saw...scared him. Felicity was still using that sarcastic wit that she had, over the last few months, honed to a sharp edge on the hurt from his betrayal, but there was something else now too: A new layer of confidence, or an I-don’t-give-a-shit attitude. He couldn’t figure out which.
But either way it felt like she was moving on.

“You should come with,” he offered hesitantly, his tone softened to almost a whisper. Don’t sound needy, he admonished himself.

Felicity laughed with no humor at all, holding up a hand to stop him.

“Oh no, as fun as that sounds, I can do anything you need from right here.” The hand fell to the desk in front of her and she patted it reassuringly. “Besides, I have things to do.”

“What things?” his own voice screamed in his head, frustrated beyond belief and worried, so fucking worried, but too paralyzed—by what, pride?—to say anything and risk pushing her further away.

Felicity’s head turned to the side to attend to other things, ponytail flying, his cue that she was done with their conversation. Oliver hesitated another breath before he left her side.

“There’s a Cuban American festival in Star City this weekend,” Chase began, his mouth next to her ear as they danced. She was still pretty bad at this, but had at least progressed far enough to be able to dance with him in hold, although he occasionally had to drop their tempo to half time to remind her of a step.

Felicity licked her lips and threw even more concentration into her footwork, buying time while she thought it over. They had never done anything other than dance at the club or eat at Rosa’s; they’d never been seen together outside of Bludhaven. Even knowing the boys would be out of town on the Green Arrow Recruitment Tour—her new favorite phrase—didn’t make the idea of being seen in public with Adrian in Star City any less terrifying.

“Can I think about it?” she asked, a little out of breath at this point in the song. He looked at her with that crazy-intense gaze and smirked.

“Sure. Take your time.”

“I know you love seeing me first thing in the morning so I can tell you we have a problem,” Quentin Lance began with a lopsided quirk of his mouth. Oliver buttoned his coat and smoothed his tie—a nervous tic transferred from his fingers now that he had a respectable day job—as he jogged up the steps to join his old friend and deputy mayor.

“What do we have?”

“Your office,” Lance advised.

Safe behind closed doors, Lance stuffed his hands in his pockets.

“There’s a rat in City Hall.”

Oliver had walked in ahead of him and now pivoted to face him, his back to the morning light streaming through the windows.

“And by rat I assume you don’t mean rodent.”

Quentin gave him The Look, much watered down from the early years when he hated the younger
man’s guts, but still well-able to convey his feelings.

“You’re sure.”

“I was a cop before you were born. I’m sure.”

Oliver’s fingers smoothed over his eyebrows as he stepped behind his desk and prepared to sit.

“What do we know?”

Quentin, cueing off his boss, also took a chair, sitting wide legged with his hands planted on his knees.

“Key members of City Council are getting wind of our plans well before we’re making them public. Collins has reportedly been snapping up real estate in the bay area because somebody told him we’re working on an affordable housing project.”

Oliver sighed in frustration.

“It gets worse,” Lance added, with a look that said he wished this was all a bad joke. “We’re missing evidence in certain high profile cases, including this—“ he waved his hand around, looking for the word—“Throwing Star Killer. Based on that alone, I’d say it’s somebody close to the DA’s office.”

Oliver stared out over Lance’s head. It all fit; he and Thea had worked closely with the DA’s on the housing project.

“You, me, Thea. That’s it. Until we figure this out.” He didn’t even need to elaborate for Quentin to nod, already standing.

“By the way, I’ll be out of the office on Friday—heading to Hub City for the weekend,” Oliver added, his hand already on the mouse to wake up his monitor.

“Romantic getaway, eh?” Lance approached the desk again as Oliver shot him a look. “Congrats, by the way, on getting back together with Felicity. I knew you two would work it out.”

Quentin’s face fell as he saw the look of utter confusion on the mayor’s face; the former cop’s expression changed to embarrassment when he realized the implication of that, and his mistake.

“Oliver, kid, I’m sorry. There’s been a rumor around the building that Felicity’s seeing someone who works here, and I just, well, I naturally assumed...”

Oliver experienced a pain not unlike being punched very hard in the solar plexus; he blinked twice before he could pull air into his lungs. The look of chagrin and pity on Quentin’s face was too hard to take; he dropped his gaze to the desk.

“No, it’s fine,” he said, very softly. “It...it explains a lot.”

Quentin made his getaway as quickly as possible, allowing Oliver a moment to collect his thoughts before his first appointment. He spun his chair to face the windows, staring out over the city in the morning glare as several minutes ticked off the clock.

He turned back around, heaved a huge sigh, and opened the top drawer in his desk. The business card was on top, the first thing his fingers found as he reached in.

Oliver rotated it by the edges between his fingers several times before picking up the phone to dial.
Chapter 8

Felicity didn’t make up her mind for sure until the boys were well on their way to Hub City. She was tracking their progress out of habit, but also to make sure they didn’t surprise her by turning back up because somebody forgot something. If she was going to take the next step with Chase, she needed to do it without the possibility of Oliver stumbling upon them.

She sat for many minutes in the half-dark and the relative stillness; the only noises were from the cooling fans of the computers and the faint hum from the server room, sounds that had been programmed into her DNA.

It was a testament to her weeks in the support group that she could be down here, alone with her thoughts, and not want to climb the walls. She still went most weeks, in the morning, without Adrian. She had never told him why she needed the group, and after that first offer to be a listening ear, he had never asked. In a way, it felt like he already knew.

To be honest, her pull to spend time with Chase had less to do with him and more to do with the music, and the rhythm. The anonymity of the club. No, she corrected herself, that wasn’t quite true. She enjoyed the music, and the chance to exercise her brain and her body, but there was really only one reason she spent so much time there: It was the only place in her life Oliver Queen wasn’t.

Neither of them could pretend to be happy apart—the summer had shown them that—but lately their arguments had turned...dark, proving they could no longer be happy together either. Neither wanted to hurt the other, god knew, but there was only a thin skin of civility left between them before they were digging into old hurts and unfinished discussions.

She couldn’t—would never—leave her team, her family, for good, but it was time to take a step back.

Felicity picked up her phone and sent the text.

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Oliver and John sat in the front seats of the van, parked in a dark alley found in the kind of neighborhood where advertisements for low-cost paternity tests emblazoned every park bench.

“What’s she hanging out here for?” Dig muttered, hunched forward, his eyes roving around their surroundings.

“Death wish,” Oliver said softly, and it took John a minute to realize he wasn’t trying to be funny. He glanced over at Oliver, who shrugged. “It’s why I’d be here.”

“There she is,” John warned, sitting up straighter and preparing to either exit the vehicle or start the engine. He waited for Oliver’s cue, content to defer to his experience in this sort of thing.

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She’d had trouble finding a decent place to park; Friday night crowds could be like that. But that just meant more people out and about. Safety in numbers. Or at least more of a chance that someone would take pity on her and dial 911 if she got in over her head.

She strode across the street, full of confidence—she didn’t always feel—and enough experience with the world to keep her wary.
The doorman let her right in; the room was crowded, but there was still a spot left at the bar. She sat down and ordered a drink.

Thirty seconds rolled in to a minute with no movement from Oliver, not even a twitch.

“What do you think?” Dig asked, beginning to doubt Oliver’s judgement. “Oliver.” He let the urgency show in his voice: What was the point of going to all this trouble if they weren’t going to engage?

It was impossible to hear the chime of the text over the noise in the bar, but she felt the vibration and picked the phone up off her lap.

“Change of plans for this weekend. Sorry,” it read. “Rain check?”

She sighed, stowed the phone, and threw a ten dollar bill on the bar, but stayed until her glass was empty.

“Let’s go,” Oliver ordered softly, clear in his voice that he meant LEAVE, his eyes still trained on the door across the street. Dig’s eyes flicked to him, trying to reconcile the absolute trust he had in this man with the wariness he felt over the decision.

“We may not get another chance...” he let the sentence trail off, well aware that Oliver knew this too. But Oliver was lost in his own head, inside the seedy club with her, confronting her—in the back hallway, where the music wasn’t quite so loud—using his bulk to at least shield her from the lust-filled gazes of drunk assholes, because he knew he couldn’t intimidate HER with his size. Been there, done that.

He was telling her he was sorry—maybe that would make a hand’s worth of apologies over the years—sorry for not telling her about William the minute he put the pieces together, Samantha’s threats be damned. Felicity had never judged him for his past, and she wouldn’t have started with a surprise child; would probably have quipped that it was a miracle there was only one, and then rolled up her sleeves and made it work. Like she always did.

For a moment the vision ran on without him and he had to catch up; he was telling her he was helpless without her, stuck, lost. Sounding like a drunk idiot, although he hadn’t touched a drop of alcohol since the day he moved out of the loft; he didn’t dare. He was practically babbling, for him, probably keeping her from her date, and when he couldn’t take the angry look in her eyes any longer—because god, would she be angry—he would ask, beg, her to talk to him.

In his mind he was caging her in between his arms, backing her against a questionable wall, but she wouldn’t even be thinking about the state of her dress because he was RIGHT THERE, so close; sexual tension had never been a problem for them. Physical needs aside—he demanded of his imagination—he was there to push the issue, to make her talk. In his heart he knew she needed a good metaphorical shake, that final shove to open up and let it all out: The heartbreak, the betrayal, probably Havenrock, although—because—that was not a word anyone ever spoke.

But he was a man who had pushed, and had been pushed, over the edge so many, painful, times. He had made a promise years ago to protect her, to allow her into his orbit but not let her get too close to
the sun, and he had failed. Miserably. What if he pushed her now and she broke completely? It would end him. She would be ruined, and he would be back to the broken monster who returned to his city with a death wish thinly disguised as a cause.

He couldn’t get any further with the fantasy of their reconciliation, no matter how hard he tried, because he couldn’t take that last step, and clearly she was no longer interested. Maybe—most likely—HE was in there with her, right now. The idea made him sick to his stomach. Oliver imagined stalking in there like a lunatic ex-boyfriend and cringed; that’s all his approval rating needed.

Not that he wouldn’t burn the place to the ground without a second thought if he suspected Felicity was in danger.

No, he trusted her, had always trusted her to make good decisions. Trusted her with his life. She was easily smarter than two Oliver Queens. So his mind could reel with scenarios of him kissing her senseless in a crappy club, his stomach could turn at the more realistic thought of her with another man, but in the end he would do nothing, because, as far as it depended on him, Felicity Smoak was going to be free to make her own decisions.

“We’re leaving,” he reiterated, his own voice grating in his ears. “Curtis is waiting in Hub City.”
Chapter 9

Dinah Drake was...quiet. She’d been hovering on the edges of the common areas down here for almost a week—John said she was still working on finding a place to live—and when it was just the two of them, during the day, Felicity often got the feeling she was being watched. By a grumpy cat.

She shook her head quickly to clear it and focused down on the victims list from last weekend. The Throwing Star Killer had gone on a spree while the guys were in Hub City. Her own plans sidelined, Felicity had spent most of her time here, adding name after name to the list of victims and trying everything she could think of to tie them together.

Work history, criminal history, education, past addresses, extended family; she’d checked them all and found nothing. Out of desperation she jotted the names down on a pad of paper and started doodling; underlining all the vowels, connecting consonants with lines, lining up their birthdates in number order.

“What are you doing?”

Her voice was husky, overlaid with velvet, her tone hovering between curiosity and suspicion. Felicity felt a chill run down her spine: She was used to listening for ninja-like Oliver Queen, but Dinah had taken her completely by surprise.

“Oh. Nothing. Just busy being stuck.” She glanced up at the woman and nodded encouragement when she started to reach for the other rolling chair. Dinah pulled it closer and sat—no, perched, as if ready to flee at the first thing that spooked her. Just like a damn cat.

“No matter what I do I can’t find a connection between the vics. Any ideas?”

Dinah self consciously pushed her hair back behind her ear with one hand and reached out to pull the pad closer. Felicity watched her eyes—they were sort of caramel colored—rove the page, using cop training, probably.

“What if you mix the letters in the names up? Like the Zodiac Killer.”

“You think maybe they’re anagrams? Hmm.”

Felicity’s fingers flew for a few minutes, putting the names into a program she luckily already had, then she sat back with a sigh.

“We’ll see what happens. Thanks.”

She offered Dinah a friendly smile, determined to get on her good side. Felicity needed closed off people to like her; it was one of her rules. Hence the Saga of Oliver Queen, probably. Or the beginning of it, anyway.

“Dig said you were looking for an apartment.” Felicity paused because Dinah was giving her a confused look that resolved itself when she worked out who “Dig” was. “I can help you look if you want. I kind of have a lot of free time during the day.”

Silence from the grumpy cat.

It was meant to be funny, but she wasn’t pulling off self-deprecating too well these days. Felicity’s lips pooched out before she could stop them, another knee-jerk reaction from years of long unamused
stares from you-know-who.

“Anyway...”

Felicity’s phone buzzed, breaking the god-awful awkwardness; a text.

“Will I see you tonight?”

She flipped the phone face down, buying time while she thought about it. Would he? Being stood up had stung, especially when it left her alone all weekend, silently wishing she’d tagged along on the road trip.

The elevator doors opened and Curtis burst out, sending Dinah up out of her chair—spooked, just like Felicity predicted. For a moment her attention was split between deciphering Curtis’s hundred-mile-an-hour babbling and keeping a wary eye on their new team member in case she decided to defend herself with an ear-splitting shriek.

“Curtis, slow down! You’ve come up with what?” He made the platform in one giant stride; it wasn’t clear he was even aware that he’d skipped the steps. Felicity and Dinah shared a quick glance of concern that would’ve been comical if she’d had time to process it.

“I think I have a way to fix John’s nerve damage!” He stopped beside her arm, a tiny clear plastic box cradled in his palm. Felicity leaned in for a closer look at the infinitesimal chip resting in a piece of foam, and felt Dinah’s warmth at her back as she moved closer, apparently curious too.

“Seriously? Like, seriously?” Felicity was having trouble finding words suddenly. Curtis nodded slowly, a huge grin taking over his face. She matched it with one of her own and almost reached up to touch her mouth, it felt so foreign. “When can we try it?” she asked, giddy.

“As soon as we can get him here.”

Felicity grabbed her phone to call John and Oliver, and remembered the text from Adrian, waiting for a reply. She barely hesitated before her fingers typed out ‘Can’t tonight’.

_____________________________________________________

“Miss Williams will be accompanying me to the waste management meeting this afternoon.”

Miss Williams this, Miss Williams that. Thea had to contain her gag reflex every time she heard it. Which was a lot. She took a fortifying breath and glanced at the acoustical tile ceiling before plastering a (slightly manic—god, it was the only type she had left) smile on her face and turning to face her monumentally stupid older brother.

“Got it,” she confirmed, with her best shot at a nod of approval.

Oliver gave her The Look as he passed her in the hall, clearly reading right through her. Quentin was off his left shoulder, offering his own look of complete and utter sympathy whenever their boss wasn’t looking. He claimed to hate the Dragon Lady more than she, if that was even possible. They often argued about it.

“Just...for scheduling purposes—“ Oliver turned back to regard her suspiciously—“how long can we expect Miss Williams (just the hint of disrespect that time) to be interviewing you?” It took every ounce of the class she had inherited from Moira Queen to stop herself from making air quotes at the end of that sentence. Because gah.
Her brother leveled a gaze at her that said there would be no more discussions after this.

“As long as it takes,” he said quietly. His eyes dropped to his phone when it began to ring; he answered immediately, which meant it was Felicity calling. Whatever she said stopped him cold. Oliver’s eyes snapped to Thea and he immediately changed course; she heard him tell her he’d be right there.

It wasn’t quite a party atmosphere, but it was a damn sight closer than anything they’d had in almost a year. Most of his attention was on the almost-painless procedure Curtis was carefully performing on his arm, but every so often John would glance up at the faces around him. There was a lot of expectant hovering, as if he was about to give birth; Felicity’s eyes kept drifting to the elevator, probably on the lookout for Lyla, who was on her way.

Curtis lifted his glasses to give the arm one final closeup check, then nodded. John stayed very very still, half afraid to know the truth.

“How long til it starts working?” he asked. Curtis shrugged.

“Now?”

No one in the room breathed as he stared at his hand, palm open to the ceiling and fingers straight. He sighed once and slowly curled his fingers into a fist: No resistance, no tremor, no pain. The collective breath was released at once, a whoosh of air from everyone with a triumphant fist pump from Curtis.

John straightened for the first time in an hour, hardly feeling the crick in his back as he opened and closed his hand in wonder, and suddenly everyone was laughing and talking at once. Lyla must have arrived at the last minute, because her arm came around his waist and she slipped under his other arm, hugging him tight. He dropped a kiss on her forehead, too overwhelmed to say anything yet.

It took him a minute to realize Oliver and Felicity had disappeared.

The look on John’s face told Oliver it had worked. He released the breath he had been holding—for weeks, really—his eyes dropping to his shoes as a rush of emotion washed over him. His jacket and tie were off, shirt sleeves rolled up, the waste management meeting long adjourned without him. Poor Thea.

He had once been the life of the party, but that Oliver was a stranger—or an ancestor, maybe—to the man in this body. This man no longer tolerated crowds, or loud noises, or lots of rapid movement. Granted, there weren’t many people in their little party, but it didn’t always take many to send his senses reeling. He glanced up once, in time to see Lyla move in on her husband, and then drifted away.

Even with her feet bare he knew she had followed him, her breaths feather-light, probably thinking she was being stealthy. She didn’t know he had memorized the cadence of her breathing—in every situation imaginable—long before he’d let himself hope that they could ever be more than teammates.

He had her sighs catalogued by level of exasperation, knew her hitched breaths of surprise—both good and bad—her special laugh in reaction to his rare moments of humor. And those he discovered later, the sounds he never dared think about; the ones HE could bring out of her. Those were
memorized too, but safely locked away.

He glanced back over his shoulder, to let her know he knew.

“‘You heard me?’ She sounded playfully disappointed. ‘Thought I was being super sneaky there.’” Felicity closed the distance between them as he dropped into a seat at the conference table, still within earshot of the rest of the group but insulated from the overwhelming energy.

“Think we’ll have a big enough team now?” he asked softly, feeling a bit playful himself. These were the moments with her he loved; no conflict, no life or death decisions to be made. Just quiet, lighthearted, peaceful. The only thing he’d ever wanted when he came home all those years ago.

Felicity traced an invisible pattern on the table top, then her fingers walked across to the hand he had left resting in her path.

“Is that your way of saying you’re sorry for resisting for so long?” Her index finger tapped the back of his hand once, on the word “resisting”. Oliver sighed and looked up at her, making eye contact and holding it.

“I’m sorry about lots of things.”

She froze, all playfulness put aside, wary about his next words and very very quiet.

“If I had made different decisions, we might be married right now.” Felicity’s eyes never left him as she lowered herself very carefully into the seat next to him. She looked skittish, not unlike Dinah had this whole week. A detached part of his brain made a note to put those two observations together and examine them later when he had a minute. But at the moment he was on a roll.

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry I left you out of decisions that absolutely affected you. Us. I’m sorry if I gave the impression that I didn’t trust you, or trusted Samantha more. Because you know—I hope you know—that I trust you with my life.” His eyes flicked to the display case holding his leathers. “Every time I’m out there.”

Felicity nodded imperceptibly, her mouth slightly open as if she was preparing to stop him if he went too far.

“I’m sorry if my stupidity has pushed you away, to someone else. It was never my intention to...to fail you.”

She blinked twice; Oliver swore he could see the gears turning in her head as she tried to decide how much he knew, or how much to tell him, or maybe something else.

“Oliver—“

Whatever else she was going to say was cut off when Curtis swung around the corner, clearly uncomfortable breaking in on their conversation.

“Sorry guys. I’m really sorry. But, Felicity, your anagram program has come up with some answers, and John says you two really need to see what it found.”
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Prepare yourselves...
*posts chapter and runs away*


Adam Hunt. Ted Gaynor. Palmer Cokes. Sachi Beech. The names floated up in front of Oliver at the damndest times, like now, in the middle of the public works budget meeting. He blinked twice, willing them away in order to concentrate on the stunningly dull water main replacement proposal.

Two pieces of the puzzle had fallen into the team’s lap over the last week. First, Felicity’s computer program discovered the Throwing Star Killer was targeting the Green Arrow specifically, and letting him know by killing people whose names were anagrams for Oliver’s earliest victims. Names from his father’s list, way back during those first weeks when he was trying to make a difference—alone—with whatever time he had left before he self-destructed.

The second piece of the puzzle came in a plain white envelope that landed on Quentin’s desk at City Hall under mysterious circumstances: Inside it was a letter containing the words “Call me Prometheus” overlaying a drawing of the distinctive Throwing Star found at the scene of each of the crimes. So far neither the letter nor the envelope had turned up any further clues.

Oliver stopped just shy of rubbing a hand over his face, turning the need to move into smoothing his tie and shifting in his seat. His eye caught Susan Williams, in a chair against the far wall, staring back at him with that eyebrow arch she seemed to consider alluring.

Thea’s face appeared in the window of the conference room door, her look clearly communicating that it was time to wrap things up. He lifted his chin slightly in acknowledgment as Susan’s head turned to follow their silent conversation with a smirk.

Oliver was reminded of another item on his never-ending to do list: Keeping those two apart.

Ten minutes later he’d managed to wrestle the meeting to a standstill with promises to meet privately with several departments, using what time he had no idea. That was Thea’s problem. The room slowly cleared until only he and the reporter were left, facing off across the conference table. Oliver stuffed his hands in his pockets.

“Bet you didn’t expect my life to be this exciting,” he joked softly, to break the silence. Susan tipped her head and huffed a laugh.

“I sure didn’t expect you to consider this your ENTIRE life.” She steepled the fingers of one hand against the surface of the table, a hip cocked against it flirtatiously. “You know, when my editor asked for an in-depth piece, she meant in-depth. Not just the 9 to 5 Mayor Queen.”

Oliver glanced at the table, then back up.

“Okay.”

“Okay what, Mr Mayor?”
“Meet me at the elevators at 5:30.”

The bar was trying its best to look like a dive, but it was failing miserably, what with all the well-dressed Millennials nursing mid-range bourbon and joking about how bad their last three Ubers had been.

Oliver had secured a booth at the back, on the opposite side of the room from the restrooms, out of both habit and necessity. He loosened his tie with his right hand while the fingers of his left rotated the glass of scotch—his first in months—absently. He tried not to imagine one of those fingers wearing a wedding band.

“So,” Susan began flirtatiously, a glass of red almost to her lips, “what shall we talk about?”

Oliver glanced up from under his lashes, scanning the room one more time before he looked at her and spoke.

“I need your help.”

There went the eyebrow again.

“It has come to my attention that City Hall has a rat.” He waited for her to catch on; it wasn’t a long wait. “Now. I could go in there—” he cocked his head to the side with a tiny smile—“or send Thea in, guns blazing, and start making threats, or I could bring someone into my circle who can ask the right questions of the right people without raising a bunch of red flags.”

Susan sat very still, clearly intrigued, but waiting for more.

“And?” she finally prompted when Oliver didn’t say more.

“You would get the exclusive on me,” he planted his fingers against his chest, “and the exclusive on the corruption story, provided you uncover it.”

Susan took another sip from her glass and set it back very carefully. Her hand slipped off the glass and fell lightly onto his, still resting on the tabletop.

“And here I thought you had a totally different proposition planned.”

Oliver huffed a laugh with very little humor behind it and pulled his hand into his lap.

“Susan, I gave my heart away a long time ago. The fact that she and I aren’t together at the moment—and maybe won’t ever be again—doesn’t change that. I hope you can understand.”

She nodded slowly, the disappointment in her eyes soothed by the idea that she could be looking at a major career boost if she managed to land both stories.

“I’m in.”

“Good. I think it’s best if we keep this between the two of us. I’ll handle my sister and Lance—” he overlooked her eye roll—“and we’ll continue as we have been.”

They each took another sip in silence, and then Susan bit her lip.

“Since we’re here, how ‘bout a game of pool?”
Felicity tapped her foot as she waited for the elevator, a bag of Big Belly—recently molested by City Hall security but still hot—clutched in her hands.

It had never been her habit to show up unannounced, but things had been crazy over the past week; between their newest discoveries about Prometheus and the regular day-to-day Star City drama, she hadn’t had a minute alone with Oliver.

His speech right after Curtis fixed John’s hand had...surprised her. Impressed her. Convinced her he really was sorry, and he understood her real reason for walking away from them. If Curtis hadn’t picked the exact wrong time to break in, she was pretty sure she would’ve reconciled on the spot. Or at least opened the door.

But since the revelation that the Throwing Star Killer—Prometheus—had Oliver in his sights, there hadn’t been a good time to bring it up. Hence a surprise supper in the Mayor’s office. Hopefully with a side of “One Step at a Time”.

She almost bowled right over Oliver’s assistant as she stepped out of the elevator. He had his coat on, obviously on his way out for the day.

“Oh,” he said, kind of weird and awkward.

“Hi,” she offered brightly, determined to carry through despite the warning bells suddenly going off in her head.

“Mayor, um, Queen left already. With Miss Williams.”

Felicity stared for a beat, her brain awash in white noise as she processed.

“Oh. Right. Huh. Okay. Thanks.” She whirled back to the nearly closed elevator doors, shoving the bag of fast food in the opening to make them reverse course, her reality crashing in on itself. And burning. To. The. Ground.

Oliver’s assistant—dammit, she could never remember his name—said “um” again and edged into the car behind her, clearly embarrassed, or embarrassed for her, or both. The ride down was silent.

And excruciatingly painful.

Oliver strode out of the elevator a little later than usual, working his tie off with one hand and his jacket slung over his arm. John and Dinah were dressed for business, standing behind Curtis at the computers.

“Where are we?” he asked, brisk and efficient. “And where’s Felicity? I thought she was supposed to be here.”

Curtis spun his chair.

“She called and said something came up. I think she may be getting sick.” Curtis shrugged. “She sounded kind of funny.”

Oliver sighed once, frowning, then turned away for his suit. Despite the busyness of the past week he’d had the feeling she wanted to talk. Maybe he’d been wrong. Or maybe she really was sick. He
"As for where we are," Curtis called out from her Lair and interrupted his thoughts, "there’s been a Vigilante sighting tonight in the Glades."

"Thought we might go say hello," John added, opening and closing his newly-mended fist. Oliver gazed up at the green leather hood and nodded. "Sounds good."

“I’m glad you could make it,” Adrian practically yelled over the music. It was particularly busy tonight; the dance floor was packed. He spun Felicity in a languid circle, her hips swaying—finally—on the appropriate beat. She came back to him and her hand landed on his muscled shoulder, his slightly damp shirt sticking to her fingers.

They hadn’t left the floor in an hour, dancing to anything the band played. Tendrils of hair had escaped her ponytail and were stuck to her face, but she didn’t care. The heat and the music and the level of her concentration had driven all other thoughts from her head; the exhaustion was blissful.

“I’ve missed you,” he continued, his stare piercing through her concentration and making her miss a step, but he swung her around and got them back on beat effortlessly, almost like he had been expecting her to mess up.

“I’m sorry,” she heard herself say, not entirely sure what she was sorry about. Adrian looked down and away as if he hadn’t heard her—mouthing the words to the chorus although she couldn’t hear him singing over the band—and then looked back up at her, stared at her, almost through her. The corners of his mouth drew up into a tiny smirk and the skin around his eyes crinkled with the glee that his eyes themselves were somehow missing.

“Be my date for the Christmas party at City Hall.”
“I don’t mean to question your judgement...”

“But...”

“...but the team went out to ‘make contact’—“ Felicity made air quotes with her blue painted nails —“with the Vigilante, and now he’s in a cell in our basement.”

Oliver stared her down, arms crossed.

“This is not how you dealt with Dinah.”

“He wasn’t as...cooperative as Dinah.”

Felicity cocked her head to the side, unimpressed with his answer, waiting for more. He uncrossed his arms and skirted around her.

“And you weren’t here at the time to consult.” Thrown over his shoulder as he walked away, clearly done.

Her mouth fell open and then closed with a click of her teeth. By the time she’d turned around he was gone: Spit polishing the Ducati, rearranging the climbing equipment, riding up and down the elevator. Whatever the hell it was he did when he was trying to avoid her but couldn’t make himself leave.

The holidays were fast approaching, and with it that damn party. Felicity changed her mind eight times a day about whether or not to go as Adrian’s date. She’d bought a dress anyway—because retail therapy was an actual thing—but the thought of showing up in it with anyone but Oliver made her hyperventilate.

And the thought of seeing him there with Susan Williams did even worse things to her.

As the night wore on she found herself creating excuses to leave her computers; Oliver hadn’t come back from wherever he was sulking but she knew he was nearby, and the same force that kept him close to her pulled her to find him.

Eventually Felicity made it as far as the basement, telling herself she just needed to check the fuse box, because nobody had done that in awhile. Her heart skipped a beat when she glanced up at the cell and thought it was empty; their captive was crouched in the back, still in his full suit and trademark ski goggles.

She passed through the room, did her check of the box, and was starting to walk back by the cell when the Vigilante rose to his feet.

“What’s up, Blondie?”

The movement was lightning fast; Oliver’s form separated itself from the shadows to her right and took up the space between her and the bars of the cell before she could blink. He was in his suit, hood up and mask on, body taut and hair trigger.

“You. Don’t. Speak. To. Her.” Low and gravelly, scarier in person then it ever sounded over the comms. Lethal.
Nobody moved for several seconds. Oliver was so close she could reach out and put a hand where his quiver usually rested. To stop him, or reassure him. Or herself.

Instead she walked on.

—–

“Hi. It’s me.”

“Where are you? Your voice is all echoey. Are you okay?”

“I’m...no I’m fine. I’m calling from the bathroom.” Felicity cringed at the way that sounded, but she was, in fact, crouched against the far wall of the bigger of the two restrooms in the Lair.

“What’s the matter, Felicity?”

“I, um, I don’t think I can come with you.”

There was a beat of silence.

“To the Christmas party?”

“Actually, it’s a Holiday—never mind. Yes, to that. Sorry.”

“Any particular reason?”

She let out a shaky sigh and pulled her skirt further over her knees.

“Oh, you know, the usual; ex-fiancée and his new girlfriend, or whatever.” She forced a tiny laugh but there were tears in her voice; her throat burned with the need to heave a sob.

“Fuck him.” It was whispered so softly she could almost convince herself she’d heard wrong; she’d never known Adrian to swear.

The silence over the line dragged out until Felicity cleared her throat, beginning to wonder if they’d been cut off.

“If you change your mind, let me know.”

“Okay,” she squeaked, the tears coming now whether she liked it or not. Felicity cut off the call and folded in on herself, weeping.

—–

His name was Rene Ramirez. He was ex-military—dishonorably discharged—with a bad temper and a chip on his shoulder big enough to build a garden shed on.

He also hated the Green Arrow with a white-hot passion.

In the end—after a whole week—it was Dinah who managed to get through to him; maybe it was her cop training, or maybe it was her smoking hotness. Felicity figured the odds were fifty-fifty. Either way, she had convinced Rene to reveal his identity, although Oliver had yet to reveal his.

“We have some weird recruitment strategies,” Felicity mused, fingers flying over the keys as she continued her perpetual search for Prometheus. Curtis grunted a reply next to her. He was elbow deep in bits of tech as he came up with yet another arrowhead adaptation. They had become his
“Think about it,” she continued, half to herself. “You three road trip all the way to Hub City to stake out a meta for 48 hours before asking her nicely to join the cause, and less than a month later our next recruit is hog tied and thrown in the back of the van without so much as a How Do You Do. Weird.”

“24 hours,” Curtis corrected absently, not looking up from his work.

“What?”

“The three of us were only together 24 hours. Oliver and John didn’t get there until Sa...turday...” Curtis’s head raised from his work very slowly. “Um...”

“Curtis...What are you talking about? How were they not with you?”

He pushed his glasses up his nose and looked everywhere but at her.

“We...drove separately?”

“Are you asking me or telling me? Why didn’t you drive together? And what were they doing if they weren’t in Hub City?”

Curtis swallowed hard.

She was up out of her chair as the elevator doors opened, at the top of the stairs before he and John and Dinah had made it five feet into the room.

“Can I speak to you, please.” It wasn’t a request. Oliver’s eyes darted left and right before settling on her, his bow in one hand, mask in the other.

“Privately,” she added, crossing her arms.

Oliver led the way to the back room and his cot. He tossed the things in his hands onto his makeshift bed and began taking off his quiver.

“You spied on me,” she hissed, as mad as she’d ever been at him, maybe as mad as she’d ever been period.

“What?” he countered mildly, going for detached although they both knew he was deflecting like crazy.

“Hub City. You and John. SPYING on me.” Felicity spit the word out.

Oliver’s eyes lifted to hers and held their ground.

“You spied on me,” she hissed, as mad as she’d ever been at him, maybe as mad as she’d ever been period.

“What?” he countered mildly, going for detached although they both knew he was deflecting like crazy.

“Hub City. You and John. SPYING on me.” Felicity spit the word out.

Oliver’s eyes lifted to hers and held their ground.

“Yes. We were worried.”

“You bastard.” It was a whisper, but it stung like a whip lash.

He took a step forward and reached out just as her hand came up, to slap him or pull him closer, she never decided. It didn’t matter after they crashed together, bruising each other with kisses, fighting for dominance as they stumbled to the cot, falling onto it in a heap.
Oliver groaned as the bow pressed into his back; he tried to reach behind his head to extract it but she slammed her hand against his, entwining their fingers and holding him in place as she surged against him; he gave in and ignored the discomfort. Within minutes there were too many other sensations vying for his attention anyway.

This wasn’t them, had never been the way they were together, this struggle, as if they sought and welcomed pain. Oliver’s brain was screaming for him to stop even as she took him in, hissing at the feel of him moving inside her.

“Felicity,” he begged, a whimper just before her mouth crashed down to silence him.

It didn’t take long; it had been too long. She collapsed on his chest, panting, the look in her eyes saying she was just becoming aware of how loud they had probably been with everyone in the next room.

Oliver reached a hand up to push her hair back off her face—had he ripped her hair out of its ponytail, or had she?—but Felicity lifted off of him, separating their bodies and making him groan, and pushed back to stand. Shaking fingers smoothed her dress and retrieved her underwear from the floor; she balled them into her fist and walked away.
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

There’s been a lot of angst lately; here’s something slightly more lighthearted (don’t worry, it won’t last long), with a generous amount of Thea goodness.

Also, assume the Crossover never happened in this version. I don’t have the strength.

They were meeting in the bar again. It had to be the bar because Oliver was beginning to suspect his office was bugged, and when Thea—very wisely—suggested that Felicity should come by and run a scan, Oliver had to tell her they weren’t speaking as of two days ago. And then his baby sister had to confess that yes, she already knew they weren’t speaking because everyone on the team had heard the two of them having very angry post-break up sex, and Curtis had taken it upon himself to tell her (and Quentin, god help him) all about it.

So here he was in the bar, with Susan Williams and a monumental headache.

“Look, Lance was right. I’ve traced it all the way to the DA’s office, but after that I hit a wall.”

Oliver sighed in frustration. He really didn’t mind Susan, as human beings went; she had actually been quite helpful recently. But he was almost 100% sure that his...whatever that was...with Felicity the other day had something to do with her thinking that he and Susan were dating. Like she wasn’t seeing someone herself. Someone who worked for him, no less. The whole thing made his stomach roil.

“Susan, I really didn’t plan to bring anyone to the Holiday party this year. I mean, I thought about asking Thea, you know, as a nice gesture—“

He stopped cold when Susan rolled her eyes.

“The mayor of Star City is also its most eligible bachelor. You don’t get to bring your little sister as your date. Sorry.”

Oliver smiled into his drink despite himself; it did sound pretty lame. Susan leaned forward to regain his attention, and because she needed to speak more softly.

“The DA’s office has lost three employees in the last month alone.”

Oliver shrugged, unconvinced. “People leave jobs all the time. Especially high stress jobs.”

“One of them died three days after they left in a single-car accident. The other two have vanished off the face of the earth since they “quit”. I’ve spent a significant amount of time looking for them.”

He studied her over his nearly empty glass, the wheels turning in his head.

“Oliver, nobody’s talking in the DA’s office right now, with good reason. But this party is a chance to speak to people who might have answers AND might be more forthcoming under the influence of a little holiday cheer, if you know what I mean. Especially when the mayor’s office is footing the bar bill.”
She was right; there was only one party a year. They had to take advantage of the opportunity.

“Alright.” He knocked back the remainder of his drink. “But under no circumstances do I dance.”

Thea had really outdone herself with the party planning; Oliver had been receiving compliments all evening, and all he had done was approve the budget.

He stood at a high top table, ignoring a plate of hors d'oeuvres in front of him and trying not to look for Felicity. He really had no idea if she would even be here; not everybody thought of dressing up and hanging out with their co-workers after hours as entertainment.

There was a touch at his elbow just as Thea rounded the corner and crossed the room in stilettos and a dress that could only be described as “glittery”. Oliver glanced to his right; Susan was there in a skin-tight red dress with a glass of champagne held out for him. He was reminded that he should’ve specified “no red” as well as “no dancing”.

“Hello again,” she said brightly, tipping her champagne flute toward his before taking a sip. Oliver ducked his head, suddenly shy—or maybe still nervous about people seeing them together in public—then glanced up from under his lashes at the last minute to gauge his sister’s expression as she approached.

“Great party,” Susan offered when Thea came to a stop on his other side. “Your brother has been getting compliments on it all night, and refuses to take any credit.”

“I’m lucky,” Thea countered. “He knows better than to try to claim what isn’t his.”

And there was the Moira Queen he remembered, embodied in his little sister. Damn.

Just as he was re-thinking his decision to leave the Kevlar at home, Susan leaned in ever so slightly, her gaze focused across the room.

“Chase just walked in.”

Oliver turned his body toward the door, his eyes meeting that crazy-intense stare of his District Attorney and lifting his chin slightly in greeting. The smirk on Adrian’s face grew into a full-on grin before he turned his head and reached a hand back for someone. Oliver was just raising his glass to his lips when he saw her.

Adrian took her change of heart—again—about going to the party completely in stride. Felicity had insisted at the last minute that she meet him there; no use ruining both their nights if it all got to be too much and she had to leave early.

“Just so you know, I plan on requesting a Salsa from the DJ.” It was the first thing he said when they met up outside on the steps of the venue, her heels putting her just at his eye level as she stood on the step above him. He grinned like a little kid, the skin around his eyes crinkling in that way that made him sort of irresistible.

“Adrian...I don’t know.” Dancing in a club in Bludhaven amidst a crowd of people she was now comfortable with was one thing; being on display in front of city officials and her ex-boyfriend-the-freakin’-Mayor was another thing entirely. His girlfriend was a reporter, for God’s sake.
“C’mon.” He stuffed his hands into the pockets of his dress coat, jogging up the steps without waiting for her. Not for the first time Felicity wondered if he was entirely sane.

They checked their coats and then he worked the crowd, shaking hands and slapping backs like a career politician. Felicity followed along in his wake, nodding and smiling shyly; she had never been comfortable with this role, even when it had been Oliver doing the schmoozing. Adrian weaved his way into the ballroom, then suddenly pulled up and turned his head back, holding out a hand for her.

Oliver Queen was a man blessed—or cursed—with more life-defining moments than most. Some had changed him forever, by fire, and by flood. Some had ripped away pieces of himself, people he loved. Many had, ultimately, made him a better person.

But none of those moments—not one—had made more of an impact on him than the moment he met Felicity Smoak.

Oliver’s glass froze on its way to his mouth, forgotten as he watched her walk into the room. Her eyes were down, studying the hand being held by Adrian, as if she wasn’t sure it was really happening. She was breathtakingly gorgeous; he was sure she didn’t know it, but Felicity had a way of looking effortlessly beautiful in formal settings that also made all the women around her look overdone.

“Breathe.” Thea threw a not-subtle elbow into his ribs, making him grunt.

Chase was crossing the dance floor, bringing her to him with a wink and a smile. Chase. His DA. And Felicity. The heat flooding up past his collar and onto his face was extraordinary. Oliver could feel Susan just to his right; she shifted her weight away from him, then back, unsure how to play this. That made two of them.

“Mr Mayor.” Adrian stuck out a hand, his eyes dancing. They shook, holding on a micro second longer than necessary, and though Oliver looked him in the eye, he could only see Felicity’s face; it was just off Adrian’s shoulder, and it was unreadable.

“Susan. Nice to see you.” Chase nodded to her and she smiled back, probably getting a kick out of all the awkwardness. “Have you met Felicity Smoak? No, probably not.”

Adrian chuckled and Oliver almost gawked at his utter shamelessness. He didn’t dare check, but he was pretty sure Felicity was just as embarrassed by this as he. He had a sudden, crazy urge to grab her hand and just go. Anywhere.

Thea acted on the idea first.

“Well look at you, without a drink.” She stepped forward and reached for Felicity’s other hand, successfully extracting her from Chase and leading her away—to the bar furthest from their little party, Oliver noted.

“So.” Adrian stuck his hands in his pockets and practically bounced on his toes, he was so pleased with himself.

Oliver gave him a tight-lipped smile and fantasized ways to kill him.
Felicity clung to Thea’s hand as they all but ran to the bar.

“Thankyouthankyouthankyou. Oh my god I’m going to die. You look amazing, by the way.”

“Thanks. You’re looking pretty hot yourself, in case you didn’t notice how my brother was losing his mind over you.” Thea stopped dead and swung Felicity around to face her. “And by the way, Adrian Chase? What the hell.”

“I know, I know. God, I don’t know how it happened either.” They resumed their walk as she babbled on. “But we’re not...we’re...I don’t know what we are. But not physical, that’s for sure.”

They dropped their conversation thread while they ordered, but as soon as they’d stepped away from the bar Thea jumped right back in.

“Do you want to be? Physical, I mean. He’s no Oliver Queen—‘Felicity rolled her eyes—‘but there’s something about him.”

“Gah, I know, but no. It’s like he’s not interested, or always distracted. Something.”

Thea took a sip from her glass and eyed the woman who, once upon a time, was almost her sister-in-law. “So, what do you two do, if you’re not...”

Felicity bypassed the sip and went straight for a sizable gulp of her wine.

“We...dance.”

Chase moved on into the crowd, leaving Oliver alone with Susan, who let out a low whistle of disbelief. Oliver studied his shoes.

“Well. That was...”

“Awkward.”

Susan laughed. “Yep.” She hooked an arm through his. “C’mon, Mr Mayor. You’re going to need something stronger than Champagne.”

“Look.” Thea had her arms crossed with her drink still in her hand as she surveyed the crowd and kept a wary eye out for Chase showing up to reclaim his date. “I don’t know where you and Oliver are at the moment, with...everything, but you have to know that this stuff with Susan and Adrian is just temporary. Right?”

“Ugh. I don’t know. Last week we—“

Thea held up a hand to stop her. “DON’T tell me. I already heard about it from Curtis. No more details, please.”

Felicity’s face went beet red and Thea nodded reprovingly.

“Yes. You should be embarrassed.”

Before Felicity could begin her profuse apology Adrian found them, a bottle of beer in his hand.
“There you are.”

She smiled shyly at him, uncomfortably aware that they had never really engaged in small talk, and now she had no idea where to start. Thea also looked mildly uncomfortable, but stuck to Felicity’s side like she was afraid to leave her alone. Adrian glanced from one to the other, silent.

The dance floor was not what you could call packed, but as alcohol loosened the crowd up more and more people began to wander out, if the song was decent. Curiously, Felicity had eyes on both Oliver and Susan, and they were not in the same place. He was no longer the party animal of legend, but she kind of expected him to at least be accompanying his date in her circuit around the room. Hmm.

The Electric Slide was enough to fill the floor, and when that song transitioned into a Salsa with a dance beat most of the crowd stayed. Adrian’s eyes lit up and he set his beer down on the table.

“This is it,” he grinned, his hips already gyrating to the beat. Thea’s eyebrows arched in appreciation; she kept mum as he reached for Felicity and coaxed her to follow him when he backed out onto the floor.

“Oh god,” Felicity squeaked, but took up her spot in hold and followed his lead. It was just the basic steps, nothing fancy, but the crowd of people loved it; the floor opened up around them and their audience grew.

Adrian led her in a quick turn and she laughed out loud in surprise; she was actually not screwing this up too badly. It kind of felt like a recital of sorts, a performance to show off all the months of hard work. Felicity glanced up to share a smile with her partner, but his face had turned serious. Stern. In her surprise she misstepped; he got them corrected so smoothly she doubted anyone had noticed, but it left her shaken. They danced on.

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Oliver wasn’t much of a music guy, so his brain never registered what was blaring over the sound system. The flashing lights and disco ball did nothing good for his PTSD, anyway; he was merely skirting the dance floor to get to Thea. The ring of cheering party goers finally alerted him to the fact that something was happening out on the parquet.

Just as he made it to his sister’s elbow, something made him look up at the dance floor, and for the second time in an hour the sight of Felicity Smoak stopped him in his tracks.

Chase was dancing with her—some kind of Latin thing, he guessed—holding her close, spinning her away, bringing her back. Oliver knew next to nothing about dancing, but this didn’t look like the kind of stuff you just went out there and...did. Clearly they had been practicing.

He found it fascinating to see Felicity like this; she was pretty good at the punching bag, and he’d seen her in the odd yoga pose, but this...dancing like this showed off her gorgeous legs, her toned arms, and her backside...

Oliver shifted a step closer to the table, concerned that someone would catch sight of his sudden reaction to Felicity’s swaying hips. Thea, unaware of his predicament, leaned closer to him without taking her eyes off the pair.

“They look good,” she observed with a shrug.

A frown creased his forehead before he could stop it, because he didn’t want them to look good together. At all. Ever. The juxtaposition of being disgruntled and turned on at the same time was
supremely uncomfortable.

The song ended and the crowd went wild, cheering and whistling and slapping Adrian on the back. Oliver slipped away into the crowd, hoping Felicity wouldn’t spot him.

The DJ, knowing good and well where his bread was buttered, called up another Salsa as the first ended—much to the crowd’s delight—but Adrian waved them off good-naturedly and led Felicity back to the table Thea was still holding down.

“You guys, that was amazing. Bravo.”

“Thanks,” Felicity responded breathlessly, pushing a piece of hair back into place as she took up the spot Oliver had just vacated. She had indeed missed seeing him.

Thea was about to ask them how long they’d been practicing when Adrian frowned and reached into his pocket, coming up with a ringing phone.

“Excuse me, ladies.” He nodded to them and stepped away to a place where he could hear. In less than two minutes he was back, a very concerned look on his face. He leaned in close to Felicity before he spoke.

“That was Ryan. From the support group.” She nodded her understanding. “His little girl is missing. I gotta go.”

Adrian started to push away from the table, worry etched into his features, but Felicity grabbed after his arm to slow him.

“I want to come too.”

He studied her for a split second and then nodded.

“That’s very nice of you. I appreciate it.”

Felicity waved a hand back at Thea in farewell and they were gone.
Chapter 13

They lived in a suburb of Star City, a smallish house on a smallish street where every house looked exactly like its neighbors. Adrian sat forward in a dining room chair that had been pulled into the living room, his elbows resting on his knees, jacket and tie gone and sleeves rolled up. Across from him, Ryan and his wife perched on the sofa, pressed together at the shoulder, elbow, and thigh. They each bore the look of someone who had been handed their worst nightmare in the form of a ticking time bomb, and they were bracing for it to go off.

Three police officers roamed through the house; more prowled in their back yard and up and down the street, the beams of their flashlights dancing among the Christmas lights adorning almost all the houses. They were looking for three year old Rebecca, seemingly snatched from her room where her baby sister Rachel was still sleeping. It had been four hours since her parents had put her to bed, three since they had found it empty.

Felicity, also seated on a dining chair, twisted her fingers together in her lap and wished she hadn’t come. What had she been thinking? This wasn’t a Green Arrow mission; she couldn’t magic up her tablet, hack into a satellite and send Oliver off to beat up the bad guys, rescue the little girl, and leave her safe and sound on their doorstep with a growly “Eat your vegetables, kid”.

Or could she?

There were more servers than party guests left at this point in the evening. Thea was long gone, as was Quentin; the DJ had just announced the last song and thanked everyone for coming.

Oliver held himself very still, trying to decide if he was really swaying or if it was just a dirty trick from the alcohol. For the first time in a very long while he had leaned on a little liquid courage to get him through the evening. He’d gone straight to the bar following Felicity’s dance with Adrian, first to hide, and then to let the Scotch talk him into finding her and telling her how great she’d looked out there. To try to tell her it was okay for her to move on without him.

Turns out, there wasn’t enough alcohol for that.

His Uber was on its way, all he had to do was stay upright and awake until it showed up. No probelmo.

Something pawed at his arm and he grunted. A pretty brunette face swam up in front of him; Susan, maybe. She was smiling...no laughing. Definitely laughing.

“How ya feeling?”

Oliver tried out a smile, but his face had slowly gone numb over the course of the evening, so he wasn’t confident about the outcome. She tugged on his arm again and he groaned a little, because that was waaay too much movement all at once.

“You, my friend, are in no shape to go home alone.”

“S’alright. Got an Uber,” he said gently, pretty sure he had the smile down this time. Susan tsked softly at him; she seemed a lot closer all of a sudden.

“My place isn’t far. Come on.” She hooked an arm through his and gave a little tug; he swayed in
She fidgeted in her seat, wishing she had fingernails to bite. An officer was crouched down next to Ryan and his wife, talking to them in low tones that didn’t carry across the room; she had been forgotten—and rightly so—in the moment.

Felicity had spent the last few years specializing in finding hard-to-find people; she’d gotten it down to a science, really. Her methods were so effective that she had packaged all her different portals into one user-friendly program; in the event that she herself was ever kidnapped, god forbid, she wanted someone else from the team to be able to find her.

She wrapped her arms across her stomach and rocked forward, warring with herself over the risk/reward of revealing to Adrian that she knew how to help with the search by breaking into pretty much any computer system in the world. Would that, coupled with her history with Oliver Queen, make him suspect that there was more to the two of them than just Mayor and tech genius? She pictured the DA opening a new Green Arrow case and almost moaned out loud with fear.

Besides that, did the team have a right to know that she was sharing this information? They had never talked about proprietary knowledge or ownership, not of her skills nor of Curtis’s tech; it was understood that all of it was used by the team for the good of the city. And wasn’t little Rebecca a part of the city?

Felicity pushed up from her chair and took the two steps to Adrian’s, crouching at his side and touching his arm softly. He turned his head to her with a quiet “Hey”.

“Can I, um, talk to you? For a second?” She tipped her head to the side to indicate her need for privacy. Adrian studied her briefly before nodding. They stood together and stepped away to the window; Felicity could see the occasional flashlight beam out on the sidewalk.

“I think I have a way to help.” She glanced aside and licked her lips, then made herself look Adrian in the eye. “But it isn’t...technically...legal.”

Chase stared at her for two breaths, and she knew he was calculating how much, as an attorney, he could hear of this before she was really in trouble. He opened his mouth once to speak, thought better of it, and sighed out an angry breath before he tried again.

“When they find whoever did this, I’m gonna kill him.”

Felicity nodded, and he nodded back, his eyes steely.

“I have to go get something,” she said. “I’ll be back as soon as I can.”

She broke every speed limit on the way to the Bunker; it was a forty minute trip, one way, and time was critical.

The lights were low, the only sounds coming from her computers. This was how Oliver kept it down here once he’d gone to bed, which meant he was probably already asleep; her gut twisted, because they had avoided each other like the plague since...that happened, but the one thing you never did was surprise him.

“Oliver?” Felicity tiptoed to the far side of the room and peeked around the corner into his makeshift bedroom, or as she’d taken to calling it in her head, the Room of Carnal Requirement. If they kept this up, she thought grimly, there would be no safe space left down here.
Hearing nothing she turned the corner, but the bed sat empty, made with crisp military precision—where had he learned that? She’d never thought to ask. It was going on one in the morning; the party was long over. She’d already spied his leathers in their case, and a midnight run, although not out of the question, was unlikely with the icy rain falling outside.

Felicity’s heart dropped into her stomach, caught on fire, and burned: Oliver was staying somewhere else tonight. There was a strange keening sound echoing around the room, but she did not recognize it as her own. She bent double, physically ill; two weeks ago they were a breath, a whisper, away from reconciliation. Would her entire life be defined by him always choosing the leggy brunette?

Tears blurred her vision, and her throat burned with the need to cry. She allowed herself the luxury of collapsing onto the cot to grip the blanket between her fists in despair, to tip forward enough to press her face to the sheets that carried his scent and let the tears fall. Thirty seconds, that’s all she needed, then she would go.

Felicity dutifully counted thirty Mississippi’s and then pushed away from the bed, in a completely different state of mind since the last time she had done that. She moaned a sob and wiped her face and made herself leave the room.

There was a spare, unused flash drive in a drawer; it only took a minute to download her Search and Rescue for Dummies file onto the drive and then she was running for the elevators.

Forty more minutes in the car gave her ample time to torture herself with visions of Oliver and—nope, she couldn’t go there. To keep her mind off such thoughts she alternated between fretting over the time it was taking to cross town and worrying that revealing her skill at hacking would find her in jail before the sun came up. At some point in the drive she started to cry again.

Chase was standing on the front stoop when she pulled up, double parking next to a cop car because there wasn’t another space to be had. He descended the steps as soon as he saw her; he’d probably been waiting for her, wondering what had taken so long.

Felicity rolled down the passenger side window as he bent down, wincing at the icy droplets falling into his collar.

“Any news?”

Adrian shook his head without breaking eye contact. Felicity dropped her eyes to the drive in her hands. If she handed it over instead of using it herself—in front of witnesses—surely that would lessen her sentence. She pictured Rebecca’s sweet face from the canvas print hanging over the sofa and held out her hand.

“I can’t stay, but everything you need is on here.”

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The icy rain was a slap in the face, and began to sober him up. Oliver shook his head in an attempt to clear it; Vertigo had nothing on the combination of heartache and the better part of a bottle of whiskey.

There was a car at the curb; his car, the one that was taking him home. But there was something else, someone on his arm, pulling him away.

“This way,” she said, attempting to steer him in another direction. But the voice wasn’t Felicity’s...this wasn’t right.
“No,” he protested softly, and even this wasted he was still big enough to decide which way they were going to go.

“Oliver...”

“No.”

He pulled his arm free of her with no grace at all, but managed not to stagger. He heard her hands slap down at her sides in frustration, but he was already moving, navigating the stairs with the slow precision of a drunk who couldn’t afford bad press.

Oliver more or less fell into the car, and almost gave the address for his old abandoned campaign office—the Bunker, where he slept now, alone—but enough common sense was left in the fog of alcohol to make him re-think that idea. He gave the driver a different address and laid his head back on the seat, drifting.

It could have been ten minutes or three years, he had no frame of reference, but someone—the driver—was shaking his shoulder, telling him they were here. Here? Ah, yes. Oliver hauled himself out of the car and made his way toward the building, hoping John and Lyla would still be up.
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Sharp right turn ahead, and then things really get going. Strap in.

“They got her back. She’s safe.”

Felicity dropped her head onto her arms where they lay crossed on the dining table and blew out a sigh of relief; she hadn’t realized she’d been mentally holding her breath since the night before.

“Did you find her?”

She heard Adrian sigh over the line.

“I was looking, but no, she just showed up, at the local police station, completely unharmed. Nobody’s sure what happened, but they have her back.”

“Adrian, that’s fantastic.”

“It really is. Hey, I’m at their place now, so I’d better go. Talk to you soon.”

“See you.”

Felicity sagged next to her cereal bowl and tried to process the first good thing that had happened since...since her dance with Adrian at the party. She had tossed and turned all night, worrying about Rebecca and feeling heartsick over Oliver. Now, at six in the morning, one of those problems had been resolved; time to leave the other behind as well.

She texted the team that she was taking a few days off from everything, shut down her phone, and headed back to bed.

Apparently “taking a few days off” was code for “everyone should drop by unannounced and spend time with Felicity”. First it was Curtis, who showed up Sunday evening bearing Big Belly Burger and the latest gossip that, thankfully, didn’t involve her. He gleefully reported that Dinah had been spending a large part of each day with Rene-in-a-Cage; he had caught her going into his cell to spar with him on more than one occasion. Curtis was still trying to decide if he should share that information with Oliver.

Diggle dropped by Monday afternoon on his way to pick up JJ from preschool. She pushed up on her toes and kissed him on the cheek, hoping he wouldn’t notice she was still in her pjs.

“Nice pjs,” he offered slyly, making her huff a laugh.

“Thanks. I’m on vacation. Or staycation. Whatever.”

John rubbed his hands together and glanced around the loft on his way to the sofa.

“And here I thought you were hiding from Oliver.”
Felicity’s face turned red, which was stupid, considering who she was talking to. Hell, he’d recently heard them having sex; what was there to be embarrassed about at this point?

“Oliver has moved on. Apparently.” She curled up at the opposite end of the sofa and wrapped her green throw around her shoulders, protection from the inevitable pain of this conversation. Diggle frowned in confusion.

“Has he moved on? I thought that was you.”

Felicity heaved a huge sigh of frustration, because MEN.

“Adrian Chase and I are just...uh...”

“Friends?” His skeptical eyebrow game was on point.

“Dance partners,” she corrected lamely. He nodded slowly.

“I see.”

“OLIVER,” she continued—a little louder than she’d intended—“is with Susan now, so.” She stuck an arm out of her blanket and waved it expansively to indicate All of the Things. John frowned again.

“Is he?”

Felicity let her head drop back in frustration and groaned; enough with the obtuse act already. She dropped her chin back down in order to affect the best glare.

“He spent the night with her after the Holiday party.”

“Oliver spent the night of the Holiday party on my couch.”

Everything—literally everything—froze inside her as she digested this morsel.

“He was pretty drunk,” John continued. “I would go so far as to say very drunk.”

She realized she wasn’t breathing, gulped, and then swallowed.

“Drunk?”

Diggle nodded, straightening up off the arm of the sofa and taking a step closer so he could lean down and leave a kiss on the top of her head. He was letting himself out the door before he turned to finish his thought.

“He didn’t strike me as a man who had moved on. Lock this door behind me, yes?”

She nodded dumbly as he left.

Felicity sat for several minutes just...being. There was something bubbling up inside her; it was too soon to call it hope, but it was definitely, at the least, a lack of dread. It felt nice.

She crept out of her blanket to retrieve her phone from the kitchen counter and turned it back on. Just in case. Nothing from Oliver, but there was a message from Adrian. She accessed her voicemail to listen.

“Hey. We’re celebrating finding Ryan’s little girl on Friday night at Rosa’s. I got some of the band to
show up and play. Everybody’s gonna be there. Eight o’clock. See you then, okay? Bye.”

Felicity smiled at the phone; a party with dancing called for a new dress, right? A good job for tomorrow.

She almost went back to the Bunker Tuesday night, but all the time off had allowed her to catch up on the DVR; one more marathon night would finish it off. She popped some corn, opened a new bottle of wine, and Olivia Pope’d her way to the sofa.

The doorbell rang ten minutes into the second show.

Felicity’s first thought when she opened the door was to thank Google she’d gone out shopping that day, because that had required a shower and actual clothes; Susan Williams stood in the hallway with a plate of brownies.

There was, understandably, a moment of silence.

“Uh, hello,” Felicity finally offered.

“Hi.”

“Can I...help you?”

Susan bit her lip and glanced at the ceiling.

“God, I hope so.”

Felicity froze in indecision, one foot lying on top of the other and both hands clinging to the edge of the door.

“Can I...come in?” Susan waggled the plate of brownies.

Felicity backed up and held the door open and Susan sneaked past.

“Wow, nice place. Do you live here alone?”

“I do now.” It came out before she could stop it. Susan glanced at the floor while her eyebrows did all kinds of ridiculous things. Leggy brunettes, Oliver? Really? Felicity huffed a sigh.

“What is it you need, Susan?”

Her demeanor had been pretty conciliatory to this point, but suddenly Susan turned hesitant, like she was changing her mind at the last minute.

“This is...kind of delicate. Can we sit?”

The lovely lack-of-dread Felicity had been enjoying for the last 28 hours swooped back in and made itself comfortable in the pit of her stomach. She swallowed hard and nodded toward the living room where her forgotten show sat frozen on the television screen, her favorite character’s eyes stuck in a perpetual eye roll. How appropriate.

They both sat and Susan slid the plate of brownies onto the coffee table before turning toward her.

“You may be under the impression that Oliver and I are dating.”

The silence strung out between them while Felicity waited for the “but”. Or the “and”.


“But we are not.”

Felicity nodded slowly, her lip caught between her teeth. She let Susan take her time continuing.

“I have been interviewing him for an in-depth piece, but there’s something else I’ve been looking into. And this part is betraying Oliver’s confidence, but it’s important that you know.” The two women stared each other down until Felicity nodded for her to continue. “Someone is working against the Mayor’s office—against Oliver himself—from inside City Hall, and he asked me to investigate—“

“Using the interview, and your supposed relationship, as cover,” Felicity finished, to Susan’s nod. She felt like she was floating above the couch all of a sudden.

“Deputy Mayor Lance suspected it was someone in the District Attorney’s office—“ Felicity’s stomach dropped—“and I think it’s the DA himself. Adrian Chase.”

Felicity allowed herself two cleansing breaths before she tried to speak.

“You think Adrian is trying to sabotage Oliver’s administration. Susan, why are you telling me this?” A headache was suddenly forming between her eyebrows, right at the crinkly bit. Felicity fought the urge to rub it with her fingers and instead watched Susan take in a big breath before she continued.

“Once I started suspecting it was Chase I did some digging. And Felicity, nothing adds up. I know you’re good—very good—with computers. Way better than me. I can’t go anywhere with this investigation unless I have hard evidence. That’s why I need your help.”

Felicity opened her mouth once, then snapped it shut before trying again.

“Susan, does Oliver know you’re here?” She said it nice and slow, in case the woman had a head injury; Susan cocked her head to the side before responding.

“If Oliver came to you and said Chase was out to get him, what would you think?”

Felicity dropped her gaze to her lap.

“Felicity, the things I’ve found are not good. If I’m right, he’s dangerous. Think what you will of me, but I wouldn’t want you to be in an unsafe situation.” She glanced away and then back, a sly look on her face. “Even if you’re the reason I can’t date Oliver Queen.”

The blood rushed to Felicity’s face as she realized what Susan was saying.

“Look,” she continued, “I know this is awkward, and pretty weird, but I think we should work together to get to the bottom of this.”

“And if it turns out you’re wrong? About Adrian?”

“I wouldn’t have come here if I thought I was wrong.”

Felicity huffed a surprised laugh and shook her head. This was crazy. And probably stupid. Curtis would never let it go.

“Okay. Let’s see what you have.”
Chapter 15

It had haunted him for days: The morning after the party, after he’d come to with the worst hangover of his life—and that was saying something—and had dragged his sorry ass back to the Bunker to collapse for a few more hours in a toddler-free zone, Oliver had almost thrown himself onto the cot without noticing that the blankets had been disturbed. Someone had grabbed them, twisted them up between small fists. And there was mascara smeared on the edge of the sheets, left by someone who had been crying pretty hard while they were there.

Oliver’s stomach had rebelled, for several reasons; he barely made it to the bathroom in time. Sick and spent, he had crawled back to the edge of his permanently temporary bed and curled up at the end, unable to disturb the evidence of Felicity’s realization that he hadn’t come back here at the end of the night.

These last few nights she’d been away from the Bunker—taking a break, she said—found him broody and short-tempered. He was sure the rest of the team was ready to be done with him, and with good reason.

Oliver checked his watch; still only 3:30 on a Thursday. It would be a good two and a half hours before he could show up at her door with dinner. Or flowers. An explanation, at the very least.

Susan popped her head into his office, disrupting his thoughts.

“Hey. I’m taking off early today, just letting you know.”

Oliver lifted his chin in surprise.

“Everything okay?”

She smiled. “Yeah. Just following up on a lead. See you tomorrow.”

Oliver stared at the door after she closed it. Susan had been...just a colleague, all week; no more flirty side-eye or intentionally-accidental brushes in the hallway. It was nice. The last few hours of the party were pretty fuzzy, if not black, for him: Had something happened to finally convince her he wasn’t interested? If he wasn’t too embarrassed to admit he couldn’t remember, he would ask her.

He scratched his chin and flipped over the next pile of papers to be signed by the mayor; no more brooding. He’d definitely go see Felicity after work.

“Okay, wait. What about Simon Morrison? We don’t have him up here yet.”

“The public records search is still running, but here.” Felicity frowned in concentration, her eyes never leaving her laptop screen as her right hand reached over to scribble something on a post-it. She pulled the paper off the top of the pad, her tongue poking out, and held it up. Susan took it from her, read it, then waved it around in thought as she looked for the correct place to put it.

“Ah ha.” She stepped toward the unlit fireplace and pressed the note onto an open spot on the large smooth surface above it—it was one of the only spaces left within her reach where the granite beneath was still visible. Susan stepped back to take the whole thing in.

The Murder Wall was really coming together.
Susan had stayed until one in the morning that first night; the coffee table had lost most of its brownies and gained a pizza by the time she went home. They had not had what one could call rapport at first, but there was at least mutual courtesy, which got them through.

She brought Chinese food the second night, and didn’t stay as late. Felicity had been able to sneak into the Bunker for most of the day to take advantage of the additional computer power without her new partner being any the wiser; more dots were connected.

Now she was here in the late afternoon, her tailored suit jacket thrown over a chair and her shoes kicked off. Felicity watched her a moment and tried to stir up any feelings for Susan, good or bad. But she just...was.

“So Simon Morrison is the illegitimate son of Justin Claybourne, but he changed his name—“

“To Adrian Chase.”

They said Chase’s name in unison, Susan nodding at the end. Her eyes roamed back over the wall as Felicity uncrossed her legs and stretched them out under the coffee table.

“I still don’t see any direct connection between Chase and the fates of the three former employees, or with Oliver.” She glanced at Felicity. “Has he ever said anything to you about why he might not like Oliver?”

Felicity snorted. “Adrian and I don’t talk.”

Susan’s eyebrows shot up and Felicity spluttered, her face going pink.

“I didn’t mean it like that! We’re not in any kind of dating relationship. We...ran into each other a few months ago, before he got the DA’s job. He invited me to come dancing with him and that’s all we’ve been doing. The Holiday party was the first time we’d been anywhere together outside of Bludhaven.”

Felicity shrugged as she finished, and thought if someone had told her a week ago she’d be sitting in the loft explaining her relationship status to Susan Williams she would’ve laughed. A lot.

She was so far into her musings she didn’t notice the sudden intensity of Susan’s expression when she said ‘Bludhaven’. She’d turned back to the Wall and stepped to the section where the information about the DA’s office employees who were now dead or missing was stuck.

“The fatal car accident happened in Bludhaven,” Susan said slowly.

“And the last credit card transaction from one of the missing employees is from a gas station in Bludhaven too,” Felicity added, her fingers dancing over the keyboard. A very bad feeling began to creep through her chest as she Google Mapped the address; it was only a block from the club. She’d driven by it multiple times.

“What,” Susan demanded, watching her like a hawk. “You found something.”

Felicity willed her hand to stop shaking as she wrote down the address for the gas station on one post-it, the name of the club and its address on another, and the location of the car crash on a third, then handed them all over.

Susan stared at them, visibly breathing, before her eyes tracked back to Felicity.

“These addresses can’t be more than two blocks apart.”
There was a friendly beep from the computer, and two sets of eyes moved in unison to the source of the sound. Felicity’s eyes roamed the screen, her face slowly draining of color. Susan, riveted by her change of expression, took two steps toward her.

“The public records search for...Simon Morrison,” Felicity said slowly. “It found a marriage license application, eleven years ago, that was never finalized.”

“He was going to get married? To who?” Susan watched in growing concern as a tear glistened on Felicity’s bottom lash and then spilled over to slide down her cheek. “Felicity?”

“To Samantha Clayton.”

Oliver maybe should’ve called, probably should’ve called, should probably call now, from the lobby, just in case. He went through the entire crazy debate in his head while pacing in front of the wall of mailboxes just inside the entrance to the building. Would she refuse to see him if he gave her fair warning though? Maybe that would be an easier rejection to take if she did it over the phone instead of in person. Of course, he could always put his foot in the door in person...

One thing was certain: There was no chance Adrian would be there, because he was in court today, which had run late. Oliver had checked.

C’mon, Queen. He breathed out a huge sigh, smoothed his tie, and crossed to the elevator. A pizza guy showed up just as the doors were closing, and though he would’ve preferred to take this particular ride alone, Oliver held the door anyway. They were going to the same floor. Great.

“Hey, don’t I know you?” Pizza Guy asked mildly. Oliver’s smile was tight-lipped.

“I’m the Mayor.”

“That’s right.” Pizza Guy gave him a slow lazy nod of the head and then stared at the elevator doors. Oliver followed suit.

They turned the same direction off the elevator and walked side by side down the hall. Oliver glanced at the heavens for strength. Felicity’s door was coming up on the right, and Pizza Guy was slowing. Oh God.

“Is this you?” Pizza Guy smirked, finding the whole thing suddenly funny.

“Um, yep.” There was an awkward moment while the kid ripped open the Velcro on the pizza warmer and extracted a box, holding it in one hand while he waited for Oliver to pay. He over tipped, just to get him to leave.

Oliver glanced at his shoes, as if courage grew up from the ground, and rang the doorbell.

Felicity pushed up from the floor while Susan looked on, shocked.

“Samantha Clayton is the connection to Oliver, isn’t she? Felicity?”

“I...I’m gonna need a minute.”

She didn’t wait for Susan to give some sort of permission, just fled to the powder room to splash water on her face and scream internally.
Oh shit oh shit oh shit. If all these connections proved to be solid, then Adrian was a psychopath. And if Adrian had been connected to Samantha once upon a time, and they were planning to get married roughly the same time Samantha got pregnant by Oliver, then...oh shit.

This was way beyond the territory Felicity should be navigating without Oliver and the team behind her. But she’d let Susan-Fracking-Williams talk her into doing this, and now she’d have to reveal much more of Oliver’s life than she wanted to. Was ALLOWED to. God, what a mess.

She made a mental note to install a trap door in this bathroom for the next time she ruined her own life and had to make a quick getaway, then opened the door at the same time the doorbell rang. Pizza again, from a different place this time. Felicity went through the motions of drying her already-dry hands on her pants and crossed to the door, with Susan perching on the arm of the sofa and rummaging through her purse in her peripheral vision.

Felicity swung the door open and stopped dead; Oliver was filling the opening, presumably straight from work, and holding a pizza.

“I can pay for it and expense it,” Susan called from behind her, and Felicity got to watch Oliver’s face go through a series of interesting expressions as his eyes flicked from her to the reporter and back.

“Did you get a part-time job?” she asked, her eyes on the pizza. Oliver blinked twice.

“You hang out with Susan Williams?”

“It’s a new development.”

Hoping to ward off any more awkward questions, Felicity dropped her head in defeat and opened the door all the way: If her world was going to crumble to dust she might as well get it over with.

“Oh,” Susan said quietly as Oliver stepped inside, his eyes scanning the soaring space the way they did every time he was here. They’d made a mess of the fireplace wall in the living room with sticky notes in neon colors, he noted immediately.

“What. Is. going on.”

An hour later the three of them were still staring at the Murder Wall, the pizza cold and forgotten, Oliver down to his rolled up shirt sleeves.

“We’d need more than addresses to tie Chase to those disappearances, murders, whatever. BODIES would be nice,” he added, skimming his palms up over his face and into his hair as he paced behind the sofa.

“Anything else you see on the wall that looks familiar?” Susan prompted. He had taken the Samantha news rather well, considering. He’d even related a story from his first meeting with Adrian, when he’d informed the mayor that the Ollie version of himself had once stolen the DA’s girl.

“I guess now we know which girl,” Felicity had said softly, while Oliver gazed at her, thinking of a different girl entirely.

He scanned the wall once again until his eyes caught on a note he’d somehow missed before.
Justin Claybourne. He stared at it so long Felicity twisted around from her spot in front of her computer to call his name.

“What is it?” she asked, tension in her voice, because she knew that look.

“Felicity,” he said very very softly, “pull up the names of the victims of the Throwing Star Killer. With the anagram names too.”

“Wha...what?”

“Put them on the wall. Next to Claybourne.”

Felicity stared, not breathing for maybe six seconds, before pulling up the info and scribbling the names onto post-its that she passed off to Susan.

“Oliver, no,” she breathed, when they were all stuck up on the wall together.

“Justin Claybourne was part of the List.” Felicity made a little moaning noise of fear at his words. “He murdered those people the weekend we were in Hub City,” Oliver pushed on, monotone but relentless, as Felicity straight-armed the edge of the coffee table in slow motion, scooting backwards onto the sofa.

“He cancelled our plans at the last minute that weekend,” she whispered, right over the top of what Oliver was saying. She came up against the back of the sofa and her momentum stopped, even though her feet, unaware, kept moving as she unconsciously tried to escape the truth.

“Chase knows,” he said. “Chase is Prometheus, and he knows.”

“Oliver...”

“What am I missing?” Susan pressed, her eyes flicking from one to the other in confusion. “Chase knows what?”

“Don’t...” Felicity whispered.

“It’s okay, Felicity,” he said, his voice as gentle as a breeze. His eyes never strayed from the cluster of sticky notes.

“Susan,” he sighed, “I’m the Green Arrow.”
“When’s the last time you scanned the loft for bugs?” Oliver asked quietly, standing just behind Felicity with his hands on his hips. He was still staring at Claybourne’s name.

“It runs weekly,” she answered, just as softly. “It was clear this morning.”

“Call the team and get them here. Thea and Quentin too. Susan,” he continued, his focus turning to the reporter, “I assume you have questions.”

Susan blinked rapidly.

Oliver took the seat on the sofa Felicity had just vacated, her phone in hand, and nodded for the reporter to join him.

Twenty minutes later she was still sitting there, shell-shocked, while everyone else huddled around the fireplace wall, going over the evidence.

“Sonofabitch,” Thea breathed, arms crossed in her defiant way.

“You got that right.” Quentin swiped a hand over his head and whistled. He turned to locate Oliver, who was back behind the couch with his hands in his pockets. “How are we supposed to interact with this guy tomorrow?”

Oliver took in a breath big enough to raise his shoulders in a shrug and glanced at Felicity, who had been a very quiet satellite around him since everyone else had arrived.

“What is his endgame?” Oliver wondered out loud, putting it out on the floor for suggestions.

“He wanted your attention, and he left clues to help you find him,” Dinah muttered, thinking out loud. “He wants something from you.”

Oliver couldn’t stop himself from looking at Felicity again; it was clear that Chase had sought her out, and lured her in, because of him. She was hugging herself for warmth, or comfort, and it was all he could do not to gather her up in his arms.

“I don’t know how much more we can do tonight,” Oliver sighed. “If we’re taking him down legally we need more evidence. If not, we need to know what he’s planning. Otherwise we could do more harm than good. Everybody head home; we’ll see what tomorrow brings.”

It didn’t take much to persuade them; nights off were rare, and it was still fairly early. Before long it was just Oliver, Felicity, and Susan left in the loft.

“Thank you for your help, Susan,” Oliver said softly, half hoping she would take the hint and head home so he didn’t have to think of excuses to outlast her. She seemed to catch on, because she reached for her heels immediately.

Felicity was speaking to her softly as she gathered up two wine glasses and two mugs off the coffee table when his phone began to vibrate in his pocket. The number didn’t look familiar, but a mayor couldn’t afford to ignore calls.

He excused himself and stepped to the far end of the room.

Susan shrugged into her jacket and gathered her things; she was just about to suggest to Felicity, who
was halfway to the kitchen, that they continue this tomorrow, when Oliver crossed the room to them in four long strides with eyes for Felicity alone.

“That was Samantha.” His voice came out lost, strained, alien. “William is missing.”

Felicity froze in place and stared.

“How...”

He shook his head slowly.

“Chase...?” Susan left it out there, suspecting they were all thinking it. Oliver’s eyes flicked to her and then away, into the air, processing.

“WE don’t even know where they are. How could he find—“

“Oh my god.”

Everything Felicity was carrying shattered as it hit the floor.

______________________________

She wasn’t even aware that Oliver had scooped her up out of the ring of shattered glass and pottery and carried her to the sofa, settling her on his lap and cradling her, until she heard the sounds—like a small animal in distress—and realized they were coming from her.

He soothed her, his arms around her tight, one large hand against the back of her head. Felicity lay against him for endless minutes as she tried to get the noises she was making under control. As she calmed, she slowly became aware of a new sound in the background: Susan was sweeping up the mess she’d made when she dropped the glassware.

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“Felicity, what is it. Can you talk to me?” His voice was feather-light, coasting over the muffled keening sound she was still making. She burrowed further into his chest, wanting to be able to enjoy the feel of him against her again, but refusing to allow herself the luxury. Because of what she’d done.

She knew time was of the essence; all she had to do was make herself tell him. Felicity allowed herself two deep breaths to let her body expand against his, so she could remember the feeling later, and then spoke.

“A little girl went missing, last Saturday night. The daughter of a friend of Chase’s.” Tears should be falling, she knew, but her eyes were dry, her voice clear. “I wanted to help, so I gave him my file...”

There was a pause.

“The Search and Rescue one?”

“Yes.”

Felicity braced herself to be pushed away, and rightly so, but he only nodded against the side of her head and whispered “Okay”.

She heard him call for Susan quietly, and not long after—her face still buried against his chest—she felt warm fingers running over her bare feet as the two of them checked her for injuries from the glass and ceramic that must’ve flown—god—everywhere.

Oliver said some other things to Susan, his voice a soft rumble as it vibrated from his chest against
her forehead. Felicity never heard her leave.

The hand cradling her head pulled away finally, and she felt his arm moving, just a bit: Texting the team, she thought. The vibration as responses came back, in the stillness of the loft, was very loud.

“Felicity,” he murmured, “Do you have plans to see Chase again?”

She held her breath a moment.

“Tomorrow night. Party for Rebecca. The little girl.”

Oliver’s lips skimmed her temple in reply, and for the first time all night she thought she might sob. Her breath hitched; he squeezed tighter.

“Curtis is at the Bunker; he’s started the search. There’s nothing else to do until we hear something from him. So I’m going to put you to bed, okay?”

Felicity hummed against him, an acknowledgment that she was listening, so he adjusted his hold on her and stood. He ignored the lights that were still on all over the first floor and navigated the stairs effortlessly; she was only aware of the difference between light and dark as he carried her into the bedroom.

He set her down at the entrance to the bath, made sure she was steady on her feet, and then left her to get the covers pulled back while she got ready for bed.

She crawled in, shivering at the coolness of the sheets, and he pulled the heavy comforter up over her; it was new, the comforter, or at least new to Oliver. She had never needed covers this heavy with him around, the human furnace.

He kissed her forehead and straightened to go, but she pushed an arm out of the bedclothes and reached for him.

“Stay,” she said.

Oliver obligingly toed off his shoes and sat on the edge of the bed, meaning to lie back on top of the covers until she fell asleep, but she reached out for his arm again, and squeezed this time.

“No. Stay.”

Her eyes had adjusted to the darkness, but his face was still unreadable. Felicity swallowed and spoke again.

“I don’t want to regret waiting to be back together. When it comes to the two of us I regret enough as it is.”

Oliver sat as still as a statue, and for a second she thought, wildly, that he would refuse and shatter her forever.

“Is my toothbrush still in there?” he asked ever so softly, tipping his head toward the bathroom. She nodded, but still held her breath until he returned, in just his boxer briefs and his undershirt. He climbed into bed and pulled her close.

Felicity awoke sometime in the night, finding Oliver already awake, or maybe still not asleep. They made love slowly and quietly, so unlike the tipsy flirtatiousness of the summer, or their recent,
desperate anger.

She thought of all she’d almost lost, and the precious thing of his that was currently missing, and the
tears finally came. He rolled them, putting her on top, and let her cry even as he moved inside her,
his hands holding her steady and his fingers catching her tears.

The next time she woke he was sitting on the edge of her side of the bed, brushing her hair off her
face. It was still dark out, but he was dressed.

“Was it too hot?” She meant the comforter, but he knew that. It made him chuckle.

“Sweltering.”

His forehead was damp, his hair sticking out everywhere: Mayor Queen was going to do the Walk of
Shame from her place. Even with everything that had happened, everything they still faced, Felicity
couldn’t help stretching and squirming with happiness.

“You didn’t wake me up,” she complained softly.

“I’m waking you up now.”

“You know what I mean.” It was an age-old argument. Oliver sighed, and never had that sound
conveyed so much.

“I knew if I did, I’d never be able to leave you. And I have to go to work, Felicity. I have to go act
like nothing is wrong. How am I—“

She surged up and threw her arms around his neck, cutting him off by pressing herself against him;
he wrapped her up and held tight.

After just a moment Oliver lowered her back to the bed and dotted her face with slow, reverent
kisses.

“I have to go,” he murmured between pecks, “but I’ll call you soon.”
Chapter 17

Thea and Quentin were only moments behind him when he walked into his office; his sister’s eyes looked bruised, like she hadn’t slept. Lance closed the door and approached the desk, but couldn’t seem to make himself sit.

“You’re sure we can’t arrest him for something?” he pressed, even though they’d been over this last night. Oliver made himself lean back in his chair and breathe deeply; Quentin’s case of nerves was threatening to upend his carefully crafted composure.

“For what, Quentin? We have no solid proof of anything at this point, and he has my son.” Oliver’s index finger came down on the desk to emphasize the last word and Thea shut her eyes.

“If we take down Chase,” he continued more softly, “without knowing where William is...” he trailed off and let his eyes drop to where his finger still pressed against the desk. He couldn’t finish that sentence. His phone buzzed with a text and he scooped it up to look, then typed a quick reply and tossed it back down.

“Susan’s here.”

They more or less sat silently until the reporter showed up, slipping through the door and leaning back against it as it clicked shut. She looked like she hadn’t slept well either. Oliver focused on each of them in turn before speaking.

“Curtis has been up all night trying to find William. Felicity will be working on it all day. Hopefully we’ll have something to go on soon. In the meantime, I can’t stress enough how important it is that we don’t let Chase know that we know.”

They all nodded their agreement, then reviewed the day’s schedule before Thea and Quentin stood to leave. Susan approached his desk as they filed out, making it plain she only wanted a quick word before going about her business.

“Hey, how’s Felicity?”

“Better this morning, I think.” He sighed. “Thank you, for your help last night.”

She smiled in acknowledgment, then dropped her chin and raised her brows, her eyes expectant.

“This morning?”

The corner of his mouth quirked up for just a second and she nodded in understanding.

“Good for you. I’m glad.” Susan patted the top of his desk with one hand and turned to walk out.

“Keep your chin up, Mr Mayor.”

Oliver waited for the door to close and then spun his chair to face the windows; the sky above the cityscape was steely gray and threatening snow. He pushed aside any thought of William, or Felicity; if he ran into Chase today he couldn’t afford to be thinking about them.

In their place he channeled the Oliver of five years ago, newly returned to Starling, pretending to still be a playboy disappointment by day so no one would know he had become a soulless killing machine at night. It was just acting.
There was no going back to sleep once Oliver left. The dual images of William being held captive somewhere and Adrian’s hands on her while they danced drove her from bed, the thoughts falling like rocks into Felicity’s stomach.

She sent Curtis home with a kiss on the cheek for working through the night to pull information for them; he’d discovered that, though she had moved them out of state, Samantha had brought William to Pennytown for a weekend meet-up with her mother. He’d been nabbed out of the hotel room while Samantha was in the adjoining room, visiting with her mom. Felicity pictured little Rebecca, taken from her own bed simply as a means to an end, and thought she might be sick.

According to the timeline Curtis was piecing together, Chase was in court past seven o’clock last evening; William was snatched sometime between 9:30 and 10:15pm. Felicity bit her lip in concentration as she mapped it: Downtown Star City to the motel in Pennytown was almost an hour and a half drive with no traffic, but he would’ve been able to pull it off. Then where did he go?

Felicity had only seen his car once, the first night she’d gone to the club. Could he be stupid enough to use his own vehicle? Surely not. She checked anyway, hacking the BMV for his plate number and setting up a traffic camera search. On a hunch, she added the plates from the two missing employees too: It wouldn’t be the smartest move, but not as dumb as using his own car.

She and Susan texted throughout the morning, sharing ideas and speculation. Silent Dinah was a badass protective presence in her life, but Susan was—weirdly—becoming someone she could actually talk to. It was, in her testosterone-heavy world, refreshing.

As promised, Oliver called once, for an update, but also, she suspected, just to say hi. Butterflies swirled briefly through the morass of dread in her stomach at the memory of the middle of last night. At least we got to have that, she thought grimly.

If this all ends in tragedy, we had last night.

It was almost the end of the day before it happened. Oliver had just finished texting Susan to come by his office when she was ready to leave so he could walk her out; it was imperative that the public (and Chase) still think he was pursuing something with her, not reconciling with Felicity.

His assistant peeked his head in and asked if he had time to see the District Attorney before he went home. Oliver’s blood ran cold but he nodded.

Adrian pushed through the door at an energetic clip, though he made sure to shut the door carefully. He was wearing that roguish smirk coupled with the intense stare; Oliver always thought it was just an odd quirk, but now it made the hair on the back of his neck stand up.

“Afternoon, Oliver,” he said shoving one of his hands in his pockets as he came to a stop at the mayor’s desk; the other hand held a packet of papers. He didn’t sit.

“What can I do for you, Adrian?” Oliver reached for calm.

“Just thought I’d stop in and give you the run down on our court dealings this week.” The papers landed on his desk with a smack, and Oliver smoothed his tie with one hand while rearranging the packet’s placement with the other.
Chase briefed him while pacing in front of his desk; it was all Oliver could do to sit still and nod at the appropriate times. He leafed through the packet to keep his hands busy, his pulse rate slowly rising. Once he pictured Adrian and Felicity on the dance floor, his hands on her, but he immediately slammed a lid on that thought and shoved it down deep.

“Anyway,” Chase finished, finally coming to a stop after stalking around for a good five minutes, “that’s what I’ve been up to. I’m heading out now.”

Oliver’s eyebrows flicked up in acknowledgment and he attempted a smile.

“Have a good weekend.”

“Thanks.” Chase grinned. “I will.”

He reached for the doorknob but then turned back, pulling it open slowly as he spoke.

“Oh, ah, I hope me seeing Felicity isn’t going to be a problem. With our working relationship, I mean.” The skin around his eyes crinkled merrily. Fuck you, Oliver thought, but he gave a little shake of his head as the corners of his mouth pulled down briefly.

“Felicity makes her own decisions.”

Chase nodded; he almost looked giddy.

“Good. That’s good. You have a nice weekend too, Mr Mayor.”

As soon as the door closed Oliver stood and braced his arms against his desk, channeling the explosive anger building inside him into the mahogany as he stared straight ahead.

He was going to kill Adrian Chase.

It was a full house in the Bunker by half past five; Oliver had been one of the first to arrive, which was highly unusual. Not accompanied by Susan, Felicity noted. Apparently the revealing of secrets only went so far.

He came right to her—made a beeline, actually—stopping directly behind her chair and putting a warm hand on her shoulder. His old greeting. Without thinking, Felicity lifted her corresponding hand and covered his, her head tilting enough for her cheek to brush his fingers. John Diggle, perched at the end of the desk, almost died of happiness.

“How’s it going?” Oliver asked softly, pulling his hand back as she sat forward to type, but maintaining the invisible thread of “togetherness” only the two of them could manufacture. Felicity sighed.

“So far I’ve figured out all the ways he DIDN’T kidnap William.” She was going for banter, but her voice was tight, strained. All day down here in the dark, imagining the worst happening to William and thinking about what lay ahead for her tonight had taken its toll.

“The police in Pennytown have been working too. I fed them the odd ‘anonymous tip’—“ she made the air quotes—“throughout the day to be my eyes on the ground. They were able to eliminate some possibilities.” Oliver nodded.

“Do we think Bludhaven might be the place to look?” Dinah asked softly. It was logical.
Psychopaths, even the ones with law degrees, had a comfort zone.

“It makes sense. There are a lot of empty buildings from failed businesses, both near the club and around the restaurant.” As Felicity finished her sentence she experienced another jolt of dread thinking about the party. Oliver must’ve seen something—or felt something, she thought with a sudden thrill—go through her body, because he stepped closer to her as he turned and addressed the room.

“Are we sure sending Felicity straight to Chase is the best idea? Are we giving him exactly what he wants?” His voice threatened to betray him at the end of the sentence, but he held it together. Surprisingly, it was Felicity who answered first.

“I was there, Saturday night, when she was missing. I sat in their house for hours with her parents. If I don’t show up for the party he’s going to be suspicious.” She spun her chair to face him and looked him in the eye. “I have to do this, Oliver.”

“Can we send Dinah in too? Chase has never met her.” It was a reach, but he was desperate. Diggle shook his head.

“Chase knew we were headed to Hub City that weekend, so there’s a good chance he knows we’ve recruited Dinah. Plus, it’s a private party; too many questions to have to answer.”

“They’ll be twitchy about strangers, after the kidnapping,” Dinah added, in her husky velvet.

“We can wire her up.” The desperate ideas were coming fast and furious, making it clear Oliver was losing his grip on this plan, fast. The waves of quiet despair coming off of him were pulsing through Felicity—she’d almost forgotten how they could do that to each other when they were openly together—it drove her to her feet. She shook her head to stop him going further.

“I can’t...the band...he’ll expect us to dance. And a wire would...he would...” She closed her eyes, unable to complete the sentence without tears. As it was her lips trembled; she thought Oliver might fly apart. He threw a look to Diggle, but his brother shook his head softly.

“She’s right, Oliver.”

“I’ll watch her.”

Thea hadn’t spoken until now, standing with her arms crossed between Quentin and Curtis. Felicity’s eyes shifted from Oliver’s chest to that side of the room; they so rarely stood together, Felicity had never noticed how much their height difference made Thea and Curtis resemble Princess Leia and Chewbacca. She swallowed hard to stop a crazy laugh escaping her.

“Speedy...” Oliver began.

“Ollie, I need to help. For William. Besides,” she shrugged one shoulder with her understated sass, “it’s easier for me to hide on a rooftop.” Her brother stared her down before nodding.

Felicity was about to offer her opinion about the best vantage point for Rosa’s when her computer beeped with an update. She threw herself back into her chair.

“I have a probable location for the missing cars from the DA’s office employees. In Bludhaven, like we thought. We still need to get a look at the wrecked one.”

“That should be no problem,” Quentin put in. “There was a police investigation of the accident; they’ll know where the car ended up after that.” Felicity’s fingers flew as she hacked into the SCPD
to start looking.

“The trick will be figuring out if the accident was due to tampering.” Oliver’s eyes shifted to Quentin. “Would that have been part of the investigation?” Quentin shook his head no.

“Probably not, unless they had reason to suspect. And Chase would’ve headed that off at the pass.”

“Rene could do it,” Dinah said suddenly. All eyes flew to her, and she looked like she wanted to take it back. “He’s been a car mechanic.”

“Makes sense. Vigilanteism does NOT pay well.” No one reacted to Curtis’s quip.

Oliver focused off into the middle distance; his finger tic was back. Before he could venture an opinion Felicity set both palms against the desktop in confirmation that she’d found something.

“I know where the wrecked car is.” She spun her chair again and looked up at him. “Oliver, I have to go change. For tonight.” It was obvious she was bracing for an argument, but he just gave her the thousand-year stare before his eyes flicked to Diggle.

“I’ll drive you, Felicity,” John offered immediately.

“Be back in forty five?” Oliver’s partner nodded.

“You okay here?” John’s question was a mental health check for Oliver, and they both knew it. He glanced once at Felicity, then nodded.

“Going to the basement. It’s time Rene Ramirez and I had a chat.”
Chapter 18

Felicity wasn’t prepared for it, but the sight of the loft fireplace splattered with brightly colored squares of paper made her heart race. The chaos of it really did ruin the carefully crafted minimalism she and Oliver had tried to create here; he lived best in tidy, uncluttered spaces meant to offset the chaos in his mind.

John took a stroll to the Murder Wall while she slipped upstairs to change. The tags were still on the dress; it was short and floaty, sort of a baby pink color. She’d been thinking of little Rebecca—and oh god, Dirty Dancing—when she chose it. The new heels weren’t super high and sported straps with buckles. She decided to wait to put them on downstairs.

She stood in front of the bathroom mirror for a full five minutes, debating: Hair up? Ponytails kept her hair off her face, but weren’t they a liability if you were being kidnapped? She’d read that somewhere. Felicity bit her lip: Never in her life had she based her decision concerning glasses over contacts on whether or not she might be spending the next how-many-ever hours in a hole somewhere, without saline solution.

THAT was the thought that finally doubled her over the toilet after all the long hours of bad news and worry. She rinsed her mouth with a trembling hand and fervently hoped Dig hadn’t heard her.

She descended the stairs and padded to the sofa, perching on the arm to put on her shoes, but her hands were too shaky to get them fastened.

“Frack,” she muttered, as her fingers fumbled with the buckle of the first shoe. She almost gasped in surprise when John appeared in front of her, kneeling to take over.

“I’ve never heard you say it,” he said mildly, eyes on his task. “In all the years I’ve known you, after all the shit we’ve been through, it’s never been worse than frack.” He glanced up at her as he finished one shoe and moved on to the other. Felicity shrugged.

“Still haven’t found the appropriate moment for it, I guess.” She studied him from this unusual vantage point; even sitting he normally towered over her. His face carried a scattering of freckles that you couldn’t see unless you were up close; John Diggle was a thoroughly gorgeous man. She was a lucky girl to have so many beautiful men in her life.

“I’ve never heard you say it either,” she sort of teased as he finished with the second shoe. John regarded her as he leaned on both arms against his bent knee.

“My grandmother never allowed that word within her hearing. She didn’t approve of any swears, but that one...” he shook his head and smiled at the memory. “That one promised a special kind of correction. Life in the military can override most any kind of conditioning you bring with you, but it couldn’t override my grandmother.”

Felicity smiled softly, and for just a moment was able to enjoy a little bubble of happiness.

Son of a bitch,” Rene breathed when Oliver Queen stepped up to the bars of his cell.

“It’s nice to meet you, Rene.”

“Your hospitality is overwhelming, Mr Mayor. Does the Chamber of Commerce know about this
place? ‘Cause you could rent it out I bet.”

Oliver kept his expression neutral, his hands in his pockets.

“I’ve come to ask a favor,” Oliver began quietly. “I need your help.” Rene looked left and right in a parody of Who, me?


“My son is missing, and I need help catching the man who took him. I need help finding my son, Rene.”

“And then what? Back in the cage? No thanks.”

Oliver shook his head in disagreement.

“You’re not in here because I fault your motives, Rene, just your methods. I had to learn the hard way, but I found a better way to be a Vigilante. Dinah has. You can. But you have to trust us, and be a part of the team.”

Rene snorted.

“What makes you think you can trust me? As soon as you open these doors I could be gone. You’d never be able to find me, but you’d always be wondering if I was watching you.” He looked smug, but Oliver was clearly unruffled.

After all, he had Overwatch.

“Dinah trusts you, and I trust Dinah. What you decide to do when I open this door is up to you, but I would hope what my team can offer is enough to persuade you to do things a different way.”

Seconds passed as they stared each other down; Rene blinked first.

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The atmosphere in the Bunker was somewhere between a war room and a funeral. It was enough to stop Felicity in her tracks; only the solid presence of Diggle at her back gave her the courage to step out of the elevator.

Oliver was there, geared up, trying to look calm. Tears sprang to Felicity’s eyes when she spotted Thea in her red leathers; it threw her back in time so violently she expected to find Laurel around every corner. She approached her Lair on shaking legs with everyone watching her like she was a hero. Or a goner.

Curtis appeared at her elbow out of nowhere, making her jump. He handed her a water bottle.

“Have you hydrated today? You need to hydrate. Here.” She took the bottle from him as he pushed his glasses up his nose with his free hand. Oliver looked at her—hadn’t stopped looking at her since she’d walked in—but appeared to be torn between coming to her or staying near a face she couldn’t place—

“Hey Blondie.”

Ah, yes. The Vigilante.
Before she could come up with a snappy reply Oliver took a single step toward Rene and looked him dead in the eye.

“You call her that again and I will end you.”

Very softly.

Rene dropped his gaze, and Oliver finally crossed the room to her. Back to the old “no personal space” Oliver Queen; it was actually one of her favorite things about him. About them. She uncapped the water and took a nervous sip.

“You ready?” he asked softly, just for her to hear. Well, and probably Dig, who was still hovering off her shoulder like a big papa bear. Oliver reached out almost unconsciously and squeezed her hand, and it was like the rest of the world dropped away: They were back in the Foundry, she was wrapped in a blanket, and he was making everything better with six little words.

“There was no choice to make,” she whispered under her breath, not really for him to hear, but she knew he did, because he reached out and caressed her cheek with his thumb, his fingers sliding up beneath her ear. Felicity fought the urge to lean into his palm with everyone watching, but she couldn’t stop the little moan at the back of her throat.

Could it just be over already? She wanted to be back in the loft, snuggled under her sweltering comforter. With him. With William safe. She was a breath away from backing out when Oliver’s gaze snapped up to John’s, behind her.

“What about an earpiece?” There was a quiet desperation in his voice, like he knew what the answer would be but was hoping for a miracle. “He’d never know.”

Felicity swallowed hard and shifted her feet, wishing she could take this worry from him but also knowing the weight of it would crush her.

“She’d know, Oliver,” John said quietly. “It would change her behavior, her mannerisms. She has to go in there on her own terms.”

“I’ll be across the street watching the whole time, Ollie,” Thea added, and Felicity caught Rene gawking at the nickname. Oliver acknowledged his sister’s words, but his eyes never left the woman in front of him.

“John and I will be in Bludhaven, checking on the missing cars. Looking for William. We’ll only be a few minutes away. I promise.”

Felicity nodded, her cheek still against his hand. She lifted the hand he had just released and rested it against his side, reacquainting herself with the feel of his leather jacket under her fingers, his rib cage expanding as he breathed. He dropped his forehead to hers and sighed.

“Oliver,” she finally whispered, trying to let him know as gently as she knew how that she needed to go. Behind them, Thea slipped away to the garage for her bike.

“I’ll walk you out,” he said softly.

They held hands in the elevator, standing side by side, not speaking. Oliver stepped out into the campaign office first, pulling her behind him, but when she would have walked on to the front door he stopped and tugged on her hand until she was facing him again. Close again.

“You don’t have to stay long,” he murmured, continuing to reel her in until their bodies were
touching. His breath coasted over the top of her head, making her shiver. Felicity shook her head.

“If he’s with me, then you’re free to look for William. I...I don’t know how long the party will go, but I won’t leave until I have to. Have John text me something about babysitting JJ when you’re through, so I know you’re safe.”

“So you know...we’re safe,” Oliver breathed the fragmented sentence with a surprised chuckle, floored that she was only worried about him. And just as quickly the lift in his mood transformed into a lump in his throat as he pictured her with Adrian, alone.

“You stay where people are, do you hear me? Do not let him take you anywhere alone, or talk you into leaving, going somewhere else—“

“Oliver, I know, I won’t. Please—“ Felicity talked over him, feeling him spiral, terrified that he would take her with him. She stretched up onto her toes and kissed him, hard, then pushed away and walked out the door.
Chapter 19

Diggle drove. Diggle always drove, but never had Oliver been so grateful that he had someone else to get them from point A to point B so he could concentrate on other things: Like trying not to call Lyla and beg for an ARGUS intervention at a certain Cuban restaurant in Bludhaven. He realized his hands ached from being clenched into fists and slowly relaxed them with a grimace.

“Dinah and Rene...”

“Will be fine. Quentin will help Dinah keep an eye on him. We need some hard evidence on our side, Oliver.”

Oliver’s silence, in this instance, was an acknowledgment that Dig knew what he was talking about. He stared out the passenger side window, blind to the scenery, and tried to focus down on his assignment. They needed to be ready for anything: Booby traps, minions, William tied to a chair...his fists clenched again in a sick rage.

“Can you go any faster?” he ground out. John’s eyes flicked to the rear view mirror before he pressed his foot down.

Felicity pulled up to Rosa’s a little past eight. She could really use five more minutes of contemplation—or breathing into a paper bag—but she didn’t dare alert his suspicions this early in the game. Besides, people were getting out of their cars all around her and heading inside; best to blend in.

The place was not large, and it was already packed. Food was laid out family style on the tables, and guests were helping themselves, laughing and talking. A square table on one side of the room held several plastic containers full of cupcakes decorated like Frozen. There was no music yet, but the band members were setting up in a corner.

Felicity scanned the room for Adrian, suddenly a bit self-conscious as she realized most everyone else was dressed casually; she kept her coat on. She spotted Ryan first, Rebecca perched in his arms, clearly enjoying being up high where she could see in this crowd of adults. She was wearing a floaty pink dress too, which weirdly made Felicity feel much better.

She finally found Adrian in the middle of the room; he was seated at the end of a table, his plate filled, talking animatedly with someone from the PTSD group. He looked like he might have come straight from work, although his jacket was gone and his sleeves were rolled up.

The logical, undercover thing to do would be to approach him, sit, eat. Smile and laugh, happy that it was the start of the weekend, that her friend’s little girl was safe, that she was wearing a beautiful new dress. Felicity realized, too late, that she should’ve spent a couple of minutes consulting Dinah before she took this mission.

She spotted Ryan’s wife, sitting in a chair near the cupcake table with the baby on her lap, and headed her direction first. The woman—Patty—was smiling, but in the strained way of someone who was here under obligation. Her eyes hardly left the far side of the room where her husband stood with their daughter. It was clear she wasn’t willing to let the little girl out of her sight.

Felicity’s gut twisted thinking of the lifelong damage the kidnapping had likely created for this family, all in the name of Adrian’s vendetta against Oliver. How many lives had Team Arrow
impacted—positively and negatively—over the last five years? She heard Dig’s voice in her head reminding her that this was not the time to calculate a body count and mentally shook herself free of those thoughts, although a kernel of something was taking root in her brain; a possible avenue they hadn’t explored yet. She let it sit and ruminate while she made polite small talk with Patty, oohed and awed over the baby, and chose a vanilla cupcake with edible glitter and a paper cut out of Elsa planted on top.

“Saved you a chair.” It was the breathy whisper, right behind her ear, and it made her jump. Adrian chuckled, always pleased with himself when he surprised her like that; she recognized it now as less a lighthearted prank than the hallmark of a bully.

“Thanks,” she said quietly, allowing him to lead the way to the table, glad that she had never been overly emotional around him; it made the reserved way she was holding herself together seem normal.

Felicity set the cupcake on the table with a steady hand as she sat, watching Adrian pick up a plate from the stack in the middle of the table and fill it for her. He set it down in front of her, almost on top of the cupcake; she rescued it at the last minute, but he didn’t seem to notice it was even there.

“Eat up. You never know where your next meal is coming from.” Felicity’s eyes shot to him; he was smirking in the way that almost closed one eye, like he was winking at her. Was that crack some kind of sick joke, or foreshadowing? Adrian’s face softened into a kinder smile. “My grandmother used to say that.”

Felicity conjured up a faint smile of her own and reached for a napkin.

The cars were parked inside a crumbling garage, three streets from the club they’d staked out just a few weeks ago. It was otherwise empty and dark. Diggle slipped back outside to check the perimeter, leaving Oliver to look over the vehicles.

A cursory examination didn’t turn up anything obvious—a couple of bodies in the trunk would’ve been helpful—but he knew there could be plenty of clues if you knew where to look. John re-entered the building with a warning “Hey” as Oliver stood in thought.

“We’re not going to get very far on our own,” Dig acknowledged, picking up on his partner’s thoughts immediately. Oliver nodded and took out his phone.

Roughly thirty seconds after he sent the text a blinding light streaked through the door.

“Hey guys. What’s up?”

“Need your help,” Oliver grunted, already pointing toward the cars with his bow. He gave Barry the short version, his eyes tracking the man in red as he paced around both vehicles at human speed.

Barry finished his circuit and rubbed his chin in thought.

“I can do it, no problem. But when it comes to forensics I like to take my time.”

“What are we talkin’?” Diggle asked.

“Two, three minutes?” Barry grimaced a ‘Please don’t shoot me’ face as Oliver blinked at him. “Is that okay?”

Another incredulous blink from Oliver.
“Okay. Gotta go get my stuff. Be right back.”

The light flashed again as he disappeared into the night. Spartan and the Arrow shared a look in the interval. This guy.

“There could be more to this building,” Oliver muttered, his eyes scanning the ceiling and walls. “Start looking for secrets. I’m gonna check in with Curtis.”

The band had been playing for nearly an hour, but no one was dancing. Felicity had managed to eat most of her dinner—the scenario of being thrown in a hole driving her to choke down more than her stomach was really happy about—and now she sat, people-watching as she rotated the cupcake with her fingers as it sat, uneaten, on the table.

Little Rebecca was running around the still-crowded restaurant, squealing and laughing with the other youngsters at the party; her cousins, maybe. She was a blur of pink and long brown curls as she squeezed past Felicity’s chair with a giggle. Her father was standing, arms folded, almost in front of the restaurant’s main entrance as he conversed with friends. His eyes flicked to his little girl every few seconds.

Felicity glanced toward the hall at the back of the room, the one that led to the kitchen, restrooms, and emergency exit. Another large man, with the look of former military about him, lingered there too. Felicity wondered if it was a conscious decision, or just instinct.

Adrian, still ignoring her most of the time—and for once she didn’t mind—returned from his circuit of the room, where he had been chatting and cutting up with party guests non-stop. He sat down next to her and spotted the cupcake she was still rotating.

“Aren’t you going to eat that?”

Felicity’s fingers stopped moving of their own accord and her hand slipped down to her lap. The stuffiness in the room had driven her to remove her coat; the gauzy fabric of her skirt slithered under her fingers as she plucked at it.

“I’m full,” she replied shortly, finding no other explanation necessary.

Adrian’s eyes shifted toward the corner where the band was launching into another song, and the crinkly-eyed grin returned.

“Time to dance,” he announced, offering a hand to her. Felicity froze, staring at it; he hadn’t touched her all night, but now, when it counted, she couldn’t get the picture of that hand grabbing William, snatching Rebecca, out of her head.

“C’mon,” he prompted, withdrawing the hand and pushing up to move toward the only open space in the room, and that only by coincidence. Felicity’s vision tunneled suddenly, and she deeply regretted eating as much as she had, but she swallowed the nausea down and managed to stand.

She had almost reached him when she veered away, toward the hallway to the restrooms, holding a finger up to tell him to wait, then pointing out her intended destination. Adrian’s grin turned into a momentary frown, but he shrugged and let her go.

Felicity tried not to stumble as she made her way to the back of the room; she had to squeeze past Ryan’s big military friend to get into the hallway. He was probably a Marine, a detached part of her brain pondered; she had discovered that Ryan was, the night she was at his house.
Despite her hopes, the women’s was not empty when she pushed through the swinging door. Patty was there, putting the finishing touches on a diaper change. Her head whipped up as Felicity entered the room; their eyes caught in the reflection from the mirror over the sink and each attempted a smile.

Felicity approached the sink and turned on the cold, sliding her wrists under the stream of water as she fought another wave of nausea. Out of the corner of her eye she watched Patty lift baby Rachel and plant her on her hip, then heft the diaper bag and move to the second sink to attempt a rather awkward hand washing.

Despite feeling ill, Felicity pulled out a couple of paper towels and patted her hands dry before holding them out to take the baby.

“Thanks,” Patty said softly, twisting toward her and passing Rachel over. She worked quickly but thoroughly, then took her back.

“I think she and I are about to take off. It’s been quite a night...week, actually.” Patty huffed out a breath that might’ve tried to be a chuckle. Felicity smiled softly.

“It’s a very nice party. Thanks for inviting me.”

Patty shook her head quickly.

“Oh, this wasn’t our idea, trust me. I mean, it was very nice, but Ryan and I had nothing to do with it. It was all Mr Chase.”

“Really?” Felicity blinked a couple of times in surprise.

“Oh, yeah. He was very insistent that it had to be tonight.” She flashed Felicity a brief smile and wished her a goodnight, then pulled the door open and left.

Holy Frack. He’d planned it. Adrian had orchestrated this whole thing: To get her here? Or more importantly, to get the team somewhere else?

Felicity moaned in distress as another wave of sickness threatened. Back went her hands under the cold water; she scooped a handful and slurped it up. She needed to contact the team, because this was probably all a trap, but she’d left her phone in her purse at the table. Frack. If she went out for it now instead of dancing, Adrian would know something was up.

She managed two deep breaths without thinking she might vomit, then dried her hands and left the restroom.

“Brake lines are cut,” Rene announced softly from under the car. “Old school, but effective.”

Dinah was crouched next to the car, close to where his torso disappeared beneath the smashed up front end of the Toyota Camry. Quentin was within earshot, keeping watch.

“How do we prove it was Chase?” he asked.

Rene wiggled out from under the car and grimaced.

“You don’t. Unless he paid someone and you can find the trail.”

“What we have to do is get the accident investigation re-opened to look at foul play,” Dinah added. “If Green Arrow and Spartan can tie the other vehicles to him, then maybe this one can be added
circumstantially.”

Quentin nodded in agreement and sighed.

“Let’s get outta here.”

Just as they reached the place in the chain link fence where they’d entered, Rene pulled up.

“Damn, forgot my flashlight. Be right back.”

Quentin shot Dinah a look, but she shrugged.

“Where’s he gonna go? This is the way out,” she whispered. Lance rolled his eyes.

Rene returned to the car and scrambled under, fishing around for the flashlight in the dark—the irony—when he froze, listening: Was that a scuffle? His hand finally found the light and he crept back out as quietly as possible, holding his breath in order to hear better in the blackness.

By the time he made it back to the spot in the fence, Dinah and Quentin were gone.
Chapter 20

Adrian was still there, standing in the open spot in the room, his hands in his pockets and a sway in his hips. Felicity walked straight to him, although she could feel the invisible tug of her phone lying out of reach on the table.

She made herself take one more deep, cleansing breath before she stepped into his arms, controlling her instinct to stiffen and avoid his touch. Look him in the eye, she chanted to herself as they launched into the dance.

Maybe he had spread the word that they would be showing off their stuff, who knew, but the crowd responded immediately, cheering and whistling as they swayed in a tight circle. A corner of her brain admitted that the dress felt amazing, the skirt swirling around her as he spun her, then falling to graze her thighs.

For his part, Adrian looked like this was just another night at the club; his expression held no indication that very bad things might be happening to her friends right now. Felicity took her cue from him and kept her face neutral, trying to convey nerves, if anything, just not terror.

“Okay. I’ve got what I need. There were definitely hair samples in both vehicles.” Barry looked at Oliver. “Is there any way to get a sample from your DA?”

Oliver tapped his comm and asked Curtis for Chase’s address.

“You mind going in to get it yourself? He’s not at home.”

Barry gave him a curious look, and Oliver grimaced.

“He’s with Felicity.”

Barry’s face under the red mask looked shocked.

“Oliver! Seriously? I thought you didn’t let Felicity out into the field!” Diggle put a hand on Barry’s shoulder to calm him down before Oliver reached into his quiver.

“It’s not ideal,” Dig soothed, “but they’re in public, and Thea’s keeping an eye out. It’s the best we can do right now, until we find William.”

Barry still looked skeptical, and worried, but he glanced at the address Curtis had texted to Oliver’s phone and disappeared.

“Should’ve told him to look for—“

Before Oliver could finish the sentence he was back.

“Got it. No sign of William there. Sorry.”

Oliver dropped his gaze and nodded once, his question answered.

“I’ll let you know as soon as I have answers,” Barry promised. He raised his hand in a goodbye and streaked away.
Curtis suddenly cut in over comms.

“Guys, something’s happened. You’re gonna want to hear this.”

Oliver slapped his chest, partly to answer, partly to get his heart to start beating again.

“Is it Felicity?”

“No. Rene.”

The song ended to loud applause and whistles. Adrian was beaming; Felicity forced a smile she hoped would look shy. He squeezed both her hands as the band launched into the next number.

“Again,” he said, grinning, releasing one of her hands and guiding her around until they were side by side. The steps were simple, but they looked good in sync. Felicity kept her eyes on Adrian’s feet, not wanting to miss his transitions.

The crowd went wild.

“I’m tellin’ ya,” Rene’s voice came over the comms, “they were just gone. I came straight back here, thinking they’d ditched me, like some kind of weird hazing thing.”

“Hazing around here usually means being shot with an arrow.” Curtis whispered the aside loudly; Oliver chose to ignore him. Instead he shot John a ‘Can we trust him?’ look that Dig answered with a shrug.

“Has Thea checked in yet?” There was silence as Curtis switched to the other line.

“She’s not answering. Heat signatures on the roof of that building...well, there aren’t any. It’s empty.”

Oliver ground out a curse as he and Diggle ran for the door.

“She’s fine, Oliver. She’s still inside the restaurant, and there are still lots of cars in the parking lot.” Curtis’s words almost stopped him in his tracks.

“Curtis, how—“ The voice that cut him off was smug.

“That water bottle I gave her had tracking nanites in it. I told John it was an option, but he said I should keep it a secret.”

Oliver glared at his brother as they climbed into the van; Dig held his gaze.

“She had to believe she was on her own. And you’re a terrible liar around her.”

Oliver growled.

Halfway through the second dance another couple joined them; the crowd moved back to make
room. Little Rebecca bounced out onto the floor too, jumping and twirling to the music, and Felicity
couldn’t help smiling.

Adrian noticed her as well. Since they were still dancing side by side he reached out a hand for her
and the little girl jumped forward to grab at him. He spun her in a circle as she squealed; Felicity felt
sick again.

He’s dancing with her, the bastard, after he kidnapped her. Just like he kidnapped William. Just
like...

Felicity suddenly knew how to find Oliver’s son.

“Dig, drop me across the street from the restaurant,” Oliver ordered, fully intending to take over
Thea’s place on the roof. But John drove on.

“Dig...” he warned.

“No can do, Oliver. You could get snatched too. And then where would we be?”

“Then where the hell are we going?” The urge to just open the door and roll out was very strong. It
wouldn’t be the first time Oliver Queen had ditched John Diggle.

“ARGUS safe house. It’s not far from the restaurant. Lyla and I already talked about the possibility.”
John checked his side mirror before turning left. “We’ll hole up there until Curtis tells us Felicity’s
leaving, then we can shadow her home.”

Oliver huffed an unhappy sigh but didn’t argue.

The dancing went on. The crowd had thinned, expanding their dance floor. The restaurant staff was
clearing tables, and guests were grabbing a cupcake for the road and saying their good nights.
Felicity estimated how much time had passed, where the team must be right now; she wanted
desperately to leave, but she’d promised herself she would stick it out as long as possible, to buy
them time.

The other dancing couple had even given up, but Adrian still held her, still spun her, still directed her
around the floor. Like a prisoner, or a puppet. Felicity tried once to tell him she needed a break, but
his fingers stiffened against her back, holding her close, bruising her.

“Adrian...” she protested, straightening the arm lying against his shoulder in an attempt to push away,
but his muscled arm responded, keeping her against him in a vice-like grip.

“You’re hurting me,” she complained. He let go to spin her crazily, laughing a loud ‘Whoops!’ as
she staggered, and then pulled her back against him.

“You don’t know hurt. Chica.” His face was close to hers, their foreheads almost touching. Felicity
was trapped by his eyes; for a second there was only insanity staring back at her. Pure, raging
insanity. She looked away first, and they danced on.

It wasn’t until Ryan tapped Adrian on the shoulder, Rebecca once again in his arms, to say
goodnight that he finally loosened his grip and let her stop. She knew there were blisters on both feet
from her stupid, brand new, super-cute shoes. On any other night Ryan might have noticed her silent
distress, but tonight he only had eyes for his sleepy three year old. He thanked them both for coming, shook Adrian’s hand for throwing the party, and left.

The band called a halt at the end of the song and began to pack up; in ten more minutes there would be no one left but the two of them. Felicity felt a shudder of fear.

Adrian was staring at her, scrunching up his nose in a grin and still holding one of her hands in his; she fought the urge to rip it from his grasp and run for the exit. Instead, she let him lead her to the table where they had eaten. Her purse, phone, and coat were still there, although the rest of the area was clean. A server was stacking chairs on tables; the scraping sound of the chair legs and the clunk as they landed upside down on the tabletop made her want to jump out of her skin.

Felicity collected her things as Adrian watched, his hands in his pockets. Her fingers threatened to shake as she slipped her phone into her purse; it had been away from her long enough that she didn’t dare try to use it until she could scan it for foul play. She struggled into her coat unassisted, her balance compromised by her throbbing feet.

“See you soon, Felicity.” Adrian said softly, amusement in his voice. Her name slithered off his tongue; it repulsed her.

Felicity started to walk away—refusing to limp, dammit—half expecting to feel a restraining hand on her, but she made it to the door unhindered. She felt his crazy stare on her as she pushed out the door.

_____________________

The safe house was shabby, but clean. Oliver had pulled down his mask and hood, but John couldn’t get him to sit at first. He paced the length of the small room, peeking out the curtains every other trip. He checked his phone repeatedly, waiting to hear from Curtis.

“We’ve known where Chase was all night, and the team still got snatched—“

“Which means he’s not working alone. Yeah.” Diggle scrubbed his hands up over his head. Despite the danger they were in, this was not the discussion he wanted to have at the moment. “So I guess you and Felicity finally got a chance to talk.” His change of subject was enough to get Oliver to stop and lower himself into a chair.

“There, um, wasn’t much talking, but yeah.” Oliver checked John’s reaction from under his lashes. “I thought maybe she got the wrong impression at the party, about Susan and me, but...” He trailed off with a shrug.

“Could be that she found out who you actually spent the night with,” Diggle offered with a faint smile. Oliver’s eyes shot to him in surprise.

“Really?”

“Yeah man. Somebody had to get you two headed back in the right direction. You were driving me crazy.”

Oliver huffed a laugh just as his phone started to ring.

“Curtis,” he prompted, eyes on John.

“She’s on the move.”
Felicity noticed the van in her rear view mirror less than ten minutes after she drove away from the restaurant. It had been ten minutes fraught with fears that Adrian might follow her, or send someone to follow her, or just blow up her car as soon as she started the engine. There had been no sign of Thea, although she knew better than to think she’d be able to spot Speedy if the woman didn’t want to be seen.

The grille of the van filling up her mirror almost broke her; she bit her lip and concentrated on the road in front of her, knowing her boys had her back.

The tears threatened as she pulled to the curb in front of the campaign office; Dig drove the van past her car but then stopped to let Oliver out. He was opening her driver’s side door before she could get her shaking fingers to undo the seatbelt.

Oliver helped her out of the car and tried to pull her to his chest, but Felicity threw a hand out and stopped him.

“Don’t,” she warned. “I...I can’t. Not yet. I have work to do.” Oliver’s heart caught in his throat but he nodded. He let her lead the way to the Bunker.

The elevator ride was silent; Oliver was close but not touching, holding himself back as she’d requested. Try as she might to erase it, she could still feel Adrian’s hands on her, his fingers digging into her ribs. Felicity closed her eyes and breathed deeply, wanting nothing more than a very hot shower, her pjs, and her bed. But time was of the essence, and now that she knew where to look for William she didn’t dare stop.

Only Curtis and Rene were in the Bunker, with Dig on the way from the garage.

“Where is everyone?” she asked, trying to hide the fact that her feet were screaming in agony as she crossed the room and mounted the stairs, Oliver a solid presence at her back.

“They’re gone, Felicity. Missing.” Curtis looked stricken. She bit her lip until she thought it would bleed, working to keep her eyes dry as they explained the disappearances of Quentin, Dinah, and Thea. Oliver shifted his weight when his sister was mentioned, but otherwise made no contribution to the story.

She swallowed once, pushing everything down, and took the seat Rene vacated as soon as she took a step in that direction.

Felicity Smoak went to work.
Chapter 21

10:43pm
She ordered her troops like a seasoned general, setting Curtis the task of locating their missing teammates, asking John to contact Lyla, and sending Rene for a bottle of water. The newest member of their team opened his mouth to protest, but Oliver shot him a look that sent him off without a word.

“What can I do?” It came out so soft, over her shoulder, she wasn’t sure at first that he’d really spoken. Felicity stilled her flying fingers long enough to swivel her chair to face him, hovering above her and so quietly anxious.

“You need to get in touch with Samantha, to see how she’s doing. And Oliver, it’s time you two had a talk about Simon Morrison.” He looked like he would rather have any other assignment, but nodded and turned away.

11:08pm
Oliver took the steps to her Lair in two strides, needing her. Felicity stopped her work again to face him.

“The police still have nothing on William,” he stated, clearly defeated. Felicity shook her head.

“And they won’t. Because they’re looking in the wrong place.” Oliver crossed his arms and waited for more as the remaining team members moved a step closer to hear.

“When Rebecca went missing, she was never found.” Oliver’s eyebrows rose a notch. “What I mean is, no one FOUND HER, she just showed up at the police station, unharmed. Everyone was so glad to have her back, they never really tried to figure out where she’d been for those nine or so hours.”

“You think William is wherever Rebecca was being held,” Oliver clarified, to Felicity’s nod.

“Exactly. I’m starting from the station where she showed up and trying to follow her trail backwards.” Oliver shifted his weight, suddenly ON, ready to do something physical.

“Are you getting anywhere?”

“Slowly, but yes.”

Everyone else drifted away, taking that statement—correctly—as a hint to stop impeding her progress, but Oliver remained, undecided, a little bit lost. Felicity sighed and tipped her head at him.

“Simon Morrison?” He matched her sigh and backed up to the desk, leaning against it and focusing on the floor between his feet.

“They were High School sweethearts, but sometime in his late teens Adrian’s...Simon’s personality changed—”

“Schizophrenia?”

Oliver shrugged as he glanced at her.

“Could be. She said he wouldn’t seek treatment. They were engaged by the time he started to get violent. Samantha was afraid of him, but she was more afraid to leave him. She told me she went out
that night—“another glance at Felicity to make sure she knew what he meant—“looking to act out, as a cry for help.” He uncrossed his arms and ran his hands up over his face to lace them behind his head, leaning forward with a forlorn sigh. “She got more than she bargained for.”

Felicity felt sick with dread, thinking about the things Adrian was capable of, and the fear that must be dogging Oliver’s heels.

“How did she get away from him?”

“When she found out she was pregnant, she came to me—or tried to—hoping my family could protect her. But my mother just bribed her instead, and she knew she was on her own. She ignored the money and went to a domestic abuse shelter. Felicity, my son was born in a shelter. Because of that bastard.” He rocked forward again, almost folding in half. “Because of me.”

Felicity laid a firm hand on his thigh to make sure she had his attention. The guilt and regret radiating off of him was draining her quick; she had too much left to do with too little already.

“No Oliver, not because of you. What happened could’ve happened to anybody. Moira made the decision for you—out of concern for your future, yes, but the fact remains she left you out of that discussion. It is not your fault.”

Oliver stared at her for three or four breaths; they had known each other too long for him to take offense at any jabs Felicity might make at his mother. Especially when they were true. He finally nodded, then stood and walked away with a murmured thank you. She spun back around and resumed her search.

11:22pm
“Gotcha!” Curtis pounded a fist onto the desktop in triumph, drawing a crowd. “I was able to get a glimpse of something during Thea’s abduction.”

Everyone leaned in to look at the still shot; it was dark and fuzzy, but the crouched figure of Speedy could clearly be seen at the edge of the roof with a hooded figure creeping up behind. A sword was on the figure’s back.

“League,” Oliver growled, squeezing and releasing both fists as he studied the pic.

“How would someone like Chase get himself involved with their lot?” John wondered aloud.

“Good question.”

Felicity slumped a little in her seat; leads were good—leads were GREAT—but she didn’t have a trip to Nanda Parbat in her at the moment.

“Keep working,” she muttered grimly.

12:57am
“Do you need coffee? You’re shaking.”

Felicity squeezed her trembling hands into fists and shook her head no even as Oliver crossed the Lair toward her, alert now that Curtis had ratted her out. They were night people—had always worked into the wee hours—but she was going on about four hours sleep from the night before. Fatigue had brought on a chill, despite the fact that she was still wearing her coat, and her feet...well, best not to think about the state THEY were in. It occurred to her that she had really needed to pee for hours.
“I’m fine,” she insisted. “Just gotta—” Her attempt to push up out of her chair was an embarrassing failure; Oliver made a grab for her, catching her under the arms right before her knees made contact with the floor.

“Hey,” he said, whisper-soft, “let me help.”

Felicity bit back a whimper as her feet once again remembered their trauma. She minced her way down the steps and across the room to the restroom door with Oliver’s arm around her waist to steady her.

“Oliver, I’m fine,” she protested, attempting to shrug him off, but he pushed through the door behind her, deaf to her complaints. A set of built-ins just inside the door held the team’s extra gear; Felicity snagged her duffel bag of spare clothes as she passed.

“We need to get those shoes off,” Oliver said softly, peering down at them as if they might be ticking.

“No...” she started to say, but he was already moving, trying to help. There was no good place to sit other than the toilet, so without warning he wrapped his hands around her rib cage and hoisted her onto the counter next to the sink. Felicity couldn’t hold in the yelp of pain when he squeezed her bruises; Oliver froze, his fingers releasing their grip and his eyes searching hers.

“Oliver...”

He gave her a look that clearly said ‘We’ll come back to THAT in a minute’ as he dropped to his knees and worked on the buckles of the shoes she would suddenly be happy to see on fire.

Felicity hissed in pain as the first one came off, revealing a mess. Oliver made a noise deep in his chest but said nothing. The other foot was worse, if that was possible.

“Stay there,” he ordered, rearing back to stand and heading out the door for supplies.

Felicity wasted no time; she needed to be changed before he got back and caught sight of what she suspected he’d find on her torso. The cold concrete under her poor feet was equal parts heaven and hell.

She had the yoga pants on and was in the middle of gasping a swear as she struggled to reach the zipper on her dress when Oliver pushed back through the door with an exasperated sigh.

“I wanted you to stay off the floor,” he admonished gently. “You have open wounds, and there’s no telling what you’re walking around in.”

His fingers slid over her bare back as he helped her with the zipper, though she made a half-hearted attempt to twist away from him with a little moan.

“Felicity,” he scolded mildly, confused by her behavior until he peeled the dress away from her body.

“Christ, Felicity...”

His hands fell away. She squeezed her eyes shut against the prick of tears and let him look.

Silence. It was so quiet she could hear his fists clench and release.

“When...” It was a gasp of disbelief. She whipped around to face him, an arm wrapped around her
front to keep the dress in place, DONE.

“While we were DANCING, Oliver. In front of everybody. It just went on and on. He wouldn’t let me stop. He wouldn’t—“ She bit off the end of her sentence because she was yelling, because she was breaking, and he was falling back a step because of it.

Her angry breaths were going to be sobs very soon, and she could not let that happen. Not yet. Felicity left the dress to drop to the floor and bent to grab a sweatshirt out of her bag, fumbling with the opening in her rage and growling—god, she actually growled like an animal—when Oliver tried to reach out and help.

He did block her with his body when she would’ve pushed past him to get out, tipping his head to the counter to indicate his intention to fix her feet. She bit back a retort and hiked herself up to sit, holding very still to keep ahold of the Mad that wanted to evaporate as she watched this man, capable of so much violence, care so gently for her.

When both feet were clean and bandaged with a fresh pair of socks pulled over everything Oliver stood, his expression very carefully neutral. Felicity slid down off the counter, her eyes on the floor.

“I have to pee,” she mumbled, so he turned and left.

2:00am
Another hour. Another step closer to finding William and the team. Dig was sacked out on the couch, catching what sleep he could, the way he’d learned in Afghanistan. Rene was somewhere, but still here; none of the proximity alarms had gone off. Oliver was about to drive her over the edge with his pacing; he was still in his leathers, paranoid that if he changed clothes something would happen and he would waste time putting them back on.

Felicity finally stood and went to him; his head snapped up, thinking she had news, but she shook her head quickly and sighed.

“Oliver, you need to rest. Did you get any sleep at all last night?” He gave her a look that could, at any second, become a laugh or a growl.

“Felicity, I can’t sleep when he’s out there...” William or Chase, it didn’t matter which he meant. She waved a hand toward the side of the room where John rested.

“Dig feels it too, Oliver, but he knows he needs to be on his game when we finally find something. Come on.”

She held out a hand and he took it, defeated, letting her lead him down the steps to the back room and his cot. Memories assaulted her as she bent to pull back the covers and waited for him to sit and unlace his boots. Oliver pulled them off and set them aside, then grabbed her hand and tugged her forward, between his knees.

“Stay,” he whispered, pressing his forehead against her, just below her breasts. Felicity sighed and wrapped her arms around his head. She placed a kiss into his hair.

“I can’t,” she whispered back. His hands slipped up and down the backs of her legs from knee to thigh, not asking for anything but comfort. “I have to keep looking. But I’ll find him. And then you can go get him and finish this.”

Oliver sighed, his breath warm on her stomach even through her shirt, then leaned back enough to look her in the eye and nod.
4:35am
“Oliver, I have an address.”

He was sitting up and grabbing his boots before he hit full consciousness, surging to his feet and tucking in his shirt as he searched Felicity’s face for clues. She looked absolutely spent, swaying on the spot. But when he reached out for her she waved him off, turning to lead the way, jogging beside him once he broke into his longer strides and pulled even.

John was waiting, suited up, with Rene beside him. Curtis looked dead too, but he was still hard at work on the search for the others.

“Do we have confirmation?” Oliver asked softly, looking at Felicity.

“Security camera caught someone in black dragging a small human into the building just before 11pm Thursday night. 2256 Baker Ave. He’s there, Oliver.”

Dig was already on the move, Rene on his heels, but Oliver hesitated a breath to look at her. To say ‘thank you’. Or ‘I love you’, maybe; he had yet to say it since they’d reconnected. But Felicity just nodded a ‘go on’ with her head, her eyes tired but determined. He nodded back and ran to catch up.

4:39am
Her phone vibrated loudly on the nightstand; it took her a minute to even place the sound. She slapped around for it until her fingers closed over the charger cord and she could use that to haul the phone close enough to read the time; she groaned at what she saw.

There was a text message that took a couple of blinks to bring into focus:

‘Found William. Meet me ASAP 2256 Baker Ave.’ It was from Oliver.

Susan bit her lip and stared at it for several seconds before pushing back the covers to get up.
“Do you think Dinah will be there?”

The question floated up from the back of the van, moody. Reluctant. Perfectly Rene.

John shook his head as he checked the rear view mirror.

“I don’t know, man. Felicity didn’t see any other activity there. If the League has them, they could be anywhere.” His eyes flicked to Oliver, who was staring straight ahead in silence. “I called Lyla; we’re to take William to the safe house when we have him. An ARGUS Agent has been assigned to Samantha and will bring her there when we give the word.”

Oliver grunted an acknowledgment but otherwise kept looking ahead.

Willing the van to go faster.

---------------------------------Susan wasn’t totally surprised to be the first one here; the address was only about a five minute drive from her home. She sat in her car, unsure what exactly she was supposed to do now. Maybe Oliver thought she would want to be here when they took down Chase so she could put it in her investigative piece.

She yawned and shook her head. Whatever. As long as he didn’t expect her to shoot a bow and arrow. Her phone chimed and she flipped it up from her lap to check the screen.

‘We’re on site. Come in from the south entrance.’

Susan frowned and took off her seatbelt.

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“Overwatch.”

“I’m here.” Felicity suppressed a yawn and shivered violently, her shoulders actually waggling as the tremor worked its way through her body. Curtis was off making them coffee from the very high-end machine that Oliver upgraded, without being asked, every time a newer model came out. It was a nod to their beginnings, and their favorite inside joke.

Also, Felicity never—ever—got her own coffee down here.

“We’re on-site.”

“Copy that. I’m reading three heat signatures inside the building. Wait, make that four. Someone just entered from the south side.”

Oliver nodded to Dig, who went left as he and Rene went right. The Vigilante had been instructed very specifically to watch their six first, look for the missing team second. Oliver was mildly curious to find out how obedient this guy actually was.

Dig confirmed that he had reached the east entrance just as Oliver and Rene turned the corner and got eyes on the door to the south. They waited for Overwatch’s count to move in.
The building was some kind of warehouse; not huge, but dark and empty. Susan stepped through the door silently. She wanted to call out for Oliver, but something held her back; this place seemed like it would be echoey, and she felt a little self-conscious hollering for the Green Arrow as it was.

Her New Balance made very little noise on the dusty concrete; she’d thrown on workout clothes, in case she had to run, but had her dress coat on overtop, for warmth and professionalism. Now that she was here that decision was starting to feel ridiculous.

Susan had just pulled her phone from her pocket to double check the time when she felt more than heard someone behind her.

Her phone fell to the ground in the brief struggle.

Even fresh, the coffee only tasted hot at this point; Felicity chalked that up to her fatigue, because she knew how expensive her blend was. Pity luxury coffee could do nothing to fix the grittiness of her eyeballs. Every blink felt like sandpaper.

She switched to her secondary monitor and pulled up current weather conditions, including wind speed and direction; archers sometimes needed to know these things at the most inconvenient times, and she wanted to be ready. She also checked the time to sunrise: They still had a good three hours of darkness.

With one more glance to tell her everyone was in the right place, Overwatch called the ball.

Just before he reached for the door, Oliver thought he heard something inside the building; could’ve been a small struggle between two people, could’ve been a largish rat. He froze, listening. Vigilante was motionless behind him.

“Overwatch,” he murmured, knowing he didn’t need to elaborate, because she could see everything, inside and outside, from the sky.

“We now have two heat sigs in the southeast corner. The two in the northwest corner haven’t moved since I found them forty minutes ago.”

“Copy,” he rasped under his breath, and reached for the door handle.

Felicity hadn’t seen it at first—damn dry eyes—the car parked across the street from the building.

“Curtis.” She muted the comm so she wouldn’t distract the team. “Has that car been there the whole time?”

Curtis obediently leaned over to scan the screen.

“Run the footage back ten minutes,” she ordered, a small frown settling into place. Damn.

The building was dark, and seemingly empty. Oliver felt Rene off his left shoulder; it was interesting
having a smaller man behind him instead of the hulking presence of Dig, but what he lacked in size he more than made up for in speed and agility. Oliver shifted his weight to the balls of his feet and dropped further into a crouch as they moved forward.

“There.” Curtis pointed to a small white car, pulling up to the curb just a couple of minutes before the Arrow van arrived on the other side of the building. He ran the footage forward until the car door opened and a figure got out to cross the street. Features were impossible to tell from overhead, but nothing about the person screamed “bad guy”.

“League of Assassins don’t normally drive, do they?”

Felicity didn’t bother to answer before she pounded the key that unmuted the comms.

Two things happened at once: A single gunshot sounded from the northwest corner of the building where Spartan had headed, and Rene stepped and slid on something that took his foot out from under him and made a scraping sound along the concrete floor. His sudden imbalance dropped him to one knee with a grunt as Oliver swiveled, arrow drawn, to cover.

Oliver was just about to call out for John when Felicity broke through, into his ear.

“Arrow, the fourth heat sig may belong to a civilian. Do you copy?”

“Copy,” he grunted, glancing down to check on Rene. The Vigilante leaned over to retrieve the thing he’d stepped on, shoved it into a pocket, and got back to his feet. There had been no word from Diggle.

“Spartan.”

There was a breath of silence before all of them heard “I have William.”

Oliver could hear Felicity’s sigh of relief in his ear, but before he could even process further instructions there was a new sound: A muffled sonic scream, in the vicinity of John and William, followed almost immediately by a woman’s cry for help coming from the room to the southeast, where Overwatch had seen the other heat signatures.

Rene said “Dinah” and sprinted for the far side of the room even as Oliver was gesturing them ahead.

“Dammit,” he growled, at a dead run for the other door. “Spartan, get William out of there. Vigilante’s on his way to you.”

“Copy that.”

Oliver hit the door at a run.

This was the worst part: The waiting. Her intel could only get them so far; eventually the team had to go in there themselves and confront the big bads while she sat and listened, her breath held and her knuckles white.

I should’ve said it, Felicity thought suddenly, out of nowhere. I should’ve said ‘I love you’.
She shared a look with Curtis but neither spoke.

He knew Susan Williams was dead as soon as he stepped into the room. Light from a bare bulb in the ceiling illuminated her body, slumped back in a chair, her eyes fixed wide with terror and staring above and to the right of his head. The single arrow in her chest was just confirmation.

Oliver scanned his surroundings before approaching, circling behind the chair to find her hands hastily zip-cuffed together. He crouched next to her and pulled a flechette off his sleeve to cut the tie; the hand closest to him fell slack. He knew she would still be warm when he carried her out.

The trank dart...the trank dart was a surprise. Susan’s carefully manicured fingernails, just in front of his face, were the last thing Oliver saw as he slumped to the floor.
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

One of the best things about a re-write is you get the chance to change the little details that just annoyed you. I loved the original 5.17, and the beginning of 5.18, when Oliver can’t even look at Felicity as he’s asking her to leave, kills me EVERY TIME, but it really bothered me that he had been missing for 6 days—6 days—and Felicity was dressed to the nines, looking fresh as a daisy. I realize it’s television, and Felicity has A LOOK, but we all know she wouldn’t have rested until she knew he was safe. So here’s my little fix-it in the middle of the big fix-it: I promise, I’m the nicest person ever in real life.

Felicity

Fear.

For three solid days the Bunker had been nothing but chaos, exhaustion, and fear. She had never realized that worry—real, legitimate worry—had a smell, and a feel, a thin oiliness that coated every surface. Every time she allowed herself a minute to not think about him, to let her mind rest, worry would rear up and remind her that what happened in the wee hours of Saturday morning had tossed life as she knew it on its head. Like nothing would ever be the same.

Besides those few days she’d recently taken off from the team—and accidentally teamed up with Susan instead—they hadn’t been apart this long in years, even when they were...apart. Not since he’d infiltrated the League, made her think he had turned, had become one of them and lost his soul to Ra’s al Ghul. Felicity closed her eyes to capture the memory of Later, in a seaside motel, Oliver whispering to her as she lay beneath him that his soul had never been in danger in Nanda Parbat, because he had left it—and his heart—behind with her, for safe-keeping.

She swiped away the single tear that slipped out and ignored the ache in her stomach that never seemed to go away, whether she ate or not. Not eating took less time away from the search, so she chose that route unless Dig called her on it. Which he did, but not that often; he was busy being worried too.

He hadn’t let any of them above ground since he had come back from the remains of the Safe House, a shell-shocked William in tow, the ARGUS agents dead and Samantha missing. Another one of them taken. There was no safe space left, it seemed.

They weren’t without resources in the Bunker; Oliver had seen to that when he built the place. There was a water tank, good ventilation, and enough canned goods for a lengthy siege, though the stackable washer and dryer was probably her most treasured possession at the moment.

She couldn’t close her eyes without seeing the aftermath of their decision to bring Susan into their secret, especially the view she’d gotten from John’s body cam when he came back to look for Oliver and found her instead. Felicity had seen death before, sometimes very close up, but it never got easier, and this time it only reinforced the lengths Chase was willing to go.

Three days wasn’t long; he’d been missing longer—god, five years, if you wanted to get technical—
but this felt...different. Final. What if...

Felicity threw herself back from the desk violently, tripping over her own feet in her haste to go...where? She was stuck. Oliver was out there somewhere, needing her help, but she was trapped down here, helpless. Either that, or he wasn’t out there at all anymore, wasn’t...just wasn’t.

She fell to her knees as Diggle intercepted her, in time to wrap her up as a sound left her that couldn’t possibly be human. He shushed her as he soothed her, probably because William was down here now as well, ready to fly apart all on his own; he didn’t need this too. Felicity clamped her teeth over the sound, akin to forcing back vomit, and struggled to her feet, away from those bear arms that promised comfort for as long as she needed. Except she couldn’t take the comfort, because Oliver was out there somewhere, alone. Waiting for her.

She pushed away from John and stumbled back to her computer.

John

It wasn’t just watching a slow motion train wreck, it was being inside the train as it wrecked in slow motion after the engineer vanished, leaving him with the controls. They had been in tight spots before, god knows, had even been without Oliver for extended periods, but never like this.

Never completely at the mercy of an enemy they couldn’t see or anticipate.

‘Fatigued’ was no longer so much a state of being as a lifestyle; his body had reached Empty a day ago and steamed on past, heading straight for a brick wall. But every time he tried to lay down for more than ten minutes John would picture Felicity—completely unable to even take a break, let alone nap—and he would haul himself back up to come stand behind her, a symbolic bodyguard keeping watch while she ran herself into the ground searching.

She broke once, running and stumbling, frantic but blind with weariness and lost without Oliver. John thought this would be it, the final straw, and he would have to brave the unknown above ground to get her medical attention. But Felicity gathered reserves from somewhere and pushed away from him to return to work, even as Curtis lay passed out from exhaustion on the couch and Rene...well, who the hell knew where Rene was.

There had been no Canary to match the cry they’d heard in that building; it had been a recording, a trick to get him separated from Oliver, they reasoned later. It was a fight to get Rene in the van, even after finding Susan Williams’s body and not finding Oliver’s.

By the time they turned onto the street where the safe house sat it no longer sat there; it had been blown into the street, made to look like a gas explosion, although it had been much too precise a blast; the houses around it only showed minor damage. An eyewitness confirmed that a woman matching Samantha’s description had been put in a van and removed minutes before the house blew sky high.

The debris was still burning as they pulled up, and John was already on the phone to Lyla, warning her to grab JJ and go to ground; it was obvious from that moment they were no longer dealing with their average villain, and he had no way of knowing how wide the net could spread.

Somewhere in the middle of that first afternoon Rene remembered the thing he had stepped on, the thing still in his pocket; it was a phone, presumably Susan’s. Felicity pounced on it and spent the next few hours cracking into it, finding the texts from Oliver that John swore he hadn’t sent, because they were enroute at those times, and the man was stone-still the whole ride, probably busy trying to make the van go faster with his mind.
So if Oliver hadn’t sent those texts, who had? Someone good, Felicity had said; it took her forever just to find a trail to follow. Two days later she was much closer, but the work was hard, above Curtis’s ability as a hacker; there was no one else to spell her, and she was flagging.

The IV for fluids was extreme—a last-ditch idea after her mini freak out—and she didn’t like it one bit, but it was either sit there and let him stick her or fight him and end up flat on her back with something more powerful than saline in her veins to make her get some rest. She wisely chose option A.

The days hadn’t been without good news, after a fashion: Barry had called to say hair samples could definitely place Adrian Chase in both of those vehicles in Bludhaven, assuming they were still there by the time what was left of the team could bring a case to the authorities—

“Cayden James,” Felicity rasped, her voice almost gone. It broke John out of his musings; he stepped closer to take a look over her shoulder as Curtis leaned in from the side. Rene even drifted out of the shadows to listen. “A man named Cayden James sent the texts. He’s a top-notch hacker, wanted all over the world, and until recently was a long term guest of ARGUS.”

“Until recently...?”

“Broken out by ‘ninjas’.” She was obviously too tired to use the finger quotes, but he could hear them in her voice. Curtis didn’t even wait for direction, just turned back to his own workspace and started digging up everything possible on this James guy.

John ran his hands over his head and paced in a circle as he began thinking out loud.

“Does Adrian Chase have the League of Assassins doing his bidding, or is someone in the League using Adrian to do their bidding?”

He didn’t get an answer, at least from Felicity; her head had dropped onto her arms and she was snoring softly. He motioned for Rene to grab the IV stand and follow as he gathered her up in his arms and headed for the cot.

Oliver

Day three. Day three. Day three.

He chanted it in his head periodically so he wouldn’t forget as the sunlight and shadows slowly marched over him, telling him that time was passing while he lay chained to the floor.

Sleep deprivation, some water boarding, that bit with the phone book. So far, just the usual stuff. Part of him wanted to point out the scars on his body from the whip, the various swords, the SHARK BITE, for godssake. A little originality would be nice. But he kept his comments to himself; torture tended to bring out the sarcastic asshole in him.

He drifted away for a minute, to The Princess Bride. Felicity had been shocked—and then not so much, once she thought about it—that he’d never seen the movie, but after they watched it—in Ivy Town—she’d given him a copy of the book.

“The movie’s fabulous,” she’d said, “but the book is better.”

He’d read it twice, the guy who’d always thought the best use for a paperback was fixing a wonky table leg. He loved Inigo (You killed my father, You have failed this city; Inigo got him), but he REALLY connected with Westley: Lost at sea, separated from his true love, tortured. Ah, the Pit of Despair. Oliver understood at a bone-deep level the way Westley could take himself OUT of
whatever was being done to him.

The trick was bringing yourself BACK, after.

Day three. Day three. Day three.

Felicity would be burning down the world right about now, looking for him. All he had to do was remove himself from the pain, whenever it came, and wait. Simple. Compartmentalization wasn’t just a big word he knew.

The clang of a metal door told him Chase was back, probably with some toy or other. Oliver closed his eyes and built a scene in his head: Fezzik and Westley wrestling, maybe. He’d always been a big fan of Andre the Giant.

“Hello Oliver.” That raspy, whispery voice of his. “Are you ready?”

“Adrian,” he sighed, trying to keep the scene built in his head, “What do you want.” It wasn’t a question, more of a ‘Let’s get this over with’. Chase chuckled so gleefully Oliver cracked one eyelid open to squint at him. It was not hard to act thoroughly annoyed with this guy.

“I have a game. You thought it was a game to sleep with my fiancée? Well I have been waiting a long time to play my own game, and, I have to say, I think it’s a good one.”

Oliver opened both eyes and considered sitting up for this; it might be important.

Day three. Day three.

“Okay, it’s pretty simple, but the best games are, don’t ya think?” Adrian squatted near his shoulder so that he was looming over the top of him; it would be awkward to try to sit up now. Oliver’s heartbeat stuttered briefly; not from fear. Dehydration, probably.

“Right next door, in a room—“ Chase’s eyes roamed the cell—“ kinda like this one, I have someone you know. Now, you already know some of the people I’ve been able to grab right under your nose, but I’ve been pretty productive over these last couple days too.” His closed-mouth grin was so wide it made one eye wink. Oliver lay still and listened.

“Here’s my game: You guess which one of your friends...or your family...I have next door.” Oliver wanted to roll his eyes, because really? Adrian chuckled. “Sounds simple, right? It is, if you guess right, because then I’ll let you both go. Scout’s honor.”

Day three. Oliver’s brow knitted slightly.

“Stay with me now, Oliver. This next part’s important. Because if you guess someone—Thea, Quentin, Felicity—“

His heart stuttered again. Dammit.

“If you guess wrong, I’m gonna kill whoever’s in that room.” Adrian stood and offered him the softest, most angelic smile. “And then we’ll start all over. There’s no time limit; take as long as you need to make your guess.”

Oliver blinked once, not so much looking at Chase as looking through him, trying to picture Fezzik with a big rock in each hand. His footsteps echoed as he walked away.

“Holler when you’re ready, okay buddy?”
Oliver swallowed.

Day...
“Easy.”

Felicity tried to roll over as she woke up, but her right arm was tangled up in something. John’s hand squeezed her shoulder gently as he held her in place.

“Dig?”

“IV, remember? Don’t want you to pull it out before I get a chance to take it out.”

His voice was incredibly soft and gentle; Felicity sighed as she watched him work.

“You would’ve made a good nurse,” she mumbled, still fuzzy from sleep. John chuckled.

“I don’t know about that.” His movements were smooth and confident, belaying his modesty as he removed the IV and applied a bandage to the spot.

“How long have I been out?” she asked around a yawn, still a bit confused about what she was doing with a needle in her arm anyway. Had she been in a fight? John’s eyes flicked to her for a second as he finished.

“About twelve hours. You probably need more sleep, but that was a good start.”

Everything came back to Felicity all at once, like a thunderclap just over her head: Chase. Susan. Oliver. Diggle was there to press her back onto the cot when she would’ve flown up to get back to her computers.

“Hey. Rest a minute. I sent what you found on Cayden James to Lyla. She has her hacker team working on it. They’re good, Felicity. Not as good as you, but good. You can get back to it after you eat. Chicken noodle soup okay?”

Felicity wrinkled her nose—about the soup or someone else doing the work to find Oliver, he couldn’t tell which—but nodded. Diggle pushed up off his knees and patted her shoulder before he turned to go.

“By the way, you have a visitor.” He looked past her left shoulder with a little smile for someone else, and then he was gone. Felicity turned to where his eyes had indicated: The fuzzy form of William was perched on a big plastic box about five feet from the cot, his hands tucked under his thighs, looking a bit shy. And lost.

Felicity knew her glasses would be around somewhere; she leaned down and felt around on the floor until she found them, then slipped them on. Much better.

“Hey William,” she said softly, still too muzzy in her brain to have space for worry about whether she was going to screw this up. She’d been aware that the boy had been in the Bunker with them since early Saturday morning, but hadn’t had any time to focus on his state of mind or well being while she’d worked furiously to track Oliver and break into Susan’s phone. Besides, she knew he’d been in good hands with John.

The boy dropped his gaze to his lap—a little scared maybe, hopefully not mad—but then looked back up at her like he wanted to ask a question. Felicity took a big breath and sat up.
“Hi. I’m Felicity,” she said simply, figuring introductions should come first. It was hard to believe they’d never met before; it felt like she knew everything about him.

“You work with the Green Arrow,” he said suddenly, catching her off guard. For a second she had to wrack her brain to remember if he knew that the Green Arrow in question was his father. Not yet, she didn’t think; spilling a secret like that didn’t seem Samantha’s style.

“I do.” Felicity nodded slowly, wondering what the follow-up question might look like. Would he ask her something she shouldn’t—or didn’t have the right to—answer? Would he want to know what happened to his mother? She realized she was holding her breath and let it out in a quiet whoosh, a little lightheaded.

“Does that mean you know the Flash?”

A surprised laugh burst out of her and suddenly she couldn’t stop; her life had been a chaotic, terrifying, wonderful mess over the past few days, and now everything she’d been holding in was pouring out of her. Caught in a moment of hilarity that felt a lot like pain, she wondered wildly if she was traumatizing the poor kid, but as she nodded helplessly, her arms wrapped around her aching stomach, William smiled too. He looked so much like his father that tears came to her eyes and rolled down her cheeks.

“You two okay in here?” John asked, hurrying around the corner with two bowls of soup and a package of crackers. Felicity wagged her head in a yes, wheezing a bit, and pulled her legs in to sit cross-legged, patting the end of the cot to coax William to join her.

“We’re fine,” she squeaked. “We’ll be just fine.”

William dutifully came to sit at the end of the cot and tucked into his bowl of soup. They ate silently for a few minutes until Felicity finished off a cracker she’d dipped in the bowl, cleared her throat, and spoke.

“I can answer pretty much any question you have about the Flash,” she offered, swiping at her mouth with the back of her hand.

“Who is he in real life?” William asked immediately.

“Except that one.” Felicity shrugged awkwardly. “Sorry, buddy. What else ya got?”

A lot, as it turned out. He was interested in the science behind his powers, and Felicity could tell him about the testing methods his team used to study his abilities, the materials that made up his suit, and even the number of calories he had to consume to maintain his fitness level.

Diggle was back to retrieve the dishes before William had run out of questions, but Felicity was feeling the pull of anxiety that she had let so much time go by without actively searching for Oliver, and she really needed to pee.

“Hey, those were all great questions, buddy. Can we talk more later? I need to get back to looking for your da...daring friend the Green Arrow.” Felicity tried not to cringe at her near-slip. “You don’t happen to like video games, do you? Because I have a tablet you can borrow...”

Everything had stopped: The sleep deprivation, the starvation, the pain. Even the visits from Chase. He didn’t trust the food, but poisoning beat making an impossible guess, so he ate. Now that he could rest, time was harder to measure, but he was pretty sure he was well into Day four.
Day four.

Exhaustion overcame the discomfort of the chains, the concrete floor, and the cold from being shirtless. He slept. When he woke, the heavy chains keeping him on the floor were gone, and he was on a cot against the wall. Definitely something in the food then, if he’d missed THAT bit of fun. He was still chained at hands and feet, but if he took small, careful steps he could move around.

Anyone that came to bring him food was dressed like League, but he didn’t let himself assume; skepticism had kept him alive more than once. No one spoke to him and he asked no questions, half afraid that any word he uttered might be interpreted as a willingness to play the game. A guess.

And he could not allow that to happen.

Day five.

He spent most of it standing against the far wall, the one Chase had looked at when he explained the game. It could’ve been a lie, of course. There might be no room next door, no prisoners, no game, no Felicity...

It took awhile for him to realize his headache was coming from hitting his forehead against the wall. He crossed the room to his cot in slow, painful steps and slept again.

William liked the rolling chairs in her Lair. He liked to scrunch himself into one, the borrowed tablet resting on his knees, and swivel himself back and forth using a couple of fingers to push off from the desk. About every fourth time he would give himself an extra hard push and try to make it all the way around. He stopped only to eat and ask for the charging cord.

Felicity tucked herself up into her own chair and consulted with John in low tones as he half-sat on the edge of the desk on the opposite end from William. Based on information gathered from satellite photos, cell records, and timelines, they—with the help of ARGUS—had narrowed the search to a couple block radius. They were close. But they were also creeping towards six days missing, a bit more for Quentin, Dinah, and Thea, plus Samantha. Were they together? Were they even all alive at this point?

Felicity shivered. They were stretched thin, sleeping in short shifts, sick of canned food and each other. Rene was worse than a hamster in a wheel: The clang of the salmon ladder could be heard day and night. She had come to loathe the sound for the memories it dredged up, and the fear she’d never see Oliver up there ever again.

“We need to get out there, Felicity,” Dig was saying quietly. “We’re close enough to knowing for sure to start checking buildings. Rene and I can handle it, with ARGUS back up.” He was telling her this like it was her call. Did Overwatch trump Spartan? They’d never discussed it, never had to. She was intelligence, he was tactical; they made their recommendations and let Oliver make the calls. She sighed, her eyes flicking to the time.

Nobody—NOBODY—wanted to get out there and rescue Oliver more than Felicity Smoak, but sending any of the team above ground risked losing them. So far Chase, and whoever he was working with, League or otherwise, had been ten steps ahead of them at every turn. The chances of her being able to bring ANYBODY home without Diggle to help her was so small she couldn’t bear to contemplate it.

“I think—“
“Felicity?” William was RIGHT THERE, behind her, the tablet in his hands.

“You need the charger cord again, buddy?” she asked, willing her heartbeat to return to normal after the scare. He shook his head ‘no’, looking at the floor. This was something else then.

“The Green Arrow’s my dad, isn’t he?”

Felicity froze like a baby bunny; she didn’t even breathe. She could see John in her peripheral, also very still; he was looking straight at her, letting her handle this, not willing to fall on the sword himself, it seemed. Great.

“What...makes you say that?” she countered, trying to sound breezy and only managing nervous. And completely guilty. William’s small shoulders shrugged.

“He’s rescued me two different times, and now I’m here.” His eyes lifted and scanned the room before falling to focus on his feet again. “I don’t know any kid that ever got to see the Arrow Cave before. Plus...” He seemed to consider whether he wanted to say the next part; when he spoke his voice was just above a whisper. “After Oliver started coming around to see us, my mom got me a Green Arrow action figure. Even though I like the Flash.”

His voice fell away to nothing, and a single tear slipped down his cheek. Felicity felt her own lip quiver, just DONE with secrets and worry and uncertainty. Could one damn thing just be simple? They had no proof that Oliver and Samantha were even alive at this point, so where did that leave this poor kid? She took a deep breath.

“Yes, William. He is. He didn’t find out about you until about a year ago, and your mom thought you’d be safer if you didn’t know right away. But obviously, some...some bad things have been happening lately, and until we can figure out where the bad guys are we have to stay down here where we’re safe.” Felicity waited until he looked up at her so she could give him a watery smile.

“He loves you so much, William. He does. He—“ Her breath caught and she wanted to sob, but she swallowed hard and pushed on. “He’s going to be so happy to know that you know, so he can tell the world he has a son. I promise.”

William nodded once, a little bit lighter through the shoulders, a new kind of spark glimmering in his eyes. Felicity nodded back and sent him on his way to ask Curtis to get him something to eat.

So she could throw herself at John and have a good cry.

________________________________________________

“Hello Oliver.”

Day six...or still five? The thread was gone. Oliver concentrated on the weight of the shackles that pulled on his hands and feet as he lay on his side facing the wall. His wrists and ankles were a bloody mess at this point, even though he’d stopped trying to get out of them long ago.

That voice was new though...wasn’t it? No, not new. Very familiar. Just not recent.

“It’s been awhile,” she confirmed in that honeyed, Oxford-educated accent. Oliver concentrated on shifting away from the wall in a way that wouldn’t rub his skin against the cuffs too badly. It didn’t work.

“Hello Talia,” he said, his voice rusty from disuse. The light behind her came from overcast skies; impossible to tell if it was morning or afternoon. But maybe it didn’t matter, if she was here.
“Come to rescue me?” he continued with an attempt at a chuckle; it was not a good sound. She smiled at him like he was a child.

“How far we’ve come, you and I. Although Mayor...that was a surprise. Well done, Oliver Queen.” She sank into a crouch so that they were eye to eye and he no longer had to squint to see her. “Finding out you killed my father wasn’t as pleasant a surprise, however.”

The honey in her voice suddenly became steel, and he knew she wasn’t there to pull off a rescue. Damn. So it was League, looking after him, or some faction of it. And that meant Chase was...a coughing fit took him before he could speak again. She waited.

“Adrian’s your pet, then?” His ribs screamed from the coughing; definitely something broken in there. Ribs were such a bitch. Talia’s perfect little bow-of-a-mouth widened into a very self-satisfied smile.

“Adrian Chase has dedicated his entire adult life to ruining you, Oliver. Over a girl. I find him fascinating. He’s crazy as a fruit bat, obviously, but incredibly entertaining, and entirely fixated on you. The funniest part, I think, is that he didn’t even like his father all that much, but when I told him you were the one who killed him, it was the final push that drove him over the edge.” She reached up and twisted a bit of hair on the top of Oliver’s head affectionately, as she might a little brother. “It was the psychotic break I’d been waiting for.”

“What do you want, Talia?” he asked with a sigh. He shifted his gaze to the ceiling, completely over Day whatever.

“We’ll get to that, in due time.” She stood in his peripheral vision; he was pretty sure she was smiling again. “First, I’m going to let you go.”

A spark of hope burst to life in his chest; he tried not to trust it, because...there had been something in her voice...

Talia leaned over into his vision, to make sure he was paying attention.

“After I let my “pet” have a little more fun.”

She disappeared from his sight; Oliver heard her walk away as he rolled heavily toward the wall and closed his eyes.
Chapter 25

I must be slipping, he thought; he never saw it coming, the baseball bat, never heard Adrian come into the cell. The hit knocked him off the cot onto the floor with no way to brace his fall; if those ribs hadn’t been broken before, they surely were now.

He still managed to roll out of the way of the next blow, his chained hands coming up to ward off the attack. There was just enough length in the chain for the bat to fit between his manacles; the next time Adrian swung down Oliver trapped the wood between his hands and jerked, pulling Adrian forward and off balance. As he fell Oliver brought his legs to his chest and planted his feet in the other man’s stomach, using Adrian’s own momentum to launch him over his head.

Adrian hit the ground hard, grunting, and lay stunned for a moment. Usually that was Oliver’s cue to jump to his feet and either finish the job or get the hell out; the cell door was standing wide open. But after the week he’d just had there wasn’t anything left in the tank. Besides, running with shackled ankles was going to be comical, at best.

He scrabbled over his head, the chains clanking madly as he searched for the bat that Adrian had hopefully lost in the fall. It was just beyond his fingertips; Oliver let out a string of curses as he tried to get his knees under him, his ribs on fire.

Adrian got to it first.

He stood, using the bat as an assist, with a surprised chuckle.

“Good one, Oliver. You’re better than I thought you’d be after this long.” He grinned, though his eyes were a little dazed. “How many ribs of yours you think I just broke?” His chin tipped up in question.

Oliver had made it to his knees, but now was thinking better of it; he was little more than a punching clown at this point. He felt a jolt of terror he otherwise wouldn’t know if Talia hadn’t promised to let him go. Was she watching? Was anyone monitoring this psycho to make sure he didn’t go too far? Oliver swallowed down the urge to yell her name.

Adrian rested the bat against his shoulder and began a leisurely pace back and forth in front of his prisoner.

“So I have to let you go, Oliver, without playing our game.” His eyes flashed in manic anger, and Oliver thought he might swing the bat again, but the look passed just as quickly. Adrian smiled. “But I wanted to leave you with a couple of souvenirs from your stay.”

Oliver’s laugh came from nowhere, a near-hysterical burst of sound that surprised them both. He was expecting a swing aimed at his torso—another shot at the ribs—but Adrian went low, almost a golf swing, hitting him square in the thigh and taking him out at the base. He landed on his side with no way to break his fall with his hands; his head bounced off the concrete floor and everything went gray.

“Tha’s it, Felicity! Tha’s the one. Hot damn.” Diggle was leaning over her chair, practically on top of her, pointing out the small square picture from a street cam among the forest of small square pictures on her monitor. A figure dressed in black was clearly exiting a building, a building within the radius of their narrowed search.
By the time she’d swung her chair around John was already yelling for Rene as he ran for his gear. Curtis and William drifted up the stairs, curious, their game of War interrupted.

“John,” she said nervously, watching as he kitted himself out with enough fire power to take out Fort Knox.

“Get Lyla,” he ordered excitedly, continuing to stick guns in increasingly unusual places. “ETA...twenty minutes.” Rene, similarly armed, nodded agreement.

“John!”

He stopped and looked at Felicity, gripping the arms of her chair and definitely not on the phone with Lyla.

“Felicity, this is it. We have to go NOW.” He checked the chamber of his last gun and stowed it as he mounted the steps toward her. Out of the corner of her eye she saw William take a step back, unsure about all that firepower coming at him.

“What if it’s a trap?” She hated how small her voice sounded, how worried. She was desperate—crazy—to get to Oliver and the others, but this just felt...OFF. The League of Assassins didn’t just slip up like this.

Diggle sank to a crouch in front of her, a hand on her knee. He was aware that William was watching them like a hawk, taking everything in. He softened his tone and attempted a smile.

“Felicity, it’s been a week. We can’t go on like this forever.” He dropped his voice. “He...can’t go on forever.” Felicity’s eyes closed involuntarily but she nodded.

“Be careful,” she whispered, knowing she didn’t need to explain how alone and helpless she and William and Curtis would be if he and Rene didn’t make it back. John kissed her forehead on his way to a stand.

“Call Lyla.”

He was chained to the floor again, flat on his back. Adrian was standing over him. He wasn’t smiling.

“Did you enjoy it, Oliver? Do you even remember it, fucking Samantha?”

Oliver blinked him into focus, still a bit stunned from the concussion. He didn’t know where this was going, but it was nowhere good.

“Adrian,” he pleaded softly; even making that much sound caused his head to throb.

“Was she as good as Felicity?”

The question stopped his heart.

“What. You thought all we did was dance? Is that what she told you? She didn’t tell you about the rest?”

Adrian’s face shifted in and out of focus as Oliver’s stomach tumbled, from the concussion or the graphic, filthy things the man was saying, he didn’t know. The baseball bat was preferable to this, laying on the floor helpless as Adrian described the things he’d done to her. There wasn’t anything in
his stomach, but that didn’t seem to matter; he rolled to the side and retched.

Adrian finally ran out of things to say and fell quiet. Oliver shifted back to staring at the ceiling, panting, and waited for whatever came next. Maybe this was it. There were some footsteps he couldn’t make himself track as Adrian moved around the space, and then he was back, looming over him.

“I’ve spent a lot of time studying your scars since you’ve been in here, Oliver.” He chuckled. “I guess the Mayor doesn’t go shirtless at the pool, huh? Yikes. Especially not with a Bratva tattoo on display.” He tsk’d in mild admonishment. “That’s not very American of you.” Oliver heard the click of a lighter and, almost immediately after, the whoosh of a butane torch lighting.

He closed his eyes.

He came to alone, unchained, his leather jacket on the floor beside him. The cell door was open. His phone, fully charged in his jacket pocket, began to ring as he was staggering his way to his feet. He tapped it without even the strength to answer.

“Hello Oliver. Head on home for a rest. I’ll be in touch soon.”

John didn’t say much on the drive; Rene hardly said anything at all anymore. Felicity’s leg jiggled nervously as she tracked their progress, keeping an eye on the two vans full of ARGUS agents on an intercepting course to the address.

“What do you see?” he asked over the comm as they pulled up. She bit her lip.

“Nothing. There’s nothing. Are you sure—“

“They could be underground, in a deep sub-level. This is it, Overwatch. We gotta go in.”

She wanted to scream at him, but she bit her lip instead; thank god she’d sent Curtis and William to the basement so the poor kid wouldn’t hear anything about his parents by accident. Felicity watched the heat signatures of her two guys and the other team circle the building. It was almost midnight; the rest of the block was quiet.

Diggle made the call and they moved in just as the elevator doors opened. Felicity’s head snapped that direction, ready to yell at Curtis to get the hell out; her words caught in her throat.

Oliver.

“Dig! He’s back! He’s here! Oliver’s okay. Oh my god Dig, do you copy?!“ It came out in a shriek, one long sentence of nonsense. She didn’t even wait for an answer before she was flying down the steps toward him; filthy, bloody, half-dead.

Oliver swayed on his feet but lifted a hand to fend her off, repulsed by his own appearance and afraid she would make his ribs worse if she got ahold of him.

“Don’t,” he warned weakly, not meeting her eyes. “I...can’t. Please.”

Felicity faltered, close enough now to see the bruises, the bloody mess of burnt and ruined flesh where his Bratva tattoo used to be; she thought she might be sick.
“Oliver,” she whispered, a gasp, pleading for him to look at her. All the while Diggle yelled in her ear, asking for confirmation, trying to figure out what to tell the ARGUS team.

“Need to sit,” he muttered, and finally he let her step close enough to take his arm and help him to the med bay.

She hissed at Dig to stand down, to come back to the Bunker as quick as he could; she didn’t think she could handle the burn on her own. Curtis and William she kept in the dark, for now. She didn’t know how William would react, and she was sure Oliver couldn’t handle more drama at the moment.

“What do you need?” she finally whispered, lost about what she should be doing to help him.

“Shower and a nap,” he grated out, with an almost-smile at the end as a ridiculous memory of them came back to him. Felicity’s eyes flicked to his face; she remembered too, but she couldn’t bring herself to smile about it.

“The others...” she trailed off. He still hadn’t looked her in the eye. His lips pulled in before he answered.

“Don’t know. Never saw them.”

He was breathing shallowly, like it hurt. A lot. Felicity started to reach for his side and he flinched, groaning with the shift.

“Don’t.” It was sharp. A warning. She curled her fingers back toward her palm and pulled her hand away. Oliver’s tongue poked out to swipe at his lips.

“Water?”

Felicity darted away to fulfill his request, coming back with a glass full and a damp rag. He drank it all in one go, wincing as he lifted his arm to drain the glass.

“That hurt?” she asked, incredulous, seeing red and picturing herself beating Adrian Chase to a bloody pulp with her fists.

“Everything hurts,” he said simply, holding very still as he waited for Dig to get back and patch him up. Clearly he didn’t want her to touch him.

Lyla called and Felicity left him long enough to report, and to get confirmation that the building was empty; there was no evidence that anyone else had been kept there. By the time Felicity had thanked her and promised to keep her updated the elevator doors were opening and John was bursting into the room, Rene on his heels. They must’ve done 90 to get back so fast.

She watched from her spot behind her computer, frozen in place as Dig looked him over, cleaned and bandaged the burn, then covered it with a plastic adhesive patch so he and Rene could help him to the shower. She only sat after they’d disappeared through the door.

Felicity’s fingers rubbed against the faded bruises on her own sides and back, cursing Adrian Chase to hell.
Chapter 26

Oliver had only been asleep a few hours when his phone rang. Felicity was snoozing in a chair beside him; he was hooked up to every monitor they had in the Bunker—Dig had insisted because of the concussion—plus his wrists and ankles were bandaged. About a mile of tape wrapped up his middle.

She pounced on the phone to shut it up but his hand came down on top of hers, stopping her.

“I need to take this,” he croaked. Oliver had yet to look directly at her; it made her want to crawl out of her skin.

He didn’t say anything when he picked up the call, and the conversation didn’t last long. Maybe fifteen seconds, start to finish. As soon as he hung up he began to fuss with the wires coming off of him.

“Hey,” she said softly, reaching out to stop him.

“Get Dig; I need this stuff off.” He was focusing NEAR her but not AT her; Felicity opened her mouth to ask if she had done something wrong, if he was mad at her, but he was seriously starting to pull his IV on his own—ohmygod—so she closed her mouth and got.

She hovered as John unhooked everything, not happy about it but smart enough to keep it to himself. In Oliver’s current condition he could be put down easily, but not without more injury. Oliver eased himself off the cot and stood very carefully. A slow test to raise his arms left him wincing; he asked for a button down shirt and a pair of jeans.

“Are you GOING somewhere?” Felicity was close to being over worrying that he was mad at her, because what the hell? She doubted he could climb the stairs to her Lair at this point.

“I have a meeting,” he ground out, taking the shirt from John, and the help he offered to put it on. The jeans...well, that was just hard to watch. Felicity huffed in exasperation and dropped to her knees in front of Oliver, helping him get into them one leg at a time. From his body language he was either super pissed or super in pain; she figured it was probably both.

She put his socks and shoes on him too, then stood and walked away with a flippant “Have fun at your meeting”, stomping up the steps to her desk. After worrying about him for a WEEK, he was running off again.

John’s eyes flicked between Oliver making his careful way to the elevator and Felicity’s retreating back, uncertain if he should say anything.

“I’m gonna go with him.”

“Fine. See if you can find the common sense he lost while you’re out there,” she replied loudly, hoping Oliver heard.

They met on a downtown roof, Talia and Oliver. Diggle kept a watchful eye on Adrian, standing behind her, wearing his Prometheus get-up and grinning like a deaths head. Oliver suppressed a shudder the first time their eyes met but otherwise ignored him.
“I believe you exaggerated, Adrian,” Talia crooned. “He doesn’t look any the worse for wear.” Adrian’s grin collapsed into a confused and murderous frown; John’s trigger finger got twitchy, but the DA made no move.

“What do you want, Talia.”

Ra’s al Ghul’s eldest daughter smiled.

“You might ask, Demon’s Head.”

Oliver shook his head.

“Once. Not anymore. I gave that title freely to Malcolm Merlyn.”

“And then won it back from him for your wife.” She spit the last word out like it was poison. Oliver didn’t even blink.


“I want what is mine. I am the rightful Heir. The title was given to you in error when you killed Ra’s, and you are responsible for the power vacuum left in his wake. You destroyed it, you will restore it.”

Oliver raised one eyebrow.

“You will summon and bring together my sister and Malcolm Merlyn, and then you will reinstate the League and turn it over to me.”

“Or?”

Talia smiled like a snake.

“Have you already forgotten that I have your friends, your sister, and the mother of your child? If you want them alive, you will do this. You have 72 hours.”

“Where?”

“Where it all began.”

There was a terrific bang and a puff of purple smoke and they were both gone.

Diggle took a step toward Oliver, his eyes on the spot where they had just been.

“He alright?”

“He’s okay, considering.” John smiled. “He and Felicity have become pretty good friends.”

He was a hard sell on the Big Belly Burger, but Diggle convinced him he needed the calories, plus it was a necessary morale booster for the team.

“William’s there,” he reminded his friend gently as they drove. He caught Oliver’s gaze flicking to him.

“He alright?”

“He’s okay, considering.” John smiled. “He and Felicity have become pretty good friends.”
Something indecipherable crossed Oliver’s face. The ride fell quiet, but two streets from the campaign office John spoke up again.

“Look man, if there’s anything you want to—“

“I’m fine.” Oliver cut him off, quietly but firmly. The two locked eyes at the red light; Diggle broke first, nodding as he returned his gaze to the road.

“Okay. But if you don’t talk to me, make sure you talk to somebody.”

Oliver was a statue.

“And the IV’s going back in.”

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The food was a big hit all around, with the possible exception of Oliver, who tried to leave his bag behind when he informed them that he had phone calls to make. Diggle was having none of it.

“Oliver, ten minutes won’t make a bit of difference. Sit down and eat your food.”

Oliver eyed the chair John was pulling out for him and shook his head.

“Sitting is...hard.” But he opened the bag and pulled out a breakfast sandwich without protest.

“Is Felicity downstairs with William?” John asked, when everyone at the table had something. Curtis nodded around a mouthful of sandwich. “I’ll take theirs down then.” He paused as he walked past Oliver. “We can bring William up whenever you’re ready.”

He meant soon. Oliver dropped his gaze to his food.

“After I make the calls,” he confirmed.

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A week without natural sunlight had ruined everyone’s sleep schedules; it was nearly 6:30 in the morning, but she and William were both wide awake. The perfect time to work on math problems.

“Did you like school?” William had paused with his fingers over the laptop keys, in the middle of a quiz his teacher had assigned in the homework portal. Thank google for the internet, Felicity thought; he was able to keep up with his classmates during his week-long “family emergency”.

“I loved school,” she replied, indulging him even though she knew he was stalling. “I didn’t have any siblings—or friends, for that matter—but I was a really good student. I got to skip grades and everything.”

William sighed, but then his face lit up with an idea.

“You think they’d let me skip a grade if I get a hundred percent on this quiz?” Felicity chuckled.

“It’s a nice thought, but I wouldn’t get my hopes up, buddy.”

John turned the corner with a bag of food in his hands and Felicity lit up.

“You’re back! Everything okay?”
He nodded—with a look that reminded her ‘okay’ was a relative term in their world—and set their bag on the table.

“Breakfast. I know it isn’t your favorite thing from Big Belly—“

“Are you kidding? That’s the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen!” Felicity made grabby hands at the bag and Dig and William both grinned.

Quiz momentarily abandoned, the three of them ate without speaking, although Felicity made so many moans and groans of pleasure while eating her hash brown cakes it gave William the giggles.

John caught Felicity’s eye as she was finishing off her egg and cheese biscuit and glanced at the ceiling.

“I can stay here if you need to go up,” he offered quietly. Felicity gulped down the bite she’d been chewing and glanced away.

“I don’t know what he wants...if he wants...” Her sentence trailed off.

“It was rough, Felicity, but he’ll be fine. And he needs you, for what’s coming. You should go.”

She couldn’t look at him, but she nodded as she balled up the paper wrapper and dropped it into the bag. She ruffled William’s hair on her way by and was almost out the door before he called her name.

“Felicity...was my dad good...at school?”

Felicity turned back and leaned against the wall with a little smile.

“We didn’t know each other back then, and the answer to your question is no, but I know he wishes he’d tried harder because he would’ve been a good student. If he’d taken it seriously.” William nodded and she almost turned away, but something pulled her back.

“Anyway, good student or not, your dad is still one of the smartest people I’ve ever met.” She pointed a finger at him. “Don’t forget to finish that quiz.”

Oliver watched Felicity get into the elevator before he turned off the A/V feed from the basement; it wouldn’t do for him to get caught messing with her computers. He swiped his hands under his eyes and blinked rapidly before steeling himself to attempt the steps down from her Lair.
Malcolm had sneered, Nyssa had been snarky, but they’d both agreed—reluctantly—to come. Oliver sighed; two down, one to go.

The call went to voicemail; he left a message and stowed his phone. He needed a lot more than the few hours of sleep he’d managed to get, but there was too much yet to do. What little pain medication he would allow Dig to give him had worn off, and he was hungry again; his body was burning calories fast in an effort to keep him going.

William. God, the poor kid had been down here underground for a week, worrying about his mother, and—if he had interpreted the overheard conversation between him and Felicity just now—coming to grips with the idea that his father was the Green Arrow.

Oliver’s stomach tightened with fear: He wasn’t sure how he’d imagined the big reveal would go, but it sure as hell wasn’t like this. His head automatically swiveled to the left as the elevator doors opened.

Felicity started to freak out during the elevator ride. William had known Oliver’s secret for a few days now, long enough for all of them in the Bunker to become used to talking about Oliver having a son, but in all the confusion around getting Oliver back and fixed up she’d kind of blocked out the fact that she, Felicity Smoak, had betrayed his trust. And he didn’t know it yet.

Now she was on her way to him, actively searching him out, and it appeared that maybe he was already mad at her about something. The thought of how he might react and what he might say took her breath in fear; she braced herself against the stainless steel doors with a sweaty palm, trying to breathe deeply in the stale, stuffy air.

Not for the first time she tried to imagine what it had been like for him, as Adrian’s prisoner. Oliver’s body already carried the evidence of years of abuse from combat, from torture, from imprisonment. Besides the broken ribs and the burnt Bratva tattoo (what kind of animal would do that, anyway?), were there other injuries he hadn’t told them—or maybe just her—about? The thought made her sick to her stomach.

By the time the doors opened Felicity was shaking; she needed to get above ground, into fresh air. Oliver was across the room, in her direct line of sight, his gaze focused in her general direction but definitely avoiding eye contact. Her stomach dropped again and she swallowed hard, afraid she might be sick, but made herself cross the room to him, her arms wrapped around her middle as if she had to physically hold herself together.

“You okay?” he asked softly—though still closed off—as he focused intently on the floor.

“I just need...I need OUT. I’ve been down here for a week. I need...sunlight.” She thought of the week he had just endured and backtracked wildly. “Sorry. I know—“

“You okay to drive?” he asked, cutting her off and shocking her to silence with his question.

“Um, yeah, but...is it...is it safe? I mean—“

“It’s safe.”
She followed him without further question.

The sun was just coming up over the harbor; it had the feel of an early spring day, crisp enough to keep all but the most dedicated runners at home until later in the morning, after it had warmed up a little. They found a bench with a great view and sat side by side, close but not touching.

In short sentences Oliver told Felicity about Talia al Ghul; how she once rescued him from a sticky situation in Russia and completed his transformation into the Hood. How she was back, somehow allied with Adrian Chase and insisting Oliver could and should give her the mantle of Demon’s Head, and that this was all supposed to happen in less than 72 hours.

Felicity was quiet, although her brain was spooling up with a slew of questions, chief among them how Oliver was supposed to pull this off—was there a ritual, or a form to fill out and notarize? Was there even anyone left to ask about League of Assassins protocol?

He fell silent with a shiver that ended in a grunt, probably because of the ribs. Felicity knew this was her cue to talk, to tell him about William, but she chickened out at the last second and went another direction entirely.

“I’m sorry about Susan,” she said with a sigh. Next to her Oliver nodded and swallowed hard.

“Felicity, Susan and I were never together.”

She glanced sidelong at him; he looked torn up about it, staring out over the view but unseeing, like he feared she’d gone this whole time under the wrong impression.

“I know. She told me.” Felicity had to smile a little at the memory; they had become friends, she and Susan, after a fashion.

There was more silence as Oliver seemed to struggle over what to say next. Felicity’s brow knitted in concern.

“Oliver?”

He looked her way, looked AT HER finally, his eyes...devastated. That was the only word she could think of. Felicity’s heart stopped.

“Felicity, were you and Adrian...did you...?” Tears swam in his eyes and his voice broke at the end. And suddenly she knew why he had been avoiding her, why he couldn’t look at her.

“Oh god, Oliver, no. Never. Not even a kiss—“

But by then he was leaning into her space, reaching for her even though he groaned with the effort, his breathing short and sharp against the pain. She came willingly, closing the distance to kiss him hard enough to make him gasp. They were both crying; Felicity moved off the bench so she could stand in front of him, to spare him from trying to twist his upper body.

She held his face between her hands, kissing him wildly, smothering him with affection. Oliver closed his eyes and lifted his face to her, blissful even as the tears continued to fall.

Eventually she sat again, pressed against his side and holding his hand; John would be calling any
minute, frantic, but until then they intended to enjoy the peace and quiet.

“William knows you’re his dad,” Felicity said into the silence; she was no longer afraid of his reaction because she was sure of HIM. Everything else would fall into place.

“I know,” was all he said in reply. He squeezed her hand and bumped her shoulder softly with his. “I hear you two are good friends already.” She grinned at him and the corners of his mouth lifted in response: The Oliver version of a toothy smile. Then he sighed.

“No mayor, no deputy mayor, no chief of staff; I suppose Chase has been running Star City while I’ve been gone.”

Felicity rubbed up and down his arm with her free hand, gently.

“He put out a press release that the three of you are on a last-minute trade mission to Japan on behalf of the city. There are flight manifests, hotel receipts, everything. Must’ve been the work of Cayden James.” She squeezed his arm. “Dig and I almost boarded a plane to come find you, it looked so real.”

Felicity briefed him on James and his role in luring Susan to her death; yet another variable he would have to account for. Oliver shook his head in disbelief. He needed to get these next hours over with, then get back to work at his day job, but sitting here with Felicity—just being STILL for a moment—was the only thing he could wrap his head around.

“What would you like to do when this is all over?” he asked softly, watching a container ship leave the harbor. From this distance they could feel the thrumming of the big Diesel engines more than hear them. Felicity dropped her head onto his shoulder and sighed.

“You mean after we sleep for a week?”

Oliver’s huffed laugh turned into a groan, which made them both chuckle.

“Ow, stop,” he chastised mildly. “I’m serious.”


He squeezed her hand and turned to plant a kiss in her hair.

“You serious?”

Felicity lifted her head and looked him in the eye before she answered.

“I am.”

“Okay then.”

“Okay.”

“We need to go talk to William.”

They walked back into the Bunker hand in hand. John was waiting for them with a few choice words but a smile in his eyes.
“Everybody should go home,” Oliver said quietly. “Get some rest. They won’t make a move on us now.”

“You sure?” John didn’t look like he trusted either Talia or Adrian as far as he could throw them. But Oliver nodded, dead on his feet yet at peace, ready to see his son and then sleep.

William was still awake but flagging, his bloodshot eyes lifting from the tablet as Oliver and Felicity turned the corner; he smiled a little.

“Hey buddy,” Oliver said softly, a hand still keeping Felicity close to his side. William’s eyes roamed over him, like he was making sure it really was him; his attention was caught by the white gauze around both of Oliver’s wrists.

“Are you...okay?”

“I’m a little beat up, but I’ll be fine. Nothing permanent.” There was a pause as William smiled a little nervously, obviously still not ready to hug or anything. Felicity squeezed Oliver’s hand in reassurance and his mouth twitched up at the corners before he continued. “You ready to get some fresh air, and sleep in a bed for a change?” William nodded so enthusiastically it made Felicity giggle. She hooked her free hand around Oliver’s arm and squeezed gently.

“I need to shut some stuff down before we go. Be back in a minute.”

John was just getting his coat on as she jogged up the steps and moved her chair to the side so she could reach her keyboard.

“Did Oliver tell you the plan?” he asked, scrubbing his hands up over his face. Felicity spared him a glance over her shoulder as she worked.

“As far as there doesn’t seem to be a plan at this point? Yes.” Her fingers flew over the keys. “Which is why I’m calling in reinforcements.”
Chapter 28

60 hours

After everything: Getting to the loft, settling William in the guest room, arming the security system, and oh-so slowly laying down in bed, Oliver assumed he would be too wired to rest. But as soon as Felicity curled up gingerly against his side he fell into a deep, dreamless sleep.

He was awake first, enjoying the feeling of the late afternoon sun warming his face and Felicity’s backside pressing against his thigh; he didn’t even care that it was the bruised one. She stretched and sighed, and he reached over to run a hand along her hip.

She rolled over to face him and sought out his earlobe for a little nibble. It pulled a happy rumbling sound from deep in his chest.

“Felicity, honey, as much as I would love to do this, you gotta give me a couple of days to let my bones knit.” Felicity giggled, undeterred. “Honey...I can’t...oh, god...”

The chest rumble turned into a growl; he pulled her on top of him and very carefully proceeded to prove himself wrong.

He stayed in bed while she took a shower; he’d have to wait to get his own back at the Bunker, since he needed Diggle to cover his bandages first. Besides, all his clothes were still there. Oliver indulged in a little post-crisis planning, imagining living here again, fixing up the guest room for William so he’d feel at home when he visited. It would be nice. And someday, when they needed more bedrooms...

His ringing phone interrupted his day dream: The voicemail he’d left had been received. Oliver managed to make his request, get an answer, and hang up just as Felicity was exiting the bathroom wrapped in a bright pink towel.

“Who dat?” she asked adorably, finger-combing her damp hair. Oliver placed the phone back on the nightstand and psyched himself up to roll out of bed.

“My secret weapon,” he replied through gritted teeth. It hurt to move, it hurt to breathe, it HURT. For a second he questioned whether sex had been a good idea, but then she dropped the towel to get dressed and he decided that yes, yes it had indeed.

“Do you have any food here?” he asked, panting against the pain as he straightened up. He was pretty sure the answer would be no, but it was worth a shot. Felicity poked her head out of the walk-in closet with her lip caught in her teeth.

“Uh...”

“That’s what I thought. Mind calling in something? Sandwiches, maybe? We need to get back to the bunker before Malcolm and Nyssa show up.” He winced his way to the bathroom as Felicity’s snort floated out from the closet.

“They’ll kill each other if you’re not there. Oh god!” Her head poked out of the closet again in search of him. “What if one of them kills the other?!”
“Depends on who lives,” he called back through the door he’d left standing open.

Felicity had gone back to giving two different outfits a critical eye.

“My money is on Nyssa.”

“All day long,” Oliver agreed.

“Hey,” Felicity added, shrugging into her pink sweater that buttoned down the back. “Do you think you’ll have an opportunity to annul your freaky Nanda Parbat marriage while we’re doing all the ritual reinstating stuff? ‘Cause that needs to happen.” Oliver walked out of the bathroom to find her standing with one hand on her hip. “I have no intention of sharing Oliver Queen.” He stepped close enough to kiss her forehead.

“I will speak to Nyssa,” he promised.

56 hours

Malcolm Merlyn loved an entrance, and this time was no different; he cut the power to everything but Felicity’s computers and dropped from the rafters into the middle of everybody. Rene fell back a few steps and went for his gun before Diggle could get a hand on him. Felicity didn’t even bother turning around from her work station.

“Hello Malcolm,” Oliver acknowledged, hands behind his back. The emergency lighting hummed to life.

“Oliver. I trust this is important.”

“It is.”

Malcolm threw up his hands dramatically.

“Well?”

“Patience,” Oliver gritted out.

As if on cue, Nyssa al Ghul strolled out of the elevator with a scowl on her face.

“Do people just walk into your secret base of operations?” Rene asked incredulously.

“Yes.” Felicity and Curtis chimed in together.

Malcolm’s annoyance became contempt.

“What is SHE doing here?”

“I might ask the same,” Nyssa shot back with a sneer.

“ENOUGH!”

Oliver’s barked order did the trick. He waited for Nyssa to join them in the Lair before he spoke.

“Talia al Ghul has kidnapped several members of our team—“ he shifted his gaze to Merlyn —“including Thea.”

“In exchange for what?” Nyssa asked, unamused.
“The League.”
Malcolm snorted and Nyssa frowned.

“The League of Assassins has been disbanded. My sister is too late.”
Oliver shrugged slightly.

“She doesn’t think so. She’s demanding a meeting with the three of us to resolve the issue.”

“And where, pray tell, is this meeting to take place?” Malcolm asked, completely unimpressed.

“Lian Yu. In just over two days.” Oliver glanced at Felicity. “We’re gonna need a ride.”

“Somebody order an Uber?”

Sara Lance rustled into their midst. Felicity jumped up and crossed the space to capture her in a hug.

“You got my message!” After a quick squeeze Felicity pushed her back to arm’s length to get a better look at her. “Also, why are you dressed like one of the wives of Henry the VIII?” Sara rolled her eyes.

“Eh. Work.”

“You work at Medieval Times?” Curtis gaped. They both ignored him.

“Did you bring everyone else?”

“Just Ray. The rest of the team wanted to stay a bit longer and try jousting.” She shrugged, as if that was enough of an answer. Oliver stepped forward to kiss her cheek and Sara smiled at him. She had yet to catch sight of Nyssa, who was taking advantage of the near-darkness and staying stock still.

“We have work to do,” Oliver reminded them quietly, taking back control of the room. He led the way to the conference table.

“We’re going to need lights, Malcolm.”

54 hours
John rejoined the group, giving his phone a toss onto the table.

“Lyla just got called on an emergency mission to Kasnia. She’ll meet us on Lian Yu if she gets done in time, but otherwise we’re on our own.” He watched Oliver run a hand over his face in frustration.

“Pizza’s here,” Curtis called as he and Rene carried in several boxes apiece. In the aftermath of the exodus for dinner only Felicity and Diggle remained behind with Oliver. He tracked Sara and Nyssa navigating the journey to the pizza boxes, both of them trying to watch the other without being obvious about it. He sighed: That would have to be addressed at some point.

“Do we have someone to stay with William?” Felicity asked. She glanced past Oliver’s shoulder at the boy mingling with their ragtag group of friends and...whatever Malcolm was. They’d had little choice but to bring him back here with them, but she and Oliver were both in agreement that he had no business being on an island in the North China Sea.

“I’ll call Raisa. She was our housekeeper when I was growing up. We’ve kept in touch.” He paused to gaze at Felicity. “Does that mean you’re coming with?”
“Hell yes I’m coming, Oliver. What if Cayden James is there?” Her voice dropped as she continued, reaching for his hand. “Plus I just got you back. I’m not letting you out of my sight.”

Oliver gave her the concerned frown but nodded, secretly relieved. He didn’t want to let her out of his sight either.

“Curtis should stay to cover Overwatch,” Diggle advised. “William and Raisa can stay here while we’re gone.”

“Agreed.” Oliver’s phone lit up with a call and he checked the screen. “Go grab some food. I’ll be right there.”

He still stepped to the far side of the room before he answered.

“It has been long time, Oliver.”

“I need a favor.”

A dry chuckle came back in answer.

“There are no favors left, Kapiushon.”

“A trade, then.”

Silence stretched over the connection, so Oliver spoke again.

“Lian Yu, Anatoly. I need you to blow it up.”
Chapter 29

Chapter Summary

Big thanks to watcherofworlds and victoriayanlinlok for help with a couple of research questions concerning the Waverider! xx

53 hours

It was somehow fitting that people from every stage of his life should be here together. Oliver sat at the conference table and studied all the faces around him. It was quite a collection of individuals: His childhood best friend’s absentee father, the sister of his first love—who had eventually come to mean something much more complicated to him than Laurel ever could—his brother in arms, the love of his life. Even Nyssa, and the newbies. Somehow it felt right to have them all working together to bring back Thea, Quentin, Dinah, and Samantha.

“Having the Waverider is going to cut our travel time by hours.” Oliver looked at Felicity. “That was an excellent idea you had.”

She smiled back softly and they shared one of their deep, soulful stares; Sara watched them from across the way, hunched forward with her elbows on the table, chin in her hands, and a gleam in her eye. She pooched her lips out.

“You two are cute.”

Oliver broke the stare first and favored her with a faintly amused glance before scanning the room.

“Go home and get some rest. Be back in—“ he glanced at the time on his phone—“14 hours.”

The group broke up swiftly, leaving only Oliver, Felicity, and Sara. He rapped his knuckles on the table a couple of times and swiveled his chair toward Felicity.

“You, me, William, some popcorn and a movie before bed. Yes?” She grinned at his hopeful expression.

“I love it. I’ll go round him up.”

Oliver waited until she had walked away before spinning back toward Sara. The serious Oliver Queen face had returned.

“You up for a quick side trip before we head to Lian Yu?”

“Always. Where we going?”

“Moscow.”

50 hours

They had let William pick the movie; his choice was Avengers, which Felicity highly approved of. They sprawled on the couch all together, and even though Felicity hogged the blanket and William
teased him for dozing off, it was the happiest Oliver had felt in a very long time.

William fell asleep curled up at the end of the couch just before the end of the movie; they covered him up and left him there since Oliver was in no shape to lift him. He followed Felicity up the stairs to bed with dread in the pit of his stomach.

She came out of the bathroom to find him still dressed, perched gingerly on the side of the bed. Like he wasn’t staying.

“Oliver, what.” He dropped his gaze to his hands, clasped together in front of him.

“I have to go. It shouldn’t take long. With the Waverider——“

“You’ll have plenty of time. Yeah, yeah. Hooray for me and my big ideas.” She sounded mad, but came to him and sat down anyway, claiming one of his hands to fit between both of hers. “Going back to the island?” She didn’t mean Lian Yu.

“Felicity...just one more time.” Her sigh stopped any other excuses he was working up to.

“Oliver, when I said I didn’t want to wait to get back together, it wasn’t because I think we’ve worked through all our problems and are back to 100%. Far from it. I just...I’ve been so miserable without you. I never, ever, stopped loving you, and I know now that I can never be truly happy without you, but...we still have things to work out. Maybe we always will.” She waited until he looked at her. “Be safe.”

Oliver swallowed thickly, the dread easing slowly away to be replaced by hope, the promise of peace, and longing for the woman sitting next to him. Suddenly he didn’t want to be without her even for the few hours it would take him to fulfill his end of the bargain with Anatoly.

He nodded softly as she stood and kissed his temple, but when she would’ve pulled her hand from his he tugged gently instead, pulling her between his knees.

“I love you,” he said, tipping his head back to look at her even though it hurt.

“I love you,” she countered, soft but assured. And then she winked.

“Tell Sara I said to keep an eye on you.”

49 hours

“Hey Oliver! Nice to see you!”

“Ray.”

Oliver did his best to look unimpressed with the timeship—because Ray was bouncing around like a puppy dog, eager to show it off—but he had to admit it was pretty interesting. Felicity would be geeking out. He uncrossed his arms and rubbed the center of his chest absently, missing her.

“Why don’t you use my cabin and get a couple hour’s sleep.” Sara tilted her head to the side and gestured away from the bridge. Oliver gave her a slow smile.

“Felicity put you up to this, didn’t she.”

Sara grinned.

“Yes. And she’s scarier than you. Get going.”
44 hours

Oliver had not missed the brutal cold of this country in winter, even on a sunny day, though the heavy coats Sara had come up with helped. The job had been simple enough; straight up intimidation and a couple of broken fingers. It frightened him how easily it came, slipping back into this life, especially with Sara here.

They were sitting on a park bench, just as Anatoly had instructed, Sara hunched forward with most of her face buried inside the collar of the coat. Oliver would’ve preferred meeting in a restaurant.

“You were a little stiff back there.” It came out muffled by the coat.

“Ribs,” he replied shortly, suppressing a groan as he shivered. Sara peeked one eye out of her collar at him but said nothing.

“You didn’t tell me you were bringing friend,” a voice spoke up behind them.

Anatoly stepped onto the path with two giant sidekicks in tow.

“You remember Sara,” Oliver said evenly, motioning toward her. Sara sat up and slowly pulled her head out of the depths of her coat. She gave him a little wave.

“Ah, yes. From the Amazo.” He glanced heavenward. “And submarine.”

“We fixed your problem, Anatoly. I need you to fix mine.”

The Russian made a face and shrugged.

“I will solve half your problem. Rest is up to you. Come with me.”

The warehouse wasn’t far. They held Ray off from rendezvousing until after they’d thanked the Bratva Pakhan and assured him they could load the explosives themselves.

“The detonators are linked with, eh...remote. Yes?” Anatoly waved one hand around as he looked for the word. Oliver almost smiled, imagining Felicity getting her hands on them.

“Yes. Thank you, Anatoly.” He offered his hand and waited while the other man considered. Finally he reached across and shook, then tugged Oliver forward into a hug that made him grunt.

“You are good man, Oliver Queen,” Anatoly said quietly, just by his ear. Oliver stared out into the distance and doubted that very much.

42 hours

“You ready?” Ray asked, wiping a bead of sweat from his forehead. Oliver had tried, but he hadn’t been much help loading all the containers. He was grimacing even now, when he thought no one was looking, but Sara was tracking him from the corner of her eye. She nodded to Ray as she grabbed Oliver’s arm and steered him away from the bridge.

“C’mon,” she ordered. “I want you to meet someone.” She turned back once with a saucy look.

“You’re gonna have to lose the shirt.”

“Someone” was Gideon. Oliver side-eyed his old friend but submitted silently to the computer’s ministrations as it set about healing his injuries. Within minutes he was feeling better than he had in days. The ribs felt completely healed, his thigh no longer ached, and the burn scar—Sara’s mouth thinned to an unhappy line when she saw THAT—was now pink with new flesh.
They hung out in the med bay even after Gideon had finished; Oliver was breathing deeply again, twisting his upper body in amazement.

“Any chance I can get one of these for the Bunker?” he joked softly. Sara cocked her head.

“You just need to join the team.”

Oliver’s mouth turned up at the corners as he looked around the room.

“This is all a bit too bright and shiny for me,” he said as he dropped his gaze to his clasped hands. Sara crossed her arms and sighed.

“Ollie, when I met you, you were the life of the party. All the girls wanted to date you, and all the guys wanted to be you.”

Oliver huffed a laugh.

“But I like this guy better,” she concluded, grinning when he looked back up at her. She glanced at a monitor displaying their ETA. “Looks like you’ll be home in time to make your family breakfast.”

40 hours

He shucked off his shoes before he walked through the front door; everything else came off just inside the bedroom. She was still asleep, her back to him. Oliver slid under the covers and pulled her against and then under him in one smooth motion.

Felicity started and stretched with an “Oh”, blinking up at him in surprise.

“I thought your bones had to knit,” she teased, her voice cracking from sleep. Oliver kissed his way across her collar bone and proceeded south.

“I’ve had a miraculous recovery,” he murmured, fully focused on his mission.

37 hours

They walked into the Bunker hand-in-hand; Nyssa was waiting for them, arms crossed and scowling.

“You’re late,” she stated flatly.

“Yes we are.”

Oliver kept walking, forcing Nyssa to follow.

“John Diggle, along with the tall one and the wild animal—“ Oliver and Felicity shared a perplexed glance—“have gone to the Waverider to look over the explosives with Sara.”

“Wild...?” Oliver raised an eyebrow as Felicity suddenly had a thought.

“Oh! Rene! The Wild—“ She swirled her hand around in the air in front of her chest.

“The hockey jersey,” Oliver finished. They both nodded. He’d been wearing it 24/7.

“Malcolm—“

Oliver grimaced, smoothing his eyebrows with the fingers of one hand.

“Let it go, Nyssa. He’ll be back in time for us to leave.” Oliver turned away, Felicity still in tow, but then he stopped and regarded her again.

“We need to talk about an annulment, or a dissolution. Felicity and I are getting married.” He squeezed her hand on the last word and Felicity blushed.

Nyssa’s eyes flicked back and forth between them, clearly considering.

“The traditional annulment ritual involves mortal combat—“

Oliver held up a hand to stop her.

“I think we can forego tradition and maybe just sign something. Or...shake on it.” He flipped the hand over with a lift of his eyebrows and walked on.

34 hours

John had gone to pick up Raisa and William and bring them to the Bunker. She had been with the boy all morning, getting acquainted, and now they stepped off the elevator like old friends. John was the last one out, his arms full of groceries. Raisa stopped to put a hand on Oliver’s arm.

“Mr Diggle told me you have a kitchen here, but no food.”

Oliver shot Dig a look.

“We have lots...” he trailed off as she moved on, then frowned at Diggle’s eye roll and Felicity’s snort.

30 hours

“Sorry you have to be back underground again, buddy.” Oliver eased himself onto the couch beside his son. William shrugged, unconcerned, his eyes on the tablet in his hands.

“Are you going to get my mom?” he asked.

Oliver nodded.

“Raisa and Curtis will take care of you. We’ll be back as soon as we can.”

William finally looked up at him.

“Felicity’s going too?” he asked, sounding a little unsure. Oliver nodded.

“Yes, she is. Is that...okay?”

William mulled it over, his eyes flicking away to look for her across the room. She was standing with the rest of the group, waiting to head out. He finally nodded.

“Be careful,” he said quietly. A lump formed in Oliver’s throat as he stood.

“I will. See you soon.”

Felicity slipped her arm through Oliver’s as he reached her; she rested her chin against his shoulder.
“He’ll be fine,” she assured him softly.

“I know,” he sighed, though his clenched jaw said otherwise.

Oliver made sure he was the last one on the elevator and William was the last thing he saw as the doors closed.
Chapter 30

3 hours

The sea wasn’t too rough today, all things considered. The wind whipped his hair, reminding him it was high time for a trim; just one of the many things he intended to get done when this was over.

“You do realize as soon as you hand the League over to my sister she intends to kill us,” Nyssa shouted over the wind.

Oliver didn’t have to turn his head to know both she and Malcolm were looking at him, waiting for his answer. The island was hard to see with his eyes in a squint, but he gave himself a moment to watch it grow infinitesimally larger as they bounced over the waves toward it.

“I know,” was all he said.

The Waverider sat, invisible, in a clearing next to the crashed cargo plane that Oliver had once—or twice—called home. Felicity, camped out on the floor of the bridge, was hunched over her tablet, paranoid to let it out of her sight now that all the explosives had been planted around the island and the trigger sat under her fingertips.

“You should get some sleep,” Dig murmured, trying not to wake the others crashed out around them. They had worked around the clock to set up the devices in what Felicity had called ‘the world’s most morbid Easter Egg hunt’, dropped Oliver, Nyssa, and Malcolm off on a nearby island to commandeer a boat, and now waited for the ill-fated meeting with Talia al Ghul. When the ceremonial power had been handed over and the hostages were returned, Oliver would give the word and she’d launch the sequence that would blow the entire island to kingdom come.

Hopefully Adrian Chase with it, she thought grimly.

That was the plan, anyway. Felicity thought over her years of doing this as she fought back a yawn.

“What do you think our percentage is for plans that went the way we expected?” she whispered. John’s shoulders jumped in a silent surprised laugh. He scrubbed a hand over his face.

“60%, maybe.” He glanced her way as he bumped his shoulder into hers. “Probably best not to think about it.”

“This will work. This will work,” she chanted under her breath with a glance at the ceiling.

Because it had to.

1 hour

Malcolm, cheekily pointing out that he had more experience keeping yachts afloat than any Queen, docked the small vessel and the three of them stepped out.

“This is the location she indicated?” Nyssa questioned softly. Something about this place demanded a sense of reverence, even from the daughter of Ra’s al Ghul. Oliver pointed straight ahead.

“A hundred yards on there’s a clearing. That’s where it’ll be.” They started forward as a unit, but Oliver pulled up almost immediately. Something had been bothering him since they’d landed the day
before to sabotage the island; now that they were nearing the end of its existence he could ignore it no longer.

“I have to check on something. You two go ahead; I’ll catch up.”

He didn’t wait for feedback, just took off at a jog down the beach before veering into the trees.

Malcolm shook his head in mild disgust.

“Typical.”

“Should we follow him?” Nyssa wondered aloud, but Malcolm threw up his hands in exasperation.

“No. Come on.”

It occurred to him as he navigated the ladder down into darkness that a quick phone call to Lyla could’ve saved him a lot of time. Oliver shuddered as soon as the cells came into view, reminding him of his own hellish week of confinement; what would three years have been like?

“Hello Slade,” he said softly, approaching the bars one slow step at a time.

A blip on the tablet was echoed in a beep across the room as Gideon picked up the same movement: Someone else was on the island.

“Here we go,” Dig muttered, getting to his feet in order to stir the rest of the team. Felicity tapped into Oliver’s comm.

“They’re here.”

Felicity’s voice in his ear wrenched him back to the present even as memories of his first two years here, under Slade Wilson’s guidance and protection, threatened to overwhelm him. The man in front of him no longer looked at him through a Mirakuru-induced rage, but nonetheless didn’t appear particularly pleased.

“Come to make faces at the caged beast?” Slade asked mildly, his tone belaying his expression. Oliver spread his hands in conciliation and shook his head once.

“Come to let you go, Slade.” His eyes flicked down the way. “You and Harkness.”

Slade barked a laugh.

“What’s the catch, kid?”

“No catch. The island’s about to go up in flames, and I couldn’t have your deaths on my conscience. Not as prisoners, anyway.” Oliver reached toward the control panel and entered the override code he and Lyla had agreed upon when she took over ARGUS. It was on an eight minute delay; enough time to give him a decent head start.

“Good luck, Slade.”
It was Malcolm who hit the tripwire, but Nyssa was close enough that it took her out with him. In less than two seconds they were upside down and swinging fifteen feet in the air inside a large primitive net. Nyssa was the first to be able to free an arm and engage her comm.

Sara was out of the Waverider before anyone could stop her.

They were marched into the clearing tied together in a line. Samantha wasn’t in good shape but she was mad, and that was getting her through. Quentin was tied behind her; he encouraged her quietly when he could get away with it. They had spent a lot of time together over the last week, the four of them; it was all-for-one-and-one-for-all at this point.

Four bamboo cages sat in a row before them. Nobody had to guess who they were for.

Felicity updated him just before he came in sight of the clearing on his approach from the west. Oliver cursed a blue streak inside his head and circled back to the south in search of Malcolm and Nyssa, with a weather eye out for Sara.

Dammit.

It took longer than they’d expected to adjust to the sunlight, but once his eye stopped watering and he got his bearings, Slade—with Digger Harkness on his heels—set off for the landmark he knew best: The cargo plane.

Even knowing to look out for her Oliver almost put an arrow in Sara; she threw up a hand in defense and he froze, his expression of disapproval easy to read, especially since he wasn’t wearing the mask. She shot him a ‘What the Hell’ look of her own before continuing her scan of the trees. They had to be close.

Thea slipped a hand through the bars to try out the fit when no one was looking; she’d dislocated a shoulder to get out of a Lian Yu prison before, might as well practice. Dinah, silent thanks to a sonic dampener clamped around her neck, watched her work from the neighboring cage.

Felicity glanced at John.

“Do we send someone else out there?”

He rubbed a hand across his chin and shook his head.

“If we all start running around out there it’ll be a nightmare rounding everyone up again when it comes time to pull the trigger.” He glanced at her tablet for emphasis. “Best to sit tight.”
Sara spied them first, swinging lazily above their heads. Oliver’s first instinct was to sever the rope with an arrow, but they were hanging upside down; a fifteen foot drop headfirst was not an ideal solution, even for these two.

“What kind of psycho would put that thing there?” Sara hissed near his ear. Oliver glanced at her, annoyed, and she rolled her eyes.

“Of course you did.”

His eyes followed the rope to its source in a nearby tree; he wiggled free from the straps of his quiver, extracted an arrow, and handed the quiver and bow to Sara.

“Where are you going?” she whispered. Oliver didn’t answer, but he glanced up into the tree.

Rene bounced on his toes, eager to get out and do something now that they knew Dinah and the others were close. Felicity had repositioned an ARGUS satellite over the island and was frantically searching for the hostages. A break in the trees finally showed a group of figures dressed in black and four boxes that might be cages. She swallowed hard.

“I think I have them,” she said.

Rene pushed forward to look at her tablet screen and bit off a curse. He turned to Diggle with a pleading scowl.

“We gotta go help, Hoss. Half the damn team is stuck in a tree! If they don’t show up for the meeting on time—“

“We’re staying here,” John ordered with a growl. Rene shook his head in disbelief and stalked away.

Apparently the person in charge of bamboo cage construction hadn’t counted on Thea Queen being one of the occupants. She didn’t even need to dislocate anything to get her slender hand on the padlock holding her door closed. Some League stooge is going to get fired for their shoddy attention to detail, she thought wryly; her exploring fingers had discovered that the lock on her door had never fully latched.

It had been a few years since he’d shimmied up a tree; Oliver marveled again at the technology on the timeship that had allowed him to fully heal in the course of a few minutes as he hoisted himself onto a large branch with the arrow in his teeth.

He’d designed this trap with a failsafe: Hopefully the extra line was still in good enough shape to work. The line holding the net was taut and creaking from their combined weight, but beyond the tie-off there was several feet of extra line. Oliver slipped a loop of the extra line over his head and down to his hips, then braced himself against the tree.

“Malcolm,” he hissed. “Can you get it to swing?”

The Dark Archer, his face bright red from being upside so long, looked like he wanted to make a pithy comeback but only scowled. He and Nyssa consulted very quietly, and then they began to rock back and forth in sync.
Talia stalked into the clearing with Adrian behind her; it was clear neither was pleased. She approached Samantha’s cage first. Thea carefully pulled her hand back inside her cage before anyone noticed; the padlock was now lying on the ground.

“It appears Oliver Queen couldn’t be bothered to show up and free you. After everything you’ve gone through, that must be a blow.” She continued down the line of cages until she got to Thea. She clicked her tongue softly in a tsk.

“Not even for his baby sister.”

Thea looked her right in the eye, not daring to give Talia any reason to look at the ground and see the padlock. She raised a defiant eyebrow.

“He’ll be here,” she warned softly. Talia smirked.

“He has three minutes before I let Adrian have you, one at a time.”

Across the clearing, Chase began to grin.

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Oliver studied the knot; years of rain had made it too tight to undo at this point. He worked the tip of the arrow into a good spot and began to saw back and forth. The trick was to loosen it without cutting the rope all the way through. Meanwhile, the two captives continued to work on the momentum of their swing.

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“Woah!” Ray jumped at the alert on his screen; he looked at Felicity.

“Somebody just blew the emergency hatch.”

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Slade was out of shape; three years of nothing but pacing a 10x15 cell would do that to a person. The plane was finally in sight, but he and Harkness glanced at each other and mutually decided to take a breather in the shade before crossing the clearing.

He had just wiped his forehead and was about to tell Digger an off-color joke when he saw the other man’s expression change from fatigue to shock. Slade followed his gaze out into the open space.

“Where the hell did THAT come from?” he asked. Harkness shook his head as he stared at the spaceship.

“Don’t know. It just...appeared.”

While they gaped a man pelted around the corner of it and away, across the clearing. They shared a look.

“You know that guy?” Digger asked. Slade shook his head.

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The knot finally began to slip; Oliver glanced up at the swinging net once to check their progress.
“Here we go,” he called softly, discarding the arrow and grabbing the excess rope with both gloved hands, jamming one foot against a neighboring branch.

The knot released and the net fell; Oliver hauled back on the rope with all his strength, hoping to slow their descent. Even with the gloves and the leather jacket the rope burned on its way by. He closed his eyes and gritted his teeth with the strain.

The swinging had insured that they’d fall more or less on their sides. They thumped onto the loam with a mutual groan and the sudden slack in the rope almost toppled Oliver off his branch backward; he hooked the foot that had been bracing his body under the limb to catch himself.

Sara dived in to untangle them. Oliver was too busy climbing back down to look, but it sounded like they were both moving. Nyssa hissed at Merlyn to get off of her, which was a very good sign.

Malcolm got to his feet and brushed himself off angrily while Oliver resettled his quiver.

“We’re late,” Oliver gritted out. He leveled a glare at Sara. “Get back to the ship before someone sees you.”

She looked like she might argue until he tilted his head in an aggravated plea; Sara glanced once at Nyssa and slipped back into the trees. He opened his mouth to tell them to get moving.

“Let’s—“

“No, Rene!!”

Oliver’s heart stopped at the yell.

“Uh, guys?” Ray began, still watching his screen. Felicity and Diggle both turned to look at him.

“Somebody’s coming. Across the clearing.” They shuffled to the side so they could see what he was seeing.

“Oh frack me,” Felicity breathed, “that’s Slade Wilson.”

“And Digger Harkness,” John added, shaking his head. “Luckily they can’t see us. Right?”

Ray’s eyes shifted from them to the screen and back a couple of times.

“Normally, yes. But when the emergency hatch blows it turns off the cloak. So...no.”

They watched in silent dread as the two men circled the ship and then moved in.
Chapter 31

They burst into the clearing, Oliver and Merlyn with their bows drawn and Nyssa with her sword. There were four bamboo cages holding their friends, and Talia al Ghul surrounded by a dozen League soldiers; everyone was looking in one direction.

Oliver swiveled that way with his companions at his back to find Rene facedown on the ground and Adrian Chase’s foot on his neck. Adrian was screaming at him in Spanish. The yell they’d heard before must have come from Dinah, who was visibly crying as she watched.

“Chase, let him go,” Oliver growled, an arrow aimed at his heart. Somewhere to his right Talia began to laugh.

“I’m afraid it’s not up to you, Oliver,” she purred; his eyes flicked to her.

“Talia, we’re here. Just like you asked. You can have the League, I just want my people.” He looked back at Chase. “Alive.”

Adrian looked up from his victim for the first time and grinned at Oliver as he ground the ball of his foot back and forth. Rene’s arms and legs spasmed and he made a noise somewhere between a grunt and a scream. Dinah had been sobbing and wailing, but the sound suddenly died down very quickly; Oliver glanced that direction for just a second and he immediately understood why:

Thea’s cage was empty.

The team members still in the Waverider watched Slade Wilson and his sidekick poke at the hull of the ship from the monitor. John’s hand was sliding down over his mouth in thought. Felicity shifted from foot to foot; there was a weird tingling in her spine all of a sudden, and she didn’t think it was because Slade Wilson and his eye patch had come to call.

She used her tablet to tap into her link with Curtis back in Star City.

“Hey,” she said immediately, “could you run a quick diagnostic on my implant? Something feels funny.”

Curtis acknowledged and got to work as Diggle looked her way.

“You okay?” he asked.

“I think so.” She tried to sound reassuring. “I think we have bigger problems than me at the moment.” She pointed at Slade.

“It doesn’t look like they have any weapons. You sure the Mirakuru is out of his system?”

“Wait. THAT Slade Wilson?” Ray didn’t look at all pleased. “Son of a...biscuit.”

“Even without the enhancement the dude’s a son of a bitch,” Diggle confirmed. “And Harkness is no better.” He looked at Felicity. “What do you think?”

Curtis cut in on their conversation.
“Felicity, I think somebody’s trying to hack into your implant.”

“Talia,” Oliver called loudly, willing all of her attention on him. “Let them go and you can have the League. And me.”

He felt Nyssa shift her weight behind him; Malcolm didn’t twitch. He could see Quentin shaking his head ‘no’ out of the corner of his eye but didn’t spare him a glance. Talia was smiling.

“You think I have a use for you in my League, Oliver? How quaint.” She paced a few steps in either direction, the cages behind her seemingly forgotten, thank god; Oliver didn’t dare try to look for Thea. Talia shrugged, clearly thinking it over.

“I’m not interested in my sister’s seconds, but I suppose I could give you over to Adrian. He really enjoyed your last encounter.”

“I really did,” Chase confirmed in that crazy, breathy voice. The memory of Felicity’s bruises exploded inside his head and Oliver almost let the arrow fly.

“Can you fight off the hack?” Felicity called out to Curtis in a shaky voice; she did not have time to be paralyzed right now.

“Working on it,” Curtis mumbled over the comm, clearly concentrating.

“What are we going to do about the Ugly Brothers?” Felicity prompted nervously as they watched Slade put a hesitant foot against the timeship’s hull.

“We could take off,” Ray shrugged.

“And like, hover?” Felicity glanced at Diggle for his feedback; he sort of shrugged and nodded at the same time. She whipped her head back to Ray.

“Okay, do that.”

Just as Ray was about to power up the ship Curtis’s voice broke through on her tablet.

“Wait! Felicity, whoever’s trying to take over your chip—and considering who we’re fighting right now I’d guess it’s Cayden James—he’s using the ship’s WIFI to get to you.”

Felicity’s lower back spasmed suddenly and her knees buckled.

“You gotta get outta there,” Curtis continued. “I can probably hold him off if he doesn’t have the boost from the WIFI.”

“Frack,” she groaned. John put a hand under her elbow to steady her as he shared a concerned look with Ray.

“I can take the ship up, but that won’t help Felicity,” he said with a shake of his head. “I’ll distract them, though, while you two go.”

“Felicity,” Curtis reiterated, “go.”

She stuffed the tablet in the back of her waistband under her jacket and John took her hand. Ray
checked the monitor again.

“They’re sniffing around the emergency hatch. You go out the front. I’ve got this.”

Diggle nodded at him and led Felicity away.

The stalemate might have lasted forever if Thea hadn’t struck, flying into the clearing with a sword she obviously took off a League soldier. She had two more of them down before Talia had even turned around. Adrian removed his foot from a motionless Rene and drew his own sword but Oliver was ready; the arrow went through his hand and left him screaming.

“Malcolm, cover Thea,” Oliver yelled, because she was turning her attention to the locks on the other cages and Nyssa was busy going after her sister. He swung back to Adrian, but the man had disappeared.

“How far away do we have to get?” Dig wondered out loud as they ran. The further they got from the ship the less Felicity’s spine tingled. By the time they’d made the trees it had stopped altogether.

“This should do it,” she assured him. They both turned in time to see the Waverider lift off and hover ten feet above the ground; Slade and Harkness could just be seen falling back in surprise. Diggle huffed an almost-laugh.

“That should keep them occupied.”

“What the hell is going on?” Sara demanded as she pounded up to them. Diggle nodded toward the clearing.

“Slade’s out of his cell, along with Digger Harkness. Ray’s keeping them busy.”

“And what are you two doing?” she asked, looking them both over.

“Cayden James is trying to hack my spinal implant using the ship’s WIFI, so we had to get the hell out of there,” Felicity explained.

“You should probably tell Oliver that,” Sara advised, her eyes on the chaos in the clearing. “I’ll go give Ray a hand.”

She jogged off as Felicity attempted to contact Oliver. All she got back were the sounds of combat.

“Oh god,” she muttered, running toward the sound with John following close behind.

Dinah and Quentin were now free and fighting as best they could, but Samantha fell to her knees on the ground as her cage door opened. Oliver took a step in that direction—she was clearly injured in some way—but a League soldier was stalking toward Rene’s prone form. He knocked an arrow and let it fly, and by the time he’d turned back Thea had Samantha up and was helping her into the trees.

He really needed to find Chase, but he didn’t want to take his eyes off Talia. Malcolm must have sensed his dilemma, because he paused long enough to jerk his head to the west.

“I’ll cover Nyssa. Go.”
Oliver sprinted into the trees.

He found John and Felicity instead, skidding up to them and automatically opening his arms as she threw herself at him.

“I’m okay,” he was already saying, while Felicity tried to catch her breath and talk a hundred miles an hour at the same time.

Diggle was hardly winded; he updated Oliver on the appearance of Slade Wilson and watched his friend roll his eyes and then hang his head.

“You let him out, didn’t you,” John said. Oliver nodded at the ground, one arm still around Felicity’s waist. But then he looked up and scanned the area around them.

“Chase is out here somewhere. He’s injured, but not critically. John, I need you to get Samantha to safety. I think she’s pretty hurt.”

“The Waverider would be safest, but not until Sara and Ray get Slade and Harkness under some kind of control.”

Oliver nodded, and then his eyes lit with an idea.

“Get her to the boat we brought here. It’s tied at the dock. She’s in the trees just north of the cages. Thea was with her.” John nodded and laid a reassuring hand on his shoulder. Oliver pulled Felicity close once more and gave her a fierce squeeze.

“Be safe,” he whispered into her hair before he let go and ran.

Diggle put a hand out to slow Felicity as they reached the clearing that had gone eerily quiet. Dinah looked up as they edged out into the open space; she was hunched over the still form of Rene. John knelt beside her and checked his pulse.

“He’s alive,” he murmured over his shoulder to Felicity as his eyes scanned the area. “Let Sara know he’s going to need medical attention as soon as they’re available.”

Dinah wiped the back of her hand across her eyes and sniffed.

“I don’t know why I’m like this,” she blubbered, rocking forward and back as she rubbed Rene’s arm methodically. John laid a comforting hand on her shoulder.

“You’ve had a traumatic week. You’re probably in shock. Stay here and protect him, but don’t try to move him. Felicity’s calling for help.” Dinah sniffed again and nodded and Diggle stood. Besides the black clad bodies of League members, the place was deserted.

“C’mon,” he said, hooking a hand under Felicity’s arm and dragging her along as she communicated with Ray about a med pick up; the quiet was making him jumpy.

They found Samantha curled up on the ground just inside the trees behind the cages, just like Oliver said. Felicity dropped to her knees and patted her arm.

“Samantha, where’s Thea?” she asked. The other woman blinked up at her.
“Thea...went to help fight,” she said slowly, almost like she was underwater. Felicity glanced up at Dig and bit her lip. He crouched down to talk to her.

“We’re going to get you to a safe place, okay? Do you think you can walk?”

Samantha nodded, but it took both of them to help her get to her feet. After only a few steps Diggle simply scooped her up and carried her, Felicity jogging beside him.

The closer he got to the beach, the more sounds of fighting Oliver was picking up. He burst out of the woods to find Quentin and Thea facing off against a handful of League soldiers, while high on a rocky outcropping Nyssa and Talia went at each other with swords.

Quentin’s foot slipped on the rocky beach and he went down on one knee, throwing up an arm in defense; Oliver found himself screaming his name, unable to do anything else from this distance, but somehow—miraculously—Thea spun and twisted and blocked the sword coming down on him. The sight of her fluid perfection made Oliver gasp. He jerked himself back into action and sprinted forward.

Between his bow and his sister’s sword they were able to put down the rest of the soldiers. Oliver had just dropped his head to gulp a breath when he heard Nyssa shout.

“OLIVER QUEEN! I release you from your marriage vows,” Nyssa cried, her voice steady even as her foot slid on loose gravel and her sister lunged forward. She knew she was going to die so she was freeing him, as he had requested.

Oliver wanted to close his eyes so he wouldn’t have to watch another friend die, but just as he was turning his head away a flash of blonde accompanied by a blood-curdling yell joined the pair on the rock.

Sara Lance had come to rescue her beloved.

The boat was in sight when Diggle’s implant brought him to his knees. Felicity cried out as Samantha tumbled from his arms; she fell to the ground next to both of them, frantic.

“Dig!” she shrieked. “Were you shot?!”

John gasped in pain, holding his arm and rolling to his back in agony.

“Get her to the boat,” he grit out between groans. Felicity stumbled to her feet as she grabbed at Samantha, tugging on her desperately. Somehow she got them both up and moving, sobbing with the effort, and with fear.

They made it to the dock and Felicity let herself breathe a sigh of relief; the boat was only a few feet away. Movement down the beach caught her eye and she squinted: Oliver. Oliver was there. They were going to be okay.
John’s shout made her turn her head just as Adrian backhanded her, dropping her to the dock. She’d never understood the phrase ‘sack of potatoes’ before, but that’s exactly how she went down. Her head was ringing, her glasses were gone, John was still yelling; she blinked a couple of times and reached for the fuzzy form of Samantha as he spoke.

“I can’t believe I finally have both of you together.”

Adrian began to laugh.
Adrian paced the narrow width of the dock, agitated, like he couldn’t decide whether to talk first or just act.

“I can’t believe Oliver Queen would just...LEAVE you two ladies to fend for yourselves on this island.” He glanced around at the scenery. “I mean, this place is CRAZY.”

Even without her glasses Felicity could tell Adrian was removing a glove from one hand; the other one was wrapped, and bloody. She could hear Dig, still yelling between groans; she didn’t know if Oliver was close enough to hear them, and blind as she was there was no way to know if he was coming to the rescue.

“Adrian,” she pleaded softly, her cheek throbbing where he’d hit her, “don’t do this.”

Samantha stirred next to her and Felicity scooched closer, the weathered wood of the dock scraping under her palms as she shifted. There was something very definitely wrong with her, some injury that didn’t show. The tablet still tucked into the back of Felicity’s jeans taunted her; help was as close as her fingertips, but she didn’t dare let him know she had it.

Samantha said something, but the way she was slumped over and speaking into her lap it was hard to hear; Felicity leaned closer, and even Adrian stopped talking and cocked his head to the side.

“Simon,” she said faintly. Her eyes were dull, checked out; it was either a defense mechanism or foreshadowing, but either way Felicity wrapped an arm around her and pulled her close.

Adrian finally registered what Samantha was saying; his eyes flashed with cold fury and he dropped into a crouch in front of her.

“DON’T say that name. DON’T YOU EVER SAY THAT NAME!!”

Felicity shrank back from him with Samantha in her arms as he screamed at them, her eyes squeezed shut and her face buried against the other woman’s shoulder, terrified.

Oliver was frozen in awe at the strength and power of Sara Lance in action. In the few seconds since she’d flown onto the scene she had managed to turn Talia’s focus and get herself between the sisters; she even had Nyssa’s sword in her hand.

He spared a glance at Quentin, whose mouth was hanging open as he watched his daughter fight; there were tears of pride in his eyes.

“Should we try to help?” Thea breathed, caught up in the scene herself. Above them Sara steadily forced Talia back into the trees and out of sight, Nyssa holding her injured side and stalking behind. Their last glimpse of Talia showed her eyes wide with fright. Oliver shook his head once in wonder.

“I think they’ve got it handled.”

A gust of wind buffeted his back and he turned his face out to sea to watch a line of black clouds march across the sky. He remembered the storms here: The wind and the rain, the deadly lightning that turned black night into a living nightmare.
The next gust of wind carried a human sound with it, an angry scream; Oliver’s brow furrowed as he tried to place its origin. He spun slowly, letting his eyes track across the tree-covered landscape.

“Hey,” Thea said behind him, “has anybody seen Malcolm?”

He had almost completed his scan of the land when his eyes found the boat, and the dock, and the people on it.

Oliver’s blood ran cold.

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Chase’s good hand whipped out and caught Samantha’s chin, lifting it to force her to look at him; it ripped a little sound from her but she didn’t fight him.

“Adrian, please.” Felicity tried again, although she knew good and well he’d never paid any attention to her even when he was acting halfway sane. Now...now it was like his last thread to reality had snapped.

His bad hand reached back for something and he swore in pain; he let go of Samantha to reach around his back awkwardly with the good hand, finally coming up with a silver revolver. Felicity moaned in fear at the sight of it. She buried her face again.

She knew Dig and Oliver would say that this was the time to fight, to throw herself at him because his balance would be compromised in that crouch, but her body only wanted to freeze, to de-escalate the situation and submit until John recovered or Oliver noticed they were here.

“Felicity, look at me.”

Adrian’s voice had lost the crazy, screaming edge; this was the soft, breathy voice, the voice from the support group, from the phone, from the dance floor. This voice was somehow scarier. She lifted her head from Samantha’s shoulder and slowly raised her eyes to his, as blue as the ocean and as bottomless. He gave her the angelic smile.

“I’m gonna kill you, chica.”

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No beach was a picnic to run on, but rocky beaches were a complete nightmare. Oliver slipped and stumbled as he pelted toward them, leaping fallen trees and trying not to twist an ankle as he came down. He couldn’t hear Thea or Quentin, but he knew they must be back there, running too.

His focus tunneled to the forms on the dock: The bigger one would be Chase, the lump in front of him probably Samantha and Felicity. He couldn’t find Diggle, didn’t dare look around too much as he navigated the pitfalls of the beach. His lungs burned with the effort and a litany of ‘no’s’ screamed through his head; far off thunder rumbled.

Details became painfully clear as he got closer; the women were huddled together, holding on to each other, and there was something shiny and silver in Chase’s hand.

“Adrian!” he screamed, willing his legs to work faster, to make it in time. Oliver had missed so much in his life, had seen so many moments stolen or mishandled. If he missed this one...
Felicity heard him scream Chase’s name and turned her head—even though she knew she shouldn’t draw attention to him—because she needed Oliver to see her, needed him to KNOW that she was fine, so far, but he should hurry the hell up anyway.

Chase heard too, and turned to watch him come. He crossed his hands in front of him, the gun held loosely in the good one, and smiled. Content to wait. When Oliver was fifty yards away Adrian turned back to them and motioned with the gun.


Felicity leaned away from Samantha but didn’t let go, slipping down to take her hand as she rose straight and tall on her knees. She would not give him the satisfaction of watching her cry.

Oliver was still coming, still screaming Adrian’s name; Chase turned his head to look over his shoulder and watch him advance with a serene smile.

“This is good. This is better,” he murmured to himself, though Felicity heard him. He waited until Oliver had sprinted up the short rise to where the dock began before he raised the gun and aimed it at Felicity’s forehead.

“Hey Oliver,” he called, the way he might say hi if they passed in the grocery. “Have you ever...” He seemed to lose his train of thought for a second as he stared at Felicity’s temple. “Did you ever have a girl NOT choose you?” He wrinkled his nose. “Probly not.”

“Adrian...” Oliver tried, softly, edging on to the dock with his eyes on the gun. Adrian shook his head quickly.

“We didn’t get to play my game the last time we were together. And I’m sorry about that.” He threw another look over his shoulder and Oliver held his breath. “So, hey. To make up for it, let’s play one now. You tell me which girl to save...and I will let you have her. That’s fair, right? You choose who lives and who dies. Classic vigilante stuff, am I right?”

Adrian laughed, high and cackling, like he’d just told the funniest joke of all time. Even without her glasses Felicity could tell that Oliver’s eyes were wide with terror.

“Adrian.” Oliver’s voice was exhausted, lost. He began to plead, babbling a string of appeals and promises, desperate and without pride.

Felicity squeezed Samantha’s hand; she didn’t want to die—she really did NOT want to die—but she didn’t want William to grow up without his mother either. She glanced myopically at the edge of the dock, calculating distances.

Adrian began to swivel the gun from her forehead to Samantha’s and back, taunting Oliver who was still trying to reason with him as tears streamed down his face.

“Choose, Oliver...CHOOSE!”

A flash of lighting lit up the sky and the memory of Sara and Shado, on their knees, on this island, superimposed itself over the scene in front of Oliver. The choice was once again just as simple. And just as hard.

The wind whipped at them and lightning flashed again; Felicity closed her eyes and counted the seconds, waiting for the thunder.

“OLIVER,” Adrian roared, “I’M GONNA—“
Thunder crashed and rolled overhead as Oliver launched himself forward to throw his body in front of Felicity, but she was already gone.

As soon as Felicity heard the crash and rumble she wrapped her arms around Samantha, pushed off the dock with her right foot, and flung them over the side of the dock.

She expected them to hit water and had braced herself for the shock of it, so it was something of a surprise to have the wind knocked out of her when they landed on stony beach instead. Felicity floundered for a second, rolling off Samantha and trying to pull air into her lungs. Her left arm, which had hit first with both of them on top of it, didn’t feel right at all; Samantha was motionless.

Oliver rolled over in shock, having come up completely empty-handed. There was a microsecond when he and Adrian shared a dumbstruck look, and then he scrambled forward to take the madman out at the knees. The gun, not as secure in his non-dominant hand, skittered away as Adrian came down hard on his back.

Felicity, finally getting a breath in, suddenly remembered her secret weapon—the tablet—and flailed around behind her with prayers to Google that it hadn’t been smashed up in the fall. With only one working arm she had to set it on Samantha to be able to type; it came to life immediately and she sobbed with relief.

She called out a shaky request for a pickup from Ray, then contacted Curtis and told him about Dig’s implant. Above her there were sounds of Oliver and Adrian struggling; she grit her teeth and prepared herself for them to roll over the side of the dock on top of them at any minute.

The fight was a dirty hardscrabble, both of them rolling and grunting, with no chance for either to use trained moves or even throw a good punch. Oliver got his fingers on Adrian’s wounded hand and dug in, making him roar in pain. Adrian hooked a leg over Oliver’s torso and flipped him onto his back, but Oliver used their momentum and heaved them over again, ever closer to the dock’s edge.

Samantha coughed, pulling Felicity’s attention back to her.

“William,” she said weakly, opening her eyes and staring at the stormy sky.

“He’s fine, Samantha. He’s safe. Oliver and I have been taking care of him.” She brushed hair off her face and wondered if any of it was getting through. “He’s all caught up with his school work. He is SO smart—” Felicity’s voice failed her and she swallowed down a sob.

Samantha’s gaze shifted from the sky to her.

“Tell him...” she whispered.

“No no no, Samantha, don’t. You can tell him yourself, okay? You’re going to be okay.”
“Tell him...about Oliver...”

Felicity wiped her face; she was crying hard now, her left arm really starting to hurt where it still lay under Samantha.

“He knows. He knows. He asked, so we told him. Wait til you see them together, Samantha, they’re so great. William’s so great. You’re doing such a great job.”

She lost track of the things she said; she just kept talking, babbling to keep Samantha awake until Ray and Gideon could get to them.

The shift came when Adrian got a knee into Oliver’s stomach hard enough to momentarily paralyze his diaphragm and make him see stars as he lay on his back. He lost his grip, and couldn’t stop Adrian from scrambling over the top of him toward the revolver.

The next thing he saw besides the storm-black sky was Adrian’s upside down face and the barrel of the gun.

“It didn’t have to be this way,” he was saying, almost too hard to hear with the wind carrying his words away. He looked incredibly sad. “I never got to choose, and you never had to.” He paused and glanced up at the threatening skies before continuing. “Samantha wasn’t yours, Oliver.”

Lightning flashed again, the thunder on its heels; they were about to be in for it. Adrian shook his head, still staring upside down into Oliver’s eyes.

“William should’ve been mine.” And just like that the sadness was replaced by a slow, slow smile. “I guess now he can be.”

Time stood still for Oliver: He was aware of the wind buffeting his face, the aging wood beneath his back, the smell of ozone and rain rushing down on him. He was twenty-two again, hungry, scared, floating in a life raft on the sea, watching his father sacrifice everything to give him a chance to survive.

He had spent the last ten years refusing to forgive himself for his father’s death, not able to understand until this moment that there was nothing to forgive: Robert Queen had given his life for his son willingly.

And he knew he would do the same.

Oliver watched Adrian’s finger squeeze the trigger in slow motion; his hands had already begun moving, reaching up to surround the wrist holding the gun and yanking down, pulling the man attached to it forward and off balance.

He was rolling them over the edge of the dock when the gun went off.
Thea and Quentin had started out at a hard run behind Oliver, but their week of captivity—with little food and less sleep—was catching up to them, and the cracks were beginning to show.

Thea slowed first, dropping to a weaving trot and then a walk; she was almost doubled over trying to get her breath.

“Quentin, I can’t,” she gasped, finally stopping completely and plopping onto a log. Quentin wasn’t looking good either; he waved her off and collapsed onto the beach next to her.

“Rest,” he nodded, a hand on his chest in that way he still had when he was worried about his heart. They huffed and blew for a few breaths, watching Oliver run ahead to try to intervene in the drama on the dock.

“He’ll make it,” Quentin finally managed, trying to reassure them both. Thea nodded loosely in agreement. “Hey,” he continued, “thanks for the save back there.”

“Anytime.” She gulped a breath and swallowed. “But next time—god, I’m thirsty—“

Whatever she’d been about to tell Quentin was cut off when a heavy hand landed on her shoulder and squeezed.

“Hello, Thea Queen.”

Sara had Talia backed up and scared. The Demon’s Head Wannabe snarled and spat, throwing form out the window and going for the dirty, desperate moves.

“Yield, Talia,” Sara gritted between her teeth, tired but far from spent. She had given her opponent a half a dozen small cuts, none of them fatal but all of them cumulative; she couldn’t have much left in her.

“Never.” Talia bared her teeth and swung again, but Sara saw an opening and took it, slashing down and hitting her arm so that she dropped her sword with a cry of pain and anguish. Sara pulled up, breathing hard.

“Make the call,” she said over her shoulder to Nyssa.

“She cannot live to do this again, beloved.”

Sara narrowed her eyes and lunged forward just as a bang and flash sent her senses reeling. A billow of smoke filled the space, and when it cleared Talia was gone.

“Slade,” Thea spat, wrenching her shoulder out of his grip as Quentin’s eyes went impossibly wide. “What the hell?!” Slade chuckled grimly.

“Your brother let me out. He was never smart on a good day.”
“What do you want.”

“A way off this god forsaken island, just like everybody else.”

Thea eyed him angrily over her shoulder.

“Well that’s up to Oliver, and he’s a little busy at the moment.” Slade followed her pointing finger and his shoulders lifted in amusement.

“Dammit,” Sara growled, whirling to look for Talia. “We got everyone else. Who was that?”


“God, I HATE that guy.”

Thea and Quentin, surrounded by Slade and Harkness, watched Felicity launch Samantha and herself off the side of the dock and land in a heap, and, not long after, Oliver and Chase go over the far side together. The sound of the gunshot carried over the wind.

Thea screamed ‘no’ and started up to run, but Slade snagged her shoulder and dragged her back.

“If he’s gone he’s gone, girl. No reason to hurry.”

She began to notice that Slade and his sidekick weren’t looking so good themselves; if she wasn’t at the end of her own strength she quite fancied her chances.

“If I know Felicity Smoak, she’ll be calling for that space ship right about now. Time to go,” Slade ordered evenly, pulling her with him.

Talia sat on a rock and watched Malcolm bandage her arm to staunch the bleeding.

“Why are you helping me?” she asked lowly, still scared and mean. Merlyn’s eyes flicked to her as he worked; he gave a small shrug.

“Call it professional courtesy. I like your style.”

She looked at him suspiciously, trying to read beyond his words, but the smile on his face was enigmatic. He finished his work and stood.

“We should go.”

Talia looked away, clearly unimpressed with the idea of him calling the shots. Malcolm frowned and tried again.

“I don’t think you understand. There’s a boat. We need to GO.” He grabbed her good arm but she twisted out of his grip with a growl.

“Not without Adrian.”
The blinding, paralyzing pain in his arm began to subside just as Diggle heard the gunshot. It still took him a couple of breaths to be able to roll over and look toward the dock.

It was deserted.

He cradled his arm as he ran, finding Felicity on the beach on the far side of the dock first and veering toward her at the last minute. It looked like she was cradling Samantha; she was definitely crying.

“Dig,” she gasped when she caught sight of him. What he thought of before as cradling was really Felicity lying partly under the other woman, her arm trapped beneath her.

“Are you okay?” He slid down to the ground next to her, worried about the way she was holding herself, worried about that arm. Definitely worried about the fact that Samantha was very very still.

“She was talking just a minute ago,” Felicity sobbed, shaking. He placed two fingers against Samantha’s neck and paused. There was nothing there, but he wasn’t ready to say that yet. His eyes flicked up past Felicity, to the storm bearing down on them.

“Felicity, where’s Oliver?” he asked her. Her body froze but her eyes darted back and forth across his face.

“You didn’t see him? Up there?” She sounded lost.

It suddenly occurred to both of them to look to the right, under the dark recesses of the dock and out the other side: Two bodies lay there on the beach. John swore under his breath and pushed to his feet; he was around the top of the dock and down the other side in seconds.

It was Adrian he saw first: He was lying on his side facing the dock with his head toward the water, his eyes open but unseeing. It appeared that he had been impaled on the limb of a fallen tree when he fell. They wouldn’t get justice for his victims, but John couldn’t say he was sorry that this was his end.

Oliver was lying very close by, in almost a mirrored position though his eyes were closed and his head was toward shore. John fell to his knees at his back, assessing him quickly before trying to move him; the only obvious injury was a gunshot wound to his thigh. It wasn’t bleeding profusely, and it looked like it had missed hitting bone. John laid a hand on him in preparation for trying to stir him.

“Felicity! He’s here. I think he’s okay.”

She didn’t answer; it was possible she couldn’t hear him over the wind and the thunder. He was just about to yell again, to ask if help had been called, when the Waverider glided over the trees and set down on the edge of the beach. He watched Ray and Dinah emerge on the run to them just as the first fat drops of rain began to smack the ground.

Oliver came to as they were carrying him onto the timeship; he gasped Felicity’s name immediately.

“I’m here,” she said, jogging along beside John and Ray, wanting to reach out to him but unable to with her right arm cradling her left. It was raining hard now, pelting onto his upturned face; he left his mouth open a little to catch the moisture.

“Samantha,” he said then, softer and a little more calm. Diggle glanced into his eyes and away and
“Let us get you fixed up first,” was all he said.

Rene’s injuries were Gideon’s top priority; Oliver violently refused any first aid until Felicity had been looked at. She threw him an exasperated glare but let them fix her up first.

“Where’s the rest of the team?” Oliver asked, gritting his teeth through the pain from his thigh.

“Sara just reported in,” Ray offered. “She and Nyssa are on their way.” He touched Felicity’s bruised cheekbone gingerly, and Oliver, watching from a bed across the room, glowered. Ray glanced over at him and immediately pulled his hand back. “We, um, haven’t heard from Thea. Or Quentin.”

“Get back with Sara and ask her to look for them,” he ordered quietly. Felicity glanced up to meet his eye and they shared a long, exhausted look.

As soon as her triage was done she jumped up and crossed the room to him, clambering up next to him, her good side snuggling up against his good side. Oliver wrapped his arms around her and kissed her temple.

“You okay?” he asked, only loud enough for her to hear.

He could feel her hesitate, holding herself very still to keep it together; he ran a hand down over her hair soothingly.

“Talk to me,” he whispered.

Oliver felt her take a big shaky breath in before she spoke.

“Samantha,” she said brokenly. “I think maybe I—“

The tears stopped her from finishing, and Oliver closed his eyes and squeezed her tight. When he opened them John was looking at them both; Oliver wasn’t sure how he knew what they were talking about, but he crossed the room to them in three long strides, coming to a stop on Oliver’s injured side and saying her name so she would look at him. He reached across Oliver and very gently tipped her chin up to make sure she was listening.

“Samantha was already dying, Felicity. Dinah said—“ he glanced at Oliver before continuing—“she said that Adrian worked her over pretty good right before they left for the island. She had internal injuries, baby girl. The fall off the dock wasn’t what killed her. Adrian Chase did.”

“You were amazing out there,” Oliver added, whispering into her hair. “Thank you.”

“Can we go home?” she asked, burying her face against his neck.

“Soon, Honey,” he soothed. “We still have something to finish.”

Sara and Nyssa intercepted them just as they were getting to the ship, bursting out of the trees and wielding swords. Slade looked them both over, and then grinned.

“Hello, ladies,” he said pleasantly, as if they had happened to meet up while out for a Sunday stroll.
Thea tested his grip on her arm by shifting her weight away very casually; it was like steel.


“Digger and I need a way off this island, and you have that ship with lots of room in it. How ‘bout a ride?” His grip tightened on Thea’s arm and she hissed in pain. Sara’s eyes flicked to her, then to her father, who looked exhausted and pissed off. She tipped her head toward the dock without looking away.

“Take the boat. Leave them with me.” Sara spun in place and swung the sword in an elaborate arc that ended with a predatory grin. “Or I can kill you.”

Slade spared the boat a glance and shrugged. “Fair enough.” He let go of Thea as Harkness shoved Quentin forward roughly.

Sara walked backwards all the way to the Waverider to keep an eye on them.

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“We’re here,” Thea confirmed, jogging into the med bay just as Gideon was about to start the repair work on Oliver’s wound. He held his hand out for her and she squeezed his fingers, but his eyes were on Felicity.

“You ready?”

Felicity hesitated, glancing at Thea and back.

“What about Malcolm?”

Sara looked up from bandaging Nyssa’s side with steely eyes.

“He stepped in and saved Talia at the last minute.” She looked at Thea. “He’s gone over to her side.”

Thea folded her arms and studied the ground, a hip cocked against her brother’s bed, and then looked at Oliver. She nodded.

“Ray,” he called, “time to take off.” He looked back to Felicity. “As soon as we’re high enough, light it up.”

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Malcolm and Talia were just coming out of the trees when the Waverider’s engines lit and it lifted off the ground. Malcolm turned his head to the dock in time to see the boat he had arrived on turning away from the shore on its way out to sea. He screamed in fury.

Talia, meanwhile, had spotted Adrian’s body on the beach; she stumbled that direction without a sound.

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Felicity and Diggle stood shoulder to shoulder, Dig supporting the tablet on one side because Felicity’s arm wasn’t fixed yet.

“You ready?” he asked softly. A real-time satellite picture of the island was on the big monitor, but the control was still in her hands. Felicity took a deep breath and entered the command.
Hundreds of explosions erupted at once, from the shoreline back to the trees, through the meadows, around the cargo plane, up to the peak where the bodies of Robert Queen and the others lay. The airstrip, the cove, the forest where Felicity had once stepped on a land mine, the Chinese prison. Everything was on fire.

One by one the other members of the team drifted to the monitor to watch the destruction of Lian Yu, while across the room Oliver lay on the bed and stared at the ceiling. Felicity looked up at John and he squeezed her good arm once.

“Fuck,” she said, under her breath. He wrapped an arm around her and nodded his agreement.

Even though it was a relatively short flight, Sara insisted that Oliver and Felicity—both newly-mended—stay in her cabin. They stripped down and curled around each other in the bed, although neither could manage to sleep. Instead, they whispered in the dark: Felicity told Oliver the story of how she’d come to meet Adrian Chase, and Oliver described his epiphany about his father and forgiveness on the dock just before the end. They discussed breaking the news to William, and what to tell the world about the now-deceased Star City DA.

With just an hour to go they finally fell asleep.

The smoke from Lian Yu could be seen from space, so naturally it attracted more than the usual amount of boat traffic. A Chinese fishing vessel was the one to find them, floating—more or less—on a section of the dock that had managed to stay in one piece after being blown sky high a day earlier.

“I don’t know why you insist on keeping him,” Malcolm growled. “He’s dead. And he’s starting to smell.”

Talia ignored him, just like she had every other time he’d said it. With a lot of grunting and gesturing she’d finally convinced the fishermen to drag Adrian’s body aboard. Malcolm put his hands up for them next.

He crouched on the deck of the boat and shivered as he watched them reach out for Talia. The fishermen spoke rapidly to each other in Mandarin as they hauled her aboard.

“If you’re trying to tell her he’s dead, she’s already heard it. A lot,” Malcolm snarked. She slithered onto the deck and lay there with her eyes closed.

“It’s not like you can revive him, in—“ he waved his hands around in exasperation—“the Lazarus Pit. Your sister filled it in.”

“There are others,” Talia al Ghul said simply, her eyes still closed.

Malcolm Merlyn stared at her silently for a long, long time.

They told William about his mother’s death together, and for the next few days the boy didn’t want to let Felicity out of his sight. But on the day of Samantha’s funeral he clung to his father, which simultaneously warmed and broke Oliver’s heart.
As the days passed they adjusted to their new normal. The paps enjoyed photographing what everyone was calling The Queen Family at the park, or out to brunch. They enrolled William in school, signed him up for the robotics club, and watched a movie at home together every Friday night.

Aruba was penciled in for the week of Spring Break, because William’s grandmother—Samantha’s mother—had asked to have him for a visit; Felicity looked at the dates on her calendar every day, just to make sure it was real.

On a random Friday afternoon, with spring still a few weeks away, Oliver and Felicity found themselves bundled up on a bench in the park overlooking the harbor. She liked to remind him that it was ‘their’ bench, which never failed to make him smile.

“You sure it’s okay if we do it like this?” Oliver asked again, eager, but also nervous that she might regret it later.

“Absolutely. Though, I should probably change first.” Felicity bit her lip and wrinkled her nose as she waited for his opinion.

“I love that dress. It’s one of my favorites.”

She smiled. “Yeah?”

“Yeah. I love you in red.”

“It is short notice,” she worried, bumping her shoulder into his as they sat side-by-side.

“Don’t worry about that. It’s all under control. A phone call. Two,” he amended quickly, making her laugh. “Two phone calls will take care of everything.” Oliver tried and failed to hide a grin as Felicity giggled.

She held one of his hands between both of hers and ran her thumbs over his knuckles; the skin there was criss-crossed with tiny white scars, souvenirs from his years-long mission to save the city, and a testament to his love for it.

“There’s something we need to do first,” she said. Oliver turned his head toward her and they locked gazes for several seconds before he nodded.

“Oh, okay.”

The church was once a landmark in the Glades, the tallest structure around and the center of the community. Now it struggled to keep the lights on, despite its loyal group of parishioners and a reconstruction grant from the city.

But even with all the scaffolding and the sheets of plastic covering half the pews, they couldn’t help gawking a little at the stained glass and the stonework as they walked up the aisle through the sanctuary to a small all-purpose room tucked behind the altar.

The folding chairs were set up in a circle; Oliver and Felicity chose two next to each other, and Felicity couldn’t help smiling when hers was a bit tippy.

They held hands the entire meeting.
A million thank you’s would never be enough for all the love, support, and encouragement I have received for this story, but thank you. Additional love to SmoakingGreenArrow and jules85 for...just...everything.

I was going to add a wedding scene, but then I realized I already wrote one last year; check out Take Two for the epilogue to this story.

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