A Bolt of Light

by InvisibleSilence

Summary

In 2005, Bartholomea Allen became friends with Oliver Queen during spring break in Vegas. There are some experiences you can't go through without becoming friends. In 2007, the night of Barry's graduation, an ill-advised threesome left Barry with a gift she only discovered after the sinking of the Queen's Gambit. In 2012, Oliver Queen returned to civilization.
Bartholomea “Barry” Allen was chatting with Joe West and Fred Chyre after delivering her lab report when her phone vibrated in her pocket. She pulled it out and glanced at the caller ID. It read, *M. Thompson.*

“Excuse me,” she said with a smile to her foster father and his partner. “I have to take this.” She stepped away and swiped the screen to answer.

“How?” she asked.

“Oh, Barry!” Moira Queen responded. She sounded like she was crying.

“What’s wrong?” Barry asked immediately, alarmed.

“Nothing, nothing,” Moira said, sniffing a bit. “Oliver…they found Oliver. He’s alive.”

Everything went numb. Barry didn’t even notice as she dropped her iPhone in shock. She paid little attention as she sunk to her knees, and tears began streaming down her face. She picked up the phone, which was thankfully still connected.

“How? Where? Is he home yet?” she asked, her voice now just as teary as Moira’s.

“He called me from China a few hours ago,” Moira replied. “He’s going to be in the hospital for a few days, but he said he’s going to be okay. I already sent the private jet out to China for him. Some fisherman found him on an island in the North China Sea. He’s coming home, Barry. Our Oliver’s coming home.”

“I…thank you,” Barry said. “We’ll get there as soon as we can.”

“Do you want me to send another jet?” Moira asked.

“No, that’s too much,” Barry said. “We’ll fly out, or take a train. Probably tomorrow. We need to pack, and I need to arrange time off work, and I have to call the schools…”

“Fly,” Moira ordered. “I’ll arrange for tickets, and send someone to meet you at the airport. I’ll email you the flight information.”

Moira hung up the phone before Barry could argue, but she found that she didn’t much care. Oliver was *alive.* He was alive and coming home.

Barry barely noticed the hands that pulled her off the ground and guided her out of the bullpen. Why would she? Oliver was coming *home.* Livvy would finally be able to meet her father.

“Barry?” a concerned voice asked. Joe. “Bare, what’s wrong?”

Barry shook her head, tears streaming down her face, and began to smile.

“Nothing. Nothing’s wrong. He’s *alive,* Joe.”

“Who, Barry?” another voice asked. Barry glanced up to see Captain Singh watching her concernedly. They must be in his office.
“Livvy’s father,” she said. “He…he went missing before I even knew I was pregnant. We all thought he was dead. But his mother called me and they’ve found him. He’s coming home.”

Captain Singh sat back in his seat.

“Take ten days,” he offered. “I doubt he’ll be back immediately, wherever he is, and you’re probably not going to be useful for a bit.” He looked over at Joe. “Joe, why don’t you take Allen to the school and then home?”


“How do I tell my four-year-old her father’s alive?” Barry asked wonderingly as Joe led her out of Singh’s office and up to her lab to pack her things. She packed in a daze, and was still mostly dazed when Joe got her into the car and drove off.

“Thea or Livvy first?” Joe asked.

“Thea,” Barry said. “She deserves to know her brother’s alive. And it’ll be easier to explain it to her before we have Livvy.”

Joe simply nodded and adjusted their course toward McFeely High School.

After losing her father and brother, Thea Queen had been lost in Starling City. Her mother was distant and grieving, and none of her spoiled, elitist friends knew how to support Thea in her grief. After Livvy was born, Thea had turned to Barry as her rock. She had flown out to visit Barry and Livvy at every opportunity. After spending spring break with the West-Allen household, Joe had invited her to stay for summer vacation.

Their household was well-used to grief, after all.

Over the summer, Barry, Thea, and Livvy had moved out of the West house. When Oliver died, Moira had given his trust fund to Barry, despite her protests, and the trust fund of a billionaire’s son was no small amount. It was easy enough to buy a house a few doors down from the West home.

At the end of the summer, Thea hadn’t wanted to go back to Starling. There were too many memories there, everyone knew her there. She had begged and pleaded with her mother, and Moira Queen had finally agreed to allow Thea to stay in Central City with Barry. While she didn’t want to lose her daughter so soon after her husband and son, she recognized that she couldn’t be what her daughter needed then. She had been a bit grudging at the fact that Thea was going to attend public school, but had still allowed it to happen.

As far as anyone in Central City knew, Thea Queen was Theodosia “Thea” Thompson, Barry’s maternal first cousin from Keystone City. She’d been living with Barry for four years now. Thea had protested the name, but Barry had pointed out that females in her family had long, terrible names. It was still better than ‘Bartholomea’ after all.

Barry didn’t come out of her daze until they parked at McFeely High School.

“Do you need me to come in with you?” Joe asked.

Barry took a deep breath.

“No. I’ve got this.”

Barry walked purposefully into the school and straight to the office.
“I need to pick up my cousin, Thea Thompson,” she told the woman at the front desk. “I’m her legal guardian. We have a family emergency.”

“Do you know which class Thea is in?” the woman asked.

“Not off the top of my head,” Barry said apologetically.

“Give me a few minutes to look it up.” The woman was silent for a long moment as she typed on her computer. “I’m not finding anything. Is ‘Thea’ her full first name?”


It only took a minute before the woman was on the office phone. “Mrs. Stone? Could you please send Thea Thompson to the office for dismissal?” She hung up the phone and told Barry, “Thea will be her in a few minutes. The chemistry wing is on the other side of the building.”

Barry barely resisted the urge to pace while she waited for Thea. She occupied her mind by checking her email on her phone. She had one new message: Moira Queen had emailed confirmation of airline tickets from Central City Airport to Starling City Airport at eight o’clock that evening, first class. Barry snorted slightly at that. Moira Queen was horrible at acting ‘plebeian.’

“Barry?” Thea asked as she walked into the room. “What’s going on?”

“I’ll tell you in the car,” Barry said. “Do you have all your stuff? You’re probably not going to be back for a week or so.”

Thea looked even more confused, but she nodded.

“Thank you,” Barry said with a smile and a small nod to the receptionist, even as she wrapped an arm around Thea’s shoulders and guided her out of the school to Joe’s car.


“Sort of,” Barry said. “But it’s good news. Thea…Oliver was found. Alive.”

“Alive?” Thea asked, choking up. Barry passed a tissue back to her as the girl began to cry. Barry felt herself tear up again as well.

“Are we…are we going to Starling?” Thea asked once she found her voice again.

“Your mom already sent plane tickets for you, me, and Livvy,” Barry said. “We fly out at 8 tonight. Joe, could you take us to the airport?”

“Of course,” the detective nodded. “Would it be faster to get to Carmichael by Cross Street or Mayberry?”

“Cross,” Barry replied instantly.

Joe nodded as he turned the car.

“After we get Livvy, we’ll head home to pack?” Thea asked.

“That’s right,” Barry said. “Make sure to email your teachers and ask for your homework. I have ten days off. Hopefully we’ll have a few with Oliver once he makes it to Starling City.”
“Where is he?” Thea asked.

“Still in China. Fishermen found him yesterday on an island,” Barry said. “I’m sure your mom will tell us more when we get there.”

They arrived at Carmichael Elementary, the same school that Barry and Iris had gone to, a few minutes later. The high school was only a few minutes away, which was why Thea had been picking Livvy up from kindergarten since she started.

“What about my car?” Thea suddenly asked. The teenager had gotten a used Volkswagen Beetle for her sixteenth birthday. It wasn’t anything like the convertible BMW Oliver had gotten for his eighteenth birthday, but it was hers, and she adored it.

“I’ll bring Iris back and she can drive it back to your house,” Joe offered. “You take care of packing. And either Iris or I will take care of Wrinkle.”

Wrinkle was the Pug that Thea and Livvy had found in a box of free puppies a year previously. Barry had only taken one look at the dog before falling in love as well. Unfortunately, they’d made the mistake of letting Livvy name him.

“If she crashes Speedy, I’m going to be very upset,” Thea promptly informed him. The teenager was very attached to the red bug, which she had christened with her own childhood nickname.

Joe pulled into the elementary school.

“Be back in a flash,” Barry said, before impulsively reaching out to squeeze Thea’s hand. The younger girl still looked dazed. “It’ll be okay,” she promised. “I don’t know if the Oliver we lost is the same one we’re getting back, but there isn’t an Oliver anywhere who can’t help but love you.”

Thea smiled weakly. “Thanks, Bare.”

Barry smiled back before heading inside the elementary school.

“I’m here to pick up Olivia Allen?” she said. “She’s in Mrs. Perkins’ kindergarten class.”

“Reason for pick-up?” the woman at the front desk asked.

“Family emergency,” Barry replied. “She won’t be back for a few days, probably a week.”

“Can I see some ID?” the woman asked.

Barry pulled out her driver’s license and handed it to the woman, who looked it over carefully before handing it back. She called Olivia down to the office. Thankfully, the kindergarten wing was close to the office, so it was only a few minutes before Livvy was in the office.

“Mama!” Olivia exclaimed. She had her blue Merida backpack on and was carrying the matching lunchbox. The four-year-old ran to hug her. Barry knelt down to wrap her in her arms. She was probably holding a bit too tightly as Livvy started squirming almost immediately.

“Hey, baby,” Barry greeted, picking her up. “You, me, and Auntie Thea are going to go see Grandma and Grandpa, okay?”

“Now?” Livvy asked with a tilt of her head.

“Tonight,” Barry replied. “We’ve got to go home and pack right away. Grandma sent us airplane
“I like airplanes!” Livvy cheered.

“I know, baby. Come on. Poppa and Auntie Thea are in the car waiting to see you.”

“Yay!”

Joe and Thea both managed to greet Livvy with appropriate amounts of excitement, though Barry could tell from the pile of tissues in the floorboard that Thea hadn’t been composed for long. Joe asked about Livvy’s day, and they spent the entire ride home being regaled by the tale of how Stevie Anderson had chased her around the playground at recess, telling everyone that she was his girlfriend.

“I can go talk to him with my cop uniform on,” Joe offered. “Tell him that nobody dates my granddaughter before talking to me.”

Livvy giggled.

“It’s okay, Poppa. I can handle Stevie Anderson. Auntie Thea taught me judo.”

Joe looked at Thea in his rearview mirror.

“When did you learn judo?”

“I’ve been taking classes for ages. I’m on my fourth black belt,” Thea replied.

“Poppa, will you teach me how to shoot a gun?” Livvy asked.

“Not until at least middle school,” Joe replied promptly.

Livvy sighed heavily. “But how will I get rid of all the boys? It’s not just Stevie Anderson you know.”

“Who else is there?” Joe asked.

“Well, Mrs. Perkins says George is pulling on my pigtails, even though I don’t wear pigtails, and Roberto gave me a pretty ring with an orange jewel, and Owen always says that I look pretty when I wear a dress. And William from first grade gave me some flowers he picked.”

As they pulled into Barry’s driveway, Joe looked over at her and said, “I think we need to have a talk with Livvy’s kindergarten teacher.”

“It’s kindergarten. She’s fine,” Barry reassured. “Iris and I had that many boys following us around when we were that age.”

“What?”

Barry resisted the urge to laugh as she got out of the car. Thea was already helping Livvy out.

“See you tonight, Joe! Be here by five to take us to the airport!”

“Bye, Poppa!” Livvy yelled.

Joe had to halt whatever he was about to yell at Barry in order to reply, “Bye, sweetie!”
Barry successfully escaped into the house with her daughter and ward before Joe could start yelling again. It wouldn’t be much use, since her foster father would be back in a few hours, but a girl could dream.

The thought of dreams made tears well up in her eyes again. An impossible dream had just come true. Oliver Queen was coming home. Livvy finally would have the chance to meet her father.
The Return of Oliver Queen

Chapter Summary

Covers the Pilot of Arrow

The city was beautiful at night. Oliver couldn’t help but stare at it from the window of his hospital room. He’d seen Starling City since he left, but this was the first time he got to see it and stay in it. It was good to be home.

The door opened behind him. It was probably just another doctor or nurse coming to check his status – he was fine, he hadn’t had proper medical attention in five years, he didn’t really need it now. Sure, he probably needed to watch what he ate for a while, and it was good to know he hadn’t contracted any strange viruses, but he wanted to go home.

“Oliver?” a familiar voice asked.

Oliver slowly turned around, almost disbelieving. He blinked at the sight of the woman before him, tears coming to his eyes.

“Mom,” he said with a small smile. They walked toward each other. Moira Queen looked him over.

“Oh. My beautiful boy,” she said as she started to cry. She reached out and wrapped him in a tight embrace. Oliver hugged her back, relishing the first hug from family he’d gotten in five years. He was glad he’d managed to get his hair and beard cut before now. He wouldn’t have wanted to look scruffy upon seeing her for the first time.

Thankfully, his mother was able to get him sprung from the hospital quickly. She hustled him into the car, where his case was already loaded into the trunk. There were no paparazzi around to view Oliver Queen’s return to Starling City. When he asked about it, his mother replied with a small smirk, “The news should be breaking…right about now, I suspect.”

“Who knows I’m back?” Oliver asked.

“Family,” Moira responded instantly. “They’ve known since I knew. I called Malcolm yesterday and asked him to pass the word on to Tommy as well. I thought you might like to see him. Some of the higher-ups in the company were informed this morning, as were the household staff.”

They arrived at Queen Mansion, which – exteriorly at least – hadn’t changed a bit. When the chauffeur tried to grab Oliver’s bow case, he stopped the man and said, “I’ve got it.”

“Your room is exactly as you left it,” his mother said as she opened the double doors for him. “I never had the heart to change a thing.”

Oliver looked around the familiar foyer as an unfamiliar male voice called out, “Oliver!”

After five years away, Oliver had absolutely no idea who this man was, though he guessed he was associated with the company in some way. He set his case down as the man approached.
“It’s damn good to see you,” the dark-skinned man said. He had a British accent, Oliver noted idly. Probably a boarding school education, even if he was born in the US. Oliver still had no idea who the man was.

“It’s Walter,” the man said, seeming to recognize that. “Walter Steele.”

Oliver glanced over at his mother, who reached out and put a hand on his shoulder.

“You remember Walter,” his mother said. “Your father’s friend from the company.”

Oliver looked over at the man again. He looked vaguely familiar, but someone more familiar did come into view behind him. Oliver walked past Walter and over to the housekeeper.

“It’s good to see you, Raisa,” he said with a genuine smile.

The woman smiled back just as honestly.

“Welcome home, Mr. Oliver,” she greeted, before looking over to his mother and Walter. “Mr. Merlyn called. He wants to join you for dinner.”

“Wonderful,” Moira Queen said.

A door opening upstairs distracted him.

“Oliver?” his mother questioned. “Did you hear that?”

Oliver ignored her as he walked over to the bottom of the stairs. Thea turned the corner and looked down at him.

“Hey, Sis,” he offered.

Thea broke into a bright grin. She ran down the rest of the stairs.

“I knew it! I knew you were alive,” she said as she threw her arms around his neck. “I missed you so much,” she said quietly.

“You were with me the whole time,” Oliver replied, hugging her back just as tightly. Out of everyone, it had been Thea that he had truly missed the most.

“Where’s –” his mother began to ask, but Thea cut her off.

“The guest room. Didn’t want to overwhelm Ollie after all this time,” she said, looking over at her brother with a teasing grin.

“Who’s here?” Oliver asked.

Thea bit her lower lip. “I’ll take you up.”

His sister didn’t let go of his arm as she pulled him upstairs. Oliver didn’t mind – it was nice to have family again. Thea stopped in front of the guest room – one of the ones used for close family friends, not random guests. It was only two doors down from Oliver’s room.

“Do you want to go see your room first, or do you want to know now?” Thea asked nervously.

“Now’s good,” Oliver said with a shrug.
Thea stepped to the side.

“Go on in.”

Oliver didn’t know who to expect when he opened the door, but his ex-wife-cum-close-friend was not it. She was sitting on the bed, looking at some sort of hand-held computer.

“Barry?” Oliver said in surprise.

Bartholomea Allen looked up at him. She’d barely changed since the last time he’d seen her, less than two months before the *Queen’s Gambit* sank. He and Sara and Barry had all gotten drunk together to celebrate Barry’s graduation from Starling University before Barry took the train back to Central. Her dress was red, a sure sign that his mother had picked her clothes. Barry had given up protesting after the hundredth time it had happened, and had just accepted the fact that his mother had fun dressing her.
She smiled when she saw him.

“It’s good to see you again, Oliver,” she said as she stood up and walked over to him. “Now, before we get to the part where I hug you and cry because I missed you, I have one thing to do first. Nobody else is probably going to do this, since you’ve pretty much just come back from the dead, but you really, really do deserve it.”

Oliver saw it coming before it happened, but he did nothing to stop Barry as she slapped him with all her strength – which was more than Oliver remembered her having.

“Ow,” he said, rubbing at his cheek. “You hit hard. When did that happen?”

“It has been five years, Ollie,” Barry said with a small smile as she reached out and hugged him tightly. “And I work for the police. I’ve taken self-defense classes.”

Oliver wrapped his arms around her as well. She was only an inch taller than Thea, but still several inches below Oliver. It was comfortable, being able to hug her again. There had never been anything overtly romantic about any of their times together – it only got sexual when they were really, really drunk, but it was usually just like this – comfortable.

“I guess that was for everything that happened with Laurel, and Sara, and you?” Oliver asked resignedly.

“More Laurel and Sara than me,” Barry admitted. “We were always just friends, Ollie, even if it was a friendship with benefits. But Laurel loved you, and I thought you loved her. What happened at my graduation…that was a mistake, one I’m ashamed to have been a part of. If I’d known that you were going to use that to continue something with my girlfriend without breaking up with her sister first, I would have told Laurel. You were pretty much Sara’s only guy-crush, and you abused that by going off and sleeping with her instead of her sister because you were scared of commitment.”

Oliver winced.

“You still don’t mince words, I see.”

“Not usually,” Barry said. “Somebody had to say it though, and I don’t think anybody else will. Except Quentin Lance. From what I’ve heard, he really hates you at this point. Laurel doesn’t like you very much either, but…”
“Detective Lance never liked me to begin with,” Oliver concluded.

“That’s right.”

“You forgave me,” Oliver pointed out.

“Sara and I were no longer dating when that trip happened,” Barry pointed out. “We mutually decided to break up when I moved back to Central. The threesome with you was kind of our last little ‘hurrah’. I was still upset, but a lot of that was because I was grieving. I lost my ex-husband and good friend at the same time I lost my ex-girlfriend, whom I was still in love with. And the worst part was, I couldn’t even say why I was so upset, because Sara’s family didn’t know she was on the lesbian side of bi.”

“Did you ever tell them?” Oliver asked.

Barry sighed.

“No. I mean, Laurel and I still talk about Sara sometimes, and I talk to their mom as well, but I’ve never actually come out and said, “Oh, by the way, Sara and I dated for a year and a half. Surprise! She was bi.”

They stood there, still embracing, in comfortable silence for a few moments more. Finally, Oliver asked, “What are you doing here? Not that I’m not glad to see you – I am – but I didn’t expect to.”

Barry sighed and pulled away from him.

“There’s something you need to see.”

She pulled him over to the bed and showed him the screen she’d been looking at. It was video from a camera looking down into a room where a little girl was playing. She had blonde hair tied back into pigtails that moved with her as she danced with her teddy bears.

“This is Livvy,” Barry said quietly. “She’ll be five soon. She was due in February, but she was born in December.”

Oliver did the math in his head.

“She was conceived in May?” he asked, already knowing the answer.

Barry nodded, biting her lower lip nervously. “May 13th. My last day in the dorm with Sara.”

“So she’s mine,” Oliver stated, looking down at the screen. “Ours.” The little girl – Livvy – was now arranging her stuffed animals at a small table with a tea set on it.

“She is,” Barry said quietly, looking down at the screen as well. “Her full name is Olivia Roberta Allen. Your mother and I both decided that it would be safer for everyone if the world didn’t know her as a Queen. You were dead, Robert was dead, Moira was already struggling to handle the company, Thea was struggling to handle everything, and I didn’t want my baby exposed to the same sort of spotlight you always had on you. Especially since her father was already dead.”

Oliver’s eyes hadn’t left the screen. He had a daughter…before the island, he would have panicked. That’s what he did when Laurel wanted to move in together, after all, what he’d done when Samantha said she was pregnant. Commitment wasn’t something he was ready for. But now he could see himself settling down…once his mission was complete. But this little girl…she was so beautiful. It was almost unbelievable that he’d had part in making something so precious.
“Can I…” he stopped as his voice broke. “Can I meet her?”

Barry nodded quickly. “Of course! Um, how do you want me to introduce you? She just knows that we’re here to visit Grandma, we didn’t tell her why.”

“Would you be okay if I introduced myself as her dad?” Oliver asked hesitantly.

“You are her dad,” Barry pointed out. “As long as you want to have a part in her life, I want you to introduce yourself as her dad. If you don’t want to be involved, then don’t get her hopes up. Please, Ollie.”

Her voice was quiet.

“If you get that little girl attached to you, and then stop caring, then you’re going to break her heart. If you break her heart, then I will murder you and your sister will help.”

“Everybody else knows her, then?” Oliver asked, still entranced by his daughter – his daughter! – on the screen.

“I told Moira once I learned I was pregnant – it had to be yours, I hadn’t slept with anyone male for a while before or after. It was only a couple weeks after we learned the *Queen’s Gambit* went down. You know me, I didn’t care about the money. But I figured Moira and Thea should know that there was something left of you in the world. Well, besides you-you. But we thought you were dead at that point. Thea’s actually been a great help with Livvy. After…after everything, Moira got kind of detached, and Thea wasn’t dealing well. She’d head out to Central every chance she could get to see Livvy. She spent all of spring break with us, and Joe invited her to come back during summer vacation – oh, Joe and Iris know about everything now, I kind of had to tell them after I got pregnant,” Barry said sheepishly. “But no one else knows. But Thea didn’t want to leave after that vacation – she actually helped Livvy and me move out into our own house. She’s been living with us ever since. She goes to normal high school as Thea Thompson, and she’s supposedly my maternal cousin and ward,” Barry explained.

“And others?” Oliver asked.

“Raisa, obviously, because I needed childcare advice and Raisa raised you and Thea. Thea and I ran into Tommy in Central at one point, and he figured it out pretty quick – I don’t know if he told his dad. Moira told Walter after they got so close.”

“I don’t really remember him,” Oliver admitted. “He’s a good man?”

“Better than a lot of the society elite around here,” Barry said. “He cares about people. He does his best to do the best for everyone under his care.”

They stayed still for a moment longer, before Oliver finally said, “I want to meet her. I want to try to be her dad. I don’t know if I’ll be any good at it, but I’d like to try.”

Barry smiled at him.

“I was hoping you’d say that.” She turned serious. “But Oliver, this isn’t just something that you can start and give up on. Parenthood is a life-long commitment. If you’re going to be her dad, you can’t just give up on it when it gets hard.”
“I know,” Oliver said firmly. “I’m not…Barry, I was on that island for five years. I’m not the same man who left on the Queen’s Gambit with my dad and my girlfriend’s sister. I didn’t even recognize myself in the mirror when I first saw myself in the hospital….Well, part of that was the hermit beard I had. But even now…I’m different, Barry. I don’t even really know how to go back to being ‘Oliver Queen, Starling City billionaire.’”

“You don’t have to go back,” Barry said quietly. “I mean, your old friends will probably expect some level of partying, but you don’t have to go get drunk every night and arrested twice a week. It’s okay to lay low for a while, Ollie. It’s okay to lay low forever, if that’s what you want. Just because you used to be tabloid fodder doesn’t mean you have to stay tabloid fodder. Even Tommy’s calmed down some!”

“Seriously?” Oliver asked in surprise.

“He kind of goes back and forth,” Barry admitted. “Your death hit him hard.”

They were both quiet for a long minute.

“I’d really like to meet her,” Oliver finally said quietly.

Barry nodded. “She’s right next door.”

Barry led him out of the room and into the next, the one between the guest room and Oliver’s. It was the same room from the video. The little girl was still seated at the tea table.

“Mommy!” she exclaimed, lighting up at the sight of Barry. “Are you going to play with me?”

“Sure, baby, but first I’d like you to meet someone.” Barry reached a hand back and dragged Oliver forward.

He crouched down next to the girl.

“Hi, Livvy,” he greeted softly. “My name’s Oliver, and I’m your daddy.”

Livvy looked to Barry, confused.

“I thought Daddy was dead?”

“We thought your Daddy was dead, but they just found him on an island a few days ago, so now he’s back,” Barry explained patiently.

“Okay,” Livvy said. She looked over at Oliver. “We’re having a tea party. You can sit next to Mr. Fuzzy. But not between Mr. Fuzzy and Mrs. Fuzzy! They’re married, so they hafta sit together. You can sit between Mr. Fuzzy and Meow-Meow. Mommy, you can sit on the other side of Meow-Meow, next to Scruffy.”

Scruffy was the well-worn Steiff dog that Moira had gotten for Livvy when she was born. The collar the dog wore was made of actual Swarovski crystals, and the dog tag was actually a gold locket with Livvy’s name and picture inside. Thankfully, the dog hadn’t been lost yet, and Livvy didn’t feel the need to drag it with her to kindergarten.

The rest of the afternoon was spent playing with Livvy and Barry, joined shortly afterward by Thea. They continued to play until Oliver’s mother stuck her head in to say that they should all get ready for dinner. She told Barry that the closet in her room had been updated with clothes in her size, and Raisa would come in to take care of Livvy. Everyone scattered to their own rooms at
Moira Queen’s command.

After his shower, Oliver ended up wandering down to the foyer to wait for their visitor. He was looking at a photo of himself as a child, sitting with his father, when the door opened behind him.

“What did I tell you,” his best friend asked as he came inside. “Yachts suck.” He closed the door behind him.

“Tommy Merlyn,” Oliver said with a smile, greeting his best friend with a hug.

“So, dinner with the fam? Did your sister come back to town to see you?” Tommy asked as Oliver walked with him to the dining room.

“She’s here,” Oliver said with a small laugh. “So are Barry and Livvy.”

“Ah. So you know about that,” Tommy said.

“Pretty much the first thing I learned,” Oliver said with a nod. “Well, after Thea said she knew I was alive, and Barry slapped me and then told me she missed me. Then she told me about Livvy.”

“Good thing Barry didn’t decide to call her Oli,” Tommy pointed out. “That could have gotten confusing once you popped up again. Though the whole Oliver/Olivia thing could be worse. Olivia’s been on the top ten baby names list since before you went missing, so it’s not like anyone’s going to automatically assume she’s named after you.”

When they entered the dining room, everyone else was already seated. Moira was at the head of the table with Walter to her right. The seat at the foot of the table was presumably left open for Oliver. Livvy was at his left with Barry next to her. Thea sat across from her, with an empty seat for Tommy left beside Oliver.

During dinner, Tommy decided the best thing to do would be to cover everything that Oliver needed to catch up from the last five years.

“Let’s see, Super Bowl Winners: Giants, Steelers, Saints, Packers, Giants again; a black president, that’s new…oh, and Lost? They were all dead…I think. What else…”

“Smartphones, hashtags, social media,” Thea said.


Both men turned to look at her.

“What?” she asked. She gestured to Livvy. “I have a four-year-old. I watch a lot of Disney movies. Besides, you loved Toy Story. And just so you’re aware, three of those are new Disney Princesses.”

Oliver knew that his face was blank. And not a killer-intent-blank, but a I-have-no-idea-how-to-respond-to-this blank.

Fortunately, Thea changed the topic of conversation.

“What was it like there?” Thea asked.
No, definitely not fortunate. That caused his mother and Walter to start paying attention from the other end of the table.

“Cold,” Oliver said succinctly before looking down at his food.

“Tomorrow, you and me, we’re doing the city,” Tommy said, ending the awkward moment.

“That’s sounds like a great idea,” Moira said with a smile.

“No,” Livvy said boldly. “Daddy’s busy tomorrow.”

“With what?” Tommy asked her.

“We’re playing rescue-the-princess tomorrow,” Livvy said matter-of-factly.

“Oh, are you the princess?” Tommy asked patronizingly.

Livvy gave him a scathing look. “No. *Mommy’s* the princess. *I’m* going to rescue her. Daddy and Auntie Thea are helping.” She gave Tommy a considering look. “You can be the dragon.”

The look of shock on Tommy’s face was comical. Both Barry and Thea were trying – and failing – to hide their laughter. Oliver felt a small smile creep onto his face. Even Walter and his mother were smiling.

“Well, you’ll get to spend time with Oliver,” Barry offered once she managed to contain her laughter. “After all, he’s only been back in civilization for a few days. You should probably give him a bit more time before dragging him all through the city getting drunk.”

“Besides, the news stations just broke the story of his ‘miraculous survival’ this morning,” Thea pointed out. “You’ve got to give them a bit of time to cover everything before giving them new material to work with.”

Everyone turned to look at her.

“What? I pay attention when Iris rants about her classes,” she said.

“Who’s Iris?” Tommy asked.

“My foster sister,” Barry replied with a small smile. “And best friend. If she’s not eating dinner with us, we’re having dinner with her and her father.”

“We’re headed back to Central the morning of the twenty-first, so you can go party your way through Central that night,” Thea reported as Barry prodded Livvy to eat her food.

“You’re not staying?” Moira asked her. “I’d hoped you would, now that Oliver’s home.”

“It’s my senior year, Mom,” Thea said. “And we’re already a month into the school year. I’m not transferring to Starling now.”

“Can we at least go around the not-drinking part of the city?” Tommy asked, a slight whine in his voice. “After rescue-the-princess, I mean,” he added in response to Livvy’s dark look.

“As long as Oliver’s okay with it,” Barry shrugged.

“Sounds good to me,” Oliver said with a forced smile. “I was hoping to swing by the office.”
“Well, there’s plenty of time for all that,” Walter said after a drink of wine. “I mean, Queen Consolidated isn’t going anywhere.”

Just then, Raisa tripped and nearly fell onto Oliver. Oliver quickly grabbed the bowl of fruit she was carried and stabilized her.

“I am so sorry, Mr. Oliver,” she said.

“Eto ne bespokoystvo,” he replied quickly. He realized his mistake as soon as everyone looked at him, but managed to keep the wince off his face.

“Dude, you speak Russian?” Tommy asked, impressed.

“I didn’t realize you took Russian in college, Oliver,” Walter commented.

“I didn’t realize you wanted to sleep with my mother, Walter,” Oliver responded, his tone slightly sharp.

The table fell silent.

Barry reached over and smacked his arm.

“Small ears, Oliver!” she hissed, jerking her head towards Livvy.

“Grandma and Grandpa always sleep together,” Livvy said confusedly.

Oliver raised his eyebrows toward the pair at the other end of the table. Moira looked to Thea, then to Barry. The latter raised her hands innocently.

“I didn’t say anything,” Thea put in.

“She didn’t have to,” Oliver clarified.

“It is kind of obvious,” Barry pointed out.

Walter set his glass down as he looked over to Moira.

“Oliver,” his mother said, reaching out to take Walter’s hand, “Walter and I are married. And I don’t want you to think that either one of us did anything to disrespect your father.”

“We both believed that Robert, like you, was…well, gone,” Walter said.

“It’s fine,” Oliver said shortly. He tried to smile, but it didn’t seem to work very well. He stood from his seat. “May I be excused?”

Moira simply nodded, and Oliver grabbed a pear as he left the table.

“See you tomorrow, buddy,” Tommy offered.

Once Oliver was gone, Moira offered, “Is anyone up for dessert?”

“Not for this little one,” Barry said, standing and picking Livvy out of her chair. “Someone needs to go to bed soon.”

“But Mommy,” Livvy whined.

“The faster you go to sleep tonight, the faster you get to get up and play with Mommy and Daddy
in the morning,” Thea told her. “The princess isn’t going to rescue herself.”

Livvy looked over at Moira.

“May we be excused, Grandma?”

“Yes, you may, Olivia,” Moira replied.

Barry smiled at the table before saying, “Goodnight Tommy, Walter, Moira. Thea…”

“I’ll be up by the time you finish Livvy’s bath,” Thea said. “I wouldn’t want to miss the next chapter of *The Secret Garden*, after all.”

“Goodnight, Barry,” Tommy said. “See you tomorrow for ‘rescue-the-princess.’” He sounded very unenthusiastic.

Barry headed up the stairs with Livvy in her arms. It only took half an hour before bath-time was over and Livvy was tucked into her fluffy pink princess bed.

Thea chose then to show up, dragging Oliver behind her.

“Look who volunteered to read tonight’s chapter!” she said cheerfully.

She pushed Oliver into the rocking chair next to Livvy’s bed before plopping down on the floor beside Barry.

“Are you sure this is a good idea?” Barry whispered.

“We’re only on chapter four. I made him read the first three while you were giving Livvy her bath,” Thea whispered back.

That wasn’t quite what Barry had meant, but she settled back against the edge of the bed as Oliver began to read.

“When she opened her eyes in the morning it was because a young housemaid had come into her room to light the fire…”

Oliver read the next chapter of Mary Lennox’s adventures very well for someone who had never read to a child before, or so Barry thought.

“He’s doing well,” she whispered to Thea.

“He used to read to me,” Thea said with a small smile. “Until he left for college and every time he was home after dropping out. It didn’t really matter to me how old I got; I just liked hearing him read to me. We’d just finished *The Two Towers* and planned to start *Return of the King* when he got back from China…I could never actually bring myself to read it,” she said sadly.

“And he actually stopped digging, threw his spade over his shoulder and walked off, without even glancing at her or saying goodbye,” Oliver finished, shutting the book.

“Another chapter?” Livvy asked hopefully, her blue eyes wide and pleading.

Barry could see Oliver about to open the book back up.

“Nope, it’s bedtime for little girls,” she said, pushing herself off the floor. She leaned over and kissed Livvy’s forehead, even as Oliver pulled Thea up from the floor.
“Night-night, Livvy.”

“Night-night, Mommy.”

Thea leaned over and kissed Livvy’s forehead as well.

“Night-night, Livvy.”

“Night-night, Auntie Thea.”

Oliver hesitantly stepped up to Livvy’s bedside. He looked over to Barry, who nodded encouragingly. Slowly, tentatively, he leaned down and kissed Livvy’s forehead with the barest brush of his lips on her skin.

“Good-night, Livvy,” he said quietly.

“Night-night, Daddy,” the girl said with a pleased smile before cuddling up to Scruffy and closing her eyes.

The three tiptoed out of the room, and Barry softly shut the door behind them. Everything was silent in the hallway for a long moment, before Oliver said, “I think I’m going to head to bed. I’m still jetlagged. Five years on an island seventeen hours away will do that to you.”

“Sleep well,” Barry offered, even as Thea rushed in for another hug.

Barry went to bed shortly afterward. Livvy was likely to be up by six, and she never stayed in bed very long.

She heard about Oliver’s late-night episode in hushed tones from Moira the next morning. She cornered him after breakfast, dressed, once more, in red.
“So,” Barry said, slipping into his room and shutting the door behind her. “Wanna talk about it?”

Oliver hastily shoved something back underneath his bed.
“Not really.”

“Hm,” Barry said as she walked over. “Whatcha got there?”

“It’s nothing,” he said quickly.

She raised an eyebrow at him.

He sighed.

“It’s a present for Thea. It’s a hozon. It symbolizes reconnecting in Buddhism.”

“And you want to reconnect with your sister?”


Barry winced.

“That might be a bad idea. She kind of hates your guts at the moment. Especially now that she can properly hate your guts instead of feeling guilty about it because you were dead.”

“I had a picture of her that she gave me before I left. It’s what helped get me through the island,” Oliver said quietly, looking down.

Barry reached out and squeezed his shoulder.

“You don’t need to answer this right now, but you should think on it. Was it Laurel specifically that got you through, or was it that the picture of her was the only image you had from home, and it was the idea of home that got you through?”

That question seemed to stump Oliver. He opened his mouth only to close it again.

“Moving on,” Barry said, “I think we should talk about what happened last night.”

Oliver’s mouth tightened, and his eyes grew sharp.

“I don’t need to know everything that happened to you, Oliver,” Barry said softly. “But talking about it will help. And I highly doubt you’re going to go to a professional, or talk to family or any of your friends. Plus, I minored in psychology, so I do have a bit of an idea as to what I’m talking about.”

“You always were the best at giving advice,” Oliver said with a small smile.

“We don’t have to talk now,” Barry said quietly. “Just remember that you can talk to me. And that you need to talk sometimes. Last night…you haven’t been somewhere safe in five years. That’s going to take a while to sink in. Just like it’s going to take you awhile to sleep on a bed again instead of on the ground. You just need to keep reminding yourself that you’re safe.”

Anything else she might have wanted to say was interrupted by Livvy bursting into the room, dragging Tommy by the arm. Thea followed them, an amused smile on her face.

“Mommy! Daddy! Come on, it’s time to play rescue-the-princess!”

They were all ensconced in the playroom a few minutes later. Barry sat on a chair in the far corner of the room, wrapped up in one of Livvy’s lace curtains as her ‘princess dress’. She was surrounded by a building-block castle that was being guarded by Tommy, who was dressed in a
leather jacket with a snakeskin scarf that Barry was relatively sure belonged to Moira over his head as a part of his ‘dragon’ costume. Thea had a toy sword in one hand and the decorative pillow in the other hand to serve as her ‘shield’. Livvy was holding the Merida bow Walter had gotten her after her obsession became evident, with the matching quiver filled with arrows on her back.

“Uh, should I be worried about that?” Tommy said, gesturing to the bow.

“Don’t worry,” Barry reassured from her position in the castle. “They’re suction cups.”

“Good,” Tommy said with a sigh. “Hey, wait a minute. Your mom’s the princess, I’m the dragon, Thea’s also a knight, so who’s your dad?”

Livvy turned to Oliver and put her hands on her hips as she looked him over.

“You can be the horse,” she said decisively.

Tommy burst out laughing. Even Thea was hiding snickers. But Barry was surprised and proud as Oliver simply shrugged and got down on his hands and knees. Livvy sat down with a pleased smile.

“You certainly are a little spitfire, aren’t you?” Tommy asked as he finally managed to stop laughing. “I think I’ll call you Sparky.”

“You are not calling my child ‘Sparky’, Merlyn,” Barry stated.

“It’s better than Speedy,” Tommy pointed out.


“What, always chasing after me as a kid? I thought it fit pretty well,” Oliver said with a smile. “Maybe it still does.”

“Speedy and Sparky,” Tommy said. “It has a nice ring to it.”

“I like it,” Livvy declared. “I’ll be Sir Sparky the Brave! With my trusty sidekick, Sir Speedy the…uh…”

“Swift?” Tommy offered.

“That’s just stupid,” Thea refused.

“Valiant?” Barry said.

Livvy perked up.

“Like Lucy?”

“Just like Lucy,” Barry agreed. She looked over at Oliver and Tommy and told them, “We just finished The Chronicles of Narnia. Lucy was titled ‘Queen Lucy the Valiant.’ She was Livvy’s favorite character.”

“Lucy’s my favorite,” Livvy said. “Mommy said we can watch the movie soon. Maybe tonight?” she asked, looking over at Barry. “Daddy can watch it with us?”

“That sounds good to me,” Barry said easily. “Ollie? Thea?”
Oliver smiled slightly. “No one’s called me that in a long time, Barry. But that sounds good to me.”

“I want to be Sir Sparky the Valiant,” Livvy declared. “Auntie Thea can be Sir Speedy the Brave.”

“Very well, Sir Sparky,” Thea said grandly. “Shall we do battle with the fearsome dragon that holds thy royal mother captive?”

“We shall, Sir Speedy,” Livvy replied in the same tone.

Barry settled into her seat to watch as Oliver crawled quickly forward so that Livvy was close enough to hit Tommy with her toy arrows. This might take a while.

BARTHOLOMEADAMIANAALLEN – OLIVIAROBERTAALLEN – OLIVERJONASQUEEN

Their evening ended up being more entertaining than expected. Tommy managed to steal Oliver out into the city during Livvy’s afternoon nap, and they got themselves kidnapped after Oliver attempted to apologize to Laurel.

Detective Lance and his partner interviewed Tommy and Oliver in the parlor, while Thea and Barry eavesdropped from upstairs via Thea’s cell phone, which she’d conveniently left under the decorative ship on the side table.

“So that’s your story,” Detective Lance said dubiously. “A guy in a green hood flew in and single-handedly took out three armed kidnappers. I mean, who is he? Why would he do that?”

“I don’t know,” Oliver said in the same emotionally-distant voice he’d been using anytime something required more than simple emotions. He barely seemed able to process things anymore. “Find him and you can ask.”

Thea snorted at that. Barry looked up at her from where they were huddling around Barry’s phone.

“I bet Detective Lance loved that,” she whispered.

Barry snorted quietly in response. On mute or not, they weren’t willing to take any chances of being discovered.

“Yeah,” Detective Lance agreed sarcastically. “What about you? You see the Hood guy?”

“I saw…” Tommy said, “just movement. Everything blurry. I was kind of out of it.”

“Yeah,” the detective said. “It’s funny, isn’t it. One day back and already somebody’s gunning for you. Aren’t you popular?”

“He really hates Ollie,” Thea said.

“Oliver’s kind of responsible for the death of one of his daughters, the broken heart of another, and the dissolution of his marriage,” Barry pointed out. Thea gave her a look. “What?” Barry asked. “I’m not saying he’s right, just that it’s understandable. It’s certainly not right that they sent Lance to talk to them. Everyone knows he hates Oliver. And he doesn’t like Tommy much either.”

“Were you able to identify the men?” Moira cut in.

“Scrubbed identities, untraceable weapons,” Detective Hilton said. “These were pros.”
“Yeah, and they probably figured you’d pay a king’s ransom to get your boy back,” Lance said. “Or a Queen’s ransom, as it were. After all, a parent would do anything to keep their child safe.”

“I don’t find your tone appropriate, Detective,” Moira said. Her own tone was mild, but the warning was obvious.

“If Oliver can think of anything else, he’ll be in touch,” Walter said firmly. “Thank you, gentlemen, for coming.”

The sounds of shuffling came over the phone. They barely caught Detective Lance saying, “Your luck never seems to run out, does it?” before footsteps heralded the detectives’ exit from the room.

A moment later, Oliver’s voice came over the phone.

“You two really could have been more subtle,” he said before the call ended.

Barry and Thea glanced at each other guiltily.

Oliver appeared in the room a few minutes later, looking unimpressed.

“Really?”

“We were curious!” Thea protested.

Livvy, bless her, walked in before Oliver had a chance to reply.

“Are we going to watch *Narnia* now?” she asked.

Barry latched onto it.

“Yes, we are. Why don’t you take your Daddy down to the theater room, then go ask Grandma and Grandpa if they want to join us?

“Okay!”

Livvy managed to drag Oliver out of the room before he could say anything else.

“Think he’ll forget about it by the time the movie’s over?” Thea asked quietly.

“Not a chance,” Barry replied with a sigh before following her daughter out of the room.

The rest of the day – and the next – was spent watching movies, first the *Chronicles of Narnia*, then anything and everything Oliver had missed that Barry or Thea deemed important. This included the last four *Harry Potter* movies (and re-watching the first four), the Marvel movies, *Transformers*, and everything Disney had produced. Of course, when they watched certain movies depended on whether or not Livvy had gone to bed – Barry wasn’t willing to let her four-year-old, however mature of a four-year-old she may be, watch PG-13 movies.

By Barry and Thea’s unspoken agreement, they skipped *Twilight*.

It was on the second day of their movie-watching campaign that Barry gave up on waiting for Oliver to come to her. They were only going to be there two more days. She cornered Oliver in his room after breakfast. Moira was spending the morning with Livvy, so that wouldn’t be a problem. Thea was taking the opportunity to go shopping in Starling.

“Okay,” Barry said, plopping down on Oliver’s bed. “Spill.”
“About what?” Oliver attempted to deflect as he moved around to sit at his desk.

“You’re uncomfortable,” Barry said bluntly. “And I’m getting the feeling it’s about more than just returning home after five years on a not-so-deserted island. You seem almost…guilty about coming home.”

Oliver winced, almost imperceptibly, but Barry caught it.

“Why do you feel guilty, Oliver?” she asked quietly.

There was a long silence as Oliver buried his face in his hands.

“It was my fault,” he mumbled, so muffled that Barry barely caught it.

Barry stood from the bed and moved to perch on the desk next to Oliver. She laid a hand on his shoulder.

“Why would you say that?”

“I asked Sara to come on that trip. She died because of me. If I hadn’t decided I wanted to cheat on my girlfriend with her sister, she wouldn’t have been there. I wouldn’t have been there. My dad might have made it to the island.”

Barry’s blood went cold.

“Ollie…did your dad die when the boat went down?”

The man in front of slowly shook his head. Barry saw a single tear squeeze out of his closed eyes. That was all it took for Barry to wrap her arms around his shoulders and pull him in for an embrace. His arms wrapped around her waist in response as he rested his head against her stomach, finally letting out five years of tears.

“He…there were three of us that made it onto the lifeboat,” Oliver managed to say as tears flowed down his cheeks. Barry gently stroked his hair. “We were on that boat for days. Dad was giving up all our water to me, determined that I would survive. I…I wasn’t doing well. The sailor – God, I don’t even remember his name – he could tell. He had a knife, and I think he was getting close to using it. We were all struggling. Dad took advantage of the quiet, pulled out a gun, and shot the guy in the head. He fell off the lifeboat then. Dad – before he shot the guy, he told me to save my strength, that I could survive. He wanted me to make it home and right his wrongs. After he shot the guy, he just said, “Survive.” Then he shot himself in the head. My dad killed himself in front of me, Bare. He killed himself to try to save my life. How could he just kill himself?” Oliver asked, tears finally turning to sobs.

Barry wrapped her arms tighter around him as he cried. If the state of his body said anything, this was probably the first time he’d been safe to cry in five years. She hadn’t ever seen Oliver cry before – well, she had once, but that was because he did not function well after drinking an entire bottle of gin when already drunk, but he’d been crying about Jack and Rose’s doomed relationship that time, so she didn’t think it quite counted. She stroked his hair gently, murmuring platitudes in a low voice. She didn’t try to stop his tears. He needed this.

When the sobs died down into tears, Barry finally spoke.

“Your dad was a lot of things,” she said slowly. “He loved you, Oliver, but his parenting was never the best. Your parents – both of them – let you and Thea get away with anything without much discipline. As a parent myself now, I don’t think highly of their methods. But again,
speaking as a parent, I can tell you that your dad did what any parent would do in that situation – he sacrificed himself so that his child would live. You’ve only known about Livvy for a few days, but could you honestly tell me that you wouldn’t give everything to keep her safe?”

“I wouldn’t kill myself in front of her,” Oliver grumbled, but he looked a little more understanding. “But I found the island the next day. We could have both lived.”

Barry’s voice was gentle when she replied.

“Ollie, you told me yourself that he was giving up all the water to you. Your dad probably didn’t think he’d be fully conscious much longer, and he wanted to make sure that you would be focused on living, not keeping him alive. He did what any parent would do, even,” she said, her tone turning wry, “if his method sucked.”

Oliver let out a small, broken laugh at that.

“You’re probably right about the bad parenting thing. I…I don’t want to be like that.”

“You don’t have to be,” Barry said quietly. “Just start by loving her, and then go with putting her needs first. Not her wants, and that’s a very important distinction. You’re the adult. You’re a better judge at what’s good for her than she is.”

Oliver managed a small smile, though his cheeks were still wet.

“I think I might need you to tutor me in parenting.”

“Tutor?” Barry scoffed. “When you haven’t even started learning. No, Mr. Queen, I’ll be teaching Parenting 101, thank you very much. Lesson number one: don’t show fear. Children are manipulative little things, our daughter especially, and if she thinks she can use your worries against you, she will.”

Oliver looked surprised, but Barry plowed on before he could say anything.

“Lesson number two: know your Disney. We’ve got a little girl, so you need to be up-to-date on Disney Princess movies and every song in them. I know you had a thing for Belle when you were younger, but you need to know more about them than how hot they are.”

Oliver stared blankly at her.

“I’ll make you a chart,” Barry said seriously, trying very hard to keep the grin off her face. “Or I’ll have Thea do it. Lesson number three…”

She continued with her ‘lessons’ until Moira called them to join the rest of the family for lunch. Her advice – while always true – varied from the serious – “Livvy’s deathly afraid of electrical outlets. And lightning. She stuck a paper clip in an electrical outlet a few months ago and got shocked. In the grand scheme of things, it wasn’t bad, but she scared the bejesus out of both herself and me” – to the casual – “Don’t ever buy children cupcakes with brightly colored icing. It stains terribly. Blue is the worst. If you can, always go with white.”

Oliver followed along in a somewhat-shell-shocked daze. Barry wasn’t positive he caught half of what she said, but the point was to get him out of his funk, so it didn’t matter too much that he wasn’t listening (so long as he remembered Livvy was allergic to strawberries. That was important).

Lunch was Moira Queen’s version of child-friendly food – grilled cheese sandwiches, salad, and a
glass of wine for the adults (Livvy had chocolate milk. Barry was kind of jealous).

It was over lunch that Barry brought up something else she’d been thinking about.

“Oliver? What do you think about giving a short interview to a reporter?”

Conversation stopped as everyone turned to look at her. Barry wanted to duck her head and blush, but she refused to back down. She turned her eyes to meet Oliver’s.

“If you do a short, controlled interview, the press’ll calm down a lot. No matter how many statements Queen Consolidated releases, it’s you they want to see.”

“Barry’s right,” Walter pointed out.

“We can set up a specific set of questions for the reporter to ask, so that you wouldn’t have to deal with anything you were uncomfortable with,” Moira said. “Even just a short interview would put off the worst of the vultures.”

“Is there any way we could do it before Barry and Thea leave?” Oliver asked.

Walter and Moira exchanged looks.

“I have some contacts with the local media that we could use,” Walter said. “We could probably get someone over here tomorrow morning.”

“That would be great,” Oliver replied.

“I’ll get on it as soon as I return to the office,” Walter promised.

Sure enough, Oliver got an email with questions from a reporter with Channel 52. Barry put Brave on and sat Livvy in front of it before going to help Oliver sort through them.

“Wow,” she said as she read it over. “The conspiracy theories got really wild really quickly. She actually wants to ask if you were deified and worshiped by the island’s native inhabitants. And she’s asking if you had a tropical island harem. You really need to clarify the climate of that place.”

“Help? Please?” Oliver asked pitifully.

Barry laughed before sorting through the plethora of questions that the reporter apparently wanted to ask.

In the end, Barry and Thea resorted to the same method they’d used to eavesdrop on the police for Barry to listen to Oliver’s interview. It would be fine if a reporter saw Oliver’s little sister in his house. It would be another thing if a reporter saw a woman with a four-year-old child in Oliver’s house, especially a woman that excessive digging would reveal was Oliver’s ex-wife.

“I suppose I should start by asking, how are you feeling, Mr. Queen?” the reporter, who had introduced herself as Susan Williams, asked.

“It’s a little overwhelming, to be honest,” Oliver said congenially. “When I ended up on the island, it was a shock, and it’s a shock again to suddenly be back home, with my family and friends. My stomach’s a bit sensitive too, after five years without proper spices.”

“Would you mind telling us, from your perspective, what happened the night of the shipwreck?” Williams asked.
Oliver grimaced, and his eyes went far away.

“We’d been listening to the thunder for a while. I went to see my dad, and he’d just agreed to turn the yacht around, to get us out of the storm. He said that everything would be okay. I then went to check on Sara. We were sitting on the bed, talking, when suddenly the bed flipped and we went flying. I was stuck on one side of the room, Sara on the other, when she got sucked out into the water through a hole in the side of the boat. She was gone before I could blink. I ended up in the ocean a moment later – after five years of thinking about it, I still don’t know how. I was yelling for Sara, for my dad, when a lifeboat with a sailor on it dragged me aboard. We spent days on that lifeboat. I almost died before making it to the island. The sailor did.”

“I’m so sorry you had to witness that,” the reporter simpered. “What can you tell us about the island?”

“Well,” Oliver chuckled, “despite the conspiracy theories my sister takes great joy in reading out to me, I was not found and deified by the natives, nor did I have a harem of tropical island girls. The island wasn’t tropical. It was actually pretty cold. Exposure was just as much a threat to me as starvation.”

“What did you miss the most while on the island?”

“While I’m sure most people would expect the answer to be catering, or booze, or meaningless sex, the answer’s actually my family and friends. I missed the people I love, the people who love me, and being able to be with them again is the best thing I could have asked for.”

“Speaking of booze and meaningless sex, will you be returning to the party-boy lifestyle?”

Oliver laughed. “It’s been a long time since I’ve partied, and parties are probably a few too many people for me to be around all the time. That doesn’t mean I’m not going to party at all – Tommy Merlyn has promised to throw me an epic welcome home bash – but it’s not going to be a nightly thing anymore.”

“I’m sure that Starling City’s club scene will continue to miss you,” the reporter said. “Any plans for the near future?”

“Reconnect with my family, reconnect with my friends, catch up on all the stuff I’ve missed – we’re watching the last four Harry Potter movies today. Oh, and I need to get myself legally declared alive again. After that, I guess I’ll just see where life takes me.”

The interview wrapped up pretty quickly after that. Oliver spent the rest of the day obviously not thinking about the island. The moment someone tried to ask him about it after the interview, he claimed that he’d promised Livvy he’d play with her and he’d be back to talk later.

True to his word, Oliver did spend the rest of the day playing with Livvy. Barry and Thea helped at times, one of them always there because Oliver didn’t speak four-year-old.

Unfortunately, they had to leave early the next morning. Barry’d taken enough time off work, and they’d been there long enough that they couldn’t justify staying any longer. Oliver saw them off in the lobby.

“I wish I could take you to the airport,” he sighed, looking down at Livvy, who had firmly attached herself to his knees.

“You know you can’t,” Barry said with a sad smile. “Not while you’ve still got so much media attention on you.
“I’ll come visit,” Oliver said firmly. “I’m not – I don’t want to just drop in and out of Livvy’s life.”

“We can Skype?” Barry offered.

Oliver frowned.

“It’s a video-conferencing system,” Barry explained. “It’s pretty easy to set up. You can see Livvy that way every night.”

“Sounds good,” Oliver said, looking relieved. “What time?”

“Seven my time? Five for you. That ought to be early enough that it never interferes with dinner or party plans,” Barry offered.

“Sounds good,” Oliver said. He reached down and wrapped Livvy in a tight hug.

“I’ll miss you, Sparky.”

“I’ll miss you too, Daddy,” Livvy said, her bottom lip quivering. “But we can talk! Every night.”

“Every night,” Oliver said solemnly. “If something comes up that I’ll miss our Skype chat, I’ll let your mom know.”

“’Kay, Daddy,” Livvy said, snuggling into their hug.

As sweet as they looked, Barry did not want to miss their flight. It was a bit easier to take a later train than a later flight, especially when you had first class tickets.

“Livvy, we’ve got to go,” she said gently.

“Do we haaave to?” Livvy whined.

“If we don’t go home to Central, how are we supposed to see Poppa Joe and Aunt Iris again?” Barry asked, leaning down and picking Livvy up. She stepped away a bit as Oliver leaned in to hug his sister and exchange a few words with her.

“They could visit?” Livvy offered tentatively.

“But what about all your kindergarten friends and your teachers and Mommy’s work friends?” Barry asked gently.

Livvy sighed.

“I guess we have to go home. But Daddy’s going to visit?” she asked hopefully, looking over to Oliver and Thea.

“Definitely,” Oliver said.

He walked over and wrapped both Livvy and Barry in a hug.

“I’ll miss you both,” he said. “Have a safe flight.”

They piled into the car, and Livvy waved toward the upstairs window where they could see Oliver watching them go.
The first time Oliver called, it was just after their flight landed in Central. Barry had barely made it into the car after loading their luggage in the trunk while Thea got Livvy - who had fallen asleep within ten minutes of takeoff and remained that way now - into her car seat.

“Hello?” Barry answered.

“She got me a bodyguard,” Oliver said, sounding frustrated. “I don’t need a bodyguard.”

“Oliver, she’s just worried. You just got kidnapped a few days ago, after five years of being presumed dead. What would you do if Livvy got kidnapped?”

There was a short silence.

“Hire a bunch of bodyguards,” Oliver said grudgingly.

“See? There you go. Besides, you ditched him already, didn’t you?”

“…Yes.”

Barry laughed.

“I’m sure he won’t be too much of a problem. Hey, gotta go, we’re about to go through a tunnel. You’re still Skyping Livvy tonight?”


Barry laughed again.

“See you then. Bye.”

“Bye.”

Joe waited half a second after she hung up before asking, “So that was Oliver Queen?”

“Yep.”

"He didn't wait long before calling."

Barry was quiet for a moment before saying, "There have always been only two people who could talk sense into Oliver: Laurel Lance and me. Laurel's currently not talking to Oliver."

"Sara's sister Laurel?" Joe asked.

"That's the one," Barry said with a sigh. "God, everything with her is going to be such a mess when she finds out about Livvy. I like Laurel. She's the only person who will talk about Sara with..."
"I thought none of Sara's family knew she was bi?" Joe asked as he got off the highway to head towards their neighborhood.

"They don't," Barry said. "As far as any of the Lances know, I was just Sara's roommate. Only Oliver and Tommy knew. And Thea, of course," she added, jerking her chin towards the teenager sitting behind her.

"So what was Mr. Queen calling about?" Joe asked.

"His mom hired a bodyguard for him. Oliver's annoyed," Barry reported.

"I can understand being a protective parent," Joe replied, looking over at her. "If anything happened to you or Iris, I'd have the entire force following you around."

"I'm surprised Mom hasn't tried to put a bodyguard on me," Thea put in from the backseat.

"Your greatest defense is your anonymity, and Moira knows that," Barry said. "As long as you're here, where no one knows where you are, where no one knows who you are, you're safe."

"You're all safe," Joe said. "You were extra careful, going to and from the airport?"

"We left early and took a roundabout route," Barry confirmed. "No followers, either time. There's no reason anyone should connect us to Oliver."

"If someone's after him, they might go after you and Livvy," Joe pointed out.

"I know," Barry said seriously. "But anonymity is our greatest defense, and the only thing connecting me to Oliver directly is a few parties we went to together in college. Anyone can look up that Laurel and I were roommates in college, just as they can find that Sara and I were roommates at one point. And everyone knew that Oliver and Laurel were dating. It's not a surprise that we were friends."

"If someone does find out, we'll keep you safe," Joe said comfortably as they pulled into the driveway of Barry's house.

"Did you finish all your homework?" Barry asked Thea as she got out of the car and moved around to the trunk to get their luggage. Since they all had plenty of clothes (and toys, for Livvy) at the Queen home, they had been able to pack light.

"Everything but The Great Gatsby," the teenager said as she carefully got Livvy - who was still asleep - out of the car. The car seat was the one that stayed in Joe's car for when he picked the girl up. Barry and Thea both had other car seats in their own cars.

"It's a good book," Barry argued quietly.

"I hate it so far," Thea said bluntly. "It's just like all those parties Mom dragged me to as a kid. I know too many people who act like those people to enjoy the book."

"See you at work tomorrow, Joe," Barry said through the window.

"Try not to be late," Joe replied before driving down the street to his own home.

The next time Oliver called her (besides his nightly Skype dates with Livvy), it was only a few hours before his welcome home bash.
“I think Tommy went overboard,” Oliver began the call. “There’s a couple hundred people at this party, and I don’t know anyone but Tommy. I haven’t even made my grand entrance yet and I already want to leave.”

“Not feeling the party scene so much anymore?” Barry asked with a cheeky grin, even though she knew Oliver couldn’t see it.

“This many people is setting off nerves I didn’t know I had,” Oliver grumbled.

“You’re not going to want to hear this, but you need to fake it ‘til you make it at the moment,” Barry said. “This party may be in your name, but it’s not really for you. It’s for Tommy to really know that he’s got his best friend back.”

“I’m not the same Oliver I was before.”

“I know. And Tommy’ll figure it out too. But right now he just needs to be sure you’re really here, and for him, that’s throwing a big party. Did you know he flew out to Hong Kong because he thought you might be there?”

“Really?”

“Yeah, there was a rumor a couple years ago. Tommy took the Merlyn jet and flew out. His dad was furious. But Tommy needed to know if you were alive. And now you are, and he’s celebrating the way he knows how: with a massive, blowout party.”

“I’ll be surprised if the police don’t show up,” Oliver said. “We’re in the middle of downtown, and I know Detective Lance would just love to slap a fine on Tommy or me.”

“Well, if the police shut it down, then you’ll get to leave sooner,” Barry said optimistically. “Try to enjoy it, Ollie. Call me if you need me. I’ve got no plans for the night except watching reruns of Golden Girls.”

“That’s the one you and Sara liked laughing over, right?” Oliver asked, his voice said.

Barry smiled wistfully at the reminder. She and Sara had been dormmates as well as girlfriends for Sara’s first and Barry’s last year at Starling University. They’d stayed up way too late on multiple occasions laughing over Golden Girls reruns.

“That’s the one,” she said. “Go. Have fun at your party.”

“Bye, Bare.”

“Bye, Ollie.”

Barry ended up being the one to call Oliver the next day, after she’d heard the rumors about what happened in Starling.

“Barry? Is something wrong?”

“I heard about the guy in the green hood attacking some millionaire across the street from your party,” she opened without preamble.

“How’d you hear about that already?” Oliver asked, sounding impressed.

“Detective Russell’s younger brother is a detective with the SCPD,” Barry reported. “The cops were gossiping about it this morning. Joe made sure I heard about it. He knew I’d want to check
“I’m all good,” Oliver said. “Not too hungover, and while the police did interrupt the party, they didn’t stay long once they realized the hood guy wasn’t there.”

“You run into Detective Lance?”

“Unfortunately. He started yelling about Sara. His partner had to drag him off,” Oliver said.

“How’d the party go after that?” Barry asked, holding her phone to her ear with her shoulder as she started one of the tests for her most recent case.

“It started back up pretty easy. Everyone was drunk enough that all we had to do was turn the music back up. So, how’s work?”

“Nothing to stressful,” Barry said. “I came in on Saturday to make inroads on my back-pile, so today hasn’t been nearly as bad as it could have been.”

“Livvy and Thea are back at school?”

“Yep. And I’m sure you’ll hear all about it when you Skype Livvy tonight.”

“I’m never going to forget with you reminding me, am I?”

“Never,” Barry promised.

“Allen!” a voice yelled from down the hall. “Is that evidence done yet?”

“Coming!” Barry yelled back. “Sorry, Oliver, I’ve got to get back to work. See you tonight?”


“Bye.”

BARTHOLOMEADAMIANAALLEN – OLIVERJONASQUEEN – OLIVIAROBERTAALLEN

“Mom and Walter want me to start working at Queen Consolidated,” was the first thing Barry heard when she picked up the call.

Barry blinked.

“Hold on a moment.” She looked over at the other woman on the playground bench. “Hey, Sharon, would you mind keeping an eye on Livvy while I take this?”

“Go ahead,” the woman said. “I’ll make sure nothing gets out of hand between Princess Rapunzel and Princess Merida.”

Barry flashed a smile. “Thanks.”

She got up and walked a ways away, far enough that they wouldn’t be casually overheard.

“Wanna start this over?” she said into the phone.

“Where are you? Who’s watching Livvy?” Oliver pressed.

“We’re at the playground. Livvy’s best friend Margaret’s mom is watching Livvy and her daughter play princesses,” Barry said calmly. “What’s going on with your mom and Queen
Consolidated?”

Oliver heaved a sigh.

“They want me to take my place as Robert Queen’s son. Take my position at the company. Five years on an island and they somehow think I got my MBA.”

“You’re an adult,” Barry pointed out. “You can say no.”

“Laurel said the same thing,” Oliver said. “I tried that. They didn’t listen. Mom just seems to think that now that I’m back, she can set up her perfect, little family and I’ll just fall in line. But… Barry, I can’t work in that building.”

“Because of your dad?”

Oliver sighed.

“Yeah. I watched my father kill himself. I buried his body myself. You’ve seen the tombstones here, I suppose?”

“They were very nice tombstones,” Barry said loyally. “I suppose yours is being removed?”

“Probably. But my dad’s…his real tombstones was just a pile of rocks. Because that’s all I could give him. But here he’s got this four-foot slab of marble,” Oliver said. “Thea told me she used to go talk to my tombstone, before she moved in with you and Livvy.”

“That house was strangling her,” Barry sighed. “After Livvy was born, she came to Central almost every weekend, because she had to get out of that house. If it hadn’t been for us, she would have gone out and gotten drunk or high every night. There were a few times she did. It’s why I insisted on her staying with us for spring break. I was hoping we could help detox her.”

“She was twelve,” Oliver said blankly.

“She was completely and utterly alone,” Barry said. “Moira…checked out, for a while. Livvy being born gave her something to live for, but it took Walter almost dragging her out of bed to really get her out of her depression. I don’t think Moira really noticed how often Thea was gone back then.”

“But she notices every time I go outside,” Oliver groaned. “She wants me constantly where she can watch me.”

“Parents freak out after they lose their children, especially after they get them back,” Barry said comfortingly. “Livvy wandered out of my sight for a few minutes at an amusement park once and I didn’t let her leave my sight for days afterwards.”

“Barry, I can’t work in that building,” Oliver said, almost pleadingly.

“Do you have a plan for what else you would do in the meantime?” Barry asked. “Because you don’t seem like you’re going back to sleeping all day and partying all night, not if your reaction to your welcome home bash says anything.”

“I was considering opening a nightclub in my dad’s old factory in the Glades,” Oliver admitted. “I’m kind of familiar with nightclubs, and it would give me some insight into the whole business-running thing on a smaller scale than Queen Consolidated.”
“So tell your mom that,” Barry prompted. “Tell her and Walter together, in private. You might have to tell them why you can’t work there. I know you don’t want to, but she needs to hear it.” She was quiet for a moment. “If you died to save Livvy, I’d feel a little better than just knowing you died in a random boat crash.”

Oliver was silent for a long moment.

“You really think I should tell them?”

Barry’s heart broke at how small Oliver’s voice was.

“I do,” she said. “But I don’t think Thea needs to know.”

“I didn’t want to tell her anything,” Oliver admitted. “It’s hard to reconnect with my sister after five years away, especially when she’s in another city, but she’s happy there. I can tell. She wouldn’t be happy here. I’m – I’m damaged.”

“That doesn’t mean you’re worth any less,” Barry said gently. “Damaged people are often the most beautiful, because you can see through all the cracks to the souls beneath.”

She heard Oliver bite back a chuckle.

“I missed you, Barry,” he said fondly. “You always see the good in everyone.”

“I missed you too,” Barry replied, “because as much of a jerk as you like to portray yourself, you’ve always had a heart of gold.”

“In the spirit of full disclosure, I should probably tell you that I got attacked by the Chinese Triads while I was at Laurel’s last night,” Oliver said abruptly. “We’re both fine, though my bodyguard’s hand got hurt.”

“Oh my God, Oliver, why did you have the Chinese Triads after you?” Barry exclaimed.

“I didn’t! They were after Laurel because she was prosecuting one of their lackeys,” Oliver protested. “But the guy confessed, so now it’s the DA’s job and not Laurel’s.”

Barry shook her head fondly.

“I guess we all tried to save the world in our own ways. I became a CSI, Laurel became a lawyer, and Tommy runs his mom’s charities.”

“Really?” Oliver asked in surprise.

“Yep. He doesn’t do much except for show up and put his name on things. The charities were pretty much self-sufficient, since Mr. Merlyn doesn’t do much with them besides throw money at them.”

“Speak of the devil and he shall appear,” Oliver quipped. “Tommy’s calling.”

“Go reassure your best friend you’re still alive and in one piece,” Barry laughed. “And talk to Moira and Walter!”

“Yes, ma’am,” Oliver said. “Talk to you later.”

“Bye.”
Several hours later, Barry received a text from Oliver. It simply read, *It worked. Thanks.*

Three days after that, two heavy packages arrived at the precinct for her, probably because they had to be signed for, one addressed to her and the other to Livvy. There was no return address, but Barry recognized the familiar way Oliver double-looped the Ls in 'Allen', though the rest of his handwriting had changed. After five years on an island without cause to write, especially considering some of the wounds that had to still be paining him, it was only to be expected.

She sent him a text anyway.

*These overweight packages I received are from you, right?*

He simply replied, *Don't worry. They're safe.*

She waited until she, Livvy, and Thea were all home before bringing them out.

"Livvy, someone sent you a present," she called.

Thea looked up from the breakfast table where she was working on her math homework.

"Who?" she asked curiously.

"Your brother," Barry replied. "There's one for me and one for Livvy, and they're ridiculously heavy. Could you help her while I open mine?"

"Sure," Thea replied, getting up from the table just as Livvy ran into the room.

"Where's my present?" she demanded.

"Olivia, how do we ask for things?" Barry asked warningly.

The four-year-old attempted to look contrite.

"Mommy, may I please have my present?"

"Yes, you may," Barry replied calmly. "Auntie Thea is going to help you get it open; it's still in the box the mailman brought it in."

Livvy's was the slightly bigger box of the two, but Thea still managed to get it open before Barry managed hers.

"It's a rock," Livvy said disappointedly, even as Barry opened up her own package.

Sure enough, it was a rather large piece of marble - Barry would hesitate to call it a rock, since it was very obviously carved into the rectangular shape it held - six inches wide, six thick, and two tall. The word *light* was carved into it.

"Mine says 'light'," Barry said, looking over at Thea. "Does Livvy's say anything?"

Thea looked up, and Barry was surprised to see the tears in her eyes. Barry immediately set her rock down and moved over to the teen.

"What's wrong, Thea?" she asked, resting her hand on her ward's shoulder.

"Livvy's...Livvy's says..." Thea tried to say, but ended up just turning the box so that Barry could read the large QUEEN written on the rock, which was a bit wider than Barry's, which probably
accounted for the additional weight.

"It's from Oliver's tombstone," Thea said softly as a tear trickled down her face. "He told me that he was going to have it removed now that he was legally dead, but he didn't mention that he was going to get it broken up. He sent Livvy our last name. I guess he was trying to say that he sees her as a Queen, even if it's not her last name. And 'light' is from the tombstone too."

"The inscription," Barry realized. "It said his 'light was dimmed far too soon.'"

"I guess he's saying he sees you as his light," Thea offered.

"No," Barry said exasperatedly. "He's teasing me."

"How so?"

"Mommy, can I go play?" Livvy asked.

"Go ahead, sweetie. We'll figure out where to put your new rock later," Barry told her daughter. "And you'll have to remember to say thank you to Daddy when he calls tonight."

Livvy squirmed out of Thea's lap and ran out of the room. Barry turned her attention back to Thea.

"During our six months of accidental marriage, Oliver would occasionally try to be romantic. I'm not sure if you remember, but he's absolutely terrible at it. He and Tommy never figured out romance since anyone they wanted to sleep with was already available for them. But he would try to be romantic, and on one occasion, he found out that I have two middle names," Barry explained.

"Really?" Thea asked. "I know Ollie and I both do, and I know Livvy does, but I didn't realize you did as well."

"I don't mention it much," Barry confessed. "My name is long enough as it is, without adding a second middle name. But yes, two middle names. Damiana for my grandfather, and Lumina, which comes from the Latin word for light. Oliver found out about that and decided that he would write poetry for me and refer to me as the 'beautiful light' throughout the entirety of it. He eventually read it to me too. He was so proud of it - four pages of rhyming couplets. It was horrific, and I nearly burned it once we were well and truly divorced. But after that, he'd figure out light-themed nicknames. I think his favorite was 'a bright light of enthusiasm.'"

"Four pages of rhyming couplets?" Thea repeated.

"It started with, 'Oh beautiful Barry, you look like a fairy,' and went downhill from there," Barry deadpanned.

"Please tell me you still have a copy of this," Thea nearly begged, the grin of anticipated mischief on her face widening.

"I do, but it's buried in the same deep, dark hole as my Vegas marriage license and the birth certificate with Livvy's father filled in," Barry told her. "Sorry to burst your bubble."

Thea sighed dramatically.

"Oh well. At least I have two lines to torment my brother with."

"Go back to your calculus, you little scamp," Barry ordered with a smile before going to pick up the two rocks that were apparently making their place in her house. She hefted them slightly. Livvy's
would probably make its home in her room, but Barry was relatively certain that hers would make a nice paperweight in her lab. She could always throw it at the detectives if they messed up her samples too many times.

BARTHOLOMEADAMIANAALLEN – OLIVERJONASQUEEN – OLIVIAROBERTAALLEN

Barry and Thea saw the announcement about the shooting at the UNIDAC Industries auction while watching the evening news. Thankfully, Livvy was already in bed.

“Mom and Walter and Oliver were supposed to be there;” Thea said in horror.

“You call your mom, I’ll call Oliver,” Barry said as she pulled out her cell phone and moved to the other side of the room. Oliver’s new number was on speed dial, so it only took half a second to call.

The phone rang. And rang. And rang, before finally going into voicemail. It was just a beep. Oliver apparently hadn’t figured out how to set up the voicemail properly.”

“Hey, it’s me,” Barry said. “Thea and I heard about the UNIDAC auction shooting on the news. Please call me when you get this. We’re worried.”

Thea was still on the phone when she hung up, but moved the microphone away from her face to say, “Mom and Walter are okay. Detective Lance saved Walter, but Oliver sent his bodyguard to get Mom out. Neither of them has been seen since.”

Before Barry could reply, her phone rang.

“Oliver,” she answered in relief. “Where have you been? Everyone’s worried.”

“Sorry, I turned my phone on silent before the auction. I had to take my bodyguard to the hospital; he got nicked by a bullet and I wanted him to get it checked out,” the man said.

“Oliver’s fine, he went with his bodyguard to the hospital,” Barry told Thea quickly, who nodded and relayed the information to her mother.

“Will you be long?” Barry asked. “Moira and Walter are worried about you.”

“It shouldn’t be too much longer,” Oliver said. “I’ve just dropped him off, and I’ll head home now.”

Barry sighed in relief. “Good to hear. Please, please don’t leave your phone on silent. Ever. Being missing and presumed dead for five years really played havoc on all of our nerves in regards to you.”

“Sorry,” Oliver said after a bit. “How are you and Thea and Livvy today? Since I missed the Skype call for the auction.”

“We’re good. Livvy’s class got to have two recesses since it was Friday. Thea’s school had a fire drill that allowed her to not take a math test. I had the usual Friday crime spree to deal with. Nothing too interesting.”

“Can I call tomorrow morning to make up for it?” Oliver asked.

“I’ll be working a half-day, but Thea will be home,” Barry said. “Just let her know beforehand. And call your mom, please.”
“I will. Bye.”

“Bye.”

The next surprise phone call was only five days later. This time, it was Moira. She sounded like she’d been crying.

“Barry, Oliver’s been arrested. For murder.”
Chapter Summary

The trio didn't arrive in Starling City until after Oliver had been released on bail. Oliver met them in the foyer.

"Daddy!" Livvy exclaimed, wriggling out of Barry's arms so she could run across the floor to her father, who immediately scooped her up into a hug.

"It's good to see you, Sparky," Oliver said, placing a kiss on her forehead. "I've missed you."

"I missed you too, Daddy!"

Oliver shifted Livvy to one arm so he could reach out and hug Thea and then Barry with the other.

"So Sparky, how do you feel about Candyland?" he asked the child in his arms.

"I love Candyland!"

"Great! I've already got it set up in the playroom," Oliver exclaimed.

Livvy squirmed, and Oliver put her down so she could run and grab Barry and Thea's hands.

"Mommy! Auntie Thea! C'mon! It's Candyland!"

"Just one game, Livvy," Barry cautioned. "Then Auntie Thea and I need to talk to Daddy."

Somehow one game became three, and then two games of Sorry! and one of Trouble, before moving on to Pretty Pretty Princess. Oliver begged out of that one, and was replaced by Moira while he stepped out for a work meeting. By dinner time, Barry and Thea still hadn't managed to talk to Oliver one-on-one.

Barry cornered Oliver while Thea was taking care of Livvy's bath.

"Ollie, talk to me," she demanded. "You're being reckless with this."

"Why does everyone think I'm being reckless?" Oliver asked, closing his laptop and seemingly giving her his full attention.

"Because that seems to be how you're acting? Oliver, please, just explain your thought process to me."

Oliver sighed.

"What do you want to know?" he asked resignedly.

"Why Laurel? Your ex-girlfriend and the prosecuting officer's daughter does not seem to be the wisest choice for a defense lawyer. Especially since she specializes in prosecuting scumbag rich people," Barry pointed out.
"Are you saying I'm a scumbag rich person?" Oliver asked with a slight smirk.


"Bad decisions?" Oliver asked with mock affront. "Me?"

Barry raised a finger.

"One: getting so drunk in Vegas that you ended up married to a girl you'd only met once before Vegas. Two: every time you've been arrested before this one. Three: having a threesome with your girlfriend's sister and her girlfriend, who also happens to be your ex-wife, with expired condoms. Four: going on that yacht trip."

Oliver winced.

"I see what you mean."

"Thought process?" Barry prompted.

Oliver sighed.

"Pretty much all of Detective Lance's evidence is circumstantial. He's just gunning for me so hard because he hates me and he hates the vigilante. I wanted Laurel as my attorney because she's the only person who might be able to get through to Detective Lance."

Barry was quiet for a moment.

"Did you know that losing Sara broke Quentin and Dinah's marriage?" she asked.

Oliver jerked.

"What?"

Barry sighed.

"After they lost Sara, Quentin threw himself into work. When he wasn't working, he was drinking. Between that and losing Sara to begin with, Dinah couldn't take it anymore. They divorced. Dinah moved to Central City. We get lunch every few months. But everything in his life that's gone wrong...Quentin lays the blame on you, because it's easier than blaming himself. At least that's how Laurel explained it to me," Barry said.

"You and Laurel talk?" Oliver asked in surprise.

"On and off. We talk about Sara, mostly. No one else will, for the most part. I haven't..." Barry too a deep breath. "Laurel doesn't know about Livvy, about what I did."

"You mean she doesn't know you agreed to a threesome with your girlfriend and your ex-husband slash sex buddy, which resulted in a baby fathered by her boyfriend?" Oliver asked.

"If we're putting things bluntly," Barry said irritably. "You distracted me again."

Before Barry could return to their previous conversation, Livvy came running in, wet hair dripping down the back of her Merida nightgown, mouth set in the position that meant she was being stubborn.
"Mommy! Auntie Thea says I have to dry my hair. I don't want to dry my hair. I want to braid it and leave it wet and then it'll dry in curls like Merida's," she burst out in one long ramble.

"Sweetie, I'm afraid people in our family tend to have straight hair, whether or not we have braids when it's wet or not. Plus, if you leave your hair wet, you'll get sick, and if you get sick, then you can't play with Daddy while we're visiting."

Livvy pouted.

"We can always play Brave tomorrow," Oliver offered. "We can get Tommy to be the bear. I'll be the king, your mom can be the queen, and you can be Merida."

Livvy thought about that.

"Okay," she said. "As long as Uncle Tommy's a good Mordu. Auntie Thea tries, but she's not very good."

She reached her arms out to Oliver.

"Will you come read my story chapter?"

"Are we still on The Secret Garden?" Oliver asked Barry in a side whisper as he carried Livvy to her room.


"I don't know anything about A Little Princess."

"Doesn't matter. Just read the chapter."

When Livvy was safely tucked into bed and Barry, Thea, and Oliver arrayed around her, Oliver opened the book Barry handed him and began to read.

"But it was a perilous thing for Ermengarde and Lottie to make pilgrimages to the attic..."

The story ended the way it always did: Livvy begged for another, Barry refused, and all three adults kissed the child good night and left her to sleep.

BARTHOLOMEADAMIANAALLEN - OLIVERJONASQUEEN - OLIVIAROBERTAALLEN

Barry spent a good portion of the next day overseeing the set-up for Oliver's ill-planned party. Oliver was supposed to be doing it himself, but he had been taken to the police station by Laurel relatively early in the day after the District Attorney called. Thea had been watching Livvy, but ended up setting her up with Brave before coming outside to think, as she had irritably told Barry when the woman asked.

"Hey, Speedy," Barry heard Oliver say from the house. She was further out into the yard, her back to the door, while Thea was sitting in a chair on the pool deck. "One of the workers left a keg too far from the bar. Can you ask them to move it? Please? I got the ankle thingy - I don't want to set off a SWAT invasion."

Barry could practically hear the dirty look Thea was giving him.

"Hey," Oliver said. "All this stuff, it's gonna be fine, I promise."

"Yeah, well, when you and Dad left on the yacht you promised me I'd see you in a few days," Thea
"said sarcastically. "Which didn't happen."

"This is different than that," Oliver said. "I didn't do any of this stuff. You know that. Right?"

"Mom says you're out all the time. You've got a bunch of scars, and since you've been back, you've been acting really weird."

"None of this makes me some Robin Hood-wannabe," Oliver pointed out.

"And you gave me this," Thea said. Barry turned to see her holding up the arrowhead - *hozen*, Oliver had called it - that he had brought back for her. She'd spent the entire flight turning it over in her hands. "I mean, it's an arrowhead."

"Oh man," she saw Oliver sigh. Barry couldn't hear him from this distance, but it was easy enough to guess what he'd say. He still hadn't gotten out of the habit of censoring his language around Thea, even though she was seventeen now. "Thea, I bought that in the gift shop of the Beijing airport. Now I'm sort of happy I didn't by you the shot glass with the panda on it, 'cause then you'd be worried I was Panda-Man."

Thea smothered a laugh.

"I know...I knew you couldn't be this...person. I-I just, I can't lose you again."

"Deal," Oliver said.

Thea got up from her chair and gave her brother a hug before heading over to Barry.

"I'll take care of the supervision," the younger woman said. "You should go get Ollie to watch Livvy's favorite movie with her."

"It should be almost over by now," Barry replied. "But I have been meaning to introduce Livvy to *Star Wars*."

"Ollie loved *Star Wars* when he was younger," Thea said with a smile.

"I know," Barry replied. "He took me as his date to the premiere of *Revenge of the Sith*. We got to meet Hayden Christiansen, Natalie Portman, and Ewan McGregor."

"That sounds amazing," Thea said with a smile. "I'm sure he'd be pleased to be there when Livvy first gets to see it."

"Do you want to come?" Barry asked.

Thea patted Barry's arm.

"Barry, I may enjoy *Star Wars* sometimes, but I'm not as much of a nerd as you and my brother are. I'm good."

Barry headed back inside to Oliver to suggest the plan. After all, if she spent the afternoon watching one of her favorite movie series with him, she might be less inclined to murder him for abandoning her to the party set-up.

Livvy was ridiculously excited to finally get to see *Star Wars* (she'd been playing with the toys Barry had gotten for years), and Thea was correct in thinking that Oliver would be equally excited.

Unfortunately, they'd just started *The Empire Strikes Back* (because Barry only considered Livvy
old enough for the prequels - she wasn't even five yet) when a police car arrived to take Oliver back to the station for his polygraph results. Barry waited anxiously for his return, which happened around the time the Millennium Falcon got to Cloud City. He insisted they finish the movie before telling her what happened.

The news that Oliver passed the polygraph was good, the news that Detective Lance refused to drop the case less so. Nevertheless, the party went on that night. It was everything that the first party hosted by Oliver Queen in five years should be.

Livvy was safely ensconced in her bed with earmuffs on, Raisa on call if she needed anything. Walter had stayed late at the office. Moira had left the house, though Barry wasn't quite sure where. Barry and Thea had gone shopping that afternoon and were now dressed to the nines for the prison party, Barry in orange and Thea in black and white stripes.

The music was pounding and drinks were flowing freely by the time Oliver exited the house and climbed on the center platform, cutting off the music with a wave of his hand.

"Hi everybody!" he greeted.

Everyone cheered.
"I'm very touched that you came to celebrate with me before I am sent up the river."

The crowd booed.

"The closest neighbors are six miles away, so don't worry about the noise. Actually, on second thought, let's wake those losers up!"

The crowd cheered again as Oliver got off the stage and the music restarted. Barry began making her way over to him, but lost him quickly in the crowd. After checking up on Thea, and then going inside to check in Livvy, she found him on his way upstairs with Laurel.

"Barry?" Laurel asked in surprise.

"Laurel!" Barry exclaimed at the sight of her ex-roommate. "It's good to see you! You don't look like you're here for the party..." she said, looking over at Oliver.

"Laurel asked for a short meeting to go over some legalities," Oliver said smoothly. "We were just headed upstairs."

Barry made a split-second decision.

"Why don't I come with you? I'm sure the booze isn't going anywhere."

"It's a lawyer-client meeting," Laurel said apologetically.

Barry smiled sadly at them.

"I'm not saying this to hurt either of you, but the last time you two were alone in Oliver's bedroom, you were still dating and you had a talk about commitment that resulted in Oliver going on a yacht trip. I think you need a buffer."

"You are probably right," Oliver admitted. "Thank you, Barry. For chaperoning."

All three headed up the stairs and into Oliver's room. Barry headed straight for Oliver's desk chair and pulled out the Slinky she knew he kept in one of his desk drawers for when he got bored. Without a glance at the other two, she said, "Ignore me. I'm not here."

Laurel sighed and looked at Oliver.

"Listen, I just wanted to come by and apologize for my father's behavior today, during the polygraph."

Oliver shook his head.

"You don't have to apologize for him," he said. "He has the right to feel...any way he wants."

"It wasn't just Sara, Ollie," Laurel said hesitantly.

Oliver nodded.

"Barry told me about your mom."

Laurel sighed again.

"Dad ran to the law, and I followed. But Mom couldn't. So she left him...left us." She took a step closer. "Look, I'm not trying to tell you this to make you feel bad, or worse, I just, I really want you
to understand him," she said earnestly.

Oliver shook his head in disbelief.

"Why don't you hate me? You should."

"I did," Laurel admitted quietly. "For so long, I did, Ollie. But after today I realized that I was so focused on what happened to my family that I didn't stop to wonder what could have happened to you. I didn't know about the torture, or your scars. What happened to you on that island was far more than you deserved. And I was wrong, that I didn't ask you before, but I'm asking you now. I need to know. I need to see."

"Are you sure?" Oliver asked.

"Yes," Laurel said, in barely a whisper.

Oliver looked over at Barry.

"Go ahead," she said quietly. "I've seen the medical files. Moira consulted me as soon as she got them from China."

Oliver slowly unbuttoned his denim 'prison' shirt, revealing the scars all over his chest. Even having seen the file, it was still shocking to see in person. It took all Barry had to keep quiet.

"How did you survive this?" Laurel asked.

"There were times I wanted to die," Oliver admitted. "In the end, there was something I wanted more. I wanted to come home."

Laurel and Oliver started leaning in toward each other. Barry let out a cough. Laurel jerked away, looking down before brushing past Oliver and heading towards the door.

"Laurel, you don't have to..." Oliver tried to say even as the woman in question close the door. "...go," he finished half-heartedly. He looked over at Barry.

"You said yourself that you didn't need to jump right back into things with Laurel," Barry reminded gently. "Kissing her then, when she's emotional and still unsure about her feelings for you...it just would have made things worse."

Oliver sighed. "You're right, as always."

Oliver's phone chose that moment to ring.

"Hold on," he said. "I have to take this."

Barry waved dismissively at him and went back to playing with the Slinky.

She could hear the other person on the line talking before there was a knock at the door.

"Hold on," Oliver told the person. "Yeah?" he called.

"Mr. Queen, if you're entertaining guests upstairs, should I have some drinks sent up?" one of the waiters called.

"No, we're on our way back down," Oliver called back, standing up. He offered a hand to help Barry out of her chair, which she took after setting the Slinky on the desk.
"Good job," Oliver said into the phone as he walked over to the door, Barry just behind him. "Now get back here."

Oliver opened the door, only to be met by a man with a gun.

"Get down!" he yelled, pushing Barry out of the way as he punched the man in the face with the other hand.

Barry yelped as she fell, her ankle twisting uncomfortably in her sky-high heels. She felt something pop.

She pushed herself off the floor long enough to see Oliver knock the gun out of the assassin's hand before throwing him over the couch. She tried to get up to grab the gun, but cried out in pain as she put weight on her injured ankle. Her cry distracted Oliver, and he looked over long enough for the assassin to grab his gun. He'd just pointed it at Oliver when as gunshot went off and the assassin crumpled to the floor.

"Detective Lance," Barry said in relief.

Oliver merely nodded to the man before rushing over to Barry.

"Are you okay, did he hurt you?" he fretted, offering her a hand.

"I twisted my ankle when I fell," Barry said, managing to hop up onto one foot with his help. She almost fell over again, as five-inch heels were not conducive to standing on one foot. "It's probably sprained."

"Barry Allen?" Detective Lance asked in shock. "What are you doing with this clown?"

"Oliver and I were friends before Sara and I were roommates," Barry reminded the man. "When I heard he might be going to prison, I figured we should come out and say hi before we had to do so through prison glass."

The detective either didn't remember that her father was in prison or was tactful enough not to comment that she ought to be used to such things.

"Ollie!" Thea yelled as she rushed into the room. "What - ack!" she screamed as she saw the dead body.

"Someone tried to kill me," Oliver said bluntly. "Go tell everyone to clear out. I'm going to help Barry downstairs, and then we'll call Mom and Walter."

BARTHOLOMEA

By the time they made it to the living room, Thea and Tommy had managed to banish all the guests from the grounds. Barry and Oliver ended up side-by-side on the couch, Barry with her ankle resting on the coffee table and Oliver with a bag of ice on his leg where the assassin had gotten a good hit in. Thea sat on Barry's other side, resting a hand on her shoulder, while Tommy took an armchair. Detective Lance hovered on the other side of the room, on the phone with someone back at the police station. A team had already come by to collect the corpse.

"How did you know I was in trouble?" Oliver asked after the detective hung up.

"When the guy was fighting you, he broke the ankle monitor," Detective Lance told him.
The front door slammed, and Moira's clicking heels echoed through the foyer.

"Are you all right?" she demanded as she strode into the room, Walter at her heels.

"I'm fine," Oliver said. "Barry might need to get her ankle checked out though. She sprained it when I pushed her out of the way."

"Oliver," Moira asked exasperatedly as she came to stand beside him.

"Mom," Oliver said. "I promise."

"This is on you," Moira said, whirling around to point at Detective Lance, "by accusing my son publicly, you've made him a target."

Detective Lance looked away in the face of an angry mother.

"Do you have any idea who attacked Oliver?" Walter asked, attempting to diffuse the situation.

"We haven't identified him yet. It must be someone with a grudge against the Hood, obviously."

The detective knelt down and reached for Oliver's ankle.

"What are you doing?" Oliver asked.

"Just got a call from my lieutenant," the detective said grudgingly. "Arms deal was attacked across town tonight." He removed the ankle monitor and stood up. "By the vigilante. Multiple witnesses put him there." He looked over at Moira. "In light of that, all charges against your son are being dropped."

"I'm truly sorry for what's happened to your family, Quentin," Moira said. Barry was suddenly struck by the reminder that Laurel, Sara, Tommy, and Oliver had known each other since the first grade and their parents had known each other as well, and had even been friends. "But would you kindly get the hell out of my house?"

The detective nodded and turned to walk out of the room.

"Mr. Lance?" Oliver asked quietly.

Detective Lance stopped and turned around.

"Thank you," Oliver said.

"Yes, thank you," Barry echoed.

The detective nodded again and left the room.

"I'd like you both to get checked out at the hospital," Moira said, turning to Barry and Oliver.

"Mom, I'm fine," Oliver protested.

"Just in case, Oliver. For my peace of mind," Moira said.

Oliver sighed, but nodded in acquiescence.

"I already told my driver to keep the car running, though we won't all fit," Moira said.

"I can drive Thea," Tommy offered.
"I'll stay here with Olivia," Walter volunteered. "Has she woken up at all?"

"Those earmuffs worked beautifully," Barry said, shaking her head. "She's been asleep the whole time."

Oliver and Tommy helped Barry hop to her feet - well, one foot - and slowly make her way out to the car. They put Barry in the middle of the backseat so that she could put her injured ankle up on the center console, and Oliver sat on her left while Moira sat on her right.

"Do you think Joe and Iris are awake?" Oliver asked. "Because they're not going to be happy if they find out you were in the hospital and didn't tell them."

Barry sighed and pulled her phone out of the clutch she'd borrowed from Moira for the night. She sent a message in the group chat she and her foster family had, asking if the others were awake. Iris replied almost immediately, saying that they'd been watching reruns of *The Office*.

"They're awake," Barry said glumly. "I'm going to call."

Joe picked up on the second ring.

"Barry? Is something wrong?"

"I might've sprained my ankle, so Oliver and Moira are taking me to the hospital," she said, side-stepping the actual problem.

Joe must've put her on speaker, because Iris immediately asked, "Oh my God, what happened?"

Barry decided to simply rip the bandage off.

"Someone tried to assassinate Oliver tonight. He pushed me out of the way, and I twisted my ankle on the way down. We're fine though."

"We're coming out there," Joe said decisively.

"There's no need for that," Barry sighed. "It's just a twisted ankle. I'll stay off of it tomorrow, probably will end up on crutches for the rest of the week, and then I'll be fine."

"Are you sure?" Iris asked worriedly.

"I'm sure," Barry said firmly. "I promise I'll call and let you know what the doctor says."

It took a few more minutes of convincing, but Joe and Iris finally agreed to hang up when they reached the hospital and Barry needed two hands to get out of the car without falling on her face.

In the end, the doctors only confirmed what they already suspected: Barry's ankle was sprained. Oliver's examination led to the conclusion that he'd strained a muscle in his leg, which he hadn't seen as something worth mentioning. Barry ended up on crutches, but Oliver was just told to rest and ice his leg.

By the time they got back to Queen Mansion, it was past midnight. Raisa was waiting for them.

"Miss Olivia has not woken up," she reported. "Mister Oliver's room is still a mess, but I prepared a guest room for him."

"Thank you, Raisa," Moira said. "You should head to bed. Good night."
"Good night, ma'am," Raisa said, before turning and heading to her room.

"It'll take you ages to get up those stairs," Tommy told Barry. "Sorry, Oliver."

Before Barry could say anything, he stepped towards her and swooped her up in a bridal carry, causing her to drop her crutches.

Thea and Moira were both covering snickers as Tommy carried her up the stairs.

"I'll get you for this, Tommy Merlyn," Barry threatened good-naturedly.

"Wait 'til you can walk again," Tommy retorted.

Over Tommy's shoulder, Barry could see Moira with her hand on Oliver's back while Thea carried her crutches. Instead of leaving her at the top of the stairs, Tommy continued carrying her to her room, though he waited for Thea to get there and open the door before carrying her inside and depositing her on her bed. Thea set the crutches by her bed.

"I'll check on Livvy, don't worry," she assured.

"Yeah, don't worry. Little Sparky's fine. Now you need to rest up," Tommy chided good-naturedly.

Barry groaned.

"I am going to knock over so much stuff while I'm on crutches. My boss is actually going to kill me."

"You're twenty-five and the best CSI they've got," Tommy pointed out. "Your boss can handle you being out of action for a week or so."

"Thanks, Tommy," Barry said with a small smile. "For everything."

"I couldn't just leave my best friend's ex-wife hanging," Tommy said cheerfully. "Good night, Barry."

"Good night, Tommy."

She'd managed to take off her make-up and change into pajamas without falling and dying. She laid down and turned off the lights, but only managed a minute before she grabbed her phone.

Would you mind sleeping over here? I don't want to be alone tonight.

Oliver slid silently through the door a few minutes later.

"Hey," he said awkwardly.

"Hey," Barry replied. She patted the bed next to her. "Just to sleep."

Oliver still hovered by the door.

"I still have nightmares," he admitted.

"I might have nightmares too," Barry countered. "But you know what? Cuddling is proven to help prevent nightmares."
Barry thought Oliver looked surprised in the dim light.

"You want to cuddle?"

"It's only awkward if we make it awkward," Barry offered. "We used to, on the couch, back during our 'enforced bonding time,' remember?"

Oliver let out a quiet laugh. During their divorce - after their three months of unintentional marriage due to Oliver trying to hide it from his parents - Moira had insisted they live together as a 'bonding experience.' It had started out with a lot of arguing, devolved into on-and-off sex, and ended up as a long-lasting friendship that started over a mutual love of Disney/Pixar's *The Incredibles*. Cuddling during movie nights had been a requirement.

Oliver moved over to the other side of the large bed and got in. Barry scooted closer to the middle and reached out to pull Oliver closer as well. He seemed hesitant at first, but he slowly wrapped his arms around her. She snuggled closer into his warmth, and felt the tension in his body melt at that simple action. It wasn't long before she was fast asleep.

Oliver woke up slowly the next morning, the first time he'd done so in a very long time - naturally at least. He'd woken up slowly after being drugged on multiple occasions.

The first thing he registered - besides being warm, which was so very nice after the cold of the island - was the scents of blackberry and vanilla and the touch of soft hair tickling his nose. He tensed up immediately upon recognizing he was not alone in bed, before he recognized the scent and relaxed again. It was enough to wake his bed partner up though, as Barry began to stir, before shifting to open her eyes and look up at him.

"Good morning," she said quietly.

"Good morning," Oliver replied. "You still use the same shampoo."

"Not quite. Same scents though. My old one got discontinued," Barry explained. "Thank you for staying with me last night."

"No, thank you for asking," Oliver replied. "That's the best sleep I've gotten in...a long time."

"I told you cuddling helps," Barry said seriously, though she wasn't doing a good job keeping the smile off her face.

Oliver offered her a small smile in response.

A moment later, a small bundle of energy burst into the room.

"Good morning, Mommy!" Livvy exclaimed, running in and jumping on the bed. "Daddy! You're here too!"

"Yes I am," Oliver agreed, grabbing the four-year-old and tickling her. "Good morning, Sparky. Did you sleep well?"

"Uh-huh," Livvy nodded. "Even though it was really loud last night. Mommy got me special headphones. They're pink!"
"Livvy," Oliver said quietly, gesturing for her to come closer. She looked curious as he sat up and she came to stand beside him. He didn't usually use her real nickname. Oliver leaned in close. "Your mom got hurt last night. She hurt her ankle, and it's hard for her to walk now. So we've got to be very careful, and I need you to help her out, okay?"

Livvy nodded seriously.

"I'll be very careful. I'll take care of Mommy. I have a doctor's kit."

Oliver tried not to smile at her seriousness.

"Great, Sparky. Why don't you go get Auntie Thea to help you get ready while your mom and I get ready?"

"OK, Daddy!" She turned to run out of the room, but stopped at the door and looked back at them. "Why were you and Mommy sleeping together, Daddy? Were you making another baby?"

Oliver froze at the question. Thankfully, Barry did not. "No, sweetie," she said. "Daddy's room got messed up last night, so he decided to have a sleepover with Mommy. It's a big bed, after all. There's plenty of room."

"Oh. Okay," Livvy said. She left the room. Oliver could hear her running down the hall and crashing into Thea's room.

"I'm going to go get ready," Oliver said, quickly sliding out of bed and leaving the room for his own before she could come back with more awkward questions. He heard Barry laughing at him as he fled.

He'd showered, changed, and was attempting to fix the mess his fight with the assassin had made of his room when there was a knock at the door. He turned around just in time to see Laurel enter. "Rough party," he attempted to explain.

"My father told me what happened," she said. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm fine," Oliver said. "Barry's got a sprained ankle, but she won't let that keep her down."

Laurel looked down at the paper in her hand.

"These are your polygraph results," she explained, walking towards him. "My father asked you if you'd ever been to Iron Heights. It's the prison where the vigilante saved me last week."

Oliver nodded, confused. He didn't understand where she was going with this. He'd been proved not to be the vigilante (even if he was). If his polygraph had blipped, it shouldn't matter.

"It's also where you and I went on our eighth-grade field trip," Laurel pointed out. There it was. Oliver felt his mouth involuntarily tighten.

"When you said you'd never been there, I thought maybe you were just nervous. Or that you'd forgotten. But then I looked at your results," she said harshly, holding up the paper. "And there is a slight flutter on your answer to that question. And if you lied on one, you could have lied on others."

"What happened to me being too selfish to be a masked crusader?" Oliver bit out.
"Oliver!" Laurel said in obvious exasperation. "I saw your scars!"

Oliver walked closer to Laurel and asked quietly, "Do you want to know why I don't talk about what happened to me there? Because if people knew, if you knew, you'd see me differently," he said, swallowing tightly. "And not as some...vigilante guy...as damaged. I don't sleep. I barely eat. I can barely sign my name, let alone aim a bow and arrow."

While all of that was technically true, the inability to sign his name was more related to his writing skills not being used, and even when they were, he didn't use the name 'Oliver Queen.'" It still felt wrong to sign it that way.

Oliver watched Laurel swallow. She didn't look him in the eyes, even as she spoke again.

"After last night...clearly we're still attracted to one another," she admitted. She finally looked up at him, but something in her eyes made him look down. "Oliver," she said. He looked up. "Nothing can ever happen between us."

"I know," Oliver said.

She passed the polygraph results over to him and turned to walk out the door. Before she could make it there, a blur of pink entered the room.

"Daddy! I can't find my doctor's kit!" Livvy exclaimed, but she skidded to a stop in front of Laurel, who had frozen at the sight. "Who're you?"

Oliver moved quickly to kneel down beside Livvy.

"This is Daddy's friend Laurel," he explained, resting a hand on her back. "Laurel, this is my daughter, Livvy."

"Auntie Sara's sister?" Livvy asked with a tilt of her head.

"Yes," Laurel said tightly. "Sara was my sister."

"Auntie Sara was my god-mommy," Livvy told Laurel. Oliver hadn't known that. "Even though Auntie Sara's in heaven now, Mommy wanted people to know that it took Mommy, Daddy, and Auntie Sara to make me. Mommy says I'm special that way."

Well, that was one way to explain to a four-year-old that she'd been conceived during a threesome.

"Indeed you are," Oliver said, kissing the top of her head. "Why don't you go ask Auntie Thea to help you find your doctor's kit?"

"Okay, Daddy," Livvy said before running out of the room.

Oliver looked up at Laurel, who still looked shocked, and slowly stood.

"You have a child," she said dumbly.

"I do," Oliver acknowledged. "She was born about five months after the boat trip. Her name is Olivia, but everyone calls her Livvy. Except Tommy. He started calling her Sparky."

"You cheated on me before Sara?" Laurel asked, looking hurt. "If she was born five months after the boat trip she was conceived in what, March?"

"May," Oliver sighed. "Livvy was two months early. Why don't you come sit down? I think I
probably need to tell you *everything* that happened with your sister."

Laurel still looked shocked as she moved to sit on the couch. Thankfully, Oliver had already righted it, though he did have to move a lamp out of the way.

Oliver sat down on the other end of the couch. He sighed as he looked over at Laurel.

"I guess it starts with Sara, really," he admitted. "Sara...Sara wasn't ready to tell her family, but since she's gone now I guess it doesn't matter."

"Stop dithering and just tell me," Laurel said.

"Sara was bi," Oliver stated bluntly. "She had a girlfriend for a year and a half before the boat trip."

Laurel jerked backwards in shock.

"She...had a girlfriend? I thought she just never dated because she was always chasing you..." Laurel said quietly. "Why didn't she tell me?"

"She wanted to," a quiet voice said from the doorway. Oliver and Laurel both turned to see Barry leaning there on her crutches. "She thought about it so many times. But she was terrified you wouldn't accept her, even when I reminded her that none of you ever cared that *I* was bi. You two may not have always gotten along, but you meant the world to Sara."

"You were her girlfriend," Laurel breathed in shock.

Barry nodded sadly.

"For a year and a half. We got together on New Year's her senior year of high school, our junior year of college. Then we decided to room together, and everyone just saw it as me being nice to my freshman friend by getting her out of the freshmen dorms since she was my roommate. Almost no one knew we were together."

"Who knew?" Laurel asked.

Barry shrugged.

"Joe. Iris. I can't keep a secret from Iris and she and Joe already knew I was bi. They kept quiet for Sara's sake though. Oliver and Tommy saw us kissing at a club once, but we managed to get them to agree to not tell anyone. Tommy asked if he could watch us though," Barry said with a snort.

"You need to sit down," Oliver told her, rising from his seat and dragging an armchair over. Barry limped over and sat down with a grateful smile and a sigh of relief. Laurel used the time to compose herself, as she looked perfectly calm by the time Oliver sat back down.

"What does all this have to do with that little girl?" she asked. She looked over at Barry. "I assume you're her mother?"

"I am," Barry admitted. "It kind of sets the context for what happened. It was my last night in Starling. I'd already had to move out of the dorms, so the Queens were letting me stay over until my train ride back to Central the next day. Sara'd come over - it was our last night together. We'd agreed that we'd break up when I went back to Central, and we'd reevaluate a few months later to see if we wanted to try to do the whole long-distance thing. Oliver came to hang out with us, and
we ended up drinking. And there may have also been weed involved. I'm not sure if you knew, but Sara could hold her alcohol. I never saw her drunk, no matter how much she drank."

"It took enough to knock most people out to get her tipsy," Laurel reminisced, a small smile on her face. "I was always so jealous."

Barry nodded.

"What you probably don't know is that if she smoked weed first, then she could get drunk. Neither of them affected her much on their own, but once you combined them she'd get drunk. So, we were all kind of drunk and high, and Sara and I started making out. It got heavy...and Oliver said that we either needed to calm down or he'd have to leave. Sara suggested he stay instead."

Laurel stared at both of them.

"So you had a threesome. With my sister. And her girlfriend. And you," she pointed at Barry, "got pregnant out of it."

"It turns out that the condoms were expired," Barry said sheepishly. "I didn't realize I was pregnant until a couple weeks after the Gambit went down. I told Joe and Iris, and I told Moira and Thea, but no one else knew. Livvy - Olivia Roberta Sara Allen - was born December 4th, and she's been the center of my world ever since. We told Oliver as soon as he got back. This is only the second time they've seen each other in person, but they Skype almost every day."

Laurel stood abruptly.

"I need to think about this. I...This is a lot to take in."

"I understand," Barry said softly. "I hope we can still be friends. For what it's worth, I'm sorry for my part in what happened."

"I am too," Oliver said. "Sleeping with Barry and Sara then...that's what led to me choosing Sara to invite on the yacht with me later. She was still kind of broken up about Barry, I was messed up about commitment, and it all came together in a perfect storm of tragedy."

Laurel bit her lip.

"I don't know when I'll see either of you again. I'll...I'll let you know."

She strode quickly out of the room and closed the door behind her. Oliver looked over at Barry and sighed.

"Well, that went well."

"She's just shocked over all this information she didn't know about her sister," Barry said softly. "Laurel and Sara...they were close. Really close, even though they fought. For Laurel to not know Sara preferred women...it's hard for her. Especially since Sara never got to tell her."

Thea came wandering in with Livvy a moment later.

"Livvy said Laurel was here? Did you tell her?"

"Yeah," Oliver said with a sigh. "We told her."

"How'd that go?"
"It could have gone better," Barry replied.

"Auntie Thea found my doctor's kit!" Livvy interrupted with glee. "Now I can check Mommy!"

Barry smiled at their daughter.

"Go right ahead."

Livvy spent the rest of the day doing her best to cater to Barry's every whim. When Oliver saw them off at the train station the next day - disguised in a hat and sunglasses - he knelt down to talk to her again.

"Be good for your mom on the train ride, okay Sparky? She can't run after you like she usually can," he warned.

Livvy nodded solemnly.

"I will, Daddy."

Oliver reached out and hugged her. She wrapped her small arms around his neck.

"I love you, Daddy," she said, though her voice was muffled as she spoke into his shirt.

"I love you too, Sparky," he replied. "I'll see you soon."

"Video tonight?" Livvy asked brightly.

"I'll definitely Skype tonight," Oliver promised. He finally got her to let go and stood up. He hugged Thea next, then carefully embraced Barry around her crutches.

"Don't go knocking into too many things," he warned good-naturedly.

"Don't go getting arrested again," Barry shot back with a smile. "See you tonight."

Oliver helped them get their suitcases and Livvy onto the train and saw them settled in their seats before returning to the platform. He saw Livvy waving out the window at him, and he waved back until the train was out of sights, before going back to the car to head to the foundry. Diggle was already there waiting on him.
Chapter Summary

Covers 1x6, Legacies

“Allen!” Captain Singh called as soon as she stepped into the station Friday morning. “We just got word that the Royal Flush Gang is back.”

“Where?” Barry asked immediately.

The Royal Flush Gang – so nicknamed because of their playing-card face masks – had first popped up in Central three years previously. They’d robbed several banks before disappearing for a few months and popping up again in Keystone. Over the past few years, they’d also hit banks in Rapid City, Hub City, Jump City, and Coast City. Barry had been the original CSI on the case. Since they’d lost the gang after the first city, Singh had made a point of sending Barry to every single crime scene, no matter what the city, in hopes that the CCPD could finally contribute to catching the criminals.

“Starling City,” the captain said grimly.

“I just need to check my kit, and then I can leave,” Barry reported.

The captain raised an eyebrow.

“Don’t you need to go home and pack?”

“I’m the single mother of a preschooler, Captain,” Barry replied. “And you know how clumsy I am. I always keep a couple changes of clothes in my car.”

While true, her actual plan was to raid the stash of clothes Moira kept furnishing her bedroom at Queen Mansion with.

“Keep your receipts,” the captain ordered. “The department will reimburse you for any food and lodging fees.”

“I went to college in Starling; I can stay with a friend,” Barry said dismissively. She looked over at her foster father. “Joe?”

“I’ll keep an eye on your kids and the dog,” he said. “I can get Iris to stay over there while you’re gone.”

“Thanks, Joe,” Barry said gratefully.

“Any time now, Allen,” Captain Singh reminded.

“Going, sir,” Barry replied, hurrying up the stairs to her lab to grab her kit.

She was on a plane to Starling less than an hour later. She had no idea how the captain had managed to get her on a flight and through security that fast, but she chalked it up to him being a
CCPD captain.

Unfortunately, she hadn’t contacted Moira or Oliver yet. Oh well.

It was a three-and-a-half-hour flight from Central to Starling. Barry spent the time reading the latest copy of Science Monthly, which had an article about Harrison Wells’ particle accelerator, being built in Central by STAR Labs. Its estimated completion date was less than a year away.

When she arrived in Starling, she was surprised to spot a sign reading, BARRY ALLEN, CCPD. She wandered over, and got another surprise to see it was Detective Quentin Lance.

“Detective Lance,” she greeted with a smile. “Isn’t picking up a consulting CSI from the airport a bit below your pay grade?”

The man shrugged.

“When I heard it was you, I volunteered. I wanted to check up on you after what happened the last time you were here. How’s the ankle?” he asked.

“All healed up,” Barry promised. “I’ve been off the crutches for a few days now. It was a little awkward, taking my daughter trick-or-treating while on crutches, but I managed to con a friend into dressing up as Darth Vader and escorting her around.”

“I didn’t know you had a daughter,” Detective Lance said, gesturing for her to walk with him out of the airport. “Boyfriend?”

Barry smiled tightly. “Died while I was pregnant. A mugging, shortly after Sara died. They never caught whoever did it.”

“I’m sorry for your loss,” the detective replied quietly.

“It’s been five years,” Barry replied with a sad smile. “It was a tough time. First, I lost one of my closest friends, then my boyfriend, all within a couple months? And I was pregnant? I was a bit of a mess for a while. Then the detectives on the case…well, they weren’t the best. A lot of people at the station couldn’t participate because of the personal connection. The CSI they used was terrible.”

Detective Lance led her straight to a police cruiser parked in the loading zone.

“Police privilege,” he said with a small smirk. “Do you want to put your case in the back?”

“Please,” Barry said. She put her kit in the trunk and slammed it closed before walking around to the passenger door. She got in just as Detective Lance started the car.

“So, are you working the Royal Flush Gang case?” she questioned.

“My partner is,” he said. “It’s not really our department, but once a cop dies, it’s everyone’s department.”

“I completely understand,” Barry said seriously.

“Do you want to go to the station first, or the bank?” Quentin asked.

“Bank, please. I prefer to collect my own information from the scene, and then I can meet with your CSIs at the station to compare notes. See if we can figure something out,” Barry said.
It was hours later that Barry realized the day was practically over and she still hadn’t asked if she could stay over at Queen Mansion. She fished her phone out of her pocket and called Moira.

“Hello, Barry,” the woman greeted. “Is something wrong?”

“Not really,” Barry said, wedging the phone between her shoulder and ear as she ran a test on a hair she’d found. “I’m in Starling for work and I was wondering if I could stay at the mansion?”

“Of course,” Moira said. “Our home is always open to you. It’s quiet at the moment – Walter’s still on Australia on his business trip. Would you like me to send someone to pick you up?”

“That would be fantastic,” Barry said. “I’m at the station. I ought to be done in less than an hour.”

“I’ll expect you in time for dinner, then,” Moira said before hanging up.

Half an hour later, there was a knock on the doorframe of the lab. Barry turned to see Oliver standing there.

“I heard you needed a ride?” he asked with a small smile.

“I do,” Barry said, smiling back. “Give me just a minute to write the results of this last test down and I can be done.”

“So what case are you here for?” Oliver asked as she wrote.

“Royal Flush Gang. They’re a team of bank robbers – started in Central three years ago. I’ve been running around after them ever since,” Barry reported. “And…done!”

She pressed the save button with satisfaction and then went through the motions of shutting down the computer. She glanced over to see a pensive look on Oliver’s face.

“Something wrong?” she asked.

He shook his head.

“It’s nothing.”

Barry gave him a look.

“I’m just a bit worried about you,” Oliver protested. “I saw the news report on those guys. They shot a cop. What if something happens to you?”

“This is the first time they’ve gotten seriously violent,” Barry said. “I hardly doubt that they’re going to seek me out to do something to me. And besides, I’m either at the police station or at your house. Last time I checked, that was pretty safe.”

Conversation on the car ride home ended up being mostly banalities and talk of how Livvy was doing.

“She’s still working her way through her Halloween candy,” Barry said. “Thank you again, for coming out to go trick-or-treating with her.”

“I’m glad I did,” Oliver said honestly. “After all the parts of her life that I missed, I’m glad I got to see this.”

“Well, you’re welcome on any and every holiday,” Barry said sensibly. “Actually, why don’t you,
Moira, and Walter come out to Central for Thanksgiving? We won’t be serving turducken, like the last time I had Thanksgiving at your house, but between Iris, Thea, and I, we can accomplish the traditional trappings of Thanksgiving dinner pretty well. And that way you all can see Livvy and Thea without us having to skip Thanksgiving with Joe and Iris. And you can give your staff a few days off to spend with their families.”

“Sounds good to me,” Oliver said. “It’ll be a bit harder to conceal our identities though. Going around in a Darth Vader costume worked on Halloween, but it won’t work on Thanksgiving.”

“You never know,” Barry replied. “I’m sure you could pull it off.”

The next morning, Barry grabbed Oliver on the way down to breakfast. She had nothing more to do at the station, though she was on call for when the next robbery occurred.

“I mean, have you noticed she’s been acting a little off lately?” she asked him. He gave her a blank look. Barry rolled her eyes. “What am I saying? You’re a guy, of course you haven’t.”

“Well who are you to judge?” Oliver argued. “Since when do you pay attention to how my mom’s feeling? You don’t even live here!”

“Since your stepfather suddenly decided to take a business trip halfway around the world a couple weeks ago?” Barry shot back.

“I think when someone at Walter’s pay grade takes a business trip halfway around the world, it’s always sudden, Barry,” Oliver said as they continued down the stairs.

“Ah,” Moira said as she walked into the foyer below them, a bouquet of white flowers in one hand. “Guess who I just hung up with?”

Oliver shrugged as Moira moved to place the flowers on the table.

“Janice Bowen,” Moira reported. “Carter’s mother.”

“Ah,” Oliver and Barry chorused. Barry had only met the guy a couple times, but she’d certainly heard about him, from Oliver, Laurel, Sara, Thea, and Moira.

Oliver let out a small laugh as they reached the bottom of the stairs.

“Carter Bowen, the perfect son,” Oliver said.

Moira turned from her flowers and raised an eyebrow.

“Is he perfect?” she asked.

“According to you,” Oliver pointed out. “Carter Bowen just won the national chess championship,” he said in a higher-pitched voice. “Carter Bowen is anchoring the debate team.”

Barry muffled a laugh.

“I’m sure I didn’t make that big of a fuss,” Moira scoffed.

Barry decided to join in.

“Oliver, Carter just got accepted into Harvard and Princeton,” she said exaggeratedly.

“Well, that’s because Carter got a perfect score on his SATs,” Oliver continued.
“Now how did he manage to study and cure cancer?” Barry asked.

“I don’t know,” Oliver said, just as Moira interrupted, “Alright, alright, alright. I get it, I get it. Well, they’re coming for brunch, and I expect you to be there,” she said with a smile.

“I have plans,” Oliver said.

“That’s fine,” Moira said. “Brunch is tomorrow.”

Barry chuckled.

“Inches from a clean getaway,” she said quietly.

“Well, you too, Barry, as long as you’re still here,” Moira said.

Barry tried not to sigh. Carter had flirted horribly – and badly – the last time they’d seen each other. She’d made it very clear that she was dating someone else (Sara) at the time, though she hadn’t named names. Even outright saying she was dating a girl didn’t get him to back off. He’d just said that he could convince her away from such silly notions. He was a sexist douche.

“Snap,” Oliver said, pointing to her.

“Nobody says that anymore,” she pointed out as Moira began to walk away.

“What?” Oliver complained, before turning to his mother. “Mom?”

“Hm?” she asked, spinning around elegantly.

“I can’t actually go,” Oliver said apologetically.

“I haven’t seen the Bowens in years,” Moira said, walking closer. “So whatever it is that you have planned, I’m sure you can make the sacrifice just this once.”

Oliver nodded solemnly.

“We’ll be there.”

Moira smiled as she walked away.

“I hate you,” Barry said quietly to Oliver. He merely smirked in reply. She turned away and walked into the breakfast room as Oliver’s phone rang. He ducked in a moment later to tell her that something had come up and he was heading out, and he’d see her later. Barry barely had time to acknowledge that before he was gone.

She heard Tommy enter, and walked out of the room to greet him.

“He sure moves fast, doesn’t he?” she offered.

“Hey,” Tommy said with a smile. “What are you doing back here?”

“Work,” Barry shrugged. “Just me this time. But while I’m on call, I don’t actually have anything to do at the moment, so if you need someone to talk to, I’m here.”

“You know,” Tommy said. “Maybe you could help. There’s this girl that I’m…uh…interested in, and I am really not sure how to pursue it.”
Barry’s brow furrowed. She’d never seen Tommy question himself about one of his conquests before.

“Have you tried using your usual lines?” she joked. “‘Hi, my name is Tommy Merlyn and I’m a billionaire, but I don’t look like Warren Buffet.’”

Tommy chuckled.

“Yeah, she is aware of that, and she doesn’t care. Money isn’t really a big deal to her.”

Barry had the sneaking suspicion that she knew who this was about.

“Why don’t you just tell her how you feel?”

“Well, I’ve known her for...a long time, and I’m not sure the direct approach is really the way to go,” Tommy said.

Now Barry was almost sure.

“Maybe you need to figure out what’s a big deal to her and make it a big deal to you?” Barry offered.

A smile stole onto Tommy’s face.

“Barry,” he said, “you are amazing.” He leaned down and kissed her cheek before turning and heading out the door. “Love you!”

“Let me know how it goes!” she called after him as he closed the door.

She eventually wandered back to the station to go through the evidence and security footage again, attempting to find something she could give to the detectives. She found it in the video footage.

“The Ace of Spades has been identified as the most violent member of the gang,” she explained to Detective Hilton. “I noticed he wore a ring in the security footage, a ring that he’s worn every other time we’ve gotten video of him. Now, before now, I’ve only been able to approximate the markings on it before now, and I’ve never managed to get a hit, but when he hit the bank manager, his ring left an imprint. By running the reverse of that imprint through the Starling databases, I got a match. The Ace is a former student at Larchmont High School. The Royal Flush Gang is local. And since they’re returning home, this is probably their final spree, and thus our final chance to catch them.”

“You’re brilliant, kid,” Detective Lance said from the next desk. “Got anything else?”

“Since he’s wearing a high school ring, we can presume that he didn’t go to college. We can safely assume that he either graduated or dropped out of Larchmont more than three years ago, before the first robberies, but no more than a decade ago, based on his approximate age. It’s not much, but it’s someplace to start,” Barry shrugged.

It was only a couple hours later that she figured some other information out.

“There’s four members of the gang, not three,” she announced to the detective. “There were more women inside the bank than exited the bank, but there were no women left inside. Therefore, one woman left with the gang, and I’m guessing it was the same woman who revealed to the Ace of Spades that Officer Washington was a cop. Based on the approximate ages of the King of Spades, the woman, the Ace, and the Jack, I don’t think we’re looking for just any group. I think we’re
looking for a family.”

“How do you figure that?” Detective Hilton asked.

“Based on the King’s body shape and subtle signs, we can approximate his age of mid-forties to early fifties,” Barry said. “The woman was mentioned in witness statements of being in her forties, while the other two gang members are early twenties. Only family would stay together for this long despite age gaps and the obvious aggressive tendencies of the Ace. You’re looking for a family of four: dad, mom, and two sons, the oldest of which graduated or almost graduated from Larchmont High School.”

“Quentin said it before, but I’ll say it again: you’re brilliant, kid,” Detective Hilton said, looking stunned. “You sure you don’t want to move out to Starling?”

“My family’s in Central,” Barry said with an apologetic smile. “I went to school out here, and Starling’s great, but Central’s home.”

Despite everything she looked through, she still didn’t manage to find anything else on their suspects. The witness statements as to the woman’s appearance were conflicting, and even looking through school records from Larchmont High provided too many possibilities.

Oliver picked her up for dinner at five, dressed to the nines.

“What’s with the suit?” she asked, eyebrows raised as she packed up her things. “Hot date tonight?”

“You could say that,” Oliver said. “We are going out to dinner.”

“We are?” Barry asked.

“We are,” Oliver confirmed. He pulled his hand from behind the doorframe to reveal a garment bag. He held it out to her. “Mom picked it out.”

Barry took it hesitantly.

“Any particular reason we’re going out?”

“Mom insisted,” Oliver said. “Honestly, Bare, when’s the last time you dressed up and went out to a nice restaurant? Actually, when’s the last time you went out to eat at all without worrying about Livvy the entire time?”

Barry opened her mouth, then closed it again.

“That’s what I thought,” Oliver said. “Besides, you know Mom likes dressing you up.”

He handed her the garment bag and a smaller bag that she presumed held her shoes.

“Go change,” he ordered. “I can log off of your computer for you.”

“That’s against protocol,” Barry argued weakly.

“You don’t want to make us late for our reservations,” Oliver pointed out.

“Fine,” Barry said, stomping off to the bathroom.

The dress was gorgeous, like everything Moira picked out for her. She took one glance at the tag
on the dress – Dolce & Gabbana – and the shoes – Christian Louboutin – and decided she didn’t want to know the price of either item, and it would be best to just go with it. Moira had helpfully provided a small makeup kit and a hairbrush in the bag with the shoes, so Barry undid her hair from the messy bun she’d put it up in, brushed her hair out, and touched up her makeup until she looked good enough for a night on the town with a billionaire.

Dinner ended up being at a ridiculously expensive restaurant, but as soon as she and Oliver walked in, they were whisked away to a table. Oliver ordered the wine in fluent French, before Barry could remind him that she was technically still on the clock and couldn’t drink.

He gave her a dubious look.

“You dated Sara. Sara. Sara Lance, who could chug an entire bottle of vodka and still not be drunk. I know you’re no lightweight. A glass of wine won’t hurt.”

Barry had to concede that point.

The meal had a ridiculous number of courses, and by the end, Barry wasn’t sure she could get up from the table.
“Thank you, Oliver,” she said as he escorted her to the car. His bodyguard had already opened the door. “This was lovely.”

“Anything for an old friend,” he said, leaning over and pressing a kiss to her cheek as he helped her into the car.

“Where to, sir?” the bodyguard asked as he got into the driver’s seat.

“Back home, Dig,” Oliver instructed. “Barry’s staying with us while she’s in town for work.”

“May I ask what you do, ma’am?”

“I’m a forensic scientist with the Central City Police Department,” Barry offered. “I’m currently consulting with the Starling City Police Department on a case.”

“Barry’s an old friend from college,” Oliver told the man.

While Barry and Oliver were both extremely cautious about talking about Livvy with other people present, Oliver did not seem to hold the same qualms in talking about Thea.

“Iris is sleeping over at mine until I’m back,” Barry reassured. “And Joe’s checking in as well, so there won’t be any wild parties. Thea’s not like teenage you, Oliver.”

“That’s a relief,” Oliver said. “I would hate to have to deal with teenage-me. I was an ass.”

“Only sometimes,” Barry reassured, patting him on the shoulder.

Once they were inside, Oliver walked her up to her room.

“Thank you, Oliver,” Barry said with a smile. “You were right. It’s been ages since I’ve gotten to go somewhere without worrying about Livvy the entire time.

“You’re welcome,” he replied. “Have a good night.”

“Good night.”

After staying up so late the previous night, getting up and ready in time for brunch with the Bowens was a trial. Still, Barry ended up downstairs, in a dress and heels, before the Bowens arrived. Oliver was not present. According the Raisa, she hadn’t seen him since early that morning.
“It’s so good to see you again, Moira. And who’s this? Not Thea, I don’t think?” Janice Bowen said.

“No, I’m just a family friend.” Barry said with an apologetic smile. “Moira offered to let me stay here while I’m in town for work. It’s always much nicer staying with friends than at a hotel.”

“I believe I remember you,” Carter Bowen said as he accepted a mimosa that Raisa was passing out. “Bartholomea Allen, wasn’t it? Oliver brought you as his date to galas a few times.”

“That’s right,” Barry said with a tight smile. She really hated her first name. “Oliver and I have been friends since college, and he did his best to convince me to accompany him any time Laurel was busy.”

“She always did an excellent job of keeping Oliver under control,” Moira said with a fond smile. “We stayed in touch, even when Oliver was gone.”

“Well, I’m sorry Walter couldn’t join us,” Janice said.

“Well, the Australian trip came up suddenly,” Moira apologized. “He sends his apologies.”
“And where’s Oliver?” Carter asked. “He’s not out of town too, is he?”

“Well, I’m sure he’s just…” Moira began, but Oliver entered the room at that moment.

“Stuck in traffic,” he said. “One of the things I didn’t miss on the island: Sunday drivers. Sorry I’m late,” he apologized, leaning over to kiss his mother on the cheek.

He then leaned over to give Barry a quick hug.

“Thank God you’re here,” she whispered, before turning back to the Bowens with a smile.

“So good to see you,” Janice said as she stepped forward to hug Oliver and kiss his cheek. “We all thought you were…”

“Oh, well, we are just happy he’s home,” Moira interrupted, rubbing Oliver’s back.

“A returning celebrity too,” Carter said as he reached out to shake Oliver’s hand.

“How do you mean?” Oliver asked.

“Billionaire scion? Castaway for five years?” Carter pointed out as they all took their seats at the table. “You know, there is a bidding war for the rights to your life story. At least, that’s what my agent says.”

“Agent?” Oliver questioned. “I thought you were a neurosurgeon, Carter.”

“I know, it’s crazy, right?” Carter said. “One minute I’m publishing this book on how long-term potentiation initiates the creation of a slow-moving protein synthesis, and the next, there’s an agent trying to make me the next Dr. Oz.”

“Why would he want you to be a wizard?” Oliver asked in confusion.

The whole table started chuckling.

“Oliver,” Moira said.

Barry reached over and patted his hand.

“For all our sakes, you should probably spending a bit more time on Wikipedia articles from the past five years.”

Oliver nodded in reluctant agreement.

“Well, truth is, I just feel it’s our duty as Starling City’s more fortunate to help those most in need,” Carter said pretentiously.

“Of course,” Moira said.

“Don’t you agree, Oliver?” Carter asked.

Barry could see how tight Oliver’s smile was.

“You’re the hero, Carter,” he said.

“So now that you’re back, what are your plans?” Janice asked. “Will you be taking a job with Queen Consolidated?”
“I’m opening a nightclub, actually,” Oliver said. “It’s a way to test myself in running a business on a small scale before I step into the business world for real.”

“Sir, your liquor distributor’s on the line,” Oliver’s bodyguard said as he stepped into the room. He leaned down to say something into Oliver’s ear, but Barry couldn’t make out what.

“Sorry,” Oliver said, pulling his napkin out of his lap and putting it on the table. He notably did not meet Moira’s steely look. “Business.” He got up and left the room.

“I’ll just check to make sure nothing’s wrong,” Moira said when Oliver didn’t come back a moment later.

Unfortunately, that meant that both of the Bowens now had their full attention on Barry.

“So what is it you do, Bartholomea, was it?” Janice asked.

“Barry, please, Mrs. Bowen,” Barry offered. “Bartholomea is such a long name. It was a horror to learn to spell in kindergarten.”

“I’m sure, dear, and it’s Janice,” Janice replied patronizingly.

“I work for the Central City Police Department as a forensic scientist,” Barry said. She took a sip of her mimosa.

“Barry was the youngest person to ever make senior technician in the Central City Police Department,” Moira said as she reentered the room.

Barry felt herself blush.

“It may not be glamorous, but I help solve crimes and make sure that the guilty go away while the innocent remain free,” she said. “We all have to help in our own way. Science was always my passion – my mother was a chemist, and my best friend’s father was a cop, so I combined the two.”

“Is Oliver not rejoining us?” Janice asked, sounding concerned.

“Unfortunately, one of the contractors for his nightclub is having major issues that required his presence to sort out,” Moira said with a sigh.

Barry groaned inwardly at the thought of sitting through more of this. Thankfully, her phone went off a few minutes later. She quickly checked her text messages.

“Excuse me,” she said, rising quickly from her seat. “I just got word that there’s a new crime scene. I need to head over right away.”

“I’ll ask my driver to take you,” Moira said immediately. “Do you need to change?”

Barry glanced down at her dress and heels and sighed.

“Probably,” she said. She looked over at the Bowens and said apologetically, “A dress and heels isn’t the best idea for a crime scene.”

“What crime are you investigating?” Carter asked.

“A series of bank robberies that began in Central three years ago,” Barry reported. “There’s just been another robbery. It was a pleasure meeting you, Janice, and good to see you again, Carter.”
“The pleasure was ours,” Carter said a bit too quickly.

Barry smiled and headed out of the room. She kissed her cell phone as she walked.

“Thank you,” she whispered.

The only information at the new crime scene was that Starling City’s resident vigilante – known colloquially as ‘The Guy in the Green Hood’ or simply ‘The Hood’ – seemed to have taken exception to the bank robbers. His participation in the heist meant that the gang hadn’t gotten away with any money, though they themselves got away clean.

“All the hostages came out of the bank this time,” Barry explained to Detective Hilton. “I presume the Queen was the getaway driver.”

“Sorry, the ‘Queen’?” the detective asked.

“Well, the others are the King, the Ace, and the Jack, so the woman is the Queen,” Barry said absently. “Anyway, I’ll have to run some tests, see if we got any viable DNA, but I wouldn’t count on it. Having an entire SWAT team parade through here messed up a lot of my evidence.”

She spent the rest of the day up in the lab she was currently sharing with the local CSIs. She got a call from Oliver mid-afternoon.

“So, Tommy’s hosting a benefit gala for CNRI tonight,” Oliver said when she picked up. “Would you come as my plus-one?”

“Sounds like fun,” Barry said absently. “I assume your mother’s already planning on dressing me?”

“Yep.”

“Red again?”

“You look good in red,” Oliver said. “There’s a reason she always dresses you in red.”

“What time’s the gala?” she asked.

“Eight. I can pick you up at six from the station so that you have time to eat and get ready?” Oliver offered.

“Better make it five. Rush hour, remember?”

“Right. See you at five.”

“Five it is.”

Barry entered the benefit gala on Oliver’s arm. Her dress and shoes were both red, selected by Moira, and so ridiculously expensive that she honestly did not want to know the price. What she did know was that the velvet cocktail dress was by Oscar de la Renta, and the crystal-encrusted shoes were Jimmy Choos. Her drop earrings, thankfully, were simply borrowed from Moira’s extensive collection, though she was relatively certain she was wearing 24-karat gold and real rubies. Her hair was in an elegant coiffure fastened by a gold hairpin.
“I see my mom,” Oliver said quietly into her ear. He was dressed sharply in a black suit that probably cost more than her monthly salary, with a red tie the same shade as her dress. “Do you mind if I go talk to her? Alone? I need to apologize.”

“Yes, you do,” Barry allowed. “If it weren’t for the fact that I got called out of brunch shortly after you did, I’d expect a better apology than simply inviting me as your plus-one to the gala. So, I’ll go find Tommy and you can go grovel to Moira.”

She slipped her arm out of Oliver’s and made her way across the ballroom. She spotted Tommy making his way toward her.

“Good to see you, Barry,” he said, leaning in and kissing her cheek. “Thank you for coming. You look beautiful.”

“I’d say thank you for inviting me, but you didn’t, even though you knew I was in town,” she said, fake pouting. “I’m hurt, Tommy. Though thank you for the compliment.”

He let out a small laugh.

“I’m guessing Oliver brought you as his plus-one?”
“He owed me for leaving me alone at brunch with his mother and her friends,” Barry said.

“At least you dragged him here. I figured the entire Queen family and their checkbooks should be present, but you left Thea in Central City,” he said.

“So how is it going for you so far?” she asked.

“It is going amazing,” Tommy said honestly. “And it’s all thanks to you. Barry Allen, the unlikely voice of reason.”

“Compared to you and Oliver, I’ve always been the voice of reason,” Barry shot back. “But I have to ask: what did I do?”

“You gave me that great advice,” Tommy said with an honest smile. “I thought about what the girl was interested in, and um…” he stepped aside to reveal Laurel chatting with several other party-goers.

Barry smiled.

“I thought it was Laurel you were talking about,” she said, pleased that she’d been right. “You did this all for her.”

“And it’s working,” Tommy said. “Thanks again. Would you like to come say hi?”

Barry winced.

“Laurel…ah…might not be talking to me at the moment. I’m not sure if Oliver told you, but the day after the party, she found out about Livvy. And she said that she needed some time to think. I haven’t heard from her since,” Barry said.

“It’s been a couple weeks,” Tommy said. “And we’re in public. She’s not going to start yelling.”

“I suppose I can give it a try,” Barry said.

She allowed Tommy to lead her back over to where Laurel was now speaking with an unfortunately familiar face.

“Barry!” Laurel exclaimed. “It’s good to see you.” She seemed honest enough about that, at least. She leaned in to give Barry a quick hug. “I’ve been meaning to call you, but I’ve been so busy with work I keep forgetting.”

“I completely understand, Laurel,” Barry said. “I do the same thing.”

“Tommy, do you remember Carter Bowen from high school? Barry, I think you’ve met a couple of times at different events?”

“Oh yeah, sure I do,” Tommy said, shaking Carter’s hand. “So glad you could make it.”

“So great to see you,” Carter said, though he was obviously directing it toward Laurel. “You look amazing.” This time, his eyes also flickered toward Barry. “And Barry and I had brunch together at the Queens’ house yesterday. Until she had to leave, that is.”

“I got paged for work,” Barry explained to Laurel. “I’m consulting with the SCPD on the Royal Flush Gang robberies.”

“My dad mentioned that to me,” Laurel said with a nod.
Carter took over the conversation again, turning back to Laurel.

“I gotta say, I’m so impressed with the work you and CNRI are doing here,” he said.

Laurel smiled. “Thanks, Carter.”

“You know, I’ve actually been thinking about starting a free clinic down here in the Glades,” the man continued.

“Really?” Tommy asked.

“Maybe we could grab a couple drinks, and I’ll tell you what I’m thinking?” Carter asked Laurel.

“That sounds great,” she said, and allowed him to lead her over to the bar. She glanced back at Tommy and Barry, but that was it.

Barry watched Tommy grimace, and then noticed something over his shoulder. Oliver left through the front doors of the building, accompanied by his bodyguard.

“Well,” she said with a sigh, “it appears that Oliver has ditched me once again.”

“Do you want a drink?” Tommy asked. “I think I need one.”

“I can’t,” Barry sighed. “I’m still on call. Not supposed to have alcohol until this thing with the bank robbers is wrapped up.”

They ended up sitting over by the bar, watching as Carter and Laurel danced.

“Did you know, that as a doctor, I was able to diagnose myself as a giant tool?” Tommy said sarcastically before taking another sip of his drink.

Barry snorted before following suit, though all she had was a soda. She drained it and set the glass down on the bar before saying, “Since we’ve both been abandoned by our dates, why don’t we go dance?”

“I thought you had two left feet?” Tommy asked, even as he drained his glass as well and stood up, offering her a hand. “I distinctly remember my feet getting stepped on repeatedly the last time I danced with you.”

“First of all, we were all so drunk that we couldn’t see straight,” Barry pointed out. “Second of all, I’ve improved since then.”

Tommy ended up dancing with her through a song and a half before her phone went off with the specific vibration alarm that meant she was being paged by the SCPD.

She sighed and pulled out her phone from the gold clutch she’d borrowed from Moira.

“Duty calls,” she said.

“Do you need a lift, since your date ditched you?” Tommy asked. He glanced over to where Laurel was still dancing with Carter. “There’s nothing here I still need to take care of.”

“Thank you, Tommy,” Barry said with a smile.

They both grabbed their coats from the valet – Barry’s was a red tulle Oscar de la Renta to match her dress – and Barry’s kit, before heading out the side door. They’d made it about halfway down
the alleyway where Tommy had parked his car when they heard the door close and heels came clicking behind them.

“Tommy? Barry?” Laurel called. “Are you okay?”

“Oh yeah, just taking Barry to work,” Tommy said. “Don’t worry. I’ve got this. You can go back inside, keep having fun. Looked like you were having a nice little do-si-do with the good doctor.”

Laurel raised an eyebrow.

“Tommy, I’m going to let you in on a little-known secret about Dr. Carter Bowen: the man is a gigantic ass.”

Barry muffled a laugh. This looked like the ‘moment’ with Laurel that Tommy had been waiting for.

“And the only reason I danced with him is because he just wrote a massive check to CNRI,” Laurel continued. “Why would you think anything else?”

“I guess when it comes to you, I tend not to think straight,” Tommy said.
“I think I’ll just go call a cab,” Barry said, starting to move out of the alleyway.

“Absolutely not,” Tommy said firmly. “I said I was taking you to your crime scene, I will take you to your crime scene.”

He opened up his passenger door for Barry to get in.

“Sorry for interrupting your moment,” she said.

“It’s no problem,” Laurel said. “I know how the job is.”

Tommy and Laurel walked to the front of the car. Barry could barely hear them through the crack in the window.

“Hey Tommy,” Laurel said. “I owe you a dance.”

“Yeah?” Tommy asked.

“You earned it,” Laurel replied, before leaning over and kissing his cheek.

Tommy still looked like he was floating when he made it into the driver’s seat and started the car.

“Are you sure you’re safe to drive like this?” Barry asked dubiously.

Tommy very obviously shook himself out.

“Oh. Yeah, yeah, I’m good. Where do you need to go?”

“Redwood United Bank, wherever that is.”

“Well, thankfully, I have GPS,” Tommy replied.

Redwood United Bank turned out to be only fifteen minutes away from the benefit.

“Do you want me to stay?” Tommy asked as Barry climbed out of the car.

“No, but thank you, Tommy. Go back to the party. I’ll call a cab or something back to Queen Mansion. Go. Dance with Laurel. If you want to talk about it afterwards and don’t want to do it to Oliver, call me.”

“You’re a great friend, Barry Allen,” Tommy said.

“So are you, Tommy Merlyn,” Barry replied as she grabbed her kit and closed the door. She didn’t look back as she walked to the doors of the bank, flashing her ID to get her into the crime scene. The officers guarding gave her dubious looks thanks to her eveningwear.

All the members of the police force in the bank looked up as her heels clicked on the stone floors.

“Did we interrupt a date, Allen?” Detective Hilton asked.

“I was at the benefit gala for CNRI, actually,” Barry said as she set her kit on the counter and opened it up. “I’ve known Laurel Lance, Tommy Merlyn, and Oliver Queen since college. Oliver invited me as his plus one.”

The scene was relatively straightforward, especially since they’d already caught all the culprits. The King had been shot and killed by the bank security guard, who had actually been aiming at the
Ace. The Ace had been knocked out by the vigilante. The Queen and Jack had been caught in the getaway car nearby.

Still, the inclusion of the vigilante added several loops of red tape to everything. It took hours to go through all the evidence and get it bagged and tagged to go back to the station.

Once she was dismissed, she called up the phone for the staff at Queen Mansion; there was always someone on duty, and that someone could tell her if anyone was available to come get her, or if she should take a cab.

“Mr. Oliver and Mrs. Queen are not here, Miss Allen,” the man on duty said. “They left about an hour ago.”

“Thank you, Christian,” Barry said. “Have a good night.”

“You too, ma’am.”

She called Oliver next.

“I am so sorry for ditching you,” Oliver opened with.

“You should be,” Barry replied promptly. “You and your mom still out?”

“Yeah. I took her to the Big Belly Burger down in the Glades. Best burgers in the city. We were about to head home.”

“Could you swing by Redwood United Bank and pick me up? And bring me some food?” Barry asked. “I just finished at the crime scene.”

Oliver was silent for a moment.

“Mom says that your dress better be intact.”

“It is, don’t worry,” Barry said with a laugh. “Pick-up?”

“And food,” Oliver confirmed. “What would you like?”

Barry rattled off her usual order for BBB, and Oliver promised they’d be by to get her within twenty minutes.

It only took fifteen before they were on the way back to the mansion.

“Are you headed back to Central tomorrow?” Moira asked from the passenger seat.

“Probably tomorrow night,” Barry admitted from behind her. “There’s still going to be paperwork to finish, but I want to get back to Livvy as soon as possible.”

“Completely understandable,” Moira said as they pulled into the driveway of Queen Mansion. “I’ll see you in the morning then, to say goodbye?”

“Of course,” Barry confirmed.

Moira got out of the car and went straight inside. Barry could hear her heels clicking on the stairs as she went up to her room.

“It was good seeing you again, while you were here,” Oliver said quietly as they left the car and
wandered into the house. They ended up in the parlor.

“Even though you ditched me at the gala?”

“Even though I ditched you at the gala,” Oliver repeated. “I’m so sorry, something came up that I had to take care of immediately.”

“You didn’t tell me goodbye,” Barry pointed out in annoyance. “You never even danced with me. I had to dance with Tommy.”

“I thought he would have been dancing with Laurel?” Oliver asked in confusion.

“She was dancing with contributors to CNRI,” Barry replied, even as Oliver moved over to the speaker system on one side of the room. “What are you doing?”

Oliver pressed a button, and orchestral music started playing.

“I think I owe you a dance,” he replied. He held out his hand to her.

Barry hesitated, then took it. They assumed the proper positions almost automatically – Barry’s left hand on Oliver’s shoulder, his right arm on her back – and he began to lead her through the waltz. Two songs later, and they were essentially just swaying back and forth to the music. Barry laughed as Oliver led her into a spin.

When their bodies were pressed close to one another once more, without thinking, Barry leaned in and pressed her lips to Oliver’s in a chaste kiss. It was extremely brief – she doubted Oliver even registered it before it was done. As she pulled away, Oliver followed her and brought his lips to hers once more.

The kiss was just as short and chaste, but it had a clear meaning.

They broke apart, and Barry ducked her head.

“Good night, Oliver,” she said quietly.

“Good night, Barry,” he replied in a low voice. She glanced up to see him staring at her with an unreadable expression.

He was already gone by the time she got up the next morning. Barry simply sighed, had breakfast with Moira, and went into the SCPD station to finish the paperwork for the Royal Flush Gang before boarding a plane back to Central.

Livvy’s enthusiastic, “Mommy!” when she, Thea, Joe, and Iris met her at the airport was the best part of her week.
Holidays

Chapter Summary

Covers Thanksgiving, Livvy's Birthday, and "Year's End".

Two days after Barry got back to Central City from her bank robbery case, Thea got called out of English for an early checkout.

“What’s going on?” she asked immediately upon seeing her guardian’s worried face.

“I’ll tell you in the car,” Barry said.

Thea felt herself pale. If she wasn’t talking in public, that meant it was her mom or Oliver.

“Mom or Oliver?” she asked as soon as the car doors closed.

“Your mom,” Barry said grimly as she started the car and pulled out of the school parking lot. “She almost got shot outside of Queen Consolidated an hour ago. The man she was with died. Joe’s booked a ticket for you to go to Starling. Oliver’s going to pick you up from the airport.”

“You’re not coming?” Thea asked, a hint of pleading in her voice that she couldn’t suppress.

“I can’t take more leave time,” Barry sighed. “But your mom will want to see you, and I bet you want to see her.”

“Yeah,” Thea said quietly. “I’m not sure I could just keep going to school when I know she’s at the hospital – is she in the hospital?”

“Oliver didn’t say, but standard procedure would mean she’s there to get checked over. Shock might also be a concern,” Barry said.

Barry dropped her off at the airport twenty minutes later. Boarding for her flight started in an hour, which gave her just enough time to get through security and buy a cup of coffee with shaking hands.

Thea tried to pull out one of her school books to read on the flight, but she only managed to make it through a page and a half in three hours. She spent most of the flight in a worried daze.

Oliver picked her up from the airport on his motorcycle.

“Hey, Speedy,” he said, embracing her tightly. Thea curled slightly into his arms, needing the hug. “Home first, or the hospital?”

“Hospital,” Thea said firmly.

Oliver shrugged off his leather jacket.

“Here. Wear this over your clothes. I’m afraid you’ll have to keep your bag on.”

Thea patted the messenger bag backpack at her side.
“I can wear it over my shoulder. It’ll stay on easy enough. Thanks. For the jacket.”

“Of course,” Oliver said, climbing back onto the motorcycle.

Thea hurriedly put the leather jacket on and climbed on behind him. Oliver revved the engine and sped off.

They arrived at Starling General fifteen minutes later, due to Oliver’s liberal interpretation of traffic laws and the ability of a motorcycle to weave through traffic. The doctor was checking their mom over when they made it to her private room – one of the perks of being rich and a notable donor to the hospital.

“Mom,” Thea said, rushing in to her mother’s side. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” her mother said. Oliver stepped up beside her. Their mother looked over at him and repeated, “I’m fine. Did you reach Walter?”

“No,” Oliver said shortly. “I’m sorry.”

“As I was telling your mother,” Dr. Lamb said, “the CAT scan shows a grade-2 concussion. She can go home, so long as someone stays with her to make sure there are no after-effects.”

“Thank you,” Oliver said. Their mom nodded in agreement as Dr. Lamb left the room.

“I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have left you, I thought you were fine,” Oliver burst out.

“You left her?” Thea demanded. “Why would you do that?”

“I wanted to see if I could get the license plate of the guy who took a shot at you,” Oliver admitted.

“Well, that was foolish,” their mom said.

“Yeah,” Oliver said quietly, looking down.

Their mom reached out to hug him, and then pulled Thea in as well. They stayed there for a long moment, until a nurse came in to start the discharge process.

Thea waited until they were in the hall to confront her brother.

“So, did you get the license plate?” she asked.

“No. He got away,” Oliver said.

Thea crossed her arms and leaned against the wall.

“Maybe you should spend a little less time trying to be a hero. You’re obviously not very good at it,” she said.

“That’s cute,” Oliver said with a small smile.

“Wasn’t trying to be,” Thea replied seriously. “You left Mom in the street. Alone. Hurt. In the street. To get a license plate?”

Oliver looked confused. He took a step towards her.

“You don’t believe me?” he asked.
“I love you,” Thea told him. “Mom loves you. But it’s getting hard when you won’t be truthful with us.”

She turned and went off to the coffee machine she knew was on this floor. This was the floor reserved for those rich enough to need privacy. They had good coffee on this floor, though after the day she’d had, she’d accept nearly anything with caffeine in it.

By the time she got back to her mom’s room, Oliver was nowhere to be seen and there were two detectives waiting outside of it.

“Have you seen my brother?” she asked.

“He left,” Detective Lance said.

Thea gritted her teeth. Now was not the time for Oliver to be blasé again. Oliver showed up again before it was time to go home – apparently he’d been calling up the car – but promptly disappeared after a quiet dinner of just the two of them – Mom had already gone to bed.

The next day was spent parent-sitting, which mostly meant Thea worked on her homework while her mother slept or fielded calls from well-wishers. Thea got to field those that came by in person, as her mother didn’t want to see anyone while she was confined to her bed in her pajamas.

Thea caught Oliver about to leave the house after dinner.

“Where are you going?” she demanded. “I’ve been with Mom all day. I thought you were taking the night shift.”

“I’ve got a work thing,” Oliver said.

“And it’s more important than our mother?” Thea demands. “Ollie, I thought I was getting to know you again, but sometimes, I don’t think I know you at all.”

She ends up on her mother’s bed, flipping through TV channels while her mother flipped through a magazine.

“So what are you in the mood for?” she asked. “We could watch reality housewife cooking show or cop docs.”

Her mother looked at her questioningly.

“It’s where doctors run around fighting crime when they’re not all sleeping with each other,” she explained.

That got a laugh, at least.

“Whatever you want, sweetheart,” her mom said. “You’re the one who’s given up your evening after spending all day here.”

“Aw, well it’s not like there’s anybody else who could be staying with you,” Thea said dramatically. “Oh wait, yes there is.”

Her mother reached over to grab her hand.

“Don’t be too harsh on your brother.”

“Why not?” Thea asked. “I mean, aren’t you getting sick of his lies?”
“Thea, everyone has secrets,” her mother said calmly. “We all have things that we want to keep to ourselves.”

“Yeah, well, Oliver seems to be keeping everything to himself,” Thea grumbled. “I just don’t get him sometimes.”

“I know,” her mom said, reaching an arm out to wrap around Thea’s shoulders and pull her in close. “I know. You know, being in that hospital and seeing Dr. Lamb again…it made me remember the day that Oliver came home. It was Dr. Lamb who told me that the Oliver we’d lost might not be the Oliver that they had found. I think it’s easy to forget, but he lived apart from civilization for five years.”

“So what?” Thea asked. “He gets, like, a free pass?”

“No, no, no, no, not at all,” her mother said. “I just think we need to stop judging him for the Oliver he was and start accepting him for the Oliver he is.”

Thea was quiet for a moment.

“The old Oliver wouldn’t have been as good with Livvy,” she finally said. “He didn’t know how to deal with kids. He still doesn’t, really, but he tries.”

“Barry’s good for him that way,” her mother said. “She always has been.”

“She doesn’t seem to have a problem accepting him for who he is now,” Thea added.

“Barry has the remarkable ability to always see the best in people,” her mother said. “No matter a person’s faults, Barry can dig through to the good underneath. She’s always seen Oliver for who he was under his party boy image. She’s the only reason he made it through a full semester of school without dropping out. Laurel might have helped, but it was really Barry.”

“She told me that he’s changed on the outside, but on the inside he’s still the same Oliver he’s always been,” Thea said slowly. “And then she started getting poetic, talking about crucibles and tempered steel. She’d been reading Shakespeare again.”

Her mother let out a small laugh.

“That certainly sounds like Barry. Have you called her with an update today?”

“Not yet,” Thea said.

“Why don’t you go do that? If Olivia’s still awake, we can Skype so she can see I’m alright.”

She was on her way to her room when there was a knock at the door. She moved to the railing overlooking the foyer to see who the well-wisher was this time.

“Mr. Merlyn,” she greeted.

“Thea,” Mr. Merlyn replied. “Is your mother awake? I came by to see how she was doing.”

“Yeah, she’s up in her room,” Thea said. “Come on up. I was just about to phone a friend about some homework.”

She made sure that Malcolm Merlyn found her mother’s room before heading back to her own to call Barry.
“Hey Thea-Bee,” Barry greeted quietly after only a single ring. “How’re you holding up?”

“I’m okay, I guess,” Thea said with a sigh. “Livvy asleep?”

“About twenty minutes ago,” Barry confirmed. “She was up half the night last night, after I told her that you were flying to Starling City because Grandma got hurt. I put her to bed early, and she was out like a light. Now, let’s try this again. How are you really feeling?”

“Your mom-sense is on point,” Thea sighed. “I’m…tired, I guess. Oliver hasn’t actually been around, so it’s just been me looking after Mom. He seems like he’s lying about where he’s going and where he’s been, and why he left Mom to try to find a license plate number. It just…it doesn’t seem like something Oliver would try to do. I wish you were here. You’re the best at cutting through his bullshit.”

“Language,” Barry chided, but Thea continued on anyway.

“And you’re the best at taking care of people, and you’re the best at getting through to all of us and making us talk like a family and not just argue.” Thea let out a sigh. “I just really wish you were here.”

“I wish I was there too,” Barry replied. “And if it wasn’t the same two months that Oliver came back from the dead and managed to get arrested, I would. Unfortunately, I have no time off unless I want to be working Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Livvy’s birthday.”

“Well, Thanksgiving you really just have to be there for the meal,” Thea pointed out. “Just take a really long lunch break.”

“I might have to,” Barry said. “Forrest and his husband’s surrogate is due any day now, so he might be taking paternity leave.”

“And crime doesn’t take holidays,” Thea sighed, quoting Joe West, who might as well have been her uncle by now.

“Exactly,” Barry said. “So, how is your mom?”

“Malcolm Merlyn’s visiting her at the moment. She seems mostly okay. She’s sad that Walter’s not here though,” Thea said. “She at least isn’t upset with how flaky Oliver’s being.”

“Oliver has never dealt with complex emotions well,” Barry said wisely. “He’s processing. Give him time. And tell him to give me a call at some point when I don’t have work or a small child to occupy me. But make sure that he knows he can call whenever if he needs to.”

Thea laughed. “I’ll pass on the message.”

They chatted for a bit more, Barry talking about her day, and briefly about Livvy’s day (though they both knew that Livvy would tell Thea in extreme detail the next time they talked), and then about the homework Thea had gotten done. Barry confirmed that she’d made it to the school – well, she hadn’t, but Iris had – to pick up all of her makeup work, and Barry’d scanned it into the computer and emailed it to her. Thea quickly checked her email to make sure she had it before making an excuse to hang up. If Barry had been up half the night before with Livvy, she needed to go to bed. Thea promised to pass on well-wishes to her mother and Oliver before ending the call.

The next few days went by in a similar manner: she spent time with her mother, did her homework, and lounged around watching television shows and movies. She forced Oliver to join her on the latter when he was around, continuing on his things-you-missed list. The only excitement was
Walter’s return two days after Thea’s own arrival.

It was at that time that Thea chose to approach Oliver.

“Look, I’m sorry that I was a bitch to you earlier,” she said.

“There were a few times,” he said in typical older brother fashion. “Could you be more specific?”

She tried to fight back a smile. “Don’t push it,” she warned him, though she could feel the smile creeping onto her face.

“Don’t worry,” Oliver said. “You weren’t a bitch. At the hospital…you were, you were a little bit.”

There was no stopping the smile and small laugh this time.

“Look, I’m just worried about you,” she told him. “You seem really lonely. And, we all have our secrets, Ollie. Clearly, you have yours. And it’s fine if you don’t want to share them with us. But…I just really think you should share them with someone.”

She had to get up on her tiptoes to kiss his cheek, and then left him with those thoughts as she went back to her room. She had a Skype call in ten minutes for a group project in history.

Four days later, she and Oliver flew back to Central City and arrived just in time for Thanksgiving dinner.

“Dinner with Joe and Iris,” Barry murmured into Oliver’s ear as she greeted him at the door with a hug. “You ready for this?”

“As I’ll ever be,” he replied quietly.

Barry hugged Thea as well.

“It’s just going to be the six of us. Joe’s at the head. Oliver, you’re at the foot. Thea, you’ll be on one side with Iris, and Livvy will between Oliver and me.”

“Is everything already done?” Thea asked.

“We’re just waiting on the turkey and stuffing,” Barry said. “The mashed potatoes, sweet potatoes, corn, peas, green bean casserole, rolls, and pumpkin are all done. Unfortunately, I forgot to turn the oven on, so the turkey’s a bit behind.”

“You were watching the parade, weren’t you,” Thea said knowingly. It happened every year. Barry got distracted watching the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day parade and inevitably either burnt part of dinner or forgot to turn something on.

Barry blushed, and that was all the confirmation Thea needed. She grabbed her brother’s arm.

“Come on, Ollie, time to greet Livvy and watch you get interrogated by Joe and Iris!”

Thea didn’t know her brother could go so pale.

They’d only made it two steps into the house – Barry had already disappeared back into the kitchen – when Livvy shrieked, “DADDY!” and came thundering down the stairs.

Oliver caught her when she jumped from five steps away.
“I missed you, Sparky,” he said, kissing the top of her head as he held her tight.

“I missed you too, Daddy,” the almost-five-year-old replied.

“Oliver Queen,” a man’s voice greeted. It wasn’t nearly as dark as Thea expected, but she supposed Joe had had five years to get used to the fact that (one of) his little girl(s) had gotten pregnant thanks to Oliver Queen.

Oliver swallowed.

“Detective West.”

He shuffled Livvy around in order to shake the offered hand. Thea watched curiously. Oliver did have experience with disapproving cop-dads. Detective Lance still hated him, and Joe just disliked him, so he already had that.

Iris liked him though, as opposed to Laurel’s hot-and-cold feelings towards Oliver, so he actually was two steps up from his relationship with the West family.

“It’s good to finally meet you properly,” Joe said.

“Properly?” Thea couldn’t help but asking.

“We met briefly, when Barry first moved to SCU,” Joe explained.

“Laurel roped Oliver and Tommy into helping her move into the dorms!” Barry yelled from the kitchen.

Joe nodded.

“But we haven’t met properly before now,” he continued.

“And that is a shame,” Iris said, stepping into the entryway and holding out her hand to Oliver as well. “Iris West. I’ve heard a lot about you, Mr. Queen.”

“Please, both of you, just Oliver,” Oliver said.

“You can call me Iris,” Iris replied.

Joe didn’t say anything for a long moment, until Iris leaned over and hit him. He sighed.

“I suppose you can call me Joe,” the detective sighed.

“Are you on-call today?” Thea asked.

“Not today or tomorrow, but I am this weekend,” Joe said. “Barry isn’t at all.”

Barry poked her head out of the kitchen.

“Turkey’s done,” she announced. “Joe, do you want to carve it?”

“On my way,” the detective said.

“Oh, and it turns out that I might be on call shortly. Forrest just called. His surrogate just went to the hospital, and they confirmed she’s in labor. Her water hasn’t broken yet, but they’re expecting the birth today or tomorrow. He said I’d probably be able to finish Thanksgiving dinner, but he’d
give me a call when he was switching on-call from him to me,” Barry announced.

Livvy slumped in Oliver’s arms.

“You have to go to work?” she asked in a small voice.

“Not yet, sweetheart,” Barry soothed, running a hand over Livvy’s hair. “Maybe tomorrow. Remember Mr. James and Mr. Lyndon, and how I told you that they’re going to have a baby?”

Livvy nodded.

“You let me pick out the toys for the baby that we’re going to give her,” Livvy confirmed.

“It could be a boy, sweetie,” Barry reminded.

Livvy shook her head stubbornly. “It’s going to be a girl.”

Barry let a small smile slip.

“Well, do you remember the book we read about the baby who had two daddies, so there was a nice lady who helped them have a baby?”

Livvy nodded. Oliver looked confused.

Thea stood on her tiptoes to whisper in his ear, “Barry found a picture book to help explain surrogacy to Livvy after she started asking questions about how the Forrests were having a baby when we told her that it takes a mommy and a daddy to have a baby.”

Oliver nodded slightly, but made sure not to disturb Livvy.

“Well, the nice lady who’s having Mr. James and Mr. Lyndon’s baby is almost ready to have the baby, even though the baby wasn’t supposed to be here for another week or two,” Barry explained. “Mr. James was supposed to be working this week, but if the baby is born, then he needs to go be with Mr. Lyndon so they can take care of the baby, and I’ll have to go work instead.”

“Ooo-kaay,” Livvy said grudgingly. She perked up again. “When the baby’s born, can we take the toys we bought to the hospital for her?”

“Or him,” Barry reminded. “I don’t think the baby needs the toys in the hospital, but if you ask very nicely, Mr. James and Mr. Lyndon might let you see the baby.”

“Mr. James thinks I’m adorable,” Livvy said, her tone making it clear that she was obviously going to get her way.

…To be fair, she usually did no matter what. Barry was good about saying no to Livvy, but Joe, Iris, Thea, Oliver, Moira, and Walter were not. Considering the Queen family was full of billionaires…well, Livvy was a bit spoiled, though not nearly as bad as Thea and Oliver had been at her age.

Thea, Oliver, and Iris were all trying to hide smiles now. Barry let out an exasperated sigh, though she didn’t bother trying to hide her smile.

“Just remember,” she said, pulling Livvy from Oliver’s arms into her own, “that you have manners which means you need to ask Mr. James and Mr. Lyndon if you can see the baby, not just demand to see the baby. Manners are important.”
Livvy nodded seriously.

“No manners, no pony,” she repeated. “Grandma said so.”

That caused them all to burst out laughing. They were still laughing when Joe came back and said, “I don’t know what joke I missed, but Thanksgiving dinner’s ready.”

They all filed into the dining room. Someone – Thea suspected Iris over Barry – had decorated it to be festive in a fall sort of way. The food was lined up on the buffet table on one wall, next to the china cabinet that held Nora Allen’s china. They weren’t using it. Barry never did. Her mom had bought Barry her own set of china as a birthday present after hearing from Thea why Barry didn’t use her mother’s.

The dark red-and-gold china went perfectly with the décor. Thea wasn’t sure if Iris had planned that.

Joe gestures for Barry to go first, as she’s the one holding the almost-five-year-old, and Joe follows along and puts food on a plate for Livvy while Barry reminds her what some of the things are.

Sweet potatoes and green bean casserole only came out on Thanksgiving, after all, and Thea was relatively sure Livvy ignored both last year.

Iris gestured for Thea to go behind the Barry-Livvy-Joe trio, and then Oliver. Oliver insisted that Iris go first, and then Barry once she finished getting Livvy situated in her chair. He looked like he was going to insist Joe go as well, but Joe just gave him his best cop look, and Oliver willingly followed Barry through the line.

Since there were only six of them, it didn’t take long for them all to be seated.

“Are we giving thanks first and then eating, or eating first and then giving thanks?” Joe asked.

“Eating,” Livvy declared firmly.

Everyone laughed, but agreed that eating was acceptable.

(It smelled delicious. Thea was glad it was a forgot-to-turn-the-oven-on-year as opposed to a forgot-to-turn-the-oven-off year. Those were the years they had to relocate to the West house.)
Granted, since they did know Barry, they kept extras of everything in the fridge over there so they could start cooking dinner all over again. That was why they had Thanksgiving dinner midday instead of in the evening, at least according to Joe. It gave them time for a do-over if round one didn’t work out.)

Even with the inclusion of Oliver, conversation flowed around the table. Livvy dominated Oliver’s attention, Barry and Joe were talking about work cases (censored for both little ears and the fact that they were at the dinner table), and Iris and Thea talked about her college plans.

She’d applied early action to both Starling City University and Central City University. She was leaning towards international relations or business administration as a major. Queen Consolidated was her family’s company, after all, and she wasn’t planning to let that go. She knew she didn’t have to work, but Barry and Joe had both drilled in the importance of working hard into her head over the past five years. She didn’t need to work, but she definitely wanted to.

“Thea, did you manage to get all the work your teachers forwarded done?” Barry asked. “Livvy, you wanted the sweet potatoes, so you have to eat them. They’re on your plate. You need to finish what’s on your plate.”

Livvy made a face and reluctantly started poking at the sweet potatoes.

“Everything got done,” Thea assured Barry. “I have a few tests and quizzes to make up next week, but I should be okay. I had plenty of time to study.” She couldn’t resist glaring at Oliver, who suddenly looked very interested in his sweet potatoes.

…Oliver hated sweet potatoes.

Thea shifted her gaze slightly and noticed that Livvy now looked very satisfied and no longer had sweet potatoes on her plate.

Barry followed Thea’s gaze, frowned at the resolution of the sweet potato argument, and glared at Oliver. Unfortunately, he was still attempting to eat sweet potatoes, so he didn’t see it.

‘Kick him,’ Barry mouthed to her.

Thea did, with great pleasure.

Oliver jerked and glared at her. Thea jerked her head toward Barry, who was still aiming a death-glare at him before very obviously looking at the sweet potatoes on his plate and the emptiness of Livvy’s. Oliver wilted, even though Barry’s death-glares were pathetic. At least he got the point.

The rest of dinner went on in a mostly-calm fashion. The highlight was Oliver’s excessive praise of Joe’s pumpkin pie, which was apparently his mother’s recipe.

The next day consisted of Oliver, Thea, Barry, and Iris going Black Friday shopping, all on Oliver’s dime. He offered, they accepted, though Barry had to be guilted into it. It helped that Joe was more than willing to not go and watch Livvy instead. Barry ended up leaving halfway through, as the Forrests’ baby had been born and she was now the on-call CSI for the department. The first crime scene she got called to was actually at the mall, so all she had to do was ask the detective who was on his way to bring her travel kit.

While Barry was still gone, Joe pulled Oliver aside for a ‘discussion’. Thea and Iris tried in vain to listen in, but Joe was smart about it. He did it in Barry’s study/lab, which was soundproofed if the door was closed (mainly to cover up the sound of any small explosions she might cause), and left Livvy in the living room watching Tangled, which obviously meant that Thea and Iris also ended
up in the living room watching *Tangled*. They couldn’t just *not* sing along to “I’ve Got a Dream.”

Oliver ended up staying until Sunday. He pretty much got thrown into parenthood as Barry lived it, since she was gone on cases most of the time. Thea and Iris were there most of the time as well, Thea because she lived there and Iris because Joe was working and she didn’t feel like staying home alone. They alternated between being actually helpful and egging on Livvy’s antics.

He, Moira, and Walter flew in barely a week later for Livvy’s birthday. Thea went over the Central City penthouse as soon as they were in, but no one told Livvy they were there yet.

“Thea, thank God!” Oliver said as soon as she came in. “Please tell me you’re good at wrapping things.” He dragged her into his room, and Thea’s jaw dropped at the mess the seeming explosion of presents had caused.

“Oh, she’s five. How many presents did you get her?” Thea asked.

Oliver winced.

“I was trying to make up for the four birthdays I missed?” he offered.

Thea groaned, but started helping him wrap the multitude of presents anyway.

Barry pressed her finger to her lips as she opened the door to let Moira, Walter, and Oliver inside. All of their arms were full of presents.

“Livvy’s still upstairs,” she said quietly. “She insisted that since she’s five now, she can get dressed on her own.

She had them leave all the presents in the hall closet — it wouldn’t do for Livvy to see them before she had to go to school — and ushered them into the kitchen/breakfast room, where Iris, Joe, and Thea were already waiting. Joe was making pancakes. Thea was half-lying on the table and clutching a cup of coffee as if her life depended on it.

Despite Barry’s best efforts, Thea was *not* a morning person. It was amazing her grades were as good as they were, since she had trouble functioning before noon.

Barry gave it another minute before going over to the stairs and calling, “Livvy! Do you need any help?”

It was quiet for a moment, before Livvy called back, “Yes.”

Barry laughed to herself as she headed up the stairs.

Upon entering Livvy’s room, she discovered that Livvy had figured out that they would let her get away with wearing whatever she wanted on her birthday. She had on her Merida dress, rainbow leggings, pink cowboy boots, and was currently trying to put her hair in a ponytail.

It had gone badly.

After ten minutes of straightening out Livvy’s hair and pulling it up into pigtails, they were finally ready to head down to breakfast.

Livvy thundered down the stairs with her usual aplomb, and greeted their visitors with a high-
pitched squeal.

“DADDY! GRANDMA! GRANDPA!”

Livvy somehow managed to hug all three of them at once with her spindly arms, before moving to hug each of them individually, along with Thea, Iris, and Joe.

“Pancakes for the birthday girl!” Joe announced. “Where are you sitting, Livvy?”

“Here,” Livvy said from Oliver’s lap, sounding unconcerned.

Barry bit back a snort and shrugged when Joe looked over at her. Joe ended up shrugging as well and placing the pancake in front of Livvy. It had whipped-cream-and-chocolate-chip eyes, a strawberry nose, and a banana smile.

Livvy squealed in delight once more. Barry pitied Oliver’s hearing, but she’d dealt with five years of crying and squealing already, so she wasn’t that sympathetic.

“Do I get my presents now?” Livvy asked anxiously once she’d finished eating.

“You know the rules,” Barry said before Moira, Walter, or Oliver could say anything. “Only one present before school, and you already got your present from me.”

She reached over and wiped the whipped cream off of her newly-five-year-old’s face.

“What did your mom get you?” Oliver asked her.

“Can I get it, Mommy?” Livvy asked, bouncing on Oliver’s laugh.

Barry exaggerated considering it, crossing her arms and drumming her fingers on her left arm.

“I suppose,” she finally said, drawing out the ‘o’. “But you can’t run, and you have to be extra, extra careful on the stairs.”

“Promise,” Livvy said with a nod, before climbing off of Oliver’s lap and running upstairs.

“Didn’t you just say no running?” Oliver asked.

“I meant when she comes back, and she knows that,” Barry replied. “If she breaks it, she has to save up her allowance until she can replace it.”

It took Livvy a couple minutes to carefully make her way back into the kitchen, cradling the figure she’d opened up this morning in her hands.

“It’s part of my birthday train,” Livvy explained. “I get a new princess every year.”
Oliver made a show of ooh-ing and aah-ing over the Precious Moments figure while he finished his breakfast before Livvy dragged him upstairs to see the rest of her collection.

Livvy and Thea both somehow made it to school on time, despite the multitude of distractions present. Barry and Joe headed to work. Iris also went to school, as she had finals in a week that she needed to study for.

Barry had no idea what Walter, Moira, and Oliver were doing, but they’d assured her that they could entertain themselves.

Despite having planned to only work a half day, Barry still ended up working until evening. Forrest was still on paternity leave, and there’d been a series of robberies recently with no evidence left behind. The CCPD suspected Leonard Snart and/or Mick Rory. The latter was more prone to arson, but he had been seen out-and-about recently, though Snart hadn’t.

Iris ended up coming up to her lab to drag her home for Livvy’s family birthday party.

“But my tests!” she protested.

“Will still be there in the morning,” Iris replied as she manhandled Barry into the car. “No one’s caught Snart in years. Staying late one night isn’t going to do it.”

“What about…” Barry began, but Iris interrupted.

“Joe can drive you to work in the morning.”

“Fine,” Barry grumbled.

Livvy’s family birthday party – as opposed to the birthday party with her class that would take place on Saturday – consisted of dinner, cake, and Livvy opening her multitude of presents.

Oliver had gone ridiculously overboard. He’d gotten their daughter two different American girl dolls (her favorite historical character as well as one that looked like her), an absurd amount of clothing for them, furniture, accessories – the works.

Barry understood that he’d missed her birth and four birthdays, but they were definitely having a talk about restraint before Livvy’s next birthday.

Joe and Iris presented her Merida-themed clothes.
“So hopefully she’ll stop wearing her costume every day,” Iris told Barry in an aside. Barry heavily suspected that Iris had picked the clothes and Joe had just paid for them. He hated picking presents, especially clothes. He’d started simply giving them money for their birthdays when they were twelve.

Moira and Walter went predictably overboard (though not as much as the $20,000 pony Walter had given her the previous year) and presented Livvy with a silver tiara with actual diamonds in it. It was perfectly sized for her head, though Moira assured Livvy that they’d pay to have more platinum – it was platinum? – when she grew.

Barry really wished she could lecture Moira on restraint, but given that she was neither related to the woman by blood or marriage, she didn’t feel she had the right.

She did have the right to make sure that tiara got locked up in a safety deposit box...as soon as she took out a personal property floater on it. She’d gotten experience in locking up ridiculously expensive gifts that she didn’t want kept in her house over the past five years of being the mother of Moira Queen’s only grandchild. The woman had been born rich and only gotten richer, and took the idea that grandparents are supposed to spoil their grandchildren to the extreme.

Thea gave Livvy a Lego set that was actually meant for children ages 9-14, but they all knew Livvy could do it.

“Is this Han Solo’s ship?” she asked excitedly.

“Yep!” Thea said. “You’ve been going through your other Legos so fast that I thought you needed one of the big sets to keep you occupied for a while.”

“And speaking of Star Wars, I believe I promised you a new movie,” Barry said. “We’ll watch one today, one on Saturday, and get you started on Clone Wars over Christmas break.”

Livvy cheered and immediately started ushering everyone into the living room for the movie.

Evidently, Walter was a secret nerd just like Oliver, while Moira – like Iris – could care less about Star Wars. Walter and Oliver eventually got banished to Barry’s study/lab because their argument over the portrayal of the Jedi in the prequel series was getting too loud for the people actually watching the movie. Moira and Iris were having a side conversation about one of Iris’ classes, but they were at least being quiet about it.

Despite her protests, Livvy got put to bed after the movie. She was out only a few minutes later. Moira and Walter had bid them all farewell before Livvy went to bed, as they had an early flight back to Starling in the morning. Oliver would be staying in the guest room through Livvy’s second birthday party on Saturday, though he’d be attending in a fake beard and wig so no one realized that Oliver Queen was attending a five-year-old’s birthday party.

Barry liked her life. She did not want her life ruined by paparazzi intent on cataloguing the life of the youngest heir to the Queen family fortune.

Livvy’s birthday party with her class went about hot she thought a party with twenty-five kindergarteners at Chuck E. Cheese’s would go. She was glad she had shanghaied Joe, Iris, Oliver, Thea, and Thea’s best friend Miri into helping corral the children.

They simply introduced Oliver as ‘Thea’s cousin Ollie’ (though Thea had recommended Miguel), and avoided mentioning that he was Livvy’s father. They also warned Livvy not to call him ‘Daddy’ in public, which she accepted with her usual ease.
It was two days later that Oliver called from Starling. As soon as Barry picked up the phone, he said, “I’m throwing the Queen Family Christmas Party. Can you all come?”

“When and I presume the where is your house?” Barry said, pulling her calendar out of her purse from where it was stashed under her lab desk.

“The where would be correct and as for when…” Barry could practically hear Oliver wince. “Two days? At seven?”

“You’re in luck,” Barry said. “Thea managed to exempt most of her mid-terms, so she’s done tomorrow afternoon. Forrest is finally back from paternity leave and owes me a favor for Thanksgiving. We can fly out tomorrow night, if you’re willing to pick us up late from the airport.”

“Deal,” Oliver said immediately.

Barry let out a laugh. “Don’t get too excited. We’ll probably only be able to stay for two or three days.”

“But I want you three there,” Oliver said. “The last time you came to a Queen family Christmas party…”

“We don’t talk about the last time I came to a Queen family Christmas party,” Barry said hurriedly.

There had been mistletoe involved. And Robert Queen had been a firm believer of the rules about getting stuck under the mistletoe, even when it ended with awkward situations for himself.

Barry had kissed more people under the mistletoe during that one Christmas party than she ever had before in her life. The only time it had been intentional was when she and Sara had staged getting caught there so they could kiss in public for once in their lives, even if it had to be kept quick.

Oliver let out a laugh. It had been a long time since Barry had heard him so free. She’d see if she could convince Forrest for three or four days instead. This obviously meant a lot to him.

“So, what caused this?” she asked.

“Mom said that the family didn’t feel like celebrating Christmas the year Dad and I disappeared, so they didn’t,” Oliver admitted. “I figured that since none of us had Christmas for five years, and I had the opportunity to have Christmas again, I didn’t want to miss it. I hope you had Christmas in Central?” he questioned.

“It was hard, after Thea moved in, to convince her about having a happy Christmas,” Barry admitted. “Since it was your dad’s favorite holiday. I understood that. It was my mom’s too, and I had a hard time for years celebrating without her and my dad. I had a hard time after you and Sara died, since it was her birthday. The only reason I celebrated that first year was because it was Livvy’s first Christmas. It’s still hard now, but I do my best to keep the spirit for Livvy, and for Thea. It’s not even a holiday anymore if I don’t head to Iron Heights to visit my dad first.”

“Does Livvy go too?” Oliver asked. He didn’t seem judging, like most people did when they asked if she took her child to prison to visit her convicted-murderer father.

“I’ve been bringing her since she was a few months old,” Barry confirmed. “I would have brought her sooner, but she was born so early and prison visiting rooms are horribly unsanitary. We go
once every couple weeks most of the time.”

“I bet he’s glad that you still believe in him,” Oliver said quietly. “If I were in prison for something I didn’t do, it’d mean the world to me if Livvy still believed in me.”

Barry felt her heart soften.

“I’d believe in you too,” she replied quietly. “You’re a good man, Oliver. Nothing you do could ever change that.”

They were both quiet for a moment, before Barry asked, “I assume your mother is dressing Livvy and I, as per usual?”

“She went shopping as soon as she and Walter agreed to have the party,” Oliver confirmed. “I’m pretty sure that, whatever it is, it’ll be cheaper than that ridiculous coat she had you wear to the benefit last month.”

“Tulle is a horrendous material for a coat, though it did look pretty,” Barry said. “I needed a second coat to make up for the insulation the first one didn’t have. At least this time, I won’t need a coat, since I’m staying upstairs instead of across town.”

Oliver chuckled.

“I’ll see you tomorrow then?” he asked.

“Tomorrow,” Barry confirmed. “And during Livvy’s Skype call tonight. I think I’ll let you tell her the good news. She’ll be thrilled. It’s a good thing none of us have to pack much, with the short notice you’re giving us.”

“Tonight,” Oliver said. “See you then, Barry.”

“See you then, Oliver.”

As predicted, Livvy was thrilled when Oliver told her about their upcoming visit during their nightly Skype call. He usually didn’t get to talk much, as the calls were mostly devoted to Livvy telling him every single detail of her day that he missed since he was in a different city. It was more Oliver getting to know Livvy than it was Livvy getting to know Oliver. Thankfully, Livvy was an extroverted ball of energy and didn’t take long to warm up to people…at least people her mother trusted. If strangers approached her on the playground, she was a well-raised CSI’s child/cop’s grandchild and screamed bloody murder.

The night they arrived in Starling City, they barely did more than shuffle from the airport to the car, and then from the car to their rooms. They didn’t get in until nearly midnight, and Livvy had been asleep for hours at that point.

The next morning, Barry had the glorious experience of not waking up until noon. Since Thea was even less of a morning person than Barry was, Livvy almost always opted to wake her when she woke up, and her wake-ups tended to be between six and seven, no matter what day of the week it was. Sleeping in was a lost luxury to Barry at this point.

While finding food, she ran into Raisa and discovered that while Livvy had been up since seven, her wake-up call of choice had been Oliver, who had helped her get ready and have breakfast before bringing her with him on his decoration tour of the house. He’d finally left her in her playroom with Raisa to keep an eye on her while he left the house on an errand. He hadn’t returned yet.
Barry still hadn’t seen Oliver again by the time the party started, though she’d been assured he’d been in and out of the house. Moira had, typically, dressed her in red, though the dress also had some black around the shoulders and chest. It was probably in order to match the red, black, and gold dress that Livvy was wearing.
The house smelled like pine. While Oliver hadn’t gone to Robert’s lengths of putting a live tree in every room, all the public rooms had at least one tree, and there was mistletoe in nearly every doorway. Barry made a point of walking through all of them with Livvy and planting a loud kiss on her cheek each time.

Livvy thought it was thrilling.

“Aw, that’s cheating,” a voice came from behind her after the third or fourth time she and Livvy had gone through the same doorway.

Livvy turned to see Tommy, Laurel on his arm, coming to greet her. She greeted them both with a hug, and Livvy dove from her arms to Tommy’s. He awkwardly tried to figure out how to hold a little girl in a dress without trying to mess up said dress. Livvy managed to squirm herself into the proper hold, which left Barry free to hug Laurel.

“You both look amazing,” Laurel complimented.

“Moira’s work, as always,” Barry demurred. “I just show up and wear what she tells me to wear.”

“When did you two – or three I guess, since I suppose Thea’s here too –” Barry nodded. “– get here?” Tommy asked.

“Very, very late last night,” Barry said. “I slept until noon. I haven’t done that since college, though that’s mostly because someone,” she said as she poked Livvy in the ribs, causing her to squirm and giggle, “always wakes me up before then.”

“So, why were you walking back and forth through the doorway?” Laurel asked.

“Mommy kisses me every time we do!” Livvy exclaimed. “It’s a lot of fun!”

“That’s not the real fun of the Queen doorways at Christmastime,” Tommy said with a wolfish grin. He was obviously remembering the last Queen Christmas party, and Barry’s unfortunate luck with it. “How many people did you kiss, Bare?”

Laurel unfortunately took her boyfriend’s side.

“Let’s see…” she said with mock-thoughtfulness. “I remember Ray, Steven, Chris, Martin…”
“…my dad, Oliver’s dad, Oliver’s mom, Oliver…” Tommy added.

“…me, you, Anna, Grant, Sophia, Raisa…” Laurel continued.

“…Mr. Chen, Mr. Bowen, Mr. Steele, Mrs. Darvish, Mr. Darvish, Mr. Taylor, Mr. Foster, Mr. Fyff …”

“…Sara,” Laurel said, then froze. Tommy did as well.

“…That one wasn’t accidental, was it?” Laurel asked quietly.

Barry smiled sadly.

“No. Sara felt sorry for how many times I’d ended up under the mistletoe with random people, plus we’d realized that we could get away with kissing in public so long as we kept in short and under the mistletoe, since everyone at the Christmas party knew Mr. Queen’s rule.”

Tommy and Laurel both smile fondly.

“Sara kissed almost as many people as you did that night,” Laurel said with a small laugh. “Were you competing?”

“Not intentionally,” Barry said grimly, shuddering at the reminder of how many random people she’d kissed. Some of them more than once. She’d only thought that kissing her ex-husband’s father was awkward until she’d had to kiss her ex-husband’s mother. Thankfully Moira never brought it up again.

“Any idea where Oliver is?” Tommy asked, not-so-subtly changing the subject.

“I haven’t seen him all day,” Barry admitted. “I know he’s been around, but he’s been busy. I’m sure he’s around here somewhere, after all the work he put into this party.”

“Found him!” Livvy cheered, pointing towards the other side of the room.

Barry grabbed her hand and pushed it down.

“It’s rude to point,” she scolded.

“I’m not supposed to say his name though,” Livvy pointed out.

Barry sighed at her daughter’s logic.

“I guess we’ll excuse it this time.”

Oliver was in the middle of taking a picture with Moira, Walter, and Thea.

“It’s their first family picture,” Barry said with a smile.

She wished that Livvy at least could join in, but they couldn’t do that in so public a setting. Any family pictures would have to be taken once all the guests had left.

Oliver made his way over to them next.

“Don’t you ladies look lovely?” he said, greeting Barry and Livvy with kisses on the cheek.

“I’m glad you two could make it,” Oliver told him, glancing at Laurel.
“Merry Christmas buddy,” Tommy said, hugging him.

“Merry Christmas.” Oliver replied.

Oliver then hugged Laurel lightly, saying, “Merry Christmas.”

“Hi,” she replied.

They stood there awkwardly for a moment before Tommy asked, “So, how long do you guys think it’ll be before this isn’t so weird?”

“It’ll probably be better by next Christmas?” Barry offered at the same time Oliver said, “It’s not weird.”

Barry saw Thea passing by and quickly passed Livvy off to her before turning back to the group and saying quietly, “There’s always going to be some bit of weird, Oliver. I only dated Iris for a week and a half and it’s still occasionally weird.”

“When did you two date?” Oliver asked in surprise.

“A couple years ago,” Barry admitted. “Officially, anyway. We made out a few times in high school. I finally confessed about the massive crush on her back then, we decided to see if it would work, and then promptly decided we were way better as friends.”

“I didn’t know that,” Laurel said, also looking surprised.

Barry shrugged.

“We went out once and kissed maybe three times before deciding that we weren’t compatible romantically. We’re still friends, of course, best friends, but it’s occasionally weird.”

Things were quiet for another moment, before Laurel asked, “Tommy, Barry, can I talk to Oliver alone for a minute?”

“I will go get us drinks,” Tommy said. “And drink both of them. And Barry can help. She’s not on call this time.”

“I have Livvy to think about,” Barry protested, but Tommy argued anyway as they walked away.

“Walter and Moira are here. Thea’s here. Oliver’s here, and he hasn’t gotten drunk yet since he got back, at least that I know of. You can let loose a bit, have a couple drinks, even if you are a lightweight,” he said as he led her to the bar.

“They’re serving champagne,” Barry said drily. “And I used to drink with Sara. I’m not a lightweight. I’m definitely not getting drunk off champagne.”

“Oh, you obviously haven’t seen the other bar,” Tommy said. “That’s where they keep the good stuff. I will warn you: you will get carded at the bar.”

“I’m twenty-five,” Barry deadpanned.

“And though you look lovely in that dress, you don’t look any older than Thea,” Tommy replied.

They acquired their drinks before wandering over to the lit fireplace, which had six stockings hanging in front of it. None of them had names, but Barry could faintly pick out initials hidden in the elaborate embroidery.
“Walter,” she said, tracing the ‘W’ in the first stocking. “Moira.”

Tommy caught on to what she was doing and picked out the ‘O’ in the next stocking. “Oliver.”

“Thea,” Barry continued, tracing the fourth.

“You and Olivia,” Tommy finished, running his hand over the ‘B’ in the fifth stocking, before gesturing to the sixth, which was identical to Oliver’s.

“He included us,” Barry said, touched.

“He wouldn’t leave Sparky out,” Tommy said. “And he couldn’t include her but forget you.”

“So, how are things going for you?” Barry asked, changing the subject before she teared up and ruined her makeup. Thea would murder her if that happened.

“I’m guessing Oliver told you about my dad?” Tommy said grimly.

“Yeah,” Barry said, reaching out to rest a hand on his arm. “How are you holding up?”

“I mean, he’s never been father of the year, but I never thought he’d cut me off either,” Tommy admitted. “It was a little out of the blue. He’s had talks with me before about my irresponsibility, but nothing recently. It’s like he literally woke up one morning and decided, ‘Hey, let’s see if cutting Tommy off would make him more responsible!’ I really don’t get him sometimes.”

“I’ve never been the biggest fan of billionaire parenting methods,” Barry said after glancing around to make sure that Moira wasn’t nearby first.

“Is that why you’re raising Sparky like a typical, middle-class single mother?” Tommy asked.

“It’s not like I’m paying for everything,” Barry replied. “Moira gave me the contents of Oliver’s trust fund after Livvy was born. I used it to buy my house, and for daycare for a while. I’ve gotten a raise since then, so I don’t anymore, and I prefer to have Livvy with family anyways. I still end up with random presents though. Thea likes to use her trust fund to buy groceries.”

“You’re still not treating her as a billionaire’s daughter,” Tommy pointed out.

Barry decided to be blunt about it.

“Oliver was dead,” she said. “I never expected her to be a billionaire’s daughter, so I never treated her like one. Sure, I went along with it when Moira decided etiquette lessons were necessary, or when Walter decided to give her a pony for her fourth birthday, but it was almost like a vacation, you know? She was a part-time billionaire’s daughter. Even with Thea living with me, we were normal. Then Oliver decided to come back from the dead, and we weren’t normal anymore.”

“Am I interrupting?” Laurel said as she came over and accepted the wine glass from Tommy’s hand.

“Not at all,” Barry said with a smile. “What happened to Oliver?”

“He went looking for Thea, or possibly Livvy,” Laurel said. “Watch out for any mistletoe if you go looking for him.”

“I cased the place earlier,” Barry said conspiratorially. “I know how to get everywhere in the house without having to go through the doors with mistletoe on them.”
“That’s cheating,” Tommy protested, but Laurel was laughing as Barry walked away.

She went the roundabout way in order to avoid the mistletoe as she looked for Oliver. She found Thea first, up in her room with Livvy, *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* playing on the TV.

“What are you two doing up here?” she asked from the doorway.

“Livvy was bored. I didn’t want to have to deal with it,” Thea said grumpily.

Barry raised an eyebrow.

“Do you want to talk about it?” she asked.

“Not really.”

“I’ll leave you to your movie then,” Barry replied. “Have you seen your brother?”

“He was here a few minutes ago. His bodyguard came to get him,” Thea replied.

Barry checked Oliver’s room, the study, and then all of the downstairs rooms once again before heading back over to Tommy and Laurel.

“I can’t find Oliver,” she admitted.

“He’s probably around somewhere,” Tommy reassured. “Relax, Bare. You find your kid at least?”

“Thea’s got her watching Christmas movies,” Barry said.

“See? All good there. Oliver’s probably just schmoozing and you managed to miss him.”

Barry felt muscles she hadn’t realized were tight relax.

“You’re probably right,” she admitted.

“Just enjoy the party,” Tommy advised.

It was only an hour later that Moira came hurrying over to them, a tight look on her face.

“Oliver was in a motorcycle accident,” she said in a low voice. “His bodyguard called. He’s in the hospital. Walter, Thea, and I are heading over there now. Can you three manage the party without us?”

Barry felt something in her chest tighten, but managed to say, “Of course. Let him know we’re thinking of him. And can you let us know how he is?”

“Of course,” Moira said, grasping Barry’s hand briefly and squeezing it before disappearing into the crowd.

“Nor will he ever discover your involvement,” Malcolm assured. “You have my word.”
“Forgive me if I don’t find that comforting,” Moira replied, turning to return to her car.

“You were warned, Moira,” Malcolm said. “I told you to get Walter under control and you couldn’t. Steps had to be taken.”

“That’s what you said to justify Robert’s murder,” Moira said, whirling around to face him. “And you wonder why I don’t trust you.”

“Quite a bit of judgment from a woman who had her son kidnapped and tortured,” Malcolm pointed out.

“To prove to you that Oliver didn’t know anything,” Moira said sharply. “What does it matter now? What’s done is done.”

“No, Moira,” Malcolm said. “It’s just beginning. In six months, the organization’s vision of what this city should be will be complete.”

Moira shook her head in disbelief.

“And you won’t feel a thing, will you? Thousands of innocent people will be dead, and you’ll feel nothing.”

Malcolm took a step closer to her.

“That’s not true. I’ll feel a sense of accomplishment. And you’ll have Walter back.”

He turned and returned to his car. He opened the door, then turned back to her.

“And Moira? Remember Walter isn’t the only weakness you have. Step out of line, and that pretty little granddaughter of yours will be next.”

He climbed into the car, which started and drove away.

BARTHOLOMEADAMIANALUMINAALLEN – OLIVERJONASROBERTQUEEN – OLIVIAROBERTASARAALLENQUEEN

The news of Walter’s kidnapping struck the Queen family to the core so soon after Oliver’s accident. The next day, Moira came into the room where Barry, Thea, and Livvy were watching Christmas movies and said, “Thea, I want you to move back home after the break.”

“I can’t move back now! I only have one more semester! It’s my senior year, Mom!” Thea protested.

“I need you back here, Thea,” Moira almost begged. She really did need this.

Barry could see the moment when Thea figured it out too. She slumped in her chair.

“After break,” she confirmed glumly.

“Thank you,” Moira said before leaving the room.

“You’re leaving?” Livvy asked in a small voice, tugging on Thea’s sleeve.

“I need to be here with your grandma and Oliver right now, Livvy,” Thea tried to explain.

“She’s still going to come back home with us for Christmas,” Barry soothed. “She’s just going to
come back and stay with Grandma and Daddy afterwards. It’s just like she’s going off to college, except a little bit early.”

Livvy climbed onto Thea’s lap and wrapped her arms around her the best she could.

“I’ll miss you,” she said, her voice muffled by Thea’s shirt.

Thea wrapped her arms around Livvy as well.

“I’ll miss you too. But you can always come out and visit me, and we can Skype, just like you do your dad.”

“Okay,” Livvy agreed, pulling her head away from Thea just long enough to get the word out properly.

Oliver was released from the hospital the next day, and they boarded the private jet to Central City that afternoon. Oliver had offered to stay in Starling instead of going to Central for Christmas with the Wests as planned, but Moira insisted they go.

Christmas was…lackluster. Oliver, Thea, and Barry were all worried about Walter, and everyone was sad about Thea’s upcoming move to Starling, six months before anticipated. Everyone was also worried about Oliver, who was still recovering from his broken ribs and concussion. They all tried their best to keep their spirits up for Livvy’s sake, but they didn’t do the best job.

There were a lot of tears the day after New Year’s, when Oliver and Thea boarded the private jet back to Starling City, along with most of Thea’s things. Her casual clothes were staying at Barry’s house, as were the basics of her room, but all of her personal items were going back to her room at Queen Mansion.

“I’ll miss you, Daddy!” Livvy said, hugging her departing family members one at a time. “I’ll miss you, Auntie Thea!”

Iris and Joe both hugged Thea as well, and Iris hugged Oliver, though Joe just shook his hand.

Barry was the last one through the line.

“Call me if you need anything,” she told Thea as she hugged her tightly. “If you need to talk, rant, anything. I love you.”

“I love you, too,” Thea replied, eyes wet.

“We’ll come out for your birthday,” Barry promised. “Four weeks, and you’ll see us again.”

Thea choked back a sob.

“I’ll miss you all so much,” she said, hugging Barry again.

“We’ll miss you too,” Barry replied, kissing the top of her head.

“We need to go now, or we won’t make it in time for dinner,” Oliver said apologetically.

Thea and Barry reluctantly pulled apart.

“Four weeks?” Thea asked in a small voice.

“Four weeks,” Barry confirmed. She felt her own eyes moisten as Oliver led Thea towards the
A tug at her pant leg had her picking up Livvy automatically.

“We’ll see Auntie Thea for her birthday?” the girl asked.

“Of course we will,” Barry said. “And we can Skype her as soon as she gets home. And whenever you want to talk to her, you can always call.”

“Really?”

“Really-really,” Barry confirmed.

As the plane started towards the runway, Barry kissed the top of Livvy’s head and turned around to look at Joe and Iris.

“Let’s go home,” she said. “I think we could use some ice cream.”

“Ice cream sounds fantastic,” Iris agreed.
Vertigo

Chapter Summary

Compasses the end of "Trust, but Verify" and all of "Vertigo".

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Having a birthday party when you’d only been going to a school for four weeks sucked. Her entire class had been invited, and there was absolutely no one Thea wanted to talk to. She missed Central City. Barry was bringing Livvy out the next day, but she was working on-call tonight and hadn’t manage to make it out for the big party.

The music was pounding, lights were flashing, and everyone was dancing around with green glow sticks. Her mother had gone all out on making sure she had a blow-out eighteenth birthday party. She wasn’t having much fun. She mostly sat off to the side with her new car keys in hand.

She missed her old friends. Miri wouldn’t have let her hide away from her own birthday party. Alex and Charles might have enjoyed it, simply because there were a bunch of pretty, rich girls around they could flirt with. The twins probably would have done something to make her laugh.

These people didn’t even realize she wasn’t in the middle of things.

Her brother, however, would, and he had just walked through the door. She plastered a smile on her face, got up, and hurried over to him.

“Ollie!” she exclaimed. “Check it out, check it out!” She held up her new car keys. “Convertible!”

“You must be so surprised,” Oliver said mockingly, but there was a smile on his face.

“Isn’t everything just absolutely perfect?” she asked. “Except for, if Dad were here.”

Oliver leaned closer to say into her ear, “If Dad were here, he’d say you look beautiful.” He kissed her cheek.

Thea smiled at him.

“I wish Barry were here too,” she admitted. “And my friends from Central. It’s a great party, but it would be better with them.”

“Barry’s a terrible dancer,” Oliver said. “But she does look young enough that she’d blend in with your crowd, if you ignored her five-year-old.”

“Probably,” Thea laughed. She caught sight of more of her classmates entering. “Excuse me, sir!”

She squeezed past Oliver and moved to greet Blake and Morgan, who were probably her closest friends at her new school so far.
“Happy birthday!” Blake exclaimed, reaching out an arm to hug her.

“Aw, thank you!” Thea replied with a smile.

“Here’s a special birthday gift for you,” Morgan said, slipping a small baggie into her hand. “It’s called Vertigo. It’s supposed to make you feel all floaty.”

Thea quickly hid the drugs in her fist.

“Uh, if my mom caught me with this, I wouldn’t make it to nineteen. I’m gonna go put it upstairs, then I’ll be right back down,” she said. She quickly slid the bag into the top of her dress, stashing it in her bra. Barry had taught her to do that with cash and IDs when she went to parties. She probably wouldn’t appreciate Thea using her lessons to hide drugs.

She’d just made it up the stairs when she saw Malcolm Merlyn standing with his hand on her mother’s back before turning and heading down the other stairwell. Her mother turned around, and stopped short when she saw her.

“At my party,” Thea said. “Right here in front of me?” she asked tightly, before turning to walk away.

“No, Thea,” her mother said, hurrying after her. “You don’t understand…”

“Walter hasn’t even been gone two months, and you’re already cheating on him,” Thea said angrily.

“Sweetie,” her mother said, reaching out for her.

Thea jerked away from her. “Just like you did on Dad,” she said.

“I never cheated,” her mother tried to say.

“Like I would believe anything you say,” Thea said, feeling betrayed.

“Thea,” her mother said.

“I wish that it’d been you who was on that boat,” Thea spat out before brushing past her mother and moving back down the stairs to the party.

She pulled the drugs out of her pocket and took a look at them. She’d been clean since she moved in with Barry…but she really wanted to forget right now. She moved swiftly through the party and out the front door. Maybe her new convertible would cheer her up.

It didn’t take long before Morgan’s present kicked in. ‘Floaty’ was a nice word for it. It was like nothing she’d seen earlier mattered anymore, until she jerked the steering wheel in order to avoid a car and ended up face to face with a tree.

She woke up in the ambulance.

“Miss, you’re okay, you’re going to be okay,” the paramedic said. “Can you tell us your name?”


“Can you tell us what today’s date is?” the other paramedic asked.

The questions continued as they transported her to the hospital. By the time her mother and Oliver
arrived, she was already situated in a room with a hospital gown, and the cut on her forehead had already been fixed up with butterfly bandages.

“Oh, Thea,” her mother said worriedly as she came in, Oliver close behind.

“Are you okay?” her brother asked. Thea believed his worried tone, unlike her mother’s.

“Yeah,” she said. “Yeah, I’m fine. Just – headache-y, really. The car, is it…?”

“The car isn’t important right now,” Oliver said.

Thea dropped her head back onto the pillows. Well, there went her BMW. Maybe she could get Barry to drive to Starling with Speedy the next time she visited.

“Do you remember what happened, sweetheart?” her mother asked.

Thea let out a huff of laughter at that.

“Just go away,” she said, looking away from her mother.

“Thea,” her mother said. “Please.”

“I said, I’m fine!” Thea snapped.

Her mother looked at her sadly, but slowly turned and left the room. Oliver stayed.

“Go home, Ollie,” Thea said tiredly. “They’re keeping me overnight for observation. I’ll be fine.”

“I don’t mind staying,” Oliver said.

“I don’t want to talk about it,” Thea said sharply. “And I’d like to be alone right now.”

She didn’t look up as Oliver leaned over and gently kissed the top of her head.

“Call me if you need anything, Speedy,” he said quietly before leaving the room. “I’ll come pick you up tomorrow.”

True to his word, he was there bright and early in order to take her home from the hospital. She was still under concussion watch, and her license had been suspended, so there would be no driving herself for the time being. At least Oliver had been kind enough to bring her clothes, though she heavily suspected their mother had actually picked them out.

“She promised me that she’s not cheating on Walter,” Oliver tried to convince her as they left her hospital room.

“Like I would trust anything that woman says,” Thea fired back.

A voice from behind them interrupted further conversation.

“Miss Queen!”

Thea turned around to see a police officer striding towards her. “Thea Queen?” the man asked.

“Is there a problem?” Oliver asked.

“We received a call from your doctor,” the officer said. “In the event of a vehicular accident, they’re required to report the results of the driver’s tox screen. Miss Queen tested positive for a
narcotic called Vertigo.”

Oliver turned slowly to look at her.

“The drug they’re using in the Glades?” he asked in a low voice.

Thea ducked her head.

“Thea Queen, you’re under arrest for driving under the influence of narcotics,” the officer said, pulling her hands behind her back as he locked handcuffs on her wrists.

BARTHOLOMEADAMIANAALLEN – OLIVERJONASQUEEN – OLIVIAROBERTAALLEN

Getting greeted at the airport by Oliver and told in an undertone that Thea had been arrested for driving under the influence of a narcotic was not how Barry expected their weeklong trip to Starling to begin. He didn’t want Livvy to know, and Barry agreed. Moira was already at the station posting bail, so as long as they took the scenic route home, Livvy should never know she was gone.

“Where’s your bodyguard?” Barry asked.

“Driving Mom to the station,” Oliver replied quietly, glancing back at Livvy, who had a book open on her lap. “Isn’t she a little young for reading?”

“She’s a genius,” Barry shrugged. “Just because I read to her every night doesn’t mean she couldn’t do it on her own if she wanted to. We had to put in a rule about reading ahead in our night-time book though. She spoiled the end of Beezus and Ramona for me.”

“Hey, Sparky,” Oliver called out. “What’cha readin’?”

Livvy didn’t look up.

“Physics: Investigate the Forces of Nature,” she replied, turning the page.

Oliver looked over at Barry once they hit a stoplight.

“What sort of books did you read with her growing up?” he asked incredulously.

“We have Quantum Physics for Babies, Newtonian Physics for Babies, Rocket Science for Babies, and General Relativity for Babies on the bookshelf at home,” Barry said. “Don’t worry. We have rules about experiments. Livvy?”

“No experiments without adult supervision, and no ‘lectricity experiments without Mommy’s supervision,” Livvy recited dutifully.

“Electricity,” Barry corrected.

“Electricity,” Livvy repeated.

Oliver just shook his head.

“My five-year-old is smarter than I am. Okay. I can handle this,” he said to himself, but it was loud enough that Barry could hear it.

She laughed at him. Oliver glared at her at another stoplight, but there was no heat behind it.
“Sorry, Ollie, but she’s definitely a genius. We had her IQ tested before she was allowed to start kindergarten early,” Barry said. “She’s probably going to skip another grade soon enough, but her teachers are focusing on her social development over her mental development at the moment. She’s reading so far beyond her peers. She can do multi-digit equations in her head. She learned Spanish from watching the Spanish channel at home, and Japanese from watching anime. She’s currently teaching herself Scots Gaelic so that she can be more like Merida. Nach eil sin ceart, milis?”

“Se mamai!” came the answer from the backseat.

“Did you include this in your Parenting 101 course?” Oliver asked faintly.

“It was near the end; I’m not surprised you missed it,” Barry replied, patting him on the shoulder comfortably.

When they arrived at the mansion, another car was just pulling out of the front drive and around to the garage.

“Looks like your grandma and Auntie Thea are here,” Barry told Livvy. “But Auntie Thea needs to rest after her accident, so how about once you hug her, I go start up a movie for you to watch?”

“Brave?” Livvy asked.

“Of course,” Barry agreed, climbing out of the car.

It only took a minute to get Livvy out of her car seat. As soon as her feet were on the ground, Livvy dashed inside.

“Auntie Thea! Grandma!” she shouted.

“I’ve got the bags,” Oliver said, waving Barry away. “Go on inside.”

Barry smiled thankfully at him and headed in.

Thea was already on her way up the stairs. Moira was holding Livvy.

“Mommy said that I can watch Brave again,” Livvy told her.

“Well, why don’t I get that set up for you while your mother talks to Thea?” Moira said with a smile.

“Are you sure?” Barry asked, brow furrowing.

Moira smiled sadly.

“She’s not talking to me at the moment. You’ve been more her parent than I have these past five years,” the older woman said before carrying Livvy off towards the media room.

Barry headed up the stairs and knocked on Thea’s door.

“Thea-Bee? It’s me,” she called out.

“Come in,” Thea replied, voice muffled by the thick door.

Barry opened the door, stepped in, and shut it behind her. Thea was lying on her bed, facing away from the door. Barry walked over to the bed and sat down next to her, laying a hand on her back.
“I don’t want to talk about it,” Thea said, not looking over at her.

“I didn’t think you did. That doesn’t mean you’re going to get away with not talking,” Barry replied. “You’ve been clean almost five years, Thee. Why now? Where’d you even get the drugs?”

Thea finally rolled over to face her.

“One of the girls from my school gave them to me. Said it was a birthday present. I was going to just flush them down the toilet, but then I had an argument with Mom and…well, it seemed like a good idea at the time,” she said with a shrug.

“What was the argument about?” Barry asked quietly. “You don’t have to talk about it right now if you don’t want to.”

“Mom or Oliver would tell you anyway,” Thea grumbled. “Mom…I think Mom’s been cheating on Walter with Malcolm Merlyn. And I think it’s been going on since Dad was alive.”

Barry sat quietly for a moment, digesting that information.

“What does Oliver think?” she finally asked.

“He asked Mom, Mom said no, Ollie believes her,” Thea said. “He’s always been a mama’s boy.”

“What have you seen that makes you think that there’s an affair?” Barry asked.

“We were out shopping for my dress for my party, and she took a detour and left me in the car. But she was meeting with him. Why else would they be having secret meetings? And then at my party, I went upstairs to throw the drugs out, and they were standing together, and he had his hand on her lower back. It just…it was at my party! It’s barely been a month since Walter went missing!” Thea said angrily.

“Why do you think it started before your dad died?” Barry asked.

“Mom and Dad were arguing a lot, before the boat trip,” Thea revealed. “I never heard the words, but I could hear their tones. Mom was angry, Dad was defensive. And then they went on that boat trip, and Dad never came home.”

“Your mother loved your father very much,” Barry said quietly, rubbing Thea’s back. “And I’ve seen how she looks at Walter. She loves him very much as well. Secret meetings can have other explanations, but you can’t hide how people act when they’re in love.”

“Like how you act around Oliver?” Thea asked.

“We are not talking about this right now,” Barry said quickly.

Thea looked up at her.

“He gets this look on his face when he thinks nobody’s looking – this look of wonder and adoration and a bit of confusion, like he doesn’t know what to do,” Thea said. “He only gets it when he’s looking at you. He has a slightly different adoring look for Livvy. He loves you.”

“La-la-la-la-la, I’m not listening,” Barry sang. “We’re not here to talk about me. Don’t change the subject.”

Thea huffed.
“I get it; I shouldn’t have done it, I won’t do it again. Mom’ll pay my fine, I’ll do my community service, and everything’ll be good again.”

“Your relationship with your mother won’t be,” Barry said quietly.

“I don’t need a relationship with her! She pays my bills and I apparently now live in the same house with her. You are the one who’s been there for me. You’re more my mom than she is.”

“I love you, Thea,” Barry said. “Moira loves you. She’s not the best at showing it, and she never figured out parenting skills, but she loves you. You’re her only daughter. You’re the one she loves going shopping with. You’re the one she watched reality TV with when she was sick. You’re the one who made her absolutely terrified, because you almost died and the last words you said to each other were in an argument.”

“To be fair,” Thea said, turning away again and muffling her voice with her pillow. “She never said anything bad. I’m the one who wished she’d died on that boat instead of Dad.”

Barry stilled the hand that was still rubbing Thea’s back.

“Do you?” she finally asked.

“No,” Thea said, voice muffled. “I’m not glad Dad was the one to die either, I love them both and I wish neither of them was dead, but I wouldn’t trade them out. That’s not how it works.”

“No,” Barry said softly. “It’s not.”

She’d wondered, at times, if Nora Allen would have been sent to prison if Henry Allen had been the murdered one, if she couldn’t have somehow kept one of her parents instead of becoming legally orphaned in a single night. She loved her mom, and there were plenty of things that she’d do to get her back. But she wouldn’t trade her dad for her.

“I should apologize for that, but I’m still angry,” Thea admitted.

“It’s okay to be angry,” Barry said comforting. “I was angry with Joe for ages after my dad got put away. Just don’t let your anger control you. It’s the path to the dark side, you know.”

That at least got Thea to roll her eyes.

“Nerd,” she said.

“And proud of it,” Barry replied. She leaned down and kissed the teen’s forehead. “So, do you want more time in your room, or do you want to watch Brave for the four thousandth time?”

“We really need to introduce her to more movies,” Thea said.

“I think she’d also agree to Star Wars,” Barry replied. “She’s not really old enough for chick flics yet.”

Thea sighed.

“Brave it is then.”

It was a holiday weekend, so the trial didn’t start until Tuesday. Livvy was staying with Raisa, but Tommy agreed to come by to pick Barry up. She couldn’t go with the Queens without people asking questions. This was bound to be a media circus.
“Docket ending 1-10-5-6, the People v. Thea Dearden Queen,” the man at the front of the court room read out to start the trial. “Possession of a controlled substance, driving under the influence of a controlled substance.”

“Counselors, I understand you’ve reached a plea agreement,” the judge said.

“We have, Your Honor,” the Queen’s lawyer – at least the one dealing with this particular case – said. “Given that my client is a juvenile, the People have generously agreed to probation.”

“Juvenile?” Judge Brackett questioned. He looked down at his notes. “Says right here she’s eighteen.”

“She is eighteen now, Your Honor,” the lawyer said, “but at the time of arrest, she was still two days’ shy of her eighteenth birthday. Miss Queen has no priors.”

“Well, just because Miss Queen’s family sweeps her priors under the rug doesn’t mean they don’t exist,” the judge retorted.

Barry winced in her seat beside Tommy. This was not going well.

“You get your client off,” the judge said to the Queen’s lawyer, “and you help your boss avoid dealing with the drug that’s sweeping across our city like a plague,” he told the prosecutors. “Everyone wins, except us, the people of Starling City.”

“Your Honor,” the Queen lawyer began, “with all due respect…”

The judge ignored him. “Miss Queen,” he said. “Like it or not, you are now the poster child for this menace. Maybe if people see that the Queen family can’t get away with using Vertigo, they’ll think twice before using it themselves. The plea arrangement is denied,” the judge announced, smacking his gavel against the sound block. “This case will proceed to trial.”

Thea turned around to look at her family, and Barry could see the shock on her face. Oliver had never had this problem during any of his court appearances. The Queen name and money was usually enough to convince judges to give them a second (or in Oliver’s case, sixth) chance.

The courtroom filled with noise, and camera shutters immediately started snapping pictures.

“Laurel’s here,” Tommy said to her. “Lunch? Maybe she has some suggestions to help Thea.”

“Sure,” Barry said, accepting his hand up to rise from her chair. “I never get to see you two much when I’m here, since I’m always with Livvy and Oliver.”

They were quiet as they met up with Laurel and exited the courtroom.

“Are you free for lunch?” Tommy asked her. “Barry agreed to come with us.”

“I’m done for the day at court, though I have things I need to go over at the office,” Laurel replied. “Lunch sounds great.”

Over lunch, Laurel explained the dilemma.

“Vertigo’s becoming a big problem in the city, especially in the Glades, but no one’s doing anything about it,” she told Barry and Tommy over Thai. “Judge Brackett’s trying to force the city executives into doing something. By making Thea his pawn, he’s also getting the Queen family and their associates to pressure the city executives into doings something.”
“So, he’s sacrificing an eighteen-year-old girl in order to play politics,” Barry summarized.

“That’s what I’ve heard,” Laurel agreed.

“Can the judge really make his decision based on priors that legally don’t exist?” Tommy asked. “I mean, it’s been what, five years since Thea did something?”

“Well, she and her friends got arrested for breaking into a public pool to skinny dip one night, but the officers on duty knew Joe and he was able to get them off with a warning. And you know, being grounded for the next six months,” Barry said. “But Judge Brackett would have no way of knowing about that, since it happened in Central City. Besides that, nothing’s happened since the first year after the boat accident.”

“But Judge Brackett has friends in the SCPD who would remember that,” Laurel said with a sigh. “He didn’t break any laws. He just made a judgment of the defendant based on old information and decided she’d work as a pawn in his political game.”

Barry sighed as well.

“Maybe we’ll get lucky and a better poster child for Vertigo will pop up to be prosecuted.”

The rest of their lunch was somber after that. They dropped Laurel off at CNRI before returning to Queen Mansion.

“So, how’s Thea been?” Tommy asked on the drive over.

“Not the greatest,” Barry sighed. “She’s mad at Moira. She thinks Moira’s having an affair with your father.”

Tommy choked on air. It was a good thing they were at a stoplight.

“What? My dad…he can be charming, yeah, but he hasn’t looked at another woman since my mom died. At least not extensively. He’s had a few flings, but they were rare, and never lasted more than a night.”

“Except for those years that he was gone,” Barry said quietly. “You don’t know about those.”

“No,” Tommy said, letting out a sigh. “I don’t. But I practically lived with the Queens back then. He was never there. He was just…gone. He and Moira were friends, but they never seemed romantic. He and Robert were friends too.”

“Thea says she’s seen secret conversations, and a secret meeting at one point,” Barry said with a sigh. “She’s convinced. Honestly, I think she’s just angry at Moira and lashing out in any way she can.”

“I’d be mad too, if I had to leave my life behind and move to a city I left because of bad memories years beforehand, especially when that meant having to change schools for my last semester of high school,” Tommy said.

“I would too,” Barry said. “I’m not really happy with Moira either. It was her right, as Thea’s mother, to take her away from me, but she shouldn’t have. Thea was happy in Central. She’s not happy in Starling. And if this goes to trial…”

“What do you mean?” Tommy asked, confused.
Barry looked at him somberly.

“If this goes to trial, it’s going to come up that she’s only been living with Moira again for a month. They’re going to want to see Thea’s previous legal guardian, meaning me. And they’re going to want to know why Moira gave Thea to my custody, which will lead to Livvy, which will lead back to Oliver,” she explained.

Tommy cursed as they pulled up to the house.

“That would be…bad,” he said.

“That’s one way of putting,” Barry said as she unbuckled her seatbelt and grabbed her purse. “Are you coming in?”

“Not today,” he said. “I doubt anyone’s really up for company right now. Except maybe your child, but I don’t want to be a dragon again.”

Barry patted his arm.

“Look on the bright side,” she said. “It was better than the horse.”

Tommy’s laughter followed her out of the car and into the house.

Barry found Moira in the sitting room, a large glass of something alcoholic in hand.

“Why does she hate me so much?” Moira asked as Barry sat down.

“She doesn’t,” Barry replied. She decided to be blunt about this. “She doesn’t like your actions. She might even hate them. She might dislike you personally at the moment. But she could never hate you. You’re her mother and she loves you.”

“She just doesn’t like me,” Moira said, taking a large gulp of liquor.

“Not at the moment, no,” Barry admitted.

“She told me not to worry, because I wouldn’t have to put up with her any longer,” Moira said. “I want her here, I want her safe! I’m not putting up with her.”

“She’s angry,” Barry said. “Angry about the trial, angry about moving, angry about leaving her friends behind. You’re the easiest person to blame. But she doesn’t hate you. I promise you that.”

Moira remained quiet for a moment. Barry took the opportunity to take her glass of…whiskey, from the smell.

“Enough day drinking,” Barry declared. “Why don’t you go lie down? Sleep off however much of this you’ve already had.”

“That’s…probably a good idea,” Moira said, swaying slightly as she stood up.

Barry followed her up the stairs to make sure she made it safely to her room before heading to check on Livvy. Her daughter was in her room, playing with Thea and her new American Girl doll.

“There you are!” Barry exclaimed as she entered. She wasn’t sure if she was talking to Livvy or Thea.
“Mommy!” Livvy exclaimed. “Play with us!”

“Is that how we ask people to play?” Barry asked her.

“Mommy, will you please play with us?” Livvy corrected.

“Yes, I will,” Barry said, taking a seat at the table.

When Livvy wasn’t looking, Barry mouthed to Thea, *Do you want to talk about it?*

Thea mouthed back, *No.*

The next day, Laurel came by with good news. Barry and Thea sat on one couch while Oliver and Laurel faced them on the other.

“My father was able to get Judge Brackett to back off his hardline stance,” Laurel explained.

“Your father hates me,” Thea pointed out.

“No,” Laurel said. “My father hates him,” she said, gesturing at Oliver, who was intently studying his lap.

“So how’d you convince him that I wasn’t just like him?” Thea asked sarcastically.

“I pointed out that there was someone else you reminded him – and me – of,” Laurel replied.

“Sara,” Barry breathed.

Laurel nodded sadly. “Sara.”

Thea looked over at Barry.

“She was a troublemaker,” Barry said with a soft smile. “I always did have a thing for people who’d drag me into things I wasn’t brave enough to do on my own.”

“Look, nobody asked you to get involved,” Thea said with a shake of her head.

“I did,” Oliver said.

Thea looked at him.

“The judge has agreed to a sentence of five hundred hours of community service and two years of probation, provisional of someone to act in loco parentis,” Laurel explained.

“In loco what?” Thea asked.

“It means that the court will appoint an individual to assume responsibility for you,” Barry told her.

“Who would they be appointing?” Thea asked.

“Me,” Laurel said.

“I…” Thea began, but Barry interrupted.

“Thea-Bee, it’s a good deal. If you don’t take it, and this goes to trial, you could face up to five years in prison. And as Judge Brackett put it, you’re now the ‘poster child’ for Vertigo. If this goes to trial, they’re going to make an example out of you,” Barry said.
“And if this goes to trial, they’re going to figure out that you haven’t been living with your mother for the past five years, which means they’ll find out about Barry and Livvy,” Laurel said.

Thea bit her lip, then took a deep breath.

“Okay. I’ll take it.”

Barry let out a breath of relief.

“Thank you, Thea. For Livvy’s sake.”

“I’m doing it for her,” Thea said stiffly. “To keep her safe. Not for Mom.”

She stormed out of the room, followed closely by Oliver.

Barry sighed and looked over at Laurel.

“Thank you, Laurel. For everything.”

Laurel smiled back sadly.

“I’m sure that if Sara hadn’t had you there to reign her in, Dad would’ve had to bail Sara out over and over again.”

“She was smart enough to stay away from the hard drugs,” Barry said. “Booze and weed? Not so much.”

Laurel let out a huff of laughter.

“Well, I’ve got to get back to work.”

“I’ll walk you out,” Barry said, standing. Laurel rose as well.

As they walked to the door, Barry said, “So, I know we just had lunch yesterday, but I was wondering if you’d like to get lunch with Livvy and I? I wanted to take her to Eduardo’s.”

Laurel smiled sadly.

“Sara loved Eduardo’s.”

Barry nodded. “It’s where we had our first date. That’s why I wanted to take Livvy.”

“I’ll be there,” Laurel said with a nod. “Is 12:30 good for you? I have a meeting at 11.”

“12:30’s great,” Barry replied. “See you tomorrow.”

“Bye,” Laurel said as she walked out the door and headed for her car.

Barry thought that would be the end of the complications of her mini vacation, until the SCPD showed up at the front door. She’d been walking by at that point, so she opened it to find Detective Lance and McKenna Hall, whom she vaguely recognized from her partying-with-Tommy-and-Oliver days.

“Allen?” Detective Lance asked in surprise. “What are you doing back here?”

“I’ve worked almost four hundred hours since Christmas,” Barry said tiredly. “My boss told me to take my daughter and leave town so he wouldn’t be obligated to put me on-call for the next
week.” She gestured around the house. “Imposing on the Queens’ hospitality means I get the room and board of a five-star hotel, and all I had to pay for was my plane tickets out here.”

“You’re never an imposition, dear,” Moira said, walking up to them. “Detectives. How can we help you?”

“Can we come in, Mrs. Queen?” McKenna Hall asked. “We have a few questions for your son in regards to an ongoing investigation.”

“And that’s my cue to leave,” Barry said. “Good to see you again, Detective Lance, McKenna.”

The woman smiled at her.

“Good to see you too, Barry.”

She found out from Oliver what had happened as soon as the detectives were gone.

“Really, Ollie? You paid the Russian mob in order to get a glimpse of this guy to get the courts off Thea’s back?” Barry asked, unimpressed.

Oliver winced.

“I know. Not my best idea.”

“Not really,” Barry agreed.

“There is something else,” Oliver said hesitantly. “I told the detectives I didn’t get a look at the guy, and I didn’t, but I did get something.” He pulled a pair of syringes out of his pocket. “This is a concentrated dose of Vertigo. Do you think you could figure out where it’s being made? And maybe create a cure?”

Barry took it from him gently.

“Ollie, these syringes are half-empty. Did you get injected with it?”

Oliver winced.

“Maybe?”

“Please tell me you’re not driving,” Barry said.

“No!” Oliver said. “My bodyguard’s been doing the driving for me.”

“Not a very good bodyguard if he let you get dosed with Vertigo,” Barry grumbled. “I’ll need you to get me into QC’s applied sciences division, so I’ve got the machines I need. But why didn’t you give this to the police?”

“I will,” Oliver said, slightly too quickly. “I just…I wanted to try something else first.”

“Please tell me you’re not planning to go after this guy yourself,” Barry asked.

“I’m not,” Oliver said, sounding offended. “I was…maybe planning on trying to set the Hood guy after him,” he muttered.

“As a member of the Central City Police Department, I can say that I officially do not support vigilantism in any capacity,” Barry said. “But in my opinion? This guy’s doing a lot to help this
city, even if his methods are…questionable. You really think you can get in contact with him?”

“I think so,” Oliver said. “Don’t ask me how,” he said quickly when Barry opened her mouth to do just that. “It’s not my secret to tell,” he admitted.

“Okay,” Barry said. “I’ll do it. But once you get me into QC, you’d better come back here and play with Livvy. But not until after lunch. Livvy and I are meeting up with Laurel at Eduardo’s.”

“Deal,” Oliver said. He leaned down to kiss her cheek. Barry hoped her blush wasn’t too obvious. “I can get my bodyguard to drive you to Eduardo’s? I should probably head over to QC and get your pass set up anyway.”

“That would be great,” Barry admitted.

On the car ride to Eduardo’s, Oliver ended up sitting in the front seat with his bodyguard while Barry sat in the back with Livvy.

“Diggle, this is my friend Barry and her daughter Livvy,” he introduced. “You met Barry a couple months ago. She and her daughter are staying with us while they’re on vacation.”

“I’m from Central, but I went to college out here,” Barry explained. “The Queens are nice enough to let us impose on them after my boss kicked me out of the city for working too much.”

“You’re never an imposition,” Oliver said, echoing his mother’s earlier statement.

“You’re sweet,” Barry replied. “You just want my help with your little chemical problem.”

“Well, you didn’t want to impose,” Oliver retorted. “I’m just making you pay for your stay at Chez Queen.”

“I’m not sure letting me play around in one of the best corporate science divisions in the world is really payment,” Barry teased.

Lunch went…surprisingly well. There were some points that were awkward, obviously. Just as Tommy had pointed out at Christmas, it would take time before they were able to dispel all the awkwardness. Overall, it was good. Laurel got to interact with Livvy, and Barry really got the chance to talk to her former roommate. Most of it was casual things – different cases they were working on, funny stories about their coworkers – but they did start getting into more serious topics, such as their respective feelings on Sara.

Needless to say, both of them had very complex feelings on the topic.

Before Barry knew it, they’d finished lunch and were headed out the door.

“Bye, Auntie Laurel!” Livvy said, giving the woman a hug around the knees. Laurel crouched down to hug her properly.

“Bye, Livvy. It was good to finally get a chance to talk to you,” Laurel said. She then stood and hugged Barry as well. “It was good to talk to you one-on-one as well – well, almost one-on-one,” she said, looking down at Livvy. “Don’t be a stranger.”

“The same goes to you,” Barry replied, picking Livvy up. “If you’re ever in Central, call me up.”

“Will do,” Laurel said, waving as she left.

Oliver’s driver was already waiting to open the backdoor so she could put Livvy into her car seat.
“Back to Queen Consolidated,” Oliver instructed once Barry and the driver were both back in the car. “How was lunch?” he asked her.

“Good,” Barry replied. “It was nice to talk to Laurel again, outside of parties and galas and such. And lunch the other day, but we mostly talked about Thea’s case. Plus, Tommy was there too.”

“Uncle Tommy?” Livvy perked up. “He hasn’t come to visit me yet.”

“Do you want to go visit him once we drop your mom off?” Oliver asked her.

Livvy wagged her head excitedly.

“Apparently we’re heading to the nightclub next,” Oliver told his driver.

“If there is any alcohol consumption in front of my child, they will never find your body,” Barry threatened.

“We don’t even have any alcohol at the club yet,” Oliver promised.

They pulled up to the door of QC.

“I’ll let you know as soon as I have the results,” Barry replied.

“Thank you,” Oliver said sincerely.

It only took a few hours to finish the tests. She immediately emailed them to Oliver and texted him that she had a location – an old juvenile detention center in the Glades. It took a few more hours – and absconding two different chemists from the applied sciences division as backup – in order to create a counteragent for the drug. It took a quick call to Moira to OK her plan, but the woman was glad to approve it.

“This,” Barry said when they were finished, holding it up for the other scientists to see, “is a counteragent for the Vertigo which the Queen Consolidated Applied Sciences Division is going to mass produce and provide, free of charge for the next six months, to the hospitals of Starling City, especially the ones in the Glades. This is in response to the Vertigo epidemic in Starling City, and as thanks for the people of Starling City’s generosity in the plea agreement made to Thea Queen. The details of the creation of this counteragent will remain a corporate secret, which the revelation of would be a violation of your contracts and would result in your termination. Send it to production!”

There was a car waiting to pick her up. It wasn’t Oliver’s; Moira had told her that she’d picked Livvy up several hours before from the club, as Tommy and Oliver had gotten into business matters and Livvy had already finished her book and watching Brave on Oliver’s iPhone.

Oliver still wasn’t home when she got back to the mansion, but Thea did tell her that she and Moira had made up.

The next day, they had take two of Thea’s birthday party. This time, it was a surprise party, and just for family.

The biggest surprise was the massive TV screen that had several different Skype calls linked to it.

“HAPPY BIRTHDAY!” Thea’s friends yelled in attempted unison.

Thea shrieked in surprise.
“Miri! Carrie! Jon! Alex! Charles!” Thea greeted happily.

“Since we weren’t able to see you on your birthday, Barry told us that they were having a second party for you, so she and Iris managed to set something up,” Miri said with a large grin.

“We sent our presents out with Barry,” Jon chimed in from the bottom corner of the screen, where he was squished next to his twin sister. “She said she hadn’t given them to you yet.”

Barry, Oliver, and Moira all watched with smiles as Thea opened her presents from her friends in Central. They were all simple, not at all like the expensive presents she’d gained from the blow-out party the previous weekend, but it was clear that they meant more than anything her new classmates had gotten her.

“Well, we love you and we miss you, and we fully expect you to come see us this summer,” Carrie said, elbowing her twin so she had more of the screen, and ignoring his yelp when he fell to the ground.

“I love you and miss you too,” Thea said, tears in her eyes though there was a smile on her face.

“BYE!” the group called.

“Bye!” Thea called back.

As soon as the screen went off, Thea immediately moved to Barry and hugged her tightly.

“Thank you.”

“Anything for you, Thea-Bee,” Barry replied, squeezing her back just as tightly.

“Group hug!” Livvy cheered, crashing into their knees. They were stopped by falling by Oliver joining the hug on the other side, and then Moira joined as well.

There were definitely people missing, but it was still a good day.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry this was so delayed. I got distracted writing chapters that won't happen for a few more seasons. On the bright side, chapters twelve and thirteen are done. I just have to write seven, eight, nine, ten, and eleven first. Note: they are also the longest chapters I have written. I originally intended for it to be one chapter, until it ended up being over twenty-two thousand words. This chapter, on the other hand, is pretty average (I calculated the mean for chapters published so far, and it was 6663. This chapter is 6658. It's really average.) But now I'm rambling in my author's note, so I should stop typing and go to bed. I don't know when the next chapter will be up. I'm about to start back at school, so I'll either have a lot of time on my hands or no time on my hands for the first few weeks.

Also, all the books mentioned in this are completely real, though the For Babies books weren't published until 2017, so Barry and Livvy would not have read them together. However, I thought it was too funny not to include.
February did not start out the best for Barry’s friends and family. On February 1st, she got a text from Laurel saying, *I got kidnapped by a crime boss, but I was rescued by the vigilante and I’m okay.*

She immediately called Laurel.

“I’m going to need a better explanation than that,” she told her ex-roommate.

“I didn’t want you finding out from the news,” Laurel apologized. “I’m fine. I was…bait, I guess, since the vigilante’s saved me before. And, um…I may have asked him to go after Cyrus Vanch?”

Barry opened her mouth, then closed it again.

“Anything I could say would be hypocritical, because I probably would have done the same thing,” she admitted. “You’re okay though?”

“A couple bruises,” Laurel admitted. “And my apartment’s trashed from the fight. I didn’t exactly go quietly.”

“Who found it like that?” Barry asked.

“Tommy,” Laurel said.

“I hope you took the day off to spend with your boyfriend,” Barry said warningly.

“Don’t worry, I did,” Laurel said with a small laugh. “Dad’s here too. He actually worked with the vigilante to rescue me.”

“A parent would do anything for their child,” Barry said. “I’m glad you’re okay. Thanks for letting me know.”

“No problem,” the lawyer replied.

“I’d chat more, but I need to get back to work,” Barry apologized. “Everyone else was completely useless while I was gone, and I’m still working on the backlog.”


“Bye,” Barry said. She hung up her phone and went back to work.

The next day, she was in the middle of processing another case when Joe came up to her lab.
“Hey, I didn’t think it was time for lunch yet,” Barry said, checking her watch. Joe usually came up to make sure she ate at some point.

“Bare, I just heard through the grapevine that Moira Queen got attacked by the Starling City vigilante in her office last night,” Joe told her quietly. Barry froze.

“All the reports say that she’s okay,” Joe said quickly, laying a hand on her shoulder. “I just thought you’d want to know.”

“Yeah…yeah, thanks, Joe,” Barry said. “I need to call her.”

“I thought you’d want to,” Joe nodded. “I’ll stand outside, make sure no one interrupts you. Let me know when you’re done, okay?”

“Will do,” Barry said, already pulling her phone out to dial the number listed in her phone as M. Thompson.

It only rung once before Moira picked up.

“Hello, Barry,” the woman said calmly. “I’m assuming you heard?”

“About you being attacked? Joe just let me know,” Barry said.

“So Livvy doesn’t know,” Moira said, letting out a breath of what Barry was guessing was relief.

“No, she doesn’t,” she confirmed. “I’m assuming you don’t want her to?”

“There’s no need to worry her,” Moira said. “I’m fine. Shaken, but fine.”

“What happened?” Barry asked.

“The vigilante crashed through my office window, knocked out the people I was meeting with, and started asking me questions I didn’t know the answer to,” Moira revealed. “I managed to get the pistol Walter always kept in the office and shot him. I believe I did more damage to my own office than I did to him, but the police did manage to acquire a blood sample.”

“What sort of questions was he asking?” Barry asked curiously.

“Things I didn’t know the answers to,” Moira replied. “Please, Barry. I’ve been over this with the police multiple times.”

“Alright,” Barry agreed, though the part of her that had spent half her life with police detectives questioned the evasiveness of her daughter’s grandmother. “How are Oliver and Thea coping?”

“Thea is…processing,” Moira said. “Oliver hasn’t been home since yesterday afternoon, and he isn’t answering his phone.”

“He’s not?” Barry asked worriedly. “And nobody’s seen him? Not even his bodyguard?”

“His bodyguard dropped him off at the mansion last night,” Moira replied. “He hasn’t seen him since. He was apparently supposed to be taking the day off today for his nephew’s birthday.” Barry heard a muffled voice on Moira’s end of the line.
“Detective Lance just arrived to go over things again,” Moira said with a sigh. “I’ll talk to you later.”

“Tell Oliver to give me a call once he’s back,” Barry requested.

“I will,” Moira replied. “Goodbye.”

“Bye,” Barry said, hanging up. She walked across the room and poked her head out of her lab. “I’m done,” she told Joe. “She’s fine. No one’s seen Ollie since last night though.”

“Maybe he went to a club or something,” Joe offered. “Went home with someone.”

“He hasn’t been doing that much since he got back,” Barry said with a frown. “I don’t know if it’s because he doesn’t like being around that many people anymore or if he’s trying to be different for Livvy’s sake. And especially since he just happens to be missing the night his mother got shot at…”

“Bare,” Joe said, wrapping an arm around her shoulders in a side-hug, “he’s a grown man. I’m sure he’s fine.”

“Yeah, well, he was supposed to be fine on a boat trip with his dad, but he ended up getting tortured on a desert island instead,” Barry grumbled, though she leaned into the hug.

“Allen,” Detective Sobel called out, coming down the hall. “Have you got the info from the Rojas case yet?”

“Working on it!” Barry called back. She looked back at Joe. “I should get back to work,” she apologized.

Joe squeezed her shoulder. “Feel free to come downstairs if you need anything,” he said. “And don’t forget to eat lunch!”

“I won’t,” Barry said, even though they both knew that she’d forget to eat lunch.

She was eating lunch (after Joe’s second reminder, sent via Detective Drake when she came to pick up her evidence) when her phone rang, speakers blaring out Simon & Garfunkel’s “I am a Rock.” She attempted to grab it off the table, knocked it to the floor, tripped off of her stool and onto the floor and probably bruised her knee, and finally managed to answer the phone.

“Ollie!” she greeted, relieved.

“Hey, Barry,” he said. “Mom said you wanted me to call?”

“Just wanted to check on you,” she said, picking herself up off the floor and sitting back down on her stool. “Since your mom said you weren’t answering your phone.”

“I didn’t realize I’d turned it off,” Oliver said apologetically.

“Where were you?” Barry asked, taking a bite out of her sandwich.

“I went camping,” Oliver replied.

Barry froze in the middle of chewing. She hurriedly swallowed and pointed out, “It’s February!”

“It’s not raining, or snowing,” Oliver said. “It’s pretty nice. No insects in winter.”
“And you just randomly decided to go camping in February?” Barry asked.

“I was missing nature,” Oliver said. “I spent five years on an island, surrounded by nature, and then immediately moved back to the big city. I missed it.”

“Next time you feel the sudden urge to go commune with nature, please let somebody know that you’re going? And where you’re going?” Barry asked, a slight hint of pleading in her voice.

“I didn’t mean to worry you,” Oliver said, sounding subdued. “Does Livvy know? About Mom?”

“No, and I wasn’t planning to tell her,” Barry said. “Your mom asked me not to. There’s no reason to worry her, so I agreed. I probably need to let Joe and Iris know though.”

“Right, Iris was taking Livvy to the winter festival today,” Oliver said. “Wait, are you at work? It’s Saturday.”

“Crime doesn’t take weekends off,” Barry said. “It’s why I end up working too many hours so often. That and I forget when I’m supposed leave unless someone reminds me. I was late to pick up Livvy so many times when she was at daycare.”

“Is that why you just bring her with you if Joe and Iris are both busy?” Oliver asked.

“Yep. Captain Singh doesn’t mind if she sits in a corner somewhere and reads. If I need her to not be in my lab, she goes and sits with Joe or in the captain’s office,” Barry explained.

“She’s a good kid,” Oliver said. “You did an amazing job.”

“I wasn’t alone,” Barry refuted. “I had Joe, and Iris, and Thea. But you’re right. She’s a good kid.”

One of her tests beeped from the other side of the room.

“I should go,” she said. “I have tests to finish, and I need to finish my lunch first.”

“You forgot to eat again, didn’t you,” Oliver said.

Barry felt herself flush.

“Shut up, you. Go spend some time with your mom.”

“Will do. Bye, Bare.”

“Bye, Ollie.”

BARTHOLOMEADAMIANAALLEN – OLIVERJONASQUEEN – OLIVIAROBERTAALLEN

“So, to catch this guy, we need to either figure out where he is, or where he’s gonna be,” Oliver explained to Felicity, the noise of the restaurant masking their conversation from the other patrons.

“Is this really how you guys figure out how to get your target? Over burgers and shakes?” Felicity asked.

Before Oliver could respond, Carly came over with Dig’s drink.

“Sorry it took me so long. I’m waiting on a bunch of particularly rowdy customers,” she said, gesturing towards the group of teenagers on the other side of the room.
“You need me to handle that?” Dig asked.

Carly smiled at him.

“I appreciate it, but I’m a pro by now,” she assured with a wink.

“I’ll be here if you need me,” Diggle replied.

Carly smiled at him before heading back to the kitchen.

“Girlfriend?” Felicity questioned.

“No, no, it’s my, uh, sister-in-law,” Dig said. “Sort of.”

“Carly was married to Dig’s brother,” Oliver explained to their new teammate. “And he passed away.”

“Well,” Felicity said, nudging Diggle with her shoulder, “looks like she’s hot for you.”

“Ah,” Dig said. “Can we get back to crimefighting please?”

“Actually, Dig, I was thinking, you probably should ask her out,” Oliver said, attempting to encourage his friend. He wasn’t sure how well he did. It had been a while since he’d had to encourage a friend to pursue someone. Except for Tommy with Laurel, and that was more giving his blessing that encouraging.

“Really?” Dig asked.

“Mm-hm,” Oliver replied.

“I’ll do that just five minutes after you ask out McKenna,” Diggle replied, leaning back in his seat.

Oliver felt his mind go blank. McKenna? She was pretty, strong-willed, vivacious…she’d been a good friend before now, and everything he should probably want in a woman. But she wasn’t the one he’d been thinking of on-and-off since he’d been back, the reason he hadn’t slept with Helena (and that would’ve been a mistake), the person who’d lingered at the edge of his thoughts since he’d kissed her months ago.

“Ooh, the detective on the Dodger case,” Felicity said. “You have a thing for her?” she asked him.

“Uh, no. She’s pretty and a friend and all, but…there’s someone else,” Oliver said, attempting to deflect.

Dig raised an eyebrow at him.

“Your friend from Central City?” he asked.

“What makes you say that?” Oliver asked.

“Besides the way you looked at her the last time I drove you two around at the same time? She’s been here four times in four months, and every time I see you together, you look at her the same way, but only so long as she’s not looking,” Dig said.

“Central City, huh?” Felicity said. “That’s quite the distance.”

“Which is one of the very logical reasons why a relationship probably would not be the best idea,”
Oliver pointed out.

“Uh-huh,” Diggle said sarcastically. “I’m guessing the others involve that little girl of hers?”

“She’s only dated once since her ex died, and that was her childhood best friend, and it only lasted a couple weeks,” Oliver said. “I’m not sure if she’d say yes even if I asked.”

“You obviously didn’t see the way she looked at you when you weren’t looking,” Dig said with a smile.

Damn it. The ex-soldier had successfully defeated most of his arguments. The others he wasn’t going to get into yet. He might have checked on both of their backgrounds, but he wasn’t ready to trust his daughter into these two’s hands yet. After all, you couldn’t tell secrets you didn’t know.

“I don’t see you asking Carly out,” Oliver finally said.

Diggle got out of the booth with a smile and made his way over to where Carly was. Crap. Felicity watched them go, but Oliver was mentally echoing Dig’s earlier statement. It was time to get back to crimefighting.

“Felicity,” he said. The blonde looked over at him. “This guy, he’s targeting a very specific type of jewel. We figure out the why, and that’ll give us the how to catch him.”

“I’ve an idea,” Felicity said, though she’d looked over at Dig and Carly again.

“Mm-hm?” Oliver questioned. She finally looked back over at him.

“You’re friends with the detective on the Dodger case, right?” she asked.

“Yes…” Oliver said. He wasn’t sure he wanted to know where this was going.

“She said they were working with Interpol,” Felicity said. “Why don’t I work up a little tech, you distract her with a little chit-chat, slip said tech onto her phone. It’ll turn into a micro-transmitter, and boom! We’ll learn everything she knows.”

“Hmm,” Oliver replied, thinking the plan over. It just might work. “It’s not how I typically get my information,” he pointed out.

“How do you typically get your information?” Felicity asked, looking like she wasn’t quite sure she wanted to know.

“I find the person, and then I put the fear of God into them until they talk,” Oliver said. “But we can try it your way.”

Diggle came back a moment later with a smile on his face, and they didn’t have to ask how his question went.

“I guess it’s your turn,” Dig said, patting Oliver’s shoulder before he sat back down next to Felicity.

“After this is done,” Oliver said. “We’ve come up with a plan…”

“BARTHOLOMEADAMIANAALLEN – OLIVERJONASQUEEN – OLIVIAROBERTAALLEN

“So, my purse got stolen while I was with Laurel yesterday,” Thea said as soon as Barry picked up
the phone.

“Are you and Laurel both okay?” Barry asked.

“Yeah, it was just a purse snatcher. He grabbed it out of my hand and ran. We ran after him of course, but he managed to jump this insanely high fence. If he hadn’t been, you know, stealing my purse, it would have been cool,” Thea said. “But the chain from his wallet got caught on the fence, so I called every used clothing and leather goods store in Starling until someone was able to ID him for me.”

“And?” Barry asked. “Did you get your purse back?”

“Laurel got her dad to arrest him,” Thea said. “He had a record. Like, a long record. Nothing major, but lots of little things. He said his mom was a Vertigo addict, so I told Detective Lance to let him go. But he still didn’t give my purse back, so I tracked down his address.”

“Please don’t tell me you went to confront this guy alone,” Barry groaned.

“Maybe?” Thea said. “And it might have been nighttime?”

Barry groaned again.

“Hey! I have self-defense training! And I took my pepper spray. And a taser. And it all turned out fine,” Thea said.

“Thea-Bee, what happened?” Barry questioned.

“Nothing! He gave me my purse back with everything in it and told me to stay out of the Glades. Aaaand that I shouldn’t believe stories that guys like him tell the police,” Thea admitted.

Barry knew that tone of voice. She was pretty sure Thea learned it from Iris.

“You’re not going to leave this alone, are you?” she asked, already resigned to the answer.

“Probably not,” Thea replied truthfully.

“Be careful, especially in the Glades,” Barry warned. “Remember what happened to Tommy’s mother.”

“I will,” Thea promised. “I’ll be safe. But you know, I do kinda work there.”

“Stay with Laurel,” Barry advised. “She and I may both be cops’ kids, but she is better trained than I am. So is Iris, for that matter. I’m just bad at self-defense.”

Thea let out a laugh at that.

“So, what’s up with you?” Thea asked. “Any plans for this week?”

“None so far,” Barry replied. “I’m getting the feeling that Iris is going to try to set me up again for Valentine’s Day.”

“That went terribly last time,” Thea pointed out. “Didn’t you have to call Joe on the guy?”

“Yep. He ended up getting convicted of 2nd degree sexual abuse. The cops ‘forgot’ about him in the holding cell as long as they could. That’s what happens when you assault a cop’s daughter and one of their coworkers. The judge was a friend of Joe’s too, which is why the guy ended up in jail
for a year.”

“Didn’t he just grope you?” Thea asked.

“Non-consensual groping is still classified as sexual assault,” Barry told her. “I just wanted the guy to spend a night in the lock-up. The ADA at the time convinced me to press charges as part of the city’s initiative to crack down on sexual abuse. Most people probably wouldn’t have gotten such a strict sentence as that guy did. But he was just an example. If you don’t want something, it’s never okay for someone to touch you, or go further, without your consent. It doesn’t matter how well you know the person. If you don’t want it, it’s illegal.”

“I know, Bare,” Thea said. “I did sit through Joe’s sex-ed-part-two.”

Barry and Iris had given Joe’s ‘just say no’ talk the name sex-ed-part-two when they’d first gotten it, mainly because the talk about legal versus illegal and consent had lasted longer than the actual Talk.

“Mommy!” Livvy called from elsewhere in the house. “Come oooon!”

“I’ve got to go,” Barry told Thea. “Livvy’s waiting for me to supervise her science project.”

“What’s she doing this time?” Thea asked.

“Play-Doh and electricity,” Barry said. “I’d better go before she decides to start without me. Talk to you later?”

“Of course,” Thea replied. “Bye, Bare.”

“Bye, Thea-Bee.”

BARTHOLOMEADAMIANAALLEN – OLIVERJONASQUEEN – OLIVIAROBERTAALLEN

A Monday evening probably wasn’t a time most people would choose to go to their friends for romantic advice, but Oliver was on a bit of a time crunch. Valentine’s Day was Thursday.

He hoped Laurel was home already. He really did need help.

When he knocked on the door to Laurel’s apartment, it only took a few minutes for someone to answer. Unfortunately, that someone was Tommy, not Laurel.

“Hey,” Tommy greeted in surprise. “What’s up? I haven’t seen you in a few days.”

“I, uh, was wondering if Laurel’s here?” Oliver asked. “I kinda need some advice.”

“And you go to my girlfriend over me? I’m hurt,” Tommy said, though he had already opened the door wider and was gesturing for Oliver to enter.

“You’re my best friend, Tommy, but you’re not the one I go to for advice about…things,” Oliver said. “I’m pretty sure I need to talk to a girl about this one. Even if it’s going to be really, really awkward.”

Tommy studied him for a moment.

“I’ll make popcorn,” he said. “Laurel,” he called out as he moved further into the apartment. “Oliver’s here! He wants to talk to you!”
Laurel stopped short upon entering the living room and seeing Oliver.

“You’re nervous,” she said, surprise coloring her voice.

Oliver winced.

“It’s that obvious?”

“Yes,” Laurel said, moving further into the room. “Sit down. What did you want to talk about?”

Oliver sat down opposite her.

“This is going to be awkward,” he began, “given that you’re my ex-girlfriend, but I needed to talk to someone, and I can’t talk to Mom and it’s even weirder talking to Thea about this sort of thing than it is you.”

Laurel raised an eyebrow at him, and crossed one leg over the other.

“I’m guessing you need help with your love life,” she said.

“Yeah,” Oliver said. “I need help.”

“You could always ask Barry,” Tommy said, entering the room with a bowl of popcorn in hand. “She was great at helping me.”

Oliver winced.

“That…wouldn’t exactly work.”

“You need advice about Barry,” Laurel surmised. “You like her?”

“I think so?” Oliver said. “I mean…it’s hard. I love Livvy. I care about Barry, I always have, but it’s different now. But I can’t figure out if it’s different because I love her or if it’s different because she’s Livvy’s mother and I love Livvy. How do I figure out if I’m conflating the two?”

“Oh, Oliver!” Laurel exclaimed. “Slow down. First, how do you feel when you’re with Livvy. Just Livvy, not Livvy and Barry. I know that you were supposed to be spending time with her while Barry was working on whatever top-secret thing you had her doing at QC last week.”

“Wonder, amazement,” Oliver listed off. “Pride. Protectiveness. A bit scared. I just…I know that I’d do absolutely anything to make her happy, and to keep her safe.”

“Why do you feel those things?” Laurel prompted.

“I…I guess I’m amazed that I could have had anything to do with making someone so perfect. Livvy’s just…she’s so smart, and she’s so alive. It seems impossible that Oliver Queen could have contributed to that. I’m kind of a screw-up, if you haven’t noticed,” he said with a self-deprecating chuckle.

“Ollie, you’ve messed up, sure,” Laurel said sharply. “We all have. But you’re not a screw-up. You’ve done an amazing job trying to get your life back together after five years without your friends and family around you. Yes, you make mistakes, but you are not a screw-up,” she said fiercely.

Oliver was taken aback. His ex-girlfriend was not near the top of his list of people who would defend him….Barry was the top, actually, followed by his mother and Dig.
“If you say so, but with Livvy… I just feel in awe and this adoration and this mind-numbing fear that I’ll end up doing something that messes her up. I mean, she’s already perfect, there’s nothing I could do to make her better. So it stands to reason that I’d mess her up,” he said.

“Every parent feels like they’re going to mess up,” Tommy said around a mouthful of popcorn. “You’re doing fine so far. If you mess up, Barry’ll tell you. She’s doing pretty good at this whole motherhood thing.”

“Okay, so how do you feel when you’re with Barry? Just Barry, not Barry and Livvy,” Laurel clarified.

“We haven’t been alone together much,” Oliver said. “I mean, there have been a few conversations, but those were mostly about Livvy. And then there was the time that we went to the CNRI gala that Tommy hosted.”

“You mean the one you ditched her at so I had to take her to her crime scene?” Tommy asked with a raised eyebrow.

Oliver refused to blush.

“Yes, that one. I apologized afterwards, and we danced. And… yeah.”

“And what?” Laurel asked.

Oliver looked down at his lap, where he’d been threading and un-threading his fingers together the entire time.

“I kissed her. Well, she kissed me. And then I kissed her. But we haven’t talked about it since then,” he said quickly, noting the looks on both Laurel and Tommy’s faces.

“How many times have you seen each other since then?” Tommy asked.

“Um, I went to Central for Thanksgiving,” Oliver started listing off. “And then again for Livvy’s birthday. She came to Starling for the Christmas party, and then I went to Central for Christmas. And then she came back to Starling for Thea’s birthday. So… five times?”

“And neither of you have mentioned the fact that you kissed?” Tommy asked incredulously.

“No?” Oliver said with a wince.

“And nothing else has happened?” Laurel questioned.

“I’ve kissed her cheek a few times?” Oliver said questioningly. “But I do the same for Mom and Thea.”

“How did kissing her make you feel?” Laurel asked patiently, though she looked like she wanted to bang her head against the coffee table at his typical male obtuseness.

Oliver paused to consider that.

“It just felt… right,” he finally said.

Laurel threw her hands in the air.

“There you have it! Just ask the woman out already!”
“But what if she doesn’t feel the same way?” Oliver asked. He refused to admit that it was a
whine. He did admit that he sounded something like a teenager with his first crush. “It’s more
than just the refusal; what about Livvy? What if I’ve been misreading everything and I ask her out
and she doesn’t feel the same way and it makes things awkward with Livvy?”

“But what if she doesn’t feel the same way?” Oliver asked. He refused to admit that it was a
whine. He did admit that he sounded something like a teenager with his first crush. “It’s more
than just the refusal; what about Livvy? What if I’ve been misreading everything and I ask her out
and she doesn’t feel the same way and it makes things awkward with Livvy?”

“Dude, there’s a simple solution,” Tommy said. “Call her sister and ask her. But I’m pretty sure
she feels the same way.”

“I agree,” Laurel said.

Oliver ducked his head.

“My driver said the same thing,” he admitted.

Both of his friends laughed at him for that.

“Well, there you have it!” Tommy said. “You like her, she likes you, Valentine’s is this week, call
the girl and ask her out already!”

“I’ll go home and call Iris,” Oliver said, rising from his chair. “Thanks for letting me interrupt
your night.”

“You’re our friend, Ollie,” Laurel said, also standing. “We can spare one night to help you with
your romantic problems.”

“But only one night,” Tommy said, standing as well. “After this, you’re on your own.”

Oliver let out a small laugh at that.

“Thanks for the help, guys. See you tomorrow, Tommy?”

“Of course, dude,” his best friend replied. “Have a good night.”

“Good night!” he called back as he showed himself out.

The drive back was far too short for his racing thoughts. Once he got back to the mansion, he went
straight to his room and started pacing, phone in hand. Finally, he gave in and called pressed go to
call Barry’s foster sister.

“Oliver?” the woman answered worriedly. “Is something wrong?”

Right. He didn’t usually call her.

“No, nothing’s wrong, Iris,” he assured quickly. He glanced at the clock. “Damn! I forgot about
the time difference. Did I wake you?”

“No, no, I have a test tomorrow,” the woman assured. “I’ve been up studying. What can I do for
you?”

“I have a question for you,” Oliver said. “Well, three questions, but they’re all related.”

“Go on,” Iris said, sounding amused at his slight rambling.

“Is Barry free on Valentine’s Day, and would she be willing to have dinner with me if I asked
her?” Oliver blurted out.
“Dinner as in dinner-dinner, or date-dinner?” Iris asked.

“Date-dinner?” Oliver said, hating how his voice pitched upwards as he said it.

“What was your third question?” Iris asked.

“How?” Oliver asked.

“Your third question,” Iris repeated. “You said you had three, that were all related. You’ve only asked two.”

“Oh. Um…I wanted to know that if Barry was available and willing to go out with me, if either you or Joe would be able to babysit Livvy,” Oliver said.

“Then yes,” Iris said.

Oliver blinked.

“To which question?” he asked.

“All of them,” Iris said, sounding smug. “Barry is available, she will definitely say yes if you ask her, and I am more than willing to watch your child while you two have dinner. I hope you’ve already made plans, because Valentine’s Day is not easy to get reservations on.”

“I may not live in Central City, but my name still means something,” Oliver reminded her. “Plus, I can just throw money around. But yes, I’ve already made reservations. At Le Rêve.”

“Her mother loved French food,” Iris said approvingly. “Good choice. What time are your reservations?”

“Seven,” Oliver replied. “Why?”

Iris didn’t deign to answer, instead saying, “I’ll make sure she’s dressed appropriately. Pick her up at six at her house.”

She hung up the phone without saying goodbye.

BARTHOLOMEADAMIANAALLEN – OLIVERJONASQUEEN – OLIVIAROBERTAALLEN

“Iris, why do I have to do this?” Barry said as Iris hovered behind her, doing her hair up into some kind of elaborate chignon. “The last time you set me up, the cops got called.”

“Ah, but this time is going to be different,” Iris said as she stabbed Barry in the head with a bobby pin.

“Ow!” Barry exclaimed as she jerked.

“Don’t move!” Iris scolded.

Barry was sure she dug the next pin in twice as hard on purpose.

“Wow, Mommy!” a voice exclaimed from behind them. “You look so pretty! Where are you going?”

“Your mom’s going out to dinner,” Iris said, finally stepping away from Barry’s aching head. “And she does look gorgeous, doesn’t she?”
“Uh-huh,” Livvy said.

Barry stood up and made her way over to the full-length mirror on the back of her bathroom door. The full-length dress she was wearing was red, as were her heels, which made it obvious who had picked it out. It had long-sleeves, thankfully, though her shoulders were left completely exposed. Any décolletage was hidden by the line of lace atop the low neckline.

“I did good, didn’t I?” Iris asked, resting her chin on Barry’s bare shoulder.

“You did,” Barry acknowledged. “I don’t suppose you’re going to tell me where I’m going now that you’ve had your fun playing dress-up doll? Or with who?”

“I think I’ll let him tell you,” Iris said. She looked over to the wall to check the clock. “And he should be here right about…”

The doorbell rang.

“Now,” Iris finished, looking pleased. “Come on! Down the stairs we go!”

The heels were shorter than some of the ones that Moira and Thea had put her in, so it wasn’t too
hard to make her way down the stairs and to the front door. She tried to look out the side window to see who it was, but from the angle she was looking at, his face was hidden by a large bundle of the flowers.

She opened the door to reveal Oliver Queen, holding a bouquet of twenty red-tipped yellow roses in his hands.

“Happy Valentine’s Day,” he said.

“Happy Valentine’s Day,” Barry replied faintly.

He held out the flowers. “These are for you.”

Barry accepted them, leaning down to sniff them.

“They’re beautiful, Oliver.”

He smiled at her.

“Bartholomea Allen,” he said slowly. “Would you do me the honor of going out to dinner with me tonight?”

“As a date?” she ventured.

“As a date,” he confirmed, nodding once.

He looked confident, but the tightness around his eyes revealed that he was just as nervous about this as she was.

“Okay,” Barry agreed, smiling at him. “Just let me put these in some water.”

“I’ll take care of that,” Iris said, plucking the bouquet from her hands. “Have a good dinner! We’ll be at my house, so don’t worry about waking Livvy up!”

She handed Barry her coat, gently pushed her out the door, and closed it behind them.

Dinner was amazing. It was awkward for the first five minutes before they silently agreed that they’d had dinner together plenty of times before, even if they’d never been dates before, so there was no reason to be awkward. The awkwardness came back once they’d driven back to Barry’s house and were sitting in the driveway.

“What are we doing, Oliver?” Barry asked softly.

“What do you mean?” he asked in reply.

“You asked me on a date. We’ve never done that before, even if we were married briefly. I kissed you last November, and you kissed me back. We have a child together. What are we doing?” she asked.

“Trying things? Seeing if this works – if we work? Dating?” Oliver offered hesitantly. “If that’s okay?”

“That sounds good,” Barry said, smiling shyly at him. She carefully leaned over and pressed a kiss to his cheek.

He caught her cheek in his palm as she pulled back and drew her closer, telegraphing his
movements so she had time to pull away, and kissed her.

It was much longer than either of the brief kisses they had exchanged.

Oliver finally pulled away.

“Still good?” he asked hesitantly.

“Definitely good,” Barry replied, drawing him back in for another kiss.

Chapter End Notes

Probably the last chapter for a while, but I thought that last one would be the last for a while. I go back to school Saturday, so I'll have a lot less free time. Or I'll at least have a lot less free time that I'm sitting alone with my computer.
“You know,” Thea said, opening the door so that Barry and Livvy could enter the mansion, “if you’d stop working so many hours, your boss would stop making you take multiple days off at a time.”

“I hyper-focus,” Barry apologized, stepping inside.

It had barely been two weeks since she and Oliver had started dating, and she was already back in Starling City. After a string of murders in Central that had returned Barry to her hundred-plus hour work weeks, her boss had forced her to take another week of vacation. They were only staying in Starling for the weekend though. Despite being a genius and only being in kindergarten, Livvy’s teacher had informed her that she shouldn’t miss any more school if at all possible.

“Auntie Thea!” Livvy exclaimed.

“Hey Sparky!” Thea greeted happily, immediately kneeling down to accept Barry’s hug.

“I missed you!” Livvy said.

“I missed you too!” Thea replied, standing up with Livvy in her arms. “Which is why we’re going to have an awesome time together tonight while your mom and dad go have a boring grown-up dinner.”

She looked over at Barry.

“Ollie’s working late at the club on something. He said he’d meet you at Laurel’s apartment. He also asked if you could grab the present out of his room.”

“Of course,” Barry agreed.

“I made Uncle Tommy a present too!” Livvy exclaimed. “Mommy’s going to take it to him.”

“What did you make?” Thea asked.

“Nuh-uh,” Livvy said. “Can’t tell you. It’s a surprise.”

“But I’m not going to be there when he opens it,” Thea pointed out. “Doesn’t that mean you can tell me now?”

Livvy shook her head again.

“Later,” she promised.

“You’d better go get changed,” Thea told Barry. “Or else you’ll both be late.”

Barry let out a small laugh.
“Will do,” she said as she headed for the stairs.

“I already picked out your clothes!” Thea called after her.

She made her way up the stairs while Thea and Livvy went...somewhere. She wasn’t too worried. Thea had never let her down while taking care of Livvy...except for that time when she was a baby and there was that accident with the diapers...but they didn’t talk about that.

Typically, the dress and heels that Thea had picked out were red. She wondered if they knew that she wore other colors when she wasn’t with them.

At least Oliver had agreed that she looked good in red.

She had just arrived on the correct floor of Laurel’s apartment building when Oliver showed up from the stairs.

“Hey,” he greeted. “Sorry I’m late.”

“Don’t be,” Barry replied with a bright smile. “I just got here too. You know how I am with time.”
“I got caught up at the office,” Oliver said apologetically. He stopped in front of her and looked her up and down. “Wow,” he said, eyes widening slightly. “You look nice.”

She flashed a smile at him, and then moved to meet him as he leaned down for a kiss. One quickly turned to two.

“We should go inside,” she pointed out.

“We should,” Oliver agreed before kissing her again.

“We don’t seem to be going inside,” she said against his lips.

It took a few minutes for them to finish and straighten their clothes before knocking on the door to the apartment.

“Welcome!” Tommy greeted warmly as he opened the door.

“Happy birthday, buddy,” Oliver said, giving his best friend a hug.

“Thank you,” Tommy replied with a smile. “Barry! Glad Oliver finally got his head out of his ass to ask you out! Did he tell you he came over here for advice?”

Barry looked over at her boyfriend, who was fidgeting slightly. She smiled at him.

“He didn’t, but that’s adorable, and I’m glad you told me. Happy birthday, Tommy.”

Tommy smiled broader.

“Always happy to help embarrass my best friend,” he said as he hugged Barry.

“Happy birthday,” she told him.

“I guess you don’t want this then,” Oliver said, holding up the bag with Tommy’s present in it.

Tommy reached out to grab it. Oliver was kind enough not to pull it away.

“This feels like a Châteauneuf-du-Pape,” Tommy said, weighing it in his hand.

“It’s going to taste like one too,” Oliver said as they made their way inside. He helped Barry out of her coat and hung it on the coat rack, followed by his own.

“You are a true friend,” Tommy informed him.

“Thank you,” Oliver replied.

They followed Tommy from the door around to the dining table, where Laurel was lighting candles.

“Ollie!” she exclaimed in greeting. “Barry! Hi!”

“Hi,” Barry and Oliver chorused.

Laurel hugged Oliver first, and then Barry.

“I’m glad Oliver managed to get up his nerves,” she whispered as she hugged Barry.

“So am I,” Barry replied quietly.
“I’m gonna go crack this open,” Tommy said, holding up the bottle of wine.

“Come on in,” Laurel invited.

Barry ended up wandering over to a picture of Quentin Lance and his daughter looking at a birdcage.

“Sara and her canary?” she asked Laurel.

Laurel let out a small laugh as she nodded.

“I still don’t know why Dad bought her that thing. It chirped day and night, drove us all nuts.”

“Sara loved it though,” Barry said with a smile. “She’d always smile when she mentioned it. She wanted to get another one someday.”

Tommy came back from the kitchen a moment later, carrying four glasses, which he quickly passed out to their company.

“A toast,” he said, holding up his glass. “To the first birthday I’ve enjoyed in a long time. I got my best friend back,” he said, staring straight at Oliver, who lifted his glass in response. Then he turned to Laurel. “And I have finally figured out why poets have been in business for the past few thousand years.”

“Happy birthday, baby,” she said, leaning close and pecking his lips.

“Thank you,” he replied quietly, before turning back to Oliver and Barry. “Cheers!”

“Cheers,” they echoed.

The toast was interrupted by a pounding on the door.

“That’ll be the food,” Laurel said, passing her glass off to Tommy as she headed for the door.

Once she was far enough away, Oliver said quietly, “Thank God she didn’t cook.”

“Amen,” Tommy added.

Barry rolled her eyes good-naturedly, but having heard about Laurel’s cooking from Sara, she couldn’t complain.

Laurel opened the door, and their eyes all widened at the sight of their guest.

“Mr. Merlyn,” Laurel said in surprise.

“Laurel,” he said with a nod. “May I come in?”

Laurel stepped back for the man to enter the apartment, before walking past him to stand beside Tommy.

Malcolm Merlyn walked towards them at a lazy pace.

“Oliver,” he greeted with a nod.

“Mr. Merlyn,” Oliver said with a nod.

“Barry, yes?” the billionaire asked next.
Barry nodded with a tight smile.

The man finally turned to his son.

“I’ve been trying to get in touch with you,” he said.

“What are you doing here, Dad?” Tommy asked bluntly.

Malcolm Merlyn pulled a small present from behind his back and held it up.

“Happy birthday, Tommy,” he said.

Tommy hesitated, then looked back over at them.

“Just give us a second,” he said.

“Of course,” Laurel said with a smile.

The billionaire tossed the present to Oliver before heading into the hallway with Tommy.

Barry looked over at Laurel and mouthed, *Eavesdropping?*

Laurel hesitated, but ultimately shook her head.

Tommy came back a few minutes later in a mood.

“He wants me to come to see him get a humanitarian award,” he nearly spat. He grabbed his glass of wine and drained it. “They must’ve run out of actual humans to give it to.”

“I’m guessing you’re not going,” Laurel said.

“Not for a billion dollars,” Tommy replied.

The rest of dinner was…tense. Laurel tried to diffuse it, asking Barry and Oliver about their first date.

Valentine’s Day had been on a Thursday, and Oliver hadn’t left until Saturday. Though most of the time had been spent as a family, they’d had a chance to go on a second, more casual date on Saturday night. They’d gone out to a diner before going to the Central City Museum. Barry had dragged Oliver through the official museum tour. He told her that Central City really needed a better hero than a guy who’d saved seventeen cows from a flood. He also told her that he was never taking that tour again.

To be fair, *no one* took the tour more than once if they could avoid it.

The weekend after that, Oliver had come back to Central again, bringing Barry dinner in her lab so they could have a picnic Friday night, as that was in the middle of the serial murder case. They’d gone to the movies on Saturday, though it was simply to see a children’s movie Livvy had asked about. *Escape from Planet Earth* wasn’t the most romantic movie out there, but it had gotten Barry out of her lab for a few hours. Oliver had still spent most of the time with Livvy, due to Captain Singh and the detectives riding Barry about the case.

Barry and Oliver took turns relating both weekends to Laurel.

“What are you doing this weekend?” the lawyer asked as she sipped her wine.
“I have the whole week off actually,” Barry admitted. “We had a serial killer in Central, and I was working ridiculous hours. My boss kicked me out for the week, told me to leave it to the lesser CSIs. We’d stay the whole time, but Livvy’s teacher doesn’t want her missing any more school. There are rules about absences apparently.”

“I heard about that guy,” Laurel said. “My dad mentioned it. The Strangler, right?”

Barry nodded. “I’d say more, but it’s really not dinner conversation,” she said.

“I saw some of the crime scene photos,” Oliver said. “I completely agree.”

That transferred into Barry asking Laurel about her current cases, but she was unfortunately working on only boring things at the moment, “in order to soothe everyone’s anxiety after the kidnapping thing,” the lawyer said.

“How’s the club going?” Barry asked. “Since you’re only a month from the opening.”

“Well, we had to return the original furniture shipment, because they sent it in black instead of white, and black does not work in a club where the lights are going to be low,” Tommy said. “The new shipment’s expected in first thing Monday morning, but it has to go into storage, since the interior isn’t done yet.”

“Cutting it a little close, aren’t you?” Barry asked, eyes widening.

“I’m sure we’ll manage,” Tommy said with a small smile, though tension remained around his eyes. “We’re good at winging it, aren’t we Oliver?”

“Most of the time,” Oliver agreed. “We tend to need advice when things with more planning are involved.”

“Like dating,” Laurel chimed. “You needed my advice for Barry.”

“Tommy needed mine for you,” Barry told her with a small smile.

Laurel let out a laugh.

“I’m not surprised.”

“Hey!” Tommy said with mock offense.

Laurel kissed the frown off his face.

“I still love you, baby.”

“I love you too,” Tommy replied, an adoring look on his face as he gazed at her.

Barry glanced over at Oliver, who had a smile on his face as he looked at them. He saw her looking, and leaned over to kiss the top of her head.

Still, there remained a tension throughout the rest of dinner. Oliver commented on it on the way back to Queen Mansion.

“Do you mind if I take Tommy out for dinner tomorrow?” he asked. “Just the two of us, for his birthday, take two?”

“Livvy, Thea, and I are having a girls’ day tomorrow,” Barry replied. “Spa day, mani-pedis,
shopping. I was going to ditch you anyway. I’ll talk to the girls, see if they mind inviting Laurel along.”

“She’d enjoy that,” Oliver said.

“If she stepped away from work long enough,” Barry retorted. “But if she’s stuck on boring cases at the moment, then she might welcome the reprieve. She’s still working on the weekends, isn’t she?”

“It’s Laurel,” Oliver said drily. “Of course she is. You and she have the same dedication to making sure your job is done well. You’ve just learned to step back sometimes.”

“I have a five-year-old,” Barry replied. “I didn’t have a choice.”

“That’s not what Thea said,” Oliver replied. “According to her, you needed her or Iris or Joe to remind you that you had a child to take care of in the first place.”

“Thankfully,” Barry said, “our child is a genius who is able to sit in my lab and read. I hated leaving her at daycare when no one could keep an eye on her.”

“Was she in there during the serial killer case?” Oliver asked.

“No,” Barry said immediately, shaking her head. “The pictures were too graphic. The Strangler was called that because he liked slicing people’s stomachs open and strangling them with their own intestines. I didn’t want Livvy near the pictures. She was hanging out with one of the beat cops, who’s stuck in the office due to a broken arm.”

“How did that go?” Oliver asked curiously.

“I think he taught her how to play poker,” Barry replied. “I’ll have to teach her how to cheat at it later.”

“You cheat at poker?” Oliver asked in surprise.

“How do you think I did so well in Vegas?” Barry replied. “I count cards. She’s definitely smart enough to do the same. Besides, it’s a great memory exercise.”

“Remind me to always stay on your side during poker games,” Oliver said with a shake of his head.

“Now where’s the fun in that?” Barry asked with a laugh as they pulled into the driveway of Queen Mansion.

They walked, hand-in-hand, into the house and up the stairs. They stopped in front of Oliver’s room.

“Since we have the opportunity to lock the door and let the child go find another adult, I think we should use it,” she offered.

Oliver looked hesitant.

“Or we can just cuddle,” Barry quickly backtracked.

“My scars,” Oliver said slowly.

“I’ve seen your scars, Ollie,” Barry said gently, laying a hand on his chest and standing on her tiptoes in order to lean up and kiss the corner of his mouth. “I’ve seen the medical reports. I know
what’s happened to you – physically, at least. Scars don’t worry me. I’m not with you for your body. I’m with you for you, because I love you.”

“I love you too,” Oliver replied softly, leaning in to kiss her.

Barry wasn’t sure how long they spent kissing in the hallway, but they eventually made their way into Oliver’s room, only pausing long enough to make sure the door was closed and locked before they returned to kissing. Clothes were shed during their trip to the bed.

“Are you sure?” Oliver breathed against her lips.

Barry silenced him with another kiss.

“Perfectly.”

There wasn’t much talking for the rest of the night.

The next day, Thea sidled up to her with a mischievous grin on her face. Laurel had just taken Livvy over to a collection of Lego toys.

“No. One. Word,” Barry told her former ward firmly.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Thea said innocently. “I just wanted to ask how much time we had left before our spa appointments.”

“Sure you were,” Barry said drily. She checked the time on her cell phone. “We probably need to leave pretty soon.”

“Laurel!” Thea called. “We need to go so we don’t miss our spa appointments!”

“We’ll be there in a minute!” Laurel called back.

There was little teasing for the rest of the day, though Thea did continue to give Barry knowing looks. A short conversation with Laurel ensured that the other woman was giving her similar looks.

Sunday was spent spending time as a family. Thea was there for part of it, but it was mostly just Barry, Oliver, and Livvy. That evening, Oliver took Barry out on another date while Thea took Livvy out to ‘give her the Starling City star experience.’

The date ended up being a picnic inside the building that would, in another month, be Oliver’s new club. She was dressed in red, as usual, and he was wearing nice jeans and a button-down shirt. He’d set up a covered spotlight on the ground and was giving her the mental tour.
“Alright, and so that’s a stage,” Oliver said, gesturing to one wall. “And most nights we’ll have a band…somebody cool. Is Fall Out Boy still cool?” he asked.

Barry laughed. “They broke up,” she said. “And they were only cool for angsty teenagers.”
“So somebody else will pick the bands,” Oliver said.

“Let Tommy do it,” Barry replied. “Definitely don’t ask me. Everything I listen to is Disney.”

Oliver smiled, and then fell quiet.

“Something bothering you?” Barry asked after a moment. “And don’t say no. I know something is.”

“There’s a lot of stuff going on at the moment,” Oliver admitted. “Work, friends, family, Livvy, you. And…I’m having a difficult time figuring out how to fit it all in.”

Barry reached out and grabbed his hand.

“I know you’re busy,” she told him. “I get busy too. I don’t expect you to fly out to Central every weekend. Livvy doesn’t expect anything but her nightly Skype calls. And honestly? If you have to choose between devoting time to me and time to Livvy, I’d tell you to give it to Livvy, every time.”

“But I love you,” Oliver said. “I don’t want to not devote time to you.”

Barry smiled at him.

“I know. I’ve struggled with fitting everything in as well, especially with how hyper-focused I get on cases.”

“Do you have any suggestions?” Oliver asked.

“I think we just have to be really honest with each other about what’s going on in our lives,” Barry told him. “If we want this to work, if we want us to work, we have to talk to each other, and we have to tell the truth. It may be a bit cliché to say that ‘communication is the key to relationships’, but it’s true. But we both went into this knowing that we had tons of other commitments. We just have to talk about it when we don’t have time for each other because of different things that are going on.”

Oliver leaned over and kissed her lightly.

“You’re amazing,” he told her.

She smiled back at him.

“Mr. Queen,” Oliver’s bodyguard said as he walked up. “The IT department has that item you requested.”

“One second,” Oliver said.

Barry waved him away. “Go on.”

She picked up her phone to see if she had any text messages when her phone rang. It was Thea.

“Don’t freak out,” Thea said as she answered.

“That doesn’t make me feel very good about the conversation,” Barry said. “What’s wrong?”

“Livvy and I are at the hospital,” Thea said. “Livvy grabbed a free sample from a vendor, and I didn’t realize it had strawberries in it, and she had an allergic reaction….It was bad, Barry. Really
Barry’s eyes widened and she got off the ground, grabbing her purse.

“What’s wrong?” Oliver asked, making his way back over to her.

“Livvy’s in the hospital,” she said worriedly. “Anaphylactic shock. She had something with strawberries in it.”

Oliver’s eyes widened, and he made to go for the door, but Barry grabbed his arm.

“Ollie, you can’t go,” she said in a low voice, glancing at the bodyguard in the background. “Thea’s already with her. If you show up, it’ll be too suspicious.”

Oliver’s mouth tightened. She could see him make the decision.

“Mr. Diggle, would you please take Barry to the hospital? Starling General?” he asked her.

Barry put her phone back to her ear.

“Starling General?” she asked.

“Yes,” Thea said. “They want me to stop being on the phone, so I’ll text you the information.”

“Thank you,” Barry said. “I’ll be there shortly.”

“See you soon,” Thea replied before hanging up.

“What about you?” Barry asked Oliver. He waved her off.

“I’ve got stuff I can work on here,” he said. “If I get tired, I’ll just call a cab. I’ll meet you back at the house later.”

Barry took a deep breath, then nodded. She kissed him quickly, and then followed the bodyguard to the car.

She’d only been at the hospital for a couple hours when word came in that Malcolm Merlyn had been attacked and saved by the vigilante with a makeshift blood transfusion via his son. Thea stayed with Livvy while Barry went to check on them.

She found Tommy standing outside his father’s door. She made sure her heels clicked loudly on the hospital floor so he’d hear her coming. He looked up.

“Barry,” he greeted, reaching out to hug her. She didn’t comment on the fact that it was a tighter hug than normal. “What are you doing here?”

“Here specifically? Checking on you,” she said. “Here in the hospital? Livvy had an allergic reaction to strawberries. She’s four floors down. She’ll be fine, but the doctors wanted to keep her overnight just in case. Thea’s with her. How are you doing?”

“I think I’m still in shock,” he admitted honestly.

“How’s your dad?” Barry asked.

“The doctors are saying that he’ll make a full recovery, but he wouldn’t have if the vigilante didn’t set up the blood transfusion,” Tommy said. “I…I don’t want to lose him. Even if we’ve been
arguing.”

Barry reached out and squeezed his hand.

“After my mom died, and I moved in with Joe, we argued for months. I wanted my dad. I was the only one who believed he was innocent. Joe and I argued about it for ages. Joe didn’t believe me. Joe wouldn’t let me see my dad. I was furious with him. Then one day, Iris and I saw an armed bank robbery on the news. They had hostages, and it turned into a big standoff. We caught a glimpse of Joe there. The standoff went on for hours, and then when it was over, the news channels reported that there had been officers shot. Iris and I were terrified. We sat together in the living room for hours, waiting for news that he was okay. When he finally got back home, we jumped him, and I just started sobbing. I was so angry with myself that I’d almost lost him while he thought I hated him.”

“Did you?” Tommy asked.

“For a little while,” Barry admitted. “I was still angry after that incident, but I didn’t hate him, and I tried to make sure that he knew that. Your dad dying doesn’t automatically fix everything. But it can act as a bridge to help you down the path of reconciliation. Hey! Maybe you’ll even get your trust fund reinstated!”

Tommy cracked a smile.

“I don’t really care anymore. I mean, I kinda want my car back, but like I said at my party, I already have everything I need. I’ve got my best friend back, and I’ve fallen in love. It’s…well, it’s kinda great.”

Barry resisted the urge to coo over the dopey look on Tommy’s face.

“So, why are you out here instead of in there anyway?” she asked, nodding towards the room.

“Moira’s visiting,” Tommy said. “She was at the reception too. I guess she wanted to make sure that Dad was okay.”

Barry nodded.

“I want to get back to Livvy, but could you let her know where we are? Livvy’s room 817.”

“I’ll let her know,” Tommy promised.

Barry hugged him once more, again ignoring how tightly he gripped her. She placed her hand on his shoulder.

“It’s gonna be okay, Tommy,” she said.

He took a deep breath.

“Yeah. You’re right.”

“Why don’t you call Laurel, ask her to bring you a change of clothes?” Barry suggested. “Raised in formalwear or not, I can’t imagine a tux is the best thing to hang around in.”

“Not particularly,” Tommy admitted. “When are you and Livvy headed back to Central?”

“It was supposed to be tomorrow, but we might push it back another day so that Livvy can recover,” Barry said. “We’ll wait and see how she’s doing tomorrow. I’ve got time off if I need
“And you’ll be back for the grand opening?”

“Of course,” Barry said, mock-affronted. “I wouldn’t miss yours and Oliver’s first successful business venture.”

“Hey!” Tommy said. “What unsuccessful business ventures have we had?”

“The ‘sexy frat calendar’ of 2006? The one that almost got you both expelled from SCU?” Barry reminded with a raised eyebrow.

“Hey,” Tommy said, “that was not unsuccessful. We sold our entire stock. The price of the calendars actually went up since we weren’t legally allowed to sell anymore.”

They shared a laugh about that.

“Will you go home with your dad tonight?” Barry asked.

“I don’t know,” Tommy said. “They might not release him ‘til tomorrow. I might, then, until he recovers. I mean…I kinda hate that house, but I don’t want him to be alone.”

Barry patted his arm.

“Keep me informed,” she requested. He nodded in response.

“Have a good night,” he said. “My best to Livvy.”

“My best to your father,” Barry shot back.

Tommy let out a small smile at that. “I’ll let him know,” he said. “If I don’t see you before you get back, I’ll see you at the opening.”

“See you then,” Barry called back as she walked back towards the elevator.

The doctor ended up releasing Livvy early on the next morning. She’d suffered from a severe allergic reaction, but she hadn’t gone into anaphylactic shock, though the doctor warned that the next time she had strawberries, it was entirely possible that she would go into anaphylactic shock, and they should talk to her doctor back in Central about possibly prescribing an Epi-Pen.

Oliver spoiled Livvy all through Monday, and Barry didn’t have the heart to object to most of it. Their child had just spent the night in the hospital, so the excess of sweets, stuffed animals, and new toys was protested less than she normally would.

Even Tommy had sent Laurel over with a three-foot stuffed bear from the pair of them.

Early Tuesday morning, they got on a plane back to Central. Assuming there were no delays (though knowing Barry’s luck, there would be), they would make it back to Central in time for Barry to drop Livvy off at school before she headed in to the station. She’d be a bit later than normal, especially if she swung by the house to drop off their suitcases, but that way Singh might not notice she was there and she could get some of her paperwork done, even if she wouldn’t get to go to any crime scenes.

Her paperwork backlog the last time Singh had given her a week off has been terrible.

Less than three weeks later, they were back in Starling for the opening of Oliver and Tommy’s
new club. Oliver carried Livvy while Barry held his other arm as they made their way down the steps.
“This is amazing, Oliver,” Barry said as she looked around in awe.

“Well, yeah,” Oliver said with a half-smile. He pointed over to the stage. “Steve Aoki’s going to DJ right there.”

Barry’s eyes widened as she moved over to the stage.

“What? How did you get Steve Aoki?” she asked.

“I dated his sister,” Oliver admitted.

Barry made a face.

“A million years ago,” Oliver said reassuringly, grabbing her arm and leaning in for a kiss.


“Good job, keep thinking that,” Oliver told her. He set her down on the ground and pointed up the other stairs. “Tommy’s office is right up those stairs, on the right. Why don’t you go say hi to him?”
“Okay!” Livvy said, running off towards the stairs.

“Are you sure she’s okay alone?” Barry asked worriedly.

“There’s nothing she could get into,” Oliver assured. “No sharp objects, and all the alcohol is locked up when it isn’t business hours.” He paused a moment, then asked, “So, I was wondering if you’d be my date tomorrow?”

Barry smiled up at his as she took a step closer.

“Did you even have to ask?”

“Is that a yes?” Oliver countered, smiling as well.

“No,” Barry said. She leaned up and kissed him. “That’s a yes.”

“Mm-hmm,” he said, leaning back down for another kiss.

“Shut your eyes, Sparky!” a voice came from above them. “You don’t want to see this!”

“Are Mommy and Daddy kissing again?” Livvy asked in her most put out voice.

“Seems so,” Tommy agreed with mock disapproval.

Barry and Oliver turned to look up at them. They were standing on the balcony outside Tommy’s office.

“Livvy, why don’t you tell Uncle Tommy what you’ve been reading about?” Barry said sweetly. “I give you permission to use him as a test subject.”

Livvy’s face lit up.

“C’mon, c’mon, c’mon!” she exclaimed, dragging Tommy back to his office.

“Isn’t that a bit dangerous?” Oliver asked her in an undertone.

“She’ll just turn his office supplies into a homemade magnet,” Barry said. “Not really dangerous. You might have to replace his phone cord if she breaks the wire down.”

“Easy enough,” Oliver agreed. “I was wondering…what would you think if I kept a few things for Livvy in my office here? Just in case we’re in another situation where we need to entertain her here…one where Tommy isn’t around.”

“Just make sure that there’s nothing too obviously for a young girl,” Barry said.

“A tablet and accessories and science experiment supplies?” Oliver suggested.

“A Kindle might be a good idea too,” Barry said.

“I’ll make a note of it,” Oliver said with a small smile.

They ended up back at the mansion not long afterwards. It didn’t take long for them to put Livvy to bed and then retire to Oliver’s room.

Barry was surprised when Oliver was still in bed with her the next morning. He wasn’t asleep. He was watching her with a soft look on his face.
“Good morning,” he murmured, reaching a hand out to brush her hair away from her face.

“Good morning,” Barry said with a smile. “No work today?”

“I have to go in later,” Oliver admitted. “Since it’s opening night tonight. But I figured that I could give myself the morning off just this once.”

Barry leaned closer and pressed her lips lightly to his.

“I’m glad that I’m a good enough incentive to pull you away from your work,” she said.

After a lazy morning – Thea was still in charge of Livvy – Oliver finally dragged himself off to work, and Barry got ready for the day. Her dress for the grand opening was already selected (not by her, though she had approved it), so she threw on jeans and a red lace tank top, slid a pair of red flats on, and headed downstairs.

She’d just finished brunch and was about to head upstairs to check in on Livvy and Thea when there was a knock at the door. Since she was already present, she decided to answer it.

The young woman standing there smiled when she opened the door.

“Hi,” she said. “I’m Helena. Is Oliver here? I just got back in town and I wanted to drop by and say hello.”

“He’s not at the moment,” Barry apologized, squashing down the jealousy that tried to pop up at the idea of this beautiful girl visiting Oliver at his house. “The club’s opening tonight, so he went to take care of some last-minute details. He shouldn’t be long though. Would you like to come in?”

“Please,” Helena said.

Barry brought her into the sitting room. They sat opposite one another and simply stared at each other for a few moments before Helena said, “Oliver and I were never a couple.”

Barry jerked slightly.

“What?” she asked.

“We were never anything but friends,” Helena clarified. “You seemed…hesitant when I showed up asking for him. Oliver helped me through a really tough time in my life last fall. My fiancé had died, and I was drowning. Oliver helped me out of it. I did come onto him at one point, but he turned me down. He said that it wasn’t what I needed, and it wouldn’t help at all. He was right.”

Barry offered her a small smile.

“I know what it’s like to lose someone you’re in love with. Oliver and I have bonded over that as well.”

“How long have you two been together?” Helena asked.

“A little over a month,” Barry admitted. “We’ve known each other since college, but it wasn’t until he came back that we started getting close in that way. I spent a lot of time with his sister while he was gone, and I didn’t stop those visits just because Oliver was back. We talked a lot about his sister, about his past, and we ended up getting close. Of course, it helped a lot that my daughter decided that he was the best thing since sliced bread,” she said with a small laugh.
“You have a daughter?” the woman asked, eyes lighting up. “How old?”

“Five, as of December,” Barry said with a fond smile. “Since Oliver felt bad that he didn’t make it back in time for her baby shower like he promised, he went ridiculously overboard on the birthday present he got her. He pretty much cemented his place as her favorite non-family person after that.”

Helena followed that with a story about her late fiancé’s six-year-old twins nephews and the trouble they got into over Thanksgiving one year. Barry replied with one of her more notable Thanksgiving dinner failures.

They’d made it to Helena explaining about how Oliver had helped her through the loss of her boyfriend when they heard the front door close.

“Barry?” he called.

“We’re in here,” Barry called back.

Oliver walked into the room a moment later.

“Look who’s visiting,” Barry said with a smile. “She was just telling me how you helped her through her grief last fall.”

“Hello, Oliver,” Helena said with a smile.

“Oh, Ollie, Thea has a friend looking for a job and she wants to know if the club’s still hiring,” Barry remembered.

“Yes,” Oliver said. “Of course. Have her talk to Tommy. As a matter of fact, why don’t you go upstairs and have her call Tommy, right now.”

Barry was about to object, but then she noticed the pleading look in his eyes.

“Okay then,” she said. She stood up told Oliver, “I’m meeting with Laurel this afternoon, so I won’t see you until later.” She walked past him and towards the door, kissing his cheek on the way.

He was obviously hiding something related to this girl, but she would pry it out of him later. She did need to let Thea know about her friend’s potential job though.

Barry arrived at the club with Moira and Thea, and they convened with Oliver at an upper-level table.

The music was pounding, the lights were flashing, and the crowd was a dull roar as they danced, drank, and had a good time.
“To Verdant!” Moira declared as they clinked their glasses together. The three adults had champagne, while Thea had a virgin martini. “I know I haven’t always been supportive of this venture,” Moira said, “but I have to admit this nightclub is quite an accomplishment. I’m proud of you. Your father would be too.”

Barry felt Oliver freeze up under her hand, which was wrapped around his arm.

“Thank you,” he said, before taking a drink of champagne. Moira and Barry followed suit.

“Yeah, congratulations, Ollie,” Thea said. “Club doesn’t totally suck,” she said with a smile before taking a sip of her martini.

“Thanks, Speedy,” Oliver said. “Thank you, all of you, very much for coming.”

He drained the rest of his champagne and offered his hand to Barry.

“Care to dance?”

Barry accepted his hand with a smile.
Oliver had left Barry dancing while he checked up on the office a few moments before. He’d just made it back to the ground floor and caught sight of her when an employee approached him and said, “Sorry to bother you Mr. Queen.”

“Your timing is perfect,” he told the man. “I can’t dance.”

The man handed him a note.

“They said it was urgent,” the man said before leaving.

Oliver opened the note.

*Meet me downstairs. NOW.* ~Dig, it read.

“Everything okay?” Barry asked, coming up to him.

“Yes,” Oliver said, crumpling up the note and sticking it in his pocket. “We ran out of Cristal.”

“Oh,” Barry said with a nod.

“I’ll be right back,” he told her.

“Oh,” she said. “I’m going to go track down Thea, see if she’ll dance with me. Or I might find Laurel. I think she might be avoiding me.”

“See you soon,” Oliver said, leaning in to press a kiss to her cheek.

He weaved through the crowd to the keypad-locked door, then headed downstairs to find his partner.

“Dig?” he called out. He froze when he entered the room. Helena was pinning Tommy to the table, his arm pulled up in a stress position.

“Let him go,” he ordered. “He has nothing to do with this.”

Oliver looked down to see the expression of pain on his best friend’s face.

“I told you, Oliver,” Helena said. Oliver could hear the crazy in her voice. “I warned you!”

“Helena!” he yelled. “This isn’t you!”

“My father is a mobster and a murderer,” Helena said breathlessly. “It’s not like you haven’t killed men like that before!”

“And I tried to teach you to obtain your objective without killing!”

“By applying leverage,” Helena said. “By exploiting someone’s weakness!” She pulled on Tommy’s arm, and he cried out in pain. “There is a whole club full of leverage above our heads right now!” Her face twisted. “After all, that girlfriend of yours may be upstairs, but she had some things to say about her little girl, and how attached you got to her. I saw your mom and your sister here as well, so I’d bet that little girl’s all alone. Do you really think that you can get there before I do?”
Before she could say another word, Oliver grabbed the small knife he had stashed at the small of his back and launched it into her throat.

She only had a second to look shocked as she let go of Tommy and moved her hands towards the knife before she collapsed to the ground.

“Tommy!” Oliver exclaimed as his best friend let out of a yell of pain, clutching his wrist to his chest. He rushed over and gently grabbed his wrist. “Easy, easy. The pain’s not permanent; it’s just your nerve adjusting to being unblocked.”

Tommy looked back over his shoulder toward Helena’s body.

“You killed her,” he said. Oliver couldn’t tell what emotion was coloring his voice. Maybe there wasn’t one.

“She was hurting you,” Oliver said quietly. “And she threatened to kill Livvy.”

“I…I need to think,” Tommy admitted. “Leave me alone for a few days.”

“You’ll need to rest the arm for a few days,” Oliver said. “If anyone asks, you got attacked by my crazy ex.”

“I thought you said you never dated her?” Tommy asked in surprise.

“I didn’t,” Oliver said with a grimace. “That was in the middle of my confusion over Barry, so I didn’t date anyone.”

Tommy looked back at the body again.

“Something needs to be done about that,” he pointed out. “But neither of us can go missing too long. Barry’s probably already looking for you, and I was supposed to be checking in with the office. Laurel’s going to come looking for me.”

“Head on back upstairs,” Oliver said. “I’ll get someone to take care of it.”

He pulled out his phone and went immediately to his favorites list and hit the number to dial.

“Hey, Dig,” he said, “Helena showed up again. She’s dead. And in the foundry.”

“I’m upstairs. I’ll take care of it.”

Oliver ended the call, and with one last glance at Helena’s still form, headed back upstairs.
Darkness Rising

Chapter Summary

The rest of Season One of Arrow

Chapter Notes

Because Oliver is happily dating Barry, the late season one Tommy-Laurel-Oliver love triangle mess never happened. Tommy and Oliver are still on shaky terms, but it's because of the revelation that Oliver is the vigilante, not because of Laurel. Laurel and Tommy never break up.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Only two days after she and Livvy had arrived back in Central City, Barry got a call from Thea.

“So, do you remember when I told you about Roy?” she asked in a rush.


“Shut up,” Thea said, though Barry could tell she was smiling. “He didn’t show up to his first day at Verdant, so I went to his house to ask why.”

“Did you go to the Glades at night again?” Barry asked with a sigh.

“Maybe?”

“Thea,” Barry sighed. “Something could happen!”

“Something almost did,” Thea admitted. “I got cornered by these two guys. First, they were asking for directions, and then they started asking for ‘a little fun’. Roy showed up and saved me. Got a knife to the side for it too. I took him to the hospital, paid for him to get stitched up. And then it turned out that he was afraid of needles, so to distract him, I kissed him.”

“Ohhhhh,” Barry said knowingly. “So, it’s like that then.”

“Barry!” Thea exclaimed. She was quiet for a moment, before admitting, “Yeah. It’s like that.”

Barry let out a small laugh.

“So, tell me about this guy. I want every detail, and I won’t tell Ollie.”

“I’m eighteen,” Thea said. “Ollie can’t do anything.”

“Ahh, but Oliver hasn’t had to deal with you dating before. You never told him about Shawn, and you haven’t dated since going back to Starling. I haven’t told him about your dating history either,
so if you want me to keep quiet about your new beau, you’ll start talking, Thea-Bee.”

Thea let out a put-upon sigh, but started talking anyway.

Barry’s next phone call from Starling wasn’t Thea, but Laurel. It had only been two days since Thea called.

“Hey, Laurell!” Barry greeted. She was at work, but it was almost time for her lunch break anyway. Singh wouldn’t mind if she took it a bit early, especially since it would ensure she actually ate as opposed to working like her lunch break like she usually did.

“Are you sitting down?” Laurel asked.

Barry felt a flash of nerves as she moved over to her desk chair.

“That’s never a good way to start a conversation. What’s wrong?”

“Are you sitting down?” Laurel repeated.

“I am now,” Barry said. “Laurel, you’re worrying me.”

“My mom’s been back in Starling for the past month,” Laurel said. “She found this picture…it was from an island in the North China Sea, near where Oliver was found. It looks like…Barry, it looks like Sara. Mom thinks she’s alive. And I’m starting to believe it too.”

Barry was glad that Laurel had made her sit down. She could feel how weak her legs were. She doubted she would have been able to stand on them.

“…Barry? Barry!”

Laurel was calling her.

“Sorry,” Barry said, shaking her head slightly. She felt something wet on her face and reached up to touch it. She realized then that she was crying. “I’m okay. I think, anyway. I just…I don’t know how I’m feeling. Sara’s alive?”

“We think she might be,” Laurel confirmed.

Barry choked back a sob.

“I suppose that’s why your mom missed our monthly lunch date,” she said weakly.

“I wanted to let you know,” Laurel said quietly. “Only my parents and Tommy and I know so far, but you deserve to know just as much as we do. You’re the one who was in love with her.”

“A part of me still is,” Barry admitted.

Laurel was quiet for a moment.

“Does Oliver know?” she finally asked.

“That part of me is still in love with your sister?” Barry asked. “We’ve never really talked about it. I think he guesses. I mean, I love Oliver. I have for a long time. But I was a little bit in love with Iris for a long time too, but I ended up getting over that after we dated. Sara…I never got over her. But I never got over my original crush on Oliver either. I pushed it to the background – Oliver loved you then, and I loved Sara. Part of Oliver still loves you, and I know and respect
that. You never really get over your first love. You were Oliver’s. Sara was mine. Iris may have been my first crush, but Sara was my first love.”

Laurel was quiet on the other end of the line.

“I’m trying to get in touch with a contact of mine at the Chinese embassy to try to find out more information about the picture. It’s…it looks like Sara. Right hair color, right build, and she’s wearing a Starling City Rockets cap. Sara had one. It wasn’t in her room after she left.”

“She took that hat everywhere,” Barry said fondly. “She always loved going to games with your dad. She even dragged me to a few.”

“You hate baseball,” Laurel said.

“Hey!” Barry protested. “I’ll have you know that I am a proud Central City Diamonds fan!”

“Barry, the Diamonds only win a game once every few years,” Laurel pointed out.

“They’re not that bad,” Barry said. “Though I did get a few weird looks sitting with Sara and cheering for the Diamonds. But Sara loved baseball, so I was willing to go to a few games. She preferred going with your dad though.”

“It was their thing,” Laurel said sadly. “Dad hasn’t gone to a game since.”

“I haven’t either,” Barry replied. “Maybe I should take Livvy to one.”

“Make it a Diamonds/Rockets game,” Laurel suggested. “You can see which team she likes better. Take Oliver too.”

“But then she’ll be corrupted!” Barry protested.

“Exactly,” Laurel said.

They were quiet for a moment before they both started laughing. When it finally faded, Barry quietly requested, “Let me know any updates?”

“Of course,” Laurel said quickly.

“Give your mom my best. Your dad too,” Barry said. “I’ll talk to you later?”

“Good-bye, Barry.”

“Bye,” Barry said before hanging up the phone.

Monday evening, Barry was in the middle of getting ready for bed when Thea called.

“I’m mad at my boyfriend,” she opened with.

“Okay,” Barry said calmly. “Is this a case of misogyny or male stupidity?”

“Stupidity. He’s still thieving. Some guy brought him a gun so he can help rob a liquor store tomorrow.”

“And you’re angry,” Barry said. She finished putting her pajamas on – it was really just a shirt of Oliver’s she’d stolen the last time she was in Starling – and plopped down on her bed.
“I’m angry,” Thea confirmed. “I thought he’d stop. I tried to help him get a job, a good job. Oliver’s not paying minimum wage. I could’ve helped. But he said he owes people, so he’s still committing crimes.”

“I feel like I should remind you that while I don’t work for the SCPD, I do still work for the police and am an officer-of-the-law-adjacent.”

Thea started snickering.

“Officer of the law-adjacent?”

“Well, I’m technically not an officer of the law, but I definitely do help them,” Barry joked. “I’d think that makes me an officer-of-the-law-adjacent.”

“What do you think I should do about Roy?” Thea asked.

“First, cool off,” Barry said. “Second, think over his motivations and everything that could possibly cause him to brush you off. Third, remember that people tend to be sensitive about money. The less you have, the less you’ll accept it from friends, or even lovers. Fourth, consider talking to Laurel. She has a lot more experience with bad boys than I do. My type is more assertive than dangerous. Maybe dangerous to my sanity, considering I’m dating your brother.”

“Yeah, I don’t know how you’re surviving that,” Thea teased.

“Faith, trust, and lots and lots of patience,” Barry joked. “Why don’t you go to bed? Sleeping on it my calm down your emotions.”

“Thanks Barry,” Thea said with a sigh.

“Sorry I wasn’t much help,” Barry apologized. “Are you back at home yet?”

“Yeah,” Thea said. “I took an Uber.”

“From the Glades?” Barry demanded. “Thea, that’s dangerous!”

“I was angry,” she said. “I wasn’t going to let him drive me home. And my license is suspended until July.”

“But you’re home now?”

“Yes, Barry,” Thea said, sounding aggravated. “I’m fine. Upset, but physically fine.”

“Sleep on it,” Barry recommended. “Talk to Laurel. And call me tomorrow. Let me know how you’re doing.”

“Will do,” Thea said with a sigh. “‘Til tomorrow, Barry.”

“Bye, Thea-Bee,” Barry said before hanging up the phone.

She snuggled into her blankets. This seemed like it was going to be much more interesting that Thea’s last relationships. She’d been the heartbreaker in those, but it seemed like this new beau was going to give her a run for her money.

Barry was working late on a case when Thea called back. It wasn’t anything urgent – at least, it wasn’t life-or-death urgent. One of the mayor’s campaign billboards had been graffitied, and he was pushing the CCPD for an arrest. Barry was still running tests on the fingerprints, but she
didn’t actually care that much about it, and she knew the captain didn’t either.

“Hey, Thea,” she answered the phone, but cut herself off at Thea’s sobbing.


“Oh my God, what happened?” Barry demanded, moving over to her computer to try to look the incident up.

Thea just started sobbing again. A moment later, the sobbing got quieter and a new voice came over the phone.

“Barry? It’s Tommy. I don’t know if Oliver’s mentioned it to you, but the past couple days we’ve had this guy going around killing people who he saw as wronging the Glades. First it was a slumlord, then the ADA, now it’s Thea’s…friend,” Tommy said. “He’s live-streaming the videos to everyone with a Glades IP address. We’re watching it at the club.” He lowered his voice.

“Thea was there when it happened.”

“Oh my God,” Barry said. She’d found the website with the livestream. “Where’s Ollie?”

“He was here when Thea got here, but he told her to stay with me while he went to do something,” Tommy said. There was something in his voice though…

“Tommy, what do you know?” she asked.

“Not my secret to tell, Bare,” he said. “I’m going to hand you back to Thea. Just…just talk to her.”

There was a moment of silence, and then a small voice said, “Barry?”

“Allen?” a voice said from behind her. Barry didn’t need to turn to recognize the Captain’s voice.

“What are you watching?”

Barry quickly pressed the mute button on her phone and turned to look at her boss.

“There’s a serial killer in Starling City,” she said. “He’s live-streaming his kills – they’re all people he sees as wronging the poorer section of the city.” She pointed at the screen. “That’s Thea’s boyfriend. I’m the only one who knows they’re dating.”

“Damn,” the Captain said, grabbing another chair and rolling it closer so he could watch as well. “What other sorts of people has this guy taken?”

“A slumlord and the ADA,” Barry revealed. “Slumlord for, you know, being a slumlord. The ADA for prioritizing cases in the nicer parts of the city.”

“What did this kid do?” Singh asked.

“Petty larceny, aggravated assault – pretty much what you’d expect from a slum-raised kid acting as a thug,” Barry said.

“How old is he?”

“Just twenty-one,” Barry said quietly. “I need to go back to Thea.”
She unmuted the phone and put it back to her ear.

“Keep breathing for me, sweetheart,” she instructed. “Just keep breathing.”

They kept watching the video until the feed cut off and the local newscaster announced that the signal had been lost, but they would keep people updated on the story. Thea started sobbing on the other end of the line. Barry muted the news feed.

“Thea, sweetheart, this doesn’t mean he’s dead. It could mean he’s being saved. Everyone else has died on camera. Camera’s out, so Roy’s still okay,” Barry tried to soothe.

The captain opened his mouth, probably to speak up about that not necessarily being true, but Barry silenced him with a glare. He shut his mouth. Barry withheld a smirk. It wasn’t every day that she could shut up her boss.

“I don’t…” Thea said, then choked back a sob. “I’ll call you when I know something,” she finally said before hanging up the phone. Barry stared at for a moment, and then looked at her computer screen. The newscaster was still talking, but the feed hasn’t come back. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. She released it and opened her eyes.

“I’ll get right back to that analysis, sir,” she told the captain.

“All right,” the captain said gently.

“I need to work, sir,” she said firmly. “Sitting around and worrying gets me nowhere. Iris has Livvy tonight. I’m on call until midnight, so I’m staying here to get the less important things out of the way. Paperwork too.”

Singh hesitated, then said, “Let me know how things go. Both with the graffiti case and the Starling one.” He got up from his chair and left the room.

Barry busied herself with work, but she couldn’t help looking at her phone every few minutes. When it finally rang, she didn’t bother checking the caller ID.

“Thea?” she asked.

“Sorry, it’s Laurel,” came the voice on the phone.

Barry felt herself sag slightly.

“Oh, hi Laurel. What’s up?”

Laurel hesitated, then said, “I found the girl from the photo. It wasn’t Sara.”

Barry pressed her lips together and closed her eyes. She took a deep breath, then opened them.

“Thank you for letting me know,” she said. “How’d your parents take it?”

“Dad’s upset. Mom’s headed back to Central on a red-eye,” Laurel explained. “I know…I know you were hopeful too. How are you taking it?”

“I…I don’t know yet,” Barry admitted. “I might call Oliver and cry a bit later, but I’m okay right now. How are you?”
Laurel huffed slightly. “I might cuddle Tommy and cry a bit later, but I’m okay right now.”

“Have you heard what’s going on?” Barry asked.

“I’ve been wrapped up in this Sara/Jenn thing. What do you mean?” Laurel asked worriedly.

“Roy’s been kidnapped,” Barry said bluntly. “Thea was there when it happened. She’s at Verdant with Tommy now.”

“Where’s Oliver?” Laurel asked. Barry could hear her beginning to move around.

“I don’t know,” Barry said. “Tommy said he went to do something; he didn’t say what.”

“I’m going to head over to the club,” Laurel said. “I’ll talk to you later?”

“Talk to you later,” Barry confirmed. “Bye.”

“Bye.”

She’d barely hung up the phone when it rung again. This time, she did check who it was, and this time, it was Thea.

“He’s alive, Barry, he’s alive, he’s okay!” Thea exclaimed as soon as she answered.

Barry sagged in relief.

“Thank God,” she said. “I’m so glad he’s okay, Thea-Bee.”

“Me too,” Thea said quietly. She sniffled. “I’m actually in the bathroom now, cleaning up. I look like a wreck. I honestly look worse than he does, and he’s the one who just got beat up by a psychopath.”

“Don’t worry,” Barry soothed. “I’m an ugly crier too. Waterproof makeup is your friend.”

“I’m starting to get that,” she said.

They were both quiet for a moment, though Barry could hear the running water on the background of Thea’s end of the line.

“I’ll let you finish cleaning up,” Barry said quietly. “Go see your boyfriend. You’re always welcome to call if you need me, or even if you just want to chat.”

“I’ll call tomorrow,” Thea promised. “I’ll even do it during your lunch break, so you remember to eat lunch.”

Barry laughed.

“I’ll talk to you then, dear. I love you.”

“Love you too,” Thea replied before hanging up.

Barry locked her phone and took a deep breath. She cleaned up everything she was still working on, scribbled a note about Roy and Thea that she left in the captain’s office, and went home.

She didn’t go up to her room, or even Livvy’s room. Instead, she went up to the guest bedroom and knocked on the door.
Iris opened it, bleary-eyed, a moment later.

“I think I’m about to cry,” she told her.

Iris had her wrapped in her arms before the tears started to fall. She spent the night huddled in the guest bedroom with her sister, crying once more for the loss of her first love.

“So…” Oliver said when Barry picked up the phone. “We kinda had an assassin in the house last night.”

“What?” Barry demanded, almost choking on her coffee. “What happened?”

“Laurel’s clients got assassinated by someone hired by the guy they were suing, but their son survived. Laurel took him into her custody, but the police Detective Lance stationed outside her building were killed. They got saved by the vigilante, but Laurel’s apartment was wrecked. According to Tommy, my family has more security than the President, which I’m not sure I believe, so they stayed here. The assassin broke in anyway, but he got killed by the vigilante. We’re all fine. The kid might have messed up Livvy’s playroom though,” Oliver explained.

“I just won’t tell her,” Barry said. She glanced at the backseat of the car. Livvy was reading a book on their way to the elementary school. She lowered her voice. “She’s going through a bit of a possessive phase. She doesn’t like sharing her toys with anyone. She got lectured by her teacher by not sharing the Legos she was playing with a few days ago.”

“Did she tell me that?” Oliver asked. She could hear him frowning.

“I think so,” Barry replied.

Oliver sighed. “I’m sorry. I didn’t remember. It’s been a hard few weeks, especially since Tommy left. I’ve got a lot of paperwork that he had been doing that’s now my job.”

“Are you going to try to apologize?” Barry asked.

“I mean…” Oliver said, then sighed. “It started because I didn’t trust him, but he threw some things back that showed that he doesn’t really trust me either. Trust was broken on both sides, and I really don’t know how to fix that.”

“Talking’s usually a good start,” Barry offered. “Hold on a moment, I’m dropping Livvy off at school.”

She set the phone in her lap as she pulled into the car rider drop-off line.

“Have a good day, sweetheart,” Barry told her. “I love you!”

“Love you too, Mommy!” Livvy called back.

Barry blew her a kiss. Livvy blew one back, then opened her door, climbed out of the car with her Brave backpack and lunchbox. She closed the door and headed into the school, pausing by the entryway to wave at Barry once more. Barry waved back.

Once she had pulled out of the carpool area, she picked up her phone again and positioned it between her shoulder and her ear.

“Okay, I’m back,” she said. “So, what kinds of things were said?”
Oliver sighed.

“I suspected that he might’ve had something to do with how the girl who’d been in the club had gotten Vertigo. I didn’t trust him, that he wasn’t doing any drugs anymore, that he didn’t have anything to do with that girl’s death. That’s what started it. Everything else…I don’t really want to talk about it.”

Barry waited a moment, then quietly said, “You know I’m always here for you, if you want or need to talk.”

Oliver let out a breath.

“I know. Thank you for that. Are you off to work?”

“Yep. Have you slept yet?”

“Not yet,” Oliver admitted. “I’ve had too much adrenaline since last night.”

“Go to bed, Ollie,” Barry instructed. “We can talk more later. It’s more important that you sleep.”

“I will. I love you,” he told her.

She smiled.

“I love you too. Good night, Ollie.”

“Good night.”

Two days later, Moira called.

“Walter’s coming home,” was all she said.

“We’ll be on the next plane,” Barry told her.

Oliver picked them up from the airport a few hours later. Neither of them had packed anything, except for a few books to keep Livvy occupied. Barry had her purse with iPad and charging cords in it.

“Have you seen him yet?” Barry asked urgently.

“I have,” Oliver said. “He’s okay, Bare. He’s okay. They’re going to keep him in the hospital for a few days – he’s a bit malnourished and dehydrated and showing some other signs of unclean living conditions for the past few months, but he’s going to be just fine.”

Barry sagged in relief. “Thank God.”

They had to be half-smuggled into the hospital. Oliver checked the doors before they entered, but as soon as they were sure that only family was present, Livvy launched herself onto Walter’s bed and wrapped her spindly five-year-old arms around his neck.

All other conversation for the next few hours was taken over by Livvy, who proceeded to relate to Walter every. single. thing. that had happened in the past few months. She had to disappear off the bed every time a doctor or nurse started coming in, but she found it entertaining to see how fast she could move from Walter to Barry.

They were only able to stay the weekend, so they spent most of their time in Walter’s hospital
room. Livvy kept the mood light and helped everyone avoid imagining what had happened to Walter over the past four months.

When Oliver dropped them off at the airport, disguised by sunglasses, a Starling City Rockets cap and a ridiculous – if realistic – fake beard, he pulled her in close and told her quietly, “Something’s coming.”

“What?” Barry asked in confusion.

“I don’t know,” Oliver admitted. He looked frustrated. “But something’s coming. Soon. Something bad. And I think Walter’s kidnapping, my dad’s death… I think it’s all connected. Please stay out of Starling for a while. Especially without telling anyone you’re coming.”

“I will,” Barry agreed. She leaned up and kissed Oliver. “Be safe.”

“You too,” he said. “I love you.”

“I love you too,” she replied.

They kissed once more, longer, until Livvy started tugging at Barry’s shirt.

“Moooommmmmyyyy,” she said. “Kissing’s groooooooosssss.”

Barry let out a small laugh and picked her daughter up.

“I’ll take your word for it, sweetheart. Give Daddy a kiss.”

Livvy leaned in and planted a kiss on Oliver’s face. It wasn’t precisely his cheek, since he had the fake beard covering that, but it was close enough.

“I love you, Daddy!” she said. “Skype tonight?”

“Not tonight, Sparky,” Oliver said. “It’ll be too late once you get back home. Tomorrow though. I promise.”

He solemnly held out his pinky to the little girl, who offered her own. They linked pinkies and shook on it with grave demeanors.

Further conversation was interrupted by the boarding announcement for their flight.

“You’d better go,” Oliver said quietly. “Have a safe flight.”

Barry hesitated, but then they called their flight again.

“I’ll call you when we get home,” she told him. “Love you.”

“Love you too,” he said.

They kissed once more, briefly, before Barry and Livvy hurried to take their seats on the plane back to Starling.

A week and a half later, Barry was in her lab when Joe came running and said, “Turn on the news.”

“Which channel?” Barry asked, though she was already headed over to her computer.

“Channel 52,” Joe said.
It only took seconds for her to pull up the channel. There was a livestream from Starling City on the first page.

“…of you just tuning in, we’ll replay the stunning press conference made by Moira Queen just minutes ago,” the anchor said.

The camera switched to show Moira standing in front of a podium. From the looks of it, she’d brought the reporters into the mansion.

“My name is Moira Dearden Queen,” she said. “I am the acting CEO of Queen Consolidated, and God forgive me, I have failed this city. For the past five years, under the threat for my life and the lives of my family, I have been complicit in an undertaking with one horrible purpose.” Moira looked over to the side of the room, but the camera didn’t show what she was looking at. She seemed to steady herself and said, “To destroy the Glades and everyone in it.”

The murmurs that broke out in the room were audible through the camera and audio. Barry clapped her hand over her mouth in shock.

“But I realize now that my family’s safety will mean nothing if I let this dreadful act occur. But you need to know that the architect of this nightmare is Malcolm Merlyn,” Moira said firmly.

“Tommy’s dad,” Barry breathed in shock.

“And I have proof that he has killed dozens in pursuit of this madness,” Moira continued. “Adam Hunt, Frank Chen, and my husband, Robert.” Her expression turned pleading. “Please,” she said, “if you reside in the Glades, you need to get out now. Your lives and the lives of your children depend on it.”

The scene immediately switched to the news anchor again.

“Moira Queen was immediately taken into custody following her confession. There has been no word on Malcolm Merlyn, though the SCPD has stated they will do whatever it takes to bring him into custody,” the newscaster continued.

Barry sat frozen in her chair, eyes fixed on the screen.

“Joe,” she finally said, her voice small, “could you please tell the captain I’m clocking out early? And ask Iris to take care of Livvy?”

“I’ll let them know,” Joe said quietly, placing a comforting hand on her shoulder before leaving her lab.

Barry stayed at her computer for the next hour, watching the goings-on of Starling City, her body tense from the terror. She was there when the newscaster said, “Oh my God,” as everything in the newsroom started shaking. She continued watching as they switched to a live feed from one of the news choppers over the Glades that was filming the chaos as people attempted to evacuate.

She watched as the city crumpled.

Over and over again she dialed familiar numbers, hoping, praying that someone would pick up. None of them did.

An hour after the city crumpled, Thea finally answered her phone.

“Thea!” Barry cried in relief. “Are you okay?”
“Yeah,” the girl said shakily. “I’m okay. I mean, I’m not emotionally okay, but I’m not hurt.”

“What about Roy?” Barry asked. “And Oliver?”

“Roy’s got a couple of bruises – he insisted on helping other people get out of the city on our way out. Roy saw Ollie half an hour ago. He was going to the hospital with Laurel and Tommy. Laurel almost got crushed beneath a building and Tommy did get crushed. They don’t know if he’s going to make it,” Thea said, almost sobbing. “I…Barry, I don’t know what to do.”

“You don’t have to stay in the city,” Barry said, mentally begging Thea to come back to Central, to come back where it was safe, where she wasn’t part of what was soon-to-be the most hated family in the city.

“No,” Thea said. “…I want to. I want to be here with Roy. I want to help all these people. Mom…God, I don’t even want to call her that anymore…it’s her fault.”

“I’m certainly not condoning what she did, but she did save lives by giving that press conference,” Barry said quietly. “If she’d stayed quiet, then no one would have known it was anything but a devastating earthquake. She destroyed her reputation to save as many people as she could.”

“That doesn’t excuse the fact that she worked with the guy who murdered Dad! She almost killed Roy! And Laurel! Tommy might not live! CNRI was destroyed!”

“It doesn’t,” Barry said quietly, clutching her phone like the lifeline it was to her. “I just want you to think about that.”

Thea was quiet for a moment. Barry could hear the loud noises of a panicking city in the background.

“I’ll think about it,” Thea finally said. “I should probably go. We’re still in the Glades, just the not-destroyed part. I’m going to head over to Verdant and get the alcohol locked up so it can be used as a shelter for some of the people who are homeless now. Oliver said that it’s mostly still intact. Roy’s planning on continuing to help people.”

“You shouldn’t go alone,” Barry said firmly. “Tell him that he will be helping people just as much if he helps you help people, and that way he can help you if anyone recognizes Moira Queen’s daughter and decides to get revenge. You’re a target now, Thea. The people are scared right now, but as soon as they stop being scared, they’re going to be angry, and you, Tommy, and Oliver are the biggest accessible targets in the city.”

Thea was quiet for only a second before saying, “I’ll take Roy with me. I’ll try to find where Ollie’s bodyguard is, and I’ll send him to go guard Tommy, if he’s willing. Ollie’s with Tommy anyway.”

“Thank you,” Barry said with a sigh of relief. “If you do see Oliver again, tell him to give me a call. I’ve been trying to get in touch with him for hours.”

“He might not have his phone on him,” Thea admitted. “He’s not actually that great at making sure he’s carrying it. Plus, he’s in the hospital. I’m not sure the rules in whatever area Tommy’s in.”

“I’ll hope that’s the case,” Barry said. “I love you, Thea-Bee. Be safe.”

“I love you too,” Thea replied quietly. “I’ll call you when I get home…or to Roy’s. I’m not sure I want to go back to the mansion at the moment.”
“Thank you,” Barry told her. “Goodbye.”

“Bye.”

She ended the call and stared at her phone for a moment, before attempting to call Oliver again. There was no answer.

Singh forced her to go home half an hour later. Joe and Chyre had responded to a call, so the captain drove her home herself. He didn’t let her out of the car until she assured him that Iris was already at the house taking care of Livvy and she wouldn’t be alone.

Iris met her at the door, and Barry finally took the opportunity to break down and cry. Somehow, they made it over to the couch, where Iris had the news on at low volume. It was still showing coverage of the Starling City earthquake. Iris wrapped her in a blanket and they watched the coverage long into the night.

Barry wasn’t sure when she’d fallen asleep, but she woke up to a knock at the door. She forced herself awake and sat up.

She was still on the couch, and the TV was still playing, though it was muted now. She was covered in a blanket and one of the decorative pillows had been shoved under her head – presumably Iris’ work.

There was another knock at the door.

Barry got up and went over to it. She peeked through the window beside the door, and then hurriedly unlocked and opened it once she saw who it was.

The man on her doorstep looked exhausted. His eyes were almost completely dead, but he tried to manage a weak smile when he saw her.

“Oh, Oliver said.

Chapter End Notes

And so ends season one of Arrow. Next comes season two, and we all know what happens in season two :) The plan is for it to be fewer chapters than season one, since Barry happens to be in a coma for most of it, and she is the catalyst for most of the changes I'm making. Right now I'm looking at five chapters for season two, though that could change as I actually write them. (Though two are written already, as I mentioned a few chapters ago.)

To anyone reading my other works, I am planning on updating Third Life before I come back to ABoL, but inspiration may not work that way.

Thanks for reading! (And sorry for the extensive author's notes.)
City of Heroes

Chapter Summary

The summer between seasons one and two of Arrow, and episode 2x1, "City of Heroes."

Chapter Notes

This is the longest chapter I've ever written that stayed a single chapter. I decided it wasn't quite long enough to split. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“They’re calling it the fourth-largest act of domestic terrorism ever,” Barry told Oliver a few days later. He’d so far refused to watch any news related the Starling Earthquake. “Second-largest on US soil. Only 9/11 was worse. It apparently took them a few days to debate whether it counted as terrorism or simply mass murder.”

“Do they have a body count yet?” Oliver asked quietly.

“Around 500 dead,” Barry admitted. “There’s others that are still in critical condition. Pretty much everyone has been located though. The regional FEMA office is just outside Starling City. Thanks to your mom’s press conference, they were prepped before the earthquake hit. That time saved lives.”

“She would’ve saved a lot more lives if she’d confessed earlier, before the device was in Malcolm’s hands,” Oliver grumbled.

“There were over four thousand residents in the Glades before the earthquake,” Barry told him. “Malcolm Merlyn meant to kill all of them. Thanks to your mom and whoever shut down that other device, less than an eighth of that were killed. Yes, it’s still awful. But it could have been so much worse if Merlyn had his way.”

Thea and Laurel had been keeping her updated on the situation in Starling. Thea was busy with relief efforts, doing the best she could to aid the people of the Glades. Walter was supporting her, helping with all the adult things she didn’t know about.

Laurel was even more busy. CNRI had been destroyed in the earthquake, and no one was sure whether it would be rebuilt, but she had other problems. Like all billionaire children, Tommy Merlyn had a will, a healthcare proxy, and a springing power-of-attorney. While the will was still sealed since Tommy was still technically alive, the healthcare proxy and springing power-of-attorney had activated. Laurel was the designated agent for both, so she was now attempting to manage Merlyn Global Group and all of Tommy’s healthcare decisions. Walter was also giving her advice, since she was neither a business major nor had she grown up with a CEO that brought business home with them. She was somewhat aware of what to do, but becoming the acting CEO of a floundering company wasn’t fun for anyone, especially someone with no experience.
According to Walter, she was doing a pretty decent job in pretty terrible circumstances. Barry suspected she was throwing herself into the work so she didn’t have to focus on everything else she was supposed to be focused on. Barry made sure to call her every night as a way to force her to have human contact besides her(?) employees and Tommy’s doctors.

Thea was rapidly working through her community service hours. She’d done 165 of 500 at CNRI before the earthquake, and now she was working 10-12 hour days working for the community. If she continued at that pace, she’d be done before July, though she was still under Laurel’s watchful (though not quite as watchful, at the moment) eye and had over a year and a half of probation to go.

Oliver on the other hand…Oliver wasn’t doing well. He’d cried the first night he was there, just curled up in her arms, spindly as they were – and cried. He didn’t sob like Barry did when she was this upset. He was almost completely silent as Barry simply sat there and stroked his hair. He would sniffle occasionally, but for the most part he just let the tears run down his face and into Barry’s shirt.

Barry took the next day off and asked (begged) Iris to continue handling Livvy for the day. She came out of her room long enough to see Livvy off to school, but didn’t tell the little girl that her father was sleeping upstairs.

She spent the rest of the day with Oliver, coaxing him to eat, to shower, to get out of the bed and move around the house.

He didn’t talk to her about it.

By the time Livvy came home, he’d built his walls back up, and he was mostly functioning – at least, he was functioning enough to fool a five-year-old, even an incredibly perceptive one like Livvy. By this point, nearly a week after he’d Oliver had arrived in Starling City, Barry could barely tell that something was wrong…at least when other people were around. With just her, Oliver seemed to feel comfortable enough to let down his barriers and show how exhausted, how…broken he was.

“It was still horrible,” Oliver finally said.

“It was,” Barry agreed. She sat down beside him on the bed and curled into him. She was glad he’d still accept physical comfort from her.

“Tell me about it,” she finally said.

He jerked under her.

“Why? You’ve seen the news reports. You’ve talked to Laurel and Thea.”

“I want to know what happened from your perspective,” Barry replied quietly. “I want to know what you saw, what you felt. You knew something was off; you told me to stay away from Starling. It’ll help if you talk about it. Tell me, Ollie.”

Oliver hesitated, then slowly began to speak.

“Before Dad killed himself, the last thing he told me was to right his wrongs,” Oliver said. “When his body washed up on the island, I found a book in his pocket, with blank pages. It had this strange symbol on the front inside cover – a circle with lots of lines inside. I used the pages for kindling for a bit, until I noticed that when they got hot, there was writing on it. It was a list of names. All of Starling City’s corrupt. After I came back, and the Hood guy started hunting, I realized he was going after the List. It’s why I was never worried. My family wasn’t on it. And
then Walter found another copy of the List hidden in our house – Mom’s copy. He gave it to a girl in IT, Felicity, who’d helped me out with figuring out technology a few times. Walter went missing not long after that. Felicity brought the List to me and told me she’d been helping Walter figure it out, and she thought that was why he went missing. Felicity and I – and Dig, my bodyguard – started looking into it, quietly. I showed the copy Felicity had to Mom and questioned her about it, and she told me to stop looking into it before throwing it in the fire.”

“And that made you more suspicious,” Barry concluded.

Oliver nodded, then continued.

“Dig was kinda keeping an eye on Mom, especially after the vigilante threatened her. He overheard her talking to someone about something they called, ‘The Undertaking.’ But he couldn’t figure out who he was talking to. After Walter got rescued, Mom muttered to herself that it was almost over. I knew whatever the Undertaking was, it had to be coming, so I wanted you and Livvy as far away from it as possible. And then Mom and I got kidnapped by the Hood guy. He threatened to hurt me, so Mom told him everything – how Malcolm Merlyn had Unidac Industries build the earthquake device, and then bought it with Queen Consolidated. How he wanted to destroy the Glades because his wife died there. I…I should have done more. I could have made the announcement, and gotten everyone out of the Glades earlier.”

“Oliver, when did you find out?”

Oliver thought about it a moment.

“Monday night?” he said questioningly.

“Oliver, the Glades were destroyed on Wednesday. Your mom gave them press conference that morning. What did you do on Tuesday?”

“I told Tommy,” Oliver said. “I went to Merlyn Global in the morning and told Tommy…and I tried to get Felicity to hack into Merlyn Global to figure out where the device was.”

“Did she find it?” Barry asked.

“No,” Oliver said. “But she found the plans for it. She gave them to the police so they could disarm the device. Just…no one realized there were two.”

“And that’s what you did on Tuesday?” Barry prompted. “Anything else?”

“Malcolm kidnapped me,” Oliver admitted. “Mom told him that I knew and he didn’t want me interfering. He threatened to hurt you and Livvy if I told after it was over, and said he’d be keeping me for a couple days.”

“Oh my God, are you okay?” Barry said, looking him up and over for injuries. She hadn’t seen any so far, but he hadn’t been sleeping shirtless like he usually did. She’d assumed that it was because he was still slightly in shock and getting cold easily. She hadn’t even thought he might be hiding injuries.

Oliver hesitated, then rolled up his sleeves. There were faint marks on his wrists that Barry recognized. They were the kind of marks you got when you struggled while wearing handcuffs.

Barry picked up one wrist and carefully inspected it, then the other.

“I’m going to clean these, then put Neosporin on them and wrap them when you’re done,” she told
him firmly.
He nodded.

“Do you have any other injuries?” she asked.

Oliver hesitated again, longer this time.

“Take off your shirt,” Barry ordered.

Oliver winced.

“Take it off!”

Oliver removed his shirt with the tenderness someone only used when they were trying to avoid aggravating an injury. Barry gasped when the neatly stitched wound was revealed.

“Did Malcolm do that to you?” she demanded.

Oliver nodded tightly.

“As it turns out, Malcolm was the one going around killing people with black arrows, in order to cover up his crimes in advance. He stabbed me with one,” Oliver said. “It’s fine – my bodyguard has medical training from the army, and he stitched it up. I’ve been watching it. No signs of infection or anything. I just… I didn’t want to go to the hospital. Especially since everyone from Starling knows what an arrow wound means,” he said.

“I’m going to keep an eye on it too,” Barry said firmly. “If you feel off or anything, you tell me, and we’ll go to the doctor. We can just say it was an archery accident. We’ll disguise you. No one has to know you’re Oliver Queen.”

Oliver raised an eyebrow. “How are you planning on disguising me?”

“Oh, don’t worry,” Barry said with a small smile. “I’m calling in the expert. But not until I’m done wrapping your wrists!”

Iris came by the next day armed with hair dye and a razor.

“Oh, okay, so everyone now knows you without the beard. Before the island, you were always clean-shaven, but there have been almost zero pictures of pre-island you published recently, so if we shave your beard and dye your hair, you should be good enough that no one recognizes you. You may be in the news now, because of… everything… but it’ll be post-island you,” Iris explained, unloading her bag in the bathroom next to a mildly-terrified looking Oliver.

“What color are you dying my hair?” Oliver asked warily.

“Unfortunately, Livvy is blonde, so if we’re going to keep up the fact that you’re her father, then you have to remain blond, since Bare’s a brunette. So we’re going to make you platinum,” Iris explained.

Oliver looked wary.

“I’m not sure I agree with this.”

“You don’t have to agree,” Iris said cheerfully. “You just have to sit back and not move.”
Oliver spent the rest of the summer as a clean-shaven, towheaded blond. Livvy wasn’t super-fond of it, but she was amenable if it meant that Daddy got to stay with them and she could call him Daddy in public.

In June, they took a family vacation to Walt Disney World. Oliver footed the bill, and all six of them – Oliver, Barry, Livvy, Joe, Iris, and Thea – went. They stayed at one of the most expensive resorts, and made Livvy’s day by making sure that she not only met Merida in person, but also got to eat dinner in Cinderella Castle with several of the other princesses. The official story was that it was a present for Livvy’s half-birthday.

She wore her Merida costume every day of the vacation, except when they went to the waterparks. Then she wore her Merida swimsuit.

In July, Oliver – going under the name “Jonas Robert” – escorted Barry to the annual Central City Police Department Ball. Thea heard about it, of course, and made sure to send over a dress and shoes for her to wear, along with a matching tuxedo for Oliver. Iris went as Joe’s date, and Livvy spent the night with her friend Margaret. Oliver had paid for Iris’ mint-green dress and shoes, insisting that Barry’s sister be no less well-dressed than she.
Captain Singh had been very interested in meeting Barry’s undead boyfriend/baby daddy. At one point, when Barry had been distracted by some of her fellow CSIs from other districts, Singh – accompanied by a few detectives and some officers – had cornered Oliver/Jonas and threatened him if he hurt Barry or Livvy. Oliver seemed more amused than anything afterwards, but he assured Barry that he’d acted suitably terrified.

In August, Thea finally finished all her community service hours. Barry had estimated July, but the two-week vacation to Walt Disney World had cut into that time. She’d thrown herself back into volunteer work when she returned, and managed to complete her hours in the first week of August. By that point, no one was using Verdant as a shelter anymore, so she started remodeling (some people had taken offense to the fact that a nightclub owned by the Queen family was now housing them). At the end of the month, she reopened it as the new manager, with her boyfriend Roy as a waiter, busboy, bartender, and her second-in-command.

In September, Livvy started complaining about the first grade. It was too easy, none of her friends were in her class, and she didn’t like her teacher. Barry began talking with both the teacher and the principal about whether or not Livvy should skip a grade.

In October, Laurel gave Barry the news she’d been waiting for.
“Tommy’s awake,” she told Oliver. “Fully awake. They’re certain his coma’s over.”

“That’s good,” Oliver replied. “What about his legs?”

Barry shook her head.

“He’s fully paralyzed from the waist down. They don’t think he’ll ever walk again, but he is a Merlyn. Floundering company or not, he’s still a billionaire. Maybe he can pay someone to make robotic legs for him or something. He’s asking about you. Laurel asked me if I knew how to get in touch with you.”

Oliver shook his head immediately.

“He doesn’t want to see me.”

“Why not?” Barry asked. “You’re his best friend. Sure, you guys had your argument. But you were doing better right before everything happened.”

“We argued again, when I said our parents were trying to destroy the Glades,” Oliver said.

“And you were right,” Barry pressed. “He can’t hold that against you.”

“He can hold it against me that I didn’t do more,” Oliver argued.

“You did what you could,” Barry shot back. “Do you hold it against Tommy that his dad stabbed you with an arrow?”

“Of course not!” Oliver said.

“See?” Barry said. “He won’t hold it against you. Besides, you need to do more with Queen Consolidated than be a digital boss. They need a person there. You’re the major stockholder now that your mom’s in prison. And of the other major stockholders, one of them is Livvy. I’d really like to properly designate you proxy on those and be done with it.”

“How did Livvy end up a major shareholder?” Oliver asked, confused.

“Walter was a major shareholder in his own right,” Barry said. “He transferred his shares to Livvy, adding to the ones she already had that Moira hadn’t told me about. Walter did tell me, and also let me know about the other shares Livvy had. I’ve been handling it since, but I didn’t take business classes; I just helped you through yours.”

“I’ll think about it,” Oliver said. “Can we just…go to bed? I’ll think about it. And really think about it, not just say I’ll think about and then not.”

“So long as you think about it,” Barry said, changing into her pajamas and crawling into bed. Oliver did the same. Barry ended up curled up next to him as she usually did.

She wasn’t surprised when she woke up pinned to the bed, Oliver’s wild eyes and bared teeth staring down at her. This wasn’t the first nightmare he’d woken her up with, and it wouldn’t be the last. She knew how to handle them now.

“Ollie,” she said gently. “It’s Barry. You’re safe, Ollie. You’re not there anymore. You’re not on the island. You’re in Central City, with me. It’s just you and me and Livvy in the house. No one here is going to hurt you. Everyone here is safe. No one is going to hurt you. You’re safe. I’m safe. You’re not on the island.”
Oliver came out of it much faster than he had at the beginning. It only took her mantra now. Sometimes it took a lot longer, but she’d never failed to get Oliver out of one of his flashbacks.

He released her as soon as he realized he was pinning her down.

“Did I hurt you?” he asked immediately.

“I’m fine, Ollie,” Barry said, leaning up to kiss him. His lips were still under hers. “Do you want to talk about it?” she asked.

He slowly shook his head.

It was unsurprising. Getting Oliver to talk about his nightmares was like pulling teeth. From a dragon.

“Do you think you can go back to sleep?” Barry asked.

Oliver hesitated, then nodded. He slowly laid back down, and Barry curled into his side once more. She kissed his bare shoulder.

“I’m safe, you’re safe, Ollie. Go back to sleep. We can talk more in the morning.”

She forced her breathing to even out, feigning sleep. Oliver’s breathing gradually slowed down as he slipped into the meditation techniques she still didn’t know where he’d learned. Eventually, he fell asleep.

Barry hated how much he was still hurting, especially when it wasn’t his fault, but she knew that he’d never find his absolution in Central. He needed to go home. As much as she and Livvy would miss him, it was time for Oliver to return to Starling City.

The next morning, they waited until Livvy had been dropped off at school before having their discussion.

“You really think I should go?” Oliver asked.

“I think that you think you need to go, but you’re scared of going back,” Barry said bluntly.

She caught his almost-imperceptible wince. She’d known she was right.

“What’s holding you back, Ollie?” she asked gently, rubbing her hand on his arm.

“I failed the city,” Oliver said. “How can I go back after that?”

“Everyone fails sometimes,” Barry pointed out. “All you can do is get up and keep going. If you stop, if you let failure conquer your life, you’ll never get anywhere. You can’t lose hope.”

“You’re my hope,” Oliver said. “You and Livvy. You help me more than you could ever know, Bare.”

Barry raised a hand to caress his cheek. “You don’t need to be with me for me to help you. Don’t get me wrong, I love having you here, Livvy loves having you here, but I don’t think it’s what’s best. You’ve got a whole city and a company waiting for you. Thea’s there, Tommy’s there, Laurel’s there. And if you ever need a break from it all, Livvy and I will be right here. Unless we decide to come visit.”

“Not now,” Oliver said quickly. “You know what Laurel’s said about the city right now. It’s
dangerous, even for the upper-class. Especially if you’re associated with a Queen.”

“We’ll give it some more time,” Barry promised. “I’m assuming that means you’ve decided to go back?”

Oliver hesitated, then said, “Yeah. Yeah, I think so.”

“We’d better get your hair back to the correct color then,” Barry noted, standing up and guiding Oliver to the bathroom.

Livvy was despondent that Daddy was leaving, but between Barry and Oliver, they had mostly managed to reassure her. Barry wasn’t sure exactly what Oliver had told the five-year-old in the conversation they’d had in Livvy’s room, but Livvy had come out of it sniffling, but strong.

“I love you,” Oliver said, kissing Barry a second, third, fourth time.

“I love you too,” Barry replied, accepting each kiss and replying with more of her own. “You’ll Skype Livvy? And call me every night?”

“I’ll try,” Oliver said. “I don’t know how busy I’ll be if I’m fully taking over as the Queen Consolidated CEO.”

Barry hesitated, then asked, “I know it’s your family’s company, but have you considered rebranding? Nothing too drastic, but just to assure people that you’re trying to stay away from what your parents were involved in.”

“I’ve thought about it,” Oliver said. “I know you said Laurel wanted to recommend something similar to Tommy when he was awake. Any name ideas?”

“Just don’t name it after me or Livvy,” Barry joked, leaning into Oliver’s embrace.

They stayed that way for a long minute, before Oliver admitted, “It’s probably time for me to go, if I want my flight to get home in time for me to make visiting hours at the hospital. I highly doubt anyone’s going to be making exceptions for a Queen or a Merlyn anymore.”

“You’ll just have to show them you’re more than your name,” Barry told him, kissing him lightly.

Livvy tugged on their shirts then.

“Enough kissing,” she ordered. “Kissing is gross. I want to hug Daddy.”

Barry laughed and stepped back so that Oliver could sweep Livvy into his arms.

“I love you so much, Sparky, and I’m really going to miss you when I’m in Starling,” Oliver said, hugging her so tightly that she squealed.

“You’ll just have to call me all the time,” Livvy said. “Skype. Lotsa Skype.”

“Lots of Skype,” Oliver nodded. He was trying to look serious, but it was ruined by the look of adoration that was always on his face when he looked at Livvy.

It took several more minutes, but eventually Barry and Livvy were just standing the front yard waving as Oliver’s motorcycle drove up the street and out of sight.

Livvy sniffled. Barry reached down and picked her up.
“Now, I don’t know about you, but I think it’s time I introduced you to what we girls do when we’re sad,” Barry said seriously.

Livvy tilted her head.

“What?”

“We’re going to go watch Disney movies and eat ice cream,” Barry continued in the same tone. Livvy smiled slightly, though her eyes were still teary.

“Oh, okay, Mommy.”

BARTHOLOMEADAMIANAALLEN – OLIVERJONASQUEEN – OLIVIAROBERTAALLEN

It was about an hour before the end of visiting hours when Oliver slipped inside Starling General. He wasn’t exactly sneaking in, as that would probably involved scaling the building and a window or two, but he was certainly avoiding being noticed.

For a patient who should have high security, considering how many people hated his family at the moment, it was surprisingly easy to get into Tommy’s room. There wasn’t even a guard outside.

Oliver knocked on the doorframe. Tommy looked up from the papers he was reading.

“Hey,” Oliver said awkwardly.

His best friend – former best friend? Oliver didn’t know anymore – looked different. He was paler, thinner, and his hair had been closely shaved, probably due to the head injury. He was dressed in a blue hospital gown and had two different IVs inserted in his arm.

“Oliver!” Tommy said. “Come in! I was hoping you’d come by.”

For some strange reason, Tommy was smiling. Oliver still did as he asked, and made his way into the room, though he dithered before sitting in the visitor’s chair by the bed.

“How was Central?” Tommy asked.

“Good,” Oliver said. “It was nice, being there with Sparky and Barry all the time, instead of long-distance.”

“Are you coming back?” Tommy asked.

“I think so,” Oliver said. “Barry thinks I should. And she thinks I want to. That I’m not sure of yet, but she’s usually right.”

“That she is,” Tommy said, nodding sagely.

Oliver hesitated, then asked, “So what’s the verdict?” He gestured towards Tommy’s body, specifically his unmoving lower half.

“Well, my dick still works,” Tommy said, startling a small laugh out of Oliver. The man smiled himself. “Honestly, for having a building fall on me, I’m doing surprisingly well. My spinal cord was severed in the T7 and T8 vertebrae, so I’ve lost my legs, but I can use the bathroom on my own, and, like I said, my dick still works. They’re even planning on removing the catheter soon, once I build up enough muscle in my arms to help lift myself up for bedpan positioning.”
“What about the head injury?” Oliver asked.

“The week or so before the Undertaking is kinda fuzzy,” Tommy admitted. “And there are a few other things that I’m just not remembering, for no rhyme or reason. Like my tenth birthday party. I know I had one, but I can’t remember it.”

“It was at my house,” Oliver said with a small smile. “We got drunk for the first time. Dad ripped us a new one afterwards.”

“You know, maybe that’s why I don’t remember it,” Tommy said with a small laugh.

They both sat quietly for a moment.

“Tommy, I’m sorry,” Oliver finally said.

“No, Oliver, no,” Tommy said. “You were right about everything. I don’t blame you. Dad needed to die. You did everything you could.”

A weight lifted off of Oliver’s shoulders. Not all of it; part of him would never forgive himself for the 502 deaths in the Glades. But Tommy’s absolution meant more than he knew.

“I could have done more,” Oliver replied, but it was more half-hearted than it had been when he’d told Barry the same thing.

“You did more than anyone else,” Tommy replied.

They were quiet for another moment.

“How’s the company?” Oliver finally asked, gesturing towards the papers in Tommy’s lap.

“Laurel’s still running it,” Tommy admitted. “Which I think you know, since Laurel was talking to Barry.”

“Yeah. But I didn’t know if she would still be, now that you’re awake.”

“That’s what this paperwork is for, actually,” Tommy said. “To confirm her as the acting CEO of Merlyn Global Group until I revoke it. Or until I change the name, which is definitely a possibility.”

“Barry recommended I do the same for Queen Consolidated,” Oliver said. “I don’t know how I’m going to keep the company in one piece. Besides the fact that I own the controlling interest.”

Tommy frowned.

“I thought the Queen family only had forty percent?”

“We do,” Oliver said. “But apparently Mom and Walter both put stocks in a trust account, so Livvy now owns fifteen percent of the company. As Livvy’s mother and designated trustee for the account, Barry named me the proxy for the Queen Consolidated shares, which sort-of makes me the majority shareholder. I at least have the power of one.”

“Well, you’re safe at least,” Tommy said. “Laurel’s having to deal with a hostile takeover from Stellmoor International. They’ve sent out their vice president of acquisitions, Isabel Rochev.”

Oliver’s eyes widened.
“Her name was on the List.”

“What list?” Tommy asked.

Oliver glanced up to make sure no one was around and lowered his voice.

“The one that my parents and your dad had. The List that started the Undertaking. The one whose members the Hood was going after.”

Tommy’s eyes widened.

“Once I’m out of here, you’re going to have to explain everything,” he said. “In detail.”

Oliver hid a grimace.

“You deserve that much, at least,” he said.

“Damn right I do,” Tommy agreed.

Footsteps heralded the approach of company. A minute later, a nurse bustled through the door.

“Mr. Merlyn,” she said anxiously. “You should turn on the news. The Starling Earthquake Relief Fundraiser has been attacked.”

Tommy’s eyes widened.

“Laurel’s there,” he said, looking over at Oliver.

Oliver grabbed the remote and flipped on the TV. It took only a moment to find the local news station.

“…reporting live from City Hall, where the Mayor was hosting the Starling Earthquake Relief Fundraiser, which has just been attacked by the Hoods. There have been numerous injuries involved, and the number of dead is unconfirmed, though it has been confirmed that the Mayor is dead. I repeat, Mayor Altman is dead.”

“Can you…” Tommy asked, looking up at Oliver.

“I’ll go find her,” Oliver promised. “I’ll make sure she’s okay, and send her here if her dad’s letting her out of his sight.”

“If she’s okay,” Tommy said worriedly. “The Hoods aren’t exactly fond of anyone involved with Merlyn Global Group right now.”

“Who are the Hoods?” Oliver asked.


“I’m on my way,” Oliver said.

“Let me know,” his best friend – who was apparently still his best friend – requested.

“Will do,” Oliver said. He grabbed his jacket and hurried out of the hospital.

He managed to talk the police into letting him inside the building and came down the stairs to see
Laurel – dressed to the nines – talking with her father. Her eyes widened when she saw him, and she immediately excused herself and walked over.

“I didn’t know you were back in town,” she said, reaching out to hug him. Oliver returned the hug.

“I just got back a little bit ago,” he said. “I was at the hospital with Tommy when the news broke. He demanded I come and check on you.”

“I’m fine,” Laurel said with a small smile, though Oliver could see how she trembled. “Just four hooded gunmen. Nothing a few self-defense classes couldn’t handle.”

He frowned. “Are you sure you’re okay? Not just physically.”

“Well, I had the barrel of a gun pointed at my face today, but when he pulled the trigger it turned out that there was no bullet in the chamber.” Her smile was tremulous.

Oliver reached out to wrap an arm around her shoulders.

“Why don’t you stay with your dad tonight?” he recommended. “I’m sure both of you will sleep better knowing that you’re not alone. And you shouldn’t be sleeping in a hospital chair. Especially since you’re running MGG.”

“I don’t think that’s necessary,” Laurel protested.

“Laurel,” Oliver said firmly. “You’re trembling.”

Laurel looked down at herself, as if to confirm Oliver’s point.

“You…you might be right,” she admitted.

“Go home, Laurel,” Oliver said gently, but firmly. “Have your dad stay over, or stay over with him. You know he’d be willing.”

“Are you headed back to the hospital?” Laurel asked.

“Visiting hours are over,” Oliver said. “Besides, I need to go home and see Thea.”

“She’s probably at Verdant this time of night,” Laurel pointed out.

“Right,” Oliver said. He gestured at his simple jeans and sweater. “Do you think they’ll let me in dressed like this.”

Laurel looked him up and down.

“You may own the club on paper, but you should probably go in the back,” Laurel recommended with a smile.

Oliver smiled back.

“I’ll keep that in mind. Do you want to try to do lunch sometime soon?”

“I actually have a proposition for you,” Laurel replied. “I just need to talk through it with Tommy first. Business lunch, your office, tomorrow?”

“Is a late lunch okay? I’ve been somewhat attempting to keep track of things, but I’m sure there
will be a million things demanding my attention tomorrow morning.”

“Two?” Laurel offered.

“Two,” Oliver confirmed. “See you tomorrow, Laurel. Talk to your dad.”

“I will,” Laurel said. “I promise.”

Oliver turned to walk away.

“Ollie?” Laurel called after him.

He looked back over his shoulder.

“It’s good to have you back,” she said.

He smile at her.

“It’s good to be back.”

He wasn’t quite sure that was true yet, but he’d find out soon enough.

Taking Laurel’s advice, he entered Verdant through the secret foundry entrance. He was surprised to hear voices inside, though he recognized them instantly.

“Are you sure this is a good idea?” Felicity asked.

“No,” Dig replied, “but it’s the best one we’ve got. Somebody’s got to drag Oliver back here, and I don’t see anyone else doing it.”

Oliver stepped into the main part of the foundry. Both of his friends were facing away from him, staring at Felicity’s computer screens. He looked around. They’d updated. The foundry was better lit now, and the technology was a few generations above what it had been before.

He paused next to the glass case containing the green outfit he’d worn during his crusade.

“I may be back, but I’m not going to become the Hood again,” he told them. They both whirled around, mouths dropping open in shock. Dig recovered first.

“And here we thought we’d have to fly to the North China Sea to find you,” Dig said.

“No,” Oliver said, accepting the hug Felicity ran up to give him. “Someone reminded me that I have responsibilities here. To my family, to my company, and to my city. But as Oliver Queen. Not as the Hood.”

Felicity winced.

“Yeah, not really a good name anymore.”

“I saw what those copycats did to the Mayor,” Oliver said. “I was with Tommy when the news came in, so he sent me to check on Laurel.”

“How are they doing?” Dig asked. “How are you doing?”

“Tommy’s awake, but he’s paralyzed from the waist down,” Oliver said bluntly. “Laurel just almost got shot by one of the copycats, and watched the Mayor die. I’m…coping. That doesn’t
mean I’m going to be some sort of vigilante anymore. I have to take care of my family, I have to take care of my company. If I want to save the city, it has to be as Oliver Queen, not as the Hood. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I was just coming through the back door on my way to see Thea.”

He breezed past them and headed up the stairs to the club.

“Oliver!” Diggle called after him.

“Oliver!” Felicity called after he didn’t stop, sounding more frantic.

Oliver opened the door to the club, stepped through, and shut it firmly behind him.

He found Thea up in his office – hers now, he supposed. The door was cracked open, though she and her boyfriend – Roy? Maybe? Barry was better at keeping track of that than he was – seemed to be having a heated discussion.

“…isn’t coming back,” he heard her say.

“I’m back,” he volunteered, stepping into the office.

“Ollie!” Thea exclaimed with a smile. She turned to wrap her arms around his neck in a hug. Oliver returned it.

“You remember my friend Roy?” Thea said, gesturing to the young man behind her when she released Oliver.

Oliver nodded.

“Still here?” he questioned. He wouldn’t have thought it of the street thug, but Barry said Thea liked him.

“Always,” Roy said, shaking Oliver’s hand. He had a firm grip. That was something, at least.

“So how was Central?” Thea asked with a sly smile. “You barely texted, no postcards.”

“Sorry, I was kind of distracted,” Oliver said.

“I’ll bet you were,” Thea said. She glanced up to make sure her boyfriend had walked to the other side of the office, then lowered her voice. “Barry talked to me more than you did. Livvy too. Forget about your sister?”

“I just…I needed some time,” Oliver admitted. “I apparently process things by running away until they make sense again.” He quickly changed the subject, gesturing out the window towards the packed club below them. “So, I heard rumors that my club is under new management.”

“Oh, it’s my club now,” Thea said. “And you’re not getting it back.”

“You’re not old enough to drink,” Oliver pointed out.

“But I am old enough to run a bar,” Thea replied.

Oliver asked gently, “Have you made it to Iron Heights?”

“To visit the woman who dropped a city on five hundred innocent people? No, thank you.”

“Thea,” Oliver said. “That’s not what Mom did.”
“Right,” Thea said sarcastically. “She had no choice. But guess what? She did. A choice not to be a mass murderer. And I have a choice too. So I choose not to be her daughter,” she said with a false smile. “It’s not like she raised me anyway. Barry did that. Joe and Iris helped. They were more involved than she ever was. But I am so happy you are back,” she said. Her smile shifted to something real as she laid a hand on her arm. “Look, I need to go. Club’s running right now, and one of our bartenders called in sick, so we’re already short staffed.”

“You’re not old enough to work the bar,” Oliver pointed out.

“Roy is,” Thea replied as she headed out the door. “I’m working the floor instead. Love you, Ollie!”

“Love you too, Speedy,” Oliver called after her.

He eventually wandered back down to the foundry. Dig and Felicity were still there. They stared at him as we walked in.

“Look, I’m sorry for not contacting you for so long. But I can’t go back to being the vigilante.”

“This town might need the vigilante,” Dig pointed out.

“Well, with what I saw at city hall earlier, it now has four of them. How’s that working out?”

“They don’t have your restraint,” Dig said, throwing his own words from so many months ago back at him. “Or your honor.”

Oliver felt his jaw clench involuntarily.

“I’m going home,” he said. “I’ve got a big day at the office tomorrow trying to save my family’s company.”

“I’ll pick you up in the morning,” Dig said firmly. “The news stations are already reporting your return. You could be a target.”

“I was planning on leaving the house at seven,” Oliver said.

“I’ll be there,” Dig said with a nod.

Oliver nodded in reply and turned to walk out again. He paused at the door and looked back at them.

“I am glad to see you both again,” he said before walking out.

He was welcomed back to Queen Mansion by Raisa. He’d been in communication with her the entire time, of course; as the Queen family housekeeper, she had been the one managing the household since everyone had left. Several members of the staff had quit after the revelation of Moira Queen’s involvement in the Undertaking, though most of the ‘old guard’ Oliver remembered from before his trip to the island had remained.

Some of them had lived in the Glades. Most of them had lost their homes, but none of his staff or their families had lost their lives. One of Thea and Oliver’s joint decisions in the days after the Undertaking was to invite all of the staff and their families to stay in the mansion. Some had taken them up on that. Others had not. The third-story bedrooms – which had primarily been a guest wing anyway – were now taken up by the staff and their families.
Once he was safely ensconced in his bedroom, he called Barry.

“How’s Starling?” she asked.

“Could be better,” Oliver admitted. “Things with Tommy went well; same with Thea. The mayor just got killed at a fundraiser. Laurel was there. She had a gun pointed to her head, but she’s physically fine. Dig and Felicity are mad at me.”

“Dig’s your bodyguard, right?” Barry asked. “And Felicity’s the one who helped you investigate the Undertaking?”

“That’s right,” Oliver said. “They’re…they’re my friends too, I think. At least they were. I don’t think they’re very happy with me at the moment.”

“If they’re really your friends, they’ll understand your reasoning,” Barry said calmly. “Oliver, you couldn’t have stayed there. You weren’t doing well when you were here. You’re better now, but those first few weeks…I was really worried about you.”

“I wasn’t suicidal,” Oliver objected.

“No, but you weren’t as careful with yourself as you could have been either. You didn’t eat. You didn’t sleep. I had to force you for weeks. You did come out of it, and with only talking to me. I’m sure Livvy’s persistence helped too.”

Oliver smiled at the thought. It had only been a few hours and he already missed his spitfire daughter.

“I don’t think anyone could remain too depressed with her around,” he replied.

Barry laughed.

“Probably not. She’s our little ball of sunshine.”

“She got that from you,” Oliver said quietly. “You’ve always been my light, Barry.”

“Well, one of my middle names is Lumina,” Barry joked. “My mom always called me her light too.”

“You shine brightly,” Oliver offered.

Barry was quiet for a moment.

“You’re making me blush, so that’s enough of the cheesy metaphors,” she said. “You back at the house?”

“Yeah,” Oliver said. “I’ve got to head to the office pretty early tomorrow. And I’m meeting with Laurel for a late lunch. Business lunch, she said. And I should probably try to make it to Iron Heights during visiting hours. And go see Thea again. She seems to be doing great at running the club, but I should probably double check…”

“Oliver,” Barry interrupted. “First, breathe. Second, Thea’s doing fine. Walter kept an eye on everything, remember? Third, you’ve got that meeting with the Stellmoor people tomorrow, right?”

“Right,” Oliver said with an internal groan. “They’re trying to take over. They can’t; I have majority between what the Queen family owns and what Livvy owns and you gave my proxy over,
but they can still be a pain in the ass. But I won’t let them take my company. Laurel didn’t let them take Merlyn Global, and they took a much bigger hit than QC did.”

“I have faith in you,” Barry said.

He heard the hints of a yawn in her voice. Oliver glanced down at his watch.

“I’m so sorry, Bare,” he said. “I forgot about the time difference. You should be asleep already. Did I wake you?”

“No,” Barry said. She didn’t bother to hide her yawn this time. “I was waiting up for you. I didn’t want to go to sleep until you called.”

“I’m glad I got to talk to you,” Oliver said softly. “I love you.”

“I love you too,” Barry replied. “Good night, Ollie.”

“Good night, Barry. Give Sparky a hug for me in the morning.”

“I will,” Barry said. “Sweet dreams, love.”

“Same to you,” Oliver replied. He heard Barry hang up. With a sigh, he got off his bed and went to change for bed.

Dig was there at six forty-five the next morning. He declined breakfast as offered by Raisa and drove Oliver to Queen Consolidated in an awkward silence.

“I’m sorry for leaving,” Oliver finally said. “But I…I couldn’t stay. Not after everything that happened, not after what my mother did, what I did.”

“All you did was save a whole lot of people,” Dig said firmly. “I don’t blame you for that, Oliver. What I do blame you for is for letting your guilt prevent you from continuing to help this city.”

“I am continuing to help this city,” Oliver argued. “As me, not as the vigilante. And I’m going to start by saving my family’s company from Stellmoor International.”

“You’ve heard about that?” Dig asked, looking at him in the rearview mirror. “Felicity’s been worried. A lot of people are going to lose their jobs if Stellmoor gets their way.”

“Yeah, I’ve been keeping up with things,” Oliver said.

He watched as Diggle hesitated, then reached over to the passenger seat. He passed back a file folder.

“Felicity set that up,” he said. “Read through it. It’s all about Stellmoor International and their representative – Isabel Rochev. Vice-President of Acquisitions. Felicity spent a lot of time complaining about how she looks angry in every photo of her.”

“She’s the one I’m meeting today,” Oliver noted. “Along with her staff.”

“Felicity said she’d meet us up there,” Dig replied.

Oliver’s brow furrowed.

“I didn’t ask her to do that.”
Dig smiled slightly.

“I know. She wanted to help. She said she ordered bagels from that nice place that your mom liked as snacks. On the company card, of course.”

“Does she have access to a company card?” Oliver wondered allowed.

“She does now,” Dig replied.

True enough, Felicity met them as soon as they stepped out of the elevator.

“They’re in the conference room,” she reported. “Just, FYI, no one is eating the bagels.”

“Felicity,” Oliver said, pausing slightly in his walk to the conference room, “thank you.”

As soon as he entered the glass-doored room, a dark-haired woman in red rose from her seat, extending a hand for him to shake.

“Isabel,” she said. “Rochev.”

Oliver shook her hand.

True to every photo of her that Felicity had found, she wasn’t smiling. Her dress was one Oliver was relatively certain he’d seen on Barry, but it looked much better on his girlfriend.

“Oliver Queen,” he replied. “Sorry I’m late.”

“For this meeting, or for your own business?” the woman asked with a slight smirk.

“I didn’t realize hostile takeovers were filled with so much hostility,” Oliver said, taking his seat at the head of the table, as was his right as CEO – however temporary it may be. If he had his way, it wouldn’t be too brief. Felicity took the empty seat to his left, while Dig moved over to the back wall to stand guard.

“Not at all,” the woman replied. “I’m actually in quite a good mood.”

“Really?” Oliver asked in mock surprise. He hoped it didn’t sound too fake. “So destroying companies agrees with you?”

He saw a flash of something in her eyes then. Her expression didn’t change, but her micro-expressions…There was something there, he just couldn’t tell what it was.

“Winning agrees with me,” the woman countered.

“You haven’t won yet,” Oliver replied in a low voice.

Isabel smirked.

“Since you majored in dropping out of college, let me put this in terms that are easy for you to understand. You control forty percent of Queen Consolidated stock, I control forty percent of Queen Consolidated stock, leaving twenty percent outstanding. Fifteen percent is held in trust for an unknown minor, so neither of us has access to that. But, in two days the Board will release the remaining five percent,” she said.

“What if I buy it before you do?” Oliver challenged.
“With what money?” Isabel asked in reply. “I doubt your trust fund is that large, and no angel investor will go near the company that built the machine that destroyed half the city. Companies rise and fall, Mr. Queen. Your company has fallen.”

“I wonder what that trustee will say about that,” Oliver said idly.

“We’ll offer a suitable trade,” Isabel said easily. “It won’t be a problem.”

Before either of them could say anymore, four armed gunmen in black burst into the room. Oliver rose from his chair.

“Oliver Queen!” one of them yelled in a voice reminiscent of his own when he had been the Hood. “You’ve failed this city!”

Oliver looked over at Felicity, who looked just as shocked as he was.

“Get down!” Dig yelled. He fired at the gunmen, which sent the rest of them diving to the floor. Oliver saw one of the gunmen go down before he dove under the table. Isabel and Felicity were there as well. Oliver met Isabel’s frightened gaze.

“Fall back!” Dig yelled as he fired again. He was kneeling against the table. “Oliver, go!”

Oliver helped Isabel out of the room, and then turned back for Felicity.

“Go, go, go!” Dig yelled.

“Get Queen!” one of the gunmen yelled.

Oliver turned, and was suddenly face to face with a gunman. Before he could do anything, the gunmen went down. Felicity appeared behind him, holding – a table leg? Oliver wasn’t sure – in her hands.

Oliver grabbed her and pulled her to the floor even as machine gun fire shattered the glass windows. They may be good for aesthetics, but Oliver was really wishing that the interior designer had gone for classical instead of modern in their design choices.

He got up and pulled Felicity up as well.

“Queen’s getting away!” he heard one of the gunmen yell.

He pulled Felicity along with him as he ran for the door. He grabbed the chain to the blinds with one hand, wrapped the other arm around Felicity, and jumped out the window. The blinds dropped down – they weren’t meant to hold the weight of two people – which have them enough reach to swing into the window a few stories below.

They took out the computer monitor and several of the other desk artifacts of whatever unfortunate person this office belonged too, but they were fine. Oliver just hoped Dig was the same.

It took a few minutes and a phone call from Dig before he went back to the conference room. He was stopped by an officer on the way in to give his statement. Felicity had come with him, despite Oliver’s protest, but she seemed to be talking with Detective – no, Officer – Lance in one of the other conference rooms, all of which were now united due to the Hoods’ remodeling effort.

“Ms. Rochev,” Oliver said, entering the conference room again. There was glass shattered all over the floor. The walls would all have to be replaced. Possibly with bulletproof glass this time. He
knew that his mother’s office – his office, now – had been reinforced with bulletproof glass after her encounter with the Hood. That wouldn’t have stopped a repeat encounter; he had armor-piercing arrows. And explosive arrows, though those would have been a bit much for a Hood encounter. “I’m sorry about this.”

“Because they were after you?” the woman asked, turning so he was forced to walk with her to the other end of the room, away from her companions.

“Because what happens in this building is my responsibility,” Oliver countered.

“Only for the next forty-eight hours,” the woman replied before walking away.

Oliver kept his expression neutral as she left. She shouldn’t be so confident. He still had his trump card.

He went to find Dig next.

“You injured?” he asked.

“Not a scratch,” Dig replied. “For local terrorists, they have pretty bad aim. The police already took my statement. I got a good hit on one of the guys, but they still made it out. They were wearing Kevlar.”

He nodded towards the elevator. They weren’t stopped on their way there, though Felicity joined them in the elevator.

It wasn’t until they reached the top floor – Oliver’s office, now – that either of his friends spoke.

“You could’ve stopped those guys!” Felicity said, storming into the office ahead of them.

“Not without giving Isabel Rochev and the Hoods a pretty good idea of what I’m capable of,” Oliver protested.

“I think what Felicity’s wondering is whether you avoided taking those Hoods on,” Diggle said as they entered the office proper. “And Oliver, she’s not the only one.”

“I told you!” Oliver said. “I did not come back to Starling City to be the vigilante!”

“But they came after you, Oliver,” Dig said. “You could’ve taken them out.”

“No, I couldn’t, Diggle,” Oliver said with gritted teeth. “Look, there’s a part of being ‘the Hood’ that neither of you are considering. The body count.”

“And excuse me for saying this, but so what?” Felicity asked angrily. “Since when do you care?”

“Since Tommy,” Dig realized quietly.

Felicity looked back at him.

Oliver quietly started speaking again.

“After he found out my secret, do you know what Tommy called me? A murderer. He was right. And then he almost died. He spent weeks in a coma, and no one thought he would wake up. I thought my best friend died thinking I was a murderer. He survived. Somehow, he survived the Glades. But after that…anyone I kill dishonors the memory of every person who did die there.”
“So don’t,” Felicity said. “It’s not like you’ve killed every guy you’ve faced.”

“I could’ve,” Oliver countered. “Because when I put on the hood, it’s kill or be killed. That is what kept me alive. It’s why sometimes I wonder…maybe I should’ve stayed on the island.”

He turned and started walking out of the office.

“Is that where you’re going now?” Felicity asked, sounding slightly frantic.

Considering the apparent plans she and Dig had been making to come to the island, and her hesitance about doing it, she probably was.

“If the two of you won’t help me save my family’s company, I’m going to talk to someone who will,” he called back.

He ended up having to wait for Dig outside anyway. He had the keys to the car.

“Where are we going?” Dig asked, sliding into the driver’s seat.

“Iron Heights,” Oliver replied. “I need to talk to my mother.”

It was a nearly silent drive there. Dig apparently understood that Oliver needed the time to gather his thoughts. Or maybe he was still mad at him. Either way, it had the same result.

Oliver had to wait ten minutes in the visiting area before a guard brought his mother in. She looked…diminished. She was in a simple, dark grey jumpsuit, and her hair was tied back in a simple ponytail. She wasn’t wearing any makeup. She’d looked more elegant the last few times Oliver had seen her in the hospital, though she didn’t look any less put together.

“Hey,” Oliver greeted as she approached his table with a smile.

“Hey,” she said in reply.

“I’m sorry I didn’t make it here sooner,” Oliver began, but his mother interrupted.

“No, no, no,” she said. “Please, Oliver. There are going to be enough apologies with me apologizing to you for the rest of my life.”

“You don’t have to,” Oliver said. “You saved thousands of lives. Barry did the math.”

“And killed hundreds more,” his mother pointed out. “Hundreds that almost included Tommy.”

“That was Malcolm,” Oliver argued.

“Your sister doesn’t see it that way.” His mother looked down at her lap. “My attorney is thrilled. If my own daughter can’t forgive me, she’s not too optimistic about twelve strangers in a jury box. Alright, enough of that. How has it been going at Queen Consolidated?”

Oliver frowned.

“Yes, we do get the news in here, Oliver,” his mother said drily.

“Right.”

“You know, if I’d known the key to getting you to take your rightful place in the company was its demise, I would have declared bankruptcy a year ago,” his mother said.
“I don’t know if I’ll get to run it for long,” Oliver admitted. “Stellmoor. Their VP is coming after us, hard.”

“Isabel Rochev,” his mother said derisively.

“Yes,” Oliver confirmed.

“Do not trust that woman, Oliver, she is dangerous,” his mother said.

“Mom, everywhere I look there are no good options,” he said. “I don’t know what to do.”

“You don’t have to do it yourself,” his mother said, leaning forward. “This is a family business.”

“I love Thea, but I don’t think she wants anything to do with this,” Oliver said. “And I’m not dragging Bare or Sparky into this.” He purposely used their nicknames. It would help hide their identities if anyone was listening.

“I wasn’t talking about them,” his mother said, before explaining her idea.

“That might just work,” Oliver said in realization.

“And I assume you’ve found out about the safety net?” Moira asked.

Oliver frowned at her.

“If you mean the trust fund you set up for my girlfriend’s child without telling anyone, then yes. Walter donated his shares to it. She’s up to fifteen percent now.”

“Add her shares to yours, and you’re the majority stockholder,” Moira pointed out.

“Barry’s made me the proxy, but I don’t want to play that card until I have to,” Oliver admitted. “I don’t want anyone looking too closely into how I have the proxy of a minor’s trust fund.”

“That’s wise,” his mother agreed. “But don’t be afraid to use it if you need it.”

“I won’t,” Oliver said with a nod.

“How are they doing? Were you with them, these past few months?” his mother asked.

“I was,” Oliver said. “They’re doing well. Sparky enjoyed having me around all the time, and Bare liked having another adult constantly around. I got to escort her to her organization’s annual ball. I got threatened by her boss and co-workers. It was kind of funny. And yes,” he said as his mother opened her mouth to ask, “Thea picked out Bare’s outfit. We all went to Disney World in June for a couple weeks. Thea too. We had a good time. It was a nice break from it all.”

“I’m glad,” Moira said.

A guard approached them then.

“It looks like our time is up,” his mother sighed. “Will you be coming back?”

“As often as I can,” Oliver said. “With the company and all.”

“I completely understand,” his mother said. “Just don’t hesitate to come by if you need advice.”

“I will,” Oliver said, rising from his chair even as a guard took his mother’s arm as she rose. “And
I’ll talk to Thea.”

“Oliver, you don’t have to…” his mother began, but Oliver cut her off.

“I want to,” he said. “I love you, Mom.”

“I love you too, Oliver,” she said as the guard led her away.

“Where to now?” Dig asked once he got back in the car.

Oliver glanced down at his watch.

“Back to the office,” he said with a sigh. “Even if Isabel Rochev is trying to take away my company, I should at least try to get some of the paperwork done. And Laurel’s coming by for a late lunch meeting at two.”

The hours of paperwork flew by, and before Oliver knew it, Laurel was knocking at his door. She had two bags of food with her, along with a briefcase.

“Thai and Indian,” he said in surprise as she came in. “Rough day?”

“Always,” Laurel said with a groan as she sat down in front of his desk. “That woman is a soulless snake.”

“What woman?” Oliver asked.

“Isabel Rochev,” she replied.

“Ah,” Oliver said. “I had a meeting with her this morning.”

“The one that got attacked?” Laurel said. “Dad told me what happened. Around the same time he told me I needed to upgrade my security. He’s probably right. I already hired extra guards for Tommy’s room. The SCPD offered to assign a protective detail, but they’re stretched thin as it is. I would rather take care of it myself, though I did have my head of security run background checks first. And he was selected by your head of security, who I know you trust, so I’m relatively sure Tommy will be safe. Speaking of, where’s your bodyguard?”

“I sent him to drive my IT assistant home,” Oliver said. “She was pretty shaken up by what happened earlier.”

Laurel raised an eyebrow.

“IT assistant?” she asked.

“She’s a friend,” Oliver said. “Felicity helped me with technology, after I came back. And she helped Walter investigate…everything…before he got kidnapped. And then she brought it to me. Unfortunately, I didn’t find out enough until too late.”

“It’s not your fault, Ollie,” Laurel said. She’d started unloading the bags of food. She ordered both of their favorites, in both cuisines. “So why was she at the meeting?”

“Like I said, she helped me investigate,” Oliver said. “I trust her. She’s one of the few people in the company I know I can trust. I might make her my assistant.”

“You said she’s IT?” Laurel asked with a raised eyebrow.
Oliver nodded.

“Don’t,” Laurel said. She handed him his food and plastic silverware. “Speaking as a woman who got an unappreciated job promotion and change, she won’t appreciate it. Do you have drinks?”

Oliver obediently went over to the mini-fridge in the corner. Someone – Oliver didn’t know who, but he suspected it was Dig or Felicity – had stocked it recently with fresh drinks.

“I have alcohol, but as much as we might want it, we probably don’t need it this time of day,” Oliver said.

Laurel groaned, but nodded in agreement.

“Coke, Sprite, or water?” Oliver asked.

“Coke,” Laurel replied.

“Diet?”

“Nope. I need all the sugar I can get.”

Oliver returned to the desk with two bottles of Coke and passed one to his ex-girlfriend. They opened their food and began eating.

“Do you regret it?” Oliver asked a moment later.

Laurel was quiet for a moment, though that might have been because she was chewing her pad thai.

“I’m glad I had something to do,” she finally said. “I wouldn’t have, if I’d stayed a lawyer. CNRI is gone – it’s never opening its doors again. I’m sure I’d have a new job by now, but I wouldn’t have for a while, and I needed that while to keep busy. I’m not sure I’d have been motivated enough to find a new job if I was sitting at Tommy’s bedside this whole time. So, I’m glad that I had something to do, even if that something was attempting to keep a floundering company afloat without any idea how to run a business.”

“I’m sure you had some idea,” he offered.

Laurel gave him a look, the same kind of look that had always quelled him when they were dating. It had been just as effective on Tommy. Barry had her own version of the look, which was less scary but had more puppy-dog eyes.

“The extent of my business education is from The Office,” Laurel said drily.

Oliver frowned.

“Is that show still on?” he asked.

“It ended the day after the earthquake, actually,” Laurel said, her voice going to that higher pitch she always used – however accidentally – whenever she was trying to hide her hurt. “Apparently, 502 people can die in a single day, but TiVo still works,” she said tightly.

Oliver reached out and squeezed her hand. She squeezed back, so Oliver felt it was safe to let go and go back to his food.

“So, what was it you wanted to talk to me about that we need a ‘business lunch’ for?” Oliver asked, complete with air quotes.
Laurel sighed and opened the briefcase she’d brought with her.

“This is a proposal for a merger between Queen Consolidated and Merlyn Global Group,” she said. “Tommy and I have discussed this, and we both agree that it’s the best chance our companies have at surviving this.”

“Queen Consolidated and Merlyn Global Group have different focuses,” Oliver pointed out, even as he picked up the papers and began skimming through them. He forced himself to slow down a moment later. He was very out of practice at reading legalese.

“Which will allow us to keep on most of our employees,” Laurel explained. “There are certain division that will have to take cuts – IT, accounting, legal, PR, HR, marketing, S&R – but the numbers are a lot lower than if Stellmoor took over even one of us.”

“I have control of Queen Consolidated still,” Oliver said. “How’s Tommy and Merlyn Global?”

“Surprisingly, I – well Tommy – still owns most of it. Murderous psychopath or not, Malcolm was also a greedy bastard who didn’t trust other people to have part of his company, so the Merlyn family own sixty percent of Merlyn Global Group. That isn’t our problem. Our problem is no one wants to associate with the Merlyn name since, you know, the founder and former CEO tried to destroy an entire portion of the city and did succeed in committing the second-largest terrorist event ever on US soil,” Laurel said drily.

“And you think merging with the other company whose name is associated with that terrorist attack is going to help?” Oliver asked drily.

“I think it will if we change the name of the new company,” Laurel said. “I know you don’t want to…”

“No, it’s a good idea,” Oliver said. “Barry recommended it anyway, though she didn’t have any suggestions. Besides not naming it after her or Livvy.”

“I have a couple ideas,” Laurel said. “How are they doing?”

“They’re good.” Oliver said. “Barry’s currently talking with Livvy’s teacher and the principal about moving her up a grade. Apparently first grade is the most boring thing in the world. When we asked, she said that kindergarten was the same, but at least there were toys there.”

Laurel shook her head, though she had a fond smile on her face.

“That child is too smart for her own good,” she said.

“Tell me about it,” Oliver said with a smile and a groan. “Over the summer, she decided that it would be a good idea to rewire all the lights in her room to run on potato power. It’s a pretty safe experiment, but she didn’t tell us about it until her room started smelling like rotting potatoes. Normally, potato-lights don’t generate much light, but she apparently did something to make them stronger.”

“Sounds like she’s trying to live up to her name,” Laurel said with a small smile.

“I think she’s just making up for my teenager years and Barry’s teenager years, and since she can’t do them all at once, she just decided to start early,” Oliver said. “Joe agreed.”

“Which one of you decided to rewire all the lights in your bedroom as a teenager?” Laurel teased.
“Neither of us,” Oliver replied, “but I say it’s more Barry than me. Barry says that ‘forgetting’ to mention that there were vegetables in my room was all me, though.”

“Potatoes aren’t vegetable,” Laurel said. “They’re starches.”

Oliver made a small face. He’d heard that enough from Barry and Livvy, but as far as he was concerned, they grew in the ground, so they were vegetables.

“It’s a good plan,” he said, looking over the proposal. “Did you do this yourself?”

“Walter helped,” Laurel admitted. “He was in favor of it as well. Said it might just save both companies. Since he has more experience than either of us as CEO of a company, I’m usually pretty inclined to listen to him. He’s been a great help.”

“Barry mentioned he’d been helping you, and Thea too,” Oliver said.

“For an ex-stepfather, he’s still being pretty fatherly for Thea,” Laurel said. “Even if they never lived in the same house for longer than a vacation.”

“He came out to visit me once in Central,” Oliver said. “Brought gifts for Livvy and everything. I think he likes being a grandfather, even if he doesn’t really have a claim to the title anymore. He told Livvy she could still call him Grandpa though.”

“He would,” Laurel said. She ate her last piece of curry and closed the disposable container. “I’m going to leave those papers with you. Let me know what you decide. And soon, please.”

“I’ll let you know tomorrow,” Oliver promised.

He spent the rest of the afternoon and well into the evening in the office. His paperwork seemed to have no end in sight, but Diggle came in with a dark look on his face.

“Thea’s been taken by the Hoods,” he said. “Straight from Verdant. And they grabbed Laurel as she was leaving Merlyn Global.”

Oliver hesitated for a split second, then made his decision.

“Take me to Verdant, Dig,” he ordered.

He had to make a quick stop in the club proper to talk to the police – including Officer Lance – before heading down to the foundry.

“I made a few improvements, in case you decided to come back,” Felicity said excitedly.

“I know, Felicity,” Oliver said. “I have been down here. We need to find these guys.”

“I’ve been trying, ever since you got back. I figured you come around eventually,” Felicity said with a smile. She moved over to her new computer station.

Oliver looked up at the salmon ladder that was still in the same place it had always been.

“I kept that,” she said. “I liked watching you do that.”

Oliver looked at her. She quickly turned away after realizing how that sounded.

“Thea’s boyfriend said one of them was missing part of his hand,” Oliver said, choosing to ignore her comment. “Maybe a veteran? Check hospital records for any males who have had surgical
amputations on their extremities.”

“Cross-checking by race and age,” Felicity said to herself as she searched. “Got one! Jeff Deveau, African-American, late thirties.”

“What else can you get on him?” Oliver asked.

“Ex-Marine,” Felicity reported.

“That would explain who he can handle himself,” Dig commented. “Did he lose his hand overseas?”

“No,” Felicity said. “In the earthquake. It says here that he and his wife were trying to make it across the 52nd Street Bridge when it collapsed. She didn’t make it.”

“Phone records,” Oliver said, walking away from the screen and over to the collection of weapons. “I want to know who he’s in contact with.”

Felicity immediately moved to check.

“He’s made a lot of calls to a church in the Glades,” she reported a moment later. “Something called, ‘Standing Strong.’ It’s a support group for those who lost loved ones in the quake.”

“Great place to meet three other guys as angry as you, looking for a little payback,” Dig pointed out.

Oliver stared at green arrows lined up in the glass case Felicity had set up.

“Get me an address, please,” he said with a nod.

Both were quiet for a moment, but he then heard Felicity stand up.

“You’re gonna need this,” she said, her heels clicking as she walked over to a table. Oliver turned around just in time to see her open a black case containing an equally dark compound bow.

“I had it custom made,” Felicity said.

Oliver walked over and slowly picked up the bow.

“How’d I do?” Felicity asked, sounding slightly nervous.

Oliver held it in his grasp and gazed down on it. He let out a deep breath.

“It’s perfect,” he said.

“You were right,” Felicity said. “Once I signed on, I stopped thinking about all the bodies you dropped. ‘Cause I knew that being the Hood occasionally meant being a killer. But maybe there’s another way.”

Oliver wandered over to the glass case containing his suit and gazed up at it.

“They have my sister,” he said in a low voice. “What other way is there?”

Before they could respond, he continued, “I’m going to suit up. Felicity, get me that address.”

“On it,” the blonde called as she hurried back to her chair.
He made it to the church in the Glades half an hour later. He came in through an upper story window, and crept low on the balcony towards the sanctuary he could hear voices coming from.

“So,” one of the men’s voices echoed through the empty building. Churches had such good acoustics. Great for musical performance, horrible for people keeping secrets. “What do you want to do with them?”

“We could knock them out,” a second suggested. “Drop them off somewhere.”

“Come on,” a third man said. “Why don’t you just buy them a couple new pairs of Pradas while you’re at it. They’ve seen our faces!”

“Look, offing Oliver Queen’s one thing, but his sister? She’s not much older than my sister was when she was killed in the earthquake,” the second man said.

“Your sister was murdered,” the third man said. “By her mother! A Merlyn and a Queen took our sisters, our wives from us. So we’re going to take Queen’s sister, Merlyn’s girl. What we’re doing here is justice! Which makes us the heroes.”

“She didn’t kill anybody,” Thea spit out.

Oliver finally got in range to see them. Both his sister and Laurel were tied to chairs in the middle of the aisle between the pews. The four ‘Hoods’ surrounded them, but they weren’t wearing their masks, and not all of them were armed. Laurel’s head had lolled to the side, and Oliver could see the large goose egg on her forehead. She seemed unconscious, which would explain why she wasn’t contributing to the conversation. She was a lawyer. She’d definitely try to argue their way out.

“My mother didn’t kill anyone,” Thea said. “Malcolm Merlyn destroyed the Glades.”

“With Mommy’s help,” the third man – who seemed to be the leader – mocked.

“Malcolm Merlyn killed my father,” Thea said. “She thought he killed my brother too. She was afraid of him. She must’ve been so afraid.” Thea ducked her head.

“Just like my wife,” the leader said. He pulled a pistol out of the holster at his hip and pulled back the slide, “when our house collapsed on top of her.”

He raised the gun to point at Thea. That was enough. Oliver fired an arrow at the man’s arm, knocking the handgun to the ground and drawing attention to himself instead of Thea.

“Get away from them!” he shouted in his deeper, vigilante voice.

They replied with a blast of machine gun fire. Oliver ducked and jumped of the balcony in the shadows where they couldn’t see him.

He stepped out of the shadows to take down one man with hand-to-hand, ending by punching him repeatedly in the face. He ducked away again before the other three started shooting. As soon as they paused, he left the shadows again and took out two more.

A cry of pain from Thea had him looking towards the back of the sanctuary. Laurel was still tied to her chair, though she was conscious now, and looked to have knocked her own chair over in order to half-hide between the pews. Thea was not tied to her chair. She was on the balcony at the back of the church, being escorted with her hands behind her back and a gun to her head. The leader had her.
“Please!” Thea yelled.

“Move!” the man yelled as he hit her. Oliver heard her cry of pain.

Oliver only spared a moment to glance at Laurel. The woman calmly jerked her head towards Thea, even as she was attempting to escape the ropes she was trapped by. Oliver ran over to her just long enough to leave a small knife in her hands before hurrying after Thea.

“Move!” the man yelled again, followed by Thea’s “Please! Stop!” just before Oliver caught up with them. He approached, arrow drawn. For his sister, he was willing to kill.

“Let. Her. Go,” he said in his most menacing vigilante voice.

The man stopped and jerked Thea close to him, pointing his pistol at her again.

“You want to save her?” the man cried out. “There was no justice for people like the Queens ‘til you showed us how to get it.”

The leader was insistent that Oliver understand. Thea was crying. This man had made his sister cry.

“You showed us,” the leader insisted.

Oliver fired his arrow. It struck the man in the shoulder, causing him to release Thea and tumble over the balcony. Oliver caught him before he could fall.

“Go!” he ordered Thea. She managed to pull herself to her feet and ran back the way they had come. Hopefully she’d go find Laurel and get cut out of her binds.

Oliver heard the click of the safety, and looked back at the man he was holding up from death. The man had started to move a gun towards him.

“You shoot me, we both die,” Oliver told the man.

“You’d drop me anyway,” the man said, before crying out in pain. Arrows to the shoulder hurt. Oliver would know. “I know you. You’re a killer.”

Oliver hesitated a moment, before grabbing the man’s arm with his other hand and hoisting him up. He disarmed him, of course, before tying all of them up.

He made sure that Laurel and Thea made it safely away before dropping the four off for Officer Lance. The man deserved to have some amusement in his life, especially since Oliver was kind of responsible for his demotion. And he needed to let the man know he was back anyway. And that his daughter was safe.

Despite the kidnapping incident, Laurel was still ready to talk business the next day. Oliver tried to broach the subject of her kidnapping, but was brushed off. They convened in Tommy’s hospital room – the three of them as well as Walter. Barry was also present via Skype, as the plan Moira and Oliver had come up with had her in a crucial role.

His girlfriend complained about it, since it risked her connection to the Queens eventually coming out. Walter had come up with an explanation for that as well: Barry had planned to make Oliver the godfather of her unborn child at the time of the boat crash, but couldn’t due to his ‘death.’ Instead, she named Moira as one of the godmothers of her child, and Walter took on the role of pseudo-godfather. That would be the explanation for why Moira and Walter had been responsible
for donating shares of Queen Consolidated to a five-year-old.

On Wednesday, Laurel and Oliver met with Isabel Rochev.

“Ms. Lance,” Isabel greeted, a hint of surprise on her face. “I’m surprised to see you here. I thought you were still avoiding me after our last discussion over the fate of your boyfriend’s company.”

Laurel smiled tightly.

“Ms. Rochev. We wanted to speak to you as the representative of Stellmoor International, since your company is a major shareholder in both Merlyn Global Group and Queen Consolidated.”

Oliver took over from there.

“You own forty percent of Merlyn Global Group. Mr. Merlyn owns sixty percent of Merlyn Global Group. You also own forty percent of Queen Consolidated. I own an additional forty percent of Queen Consolidated. As of two days ago, fifteen percent of Queen Consolidated belonged to a minor in trust, while the remaining five percent was outstanding. That five percent was released this morning, and now twenty percent of Queen Consolidated belongs to the minor in question.”

Oliver saw a flash of rage on Isabel’s face, but it was gone just as quickly. He continued.

“As a major shareholder in both Merlyn Global Group and Queen Consolidated, Ms. Lance and I called you here to discuss a proposed merger between Merlyn Global Group and Queen Consolidated, with a two-for-one stock exchange in the new company, which we’ve decided to call Camelot Consolidated.”

Isabel Rochev raised an eyebrow.

“Under those options, I would hold forty percent of the new company, while the two of you would only have thirty and twenty percent, respectively. I would outrank both of you,” she pointed out.

“You would,” Laurel agreed, “were it not for this,” she said. She pulled out a file and slid it over to Isabel. “That would be a legal file, signed by both parties, stating that Thomas Merlyn entrusts his shares of Camelot Consolidated to Oliver Queen until revocation by one or both parties.”

“Why should I agree?” Isabel asked. “While Mr. Merlyn and Ms. Lance may have enough pull to confirm the merger on the side of Merlyn Global Group, you, Mr. Queen, do not have the pull to agree on the side of Queen Consolidated. You only have forty percent of the company, after all.”

“That’s true,” Oliver said with a nod. He pulled out another file. “But I have a legal file signed by the trustee of the minor who owns the other twenty percent of the company, agreeing to the merger.”

No need to bring up his proxy of that twenty percent yet. It had been difficult enough to arrange for Barry to purchase the last five percent of Queen Consolidated for Livvy’s trust fund. The money hadn’t been a problem; Moira had heavily padded Oliver’s original trust fund when they’d thought him dead and given it over to Barry. She and Walter had simply created a new trust fund for Oliver when he had returned instead of trying to rearrange possession of the original.

Isabel gave Oliver a considering look.

“You aren’t at all what people say about you,” she said.
“Most people fail to see the real me,” Oliver replied.

Isabel nodded once in defeat, though she kept her chin up.

“It seems you’ve won this round, Mr. Queen, Ms. Lance. I look forward to seeing you in Camelot Consolidated.”

She shook hands with both of them before leaving the room with her associates.

Once they were alone, Laurel and Oliver simply stared at each other before sagging in relief.

“Do you want to get some celebratory ice cream and crash Tommy’s hospital room?” Laurel offered. “Maybe grab lunch for afterwards? I know he’s been getting tired of hospital food, especially since he’s been restricted to things that are hard to poison.”

“I’m in the mood for pizza,” Oliver said. “Barry and I have been arguing about whether Starling or Central has better pizza.”

“Coast City has the best pizza,” Laurel pointed out as they gathered up their paperwork and headed to the elevator.


Laurel shook her head and tsked.

“My poor, misguided former roommate,” she said.

Before heading back to the office after the hospital visit, Oliver swung by the foundry to speak privately with Dig and Felicity.

“Well, looks like Starling is back down to only one man in a hood,” Dig said.

“And the three of us are back in the archery business,” Felicity said with a smile.

“No,” Oliver said. “I spent the past year trying to avenge my father. If we’re going to do…this…it has to be about honoring the victims in the Glades. I need to become the man that Tommy think I could be.” A man that Livvy would be proud to have as her father, a man that Barry would be proud to have as her boyfriend. “And you two have helped me take the first step.”

“So, what’s step two?” Felicity asked. “I mean, I’m game on pretty much anything that doesn’t involve skydiving, ‘cause that was apparently part of Dig’s plan when he thought you were on the island, and I would have done it to get you back, but I really don’t like heights…”

“Felicity,” Oliver cut her off.

“Sorry,” she said.

Oliver waved her off.

“The city still needs saving,” he said. “But not by the Hood.” He slowly walked over to the display case of his arrows and picked one up. “And not by some vigilante who’s just crossing names off a list. It needs…something more.”

“It needs a hero, Oliver,” Dig said.

“It’s kinda bad the Hoods ruined your nickname,” Felicity said.
“No, it’s a good thing,” Oliver said, turning around to face his friends. “I never…I don’t want to be called the Hood anymore.”

“Okay,” Dig said. “So what do you want to be called?”

Oliver looked down at the bolt in his hands.

“I think ‘the Arrow’ has a nice ring to it,” he said.

Chapter End Notes

Also, this is what I was doing when I should have been writing my final papers, so pray for my grades this semester.
"So, how’s your first week going?” Barry asked as soon as Oliver answered the Skype call from his penthouse office.

His only response was a groan as he slouched down at his desk.

“Why did I agree this was a good idea?” he asked.

“Because you wanted to save your family’s company, as well as Tommy’s, and all the people employed by both of them,” Barry said patiently.

“Bare, I’m now the chairman and CEO of a multi-billion-dollar company. I only have an associate’s degree. And Laurel quit on me. She’s helping with the merger into Camelot Consolidated, but then she’s leaving. She got a job offer from the DA’s office. Apparently they were impressed after saved ADA Donner, and they offered to hire her as an ADA if she decided she was tired with the business world.”

“And she didn’t want to be part of the business world to begin with, so she’s more than happy to join the DA’s office, especially since she’s been doing their work for them for years,” Barry concluded. “Well, I’m sure the district attorney will be happy to have someone on their staff who isn’t afraid to prosecute anyone, no matter who they may be. How many near-death experiences has Laurel now?”

Oliver thought a moment.

“In the past year? Five related to her being a lawyer. Once in the Glades during the earthquake. Once a few nights ago, after she and Thea got kidnapped.”

Barry made an angry noise at the reminder. She had not been happy to find out about Laurel and Thea’s kidnapping the next morning during her Skype-entry to the save-the-companies meeting less than a week ago.

“Even if she’s resigning as CEO of Merlyn Global, she probably should get a bodyguard,” Barry pointed out. “Those Hood guys didn’t take her because she was the CEO. They took her because she was Tommy Merlyn’s girlfriend.”

“I’ve got people following Thea now,” Oliver admitted in a low voice. “Mainly at the club, and when she goes out shopping. I told her boyfriend that her safety was his responsibility when they were at home.” He grimaced. “I also tried to get them both to move into the mansion, but the boyfriend didn’t seem that comfortable with the idea.”

“He has a name, Oliver,” Barry reminded. “It’s Roy. Use it. Thea really likes him.”
“Thea has a bad boy problem,” Oliver grumbled.

Barry laughed.

“You really can’t say anything. You were a bad boy for ages, just in a different way than Roy.”

“Does that mean you have a bad boy problem too?” Oliver teased.

“Not just bad boys,” Barry said. “I’ve always been attracted to troublemakers, no matter their gender.”

Oliver felt a pang. He’d never stop missing Sara. He was pretty sure Barry felt the same way.

“Tommy’s getting released from the hospital tomorrow,” he said. “Either Laurel or I are picking him up, depending on who’s the most busy with the merger at that moment.”

“Those your only plans for tomorrow?” Barry asked.

“I’ve got a meeting with Alderman Blood, have you heard of him?” Oliver asked.

“Yep,” Barry said. “I am still keeping up with my Starling news.”

Oliver nodded. “We, uh, ran into each other at Glades Memorial this morning. He had some – things – to say about the Queen family, and me in particular. There may have been a mob involved.”

“Are you okay?” Barry asked, squinting as she looked him over for injuries.

“Completely,” Oliver assured. “My only trauma today is from this job, and that was purely emotional.”

“Ah,” Barry said. “How’s the purge going?”

“I’ve fired the head of applied sciences, the CIO, the CTO, and several other important people. Most of Merlyn Global’s C-Suite needed to be fired; the only reason Laurel hadn’t done it was because she couldn’t risk the company she was already struggling to run,” Oliver said with a sigh. “Pretty much the only decent executive they had was their CFO, Zehra Darvish, which is good, since I fired my CFO as well.”

“Have you sorted out the other positions?” Barry asked.

“I’m combining the CIO/CTO positions and giving it to Felicity,” Oliver admitted. “I’m sure someone will start saying I’m sleeping with her, but she really is the best person in the IT department, and I trust her, which counts for a lot. I’m giving the new head of applied sciences the title of Chief Science Officer, and he’ll take some of the responsibilities from the CTO position, so Felicity doesn’t get overloaded. I promoted a guy named Henry Fyff to the job. I think you’d like him. Felicity does, even though she isn’t too thrilled with her promotion.”

“What about the other positions?” Barry asked.

“Ned Foster’s going to stay the COO; he’s clean, I’ve triple-checked. Ian Carmichael and Terry Marsh are staying the CBO and CMO as well, at least for the moment. I haven’t been able to go over their backgrounds as finely as I’d like to, but enough to make sure there’s no glaring problems. Our new C-Suite is meeting on Thursday, plus Laurel, since she isn’t leaving quite yet,” Oliver said with a sigh. “It’s pretty busy out here.”
“Have you found an EA yet?” Barry asked sympathetically.

“I’m inheriting Laurel’s, but I don’t get her completely until Laurel finishes leaving.” Oliver said. “She’s not planning on staying through the entire merger process, but she does have to stay long enough for the approvals to go through, which could take a couple months.”

“What’s her name?” Barry asked.

“Adrienne Rivers,” Oliver replied.


Oliver raised his eyebrows.

“What?” Barry said. “I have eyes. So do you. I don’t mind if you use your eyes, so long as they don’t wander too long.”

“You know her?” Oliver asked, unable to think of a reply to that.

“She went to college with us,” Barry explained. “She and Laurel were sorority sisters. We were on pretty good terms. I went to her wedding.”

“Laurel did say she was an old friend,” Oliver said.

“Yep. Laurel was one of her bridesmaids, if I remember correctly. Adrienne’s husband, Gideon, is a pretty good guy. He’s in the navy, so he’s gone a lot. Most of the time it’s just Adrienne and their little boy… I think his name’s Colby. You still have on-site daycare, right?”

“Unless something on the second floor has changed since the last time I looked,” Oliver said. “Do you know how old her son is?”

“Younger than Livvy, but at least two,” Barry said. “I got the birth announcement, but I don’t remember when. You’ll have to ask Laurel. Have you had any run-ins with the snake?”

His girlfriend had picked up on Laurel’s name for Isabel Rochev and run with it. Even Livvy was using it now.

“Not today,” he replied. “I think she was bugging Laurel. How about you? How’s the CCPD?”

Barry gave him a look that said she knew he was purposefully changing the subject, then started chattering about the last case she’d been working on, and soil deposits and trace chemicals and other things that Oliver didn’t really understand much of.

He’d read Barry’s master’s thesis when she wrote it, but that didn’t mean he’d understood it.

They said goodnight a little while later. Barry needed to go to bed herself, and Oliver needed to head for the foundry.

After a disastrous night attempting to help Glades Memorial, and a somewhat more productive meeting with Alderman Sebastian Blood, Oliver got the call from Laurel that she was still entertaining Isabel Rochev, so he needed to go pick Tommy up from the hospital.

“Are you ready to blow this popsicle stand?” Oliver asked as he entered the hospital room.

Tommy was already seated in a wheelchair, dressed in everyday clothes.
“Oliver, no one says that anymore,” he said.

“Oh well. You know what I meant,” Oliver replied.

“The papers are all signed and I am ready to go,” Tommy confirmed. “I have physical therapy tomorrow, but my brand-new personal assistant-slash-nurse-slash-bodyguard – and how did you find someone with all of those qualifications? – is supposed to pick me up from your place tomorrow.”

“You’re still sure you’re not moving into Merlyn Mansion?” Oliver asked.

Tommy shivered theatrically.

“God, no! I hated that place. I always liked your house more. And Laurel’s apartment, but an apartment’s not really suitable for…well, me,” he said, gesturing down at his wheelchair and useless legs.

A wave of guilt passed over Oliver.

“Tommy, I’m…”

“Nope!” his friend interrupted. “No more apologies. What happened is not your fault. The only person at fault is my father for being a complete and total psychopath. Now, c’mon, let’s get me out of here.”

As soon as Oliver started pushing the wheelchair, Tommy cried out, “Onward, Jeeves!”

Oliver had to resist the urge to dump his best friend out.

“So, how’d the meeting go? Laurel said you were meeting with the good alderman Blood today,” Tommy said once they were situated in the car.

“I’m hosting a benefit for Glades Memorial on Friday,” Oliver said. “Mainly because they need help, but also because the city – and the alderman – need a reason to believe that I actually do want to help the city and its people.”

Tommy looked toward the front seat, where Diggle was driving.

“He’s your nighttime buddy, right?” Tommy asked, jerking a thumb at Dig. “Knows how you usually spend your nights?”

“He does,” Oliver said with a frown, wondering why Tommy was asking.

“If I’m not mistaken, you tend to be kinda busy at night. You know, the time that benefits normally take place? If I’m reading the news correctly, you’re actually in the middle of stopping some sort of gang from stealing FEMA drugs meant for Glades Memorial. Ever think that your night job and this benefit might overlap?”

Oliver frowned. He hadn’t actually thought of that.

“That might be a problem,” he admitted.

“Look, Oliver, I heard what you did with the Hoods. You didn’t kill any of them,” Tommy said.

“I’m trying not to kill anymore,” Oliver said. “You were right. I was a murderer. That’s not the kind of person I want to be. That’s not the kind of person the memory of the 502 people in the
“Glades that I couldn’t save deserve.”

“A few months ago, I said that I was wrong, that I didn’t know you at all,” Tommy said. “But I was wrong then. I do know you, Oliver Queen. You might have gone down a dark path, but you’re still a good man. So if you don’t make it to that benefit Friday night, I’ll cover for you.”

“How are you planning to do that?” Oliver asked with a frown.

“Well, they’re expecting a speech from the son of the woman who was an accomplice in destroying the city. Instead, they’ll get a speech from the son of the man who destroyed the city, who is now paralyzed, whose initial care was done by Glades Memorial.”

“I didn’t know that,” Oliver said.

Tommy tilted his head.

“From what I hear, you kinda left town pretty quickly after the earthquake. I was transferred to Starling General soon enough, but Glades Memorial did the initial patchwork.”

They arrived at Queen Mansion a minute later. While Dig unloaded the wheelchair, Oliver picked Tommy up and got him out of the car.

“Now I know how Barry must feel,” Tommy joked. “Do I look make a pretty princess?”

“Don’t say that in front of Livvy,” Oliver warned quietly, after making sure Dig was still at the back of the car. “Or else you’ll end up playing Pretty Pretty Princess with her.”

Tommy looked half-scared, half-confused.

“What’s Pretty Pretty Princess?”

“A very scary board game,” Oliver said. “Each player gets a color, and the goal of the game is to acquire both earrings, the necklace, the bracelet, and the ring of your color, as well as the crown, which there’s only one of. And yes, you do have to wear all of the jewelry as you collect it.”

“Did Livvy get you to play?” Tommy asked mischievously.

“Unfortunately,” Oliver grumbled.

“Are there pictures?” Tommy persisted as Oliver set him down in his wheelchair.

“None that you’ll ever find,” Oliver replied. “Thank you, Dig,” he added, looking up at his friend.

“Should I keep the car running, or are you done for a while?” Dig asked.

“I need to get Tommy settled in his room, and make sure Raisa’s doing okay,” Oliver said slowly. “But I’ll be back after that.”

“Don’t worry about me,” Tommy said with a wave of his hand. “I’ll be fine. I’ve got Raisa’s number if I need anything.”

“If you’re sure…” Oliver said.

“I’m fine, Ollie,” Tommy said. “And look! Raisa’s already here to meet me. You’ll get me settled, won’t you, Raisa?” he asked the approaching housekeeper.
“Of course, Mr. Merlyn,” she said with a smile. “I will take care of him, Mr. Oliver,” she told Oliver firmly.

Oliver smiled at her. “Spasibo, Raisa.”

The woman smiled again, then firmly took the wheelchair away from Oliver and rolled Tommy inside.

Oliver looked back at Dig. “Well, I guess I’m ready to go.”

Dig smiled and gestured for the car.

Four days later, he’d gotten his old enemy, China White, arrested; somehow survived his first meeting with the new Camelot Consolidated C-Suite plus Laurel; gotten through the benefit with his reputation intact without actually showing up (apparently Tommy had played off his paraplegia and regret at what his father had done excellently); and recruited Roy to be his eyes and ears in the Glades while stopping him from his borderline suicidal brand of vigilantism. All in all, it was a good few days, until Officer Lance called in their assistance in tracking down a serial killer he’d put away in Iron Heights, who had then escaped Iron Heights in the earthquake.

Their investigation had some setbacks, but was still relatively optimistic when it was interrupted by his mother’s pre-trial hearing.

Afterwards, they were all in shock. Oliver took Thea home and called Barry from the car.

“They’re seeking the death penalty for Mom,” he said as soon as she picked up.

“I know,” she said quietly. “I was watching the live footage. Livvy and I are coming to town tomorrow. How many of the staff’s family members are still in residence?”

“Only Raisa’s family, and they’ve all signed NDAs already,” Oliver reported. “Is there anything you want me to get ready?”

“Ollie, we’re coming to support you. The only thing you need to do is make sure Livvy has clothes that fit in her closet and possibly pick us up from the airport,” Barry said firmly. “I love you, Ollie. I love you, Thea.”

“Love you too,” Thea choked out. She’d started to cry.

“I have to get back to work,” Barry said apologetically. “I’ll see you all tomorrow.”


“Bye,” Barry replied.

Thankfully, he managed to wrap up the Dollmaker case before Barry and Livvy came to town, though it did result in Laurel being kidnapped again. She really needed her own team of bodyguards.

The kidnapping attempt resulted in Officer Lance also staying the weekend at Queen Mansion, which resulted in him being let in on the secret of Livvy’s father.

“I’m sorry for lying to you,” Barry told him, “but I’m not sorry for lying. I’m sure you understand that I’ll do whatever it takes to keep my daughter safe.”

“Yeah,” Lance said. “Yeah, I think I do.”
The highlight of the weekend was Oliver planting the idea of playing Pretty Pretty Princess in Livvy’s mind. Unfortunately, it backfired on him, as he was also dragged into the game along with Tommy and Officer Lance. Laurel, Barry, and Thea took great pleasure in taking pictures while pretending they weren’t laughing.

The other interesting event of the weekend was Barry asking him, “Next time you see your mom, could you ask her why she decided I needed a castle?”

Oliver stared at her.

“What?”

“Apparently she bought a very castle-like house in Central City in my name. It’s a beautiful place – right on the river, it’s got its own boat dock – but the fact is, I don’t know why I need a castle.”

“Castle?”

“As much of one as this place is, maybe even more internally. It has iron chandeliers. And tapestries. And stained-glass windows. Hand-carved fireplaces, Gothic arches, and an absolutely **massive** four-poster canopy bed in the master bedroom. And battlements. They’re decorative, but still. **Battlements.**”

“Barry, I have absolutely no idea. I didn’t know she’d done that. When did this happen?” Oliver asked.

Barry huffed.

“I didn’t know anything until I got the homeowners’ association notice last week. I then went searching through court records, and learned that the house was bought in my name last May, a week or two before the Undertaking.”

“I guess she thought something might happen to her, and might happen to the QC stock, so she made a back-up plan,” Oliver mused. “How much is the house worth?”

“Based on the last property taxes? $3.9 million,” Barry said with false casualty. “And that’s not including the land.”

While Oliver knew that was nothing compared to Queen Mansion, or even some of the houses that Tommy and Laurel were looking at, it was still quite a bit of money to randomly drop on your ex-daughter-in-law. Or your son’s baby mama, depending on how you wanted to look at it.

“I will definitely ask her about that,” Oliver said. “Or I’ll have Thea do it. She’s been able to get down to see Mom more often than me. I’m usually busy during visiting hours.”

“They can be a pain some times,” Barry said with a nod.

Oliver was suddenly struck by the reminder that his girlfriend had spent the past fifteen years visiting her father in prison for a crime she said he hadn’t committed. He had always believed Barry when she said her father was innocent, just not necessarily the story of the ‘man in lightning.’ After all the things he’d seen on the island – especially the mess with Baron Reiter and John Constantine – he was much more inclined to believe her. Magic, men in lightning – all his life was missing was aliens.

Oliver leaned in and kissed her.
“I’ll take care of it. Do you want to keep the castle?”

Barry shrugged.

“Might as well. Who knows, maybe my house will get hit by a tornado or something and I’ll need to go stay somewhere. Maybe I’ll adopt five kids and need the extra space. But for now, I’ll just make sure that they taxes are paid and hire a cleaning crew to go in once a week. Or once a month. I don’t know how often an unused house should be cleaned.”

“Ask Raisa,” Oliver advised. He didn’t know either.

Unfortunately, Barry and Livvy flew back Sunday. It had been a nice weekend; no Camelot Consolidated, no Arrow hijinks, but it was time to get back to work.

On Wednesday, he survived a Camelot Consolidated fundraiser alongside Tommy and Laurel – though Tommy had to leave early, as he was still easily fatigued – and got the shock of his life upon catching the female vigilante.

Sara had certainly changed. Oliver wasn’t sure whether it was a good thing or not yet.

Thursday morning started with him meeting Sebastian Blood, Isabel Rochev, and Laurel about sponsoring a cash-for-guns rally in the Glades. While Isabel refused to allow company funds for the matter, both Laurel – on Tommy’s behalf – and Oliver pledged their personal money to contribute. That evening, he was still at the office when he got a text from Barry, containing her and Livvy in their Halloween costumes as they went out trick-or-treating. Missing our King Fergus, the caption read.

It made him smile sadly. He’d taken Livvy trick-or-treating last year while Barry was stuck home on crutches, but this year he was the one kept away.

Friday morning, Sara showed up at Verdant when Oliver arrived. Neither of them said anything until they were inside, with the doors locked.

“Did you tell my family I’m alive?” Sara asked, breaking the silence.

“No,” Oliver said.

They were both silent for a moment, then Sara turned away. Oliver quickly walked around to stand in front of her again.

“Sara,” he said. “I saw you die.”

“Not the first time that’s happened, right?” she pointed out. “I thought you were dead too. What happened to Slade?”

Oliver didn’t answer, instead responding with another question.

“Where have you been?”

“Everywhere,” she replied.

“That’s not an answer,” he countered.

“Well, it’s the one you’re getting,” she said sharply. She turned away again, but still started talking as she paced. “About a year ago, I started hearing tales of the Starling City vigilante. The man in the green hood. I knew it was you.”
“I’ve never known you to be much of a fighter,” Oliver said. “Where’d you pick that up?”

“I met some rough people,” she said evasively. “Thought I should get rougher too.”

“Sara,” Oliver said harshly. “Why did you come back?”

“The earthquake,” she said.

“Because you wanted to make sure your family was safe,” he said in realization.

She nodded.

“But now you’re still here, watching over them. Protecting them. So, did you come here to make sure I didn’t tell them, or because you were hoping I had?” Oliver asked.

A tapping on the door interrupted them.

“I’ll get rid of them,” Oliver said.

“Mr. Lance?” he said loudly, making sure that Sara could hear. “What can I do for you?”

“I came to ask how Laurel was doing,” the man said. For once, he wasn’t in uniform. “She’s not talking to me again, since she had to bail me out for ‘obstruction of justice’ with her shiny new ADA job last week.”

“Oh,” Oliver said. Apparently the post-Dollmaker reconciliation hadn’t lasted as long as he thought. “She’s doing decently. She’s picking up cases for the district attorney’s office – slowly, for the moment – but they’ll pick up as she discards more and more of her CEO duties.”

“Oh, she wasn’t too happy with that little career change,” Quentin Lance said with a snort. “And Merlyn?”

“She and Tommy are doing better than I think anyone would have expected after Tommy’s paralysis. They’ve both been talking to a therapist Barry recommended, Annie Green. They were in some of the same psychology classes,” Oliver reported.

The police officer nodded again. “Ah, thank you, Oliver. I know that we haven’t exactly gotten along…ever…but thank you for still letting me know.”

“You’re welcome,” Oliver replied. “If you need any other information, you know where to find me.” He nodded to the detective as the man turned to leave again.

Oliver was surprised to find Sara still inside when he returned.

“I have one more question for you,” she said. “I saw Barry here, with you, last weekend. I went by Central to check on my mom a few weeks ago too, and I saw her there. She has a little girl with her. Who is she?”

Oliver grimaced inwardly.

“Her name is Olivia Roberta Sara Allen,” Oliver revealed. “She was conceived Barry’s last night in Starling.”

Sara’s eyes lit up in realization.

“During the threesome?” she asked incredulously.
Oliver nodded.

Sara snorted.

“That’ll be a hell of a story to explain when she’s older. Does everyone know?”

“My family and Barry’s have known since the beginning,” Oliver said. “Tommy found out a few years in. It was the first thing Barry told me when I came back. Laurel found out a couple months after that, and we told your dad last weekend, when he was staying with us to keep an eye on Laurel. Other than that, the only person who knows is my housekeeper, and she only knows Livvy’s my daughter, not the whole threesome thing, though she can probably guess.”

Sara nodded, looking distracted. Oliver recognized the look on her face. He saw it on Barry’s every time they talked about Sara.

“Barry named you her godmother,” he offered. “Even though you were dead. She wanted Livvy to know you anyway. She calls you Auntie Sara. And Barry did explain the threesome thing…kind of.”

Sara raised her eyebrows.

“I’d love to know how she managed to explain that to a…five-year-old?” she questioned.

“She’ll be six in December,” Oliver added.

Sara frowned.

“Isn’t that a little early?”

“Livvy was two months early. Gave everyone a shock, apparently, but she’s perfectly healthy. Barry apparently told Livvy that it takes a mommy and a daddy to make a baby most of the time, but she’s special because it took Mommy, Daddy, and Auntie Sara.”

Sara choked back a laugh.

“That’s going to be traumatizing once she’s old enough to figure out what her mom was talking about,” she said with a smile.

Oliver smiled back.

“To be fair, I’m pretty sure most kids are grossed out when they think about their parents having sex to make them,” he said. “Livvy’s just going to be a bit more traumatized than most. And earlier than most. She’s a genius.”

“Must be from Barry’s genes,” Sara teased.

Oliver cracked another smile at that.

They were both quiet as their laughter died off, until Sara took a deep breath.

“I’m going to leave again,” she stated. “I…I’ll be back though. I’m not planning on leaving town.”

“Is there a good way to get in contact with you?” Oliver asked. “Cell phone, smoke signals, flares?”
“I have a phone,” she said. “It’s a burner, and all it can do is call.”

“I’ll keep that in mind,” Oliver said. “Number?”

Sara rattled it off.

Oliver pulled out his phone and called hers, letting it ring once before hanging up.

“There,” he said. “Now you have my number too. Let me know if you need anything. Anything.”

She offered him a half-smile.

“Get going. I’m sure you have stuff you should be doing, Mr. CEO.”

Before he could say any more, she sauntered out of the club.

They took the Mayor down together two days later. In doing so, Sara proved that she was just as capable with Oliver’s weapon as he was with hers.

He ran into her again the next day in Glades Memorial.

“Your friend,” Oliver said. “I took care of her medical expenses.”

“Thank you,” Sara said. She ducked her head and made to leave. “I don’t want Thea to see me…”

“What’s your plan, Sara?” Oliver asked. “Because right now you just…you’re whipping across rooftops and keeping watch over your family like some sort of ghost.”

“We’re both ghosts,” she argued. “We died on that island.”

“No, we didn’t,” Oliver said. “We both lived. And, I get that you have been in pain so long that it probably just feels normal now, but you can let it go and come home. I know that the earthquake brought you here, but your family kept you here. You have to tell them, Sara. They need you.”

“You told them that I died on the Gambit,” Sara said. “If I told them the truth…”

Oliver let out a huff. “They would never talk to me again. Not one of them. But it’d be worth it.”

He offered her his hand.

“What about Barry?” Sara challenged.

“She still loves you,” Oliver said quietly. “She told me so.”

“I wouldn’t want to come between you,” Sara said, but Oliver could see the pain in her eyes.

“I promised to be there for Livvy,” Oliver said slowly, “so Barry would never force me to leave their lives, but if she wanted you back? I’d give her up. Because she loves you, and you made her so happy back then. You could do it again.”

“She loves you now,” Sara said. “The way she looks at you…it’s the same way she looked at me, when she was mine. But I don’t want to come between you. You have a little girl.”

“It’s not like we live in the same place,” Oliver pointed out. “Even if we break up and just end up with some weird joint custody arrangement, it won’t be different than what we have now. But it’d be worth it, to see you come home.”
He continued holding out his hand. Finally, finally, Sara took it.

“Where exactly are you planning on taking me?” she asked. “If I remember correctly, my sister and her boyfriend are currently living in your house.”

“How do you feel about the suburbs?” Oliver asked.

“I grew up in them?” Sara said warily.

“There’s a house on 32nd Street,” Oliver revealed. “Mom bought it in case something happened that Barry and Livvy came to town, but it wasn’t safe for them to stay with us. It’s got two bedrooms, a bath and a half. I’ve only been there a couple times, but I have a copy of the key, and I know where the spare is. You can stay there. Your friend can too, once she’s out of the hospital, if she needs someplace safer to sleep.”

“Thank you,” Sara said.

He, Thea, his mother, and her lawyer – Jean Loring – met with the ADA in charge of her case at the prison the next day. They offered her a plea deal: life with possibility of parole. His mother diplomatically asked for a few days to consider the offer. The rest of the day consisted of dropping by to see Sara, fighting off an armed assassin who was after her, finding out that she was a member of the League of Assassins, finding out that she had as much of a I’m-a-murderer-I-don’t-deserve-my-family complex as Oliver did before he came back, finding out that his mother wanted to take the plea deal, figuring out that she was still keeping secrets from him, and fighting of Al-Owal and his friends. Hitting people got out his anger at his mother, at least.

Laurel was easy enough to protect, considering she lived in his house at the moment, though even he was prepared to admit that his house might not be as safe as he wanted it to be. If the assassins could find the suburbia house, they could probably break into the mansion.

But they didn’t go after Laurel. They went after her father, and Oliver had to rapidly get into his suit and crash the fight at the clock tower. Officer Lance did prove why he was a good cop when he managed to take down a member of the League of Assassins, the organization that Oliver was now sure had trained Malcolm Merlyn.

Sara left, at the end. Oliver had only known she was alive for eight days, but he was sad to see her go.

“I’ll probably go by Central at some point,” she said just before she left, quietly, so her father didn’t hear. “Check on my mom. Check on Barry and Livvy. Make sure there’s no League members around. But I won’t stay. I don’t want to put them in danger.”

“You should consider telling Barry,” Oliver said quietly. “She still loves you. She’d want to know. She’ll understand that she can’t look for you.”

“Does she know how you spend your nights?” Sara challenged.

“No,” Oliver said quietly. “But she does know about my first year on the island. She knows about Slade…and Shado. Not everything. She doesn’t know about Ivo, or the mirakuru, or you. But she knows some things. She can keep a secret.”

“Goodbye, Oliver,” Sara said quietly, before turning and walking back over to her father to say goodbye to him as well.

He lost a friend that day, but he might have managed to save his mother the next.
“She’s fighting?” Barry asked as he called her from the car.

“She’s fighting,” Oliver confirmed. “Thea and I promised her that no matter what came out, we would always love her. And I reminded her that Thea and I might technically be grown, but she still has a granddaughter who wants her to be around as she grows up, and that she’s the only grandmother Livvy has.”

“I don’t understand why she would think Thea doesn’t need her,” Barry said, sounding frustrated. “She may be eighteen, but that doesn’t really mean she’s grown.”

Oliver was quiet a moment, then admitted, “She doesn’t think Thea needs her because she has you.”

Barry was silent on the other end of the line, so Oliver continued.

“You’re the one who raised Thea for all of her teenage years. You’re the one she goes to when she has boy problems, or friend problems, or any kind of problems, really. Well, anything that requires emotions instead of money or a glowering big brother. I guess Mom just thought that you got Thea this far, so you’d be able to get her through the rest of life as well.”

“To some extent, Thea is like my child,” Barry admitted. “But part of her is also a little sister. I’m Livvy’s mom, but that doesn’t make me Thea’s. Moira is Thea’s. And I’d like you to tell her I said that.”

“I will,” Oliver said. “We just left the prison, but I’m supposed to go back tomorrow for another discussion about Mom’s case.”

“Good,” Barry said, sounding satisfied. “I’m glad she’s fighting but – oh! My tests are done!”

Oliver smiled at the excitement in her voice.

“I’ll let you go,” he said. “You’re not the only one who has to get back to work. Love you.”

“Love you too,” Barry replied, already sounding distracted.

Oliver hung up, knowing Barry would probably forget with how rapidly she seemed to be delving into her case.

The next few weeks were mostly calm. Team Arrow (as Felicity was calling it) had to make a visit to Moscow to rescue Dig’s ex-wife, under the guise of inspecting Camelot Consolidated’s Russian holdings. Isabel tried to worm her way into the trip, but Laurel was able to keep her in Starling. He apparently missed the drama of his mother’s lawyer telling Thea to break up with Roy, Thea breaking up with Roy, and his mother telling Roy not to let Thea break up with Roy and them getting back together. He did see the aftermath, as they had spent the night at Queen Mansion. Oliver studiously ignored those implications, despite the flares his big brother-instincts were letting off.

At the beginning of December, his mother’s trial began. Dig originally escorted Oliver and Thea to the courtroom, but Oliver had him go home. He was looking ill.

The prosecution opened the trial by playing the video of his mother’s press conference from seven months ago.

“And it worked,” ADA Donner said. “The Glades were destroyed. Home and lives were lost. All because of her actions. True, she had second thoughts, remorse, which compelled her to deliver
this statement, but on behalf of the five hundred and two lives that were extinguished that day, I say Moira Queen, your remorse comes too late.”

Jean Loring, his mother’s lawyer, continued playing the video to make her opening statement. “For the last five years, under the threat for my life and the lives of my family” was all the video played before Jean paused it.

“Why wouldn’t those threats silence her?” Jean asked. “Why wouldn’t Moira Queen be terrified? Malcolm Merlyn killed her first husband, abducted her second. Why wouldn’t she be in fear for her life? For the lives of her children?” Jean gestured towards where he and Thea were sitting with Roy. His mother looked back at them. “What would you do,” Jean continued, “if it were your children in the crosshairs of a madman’s rage?”

Oliver had to duck out after that. Felicity texted that Dig had passed out at the office and she was taking him to the foundry.

Well, she called it the ‘Arrow-cave,’ but that was ridiculous and he refused to use the term.

“What the hell are you doing here?” Dig asked as Oliver walked in.

“I heard you passed out,” Oliver said.

“I told Felicity not to call you,” Dig argued.

“But before that, you said ‘Gah’ and thud, so I didn’t take it very seriously,” the woman said.

“She was right to call me,” Oliver said. “Diggle, you need medical attention.”

“He needs more than that,” Felicity said seriously. “When Dig passed out, I sent a sample of his blood I know at CC. Guy owes me a favor, long story, I fixed his parking ticket. Huh,” she said, brow furrowing. “I guess it’s not that long.”


“Yeah,” she said. “It came back positive for trace amounts of Vertigo.”

“I’ve never used Vertigo before in my life,” Dig denied.

“You were exposed to it somehow,” Felicity told him.

“Vertigo’s in play again?” Oliver asked.

“When the Count recovered from his OD on Vertigo, he was sent to Iron Heights,” Felicity said, moving over to her computer and beginning to type.

“It got hit in the quake,” Oliver cursed. “He got out the same way the Dollmaker did.”

“And just like with the Dollmaker, prison officials worked overtime to keep a lid on the escape,” Felicity revealed.

Oliver grimaced and grabbed an arrow.

“I know what you’re thinking,” Felicity said.

“No, you don’t,” Oliver denied. “I made a choice not to put an arrow in this guy. And it was the right choice. There’s no more killing.”
Felicity nodded. He handed her the arrow.

“A friend of mine worked up the serum to counter the effects of Vertigo back in January. This is the same version Queen Consolidated released to the public, just more…concentrated. Give it to Diggle.” He glanced down at his watch. “I need to get back to court. While I’m gone, just look up whatever you can to find out how Diggle got Vertigo in his system without his knowledge.”

Felicity nodded again as he hurried out of the foundry.

Once he got back to the courtroom, they were still in the middle of character witnesses for his mother. Then, it was his sister’s turn.

“When did you first hear about this so-called ‘Undertaking’?” ADA Donner asked.

Thea didn’t look too nervous. Both Laurel and Barry had prepped her for questions that the prosecution might ask. This had been an obvious one. Oliver thanked whoever was out there that his ex-girlfriend and best friend’s girlfriend was a lawyer.


“Doesn’t seem like you took it too well,” the ADA said.

“I was in shock,” Thea said calmly. “Who wouldn’t be? It took me a long time to work through my feelings about everything.”

“Your mother was immediately taken into custody,” Donner said, “but I assume you went down to the precinct to see her?”

“I actually went into the Glades,” Thea said. “I have friends there. My job at the time was there. I wanted to make sure that the people I cared about got out. I didn’t see my mother until after she was moved.”

“To the prison,” Donner confirmed.

Thea nodded.

“Do you remember when you visited her?” Donner pressed.

They’d all talked about this. They knew that it was going to be hard to present Moira as a loving mother when neither of her children had come to visit her for six months. But they’d prepared for it too.

“October 9th, I believe,” Thea said calmly.

“Five months later,” Donner said, looking surprised. They all knew they weren’t. He had the prison logs. “Why so long?”

“It took time for me to come to terms with what had happened,” Thea said calmly. “By the time I did, I felt guilty about not visiting, so I solved the problem by continuing to…not visit. It was Oliver coming home and my kidnapping by the Hoods that eventually gave me the courage to go.”

Oliver saw Donner’s face twitch. He’d obviously hoped to use that time gap. Thankfully, Thea had been prepared for that question.

Donner changed the subject.
“Ms. Queen, there are no records of you living in Starling City, with your mother, from June of 2008 until January of 2013. Why is that?”

Donner had walked back over towards his desk, and ending up leaning on it, breathing heavily.

“Are you okay?” Thea asked.

Donner took a breath, drew himself up, and turned around.

“An answer, please,” he said.

Jean Loring stood up.

“Your Honor, if I may…”

“No,” the judge said, waving her off, “I want to hear this.”

“I…I wasn’t coping well, after my dad and my brother died – or I thought they died,” she said, glancing over at Oliver. He smiled at her reassuringly. “Mom wasn’t coping well either, and I was having a really hard time staying at our house – our too big, too quiet house. I wanted to leave, so when a family friend offered to let me stay with them for the summer, I jumped on it. After that summer, I was doing much better, and I didn’t want to come back to Starling. There were too many memories. Mom let me keep staying with our family friend.”

“Who was this family friend?” Donner pressed.

“Objection!” Jean said, standing up again. “The question is irrelevant to the case.”

The judge considered it, then said, “Sustained.”

Oliver sighed inwardly with relief.

Donner shifted the subject.

“Why did you come back to Starling City?” he asked. “Your brother was found alive in October. Your mother had been remarried for nearly two years by that point. Why January?”

“I didn’t want to,” Thea admitted. “Mom made me come back after Malcolm Merlyn threatened me and our family friend. She let me leave to protect me. She made me come back to protect others.”

It had been a shock when his mother had admitted that a few weeks prior. That Malcolm had somehow found out about Livvy and Barry early enough to use them as threats back in December, before Oliver had started dating Barry again…it had made Oliver mentally promise to do everything to protect them. He couldn’t have them in danger.

Donner hesitated. Thea had been calm and collected. She’d explained herself rationally. Donner had actually impeded his case by giving Thea the change to reveal a specific threat Malcolm had made against her.

“Your Honor, we have no further questions for the witness,” he ground out, before turning to go back to his seat. He stopped, swayed slightly, and collapsed to the ground.

“Adam!” his second chair cried out. Oliver hadn’t caught her name.

That concluded the trial for a bit, while an ambulance was called. Paramedics wheeled Donner out
of the courtroom on live television. Oliver went over to Thea, who’d been released from the witness box.

“You did great,” Oliver murmured, wrapping an arm around her shoulders and kissing her temple.

“I couldn’t have done it without Barry and Laurel,” she replied quietly. Oliver hugged her again, then followed Jean and his mother out of the room.

They were headed for the private room used for lawyer-client meetings. Oliver slid in behind them.

“Well, it wasn’t as bad as it could have been,” his mother said.

“It wasn’t a setback, at least,” Jean nodded, “and it helped that Thea was able to mention Malcolm’s specific threat against her. But I’m not sure it’ll be enough.”

“No,” his mother said. “No. I told you, I won’t testify.”

“I know you did,” Jean said, “but you need to.”

“She’s right, Mom,” Oliver said quietly. His mother glanced at him, then looked away again. “Jean, could you give us a minute?” Oliver asked.

“Sure,” the lawyer said. She walked out and closed the door behind her.

Oliver walked around to lean against the desk in front of his mother.

“I know what you’re going to say,” she said. “But if I testify, it will destroy our family.”

“And if your lawyer’s right, you don’t have a choice,” Oliver said.

His mother looked away.

“Mom, secrets are what put you in this situation,” Oliver said. “Secrets and lies. And now it’s time to give the truth its day.”

She didn’t respond to that. After a minute of silence, Oliver left the room and let Jean back in.

There was more bad news when he made it back to the foundry. The antidote Barry had cooked up hadn’t worked. Then, more bad news. The Count had apparently dosed a good portion of the city, including ADA Donner, kidnapped the aforementioned, and made him beg for Vertigo on live television.

Thankfully, Felicity found him. Beating up bad guys always made him feel a bit better. Unfortunately, he only succeeded in rescuing the ADA and grabbing a sample of the new formula.

On his way back to the foundry, he called Barry and asked, “So, have you heard the news from Starling?”

“The part about Thea’s testimony not being as helpful as you all hoped or the part about one of your ADAs getting kidnapped and dosed with Vertigo on live TV?”

“The latter,” Oliver said. “The counteragent you cooked up in January isn’t working. My bodyguard got hit too. He must have changed the formula.”

“Don’t tell me you’re going to try to get another dose so you can get me to cook up another
counteragent?” Barry said disapprovingly.

“I already have another dose?” Oliver said.

“Please tell me you didn’t bribe the Bratva again,” Barry almost begged.

“I didn’t,” Oliver said, sounding offended. “Like I said, my bodyguard got dosed. I just sent him to the nearest dealer to pick up a supply.”

Barry sighed.

“Have someone run the chemical analysis on it and send me the results. I can probably cook something up. I’m on-call overnight, and I work ‘til three tomorrow, so I have access to everything.”

“Isn’t that a bit of a long shift?” Oliver asked worriedly.

“I just started a bit ago, and I slept nearly all day,” Barry reassured. “Iris is staying at mine with Livvy.”

“Does she even have an apartment of her own anymore?” Oliver asked wonderingly. Since he’d left Central two months ago, it seemed that Iris was always there. It made him slightly jealous.

“Her lease runs out at the end of the month,” Barry said, sounding amused. “She’s debating on whether or not to renew it or just bounce between her room at Joe’s and my guest room.”

“Let me know, so I know to be careful if I decide to surprise you,” Oliver said.

Barry laughed.

“Will do. Are you planning to call Livvy on Wednesday?”

“Of course,” Oliver said. “I may be busy, with Mom’s trial and all, but I wouldn’t forget her birthday. I’m upset that I can’t make it, or that you can’t come out, but there’s too much publicity on us. Plus, we don’t know that the trial will be over by then.”

“I know,” Barry said. “And to some extent, Livvy understands. She’s upset, but she understands. Benefits of a genius child.”

“I owe her the best birthday present ever,” Oliver said.

“Nothing I have to take out a personal property floater for, please,” Barry requested quickly.

“I’ll try,” Oliver said with a smile. “I’ll let you know when I send the analysis results.”

“Okay,” Barry said. “I’ll see what I can do when I get them, as long as I’m not working a case. Or at least as long as I’m not working something more urgent. If someone graffitied the mayor’s house again, it’s not going on my priority list.”

“I love you,” Oliver said.


“Bye,” he said quietly. He hung up the phone, then went back to the foundry. Felicity knew how to run chemical analyses, and as CIO, had access to the Camelot Consolidated Applied Science division in order to run the tests. She just wasn’t as good as Barry and interpreting the results.
The next morning, his mother called him, Thea, and surprisingly, Tommy, to meet with her before the trial began.

“I’m testifying today,” she said bluntly, “and there’s a very good chance that some information is going to come out that all of you deserve to hear from me, and not from the prosecutor.”

Oliver considered calling Barry, but he’d forwarded the results Felicity had gotten to her just an hour before. She’d be busy.

“I thought you said you weren’t testifying?” Thea demanded. Then realization slid over her face. “But you have to. Because of me. Because what I’ve done made you look bad. You have to do damage control.”

“No!” his mother said sharply. “None of this is your fault. We’re here because of what I did.”

She looked around at them. Thea was sitting directly in front of her. Oliver slouched in his chair to Thea’s right, and Tommy’s wheelchair was parked to Thea’s left. Jean was seated in a chair at the side of the desk, between Oliver and his mother.

“Now, you all know the truth but you don’t know all of it,” his mother said. “But the DA does.”

“What do they have?” Oliver asked.

His mother just shook her head.

“You shouldn’t have to find this out in court,” she said.

“Find out what?” Thea demanded.

“Years ago,” his mother began, “it was many years ago – your father was engaging in his extramarital activities, and I had a moment of weakness. I cheated on him. With Malcolm Merlyn.”

All three of the young adults in the room stared at her in shock. Oliver didn’t know how to react to that. Though the girl he’d cheated with was now an assassin, so the fact that the man she’d cheated with became a domestic terrorist and mass murderer was almost understandable. They all agreed that Malcolm had changed after the death of Rebecca Merlyn.

“It was after your mother died,” his mother said, looking at Tommy. “Before he left. He never cheated on her. He did so much wrong, but he loved her so much, and he never cheated on Rebecca.”

“No,” Thea said. “No! I asked you about this! Last year! And you said there was nothing between you two!”

“There wasn’t,” his mother said firmly. “Sweetheart, there wasn’t an affair. It was very brief, and a long time ago.”

“He left a week after Mom died,” Tommy said. “Just after her funeral.”

“And I slept with him the preceding two days,” his mother admitted. “The first night…it was the night of the viewing. Malcolm and I were the last ones there. Raisa took both of you boys back to our house. Robert had left earlier, with his…companion. Malcolm and I started drinking. We were both so miserable, and so lonely, that one thing led to another. The first night was an accident. The second night – the night before Rebecca’s funeral – was intentional. Then at the
funeral, we both regretted it so much. Malcolm spoke with me afterwards and said that nothing like it could ever happen again, and I agreed. Nothing ever happened again. We never spoke of it. Once he came back from his little trip, we rebuilt our friendship, just as Robert and Malcolm rebuilt theirs.”

“Did Dad know?” Oliver asked.

His mother nodded.

“I told him. Not immediately, but I did tell him.”

“Thank you,” Tommy said. “For telling me. Before the hearing.”

“You deserved to know beforehand just as much as Oliver and Thea,” Moira Queen said.

Oliver hesitated, then said, “I forgive you, Mom. I don’t think I need to forgive you for the original affair, but I forgive you for not telling us. I still love you. Honestly, I’m the last person here who can say anything about cheating on your significant other.”

“True that,” he heard Tommy mutter.

“…” Thea said. “I don’t know what to say. I still love you, Mom, but I can’t forgive you just yet.”

“I understand,” their mother said quietly. “But you deserved to know.”

The trial that day was…tense. His mother had to defend her decades-old affair in front of an entire courtroom of people, the jury, and live television.

He ended up sitting with Thea in the hall while the jury deliberated, until he got a phone call from Felicity that turned out not to be Felicity. Count Vertigo was just what his day needed.

He ended up having to shoot the man out the window of his penthouse office, but he made it back to the courthouse before the jury finished deliberating. Thea still wasn’t happy with him. At least Barry had already sent word that Camelot Consolidated’s Applied Sciences division had already put together the non-addictive counteragent she’d formulated. She’d apparently had a long argument with Henry Fyff on chemistry, however.

“In the Superior Court of Star County, State v. Queen, verdict,” the jury forewoman read. “On one count of conspiracy in the first degree, the defendant is found not guilty. On the five hundred and two counts of murder in the first degree, the defendant is found not guilty.”

Camera lights started flashing all around them. The prosecuting ADA – Oliver still wasn’t sure of her name – looked shocked. He felt shocked.

“I don’t believe it,” he muttered.

He watched as his mother hugged Jean, then moved to hug Thea and himself, even as reporters crowded around them.

He swung by the foundry on his way home. Thea was waiting for their mother to be processed out, and Laurel was waiting with her, so Oliver was driving Tommy back. He’d kindly agreed to this detour once Oliver mentioned what had happened at the office earlier.

Once he’d checked on Dig and Felicity and sent them home, he headed home himself. They had
an impromptu party to hold. It was too bad that Barry and Livvy couldn’t be there to enjoy it with them.

Chapter End Notes

And next comes "The Scientist"!!! I'm excited. I hope you all are excited too. The next two chapters are written, so I'll be publishing once a week or so for the next couple weeks.
The Scientist

Chapter Summary

Covers (most of) the contents of 2x8, "The Scientist." I split the episodes in a slightly different place, so it's not going to be everything that happened in the episode.

Chapter Notes

What we've all been waiting for has arrived!
Note: I split the episodes in a slightly different place, so it's not going to be everything that happened in the episode. Also, I own none of these images. I got them off the Internet. I finally figured out how to insert images on Ao3, so I went back and inserted the images in all the past chapters that I had picked out. It took me ages, but I did it. I might have overdone it with the images this chapter...but I wanted to see everything and I wanted everyone else to see everything as well.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“This is the only guy we got on video,” CSU Tech Kelton said as they – Oliver, Felicity, Detective Lance, and the CSU Tech himself – stood inside Camelot Consolidated’s recently-broken-into Applied Sciences Division. Henry Fyff, as the Chief Science Officer, should have been there as well, but he’d been sent to track down the inventory in order to figure out what was missing. “The rest of the crew must have come in after him.”

“Actually,” a new voice – a very familiar voice – said. “It was only one guy.”

Everyone turned to see the drenched young woman making their way towards them. Oliver’s eyes widened at the sight of her. She didn’t even glance in his direction. He glanced over at Felicity and Diggle. Neither of them seemed to have made the connection, but she did look vastly different in her dripping oversized sweater, puffy coat, jeans, and Converse than she did in designer dresses and heels.

“Sorry I’m late. Actually, my train was late. Well, the second train. The first one I did miss, but that was my cab driver’s fault. I’ve got this great traffic app and he thought that he was right,” Barry said, her voice trailing off. “I’m here now though, so…yeah.” She brushed her soaked hair out of her face.

“Great,” Lance said. “What are you doing here, Allen?”

“My job,” Barry replied.

“I’m sorry, who are you?” Felicity asked curiously.

“I’m Barry Allen,” she introduced. “From the Central City Crime Scene Investigation Department. We’re working on a case with some similar unexplained elements in Central City, so when the report of your robbery came in over the wire, my captain sent me up here.”
Oliver knew Barry well enough to know that she was lying. It was a practiced lie, but a lie all the same. But there was one word in her lie that explained was she was here: unexplained. As long as he’d known her, Barry had been intent on seeking out cases with unexplained elements. It had to do with her mom’s murder. Before his time on the island, Oliver accepted that her dad didn’t kill her mom, but he didn’t quite believe her either. After what he’d seen since then…well, suspending disbelief was much easier.

“It’s good working with you again, Allen, but do you really think that one guy ripped through this door like it was tin foil?” Lance asked.

“One very strong guy, yeah,” Barry confirmed with a nod. She then seemed to notice that they were all still staring at her. She looked down at her tablet, which was nearly as wet as she was. She tried to dry it off with her sleeve, but that just made it worse. Oliver stepped forward and handed her a handkerchief. She flashed a smile up at him in thanks before drying the tablet off, and then wiping water off her face. It was a good thing she didn’t usually wear makeup. “Uh, it takes around 1250 ft. pounds of torque to break someone’s neck.” She turned the tablet around and pressed a button to pull up the images. “You see the marks on the guard’s neck? The bruising pattern suggests the killer used only one hand.”

She looked up at Oliver, a slightly mischievous smile on her face. “I’m guessing you don’t know how hard it is to break someone’s neck,” she said.

“Hmm?” Oliver asked, looking up and meeting her eyes with an innocent look. “No. No idea.”

Of course he knew. Not only had he done it, but he’d also been the one to sit through Barry’s master’s thesis through six different revisions. It had come up several times.

“Um, we’re gonna need a list of the entire inventory here to find out what was stolen,” Kelton said to Oliver.

“Actually, I think I know what was stolen,” Barry interrupted.

Everyone looked at her.

“A centrifuge,” she said.

They all stared blankly.

“An industrial centrifuge. Probably the Kord Enterprises 2BX-900, maybe the 6-series.” Barry led the way over to the empty space in the floor. “Both have a three-column base. Here, you can see the three sets of broken bolts where the thief just…pfft…” she made a jerking motion with her hand, “ripped it out of the ground.”

“And what exactly is a centrifuge?” Lance asked.

“It separates liquids,” Felicity said. “The centripetal acceleration causes denser substances to separate along the radial direction.”

“And lighter objects move to the top,” Barry said.

“What did you say your name was again?” Felicity asked interestedly.

“Felicity,” his CIO replied. “Smoak.” They smiled at each other.

Oliver groaned inwardly. Those two would get along like a house on fire. There was a reason he’d avoided introducing them, besides the secret-vigilante-and-secret-daughter thing. Though it was probably a good thing Henry was off hunting the manifest. He and Barry had had seven chemistry arguments in the four days since Oliver had digitally introduced them.

Oliver stared at Barry, who noticed and stopped smiling. She looked down at her tablet.

“You can see the cracks heading towards the door,” Barry pointed out. “Footsteps. One guy.”

Everyone stared at her some more, except for Oliver, who went to kneel down by the broken base.

“No, it’s just a theory,” Barry continued. “One backed by a lot of evidence.”

“Doesn’t have to be another explanation,” Lance protested.

“Yeah,” Barry said unconvincingly. “I’m sure you’re right.”

Oliver saw Lance take Felicity aside and faintly heard him say, “You might want to fill our mutual friend in on all of this.”

“Don’t worry,” Felicity replied with a tight nod. “I’m sure he’s already on it.”

Oliver stood up and moved over to Barry. He felt a small smile curve onto his face, though he was angled so no one but she could see it.

“Can I arrange for you a ride anywhere, Miss Allen? Do you have a hotel room yet?” he asked.

“Oh no, Mr. Queen,” she said with a warm smile. “I’m staying with a friend from college and his family. They’re close family friends. And it’s so much nicer to stay with friends than in a hotel.”

In an undertone, she added, “Raisa met me at the station and took Livvy to the house. She’s with Moira now.” In a louder voice she said, “But a ride would be lovely, thank you. I’m still soaked from the walk over here. It took me ages to get a cab.”

“You should definitely get out of those wet clothes,” Felicity said, coming up to them. “You’ll catch a cold.”

“Felicity, would you be willing to call the house and ask one of the drivers to head over here?” Oliver asked.

She glared at him for a moment, but still stepped away to make the call. He really needed to acquire Laurel’s EA so that he’d stop foisting the work of it off on Felicity.

“Thank you for your help, Miss…Alden, was it?” Oliver said carelessly.

He could tell Barry was resisting rolling her eyes.

“Allen, actually, Mr….is it King? But I’m just doing my job.”

“Oliver Queen, actually,” Oliver replied. “You can see my associate about your ride.”

He turned and strode off. The faster he took care of this at Camelot Consolidated, the faster he could get home to see his daughter. Two months was far too long, especially since he’d missed her birthday because of his mother’s trial.
It was only an hour later that Diggle approached him in his office.

“Oliver.”

He turned around from looking out at the rain.

“I got the final inventory from Fyff,” Diggle reported. “That CSI from Central City was right. The only thing missing is a centrifuge.”

“You have to see this,” Felicity said as she walked into the room, tablet in hand. “I pulled up CC traffic footage from across the street of applied sciences. This is three minutes after the alarm went off.”

She turned her tablet around to display a black-and-white video of a single man carrying a large cylindrical device over one shoulder and putting it into the back of a truck.

Oliver looked up from the video when he heard the click of heels on the marble floor. It was Barry, now obviously dressed by his mother, as she wore a red dress with a cream sweater over it and red leather boots. Her hair had been dried and pulled back into a loose bun, and either his mother or Thea had forced small amounts of makeup on her.
“Can I help you with something, Detective?” he asked, purposefully messing up her title.

She didn’t hesitate to roll her eyes this time.

“CSIs aren’t actually detectives, Oliver, as you well know. We only carry guns if we get the license separately.”

“And are you armed?” Diggle asked, crossing his arms over his chest.

Barry pressed the skirt of her dress closer to her leg, revealing the outline of a small pistol.

“I’m licensed to conceal carry in this state as well as my own,” she said. “So where should I set up my equipment?” she asked, gesturing towards her rolling kit.

“I’ll show you,” Felicity said.

“What’s going on?” Oliver asked.

“Your CIO said that you preferred to keep the investigation in-house?” Barry said, raising her eyebrow at Oliver. “So, I cleared it with my captain to give you a hand.”

Felicity turned to smile tightly at him. He grabbed her elbow and pulled her off to the side.

“What are you doing?” he asked quietly.

“We need to find this intruder,” she replied tightly. “And she seems to know more about it than any of us. Forensic science isn’t exactly my forte, so…” She glanced back at Barry, who was looking around the office, her sharp eyes cataloguing the differences from the last time she’d been here, when it was Walter’s office. “I think we need her. Don’t you?”

Oliver nodded slowly and smiled tightly. He did not want his girlfriend anywhere near this case, but it would be hard to get rid of her since she was already in town. And at least if she was here physically, he could keep an eye on her. If she stayed at the police station, they might figure out that she wasn’t exactly supposed to be there.

“Mm-hmm,” he agreed.

Felicity smiled brightly before turning and walking back to Barry.

“I’ll show you around,” she offered.

Barry flashed a far-too-innocent smile at Oliver before following Felicity away. Oliver turned back to the window.

“Why am I getting the feeling you know more about this than Felicity’s new friend?” he asked in a low voice.

“Pray I’m wrong,” he replied.

Felicity had shown her to a conference room on the executive floor to set up in, but Barry had quickly determined that she needed to go back to the applied sciences division of Camelot Consolidated to look through the evidence.
The bubbly blonde had arranged for a ride back to the applied sciences building immediately.

“I’ve never seen forensics in action,” the CIO said. “Well, aside from CSI. I’m curious though. Would you mind if I came along and watched?”

“Can your boss spare you that long?” Barry asked with a raised eyebrow.

“I’m a terrible CIO anyway.” Felicity shared conspiratorially. “I worked IT before he promoted me. We didn’t use to have a proper CIO or a CSO, just a CTO. Oliver – Mr. Queen – split the positions and yanked me up here from my nice job twelve floors down. After five years on an island, he barely knows how to call someone with a smartphone, let alone work his own computer. He really just did it so he didn’t have to call down twelve floors for tech support.”

Having lived with Oliver for five months, Barry knew that he wasn’t that inept with computers. There were still some things that confused him – she and Thea had tried to set him up on social media only for him to take one look and back far, far away – but he wasn’t useless enough to need tech support on the same floor.

But Oliver had told her the story of how Felicity was the one who originally brought the Undertaking to his attention, because she’d worked with Walter to help uncover it. When Walter went missing, Felicity went to Oliver instead. Oliver trusted her. In a company that was hanging by a thread, trust was probably much more important than having a CIO that everyone didn’t think he was sleeping with. From what Oliver had said, she was excellent at the IT portion of her job, though she was still getting used to the business side.

“Then sure,” Barry said with an open smile. “I’d love to have company.”

Felicity smiled back brightly.

“Then let’s head down to the lobby. The car’ll probably be ready by the time we get there.”

The elevator ride and subsequent car ride were surprisingly fun. Felicity had noticed the magazine on the STAR Labs particle accelerator in her purse, and they’d spent the entire time discussing the scientific implications the accelerator could have.

By the time everything was set up for Barry to begin her investigation, she felt that she knew the other woman relatively well.

Barry turned the UV lights on, then went to where her kit was opened up to put a glove on. She knelt down with a pair of tweezers and started examining the ground. It was a good thing that she’d insisted on wearing spandex shorts underneath her dress.

“What exactly are you looking for?” Felicity asked.

“Your thief’s shoes touched the ground, which means he tracked in dozens of clues to where he’s been the past few days,” Barry said, leaning even closer to the ground to examine a footprint revealed by the UV lights. She picked up a small piece of dirt with her tweezers and immediately moved it so that it was over her gloved hand. “Gotcha,” she said as she stood up.

She walked it over to the analysis machine next to Felicity and put it inside.

“Shouldn’t take long,” she told the executive with a smile.

Felicity’s eyes immediately went to the computer the analysis machine was linked to. Barry decided that now was a good time for the other conversation line she’d been hoping to get to.
“So, you’ve seen him, right?” she asked. Felicity turned towards her in confusion. “The vigilante?” Barry clarified. Felicity’s eyes widened, and she turned back to the computer screen. “I read that he saved you,” Barry continued. “What was he like?”

“Green,” Felicity said after a second’s hesitation.

“Green,” Barry said thoughtfully. “That’s interesting, right? I mean, why green? Black would be better for stealth and urban camouflage. Me personally, I think that he trained in some sort of forest or jungle environment, and the green is a nod to that.”

“I don’t give the vigilante much thought,” Felicity said as she walked around the table and knelt down to turn the UV lights off. She was speaking slightly faster now than she was earlier.

Interesting.

“Police reports show that he uses carbon arrows, but if he switched to an aluminum-carbon composite, he would have far better penetration,” Barry pointed out.

“Maybe he thinks he penetrates just fine,” Felicity said, sounding slightly defensive as she walked up to Barry.

Another point in favor of the idea that had been niggling at the back of Barry’s mind for weeks.

“Wanna know something else?” Barry asked conspiratorially. “I think that he has partners. Definitely someone with a background in computer sciences.”

Such as the blonde in front of her who’d graduated from MIT with a degree in computer sciences.

“Yeah,” Felicity said quietly, leaning over to check something on the computer. “Why are you so interested in the vigilante?” she asked, turning to look at Barry.

*Besides the fact that I think he’s my boyfriend?* Barry asked herself. She glanced down and took a deep breath, preparing to tell the story that still haunted her to this day. “When I was eleven, my mom was murdered,” she said.

“I’m so sorry,” Felicity said.

Barry shook her head.

“No, don’t be.” She sighed again. “They never caught the guy who did it.” She shrugged helplessly. “Maybe he would’ve.”

Any further conversation was interrupted by beeping from the computer. Barry tapped a few keys.

“The soil,” she said. “There’s a crystalline structure in it.” She tapped a few more keys and frowned at the results. “That’s weird.”

“What’s weird?” Felicity asked.

“It’s sugar,” Barry said in surprise.

“I’m calling Oliver,” Felicity said immediately.

BARTHOLOMEADAMIANAALLEN – OLIVERJONASQUEEN – OLIVIAROBERTAALLEN

When Felicity came in to say that Barry needed to go back to applied sciences, he volun-told
Diggle to take them while he headed back home to check in with his mother.

And Livvy, but they didn’t need to know that.

He found his mom in the living room staring at pictures, Livvy nowhere in sight.

“Good,” he said to himself. “Hi,” he said. “I’m sorry about what happened at the office this morning.”

His mother shook her head.

“There are a lot of people who think I got away with murder, Oliver,” she said, replacing the picture on the table behind the couch. “Maybe I did.”

“Mom,” Oliver protested, “the trial, the Undertaking, Malcolm Merlyn – all of that is behind us now, and we need everyone to see that.”

“How are we going to do that?” his mother asked.

“We throw a party,” Oliver said.

Clicking heels heralded his sister’s entrance to the room, her boyfriend in tow. His mother stood to greet them. Oliver turned to see Roy staring around in amazement.


“Did I hear you guys say something about a party?” Thea asked.

“A welcome-back-to-Camelot-Consolidated party for Mom,” Oliver said.

“I don’t think so,” Moira Queen said firmly.

“If things are gonna get back to normal, then we need to start acting normal,” Oliver pointed out.

“Normal for us is a lavish party,” Thea pointed out.

Oliver faintly heard a phone go off.

“I want a party,” a young voice said from behind them all. They all turned to see Livvy standing in the other entrance to the room. “Nobody came to my party before. I want another party!” she demanded, stomping her foot to the ground.


Oliver sighed inwardly, but knelt down and held out his arms. Angry or not, Livvy still ran to him. He stood up with her on his hip.

“Roy, this is my daughter, Livvy. Sparky, this is Auntie Thea’s boyfriend, Roy.”

Livvy stared at the blond man.

“Auntie Thea doesn’t need a knight to rescue her,” she informed him bluntly. “Auntie Thea is Sir Speedy the Brave. She can save herself.”

Thea smiled delightedly.

“I can save myself most of the time, but everybody needs help sometimes,” she said the newly six-
year-old. “Sir Sparky the Valiant needed help from Sir Speedy the Brave to defeat the dragon and rescue the princess, didn’t she?”

Livvy’s face scrunched up.

“I guess,” she finally admitted.

“Well, then Sir Speedy can have a little help from Sir Roy sometimes, can’t I?” Thea asked.

Livvy heaved a dramatic sign.

“Fine. But he’s not Sir Roy yet. He has to be knighted by the princess first.”

“Who’s the princess?” Roy asked in confusion.

“Mommy,” Livvy replied simply. “Mommy’s at work, so you’ll have to come back later.”

Roy held up his phone as an excuse.

“I’m sorry, I can’t stay for brunch,” he said.

“I guess we gotta go,” Thea said, patting her boyfriend’s shoulder.

“No, it’s fine, spend some time with your niece,” Roy told her.

“I can walk you out at least,” she argued.

He smiled at her.

“Fine.”

As they walked out, Livvy looked up at him.

“Daddy, I still want a party.”

“Well, then I guess we’ll have to have another birthday party,” Moira said. “Should we invite Tommy and Laurel?”

“We should invite everybody,” Livvy said firmly. “I want more presents.”

Oliver could see his mother trying to hide a laugh.

“We’ll do our very best, Olivia,” she replied. “Now it’s off to brunch with us. Then your father needs to get back to work.”

Livvy heaved another dramatic sigh.

“Fine.”

Brunch was pleasant. His mother made sure the conversation focused mostly around Livvy, who was more than happy to share every detail about her life with her grandmother, father, and aunt. Due to their nightly Skype calls, Oliver knew most of it already, but Thea and his mother weren’t quite so informed about his daughter’s life.

Livvy was still in the process of relating every single birthday present she’d received when his phone buzzed. It was Diggle, telling him that the car was waiting for him when he was ready to head back to the office.
Brunch was over, so he didn’t have much of an excuse to stay, as much as he wanted to spend time with Livvy.

“I’ve got to get back to the office,” he said. He pressed a kiss to his mother’s cheek, then Thea’s, before grabbing his daughter out of her chair and pulling her into a hug. Livvy squealed in delight and pressed a kiss to his cheek.

“I love you, Daddy,” she said.

“I love you too, Sparky,” he said. “I’ll be back later, okay?”

“Okay,” she said with a smile. “Bye, Daddy!”

“Bye, Sparky,” he replied.

It was hard to pull himself away, but he did so anyway. The sooner he got his work done, the sooner he’d be back.

It was several hours later that Diggle entered his office.

“Oliver, Felicity called. She and the CSI’ve got something.”

They were striding into the science building half an hour later.

“Found something?” he called out.

“We found something,” Felicity confirmed.

Barry stepped out from behind some sort of machine that Oliver didn’t have the faintest idea as to what it did.

“There were trace amounts of sucrose in a speck of dirt the killer dragged in here on his boot,” she reported.

“Which got me thinking,” Felicity continued. “There’s a sugar refinery two miles from here. The land around it is suffused in way sugar, so I checked. They had a delivery truck stolen a few days ago.”

“The truck matches the make and model of the truck used to steal the centrifuge,” Barry confirmed.

“Did you track the vehicle?” Oliver asked.

“We’ve been trying,” Felicity said.

Something on the computer beeped.

“What was that?” Oliver asked.

Felicity and Barry both looked at the screen.

“You’re not going to believe this,” Felicity said. “The truck…it was just used to rob a blood bank?”

“Are you sure?” Oliver asked.

“Yeah, our guy just made off with 30,000 ccs of O-negative,” Felicity said in surprise.
“Wait, super-strength? Likes blood? Please tell me we don’t suddenly believe in vampires,” Diggle said.

“We should get this information to the local police,” Barry pointed out.

“I’ll…take care of that,” Oliver said. “Did you say you were working a similar case in Central City?”

He had thought she was lying about that, but if something like this had happened in Central…it wasn’t safe there for Barry and Livvy anymore.

“Oh yeah, you know, it’s similar. Has similar elements. A lot of similarities,” Barry said.

Well, there was his confirmation. There was no way mirakuru – or Slade – was anyway near Central City.

“Right,” Oliver said.

He turned and began walking away, Diggle with him.

Digg stopped him was a hand on the arm once they were out of hearing distance.

“Do you want me to look into this Allen girl? Seems to be more to her than she’s letting on,” he offered.

“No, I already did,” Oliver said dismissively. “She’s harmless.”

Digg gave him a considering look.

“Oliver, when are you going to tell me what exactly we’re up against?”

Oliver simply turned and walked away. He had a sugar truck to catch.

BARTHOLOMEADAMIA

By the time Barry got back to Queen Mansion, she was nearly positive her suspicions were correct. After all, she had a lot of evidence.

1. The Starling City vigilante had appeared just after Oliver returned to town, and his first act was rescuing Oliver and Tommy. Oliver had given the report. Tommy couldn’t remember anything.
2. Sightings of the vigilante had never been reported any of the times that Oliver had been in Central City with Barry and Livvy.
3. Oliver’s muscle tone had definitely increased on the island, especially his arm strength. It took a lot of force to pull back a bowstring.
4. Oliver had been well on his way to defeating that assassin during his prison party, and probably would have won if Barry hadn’t distracted him.
5. Oliver was in the hospital right after the vigilante was in a duel with the Dark Archer. His ‘car accident’ wounds could have also been explained as battle injuries.
6. The vigilante’s activities coincided with things Laurel was covering for months.
7. Oliver had bailed on their date shortly before the vigilante was seen.
8. Oliver had known Helena Bertinelli – whom Barry had only figured out several days after meeting was a psychopathic murderer – who used a crossbow to take down her father’s gang and was trained by the vigilante.
9. Oliver had known about the Undertaking before it actually went down, and had been
kidnapped by Malcolm Merlyn because of it.

10. The vigilante had disappeared after the Undertaking and had only reappeared the day after Oliver returned to Starling, in order to rescue Thea.

11. The vigilante had to have partners. Someone with a background in computer sciences – such as the really-bad-at-lying Felicity Smoak – and probably someone with a similar skillset to act as backup – such as a veteran of three tours in Afghanistan who now served as a bodyguard and always seemed to be the one informing Oliver of when he needed to leave.

Honestly, there was very little reasonable doubt that Oliver was actually the vigilante. Now all she had to do was prove it.

She barely stepped in to hug her daughter and say hello to Moira on her way upstairs to change. The best place to look for Oliver would be his club, which seemed like the optimal place to hide a secret lair for vigilantism.

“I’m changing and heading out to Verdant,” she told Moira, placing a kiss on the woman’s cheek. “Oliver is lucky enough to be able to just go and still look acceptable. I need to change.”

“The McQueen dress would be suitable,” Moira recommended. “I’ll ask Raisa to take care of putting Olivia to bed.”

“Thank you,” Barry replied.

An hour later, she was walking into the club. Her name was on the ‘always-enter’ list, so she easily bypassed the line waiting to get in. Once inside, she made her way to a nearly invisible side door with a keypad lock. Thea had complained about the door multiple times, usually in reference to how it probably led to Oliver’s man-cave.
Barry was relatively certain that Arrow-cave was a more accurate term.

She carefully examined the keypad. By shining the flashlight from her phone onto it, she could see which keys were the most worn down. 1-2-3-5-9-0. And she knew a date that matched those six digits. She entered the key and smiled as the door opened. She went inside and made her way down the stairs.

She’d just closed the door when she heard Oliver let out a yowl of pain.

“Sorry,” Felicity said quietly.

Barry walked down the stairs, her silver boot heels clicking all the while. When she came into view of the three people in the basement cave, she had to withhold a smirk. She’d been right.

Felicity Smoak was staring at her in shock. John Diggle had his gun out and pointed her direction. Oliver’s eyes were wide, but he didn’t seem nearly as surprised as the other two.

“I thought that I’d find you here,” she said, directing the comment to her boyfriend. She finished
descending the stairs and walked over to them, even as she glanced around the room. “You’re really not as subtle as you think you are.”

Oliver seemed to realize that Diggle was pointing a gun at her and grabbed it, forcing it downwards.

“How did you even get in here?” Felicity asked.

“Oliver’s not as subtle as he seems to think he is,” Barry replied. “March 19, 2005 is an easy date to figure out.”

“For you and maybe two other people,” Oliver said with a roll of his eyes.

“You know her?” Diggle asked in surprise. “As more than just the CSI who showed up this morning?”

“Oliver and I have known each other since college,” Barry said.

“Oliver and I have known each other since college,” Barry said.

Oliver sighed.

“We’d met in passing before – Barry and Laurel were roommates their freshman year of college – but we really got to know each other during spring break in Vegas in 2005,” Oliver said. “I’d recently dropped out of my fourth Ivy League school. Barry was celebrating her eighteenth birthday. We ran into each other, realized we vaguely knew each other, and spent the rest of the week hanging out together. When we came back to Starling, we remained friends. Barry graduated from Starling University and moved back to Central a couple months before I got on the Gambit, but we reconnected when I came back. We started dating last February.”

“That’s why you look familiar!” Felicity exclaimed, pointing at Barry. “I didn’t recognize you at first because you look really different when you’re dressed down and soaking wet.”

“And not wearing red,” Diggle added.

“Why are you always wearing red?” Felicity asked.

“Moira likes dressing me up,” Barry shrugged, tapping the red dress she wore. “She says it’s my best color. So, what happened to you, Ollie?”

Her boyfriend had a large injury on the side of his torso.

“I went after the sugar truck,” he admitted. “I tried to stop it. The driver…he was super strong. My arrows barely pierced him.”

“You don’t seem surprised,” Barry pointed out.

Oliver looked over at Diggle.

“You were right to ask if I knew more than I was letting on. I’ve seen men with abilities like that before,” he admitted.

“You have?” Felicity asked in surprise. “Where?”
“The island,” Oliver said grimly. “My second year marooned there, we…I came across the remains of a Japanese World War II military project. It was a serum designed to create human weapons.”


“This is real, Diggle,” Oliver said firmly. “Those five years that I was away, I came across things that just…defy explanation.”

“Like my mom’s killer,” Barry said quietly. “You accepted that my dad was innocent before, but you didn’t really believe me. But now you do.”

Oliver looked over at her and nodded.

“What you saw back then was impossible. But in the past six years, I’ve seen the impossible too,” he said. He took a deep breath and continued his story. “There was a doctor, his name was Ivo, and he came to the island to test the serum on people. The ones that survived…their endurance, reflexes, and strength were all enhanced.”

“And you think this Ivo’s in Starling City?” Diggle asked.

“He’s dead,” Oliver said firmly, leaving no room for argument. “And so is everyone he injected with the serum, the last of which I burned.”

“But could someone have survived?” Barry asked. “Someone else who might know how to use the serum, or already has it in them? They stole 30,000 ccs of O-negative and a centrifuge. If they take the blood of someone who already carries the serum and separate it in the centrifuge, and then dilute the serum with the O-negative they stole, they’d be able to create a new serum that was less harmful than the previous versions, since it already came from a survivor of the original serum.”

“I think someone found the recipe,” Oliver said. “A centrifuge and a large supply of blood would allow them to make more of it. A lot more of it.”

“Why couldn’t you have been marooned on Aruba?” Felicity moaned.

“There’s a third component,” Oliver said. “A strong sedative.”

He picked up a crumpled arrow with blood on it.

“I think I preferred it when you left those in people,” Felicity said.

Oliver held it out toward Barry, but pulled it back slightly.

“I don’t want you involved with this,” he said. “I want you safe. Both of you.”

“You need the blood on the arrowhead analyzed in order to determine which sedative was used,” Barry said, sliding off the desk and walking forward to snatch the arrow. “That way you can figure out where the next robbery will be. I’ll get right on it.”

“I’ll help,” Felicity volunteered.

“Back to applied sciences we go,” Barry sighed. “Mr. Diggle, could we trouble you for a ride?”

“You probably shouldn’t go now,” Oliver said slowly. “It would be a little suspicious if you were running tests in the middle of the night, especially since the police do not have this information.”
“Good point,” Barry said. “Tomorrow then? Bright and early? It’ll give us some time back at the house. It’s supposed to storm tonight, and you know how she feels about storms.”

“Who?” Felicity asked.

Barry looked at Oliver.

“You haven’t told them?”

“Of course not,” Oliver said firmly.

“You told them this secret,” Barry said, gesturing at the room around them. “Do you trust them?”

“I do,” Oliver said. “But I wasn’t going to tell without your permission.”

Barry hesitated, then nodded. If Oliver trusted them with this secret, she could trust them with the greatest.

“Would you like to learn the greatest secret of the Queen family?” she asked them.

Both nodded.

“I think it’s better if we show you,” Oliver said, rising from the table with a grunt. He grabbed a t-shirt and carefully pulled it on before replacing his grey hoodie.

“I’ll get your shoes,” Barry said, kneeling down. “You probably shouldn’t lean over with that side.”

“It’ll heal,” he said.

“It’ll heal faster if you don’t strain it,” she shot back.

The ride to Queen Mansion was mostly quiet. It wasn’t that late, for all that the club was already open. Barry’s exploring hadn’t taken long. It was dark though, a consequence of the early December weather.

They arrived at the mansion not long afterwards. Instead of having Diggle drop them off at the front and then park the car, Oliver insisted that he park the car first. They could all walk to the door.

Once they entered through the front door, Oliver called out, “We’re back!”

Barry heard a door close, followed by the sound of small feet running. A moment later, Livvy came zipping down the stairs.

“Mommy!” she exclaimed. “Daddy! You’re back!”

“Daddy,” Barry heard Diggle repeat in disbelief, but she was too occupied with the sight of her daughter jumping into her boyfriend’s arms to care. Livvy was dressed in her favorite Merida nightgown – Barry had eventually given in and bought more than one, since Livvy still refused to wear anything else to sleep – but with her face so close to Oliver’s, the resemblance was obvious. She’d gotten his eyes, nose, and hair color, though the shape of her face and her smile were all Barry.

“Hey, Sparky!” Oliver greeted, kissing the top of her head. “ Aren’t you supposed to be asleep?”
“There’s a storm,” Livvy said in a small voice. “I didn’t want to sleep while you and Mommy were gone.”

“Thunder doesn’t hurt anyone,” Barry reminded gently.

“Lightning does,” Livvy said stubbornly.

Barry looked over at Felicity and Diggle, who seemed shocked.

“Livvy got shocked when she stuck a fork in an electrical outlet a couple years ago,” Barry explained. “She’s been scared of anything lightning related ever since.”

“Sparky, these are Daddy’s friends,” Oliver said, turning so that Livvy could see them. “This is Mr. Diggle and Miss Felicity. Digg, Felicity, this is mine and Barry’s daughter, Livvy. Tommy and I call her Sparky.”

Diggle recovered the fastest.

“It’s nice to meet you, Miss Sparky,” he said, reaching out to shake her hand. “Nice to meet you too, Mr. Diggle,” Livvy replied.

“You can call me Dig, Miss Sparky,” Diggle said with a smile.

“Then I’m just Sparky, Mr. Dig,” Livvy said stubbornly.

“If you say so,” Diggle said amicably.

“I’m Felicity,” the blonde said, reaching out to shake Livvy’s hand as well. “I work with your dad.”

“Daddy runs the company now,” Livvy said solemnly. “He’s really busy now. He keeps missing our Skype calls.”

“I’m sorry about that, Livvy,” Felicity said. “Half the time it’s seems like it’s my job to make sure that he makes it to all his meetings, so I’ll do my best to make sure he makes it to all your Skype calls too.”

“Five o’clock every evening, Pacific time,” Barry told Felicity.

She nodded. “I’ll try to make sure he’s there.”

“Do you want Daddy or Mommy to put you to bed?” Barry asked.

“Both!” Livvy insisted.

“If you two would wait in the living room, we’ll come explain everything once she’s asleep,” Oliver told them.

Both nodded hesitantly and wandered off in the direction of the living room.

Barry walked with Oliver up to Livvy’s room. Over the past year, the pink had been replaced with blue as Livvy’s Merida obsession continued. The frills had been toned down slightly, though it was still evident that this bedroom was meant for the family’s little princess.

“What book are we reading tonight?” Oliver asked, dropping Livvy onto her bed. She giggled as she bounced a little.
“Heidi!” Livvy exclaimed. “Her auntie made her go to the city to be Clara’s best friend. But now she’s sad because she’s not with her Grandpa and Grandmama and Peter and the goats. And Frawline Rotten-my-err found the bread she was keeping for Grandmama and threw it all away.”

“I suppose it’s time to see what happens to Heidi then,” Oliver said, opening up the book Barry handed him.

Barry settled herself at the foot of Livvy’s bed as Oliver began to read.

“A few days after these events there was great commotion and much running up and down stairs in Herr Sesemann’s house…”

Barry could tell by the look on his face as he read that Oliver didn’t really know what was going on. She’d probably be explaining Heidi to him tonight, or he’d just sit down and read it instead of sleeping.

“The latter had not understood, but seeing the severe expression on the lady’s face she did not ask for more explanation,” Oliver finished, closing the book.

“One more chapter?” Livvy asked with her most winning smile.

“You know the rules,” Barry told her firmly. “Mommy and Daddy need to go talk to Daddy’s friends, so you need to go to sleep.”

“But I want to be with Daddy,” Livvy whined.

Barry could see Oliver’s resolve breaking.

“You can spend time with Daddy tomorrow after work,” she said.

“For my party?” Livvy asked.

“What party?” Barry asked in confusion.

“I was going to hold a party for Mom, as a return-to-the-company party, but she said it was a bad idea,” Oliver said sheepishly. “Livvy overheard and said that she needed another party, since Mom, Thea, and I couldn’t come to her other one.”

“I want a ball,” Livvy said firmly. “And Auntie Laurel and Uncle Tommy and Grandpa and Grandma and Auntie Thea and Mommy and Daddy all have to be there. And Miss Felicity and Mister Dig. And Roy.”

“Then we’ll have a ball tomorrow night,” Oliver said.

Barry gave him a you-are-such-a-pushover look. He winced almost imperceptibly when he saw it.

“Goodnight, Sparky,” he said, leaning down and kissing her forehead.

Barry followed suit.

“Goodnight, Livvy.”

They turned off the light and quietly closed the door before heading down the hall to the stairs.

Once they were to what Barry considered an acceptable distance away, she elbowed her boyfriend and said, “You are such a pushover. She’s six. Why does she need a ball?”
Oliver looked sheepish.

“I feel bad that we all missed her birthday. She’s six years old and I’ve missed five of her birthdays, as well as her birth.”

“You were on an island for five years,” Barry pointed out as they finished walking down the stairs and crossed the foyer to the living room where Dig and Felicity were waiting.

“That doesn’t excuse the fact that I’ve missed so much of her life,” Oliver argued as they entered the living room.

“Giving in to everything she wants doesn’t fix that, Oliver!” Barry said exasperatedly, plopping down on the couch opposite Diggle and Felicity and pulling off her heeled boots. “There is a limit!”

“You let Mom buy her a $20,000 pony for her fourth birthday,” Oliver pointed out. “I think I can throw her a birthday ball.”

“You’re throwing your child a ball?” Felicity asked incredulously.

“You’re invited,” Oliver said. “Tomorrow night. For her sixth birthday. It was actually three days ago, but the family missed it because of the trial.”

“Walter bought the horse,” Barry said. “I had nothing to do with it. I can’t even ride.”

“I think you were explaining that you have a child?” Diggle prompted.

Oliver sighed and sat down next to Barry.

“I guess it all started eight years ago,” he said.

“Ten,” Barry corrected. “It started when I decided to go to college at Starling City University and got roomed with English major Laurel Lance.”

Oliver nodded.

“Ten, then. But it really started spring break sophomore year. I’d dropped out of my fourth Ivy League school in four semesters by that point. Tommy and I went out to Vegas for break,” Oliver explained.

“My eighteenth birthday happened over spring break – I skipped two grades – and some of my friends dragged me out to Vegas to get drunk. Oliver and I ran into each other, realized we knew each other, and ended up drinking buddies for the week,” Barry chipped in.

“We ended up married in Vegas on March 19, 2005,” Oliver said.

“The foundry code,” Felicity said in realization.

“Of course, Oliver didn’t want it getting out that he’d gotten married while drunk, and he also didn’t want to tell his parents he’d gotten married while drunk, and I also didn’t want my family to find out I’d gotten married in Vegas, and I also didn’t want to be married, so I let him handle it.”

“He didn’t handle it, did he?” Felicity guessed.

“Not in the least,” Barry confirmed.
Oliver groaned.

“Mom found out a few months later and took care of it, but she also insisted that Barry and I stop avoiding each other like we had been. Mom had Barry move in here during her summer classes instead of staying in her the crappy summer dorms all alone.”

“By the time our divorce actually happened in the fall, we were friends,” Barry explained. “I stayed here my junior year, and moved back on campus my senior year, when Sara Lance and I were roommates.”

“And lovers,” Oliver chimed in.

“And lovers,” Barry agreed. “My last night in Starling, after I’d moved out of the dorms but before I took the train back to Central, I spent the night here. Sara came over since it was our last night together.”

“The three of us were hanging out together, and things just kind of…progressed from there,” Oliver said. “It was about two months before the Gambit.”

“I found out I was pregnant about two weeks after the Gambit was lost,” Barry said. “Apparently the condoms we used were expired.”

“So you’ve had a daughter all this time and you never told us?” Felicity asked, sounding hurt.

“I’d originally planned to retire once the List was finished,” Oliver reminded quietly. “I thought that then I could start building a future with Livvy, become a man she could be proud to call her father. By keeping her away from everything, I thought that she’d be safer.”

“I’m proud to call you her father,” Barry said, focusing on his self-deprecating words. “You have grown so much from that frat boy that I met in Vegas. You’re more involved in taking care of your family and your city. You’ve been working tirelessly to be a force of good in this city. You haven’t gotten arrested at all for stupid things – just something you were actually guilty of and wow you were lucky there. I’m guess Mr. Diggle was the reason you got off?”

“You can call me Dig, ma’am,” the ex-soldier said.

“Barry, please,” she insisted. “’Ma’am makes me feel old.”

“I still can’t believe you hid your child from us!” Felicity exclaimed. “I thought we were your friends!”

Oliver flinched.

“You are,” he insisted. “I just…you guys know everything about my life. I just wanted to keep something to myself. At first it was for her protection, because it was one thing is my secret got out. It’s an entirely different thing if someone goes after Livvy because of me. The easiest way to do that was to keep any mention of her away from you.”

“I can’t say I don’t understand, but I still wish you’d told us, Oliver,” Dig said.

“Malcolm Merlyn threatened Livvy last year,” Oliver said quietly.

“What?” Barry demanded, a half-second before Dig and Felicity said the same thing.

“After he had Walter kidnapped. He threatened Mom with Livvy. He used her against Mom so
many times. And then when we were fighting, he said that he’d make sure that he killed Mom and Thea…as well as Livvy and Barry. That was part of my reasoning for going to Central after the Undertaking last year,” Oliver explained.

“You were in Central?” Felicity asked, aghast. “I spent five months scouring everywhere for any possible mention of you and you were only a few hundred miles away?”

“He grew a beard and dyed his hair,” Barry said helpfully. “We went to Walt Disney World. He got to see Livvy’s first day of school. I learned that the Oliver’s taste buds are genetic. If he ever offers you his chili, don’t.”

“I learned that lesson the hard way,” Dig said with a shudder.

“Oliver makes chili?” Felicity asked, sounding intrigued.

“It’s literally made of hellfire,” Barry warned. “Moira, Oliver, Thea, and Livvy are the only people I’ve ever met who could eat the stuff.”

“It can’t be that bad,” Felicity said doubtfully, though she was starting to look worried.

“It is,” Barry and Dig chorused.

The room was quiet for a moment, before Oliver offered, “Livvy wanted you two to come to her ball tomorrow. We’ll probably start it around six. Bedtime’s eight for Livvy, nine at the latest.”

“Who else is invited?” Felicity asked.

“Walter. Tommy. Laurel. Thea and Roy. Officer Lance is the only other person in Starling who knows who Livvy is, and I don’t he’d want to come, so that’s pretty much it,” Oliver said.

“I think we both need a bit of time,” Dig finally said. “I’ll take Felicity home, and then we’ll see you both tomorrow.”

“I’m sorry for keeping secrets from you, but I’m not sorry for trying to keep my daughter safe,” Oliver replied quietly. “See you in the morning.”

The pair got up and were walking out when Barry called, “Felicity!”

The blonde looked back.

Barry smiled shyly.

“I hope we can still be friends.”

Felicity smiled back.

“I’d like that,” she said, before following Diggle out.

Barry looked over at Oliver.

“That could have been worse,” she pointed out. “Why don’t we both head to bed? It’s been a long day, and I’m sure tomorrow will be even longer.”

“I’m not sure I can sleep with this mess on my mind,” Oliver admitted, though he rose from his seat before helping her up.
Barry leaned closer so that her lips were by his ear.

“Then I guess I’ll just have to tire you out,” she said, before turning quickly and flouncing off towards the stairs. Oliver was only still a moment before he took two large steps to catch up to her before scooping her up and carrying her up to his bedroom, ignoring the quiet squeal she let out.

Barry met Felicity at the Applied Sciences division the next morning to finish running tests on the arrowhead. Barry got distracted while the machines were being fired up.

“They have nitric acid next to hydrazine?” she asked incredulously. “And manganese on top of acetone? This is the definition of dangerous,” she told Felicity, shaking the bottles for emphasis as she began reorganizing CCASD’s chemical storage.

“If it’s so dangerous, maybe you shouldn’t be touching them,” Felicity pointed out

“I’m trained to handle these sorts of things,” Barry replied, continuing to reorganize. “I have
Masters’ degrees in both chemistry and physics, and I’m taking night classes in order to earn my doctorates. Combining all the courses I’ve taken, I also technically have enough for a chemical engineering degree and a forensic chemistry degree.”

“Then maybe you should mention it to Oliver,” Felicity suggested.

“Or I can track Fyff down and yell at him about it,” Barry grumbled.

A flash of lightning and roar of thunder caught her attention. Her head jerked towards the narrow window.

“Livvy’s going to hate this,” she said, mostly to herself, though she was relatively sure Felicity could hear her. “She’ll probably hole herself up with Moira all day so she’s not alone.”

“She’s that scared of thunderstorms?” Felicity asked, sounding intrigued.

“Terrified,” Barry said, climbing down from the shelves. She’d finished fixing the most dangerous chemical errors.

With the machines fired up, she carefully removed a blood sample from the arrow Oliver had passed over the previous night and ran the sample.

“Livvy’s brilliant – she started kindergarten a year early, so she’s already in first grade, and they’re talking about moving her up again. So she completely understands that lightning is made of electricity. She stuck a fork in an outlet and got shocked a couple years ago, and she’s been scared of exposed electricity ever since. She’s probably the only six-year-old so well-versed in electrical safety. Don’t get me wrong, she’s completely fascinated by it, which is why she put the fork in the outlet in the first place, but she’s also terrified,” Barry explained.

“I’m that way with snakes,” Felicity said. “I know all about them, and they’re really cool, but also really creepy and I don’t want them anywhere near me.”

“I had a pet corn snake when I was younger,” Barry admitted. “I got her after herpetology camp one summer. I wasn’t allowed to have her at college, and my foster dad and sister refused to take care of her, so she lives with one of our neighbors now.”

Felicity shuddered.

“As long as she’s there and not here.”

They stood there quietly for a long minute before Felicity asked, “So, how are you handling this whole boyfriend-vigilante thing? I mean, I was shocked when I found out, and I wasn’t dating him.”

Barry snorted.

“From the abridged version I got last night, you also met him when he showed up bleeding in the back of your car. I had my suspicions – I have for a while. Oliver may be good at covering his tracks, but I work for the police, and I’m legally a genius.”

“Most girls would have suspected he was cheating,” Felicity pointed out.

Barry stilled.

“When he came back,” she said quietly, “Oliver promised me that he would do everything he could
to be a good father for Livvy. When we started dating, I warned him that Livvy came first, and if we wanted to make this work, we had to actually make this work, for Livvy. She’s more important than we are. He agreed. I trusted that he wouldn’t break his word. Not when it was Livvy on the line. I trust that he’s not going to cheat on me. We’ve both agreed to talk about things. The only thing he’s kept from me is this vigilante thing, and I can understand why he did that. At first, because he wasn’t going to continue it past the Undertaking. That summer he was staying with us? It hurt him to think about it, because he felt like he failed. More recently? He didn’t want me getting hurt. We probably still need to talk about it some more – and we will – but right now we need to focus on making sure that we stop the spread of this super serum, along with making sure Livvy has a happy second birthday party.”

“Speaking of birthdays, Dig and I wanted to get her something, but since we just met last night, we have no idea what to get,” Felicity said quickly.

Barry smiled.

“If you’re asking me to tell you about my daughter, I assure you, I can go on for quite awhile.”

Felicity smiled back.

“Go ahead. I know we’ve just met, but you’re practically my science twin already. And I mean, I do spend all my work time and my nights with your boyfriend…not like that! I did not mean it that way!”

Barry laughed again. “Don’t worry, I know what you meant,” she reassured the mortified blonde. “So, Livvy! Well, she just turned six. She’s in the first grade. Again, she’s absolutely brilliant. She does a lot of reading, both fiction and non-fiction. She adores Disney Princesses, especially Merida from Brave.”

“Isn’t that the archer?” Felicity asked, trying to muffle giggles.

Barry let out a laugh of her own.

“I know, it’s so ironic. Livvy’s loved Brave since before Oliver came back as a vigilante. Oliver and I also introduced her to Star Wars last year – the original trilogy, The Phantom Menace, Attack of the Clones, and all of the Clone Wars stuff. She likes the idea of both Princess Leia and Queen Amidala – she loves princesses that can save themselves. Narnia too, Lucy and Susan – again, another archer.”

“Strong female characters, got it,” Felicity said with a nod.

“She takes karate too,” Barry added. “And gymnastics. She only made it through two years of dance before deciding she disliked it. Moira insists on ballroom dancing in a couple years. She rides whenever she’s here. She wants to be a princess, but she also insists she’s completely capable of handling herself. Which she is. She broke a second-grader’s nose last month after he said that princesses were for babies.”

“Ooh,” Felicity said with a grimace. “What’d you do?”

“I gave her a spanking for using karate outside of karate class, then took away her TV time for a week for physical violence. Then we watched Mulan II and talked about how a princess needs to be balanced between being strong and being kind. And then we watched Brave again and discussed how Merida didn’t just use her archery skills, but also the princess skills her mother taught her in order to save the day. Though I’m sure every lecture I ever gave on violence not
being the answer is going to fail again once she figures out this vigilante thing,” Barry sighed.

“Hopefully you have a few years before that happens,” Felicity replied.

“I doubt we’ll make it through third grade,” Barry replied drily, rubbing her temples at the mere thought of the headache that was going to cause. “My child is a genius.”

“How long do you think this will take?” Felicity asked, looking back at the machine.

“Could be anywhere from a couple minutes to a couple hours, depending on the size of what it needs to isolate,” Barry sighed. “And if it’s not done now, it’s probably going to be a bit. Do you think you can set it up so it gives one of us an alert when it’s done?”

“It’ll just take a second,” Felicity promised.

Sure enough, the blonde tech genius had the machine set to alert both of them when it had results and send those results directly to them so they didn’t have to come back to the applied sciences division.

“I’ll get Dig to drop you at the house before he takes me shopping,” Felicity said. “I’m sure that you have stuff for the party to do. And if not, there’s always the round-the-clock news coverage leading up to the STAR Labs particle accelerator opening.”

“It’s going to be amazing,” Barry said. “Think of all the science that this could help us learn!”

“I know, right!” Felicity agreed happily. “If you ignore all the potential dangers.”

“The earthquake thing was never proven,” Barry said, going back to their argument the previous day on the car ride to applied sciences.

“Still, here in Starling we’ve developed a very healthy fear of earthquakes,” Felicity muttered.

Barry winced.

“I can understand that. Is Dig still here, or is he with Oliver?”

“He’s here,” Felicity said. “Oliver’s stuck in board meetings most of today, so he sent Dig to make sure that this super-guy doesn’t show up while we’re working. I’m just lucky I didn’t have to attend.”

“I’m not sure if his overprotectiveness is annoying or sweet,” Barry remarked idly as she picked up her coat and bag and headed for the door.

“Me neither,” Felicity agreed.

Unsurprisingly, Barry spent most of her afternoon corralling an excited six-year-old. Somehow, Moira had managed to get a pint-sized ball gown for Livvy already (Barry half-expected she’d already had it stashed somewhere for Livvy to use to play dress-up in), and Raisa was in charge of curling her hair. Thea had put herself in charge of doing Barry’s hair, knowing full well that if she didn’t, Barry would either simply throw a headband in it or braid it back. Thea’s interference had resulted in a braided chignon with enough hairspray that Barry was certain her hair was never coming down.

With Raisa in charge of preparing Livvy, all that left Barry to do was to get her red ball gown on.
She’d returned to ‘her’ bedroom for this, allowing Oliver his room to get ready in privately. Thea had a thing about him not seeing her until she was all done up. Thea was also responsible for the gold shoes Barry was wearing with this dress.

“You look so pretty, Mommy!” Livvy announced as she burst into the room, Thea following close behind.

“So do you, Livvy! You look like our very own Cinderella!” Barry announced, leaning down to carefully place a kiss atop Livvy’s hair, which was curled and held in place by a tiara. It looked exactly like the one that Walter and Moira had given Livvy for her last birthday, though she wasn’t sure how since that particular tiara was in a safe deposit box in Central City.
Her dress was a light blue with the fullest skirt Barry had ever seen on a six-year-old, with the top covered in silver crystal designs. Thea’s strapless ball gown was a medium blue with large white flowers and a slit at the front that teased at her legs.

“She’s right, Bare,” Thea said. “Oliver’s going to drop dead when he sees you. You’re stunning.”

“You’re the stunning one, Thea,” Barry said with a smile. “You look like you’re trying to kill your boyfriend.”

“I like my boyfriend,” Thea said. “I don’t want him dead.” She smirked. “At least not more than a little death.”

“Thea, I love you, but I practically raised you,” Barry said. “I do not want to know anything. ANYTHING. Please.”

Thea only laughed, but thankfully dropped the topic.

Thea was right. Oliver’s jaw dropped when he saw her.
Barry was right as well. Roy was struck dumb for several minutes upon seeing Thea.

Livvy proceeded to welcome her guests with her version of princess manners. Walter arrived first, much to Livvy’s pleasure, followed by Tommy and Laurel, who was wearing a black and white gown. Moira came downstairs next, dressed in enough sparkles to make Livvy squeal with delight. Livvy only abandoned her grandmother when the last of her guests arrived, Diggle in a tux and Felicity in a bright pink gown to match her lipstick.
The party went on easily. Livvy danced with everyone. Walter, Oliver, Roy, and Diggle all let her stand on their feet while they danced with her, ignoring the sharpness of her child-sized heels that she’d felt so grown-up to wear. Funnily enough, Livvy seemed to be interrogating Roy on his intentions towards Thea during their dance. When it was over, he went back to Thea looking shell-shocked. Livvy ‘danced’ with Tommy by sitting on his lap while Oliver ran the wheelchair in circles, much to Livvy’s delight. They were all laughing when it was over.

Dancing was followed by cake, a two-tiered monstrosity made to look like Merida’s dress, complete with a sash between the tiers that said ‘6’ and three small bears wandering around. The cake was topped with a crown in the same colors made of chocolate.
Cake was followed by presents. Everyone – even Walter, who had been in Central a few days before to give Livvy a birthday present – brought something for the little girl. Barry had already given Livvy her gift on her actual birthday, the continuation of the Precious Moments Disney Princess birthday train. Year six had Tinker Bell on it.
Moira gifted her with a diamond necklace that matched her tiara. Barry made a mental note to call her insurance agent about another personal property floater.

Thea and Roy’s joint gift was a bunch of *Frozen*-themed merchandise. The movie hadn’t even been out two weeks and Livvy had seen it twice already. The soundtrack was the only thing they listened to in the car. The words to “Do You Want To Build A Snowman?” were already permanently embedded in her brain.

Walter – despite the custom-made Merida porcelain doll he’d given her on her actual birthday four days before – presented Livvy with a silver necklace that had ‘Livvy’ written in silver.

Tommy and Laurel’s gift was more personal.

“So, I know that my sister Sara was your godmother,” Laurel said, kneeling down in front of Livvy’s chair to present her with her gift. “She never got to give you anything, so I thought it would be nice if you had some things of hers.”

Livvy pulled off the lid of the box. The first thing out was a stuffed shark with the Starling City Aquarium logo on its fin.

“Sara’s absolute favorite stuffed animal when she was your age was a stuffed shark just like that one,” Laurel explained. “My mom has the original, but I wanted to get you one too.”

Laurel then lifted the other item out of the box. It was a wooden box, about eight inches long, with flowers painted on the top and a key in the lock.

“This was Sara’s jewelry box,” Laurel said. “It’s a music box as well. It plays, “Somewhere Out
There.” Have you heard it?”

Livvy shook her head.

Laurel glanced over at Barry.

“Somewhere out there, beneath the pale moonlight, someone’s thinking of me and loving me tonight,” Barry sang softly. “Somewhere out there, someone’s saying a prayer, that we’ll find one another in that big somewhere out there.”

Laurel nodded with a smile when Livvy looked back at her.

“I gave this to Sara when I went off to college, as a reminder that even though we were apart, we’d always be family. But I think that she’d want you to have it now, as a reminder that she may not be here physically, but she’ll always be with you.”

Livvy accepted the box carefully and pulled it tightly to her chest.

“Thank you,” she said in a small voice. “Thank you very much.”

Laurel smiled as she stood up again, using Tommy’s wheelchair to help herself up.

“I’m glad you like it.”

“I love it,” Livvy said fervently.

Barry gently took the music box from Livvy and set it on the nearest end table, where it was unlikely to get pushed off and broken. She knew that although Moira had gotten Livvy a necklace worth thousands of dollars, it was Laurel who had given her the most precious present this night.

Diggle and Felicity were last. Barry wasn’t surprised that they’d gone in together on their gifts, especially since Felicity had had the time to quiz Barry on Livvy’s likes and dislikes. Their gift came in a large Happy Birthday bag filled with pink tissue paper.

“I heard from your mom that you really like Merida,” Felicity said. “So we thought you might enjoy this.”

Livvy accepted the humongous bag from Felicity, setting it on the floor in front of her so she had room to see into it. She tore the tissue paper out of the bag, throwing it here and there on the floor around her chair. Her face lit up when she saw what was inside.

“Now I can be just like Merida!” she exclaimed, pulling out a child-sized bow from the bag.

“There’s a quiver of arrows, an arm guard, and a glove in there as well,” Diggle said helpfully. “Oliver mentioned he learned how to shoot at summer camp one year, so he ought to be able to teach her.”
Oliver shot Diggle a look.

“Summer camp when I was twelve, Diggle.”

Livvy’s face fell.

“So you won’t teach me, Daddy?”

Oliver immediately tried to correct his mistake.

“No, Sparky, I’ll do my best. I’m sure I remember something.”

Felicity looked like she was going to laugh at the by-play. Tommy also looked incredulous. Her manipulation complete, Livvy brightened immediately.

“Can we practice over Christmas, Daddy?”

Oliver smiled at her.

“Sure, Sparky.”

Livvy managed to remember to thank Diggle and Felicity without Barry’s prompting.

“And now it’s about time to see your guests out,” Barry reminded her.

Livvy made a face.
“Bedtime?” she whined.

“Bedtime,” Barry confirmed.

Livvy politely saw her guests to the door and bid them goodbye by name. Once the door closed behind the last of them, she whined again, “Do I have to go to bed?”

“Yes, you do, little miss,” Barry said. “I let you stay up on your actual birthday, and you were cranky all day the next day. We’re not going to do that again.”

A flash of blue appeared beside them.

“Why don’t I put you to bed tonight?” Thea asked Livvy, holding out a hand with a smile. “We’ll let your mom and dad go out and have some time to themselves.”

“Okay, Auntie Thea,” Livvy agreed. “Night-night, Mommy! Night-night, Daddy!”

“Good night, Sparky,” Oliver called back from right behind Barry, causing her to jump. She glanced back at him quickly, then called, “Good night, Livvy!”

Chapter End Notes

See you next week for "Three Ghosts!"
Three Ghosts

Chapter Summary

The rest of 2x8 and all of 2x9, "Three Ghosts", with a little bit from The Flash 1x1 thrown in as well.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Oliver held out a coat towards Barry – he was already wearing his own dress coat over his tux – and helped her into it before ushering out the door.

“Your alerts went off right after Felicity got to the car,” he said in a low voice. “Dig and Felicity are waiting for us outside. We need to get back to the foundry. I asked Thea to put Livvy to bed so I could take you out for a late dinner.”

Barry raised an eyebrow at him as they made their way to the car.

“What if I was actually hungry?” she asked.

“Felicity keeps a collection of snacks in the foundry,” Oliver replied. “And the club’s right upstairs.”

He opened the door to the car for her, and helped her into the backseat where Felicity was already sitting before making his way up to the passenger seat.

“I can’t actually read these results,” Felicity said, passing her phone over to Barry.

Barry scanned the results with the ease of long practice.

“The sedative in the thief’s blood is ketamine,” she announced. “It’s a common surgical anesthesia derived from hydrochloric salt, but it’s also a schedule-three controlled substance; shouldn’t be too hard to track down.”

“Felicity?” Oliver questioned.

“I can find it,” the blonde said. “With the current concentration ratio in the blood sample, there can’t be many places with a large enough quantity of the sedative that correlates with the amount of blood the centrifuge can process.”

It didn’t take them long to get to the foundry (which was a horrible name, really, Oliver?). Felicity started on her computers immediately while Oliver went to change into his vigilante outfit.

Barry looked him up and down appreciatively.

“I love the leather,” she told him. “And green’s always been your color.”

“Red’s always been yours,” he replied, running a hand down the back of her red ball gown before leaning in for a kiss.
“Got it!” Felicity announced, spinning around. She blushed when she saw the position they were in. “Sorry.”

“No, go ahead,” Barry said, moving over to Felicity’s screens along with Oliver and Diggle.

“This is the only location with enough sedative,” Felicity said, gesturing to the picture on her screen.

“What is it?” Diggle asked. “There’s no sign.”

“ARGUS doesn’t like to advertise,” Felicity said. “It’s a disaster bunker, right on the edge of the Glades. ARGUS has them all over the country. They store relief supplies. Food, clothing…”

“Medicine,” Diggle filled in.

“I’m on my way,” Oliver said, pulling his bow out of its case.

“Oliver,” Felicity said, pulling the arrow they’d gotten the blood sample off of from the table and holding it out to him. “I can’t believe I’m saying this, but the way this arrowhead is bent…it means our thief’s muscle density is at least 120 pounds per cubic foot. That’s almost the same density as common concrete. Your arrows may cut this guy, but they will not stop him.”

“I beat someone like this before, Felicity,” Oliver said. “I can do it again.”

“What if you can’t?” Felicity asked.

“I will,” Oliver said. He looked over at Barry. “I’ve got something to live for.”

“Oliver!” Diggle said from the computer screen. There was a picture – security camera? – of a red arrow in a pole.

“What’s that mean?” Barry asked as Oliver pulled his hood up and headed upstairs.

“Roy, Thea’s boyfriend? He was getting himself into trouble trying to fight the wrong in the Glades,” Felicity explained. “Oliver recruited him to be his eyes and ears instead. Thea’s happy her boyfriend’s not getting beat up, Roy feels like he’s doing something, Oliver gets information.”

“That arrow’s the signal that Roy has something for Oliver,” Diggle said.

It only took a few minutes for Oliver’s voice to come over the comms.

“A friend of Roy’s was dosed with the mirakuru. He’s dead. Police claimed it was an OD.”

“But he wasn’t a junkie?” Barry asked.

“Not according to Roy,” Oliver replied. “I had to encourage him to stay away from this. Felicity, find out everything you can on a Max Stanton.”

“Will do,” Felicity replied.

The next half hour was mostly tense waiting. Diggle and Felicity both changed out of their formalwear into spare clothes they kept in the foundry.

“I only have one set of spare clothes here,” Felicity apologized, “but Oliver has several if you want to borrow some of his stuff?”
Barry wandered over to look at the contents of the closet.

“I can do something with this,” she said.

It only took her a few minutes in the bathroom to turn one of Oliver’s button-downs into a mini-dress. She also stole a pair of socks, as she didn’t feel like wearing her heels or walking around barefoot on the concrete floor.

Felicity looked at her appraisingly when she came back.

“I need to learn to do that,” she said, before quickly backtracking. “Not that I usually end up stealing men’s clothes or anything. I don’t, it just seems like a useful skill to have in case something happens to my clothes or something, and considering how I spend my nights, that seems like it could happen.”

“Oliver’s going in,” Diggle interrupted, putting the comms on speaker.

“Who are you?” he yelled.

“Merely a follower,” a deep voice replied.

“Of who?” Oliver demanded.

“My brother,” the man said.

“Did he give you the mirakuru?” Oliver asked. “Did he inject you with it?”

“No,” the man replied. “He saved me with it.”

There were sounds of fighting, a loud crash, and then nothing.

“Oliver?” Barry asked worriedly. “Oliver!”

There was no reply.

“We need to go after him,” Barry said, moving to the chair where she’d left her coat.

Diggle stopped her.

“You need to stay here,” he said.

“I need to be there,” Barry replied. “Oliver needs me there.”

“Oliver needs you safe,” Diggle countered. “What if that guy’s still there? If you both ended up dead, who would be there for your daughter? Besides, you’re probably our best chance of treating him if he got injected with something.”

Barry took a deep breath.

“Okay. Okay. You two go. I’ll set up medical supplies. And hurry!”

“We will,” Diggle said before leading Felicity up the stairs and out of the foundry.

Barry kept herself busy by finding all the medical supplies and setting them out near a table probably meant for that purpose. It was only twenty minutes before her phone rang.

“Hello?” she asked frantically.
“We’ve got him,” Felicity said. “We’re bringing him back. He got injected with something…two somethings. It was coded and the computer was broken so I couldn’t find out what. His pulse is there but weak, and his pupils are dilated.”

“I’ve already got everything set up,” Barry said.

Diggle carried Oliver down the stairs ten minutes later. Barry immediately started removing his top and attaching the medical devices that would monitor his heart rate and other functions. She also set up an IV line.

Unfortunately, she’d barely finished it when Oliver started seizing and his heart monitor went off.

“Hold him!” Barry ordered Diggle, rushing over to check different signs.

“He’s not going to make it,” Diggle said.

“He will,” Felicity said. “We just have to find out what’s in his system.”

Barry ran over to grab a flashlight. “I can think of four possible diagnoses that could be causing his body to react this way.” She checked his eyes. “Make that three possible diagnoses. She then threw the flashlight aside as she went to his wrist. “Two. Start chest compressions,” she ordered.

She grabbed a syringe off the side table and drew blood. She knew it as soon as she saw it.

“Got it,” she said. “He’s suffering from intravenous coagulation.” She set the syringe down and grabbed a pair of rubber gloves, which she put on as she moved over to the corner where she’d seen the rat poison stored earlier.

“What?” Felicity asked.

“His blood is unnaturally clotting! It’s like maple syrup!” Barry snapped. She brought the rat poison to the table and carefully measured it into a syringe. She couldn’t mess up on this. Too much or too little, Oliver would die.

“What are you doing?” Diggle demanded. “That’ll kill him!”

“I know what I’m doing!” Barry snapped back as she sealed the syringe and brought it over. “Medications prescribed as blood thinners were marketed as rat poisons first!”

She injected the syringe into his IV, then waited anxiously until his heart started beating again. She collapsed to the floor in relief, uncaring of the fact that she was wearing a miniskirt and really shouldn’t sit like that.

Felicity came over and rested a hand on her shoulder.

“It’s okay, you did it. You saved him,” she said comfortingly.

“This is why I usually just work on dead people,” Barry said. “My dad was a surgeon, and I don’t know how he did it.”

“Probably the way you just did, just with more hospitals and medical training,” Felicity said.

“Probably,” Barry said, letting out a stressed laugh. “Help me up?”

Felicity did so, before leading her over to a darker corner where a few cots was set up.
“We keep this in here for when someone spends the night here,” she said. “I think you need to sleep.”

“I need an alibi first,” Barry refuted. “Mr. Diggle, if I make a hotel reservation with Oliver’s credit card, can you go check in and then mess the room up as if a couple actually spent the night there? I’m going to tell Thea we wanted a child-free night.”

“Sure,” the man agreed. “And Dig’s fine. Get some rest.”

Barry was asleep almost as soon as her head hit the pillow, probably from the adrenaline crash from saving Oliver’s life. She woke up four hours later, yawned, and got up.

“Any change?” she asked Dig and Felicity with another yawn.

“He’s been sleeping peacefully,” Felicity said. “There’s coffee over there.” She pointed to a small area near the cot-corner, which had a microwave, mini-fridge, and coffee machine.

“Thanks,” Barry said, moving over to the corner. She grabbed a mug off of the mug tree next to the coffee maker and poured a cup. It was lukewarm, but it was caffeine, and that was what she really needed.

She watched Oliver’s sleeping form for a minute, noting the bruises that were starting to form on his neck from where the thief must have grabbed him.

She face-palmed when the realization came to her.

“What is it?” Felicity asked.

“I just realized I might be able to get the guy’s fingerprints off of Oliver,” Barry replied, setting her coffee mug down.

It took her a few minutes to gather the materials and then try to pull the fingerprints off of Oliver’s neck. She’d just pulled the tape off when Oliver shot up, his hand immediately going for her throat.

Barry forced all her muscles to relax. She didn’t try to pull his hand off her neck. She could see it in his eyes that he wasn’t with them.

“Oliver,” she said quietly, half because that’s what he needed to pull himself out of the flashback and half because she couldn’t talk any louder with his hand on her throat. “Ollie. It’s okay. You’re safe.”

She saw Diggle and Felicity jerk up and try to come help her, but she held a hand up and motioned for them to back away. She didn’t need help with this. As close as they were, Barry doubted that they’d ever had to talk Oliver out of his nightmare-flashbacks before. She had a whole summer’s worth of experiences with it.

“Ollie, it’s me, it’s Barry. You’re safe. You’re not there anymore. You’re not on the island. You’re in Starling City. No one here is going to hurt you. I’m here, Diggle’s here, Felicity’s here. Everyone here is safe. No one is going to hurt you. Everyone is safe.”

She repeated her litany several more times. Oliver didn’t release her neck, but he didn’t tighten his grip either.

“You’re safe, Ollie. You just woke up after getting drugged while fighting the thief, but you’re
safe now. You’re in the foundry. I’m here, Barry’s here, and Diggle’s here, and Felicity’s here. No one here wants to hurt you. Everyone is here to keep you safe. There are no people in the club upstairs anymore, but even if there were, the door is locked and no one can get in. You’re safe. We’re all safe.”

This wasn’t working. Time to pull out the big guns.

“This love it is a distant star,” she sang softly. “Guiding us home wherever we are. This love it is a burning sun, shining a light on the things that we’ve done. I tried to speak to you every day but each word we spoke the wind blew away. Could these walls come crumbling down? I want to feel my feet on the ground. And leave behind this prison we share. Step into the open air.”

As she hoped, the song from Livvy’s favorite movie brought him back. It helped that it was something he’d never heard before the island, and had been a weekly occurrence during the five months he’d lived with them.

His grip on her throat finally loosened, and she could see the realization coming back to him.

“Barry?” he asked in confusion. He finally realized what he’d been doing and snatched his hand away, shying away from her.

Barry stepped up to him and wrapped her arms around him.

“Hey, don’t do that. Don’t hide from me. You didn’t hurt me. I’m fine.”

“I can already see the bruises forming,” Oliver replied.

“I’m super pale,” Barry retorted. “You didn’t hurt me, Oliver. Just some slight bruises that a bit of makeup can fix.”

“Hide you mean,” Oliver said, still not looking up at her. “You can’t fix bruises.”

“Look at me,” Barry said, taking his head in her hands and gently forcing him to look up at her. “I’m fine. You never need to apologize for nightmares, or for your reactions when you wake up. And besides,” she added in a teasing voice. “I can always just say it’s a bunch of hickeys.”

She heard Felicity snicker from the other side of the room. Oliver heard it as well, and turned to see Diggle and Felicity watching them.

“I’m sorry you had to see that,” he said.

“Like she said,” Diggle said, “you never have to apologize for flashbacks or nightmares. I’m a soldier, remember? I’ve had ‘em too.”

“What time is it?” Oliver asked, still groggy.

“Eight a.m.,” Barry said. “You were out a while. As far as the family’s concerned, we decided we wanted a child-free night and spent the night at a hotel downtown. Dig went and checked us in and messed up the sheets so the hotel staff don’t realize no one was there.”

“Smart,” Oliver said.

His phone chose that moment to go off. Oliver stood up and grabbed it off the table.

“Mom texted,” he said. “She wants me home. I have to go,” he said. “The man I fought in the bunker…he has what he needs to mass-produce the serum from the island. We have to stop him.”
“I’ll get right on trying to get a fingerprint,” Barry said. She held up the pad that was still in her hand. “He touched your skin when he grabbed your neck. I was able to absorb the residual oils from his skin, which, when added to a gel-based polymer, might be able to recreate his fingerprint. Just tell Moira you dropped me off for CSI stuff.”

“Will do,” Oliver said.

“I’ll drive,” Dig offered.

“No, I’m good,” Oliver said, turning around to look at him. Then his eyes went to Barry. “Wait,” he said, “is that my shirt?”

“Makes a wonderful mini-dress, doesn’t it?” Barry asked, twirling around dramatically. “I also stole someone’s socks. I’m not sure who’s…you didn’t exactly label your spare clothes cabinet. You have plenty, and the wrinkles will come out as soon as it’s dry-cleaned. Though if you could grab some of my clothes and bring them back with you…”

“Got it,” Oliver said before heading off to change out of his vigilante outfit.

Barry watched him leave.

“He really does look good in leather,” she muttered to Felicity.

“You should see him on Wednesdays,” Felicity replied quietly. “It’s salmon ladder day.” She pointed at the device.

Barry looked it up and down.

“Does he still exercise shirtless?”

“Yep.”

Barry ended up wandering over to the glass case where the green outfit was displayed while her tests were running.

“I knew the vigilante had partners,” she told Diggle as she passed him on her way to look at the weapons display.

“He likes to be called ‘the Arrow’ now,” Diggle pointed out.

Barry waved him off.

“You guys have messed with some really nasty people,” she said as she looked at the variety of arrows. “The Dollmaker, Count Vertigo, the Dodger, the Huntress – whom I only realized later that I met in Oliver’s living room…”

“We weren’t really keeping score” Diggle asked.

Barry shrugged.

“I was.”

Diggle’s phone rang at that moment.

“It’s Oliver,” he said before answering it. “I thought you said you could handle it, Oliver.”
He was quiet a moment, then said warningly, “Oliver…” before sighing and saying, “I’m on my way.”

He hung up the phone and said, “Apparently Roy has an arrow in his leg, and I’ve been appointed to stitch him up. It’s a good thing the first aid kit’s still in my car,” he grumbled on the way out.

Barry’s own phone rang only a few minutes later, as she was in the middle of taking notes on what they knew so far. She put her pen in her mouth in order to keep writing with her pencil while she answered the phone.

“Mm-hm?” she answered.

“What are the symptoms of…whatever it was that I got injected with? And whatever you used to fix me?” Oliver asked.

Barry spit the pen onto the floor. That was not the question she was expecting.

“Why?” she asked concernedly. “What symptoms are you experiencing?”

“I…I just had a conversation with Shado,” he admitted.

“The girl from the island?” Barry asked incredulously. “The one who died?”

“I saw here, I touched her, she was as real as you are,” Oliver replied. “And she’s been dead for five years.”

“Get back here so I can check you out,” Barry ordered. “Actually, wait for Dig to get there, finish stitching Roy up, and have him drive you back here, because I don’t want you driving if you’re suffering symptoms.”

“Will do.”

BARTHOLOMEADAMIANAALLEN – OLIVERJONASQUEEN – OLIVIAROBERTAALLEN

“Mom?” Oliver called out, stepping into the living room where his mother was adjusting the decorations on one of the Christmas trees.

“Thank you for coming home, sweetheart,” she said, coming over to hug him. “Where’s Barry?”

“She had me drop her off at the lab,” Oliver replied. “CSI stuff. Is everything alright?”

“Well, I don’t know,” his mother said. “Your sister has locked herself in her room and she won’t talk to me.”

Well that was concerning.

“Don’t worry, I’ll talk to her,” he told his mother. His eyes focused on the Christmas tree behind her. Wait, Christmas tree.

“It’s Christmas,” he said slowly.

“Yes,” his mother said, “but given the last few months, I think we’re going to skip this year’s Christmas party.”

“Okay,” Oliver said with a small nod before turning and heading upstairs.
He left his things in his room and put a pair of jeans, a sweater, and Barry’s converse into a bag for her for when he went back to the foundry. He then moved over the Thea’s room and knocked on the door.

“She, it’s Ollie. Open the door.”

“Not now, Ollie,” she called back. She sounded like she’d been crying.

“Speedy, open the door!” Oliver called.

“Is Mom with you?” she asked. She sounded closer to the door this time.

“No,” Oliver replied.

Thea opened the door and stuck her head out.

“What’s going on?” Oliver asked.

“I didn’t want Mom to see,” she said.

“See what?”

In response, Thea opened the door wider to reveal Roy lying on her bed, a girl Oliver had seen with him at the cash-for-guns event with him. Roy had an arrow through his leg.

Right. He’d forgotten he’d shot his sister’s boyfriend the night before. It was a long night.

“What happened to him?” Oliver asked as he moved into the room. Thea shut the door behind him.

“The vigilante decided to use him as target practice,” Thea said sarcastically. “You’re right. The guy’s a psycho.”

“Why didn’t you go to the hospital?” Oliver asked.

“In this city, an arrow’s the same as a bullet if you want the cops involved,” Roy pointed out.

“Mom actually likes Roy, but something tells me she’d revoke his tree-trimming invitation if she found out he was messing around with the Hood,” Thea said, giving her boyfriend a sharp look.

Oliver moved up to the bed.

“Hi,” he told the girl. She nodded back. Oliver grabbed a towel. “Roy, this is going to hurt.”

“My anger is dulling the pain,” the young man replied.

“This’ll dull it better,” the girl said, holding up a bottle of vodka.

Roy grabbed it and took a swig. Oliver took the bottle and splashed it over the wound. Roy let out a noise of pain. Oliver wrapped the towel around the arrow and swiftly pulled it out, ignoring Roy’s sounds of pain.

“There we go!” he said. He grabbed Roy’s hand, put it over the towel, and laid it on the wound.

“Now put pressure on it right there.”

He moved over to the window, pulled out his phone, and dialed one of the numbers on his favorites
“Diggle, I need you to come to the Queen Mansion.”

“I thought you said you could handle it, Oliver,” Diggle replied. “What’s happened?”

“Roy’s been shot,” Oliver replied. “With an arrow.”

“Oliver…” Diggle said warningly.

“It’s a long story,” Oliver said. “Look, just bring the first aid kit to Thea’s room.”

“I’m on my way now,” Diggle said.

“Thank you,” Oliver replied before hanging up. He turned back around to face the young adults. “Roy, my driver, Mr. Diggle? He has medical training from his time in the army. He’s gonna patch you up.”

“Thank you,” Roy said.

“It’s the least I can do,” Oliver replied.

“Wouldn’t Barry be a better choice?” Thea asked.

“Barry’s working,” Oliver replied. “And she only works on dead bodies.”

“That’s disturbing,” the so-far nameless girl said.

Oliver looked over at her, then at Thea.

“This is Sin,” Thea replied. “She’s a friend.”

Oliver nodded, then said, “Barry’s a friend of mine from out of town. She’s here for work. She’s a CSI, and she’s helping investigate a break-in. Look, I don’t know what the three of you are up to, but maybe the vigilante was just trying to keep you safe.”

“By shooting Roy?” Thea demanded.

“I…I’m just saying,” Oliver replied. “Maybe you should let this go. And Thea? Didn’t Barry ask you to watch her daughter?”

“Raisa took Livvy to the movie theater to see Frozen for the third time,” Thea said. “She was thrilled.”

“What’s Frozen?” Oliver asked.

“New Disney movie, keep up, Ollie. Livvy’s been twice already, and it hasn’t been out two weeks yet,” Thea said.

Oliver rolled his eyes. “Just stay out of trouble,” he said as he left the room.

It was only a few minutes later that he closed the door to his room and dialed Barry’s number.

“Mm-hm?” she answered, in the tone of voice that meant she had a pencil or something in her mouth because her hands were full.

“What are the symptoms of…whatever it was that I got injected with? And whatever you used to
“fix me?” he asked.

Oliver heard her spit whatever-it-was out of her mouth.

“How?” she asked concernedly. “What symptoms are you experiencing?”

“I…I just had a conversation with Shado,” he admitted.

“The girl from the island?” Barry asked. “The one who died?”

“I saw her, I touched her, she was as real as you are,” Oliver replied. “And she’s been dead for five years.”

“Get back here so I can check you out. Actually, wait for Dig to get there, finish stitching Roy up, and have him drive you back here, because I don’t want you driving if you’re suffering symptoms.”

“Will do,” Oliver replied before hanging up the phone. He headed back to his room, because if he was going to have any other symptoms, he was going to do so on the couch.

BARTHOLOMEADAMIANAALLEN – OLIVERJONASQUEEN – OLIVIAROBERTAALLEN

She was ready with a needle to draw blood as soon as Oliver returns to the foundry with Diggle.

“Side effects of warfarin – what I gave you to save your life – include hallucinations, excessive sweating, diarrhea, hair loss, breathing problems, chest pain, headache, dizziness, purple toes, stomach pain, skin ulcers, increased weakness or tiredness, and signs of internal bleeding,” Barry told him as she grabbed his arm. He helpfully pulled up his sleeve so she could draw blood.

“You’re hallucinating?” Felicity asked. “What do you see?”

“A girl named Shado that was with me on the island,” Oliver said.

“Shado,” Felicity said. “Sara. How many women were you marooned with? Sure this wasn’t Fantasy Island?”

Barry’s mind froze on one word.

“Sara?” she asked in a choked voice.

Felicity and Oliver both froze and slowly turned to look at her.

“Shado?” Barry asked in a small voice. “Sara…didn’t die with the Gambit?”

Oliver closed his eyes.

“No,” he said tightly. “She didn’t. I found her a year later. She’d been rescued by Ivo, the doctor who was after the mirakuru serum. When we were going up against him, she made me promise that if she died and I lived and made it home, I’d tell everyone that she died on the Gambit, so her family – and you – never learned what she had to do to survive on that boat.”

“I need to sit down,” Barry said. Oliver caught her as her knees gave out, and he carried her over to a chair.

“There’s more,” Oliver said once she was comfortably seated. “I thought Sara died, but she showed up in Starling after the Undertaking. She was rescued by the League of Assassins, but she
left them and now they’re hunting her, so she’s not here anymore.”

“She’s alive?” Barry whispered.

“She’s alive,” Oliver replied solemnly. “She was watching over Laurel – she helped me with the Dollmaker. She had to leave after the League found her here, but she said at one point that she was going to go check on you. She asked about you and Livvy.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?” Barry asked. He’d told her so many other things – so long as it didn’t interfere with his night-life – but not that her first love was alive.

“She asked me not to,” Oliver replied. “She’s hurting. She doesn’t know how to come back yet. But she’s going to. Once she came back and started watching everyone – you, Laurel, her dad – she’s bound to come back. Just…not yet.”

“Do you have a phone number?” Barry asked. “I need…I need to see her.”

“You still love her,” Oliver said.

Barry’s head jerked up to look at him.

“Ollie,” she said, reaching out to take his face in her hands. “I love you. I won’t say I love you more than I loved her, because our situations were completely different. That was six years ago. I’m different now – I’m working full-time, I’m a mother, I’m not the college student Sara dated. Yes, part of me still loves her, and part of me always will. She was my first love. But I love you. You’re the one who loves me as I am now, and you’re the one I love now.”

Oliver leaned down and brushed his lips against hers.

“I love you too. And I think I understand what you’re saying. Part of me will always love Laurel, but you’re the one I’m in love with. But there’s always that saying,” he said with a sad smile.

“You never forget your first love,” Barry agreed, before kissing him again.

Oliver broke it off.

“Bare, you’re sticking me in the face with that,” he said.

Barry jerked the hand still holding the needle and syringe away from him. “I’m so sorry! Come over here, I’ll run a few tests on it to see what’s up.”

She pulled him over to the bloodwork machine, which happened to be in front of the case where his vigilante outfit was displayed.

“So, why no mask?” she asked him. “Not to tell you how to do your vigilante-ing, but the greasepaint thing? It’s a poor identity concealer.”

“I haven’t been able to find a mask that conforms perfectly to my face and doesn’t affect my ability to aim while I’m on the run,” Oliver confessed.

“Maybe a compressible micro-fabric…” Barry mused.

“I found Cyrus Gold,” Felicity interrupted from her computer.

“Who’s Cyrus Gold?” Oliver asked.
“The human weapon who left his fingerprints on your neck,” Barry said, wandering over to Felicity’s computer with Oliver and Diggle. “And, you know, left you nearly dead. I managed to pull the prints.”

“I’ve had facial recognition software running close-circuit cameras all over town,” Felicity said. “He’s at the corner of Delgado and 25th right now, but we’re just about to lose him.”

“What else is at that intersection?” Oliver asked.

“A parking lot, a market, a motel,” Felicity listed off.

“Could be where he’s holed up,” Diggle recommended.

“I got this,” Oliver said, turning back towards his suit.

“Oliver,” Diggle said. “Why don’t you let me handle this? It’s just recon.”

“Fine,” Oliver said. “But I’m going as your backup.”

“Before you go, did you remember to bring me a change of clothes?” Barry asked idly.

Oliver glanced away.

“Don’t worry about it,” Barry reassured. “I’m fine. Though if you pass a Wal-Mart on the way back, bring me jeans and a t-shirt.”

“Will do,” Oliver said.

“Be safe,” Barry said, pressing a quick kiss to Oliver’s cheek before he and Diggle headed out.

“Does it ever get any easier?” she asked Felicity.

“A little bit,” Felicity said. “They’re really good at handling themselves. When, you know, Oliver isn’t almost dying because he was fighting a super-strong human weapon. And that wasn’t comforting at all.”

“Not really,” Barry said with a small smile. “Though it’s probably better for my sanity if I don’t know how many times Oliver’s almost died since he started this.”

“You’re not going to ask him to stop?” Felicity asked.

“He needs this,” Barry said. “Starling needs this. Maybe before he could have just gone on with his life, but not anymore. I woke up every night for the five months he was staying with me because of his nightmares. He blamed himself for the Undertaking. He told me how he learned about it from his mother shortly before, and I thought he just was blaming himself that he didn’t manage to find the evidence to expose his mother and Malcolm Merlyn beforehand. Realizing that he’d been there, that he’d physically been the one trying to stop it? It explained a lot of things, about him over the summer and about him now. This is his absolution.”

“That’s kind of what I was thinking,” Felicity agreed. “Except, you know, I also thought that he should keep trying to help people because it was something he was good at, and they needed the help. It’s why Dig and I updated the Cave while he was gone.”

“Cave?” Barry questioned.

Felicity gestured around them.
“Oliver might call it ‘the foundry’, but Arrow-Cave sounds so much cooler.”

“You’re totally right,” Barry agreed. “Especially since Thea thinks this is his ‘man-cave’.

They ended up giggling together until Diggle’s voice came over the comms to tell them they were there. He and Oliver switched comm channels at that point. It was only a few minutes before Oliver’s voice came back over the comms.

“Felicity, call for back-up,” he ordered.

“On it,” Felicity replied instantly.

“Back-up?” Barry asked as she started dialing. “What sort of back-up do you have?”

“Hi Officer Lance,” Felicity said into the phone. “My friend needs to meet with you, as soon as possible.” She was quiet for a moment. “One hour, got it. I’ll pass on the message.” She hung up quickly.

“You called the SCPD?” Barry said with raised eyebrows.

“Detective Lance has been…helpful,” Felicity said. “We’re probably not going to get anything else done tonight though, if you want to head home to Livvy.”

Barry checked her watch.

“I probably should, but I’ve got something I want to try. I promised to go shopping with Laurel tomorrow.”

“Right, you guys were friends,” Felicity said. “How does that work, with the whole sleeping-with-her-ex thing?”

“It was…awkward, for a bit, once she found out. Laurel didn’t know Sara was bi, and didn’t know about the threesome we had with Oliver until after Oliver and I got attacked during his prison party. She asked me to leave her alone for a while, and I did, and we eventually started talking as friends again. She’s always been more angry with Sara than she ever was with me, even if I was the one who got pregnant out of it,” Barry explained as she started putting chemicals together. She turned on a Bunsen burner to start warming a plate up. “But with Livvy and all, we haven’t had the chance to spend much time just the two of us. That’s what we’re spending tomorrow afternoon doing.”

“Sounds like fun,” Felicity said. “Who’s watching Livvy?”

“Whoever’s around,” Barry said. She started measuring out the chemicals. “Try to get Oliver to go over there if there aren’t any leads. She misses him. It was hard for her, going from seeing him on Skype everyday to having him in the house, to going back to Skype with him missing half the time.”

“I am definitely going to permanently put those meetings on his calendar,” Felicity promised. “Even if I’m not actually his PA.

“He trusts you,” Barry said honestly. “That’s more important to him than you doing the PA work. Or your CIO work. Have you considered getting your own PA? It might make things easier, and as part of the C-Suite, you definitely are allowed one.”

“You seem like you know a decent amount about business, for a science major,” Felicity said.
“I’m the reason Oliver made it through two years of college after dropping out of four Ivy League schools,” Barry replied. “I forced it down his throat, which meant I had to learn it as well.”

They both ended up laughing about that as well.

“So, what are you doing?” Felicity asked as Barry dropped a few drops of another chemical into the beaker with a pipette.

“Just messing around with something,” Barry replied. She put the beaker on the hot plate and took off her goggles.

“Shouldn’t you be trying to figure out what’s causing Oliver’s hallucinations?” Felicity asked.

“The sample’s still being scanned,” Barry replied. “Shouldn’t be too much longer.”

“Good,” Felicity said.

“You’re really worried about him, huh?” Barry asked.

“He takes crazy chances, even when he’s not hallucinating about beautiful island girls,” Felicity grumbled. “Not that I’m trying to poach your man! I wouldn’t do that! Ever. Even if I couldn’t see how absolutely in love with you he is – which he is, he’s never like this when he’s just around us. He adores you.”

Barry ducked her head as she smiled.

“Thanks,” she replied. “I know he loves me, but…it’s good to see others can see it too, especially since we don’t go out in public very often.”

“Why not?” Felicity asked.

“Livvy,” Barry said firmly. “I want her to have a normal childhood. I saw what being a billionaire’s child did to Oliver, and to Thea, and to Tommy. Thea was a mess when she moved in with me, and Moira had done nothing to stop it. I don’t think I’d ever parent like that, but…I just don’t want her to deal with that, especially when it came out that Livvy’s his biological child. It was a scandal when people found out that Oliver Queen and Sara Lance died on the Queen’s Gambit, because people knew that Oliver was dating Laurel Lance. If they found out that Livvy was Oliver’s child, they’d somehow find out that Sara and I dated, and everything would just be a mess again. The way we’re doing things is hard, but Oliver and I both see it as better than the alternative.”

“Oliver takes you as his date to things,” Felicity pointed out.

“He never introduces me as his girlfriend though,” Barry replied quietly. “Just as his friend. He took me as his date before the Gambit, so no one ever pays too much attention. I did the whole arm-candy thing a lot during college, for both Oliver and Tommy. It’s always a bad plan to go to the formal functions alone, even if you’re not dating anyone, so they’d take Laurel and I, usually. Sometimes Sara. It really depended on who was available.”

Things were quiet for another moment, before Barry asked, “So, any plans for Christmas?”

“Lighting my menorah,” Felicity replied with a smile.

“Sorry for assuming,” Barry apologized.
Felicity waved it off. “Everyone does it.”

“You can head home,” Barry offered. “Oliver can give me a ride once he gets back.”

“If you’re sure,” Felicity said, grabbing her coat from a chair.

Barry waved her off.

“I’ll be fine. There’s a whole club of people upstairs if I get lonely. I can go hang out in Thea’s office.”

“I’ll see you tomorrow then,” Felicity replied.

“See you then,” Barry said.

Once she was gone, Barry continued the work on the early Christmas present she was making for Oliver. Hopefully she’d manage to set it up to cool before he got back.

Shopping with Laurel the next day was fun. They’d spent most of the day out, as Laurel had the day off and Tommy had doctor’s appointments and therapy most of the day. He’d also promised to cook, but Laurel assured Barry, who remembered his attempts from five years ago, that his version of cooking was calling for takeout and using the microwave to warm it up.

They’d just finished picking out way too much *Frozen* merchandise for Livvy – Laurel hadn’t seen the movie yet, but she promised to drag Tommy with her on her next day off – when Laurel’s phone went off.

“Hello?” she asked. “What?” She paled rapidly. “Okay, I’ll be right over.”

“What happened?” Barry asked, concerned.

“My father, um,” Laurel said. “He’s in the ICU, I’m so sorry, I have to go.”

“Give me your keys,” Barry ordered. “I’m coming too, and you’re not safe to drive. You call Tommy.”

The drive to the hospital was tense. Despite Laurel’s protests that she didn’t want Barry to get stuck there, Barry assured her that she could get someone to come pick her up, and did exactly that as soon as they arrived.

Diggle picked her up at the front door, and then drove around the side of the hospital and idled on the curb.

“The Arrow went to talk to Officer Lance,” Diggle answered her unspoken question. “He’ll remove the hood and stash the bow before he gets in the car though.

Oliver was quiet the entire way to the foundry, and didn’t say a word once they got there, just put his jacket back on and started sharpening his arrows.

“Good news,” Barry told him. “Your blood test’s done.”

“So you know what’s in my system?” Oliver asked.

“That’s the thing,” Barry said slowly, “your blood’s clean. Your hallucinations aren’t pharmacological, they’re psychological. Are your hallucinations related to the *mirakuru*? Could its return have brought up suppressed memories and emotions?”
“Possibly,” Oliver said shortly. He afterwards simply went back to sharpening his arrows.

“Give him time,” Felicity whispered as she pulled her away to the other side of the foundry. “He’ll feel better once this is over. Come on, you can help me track this guy down.”

She could faintly hear Diggle and Oliver talking on the other side of the room, but Felicity drew her attention back when she started to look over.

“Guys, we got something here,” Felicity announced. “I scanned the key Lance gave you and traced its serial code back to the manufacturer.”

“This particular key fits a locked gate somewhere on Crescent Circle in the Glades,” Barry added. Oliver slowly picked up his bow.

“Where are you going?” Felicity asked. “You can’t go out there in your condition.”

“I have to stop this,” he replied.

“Oliver, Gold left you half dead, which is fifty percent better than he left Detective Hilton,” Felicity reminded.

“Felicity,” Oliver said. “I don’t have a choice.”

He looked over at Barry.

“I’ll come back,” he said firmly. “But I have to do this.”

“I know,” Barry said, rising from her chair. “Just…promise you’ll come back. I can’t spend my first Christmas not mourning Sara mourning you.”

“I can’t promise that,” Oliver said quietly, moving towards her as well.

Barry smiled sadly.

“I didn’t think so, but I had to try.”

She pressed a lingering kiss to his lips. He returned it easily, wrapping his arm – still holding his bow – around her waist.

“Be safe,” she breathed against his lips. “I love you.”

“I love you too,” he replied. One more kiss, and he was gone.

Barry sagged into a chair. Felicity sat down beside her.

“Now we wait,” the blonde said quietly.

“Now we wait,” Barry agreed.

Crashing through the ceiling worked out as an entry method, and the scientist with the gun was easily taken down. Oliver nearly froze when he saw Roy strapped to a chair, muscles tense and a man in a skull mask standing over him, empty syringe in hand.

“Brother Cyrus told me he killed you,” the man in the skull mask said.
“Guess he’s not as strong as you hoped,” Oliver replied. “Where’d you get the mirakuru? Who gave you the formula?”

“It was a gift,” the man said. “A gift I will use to save this city from itself.”

Roy let out a pained groan. Oliver barely heard the footsteps over it, but he turned in time to fire another arrow into Cyrus Gold’s shoulder. He jerked, but it didn’t stop him. Oliver then used the cord he’d rappelled in on to give himself the leverage to kick Gold in the face.

Gold responded by throwing him into a wall, which made him drop his bow. He barely managed to grab it before Gold kicked him across the floor.

Roy’s pained groans had stopped. Oliver looked up to see the man in the skull mask checking his pulse.

“Another failure,” the man said.

Oliver sagged backwards onto the ground, defeated. Not Roy. Thea would be devastated.

“Get up,” a high-pitched, echoing voice said. “Get up, Daddy.”

Oliver knew that voice. That voice shouldn’t be here, shouldn’t be anywhere near the mirakuru.

“Livvy,” he breathed, pushing himself off the ground to see his daughter – his daughter, what was she doing here? – standing beside him.

“You’re not gonna die down here,” Livvy said with a shake of her head.

“Livvy, I’m sorry,” Oliver said. “I couldn’t save Roy. I let him die.”

“You didn’t let him die, Daddy,” Livvy said with a small shake of her head. “You fought to save him. You fought to protect me, to protect Mommy. Because that’s what you do, what you have always done. You fight to survive, and you fight to save people. You’re a hero, Daddy. You beat the island, you beat the Dark Archer. So fight, Daddy. Get up, and fight back.”

“Kill him,” the man in the skull mask said, and the image of Livvy – a hallucination, it was just a hallucination, she’s not really here – disappeared.

As soon as Cyrus Gold charged him, Oliver was on his feet and kicking him where it hurts. He threw repeated punches to the man’s face, dodged those in return, and then managed to get far enough away that he was unharmed when he fired an exploding arrow into the fuse box. The box blew, the ceiling caved on Gold, and Roy’s chair fell over.

As soon as he checked that Gold was dead, he ran over to Roy and sliced him free of his chair. He dragged him far enough away that he was lying flat, then started chest compressions.

“C’mon, Roy,” he said. He took the teen’s face in his hands and told him, “I am not leaving anyone else to die. You’re strong, kid. C’mon.” He started chest compressions again. “C’mon, Roy. C’mon, fight! Fight!”

Roy took a shuddering breath. He then passed out again, but he was alive. The mirakuru would take care of the rest.

Oliver flicked his comm on.

“Gold’s dead. They injected Roy with the serum, but he survived. I’m going to take him back to
the mansion.”

“You’re okay?” he heard Barry breath in relief.

“I’m okay,” he confirmed. “I’ll be back soon.”

When he returned to the foundry, Felicity greeted him with a hug and Barry with a kiss.

“Still have a ghost problem?” Dig asked.

“No. I got the message,” Oliver said. “But we, we have other problems.” He moved further into the foundry and started putting his gear away.

“Wouldn’t be us if we didn’t,” Dig remarked.

“Roy was injected with the serum, so we’re going to have to keep an eye on him. Gold was working with someone. I saw him wear a mask, with the image of a skull. He’s trying to mass-produce the serum to build an army,” Oliver revealed.

“For what?” Dig asked.

“You’re a soldier. What’s the primary purpose of an army?” Oliver asked.

“War,” Dig replied. Oliver nodded in agreement.

Oliver turned to Barry.

“I don’t want you and Livvy in Starling City until this is over,” he said. “If one of you got hurt…I couldn’t stand it.”

“We can scale back our visits,” Barry said slowly. “We can’t cut them off or someone will ask questions.”

“I’ll come out to Central more,” Oliver tried, but Barry shook her head.

“It sounds like you’ll be busy. I can’t promise I’ll be safe, but I’ll promise that Livvy will always be my top priority, so I won’t put her in jeopardy,” Barry said firmly.

Oliver let out a relieved sigh and reached out to her, pulling her into his embrace.

“Thank you.”

“Livvy and I head back very early tomorrow morning, so you need to be home in time for bed, but before you go, I’ve got an early Christmas present for you,” Barry said.

She pulled out of his arms in order to grab a box off of one of the side tables. It was wrapped in newspaper.

Oliver pulled the lid off to reveal a green domino mask, the same shade as the rest of his suit.

“Compressible micro-fiber,” Barry said proudly. “Here.”

She took it from his hands and slid the strap over his head before adjusting its fit on his face and smiling.

“How do I look?” Oliver asked, turning so that Dig and Felicity could see.
“Like a hero,” Felicity said.

The next morning, Oliver drove Barry and Livvy to the airport, despite the early hour. Livvy slept the whole way, and was still asleep as Oliver carried her to the security checkpoint.

“Should I wake her?” he asked quietly.

“No, I can carry her,” Barry said, carefully taking the six-year-old from his arms. “She’s got school today. Might as well sleep as long as possible.”

“You’re making her go to school after getting off of an airplane?” Oliver asked.

Barry shrugged. “I have work. She can handle it. Even if she falls asleep, she’s still smarter than everyone else in her grade. I’ll send a note so her teacher’s aware, just in case.”

Oliver was wearing a baseball cap and sunglasses to conceal his identity, but he still looked around to make sure there were no cameras watching before leaning in and kissing her quickly.

“I love you,” he said. “Have a safe flight.”

“Love you too,” she said. “We will.”

Oliver pressed a kiss to Livvy’s forehead before sending them off through security.

“Be safe,” he said as he watched them go.

BARTHOLOMEADAMIANAALLEN – OLIVERJONASQUEEN – OLIVIAROBERTAALLEN

Well, Barry at least managed to make it to the school to drop Livvy off on time. She could not say the same for getting to the crime scene she’d been called to. She parked her car at the station and headed there on foot, case in hand. Thankfully it wasn’t raining, like it had been the last day she’d been running with her case.

“CSI, coming through,” she told the people at the crime scene before hurrying over to where Captain Singh was standing with Joe and Fred Chyre.

“Sorry I’m late, Captain Singh,” she said.

“What was it this time, Miss Allen?” the captain asked. “Did you forget to set your alarm clock?”

“Livvy forgot her lunchbox,” Barry replied. “We just got in from Starling this morning, and I was going to take her straight to the school, until she remembered that it was fish sandwich day, and…”

“Livvy won’t eat fish,” Joe said with a nod.

“It’s amazing that child doesn’t have a truancy record already,” the captain said with a shake of his head.

“She inherited all the punctuality that skipped me,” Barry offered as she pulled her gloves out and set her case down. She ended up lying on the ground by the tire tracks in the dirt to examine them. Her mind automatically analyzed them.

“Getaway car’s a Mustang Shelby GT500. Shelbies have a rear super-wide tire specific to that model,” she announced, even as she noticed the clod of dirt on that must have fallen off the tire. “Twelve inches with an asymmetrical tread. And there’s something else.”
She stood up, stole Chyre’s pen out of his pocket with a quick, “Thanks,” and moved to the dirt clump. She carefully used the edge of the pen to pick up the dirt…which turned out not to be dirt as she sniffed it and automatically turned away.

“Fecal excrement…from an animal, I’d guess,” she said as she pulled an evidence baggy from her pocket.

“My dad gave me that pen,” Chyre said angrily. “Before he died.”

Barry immediately turned away.

“Sorry,” she squeaked.

She ended up spending the rest of the day in her lab, trying to find out more about the Mardon brothers and where they were hiding.

“Hey,” Iris said as she walked into the lab, one hand on her purse and the other holding Livvy’s hand. “I am ready to see this atom-smasher…smashing.”

“There was a shooting today,” Barry told her. “Your dad needs me to process some evidence, which means I don’t know if we’re gonna be able to make it to STAR Labs.” She placed a sticky note on her map of the city before heading back to her computer.

“Seeing that thing turn on is like your dream,” Iris said, following her in order to steal one of the fries she’d gotten from Big Belly Burger. “Your sad, little, nerdy dream. Besides, I cancelled a date for this,” she said as she chewed.

“Hands off my fries!” Barry said, snatching them away. “Unbelievable.”

“Can I have a fry, Mommy?” Livvy asked with a winning smile.

“What do we say when we want something?” Barry asked instead.

Livvy thought about it quickly.

“May I have a fry, please, Mommy?” she asked.

“Yes, you may,” Barry said, offering the fries to her daughter.

“I see how it is,” Iris said. “Prejudice. I am stress-eating over my dissertation. We started selling cronuts at Jitters. I ate two today. If I don’t graduate soon, I’m going to be more muffin-top than woman.”

Barry looked up from her computer and gave her best friend a once over.

“You look amazing,” she said honestly.

Iris rolled her eyes fondly and took another fry.

“What’s so important about this particle accelerator anyway?” she asked.

“Science, Aunt Iris,” Livvy insisted. She’d pulled a book out of her backpack. Barry knew that Iris had planned to take Livvy to the library after school, but she was relatively certain that book didn’t come from the children’s section, since it looked several hundred pages long. Teach Yourself Electricity and Electronics did seem right up Livvy’s alley though. Her ongoing fascination with electricity persisted despite her fear of lightning.
“Harrison Wells’ work in quantum theory is light-years ahead of anything they’re doing at CERN,” Barry told Iris.

“You’re doing that thing where you’re not speaking English,” Iris said.

“Okay,” Barry said, going over to her glass whiteboard and picking up a marker. She drew a dot.

“Okay, imagine that that dot is everything the human race has ever learned until this moment.”

“Does that include twerking?” Iris asked sarcastically.

“That,” Barry said, drawing a huge circle around the dot, “is everything we could learn from the particle accelerator. It’s a whole new way of looking at physics. It will literally change the way that we think about…everything.”

Iris laid a hand on her shoulder.

“I have no idea how you have a boyfriend,” she said.

“Hey,” Joe’s voice came from the door, “leave her alone. She’s working.”

“Hi, Daddy,” Iris said.

A beep came from the computer area. Iris turned to look.

“Your test thingy is done,” she announced.

Barry hurried over, followed by Joe and Iris. She quickly read the results.

“I think the Mardon brothers are hiding on a farm,” she said. “The fecal matter I found on the street – it was cow manure, which contained traces of oxytetracycline.” They gave her blank looks. “It’s an antibiotic,” Barry explained. She reached over to the computer and tapped a few keys. “There are only four farms in the area that still use it in their feed.” She handed the list that had just printed it out over to Joe. “Bet you’ll find a really sweet Shelby parked at one of them.”

“Dad,” Iris said, standing up and putting an arm around her father’s shoulders, “seeing as how Barry solved your poop problem, how ‘bout letting him go to STAR Labs?”

Barry did her best to make puppy eyes.

“Fine,” Joe said. “Go.”

Barry smiled and Iris kissed Joe’s cheek.

“Thank you, Joe,” Barry said, jumping up and grabbing her coat and purse. “Could you take Livvy’s backpack home with you?”


All three of them stared at her.

“Barry,” Iris asked slowly, “when did you teach your child to speak nerd?”

“You’re the one who let her get that book from the library,” Barry replied. “Sweetheart, you can carry your book or put it in my purse. Joe’s just going to take your backpack so we don’t lose it.”

“Oh, Livvy agreed, zipping the Merida backpack up and handing it to Joe. Barry helped her
back into her coat as the three of them hurried out the door.

Iris ended up driving to STAR Labs, reasoning that she could drive Livvy to school in the morning and Joe could take Barry to work the next morning.

“So Barry,” Iris asked as they walked through the crowd. Barry had picked Livvy (and her book) up and had her perched on one hip, while Iris had slid her hand through Barry’s other arm so they wouldn’t get separated. “How was your trip? Did you find proof of the “impossible”, or were you just visiting your boyfriend?”

Barry let out a small laugh.

“Well, someone demanded we have a ball for her birthday, so I have some nice pictures. I finally met Ollie’s CIO. It was a good trip, overall.”

People further up in the crowd started cheering, so they all looked up to see Harrison Wells himself walking onto the stage. Iris and Barry joined the clapping. Livvy looked up, but her hands were full of her book.

“Thank you,” the man said, holding up a hand to stop the applause. “My name is Harrison Wells, and tonight, the future begins. The work my team and I will do here will change our understanding of physics, will bring about advancements in power, advancements in medicine, and trust me, that future will be here faster than you think.”

They didn’t get to hear the rest of the speech, as someone bumped into Iris and yanked her messenger bag off her shoulder.

“My laptop!” she cried out. “It’s got my dissertation on it!”

Barry immediately passed Livvy off to Iris and took after the thief. Iris was wearing heels; she had Converse on. She followed the thief through the crowd and into an alley, only to get hit with the laptop bag in the face and knocked to the ground.

She pulled herself up and looked at the young man standing there holding the bag. There was a chain-link fence behind him, which explained why he’d stopped running.

“Hey, kid,” she said, “you don’t have to do this. Just give me back my friend’s bag and we’ll call it even.”

The kid looked hesitant. She might actually have a chance.

“That’s it,” she said as the kid took a slow step forward, only for him to shove the bag into her stomach and run again.

“Barry!” Iris said, finally catching up. “Are you all right?”

“I’ll be fine,” Barry said, panting heavily. “Livvy hit me harder from the inside.”

They ended up headed back to the police station to make their reports on the theft. The thief was escorted by the guy who’d caught him.

“Who is that guy, anyway?” Iris asked as she brought Barry a bag of ice. “What is he so proud of? So, he caught a mugger.”

“He’s a transfer from Keystone,” Barry explained, accepting the ice. “Started a few weeks ago.
Eddie Thawne.”


Barry raised an eyebrow at her.

“That’s what my dad calls him,” Iris said. “Says he actually keeps score when it comes to arrests.”

She made a face. Barry laughed, which caused her to clutch her sore ribs from where the mugger had hit her.

“He is pretty though,” Iris added, looking back at the detective.

“Eh,” Barry said, waving her hand in a so-so gesture.

Iris smacked her shoulder lightly.

“You don’t get to comment. Your boyfriend’s smokin’.”

“Very true,” Barry agreed. “I’m going to head up to my lab for a bit, see if there’s anything else I can finish up. Can you keep an eye on Livvy until we’re allowed to leave?”

“Will do,” Iris said. “And I’ll even take her home when you inevitably get distracted by something. Are you on-call?”

“Not ‘til tomorrow,” Barry replied. “You know that Singh doesn’t like putting me on during weekdays because of Livvy. But seriously, if I’m not back in twenty minutes, come get me. Liv, I know you’re enjoying your electricity book, but have you done your homework yet? And what’s the rule about experiments?”

“I didn’t have homework and no experiments without supervision,” Livvy recited dutifully.

“Good girl,” Barry praised. She kissed her daughter on the top of the head and headed up to her lab.

She could hear water dripping in as soon as she opened the door. The skylight was leaking again. She deftly walked around the puddle on the floor and headed for her computer. It was easy enough to turn on the news report from STAR Labs.

“I’m Linda Park and we’re live outside STAR Labs, despite the inclement weather, which is only going to get worse,” the reporter for KSFZ8 said. “The torrential downpour has in now way effected the particle accelerator, which is up and running smoothly, according to STAR Labs CEO Harrison Wells.”

Barry let the report fade into background noise as she picked up the news article about the theft from CCASD and took it over to her crime board. She rolled up the map that hid it from casual view and pinned the article in the top right corner.

“Still chasing the impossible, I see,” a voice came from behind her.

Barry jumped, but whirled around anyways, responding automatically to the familiar voice that had haunted her dreams for years.

“Sara,” she breathed.

The blonde stepped out of the shadows of her lab and walked slowly toward her. She was dressed
simply, but that didn’t change anything.

Barry met her in the middle of the room, a few feet from the leaking skylight. She raised a trembling hand to rest against Sara’s cheek.

“You’re just as beautiful as I remembered.” She let out a tremulous laugh. “Oliver told me you were alive, but…I can’t say I actually believed it until now,” she said shakily.

Sara rested her hand on top of Barry’s pressing it more firmly to her cheek.

“I’m here,” she promised. “I’m alive. I’ve missed you.”

“I missed you too,” Barry breathed.

“I can’t stay long,” Sara said apologetically. “It’s not safe.”

“Oliver told me about the League, how they’re hunting you,” Barry replied quietly. “I’m glad you came though.”

“Oliver said you knew, and said you needed to see me,” Sara replied, equally quiet.

“I did. I do. God, Sara, I missed you so much. Just being able to see for myself that you’re here, that you’re alive…it means more to me than you know,” Barry said.

The sound of people coming down the hall caused Sara to draw back into the shadows until they’d gone by and the sounds had faded away again.

“I should go,” Sara said quietly. “It’s not safe for me to be here, not for me or for you.”

Barry stepped forward and wrapped her in a tight embrace.

“When it’s safe, you’d better come back so I can introduce you to Livvy,” she threatened, though it was probably ruined by the tears in her eyes.

“I’d love to meet her properly,” Sara replied, looking equally teary. “She’s beautiful, Bare. And you say I’m still beautiful…you’re even more beautiful now. Motherhood suits you.”

“She’s the most important thing to me,” Barry said. She reached up to cup Sara’s face in her hands. Slowly, telegraphing her movements, she captured Sara’s lips in a soft, gentle kiss, which Sara easily returned.

“I thought you were dating Oliver,” the slightly younger woman replied when their lips parted, though they remained close together.

“I don’t think he’ll begrudge me one last kiss,” Barry replied softly.

Sara pressed a light kiss to Barry’s cheek.

“You two seem happy together. I would never want to get between that, but part of me will always love you,” Sara admitted.

Barry rubbed her thumb over Sara’s cheekbone.

“Part of me will always love you,” Barry replied. “I thought you were my forever once. But Oliver’s my forever now.”
“I know,” Sara said. “As creepy as it may sound, I’ve been watching you. I was dead, Barry. It’s okay that you moved on.”

Voices approached the room again.

“I have to go,” Sara said. She pressed another fleeting kiss to Barry’s cheek. “I love you,” she said as she stepped out of Barry’s arms.

“I love you too,” Barry replied, but Sara was already gone.

She let out a sigh and turned back to her crime board, eyes immediately resting on the photo of her father being led away in handcuffs.

“Dad, love is really, really hard,” she sighed.

Suddenly, alarms sounded from her computer screen. She turned around to face it.

“Wait,” the reporter said. “We’re now being told to evacuate the facility. The storm may have caused a malfunction to the primary cooling system.” Barry moved over to the computer to watch more closely. “Officials are now trying to shut down the particle accelerator, but so far have been unsuccessful.”

The computer chose that point to shut out as the power shorted out. Barry looked up and out the window to see a large explosion further into the city, where she knew the particle accelerator was located. The blast of fire up into the stormy sky was followed by a pulsing force that she felt race through her. She moved over to the skylight chain in order to try to get the roof closed further before anything expelled by the accelerator came towards her. An open roof in that situation would be stupid.

She’d barely grabbed the chain when the room around her started to shake. She looked around, and the liquid chemicals she had stored in beakers and Erlenmeyer flasks were floating into the air, as if there wasn’t any gravity…just like her fish tank had on that night sixteen years ago.

She didn’t know why she looked up, but she did, only to see the flash of lightning coming straight for her. As she heard the glass shatter, her final thought was, There goes Livvy’s astraphobia.

BARTHOLOMEADAMIANAALLEN – OLIVERJONASQUEEN – OLIVIAROBERTAALLEN

Oliver had just arrived at the foundry after a long day at Camelot Consolidated when his phone started ringing.

“Who is it?” Felicity asked absently from her computer.

“Iris, Barry’s sister,” he said with a frown. He answered the phone. “Hey, Iris.”

She only had to say one sentence.

“I’m on my way,” Oliver said. “I’ll take the jet. Keep me posted; I’ve got WiFi.”

He hung up the phone and looked over at Felicity and Dig.

“Barry got struck by lightning after the STAR Labs accelerator exploded,” he said, his voice shaking. “How fast can we have the private jet ready?”

“I’ll start calling, but we should be able to be in the air in less than an hour,” Felicity said. “Grab your stuff and go. I’m coming too.”
“And me,” Dig said. “Get in the car. I’ll take us to the airport.”

“I’m calling Mom and Thea,” Oliver said as they hurried out of the foundry. Felicity already on the phone. “They’re probably coming. Maybe Tommy and Laurel too. I’ll call them next.”

“Shouldn’t you also let your girlfriend’s assassin ex-girlfriend know?” Diggle asked.

“I’ll text Sara after I call Laurel,” Oliver replied, phone already at his ear. “Thea? Wake Mom. Barry’s been struck by lightning. We’re taking the private jet to Central….Spare clothes would be great….Okay, see you there.”

The call to Tommy and Laurel went much the same, and Oliver sent a simple text to the burner phone Sara had passed along the number of afterwards. After that, all he could do was stare out the window and pray, Please be okay. I love you. Please be okay.

BARTHOLOMEADAMIANAALLEN – OLIVERJONASQUEEN – OLIVIAROBERTAALLEN

Two floors up from where a team of doctors was desperately trying to save Barry Allen’s life, a baby’s first cry filled the hospital room.

“Congratulations, Ms. Mark,” the doctor said. “It’s a girl.”

“What are you going to name her?” a nurse asked. “And will it be ‘Mark’ or a different last name?”

“Rose,” the blonde woman said, looking out the window towards where the particle accelerator had lit up the sky not an hour before. “Her name is Rose. And no,” she said as her blue eyes turned solid gold. “She’ll have her father’s last name.”

Chapter End Notes

It's probably going to be a while before the next chapter comes out. I'm planning on sticking the rest of Arrow Season 2 into the next chapter, but if it ends up too long I'll split it. However, I won't know that until I'm done, and I still have ten episodes of season two to go, so it's probably going to be a bit. However, I'm currently on sit-still-and-don't-move-around orders due to stitches in my foot, so I may have time to be really productive on writing...I just don't know what I'll be productive on.
While She Was Sleeping (Part One)

Chapter Summary

Covering season 2 episodes 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17.

Chapter Notes

Well, 'While She Was Sleeping' got split into two chapters. The original was forty pages long and seventeen thousand words, so I cut it in half. Sorry, there's less showing and a lot more telling in this chapter and the next one, since I'm trying to cover so many episodes so quickly. Hope you all enjoy!

“I’m back again,” Oliver told the seemingly-sleeping form of his beloved as he sat down in the chair beside her. “Sorry I was gone. I had to go back to Starling and get everything set up before coming back here for Christmas.”

He grimaced.

“I don’t know how we’re going to do Christmas without you. It’s like we’re cursed to never get a good Christmas. This year you’re in a coma, last year Walter got kidnapped, and the five years before that I was dead. Do you remember the Christmas before that?” he asked, smiling slightly at the memory. “You kissed so many people at the Queen Christmas Party. You got pretty close to making out with Sara a couple times as well, before Tommy or I distracted you.”

His smile slowly faded as he sat in the chair, simply staring at her. Were it not for the various medical devices she was attached to, she could have been asleep. She looked so peaceful. Someone had taken the time to French braid her hair.

“Livvy’s…she’s thrown herself into schoolwork,” Oliver admitted. “Which is hard when it was already way too easy for her. The planned grade jump is still happening, since her grades aren’t suffering. She apparently introduced herself to her new class as ‘Sparky’ though. She’s refusing to go by Livvy. I asked her about it, and she said that it’s your name for her, and since you’re not here to use it, no one else should as well. Only family is still allowed to call her Livvy. She’s started running more experiments too; she shanghaied Felicity into supervising. She’s got her master’s in computer science and cyber security, and she said that she had to take some electrical engineering classes in college, so she’ll hopefully not let either of them get electrocuted. You kinda did enough of that for all of our family for a lifetime.”

He reached out a finger and ran it along the Lichtenberg figures that were slowly fading from her arms and torso. The doctors were surprised that they’d lasted this long – ten days after the strike. Most Lichtenberg figures didn’t last more than one or two, though with how fair Barry’s skin was, it was possible that they’d scar.

“I’m not sure if she’s experimenting now to understand what happened to you, or to prevent it from happening again,” Oliver admitted. “Maybe she’s trying to figure out how to wake you up. Maybe
she’s scared, and trying to understand her fear so she isn’t scared.” He sighed. “I don’t know if it’ll help.”

Barry was almost never alone. If Oliver wasn’t there, Iris or Joe or Felicity was. If Livvy wasn’t in school, she was at the hospital. Until the hospital kicked them out at the end of visiting hours, but that stopped happening once Oliver had her transferred to a private hospital with luxury hospital suites.

“Christmas was hard without you,” Oliver told her when he visited again – alone, for once. Felicity had tempted her out with the promise of an experiment she couldn’t conduct in a hospital room. “There was just…there was just no cheer. It’s a good thing that you and the Wests had already decorated everything, or those wouldn’t be up. We’re having trouble finding where you put the decoration boxes, so your house may still be decorated when you wake up.”

He fingered the box that he was still carrying around in his pocket.

“I had the perfect present for you,” he admitted. “I guess I’ll just have to wait until you wake up to give it to you. I know you’ll wake up, Bare. I have faith. Maybe not in most things, but I have faith in you.”

A week later, once Livvy was in school and he was alone with Barry again, he told her, “I’m going to have to leave soon. Isabel Rochev is asking questions. Laurel’s been fending her off as much as possible, but she’s supposed to be stepping back from Camelot Consolidated, which she can’t do if she’s there and I’m here. I hate that I can’t stay. I want to be here for Livvy…for you. Livvy’s still grieving. All the doctors say that she’s the most precocious kid they’ve ever met. She’s asked them all sorts of questions…she’s been reading up on comas and brain injuries and lightning strikes…she had a discussion with the doctor yesterday about the Glasgow Coma Scale and the cold caloric test and some sort of reflex that had a medical name I can’t pronounce. Oculation-something. She’s charmed them all, of course – the doctors and the nurses. Everyone loves her. She’s even charmed the families of the other patients here on this floor. Rachel Rathaway had appendicitis and was here, and during their hour-long conversation, Livvy managed to convince her to give her estranged son a call. You’d be proud of her.”

Livvy moved in with Joe – and Iris, who also moved back in with Joe – once Oliver, Felicity, and Dig left Central City. Oliver hated to go. His daughter was a genius, but that giftedness made her mental capacity closer to that of someone much older. She was more affected by her mother’s hospitalization than other children her age would be. She’d gone from having two parents living with her six months ago to having none.

“It’s been a busy few weeks,” Oliver told Barry’s still form when he returned again, nearly three weeks later. Livvy was still in school at the moment, but Joe would be bringing her by as soon as it ended. He had work, but Livvy was very used to doing her homework at her mother’s bedside by this point. Second grade apparently wasn’t much harder than first, and his genius child found it simple.

“I spent over a week cornering lowlifes in the Glades to try to figure out who the man in the skull mask was. It was never effective. No one knew anything. Thea and I threw a campaign party for Sebastian Blood, since he’s running for mayor. I had to leave in the middle though; some guy who called himself ‘Shrapnel’ started setting off bombs, so I went to try to help people. Felicity might’ve told you about that; she was out here when it happened, but flew back once she heard,” he explained.

“Dig found the guy’s crazy anti-government manifesto, and we figured out who he was. Then Sebastian Blood decided to host a ‘unity rally’ which, of course, was the biggest target in the city
for the bomber. I caught him though. Didn’t kill him, but I turned him over to the proper authorities. All of us were okay, though Mom almost got crushed. Roy saved her. And then Laurel started using her ADA job to snoop about Sebastian Blood. She called me – Arrow-me, not me-me – to ask for my help. Apparently Blood’s mother was in a mental hospital and told Laurel that she wasn’t crazy, she was just in there so no one asked questions about Sebastian, who killed his father. Then the mom died right after Laurel visited. It was fishy. Sometimes I wonder if Laurel would’ve made a good reporter.

“Laurel got kidnapped by skull mask guy. She also managed to escape, almost before I could rescue her. She shot the guy in the head – it was a police officer she’d worked with before, which explains how Gold knew that the SCPD was coming for him. Laurel and Tommy are almost ready to move in to their new house. It came with an elevator, but they’re having all the counters and things adjusted so that Tommy can access them. He’s learning to cook. He’s much better than Laurel is,” Oliver said thankfully. He’d served as a taste tester several times lately. It was good to see his best friend get a hobby that didn’t involve flashy cars, clubs, or drinking. He wasn’t supposed to drink with the meds he was on anyway.

“Roy’s gotten a lot stronger,” Oliver admitted. “He and his friend, Sin – the one who’s Sara’s friend? I told you about her – came up with this idea to catch a serial killer by dressing Sin as a prostitute and having her almost get caught so Roy could save her. Roy lost control and beat the guy bloody. I offered to help him – train him. As the Arrow, obviously, not as Oliver Queen. He doesn’t like Oliver Queen that much. I probably shouldn’t have tried so hard when I threatened him for dating Thea.”

Oliver smiled slightly, thinking of his sister.

“She’s doing well. She and Roy are out here too; they’re meeting with some of Thea’s Central friends at the moment. They wanted to throw her a birthday party that wasn’t at the club she already managed. According to Iris, they figured out that she’s Thea Queen, since Thea’s face got splashed on the news a few times during the trial. They don’t care. They even agreed to sign NDAs. She’s got some pretty great friends out here. You did an amazing job raising her.”

Livvy got there shortly afterwards. They spent the rest of the weekend in the hospital room – except for sleeping. Then they went back to Barry’s house, even though Livvy was primarily living at Joe’s now. Livvy worked on her homework, or read books, or watched movies, or played with her dolls while Oliver alternated between planning a training schedule for Roy and doing paperwork for Camelot Consolidated. Laurel had no problems forwarding all of it to him. Or rather, she had Adrienne do it. The EA was going to be fully Oliver’s problem – or solution, considering her skills, solution was probably a better word – in one more week, when Laurel finished handing over her CEO duties. She’d go to work full-time as an ADA the following Monday. Roy and Thea came by sometimes, but they were also trying to spend time with all of Thea’s Central friends. Thea also wanted the chance to show Roy around Central, around the place she’d spent her adolescence.

The trio returned to Starling Sunday evening. On Monday, Oliver started attempting to teach Roy to control his strength. It didn’t go too well. He’d always been an angry kid, but now his emotions were even more volatile.

The middle of the week was taken up by going after the Bronze Tiger, who’d escaped prison, and was now after the prototype earthquake machine that Malcolm Merlyn had. Even with Roy’s help, Oliver was unable to stop the mercenary from stealing it, though they did successfully destroy a good portion of Tommy’s family home. It was a good thing that a. Tommy and Laurel were already moving into their new home and b. Tommy hated the place anyway. After getting beat up
by his almost-protégé the next day, they managed to stop the earthquake machine from being
shipped out, destroyed it, and then Oliver had to reveal his identity to Roy after using Thea’s
nickname to get him to regain control. He finished the day off by introducing Roy to what Barry
had dubbed, ‘Team Arrow.’

On Thursday, her last day at work before she finished resigning as co-CEO of Camelot
Consolidated, Laurel got horribly sick after getting home from an evening at Verdant. If Tommy
hadn’t found her, she probably would have died. Laure had no allergies. They knew that the
Verdant stock was clean. It was suspicious. Too suspicious. Oliver gave in and called Sara.

He spent the next day in a meeting with his mother, Walter, and Thea about his mother’s soon-to-
be-announced mayoral campaign. That was a bit of a shock, though he could see it being good for
her, if it worked out. He got a call from Tommy as soon as the meeting was over. Laurel was
awake.

He found both of Laurel’s parents and Tommy at her bedside. Both of the Lance parents greeted
him cordially enough. It was a nice change from when Detective Lance was threatening to shoot
him on site.

A comment from the nurse made him notice the glints of gold in Laurel’s eyes. Her eyes were a
blue-green color. He’d never seen that shade in them before.

Oliver found his ex-lover in the foundry, going up and down the salmon ladder. According to
Felicity, she’d been at it awhile.

Sara tried to leave as soon as Oliver assured her that Laurel was okay.

“So that’s it?” he challenged. “You’re in town for four hours and you’re just going to take off
again?”

“The League of Assassins is still after me, Ollie, and staying in town would put my whole family at
risk,” Sara replied. “I only came back because Laurel was in trouble.”

“She’s still in trouble, Sara!” Oliver insisted. “She was at Verdant last night. She only had two
drinks. She was fine in the cab ride home. But if Tommy hadn’t found her on the floor of their
living room, she would have died. And there was something off about her eyes…”

“What do you mean?” Sara asked sharply. “Off how?”

“They were almost gold,” Oliver said.

Sara looked over at Felicity.

“Can you get a copy of her bloodwork?” she asked.

“Hospital servers are easy,” Felicity said, moving over to the computer.

They stood there, watching her, until Oliver’s phone rang. And not his usual phone; the phone he
kept for usage as the Arrow. And at the moment, the only person with the Arrow’s phone number
was Quentin Lance.

Officer Lance demanded Sara come meet him. Oliver trailed her cautiously, in full vigilante attire,
which was the only reason he was present when an assassin in red and black floated down from the
rafters of a bridge on aerial silk. She had a knife in her hand, but instead of stabbing Sara, they
kissed instead.
Oliver blinked, then blinked again. Well, that explained some of Sara’s reluctance to come home, if she was involved with a high-ranking member of the League of Assassins.

Oliver reevaluated that as soon as the woman introduced herself as Nyssa al Ghul, daughter of R’as al Ghul and Heir to the Demon. He didn’t agree when she tried to demand Sara return to Nanda Parbat.

Sara asked for a minute. The assassin agreed, walking away with clicking boot heels. Every word they exchanged, every gesture – it all spoke of a deep intimacy. It was like watching Sara with Barry back in college, except even more pronounced. Nyssa and Sara obviously never hid their relationship like Barry and Sara did.

All Sara asked was that he trust her.

He grudgingly went back to the foundry. It took Sara a long time – too long – to return, and even then she still tried to leave. That was when Felicity revealed that Laurel’s bloodwork revealed Tibetan pit viper venom in her system. She was poisoned to bring Sara back to Starling City.

Oliver and Sara jumped into action at that. They were on Oliver’s motorcycle a minute later, though they were unable to stop Nyssa from kidnapping Dinah. They then had to discuss the matter with Officer Lance, before using information Felicity found to track them down. They found an assassin, but no Nyssa and no Dinah, and the assassin killed himself with pit viper venom. Try as they might, they couldn’t find out any more that night.

The next morning, his mother announced her mayoral campaign. Just beforehand, Felicity revealed the information that she’d found out…and gotten confirmed straight from his mother’s mouth.

Thea was the product of his mother’s affair with Malcolm Merlyn.

Rage flashed through him. He’d stood by her, trusted her, and this was what she’d kept secret? No more.

When he returned to the foundry with Dig and Felicity, Sara was gone…and so was the Tibetan pit viper. They hurried to find her. Dead assassin in Starling – especially the heir to the League of Assassins – was not something he wanted to deal with.

In the end, he had to stop Nyssa from killing Quentin, saved Sara’s life, as she’d simply poisoned herself with pit viper venom, and watched as Sara was both released from the League and reunited with her family.

He went back to the mansion to confront his mother after that. She was having a nightcap while watching the video of her campaign speech. She turned it off when she saw him.

“I know we need to talk,” his mother said.

“You need to listen,” Oliver said firmly. “For the past year, I have stood by your side and I’ve fought because I wanted to believe that you weren’t this…monster. And I needed to believe that I still had a mother.”

“You do,” his mother said, holding out a hand and walking towards him.

Oliver held up a hand to ward her away as he stepped back.

“Oliver, I only lied about Thea to protect her from Malcolm,” Moira said. “I let her leave, so that
she would be away from him, so he’d never be able to figure it out. I lied for her protection, for Barry and Livvy’s protection.”

“No, you lied because that’s what you do,” Oliver said stiffly. “And that is who you are, Mom. Lies. And now you’ve made a liar of me, because the world can never find out about this, and they can never find out about us.” His mother’s brow furrowed. Oliver continued, “Which is, as of right now, we have no relationship.” She started shaking her head. “I will keep up appearances for the family’s sake,” Oliver said. “Publicly, I will support your campaign. But privately? You and I are done. And I don’t want you anywhere near my daughter.”

“Oliver,” his mother said, coming towards him. Oliver held up a hand and walked away. “Oliver!”

He didn’t stop walking. He left the house, grabbed his motorcycle, and headed back to the foundry.

Sara found him as he was running drills on the dummy.

“You’ve been crying,” he remarked.

“Yeah, I was happy to know I still could,” Sara said with a wry smile.

“Are you okay?” Oliver asked.

“Laurel wasn’t as thrilled to see me as you thought,” Sara said, putting her hands in her pockets.

“Give her time,” Oliver recommended. “She didn’t like me my first couple months back either.”

He went back to beating on the dummy.

“I gave her six years,” Sara pointed out.

“She told me, when I came back, that she couldn’t grieve because she was too angry, and she couldn’t be angry because she was grieving,” Oliver said, not stopping his exercise. “She couldn’t work through her emotions when you were dead. Now that you’re alive, she’ll be able too. She’s not alone. She’s got Tommy.”

“What exactly are you taking out on that dummy?” Sara asked.

“My mother,” Oliver said with a sigh. “She’s not who I thought she was.”

“I guess it’s going around,” Sara offered.

They were both quiet for a moment.

“So what now?” Oliver asked her.

“I don’t know,” she replied.

“I don’t either,” Oliver admitted.

“I know one thing,” Sara said, stepping closer.

“What’s that?”

“I’m home,” Sara said.
She stepped forward and kissed him. For a moment, Oliver kissed back, before remembering his unconscious girlfriend. He stopped the embrace and gently pushed her away.

“Sara, I can’t,” he said.

She nodded, understanding immediately.

“Because of Barry,” she said.

“Because of Barry,” Oliver agreed. “And Livvy.”

“In the spirit of full disclosure, I saw Barry that night, just before she got struck by lightning,” Sara said. “Since you said she wanted to see me. We talked, and I kissed her. A final good-bye, so to speak. I just wanted to make my goodbyes even. Hypothetically, what are your feelings on polyamory?”

Oliver raised his eyebrows.

“Are you proposing a throuple?”

Sara snorted.

“Is that a thing now?”

“According to Thea it is,” Oliver replied.

“That sounds stupid.”

Oliver hummed in agreement.

Sara snickered a moment, then turned serious.

“I still love her, Ollie, and I still care about you. I know she loves you, and I think she still cares about me. I know you love her. Do you care about me?”

“She still loves you,” Oliver said quietly. “I know that. And yes, I love her. I definitely still care about you, Sara. I don’t know if I love you, but I care about you. But we can’t make these kinds of decisions without Barry here.”

“I don’t think she’d mind,” Sara pointed out, “but I agree. Until she wakes up, we can just put everything on hold.”

“Probably smart,” Oliver admitted. “Do you want to stay at the house still?”

“If you don’t mind,” Sara said. “Mom’s staying with Laurel and Tommy, and Dad’s just got a one-bedroom apartment. I guess I need to figure out some kind of work, since I’m not a college student anymore.”

“You could always go back to college,” Oliver said. “Or even do online courses. That’s what Thea’s doing. She’s a SCU student, but all her courses are online.”

“I’m sure that helps with what her sleep schedule must look like,” Sara said with a small smile.

Oliver shrugged.

“No worse than ours. Wanna spar?”
Sara raised her eyebrows, but started taking off her jacket anyway.

“I still need to hit something after Mom,” Oliver explained.

Sara launched herself at him, and they exchanged a quick fury of blows.

“So what happened with your mom anyway?” Sara asked, spinning around and launching a high kick towards Oliver’s face.

“She lied. About the affair with Malcolm,” Oliver said shortly as he dodged the kick before striking back with a kick of his own.

Sara ducked under it.

“And you learned about that three months ago. What’s really wrong?”

Oliver hesitated, which gave Sara an opening to launch another salvo of hits.

“Thea was the product of the affair,” Oliver finally admitted, only after barely twisting out of the way of what would have been a truly nasty hit to his solar plexus.

“Oh. So have you told Thea yet? And Tommy?”

“What?” Oliver asked, jerking into one of her punches rather than out of the way. He retaliated by kicking out at the back of her knee. “No!”

“Thea should know,” Sara pointed out. “Secrets never stay secret, Ollie. And besides, doesn’t Tommy deserve to know that he still has family? Thea’s practically his little sister anyway. And guess what! He’s your brother now!”

“Not really,” Oliver said. “Since my mom and his dad were never married, just slept together, we’re not even stepsiblings. We just happen to share a half-sister.” He threw out another attack and managed to pin Sara to the ground, only to find that she had a knife poking him in the stomach. “Draw?”

“Draw,” Sara agreed. She sheathed the knife as Oliver got to his feet, and then accepted his offered hand up. “Feeling better?”

Oliver took a deep breath and let it out. He felt some of the tension he’d been carrying around since that morning melt away.

“Yeah,” he said.

“You know, there’s got to be a term for people who share a half-sibling but aren’t step-siblings,” Sara said thoughtfully. “I’m going to find out. And then make you t-shirts.”

“Oh God, you still make t-shirts for people?” Oliver asked.

Sara had gone through a phase – lasting through half of middle school, all of high school, and her first year of college – where she would make t-shirts for any group doing anything. Oliver had t-shirts from every single birthday he, Tommy, Laurel, Sara, and Thea had had during that time period. He had t-shirts from every single person’s graduation. He even had a t-shirt from the Vegas trip where he had ended up married to Barry. Related to that, Sara had also made them, “Just Divorced!” t-shirts, though he had never worn his. As far as he knew, Barry had never worn hers either, but he wasn’t sure. Additionally, he had t-shirts for every time he’d been arrested and
“I mean, it’s been a few years,” Sara said with a small shrug. “But I figured I should try. See if I still find it fun. See if I still can.”

“I’m sure you’ll do fine,” Oliver said. He grabbed a nearby towel and tossed it to Sara so she could wipe the sweat away. Then he grabbed another and quickly toweled off his face and upper body before putting a shirt on.

“You headed home?”

Oliver hesitated.

“Do you mind if I stay in the other bedroom of the house? Or on the couch, since I think the second bedroom is still set up for a five year old.”

“Of course,” Sara said. “It’s your house. You should take the adult bed.”

“It’s Barry’s house,” Oliver shot back. “And I’m pretty sure she cares about you just as much as she cares about me. Besides, someone would make me pay if I slept on the bed while the lady took the couch.”

“I’m not lady,” Sara shot back, “but I’m not going to turn down a bed in favor of a couch. I did almost die earlier.”

“Don’t remind me,” Oliver replied. “Do you need a ride? How did you get here anyway?”

“I called a cab,” Sara said easily. “A ride would be great.”

Oliver met with Tommy and Thea the next afternoon at Tommy and Laurel’s house. Laurel was out shopping with her mother and Quentin was at work and not staying there besides, so they were all alone in the house.

“What’s wrong, Ollie?” Thea asked. She looked worried. “You’ve been upset since the press conference yesterday. And don’t think I didn’t notice that you didn’t come home last night!”

Well, that was as good a place to start as any.

“I had an argument with Mom,” Oliver said. “I told her we’re through, and that she should stay away from Livvy.”

“What could your mom have possibly done that you’d do that?” Tommy asked. “I mean, you were still talking to her after she helped level half the city.”

“That wasn’t her fault,” Thea snapped immediately.

Tommy raised his hands.

“I know. She was coerced. The only one at fault was my father. But Oliver didn’t even have the angry phase you went through. He was still talking to her the whole time. Well, he would have been if he’d been in town. So what did your mom do?”

“It goes back to her sleeping with Dad,” Oliver said. He glanced over at Thea. “In court, she admitted to the affair, but she didn’t specify the dates. She said it was after your mom died, Tommy, but she didn’t say when. Your mom died right after Christmas. The affair took place four months later, in the spring of 1994.”
“What are you saying?” Thea asked, looking confused.

“Late April, 1994,” Oliver said gently. “Nine months later was January 21, 1995.”

“My birthday? Ollie, wh-what are you saying?” Thea asked. She had started to tremble.

Oliver took a deep breath.

“I’m saying that Malcolm Merlyn was your father,” he said.

Thea sagged.

Oliver moved over to hug her.

“Hey, this doesn’t change anything,” he said. “You’re still Thea Queen. Dad knew, and he loved you anyway. I’m still your brother. You’re not losing anything. You’re just gaining an extra brother. And a future sister-in-law. And the future-sister-in-law’s sister, who happens to be your brother’s girlfriend’s ex-girlfriend. Family reunions are going to be so much fun when we’re eighty and trying to explain all of this to someone’s great-grandchildren.”

Thea let out a small laugh at that.

“Thanks, Ollie. You’ll always be my big brother.”

“I hope that I get the official promotion?” Tommy said. He’d recovered faster than Oliver expected. “I mean, I’ve seen you as a little sister since you were born, so does blood relation mean I get to be called a brother now?”

Thea smiled at him.

“Tommy, you’ve always been a big brother to me. Now I’ll just call you one.”

They were all quiet for a long moment.

“So, what now?” Tommy asked.

“Well, I think you and all the Lances are coming to Thanksgiving de Queen-Allen-West this year,” Oliver offered. “I guess Barry’s going to end up using her castle after all.”

“Wait, since when has Barry had a castle?” Tommy asked incredulously. “I mean, your house looks like a castle, but the last time I checked, Barry lived in suburbia.”

“She does,” Oliver said. “But apparently Mom decided she needed a castle, so she bought her one. Barry didn’t even know about it until she got the homeowners’ association notice.”

“I can’t imagine that she actually moved into it,” Thea said. “She likes where she lives too much, since the schools are good and it’s right across the street from Joe.”

“You’re right,” Oliver said. “She didn’t move in. She’s got a housecleaning service going through. She said that she’s going to keep it though. Just in case.”

“That sounds like Barry,” Thea said. “At the very least, everyone can stay there when we go visit instead of getting hotel rooms.”

“Certainly a benefit,” Oliver said.
They all laughed a bit.

“‘You know, that’s not what I meant,’” Tommy said a bit more seriously.

“I know,” Oliver said. He sighed. “But I don’t know what we’re going to do now. I mean, you’ve always been my best friend, and you already treat Thea like a little sister.”

“I should probably stick you in my will,” Tommy said, giving Thea a considering look. “At the moment, it’s a sixty-forty split between Laurel and Ollie. I could change it to a sixty-forty split between you and Laurel.”

“You don’t need to do that,” Thea said immediately.

Tommy shrugged.

“Rightfully, it’s part yours anyway. By the way, do you want Merlyn Mansion?”

“Not in the least,” Thea said quickly.

Tommy nodded.

“Do you have any objections to me cleaning out the interior and then destroying it?”

“None at all,” Thea assured. “Honestly, you could probably sell tickets to the destruction. I’m sure plenty of people would pay for it.”

“I’ve considered it,” he said.

They laughed again.

“What about Mom?” Thea asked quietly. “I mean, we were finally on good terms with her. This is what she was afraid of coming out during the trial. We promised that we’d always love her, no matter what came out. This came out. Should we really stop being family for this?”

“You’re the one she lied to the most,” Oliver said quietly. “How are you feeling about this?”

“I don’t know. I…I wish Barry were here,” Thea admitted.

“Me too,” Oliver said.

“Me three,” Tommy said.

They both looked at him.

“She probably could have diffused this whole Laurel-Sara argument faster. Then I wouldn’t have angry Lances hanging around my house.”

“Except for the fact that she’s Sara’s ex-girlfriend and they both slept with me when Livvy was conceived,” Oliver pointed out. “I’m sure that would get thrown out again.”

“Well, maybe they’d keep their tempers if Sparky was around,” Tommy said. “How is she, anyway?”

“Still living at her mom’s bedside,” Oliver said. “They’re talking about transferring her again.”

“Where could they possibly transfer her?” Tommy asked. “You’ve got her in the best long-term
“STAR Labs has offered to help her, since they were the cause of her coma in the first place,” Oliver said grudgingly.

“What are you going to say?” Tommy asked.

“It’s not my decision,” Oliver replied. “Boyfriend or not, Livvy’s father or not, no one knows about these things. Barry’s medical proxy is Joe. He hasn’t said yes yet, but he’s thinking about it.”

“I’m sure he’d still consider your opinion,” Tommy said, but Thea cut in.

“He only tolerates Oliver. Oliver may be Livvy’s father, but that also means that Oliver knocked Barry up. And that’s not even counting the whole marriage-in-Vegas thing.”

Oliver winced.

“He tolerates me. But he still thinks of me as a spoiled rich boy – kind of like Officer Lance thinks of you – so he doesn’t particularly like me, and he’s always going to think that he knows best when it comes to his daughters.”

“So, Barry’s moving?” Thea asked.

“Maybe,” Oliver said. “I was considering calling Joe and asking if he thinks it would be good for Livvy to get away from it for a bit, maybe come spend a weekend out here. But I’m not sure, since I’m not talking to Mom at the moment. Plus, I don’t know how she’d react to staying at the house without Barry.”

“You two could stay at Laurel’s apartment,” Tommy offered. “It’s got two bedrooms. I mean, I should ask Laurel, but I don’t see why she’d mind. She paid for a three year lease, but I couldn’t stay in the apartment with this,” he gestured at his wheelchair, “so we’re paying for it without using it.”

“Is it still furnished?” Oliver asked.

Tommy nodded. “Sparsely, but it still has the basics. And you could move some of Sparky’s stuff over there if you want to.”

“If Laurel agrees,” Oliver said. “I’m not actually sure whether or not she’s speaking to me at the moment. I know she’s not speaking to Sara.”

“Did you know she was alive?” Thea asked.

“I knew she didn’t die on the Gambit,” Oliver admitted. “But I fully believed she was dead.”

“Why didn’t you tell anyone she made it to the island?” Tommy asked incredulously.

“She asked me not to, if she died,” Oliver admitted. “I thought she was dead, so I said she died on the Gambit.”

“What did happen?” Thea asked.

Oliver shook her head.

“That’s her story to tell.”
Thea rose from the table and announced, “I’m going to go tell my boyfriend that I’m apparently the bastard child of Moira Queen and Malcolm Merlyn. Ollie, come by the club tonight?”

“Sure,” Oliver said.

“Make sure to let me know if Livvy’s coming!” Thea called as she showed herself out of the house.

Tommy looked over at him.

“You know she just wanted to leave so she could be alone, right?”

“Yeah,” Oliver said. “Like she said, I wish Barry were here.”

Tommy rolled his wheelchair into the kitchen.

“Wanna get drunk?” he called out. “My dad’s liquor cabinet was pretty much the only thing I took from the mansion whole.”

“Getting drunk sounds fantastic right now,” Oliver admitted. “What’s the strongest thing you’ve got?”

“I’ve got Everclear,” Tommy replied.

“Add it to some expensive wine and we’re golden,” Oliver said firmly.

He pulled out his phone and sent a quick text to Dig, Felicity, and Sara.

*Getting drunk with Tommy. Don’t be surprised if you don’t hear from me.*

On Friday, Oliver picked Livvy up from the airport. He had to do some fast-talking with the Ferris Air flight attendant to explain why *Oliver Queen* was picking up a six-year-old who’d just flown halfway across the country on her own, but he threw out the dead-father, mother-in-a-coma, old-family-friend cards, and he didn’t show up in the gossip pages the next day, so he assumed she’d bought it.

Livvy was…tired. She had bags under her eyes, though it looked like she’d gotten into her mom’s makeup and tried to hide them. Considering she was currently living with Joe, Oliver could only assume she stashed it when she picked her clothes up from the house at one point.

“Hey, Sparky,” he greeted, giving her a small hug before ushering her off to the car. Dig was driving, so Oliver got to sit in the backseat and talk to his daughter. Hopefully he’d manage to corner her and figure out why she wasn’t sleeping – besides her mom being in a coma.

“Why are we at Auntie Laurel’s?” Livvy asked as they pulled up in front of Laurel’s building.

“We’re staying at Auntie Laurel’s old apartment this weekend,” Oliver explained. “Since Grandma’s running for mayor, there’s a bit too much press around the mansion, so I didn’t want you to get caught up in it. Laurel and Tommy have their own house now.”

Livvy stared at him.

“Okay,” she said. “What’s the real reason?”

When did she get so perceptive?

“Mom and I aren’t talking at the moment,” Oliver said with a sigh. “Some of the things she’s done
recently...I don’t want her around you.”

Livvy nodded.

“Is that why you told Poppa not to answer her phone calls or let her in?” she asked.

“That would be why,” Oliver replied. “Come on. Let me show you where you’ll be spending the weekend.”

Livvy was perfectly happy with her room. Between himself, Diggle, and Roy, they’d managed to move Livvy’s entire bedroom at the mansion over here. A good portion of Oliver’s room was here as well; Laurel had told him that he was welcome to stay there until he was ready to go back to the mansion – or until her lease ran out, at which point he was responsible for renewing it.

Sara arrived not long afterwards.

“Livvy, there’s someone I’d like you to meet,” Oliver said. He was standing in Livvy’s room while Sara was just outside the door. She took that statement as her cue to enter the room.

Livvy tilted her head, eyes focused on Sara’s face.

“Auntie Sara, aren’t you supposed to be dead?” she asked, confused.

Sara smiled at her.

“I was missing, like your dad was. He thought that I was dead too, and there were reasons that I couldn’t come home. But everything’s fixed now, so I’m back home.”

Livvy smiled, but then it dropped.

“Mommy isn’t home anymore,” she said quietly. “She has to stay at the hospital. Except now they’re moving her, but not home. She’s going to STAR Labs.”

Sara knelt down so she was eye-level with Livvy and took her hand.

“I know,” she said quietly. “But I also know that your mom loves you very much and I’m sure she’s trying very hard to heal so that she can come home and be with you again. Because she loves you very much, and all she wants is to be back with you.”

Livvy smiled sadly.

“I know. Thank you, Auntie Sara.”

“So, Sara’s here to meet you, not see me, so why don’t you pick a game for us to play?” Oliver recommended.

Livvy immediately went to her backpack and pulled out a deck of cards.

“Poker?” she asked with an innocent smile.

Oliver sighed inwardly.

“I’ll go get the M&Ms.”

Of the seven rounds they played that night, Oliver and Sara each won one and Livvy won five. Oliver didn’t remember until he was attempting to sleep that night that Barry had taught Livvy to
cheat at poker.

Oliver spent most of Saturday with Livvy – which included going to see *Frozen*. She’d seen it five times, but Oliver had never seen his daughter’s latest obsession. The singing snowman was certainly something, and those songs were going to be stuck in his head for the next week. That evening, Felicity came by to babysit Livvy while he went to the mansion where he and Thea were hosting a cocktail party for Sara’s homecoming. Their mother wasn’t there, which was good, since neither of them were talking to her at the moment.

Thankfully, Livvy was asleep by the point Felicity had to pull out her laptop to direct Oliver and Sara to a murder via clock hand.

There was no more murder the next day, so Oliver let the city survive on its own until after he’d taken Livvy to the airport.

Early Monday morning, the Arrow and Canary interrupted a bank heist led by the clock-obsessed brain that had managed to steal the Kord Industries skeleton key.

Oliver really needed to talk to Ted Kord about thinking through some of his projects. The man was brilliant, but never thought of the implications of some of his brilliant ideas.

It was only after they attempted to track down William Tockman and got their entire system blown up for their efforts that Sara begged him to come to her family dinner. Her reasoning was that Tommy was going to be there, considering it was at his house, so there was no reason she couldn’t bring back-up as well.

“Oh,” Dinah Lance said as she opened the door.

“Hey, Mom,” Sara said, stepping forward to hug her mother.

“Hi,” Dinah responded. “Oliver, I didn’t know you were coming.”

“I didn’t either,” Oliver replied. “But I’m here as backup. I’m not really sure what kind of backup. Backup for Sara, backup for Laurel, possibly backup for Tommy so he doesn’t have to hide in a corner alone if things start getting crazy,” he joked.

“And I’m very glad for it, buddy,” Tommy said, rolling into the entryway. “Come on. You can help me finish dinner while they chat.”

“Tommy, the extent of my cooking ability involves a fire and a spit,” Oliver pointed out, but he followed his friend into the kitchen anyway. He paused to hand off the bouquet he’d picked up to Laurel.

“For the hostess,” he said. “And as thanks for letting me borrow your apartment.”

“It’s no problem,” Laurel replied. “But thank you. They’re lovely.”

The evening was…tense, to say the least. Laurel still wasn’t happy with Sara, and she wasn’t happy that her ex-boyfriend who had cheated on her with her sister had shown up at her house in the company of her sister.

She made a very pointed comment about Barry’s condition at one point, which Sara snapped at.

“For God’s sake, Laurel! Do you think I would do that to Barry? Do you think that I would sleep with her boyfriend while *she’s in a coma*?! Do you really think so little of me?” Sara demanded,
“You did it to me,” Laurel shot back. “You went behind my back and slept with my boyfriend. Why should things be any different now that he’s dating your ex instead of your sister?”

Dinah Lance gasped slightly. Oliver had forgotten that she had never been clued in on Barry and Sara’s relationship…and the circumstances surrounding Livvy’s birth.

“I still love her!” Sara exclaimed. “I wouldn’t hurt her like that!”

“No, but you hurt me!” Laurel yelled. “You’re my sister! And you betrayed me!”

“He would’ve cheated on you anyway!” Sara yelled back. “He propositioned me, not the other way around!”

“Oh, for the boat trip, yes, but Barry told me what happened the night of her graduation. It wasn’t Barry who invited my boyfriend into your bed. It was you. You’re the one who started all this!” Laurel said.

The other four adults in the room were watching them go back and forth. Officer Lance looked like he wanted to intervene, but Dinah laid a hand on his arm. Tommy and Oliver exchanged glances. Neither of them wanted to be there for this.

“You’re the one who was too threatened by me to listen when I was honestly trying to tell you your boyfriend wasn’t ready to settle down!” Sara replied.

Tommy nudged Oliver, then jerked his head towards the kitchen. Oliver nodded, and silently got up from the table and grabbed Tommy’s wheelchair, pulling it out of the room with the yelling sisters.

The Lance parents apparently thought they had the right idea, because they joined them a few minutes later.

“Well, this could be going worse,” Tommy said quietly. He rolled over to the fridge and pulled out the cheesecake he’d apparently stashed for dessert.

“I thought you hadn’t figured out cheesecake yet,” Oliver said suspiciously – though still quietly. They could still hear the Lance sisters yelling, and they didn’t want to interrupt.

“I got this recipe from this guy on Pinterest,” Tommy replied. “It’s cinnamon roll cheesecake. I did a test run yesterday and it turned out fine. Thea and Roy ate all of it.”

He cut the cheesecake and passed out slices and forks.

Once they were all happily munching on dessert, ignoring the continued yelling from the dining room, Officer Lance asked, “So why are you here, Oliver?”

“I wanted to explain myself,” Oliver said quietly. “Why I said that Sara died on the Gambit…even though I knew she didn’t.”

“You knew she wasn’t dead?” Dinah demanded.

“No!” Oliver said. “I was positive she was dead! I just…I knew that she didn’t die on the Gambit. As far as I knew, she died almost two years later. But she made me promise, that if I made it home and she didn’t, to say that she died on the Gambit. She didn’t want you to know
what she went through. She probably still doesn’t. I won’t say what – that’s her story. But I do want to apologize for lying.”

“I can understand that,” Quentin Lance finally said. “Was it the last thing she asked you to do?”

“No,” Oliver said, “but we were worried it would be.”

He nodded.

“I’ll withhold judgment until I hear her story, though,” he said, jerking his head towards the dining room, “from the sounds of it, that won’t be happening tonight.”

Sara ended up storming out a moment later, and Laurel stormed up the stairs, yelling, “Tommy! I’m going to bed!”

Tommy put his plate in the sink.

“That’s my cue,” he said. “You are all welcome to stay and eat dessert – or go grab the pizza in heat it up. I’m going to check on Laurel.”

“I’ll go check on Sara,” Oliver said, rising from his chair and placing his own plate and fork in the sink.

“Do you know where she’s staying at the moment?” Quentin asked. “She hasn’t told me.”

“It’s a house that Barry has in the city,” Oliver told him. “It’s safe. Hidden in plain sight in the suburbs. I’ve been checking up on her.”

“Thank you for taking care of my daughter,” Quentin said, squeezing his shoulder. “Both of them.”

“I’ve done enough to hurt them both,” Oliver replied as he left. “It’s the least I could do.”

The rest of the night was taken up with stopping William Tockman. Felicity was the one to do it, even though she got shot in the process. Sara stitched her up. She was nice and calm about it thanks to Dig’s contribution of oxycodone.

The next day, a 911 message from Thea meant that he missed Sara and Laurel’s reconciliation conversation. He arrived home to find out that not only was Thea not present, but Slade Wilson was.

After a tense hour and a half tour of the mansion with his mother, sister, and Slade, he finally got the man out of his house when Roy and Sara showed up. Unfortunately, someone knocked Dig out so he couldn’t take the headshot and end the threat of Slade permanently…again.

As soon as they were sure they weren’t being watched, Oliver flew to Central with Sara and left Dig to protect Felicity and Roy to protect Thea. He had to make sure that Barry and Livvy were safe.

Upon arrival, he found out that Barry had finally been transferred to STAR Labs. The scientists there were kind enough to leave him alone to talk to Barry. He checked for cameras first, and then turned on the sound muffler Felicity had provided him with before starting the one-sided conversation.

“Slade’s alive,” he told her. “I don’t know how. I don’t know why. I’m checking the security
around you and Livvy. When Joe asked why I was in town, I said I was here for our anniversary. I told him to reinforce with the school who was allowed to pick Livvy up. I said that it was in case Mom tried something. I’m not worried about Mom. I know she won’t do anything – not yet, at least. Not until this campaign’s over, not until we’ve had time to make up again. She’s mad at me too, since I told Thea.”

He looked around the room they were in. It was much more…alive, than a hospital room. This was the main room in STAR Labs; they’d called it the cortex.

“The scientists here seem nice,” he told her. “Only one of them is a medical doctor, Dr. Snow, but she’s apparently more research-based than hospital based. They’re down to a skeleton staff. It’s Dr. Snow, Dr. Wells, and this other guy, Cisco Ramon. They’re all geniuses, like you and Livvy, but with different specialties. I know you know all about Harrison Wells; Dr. Snow has her MD and two doctorates. Ramon’s a mechanical engineering genius. I think you’d like them, if you could talk to them. You’d certainly keep up with the conversation more than I can. Livvy’s charmed them all, of course. She’s already roped Ramon into supervising her electricity experiments. I did background checks on all three of them, of course. They’re good people, safe to leave our daughter around.”

He leaned over her bed and kissed her unmoving lips.

“I should probably let the others back in,” he said regretfully. “Sara’s here to see you again. She’s been having a nice time seeing Iris and Joe. They like her more than they like me – at least Joe does. Probably because your girlfriend couldn’t get your pregnant, even though she was involved in the situation that did get you pregnant.”

He sighed.

“I’m worried, Bare. Slade being alive…he promised to kill everyone I cared about, to make me suffer like he did. I’m worried he’ll come after you and Livvy, that he’ll find out about you. But I promise to do everything I can to keep you safe. And yes,” he said, knowing exactly what she would say to that, “I will put Livvy’s safety over yours, though I’d prefer to keep both of you safe.”

He related more of the past few weeks, then finally turned the muffler off and let the others back in. Sara promptly kicked him out and turned the muffler back on to have her own conversation with Barry – probably about the status of her resurrection and her family relationships – so Oliver went off to chat with Dr. Harrison Wells about the security around STAR Labs.

Oliver simply said that there’d been a threat against him and his family, and he was worried that would extend to his girlfriend and her daughter. Harrison Wells assured Oliver that the security around STAR Labs – even though the building was still damaged after the particle accelerator explosion – was still top-notch and that Barry and Livvy would be perfectly safe while there.

Oliver arrived back in Central City on Monday. He and Sara spent the next month looking for Slade. He was nowhere to be found.

Dig got recruited by Amanda Waller of all people to travel with his ex-girlfriend and a team made up of their enemies – including Deadshot, Bronze Tiger, and Shrapnel – to go after a warlord Dig had saved in Afghanistan. That mission resulted in Oliver doing something he knew he’d come to regret later: he went to talk to Amanda Waller about Slade. He hated the woman for what he’d done to him, but she had power, power that could be used to protect his and Sara’s families, especially Barry, Livvy, and Dinah Lance, who were far away from them in Central City.

Trouble showed up when Frank Bertinelli was captured in a police raid. Considering the last
Oliver had known of him, he’d been in police custody…well, he was certainly curious about that story. His arrest brought more bad news: Helena Bertinelli was alive.

“I thought you said she was dead,” Sara said.

“I thought she was,” Oliver replied.

“The police never found her body after I removed it from the foundry,” Diggle said. “I don’t know how she survived, but she did.”

“She popped up on my radar again six months ago in Italy,” Felicity said. “Last known sighting was a month ago, in Palermo. She’s been torturing and killing mafiosos who might know where her father is.”

Even more trouble showed up when Laurel was assigned as the ADA in charge of prosecuting Frank Bertinelli.

“She’s going to be in danger,” Sara fretted.

“Then we’ll just have to protect her,” Oliver told her.

Helena managed to get into town without them noticing due to her decoy, which resulted in Roy getting shot and almost losing it. That was followed by Helena showing up on the first day of the trial, which turned out to be a trap for her. Oliver managed to get both Laurel and Frank Bertinelli out of the killing field of the courthouse lobby, but only Frank Bertinelli made it out of the building.

Sara and Tommy were not happy with him.

They managed to save the hostages, but only by making a deal with Helena to trade Frank for Laurel. The trade was interrupted by the police. Everyone made it out alive…except Frank Bertinelli, who died in the shootout.

The end of the frankly terrible night was Thea telling him that Roy kissed another girl in order to force her to break up with him, since she wouldn’t when he asked earlier. He offered to drive her home – or even to Laurel’s apartment, since he knew that she still wasn’t talking to their mother – but she refused. She wanted to be alone.

Oliver really wished Barry were there.
“I just can’t stop thinking what’s the worst that could happen if I told her the truth,” Roy said the next day.

“Oliver told Barry the truth and she got struck by lightning,” Felicity remarked as she came in. “To be fair, that probably won’t happen again, statistically.”

Once he made it to work, Adrienne was ready with a mile-long to-do list he needed to accomplish before the board meeting – the annual board meeting, which meant that Isabel Rochev was going to be there. The meeting went surprisingly well, all things considered. She wasn’t acting nearly as evil as she had in the past.

That evening was the debate, which was interrupted by a video of Thea. She was crying, and a man in a bi-colored mask held a gun to her head. Big block letters on the screen spelled out, “How much is Thea Queen’s life worth to you?”

In the midst of that catastrophe, Isabel offered to take the position of CEO so that he wouldn’t have to deal with it. She was the second-highest ranking person in the company as the representative of Stellmoor, even though she didn’t have an official title. Before she’d resigned as co-CEO, Laurel had suggested, ‘interfering busybody.’

“I need to check the written agreements,” Oliver said quickly. “Give me an hour while I look into things.”

Tommy rolled into the room he’d appropriated for legalese reading.

“Anything I can do to help?” he asked.

“How do you feel about taking over Camelot Consolidated?” Oliver asked.

“Wait, what?” Tommy said.

Oliver glanced around to make sure they were truly alone. The glass windows were such a pain sometimes.

“I need to find Thea,” he said in a low voice. “With my night job. The problem is, there’s a board vote tomorrow that the CEO cannot skip. Based on the contract we wrote out where you handed
over your control of thirty percent of Camelot Consolidated to me, I can reverse it and instead hand
over control of all fifty percent to you, making you the CEO of Camelot Consolidated so that I
don’t have to give it over to Isabel Rochev.”

He nearly spat the last two words.

Tommy shivered.

“That woman’s a snake,” he said. “Laurel had a lot of not-nice things to say when she had to deal
with her.”

He took a deep breath.

“I’ll do it. If that’s what you need. So you do what I need and go save our sister.”

“I will,” Oliver said firmly. “Is Laurel here?”

“She’s with your mom,” Tommy said.

“We need to get her in here to write up the new reversal. And make sure all the legal terminology
fits. And let her know that I’ve shanghaied her boyfriend into her old job,” Oliver said.

Tommy reported that Isabel seemed angry when he rolled in – literally – as the new CEO.

More digging resulted in them finding out that Isabel Rochev worked for Slade. Oliver threatened
her, but she didn’t reveal where Thea was.

Thea was eventually dropped off at the precinct, shaken. She revealed that Slade had told her that
she was Malcolm’s daughter, not Robert’s. She’d had to pretend like she didn’t know. She wryly
told Oliver that she’d be a lot more shaken if she hadn’t known that already, so thank you for
telling her when he found out. It was good to know someone in her family didn’t keep secrets.
That made Oliver wince inwardly.

The one good thing about the kidnapping was that their family was talking to one another again.
Oliver and Thea both moved back into the mansion with their mother, all of them needing the
closeness. Their mother – while she may have been terrible at many typical mothering traits – was
at least good at comforting Thea after her breakup and kidnapping. She mentioned that Roy had
been at the office with the group of people looking for her, which only made Thea start crying
again. She and Moira ended up Skyping Livvy – who was, as always, in Barry’s hospital room – in
order to cheer her up.

Oliver didn’t know where Roy was. He had stormed out of the foundry when they couldn’t find
Thea. That was only part of the bad news: Tommy was voted permanent CEO of Camelot
Consolidated, as the board considered Oliver ‘flaky’ due to all the meetings he’d missed while he
was looking for Slade. Slade managed to acquire a group of prisoners that would probably be his
new mirakuru experiments. Felicity pointed out that Isabel could let Slade into the CCASD
building to access the centrifuges there, and there was nothing they could legally do to stop her.
She then pointed out an option that Oliver didn’t like – and practically cemented his bad weekend –
but was the only thing they could do to stop Slade.

They blew up the Robert Queen Applied Sciences Center.

It backfired on them. Slade broke into the foundry, beat them all up, and stole the skeleton key,
which he then used to break into STAR Labs. Thankfully, Cisco Ramon and Dr. Caitlin Snow
were visiting, and both Oliver and Felicity knew them from visiting Barry. Oliver was the better
liar, but Felicity had conversed with them more often, so she and Dig went to talk to them. The only thing they told them was that Iris visited a lot and Livvy lived at Barry’s bedside, which they already knew, so it was mostly a bust. Felicity ended up hacking Harrison Wells’ files to discover that Slade had stolen a patent-pending bio-transfuser that would allow him to transfer his blood to multiple people at once.

Two days later, the bio-transfuser turned on. Oliver’s plan to take down Slade while he was weak went awry. He wasn’t the one in the device. Roy was. He didn’t manage to take down Slade or Isabel, though Dig shot the later with a double-tap to the chest, but they did manage to rescue Roy.

He didn’t wake up for a week, and when he did, he wasn’t Roy anymore. He took down several men – including killing a cop – but Oliver couldn’t find him, even with Sara and Felicity’s help. Dig would have been helping, but Oliver sent him to guard Thea instead. Sin eventually told Sara that Roy was at the clock tower. When they went to confront him, they only succeeded in getting Oliver’s knee horribly messed up. Thankfully, a doctor at Glades Memorial was willing to treat him as a thank you for stopping the interruption of medicinal shipments to the hospital.

The Moira Queen for Mayor rally was at Verdant that night. Oliver had just arrived in the main part of the club when Mark Francis, a friend of Walter’s and part of his mother’s campaign staff, told him his mother was dropping out of the race. Confronting his mother about it meant that he talked her into staying in, but it also revealed that she knew he was the Arrow. She told him that she hadn’t slept since she figured it out, but that she was proud of him. Her only question was whether or not Barry knew. Oliver assured her she did.

The rally went well, but surprisingly, Thea ended up making her own speech. It only took one look at Dig to figure out that she knew about Roy.

Roy ended up attacking the rally. Sara nearly killed him, but Oliver managed to shoot him with enough pit viper venom to kill an elephant – or keep down an angry super soldier. Felicity and Dig were happy that they managed to keep him alive, but Sara was upset with herself. She claimed she was too dark, that she could never be with someone as light as Barry, and Oliver deserved to have her to himself in order to bring out the inner goodness he liked to hide.

When Oliver climbed into the limousine with his mother and sister, Thea immediately said, “You knew about Roy. That’s why you had your bodyguard stalking me.”

“I didn’t know,” Oliver said, sighing. “I’d heard something about a guy in a red hoodie beating people up indiscriminately. I didn’t want to believe it was Roy, but I wanted to take precautions just in case. But since I didn’t know, I didn’t want to worry you. I just wanted to protect you.”

“By not telling me the truth,” Thea said. “That’s something we – all of us – need to work on. Truth. The two of you think you’re protecting me by lying, by keeping secrets. But that’s what’s actually hurting me.”

Oliver thought on that for a moment. Could all of this have been avoided if he’d brought Thea into things at the same point he brought Roy in?

“You’re absolutely right,” his mother said. “We need to turn a new page.”

“It’s not gonna be that simple,” Thea said. “Or easy.”

“I know,” their mother said. “If the truth were easy for me, we wouldn’t be in this situation. But to start, there’s something about Malcolm that both you and Oliver need to know. Malcolm…”
She was interrupted by the car getting struck and glass shattering everywhere. Oliver knew no more.

When he awoke, he was tied up and his mother was crying his name.

“I was dead the last time you were offered this choice,” a harsh voice said. Oliver would know it anywhere.

“Slade,” he said. HE fought to get out of the ropes, but the former ASIS member had done too good of a job.

“What’s happening?” Thea sobbed.

She and his mother were kneeling next to each other, hands tied behind their backs. All of a sudden, Oliver knew what was going to happen.

“I often wonder how you looked,” Slade said, “when he pointed the gun at Shado and took her from me.”

“You psychopath,” Oliver ground out. “Shado…Shado wasn’t yours!”

“No, she was yours,” Slade said, leaning in close to his face. “’Til you chose another woman over her.”

“That’s not what happened!” Oliver yelled back, struggling in his bonds.

“It is what happened!” Slade yelled back. He stood up. “It is! She told me!” He pointed towards the woods around them.

“What do you mean she?” Oliver asked. “There’s nobody there!”

“Slade,” his mother said in realization. “You were on the island. With Oliver.”

His sister looked at him in shock.

“I thought I had known true despair until I met your son,” Slade growled, leaning in towards Moira.

They were terrified. His mother and his sister were tied up, in the woods, and terrified, and it was all his fault.

“I trusted him,” Slade continued, “to make the right choice.”

“Let me make the right choice now,” Oliver said. “Kill me. Choose me!”

“No,” his mother said.

“Noo!” his sister wailed.

“Please!” Oliver asked.

“I am killing you, Oliver,” Slade said. “Only more slowly than you would like.”

He pulled out a gun and released the safety.

“Don’t,” Oliver begged.

Slade pointed the gun at his mother.
“Choose.”

“No, no, no,” his sister sobbed.

“Don’t choose,” Oliver said.

“Choose,” Slade reiterated, moving the gun to point at his sister.

“No!” his mother said.

“I swear to God I am going to kill you,” Oliver said.

“Choooose!” Slade roared.

“No! No!” Oliver yelled back.

His mother pushed herself to her feet.

“Mom?” Oliver said shakily. “Mom, what are you doing?”

“There’s only one way this night can end,” she said. She turned to face Slade. “We both know that, don’t we, Mr. Wilson?”

“Mom,” Oliver cried out. “Please don’t.”

“Both my children will live,” his mother said, stepping towards Slade.

“Mom,” Thea sobbed. “What are you doing? Mom!”

“Thea, I love you,” his mother said. “Close your eyes, baby!” she said as Slade raised the gun to point at her forehead.

“No!” Oliver yelled.

“No,” Thea sobbed.

“You possess true courage,” Slade said. He lowered the gun and put it back inside his jacket. “I am truly sorry.” He turned away. “You did not pass that on to your son!”

He spun around, drawing his sword as he did, and thrust it through Moira Queen’s heart.

“No!” Thea yelled. “No!”

All Oliver could do was crumple to the ground.

Slade pulled the sword out and his mother’s body fell to the ground. Her face ended up right in front of him. Her eyes seemed to be staring into his soul.

“There is still one person who has to die,” Slade said over the sound of Thea’s sobs. He moved so his sword was next to Thea’s neck.

“No,” Oliver said.

“…before this can end,” Slade said. He cut Thea’s bonds and walked away.

Thea crawled over to their mother.
“Mom?” she said. “Mom?” She fell onto their mother’s body, sobbing.

Eventually, she recovered enough to crawl over to Oliver and attempt to undo his bonds.

“I-I can’t get them,” she said, still crying. “They’re too tight.”

“Do you have your phone?” Oliver asked, trying to ignore the tears rolling down his face.

Thea felt around in her pocket.

“Yeah,” she said quietly.

“Call 911,” he told her.

He watched as she shakily dialed the numbers and put the phone up to her ear.

“I’m… I’m Thea Queen,” she told the operator shakily. “Slade Wilson, he-he kidnapped me again, and my mom, and my brother, and he killed my mom.” She paused. “No, he’s gone, but my brother’s still tied up and I can’t get him loose and Mom…” She choked up and started sobbing again. She eventually told the operator, “Not really. The car got hit, so bruises and a couple scrapes.”

She looked over at Oliver.

“Are you… are you hurt?” she asked tremulously.

Oliver wriggled in his bonds, trying to check.

“Not really,” he said. “My knee’s probably messed up even worse than before.”

“His knee was already hurt,” Thea said into the phone. “He says its probably worse.”

The operator stayed on the line with Thea until the police and ambulances showed up, a good twenty minutes later. One of the police officers cut Oliver free while paramedics ushered Thea into an ambulance. They tried to send Oliver to a different one, but he refused.

“I’m not leaving my sister,” he said firmly.

The officers acquiesced.

The rest of the night was a blur. They were patched up in the ambulance, though the paramedics insisted Oliver’s knee required a trip to the hospital for an x-ray. They were set up in one of the luxury rooms at Starling General, and detectives were sent to get their statements.

They weren’t allowed to be in the same room during that part, but Tommy and Laurel showed up in time for Tommy to plant himself at Thea’s side and Laurel to take a seat at Oliver’s.

“I need to call Walter,” Oliver murmured. “And Joe.”

Laurel laid a hand on his arm.

“I’ll do it,” she said.

Oliver handed her his phone. She made the calls, first to Walter, then to Joe. Both were asleep, but Walter said he was headed straight to the hospital, and Joe said he’d bring Livvy in the morning.
If he’d been on the phone, he might have tried to protest, but he honestly wanted his daughter with him, so he could be sure she was safe.

He needed to be sure she was safe.

The doctors decided to keep him overnight. Thea declared that she wasn’t going to leave his side. Dig planted himself outside the door, with Felicity at his side.

Thea was angry. Oliver knew that she was angry that he’d never mentioned Slade might be a threat. He tried to assuage her anger by saying that he’d apologized for what had happened, and Slade had said everything was forgiven, and he hadn’t know until he’d kidnapped Thea that there was a danger.

She told him that he should have explained everything at that point. She was probably right. She promised that she still loved him. He told her he loved her too.

He was released the next morning, and arrived back at the mansion just in time to greet Joe and Livvy. Tommy and Laurel also showed up and claimed they were moving back in temporarily.

The funeral was a week later. If it weren’t for Livvy, Oliver probably wouldn’t have gone. He wanted to be alone. But he couldn’t do that to his daughter. Were it not for her, he probably would have gone to ground as soon as he was released from the hospital. As it was, he ended up at the funeral, seated between Walter and Thea, with Livvy and Joe on Thea’s other side.

The detective hadn’t been there the entire week. He had work, and he’d already taken off enough days due to Barry’s accident. Iris had exams this week. She brought Livvy to Starling, then returned home. Joe had come out the day before to watch over Livvy during the funeral. Despite their protests, Oliver paid for the tickets.

The funeral was solemn. Everyone was dressed in black, including Livvy. His color-loving daughter hadn’t owned a black dress, but Laurel had taken her shopping so she’d be dressed properly for the funeral. She’d ended up in a long black dress and matching patent-leather shoes. Oliver had paid for it, but he didn’t want to know how much designer clothes had cost last-minute. Of course it was designer. His mother wouldn’t have stood for her granddaughter wearing anything less to her funeral, and Laurel would have known that.

His mother was being laid to rest beside his father’s tombstone, so there was no press there. They were on the now very well-guarded grounds of Queen Mansion. Each guest was given pink roses to lay atop the coffin. Walter was the first to rise and lay his rose, followed by Laurel, Tommy, and Quentin, who were seated in the second row. Oliver ended up having to guide Thea to the coffin to lay her rose. Livvy was carried by Joe, her fluffy black dress spread out around his waist.

The reception was held in their living room. Oliver stayed beside Thea the whole time, one arm wrapped around her waist, as they accepted condolences from everyone who’d shown up. Tommy and Laurel were hovering in their vicinity – well, Tommy was hovering, Laurel was just with him. Oliver had sent Joe and Livvy upstairs as soon as they’d come inside. They didn’t need anyone asking who Livvy was and why she was the only child at Moira Queen’s funeral.

The only surprise was when Isabel Rochev showed up to give her condolences…for the future deaths of Dig and Felicity. It took a lot to not punch her.

Once Livvy and Joe were safely on a flight back to Central City, he gave Thea a hug, told her he
needed some time, and went to ground in his back-up base. Slade had shown that the foundry wasn’t safe. But no one knew about this place.

Thea was fine. She was occupying herself with the club. Tommy was running Camelot Consolidated and keeping Isabel Rochev busy now that she was back from her two weeks off. Laurel was helping her father with...something, Oliver wasn’t sure what. But all three were staying in Queen Mansion still, so Thea wasn’t alone. She still had one brother and sister-figure with her, even if the other set weren’t available.

Just as he had every day since her coma began, Oliver wished Barry was there. Not only would she have done better to comfort Thea, but she probably could have cooked up the mirakuru cure already. Chemistry was her specialty. It had only taken her a few hours to come up with a Vertigo detox, both times he’d needed it.

Dig and Felicity found him a few days later. Waller told them. Of course she did. He told them his plan to give himself up, then went home to talk to Thea. Tommy was trying to talk her out of leaving. She told him she was going to Central. Joe had told her she was welcome there, if she needed to get away. It had helped her once, so she decided to go again. He urged her to go. The further she was from Starling City, the better.

That made his decision. He called Isabel and told her he’d be at the pier. Instead of being taken by Slade and Isabel from there, he was taken by Dig, Felicity, and Laurel.

Finding out she knew was a shock, but she managed a pep talk that got him to agree to fight instead of giving up his life. Finding out she’d been right all along, that Sebastian Blood was the man in the skull mask, was another shock.

He had dinner with Sebastian that night. Oliver tried to talk him out of helping Slade, even revealed that he was the Arrow, but the man wouldn’t listen. Thankfully, Dig and Felicity did a better job interrogating Sebastian’s bodyguard. The mirakuru army was using the sewers, which meant all they had to do was blow it up and drop it on them.

Unfortunately, that went wrong as well, and the mirakuru army began attacking Starling City at 9 o’clock on the dot. Laurel also didn’t listen, which resulted in her saving Oliver’s life, but they then got cornered and Oliver had to bring the ceiling down on them. They were separated by the debris. Oliver was able to crawl out from under the concrete, but he had to talk Laurel through firing an explosive arrow to get her out of it. He knew she could aim a gun, but she could apparently aim an arrow as well.

Laurel went off towards the precinct while Oliver, Felicity, and Dig drove towards the courier from STAR Labs with the cure. His car had crashed at the 4th street bridge due to the mayhem. Tommy reported all the different reports coming in, thanks to the lines Felicity had set up. He also reported that Laurel had gotten in trouble, but she was safe. Sara was back. Officer Lance called in with the news that he was a detective again, and the police force would be working with the Arrow to stop the siege.

They were almost to the bridge when a group of mirakuru soldiers toppled their van to stop them. They managed to escape, but Felicity was unconscious. She woke up soon enough, and they almost made it to the car, but the courier was killed and the cure stolen. They retreated to the clock tower to regroup. Dig went to the foundry to get Roy out, since it was compromised. Oliver almost gave up, but Felicity managed to give him a decent pep talk. She was half-crying at the time, but she still did a good job.

Sebastian Blood called a minute later. He revealed that Oliver was right and that he wanted to
help. He claimed to have the mirakuru cure, and told Oliver to meet him at City Hall. Tommy reported that Sebastian was leaving Camelot Consolidated with a briefcase, but he couldn’t tell whether or not it had the STAR Labs symbol.

City Hall was strewn with bodies. Sebastian was looking out his window.

“As a young boy, I was plagued by nightmares,” Sebastian said. “Every night I would wake up in a cold sweat, frightened and alone. It was my father’s face that haunted me.” He held up his mask. “And this was how I saw him. The embodiment of desperation and despair. I made this mask to conquer my fears, and to remind myself why I fight, every day, to give this city’s most desperate a chance. All I ever wanted to do was help people, Oliver. Help me believe.”

“Where’s the cure?” Oliver asked.

“Slade Wilson will not rest until he honors the promise he made you,” Sebastian warned.

“I won’t be so easy to kill once we level the playing field,” Oliver said in a low voice.

“He’s not interested in killing you. Not until he’s taken away everything and everyone you love,” Sebastian said.

“After he murdered my mother, he said one more person had to die,” Oliver remembered.

“The person you love the most,” Sebastian said. “He already has her. He sent men to get her. She’s on the way now, from Central City.”

Oliver felt himself pale.

“I’m sorry,” Sebastian said.

The mayor moved to his desk and leaned down. Oliver heard Dig cock his gun behind him, but Sebastian pulled out the STAR Labs briefcase.

“I hope you can beat him with this,” Sebastian said. “For all our sakes.”

Oliver took the briefcase.

“And when this is over, I promise you, I will do everything in my power to rebuild Starling City. And I won’t just make it what it was. I will make it better. Like I always planned,” Sebastian said quickly.

“You really think,” Oliver said incredulously, “after everything that’s happened, after what you’ve done, that they’ll still let you be mayor?”

“Why not?” Sebastian said. “No one knows I’ve done anything except try to save this city. And if you tell anyone about my mask, I will tell them about yours.”

“Do what you have to, Sebastian,” Oliver said. He turned and walked out.

“You guys okay?” Tommy asked over the comms.

“We’re good,” Dig said. “And we have the cure.”

“Are you at that other location yet?” Oliver asked his best friend.

“Yep,” Tommy confirmed. “Though how safe it is, I don’t know, considering the bad guys are
forty stories up.”

“No one knows that floor exists,” Oliver reassured. “Did you?”

“Not until I came down here. Nice of you to put in an elevator, by the way. Even if it’s only big enough for my wheelchair. And I had to lower myself down manually,” Tommy said.

“It worked,” Oliver pointed out.

“Yeah,” Tommy said. “Good thing I’ve been doing arm workouts. Your bowl of water suggestion was a nice one, even though Laurel yelled at me for making a mess.”

“I can hear you, you know,” his girlfriend replied.

“I know,” Tommy replied. “So, I know this is really bad timing, and I haven’t actually asked permission yet, but I don’t want either of us to possibly die before I get answer. Dinah Laurel Lance, will you marry me?”

There was a strangled noise over the comms.


“Dad, Tommy just proposed to Laurel over phone call,” they heard Sara say.

There was a pause.

“Tommy, Dad says congratulations, and if you both survive this, he’s going to kill you for not asking permission first,” Sara reported.

“Congratulations, you two,” Oliver said as they headed for the clock tower. “I’m happy for you. Sorry to interrupt, but I need Felicity to call STAR Labs, and Tommy or Laurel to call Joe. According to Sebastian, Slade’s already kidnapped the person I love the most, and she’s on the way from Central City.”

“Barry or Livvy?” Laurel gasped.

“I don’t know,” Oliver said grimly. “That’s what I need you to find out.”

Felicity got through to STAR Labs first.

“Caitlin’s on night watch,” she reported. “Barry’s safe in her bed, and there is apparently no way that she could have been replaced by a decoy with how many monitors she’s hooked up to.”

“Joe?” they heard Laurel say over the comms. “It’s Laurel Lance. Sorry to wake you, but it’s an emergency. I need you to go check on Livvy right now. Right now!”

A tense minute later, Laurel said tightly, “Livvy’s gone. Joe put her to bed at eight, and they’re two hours behind us. She could have been gone for up to five hours now.” She paused again. “Joe wants to know if this was the same person who took Thea and killed your mom.”

“Yeah,” Oliver said, choking up a bit. “Tell him I think so.”

Laurel did so. She then said, “Go ahead and call the police there. I’d call the ones here, but they’re a little busy at the moment.” She let out a bitter laugh. “Turn on any news station from Starling and you’ll see what’s going on. I need to go. We’ll get Livvy back. Bye, Joe.” She paused again, presumably to hang up the phone. “He’s calling the police so they can go over
Livvy’s bedroom. I’m not sure how much use it’s going to be if she’s already on her way here.”

“Slade means to kill her,” Oliver said tightly. “I’m not going to let that happen.”

When they made it back to the foundry, Oliver argued that they needed to test the mirakuru cure on Roy, despite Felicity’s protests. He was about to do it, but couldn’t bring himself to stab his protégé. Detective Lance called Felicity then to tell him to turn the TV on. There were reports of a military convoy arriving in Starling. Oliver knew immediately it wasn’t actually the military.

He called Amanda. She finally admitted that she was planning to blow up the city and its half a million inhabitants. She told them that they had until dawn before Starling was a crater.

Oliver used that incentive to inject Roy with the cure. They had no time to waste anymore. Before he could wake up, a proximity alert went off revealing ‘Slade’s goons’ were there to kill them. Roy woke up just in time to go down the cable Oliver fired. They’d just landed on the ground when an ARGUS helicopter showed up and the clock tower exploded. They looked up to see Lyla standing there in tactical gear, holding a M-72 light anti-tank weapon with a 66 mm high-explosive anti-tank round.

All five of them arrived at the foundry to find it trashed. Slade’s army had been by. Oliver instructed Lyla to go back to ARGUS and stall Waller and sent his team to find as many injection arrows as possible. No one was going to die that night. Dig decided to go with Lyla to ARGUS. Oliver handed Lyla an earpiece before they left.

“Hello?” she said as she put it in.

“Hello!” Tommy greeted. “This is Tommy Merlyn from Team Arrow communication – well, not headquarters, since that’s where you all are, and it got trashed, but Team Arrow secret lair! You’re Diggle’s wife?”


“Nice to meet you, even though I’m not actually meeting you. Oliver, why do you get a cool name and I don’t?” he asked.

“Do you want a name?” Oliver asked as he started scrounging for injection arrows.

“I think I do,” he admitted. “I think I’ll call myself the Chairman. Since, you know, I’m overseeing all of you right now and I’m the chairman of the board at Camelot Consolidated, and…”

“Because you’re literally in a chair,” Oliver said with a sigh, though he smiled at his friend’s humor. “Good call, Chairman.”

He heard Tommy give off a quiet, “Yes!”

Diggle mentioned that they would need an army, so a new voice said she brought one.

Sara had apparently recruited Nyssa al Ghul and a group of assassins to help take down Slade in return for her returning to the League. Oliver wasn’t happy about it, but he passed out earpieces to all of them anyway.

“Chairman, we’re adding in Nyssa al Ghul and a bunch of assassins. I don’t know their names; they didn’t introduce themselves. Don’t introduce yourself.”
“Will do,” Tommy replied. “Nyssa al Ghul, Bunch of Assassins, I’m Chairman, and I’m your communications director. Good luck out there.”

They headed towards Camelot Consolidated. It was time to take down Slade. Roy broke off from the group. He said that he had something to take care of, that it was important. They left Felicity in the lobby until they were done.

At Camelot, they took down all of Slade’s men, but the villain himself escaped. Nyssa killed Isabel Rochev. Oliver didn’t want anyone to die…but he was glad to see her go. Laurel and Tommy probably would be too.

Oliver switched his comm to a direct line to tell him. Tommy cheered at the news, and then passed it on to Laurel. She didn’t respond.

“Nyssa gave her a sedative,” Sara explained. “She’s probably still out.”

Laurel and Quentin showed up at their impromptu war meeting a few minutes later. Apparently they’d nearly died when another of Slade’s men had broken in, but Laurel had managed to blow him up with a trio of grenades. Sara and Oliver were both very proud of her. Of course, Quentin nearly show Nyssa, but calmed down at Sara’s say-so.

All of them were needed when they found out the army was amassing at a tunnel, with the intention of escaping the future destruction of Starling City. Laurel and Felicity volunteered for a back-up plan to take down Slade, and went to Queen Mansion together.

“For Livvy?” Laurel asked in a quiet voice before she left, once her father was out of hearing distance.

“For Livvy,” Oliver confirmed, equally quiet. There were some things that the assassins in the room didn’t need to know about.

The tunnel battle was…intense, but they were successful. Slade’s army was defeated. Then Slade himself called.

“You’ve been busy, kid,” his former friend greeted.

“It’s over, Slade!” Oliver replied from where he was standing on the hood of a taxi as his – not really a team, he didn’t want to count the assassins as teammates, his group, maybe? – looked over the piles of bodies on the ground. “Your army is broken!”

“And I pity them,” Slade replied. “But once again, you missed the point. I have the one you love. You’re going to meet me where I say. Otherwise, I’m going to kill her. And she’s such a sweet thing, your little girl. Long blonde hair, big blue eyes – I must admit, I considered taking the woman you love, but then I found out your current interest is in a coma. I thought you had a thing for stronger women, but once I met her, I saw the appeal. She was still in the hospital then, back before they moved her to STAR Labs. I must admit, that would have been a bit difficult to break into, but that’s not why I didn’t choose her. It’s because, when I was leaving that hospital, I saw that little girl. She was going to visit her mother. The nurses said she did so every day. Wasn’t it a surprise when I borrowed a bit of her hair and ran a DNA test? You never told me you were a father, kid.”

“She’s just a child,” Oliver argued. “She’s only six. Less than half the age your son was when you left for Lian Yu.”

“And now my son is an trained killer for ASIS, just like I was,” Slade replied. “Children grow up,
Oliver. But if you want yours to grow up, you’ll do as I say. And for a little extra incentive, I have a couple more of your friends. Dear Sara’s sister is here, as is your new interest. I should have known you wouldn’t be faithful to your little coma patient, even if you’re the father of her child. But then again, she’s quite lovely, your Felicity.”

Oliver went to the Slade-ordered meeting place at the City Public Works. He was inside. There were a lot of pipes. He could hear Slade talking as he walked through the large, low-ceilinged room, arrow drawn.

“Twitch, and I will open your throat,” Slade said. His voice echoed all around the room. “My first words to you. Do you remember? I do. I remember that exact moment, my blade against your neck, just like my blade is against the neck of your child. If only I’d killed you then, everything would be different.”

Oliver turned a corner to see Slade with his katana at Livvy’s neck. Laurel and Felicity were each kneeling on the ground beside them, arms crossed behind their backs in the same positions that Slade had forced his mother and Thea into that terrible knight almost three weeks before. Each had a mirakuru soldier pointing a gun at their heads. Oliver spared them a brief glance, but kept most of his focus on his daughter, whom Slade held against him. She was only up to his ribcage, dressed in her favorite Merida nightgown with her hair in dual braids that were falling out. She wasn’t even wearing shoes. She had faint tear tracks on her cheeks. Oliver wasn’t sure whether she was shivering because she was cold or because she was terrified. Probably both.

“Daddy?” she said in a small voice.

“It’s me, Livvy,” he told her.

“Drop the bow, kid,” Slade instructed.

“Did you hurt her?” Oliver asked in response. “Did you hurt her?!”

“She’s not hurt,” Slade said. “Dear Sara’s sister asked the same thing. I was even kind enough to let her check on her, to make sure that the little plane trip didn’t do anything.”

Oliver glanced at Laurel.

“She has a few bruises, but she’s okay, Ollie,” the lawyer said shakily.

Good.

“Drop the bow, or she’s not going to stay okay,” Slade threatened.

Livvy started crying again.

“It’s all going to be okay,” he told Livvy, even as he lowered his bow to the ground.

Slade smirked at the sight.

“Yes,” he said. “Countless nights dreaming of taking from you all that you took from me!”

“By killing the one I love most?” Oliver questioned.

“Yes,” Slade nearly hissed.
“Like you loved Shado,” Oliver said. It wasn’t a question.

“Yes,” Slade replied.

“You see her,” Oliver said. “Don’t you?”

Slade stared at him, then glanced over to the side. Oliver was right. He’d seen her. He still saw her.

“What does she look like, in your madness, Slade?” Oliver asked. “What does she say to you?”

Slade turned, but he dropped Livvy as he did so. She was still crying, but it was quieter now. Oliver could see her clench her hands in her nightgown. Slade didn’t quite free her. He still had his blade at her throat, but it was lower now. Livvy on her knees was much shorter than an adult would be.

“I remember her being beautiful. Young. Kind,” Oliver told his former friend. “She would be horrified by what you’ve done in her name.”

“What I have done,” Slade growled, stepping away from Livvy, his sword leaving her throat as he pointed it at Oliver, “what I have done is what you lack the courage to do! To fight for her! So, when her body,” he jerked his head backwards towards Livvy, who was now fully behind him, “lies at your feet, her blood wet against your skin, then you will know how I feel!” he yelled.

“I already know how you feel,” Oliver replied. It was time. Livvy pushed herself to her feet. “I know what it’s like to hate. To want revenge. And now I know how it feels to see my enemy so distracted he doesn’t recognize the real danger in front of him.”

Livvy took a flying leap – courtesy of all her martial arts and gymnastics lessons – and grabbed onto one of the straps on Slade’s shoulder with one hand, her bare feet finding the slight protuberance made by his belt. With that leverage, she reached out her other hand and stabbed Slade in the neck with the cure before jumping off of him and bolting away.

“Kill them!” Slade yelled to his minions. “Kill them all!”

They didn’t have a chance. Sara took down the minion guarding Laurel while Nyssa took the one guarding Felicity. Roy scooped Livvy up.

“Uncle Roy?” Oliver heard her ask as he scooped up his bow.

“Get them out of here!” he ordered the rescue team.

The battle wasn’t over. Even before the mirakuru, Slade was a trained assassin. He was hard to fight. They ended up on the roof, in a similar position the last time Slade had almost killed him, when the ARGUS drone flew by. Most of their fight was similar to their last one, despite the fact that Oliver was much better trained now.

“We both know there’s only one way that this can end,” Slade said. “To beat me, kid, you’re gonna have to kill me.”

He pulled himself to his feet, and Oliver did the same.

“But in the moment of my death,” Slade continued, “you’ll prove one thing. That you are a murderer.”
They fell from the roof the ground and finished their fight. Oliver tied Slade to a pillar with multiples of his tripwire arrows. Unlike the last time he defeated him, he wasn’t going to stab him through the eye with an arrow. It hadn’t been effective anyway.

Oliver hopped slightly. His ankle was twisted, possibly broken.

“You can kill me or not,” Slade said. “Either way, I win.”

Oliver let out a breath and tapped his comms.

“Chairman,” he instructed, “patch me through to ARGUS headquarters.”

“On it,” his best friend replied. “And…go!”

“Amanda, it’s over,” Oliver told his former boss. “Slade’s down, his army’s been taken out. Call back the drones. Amanda, it’s over!” he yelled.

“She’s recalled it,” Dig’s voice came over the line.

“So what now, kid?” Slade asked.

“So, Amanda,” Oliver said into his comm, “Slade’s cured. You wanna come pick him up?”

“I’m sending a squad,” Amanda Waller replied. “Keep pointing an arrow at him for now. And Oliver?”

“What.”

“You have my apologies, that our agents in Central City did an insufficient job of protecting your daughter. I’m glad that she is safe. I know what it’s like to lose a child, and I wouldn’t wish that on anyone that I still hold respect for.”

Oliver didn’t know what to say to that. He gritted his teeth instead.

“End call,” he ordered.

“It’s ended,” Tommy said, “but, just in case, you’re still connected to Dig and his girlfriend. Who according to Waller is pregnant with his child. So, you might want to start planning baby gifts.”

Waller’s men were efficient. They were there ten minutes later to take Slade into custody.

Per Oliver’s instructions, Nyssa, Felicity, Sara, Laurel, Roy, and Livvy had gone back to Camelot Consolidated. Quentin had gone back to the SCPD, and Nyssa’s assassins had gone…somewhere. Oliver should probably care more, but his entire focus was on the little girl sitting on Sara’s lap, wrapped in Sara’s jacket with Nyssa’s cape over her lap.

“Daddy!” she cried out, lifting her arms.

He picked her up, though he had to immediately sit down in the chair Sara vacated due to his injured ankle.

“Livvy,” he said, clutching her tightly. “I’m so sorry, princess. I’m so sorry.”

She was crying. It made him start crying. They just held each other for several minutes while everyone else in the room pretended they weren’t there.
“Are you okay, princess?” Oliver finally asked, looking her over. It was hard to tell, since Sara’s jacket covered all of her arms and hands and half her torso. Someone had also found socks for her, though they were massively too big.

“My arm hurts,” she admitted.

“We think it might be broken,” Sara said. “But we thought you’d want to take her to the hospital…but I’m not sure you’d get her into the hospital at the moment. Everything’s a bit of a mess.”

“Do we have the materials for a splint?” Oliver asked.

“Tommy bringing some over,” Laurel said.

By that he presumed she meant that he was getting the massive first aid kit he had stored in the backup location in the sub-basement, then taking the elevator up.

“Those of us in costume probably need to change,” Oliver said with a wince. “There’s no telling when Detective Lance is going to come back, and it would probably be better for him to see Oliver Queen comforting his recently kidnapped daughter than the Arrow comforting a child he has no reason to have met.”

“And that is why Tommy is also bringing spare clothes,” Laurel said.

Oliver looked down at his daughter.

“You’ve been really brave tonight, Sparky,” he told her. “Sir Sparky the Valiant definitely earned her title.”

“I hurt the bad guy with the cure Cisco and Caitlin have been working on,” Livvy said proudly. “Does that mean I’m a superhero, just like you?”

Everyone in the room covered up snickers.

“You are definitely a superhero,” Oliver told her, “though I’m not sure I qualify.”

“No,” Livvy said stubbornly. “You are. You’re the Arrow. Mommy said the Arrow was a hero who saved people. In a mask, so that people you loved would be safe. Like me and Mommy. Does Mommy know you’re a superhero?”

“Your mom knows,” he assured her. “She actually made my mask.”

Livvy nodded, then looked at the other people in the room.

“Mommy’s amazing,” she told them.

“I am sure your mother is a wonderful woman,” Nyssa told her. She looked up at Oliver. “You have a beautiful child. And she is far braver than most adults.”

“I was hoping she wouldn’t have to, but Felicity and Laurel both had a second vial of the cure to slip her just in case,” Oliver told her. “But the way Slade had them, neither Laurel nor Felicity could get close enough to inject him. Livvy could.”

“And I did,” she said proudly. “I saved the day.”

“You did indeed,” Oliver said, hugging her again. “You saved the city, Sparky.”
“Is Sparky my superhero name?” Livvy asked.

“It is until you’ve graduated college and passed fighting tests with both me and Sara,” Oliver said quickly. He didn’t want her getting any ideas.

She let out a sigh.

“Ohhh-kaaay,” Livvy said. She perked up. “Since you’re a archery hero, does that mean you can teach me how to use my bow better? I want to come see you for the summer.”

“Are you sure, princess?” Oliver asked.

She nodded sadly.

“Mommy can’t play with me, and Auntie Iris is going to be working a lot now that her dis-ser-ta-shun is done, and Poppa is always working. I want to come see you and Auntie Thea and Auntie Laurel and Uncle Tommy and Auntie Sara. And Mr. Dig and Miss Felicity,” she added. “And here you’re a hero.”

“That’s a secret, Livvy,” Oliver said firmly. “We can’t tell anyone about it.”

She nodded solemnly.

“I understand,” she said. “Who does know?”

“Everyone in this room, your mom, and your uncle Tommy,” Oliver said.

“No telling Auntie Thea? Or Auntie Iris or Poppa?” Livvy asked.

Oliver shook his head.

“No telling them. I know you can keep a secret, Sparky, but this one you need to keep from even them. You can’t tell anybody about it.”


Oliver hugged her again.

“Thank you, Sparky.”

“Sparky!” Tommy greeted, rolling into the room with a large first aid kid on his lap and a large bag tied to the side. “Good to see you! How are you feeling?”

“I’m shaky,” Livvy said. “That’s why I’m sitting with Daddy.”

“Well, I’ve got some clothes for your daddy to change into, so why don’t you come sit with me for a few minutes while he stashes the super-suit?” Tommy offered.

Livvy hesitated, then nodded. Laurel grabbed the first aid kit so that Oliver could deposit his daughter on his best friend’s lap.

“When I get back, we’ll see what we can do with your arm,” he told her.

She nodded, then winced in pain.

Oliver looked over at Laure and Felicity.
“Can you two try to figure out child-sized doses of pain medication?” he asked.

“On it,” Felicity said, pulling out her tablet.

“What’s wrong?” Dig asked, walking into the room.

“Livvy’s arm is probably broken,” Oliver reported. “Where’s Lyla?”

“Discussing with Amanda Waller whether disobeying your commanding officer or firing bombs without authorization from the higher-ups is closer to treason,” Dig replied. “She’ll be here soon. She’s not going to lose her job, but she’ll probably be taking some unpaid leave. I can splint her arm, if you’d like.”

Oliver knelt down – despite the pain – and looked at his daughter.

“Would you be okay with that, Livvy?” he asked.

She nodded.

“Mr. Dig is nice,” she said. “I know that. He and Miss Felicity gave me my bow. Which you’re going to teach me to use better.”

Oliver smiled at her.

“That I will. I’ll be right back, okay Sparky?”

“Okay, Daddy,” Livvy replied.

Oliver took the bag Tommy offered him and hurried to the nearest bathroom. He changed as fast as he possibly could with his ankle, which was definitely broken, before heading back out to the main office. Dig had already finished splinting Livvy’s wrist, and as soon as he saw Oliver limping, moved on to splinting his ankle.

Once they were all in normal person clothes, Laurel called her father.

“Hi, Dad. We’re all safe at Camelot Consolidated. We found Tommy and Oliver locked in a closet. The Arrow showed up with Livvy Allen as well. She got kidnapped from Central City as part of Slade’s revenge on the Queen family, but the Arrow rescued her. We’re all fine, mostly anyway. Bumps and bruises. Livvy’s arm is broken, and so is Oliver’s ankle, but those are the worst injuries. Oliver’s bodyguard already splinted them and wrapped them. Okay. Uh-huh. See you soon.” She looked around at all of them. “He’s coming by to take statements. Tommy, Oliver, I hope you have your closet story ironed out.”

Oliver called Joe next and told him that Livvy was safe, that she’d been rescued by the Arrow and was back with him now. He wasn’t sure when he could get her back to Central – according to all reports, the train station and airport had both been attacked by Slade’s goons, and the roads were a mess as well. Joe promised that he’d call of the police search for his granddaughter, and to please let him know when transportation was clear enough for him to bring Livvy back or them to come see her. He also promised to call the school in the morning and let them know she’d be out for an indeterminate period of time.

Detective Lance showed up shortly afterwards to take statements, primarily Livvy’s as a kidnapping victim. Livvy’s first question to him was, “Do you want the on-the-book story or the off-the-book one?”
Quentin had sighed and asked for the off-the-book one. Livvy managed to tell the whole story without revealing that Oliver was the Arrow or that she knew Sara was the Canary. She also managed to mention the closet story by saying that Slade had said that Oliver was locked up somewhere safe until he finished with the Arrow before finishing with the Queens.

Oliver wondered when his six-year-old got to be such a good liar.

Quentin hadn’t been happy that Laurel had been part of defeating Slade, or that Livvy had been the one to stab him with the cure, but he had simply sighed again and helped them compose an on-the-book story.

Livvy ended up staying until August. The thought of going home terrified her. She stayed through the clean-up, usually safely ensconced at Queen Mansion with Raisa. Thea had disappeared to parts unknown, saying she needed to leave Starling and she wasn’t sure she’d ever come back. She had dropped by Central City and said goodbye to Joe, Iris, and Barry, though the latter didn’t know about it. She’d wanted to say goodbye to Livvy, but with her still in Starling, it ended up being over Skype.

Oliver ended up making several speeches during the clean-up. Tommy had given the official position of ‘Chief Spokesman,’ so his sole job was press conferences, speeches, and making people think that Camelot Consolidated had a lot less to do with the Siege than it did. He ended up having to share that the Siege was a devious plot between Slade Wilson, the man who had kidnapped Thea Queen and killed Moira Queen, and Isabel Rochev, who had been working at Camelot Consolidated, to destroy the Queen family and Starling City as revenge for Isabel’s previous lover, Robert Queen, leaving her. It was definitely interesting to spin everything. He’d also revealed that Sebastian Blood had been involved as well, and the SCPD had confirmed that Sebastian Blood had written the press release concerning Moira Queen’s death the day before she had died.

Over the summer, he continued as the Arrow with Dig and Felicity’s help. Tommy and Laurel were still staying at Queen Mansion – supposedly because the road to their house got messed up, but he knew it was mostly so they’d be there for Livvy, and so he wouldn’t be alone.

By the time Livvy went back to Central, she had enough strength and skill to hit a bull’s eye at 20 yds. Oliver was proud. Dig and Felicity were impressed. Livvy promised to continue practicing when she returned to Central.

It wasn’t like they’d never visited Central. They’d gone back nearly every week to visit Barry. She still had no changes. Her coma wasn’t deep, but she wouldn’t wake up. For all intents in purposes, she was just sleeping.

Livvy returned to school in August. Oliver stayed with her for a week in Central in Barry’s house. She had attempted to sleep over at her bedroom – formerly her mother’s bedroom – at Joe’s house, only to have a panic attack. Iris moved in with her at Barry’s house instead, and Oliver updated the security, and she was able to sleep peacefully. She had gone to therapy in Starling, with the same therapist that was Barry and Laurel’s friend from college, Annie Green. She hadn’t been able to share everything, but it had been enough to prevent PTSD.

Even after Livvy was back home to start third grade, Oliver still traveled to Central every week. Now that the threat of Slade was gone and he wasn’t running a company, he had a lot more free time and didn’t have to worry about eyes on him. He did still have to run Verdant, since he still hadn’t found a new manager.

It was October when his phone rang while he was training in the foundry. He answered it without looking.
“Hello?”

“Hi, Ollie,” Barry said. “I’m back.”

Chapter End Notes

And we have reached the end of Arrow Season Two and the beginning of the Flash! I'm excited. I probably need to stop writing on this and go work on my other WIPs, but this is what I'm stuck on at the moment.
The first thing she was aware of was voices. A male and a female. Not Joe and Iris. And there was music playing…Lady Gaga?

Barry shot up in bed with a deep gasp. There were wires attached to her face and chest, and something medical-sounding started beeping.

“Oh my God,” the male voice said. He was standing across the room from her, but he didn’t look like a doctor and this didn’t look like a hospital.

“Where am I?” she asked. “Where’s Livvy?”

The woman announced, “She’s up!” and immediately started checking her pulse, eyelids, ears, and everything else a doctor did at a physical, except much faster, without the explanation the doctor normally gave, and without introducing herself. Barry tried to pull away, and began pulling at the wires on her chest as well.

“Look at me,” the woman said. “Look at me.”


“Where’s my daughter?” Barry asked.

“She’ll be here soon,” the man said. “She’s at school right now, but it’ll be getting out shortly. She comes here every day after school.”

“Who are you?” Barry asked. “Why am I here?”

“I’m Cisco,” the man said as the woman kept running tests. “Ramon. She’s Caitlin – Dr. Snow,” he said with a small roll of his eyes.

“I need you to urinate in this,” the woman said, holding out a plastic cup.

“Not this second,” Cisco said, snatching the cup from her. “Bedside manner, Cait.”

Barry looked around. The STAR Labs logo was indeed branded in several places, and there was a sweatshirt casually tossed over one of the chairs with the same logo. She was pretty sure she was actually at STAR Labs. Besides, she could vaguely remember seeing the woman – Dr. Snow – at the press conference right before the particle accelerator. The particle accelerator that had blown up…

“I got struck by lightning,” Barry said in realization.
Cisco and Dr. Snow both looked at her.

“Yes,” Cisco said. “Yes, you did.”

“How long have I been out?” Barry said. She could tell it had been a while. Her joints were stiff and there were tubes in awkward places, along with the nasal cannula and the IV in her arm.

“Nine months,” another man’s voice said. “Welcome back, Miss Allen.”

Barry turned her head to see Harrison Wells – now in a wheelchair, for some reason – standing beside a more familiar figure.

“Mommy!” Livvy yelled, dropping her backpack and lunchbox – not the same ones as before, but still Merida themed – and running towards her.

Despite the IV and the electrodes that still remained attached to her, Barry managed to reach out and grab her daughter. She hugged her tightly, pulling her onto the bed and onto her lap. She wasn’t sure who started crying first, but they were both crying soon enough. Thankfully, Dr. Snow stopped her tests while they were occupied.

Finally, she released Livvy from her embrace, though her daughter – nine months older? She was still six then, but almost seven now – remained on the bed, tucking herself under Barry’s arm.

“You were in a coma for ages, Mommy,” she said quietly. “Nine months. It’ll be ten in a few days. A lot happened while you were asleep.”

“Did you still move up to second grade?” Barry asked.

Livvy nodded.

“I’m in third grade now. I have a new best friend – it was getting too hard to be best friends with Margaret when she’s in a different grade. My new best friend is a boy, but he’s not gross like some of the others. His name is William. He’s really smart too, though not quite as smart as me,” Livvy said. She didn’t sound like she was bragging, merely stating a fact.

“Remember, Livvy, people are smart in different ways,” Barry cautioned. “Just because you might score better on tests, or because you’re younger but still top of your class, doesn’t necessarily mean you’re any smarter.”

“I know, Mommy,” Livvy said.

Barry looked over at the trio of scientists, who were huddled together on the other side of the room, probably to give them privacy.

“I’ve been in a coma for nine months?” she asked. “I had a friend in a coma last year. He didn’t wake up all of a sudden like I did. And his muscles were very weak. I feel completely fine, if a little stiff.”

“Your muscles should be atrophied, but instead they’re in a chronic and unexplained state of cellular regeneration,” Dr. Snow said, walking over and palpating the muscles on either side of her neck.

“So, otherwise, how am I medically?” Barry asked. She wriggled a bit. “I mean, I don’t feel like I have bedsores.”
“You don’t,” Dr. Snow said. “I made sure of that. Medically – as far as I can tell, anyway – you’re completely fine, now that you’re awake. There’s still a few more tests I want to run, but you shouldn’t be here too much longer. Tomorrow, probably. I want to make sure you sleep and wake up normally before I release you.”

“Mommy’s coming home tomorrow?” Livvy asked excitedly.

Dr. Snow smiled at her.

“I’ll do my very best to make sure she does, Sparky.”

“Hey, Sparky, why don’t you come show Dr. Wells and I how your practicing is going while Caitlin gets all those wires out of your mom?” Cisco suggested.

Livvy hesitated.

“Go on, sweetheart,” Barry said, nudging her slightly. “I promise I’ll still be awake when you come back. Dr. Snow just needs to take all these tubes out.”

Livvy looked over at Dr. Snow.

“You’ll call as soon as you’re done?” she questioned.

“I promise,” Dr. Snow said. She offered her pinky to Livvy, who grasped it with her own. They shook on it solemnly.

Livvy slid off the bed and took Cisco’s offered hand, walking to the door on the other side of the large room. She glanced back once before Cisco tugged her out the door, closing it behind him.

“Okay,” Dr. Snow said, putting on a pair of latex gloves. “Let’s do this.”

Half an hour later, Barry was disconnected from all wires and tubes, had changed into a STAR Labs sweatshirt and sweatpants, and was handed a box of pizza Cisco had ordered.

“That is not healthy food,” Dr. Snow scolded.

“Caitlin, she just woke up from a coma. She’s going to be hungry. IVs are not filling,” Cisco pointed out. “Pizza is.”

“I asked Sparky what your favorite was,” Cisco said. “She said pepperoni, olives, and jalapenos. I hope she was right, cause otherwise you ended up with a weird order.”

“No,” Barry said, opening the box. “She’s right.”

It was even from her favorite pizza place.

Cisco opened his own box, took out a slice of cheese, put it on a plate, and handed it to Livvy. She carried it over to the child-sized desk sitting by the wall. It was as close to Barry’s hospital bed as possible without interfering with her medical equipment.

“You came by every afternoon,” Barry said softly. “Is this where you worked on homework?”

Livvy nodded.

“And science experiments. Caitlin and Cisco and Dr. Wells supervised Mommy, so I was safe, even when I used electricity.”
“You’ve got a tiny electrical engineer on your hands,” Cisco said. “I wasn’t doing the kinds of projects she’s doing until high school. The computer she’s got there? She built it and programmed it herself. Felicity supervised, one of the times she was here.”

“Did Felicity come a lot?” Barry asked.

“One of your most common visitors,” Caitlin said. “First was Sparky, of course, then Iris and Joe. Felicity, Oliver, and John came as often as they could. Once a week, since summer.”

“I stayed with Oliver over the summer,” Livvy said. “I got kidnapped and taken to Starling, and then the Arrow rescued me, and then it was too hard to leave the city, so I just stayed. I came back to visit though.”

“You got kidnapped?” Barry demanded, immediately setting her food down and moving over to her daughter.

Livvy nodded.

“The bad guy broke my arm,” she said. “I had a cast on for a month.”

“She’s fine now,” Caitlin offered. “I checked her over once she came home, just to make sure it was fully healed.”

“I apparently need to make a phone call to Starling,” Barry grumbled.

Livvy leaned over, unzipped her backpack, dug around for a moment, and pulled out an iPhone. She handed it to Barry.

“When did you get a cell phone?” Barry asked – more like sighed. She was pretty sure she knew the answer.

“Oliver got it for me when I came back home,” Livvy said. “I got scared being at home at first, even with Iris there, so he got me a cell phone and George.”

“George?” Barry questioned.

“He’s my new doggy!” Livvy said cheerfully.

“So now we have two dogs?” Barry asked wearily. She was considering murdering her boyfriend.

Livvy nodded.

“George is a lot bigger than Wrinkle though,” she said. “He’s an Akita-wolf hybrid.”

Scratch that. Barry was definitely murdering her boyfriend.

“Are those legal in Central City?” Barry wondered aloud.

Livvy nodded.

“Oliver checked.”

“Can I call with all this medical equipment around?” Barry asked, looking at Caitlin.

She nodded.
“It’s shielded. Cisco and I worked on it as a side project, since...well, since the particle accelerator exploded.”

“I’m guessing that didn’t do much for STAR Labs reputation,” Barry said.

“No,” Caitlin said. “No, it did not.”

Barry didn’t press further. Instead, she unlocked Livvy’s iPhone – and this looked to be a newer model than she had, probably the newest there was. Seriously, Oliver? – and scrolled through the contacts. Livvy had been smart. Oliver’s number was listed under ‘Oliver,’ not ‘Daddy’ or something else incriminating.

Oliver answered on the first ring.

“Hello?”

“Hey, Ollie,” Barry said. “I’m back.”

“Barry?” Oliver demanded incredulously.

“It’s me,” Barry confirmed. “I woke up about an hour ago. Everything seems A-OK so far, and Dr. Snow says that she can probably send me home in the morning.”

“I’m flying out,” Oliver said, his tone brooking no arguments. “I need to go tell Tommy I’m appropriating the jet – he’s CEO now, long story – but then I’ll be on my way. There’s...a lot’s happened, Bare. We’ve got a lot to talk about.”

“Livvy mentioned a kidnapping and a new dog,” Barry replied. “And that she was apparently saved by the Arrow.”

“Yeah...she knows now,” Oliver said sheepishly. “I couldn’t really hide it, with what was going on.”

“I want more of this story, Ollie,” Barry said firmly.

“I know,” Oliver replied. “But it’s something you need to hear in person. I’ll be there tonight, okay? I’ll explain everything then. There’s a lot to cover. It’s been a rough few months.”

“Okay, Ollie,” Barry said. “I’ll wait. I love you.”

“I love you too,” Oliver replied. “See you soon.”

“See you soon.”

She hung up the phone, feeling oddly bereft, and handed it back to Livvy. She took a deep breath, steeling herself, and turned to Caitlin.

“So,” she said. “Are there anymore tests you need to run me through?”

“Not at the moment,” she said. “Dr. Wells wanted to speak with you, though, if you feel up to taking a walk.”

“Stretching my legs seems like a great idea,” Barry said. She finished off the slice of pizza she was in the middle of and stood up again. Dr. Wells was waiting at the doorway.

“Can I come?” Livvy asked in a small voice.
The scientist smiled at her. “Of course, Olivia.”

“I’ve always wanted to meet you face to face,” Barry admitted as they walked through the dimly-lit concrete halls.

“Yeah?” Dr. Wells said. “You certainly went to great lengths to do it. STAR Labs has not been operational since FEMA categorized us as a class four hazardous location,” he admitted. “Class four didn’t even exist until they gave it to us. But that’s what happens when you blow up a particle accelerator. Seventeen people died that night. Many more were injured, myself amongst them.”

He led Barry to an overlook. She looked down and saw the remains of the particle accelerator.

“Jeez,” she said. “What happened?”

“Nine months ago, the particle accelerator went online exactly as planned,” Dr. Wells said. “For forty-five minutes, I had achieved my life’s dream, and then, then there was an anomaly. The electron volts became unmeasurable, the ring under us popped. Energy from that detonation was thrown into the sky, and that, in turn, seeded a storm cloud…”

“That created a lightning bolt that struck me,” Barry said in realization.

“That’s right,” Dr. Wells said. “I was recovering myself when I heard about you. The hospital was undergoing unexplainable power outages any time you went into cardiac arrest, which was actually a misdiagnosis, because you see, you weren’t flatlining, Barry. Your heartbeat was moving too fast for the EKG to register it.”

“That’s impossible,” Barry objected. “If my heart was beating that fast, it should have exploded, my blood wouldn’t have time for oxygen to be distributed, something! I shouldn’t be fine and walking around right now.”

“We know,” Dr. Wells said, leading her back into the main room. “Now, I’m not the most popular person in town these days, but Detective West and his daughter gave me permission to bring you here, where we were able to stabilize you. You’d been in two different hospitals by that point: CCH and a private hospital paid for by your boyfriend. We stabilized you at the first, then after you were moved to the second, your problems started up again, so we moved you here.”

“I came every day I was here,” Livvy said solemnly.

Barry reached out and pulled her daughter into her arms again. The tight way Livvy clutched her back made her realize that Livvy was still not quite believing that her mother was back.

“She did,” Dr. Wells said. “Eventually, we offered to pick her up from school and bring her over here, so that Detective and Miss West didn’t have to interrupt their jobs to do so. It was the least we could do.”

“We have a rotation,” Cisco volunteered. “Sparky’s been great.”

Barry pulled away enough to raise her eyebrow at her daughter.

“Are you going by Sparky now?” she asked.

Livvy nodded.

“Since I moved up to second grade. You can still call me Livvy. Family still does. But everybody else calls me Sparky. Except Dr. Wells.” She made a face. “He calls me ‘Olivia.’”
“Olivia is a perfectly lovely name,” Dr. Wells said.

“Why don’t you work on your homework while they run some more tests?” Barry told her daughter. “I’m not going anywhere. Though maybe you should text your Poppa and Aunt Iris, let them know I’m awake.”

“It’s Wednesday,” Livvy said. “Poppa and Aunt Iris are both coming to pick me up today. They’ll be here in an hour.”

By the time Joe and Iris showed up, Drs. Wells and Snow had moved on from running tests to putting Barry through her paces. She’d already lifted weights, done push-ups, sit-ups, and pull-ups (she’d never been able to do those before), and had moved on to flexibility tests. Which basically meant they were running her through yoga poses.

“You’re awake!” Iris exclaimed, rushing over to hug her.

Barry dropped out of her warrior pose to return it.

“I’m awake,” she confirmed.

“Why didn’t you call us?” Joe asked, looking at the scientists.

“I’ve only been awake a couple hours,” Barry said. “They’re still running tests.”

“Should you even be on your feet?” Iris asked.

“Iris, I’m okay,” Barry said comfortingly.

“I watched you die, Barry. Your kept dying, your heart kept stopping. And all we could do was watch,” Iris said.

“It’s still beating,” Barry reassured, taking her hand and placing her fingers on the pulse point in her wrist.

“It feels really fast,” Iris commented.

“It is still higher than normal, but not at the same speeds we were seeing a few months ago,” Caitlin offered. “The uptick could be because she’s finally up and moving, not just lying in bed. So far, it’s nothing to worry about.”

Joe finally stepped forward to hug her as well.

“You scared the hell out of us, kid,” he told her.

“I’m back now,” she promised. “I’m okay.”

Caitlin had her run through a few more yoga poses before releasing her to catch up with Joe and Iris. The scientists clustered by their computer station, going over the results.

“Okay, nine-almost-ten-months that I missed, go!” Barry instructed.

Joe winced.

“Well, first thing you should know is that you were right about the Shelby and the farm,” Joe said. “Chyre and I found the Mardon brothers there. There was a shootout. Clyde Mardon shot and killed Chyre. Mardon and his brother died trying to escape. Their plane crashed.”
“Joe, I’m so sorry,” Barry said, eyes wide. Chyre had been his partner since they were kids.

He smiled tightly.

“I’m…I’m doing better. I talked to Rebecca a lot, though we’ve scaled back to monthly meetings now.” Rebecca Janus was the CCPD therapist. She and Barry tended to avoid each other, mainly because she’d tried to convince Barry that her dad was a murderer at some point, and Barry had used her psychology minor to talk circles around her. Needless to say, neither of them wanted another repeat.

“Do you have a new partner?” Barry asked.

“Eddie Thawne,” Joe said. “You remember him?”

Barry nodded.

“You still calling him Detective Pretty Boy?” she teased.

“Not to his face,” Joe replied promptly.

“Eddie’s nice,” Livvy put in. “He gives me candy when Poppa isn’t looking.”

“Livvy, half the station gives you candy when no one’s looking,” Barry said.

“Wait, what?” Joe asked.

“Nothing,” Barry, Iris, and Livvy chorused.

Sneaky candy gifts were time-honored tradition among the police station employees and the children who spent time there. Barry and Iris – as the children of a single-parent police officer – had been the recipients of candy repeatedly throughout their childhood. Until Livvy was old enough to be a recipient, Barry had kept candy in the pockets of her lab coat to hand out to any of the children running around. She still had candy in her lab, she just had to re-hide it every time Livvy found it.

“Okay,” she said. “Anything else?”

Iris and Joe exchanged glances.

“We’ll let Oliver tell you about Starling,” Joe said. “I assume he’s on his way?”

Barry and Livvy both nodded.

“I assume that has to do with Livvy’s kidnapping?”

“Oh. So she mentioned that,” Joe said, sagging into a chair.

“Yeah,” Barry said, perching on the edge of her hospital bed. “Where did it happen? When?”

“Mid-May,” Joe said. “I’d put her to bed at eight, and I didn’t know anything was wrong until Laurel Lance called in the middle of the night and told me to go check on her. She was gone.”

“You and I switched bedrooms at Dad’s house again,” Iris said. “For when Livvy was sleeping over there. She didn’t like sleeping there anymore. And I moved into your spare bedroom. I finally gave up my apartment.”
“Thank you for taking care of her,” Barry said, hugging her foster sister again.

“Of course,” Iris replied.

They passed along other tidbits of gossip from around the police station and their other friends – well, Iris’ friends that she dragged Barry along to hang out with occasionally (being a single mother was not conducive to her social life) – for the next hour before Oliver walked in.

“Barry,” he said breathlessly before running up and kissing her.

They probably gave the scientists and her family an eyeful, but it had apparently been nine months. Oliver needed this.

Finally, Joe cleared his throat loudly, and Oliver stepped away.

“Hi,” he said.

“Hi,” she replied.

“I missed you.”

“I missed you too.”

“How are you feeling?” he asked.

“Completely normal,” Barry admitted. “Better than normal, honestly. My muscles are actually in better shape now than they were before I got struck by lightning. I’m showing no signs of muscle atrophy, I woke up immediately, no going up and down the Glasgow scale. So basically, I’m in the same physical state I’d be in if I took a nap. Except my musculature has improved.”

“That’s weird, but not the weirdest thing I’ve ever seen,” Oliver admitted.

Barry patted the bed beside her.

“Okay, no one’s told me anything about you or the Starling City crew, except for the fact that Livvy got kidnapped from her bedroom and taken to Starling City,” she said.

“Do you want the long version or the short version?” Oliver asked. He sounded tired.

“Let’s start with the short version, then we can talk about the long version,” Barry prompted.

Oliver looked over at Joe, Iris, and the scientists.

“Is there a room we can go, to discuss things privately?” he asked.

“Down the hall, to the left,” Caitlin called, before immediately going back to the results.

Oliver grabbed her hand and led her out of the room. They ended up in what looked like it used to be the break room. He sat down on the couch and pulled her down next to him.

“So, remember the drug that made that guy into a super soldier, on that case you helped us with in Starling?” Oliver asked.

“Ollie, it’s been nine months for you. For me, that was yesterday,” Barry pointed out.

“Right,” he said. “Well, the mirakuru, it was given to Cyrus Gold by a man called Slade Wilson.”
“The one who was on the island with you?” Barry asked, remembering the story Oliver had told her of his first year on the island.

“Right,” Oliver said. “So, short version: my second year on the island, we encountered this scientist and his group of soldiers – they were basically a private army. He was based off of a boat called the Amazo. His name was Dr. Anthony Ivo, and he was searching for a Japanese super serum that was lost during World War II, mirakuru. Sara was on the boat. He’d been the one to find her after the yacht wrecked. I got captured by Ivo’s men, but ended up escaping with Sara. Slade was injured by Ivo’s men, badly. He was dying. We went looking for the mirakuru, found it, and injected Slade with it. We thought he died. Sara, Shado, and I were captured by Ivo, and Ivo told me to choose who to save: Shado or Sara. I couldn’t choose, and he shot Shado. Slade rescued Sara and I before Ivo could kill us. We attacked the boat later, and rescued the prisoners, but before I could kill Ivo, he told Slade that I picked Shado over Sara. He was unstable. He took over the boat, threw my in its cages, and promised to kill me and everyone I loved. Sara and I eventually ended up on the boat, in the brig, fighting Slade, when another friend of ours, Anatoly – one of the former prisoners from the Amazo – used the Japanese submarine to fire a torpedo at the Amazo. Sara got sucked out of the side of the boat. I thought she was dead, again. I defeated Slade, and had the opportunity to either inject him with the mirakuru cure or kill him. I chose to stab him in the eye with an arrow. It apparently didn’t work.”

“How did you find that out?” Barry questioned.

“Slade was the one who provided the mirakuru to the man in the skull mask, who then injected Cyrus Gold,” Oliver said. “Also, around the same time, Roy started developing mirakuru powers – as well as the rage that comes with it. I – as the Arrow – started training him in hope that he could control it. I eventually told him that I was the Arrow and introduced him to Dig and Felicity. Sara came back about that time, and we faced off with the League of Assassins to save her – oh, and she was dating the head of the League’s daughter, Nyssa al Ghul, before she left. So not only was she leaving an organization she wasn’t allowed to leave, she also ghosted her girlfriend. Sara revealed to her mom and Laurel that she was alive after that. She and Laurel were on rocky terms for a while, but they reconnected. My mom then decided to run for mayor. Two weeks later, I found her talking with a campaign contributor in the living room: Slade Wilson. He asked about Dad’s art collection, so Thea gave him the tour, and he ended up planting cameras all over the house. We then spent the next couple months fighting crime and tracking Slade down, before he kidnapped Thea. Oh, and we found out that Malcolm Merlyn was Thea’s biological father.”

“Wait, what?” Barry demanded.

“Malcolm Merlyn is Thea’s biological father,” Oliver repeated. “So Tommy is also her half-brother. And I kinda invited Tommy, Laurel, and probably Laurel’s parents to have Thanksgiving with us at your house. Since he’s family now. Sara made t-shirts. The technical term for Tommy and I is apparently ‘cross-siblings.’”

“Cross-siblings,” Barry said, testing the word on her tongue. “Okay. What happened next. Thea got kidnapped?”

“Yeah, I found out about her dad around the time Sara came back. Well, Felicity did. She confronted Mom and confirmed it, then told me, and I told Tommy and Thea. So none of us were talking to her for a while. Slade kidnapped Thea and sent in a video message in the middle of Mom’s debate. He didn’t hurt her, he released her a few days later, but he did tell her that Malcolm Merlyn was her father. Thankfully, she already knew, or our relationship might’ve gotten hurt. Mom and Thea – and me – ended up getting closer after that. Though that was when Tommy ended up CEO, ‘cause I needed to be the Arrow, and I didn’t have the time to find Thea while I
was busy being CEO. I’m not the Chief Business Officer instead.”

“What does that mean you do?” Barry questioned.

“So far? I coordinate with Tommy on things, serve as a general spokesperson for Camelot, and come up with plans to revitalize the city,” Oliver said.

“Why does it need to be revitalized? Besides the Glades earthquake, but I thought things were getting better after that,” Barry said.

“They were,” Oliver said. “I’m getting to that. So, we blew up the Applied Sciences building, because Isabel Rochev, the Stellmoor representative who ended up running half the company, turned out to be working for Slade and was using the building to make more mirakuru. Since he didn’t have access to that, he broke into the STAR Labs facility in Starling and stole a bio-transfuser. Your friends Caitlin and Cisco were there at the time, and managed to survive the attack, but the bio-transfuser allowed him to transfer his blood into multiple people at once. He had a whole army of mirakuru soldiers. Roy ended up going crazy from the mirakuru, and we had to take him down and keep him drugged with pit viper venom for a few weeks. Right after we took him down, Mom, Thea, and I were in a limo on the way home when we were kidnapped by Slade.”

Oliver looked grim.

“Slade put Mom and Thea on their knees in front of me, just like Ivo had done to Sara and Shado. He told me to choose. I couldn’t do it. So Mom offered her life instead. Slade stabbed her through the chest.”

Barry put her hand over her mouth. She felt herself start to tear up.

“Livvy came out for the funeral,” Oliver said quietly. “Iris brought her out. Joe came out for the funeral. Honestly, if it weren’t for her, I’m not sure I would’ve gone.”

Barry reached out and took his hand.

“How are you doing?” she asked quietly.

“I’m…coping,” he admitted. “Taking down Slade helped. We stopped him, and his army. STAR Labs made a cure for the mirakuru and sent it to us. Between me, Roy, Sara, her assassin girlfriend, and the army of assassins Nyssa brought with her, we stopped Slade’s army. Nyssa killed Isabel Rochev, but most of the other soldiers survived, but not before they trashed the city and destroyed most of the city’s upper-level leadership. The mayor, the DA, the chief of police—all dead. But before it was over, Slade kidnapped Livvy. He wanted to force me to choose between the person I loved most. He also kidnapped Felicity and Laurel, because I found the cameras and she and I planned a way to get her close to him with the cure so she could cure him.”

He winced.

“What did you do?” Barry half-asked, half-demanded.

“I told Felicity I loved her in front of the cameras,” Oliver admitted. “She and Laurel both had two vials of the cure. Once they were kidnapped, Laurel was allowed to check on Livvy, and she passed one vial of the cure to her. When I showed up as the Arrow and distracted Slade, Livvy managed to inject Slade with the cure. Laurel, Felicity, and Livvy were rescued by Roy, Nyssa, and Sara, and I fought Slade until I managed to tie him up. Then I passed him over to ARGUS, and they locked him up in a prison on Lian Yu.”
“Let me get this straight,” Barry said slowly. “You made our daughter part of your plan to defeat the super-soldier assassin who was hell-bent on destroying you and everyone you love. Our six-year-old daughter, who is barely four feet tall and maybe forty-five pounds.”

“If there’d been any other way, I wouldn’t have done it,” Oliver said quietly. “It was a just-in-case that I ended up needing. She saved Starling City.”

“And I’m very proud of her,” Barry acknowledged. “That doesn’t mean I’m not angry with you! And that’s before we start talking about the dog!”

“Oh. George.”

“Yes, George. Why did you get our six-year-old a wolfdog?”

“He’s very loyal? And a very good guard dog?” Oliver offered.

“Oliver.”

“She didn’t feel safe anymore,” Oliver said. “She stayed in Starling with me all summer, and she was fine after the first couple weeks. I was right there, I was the one that saved her, she was safe. But once we came back to Central, she started having nightmares again. She won’t even go into your old room at Joe’s house. I stayed for the first week she was back here, but I couldn’t stay forever. I rescued George from a dogfighting ring in Starling, and he’d been living in the mansion with us for a few weeks. I already knew he and Livvy got along, so when Iris called and said that Livvy was having nightmares again after I left, I brought George to Central. And it worked. She feels safe again.”

“How trained is he?” Barry questioned, resigned to the fact that she was going to have two dogs now.

“Very,” Oliver reassured. “Either you or Livvy, or maybe Joe and Iris, will need to welcome any guests into the house. If anyone comes in unannounced, he’ll growl at them. If anyone acts threateningly towards any of you, he’ll growl. He won’t attack unless ordered, except in situations where someone breaks in. He’s great with Livvy though. He adores her. He sleeps in her room most nights, and that’s what makes her feel safe again.”

Barry sighed.

“I suppose that’s acceptable. How long can you stay in Central?”

“I have a meeting with Tommy and the new CSO of Camelot on Monday,” Oliver revealed. “So, I’ll need to head back to Starling on Sunday.”

“How’s travel into the city now?” Barry asked.

“A lot of people are moving out, and the tourism industry is way down,” Oliver said. “The city hadn’t recovered from the Undertaking yet, and then the infrastructure nearly got taken down by Slade’s army. They’re calling it ‘the Siege.’”

“I’m so sorry, Oliver. I wish I had been there for you,” Barry said quietly.

“If you had, it would have been you and Livvy kidnapped, and I would have been forced to choose between the two of you,” Oliver said quietly. “I’m glad you were spared that.”

“I’d give anything for it to have been me instead of Livvy,” Barry said immediately.
“I would too,” Oliver admitted. “And thinking about that is how I came to terms with my mother’s choice. She couldn’t bear to see either of her children die, so she gave herself up for them instead. I knew you would do the same for Livvy, and I would do the same for both of you.”

“Let’s just hope that there are going to be no more giving-yourself-up for any of us,” Barry said.

“I hope so,” Oliver agreed.

They sat quietly for a moment. Barry leaned into Oliver, and he moved his arm to wrap around her shoulders.

“Any other news I missed?” she finally asked.

Oliver thought a moment.

“Roy and Thea broke up, almost got back together, but Thea left town instead. She was in Monaco the last time she texted. Roy’s still moping. Tommy proposed to Laurel in the middle of all of us running around during the Siege, and over the comms too. Laurel knows now, by the way. And Dig’s girlfriend, Lyla, is pregnant with his child.”

“That’s so exciting!” Barry exclaimed. “When’s the baby due? Do Tommy and Laurel have a date yet?”

“The baby is due on Livvy’s birthday, funnily enough,” Oliver said. “I warned them that Livvy showed up two months early, so don’t count on that date happening. Tommy and Laurel do not have a date yet, though Laurel was considering Christmas of 2015. And Laurel is also pregnant, which is why they didn’t want to have the wedding this year. She said she refused to wear a wedding dress with a pregnancy belly.”

“When’s the Lance-Merlyn baby due?” Barry asked.

“February,” Oliver said. “They’re expecting a girl. Dig and Lyla are having a boy.”

“Have they said anything about names yet?” Barry asked.

“Not yet,” Oliver said with a shake of his head. “Dig let Lyla pick, and she said she has, but Laurel and Tommy haven’t decided anything. They would have come out here, but Tommy’s busy as the CEO, and Laurel’s in the middle of a case. The DA’s office has been overworked since the Siege.”

“Is there a new DA yet?” Barry asked.

“Yeah, Susanna Stephens. Laurel seems to like her. Apparently she had blackmail on her last boss, so their working relationship was a bit tense,” Oliver said.

They sat quietly for another moment.

“How was your summer?” Barry asked. “Besides rescuing George from a dogfighting ring.”

“I’ve been working through the SCPD’s most wanted list,” Oliver said. “I’m trying to make the city safer, since it seems to be dying otherwise.”

“I believe in you, Oliver. Not just you as the Arrow. You as in Oliver Queen. You’re the part-owner of one of the biggest companies in the city. You and Tommy can bring it back,” Barry said firmly.

“Our new CSO apparently has some ideas along those lines,” Oliver said. “He’s going to present
them all next week.”

“I hope it goes well.”

There was a knock at the door. They both looked up, and Iris poked her head in. She frowned when she saw them.

“I was hoping you at least made it to shirtless while you were in here,” she said.

“Iris!” Barry exclaimed, feeling her cheeks heat.

Her sister laughed at her.

“We wouldn’t do that in here,” Oliver said firmly. “It’s a break room. We have standards.”

“Besides,” Barry said, recovering her composure. “I haven’t been cleared for sex yet.”

Iris let out a laugh at that.

“Well, I’ll see if I can convince Livvy and George to stay with Dad and I tomorrow,” she said with a wink. “But at the moment, the science team wants you back to discuss your results with you.”

Barry sighed, then accepted Oliver’s hand up.

“Once more into the breach,” she quoted.

The scientists determined that not only was she in perfect health, according to the results of her last physical, she was in better than perfect health, at least for her. Her physical fitness had improved, her metabolism was higher, and she had lower cholesterol. The only change was her heartbeat, which was still running faster than normal.

“So if I pass the sleep test, I can go home tomorrow?” Barry questioned.

Caitlin nodded.

“It’s mostly a precaution,” she said. “I just want to make sure that falling asleep doesn’t affect you in any way. But everything’s looking great so far. As far as I can tell, you’ll be home with your daughter tomorrow.”

She was true to her word. Caitlin woke her up at seven the next morning, and discharged her at eight. She was told not to drive for another week, and to come back immediately if she felt anything off.

Oliver stayed the entire weekend, showering her with attention and affection. He seemed to be attempting to make up for lost time. Barry, in return, did the same for both him and Livvy. Her boyfriend had lost his girlfriend for nine months, and her daughter had lost her mother. Of the two, the latter was more important, but since Oliver was only there for a few days, she placed her focus on him.

He ended up telling her about the past nine-to-ten months in Starling City in more detail, as well as explaining his second year on the island in more detail, concluding with the fact that he woke up after the Amazo sunk in Hong Kong, of all places.

She demanded more information after that, and he slowly started explaining his past with ARGUS, though he had to get an ARGUS non-disclosure agreement through Dig’s girlfriend for her to sign first. Dig’s girlfriend – Lyla – was apparently more than willing to get the agreement and file it
without telling Amanda Waller, since her boss had almost just bombed Starling City to dust despite the 576,000 people living in it.

He went back to Starling City Sunday evening, since he had a meeting with Tommy and the new CSO, Raymond Palmer, bright and early Monday morning.

Oliver was hesitant to leave, and Barry ended up having to push him out the door. It had been a few days, and there were no side effects. What could go wrong now?

Chapter End Notes

The whole chapter got too long, since my Barry was a lot chattier than canon Barry, so I split the chapter in two.
Monday went by normally. Iris took Livvy to school while Barry reorganized her house. Other people had cleaned for her, and she now knew where nothing was. Tuesday, Livvy was off school due to a pipe bursting in the elementary school. She was incredibly pleased to be spending more time with her mother after the two days she’d taken off school the previous week.

Barry ended up dressing up slightly and putting makeup on for to see everyone. She didn’t want to look like she’d just spent the last few months in the hospital. She’d put off seeing everyone while Oliver was there, but now that he was gone, it was time to do personally reassure everyone that she was still alive and awake. The dress she chose was one of Thea’s choices, and not something she remembered being in her closet previously. Once she was dressed, Livvy rushed to change into a dress in a similar shade of red.
They were happy to see her at the station. Joe hugged her again, glad that she’d been released.

“That was quite the nap you took, doll-face,” Detective Conwell said, patting her on the back. “Glad you’re back.”

She smiled back at him. Were it one of the younger members of the force who called her that, she would be offended, but Detective Conwell had known her since she was a kid, and had been calling her ‘doll-face’ for just as long. He didn’t much anymore, now that they were coworkers, but he apparently still pulled it out for special occasions.

“Thanks,” she told him.

“Detective West,” one of the female officers interrupted. “We’ve got a 5-15 in progress at Gold City Bank, two dead. Storm’s really picking up on the south side. I’d grab your rain gear.”

“I’m sorry, Barry,” Joe said, grabbing his coat off the coat rack. “I’ve got to run.”

“Do you need my help?” she questioned.

“No, there’ll be plenty for you to do once you’ve settled in,” Joe said, wagging his finger at her.
“Let’s go, partner!” he called out.

Eddie grabbed his coat as he walked past.

“Hey, Allen,” he greeted. “Glad to see you.”

“Thanks, Eddie,” she said with a polite smile.

“Hey, Iris,” he greeted, smiling at her foster sister.

“Detective,” she greeted. “You should go. My dad doesn’t like to be kept waiting.”

He nodded with a tight smile, patted Barry’s shoulder companionably, and said, “Glad you’re back,” before walking out the door.

As soon as they were out of earshot, Barry turned to Iris and said, “He likes you!”

Iris bit her lower lip and pulled her off into a deserted corner.

“Can you keep a secret?” she asked.

Barry gave her a look.

“Of course I can; I’m your sister,” she said.

“Okay,” Iris said. She took a deep breath and blurted out, “Eddie and I have been dating for a few months now but Dad doesn’t know.”

Barry took a moment to parse out the word vomit.

“You’re dating? And have been for a while? Iris, I’m so happy for you!” Barry squealed. She hugged her sister and best friend. “But not telling Joe? I’m not sure if that’s smart or stupid.”

“Hey,” Iris said, stepping back and looking insulted.

“I mean,” Barry continued, “that it’s probably smart, so that Joe doesn’t shoot Eddie. But it’s stupid because he’s going to find out at some point and be mad at you for not telling him.”

Iris sagged.

“I know,” she groaned. “But for the moment, I’m sticking with not telling him.”

“Your funeral,” Barry joked.

Iris smacked her for that.

“Hey Iris,” Detective Conwell called. “Got a minute?”

“Sure,” Iris called back, heading over to talk to the detective.

“Hey Barry,” Officer Unrau called.

Barry looked up to see the officer and Officer Vukuvich booking a junkie on the other side of the station.

“Good to see you,” Officer Unrau continued.
Barry smiled and nodded at him.

Suddenly, she noticed the junkie’s hand creeping toward Officer Vukuvich’s gun while he leaned in to his radio to listen to the dispatcher.

Immediately, she had run over there, knocked him down to the table and away from the gun, and ended up back in her previous position.

“Screw you!” the junkie started yelling as the officers hauled him back towards the jail cells. “Screw you!”

“You okay?” Iris asked, coming up to her looking concerned.

The look on her face was probably interesting, considering she had no idea how that just happened. She shoved her hands into her pockets.

“I-I’m fine,” Barry said, plastering on a smile. “I just need some air. It’s been awhile, and you know, there’s a lot of people in here…”

“Of course,” Iris said immediately. “Do you want me to come with you?”

“No, I’ll just be a couple minutes,” Barry said reassuringly. “Can you keep an eye on Livvy?”

Her daughter was currently wandering around the bullpen, smiling prettily at the different officers and acquiring a large amount of candy. And possibly blackmail material. Barry was never quite sure with her daughter.

“Of course,” Iris replied. “She does know that she’s not supposed to go trick-or-treating for a couple more weeks, right?”

“I’d assume so,” Barry said. “See you in a few.”

She stepped out the back door of the precinct, where the police cars were parked, and glanced around to make sure she was alone before pulling her hand out of her pocket. It was spastically vibrating at an inhuman level. Moving super-fast…just like she a moment ago.

“What’s happening to me?” she wondered aloud. She went to take a step forward, and ended up running into the dumpster on the other side of the large alleyway. She tried to step the other way, and crashed into the back window of a police car, shattering it. She backed away slowly.

She looked down the alley, which extended a decent ways down since she’d come out the back door of the precinct, took a deep breath, and ran. Seconds later, she crashed into the back of a laundry truck half a mile away. The man driving the truck had to pull a bag of laundry off her face.

“Sorry,” she said, accepting his help out of the truck. She glanced at the bottom of her shoes as she got out, glad she had worn flats instead of heels. The rubber bottom was melted slightly.

She hurried back inside the precinct – thankfully at a normal-person pace, and ended up half-dragging Iris and Livvy out to the car. Iris had driven, since Barry still wasn’t allowed for a couple more days.

“So, something completely bizarre and awesome just happened,” Barry said before Iris could ask why they left so suddenly. “I moved super-fast. Which sounds completely impossible, and I don’t know how it happened, but it happened.”
“I will give you the benefit of the doubt, but I demand a demonstration,” Iris said.

“I believe you, Mommy,” Livvy said loyally. Or maybe it wasn’t loyalty. Livvy had been kidnapped by a super-soldier that she had cured of his super-strength by injecting him with a miracle drug concocted by STAR Labs, so her daughter’s suspension of disbelief was a bit higher than most people’s. Besides, she was a child. Children – even genius children who were most likely legitimate science prodigies – believed more than adults did.

“I was thinking I should call STAR Labs, maybe set some testing up,” Barry said. “Besides, this wasn’t something I could do before I got struck by lightning, so my doctor should probably be informed.”

The scientists at STAR Labs were apparently very interested in her potential superpowers. They asked her to meet them at the Ferris Air Testing Facility that very afternoon. Apparently STAR Labs had a contract with Ferris Air, one of the few that hadn’t been cancelled after the particle accelerator explosion, and they had free range of the little-used airfield.

Cisco provided an outfit – complete with several different sensors, arm pads, knee-pads, and a helmet – for her to wear during their tests. Iris helped her put everything on.

“I look stupid,” she said bluntly.

Livvy giggled from behind her.

Iris opened her mouth, then shut it again and dropped her chin, looking defeated.

“Yeah. You look pretty stupid.”

“Well,” Barry sighed. “Best get this over with.”

“How’s it fit?” Cisco asked as she stepped out of the RV they’d brought the equipment over in.

“It’s a little snug,” Barry said. Every line of her sports bra was visible through the unitard, which Barry was pretty sure was originally a female wrestling outfit.

“At least you’ll be moving so fast no one will see you,” Cisco said, patting her companionably on the elbow.

She stepped out of the RV fully, followed by Iris and Livvy.

“See, you thought the world was slowing down,” Cisco theorized. “It wasn’t. You were moving so fast that it only looked like everyone else was standing still.” He escorted her to what she assumed was the starting line. He gestured back towards the tent where the other two scientists were standing/sitting. “Dr. Wells will be monitoring your energy output and Caitlin will be monitoring your vitals.”

“What do you do?” Barry asked, honestly curious.


Barry held up a hand, laughing slightly.

“I’m not offended. I kept my hair close-cropped for years when I was younger. One of my neighbors thought I was a boy for six years. And considering I go by Barry…well, it happens a
lot. I don’t mind.”

“Whew,” Cisco said. “Anyway, check it.” He pulled a black circle with a lightning bolt on it out of his pocket. “This is a two-way headset with a camera I modified. Typically designed to combat battlefield impulse noise, or in your case, potential sonic booms.” He nodded eagerly. “Which would be awesome.”

He took off Barry’s helmet and took it over to the table, presumably to install the headset. Caitlin came over at the same time, tapping the sensors wrapped around Barry’s ribs and making adjustments on her tablet.

Barry looked at her curiously.

“What?” she asked.

“Nothing,” Barry said. “I just noticed you don’t smile too much.”

That made her look angrier as she brushed her hair behind her ear.

“My once-promising career in bio-engineering is over, my boss in a wheelchair for life. The explosion that put you in a coma also killed my fiancéé. So this blank expression kinda feels like the way to go,” she said wryly.

“I’m sorry for your loss,” Barry said quietly. “I know what it’s like. My girlfriend died a few months before Livvy was born. We’d actually just broken up at the time, but that just made it hurt worse.”

“Was she meant to be Livvy’s other parent?” Caitlin asked curiously.

“No,” Barry said with a shake of her head. “Livvy was…a happy accident. Right before we broke up, we had a threesome with a mutual friend of ours. The condoms apparently failed. I found out I was pregnant right after I got the notice that my girlfriend and Livvy’s father had died in an accident.”

“That must have been awful,” Caitlin said, sympathy in her eyes.

“It was hard,” Barry told her honestly. “It was hard for a long time. But it got better. I had Joe and Iris. I wasn’t alone. You’re not alone either, Caitlin.”

“It feels like it,” she said quietly.

Barry reached out a hand and grabbed hers. She squeezed it.

“You’re not alone,” Barry said firmly. “You have Cisco and Dr. Wells. And if you ever need someone to talk to, I’m willing to listen. I get it.”

That did get a small smile out of Caitlin.

“Thanks, Barry.”

She finished her tests and walked back over to the tent set-up. Dr. Wells rolled up to replace her.

“Miss Allen,” he said, “while I am extremely eager to determine your full range of abilities, I do caution restraint.”

Barry nodded. Restraint. She could do that.
“Yeah,” she said.

Who was she kidding. Lack of restraint was what got her into trouble when she started that chemical fire during the middle school science fair. Lack of restraint was what made her get drunk enough in Vegas that she’d ended up married. Lack of restraint was what made her give in so easily when Sara suggested a threesome. Her type may have been people who pulled her into things she wouldn’t dare to do on her own, but that didn’t mean she didn’t want to do them in the first place.

She got set up on the runner’s blocks, took a deep breath, and ran. It was amazing. It was fantastic. It...reminded her of the lightning rushing through the house right before her mom was murdered. Of course, the distraction of that thought ended with her crashing into a pile of water barrels and breaking her wrist.

“Oh my God, are you okay?” Iris demanded once she made it back over to the RV on the other end of the airway, clutching her wrist.

“I might have broken something,” she admitted.

Three hours later, back at STAR Labs, Caitlin showed her the x-ray and told her, “It looks like you had a distal radius fracture.”

Barry picked up on the key word in that sentence.

“Had?” she questioned.

Caitlin changed the x-ray picture to a perfectly normal wrist.

“It’s healed,” she said. “In three hours.”

“How is that even possible?” Barry asked.

“We don’t know,” Caitlin grudgingly admitted. “Yet.”

“You really need to learn how to stop,” Cisco said, holding up the helmet she’d worn.

“Agreed,” Iris said from where she was perched in the corner in front of her.

Livvy had retreated to her desk, which was still set up next to the hospital bed. She appeared to be drawing something out – probably plans for her next experiment, since she was using colored pencils to make lines and didn’t appear to be coloring anything in.

“What happened out there today?” Dr. Wells asked, rolling up to him. “You were moving pretty well, and then something caused you to lose focus.”

Barry was startled at his insight.

“I started remembering something,” she admitted.

Dr. Wells raised his eyebrows.

Barry sighed inwardly, resigned to telling the story again.

“When I was eleven, my mom was murdered,” she said bluntly. She saw Caitlin and Cisco both look at her in the corner of her eye. Iris winced noticeably. “It was late,” Barry said, thinking back. She still remembered every detail as if had been yesterday. “A sound woke me up. I...
came downstairs, and…I saw what looked like a ball of lightning.” Dr. Wells took his glasses off in surprise. “Inside the lightning…there was a man. He killed my mom.” She was quiet for a moment. “They arrested my dad. He’s still sitting in Iron Heights for her murder. Everyone – the cops, the shrinks – they all told me what I saw was impossible.” She lowered her voice, glancing over to where Livvy was still avidly working. “But what if the man who killed my mom was like me?”

“I think I can say, unequivocally, you are one of a kind,” Dr. Wells said with a slight chuckle.

Barry felt her face – and her hopes – fall. She’d just proven that the impossible was possible. She’d hoped that Dr. Wells of all people would believe her. Hadn’t he said that he believed everything was possible?

“Well, if I’m okay, Iris has a meeting to get to, and she’s my ride,” Barry said, pushing herself off the hospital bed. “Call me when you’re done analyzing the data, if you want to set up more tests.”

Livvy – bless her – immediately started packing up her backpack. Iris grabbed her purse and Barry’s.

“Miss Allen,” Dr. Wells began, but Barry brushed past him with a tight smile.

“Have a good rest of your day, Dr. Wells. Caitlin, Cisco,” she nodded at each of the younger scientists. “Caitlin, feel free to call me if you want to talk. I’ll see you all later.”

All three of them left STAR Labs quickly. Iris was quiet until they were in the car, and then said, “You’re right.”

Barry’s head shot up.

“What?” she asked.

“You’re right,” Iris said. “When you were running, it looked like a red blur. And there was lightning at your feet when you ran. The man in lightning you said you saw…if he was wearing yellow and running at super-speed like you were…he would have looked like a yellow blur in a ball of lightning. Exactly like you described when you were a kid. You’re right. And…I believe you.”

Barry’s jaw dropped.

“And I’m sorry I never believed you before,” Iris said, the words rushing out like a torrent. “I was your best friend – I am your best friend – and I was even your girlfriend for an entire two weeks, and you’re my sister, Bare, and I never believed you before, but I do now. I’m sorry it took me this long to believe you.”

Barry felt her face tighten as she tried not to cry. She’d wanted Iris to believe her for so long. It felt almost impossible that she finally did.

“Thank you, Iris,” was all she managed to choke out.

Iris was kind enough to change the subject.

“So, what do you want for dinner tonight? I’m cooking.”

The next day, Iris was off again, but she interrupted Barry’s how-many-TV-shows-that-I-missed-can-I-binge-watch marathon to say, “So, this is about the time Eddie takes his coffee break, which
means he should be headed over to Jitters, since I don’t think I told him I took the day off,” she said.

Barry rolled her eyes.

“Yes, we can got to Jitters so we can see your boyfriend. I still expect details on that, by the way!”

“Are you going to tell me details of what happened the last night Oliver was in town?” Iris asked wickedly, wagging her eyebrows.

“ Iris!” Barry hissed. “Small ears!”

“I’m not listening,” Livvy – who was still off school due to the pipe break – informed them, in the exact tone that meant that while she was trying to ignore them while she read her book (currently volume 2 of Basic Electricity, which from what she could tell was a college-level electrical engineering textbook) on the other side of the room, she had still heard every word.

“Sorry,” Iris said.

They parked a few blocks away from Jitters shortly afterwards. As soon as they walked into the coffeeshop, Iris got roped into covering for one of her coworkers for twenty minutes while she picked her son up from school. Apparently, his school did not have a pipe break.

If Barry didn’t know better, she would have guessed that Livvy had engineered the break somehow so that she could spend more time with her. However, her specialty was electricity, not plumbing, and no one had mentioned that changing over the past nine months.

Eddie showed up while Iris was still waiting tables. They kissed, and then Eddie freaked out when he realized that Barry and Livvy saw them. Iris had to quickly explain that Barry and Livvy both knew, that they wouldn’t tell, because Barry was bound by Sister Rules and Livvy was bribable with sweets.

Barry saw the glint in Livvy’s eyes when she heard that. Livvy didn’t actually need to be bribed with sweets to keep secrets – she’d kept the secret of Oliver’s secret identity for the pats few months – but she was obviously more than willing to pretend she needed the bribe in order to get more candy.

“No more than three fun-size pieces of candy a day,” Barry told her firmly. “Or half a full-size candy bar.”

Livvy pouted, but still agreed. Her science addiction was good for something: she understood that candy was bad for her.

Maybe Barry should get Caitlin give her a presentation on the detriments of candy consumption…

Eddie didn’t stay long, and he spent the whole time he was there talking to Iris. Thankfully, by the time he left, Iris’ coworker had returned with her child and Iris was free to leave.

As they walked back to the car, Barry demanded details, since it had already been twenty-four hours since she admitted her relationship and Iris still hadn’t talked, which was somehow against the Sister Rules.

“When you were in the hospital, Eddie covered Dad’s shifts so we could both be with you,” Iris explained. “I thanked him with a cup of coffee, and things just kind of…happened. And it’s good.”
“Is dating your partner’s daughter against department regulations?” Barry asked. “Because I don’t want to get in trouble when this comes out.”

“Eddie checked,” Iris said. “It’s not. If he and I got married, then he and Joe couldn’t be partners anymore since they’d legally be family, but until then it’s not a problem.”

“Until then?” Barry questioned with a smile. “Are you already planning for it?”

“Shut up,” Iris said, though she was blushing slightly.

It was a good thing Barry had superspeed, or she wouldn’t have been able to get her sister and her daughter out of the way of the patrol car that was sliding into the planter that they’d been standing next to, slipping on the wet roads as it tried to block a black Mustang.

Barry felt the world slow down as she looked at the man driving it. She recognized that face.

“Stay with Livvy,” she told Iris quickly before taking off at a run.

She dashed through traffic and dove through the passenger side window into the car. She got a better look at the man’s face as he stared at her, wide-eyed. She was right. It was Clyde Mardon. He looked just as shocked to see her as she was to see him, though he recovered quickly and responded by reaching for his gun. Barry saw it and stopped him by grabbing the steering wheel and flipping the car. It was a shame. It was a nice car.

She crawled out of the upside-down car to see that Clyde Mardon had already made it out and was walking away.

“Hey!” she yelled. “Mardon!”

The man turned around at that. He had a nasty look on his face. Barry was starting to think that this hadn’t been the smartest idea.

He raised his arms, and a fog developed more rapidly than Barry had ever seen, starting from his hands and enveloping the entire area in dense fog. As she watched, Mardon disappeared into it.

A car horn blasted behind her, and suddenly crashed into the downed Mustang, flipping over and landing on its roof. If it weren’t for her superspeed, she wouldn’t have made it out of the way.

She ran back to Iris and Livvy after that, slowing down enough to jog the rest of the way once she was in sight of the police officer from the patrol car.

“Barry!” Iris exclaimed. “Did you get a good look at the guy?”

“Yeah,” Barry said. “And I know who it was too.”

They didn’t talk much more until after the ambulance had arrived at they were taking the dead man away from his crashed car.

“That poor man,” Iris said. “The way that fog came in…I have never seen anything like it.”

“That’s because it wasn’t normal,” Barry said in a low voice. “He had…abilities. Like me. Except he could do something with weather, I guess. He made the fog show up.”

“Barry! Iris!” Joe’s voice interrupted before Iris could say anything.

“We’re alright, Dad,” she said, turning to look at her worried father.
“What the hell were you two thinking, being out here, having Livvy out here? Haven’t I told you? When you see danger, you run the other way. You’re not cops!”

“Because you wouldn’t let me!” Iris said.

“You’re damn right,” Joe said.

“Language!” Barry said sharply. “Livvy’s here.”

“Sorry,” Joe said, calming down slightly and looking abashed. Barry decided changing the topic would be a good plan.

“Joe, I know who did this. I saw the guy.” Joe nodded for her to continue. “It’s Clyde Mardon,” Barry said. Joe looked disbelieving. “I know everybody thinks he died in a plane crash after the STAR Labs explosion, but he is alive.”

Joe nodded again, but Barry could tell he didn’t believe her.

“Something happened to him that night,” she said. “I…I think he can control the weather.”

Now Joe really didn’t look like he believed her. At least Iris and Livvy did. Barry continued her explanation anyway.

“The recent robberies, they all happened during freak meteorological events. And when I just confronted Mardon, the street was instantly enveloped in fog,” she said. The look on Joe’s face hadn’t changed. “Of course you don’t believe me,” she sighed. “You never believe me.”


“Dad,” Iris said.

“No, Iris,” Joe said, keeping his eyes on Barry. “Mardon is dead. There is no controlling the weather, Barry, just like there was no lightning storm in your house that night! It was your brain, helping a scared little boy accept what he saw!”

“My dad did not murder my mother,” Barry said firmly.

“Yes he did!” Joe nearly yelled. It was a good thing they’d stepped away from the scene somewhat. Otherwise they’d be getting more looks than the concerned glances at the raised voices. “Your dad killed your mother, Barry! I am sorry, sweetheart, but I knew it, the jury knew it, and now he’s paying for what he did.”

“Dad, enough!” Iris tried to interrupt.

“Uh-uh, Iris,” Joe said, pushing her away. He turned back to Barry. “I have done my best to take care of you since that night and I have never asked for anything in return, not even a thank you, but what I do ask now is that you, for once in your life, see things as they are,” he said harshly.

Barry met his gaze head-on, but she said nothing. She simply picked Livvy up and walked away. Behind her, she heard Iris sarcastically say, “Good job, Dad,” before hurrying after her.

“I need to go back to STAR Labs,” Barry said as soon as Iris reached her.

“Sounds like a good plan to me,” Iris said. “Are we boycotting family night this week?”
“It’s my first one back,” Barry said. “I won’t do that to Joe.”

“I think you’re right, Mommy,” Livvy said. “Weather doesn’t work like that. Something else – or someone else – had to cause it.”

“Which is why it’s time to go talk to some scientists,” Barry said firmly.

They burst into STAR Labs twenty minutes later.

“I wasn’t the only one affected by the particle accelerator explosion, was I?” she demanded as she entered the cortex.

The scientists looked at each other.

“We don’t know for sure,” Dr. Wells admitted.

“You said the city was safe, that there as no residual danger,” Iris said. “A bunch of random people with superpowers running around sounds like danger to me.”

“So what really happened that night?” Barry asked.

“Well,” Dr. Wells said slowly, pressing buttons on his wheelchair keypad, “the accelerator went active. We all felt like heroes, and then…it all went wrong.” The screen behind Barry was now showing a mock-image of the accelerator and the explosion it had caused. “The dimensional barrier ruptured, releasing unknown energies into our world – antimatter, dark energy, x-elements…”

“Those are all theoretical,” Barry interrupted.

“And how theoretical are you?” Dr. Wells challenged.

Barry had to concede that.

“We mapped the dispersion throughout and around Central City,” Dr. Wells continued. The screen showed the map of the city streets, complete with the orange glowing energy clusters all over the city. “Though we have no way of knowing what or…who was exposed, we’ve been searching for other metahumans like yourself.”

“Metahumans?” Iris questioned.

“That’s what we’re calling them,” Caitlin explained.

“Meta means beyond,” Livvy piped up. “So you’re saying that people like Mommy are beyond human?”

“Well,” Dr. Wells said, “it sounded more scientific that going with ‘super-human.’ That just implies we’re all living in a comic book.”

“I saw one today,” Barry said. “Another metahuman.” All three scientists looked at her intently. “He’s a bank robber, and he can control the weather.”

Caitlin looked horrified. Cisco looked excited.

“This just keeps getting cooler,” he said.

“This is not cool,” Barry said firmly. “Alright? A man died due to the fog he created, and that’s
not counting the people he’s murdered while robbing banks.”

Cisco’s face fell, and Caitlin looked even more horrified.

“Mardon must’ve gotten his powers the same way I did,” Barry said. “From the storm cloud. He is still out there, and I don’t doubt he is going to kill again. We have to stop him before he hurts anyone else!” She turned to leave.

“Barry!” Dr. Wells said. She turned back around. “That’s a job for the police.”

“I work for the police,” Barry pointed out.

“As a forensic scientist,” Dr. Wells argued.

“You’re responsible for this,” Barry said bluntly. “For him.”

“What’s important is you!” Dr. Wells said loudly. His voice dropped and he rolled his wheelchair forward. “Not me. I lost everything. I lost my company. I lost my reputation. I lost my freedom. And then you broke your arm, and it healed in three hours. Inside your body could be a map to a whole new world – genetic therapies, vaccines medicines, treasures buried deep within your cells, and we cannot risk losing everything because you want to go out and play hero!”

Barry really didn’t like him at the moment. She was not a lab rat.

“You’re not a hero,” Dr. Wells said. “You’re just a young woman who was struck by lightning.”

Barry didn’t say anything to that, simply grabbed Iris’ and Livvy’s hands and pulled them out the door.

“I’m going for a run,” she told Iris bluntly. “I might be gone for a few hours. Maybe all night, but hopefully. I’ll be back by morning in time to take Livvy to school, but could you…”

“Of course,” Iris said with a nod. “I’ll take care of her for the afternoon.”

“You’re leaving me?” Livvy asked in a small voice.

Barry immediately knelt down and embraced her daughter.

“Just for a few hours,” she told her quietly. “I need some advice.”

“You really want to stop that guy,” Iris observed.

“And anyone else who’s using their new abilities to break the law,” Barry said firmly. “I have this power within me, incredible power. Isn’t it my responsibility to use all my abilities to make the world a safer place? For you, for me, for Livvy and all the other children in this city?”

“I don’t want you to get hurt,” Iris said. “You have Livvy to think about.”

“What do you think, sweetheart?” Barry asked your daughter.

Livvy was quiet for a moment.

“When I got kidnapped,” she said slowly, “the Arrow saved me. He’s not a policeman. It’s not his job to help people. But he does anyway, because he has the ability to fight bad guys and help people. If it wasn’t for him, I would have died. But I didn’t, because he used his ability to help people, including me. If Mommy can use her super-speed to help people, I think she should.”
“What if she gets hurt?” Iris asked.

“She could get hurt as a CSI,” Livvy pointed out. “Poppa could get hurt being a detective. Detective Chyre died last year. Firefighters could get hurt or die. Lots of people who want to help people have dangerous jobs. That doesn’t stop them from doing them. Why should it stop Mommy?”

Iris stared at her for a moment before leaning down to hug her.

“You’re an amazing kid, Olivia Allen,” she said firmly.

“From the mouths of babes, huh?” Barry offered with a small smile once Iris looked up at her.

“Okay,” Iris said. “If this is what you think you need to do, to be some sort of super-powered vigilante, then I’ll support you. Though we probably shouldn’t tell Dad.”

“Probably not,” Barry said with a small laugh. “But we’re not talking to him anyway at the moment, so he doesn’t need to know that I am, for some reason, not in town for a few hours.”

“Gotcha,” Iris said with a nod. “Do you want to go home and change first? I can’t imagine a dress and flats are good for a run – however far you may be running.”

“True enough,” Barry admitted.

“And you should probably have lunch first,” Iris added. “I don’t know how many calories super-speed burns, but it’s probably a lot. And you’re still recovering from a coma.”

Barry sighed.

“Fine.”

Three hours later, she was in Starling City. She went immediately to the Arrowcave (it didn’t matter what Oliver said. It was definitely the Arrowcave) under Verdant. She ran in, practically appearing in the center of a room occupied by Oliver, Roy, Felicity, and Sara. Dig wasn’t there. Barry assumed he was home with his pregnant girlfriend. Oliver and Sara both had weapons pointing at her before they realized who she was.

“Barry?” Sara said breathlessly. “You’re awake.”

“Hey, Sara,” Barry said, smiling at her ex. “I’m awake.”

“Sara just got back into town,” Oliver said. “I haven’t had time to catch her up on everything.”

Sara immediately put her bō staff away and hurried to hug Barry. She looked over at Oliver.

“Go ahead,” Oliver said with a small smile.

Sara smiled widely before leaning in and kissing Barry deeply. Barry responded, before leaning back and asking, “Is this going to get me killed by your assassin girlfriend?”

“Kissing no, but if you wanted another threesome I’d have to turn it down,” Sara replied.

Barry kissed her again before stepping away.

“It’s good to see you again, Sara,” she said with a smile.
“You too,” her ex replied.

Barry went to greet Oliver after that, kissing him as well.

“How are you here?” he asked.

“So…” she said, looking around at the friends in the room. “Apparently getting struck by lightning meant I developed superpowers?”

She flashed to the other side of the room and back as a demonstration.

“I…well, the particle accelerator explosion affected a lot of people, giving them abilities beyond regular people,” Barry explained. “I wanted to help stop them. Right now there’s a bank robber running around Central City, Clyde Mardon, and he can control the weather. The CCPD can’t stop him. They don’t have the power. But I have powers that they don’t have,” she explained.

She was explaining to everyone, but she was standing in front of Oliver. It was his opinion that she wanted.

“I just don’t know if I can,” she confessed. “I confronted him earlier today, tried to stop him, and he got away. And I just made things worse. His car crashed, but he still got away. He made fog to get away, and that fog not only helped him escape, but it caused a car accident. A man died.”

Barry sighed.

“I’ve spent my whole life searching for the impossible, never imagining that I would become the impossible.”

“Did you come to me as your boyfriend or as a costumed vigilante?” Oliver asked gently.

“A little bit of both?” Barry said. “I mean, more the latter, but the former is important too.”

“Is it advice you’re searching for?” Oliver asked.

Barry nodded helplessly.

“All my life, I’ve wanted to do more…be more. And now I am. And the first chance I get to help someone, I screw up.”

“Barry, everyone makes mistakes. I’ve told you how many people died because of my mistakes,” Oliver told her. “I have deaths on my conscious. Five hundred and two of them, specifically, and that’s not including everyone who died before that, or during the Siege.”

“Those weren’t your fault,” she said immediately.

“And the motorist who died wasn’t your fault,” Oliver chided gently.

“What if Wells was right?” she asked in a near whisper. Oliver, only a step away from her, was the only one who could hear. “What if I’m not a hero? What if I’m just some girl who was struck by lightning?”

“I don’t think that bolt of lightning struck you, Barry,” Oliver said. He reached out and cupped her face in his hands. “I think it chose you.”

As cheesy as that sounded, it actually helped.
“I’m not sure I’m like you, Oliver, or you, Sara, or Roy, or Dig, or even Felicity,” Barry confessed. “I don’t know if I can be some…vigilante.”

“You can be better,” Oliver said. “Me, Sara, Roy, Dig…we all have darkness that haunts us. But you, Barry, you’ve always been a bright, beautiful light. Barry Lumina. You can inspire people in a way that I never could, be a shining example for people. A symbol of hope, and goodness, and light. You can watch over your city like a guardian angel, make a difference, save people in a flash. I believe in you, Barry.”

“I feel like I’m interrupting your moment, but I totally believe in you too, Barry,” Felicity put in.

“Ollie’s right,” Sara said, coming up and squeezing Barry’s hand. “You’ve always been a light, no matter what darkness was in your past. You can keep being that light, except on a larger scale. A superhero, not just a vigilante like us.”

“There’s another thing though, if I decide to do this,” Barry said slowly.

“Livvy,” Oliver realized.

“Livvy,” Barry confirmed. “If I do this, if both of her parents are regularly putting themselves in danger…”

“If something happens to one of us, we agree that the other stops nighttime activities,” Oliver said solemnly. “She’s the most important thing. We can’t leave her an orphan.”

Barry sagged slightly, relieved.

“I was hoping you’d agree. I want to do this, but I don’t want to risk her being left alone.”

Oliver grabbed her hands.

“She won’t be,” he promised. “Besides, I’m planning to survive, and I hope you are too.”

“I definitely am,” Barry said with a small smile. “I’ve got a lot to live for, after all.”

He leaned in and kissed her lightly.

“One more thing,” he said with a smile. “Take your own advice. Wear a mask.”

“I will make sure to do so,” Barry promised. “So, how has the beginning of your week been? Did the meeting with the new CSO go well?”

“Ray Palmer is a very enthusiastic, very driven man,” Oliver said. “I think he’ll do a great job. Though he did manage to insult Felicity during the C-suite meeting, and she hacked all of his devices.”

“I made it so the only thing he could access is videos of gassy porcupines,” Felicity said smugly.

“He still had some pretty great ideas,” Oliver said. “For example, he suggested changing the city’s name from Starling to Star in order to promote growth and distance ourselves from the dark things in the past.”

“And how was the Arrow-ing?” Barry asked.

“T ook down Vincent Steelgrave, who was another member of the SCPD’s most wanted,” Oliver reported. “And then we took down his replacement, Werner Zytle. He was the new Vertigo
pusher. Speaking of, do you think you can whip up a counteragent to the new version of the formula?"

Barry sighed.

“I really wish people would stop modifying that stuff. It was bad enough in the first round. Do they really need to make it worse? But yes, if you have a sample for me.”

Oliver went to one of the drawers, pulled out a syringe filled with liquid, and handed it to her.

“I’m not back at work yet, but STAR Labs will probably let me use their equipment, since we seem to be friends now.” Barry said. She grimaced, remembering the argument they’d had earlier.

“Well, mostly anyway.”

Sara’s phone went off. She checked it.

“I’ve got to go,” she said. “I’m supposed to meet up with Laurel. It was good to see you, Barry.”

“It was good to see you too,” Barry replied, dashing over to hug her. She kissed her cheek before she left, before turning to Oliver, Felicity, and Roy with a sigh. “I’d better head back to Central City. I ran over here, and I’ve still got to convince Caitlin and Cisco to help me take down Mardon.”

Oliver moved over to her and kissed her again.

“Be safe. Let me know how it goes. Love you.”

“Love you too. Bye!”

She dashed out again.

Convincing Caitlin and Cisco wasn’t hard, and Cisco already had an outfit ready, though it was made with a male in mind and didn’t quite fit her frame. Caitlin had already set the STAR Labs satellite to track weather anomalies, so they found Mardon easily enough, and Barry rapidly changed into her new suit and ran to the farm he was hiding out on. She arrived just in time to protect Joe and an unconscious Eddie from a piece of flying debris, because Mardon had decided a tornado was the way to go.

In the end, with help from a pep talk from Dr. Wells, Barry managed to unravel the tornado. Of course, it also resulted in her superhero identity being revealed to Joe – and wow, she was not doing well with this secret identity thing so far; it hadn’t even been a day, so they ended up having a very frank conversation, though Barry managed to put it off until they were supervising the clean-up of the farm the next day.

“What you can do,” Joe began, “it was the lightning bolt?”

“More or less,” Barry replied.

“I’m sorry, Barry,” Joe said, surprising her. “I’m sorry I didn’t believe you. And I called you crazy for chasing the impossible.” He sounded like he was tearing up. “But you really did see something that night your mom died.”

Barry simply nodded.

“And your dad is innocent,” Joe continued. He moved to stand in front of her. “I need you to
promise me something,” he said in a low voice. “I don’t want you telling Iris about anything you can do. Any of it. I want her safe. Promise me.”

“About that,” Barry said slowly.

Joe grimaced.

“She already knows, doesn’t she?”

“First one I told,” Barry said with a nod. “Besides, I haven’t been given the all-clear to drive at the moment. She’s been driving me to STAR Labs.”

“Does Livvy know too?” Joe asked, sounding resigned to the answer.

“Also yes,” Barry said with a nod. “As does Oliver. And the scientists at STAR Labs.”

“Barry, she’s six,” Joe said. “Why did you tell her?”

“Because she’s a child genius and would have figured it out sooner or later anyway?” Barry offered. “And because she was already with us, and I wasn’t going to lie about why she needed to go one place while I went to another. She’s been sticking to me like glue.”

Joe sighed.

“Fine. But you’d better be keeping her safe. Both of them.”

“I will, Joe,” Barry said. “I promise.”

Her phone rang. She checked to see who it was.

“Excuse me a minute, it’s Oliver,” she said.

Joe waved her away.

“Hey, Ollie,” she greeted, stepping away from her foster father.

“Hey,” he said, sounding grim. “I need you back in Starling. Sara’s dead.”

Chapter End Notes

So, a bit of a cliffhanger, but this is probably going to be the last regular update for a while. I’m planning out Season 3 of Arrow/Season 1 of Flash, but since they overlap and I need characters from both in both, it’s taking a bit to get everything organized. Once I get things planned out through Christmas, I’ll start writing on this again. I also need to go work on Third Life and A Mother’s Choice, and I have another WIP that I may be publishing in the near future. And then my brain keeps taking detours to my original content, so again, it’s probably going to be a bit.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!