Summary

What if Nyssa had given Oliver an important piece of information before Oliver was to hand over the League to Malcolm Merlyn. OR why it's important to have a clear understanding of what things mean before agreeing to anything

Notes

I need to give credit to Laxit21’s “Fifth or Sixth Time's the Charm, Right?” for the plot bunny that just wouldn’t go away, which led to this. If you haven’t read any of Laxit21’s stories, I highly encourage you to do so. As for where this story is set in Arrow, it would be during “My Name is Oliver Queen” and will go AU from there.
Oliver and Nyssa climbed out of the wreckage of the C-130 after gathering what weapons they could. They were lucky enough to find their bows and quivers, along with a pair of swords. Nyssa also had a handful of knives on her as well. The pair saw the scattered fires and could smell the jet fuel in the air, giving added incentive to get away from there as quickly as they could. It took them a brief moment to pick their direction and then they were running into the trees, on a course for the city.

“What is your plan now, Mister Queen?” Nyssa asked as they settled into a pace she could effortlessly maintain.

“We need to get to my team. Laurel needs to let her father know what is happening. We’ll need Ray and Felicity to work on a way to counter the Alpha/Omega. John, Thea and Malcolm will need to help us figure out how your father plans to disperse it,” Oliver told her.

“I know why your team will assist you, but what did you have to promise Al Sa-Her to gain his aid. What does he hope to gain out of this?”

Oliver was silent for several minutes, debating how much he was willing to trust Nyssa. Especially with the knowledge of the Faustian bargain he’d been forced to make with Malcolm, remembering that the man was responsible for the death of Sara Lance. He knew Nyssa wanted Malcolm to face death for that crime. He also knew that their alliance was based less on mutual trust and more on a desire to be free of Ra’s al Ghul. He had a good idea of how she would react if she knew the promise Oliver had been forced to make to get Malcolm’s aid. He also knew, however, how much worse that reaction would be if she found out at the wrong time. So, he braced himself and then answered.

“Malcolm’s price is that once I defeat your father, I make him Ra’s,” Oliver told her.

It took every ounce of control Nyssa possessed not to strike Oliver. How could he have agreed to that, to just hand the League over to the man who had murdered her Beloved. Were all the declarations of his feeling about Sara nothing but lies?

Oliver had stopped when she did and turned to face her. He could clearly see the anger and hurt in her eyes. He too had felt that anger when he’d made the deal with Malcolm and he still felt it at this very moment. The only thing that had kept that anger from taking over was the fear he had for his sister. Thea was the only reason he had allied himself with Malcolm. He certainly didn’t trust the other man, which, if he thought about it more, made their deal all the more unbelievable.

“You agreed to hand over the League to the man who murdered Sara, who was responsible for you both being on that island. Who forced you into a duel against my father which almost resulted in your death. Whose scheming forced you to become a member of the League. May I ask what you get out of this arrangement, Mister Queen?”

“My sister’s safety, for one. I also get to walk away from the League.”
Nyssa frowned slightly at that. The words just sounded off to her somehow. Not that she doubted Oliver, but it just sounded wrong. Because surely the man knew there were only two ways to leave the League: either you were dead or you were released by Ra’s. Somehow, she just couldn’t see Al Sa-Her giving up the advantage of having the Arrow neutralized, especially if he decided to cleanse Starling once more. Without him, the city would be virtually defenseless against a force like the League, something that Al Sa-Her certainly knew.

“Did Al Sa-Her explicitly tell you that he would release you from the League when this was done?” Nyssa asked.

“No, he didn’t,” Oliver told her, watching her face carefully. “Is that important?”

“Very, Mister Queen. Do you remember the first time you saw me? And the reason why I was there?”

“Yes. You came to force Sara back to the League. You poisoned Laurel and kidnapped their mother, because Sara refused to return with you.”

“You still have not answered the important question. Why was I there?” Nyssa asked again, wanting Oliver to reach the conclusion and realize what that meant for him. For both of them.

“Sara ran from the League and you were here to force her back,” Oliver said, thinking back to those weeks where Sara was under threat from the League. First from al-Owal and the members that had come with him, then from Nyssa. Then he remembered what Sara had told him and it clicked. “You’re saying that the League would view me the same way if I just leave after I hand the title of Ra’s over to Malcolm?”

“Indeed it would. Walking away from the League is not an option, especially for one with such a public profile as you. The only way that you and your sister, your friends, your city would be safe from retribution would be if Al Sa-Her released you.”

Realizing that they were wasting precious time, especially since they hadn’t defeated Ra’s yet, Oliver started moving again. Nyssa was quick to join him as well, the pair quickly falling back into that easy pace. Yet, Oliver couldn’t stop his mind from thinking about everything. Not just his plans and their backups, but also about what Nyssa had said and what it meant. Was what Nyssa had said really Malcolm’s intention? Was handing over the League only going to make things worse, with the League being lead by a man even worse than the current Ra’s al Ghul. A man who drugged his own daughter, had her murder a friend in order to force her brother on a collision course with the most dangerous man on Earth. Oliver was now forced to wonder if he had somehow been manipulated into believing that Malcolm was their only option for an ally against the League.

He also thought about the scorched earth he’d left behind in his quest to infiltrate the League, the looks he’d seen on Dig, Laurel and Felicity’s faces when the dungeon had been sealed and he’d left them to what they’d believed was their deaths. Was there a way to come back from that? If his initial plan had succeeded, he wouldn’t had to worry about that, because he, Ra’s and everyone else on that plane would now be dead. He doubted anyone would have mourned his passing except perhaps Thea and Felicity. Pushing those thoughts and all others aside, he choose to concentrate of finding where his team was, so that they could help him defeat Ra’s.

Palmer Technologies

May 15, 2015
The last two days had been stressful to say the least. The tension coming off Dig and to lesser degrees Felicity, Laurel and Thea had only added to that stress. This was why, while they were trying to figure out where Ra’s was, Oliver would slip into an empty office and sit in the quiet. He’d known going after Ra’s while his emotions were running high was virtual suicide. He’d needed to find that point where the emotions aided him, rather than hindered. After his talk with Felicity, he had found it. They had managed to win, but the victory had come with a cost. Scores of people had been infected and a number had died. Now he faced his team, Nyssa and Malcolm. Nyssa finished bandaging his injured hand.

“You killed my father.”

“I had to,” Oliver told her.

“I wanted to be the one,” Nyssa said, fixing him with a look. “You’re lucky you’re still alive. You wouldn’t be had you not being wearing League armor.”

The tone of her voice could almost be called flirty, drawing a smile from Oliver that matched hers.

“I like to think I had a little something to do with that,” Felicity told him.

Oliver stood and walked to the center of the room.

“When I started this, I wanted to keep you as far away from it as possible, because that has always been my instinct. To go it alone. But the truth is that we won tonight because I wasn’t alone. I thought that this crusade would only end with my death. But even if I had died tonight, it would live on because of you, and you, oh, and you,” Oliver said, ending looking at Thea.

“It’s true,” Laurel said. “This city isn’t lacking masks.”

“Heroes. Which is why I no longer need to be one.”

“What are you saying?” Felicity asked.

“Ra’s took the Arrow identity from me. I couldn’t be that person even if I wanted to be. And I don’t want to be,” Oliver said, walking forward so that he was face to face with Felicity. “You told me I have become someone else. And I need to discover a little more about that person, so I’m leaving Starling for a while.”

The others turned to look at Oliver. He could see the confusion and hurt in Felicity’s eyes, the dashed hope that this would be the time he told her that they could be together. Nyssa and Thea were both surprised by the announcement. Laurel and Dig’s faces were more expressionless, the only sign of some reaction was the slight clenching of Dig’s fist before it relaxed again.

“Where?” Thea asked.

“Um, someplace far away from here. Even without me, Starling still has heroes to watch over it.”

Dig’s face was still expressionless as he grabbed his jacket and walked out.

“John,” Felicity called after him.

“I’ll talk to him,” Oliver told her, before following the man who had been his rock.

“John?” Oliver said as he found him by the elevators.
“I’m happy for you Oliver. Despite our issues, you deserve to be happy. And you’re right, the city’s in good hands,” Dig told him.

“Including yours.”

“I’m no superhero.”

“You’re a hero. For three years, you’ve been a rock. The city’s rock, my rock. For three years, you’re been the person I can count on. I’m still counting on you,” Oliver stated.

“Oliver, I don’t know if I can get past what happened between the two of us.”

“I’m not asking you to.”

“I’ll think on it,” Dig said.

“OK,” Oliver told him as they shook hands. As Dig went to step into the elevator that had just arrived, Oliver continued, “John. If you’re going to keep going, you may want to find a way to conceal your identity when you’re out there.”

“I’ll think on that, too. You be well, Oliver.”

“You, too.”

Thea’s Loft

May 16, 2015

Oliver was closing his bag. All of the clothes he was planning on taking with him were in that bag, the rest could be thrown out or given away. He heard Malcolm Merlyn downstairs talking to Thea and knew it was time. Walking down the stairs, he dropped the bag and walked over to his sister.

“Are you sure you really want to do this?” Thea asked.

“As sure as I was the last five times you asked me,” Oliver replied. “Be safe out there, OK?”

“As safe as anyone with a mask on can be. But actually, I was thinking, um, maybe I’ll call myself the Red Arrow?”

“I think I already told everyone to call you Speedy.”

With that, the two siblings shared a hug before Oliver walked over to Malcolm. The warmth that Oliver had previously exhibited seemed to evaporate with each step, something that the older man noticed. However, he was still confident that Oliver’s naivety would see him achieve what he had long desired. Oliver would hand over the League never guessing that everything that had happened had all been part of his master plan, nor that Oliver was now bound to the League for the rest of his days and that Malcolm would make use of that when the time was right.

“We’ve come a long way, you and I. I’ve always looked at you as a son, Oliver. And I’m glad we got to work together, to trust as we did,” Malcolm stated.

“I will never forgive you for what you did to Sara. And my sister. Ever,” Oliver told him, his voice
taking on a harsher tone with each word.

“Does that mean we’re enemies once more?”

Oliver looked into the face of a man who had had many roles in his life. His best friend’s father, a surrogate uncle and his most bitter enemy. He thought of all the suffering he’d personally endured because of this one man, the sinking of the Gambit, which had led to the death of his father and trapped he and Sara in hell for five years. The time on Lian Yu leading to his meeting Slade and Sara meeting Ivo, Ivo then coming to Lian Yu searching for the Mirakuru. Slade being injured in the fight against Ivo, which led to them using the Mirakuru on him. Ivo murdering Shado, causing Slade to snap and his rage leading him to blame Oliver for Shado’s death, for choosing Sara over the other woman. Slade not seeing or not caring that if Ivo had pointed the gun first at Shado, Oliver would have jumped in front of her and it would have been Sara who died. Slade’s thirst for vengeance against Oliver leading the man to Starling City, where he’d infected Roy with the Mirakuru, terrorized Thea and ultimately killed Oliver’s mother in from of he and Thea. Then there was the Undertaking and Tommy’s death.

Thinking about all of that, Oliver let the knife slip down the sleeve of his jacket and into his hand. He hoped that Thea would forgive him for what he was about to do was his last thought before he stabbed Malcolm in the stomach with all of his strength, twisting the blade once it was in. A shocked gasp was all he heard, which turned to a scream as Oliver ripped the knife upward and opened the older man from virtually navel to sternum before he pulled the knife out. He then stabbed again, this time aiming for Malcolm’s heart. Malcolm collapsed to his knees, the light starting to fade from his eyes.

“Forgive and have mercy on him. Protect him from the punishment of the grave and the torment of the Fire,” Oliver said in Arabic.

“Ollie,” Thea said softly from behind him. As he turned, he heard a trio of assassins land on the balcony and enter the room.

“What are your orders, my lord?”

“Remove the body and any evidence that anything happened here. Bury him next to his wife and son.”

The figure bowed, even though Oliver had not turned. The trio worked quickly and were gone only moments later. During that time, Oliver led Thea to the couch and sat down next to her. It took him a moment to gather his thoughts.

“Malcolm was behind this whole thing, Thea. He used you to pit me against the League,” Oliver said.

“I know, Ollie. My killing Sara gave him the leverage to force you to fight Ra’s the first time,” Thea said.

“There was more to it than that. I think Malcolm knew I would fail and that I would die. When I didn’t, it gave him an even better opportunity. If I had defeated Ra’s in that first fight, it would have left the League with a power vacuum. Because while Nyssa was Heir in name, the League is old school enough that a woman, even once as skilled and smart as Nyssa, would not have been viewed favorably as leader. I believe Malcolm intended to try to use this to create a power struggle in the League and hopefully take over.”

“But, then I survived and fulfilled a League prophesy. ‘The man who survives the sword of Ra’s al
Ghul shall become Ra’s al Ghul.’ Malcolm knew that Ra’s would come for me, to force me to become his successor, and Malcolm knew that I wouldn’t want that. So, he offered his help in training you and I so that we could defeat Ra’s. His price was that when I won and was about to become Ra’s, I hand the title over to Malcolm,” Oliver told her.

“And Ra’s stabbing me to force you to choose between saving my life and staying free of the League? Roy being forced to confess to being the Arrow and being murdered in prison? You’re saying this was all part of Malcolm’s plot?”

“You getting stabbed probably wasn’t. I think Malcolm was expecting Ra’s to go after Felicity, not you. As for Roy, I think Malcolm viewed him as a pawn, one he was happy to sacrifice to further his own agenda. I also think there was more.”

“More what?” Thea asked.

“I think Malcolm didn’t just want the League, he wanted me out of the way. He knew that for me to become Ra’s successor, I would have to join the League. And once you join the League, there are only two ways to leave it: either you die or Ra’s releases you. So, if I killed Ra’s and then handed the title and the ring over to Malcolm so that he could become Ra’s, I think Malcolm would have forced me to honor my pledge of loyalty to the League,” Oliver said. “And if I tried to run, he would use you, Felicity, Dig, Laurel and this city to force me to return or watch them suffer. He may even have forced me to watch by his side as he cleansed Starling City, just as he intended to do with the Undertaking. Except now, he would have the resources of the League to aid in his quest.”

Thea just looked at her brother for a long moment, processing everything that he had just told her. She knew Malcolm was evil just from what he had forced her to do, but this, this was a whole new level. She didn’t doubt what Oliver was telling her at all, though she was having a little trouble wrapping her head around it all. She also sensed that there was more going on here that he wasn’t telling her yet, she just didn’t know what it might be.

Oliver gave her time and when she didn’t say anything, he leaned over and gave her a hug, kissed her cheek and walked away. Picking up his bag, he left the loft and went down to the parking garage. After strapping the soft-sided bag to the back of his Ducati, Oliver climbed on and drove away. He didn’t have a destination in mind as he pointed the bike out of town, not even caring about the direction. The gas tank was full and night was clear, as Oliver settled in to enjoy the ride. That all changed as he reached the city limits. A line of four assassins appeared on the road in front of him.

“Al Sah-him, Nyssa al Ghul requests that you meet with her,” one of the assassins told him.

Oliver almost smiled to himself, before remembering that he needed to maintain the stoic mask of al Sah-him. He’d known that this couldn’t be avoided, but had hoped to at least delay things until he could figure out the path he wanted. As he’d told his former team, he couldn’t be the Arrow anymore. He no longer had that, nor did he have anything as Oliver Queen, not here in Starling City anyways. There were things inside of him, fighting for control. The part that wanted peace and the part that knew there was evil in the world and that he was uniquely suited to fight it. The one thing both of those parts had completely agreed on had been killing Malcolm. The part that wanted peace knew it could never be found as long as the other man still breathed, while the other side of him knew just how much of a threat Malcolm could be and knew it needed to be eliminated.

“Take me to her,” Oliver finally said.

A moment later, a black SUV appeared and Oliver got into the back. One of the assassins rode his Ducati, following along behind the SUV as it went back into the city and to the League’s
headquarters in Starling. The other assassins waited outside in the shadows as Oliver went into the
building alone. He walked the brazer lite hall until he came to the same large area where he had meet
Ra’s all of those months before. Nyssa stood in the middle, surrounded by a semi-circle of assassins.
As one, they all knelt before Oliver as a murmured “Ra’s” filled the room.

“Rise,” Oliver said, all the coldness that had been evident in al Sah-him there in his voice. “Leave us.
I wish to speak with my wife.”

“Husband,” Nyssa said, that same little smile on her face and almost flirty tone of voice she had used
last night as she led the way from the chamber and outside. “The League awaits your ascension to
Ra’s. We will need to return to Nanda Parbat for the ceremonies. I am glad my men stopped you
before you left the city.”

“I won’t be ascending to Ra’s, Nyssa.”

“You have little choice. Remember what I told you, the only way to leave the League other than
death is for Ra’s to release you. And no, to answer the question I’m sure that you have, you can not
release yourself. To do so would leave the League leaderless and ripe to be taken over by any
number of our enemies.”

Oliver almost brought up the fact that he didn’t kill anymore, until he remembered that he had just
killed Malcolm. Yes, it was justified, but a part of him regretted having to do it. He remembered
Nyssa’s disdain with regards to his unwillingness to do all that was necessary to save his city.

“What if I handed the League over to you?” Oliver asked, knowing that Nyssa had been Heir before
Ra’s had turned his sights onto him.

“While I would certainly welcome it, I fear that my time has passed. The last few weeks have
undermined a good deal of the standing I have in the League. My seeming desertion to go to Starling
City, my father having you drag me back as a virtual prisoner and then forcing me to marry you.
These are all things that count against me. With time, I could repair the damage done, but time is
something neither of us has,” Nyssa told him, as she looked out at the city from the rooftop.

“And what if I can’t order killings, the way your father was able to?”

“The League exists to serve the will of Ra’s al Ghul. If you choose not to order evil to be replaced
with death, your will be done. Still, I think with time, you will come to see that sometimes, taking a
life or several helps save many fold more lives.”

Oliver almost smiled at that, thinking of a different time. He, Felicity and Dig were in the lair and
Oliver had made the mistake of admitting he’d never really watched either Star Wars or Star Trek.
This brought forth a rather lengthy, even by Felicity standards, exposition on why Star Trek was
better than Star Wars, though she did like the Ewoks. But the thing that had stuck with him was
about the needs of the many outweighing the needs of the few or the one. Perhaps that is what he
could do here, be willing to sacrifice himself, not just physically, but mentally and emotionally. And
by doing so, gift a better future for those he cared about.

“And what about us?” Oliver asked the last thing on his mind. He had a certain respect for
Nyssa and hatted the fact that she had been forced into a loveless marriage to him.

“What about us? I am now Bride of the Demon, you are my husband. You heard the Priestess during
the ceremony. ‘There is no vow more sacred, nor covenant more holy than the one between man and
woman. With this ceremony, your souls are bound, forever joined.’ There is no divorce or annulment
of this marriage. As far as the League is concerned, it is until death,” Nyssa said.
“I am sorry, Nyssa. This is my fault.”

“No, it is not. My father looked on my desires, my love of Sara, as a perversion. He had long desired an Heir of his blood. If it had not been you, it would have been another, someone who doesn’t share your sense of honor nor your memories of Sara. At least we will have that in common.”

Oliver turned from Nyssa and looked out at Starling City. The city he had spent the better part of 3 years protecting. He hoped that Dig would come around, because Thea, Laurel and Felicity were going to need help if they did continue being heroes. He also took a moment to remember those he had lost along the way. Of them, he believed that Sara would have been the only one to understand his choice.

“Gather our men. We return to Nanda Parbat,” Oliver said.
Two figures stood in the center of the room, their robes almost identical except in the trim. One was a dark red, while the other was dark green and gold. In a circle around them were two dozen assassins. All of them were armed with swords, except for the taller of the two figures in the center. At a nod, the ring attacked, yet the lopsided nature of the fight was evident from the beginning. In a matter of moments, the fight was over. Looking down at the fallen, the pair still standing removed their hoods and mask revealing Nyssa and Oliver.

“That was most enjoyable, Husband. Your skills continue to impress,” Nyssa said with a smile.

“Have their wounds treated and then work with them on fighting as a group. There were too many times where they were actually aiding us by getting in each other’s way,” Oliver told the assassin who was standing near the doorway.

“As you command, my lord.”

Oliver and Nyssa left the training room and walked through the halls until they reached the family wing of Nanda Parbat, the home of Ra’s and his most trusted advisors. Oliver had become used to the bowing every time he passed, but he still didn’t enjoy it. He was pleased that the tension that had existed in the first month of his reign was now largely a thing of the past. There had been those who didn’t like the fact that a relative outsider was now their leader. Not that they disputed his right, as there had been several witnesses to his fight against his predecessor, all of whom saw the man die. Still, Oliver had silenced them by not making any big changes, by keeping to the traditions of the League and by listening to Nyssa.

Nyssa had been a rock for him. Her knowledge of the League had been critical in his first days as Ra’s. It was she who had guided him through the ceremonies relating to his ascension, as well as acting a voice of wisdom making sure he didn’t go too far too fast. For all intents and purposes, she was running the day to day of the League, while he dealt more with the future. When they disagreed, he listened to all she had to say, learning to trust her judgment. The only issue that they hadn’t been able to agree on and which they had tabled until later was the matter of his heir. Nyssa felt that he should name one as soon as possible, in order to protect the League and had even offered three members of the League that she felt would be good choices. Oliver had wanted it to be her and when informed that that was not possible, given that she was Bride of the Demon, he had shown his stubborn streak and dug his heels in.

Once they were in their suite of rooms, they went their separate ways for the moment. Nyssa took some clothes and went into the bathroom, while Oliver went behind a set of bookshelves where he’d fashioned a small area to read or think. Here he changed quickly into a blue shirt and jeans before going back into the main room and taking his seat in the leather armchair. A folder he’d been reading earlier was on the small table next to it, so he picked that up to read while he waited for Nyssa to rejoin him. Nyssa came back a few moments later, now dressed in a multicolored blouse and black slacks. Taking a seat on the couch, she waited for Oliver to finish reading.

“I’m glad that you are back,” Oliver said as he closed the folder and put it aside.
“My trip was very profitable. Two human trafficking rings have been destroyed, with over two hundred people freed and we have the records as well. I have four teams of assassins going down the lists and believe we may be able to locate and rescue several thousand others,” Nyssa told him, a smile on her face.

“What else?”

“One of the rings had a group in Starling City. Our men were just finishing up when they encountered Laurel and your sister. Based on their reports, I made a stop there on my way home.”

Oliver looked at Nyssa sharply. In the last six months, he had left Nanda Parbat several times. He had never gone closer to Starling City than a brief stop in Central City. He had called his sister several times, yet between the time difference and whatnot, they hadn’t been able to speak at length. Now, looking at Nyssa, he sensed that something was wrong. She looked similar to how she had when she found out about Sara. It was less deep, but there was a definite sadness there.

“What’s wrong, Nyssa?” Oliver asked gently.

“It is your sister, Oliver,” Nyssa said softly. “She is suffering the effects of the Lazarus Pit. When I was in Starling City, I followed her and Laurel one night. They were questioning a man, trying to find the source of a drug. The man was not answering Laurel’s questions, so Thea stepped in and broke the man’s arm, nearly tearing it from his shoulder with the force she used.”

“And this is because of the Lazarus Pit?”

“It is a blood lust. Your sister was near death when my father put her in the Pit. The Pit healed her, but at a terrible cost, one that is now making itself known to her. The Pit gives life, but a balance must be maintained. Thea will need to kill, to replace the balance. If she does not, then it will take that life from her and she will die. After everything that I saw, I visited Laurel, so that I could tell her. Laurel then asked me for the impossible, that we use the Pit to bring Sara back from the dead. When I told her I would not assist in such an endeavor, she demanded to speak with Ra’s, to ask him for this.”

“Does she know that I am Ra’s?” Oliver asked, searching Nyssa’s face.

“No, the false trail that you have laid has been effective,” Nyssa told him with a smile.

It had been one of the first things Oliver had done as Ra’s and he almost laughed at how easy it had been to accomplish. The League might be a little old fashioned, but not in the places where it really mattered. There was a state of the art communication system in Nanda Parbat and a room full of computer equipment that would have had Felicity dying to get her hands on it. So, it had been simple to pair up two phones. Oliver had the one and when he made a call, it went first to the other cell phone and then was forwarded to the dialed number. The person on the other end of the call only saw the number of the second phone, which was in the possession of a League member. Clear orders had been given that the phone was not to come with five hundred miles of Nanda Parbat. If it was necessary for the member to return, they first met up with another member of the League and handed off the phone.

Oliver then thought about the information that Nyssa had given him. He wished he had known about Thea before this, had known that she was dealing with this. Yes, he was now Ra’s and as the head of the League, he was supposed to have left his former life behind. That was part of the reason he’d avoided Starling City when he left Nanda Parbat, thinking that distance and time would help him create his new life here. The one thing from that former life he couldn’t cut out was Thea, because she was and always would be his sister. He would always have a need to take care of her, protect
Oliver also thought about Sara. Given what Nyssa had just told him about Thea, did he want to subject Sara to the Pit? Or would it be better just to allow her to rest in peace? He knew Nyssa loved her, as did he. There was a part of him that wanted to do it, wanted his friend, his lover back. That wanted to give Nyssa more time with her Beloved as some form of recompense for all her father had done to her. The decision was not one that he would easily arrive at, nor would it be one he would make alone.

“Do you know of any possible cures of the blood lust, Nyssa?”

“There is one. It is called the Lotus, a rare elixir found in Japan. It is guarded by a group called the Crescent Order. The League and the Order have been foes in the past and it is not likely that the Order would give up the Lotus to the League, as they know the dangers of the Lazarus Pit. They believe that the power of the Pit should be used sparingly, if at all. It was a view my father did not hold to, especially as time passed and his use of the Pit became more frequent, bringing with it a greater degree of cruelty and madness.”

“We will still need to try, to somehow convince the Order that there is honor in what we seek,” Oliver told her. “We will leave for Japan in the next few days, after we come up with a plan to both obtain the Lotus and convince my former team to give the cure to Thea. We will also need a plan to deal with the other issue by that time.”

“Laurel and her request?”

“Yes. There is a part of me that wants their friend back. That misses her laugh, her smile, her spirit. But there is also that part of me that remembers Sara fleeing the League because she couldn’t take what she had done. I think of that and ask what right do I have to bring her back only for her to be trapped into that life once more, driven to kill because of the blood lust.”

“Also, Sara is dead. The Pit wasn’t meant to be used on the dead, but rather those injured or near death. I do not know if it would even work. If it did, what came out of the Pit might not be the Sara that we remember. That is why I told Laurel that her request was impossible,” Nyssa told him.

“What do you mean by ‘what came out of the Pit might not be the Sara that we remember’?” Oliver asked.

“Sara’s soul is no longer in that body, Oliver. If we were to put her body in the Pit and by some miracle it did come back to life, Sara, our Sara, would not be there. It would be more of a wild animal. It would take the work of a Priestess or Shaman to possibly restore her soul to her, if such a thing were even possible.”

Oliver closed his eyes and leaned forward in the chair, resting his forearms on his thighs. Nyssa had come to recognize this as the pose he took when he was wrestling with a difficult decision. So, she got up from the couch and walked over to the bookshelves, selecting a book Oliver had bought on one of his trips. Since coming to Nanda Parbat, he had taken an interest in broadening his education. First, he’d read books from the League’s library, learning the history of the League and the teachings of some of the previous Ra’s al Ghul’s. He’d come to learn that her father had twisted those teachings for his own purposes. That had been the day he’d taken her aside and made her swear that if he headed down a similar path, she would not hesitate to do whatever it took to stop him.

Nyssa completed the book, all the while Oliver remained as he had been when she started reading. Night had fallen and she had gotten up to light the torches and the brazier that served to keep the rooms warm during the winter’s night. Yet, he remained deep in thought, so still that if it had not
been for the rise and fall of his chest, she might have been concerned he had died. It was only when one of the servants brought in dinner that he had stirred, eating the meal of lamb and rice before settling back into his previous position.

“I may have an idea for how we could help Sara, if we decided to try and bring her back with the Pit. I’ll need to make a call in the morning.”

“A call to whom?” Nyssa asked.

“While I was on Lian Yu, I once met a man by the name of John Constantine. He was very skilled with magic and the occult. If anyone might have an idea of how to get Sara’s soul back into her body, it would be him,” Oliver said, looking at Nyssa and catching the hurt in her eyes. “I’m not saying we’re going to do this, just that before we make any decisions, we should have as many facts as possible.”

“I would like to listen to what this man has to say.”

“We’ll call him in the morning, then. The both of us.”

Nanda Parbat

November 4, 2015

Oliver and Nyssa had both awoken early. This was so that they could eat breakfast and then call John Constantine before it was time for the daily training to begin. They both liked to observe and even take part in the training of the new recruits. They would also spend some time sparring with the more experienced League members, so that they could maintain their skills.

“How will you know what time to call him?” Nyssa asked.

“John travels a lot, so any time is as good as any other since I’ve got no idea where he is right now,” Oliver told her as he picked up the phone and dialed a number before putting the phone on speaker.

“Oliver.”

“John.”

“It’s been a dog’s age, mate,” Constantine said.

“More than. Remember that favor you owe me?” Oliver asked.

“I hardly expect you to let me forget about that.”

“I need some information and I may need your help.”

“The information is free. What do you need to know?” Constantine asked.

“I have a friend, a very good friend and she was killed last year. I have found a way to bring her back to life, maybe, but I’ve also been told she might not be her if I was to do this,” Oliver explained.

“Whoever told you that is right, mate. Bringing someone back from the dead is tricky stuff and the longer someone is dead, the trickier it gets. If you were to succeed in bringing the body back, you
would still need to get her soul back into that body. That would require a Restitutionem, the restoration of her soul to her body.”

“And you have done such a Restitutionem, Mister Constantine?” Nyssa asked.

“Once, maybe a year ago. But don’t worry, love, it’s just like riding a bike,” Constantine told her.

“How long would it take you to get what you need and be prepared to perform the Restitutionem, John?” Oliver asked.

“If you can give me a couple of days, I can be in Nanda Parbat with everything I need.”

“I’m not even going to ask how you know I’m in Nanda Parbat, John.”

“Are you confident that this will work, Mister Constantine? I have lost Sara once already. I don’t think I could bare losing her again.”

“I am very confident, love,” Constantine said. “Beside, I owe Oliver and I have no intention of letting him down. I’ll see you all in a couple of days.”

Oliver had to fight not to laugh when the phone clicked off. Nyssa was looking at the phone in annoyance. She was also, Oliver noticed, looking anywhere but at him.

“Nyssa, talk to me, please,” Oliver said softly. “If you are against this, if you think this is wrong, tell me. I will call John and tell him that we have reconsidered. Sara was your Beloved and I will not disrespect that, nor you or her memory. This decision had to be unanimous. We already know Laurel’s thoughts, she wants her sister back. And I am pretty sure their father feels the same.”

“I don’t know, Oliver,” Nyssa said. “I trust Mister Constantine believes what he is saying, I trust your faith in the man, but I also know the Pit gave my father a long life, longer than what was natural, and much longer than he deserved. But he paid a dark price for it. A price Thea is paying now. I wouldn’t wish it on my most bitter enemy, let alone my Beloved.”

Oliver stayed silent knowing that Nyssa needed to process this on her own. He couldn’t and wouldn’t tell her how to feel about this, nor what she should think. In truth, he was also uncertain. Not because he didn’t believe that John could do what he had said he could, he’d certainly seen some strange things when he’d helped John. No, what he was uncertain about was whether Sara, if they did this and if John succeeded in restoring her soul, would also experience the same blood lust that Nyssa reported his sister was going through. What was worse was that it would not be him or Laurel or Nyssa that would be forced to pay the price, it would be Sara herself. And there was no way to ask her opinion on what they were purposing to do.

“We need to go to Japan. We will need as much of the Lotus as we can acquire. I will not decide on this until we have done that, for without it there is no hope for either Sara or Thea.”

Kyushu, Japan

November 4, 2015

Nyssa, Oliver and an assassin named Talibah walked through the forest, following a well worn path. They had only the light of the moon to go by, yet all were adapt at moving in darkness. When they
had prepared to leave Nanda Parbat, they had discussed whether they should bring more assassins. Oliver had persuaded Nyssa that taking more men with them might be seen as a desire for conflict. They would need to gain the Lotus not by fighting, but by talking if at all possible.

“This is it,” Nyssa said as they came to a small clearing, an ornate lantern on one side of the path.

“I see no shrine,” Talibah said.

“The woods are the shrine, Talibah. In times long past, the people of Japan found their Gods in all things. Nature was their temple.”

Nyssa began to kneel at a wooden arch, the symbol of the Shinto shrine. Oliver and Talibah were quick to follow suit. All three acknowledge that while this was not the god that they worshiped, such as it were, it was the god of the people that they came to meet and it was only right to show their respect.

“Wait for us here, Talibah. This is something we must do on our own,” Oliver said, then he and Nyssa entered the shrine.

A short walk later, they reached a small building. Similar ornate lanterns surrounded the perimeter of the clearing it sat in. Inside the building, candles were lit. A figure knelt before the structure, in prayer perhaps, Oliver wondered.

“Are you lost?” came a voice in Japanese, soft but easily understandable to Oliver. It also brought a smile of remembrance, for he knew that voice.

“No. we have found what we seek,” Nyssa replied in kind, causing the figure to turn.

“Hello, Tatsu,” Oliver said, “You look well. Being a member of the Crescent Order clearly suits you.”

“I have found my purpose. What is yours in Japan?”

“We have come for the Lotus.”

“It is my responsibility to keep it safe,” Tatsu said.

“I know,” Oliver told her, “but I ask that you hear what I have to say. Please, Tatsu.”

Looking at the pair, neither of whom had made any move for a weapon, Tatsu nodded. The three of them took seats on the ground, facing each other. Nyssa remained silent now, knowing that Oliver had the better chance of reaching the other woman.

“The last time we met, you know I was fighting against the League of Assassins.”

“And now you are here in the garb of the League, accompanied by Ra’s al Ghul’s daughter.”

“Actually, she is now Ra’s al Ghul’s wife. My wife,” Oliver said. “Ra’s was cunning and manipulative. He eventually did the one thing that forced me to join the League, he stabbed my sister with a sword. The only way to save her was the Lazarus Pit. What he didn’t tell me was the cost that using the pit on her would entail.”

“Your sister is suffering from the blood lust,” Tatsu said, knowing instantly.

“Yes, but that is not the only reason we seek the Lotus. The reason I was fighting against the League was because of Malcolm Merlyn. He was wanted by the League for violating their code, so he
drugged my sister, his daughter, and training her to use a bow. He then had her kill a member of the League, a good friend of ours and Nyssa’s Beloved.”

“How did this friend end up in the League, Oliver?”

“She was with me on the Queen’s Gambit when we were shipwrecked. We got separated and while I was found by ARGUS, she was found by Nyssa. I need to right the wrongs that were done by myself and others to Sara and to her family,” Oliver told her.

“And you are intending to use the Lazarus Pit to resurrect this woman? How to you intend to make her whole, for the woman that would come out of the Pit would be this Sara in body only,” Tatsu replied. “She would be feral, little better than a wild animal. Can you truly wish this on your friend?”

“No, I do not. And if I did not have someone who is confident that he can restore Sara’s soul to her body, I would not even consider it. But even if this person is right and he can, she would still suffer from the same blood lust, if not worse, that my sister is going through. I will not inflict that on Sara, which means that without the Lotus elixir, I can not proceed.”

“And if I was willing to give you the elixir, but only enough for one person, what would you do then?”

Oliver went silent at that, wondering if this was so form of test. He knew what he immediate response was, that he would use it to help his sister. But was that the voice of reason speaking or was it because Thea was his sister, his only surviving family and he wasn’t willing to lose that. But could he so quickly cast this one hope for Sara aside.

“I would use it to save my sister. Not because my sister means more to me than Sara, but because Sara is already dead. Thea will die without the Lotus, unless she becomes a killer, curbing the blood lust by taking the lives of others. If I use the elixir on Thea and cure her, Sara would still be just as dead. If I use it for Sara, I may bring Sara back but at the price of condemning Thea to a life of killing or her own death,” Oliver said, his tone steady throughout.

“And indeed, Oliver. I am glad to see you are thinking with your head and not your heart. Wait here,” Tatsu said as she stood up and left the clearing. Nyssa and Oliver both stood and faced the small shrine. Ten minutes later, Tatsu came back, followed by an old man. Oliver and Nyssa both bowed to the man, who returned the gesture before reaching into his robes and pulling out two bottles filled with a blue liquid.

“This is the Lotus, enough for the two women you wish to save,” the man said, handing them over to Oliver. “Tatsu had spoken highly of you, as a man of honor. I trust you will take a polite word of caution from an old man. Now that you are aware of the price that the Pit exacts, exercise extreme caution in its future use. The Crescent Order will not provide future quantities of the Lotus to the League, Ra’s a Ghul.”

“I understand, sir. I am indebted to the Crescent Order. If the Order ever requires it, the League is at your service.”

The four exchanged bows, then the old man went back the way he had come. Tatsu resumed her vigil before the shrine, while Oliver and Nyssa returned to where they had left Talibah. Motioning the woman to silence, the group left the area around the shrine. The walk back to their vehicle seemed quicker than their journey to the shrine, but whether that was perception or if they had actually increased their pace was unknown. What was known was that soon they were at the airfield, where the plane that they had arrived in was waiting for them.
Talibah was the first to exit the vehicle. She made her way to the plane, almost reaching the stairs before realizing that Nyssa and Ra’s were not following her. She turned back to see that Ra’s was still seated in the vehicle, while Nyssa was outside and now kneeling next to his door’s window. There were several minutes of conversation between the pair before Nyssa stood and walked towards the plane.

“Get onboard, Talibah,” Nyssa said.

“Is Ra’s not joining us for the next part of the journey?” Talibah asked.

“No. There are preparations he must make in Nanda Parbat. Our orders are to provide the elixir to Thea Queen and to procure the remains of Ta-er al-Sahfer. The easiest way to accomplish this will be by me distracting those who might take notice by giving them the elixir while you and some of our members in Starling City retrieve the remains from her grave.”

“It will be as you say, Nyssa.”
Spartan, Speedy and Black Canary were out patrolling the streets. The criminal element in Starling had realized that the Arrow was no longer around, so they were starting to get back to the way things were before the vigilante was around. They weren’t as afraid of the others as they had been of him. The trio was trying, but at best they were in a holding action. At worst, they were in danger of losing the city to the criminals.

Dig was the one that spotted them first, not that they were trying too hard to remain hidden. Taking the small camera that Felicity had given to each of them, he started taking pictures. As he did, they were transmitted to the lair so that Felicity could run facial recognition and hopefully identify all the players. He also let Thea and Laurel know where he was and that he would need backup. There were definitely too many for him to even consider going it alone. He had stopped counting once he hit twenty.

“Well, that looks like fun,” Thea said from behind John, startling him a little.

“Any ideas, John?” Laurel asked.

“You and me on the ground, Thea up high taking down who she can with her bow. Thea, try to get the leaders first, see if we can’t cut the head off the snake.”

Thea took up her bow and aimed, shooting out a grapnel arrow to get her up to the rooftops. She moved a couple of buildings over, so that she had the best angle she could on the group down below. Once she was in position, she aimed an arrow at the group and let the others know she was ready. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Dig and Laurel break cover and charge at the group. Thea released the arrow, grabbed another from her quiver and repeated the process. She had gotten four arrows into gang members by the time her partners were engaged.

Dig and Laurel were fighting, up close and personal. Dig had a pair of batons as well as his pistol, while Laurel had her tonfa. The pair worked well together, watching each others backs as they took down the gang members. Yet, it was hard work, as some of their opponents would be back on their feet after a moment. Still, they fought on and eventually won. Two large vans full of drugs were now off the streets and the city would be able to confiscate over a million dollars, making it two very big wins as far as the team was concerned.

They were just about to leave when a shadow stepped away from the wall. Dig had his pistol out and aimed swiftly, while Thea knocked an arrow. The only one who didn’t was Laurel, as she looked at the person who was clearly a member of the League. As she looked, the little details hit her. From the other person’s size, the way they stood and the accents on their uniform. She hoped she was right, as she took a step forward to the surprise of her teammates.

“Hello, Laurel,” Nyssa said.

“Nyssa?” Laurel half asked, half stated.

Nyssa lowered her mask and her hood, revealing herself. This got Thea to relax her bow and return
the arrow to her quiver. John, on the other hand, only lowered his pistol. After everything that happened, he wasn’t exactly sure what to think about the woman.

“I mean you no harm, Mister Diggle.”

“Why are you here, then?” John asked.

“It is a somewhat lengthy conversation. One that would be better suited for somewhere else at the moment, I believe,” Nyssa told him.

“I’m not sure I’m comfortable with you knowing where the lair is.”

“In a sub-basement under Palmer Technologies.”

“I didn’t tell her,” Laurel said when John looked at her.

“Mister Diggle, what made my father so dangerous wasn’t his skills at combat. It was all of the knowledge that the League has acquired and is still acquiring. Knowledge is true power, as my father’s successor knows well. Now, please,” Nyssa said.

With that, the four got into the van and drove away. Dig took a few precautions to make sure no one was following them, before making his way to the garage area of Palmer Technologies and the lair. A ramp led down to a parking area, hidden behind a steel door. Felicity had seen the van enter the parking area and opened the door before they got there, closing it after the van had cleared. Felicity had also heard everything over their communications channel, so she was not surprised to see Nyssa. Once everyone was out of the van, they divided into two groups. The four members of the team stood by Felicity’s workstation, while Nyssa stood across from them.

“OK. Let me ask you again, why are you here?” John asked.

“It is the will of Ra’s al Ghul. He knows that in the fight between my father and Oliver Queen, innocents were harmed. He can not change that. He can, however, offer Miss Queen some assistance with the effects of the Pit that she is suffering. It is for this reason that I have been sent to Starling City.”

“What do you mean, effects of the Pit?”

“I was in Starling City last week, on my way back to Nanda Parbat. I had some time, so I was wandering the city when I came upon a fight. More accurately, a rather savage beating being delivered by my sister-in-law. I was somewhat stunned, not at that fact that she could fight, but by the sheer ferocity of the attack. Yet, when she was done, she had an expression on her face that nearly broke my heart. She looked lost, horrified at what she had done. It was then that I realized she was suffering from blood lust, brought on by her being healed by the Pit.”

“When I returned to Nanda Parbat, I spoke with Ra’s al Ghul and advised him of what I had seen. I also told him about a cure for the blood lust, one my father had tried to obtain many times over the course of his life, often at great cost. My father always failed, because of a number of reasons. Ra’s agreed that we should attempt to obtain the elixir and right the wrong done. We were fortunate, when we arrived at the temple where it is kept, to find Tatsu there. Once we explained why we wanted the elixir and the connection to Oliver Queen, she spoke with her Order and was granted permission to give us enough to cure Miss Queen,” Nyssa told them, as she reached into her robes and removed a bottle of blue liquid.

“And you expect us to believe that some magic potion is going to cure this mythical ‘blood lust’ that you say Thea is suffering from? I mean, I’m blonde, but I’m not that blonde. Right, guys?” Felicity
pointed out before looking at the others. Thea’s head was down, looking at her feet, while Laurel and Dig were both looking at Thea. “I mean, there’s no such thing as ‘blood lust’, is there?”

“Is what she saying true, Thea?” Dig asked, as he took the young woman in. The fact that she wouldn’t look at him, at any of them, worried him. So did the white knuckles as her hands gripped the edge of Felicity’s workstation as if it was the only thing keeping her from either dropping to the floor or launching herself at someone.

“It’s true. Ever since it happened, I could feel I was a little more aggressive, but it didn’t seem like something I couldn’t handle. Then it started getting worse. And that night, I suddenly couldn’t handle it anymore,” Thea said softly.

“You could have told us, any of us. We would have done whatever we could have to help you.”

Laurel stepped up to Thea and gathered her in a hug. She considered the youngest Queen a sister and had for a long time. When she and Oliver had been together and she used to think about their future together, one thing she’d hoped for was a close relationship with her sister-in-law. And since Oliver wasn’t here to help her, Laurel would take up that mantel.

“I trust her, Thea,” Laurel told her. “You can too.”

“So, how exactly does this work? Do I drink it?”

“No, you would take it intravenously. I am certain that you know people that could assist you with this,” Nyssa said, handing the bottle to Dig before approaching Thea and Laurel. “Be well, both of you. Until we meet again.”

With that, Nyssa turned and walked to the end of the lair, where a set of steps were. Dig gave a chuckle of amusement as Nyssa disappeared from sight. The woman had been both their enemy and their ally more than once, so he was still a little hesitant about what she had told them. Which was she actually now? Yet, Laurel had said that she trusted her and if what Nyssa and Thea had said was true, they could not let Thea’s condition get worse. So far, they could count themselves lucky that the young woman hadn’t killed anyone yet. But how long could that luck reasonably last?

“When do we want to do this, if we want to do this that is. Are we sure that we want to do this? I mean, don’t get me wrong, but we have no way of knowing that this is what she said it is. And even if it is, we have no way of testing that it will do what she claimed it will do. What if it makes things worse instead of better?”

“I say we do this and sooner rather than later. I understand what you’re saying, Felicity, but I’m scared that the next time this happens…. What if, one of you is with me and tries to stop me, so I lose it with you. What if I hurt or worse, what if I kill one of you because of this,” Thea said, the pain on her face revealing the inner torment that she was going through.

“Then we face it together, as a team. Because, we’re not going to let you go through this alone. And whatever you decide, we’ve got your back,” Dig told her, meaning every word. No matter what his issues with Oliver, there was no way that he was going to leave Thea to face this alone. At the same time, and for the first time since the night Oliver defeated Ra’s al Ghul, Dig found himself wishing that the other man was here. His sister would have the team, but he knew from experience that nothing replaced family in times like this.

Outside, Nyssa was on the rooftop of a neighboring building. She waited and watched for several minutes, to see if any of the members of team would try to follow her. Once she was satisfied, she moved off across the rooftops, keeping to a swift pace but also a circuitous route. She was getting
close to where she had first encountered the team when she felt the cell phone she carried vibrate. Stopping in the shadows of an HVAC unit, she took out the phone, already guessing who it was.

“We have completed our task,” Talibah reported,

“And the site?” Nyssa asked.

“It has been restored as it was. Only the closest examination would reveal that it has been disturbed.”

“Very well. Proceed to the airplane and I will join you there. Once the package is secured, release the Shadows to return to their task.”

“Yes, Nyssa,” Talibah said before ending the call.

Nyssa turned the phone off, put it away and made her way to where she had left her car. Once there, she got behind the wheel and drove off towards the airport. Nyssa used the drive to steady herself for what lay ahead. By the time she arrived, she was as prepared as she could be. A figure stepped out of the shadows as she got out of the car, driving it away as she walked towards the plane that was waiting. Climbing inside, the rear ramp was closed and the plane began to taxi. Taking a seat, she looked at the plain wooden box that sat by itself in the middle of the cargo hold.

Once the aircraft had reached altitude, Nyssa got out of her seat and went to the box. Kneeling, she spent several moments in prayer. Only then did she lift the lid and stare down at the remains of her Beloved. She felt the sadness rise up within her once again, one that she had believed that she had put aside when she had accepted Sara’s death. Yet, looking at the body of her Beloved once again and it all came rushing back. So, with one final glance, she closed the box and began to pray once more. Only this time, it was not for Sara’s soul, but rather that what Oliver purposed was possible.

Nanda Parbat

November 7, 2015

Oliver stood in the great hall with John Constantine beside him. The Priestess and several members of the League, all of whom had been personally trained by the Priestess, were in another room preparing Sara’s body. Nyssa had gone with them, but to what purpose, Oliver did not know for certain. He suspected it was so that she would have to spend as little time around Constantine as possible. He gave himself a mental head shake, realizing that he should have better prepared Nyssa for meeting the man, who was something of an acquired taste.

Last night, the three of them had sat down and discussed how they would proceed. Obviously, the first task would be the resurrection, as the other two tasks didn’t matter if they failed at that. The sticking point had been whether to have Constantine perform the Restitutionem before or after they administered the Lotus. It wasn’t until Constantine told them that he believed the elixir would be most effective if Sara was made whole before it was administered that they finalized their plans.

A few handfuls of assassins, known to be loyal to Nyssa, had assisted in the tasks that needed to be completed. They had gathered everything that Constantine would need for the Restitutionem. They guarded a second room, where Constantine had made his preparations, after the Priestess flatly refused to permit them in the great hall. She had feared that some of the magic and symbols would thwart her own magic, which would be needed to successfully resurrect Sara. So, once they resurrected Sara, they would quickly move her to the second room for the Restitutionem and after
that was completed, it would be on to the private wing of Ra’s al Ghul. There, a room had been set aside for Sara and a healer awaited to administer the Lotus elixir to Sara.

“Explain to me again, how is this going to work?”

“I have enough juice to take me, you and Nyssa to the other realm and back. You both need to understand, whatever has locked her soul away. It’s not going to give it over without a fight,” Constantine told him.

As he was saying that, Nyssa walked into the room. She looked a little off, not the confident Nyssa al Ghul that he had come to know these last six months. Oliver knew that this was weighing on her, so he stepped up to her.

“They are ready, Husband,” Nyssa said softly.

“Nyssa, look at me,” Oliver said just as softly. “It’s not too late. For you to say ‘Don’t do this’, ‘This isn’t what Sara would want’ or just ‘Stop’. I may be Ra’s al Ghul and my will may be all the reason needed for something to be done, but not with you. Never with you. You are my partner, my friend, my Wife. I will always listen to your thoughts, ideas, opinions. I may not always do what you want, but I will never ignore what you have to say.”

Nyssa felt something shift inside of her at those words. In all of her years with her father, she had never heard anything close to what this man had just said to her. And even if he didn’t say the word love, she felt it none the less. No, not the romantic love between a man and a woman, but more the love that the Christian scriptures spoke of. So, she would put her faith in that love and place her trust in this man.

“I will not lie and say I have no reservations about what we are about to attempt, Husband. But sometimes we have to put our trust in others, especially those we are wed to.”

“Thank you, Nyssa.”

At that, Nyssa left the room and a few moments later returned. She was followed by the Priestess and a group of assassins bearing Sara’s body on a wooden stretcher. The Priestess walked over to the Lazarus Pit and lit the candles that surrounded it, all the while offering prayers. Once that was done, the stretcher was set on the floor and ropes were fastened to each corner. As it was lifted into the air, chanting began from those assembled, as they joined the Priestess in her prayers. Slowly, the stretcher was moved over the Pit and then lowered into the bubbling waters. Once her body was fully submerged, the ends of the ropes were let go and the group all watched expectantly.

Oliver began to fear that they had failed. The waters had stopped bubbling as heavily, but nothing else seemed to be happening. Then, just as he was about to give up hope, something changed. The waters weren’t bubbling, but they were moving. A form was beginning to rise from them. First, all that he and the others could see was a bowed head with stringy, dirty blonde hair. As she rose, the costume of the Canary was revealed, the same outfit that Sara had been wearing when they buried her last year. But the look in her eyes, that wasn’t Sara at all. She leaped from the Pit with a cry, grunting as she landed. Her eyes were wild, almost crazed, as she whirled about like an animal looking for prey.

“Hold her,” Oliver called, bringing two of the assassins in the room to seize Sara, so that the Priestess could inject her with something to sedate her. Oliver couldn’t help catch the look on Nyssa’s face as she watched this, the pain and sadness that were there. All he could do was repeat to himself that this would work, it had to work.
Oliver lifted Sara into his arms and led the way to the second chamber. On the floor was something that he couldn’t even guess at, drawn there by Constantine. He remembered the instructions that he had been given and set her down in the middle of the diagram. Constantine took his place at Sara’s head, while Nyssa and Oliver stood by her sides. At a glance to one of the assassins, the others left the room save for the Priestess and two others. The doors were closed, with those outside having already been instructed not to open them for any reason.

“Remember. Whatever has locked her soul away, it’s not going to give it over without a fight. So be ready,” Constantine told them, as Nyssa and Oliver joined hands across Sara’s body. “All right then. On with the show.” With that, he knelt down and lit the mixture that he had prepared, then stood and began to pray. “Pelako ameso yobe elegguia imbone ukuchila panshita. De domino vestro, aliquis. Et stabit de domino vestro. Audite vocem meam. Ancor, ancor, candones helosi et vos eleutis phugori...”

At this, Sara gave a gasp and the room began to shake, the light from the torches flicking. Oliver and Nyssa both had their eyes closed, but the others in the room were looking around uncertainly.

“De cuinne-ce agus akasha seall me do solas!”

Sara screamed and Nyssa cried out, as suddenly they were no longer in the chamber that they had been in. This still looked like Nanda Parbat, but lighter, cleaner in some ways. Sara was no longer with them, either. Nyssa looked around in confusion.

“Well, I’ve had worse hangovers,” Constantine said with a grin.

“So, what are we supposed to do now,” Oliver asked.

“Help!” Sara cried from somewhere, getting Nyssa to run looking for her, the others following her. A second later and they were all back where the started.

“This is new.”

“Well, new is why you brought me along.”

They heard Sara call out again, but this time Constantine stopped Nyssa before she could run off.

“No, no, no, no.”

“Well, I’m not going to just stand here!”

“We need a tour guide,” Constantine said, as he took his lighter from his pocket and placed it on the ground. Waving his hand over it, as he recited, “Axis mundi, produco tuus vires.”

The lighter began to spin and rise from the floor. Oliver and Nyssa watched and waited until the lighter stopped and Constantine took it back in his hand.

“This way. Unless you want to be trapped here for all eternity,” Constantine told them, before leading the way. The others followed him into a room that resembled the great hall of Nanda Parbat. A pair white eyed assassins stood between them and the Pit, where Sara was.

“This is what locked away Sara’s soul?” Nyssa asked.

“How the human mind perceives it, anyway.”

The pair of assassins begin to advance, as Sara cried once more for help. Oliver takes down the
assassins with his bow, then he and Nyssa run to the Pit. Nyssa runs to the Pit to get Sara, while behind them another assassin come in through the door that they had entered through.

“Get to the Pit. You need to work together to get her out. I’ll take care of our new friend,” Constantine said.

Oliver jumped onto the edge of the Pit and reached in for Sara. The two of them worked to get her out, but something was fighting back from the waters themselves. Meanwhile, Constantine had snatched up a fallen sword and was trying to defend himself against the assassin. Trying being the operative word, as the man was mostly ducking and dodging to avoid the assassin’s blade.

“You know, any time today would be good.”

Constantine finally had to resort to his magic to keep from getting killed. He recited a spell that eventually froze the assassin in mid air, allowing him to run his sword through the man. As he was doing this, Oliver and Nyssa stood on the edge of the Pit. Reaching down, they got a firm grip on Sara and on the count of three, yanked her out of the Pit and all of them out of the other realm. A collective gasp passed through the trio that was standing as they all came back to themselves. Nyssa swayed slightly, as they all stumbled back from Sara, who was lying on the floor unconscious.

“Did we….?” Nyssa started to say before seeing that Sara was still, her eyes closed. Then, her eyes opened, not the eyes that they had seen before, but Sara’s eyes. Those beautiful blue eyes and Nyssa wanted to cry, as she dropped down on her knees next to Sara, who was sitting up and looking around in confusion. Nyssa wrapped her arms around her Beloved, holding her to her. Constantine stood with a satisfied smile on his face, while Oliver looked on with happiness. Happiness that his friend was back, that Nyssa and Sara would have more time, that the Lances would have their daughter and sister back.

“Thank you, John. I owe you one,” Oliver told him, holding out his hand.

“I believe I owed you one, Mate,” Constantine replied. “How’s about we just call it even, eh?”

“How about any time, anywhere you need me, I’ll be there.”

“I’ll take that. Now, if there is nothing else, do you suppose you could get me a way to London?”

“Talibah, see to it,” Oliver said to one of the assassins in the room.

“Yes, my lord,” Talibah said, as she gestured for him to follow her.

As they left, Oliver looked back over at where Sara and Nyssa were. He was only slightly surprised to see the pair looking at him, Nyssa with a joy he had never seen before while Sara was a little dazed. He knelt down on the floor with them and pulled them both into a hug.

“Ollie,” Sara said, her mind not fully understanding what she was seeing. She had expected him in street clothes or even his Arrow costume, not in the robes of the League and certainly not in those marking him as Ra’s. Yet, all of the things were there, the Demon’s Head pendant, the rings, the look.

“Welcome back, Sara. We have a lot to talk about, I know. But for now, we need to get you to the healers, so that they can do their work as well.”

With that, Oliver lifted Sara bridal style and carried her from the room. In the halls, assassins backed up and bowed as they passed. Sara spent the journey to her room looking around at everything, as her mind started to put pieces back together and memories came to her. The room that she was taken
to had been Nyssa’s when they had been together. Now, there were only a few vestiges of her there. Instead, the room looked to have been prepared for someone else. When she saw the bo that she used in training leaning against a standing wardrobe, Sara realized it was for her.

Oliver carried her to the bed and gently laid her down. When he stepped back, he motioned for the healer to come forward. The woman had an IV pole, with a bag of saline solution and a bottle of blue liquid hanging from it. Taking Sara’s arm, she found a vein and slid a needle in. Once the fluids were flowing, the healer tapped down the needle to told it in place and cautioned Sara to lay still. Nyssa climbed onto the bed behind Sara and held her to her, talking softly to her Beloved. The healer took a chair by the door to the room, while Oliver settled into a seat next to the bed.

“Rest, Sara. We’ll be here when you wake,” Nyssa said, looking across at Oliver.
Since You've Been Gone

Nanda Parbat

November 8, 2015

Sara opened her eyes to the sunlight streaming into the room. She was feeling confused, as she took in the bed that she was laying in and the room that she could see from the way she lay. She felt a warm body pressed to her back, an arm draped around her. Taking a deep breath, she inhaled a scent that both familiar and confusing. Sara turned over to her side and found Nyssa there, blue eyes meeting brown.

“Good morning, Beloved,” Nyssa said, as she pressed a kiss to Sara’s forehead.

“Is this a dream?” Sara asked.

“No, Beloved. This is very much real.”

“But I shouldn’t be here. I should be…."

“What is the last thing that you remember?” Nyssa asked.

“I was in Starling City. I had just seen my sister, before she had to go someplace. I was heading back to my safe house when I heard someone call to me. Then nothing until I woke up here,” Sara said.

“Then there is much we will have to tell you.”

“We? You mean your father? How did I get here from Starling?”

“Nyssa means her and myself, Sara,” Oliver said from the other side of the bed, causing Sara to bolt upright in shock, before she remembered what she thought was a dream. She was laying on the ground, Nyssa was holding her and Oliver was there too. But why would those two be together? As far as she remembered, they were more antagonistic than not.

“As I said, there is much we need to tell you,” Nyssa said. “Some of it will be hard to hear, but you need to in order to understand the way things are now. Since this is more his story than mine, I will let Oliver explain and will fill in where needed.”

“The voice that you heard was that of someone that was sent to kill you. They shot you with three arrows, then you felt off the roof of the building. I can’t say for certain if the arrows killed you, or if the fall did. What I do know is that you were dead. The team and I tried to find the person that did it, but ran into dead end after dead end. Then, Nyssa came to town and we learned that Malcolm was still alive. We found him and he told us that he hadn’t killed you. Nyssa didn’t believe him, but I did because he swore to me on Thea that he hadn’t done it.”

“Why would you have believed anything that Malcolm said after everything that he had done, Ollie? I know Thea’s your sister, but any promise of his is worthless and you should know it,” Sara said, feeling anger and disappointment mixing.

“I know,” Oliver said. “Nyssa left Starling afterward and told her father what she found, as well as that I had placed Malcolm under my protection while he was in the city. It was a mistake, which
ultimately led to the League issuing an ultimatum. I had 48 hours to hand over the guilty party, or they would kill 50 people every day until I did so. The problem was, we found out who the guilty party was and who was behind it. Turns out Nyssa was right and wrong when she said Malcolm killed you.”

“What do you mean, Ollie? How can it be both? Either he did it or he didn’t?”

Oliver sighed. Even now, just the thought of what had happened was enough to bring the whole range of emotions flooding back. His rage at Malcolm for what he had done, his grief for Thea and what Malcolm had turned her into, the utter hopelessness of the situation once Malcolm had revealed everything to him. The masterstroke of the Magician, leaving Oliver with a choice that hadn’t been any choice at all. Just as Malcolm had known it wouldn’t be.

“Malcolm wasn’t the one to fire the arrow, he just created the instrument that did that actual killing. During Slade’s rampage through Starling, Thea was trying to leave on a train. She was at the train station when one of the soldiers attacked. Malcolm, for reasons that I’m sure were less born of love and more of her possible usefulness at some later time, rescued her. He ended up taking her to Corto Maltese and training her to fight, with a sword, a bow, her bare hands. He also was drugging her with Votura. He used it to get her to kill you and he recorded it, to use as leverage against me when the time was right. Malcolm told me if I didn’t want him to turn the recording over to the League, then I would confess that I had killed you. When I said that I would tell them that he had drugged her, that she didn’t know what she was doing, and that it was him that was responsible, Malcolm just smiled and said it wouldn’t matter. They would still hold Thea responsible, because she was still the one who fired the arrows.”

“So, I went before Nyssa’s father and confessed. I’m sure he knew I was lying,” Oliver said.

“He did,” Nyssa told him. “He had centuries of experience dealing with people. He knew as soon as you tried to confess. But it didn’t matter, because you had asked for a Trial by Combat. There was no way that he could back down from such a challenge, which al Sa-Her would have known. Also, I think my father saw it as a way to punish you for your refusal to yield to the will of Ra’s al Ghul.”

“Then how are you still alive? Don’t get me wrong, I know you’re a good fighter, Ollie. But Ra’s, he was many levels above Slade.”

“We fought and for a moment, it felt like I was going to win. But, I think he was just toying with me, because the next thing I knew, I was on the edge of a cliff on my knees as he drove a sword through my chest before kicking me off the cliff. I should have died then, but one of Ra’s horsemen was someone I had met while I was away. He found my body on a ledge and carried me to a cabin in the woods. His wife was there and between them, they managed to nurse me back to health. As I was recovering, I was also thinking about the next time. I knew that Ra’s would eventually discover I was alive and come for me. So, when I returned to Starling City, I knew that I would need to get better and the only way to do so was to have Malcolm train me.”

“What Oliver didn’t know about was a Prophesy where ‘He who survives the sword of Ra’s al Ghul shall become Ra’s al Ghul’. My father knew his time was slowly coming to an end and had decided that Oliver would make a worthy heir, once he had been trained. Or so he claimed, at least.”

“Thea finally confessed what had happened to Laurel, the guilt of what she’d done weighing on her. She informed the League of where Malcolm was so that Nyssa could capture him. In the process, we captured Nyssa. I didn’t want my sister to regret what she had done once she fully realized that she was aiding in the killing of her father, so Dig and I went to rescue him. It was a trap though, one designed so that I was here. Ra’s then made me the offer of joining the League. He freed Malcolm and Dig as a sign of good will. When I got back to Starling, we freed Nyssa and I took some time to
think about Ra’s offer. I turned him down, for a number of reasons,” Oliver said.

“My father did not handle the rejection well. This should not surprise you, Sara. He then framed the Arrow for several murders, resulting in your father issuing an arrest warrant for the Arrow. He also told your father that Oliver was the Arrow and your father made that information public. This was my father’s way for forcing Oliver to cut his ties with his former life, with the League being his only option,” Nyssa said.

“He just didn’t count of the loyalty of the team. Roy turned himself in, claiming he was the Arrow. When they got into the lair, Felicity and Dig had already wiped everything down with Roy’s fingerprints being the only ones that they found. At this point, Ra’s decided that a more direct, personal approach was needed. So, he broke into the loft where Thea and I were living and attacked her. He ended up driving a sword through her chest, leaving her in the remnants of a broken coffee table bleeding out. We got her to the hospital, but the prognosis wasn’t good. Then, Ra’s got word to me that if I accepted his offer, I could use the Lazarus Pit to save my sister. I had no choice but to accept,” Oliver told her.

“The rest of the team was unhappy with the decision and tried to sneak me out of Nanda Parbat, but were stopped. I had to order them to leave me and take Thea home. What they didn’t know was that I was secretly working with Malcolm to stop the League, because we knew what the final act was for me to ascend to Ra’s. I would have to cleanse Starling City. We found out that Ra’s was planning to use a deadly virus as the instrument of this cleansing, one that I had encountered before. I also had been inoculated against the virus. Malcolm was able to use my blood and his contacts to get the antidote. He was then able to inoculate himself and the team, so that when they came to try to stop this they would be protected. The plan was to destroy the plane carrying it, but they failed. Ra’s then decided to test my loyalty one last time, by making me use a sample of the virus on them and then locking them in an airtight room. He also forced Nyssa to marry me, for some reason that likely only made sense to him.”

“We then flew to Starling on a plane that I had sabotaged. My intention was for the plane to crash, killing Ra’s and destroying the virus. Nyssa and I would unfortunately be casualties in accomplishing what I believed was necessary. We failed, with Ra’s jumping from the plane and us having to ride the burning plane down into a crash landing. With the help of the team and a lot of luck, we were able to stop Ra’s plan, though one of his men did managed to release some of the virus. While they were handling that, I went to face Ra’s. This time, I was able to defeat him by killing him and I told the ring. I had made a deal with Malcolm, in exchange for his help, I would make him Ra’s. If Nyssa and I hadn’t talked after the crash, his plan might have worked. But she made me see what a mistake that would be, so when it was time, I killed Malcolm instead,” Oliver told her.

“Oliver and I talked later that evening. I explained to him that he had little choice but to ascend to Ra’s. Whatever he might think, he was now a member of the League. Even if he didn’t become Ra’s, he could not leave. Nor could he turn the League over to me. I told him that he was not required to kill, that the will of Ra’s al Ghul guided the League. Over time, we have come to a more mutual understanding of when killing is necessary and when it is not.”

“Wow,” Sara said. “So, Ollie’s now Ra’s al Ghul and you’re now the Bride of the Demon. What can you tell me about Laurel and my dad?”

“They both grieve for you. Your death drove a wedge between them, though. Laurel, she was worried about your dad and his heart. So, when you were killed, she didn’t tell him. When he eventually found out, it made it all the worse that she had hidden it from him for months. I don’t know where things stand now, I haven’t seen your father since he arrested me and I’ve only talked to Laurel twice on the phone. No one on the team knows that I’m now Ra’s and I would like to keep it
that way. The way things ended when I left, it wasn’t good. I burned a few bridges doing what I did and I don’t know if they can ever be rebuilt,” Oliver told her.

“So, Dig, Roy and Felicity think what?”

“That I’m traveling, trying to make peace with what I’ve become. I haven’t talked to Dig since the night I defeated Ra’s. I had had to kidnap Lyla in order to force a trade for Nyssa and when I did that, I left their baby daughter alone in their apartment. Dig blames me for that, for endangering his daughter, and I can’t say I completely disagree. Felicity and I have talked a handful of times, about how we’re doing, if I’m coming home, where I’m at and where I’m going next. I think at first, she was hoping I would be back, that we could try to move forward together. The last two times I talked to her, she let it slip that she’d dating again, with Ray Palmer. Ray bought Queen Consolidated and turned it into Palmer Technologies. Felicity is his Vice President, handling a good portion of the day to day running of the business. She sounded happy, which I’m glad about because she deserves to be happy. Roy was stabbed while he was in prison, seemingly killed, but it was all a ruse to get him out. He’s on the run, living somewhere under a new name that Felicity created for him. I hope wherever he is that he’s happy.”

Sara was silent after that, her mind trying to process all of the information that she had just been given. Nyssa and Oliver knew what she was facing, at least on an intellectual level. They had just told her in a matter of an hour or so, what they had experienced over the course of an entire year. If it had been overwhelming to them as they had gone through it, how must Sara be feeling?

A soft knock came at the door, followed by the entry of a pair of assassins. They brought with them two trays filled with food for their breakfast. Oliver pointed to the table near the balcony, silently directing that they lay everything out their. The three of them went to the table and took seats. There was oatmeal, fresh fruit, orange juice and coffee. Sara and Oliver each took bowls of oatmeal and some plums, while Nyssa ate some peaches and pears. Sara ate slowly, getting used to food again and wanting to see how her stomach would handle it.

“Why did you bring me back, Ollie?” Sara asked softly.

“There’s a lot of different reasons, Sara. Because I thought your death was unfair and that I was partial responsible for it. If you hadn’t been forced to go back to the League to get their assistance with Slade, you wouldn’t have been the one hunting him down. You wouldn’t have been Malcolm’s target because Ra’s wouldn’t have cared if you were killed. I also felt, after everything I had done to your family, that this was a way to right those wrongs. But more importantly, I missed my friend and Nyssa missed her Beloved, we both wanted you back,” Oliver told her.

“And Nyssa didn’t warn you about the Pit? About the damage that it can do to a person? How his continued use of it made Ra’s into what he was?”

“She did. We talked a lot about it before we decided to do it. We also found ways to prevent the negative effects of the Pit from harming you. We also needed a little extra help, because the Pit wasn’t intended to do what we were going to try. It would have restored your body, the physical being, but not your soul, your spirit, that part of you that makes you our Sara. For that, we needed someone who could restore your soul to your body. Nyssa would only agree once we had both of those things. Because both of us would have rather remembered you as you had been, than tried to bring you back and have you be some form of monster.”

“And who else knows?” Sara asked

“No one, for a pair of reasons. First, like I said, no one from our old life knows that I am Ra’s al Ghul and I intend to keep it that way. Second, we didn’t want to get their hopes up, only for us to fail
or worse, have something go wrong,” Oliver told her.

“And the League? Am I still a member, or did my ‘death’ conclude that obligation?”

“If you’re asking if we will force you to stay, the answer is no. If you wish to go, you may do so with my blessing as Ra’s. I know, or at least I knew, that you were tired of killing. I don’t know if that changed since the last time we had an opportunity to really talk. I will say that if you wish to stay, I have an assignment in mind for you that would make use of your talents very nicely and I think you would enjoy it, as well. The only downside would be having to be away from here for extended periods of time.”

Both Nyssa and Sara were looking at him in confusion. Nyssa was also a little upset, as he had not said anything to her about a possible assignment for Ta-er al-Sahfer. She had hoped to have a little time to spend with her Beloved before a choice was required. Now it seemed like Oliver was forcing one.

“Why did you say nothing about this before?” Nyssa asked.

“Because it was something that occurred to me last night, after you and Sara fell asleep. For me, it solves two problems rather nicely and I thought Sara would be happy taking the assignment. But, seeing your reaction, I obviously missed something and I’m sorry,” Oliver told her.

“Can you tell me what the assignment is or do I need to agree to stay first?” Sara asked.

“No, Sara. The assignment is simple. I need someone to supervise the Shadows we left in Starling City. And I can think of no one I would trust more with that responsibility, because I am trusting you to watch over my sister as well. You’ll be able to spend some time with your family, as well. Though Laurel might be a little mad at Nyssa when she sees you. You will need to stay here for a little while, first, so that Nyssa and I can make sure you are ready.”

“There’s no way I can say no to that, which I think you knew when you thought it up.”

“I didn’t know, merely hoped,” was all Oliver said as he stood up. “I need to spend some time running the League and while I would usually ask Nyssa to assist me, I think her time would be better spent today with you. I will see you both for dinner.”

Starling City
November 8, 2015

Ray and Felicity were the first to begin applauding when Curtis Holt finished his presentation to the board of directors of Palmer Technologies, as well as a number of key investors. Holt’s power cell was going to be groundbreaking and it would help them compete against the likes of LexCorp and Wayne Enterprises. It would also be useful in a number of other projects that the company had on the drawing boards, projects that would be of great benefit to humanity if they could only figure out how to knock the price point down by about a factor of ten. As people began to leave, Felicity saw that everyone was stopping to congratulate Curtis on the presentation and the power cell itself.

Felicity was going to go over herself, except as she was turning her phone back on it started going crazy. Looking down, she saw a number of alerts. Two major banks were getting robbed, Dig and Thea were responding to one and needed her assistance. Felicity caught Ray’s eye and he nodded.
While he wasn’t technically a part of the team, he not only knew about them, but their new lair was under the building and he was helping to finance them. Dig’s helmet came from Ray, as did some new trick arrows for Thea. He was even working on something for Laurel, but whatever it was, it was still on the drawing board. Beyond that, he hadn’t offered his help, nor had Dig asked for it.

Slipping out of the room, she made her way to a private elevator that took he down to the lair. Her workstation was online and waiting for her, because it was never offline. The monitors were works of art, not only large but also touchscreen. Felicity settled into her chair and got to work.

“OK, I’ve got them. Take a left on Adams and you’ll see them a block ahead of you.”

“Roger that,” Dig said as he caught sight of the street and turned. “I’ve got eyes on. Speedy, your location?”

“I’m ahead of them, I think. On the overpass. Keep them coming in this direction, I’m waiting for them,” Thea told him, just as she saw the van.

Thea knocked an explosive arrow and aimed, waiting for her window to fire. When she had it, she didn’t miss. The arrow hit the engine and exploded, instantly killing power and causing the van to slow to a halt. Dig brought his van to a stop behind it, while Thea used a line to descend from the overpass onto the street below. As they approached, the rear doors of the van flew open and four men with assault rifles came out firing. Dig’s first shots did nothing to stop them, before he realized they were wearing full body armor. Thea was having a little better luck with her arrows, as they were causing some damage, just not enough to put the guys down for more than a moment.

“Behind you, Dig,” Felicity called, having caught a second van approaching the scene.

“Damn it,” was the only response she got, as men poured out of the other vehicle and now had Dig in a crossfire. He couldn’t stay where he was, with his back open to the people behind him. But he also couldn’t turn to face them.

Thea saw all of this and made a choice. She selected a special arrow, one that acted like a smoke grenade and fired it. She followed it up with three more, giving Dig cover to get out of there. When the smoke eventually cleared, all that was there was the disabled van, the bodies of two of the bank robbers and nothing else. Dig came back out of the cover he had found and took a few quick pictures of the bodies before he and Thea got into the van and drove away before the police arrived.

Thea stayed quiet on the drive back to the lair. She could sense Dig was upset and didn’t know if it was directed at her. The fact that he was silent didn’t help matters, as far as she was concerned. But she also didn’t want to say anything and make matters worse. Dig was upset, but it was mostly a product of their overall situation. A year ago, it had been him, Roy and Oliver going out. Roy was still relatively new, but he made up for it with his street smarts, and Oliver was more than a match for almost anyone they faced. Now, it was him, Thea and Laurel, with neither of the two women possessing either Roy’s street smarts or Oliver’s leave of training. Laurel had some boxing lessons and what Nyssa had passed on to her, while Thea had a few months with Malcolm. They were good, but good just didn’t seem to be good enough anymore, not when they were going out with pistols and bows against gangs that acted more like soldiers than street thugs and carried automatic weapons.

“Thanks for having my back today, Thea,” Dig told her as the pulled into the parking area.

“Always,” Thea replied, her voice full of meaning. Lyla and Dig had opened her home to her after everything that had happened and she would never forget that. Nor would she forget that Dig had a baby girl at home, one that needed her daddy. She would do what she could to make sure he came
The pair walked from the van into the lair, seeing Felicity working at her station. Still photos from the fight were up on one of the monitors, while she worked at enhancing the images on another. A third monitor was showing the current news, with the sound down low.

“In the last six months, crime has risen by fifteen percent over the previous six months. Violent crime is up by twenty-one percent. What, you may ask, is the significance of the six month mark? It was six months ago that the SCPD arrested the Arrow, Roy Harper. Now, whether you agree with his methods or not, it can not be denied that this man did keep crime down. And while we are still seeing the others that assisted him in this crusade, we can not help be noticing that they are not as great a deterrent as he was,” the commentator said.

“Our city’s leadership is to blame for the problem. This vigilante may have taken on criminals, but if we were to count what he did as the crimes that they were, then crime is actually down three percent in the last six months. It is only by accepting the myth that he was on some holy mission to, what? Save the city? Play Robin Hood? Who knows, because he was still committing crimes to do what he did. He wasn’t a hero, he was as much a villain as every other criminal,” replied the show’s guest.

“Turn that garbage off,” Thea told Felicity, as she put up her bow.

Felicity quickly turned the show off. She hadn’t really be paying any attention to it anyways, it was just there in case there was some breaking news that the team might have to react to. She did feel bad that Thea had had to hear that, especially since the two closest people in her life had either been or been accused of being the Arrow. Now both of them were gone because of it.

“This is what, the fourth time this week that these guys have hit a bank,” Dig said.

“Yep. And the van you stopped can be traced to the first of these robberies, or at least a similar van with those license plates. I got into the SCPD computer system and preliminary reports have them making off with over eighty thousand dollars. The total for all of them is almost three hundred thousand.”

“When the Royal Flush gang was active, they were two, three banks and then on to the next town. Why are these guys staying around? Especially with that kind of haul, just don’t make sense.”

“I hate to sound like I’ve been watching too many movies or something, but could these all be leading up to something bigger? Like, maybe they’re working on their timing or trying to gauge our response or something,” Thea put in, looking at the others.

“When you talk to Laurel, have her father check for any big events. We’ll also need to keep trying to track this group down on our end,” Dig said.

“Let me get changed and I can head over to the courthouse. I need to see my lawyer anyway, so it will save me a trip.”

“Lawyer?” Felicity asked.

“Yeah. Now that Malcolm’s officially dead, for sure this time, the estate is being settled. And as I am his daughter and only living heir, it all comes to me. It’s not as much as it once might have been, considering everything that happened, but what there is is mine,” Thea said.

“Do you want some company?”

“No, I’m good. But maybe afterwards, we could all get dinner together.”
“Why don’t you both come over to my place. I know Lyla would love to see you, as would Sara. Let Laurel know too.”

“You’ve got it,” Thea said before walking off to where the changing room and shower were, grabbing a small bag containing her clothes on her way.

“How’s everything else?” Dig asked Felicity.

“Good. Works been great, plus my boss is super understanding when I need to slip away for our little side project,” Felicity told him.

“That wouldn’t be because you’re dating the boss.”

“No. Maybe. I don’t know, probably to some extent. After everything that happened with the League and finding out what we do, how we try to help the city, things have changed. Ray’s not looking to suit up and help in the field, not anymore. But he thinks that helping to fund the team, get you guys the things you need to be safer, that’s the best way he can help the city.”

“He’s not wrong. Having the helmet and the Kevlar armor is definitely a help, same with the armored van and the motorcycles. I know we would welcome him in the field, with the right training, but I can appreciate him setting limits on what he feels comfortable doing,” Dig told her.

“Well, I’m going to get back to my office. The searches will keep going and I’ll get notifications on my tablet, so we’re all good,” Felicity said as she headed for the elevator.

Dig watched her leave, a smile on his face. The smile quickly faded as he looked around the lair and noticed something standing in the corner, covered in an off-white painters drop cloth. He frowned as he walked over towards it. He was certain that this hadn’t been here before, not to mention his curiosity as to how whatever it was had gotten down here. Moving to the side, he could see a little through a gap between the wall and the cloth, recognizing the glass case as similar to the cases that had held the three costumes in the old lair.

Taking a breath, he moved the cloth so that he could see what was there. Dig jerked his hand back as if it had been burned. That shouldn’t be there was all he could think, before realizing that there was something different about what he was seeing and what he should have been seeing. Because this, this wasn’t Oliver’s Arrow uniform, though it was certainly similar to it. This was new, brand new in fact, as in it had never been worn. So, where had it come from and why. Deciding to wait until he could ask Felicity, Dig hurriedly covered the case and moved away. When Thea came out of the back, he was practicing his martial arts on one of the dummies in the lair.

After a quick wave, Thea was gone and Dig was left alone with his thoughts.
Oliver awoke in his bed. Looking through the closed doors to the balcony, he could see that it was just barely dawn. Sitting up, he looked at the other bed in the room and was not surprised to find it had not been slept in. He had assumed that Nyssa would be with Sara when she hadn’t been here last night after he’d taken what had become his habitual evening walk. He used it to be seen by the members of the League, as well as to get better acquainted with the halls of the fortress.

This morning, he went and bathed quickly before dressing for the day. Today, as with almost every day, he wore the robes of Ra’s al Ghul. He was just about done when a knock came at the door.

“Enter,” Oliver called.

“My lord. Do you desire breakfast here, in Ta-er al-Sahfer’s room or will you be joining in the communal dinning?”

“With Ta-er al-Sahfer, I believe. My wife should already be there.”

“As you command, my lord.”

When the assassin had backed out of the room, Oliver finished and walked down to Sara’s room. Going inside, he found Nyssa and Sara at the vanity in the corner of the room. Nyssa was running a brush through Sara’s hair, trying to be gentle with the tangled mess. Leaving them to it, he sat down in the chair by the bed, settling for just watching the two women. Both were already dressed in the League’s robes, Sara’s rather plain looking when compared with his or Nyssa’s. Oliver thought that if she stayed, they would have to get her robes that better marked her place in the League and in their lives. Perhaps a dark yellow trim, something like goldenrod, similar to the trims on Nyssa and his robes.

The two women were still there when their breakfast was delivered. The food was the same as the day before, not that any of them minded. It was good for them and tasted good as well, even if it wasn’t Big Belly Burger or Table Salt. The coffee definitely wasn’t Jitters, it was too strong for that and it had taken Oliver a couple of months to get used to it. The fact that the food was plain was likely best for Sara right now, given she’d thrown up the lamb and rice they had had for dinner last night.

Conversation over the meal was mostly light. Oliver consciously tried to steer away from talk about what Sara’s choice was or anything that might seem to Nyssa like he was trying to persuade her one way or the other. So, they talked about what they had read recently and also talked about the past. Still, there was only so much that they could say before all that was left was the Elephant in the room. When it did come up, it was Sara that initiated the conversation.

“So, how would it work?”

“How would what work?” Nyssa asked.

“All of this, if I were to stay. I mean, you and Ollie are now married, which is weird on a bunch of
levels without getting into the whole ‘She is Lesbian’ thing. And Nyssa, I mean, I knew your father was a misogynistic, homophobic ass, but I still can’t believe he forced you to marry Ollie,” Sara said.

“In many ways I am lucky, Beloved. If I had to have a husband, I am glad it is him, though at first I absolutely hated the idea of it.”

“Could have fooled me,” Oliver quipped with a smirk. “I mean, we made it halfway through the ceremony before you tried to kill me.”

“I’m glad I did not succeed now. You have freed me from my father and shown me more care than I had any right to expect. I know some of the older members are already whispering about an heir and how there will not be one as long as I am your only wife,” Nyssa replied.

“If those whispers get loud enough that I hear them, I may have to silence those whisperers by removing their tongues.”

Sara looked at Oliver at that, seeing a harshness in his eyes that she had come to associate with the Arrow. She wondered if it was only because of the League and becoming Ra’s al Ghul, or if it was the whole last year or so that had done this. Had gotten Oliver to realize that neither Oliver Queen nor the Arrow were masks, but rather two parts of one person.

“We seem to have gotten a little off track. You still haven’t answered how this will work.”

“It’s as I said before. If you stay in the League, you would be posted to Starling City as a Shadow. Spend time with Laurel and your dad, enjoy Big Belly Burger and black and white milkshakes. Keep an eye on the city and our families. Come back here and spend some time with us, or Nyssa and I might visit you. Though that would have to be in secret, if I did. As for your place with us, its whatever you want it to be. I know Nyssa loves you and I do as well, I know we both missed you more than words can say. But most of all, we want you to be happy,” Oliver told her.

A knock at the door disrupted them.

“Come,” Oliver called.

“My lord, your presence is required,” an assassin said, bowing his head.

To his credit, Oliver didn’t huff out a frustrated sigh as he got up from the table, snagging a plum as he did so. He motioned for the women to stay, silently conveying that they should continue with what they had been doing. Then, he followed the man from the room and through the halls to the great room. There, knelling on the floor was a man, bound with rope. Oliver could tell he was one of the villagers from near Nanda Parbat. The League had long had a symbiotic relationship with the nearby villages, with the League providing protection from various forces while the villages provided food and men for the League.

“This man has been accused of stealing a cow from a farmer in a neighboring village,” the assassin told Oliver.

“And what does he have to say about these accusations?”

“That a man came thru their village four days ago, with the cow. That the man was looking to sell the cow. He says that he bought it from the man.”

“Were there any witnesses to either event?” Oliver asked.

“His brother-in-law saw the man who they claim brought the cow,” the assassin told him.
“Did they say where this man went after selling the cow?”

“They said he continued on, not going back the way they had seen him come from, but coming towards Nanda Parbat.”

At that, Oliver stopped to think. The villagers all expected to receive ‘justice’ from Ra’s al Ghul and as he looked at the man knelling there, he wondered if the man had thought he’d seen his last sunrise when he’d been taken by the League. He also remembered that a few new recruits had arrived over the last few days. Could the man that they were talking about be among them.

“Go to the training area and get those men who have arrived in the last week,” Oliver ordered one of the assassins standing next to the door. He then turned to the assassin that had summoned him. “Place him where he can see those who come in, but can not be seen easily by them. Watch him closely for any reaction.”

“Yes, my lord,” the assassin said as he got the man to his feet and over behind a screen. If one looked, they could see the room. But, if one didn’t pay attention, they would see nothing but the screen when looking at it.

A few minutes passed as Oliver stood in the middle of the room, facing the Pit. When he heard the recruits enter, he waited until the sound of the door closing reached him. He fought the smile that threatened, as he was sure at least one of the recruit had jumped at that sound. Only when he had control of himself did he turn to face them.

“When you came to the League, it was with the understanding that you would have to leave your former lives behind. To eventually be reborn as something else. However, our training can not change who you are underneath, whether you are a man of honor or a cowardly thief. You were all told that we replace evil with death.”

Now, Oliver smiled, because he had seen what he needed to see. Of the five recruits, four were able to look at him. Yes, there was fear in their eyes as they did not understand what this was about and they could see Ra’s hand on the hilt of his sword. It was the fifth man who Oliver knew was guilty. Perhaps not of this, but of something. He would not meet his eyes and he was shaking. It was at this moment that the villager made his appearance, the assassin next to him holding his arm, the ropes gone. Oliver looked over at him.

“Is this the man?”

“Yes, my Lord Ra’s,” the village said as he knelt.

“Stand, Sir,” Oliver said. “See that he is well fed, then take him back to his village. Speak with the elders and make sure they understand that not only was he guilty of no crime, but that he brought honor to their village. If that is not enough, advise me on you return and I will go speak with them myself. Make sure he is repaid whatever he gave this, this thing. Also, make sure that the cow is returned to it’s rightful owner, if that was not done already.”

“It will be as you command,” the assassin said as he led the villager from the room.

“I will grant you a choice. Stand and accept your fate with some honor, or remain there on your knees as I deliver justice.”

The man did not move, though Oliver gave him several moments to rise. He just shook his head, shaking. Finally accepting that the man would not die on his feet, he removed his sword and drove it through the man’s chest, twisting it as he pulled it out.
“As I said. We exist to replace evil with death. The theft of a cow may not seem like much, but it could mean the difference between a family surviving another year or not. He then stole from the villager when he sold the cow to him, knowing that it wasn’t his to begin with. Now, return to your training and remember this lesson,” Oliver said as he strode from the room.

Doing what he had just done was not something he would ever be entirely comfortable with. Yet, it was expected by those who knew of the League. And he had meant what he’d said about that single cow potentially being the difference between life or death for the victim. He’d also come to understand that criminals were the same the world over, they don’t stop until someone or something forces them to.

Oliver left the room and walked back to his and Nyssa’s room. Not finding his wife or Sara there, he next went to Sara’s room. Finding it empty as well, he thought for a moment before heading for the training room that was set aside for them. Reaching the doorway, he smiled as he looked inside. Nyssa and Sara were practicing hand-to-hand combat, at a slower pace than Nyssa normally went at to be sure, but Sara was holding her own and even managed to take her sparring partner down in the end. He wasn’t surprised to see her breathing a little heavily after they finished. The Pit had healed her wounds and restored her life, but it couldn’t help the stamina that she had lost. Only time and exercise would help with that.

“Well done,” Oliver said as he walked inside, applauding as he did so.

“I remember my training, just need to keep practicing,” Sara told him.

“You’ll get there, Beloved. We will make sure of that,” Nyssa added, wrapping her arms around Sara.

Sara thought that she could get used to this. No more having to hide her affections for Nyssa or even for Oliver, though she would still be more reserved while among the other League members. She intended to take a little time before deciding on Oliver’s, or rather Ra’s al Ghul’s, offer, though she’d probably accept it. Because she’d meant what she remembered telling Laurel, that she’d chosen the League for herself. There was a darkness inside her now, had been since Lian Yu. The people in the League were more like her than those in Starling City, she felt more at home here than back there, but she did still miss her family.

“Why don’t you take a break, Sara, and I’ll train with my wife.”

“And what weapons will it be today, Husband?”

Nyssa had smiled as she said that, both at the title and because she had a very good idea which weapon he would choose. She knew he still felt his swordsman ship was only adequate at best, even after months of training with the League’s horsemen. Seeing him grasp a sword, one without an edge, she did likewise and stepped to the center of the room. They bowed to each other, then Nyssa attacked and the fight was on. Oliver was on the defensive at the start, but Sara could see that he was already looking for openings that would allow him to go on the offensive. Remembering all the trouble he’d had when Slade had tried to teach him, Sara was impressed with how well he was doing.

Oliver was enjoying himself and he knew Nyssa was too. He had learned a lot since he’d joined the League and a part of him couldn’t figure out the difference between now and when he’d been on Lian Yu and Slade had tried to teach him. Except now, he had already learned the price of not learning something, the importance of always getting better. Malcolm, Slade and Nyssa’s father had all taught him that. So, now he trained on not just things he was comfortable with, but on every weapon that the League possessed. He and Nyssa trained full out, the only rules were no strikes to
the head with the sword. This was why he had chosen the swords with no edge, so that neither of them would get cut. Nyssa had told him that her father would treat the cuts he received in training with the Lazarus Pit. Oliver refused to consider that, knowing the price of using it.

Their sparring went on, both landing the occasional strike. More often though, it was a case of sword meet sword. Oliver was bigger, stronger while Nyssa had years of experience on him. Sara sat on the floor, watching and learning as she rested. She was enjoying this, as she got to take in details that she missed when she was the one sparring with Nyssa. When the sparring did end, it was with Nyssa sword at Oliver’s neck and his laying on the ground. At that, Nyssa stepped back and they exchanged bows once more.

“That was great, Ollie,” Sara said.

“No, Nyssa is great. Me, I’m still a couple of levels below that,” Oliver said.

“You’ve come a long way in the time that I have known you, Husband. But you still have trouble accepting a complement.”

“I try not to think of the first time you saw me fight with a sword.”

Nyssa knew that he had nightmares about that day, as she’d heard them herself. She’d done what she could to help him through them and they did seem to come less frequently the further away they got from that day. But those memories would be with him and her until the end of their days. She remembered that day as well, the fight giving rise to a brief flair of hope that she might finally be free of her father’s tyranny. But the next moment, it was snuffed out and soon thereafter, so was the life of Oliver Queen and she’d allowed herself to believe justice had been served.

When she’d found out he’d been lying to her, that he had lied to protect the true killer of her Beloved, she had been enraged. That had passed when she’d learned the whole truth about the crime and why he was protecting the person who fired the arrows. She could not fault the man for wanting to save his sister, especially a sister who had placed their trust in the wrong person and been used so fouly by them. After listening to everything, she’d known the real killer was Malcolm. Thea had merely been the instrument of death, no different than if Malcolm had gotten some bartender to serve Sara something laced with Curare or Tibetan Pit Viper venom. Besides, Thea suffered more than enough after learning that she’d been the one to fire the arrows into her friend’s chest.

Sadly, she knew her father wouldn’t have seen it that way. He would have ordered the young woman’s death not just for that, but also for being the daughter of Malcolm Merlyn. Nyssa knew there was neither justice or honor in that. It was just another sign of his madness in her mind, just as was the way he so carelessly tossed the memory of her Beloved aside until it suited him to remember her.

“Well, I’m ready for another go,” Sara said. “How about we give Nyssa a break, this time?”

“OK. I assume you want to use your bo?”

“Do you even need to ask?”

No, no he did not, especially after seeing her smirk as she grabbed hers. Oliver put his sword down and picked up a bo for himself. He turned to face her and settled into a loose stance, waiting to see what she would do. It didn’t take long to find out, as her bo was racing towards his hip in a moment. He moved to block it, only for Sara to redirect her attack at his hands. He managed to spread them enough that the two bo met between his hands. She then tried to thrust forward and catch him with the end in his chest. He pivoted, so the bo went past, then he stepped back to gain space and recover.
his stance. The pair traded several strikes, the sound of wood meeting wood filling the room as the pair danced a deadly waltz to the music of their own making.

Nyssa watched and enjoyed the sight of the duo. Sara was a little more limber, a touch more agile, but Oliver was stronger and his stamina was beginning to show as the sparring when longer and longer. She watched him pick up the pace, trying to create an opening so he could strike. Sara was starting to lag, but she wasn’t backing down from the challenge. Finally, she gave him an opening, but when he went to strike, it was he who ended up get hit. Not just once, but twice before he ended up on the floor.

“I should have known better,” Oliver muttered as he lay there looking up at Sara and Nyssa, who had come to stand behind her Beloved.

“Just wait until I’m back in shape,” Sara told him with a grin.

“No thanks. I remember what you did to the Mayor with that bo.”

“Just don’t call me Bitch and you’ll be fine.”

The trio shared a laugh at that. They all knew there was no way that he would ever call either of them that. Not because he knew what their reactions would be, but because he could never think of them that way. He had too much regard for them to do that. Now, Isabel on the other hand, yeah she was a Bitch. Oliver smiled as he remembered Felicity’s nickname for her, Isabitch.

Nanda Parbat

November 16, 2015

Over the following week, the trio of Sara, Nyssa and Oliver had spent much of their time training. Sara’s stamina was much improved by the twice daily sessions. For those times when Oliver and Nyssa were busy with League business, one of Ra’s Horsemen took over Sara’s training. During that time, Sara had not made a decision and Oliver hadn’t brought it up again with her. At night, however, he and Nyssa had spoken about it. Nyssa believed that Sara would eventually accept the offer and argued that it was a good thing that she was taking her time before committing to a course of action. He felt she was right, though he couldn’t deny his growing anxiety as the days passed.

What neither of them knew was that Sara had actually decided already. The reason she hadn’t said anything was that she was waiting until she was stronger, more ready to leave. She knew it would be weeks, if not months before she was back to what she’d been before. She certainly had no intention of waiting that long, trusting her body and mind to pick the right time. When she woke up that morning, she’d felt great as she did her morning exercises. Getting through an entire circuit without feeling the least bit winded, she decided that the time had come.

As she was cooling down, the door opened admitting Nyssa, Oliver and a pair of assassins bearing trays loaded with breakfast foods. Nyssa silently directed them to set the food on the table, while Sara mopped her face with a towel.

“Good morning, Nyssa, Ra’s,” Sara said, using Oliver’s title around the other assassins, showing her respect for his position.

“Good morning, Ta-er al-Sahfer,” Oliver replied, nodding to the departing assassins, who bowed to
him as they left.

“How are you feeling, Beloved?” Nyssa asked. “I see you are exercising in the mornings now, in addition to our training sessions.”

“I feel great. So much so that I think I’m ready to tell you my decision.”

“Yes, Beloved?”

“I accept your offer, Oliver. Or should I make that Ra’s?” Sara asked with a teasing grin. “I think I’m ready and now that I’m alive again, I need to tell my family. Something tells me that telling them sooner rather than later is the way to go with that.”

“And when were you thinking of leaving for Starling City?” Oliver asked.

“Tonight, with your permission.”

“I would like to travel with her, as well,” Nyssa told him. “I’m certain that Laurel will have questions and feelings regarding this. I do not think it fair that Sara should face them alone, especially since what happened, what was said and done were not choices that she made. It is only fair that one of us face her when this is revealed.”

What went unsaid was the fact that he should really be the one facing Laurel. After all, he had been the primary architect of Sara’s resurrection. He should be there to answer her sister’s questions and also accept the joyful thanks from both Laurel and Captain Lance afterwards. But he couldn’t, because those questions and emotions were only the tip of the iceberg compared to how his former team would react if they found out that he was now Ra’s al Ghul, the head of the League of Assassins. Dig would likely feel justified in his scorn and hatred for Oliver, seeing this as confirmation of every bad thing he’d thought since Oliver kidnapped Lyla. Felicity would be hurt, wondering if the good man she had been so sure existed within Oliver was nothing but a fantasy, wishful thinking to justify her feelings for him. Laurel’s feelings would be confused by her happiness at having her sister back, though it likely wouldn’t be too long before her anger at the choice he’d made would make itself known. As for Thea, would she just see this as another lie her brother had told her, another betrayal of her trust in him. Would she worry that the League would turn him into a killer like Malcolm? Plus, there was the fact that the previous Ra’s al Ghul had nearly killed her and he doubted that she had any warm feelings for the League.

Just thinking about it unsettled him momentarily, until he took a breath, held it and finally exhaled slowly. He did this several more time until he felt calm and collected. Reaching onto the table, he lifted a small, silver bell and rang it.

“Bring the package for Ta-er al-Sahfer,” Oliver called when an assassin stepped into the room. The man backed out and returned shortly carrying a large rectangular box. He carried it to Oliver and placed it on the floor next to him, before bowing and leaving.

“We thought that might be your decision, so I ordered this be made for you.”

Sara opened the box and removed everything, laying it all on the chair next to her. What she found was an exact copy of Nyssa’s League uniform, except that the red accents had been replaced by a dark yellowish gold. She was certain that these would be hidden in the darkness as Nyssa’s were, yet would mark her as a high-ranking member of the League to the initiated. Usually, only members of Ra’s al Ghul’s family were given the honor of a personalized uniform. Underneath the uniform were her weapons. A compound bow and quiver filled with arrows fletched to match the trim on her uniform. A short sword was on a belt, with a knife on the other side. There were holders for her
specially made bo, so that one baton would be on each leg.

“Thank you so much. Both of you,” Sara said, moving to give each of them a hug.

“You’re welcome, Sara. We know you want to spend time with your family in Starling City. We wanted you to have something to remind you that you have family here as well,” Nyssa told her.

“Also, we know you’ll want to go out and help the city some while you’re there. We can’t allow you to do that in this uniform, which is why we had your Canary costume replaced with new items. It looks the same, but gives you a little more protection as well. It will be waiting for you in Starling.”

Sara understood what Oliver was saying and why. The League lived in the shadows, believed to be mythical by all but the most informed. The team, on the other hand, was a somewhat known entity. Not necessarily the people under the hoods and masks, but as the Canary, Arsenal, Black Canary, Speedy, Spartan. The League, with its enemies, had no desire for such publicity. If someone like Amanda Waller could positively tie them to the League, the outcome would not be good. The fact that they had fought the League created the perception that the two were enemies and that was a perception he wanted to last as long as possible, if not forever.

Thinking of Waller got him thinking about ARGUS, a perpetual thorn in the League’s side. He also couldn’t help remembering his own dealing with the woman when he was Oliver Queen. A smile almost came to his face as he considered her reaction if she ever found out he was now Ra’s al Ghul. Would she curse herself for not having left him for dead on Lian Yu? For not having just left him in Coast City where she tracked him down after Hong Kong? Because all the things that she had done to him had contributed to making him the Arrow. He’d learned how to infiltrate a group by her dropping him back onto Lian Yu. He’d found the darkness inside him by torturing men for her in Hong Kong.

As much as he wanted to kill Amanda Waller, her organization was insignificant compared to the League. She didn’t even know that there were two Shadows currently working in her command center. The information that they passed onto the League helped many missions succeed and led to others being canceled. To throw her off the scent, they would even allow ARGUS’s operatives to “catch” the League in a mission. However, the Shadows were never captured, instead inflicting a few casualties on their opponents before disappearing.

Oliver was brought from his thoughts when he heard a cough. Focusing once more, he smiled when he saw that Sara had changed into her new League outfit. She had her hood up and the veil across the lower half of her face. A few stray hairs showed, revealing that the person beneath was a blonde. Nyssa, he saw, noticed this too. No doubt she would talk to her Beloved about that, though it was likely that she’d hurried when she’d pulled up her hood. Nyssa, he knew, didn’t pin her hair back, yet her dark locks blended perfectly with the dark fabric of the hood. Sara’s dirty blonde hair, not so much.

“What’s wrong?” Sara asked, seeing the look.

“Your hair,” was Oliver needed to say before she was adjusting her hood, then looking back up. “That’s better.”

“Not many blonde assassins, I know.”

“Let finish breakfast, then we’ll get you packed for your journey.”

“Is it bad to say that there’s a part of me that doesn’t want to go?” Sara asked.
“Only if it is wrong for both of us to admit that there is a part of us that doesn’t want you to either,” Nyssa replied. “But I think this is necessary for many reasons and will ultimately be of great benefit to you.”

“And my family?”

“Yes, and your family. We both saw how much Laurel grieved your passing. Yet, unlike with Tommy, she didn’t try to drown herself in alcohol and pills. She channeled her grief and anger into taking up your mantle as the Black Canary. Still, that grief is still there, as evidenced by her desire that we restore your body to life. She knew that Thea was struggling with the Pit’s effects and yet, she didn’t think of that or that Thea was only near death when Ra’s put her in the Pit while you had been gone for a year. She just begged Nyssa to ask Ra’s to bring you back.”

“You didn’t want to resurrect me,” Sara stated, “because you knew what might happen. I assume you tried to warn Laurel?”

“I did, but as I said, I believe that her grief drove her to make the request. Nothing I said was going to reach her, not until she’d come to accept your passing as I had done,” Nyssa said.

After that, none of them knew what to say. So instead, they shared a hug before finishing their breakfast. Oliver left to handle League business, while Sara and Nyssa packed their bags. Sara sorted what she was taking and packed everything carefully. Her luggage, like Nyssa’s, had secret compartments which she used to hide her uniforms. Her weapons would, she knew, be waiting for her when she arrived at her safe house. One of her first orders of business would be finding somewhere for Sara Lance to live, as well as a job for appearances sake.

With everything packed, it was time to leave. Neither of the women were surprised when Oliver did not appear to wish them well. They knew it was not from lack of caring, but devotion to his duties as Ra’s. Also, it would not do for anyone to feel he attached too much importance to Sara, for it could be taken as a sign of weakness. Ra’s was meant to be cold, detached, almost inhuman. Sara was just another assassin, leaving on an assignment. Yes, the Bride of the Demon was accompanying her, but then all of the League remembered that Ta-er al-Sahfer was Nyssa’s Beloved and were certain that even marriage to Ra’s hadn’t changed that. Perhaps that was why he was sending Ta-er al-Sahfer on this mission, they thought.
Sara and Nyssa were smiling as they cleared customs and entered the United States. Nyssa had told Sara what had happened the last time she was at the airport here and both were relieved to not have a repeat experience. Both were dressed in fashionable travel attire, looking like a pair of successfully women returning from a trip overseas. The passports that they were traveling on were not their own, but rather issued by a friendly country in exchange for Ra’s favor.

Walking outside, they saw several taxis waiting for fares. Sara started towards one when Nyssa stopped her and nodded towards a small van. It wasn’t a taxi as far as she could tell, which meant that it had to be someone connected with the League meeting them. As they approached, a man stepped out of the driver’s side and approached them, bowing slightly to Nyssa.

“Welcome to Starling City, Miss Raatko, Miss Lance,” he said to them, taking their luggage from them as if it weighed no more than a couple of pillows. The two women seated themselves in the middle seat of the van, while he loaded the rear before getting back behind the wheel.

“Ta-er al-Sahfer, this is Salah. He is one of the shadows who will be reporting to you,” Nyssa explained once they were in traffic. “You will meet the others over the next few days.”

“I know the others will be as happy to have you here with us as I am. Your knowledge of the city will be especially useful to many of us,” Salah told Sara.

“What of the crime and corruption in the city?” Sara asked.

“The Italians are mostly gone, save for a few holdouts. After the death of Frank Bertinelli, they were never able to recover. The Triad still has the docks, but they are weakened at the moment due to infighting to see who will be their leader. The most powerful is the Bratva, because they are bringing more muscle into the city with every passing week. The local street gangs are being given a choice of either working with them or being buried by them. As for the authorities, they are powerless to stop them. The team that worked with the Arrow are trying, but even they are finding themselves disadvantaged, not to mention also facing other threats.”

“Sounds like we have some work to do. I will not insult you or the others by asking if we know who the leaders are, where their weak spots are and have plans for how to cripple them.”

The smile she got in the rear-view mirror was all the answer Sara needed and she returned it with one of her own. Yes, the League had plans to deal with the Bratva if it became necessary for them to do so, though it would likely be others who handled that task. She knew that the assassins in the city could do it, but then would have to take time from their primary tasks to do so. And they were much more useful to the League handling those things.

When they were in the city, Sara noticed that they were going to the edge of the downtown area. They passed Palmer Technologies as well as Merlyn Global on their way to the hotel that they were staying at, the Starling Grand. She remembered it as the best hotel in the city, as well as where her high school had had its prom. The van turned off the street and went under the hotel’s over hanging frontage. Salah passed them both cell phones before the doorman reached the rear door to let them
out. With Sara’s phone was also a small slip of paper, quickly finding its way into a pocket along with the phone.

A bellman wheeled a cart with their luggage into the hotel behind them. Sara smirked as she caught a couple of men in the lobby trying to covertly checkout Nyssa. She wondered what Nyssa’s first reaction would be if one of them was so bold as to approach her. She’d once seen her punch a man in the throat when he’d been stupid enough as to make a sexually suggestive comment to her. Thankfully for their stay here, neither of the men did more than look. The check-in process went smoothly and soon they were up at their suite. The pair went to their separate rooms and unpacked. Sara also used the time to read and memorize the little slip of paper, after using the bathroom hairdryer to make the writing visible. When that was done, she destroyed the slip and flushed the pieces down the toilet.

Coming out into the main room of the suite, she found Nyssa sitting on the couch. Going over, she sat down next to her, leaning up against her. The pair just sat like that for a time, looking out the windows across the room. It was still too early to go out, either for the League or to visit the team. Visiting the team was the priority, but they needed the situation to be right. This was definitely not something to be dropped on them without some planning.

“What are you thinking, Beloved?”

“How to tell my family and the others.”

Nyssa had her own thoughts on the way to do the revelation. She knew there would be no perfect time for something like this. That no matter what they did, this was going to have a strong impact with several people. Mostly with Laurel and her father, true, but Thea would also be affected. As for Felicity and Dig, even in the time that she’d been around the time, she’d never sensed really strong feelings one way or the other about Sara. She’d been an ally who might have become more given more time. She felt that they would be happy, but that happiness would be more for Laurel and Captain Lance getting their sister and daughter back.

“I have an idea of how we should do this,” Nyssa told her. “If I get them all to their lair, you remain in the shadows while I begin to explain. When the moment is right, you come out.”

“That could work, I suppose,” Sara said, thinking it over. “Or, we could go in our League garb. With my hood up and my veil on, I doubt any of them would recognize me if I just stand there silently.”

“But can you keep your blonde hair hidden that long, Beloved? Also, do not underestimate Miss Smoak, she is a genius, after all.”

“There is that, I suppose.”

The pair laughed together at that, snuggling closer together. Neither felt the need to fill the silence with words. Rather, they wanted to simply enjoy their time together just being together. When they got hungry, they ordered from room service and watched as the sun sank towards the horizon. Taking one last look, the pair went and collected their clothing for the night. They put it into a pair of soft-sided bags, like those people used for their gym clothes. Leaving the suite, they went down to the parking garage. A pair of Kawasaki Ninjas sat waiting, along with helmets. Tossing the bags over their shoulders, they climbed on and Nyssa handed a key to Sara.

Out on the street, Nyssa led the way out of the downtown area and on to the Glades. Sara had to work to keep up with her, as well as hit the turns. When they finally stopped, it took Sara a moment to realize where they were. A smile crossed her face as she remembered this place, her safe house from when she was tracking Malcolm Merlyn. It was as run down as she remembered it, she thought
as she got off the motorcycle, then rolled it into the open door of the garage.

When she’d been a kid, this had been an auto repair shop. The owner and his family had lived upstairs, in the apartment that they were now using as a safe house. She’d chosen it mostly for the location, but also for the garage below. Something like a motorcycle was too tempting a target for any of the street gangs in the Glades and much easier to hot-wire than a car. Together, they closed the garage door, then went upstairs to get ready for the evening. After the motorcycles, Sara wasn’t surprised to find the upstairs had been stocked as well. Her and Nyssa’s weapons were all there, as were plenty of medical supplies. Even the bed had fresh linens on it, all courtesy of Salah, she suspected.

Opening her bag, Sara removed her uniform and quickly changed into it. She then walked out and began to put on her weapons. Nyssa was already ahead of her, but that had always been the case from the first day she’d met her. Sara didn’t try to rush and catch up, rather she concentrated on getting everything that she would need. By the time she was done, it was like looking at a twin. Not identical, but rather fraternal. Sara didn’t normally carry a bow and quiver, not because she wasn’t good with them, but because they’d reminded her of Shado for too long. Now, here, she would carry them to honor the pair that had given her everything.

“Are you ready, Beloved?” Nyssa asked softly from behind her.

Sara turned and smiled, one that Nyssa could see clearly through the veil.

“We taking the bikes or we taking a walk?”

“I do not think your stamina is up for that long of a journey just yet.”

“Then the bikes it is,” Sara said, heading back downstairs.

The ride back downtown was a little more sedate, as Nyssa was certain that no one had tracked them to the safe house. Still, she kept her eyes open as they went and took a couple of turns just to check behind them. The ride ended with them in an alley two blocks from Palmer Technologies, where they left them and made their way to the rooftops. Nyssa was pleased to see that Sara wasn’t breathing hard from their short run to the parking structure that covered the entrance to the team’s lair.

Getting into the base was disappointingly easy and definitely something that Sara would need to address with the team later. For now, she stayed to the shadows while Nyssa walked closer. She could see her sister near the computer station, talking with Dig and Felicity about something. Still, they hadn’t noticed that they were no longer alone, until Nyssa deliberately made a noise. Dig snapped around, his hand reaching for a gun. He didn’t stop when he saw it was Nyssa, either. While he didn’t point it at her, it was drawn and ready.

“Is this how you are going to greet me every time we meet, Mister Diggle?” Nyssa asked and Sara could hear the tease in her voice, even if the others couldn’t.

“Nyssa? You’re back?” Laurel asked, looking at her.

“I am, for a time. I have news that concerns you, your team and your father. Would it be possible to get the rest of your team and Captain Lance here?”

Felicity was already calling Thea before Nyssa had even finished her sentence. She was explaining what was happening to the younger woman, while Laurel called her father and Dig messaged Ray. Not surprisingly, Ray was the first to arrive, having the shortest distance to come. Captain Lance and
Thea arrived at almost the same time.

“Thank you,” Thea said as she went up to Nyssa. “I realized I didn’t say that the last time I saw you and I should have.”

“I take it that you are feeling better,” Nyssa said as she looked at her sister-in-law.

“Yes, though John and Laurel are keeping an eye on me, just in case.”

“Be glad you have those who care enough to do so.”

“OK, so everyone is here. What’s the news that you need to share?” Felicity asked, her curiosity getting the best of her, though fortunately not enough to induce a babble.

“Most of you know that I was here a month ago and saw Thea Queen exhibiting sign of blood lust due to her having been healed with Lazarus Pit. What you don’t know is that while I was here, I spoke with Laurel. I wished to warn her about Thea’s condition, to protect her and those around Thea. At that time, Laurel made a request of me, one that I refused to accede to,” Nyssa said.

Everyone looked at Laurel, who was looking at Nyssa with anger and hurt in her eyes.

“I asked that you ask Ra’s to restore my sister to life and you refused. You wouldn’t even consider it, just told me it was impossible,” Laurel said, struggling to keep the tears from her eyes.

“Because you were speaking from your grief, Laurel. You were asking me that, even after I had told you what Thea was suffering. Would you really have wanted your sister to suffer that as well? Also, you didn’t see the difference between Thea and Sara. Thea was still alive when she went into the Pit. Sara was gone and had been for a year. The Pit wasn’t intended to be used in a situation like that. I loved your sister with all my heart, Laurel, and there was nothing on this earth I would not do if it could have restored her to me. But what you were asking would have restored the shell, while that part of her that made her Sara would have been lost to us.”

“That’s all nice and all, but what does that have to do with now?” Lance asked, looking at the woman that he remembered kidnapped his ex-wife, threatened to kill her and him if Sara didn’t return to the League with her. The pretty words didn’t erase the fact that she was partly to blame for what happened to Sara.

“Because when I was here two weeks ago, I did not tell you the whole truth regarding the purpose of my visit. When I had returned to Nanda Parbat after speaking with Laurel, I told Ra’s al Ghul about her request. His reaction was similar to mine, at first. Then, he thought about it some more and concluded that it might be possible. He spoke with an expert on mysticism and magic whom he believed could assist us. When I came here to give Thea the cure for her blood lust, another part of the plan was being carried out,” Nyssa said as she heard soft footsteps behind her.

“We took Sara’s body to Nanda Parbat and used the Lazarus Pit on it to restore it to life. Then, with the assistance of this magician, we were able to restore Sara’s soul. We used a second bottle of the Lotus elixir to cure her of the blood lust.”

By the time Nyssa had said this, Laurel was on her knees, sobbing. Captain Lance wasn’t doing much better, but was still able to see the figure that was now standing beside Nyssa. So too did Dig, Felicity, Ray and Thea.

“Sara?” was the whispered question that came from Captain Lance’s lips as the second assassin slowly dropped her veil and pushed her hood back. Ray didn’t recognize the woman, but the others certainly did.
“Hi, Dad,” was all Sara said, as she found herself wrapped in the arms of her father. Those arms were soon joined by her sister’s as well.

Dig and Felicity were in shock. Both had been there the night they buried Sara, both had seen her body when they’d placed it in the wooden box. Their minds couldn’t understand how it was possible for her to be standing there, looking so alive, so like the Sara they remembered. Thea stayed back, because she was the reason Sara had been dead in the first place. She didn’t know how the other woman would react to her, what Nyssa and the League might have told her. A part of her was certain that the blonde remembered and would seek her revenge at some point. A part of her was also still deeply ashamed at what she had done, the part she’d played in Sara’s death. No matter how many times Oliver, Laurel and even Dig had talked to her, telling her it wasn’t her fault and that it was all Malcolm’s doing, she would never get over the fact that she’d fired the arrows.

Nyssa, her part now done, stayed silent, watching. A part of her wished Oliver was here to see this, to see what he had brought about. She remembered something Sara had told her, about her first return to Starling, before she revealed herself to her family. She had said that he’d told her she needed to tell her family, that they needed her. When she’d brought up all the lies he’d told and how her family knowing the truth would change things, Oliver had said that they would never speak him again, but that it would be worth it. Seeing this, Nyssa now understood what he must have meant about it being worth it. It had never occurred to her before, when she’d looked on new recruits to the League, what those left behind must be going through. Certainly, some of them had had nothing left behind, but the majority did, especially those few like Sara who became trapped into the League.

Nyssa watched Sara separate herself from her family’s hug before approaching Dig and Felicity. The pair’s greeting was a little more restrained, but no less heartfelt. She watched Sara laugh as the blonde genius rambled through a ‘glad you’re not dead, for the second time,’ something that even got a smile out of Nyssa. She agreed with her Beloved, the other woman was cute. She wondered if the woman knew the level of respect she’d gained from the League during Slade’s Siege on the city, by being willing to do what was necessary to stop the man. They’d known she was afraid, that there were many ways that the plan could go wrong. But she’d stayed the course and gotten her part done. A part of her wondered what Felicity could become if someone from the League were to train her. Not that it would ever happen, as long as Oliver was Ra’s al Ghul.

“Were you planning to hide over here all day,” Sara said to Thea as she approached her.

“I just didn’t think it was right for me to approach you,” Thea told her, looking down.

“Sweet, sweet Thea. This wasn’t your fault. I’m sure Oliver told you that, so did the others too. If you won’t believe them, then believe me. I don’t blame you for what happened. You were drugged and crafted into a weapon by a madman. Now, going off to Corto Maltese with Malcolm Merlyn, that was just dumb.”

“Yeah, in hindsight it certainly is. But at the time, he’d saved me from one of Slade’s soldiers, Oliver was lying to me and keeping secrets, I’d just found out Roy was lying to me and working with the Arrow and I’d watched my mother have a sword driven through her chest. With all of that, it felt like he was the only one I could trust. Even after everything, I kept siding with Malcolm over Oliver until I took a good long look and realized that they were both lying to me. The difference was, Oliver was lying because he wanted to protect me, while Malcolm was lying to serve his own interests.”

“We both have regrets, we’ve both done things we wish later we hadn’t. But rather than focusing on them, we need to look at the things that came from those decisions. If I had never gotten on that yacht with Ollie, I never would have been trapped on Lian Yu. But then, I might never have found the strength that was inside of me. I certainly wouldn’t have met Nyssa and never found the love that
we shared. For you, I think Malcolm showed you a strength, too. The fact that he misused that strength doesn’t change that. Without his training, you never would have become Speedy, who I hear is helping to save this city, just like her brother did,” Sara told her with a smile, one that faded a little when she saw the look on Dig’s face. She knew that was and would remain the elephant in the room, one that she would have to confront sooner or later. The question was how to do that without revealing that Oliver was the one who’d helped resurrect her, that Oliver was now Ra’s.

Speaking of Oliver, Felicity was now on the phone trying to call the number that they had for Oliver. She sighed when he didn’t answer the phone. She knew that he would be just as happy as they all were that Sara was alive. And after everything he had been through, she believed that he deserved some happiness. She hadn’t told anyone, but she had been trying to track Oliver down for months now. She’d even managed to find him twice, catching a time when his phone had been in use to get a closer fix on where he was. But it hadn’t helped, because his movements were maddeningly random. As if he’d guessed she’d try to track him and this was his way of saying “Don’t”.

And it wasn’t what the others would think, that she wanted him back so that they could have another chance together. No, she was with Ray and she was happy with him. Ray understood her in ways Oliver never had and never even tried to and she understood him. It wasn’t the fairy tale that she’d dreamed of with Oliver, but it was more than she’d expected. Besides, she was smart enough to realize that, given everything he’d said and done, Oliver would likely never be ready to take that leap with her.

“Hey,” Sara said from behind her, getting Felicity to just about jump out of her skin. “Where did you go, just now?

“Wishing Oliver was here. He’d be so happy about this whole ‘Sara’s not dead, she’s here and alive’ thing. Not that we’re not happy enough or anything. Just that, he really blamed himself, especially after we found out that it was Thea who had shot you. Plus, I don’t think he ever really let himself grieve afterwards because he was so focused on being strong for the rest of us. So, I tried to call him, so that even long distance, he could still be a part of this. But, he didn’t answer,” Felicity said or rather rambled.

“Good to see some things haven’t changed.”

“I don’t think I could change this if I tried.”

Before anything else could be said, an alarm on Felicity’s computer started going off. Turning to it, she checked the information and began typing away at her computer. Another screen began showing surveillance camera footage, getting everyone’s attention.

“Looks like our friends are at it again. This time a warehouse down at the docks,” Felicity called out, as Thea, Laurel and Dig went to get changed. Sara and Nyssa exchanged a glance, with Nyssa sighing after Sara had fixed her with a pathetic sad face, like a child gets when they’re begging their mother for something.

“Take it slow out there, Beloved,” Nyssa cautioned.

“I promise,” Sara told her. “I’ve just come back, so I’m certainly not in any hurry to do something stupid and end up dead.”

“I will be there to make sure you keep that promise.”

“I’m counting on it.”
Oliver and two of the League’s horsemen were sparring, improving his swordsmanship. It was the one area he felt most lacking in, despite having received training from Malcolm, Ra’s and Nyssa. His marksmanship with his bow and arrows was exceptional, even by League standards. His unarmed fighting was also very good now. Now, he intended to similarly master the sword, which is why he spent most of his training time working on it. He didn’t neglect his archery, though. He still shot hundreds of arrows a day.

As he finally had both men disarmed and at his mercy, he became aware of another assassin standing in the doorway to the room. The horsemen stood and waited for direction. Getting a dismissive gesture, they collected their swords, then bowed to Ra’s and departed.

“Forgive the intrusion, my lord, but Talia al Ghul is here. She seeks an audience with Ra’s al Ghul.”

Oliver’s eyebrows rose at that. He wondered where she had been and if she knew about what had happened. He was also somewhat concerned as to why she was here now, at a time where Nyssa was away from Nanda Parbat. Schooling his features, he left the room and walked towards the main hall.

“Has my father finally consented to grant me an audience?”

“Your father is not here, Talia. You requested an audience with Ra’s al Ghul and here I am,” Oliver told her, watching and waiting.

“Oliver? Oliver Queen?” Talia asked, stunned. She had believed that he was going home after he left Russia, going to right his father’s wrongs.

“Oliver Queen is alive only in the past. He is forgotten. I am Ra’s al Ghul.”

“That’s not possible. My father is Ra’s al Ghul.”

“Your father was Ra’s al Ghul, until I took his life and the title of the Demon’s Head,” Oliver told her.

“This is more of my father’s tricks. They weren’t funny when I was a child and they grow more tiresome now. Show yourself, Father,” Talia called out.

“This is no trick, Talia. We fought, I managed to get the upper hand and this time, I did not hesitate to do that which was necessary.”

“I do not believe that you, even with all the potential I saw within you, could have defeated my father, much less killed him.”

“Yet here I stand, the ring of the Demon’s Head upon my finger. Assassins from your sister on down accede to my command, my will is the will of the entire League. If that does not satisfy you, would you believe the word of your sister Nyssa? The word of the assassins who bore your father’s body
back here to Nanda Parbat, for the ceremonies marking his death and my ascension as Ra’s al Ghul,” Oliver told her.

“Then how is Starling City still standing? The destruction of one’s home is the final step before they can become Ra’s al Ghul,” Talia remarked, fire still in her eyes.

“Your father tried. He wanted to unleash a bio-weapon on the city, but I stopped him. That is when we fought our final battle, atop the Starling City Dam, and that is where I took his life. According to League law, it was a trial by combat. By defeating your father, I was proved right in the eyes of the League. Therefore, I could become Ra’s al Ghul without laying waste to Starling City.”

“So, not only did you murder my father, but you also stole my birthright.”

“Interesting that you should say I stole your birthright, given that you left the League long ago. When I first encountered the League, your sister was Heir to the Demon. Only after I survived your father’s sword did he decide I’d fulfilled a prophesy and that I would be his new Heir. He further cemented that decision by having me wed Nyssa, making his daughter my wife and uniting our two families,” Oliver told her.

“There is no way that my sister would have willingly wed you,” Talia said. She had long known of Nyssa’s desires and knew that they were not for a man, even one such as Oliver Queen.

“Oh, she made that abundantly clear when she tried to kill me with a knife at the wedding ceremony. But since then, we have come to a mutual understanding and even friendship. We know that we each need the other.”

Talia had been watching her former student as he stood before her. He looked a little more worn than she remembered, but also more confident, more composed. He seemed to have taken to the role of Demon’s Head, yet she did not sense the ruthlessness that had come with her father. She suspected that was something that he would gain with time and experience, if he was permitted such luxuries as those. Word had been coming from Nanda Parbat that there was a new Demon’s Head, which is why she’d come here today. She had been cautious, because it would not have surprised her if it wasn’t all a trap meant to ensnare his rivals. Make them think the League was weak and use that against them. What she found was worse than that, a new Ra’s al Ghul who, she knew, could be just as ruthless as her father. The difference was, her father was a known quantity, whereas Oliver was not. They would react differently to the same event and the League’s enemies were so used to dealing with her father, they might do something that he was shrug off only for it to ignite all out warfare because Oliver did not.

Talia knew she would have to think a great deal about her next course of action. What might have worked with her father might not with Oliver. So, for now, she would hold her tongue from going any further that she had already today. Patience was, after all, a virtue. She would exercise that virtue in planning her revenge on Oliver Queen and her sister. They had taken what she wanted most in life, she would find a way to return the favor. She exchanged a little more general conversation before taking her leave of Ra’s al Ghul and Nanda Parbat. Looking back as she reached the end of the long path out of the fortress, she vowed to herself that the next time she saw that view would be when she arrived to claim her rightful position as the Demon’s Head. On that day, she would see the usurper and his bride dead.

Oliver watched her leave, feeling a sense of unease wash over him. He didn’t know what to make of what just happened, but he suspected that this would not be the last he and the League would hear from Talia. Her anger had been too great to think that their talk had diminished it, yet that was the impression she’d tried to leave him with. What she didn’t know was that he was coming to learn to look for hidden meanings to everything people said to him. He’d learned the hard way that what
someone said might not be what they meant, felt or thought.

Walking from the room, Oliver made his way to his and Nyssa’s rooms. Going inside, he made his way to his reading area and found the phone. He was pleased to see that the solar charger that it was connected to was doing a good job of keeping the battery charged. Disconnecting the phone from the charger, he carried it out onto the balcony and sat down on a stone bench there. The view up here was truly magnificent and Oliver doubted that he would ever not enjoy it. So he took a moment to just look before he began dialing a number on the phone.

“Good morning, Husband,” Nyssa said from the other end of the line. “We’ve only been gone two days, you can’t miss us that much already.”

“Or perhaps I just needed my daily dose of your sarcasm,” Oliver replied teasingly.

“You must mean my wisdom.”

“That too, my wife.”

“If you guys are going to get all lovey dovey, could you at least take it to your room,” Sara said in the background, laughing as Nyssa threw one of the decorative pillows from the couch at her.

“Well, if you didn’t miss us, then why the call at this hour of the night?” Nyssa asked.

“We had a visitor today. Your sister,” Oliver told her.

“I don’t know. She requested to see Ra’s and when I appeared, she believed that this was another of your father’s tricks. I don’t know if she ultimately believed me or just moved on, but she then accused me of stealing her birthright.”

“Any rights she might have had to the League and the Demon’s Head died years ago. She came to believe that our father had no intentions of having her, or even me, succeed him. She had trained all of her life for it, yet he easily dismissed her. So, one night, she left with a handful of loyal followers, seeking to make her reputation and prove herself to be a worthy heir. Instead, my father named me Heir to the Demon and turned his back on Talia. She was not to be spoken of, any followers who had been members of the League were to be killed as traitors. It never became open warfare, as she knew she did not have the strength to oppose the League directly. So, she had remained, sticking to the edges. Perhaps waiting for her opportunity to strike, perhaps resigned to the fact that time and events have passed her by,” Nyssa told him.

“If you had seen her anger when I told her that I had killed your father, I doubt you would use the word resigned to describe her,” Oliver replied.

“Talia, I think, always hoped that father would acknowledge what she had achieved with her group, her students. That one day, she would return to the League in triumph and be father’s successor. Now, that will never happen. You know I was angered by his decision as well. The difference is, I never felt I had something more to prove to my father, while Talia does. And you have robbed her of her chance to do so.”

“Do you think she’ll go after the League, then?”

“The correlation of forces remains relatively unchanged. Her group does not have the power to attack the League directly. If she were to decide to seek retribution, it would have to be in a more indirect manner. Now that we are aware of the potential problem, we can make plans to defend
“against it,” Nyssa told him.

“We’ll talk more about that when you return,” Oliver replied.

“Just ask it, Oliver. I know you want to.”

“I was refraining from doing so because you’ve only just arrived. I hoped the two of you could manage to go a day without getting into trouble.”

“Oh, it was no trouble at all. We went and saw your former team and Sara’s father. The reunion was very good. I know they tried to call you, but you didn’t answer,” Nyssa said.

“I thought that might be why I was getting a call and I didn’t want it to look like I was sitting by the phone waiting for it,” Oliver let her know. “I’ll call back in a day or two, let them tell me. I know Felicity or Thea will want me to come back home, so I’ll need to think of a reason to put them off.”

“Or you could come here, see your sister. Let the others know you are doing well. If they pressure you about returning home, just let them know that is not possible at this moment.”

Oliver sighed at that. It wasn’t that he didn’t want to see his sister. He was conflicted, because as a member of the League, one was supposed to leave their former life behind. How could he expect that of those he now led if he refused to adhere to the same standard. He was sure if he gave over to such a thought, Nyssa would tell him that he was Ra’s al Ghul. Whatever he wished, he had but to command it and it would be done. If he wished to visit his sister and his friends, he could do so.

While that might be true, he worried about what might happen if he did so. Part of the reason for disconnecting from one’s former life was to eliminate potential targets for retaliation. Members of the League were meant to be shadows, ghosts. Yet, in many respects, that did not apply to him. His face was too recognizable, his former self too famous. Unlike someone like Maseo or even Sara, there were no shortage of people out there who knew him or about him. Given that, it would not be hard for his enemies to wait in hopes of his appearing in Starling City, if not attacking there in a move to draw him out. The best thing for him to do was to stay away, while moving others into positions where they could watch over those he loved.

“Not now, Nyssa. We still have work to do to better solidify my position as Ra’s al Ghul. Until that has been fully accomplished, it would be best for one of us to be here.”

Nyssa frowned at that. She was more in tune with the League than her husband was, she knew. She was not aware of any whispers of dissension, as they had worked hard to show Oliver respected the traditions of the League. She also knew that he was training hard to prove that he belonged as Ra’s al Ghul. She decided that this was a deflection tactic, a way of arguing why he could not visit. She knew he was stubborn, but then she could be stubborn as well. So, she tabled this mentally for when she got back to Nanda Parbat. Then, they could better discuss it face to face.

“Very well, but we will talk about this further upon my return,” Nyssa promised him. “We were there when there was a possible robbery of a warehouse. Sara and I joined your former team in going there. We were able to stop the theft, but the criminals managed to get away. Mr. Diggle had expressed some concern about this group and I am not able to disagree with him. They are heavily armed and show no hesitation in using those weapons.”

“If you wish to have Sara and the other Shadows look into them, I am not opposed. However, I do not want to jeopardize their other missions. Those remain the priority,” Oliver told her.

“As you command, Ra’s al Ghul.”
Oliver laughed as he hung up the phone, wondering why it felt like he’d just lost another argument with his wife. And why he didn’t mind that or thinking of Nyssa as his wife.

Starling City

November 19, 2015

Nyssa smiled as she came out of her room. Sara was already up and from the looks of things, more than halfway through her breakfast. There was a second covered dish across the table from her Beloved, so she went and took a seat there. Lifting the lid, she found bacon, eggs and hash browns. There was a coffee pot in the middle of the table, as well as a pitcher of orange juice and bowl of fresh fruit.

“Did you sleep well?” Nyssa asked.

“Once I finally got to sleep, I did,” Sara replied. “I’ve grown used to the quiet in Nanda Parbat. I need to adjust to the sounds of the city again, I think.”

“And your plans for today?”

“Get reacquainted with the city. Felicity, Laurel, Dad and Dig are working and Thea said she had something she needed to take care of. What about you?”

“I will probably exercise for a while. At some point, I need to speak with the other Shadows that are here. Ra’s had consented to them looking into this group that troubles your friends. However, they are not to let this get in the way of their current assignments and I need to make that clear when I tell them,” Nyssa said.

“We’ll probably need some others on standby, in case we need to take action. Especially if what the Shadows here are doing is important.”

“Ra’s knows that. When the time is right, he will make sure you have the resources you need to cleanse this city of the corruption that plagues it. Not the way my father tried, or Malcolm Merlyn attempted. Rather, he would use the League as a surgeon uses a scalpel, to cut away that which is diseased, leaving the rest to grow healthy once more.”

Sara smiled at that. Like Oliver, she remembered a time when the people of this city cared about one another. A time when you were able to walk the streets without fear, when the city was brighter. She knew that men like Malcolm, Robert Queen and those behind the Undertaking had done things that made bad situations worse. Took jobs out of the city, left those workers with nothing. Stopped many of the charitable endeavors that might have help them, instead focusing on feel good projects that really didn’t help many. When something was working to make things better, they worked behind the scenes to kill it, like cutting funding to CNRI so that the lower income people who used it didn’t have the resources to fight back against the powerful elites.

Now, the city was on its knees. So much had happened since she’d gotten on that boat with Oliver. The Undertaking, Slade Wilson, the League trying to unleash a biological weapon were just the big events. It was all the little things, all the criminals that Oliver and his teams had fought and beaten, now having to fight them again after the evidence against them was destroyed and they were released. A few had left Starling, looking for better opportunities elsewhere. Not surprising considering a lot of good people were also either leaving or just one more bad day away from doing
"I'll be back later," Sara said as she got up from the table. She grabbed her jacket from where it was draped over the back of the couch before walking out the door. A couple of minutes later and she was in the parking garage. Going to her motorcycle, she climbed aboard. Firing the engine, she took off out of the garage and onto the streets.

Riding into the Glades, she began looking around. She had a basic idea of where to look, but knew that what she was doing might take time. Sin wasn’t likely to be easy to find, but Sara figured the best way to start would be to cruise around and let herself be seen. She would also try to spot one of the few people who knew Sin and see if they would pass on a message to the girl. She knew she’d have some explaining to do, but she was back now and she was going to keep the promises she’d made.

On her route through the Glades, she happened to go past Verdant. She looped back around and took a look. She’d never asked Oliver what happened to the club after everything with Slade and Isabel. She’d heard that Isabel evicted them after Oliver lost Queen Consolidated and that now QC was Palmer Technologies, but not what came in between. Not that any of that was super important to her, though if Verdant was still open, she could see about getting a job bar tending there. With Thea as her boss, she wouldn’t have to worry about explaining where she was going at night. She knew she didn’t need a job for the money, as the League would handle her daily expenses, but she did need something to explain how she had money.

Sara was pulling away from Verdant when a van came and tried to block her in. There was a gap that she could have slipped through, but it forced her into an alley that dead-ended behind the closed club. So, she stopped the bike and waited, letting the engine idle. The van had no windows in the back portion of it, so she had no idea how many people it might contain beside the pair up front. Besides the driver, she guessed at a pair in the back and the guy she could see in the passenger seat.

When the doors opened and three men got out, she smiled slightly to herself. She noted with some surprise that none of them were brandishing a weapon, though there were bulges in their coats that made it plain they were armed. The way that they moved also made it plain that they had done this before. Looking them over, she guessed that they were Bratva and that this was likely a kidnapping/white slavery ring. At that though, Sara wished that Nyssa was here. If there was one thing that both of them despised with a passion, it was the merchants of flesh.

"You looking for party?" one of the men asked. "Come with us, we show you party."

One of the other men snickered, as they all ogled her body. Sara smiled as she slid off the bike, her mind already seeing what she was going to do. She removed the key from the ignition, but didn’t move to put it in her pocket just yet. Patience, she thought as she took a step forward. Get a little closer, but also get them to come closer to her. The trio of men smiled, thinking that this was going to be easy. The girl was walking right too them.

"But if I go with you, what about my bike?" Sara asked, making a face. "It won’t be safe if I just leave it here."

"No worry, Vlad will bring bike," the man said, pointing at one of the other two.

Sara smiled at that, which encouraged the men. They came closer, not seeing the danger until it was too late. She threw the keys into the man’s face as her other hand reached for one of the two batons that made up her bo. A flick of her wrist had it extended, then she struck the speaker in the side of the head. The other two had been distracted by the keys, but were now reaching for their guns. She grabbed the other baton from its hidden holster and moved in. The two men were little better than
street thugs, intended to scare their intended victims into compliance. They were certainly not a match for someone trained by the League.

As she was defeating the third man, she wasn’t surprised to hear the van take off. If anything, she was surprised that the driver had stayed as long as he had. Perhaps he had been hoping that his guys would be able to subdue her with their numbers. Or, it had simply taken him this long to realize that it was time to cut his losses and flee. Either way, it didn’t matter as she looked at the three men. Were these anyone else, she would not do what she knew she was going to do. But, if she let them go, she knew it would only be a matter of time before they were back out on the streets hunting other women. Women who wouldn’t have the skills she did, who wouldn’t be able to stop themselves from being taken. Sometimes, killing was the only solution, she thought as she proceeded to snap the three men’s necks. It might not stop the trade or even the local group, but these three wouldn’t be taking any more women and she’d have to settle for that.

Looking around, Sara found her keys and got back on the motorcycle. Pulling out of the lot and away from the area, she felt more tired that she had since she was resurrected. So much so that she failed to notice someone watching her as she drove past. Sin was just coming out of a bar, a sandwich in her hand when she saw the blonde on the bike ride past her. She looked at her in shock, her mind taking a moment to piece together what it had just seen. By the time it did and she could call out, the other woman was out of ear shot, leaving the young girl with more questions. Chief among them was where could she find her?
Amanda Waller stood drinking a large cup of coffee, waiting impatiently while the technician in front of her worked on the data. She had a project in the works, something special and it needed someone special to lead it. She had wanted Oliver Queen, until she found out that he was no longer in Starling City. She’d tried to trace him, but had surprisingly gotten nowhere. She’d then had her people on Lian Yu check the island, knowing that he’d gone there after the Undertaking. When they reported back that the only inhabitants were Slade Wilson and his guards, she’d gotten angry.

Since that day, she’d been pushing her people harder and harder to locate Oliver Queen. She’d had them listening in on all of his former associates phone calls. She’d had them following those same people, then anyone they met were investigated and followed. Somebody, she was sure, knew where he was. Waller just needed to find that person. Not surprisingly, it was the phone calls that gave them their first lead. They intercepted a call between Oliver Queen and Felicity Smoak, one that they were able to trace the call as having originated in Peru. By the time they were able to narrow it down more, the call had ended. Waller had ordered satellite surveillance and quietly sent a team down there, hoping to find him.

They failed, because they were still looking for him in Peru when the next phone call was intercepted. This one was between Oliver and his sister Thea. The only problem was that this time, he was calling from South Africa. This got Waller to move her team and resources to that part of the world, where they resumed the hunt. And so the hunt continued, with her committing more resources and more attention with every successive move. Some of the agents were whispering that she was obsessed with this, wondering why they hadn’t just tried to find someone else. There were a few that were thinking of the potential of Oliver Queen, if he could elude Amanda Waller for this long.

“Ma’am, Ms. Michaels is here,” a guard by the door informed her.

“Let them know I’ll be right there,” Waller said before focusing on the agent in front of her. “When I get back, I expect you to have something new to report.”

With that, Waller turned and walked from the room. If she had looked back, she would have caught a glimpse of a smile on the agent’s face. Not because she was happy with that demand, but rather because she knew ARGUS would only find Oliver Queen when he chose for them to do so. And when they did find Oliver Queen, they would also find Ra’s al Ghul. A part of her wanted to be there when that happened, just to see the look on Waller’s face.
“Michaels,” Waller said as she walked into the small room, eyeing her former subordinate. “Good of you to come.”

“I wasn’t aware I was being offered a choice,” Lyla said, thinking about the trio of agents that had shown up at her home with orders to take her to see Waller.

“Yes, unfortunately I’m a little pressed for time. I’m trying to locate Oliver Queen.”

“Sorry, I have no idea where he is, just that he’s not in Starling City any more.”

“But you can find out, from your husband and your husband’s friends,” Waller stated firmly.

“They don’t know either, according to John,” Lyla replied.

“That’s a shame. I never would have figured that Mr. Queen would leave you all to hold the bag, but perhaps I underestimated his self-preservation skills”

“What do you mean, hold the bag?”

“Why, for that nasty bio-weapon attack that took place in Starling City. See, the thing about incidents like that is that the public always wants somebody to blame. Now, I was going to offer up Mr. Queen as the scapegoat, but I need him here for that to work. Explain his options, as it were. But since he’s not available, I guess it will be you, the disgruntled government agent passed over for promotion, and your husband, who was secretly the Arrow’s right hand for the past three years. The media and the public will eat it up,” Waller told her, a smug smirk on her face.

A mixture of anger and fear played out on Lyla’s face. She knew it was a scam, but she’d been around Waller long enough to know it wouldn’t matter. Evidence would be manufactured, witnesses bribed or threatened and the court packed with ‘friendly’ people just to be certain. The conviction would be guaranteed before either she or John walked into a courtroom. Once they were convicted, they would be at Waller’s mercy, most likely ending up on her suicide squad or something worse. Then there was Baby Sara. What would happen to her if that came to be? Lyla had no family and John only had his sister-in-law Carly. Would she be willing to take the child in? Could she afford it?

“Now, as I said, I’m really only interested in Mr. Queen. So, since I’m not entirely heartless, I’ll give you and your husband two weeks to find him for me. Otherwise, I’ll have no choice but to go with the other option. I would suggest you use your time wisely,” Waller said as she got up from her seat and walked to the door. “Oh, and if you try to run, I’ll consider the deal null and void. Agents will immediately arrest you and bring you in, regardless of if there is someone to watch your daughter or not.”

Lyla just glared at the door as Waller left the room. A couple of minutes later and her guard escorted her from the building. The same black SUV that had brought her here was waiting. Her hand itched to grab a phone and call her husband until she remembered that she didn’t have her phone with her. When they’d come to get her, they’d made her leave everything except her house keys. So, she was stuck waiting until she got home before she could call anyone, to warn them about what was coming. Lyla had no doubt that Amanda Waller meant every word she’d said and to face that, they would need all the help they could get.

When she entered the apartment, she found Sara laying in her crib while the agent that had stayed with her was sitting on a chair taken from the table. The way the chair was positioned, they could see everything in the apartment except for the master bedroom. Lyla frowned slightly, as she took in the sight of the agent, gun resting in their lap with their right hand on it. A part of her wanted to ask if there was an implied threat in that or if the agent thought that there was some form of threat against
Lyla and her family. Not that the agent would ever guess that the threat was from ARGUS itself, unless they were briefed by Waller on what was happening. More than likely, they just assumed that there was some form of threat and acted accordingly.

Lyla watched as the woman stood, put her gun away and walked out the door. Once she was gone, Lyla went and locked the door before checking on her daughter. Seeing the little girl was asleep, she went to the couch and sat down. She looked at her hand and noticed that it was shaking. She dropped her other hand on top of it, trying to still the motion as her mind tried to deal with the emotions that were the cause. It also felt like there was a running clock in her head, counting down how long they had to find Oliver. As she thought that, she reached out and picked up her cell phone, quickly dialing her husband.

“Hi, hon,” Dig said as he answered.

“I need to see you and your team, John,” Lyla told him, her tone of voice carrying its own message of ‘NOW’.

“Come to Palmer Technologies. Felicity will be waiting for you in the lobby.”

With that, Lyla hung up and stood. She quickly got baby Sara out of the crib and into her carrier, then they were out the door. Going down to her car, she kept her eyes open. It certainly wouldn’t surprise her if Waller had a few people watching her, to make sure she didn’t try to run if nothing else. She didn’t see anything obvious, but that didn’t mean they weren’t there. She also didn’t see any cars pull away when she did either, nor when she ran a couple of surveillance detection sweeps. Lyla decided at that point to just get on with her trip and headed for the Palmer Technologies building. When she got there, she parked in the garage and took the elevator up to the Lobby level of the building.

Felicity was waiting for her, near the elevators. Her greeting was subdued, due to the sleeping baby. She already had a visitor’s pass for Lyla, so they could just get on the private elevator that is waiting for them. As the doors closed, Felicity took her key card and held it to a scanner under the elevator’s controls. She then pressed the down button three times before removing her key card. At that, the elevator descended and a moment later they were stepping into the lair. Dig, Laurel, Thea and Captain Lance were all standing behind Felicity’s computer station. Ray was seated there, working on something. They all looked up when they heard the sound of Felicity’s heels on the concrete. When Dig saw Lyla, he rushed over to greet her. After a hug, he looked down at Baby Sara, worried that whatever was wrong had to do with her.

“I’m glad you’re all here,” Lyla said.

“Actually, we’re waiting for at least one more,” Laurel said, surprising Lyla as this was all the team her husband had mentioned.

Before Lyla could say anything, they all heard the sound of the garage door going up. It was accompanied by the sound of motorcycle engines briefly accelerating before they were powered down. Lyla followed the others looks and saw two figures in black walk in. Once she recognized them, her jaw dropped to the floor, but her husband stopped her before she could ask any of the questions that had instantly popped to mind.

“I’ll tell you about it later,” Dig assured her. “Right now, we need to hear why you needed to see us.”

“When Sara and I came home from the park today, there were three agents from ARGUS waiting for me. One stayed with Sara, while the other two took me to headquarters where I met with Waller.
She’s looking for Oliver, didn’t say why except for some garbage about using him as her scapegoat for the bio-weapon attack last May. I told her we don’t know where he is, which I don’t think she believes because she said we had two weeks to find him for her. If not, she makes John and I her scapegoats, pinning the attack on us, outing John as part of your team and implying that your team may have been in on the attack as well.”

“No one would believe either of those things,” Laurel said. “Not to mention, if it went to trial, any good attorney would be able to beat those charges.”

Lyla just looked at the older Lance sister sadly. Not that it was her fault for believing in the law and that the truth would win out. She’d never gone up against Amanda Waller, so she didn’t know any better. Lyla, on the other hand, knew how this would go. Waller would use the next two weeks to have her people create enough fake evidence to bury them. If they were detained, it would be at ARGUS, where experts in enhanced interrogation techniques would handle their questioning. By the time they were done, both John and her would likely confess to anything just to make it stop. Or, Waller might just use their friends on the outside as leverage, making it plain that their safety depended on cooperation.

“No, Laurel, they won’t,” Sara said, looking at her sister. “Waller will stack the deck to get the results that she wants.”

“She’s right,” Dig added. “We wouldn’t appear in a regular court, due to ‘national security implications’. Any attorney we get would likely be provided by ARGUS or at a minimum, intimidated by them to make the trial go their way. After that, she’ll have Task Force X waiting for us.”

“I’m afraid to ask, but what’s Task Force X?” Lance asked.

“You ever see the movie ‘The Dirty Dozen’? Same concept, except these prisoners are all extremely lethal. Waller finds them and makes them an offer, work with her and get possible early release. She’s had Deadshot, Cupid, Huntress and others on the Task Force. The inmates have another name for it, too. They call it the Suicide Squad, because the missions are all high risk and Waller doesn’t care about friendly casualties,” Lyla told them.

“How is she able to control them, out in the field with no restraints?”

“Easily. What she doesn’t tell them before its too late is that she has a small surgical procedure done. An implant is inserted at the base of their neck, which contains a small explosive device and a tracker. You try to run, you get a warning and she activates the bomb. You continue and the next thing anyone knows, you lose your head, literally.”

“And this bitch is now looking for Ollie,” Thea said. “We’re not going to seriously contemplate finding him, just to hand him over to her. Right?”

Thea was trying to read the room and she was getting an uneasy feeling as she did so. Dig and Lyla were fairly easy, as they were the ones being directly threatened and they had their daughter to think of too. She didn’t blame them for that. Captain Lance looked like he would sign on for that idea. She figured that was because he blamed Ollie for everything bad that had happened to Sara, which she felt was unfair in the extreme. She didn’t know what had happened during those years away, but she did know that Sara was on that boat of her own free will. She just wished the older man would acknowledge that one day. But what scared her the most was the fact that Felicity, Laurel and Ray weren’t saying anything. They didn’t look completely sold on the idea, but they also didn’t look completely opposed to it either.
“I think our first step is to find Oliver,” Felicity said before catching Thea’s glare. “I’m not saying that we turn him in. We need to find him and see if he can help us with this.”

“Felicity, you haven’t been able to find him in almost five months,” Dig said gently. “What makes you think you can do it in the next two weeks?”

“Because up until now, I’ve been trying to track him. Now, we’ll ask him for his help.”

Dig just shook his head. He didn’t believe in Oliver anymore, because he no longer trusted him. Even knowing that reaching out to the man was the only option that he and his family might have. The feeling of betrayal just cut too deep for the man. Lyla had tried to talk to him about this, comparing Oliver to a soldier fighting a war again the League. Dig hadn’t said it, but he remembered Oliver trying that line on him back when the vigilante was trying to recruit his bodyguard into his crusade to save their city. Dig also remembered his response, calling Oliver a criminal and a murderer. That belief had changed with time, as had Oliver. Or so he thought, until Ra’s and the League happened. Until a man he’d called his brother had turned his back on that bond.

Sara and Nyssa stayed silent, both noticing that the room had largely ignored them since their arrival. It didn’t surprise either of them, considering that they were on the fringes of the group for the most part. Sara had once been a part of the team before she left and then died, while Nyssa was only a sometimes ally who had helped the team when it helped her or the League. Being unnoticed was beneficial at the moment, as it meant that no one had noticed the look that passed between them. Or the smile that traced Nyssa’s lips, making her look like a shark that had spotted a large, injured sea lion.

Nyssa felt she had a good idea of what her husband’s reaction to this news would be. It was his plans that she could not guess at. She would have to talk with him and hope that she could talk him away from the more dangerous responses. Then again, perhaps a more extreme response was called for in this case, in order to send a message not just to ARGUS, but the wider world. Except that would likely also mean revealing to his former friends and family a truth that her husband didn’t want known.

Felicity tried to call Oliver, but it went to voice mail. Nyssa was pleased with that, as it would hopefully give her time to talk with him before any of the others reached him. As there were a few hours before they would go on patrol, the group decided to split up for dinner. Ray and Felicity went upstairs to his office, while Dig and his family went back to their apartment. The Lances decided to go to their favorite Chinese restaurant, with Thea tagging along. After giving Sara a look, Nyssa had begged off, saying she had something she needed to take care of first. Sara knew what she was going to do, while the others just assumed it was something to do with the League.

Monastery in Tibet

November 20, 2015

Talia returned to her base still dealing with what she had found in Nanda Parbat. She would have to send one of her men to Starling City and have them gather as much information as possible about Oliver Queen and the entire Queen family. She needed to know everything that she could, so that she could determine a course of action. She had made one misstep already due to not having good information and she would not make another.
She walked into the main training room, where several students were training against one another. Looking at them, she was confronted by the main disadvantage that she would have against the League. Her group was small, insignificant against the host that Oliver Queen now commanded. She could always challenge him to a trial by combat, with the winner gaining the League. But the risks inherent with such a strategy made it a last resort, not a first option. She valued living too highly to engage in a fight she would likely lose, as her mind again whispered to her: patience.

That, however, would be a problem for one of her students. She had met him almost two years ago. He had been searching for someone to train him, saying he needed to avenge the murder of his father. She had agreed to take him even after learning the name of the man he held responsible. Now, she wondered how he would take the news that his quest was likely to end in failure.

“Adrian,” Talia called out. When he didn’t turn from the target he was shooting arrows at, she walked over and called louder, “Adrian.”

“My apologies, mistress,” Adrian said as he knelt before her.

“Do I need to remind you of the first lesson?”

“No, mistress. I must be mindful of my surroundings. I failed at that today, I will not allow it to happen again.”

“See that you do not, or I may have to give you a more pointed reminder,” Talia told him.

Adrian Chase nodded at that. He’d been on the receiving end of one of her pointed reminders in the past and had no great wish to repeat the experience. His shoulder would be forever marked by the scar left from that arrow. He had thought the pain of it going in was bad, until she’d pulled it out. He’d come a long way since that day, not only in his skills, but also his ability to tolerate pain. As she had told him, pain is inevitable, suffering from it is optional. Now, he no longer suffered, he looked to make others suffer, especially Oliver Queen.

“Come with me, Adrian,” Talia told him, leading him from the room and down the hall to another, more private training room.

“As you know, I went to see my father, to discover if the rumors were true or not. When I got there, I found something even worse, something that affects you as well as me. My father is indeed dead and his place has been taken by Oliver Queen. I’m sorry, but I fear that your plans for revenge have been doomed before they every truly got started.”

“Are you saying that there is no way for me to defeat him?” Adrian asked.

“There is not, at this time. I will have someone go to Starling City, gather everything that they can about Oliver Queen. There is too much missing information, too much we don’t know. Even you, you can not say for certain that Oliver Queen is the man who killed your father,” Talia told him.

“Also, the man that I trained, he was good. But my father was exceptional. If Oliver Queen has now mastered that level of skill, he is too dangerous for you to face yet.”

“Then teach me more.”

“I will try, but it will take time. Are you willing to commit more time to this? Because I know you wanted to leave for Starling City soon, so that you could lay the proper seeds for your rise.”

“I will devote however long you ask, just so long as I can defeat him and get my revenge.”

Talia smiled at that, the smile of the predator. She now had her weapon, dull and blunt though it may
still be. She would use her time not focused on planning to hone him until he was razor sharp.

Adrian, for his part, knew that Talia was making her own plans. Those didn’t concern him, because he was making plans of his own. He cared nothing about this League of Assassins or Talia’s birthright, though he’d heard her speak of it before. His focus was on his goal of destroying Oliver Queen.

Nanda Parbat

November 20, 2015

Oliver stood at the end of one of the larger training areas in the fortress, watching as the newer members of the League were being trained. He had been up since before sunrise and already spent two hours training against two of the League’s horsemen, working on his swordsmanship. In the afternoon, he planned on practicing his work with the bo. As Ra’s, he believed he should be more than proficient with any of the League’s weaponry. Tomorrow, he would train on tonfa and other melee weapons. The one weapon he practiced every day was his custom made bow, which had been a gift from Nyssa.

Since Lian Yu, he had always used a recurve bow. Nyssa and the rest of the League used compound bows, which are smaller and easier to maneuver in tight spaces. But she had seen how well he did with his signature weapon and she did not want to make him start over with a new type of bow. So, she had a bow made to his specifications, one that was a modern take on the bow Yao Fei and Shado had taught him with. This one was black, with a dark green grip. It was solid enough for him to use it as a makeshift staff in a fight, yet lighter than his old bow had been.

Focusing on the students, he watched them all draw the compound bows and fire. They all hit their targets, but only one was near the center. The others were scattered top, bottom, left or right. It had been like this since he had come into the room. Oliver frowned before walking further into the room. The assassins all froze as he moved towards the students.

“How is it that only one of your students has been able to hit near the center?” Oliver asked. “Why have I not seen any of you coaching them?”

Oliver glared at the four assassins that were the students’ instructors.

“No answer for why you have failed at your tasks? Very well. Who is his teacher?”

“I am, my lord,” a young woman said from the side.

“Do you think that you can get the other students up to his level quickly?” Oliver asked.

“I am certain of it, my lord.”

“See to it,” Oliver told her before turning his focus on the other three. “I do not tolerate failure and that is what you have done by neglecting your duties. Perhaps you need a lesson on the importance of archery?”

The trio met his gaze, he would give them credit for that. Aware that everyone in the room was now watching him, Oliver pointed towards the targets at the end of the room. As they walked down there, Oliver took one of the students’ bows and a quiver full of arrows. He then took aim and began knocking and firing them at a rapid pace. He didn’t hit any of the former teachers with an arrow, but
he wasn’t trying for that. Rather, he was trying to show precision, even using a bow not his own. When he was done, the centers of the targets were decorated with arrows, as well as bits of black fabric.

“The next time, if this happens, I will not aim to miss. Now, collect the arrows and then move so that the training may continue. You will continue collecting the arrows until all of these students are consistently able to hit the bullseye.”

When Oliver got to the back of the room, he turned to watch again. As he did so, one of his Horsemen came up beside him.

“My apologies, but Nyssa is calling for you.”

“Watch them for me and make sure that the others improve as well.”

Walking through the fortress at a steady pace, Oliver made his way down to the communication center. Stepping inside, he nodded to the Shadows that were on duty. He could see the old-style phone sitting at a desk in the corner, the handset laying next to it. As he approached, he could feel the tension building within himself. They had just spoken yesterday, after all, and it was not like Nyssa to call during a mission, even one that he was so personally invested in. He couldn’t, however, think of anything that could have gone wrong, which worried him even more.

“Good evening, Nyssa,” Oliver said into the telephone.

“And good morning to you, Husband,” was Nyssa’s response.

“Why do I have a bad feeling?”

“Because you know me too well. At least well enough to know that I would not call unless I felt it important.”

“What happened?” Oliver asked.

“Your former team has a problem. Ms. Waller is looking for you and she has given them two weeks to find you, or she is going to arrest Mr. Diggle and his wife in connection to the bio-weapon attack on Starling City,” Nyssa told him.

Oliver gripped the handset so hard, he was afraid he had cracked it.

“Did they say why Waller wants me?”

“Mr. Diggle’s wife said that she planned to use you as her scapegoat regarding the attack, though she doubts that is the true reason. As do I.”

“Do you think that she knows?” Oliver asked.

“Ms. Waller? No, I doubt very much that she has any idea about that. If she did, she would have one of her cutouts contact one of the League’s, to see if she could arrange a meeting to discuss it. She would, no doubt, attempt some form of trap to catch you. Instead, it appears as if she is grasping at straws, I believe the phrase is,” Nyssa told him.

“And what do you think would be her reaction if she learned that Oliver Queen is dead?”

“Unless the other part of that is that he is now Ra’s al Ghul, I do not see it changing much. Someone or something is pressing Ms. Waller regarding that attack. From what I know of the woman, she will...
do whatever is necessary to provide answers, even if those answers are not the truth.”

That was what Oliver was afraid of. Waller was willing to do whatever was necessary to win, regardless of the costs. He remembered when she’d learned that Akio had died from the Alpha/Omega virus, she’d barely blinked. So he could see her having no issues with having Dig and Lyla wrongfully convicted for the attack, if it solved her problems, whatever those might be.

“And if I reveal to her that I am Ra’s al Ghul, it gives her leverage against me,” Oliver said flatly. “This is an interesting dilemma that you have given me, Nyssa.”

Nyssa agreed with both of Oliver’s statements. Knowing what she did of the woman, it was easy to see that she would try to use his friends and family as leverage against him. She knew him well enough to know that he wouldn’t want them to suffer if he could prevent it. The question was, how to prevent Ms. Waller from attempting something like that. She had an answer, but wondered if Oliver would agree to it.

“I will be in Starling City in 48 hours. Do not let anyone know I am coming. When I get there, we will deal with this problem.”

Nyssa shivered at that tone of voice. It was one that she heard all too rarely from her husband. She remembered the time she had heard it on the plane from Nanda Parbat with Oliver and her father. It was the tone he’d used to announce his name was Oliver Queen. It was a tone that reminded her of her father. The tone of Ra’s al Ghul.

“As you command.”

Oliver hung up the phone at that, then turned to one of the Shadows in the room.

“Where is the phone at today?” Oliver asked.

“A moment, my lord,” the man stated, entering something into the computer in front of him. He then checked his screen before turning back to face Ra’s. “The phone is in Spain, near the city of Malaga.”

“Very well. Do we have an update on his assignment?”

“He sent a mission completed message two hours ago. That was sent to your office with the rest of the overnight messages.”

Oliver nodded at that. That was perfect actually for what he had planned, because if the assassin followed usual procedure, they would be leaving the city tonight or first thing tomorrow. Enough time for him to call someone and let Felicity track the phone there. Dig would give the information to Lyla, who would pass it on to Waller. The only question was if Waller would chase this down herself with a team or send just a team under someone else. The only difference that would make is the overall time it would take to do what he intended. Oliver left the communication center and went to his and Nyssa’s rooms. Settling into the leather chair in his reading area, he picked up the cell phone and dialed one of the preset numbers.

“Oliver? Is that you?” Felicity asked.

“Hey, Felicity,” Oliver answered back. “I got your message and called you back.”

“Can you give me like thirty minutes to get everybody here? We have some really big news to share with you and I know that the others will want to be here as well. And by big news, I mean news you won’t believe and will definitely want others to confirm and even then you might not believe it.”
“Relax, Felicity. Thirty minutes should be fine. I’m just sitting around, reading a book and watching
the waves come to shore.”

“Thanks, Oliver. I’ll call you back as soon as the others get here,” Felicity told him before hanging
up. It didn’t hit her until that point that Oliver had actually said something about where he was. Not
that it necessarily helped with finding him, but it was the first time he’d ever done that when they
talked. She immediately called Laurel, who was just finishing dinner with her family and Thea. Once
they heard Oliver called, they agreed to hurry back to the lair. Dig was in the middle of getting baby
Sara down, so he would be a little longer as the little girl wanted her daddy right now. She didn’t
have a way of contacting Nyssa, but figured Laurel or Sara would take care of that. Or, perhaps not,
as she doubted that Nyssa would be too interested in a conversation with Oliver.

When everyone was finally gathered, Felicity turned to her computers and placed the call. She had
already set things up to record the call, as well as try to trace it. She put the call on speaker and they
all waited for it to be answered.

“Hi, Felicity,” Oliver said.

“Well, everyone’s here now, so we can share our news. There’s some great news and some bad
news, too,” Felicity told him.

“And you didn’t tell me about the bad news the first time you called because….”

“I was afraid if I told you it, you wouldn’t answer when we called with the great news.”

Oliver sighed at that. Since he already knew what their news was, he had to say that Felicity had a
very accurate read on what his reaction to it would have been. However, they didn’t know that he
knew. They also didn’t know that the only way they would find him, unless he wanted them to,
would be if someone made a mistake. So, he decided to let the silence drag out a moment.

“Ollie, are you still there?” Thea asked.

“Yeah, Speedy, I’m still here,” Oliver told her.

“Why don’t we do the bad news first, just to get it out of the way. That way, the good news is that
much better,” Felicity put in.

“OK, then what is the bad news?”

“Amanda Waller is looking for you,” Dig said. “She had Lyla brought in and told her that she wants
to use you as the scapegoat for the whole bio-weapon attack last spring. And if we can’t find you for
her, then Lyla and I take your place.”

“So, that’s what this call is? A chance to try and hunt me down for her?” Oliver asked.

“No. Lyla and I talked about it and just, no. The others want you to come here, help them take on
Waller. But I know Waller and ARGUS, I know that wouldn’t work. All it would do is put them on
ARGUS’ radar.”

“And sacrificing yourselves won’t stop her either,” Felicity told him.

“She’s right. It also wouldn’t stop her from just picking another person, until she finds just the right
leverage. She’s starting with you and Lyla, next it might be Laurel or Felicity. She’d save Thea for
last, because she knows that could be my breaking point or it could be the point where I use
everything I’ve learned against her. Waller better than anyone knows just how deep the well of
Then, what do we do?” Laurel asked.

“You do nothing. Track the phone, give her the information, buy Dig and Lyla some time. I won’t be here when they come, but it will show you’re trying,” Oliver told them. “Give me a couple of days to think about this and we’ll talk some more.”

“All right, just don’t hang up yet, because we haven’t told you the good news,” Felicity said, motioning Sara forward.

“Hello, Ollie,” Sara said, putting just the right amount of quiver into her voice.

“Sara?”

“I’ll give you some time to let it sink in.”

Oliver smiled at that, remembering her saying exactly that the last time he’d found out she was alive.

“How?” Oliver asked softly, trying to put a range of emotions into his voice, playing the part that they would expect if he was just learning about Sara.

“Nyssa convinced Ra’s to use the Lazarus Pit on her, then they somehow restored her soul to her body. She brought her here yesterday,” Laurel said.

“Are you home for good?”

“If you’re trying to ask about the League, just say it, Ollie,” Sara retorted.

“Fine,” Oliver replied. “Are you still in the League?”

“Yes, I’m still a member of the League. However, Ra’s has assigned me to Starling City for now. It suited his purposes and mine.”

“So, the new Ra’s didn’t release you even after you died for the League?”

“No,” was Sara's reply, “but he’s also not asking me to kill again, either.”

“I guess that’s something,” Oliver said. “Just, be safe, Sara.”

“Well, Nyssa’s got my back, so I’ll be fine.”

“I’m sure you will. I’ll see you when I can.”

With that, Oliver hung up the phone. Thinking back over the call, he felt that he hadn’t given anything away. He’d played it well, acting happy, surprised and also concerned. He’d taken care not to push too hard, so that they didn’t get too deep into things. If pushed on it later, he would simply say that he didn’t want to make her uncomfortable by asking too many questions. He also needed to start getting ready to leave for Starling City and a very pointed conversation with Amanda Waller.
As soon as the call ended, everyone looked at Felicity. She, in turn, was watching her computer screens and hoping. She was certain that the call had been long enough for the trace to complete, unless he’d found some IT genius to reroute the traffic a dozen different ways. When the program completed, she did a little fist pump, because she had a location. The program was only able to get them within the radius of the cell tower his phone had been connected to but it was still a location.

“Where is he?” Dig asked, looking over her shoulder.

“He’s in Malaga, Spain,” Felicity said, her fingers flying over the keyboards, setting up new searches to try to find him. She was certain he wasn’t traveling on his own passport, so she doubted he’d be using his own name for hotels, meals or such. So, the first thing she did was set a search for all hotel rooms paid for in cash. She would then run searches on all the names produced, after she eliminated the ones it obviously couldn’t be.

Dig, in the meantime, was calling Lyla to pass on what they had so far. That way, Lyla could give it to Waller. He doubted that Waller would believe it, because he didn’t believe it either, to be honest. Not just because Oliver had told them to track the call, but because Malaga didn’t strike him as someplace to go if you’re trying to lay low. If it was him, he would stay off the beaten track. Waller would likely think that too, unless she thought Oliver was trying to do the opposite of what anyone would expect of him.

A beeping from Felicity’s computers brought them all over to her.

“Looks like a break-in at Kord Industries,” Felicity told them as she hacked her way into the security cameras. “And look, guess who it is.”

“Suit up, everybody,” Dig said.

“I’ll meet you there,” Sara told them, running for the exit.

By the time the team had changed into their costumes and were on their way, Sara had reached her safe house. She ran upstairs and undressed quickly, then proceeded to put on her Canary costume. She also selected a few weapons and ran back out. She smiled as she got back on her motorcycle and raced off into the night. She had missed this, the feel of the wind on her face, the sound of the engine, being alive. She took a moment to savor the feeling, then told herself to focus on what she was going to be doing.

Sara arrived just as Team Arrow did, sliding off her bike to join them. As they approached the scene, they heard gunshots but not aimed at them. Dig didn’t have to say a word as the group rushed to the open front doors. The entryway separated with a hall going in each direction. Dig motioned Thea and Sara to go right, while he and Laurel went left. Both groups had communication devices so that Felicity could track them and let them know what she was seeing.

“There’s a pair ahead of you at the corner, Thea,” Felicity said.
Thea and Sara edged closer and took a peek. The two men were pushing a loaded cart their way, which meant that their hands were full at the moment. The two women decided to take advantage of that and rushed around the corner, Thea firing an arrow into the one on the left, while Sara used her baton on the one to the right.

“Fucking Bitch,” the man with the arrow in his shoulder said.

“Want to repeat that?” Sara asked just before she slammed her baton into his throat, then followed it with the punch to the mouth. The man was left gasping for air and spitting blood. “I didn’t think so.”

Thea used two pairs of zip cuffs to secure the pair before they moved on. She could hear the others reporting in, but it sounded like they hadn’t found anything yet. When another gun shot rang out, Sara could tell it was both close and up ahead of them.

“It looks like the main group is in a vault area, but they can’t get into the big vault. So, they’re trying to force someone to open it,” Felicity said.

“Where, Felicity?” Dig asked.

“Near where Sara and Thea are. If they go to the end of the hall that they are currently in and turn right, the doors are just ahead of them.”

“Moving that way now.”

Sara and Thea continued moving forward, but going slowly. This was to make sure they didn’t get ambushed by someone coming out of that area, but also to give Dig and Laurel time to reach them. For the moment, Sara put her batons away and grabbed a pair of knives. If someone did come out, she could throw the knives. By the time they reached the end of the hall, Dig and Laurel had joined them.

“Is there any cover in that room that we can use?” Dig asked.

“Some, but not a lot,” Felicity replied. “A few rows of shelves, but everything empties out about half way, then it’s all open space.”

“OK, we stay to cover as best we can and work our way as close as we can.”

The four of them entered the room and took to the rows of shelving. They could all see the vault area and each did a silent count of those standing with weapons. Sara was forced to hide when she saw one of the men head her way. She waited until he was right next to her hiding place, then thrust her knife into his kidney while clamping her hand over his mouth. She then jammed the knife into his throat and pulled the body into the shelf, hiding it from view.

Thea wasn’t so fortunate, as she got seen before she could hide. At that point, the alarm was raised among the thieves. Most of them ran towards the team with guns blazing, while a couple were still trying to get into the vault. Dig was shooting back, but they were running into the same problems that they had had before with this group. They were too heavily armed and wearing too much protective gear for Dig’s pistol to be effective, unless he went for head shots.

Sara was managing to take down a few with well aimed knives, but she seemed to be the only one. To make matters worse, the SCPD finally showed up. Problem was, they were going after both sides and seemed to be as heavily armed as the criminals they were facing. Not wanting to fight them, Dig had no choice but to tell the team to break it off and get away. Sara could tell he wasn’t happy, but knew he’d made the right call.
The ride back to the lair was silent. Dig, Laurel and Thea had all noticed Sara during the fight. How her knives were aimed to kill, not wound. Of them, only Thea really understood, because that was how she had been trained as well. Sara was still League of Assassins and they viewed mercy as weakness, taking prisoners was not something that they did. And while she had put that aside when she’d worked with the team before, it was still there. Dig knew he needed to talk with her about that and it needed to be now, not later.

“Sara, can we talk?” Dig asked as she walked into the lair.

Sara followed him to a private spot near the entrance to the lair from inside Palmer Technologies. She was curious as to what this was about, but not terribly concerned. Yes, tonight hadn’t ended well, but it certainly wasn’t her fault. They were outmatched, plain and simple.

“What happened out there, Sara? Because you know that we don’t kill, not anymore.”

“Bullshit,” Sara said staring at Dig. “Or are you forgetting Oliver killing Nyssa’s father? Or the Assassins you all killed trying to rescue Oliver from the League? You want to get judgmental because I choose to take those guys out rather than let them kill me or one of you, go right ahead. You seem to have it down to a science.”

“And what’s that supposed to mean?”

“I saw the look you gave me when I compared Thea to Oliver, how she was becoming a hero like he had been. Tell me, did you pull the same crap on him that you just tried with me. ‘Killing’s wrong, Oliver. You need to find a different way.’ Never mentioning that your way just results in his enemies having a chance for round 2, round 3 and however many more until someone finally puts them in the ground. Kind of like the Count. You remember him, right? I know Felicity does, considering he would have killed her if Oliver hadn’t killed him first.”

Dig at least has the good grace to look a little embarrassed at that. Not that he would have objected strongly if Oliver had killed the Count the first time they’d encountered him, given what had happened with Thea. But he had been slightly relieved that there had been a different outcome. Then, Vertigo had cropped up again and while the Count had been innocent that time, it could be argued that if Oliver had killed him, then that doctor never would have been able to reverse engineer the drug using tissue samples from the Count. Strike three had been when the Count managed to escape and terrorize the city with his drug once again, ending when Oliver had put arrows into his chest and he fell out a window at Queen Consolidated.

“Nyssa told Oliver the night of Slade’s Siege that his city falls because he fails to do what is necessary. She and I both hoped that he and the rest of you would take that lesson to heart. Yet, here we are over a year later and you still seem to think that you can save this city while fighting with one hand tied behind your backs,” Sara told him.

“And your first move now seems to be aimed to kill,” Dig responded.

“No, my first move is to do whatever it takes. When we’re outnumbered and going up against men in body armor carrying fully automatic weapons, I’m looking to put them down hard, so that they stay down. In case you haven’t noticed, you’re in a war here.”

“Except, if we do things that way, the police will be after us as well. When Oliver stopped dropping a bunch of bodies, the police backed off on coming after him. That meant they were able to handle more criminal activity.”

Sara sighed at that. It was becoming clear that she wouldn’t get through to Dig, at least not without
more arguments. And quite honestly, she didn’t have the energy for it. Besides, this wasn’t her team, she was just giving them a little help. This was Dig’s team now. She only worried about Thea and Laurel getting hurt because they were following Dig’s lead. Then again, she could always go out alone as Ta-er al-Sahfer, rather than the Canary. And then, she could act like the Assassin she is.

ARGUS Headquarters
November 22, 2015

Amanda Waller was standing near her desk, watching the satellite imagery showing Malaga, Spain. A team of ARGUS agents had been sent to find Oliver, based on the information Lyla had given her. She had no reason to doubt the accuracy of the information, as she knew the ultimate source was Felicity Smoak. The IT genius had been on ARGUS’ radar since she was in grade school, just hoping that she would be as skilled and as dirty as her father. It had turned out that she was infinitely more skilled, as evidenced by her graduating MIT at age 19 with a Masters in Computer Sciences and Cyber Security, summa cum laude. And even though she was the author of the virus that her boyfriend had used, she wasn’t nearly as dirty as her father was, unless one counted her work with Oliver Queen and his team.

Still, Waller would have been tempted to ‘recruit’ her then, if not for the interest in her by companies like Wayne Enterprises, Queen Consolidated and Kord Industries. That was too much interest for ARGUS to bring her on board and then have her effectively disappear. So, Waller had backed off, knowing that she would get her chance at some point. She believed that Felicity would eventually follow the path of her father and she would be waiting when she did. If not, she’d make up something to trap her with. It wouldn’t be the first time she’d done it, after all.

Waller was thinking about that when her office phone rang. Looking at the display, she was surprised to see a number that she didn’t instantly recognize. So, she followed standard procedure and initiated a trace of the call, as well as a recording. Only when that was done did she answer the phone.

“Waller.”

“I understand that you’re looking for me,” Oliver said, his tone cold and serious. “Why?”

“If you know that I’m looking for you, then you must know why,” Waller told him, smiling.

“No, I know the fiction that you told as your excuse. And you and I both know it’s a lie, because you wouldn’t have shared the truth in any way that it might get back to me. So, try again.”

“Whether it is the truth or not shouldn’t be your concern, Oliver. Your concern should be that people will believe it is the truth.”

“And yours should be the public’s reaction when they find out that you hired a mercenary named Edward Fyers to shoot down a civilian airliner, just so that you could kill one person. Or that what happened in Hong Kong wasn’t a chemical spill, but rather the release of the Alpha/Omega virus by General Shrieve and his men. Interestingly enough, Shrieve and you worked together to steal that virus before he went rogue on you. Shall I go on?” Oliver asked.

“You can try and claim all of that, it wouldn’t change a thing. Because before you could get to anyone influential enough to do anything, my people would have already scooped you up,” Waller
“From Malaga, right? Hope they enjoy the Mediterranean sea air.”

The laughter that came over the line at that got Waller to look at her computer and curse. He wasn’t in Malaga anymore, now he was in the Canary Islands.

“You couldn’t have believed it would be that easy, Amanda.” Oliver said, still chuckling as he heard Waller ordering satellite coverage of the Canary Islands and that the team be redirected based on the new information.

“It doesn’t matter, because I will find you. And if you do make good on your claims, they won’t be believed without proof. Proof that you don’t have.”

“Do you want to bet on that, Amanda? Or should I give you a sample of the proof that I don’t have? Say the account that was used to pay for the S-300 missile launcher that you had shipped to Fyers and the trail of dummy accounts leading back to an ARGUS account that the director controls. You are still the director of ARGUS, aren’t you?”

“And what do you want in exchange for not releasing that information, Mister Queen?” Waller asked.

“You to forget you ever knew me, as well as you leaving my former team and their families alone,” Oliver told her.

“And if I can’t do that?”

“Then my releasing this information will be the least of your worries.”

Waller had to fight to keep from laughing at that. He was actually going to try to threaten her in that manner. The leaks would be bothersome, to be sure, but she had weathered worse. The country needed her and those in power knew it. Beside, Oliver Queen, for all of his skills (and those skills were why she needed him), was simply one man. One man against the whole of ARGUS? No, she had nothing to fear from him.

“If you have nothing more than empty threats to offer, then I have more important things to do,” Waller told him as she hung up the phone.

On the other end of the phone, Oliver just smiled. Putting the phone away, he turned to the window and looked out at the skyline of Starling City as the plane came in for a landing at the private airport. There were a trio of cars waiting off to the side when the business jet taxied over to the hanger, as well as one from the customs service. He wasn’t too worried about that, because he knew that the agent would be much more deferential to the wealthy traveler than he would be to someone who’d traveled commercial.

Oliver and the assassins that were accompanying him were all dressed in expensive suits and handmade shoes. The pilot opened the door for the agent and quickly handled all of their paperwork, with the agent wishing them a welcome to the United States on his way off the plane. One of his group laughed a little once the agent was truly gone, looking back at Oliver.

“He never even looked at you, my lord,” the Assassin said. “Or any of us for that matter.”

“He saw what he expected to see, so he never looked beyond the surface appearance,” Oliver told him as he stood and walked off the plane. Two of the assassins accompanying him got into the lead car, two others got into the trail car and Oliver and one assassin got into the van along with the
“Greetings, my lord. Everything is in readiness, as you ordered,” Salah told Oliver as their convoy drove off. “Would you prefer to go to the hotel first or to our base?”

“The hotel first. It will give us all a chance to refresh ourselves and the rest of the Shadows are not due to be there until this evening.”

“That is correct. The ones working at ARGUS can not make it until then.”

As they drove into the city, Oliver couldn’t help looking out the window of the van. It had only been six months since he was last here, but the city looked worse than it had. He felt a momentary stab of depression at the thought before reminding himself that there was still time to arrest the city’s slide. Time before he would feel compelled to have the League act more directly. Because the last thing he wanted was to cleanse the city, though he would if it became necessary.

When the convoy reached the hotel, they went into the parking garage. Salah had reserved the entire floor when getting the suite for Sara and Nyssa, something that was customary for important members of the League. After Ra’s, there was none more important that his wife. Oliver and the rest got out of the vehicles. One member went and activated the elevator, while the rest got the luggage out of the van. Looking at everything, Oliver knew that it would take two trips to get it all upstairs. The division of trips was easy, as the priority was getting him out of view and secure. Oliver, Salah and three assassins came up in the first trip.

In the hallway, Salah handed over room keys to Oliver and the others. As they went to their rooms, he waited until the rest of the group came up with the luggage. Oliver checked the card for the room number, then went to that door and opened it. When he stepped inside, he was not surprised to find that it was actually a suite. Nor was he surprised to find Nyssa and Sara sitting on the couch, even though he had not told them he would be coming to Starling City.

“Welcome home, Husband,” Nyssa said with a smirk.

“Nanda Parbat is my home now, Nyssa,” Oliver replied. “I am simply here briefly on business.”

“Business that neither I nor Sara could have handled for you?”

“No, this called for a more personal touch.”

“So, what is the business that required your presence?” Sara asked, keeping her voice low to prevent anyone but the three of them from hearing her questioning the Demon’s Head.

“Amanda Waller,” Oliver said. “Since she would not listen to reason, perhaps she’ll listen to power.”

“So, Ra’s al Ghul will threaten the head of ARGUS?” Nyssa asked with a smile.

“No. I’ve decided that the time for threats has passed, as I do not trust Amanda to keep any promise she might make to me under such conditions.”

“And you are certain of your plan, Husband?”

“I am, because it is the only option that ends this permanently. As well, the League exists to replace evil with death. The things that Amanda Waller has done or attempted to do qualify as evil, as far as I am concerned. Just because she heads a government agency doesn’t change that, nor does the fact that she was concerned for the greater good,” Oliver said, looking at Nyssa and Sara to see if they had any objection.
“And what about your former team?” Nyssa asked.

“If we do this right, they won’t be able to interfere. Tonight, you both will take a team and search for this group that has been bothering my former team. When you find them, the others will join you. Once you have defeated them, you will call in Team Arrow by having one of the Shadows call the SCPD.”

“And while they’re distracted with that, you go after Waller. As Ra’s al Ghul or Oliver Queen?”

“It doesn’t really make a difference, does it? Because either way, it will be the last face she ever sees,” Oliver said.
Oliver stood waiting in the main room of the League’s base in Starling City. He was flanked by Nyssa and Sara. To the sides were the assassins he’d brought with him, as well as the ones who were summoned to the city and the shadows based here, all but two. Those two, however, were the most critical for tonight’s plans, as they were both inside of ARGUS. One worked in the command center, while the other was in their technical services as a computer programmer. Oliver knew that their value was beyond measure and he knew that they would likely be the last to show.

The sound of a light footfall was enough to alert the others, as everyone’s attention focused toward the entrance. The pair that came into view couldn’t have been more different if they tried and looked almost comical next to each other, even dressed in the League’s uniform. He was tall, almost 6 feet 7 inches, while she was short at just over 5 feet. Where he was dark complected and had closely cropped black hair, she was so pale as to almost be transparent and wore her whitish-blonde hair in a bun.

“An-Nur, it is good to see you again,” Nyssa said to the woman, “and you as well Nadeem”

“Thank you, my lady. It is good to be in the company of so many of my brothers and sisters again,” An-Nur said with a smile. “Nadeem has news.”

“Indeed? Of what nature?” Oliver asked, looking at the tall man.

“One of my fellow programmers has been working on a special project. Today, he let slip that it was finished and ready for testing, though he was not sure how they would be able to completely test it. He and I have become friends over our time there, so he told me more than he should have. This program, which he called ‘Rubicon’, will allow whoever controls it to stop any other nations from launching their nuclear missiles. He was very excited about the idea, saying that he was sure Waller would give him what he had asked for because of this,” Nadeem told them.

It was only by a force of will that Oliver was able not to react. Because he could see the flaws in something like that. If this program gave the kind of access needed to stop the missiles from launching, it also gave all the access needed to actually launch them. He wondered if Waller knew that was a possibility when she started the project and just ignored it. Or, did she know and that was exactly what she was looking for. The later definitely wouldn’t surprise him in the least. After all, what better way to get someone to do what you want that with a nuclear weapon aimed at their heads with the button in the hands of someone with absolutely not regard for human life.

“Would you be able to get access to the program and delete it?”

“Given enough time, yes. Anything can be hacked if you’re already inside the system. Or, I have a nasty computer virus I’ve been waiting for an excuse to actually use. The only downside to that is it will also infect and destroy all the other data in ARGUS’ system. Question is, do we care?”

“We do care, but the risks of this getting in the wrong hands may make such a step necessary,” Oliver stated. “We also need to deal with the person who created this program. Because if they still have access to him, they could just get him to recreate it.”
“I understand, my lord,” Nadeem replied, a touch of sadness in his tone, something that didn’t go unnoticed by Oliver, Nyssa or Sara. It was one of the inherent dangers of life as a Shadow. In building the connections necessary to get the information you needed, you got close to the other person. You learned about their lives, their families, their hopes and dreams. You also knew that the information you gathered could lead to their death. Most of the time, the other person was someone evil enough that you could ignore it. But every so often, there was something like this. A person who had to die because they knew something that was too dangerous.

“Tonight, we will have three missions that will all be part of the whole, yet independent of one another. Nyssa and Ta-er al-Sahfer were lead two teams on the first mission. There is a group of criminals in this city that the police and the city’s vigilantes have been unable to stop. They are heavily armed and do not care how many innocents get harmed. We will find them and we will destroy them tonight. This mission will also serve to distract the vigilantes while we carry out the other missions. Tonight, we are going to eliminate the threat posed by the director of ARGUS, Amanda Waller. That will be my mission. As that is happening, Nadeem and An-Nur will go back to ARGUS. They will deal with this ‘Rubicon’ and the person who created it. Nyssa will give you your assignments.”

With that, Nyssa walked to each of the Assassins and Shadows, telling them which team they were on. The ones on Nyssa and Ta-er al-Sahfer’s teams looked almost happy about it, knowing that they would likely face a good fight tonight. The two Assassins that were going with Oliver looked stoic, as befitted a Horseman and his apprentice. An-Nur was quietly talking to Nadeem, who looked ready but definitely not happy. Worried about that, he walked over to them and motioned for them to follow him.

“Nadeem?” Oliver asked softly, mindful of the others being near.

“My apologies, my lord. I know this is the will of Ra’s al Ghul, but….”

“Nadeem feels badly, as do I, my lord. We have been in ARGUS for over ten years now. We know this man who you have condemned. He has been a prisoner of ARGUS for over 15 years. Yes, he was a criminal, but now he is just a man would longs to see his daughter. If he had been arrested for his crimes, he would have at least been allowed visits, yet he had not seen her since she was 7 years old. He knows about the life she has had, to a degree, but only that which Waller tells him,” An-Nur said.

“Waller once told him she would fake some charges and get his daughter arrested when he refused to work on a project to create a release system for a virus. Said she’d arrange a perfect little family reunion for him, the pair of them in matching orange jumpsuits. He tried to kill himself after that, but they stopped him and moved him to a more secure cell afterwards,” Nadeem added.

“I appreciate you both telling me what you have and I can sympathize with the man to a degree, but I see no solution to it. If we were to simply release him from ARGUS, it would likely only be a matter of time before they recaptured him or someone worse did. As I said, if someone has him, then they could recreate this Rubicon. I cannot allow that to happen.”

“My lord, could we not take him to Nanda Parbat? I am certain he could be of use to the League, with his computer skills.”

Oliver weighed their words, considering what they were proposing as well as the dangers of the suggestion. The League had need of people with expertise in technology, of that there was no doubt. But did that offset the fact that this man had objected enough to what Waller was forcing him to do that he was willing to kill himself to get out of it. What if he had similar objections about the League’s mission and instead of trying to end his life, he managed to flee instead. True, he would
likely not last long, but what if it was long enough to pass on Rubicon or something similar. The theoretical fate of millions versus the real fate of one man. Sadly, it was no choice in his mind.

“An-Nur, Nadeem. If you are not able to do this, I will understand and have another carry out that task,” Oliver told them. “But it must be done.”

“I will do it, my lord, so that I might make his passing as painless as possible,” Nadeem said, acceding to the will of Ra’s al Ghul.

Oliver walked away, removing his cell phone with a grim look on his face. He saw that Nyssa, Sara and their teams had left while he was conversing with the pair of Shadows. The timing of this was going to be almost impossible to get exactly right, but he hoped that the first part would be beginning within the next two hours. Using that as a guide, he waited thirty minutes before sending Nadeem and An-Nur on their way. Then, he made a call.

“Twice in one day, Mr. Queen,” Waller said as she answered. “Getting lonely on the run.”

“Not particularly, though I wouldn’t mind some company. Perhaps you’re free this evening. We could get together for drinks and talk,” Oliver replied.

“Don’t think I could make it to the Canary Islands tonight.”

“I was thinking more like Verdant, actually. It shouldn’t be crowded, so plenty of room.”

Waller froze at that before looking at her computer screen. She bit back the curse that came from her as she saw that this call was coming from Starling City. Had he been here the whole time, just taunting her and sending her agents off on wild goose chases. Oh, she would make sure to repay him for this. Reaching over, she pressed a button activating a silent call.

“And when were you thinking we could get together?” Waller asked.

“Whenever is good for you, Amanda. I’ve got plenty of time to kill and there’s plenty to drink here, while I’m waiting for you,” Oliver said.

“I could be there in a couple of hours.”

“That’s fine. But if I see your friends come without you, I should warn you that the bouncer can be a little aggressive, shall we say.”

“I wouldn’t expect anything less from you.”

Oliver hung up the phone with a laugh. He would think that this was going to be too easy, but he knew Amanda Waller. She was likely already alerting a strike team to go to Verdant and capture him. He also knew that she would be right behind them, intending to gloat when she captured him, just like she had in Coast City. This time, though, he would have the upper hand.

Oliver and the assassins with him left the base and got into a black SUV for the drive over to Verdant. As they were driving into the Glades, his telephone beeped with a message. Looking at it, he smiled. Nyssa had found the group and Sara’s team was on its way there. Oliver texted back a simple “Happy Hunting” and got a smile emoji in return. Putting the phone back away, he relaxed a little for the rest of the drive, now that phase one was well underway.

Starling City
At a warehouse down by the docks, Nyssa stood on a rooftop watching the activity occurring in the one opposite her. By her count, there were ten members of this group including the leader. They were unloading what was obviously a stolen truck. From the way that they were setting certain things aside, it felt like they were looking for something in particular. She almost wondered if it would be useful to keep one of them alive, just to see what their plans had been. Then again, if they killed them all, whatever their plans were died with them.

“Hello, Beloved,” Nyssa said softly.

“Never will be able to sneak up on you,” Sara replied with a sigh. “So, how do you want to do this?”

“Trap them between our two groups would be best, would it not?”

“Yes, but that isn’t what I meant. I meant, do we want to take them all out and then call it in. Or do we want to call them first?”

Nyssa thought about that. This had two goals, take out this group of criminals and distract team Arrow so that they were less likely to interfere with the rest of the night’s events. They didn’t need them to take down the group and even when they sent half of their forces back, it would still be that way. But having team Arrow here would provide an excellent distraction for them, though they would likely insist on their ‘no-kill’ policy and unnecessarily complicate matters.

“Have them come now,” Nyssa said, turning her full attention to the warehouse opposite. “I would suggest haste as well or we may have to begin without them.”

Sara quickly called Felicity and filled her in. They were betting that the team would be somewhere in the area, as it was late enough for them to be on patrol. And the docks and the Glades were the two most crime ridden areas, so it was safe to assume that those would be where the team placed its efforts. That belief was validated when they heard the sound of an arrow about ten minutes later, followed by two pairs of feet hitting the gravel of the rooftop.

“Thanks for coming, Speedy,” Sara said as she turned to face Thea and Laurel. “Hey, Sis.”

“Sara,” Thea replied with a smile, “Nyssa.”

“Sister-in-law. Come, we have work to do.”

“Dig’s at the end of the building on ground level, waiting for your signal.”

“Indeed? Then, I suppose I should signal him,” Nyssa said with a grin as she knocked an arrow and fired it into one of the men unloading the truck. That arrow seemed to be the signal for a barrage of arrows that took down five of the men below. With that, assassins dropped from the building and the one that the criminals were in. Thea, Laurel and Dig joined them, making the fight very short and completely unfair. In the end, there were two survivors who had been subdued by Laurel and Dig. The rest were killed with arrows, including one by Thea.

When the fight was over, Dig and Laurel started looking through what the criminals had stolen, trying to piece together what the importance was. They gathered up all of the paperwork that they could find, as well as taking pictures of the marking on the crates. They would give it all over to Felicity and see if she would dig deeper. A lot of it they couldn’t make heads or tails of. The sound of sirens in the distance is what finally ended their search, as the last thing they wanted to do was be
here when the police arrived.

“Thank you for calling us about this,” Laurel said to Nyssa and Sara.

“We knew what a danger they were and thought you might like to see that danger ended,” Nyssa told her.

“We should get dinner later tonight or maybe an early breakfast.”

“Perhaps. But for now, you have things you need to do and we do as well.”

“Call us, Sis, when you’re done. We’ll be around,” Sara said as she and Nyssa ran towards the edge of the roof before leaping to the next building over. Laurel watched until they were out of view, then turned to make her way to where Dig waited with the van. After she got in, they drove off. A mutual decision was made to head back to base and have Felicity get started on the evidence that they had found. They’d stopped the group tonight and it should be a permanent victory, but they needed to do whatever they could to make sure that actually happened.

Once they were away from the scene and the other team, Nyssa and Sara stopped on a rooftop. Nyssa removed her phone and sent a quick text to Oliver letting him know that their part was completed. The response was for her and Sara to come to Verdant with their teams. This got a broad smile out of both the women, as they had hoped to be there when it happened. Together, they raced across the rooftops from the docks into the Glades, tracking towards Verdant. They were about a block away when they caught sight of the convoy heading that way. Four large black SUVs, all riding low on their suspensions marking them as heavily armored.

“It appears that Miss Waller wants to make sure your party is crowded, Husband,” Nyssa said into the phone.

“I figured as much. Nobody does anything until we make sure that she is there,” Oliver warned.

“Of course not. We have done this sort of thing before.”

Oliver smirked at the hurt tone in Nyssa’s voice. “I know, though that was not against her. And I want the rat to have completely taken the bait before we spring this trap.”

Before Nyssa could say anything else, Oliver’s phone beeped with a text message. Looking, he was surprised to see it was from Nadeem. Opening it, he almost dropped the phone in shock. Sucking in a deep breath, he sent back a quick response before he turned his attention away from the device as he heard the sound of car doors closing outside.

“Showtime,” Oliver whispered as he faded into the shadows of the closed club.

Nyssa went silent at that, as she, Sara and their teams rushed to get there. She kept counting as more and more bodies climbed out of the SUVs. Then she saw her, Amanda Waller was there. She didn’t know if it was ego, hubris or just the thought that she was untouchable, but there was no reason for her to be anywhere near here. Nyssa almost wanted to laugh when the woman walked through the host of agents and headed for the doors to the closed nightclub. She looked at Sara and the others, making sure that they were in position and ready. Seeing that they were, all they had to do was wait. The darkness around the club made for plenty of shadows.

“Now,” came the call over Nyssa’s phone.

At a nod, Sara fired the first arrow while Nyssa put the phone away and took up her bow as well. The agents never knew what hit them, as the arrows seemed to come out of nowhere. A few of the
agents just adopted a spray and pray philosophy to their shooting, as they emptied their magazines
into the darkness. It didn’t stop the rain of arrows.

Inside the club, things weren’t going any better, though the fighting here was more personal. The
only arrow fired had been an injection arrow filled with a paralytic aimed at Amanda Waller, which
caused her to drop to the floor. She could only watch helplessly as what seemed like ghosts used
knives and swords to cut the agents inside to pieces. She had never seen anything like this, ever.
Then, she felt a pinprick on the side of her neck before darkness overcame her.

When it was over, two large moving trucks pulled up to the club. The assembled assassins moved
quickly to clean up the bodies, as well as any evidence. While they were doing that, Oliver carried
Waller over to an SUV and put her in the back of it. He got in beside a driver and they left the area.
Only when they could find nothing else did Sara, Nyssa and the others leave as well. The trucks and
the ARGUS SUVs were driven to the docks, left near a warehouse known to be used by the Triad.
A call would be placed later to the SCPD regarding suspicious activity, but not just yet. Other things
needed to happen first.

ARGUS Headquarters
November 22, 2015

Nadeem and An-Nur walked into the building and stopped at security to swipe their badges. The
guards here knew both of them by name, but that didn’t make them deviate from standard operating
procedure one bit. Not even for someone as well liked as Nadeem and An-Nur both were. Once they
were both through, the pair split up and headed for their own departments.

An-Nur went into the command center and smiled at the agent in charge of the shift.

“What brings you in so late?” the man asked.

“Some paperwork I need Waller to sign off on. Not that she will, but I can always hope,” An-Nur
replied.

“Ah, looking for a little vacation time?”

“Yep. A friend had a place in the mountains, good spot to get away and let all of this go.”

“Well, I wouldn’t count on her approving. She and a whole bunch of agents tore out of here like
Satan himself was on their heels,” he told her.

“Damn. Do you mind if I just drop this on her desk then? Maybe I’ll get lucky and she’ll be in a
good mood when she gets back,” An-Nur said with a smile, the both of them knowing how unlikely
that was.

“If you’re betting on those kind of odds, never go to a Casino.”

The pair of them laughed as he waved her away. An-Nur walked into Waller’s office, paying careful
attention to everything, all while not appearing to do so. She laid the folder she was carrying on the
desk along with a thumb drive she slipped from her pants pocket, then walked out of the office and
through the command center, saying good night to a few friends on the night shift. Once she was
back in the hallway, she turned left instead of the right needed to head back towards the exit. Instead,
she want down towards the employee break-room, which just happened to be next to the electrical room. Slipping in there, she checked in with Nadeem.

Nadeem had been busy as well, though much less interrupted as he had his own office. Once he was in there, he’d connected to the intranet and looked for Rubicon. It took a few moments, but then he found it. Working quickly, he tried to delete the program first. When that failed, he tried corrupting the directory that it was in. Only after that failed did Nadeem upload his virus, knowing that this would work. Part one was done, now it was on to part two.

Leaving his office, he walked down to where the cells were. The area was an oft-used path between parts of the building, so it wasn’t unusual to see an agent heading that way. Nadeem walked over to the cell he was looking for and knocked lightly on the window. As he waited for the man inside to turn, something caught his eye. It was a picture, one he’d seen several times. A picture of the man’s daughter, walking with a pair of men. He’d never really paid it much attention, knowing that Waller had used it and others like it to keep the man in line. Tonight, he did look at it, knowing that he was about to take that young woman’s father from her forever. And for the first time, he paid attention to its details. And those details stopped him, his hand reaching for his cell phone before he could consciously process what he had seen.

Nadeem took a picture of the photo and sent it. A moment later came a brief reply. The man in the cell looked at Nadeem and give his acquaintance a smile. At that moment, the power cut out and the locks cycled. Nadeem quickly opened the door to the cell.

“Grab anything you want to take quickly,” Nadeem told the man.

The man grabbed his pillow case and used it to hold the pictures he removed from the walls. He then found the sweater that he sometimes wore when in the networking room. His clothes were thin and the room was cool, as that was better for the equipment. Ready, he walked along behind Nadeem as they made their way to the entrance. An-Nur was there waiting for them, a look of surprise on her face at seeing Nadeem had someone with him before she realized who it was.

“I will go first and distract the guard. Try to hurry as the power will be back on momentarily,” An-Nur told them, before stepping out into the security area by the front doors. She smiled at the guard that was there, before asking him about the latest movie that had come out.

Nadeem watched An-Nur work her magic with the guard and then walked through the door, the other man right beside him. The guard didn’t even look up as the pair walked out the doors. An-Nur heard them close, but waited about thirty seconds before she bid the guard goodnight. She was halfway to their car when the power came back on in the building. It took another minute or so before the security cameras came back online and the first sign that something was wrong came into view. The night shift supervisor ordered an immediate search of the building, while he also tried to call Director Waller. He was perplexed that the call wasn’t answered, with his concern rising as call after call went unanswered.

By the time the search of the building was done, they found one prisoner missing. As this was being reported, the supervisor had reluctantly come to the conclusion that he needed to call Director Waller’s superior. The Director of Homeland Security ordered an immediate lock down of the facility until a team from Washington could arrive on site. A team of off-duty agents would be recruited to begin the search for Director Waller.

Starling City
Amanda Waller came to slowly, only to find that she was definitely no longer in Verdant. This room, wherever it was, was made out of poured concrete blocks. The only light was by flickering torches on the walls. She couldn’t see a door, given the shadows that surrounded her. She took her time and focused on getting her wits about her, as her head was still a little fuzzy. Then came the sound of metal scraping against the concrete, deliberate and slow. It sounded like it was behind her, then it stopped for a moment. When it came again, it was in front of her.

Waller tried to turn, to locate the source of the noise, only to discover that she was strapped to the chair she was sitting in. Not just once or twice, but multiple times. The chair was a wooden one, like from a dining room set. Two straps crossed her chest, holding her secure to the chair back. Another three each secured her arms to the chair’s arms, holding them flat, with her hands resting on the ends. Her lap had two belts as well, one like a seat belt and the other going over her thighs and under the chair’s seat. Another pair on each leg fused them to the chair legs. She tried to rock the chair backwards, but found that it didn’t move.

The sound came again and this time she knew it was in front of her, as three pairs of legs came into view. Amanda Waller prided herself on her stony demeanor, yet inside she felt a chill pass through her as the trio before her came further into view. She’d been the Director of ARGUS long enough to recognize the uniforms that the trio wore. The League of Assassins and ARGUS had been on opposite sides often enough, with ARGUS always coming out the worse for it. She was confused as to why they were there, or why they had taken her, until she remembered that Oliver Queen had been the reason the League attacked Starling City. Had they been at Verdant to capture him for their own reasons when she had arrived with her agents.

“Ah, good to see you are finally awake, Miss Waller,” came a soft female voice. “Now, we can begin.”

“Begin what?” Waller asked.

“A reckoning,” came a harsher voice. “One where the pain that you’ve caused is visited upon you in equal measure.”

Waller had no time to react to that before the piece of steel re-bar that the assassin held came crashing down upon her left forearm. She bit down, trying to stem the scream that threatened to tear loose. She wasn’t so lucky when the next blow shattered the bones in her left hand. She screamed loud and long at that, while the assassin waited patiently for her to relax again. The trio stepped closer, so that she could now get a good look at them in the light. One of them, a woman, pulled back the hood of her uniform and Waller flinched as she recognized Nyssa al Ghul.

“Ah, I see you remember me, Miss Waller. I am not surprised, given how many times you tried to have me captured or killed,” Nyssa said with a smile. “And now, my husband has captured you instead. It is ironic, is it not?”

“Those blows were for Yao Fei and Shado who died on Lian Yu because of you,” the man said, before striking again, this time on the left shin, the left foot and the left thigh. He paused between each strike, letting her scream out her agony, taking his time to inflict maximum suffering. “For Maseo, Tatsu and Akio Yamashiro. Two parents who lost their only son because of what you set in motion.”

“I did what was necessary,” Waller said through gritted teeth, blood staining her teeth from her biting
her tongue as she screamed, “There are people in this world who deal only in extremes. It's naive to think that anything less than extreme measures will stop them.”

“Yes, it is. And since you are one of those people, that is why I am doing this,” he said as he lowered his hood, revealing Oliver Queen. “You thought I had a talent for torture, I guess we’ll see if you’re right.”

The next three hours were a continuation of the pattern. Oliver would strike a part of Waller’s body with the steel rod, followed by a list of one of her wrongs. A list that was not just focused on those he knew or had met while he was forced to work with ARGUS. By the time he was done, her arms, legs and collarbone were all broken in multiple places. Both her hands and feet were shattered. She was barely conscious at the end, merely whimpering at the pain of each blow. Oliver finally stopped, as he wanted her to be conscious at the end. He reached over and slapped her face.

“Oh, only one last crime you need to pay for. This is for a father you ripped from his daughter. A daughter you then used to torment this man with for almost twenty years. A family broken because of you,” Oliver told her.

“Ah, your precious Miss Smoak,” Amanda said with a smile. “I should have known she was involved in this, somehow.”

“No, she’s not. She would have tried to stop me before we got to this part, because, from the moment she knew about what I truly was, she was trying to convince me that I should follow a different path. And I tried, for a while, to do as she asked. But that darkness that you helped cultivate within me, the man who could torture someone to get what you wanted from them, that’s always going to be a part of me. I don’t want that around her, where the darkness within me might dim the light inside of her. But we digress and the hour is growing late, so let us conclude this.”

With those words, Oliver took the steel rod and slammed it down on top of Amanda Waller’s head. He repeated this again and again, counting until he reached eighteen. One blow for each year Felicity had been without her father, not knowing whether he was alive or not, believing that he had left because of some failing of hers. Waller was dead long before the final blow fell, as the force of the blows had caved in her skull and caused a massive cerebral hemorrhage. Once he was done, he dropped the bar next to the chair and left the room. Nyssa and Sara followed along behind him, keeping a close eye on him. They both had seen some brutal things before, but this was on another level and they both worried a little about how Oliver would handle what he’d done.

“Dispose of the body. Somewhere that it will be found, but not for a day or two,” Oliver told one of the assassins in the main hall, before facing the whole room and addressing them. “You have performed magnificently this night. Not only have we destroyed a group of criminals who were causing this city to sink lower into the pit of crime and corruption, we have crippled ARGUS by killing their director and destroying a number of there electronic files. When they choose a new director, I hope it will be one not so willing to do evil while pursuing noble goals. For now, know that you have my appreciation as you return to your duties.”

The assembled League members all dropped to one knee, Nyssa and Sara being no exception. Nyssa found things like this admirable in Oliver. Her father as Ra’s had always acted as if members should be loyal simply because he was Ra’s. Yes, he was strong, skilled and wise and he had had the ability to read people, but once someone joined the League, they did what they were told. No praise, no appreciation, nothing but a set of expectations set. Oliver, on the other hand, was strong, skilled and growing wiser every day. But, whereas her father felt members should be loyal because he was Ra’s, Oliver felt a need to earn that loyalty every day. He did this by showing devotion to his own duties, so that he could expect it from others, and by actually talking to the members, letting them know
when he felt they had done well.

Oliver was beyond exhausted, not just from the long night, but also the emotional toll of what he had just done. He knew he could have just put an arrow in her heart back at Verdant and been done with it. Or if he’d wanted to drag it out a little, there were places he could have stabbed her where it would have taken time for her to bleed out. But this, this was different. Nyssa and Sara had both seen it immediately when he’d dragged an unconscious Waller out of Verdant, the raging hatred in his eyes. He wanted it to be slow, he wanted it to be painful, not to teach a lesson or at least not one to his chosen victim. No, this was a message to ARGUS, one that he hoped would be understood after someone checked the thumb drive An-Nur left in Waller’s office. On it was every shady deal, every excessive operation, every bit of dirt that the League knew about Amanda Waller. Oliver knew there was one last thing that he needed to do before he could finally rest however. So, he, Nyssa and Sara left the League base and were driven into Starling City.
Starling City

November 23, 2015

The sky was just beginning to lighten as the SUV they were in arrived back at the Starling Grand Hotel. Going up to their floor, they could easily see Nadeem and An-Nur waiting for them. The pair knelt as soon as they saw Oliver exit the elevator.

“Give me ten minutes to clean up a little,” Oliver told them as he went over to the suite. Going inside, he quickly disrobed and got in the shower. Looking at his hands, he could see a little blood on them, likely from when he’d bashed Waller’s brains in. Taking care, he scrubbed it all off before soaping up entirely, then rinsing off. A brisk toweling dry and he was back in his bedroom. He chose something slightly casual, a blue long-sleeved shirt and black slacks. Going into the sitting area of the suite, he found Nyssa and Sara on one couch. On the other was a thin man with graying hair and a pair of glasses. Looking at him, Oliver decided that most of Felicity’s features came from her mother, while she got her brains from her father.

“My lord, may I introduce Noah Kuttler,” Nadeem said from where he was standing behind Mister Kuttler.

“Thank you,” Noah said as he stood and extended his hand. “I am told I have you to thank for my freedom, Mister Queen.”

“Do not say that name,” Oliver said somewhat harshly. “If you are ever asked, by anyone, you have never met me, only seen me in pictures with your daughter. And you should thank your daughter for your freedom, not me. If Nadeem had not seen that picture, at this time you would be dead.”

“Why? What is so special about me that you would want me dead?”

“Rubicon.”

“That abomination? Waller had no idea the Pandora’s box she was potentially opening with that. I tried to warn her, tried to show her the catastrophic dangers in what she was asking. She ignored me, saying that it would be safe because she would be the only one able to access the program. I didn’t believe her, I still don’t. Then, she promised to let me actually see my daughter and I caved, because I knew that if I refused, I’d still see her, just in another cell like mine,” Kuttler told them.

“I still do not fully grasp what makes this program so dangerous,” Nyssa said.

“Let me put it in simple terms. Think of Rubicon as a kind of key, designed to lock down an enemy’s nuclear missiles in case of a rogue General getting control of them or a country like North Korea threatening to launch them. With Rubicon, they can enter their codes, turn their keys, whatever and it doesn’t matter because Rubicon doesn’t let their commands go anywhere. The missiles stay on the ground. As I wrote it, Rubicon is a key designed to turn only one way, to lock. However, it would be a matter of minutes for any competent coder or hacker to take what I have written, make three or four changes and now, the key turns in both directions. Someone can now use that to actually launch another country’s nuclear missiles and there would be almost no way to stop it.”
“And you knew this and still created this Rubicon?”

“Are you a parent?” Kuttler asked. “I wasn’t the best father. I did things that broke the law, things that I knew I shouldn’t do and I have lived with the regrets of doing them for many years now. But as a father, there is nothing I wouldn’t do to protect my daughter, especially from a monster like Amanda Waller. So, yes, I wrote Rubicon. Because the alternative was watching the only good thing I ever did with my life be brought before me in an orange jumpsuit on her way to Waller’s Task Force X.”

Nyssa was stunned by the shortsightedness of the man. Yes, she understood about wanting to protect someone you loved. But this, it was insanity. He was gambling the fate of billions to protect a single person. And while she liked Felicity, no one person was worth doing what he did. It revealed a weakness that she found somewhat disgusting. Thankfully, his daughter did not seem to suffer from that as well.

“So, what happens now?”

“Now, Mister Kuttler, you learn the conditions of your freedom. First, as I said earlier, you never met me. You never met anyone in this room except for Nadeem. If you should see one of us in the future, you will act like it is the very first time. Second, you will stay out of trouble. That means you will find honest work. If I hear of you going back to crime, and especially if I hear of you working on something like Rubicon again, I will return and you will meet the same fate that would have befallen you tonight if your daughter wasn’t who she is,” Oliver told him.

“And when someone asks where I was, what am I supposed to tell them?” Kuttler asked.

“You tell them the truth, just omitting certain details. You were taken by ARGUS and have been their prisoner for the past eighteen, nineteen years. Two people in black helped you escape tonight. They dropped you off near Palmer Technologies, telling you that your daughter worked there. When you asked why they’d helped you, one of them said ‘A life for a life’. Keep your descriptions of your helpers vague. And remember, we will be watching you.”

With that, Oliver nodded his head at Nadeem, then towards the door. Noah Kuttler stood from the couch and allowed himself to be escorted out of the suite. Nadeem took him to a room down the hall, where a change of clothes was waiting for him. Letting him out on the busy sidewalk in front of Palmer Technologies in what was all to clearly a prison jumpsuit would have defeated the purpose of this. Besides, as long as he was held by ARGUS should count against any crimes they might be looking for him in regards to. And Oliver was sure that Laurel would take the case as a favor to Felicity if Kuttler was charged with anything.

When the door closed, Oliver sank down on the couch Kuttler had just vacated, leaned back and closed his eyes. He just needed a moment to let it all sink in, to come to terms once again with the darkness that was inside himself. Nyssa and Sara watched him before getting up and going to the other couch to sit, one on either side of him.

“Let it go, Husband,” Nyssa said. “Neither of us will think the lesser of you if you do.”

“You did what you felt you had to do, Ollie,” Sara told him. “No matter what, we support you.”

“Thanks. I just feel like doing that, I was no better than she was. Like no matter how hard I’ve tried and how far I’ve come, the right push and I’m back to that person again,” Oliver replied. “What I did tonight was something that...I don’t know.”

“The fact that you feel like this now means that good man is still inside of you. Give it some time and
let Nyssa help you. She’s had experience with it, dealing with me.”

“That’s true, Beloved. Though I think Oliver might be easier than you ever were.”

“Watch out, Ollie, she’s calling you easy now,” Sara said with a laugh.

“I know she didn’t mean it like that, Sara. If she did, she’d have clearly directed that at you.”

“He’s not wrong, Beloved,” Nyssa said with a wicked grin that evident in her tone of voice, enough so that Oliver opened his eyes for a moment to see Sara try to hit Nyssa with a little pillow. He then closed his eyes again and tried to let himself relax so that he could fall asleep. It was not to be, however, as there came a knock at the door. Oliver grumbled at that. Between the long flight to get here and the long day yesterday, he was bone tired and just wanted to get a little sleep. Now, it would have to be deferred, as this would certainly be a member of the League needing Ra’s to address something. He opened his eyes as Sara got up and walked over to the door. She knew that the floor was secure, so she didn’t even think about it before she opened the door, expecting that same thing as Oliver. The first thought that crossed her mind when she saw who was there was, ‘Crap.’

“Look who I found. She showed up at my place this morning, looking for you. And Felicity said you guys were staying here,” Thea said as she made to walk into the suite, Sin already in the process of hugging the life out of Sara. There was nothing she could do but brace herself for the inevitable and pray. “Hi, Nyssa, Ollie.”

“Good morning, sister-in-law,” Nyssa said with a grin, just biting back an outright laugh as she caught the deer-in-the-headlights look on her husband’s face which matched perfectly against the stunned shock on Thea’s as she realized what she was seeing and what she had said.

“What the fuck?!? Ollie, you’re here? This isn’t some hallucination or dream, right?”

“No, you’re not dreaming, Speedy,” Oliver told her as he got up and went to his sister, wincing as she punched him hard in the arm.

“Start explaining, Ollie,” Thea demanded.

“I guess the best place to start is at the beginning. You remember the night I left, right?” Oliver asked, looking at her. Getting a nod, he continued. “So, you remember me telling you that there are only two ways to leave the League, either dead or Ra’s releasing you. Problem was, I had killed Ra’s, which meant that I became Ra’s and I couldn’t release myself. Nyssa stopped me as I was leaving Starling and explained it to me. So, I went to Nanda Parbat and went through the ceremonies to become Ra’s.”

“Then you knew, before we called you and told you. You knew about Sara?”

“Yes, Nyssa and I made that decision together.”

“I’m sorry, what decision?” Sin asked as she finally let loose of Sara long enough to be seated.

“I was killed last year, but Oliver and Nyssa were able to resurrect me about two weeks ago,” Sara told her.

“I knew something had happened to you when I saw someone else going around dressed like you. But dead, like the Grim Reaper, the white light and all of that?”

“Well, I didn’t see a white light. Just felt the arrows strike me and then I was falling.”
“I’m just glad you’re back.”

“We all are,” Nyssa said, smiling at the young girl.

“And you’re the one who sent Sara home?” Thea asked.

“No, I made her an offer. If she wanted, I would release her from the League. Or she could stay in the League, but I would send her to Starling City for an extended period of time. Eventually, she will have to return to Nanda Parbat,” Oliver said. “Though, even then I would allow her to visit her family here.”

“And what about you? Did you ever intend to visit your family here?”

“Not right away. I needed to show the League that I was fit to be Ra’s and to me, that meant showing that I would respect all of the rules and customs that come with being a member of the League. The biggest of those is that we leave our past lives behind. We take a new name because that old name represents our former life.”

“So that night at the loft, that was going to be the last time I saw you?” Thea asked, tears forming in her eyes.

“No, Speedy. I would have been back, I promise you. And like I told you when I returned from those five years away, you were with me the entire time,” Oliver told her.

“Laurel, Felicity and Dig are going to be happy that you’re here.”

“You can’t tell them, Speedy. I need you to promise me, you won’t tell them.”

“Why not, Ollie?”

“A lot of reasons. Do you really think Dig would be happy to see me, after everything that happened before I left? Felicity might be, but then she’d hound me about why I can’t stay. As soon as I drop the Ra’s bomb, that’s it. Dig would automatically think the worst of me, perhaps even saw that it was my goal the entire time if he’s angry enough. Felicity would try to convince me to leave the League, that the killing is wrong and it would be the same old argument all over again. And I have no desire to deal with that again,” Oliver said.

Thea couldn’t think of an argument against that. She could still see the looks on their faces when Oliver and Nyssa had shown up to stop Nyssa’s father. The anger on Dig’s that had led to him hitting Oliver in the face, the look of betrayal on Felicity’s at seeing the pair of them together and her snide comment about them being on their honeymoon. Worse had been when Malcolm’s body had been found and she had made the mistake of telling them that Oliver had been the one to kill him. Even when they’d gotten the whole story, their looks of disappointment in her brother hadn’t changed.

“And Laurel?” Thea asked quietly.

“Someday I’ll see her again, just not right now. I did some things last night that they will all learn about in the next day or two, things that are going to make things worse between all of us for the time being. And before you ask, no, I’m not going to tell you what I’ve done. I just hope, when they put all of the pieces together, they’ll at least understand why I’ve done what I’ve done. Not that they’ll support it, or be happy about it, just that they’ll understand it. I hope that you will understand.”

“You’re my brother, Ollie, and I love you, no matter what. I just really miss you.”
“I miss you too, Speedy. And I promise, next time I’m in town, we’ll spend plenty of time together.”

“That sounds like you’re leaving,” Thea replied.

“This afternoon. I need to get back to Nanda Parbat and Nyssa probably should too. We have duties to perform and I don’t think it wise that we are both away too long. I’m sorry, Sara,” Oliver said.

“Don’t be. We’ve had a week, which is more than I could have hoped for,” Sara said. “Besides, you have things you both need to do and I do as well. Can’t have either of us failing Ra’s, now can we Nyssa?”

“No, we certainly can not. He can be a bit of a groucher when that happens,” Nyssa said, smiling at Thea. “I’m sure you know that, sister-in-law.”

“That is going to take some getting used to, Ollie being married and to you. Besides, aren’t you and Sara together, or does it just seem like you are?”

“OK, Thea. Here it is in a nutshell. Nyssa and I are married, because her father forced us to be. Under League law, that marriage only ends on one of our deaths. Nyssa is a lesbian who was with Sara, who is her Beloved. And, just to make the triangle complete, you are smart enough to figure out why Sara and I were together on the Gambit.”

“Yeah, I’d say that sums things up nicely,” Sara said. “My ex-friend-with-benefits got married to my girlfriend while I was dead. Not quite on the level of sleeping with your sister’s boyfriend, but still kinda up there on the freaky scale.”

Thea laughed as Sin just gaped at Sara after that revelation. For Sin, this whole morning had been something of a revelation. She’d approached Thea, because she knew Thea was connected to Roy and Roy was definitely connected with Sara. And regardless of the news reports, she knew Roy wasn’t the Green Arrow, but rather was the other guy, the one in Red. When Thea had offered to help, she figured she’d get an address from the woman, not be taken to the nicest hotel in the city. Now, here she was with Sara, listening to them talk about some League and a whole host of people she didn’t know. Only to top it all off by finding out that Sara had died, somehow been brought back to life only to find her girlfriend married to a man, who she used to have sex with.

“I can see you have questions, Sin,” Nyssa said gently. “You can ask them.”

“Only a bunch,” Sin said. “What’s this League you’re talking about?”

“It is the League of Assassins. The League is headed by Ra’s al Ghul, the title meaning Head of the Demon. The League is centuries old and there have been many Ra’s al Ghul’s. The latest is my husband, before him was my father. The League exists to fight evil, replacing it with death. There are many thousands of members of the League, all sworn to obey the will of Ra’s al Ghul, loyal onto death. The members of the League are the finest warriors in the world, a force that has destroyed cities and conquered countries in the past.”

“And how did Sara join this League?”

“Ollie and I got separated at one point, the second year after the Gambit went down. He got picked up by ARGUS, while I was rescued by Nyssa. I was alone, starving, waiting to die when she found me. She took me in, nursed me back to health. She explained to me about the League and told me that by her bringing me to Nanda Parbat, I would either be accepted into the League or I would die. Her father had this show he would put on for new recruits, meant to terrify them. When it was my turn, I just laughed. I couldn’t help it, after everything I’d been through already, all the times I’d
already looked death in the eye. The League trained me, made me into what I am.”

“When did you know ARGUS rescued me, Sara?” Oliver asked, his voice almost a growl.

“I watched them take you, Ollie. They saw me, I know they did, and they still left me there. Hey, it’s not your fault, Ollie. It’s not your fault. You were unconscious when they found you. I had seen the helicopter that they came in and ran towards where it was landing, waving my arms and yelling, begging to help,” Sara told him.

Nyssa had heard this story before. She had helped Sara deal with the feelings that came with being abandoned, left to die. At first, Sara had blamed Oliver as well as the mysterious men who’d carried him off, but Nyssa had gotten her to understand that there was no way for him to have helped her. Even if he had awoken while they were carrying him away, it wouldn’t have mattered. Nyssa had been able to find out he was taken by ARGUS when Maseo had arrived in Nanda Parbat.

Seeing that the pair needed some time, she led Thea and Sin into the little kitchenette of the suite. She removed a bottle of orange juice and filled three glasses for them. Sin took a drink while looking at Nyssa. She found herself wanting that, the strength and composure that these women had. Yeah, she was tough, in her own way, but not like them.

“How does one join the League?” Sin asked quietly, mindful of Sara and Oliver having their own talk.

“Why do you ask?” Nyssa asked in return, wanting to assess the young woman.

“Because I want to be like her and like you. Sara’s the only real friend I have and I don’t want to lose her again.”

“You need not join the League to be trained. Sara would no doubt be happy to help you in that regard.”

“Until she goes away again,” Sin said. “I know she’s here now, but that won’t be forever, will it?”

“No, it would not. But, I would still ask that you think about your request. The League can be a hard life and it is not meant for everyone. You mean too much to Sara for me to wish to see you hurt or worse,” Nyssa told her.

“And if after I think about it, I decide I still want to do this. How do I let you know?”

“Tell Sara what you have decided and she will make the arrangements.”

Thea’s phone rang then. Pulling it out, she saw that the call was from Felicity. A part of her didn’t want to answer it, certain that it was Team Arrow business. She was also enjoying spending time with her brother. She knew if she answered it, she would have to go and by the time she would likely be able to return, Ollie would have gone. But, she also knew that the team might need her and she couldn’t let them down.

“Hi, Felicity,” Thea said as she answered.

“Where are you, Thea?” Felicity asked.

“Sin and I are visiting Sara and Nyssa right now. Why?”

“How quickly can you guys get to my office at Palmer Technologies?”
“Five to ten minutes at most,” Thea said.

“The guard will have visitors passes waiting for you,” Felicity told her before hanging up the phone.

Thea found the others staring at her, as they had only been able to hear her part of the short conversation. She filled them in and the ladies left, but only after a long hug between brother and sister and a moment spent with Thea composing herself afterwards. The drive over to the Palmer Technologies building was short, as it was near the hotel. Parking the car, the four of them got out and took the elevator up to the lobby. A security guard was waiting for them, along with the promised visitors badges. Once they were all signed in, he give them directions and pointed to the elevator they would need to take.

Starling City

November 23, 2015

Felicity had arrived to work early that morning. She had a meeting to prep with Ray, regarding an offer that they had received from Wayne Enterprises. There was a project that they had and they believed that Curtis’ power cell could be an ideal power source. With that in mind, they wanted to have a meeting with both companies senior directors to discuss the Wayne Enterprises project and how the power cell would be used in more details. She knew that Ray held Lucius Fox in high regard, as did she, but she was worried that such a commitment would be moving too fast on this. On the other hand, having a deal with Wayne Enterprises would help calm some of the more nervous investors, as well as possibly get them other contracts as well.

“Ms. Smoak,” came a knock on her door, getting her to look up at her EA. “There’s a gentleman here to see you.”

Felicity looked past him, out into the open space where her EA’s desk sat. There was a man standing there, thin with gray hair, wearing slacks and a shirt. He was looking out the windows, so she couldn’t see his face, but the way he stood seemed familiar. She got up from her desk and headed out of her office, going towards him. He heard the sound of her heels on the floor and turned to face her, stopping Felicity dead.

“Dad?” Felicity asked, her voice trembling.

“Finally,” came a breathless, barely audible sigh from the man. “It’s been so long, baby.”

Felicity was in shock, as her emotions waged battle inside of her. Anger, hurt, joy, sorrow and a whole host of others fought for dominance. One second she wanted to slap him, then next she just wanted to fall into his arms and never let go. In the end, her happiness won out, though she was sure that the hurt and anger would reappear after they had had a chance to talk. So, she stepped into arms that had opened instantly for her and just sobbed on his chest, not caring what it did for her mascara or if she’d end up with raccoon eyes.

“I’m so sorry, baby. I am so sorry.”

“Why did you leave me, daddy?”

Noah knew that this was going to be a long talk, so he steered them into Felicity’s office and closed the door. Looking, he saw a couch over by the windows. Moving them there, he helped her sit
down, then took the seat next to her.

“What did your mother tell you? About what I did?” Noah asked.

“Nothing, really. I would ask, but all she said is that you did techie things and she didn’t understand. Then one morning, you just left,” Felicity told him.

“I was a computer hacker, Felicity. That’s how I made my money, by hacking into companies. The morning I left, I wasn’t planning on going anywhere. I was just going to run a few errands and be back for lunch. I never did learn how they found me, just one minute I was at the drug store and the next I was in a van. At first, I thought I had been arrested. Then, I came to realize this was something else. There was no trial, no lawyer, no nothing but a cell. Finally, I was offered a choice. I could either work for them, hacking what they told me to, or I could go to prison for a good part of my life. The way they made it sound, I would work for them a few years and then be let go. It sounds better than the alternative.”

“Before I knew it, five years had passed. I kept asking how long they were going to keep me, but they never answered. Then, what they were asking me to do became more complex, more dangerous than simply hacking. I tried to refuse, only for the person in charge to come to my cell. She gave me this,” Noah told her, as he took something from his pocket and handed it to Felicity.

Felicity looked at the picture and gasped. It was of her, from her high school science fair. She remembered that day, how proud her mother had been of the program she’d written. The poor woman hadn’t understood the coding needed, but she’d liked the line art characters that it could draw. It had been good enough to win her first place and had been part of her submission to MIT for one of her scholarships.

“Over time, she gave me other photographs, to taunt me or simply remind me that they could easily get you too. After that first one, I rarely gave her any trouble. I’d resigned myself to the fact that she was never going to let me go. I just hoped that if I did what she wanted well enough, one day I would get to see you.”

“Then how are you here, now?”

“Last night, someone came to where I was held and freed me. I don’t know who they were, but they brought me here and said that this is where you work. I asked why they were helping me and all I was told was ‘A life for a life’,” Noah told her.

“And this group that held you, do you know who they were?” Felicity asked.

“They were called ARGUS.”

Felicity bolted upright at that, jumping off the couch and stalking to her desk. She picked up her phone and started calling. First were Dig and Lyla, followed by Laurel and finally Thea. All were basically the same conversations, “Get to my office ASAP”. She then sat down behind her desk and opened up her personal laptop, fingers itching to begin. First off was the FBI, as she looked for any outstanding warrants for her father. Finding nothing, she then looked for any federal cases that might be linked to him. Finding two, she saved the information so that she could discuss them with Laurel later. She then searched federal and state court records for anything in her father’s name. Nothing there.

By this time, Thea, Sara, Nyssa and Sin were walking into her outer office. Felicity vaguely recognized the girl that was with them, having seen her around Verdant once or twice. She watched her take a seat, while the other three came through Felicity’s office door.
“What’s going on, Felicity?” Sara asked before catching sight of the man sitting in her office.

“Can we wait until the others get here? That way I only have to say it once,” Felicity requested.

With that, Thea took the seat in front of Felicity’s desk, while Sara and Nyssa leaned against the wall near the doorway. Laurel was the next to arrive, along with Captain Lance. Last were Dig, Lyla and baby Sara. Once the door was shut, everyone looked at Felicity, then the unknown man in the room with them. They all got the feeling that he was the reason that they were being asked here on a Monday morning.

“So, I’m sure you’ve all noticed that I talk, like a lot. About almost anything, except one thing. I don’t talk about my family, like ever, because its never been a topic I’ve been especially comfortable with telling others about,” Felicity said. “But today, I kinda have to tell you about it. My mom is, well, my mom. She’s almost my polar opposite. She’s completely tech illiterate, to the point she can’t even send a text. She’s more about what’s popular, dating and people. I’m most comfortable around my machines and less so with people.”

“I get the technology gene from my dad, or at least I think I do. I don’t know for sure because one day when I was seven, I came home from school and he was gone. For a long time, I thought there was something wrong with me that made him leave, that I wasn’t good enough in some way. I didn’t see him again until this morning when he walked into my office. I found out that it wasn’t me that the was reason he left and didn’t come back. He had been taken by ARGUS while he was out that day and had been their prisoner until last night, when someone freed him.”

“Did you say last night, Felicity?” Lyla asked, looking at her strangely.

“Yeah, why?”

“I got a call during the night from the Director of Homeland Security. There was an issue at ARGUS headquarters and I was being recalled as part of the investigation. I went in and found the night shift supervisor in a frenzy. Director Waller disappeared last night while she was working with a strike team to capture a high value target. He only found this out because, during a brief power outage at ARGUS, a prisoner escaped. They tried to call Waller and didn’t get an answer. When he escalated to the Director of Homeland Security, the facility was placed on lock down. At least I can report that the prisoner is recaptured.”

“No, you can’t. I looked while I was waiting for everyone to show up. ARGUS has been holding him for 19 years, but never once has he been charged with a crime, appeared in court on any charges or sentenced to a term in prison. So, you can try, but you should understand my next phone call will be to the news media,” Felicity said as she got up. “After that, I’d be hiring a couple of attorneys. One to work on get my dad released, the other for the wrongful imprisonment lawsuit we’d be filing on his behalf.”

“Don’t look at me,” Dig told his wife. “This is one of those times when there isn’t any argument to be made. Not because she’s our friend or that she’s baby Sara’s godmother, but because she’s right. If what she told you is true, then ARGUS basically kidnapped her father. And while I know and Felicity knows that you aren’t responsible for what happened, if you take him back, knowing what you now know, that’s all on you.”

Lyla looked at the others in the room and knew with certainty that there would be no help from any of them. Not for the first time, she found herself cursing the day she’d ever joined ARGUS and met Amanda Waller. Because, sure as the sun rising in the morning, there was going to be a shit show when this got out, one that Amanda Waller would make sure didn’t splatter on her. And the same people who had looked the other way regarding Task Force X would most definitely not on this. If
what Felicity was telling them was true, ARGUS had not just broken the law, but violated someone’s fundamental human rights.

“How was ARGUS able to do that?” Thea asked. “Just take someone off the street like that?”

“The same way any police officer can. They pull up with lights, sirens, guns and a badge. People on the street see what their mind tells them they should see, a cop. They cuff someone, they must have a reason. Unless something goes way wrong, nobody is going to interfere,” Captain Lance told them.

“So, the question is, what do we do now?” Dig asked.

“Get him somewhere out of sight. Don’t tell me where, so there’s no chance I can tell ARGUS when I go back this afternoon. Give me some time to work on this, convince those normally above Waller that this is one fight we shouldn’t start. It might take me a few days, but I’ll take care of it,” Lyla told them. “I’ll see you at home, Johnny.”

“I would suggest not having him stay with you, Felicity,” Laurel said. “I know you want to make up for lost time, but it would just be too easy for ARGUS to connect the dots from him to you.”

“He can stay with me, if he’d like,” Thea said. “I’ve got plenty of room in the loft and it shouldn’t be easy for anyone to connect us.”

“Then, I should probably introduce you. Thea, this is my father, Noah Kuttler. Dad, these are my friends. Thea Queen, John Diggle, Quentin Lance, Laurel Lance, Sara Lance and Nyssa al Ghul,” Felicity said, as the group came over to meet her father.

Felicity couldn’t help the smile that came to her face. This was a day that she used to wish for as a child and as she’d grown older, it had seemed like those wishes would never come true. Yet, here he was now. He was back and she couldn’t believe how happy she felt. But the look on her father’s face and the tears in his eyes shook some of that happiness from her. Because he looked so lost and so afraid, it tore at her heart.

“What’s wrong, Daddy?”

“I’m afraid. Afraid that I’m going to wake up and this will have all been a dream. Afraid I’ll be back in that cell again and find Waller standing there laughing as she hands me another picture of you. And after this, I know there is no way that I could take that,” Noah told her.

“I’m not going anywhere. I’m here now,” Felicity stated, holding him to her.

Dig and Sara got the others out of the office. They didn’t know exactly what was happening, but they could make a reasonable guess. Regardless, they were sure that Mister Kuttler didn’t want or need a group of strangers watching as he fell apart. A few moments later, Felicity popped her head out to thank them for being there for her. At that point, they decided that they would leave for now. This was a time for father and daughter to reconnect. Thea stayed in the outer office, so that when they were done, she could take Felicity’s father back to the loft. Quentin and Laurel headed off to work, while Dig would drop Sara, Nyssa and Sin back at their hotel before he went home.
Nyssa, Sara and Sin walked into the suite to find Oliver asleep on the couch, his packed bags near the door. Seeing this, they decided to be as quiet as they could and let him rest. Sin didn’t know what had happened last night. She could, however, see that while Nyssa and Sara looked tired, Oliver seemed exhausted. When Nyssa went into the kitchenette and started the coffee maker, he barely even twitched. As it brewed, the three women went and sat at the table.

“I know we talked about me earlier. How have you been doing, Sin?” Sara asked her friend.

“Not great. The Glades is even worse than you remember and it’s getting harder to dodge all the stuff going on in there,” Sin told her. “Especially with no Arrow any more.”

“What about the others? Aren’t they helping?”

“Not really. They go after the guys at the top, the big fish. All that does is cause the ones below to start fighting over who gets to be the new top guy. Lot of innocents getting hurt while they sort that out, but they’re like me, got nowhere else to go.”

“I’m sorry I wasn’t there for you, Sin,” Sara told her.

“Hey, not your fault. Though it would have been nice to have gotten some lessons before you left. Maybe it would have made a difference, like I could have helped,” Sin replied.

“Is that what you and Nyssa were talking about earlier?”

“I asked her how to join the League of Assassins. She told me more about the League, including how hard it is. Then she told me to think about that and if I still wanted to join, to talk to you.”

“Do not look at me like that, Beloved,” Nyssa told Sara. “I know what she means to you and I would not do anything that might hurt her. That is why I cautioned her about what joining the League would be like and that she need not join the League for you or us to train her.”

“I know that, Nyssa. It’s just that the League is a lifetime commitment. I don’t want her to get drawn in because of me and then, a couple of years later, have a crisis of conscience and try to flee like I did,” Sara said.

“Crisis of conscience?” Sin asked.

“Nyssa told you earlier that the League exist to replace evil with death. We assassinate people. Drug kingpins, human traffickers, corrupt businessmen and government officials to name a few. All prosper on the suffering of others. If a city grows too rife with crime and corruption, the League will cleanse that city. The problem is, that sometimes innocents suffer from our actions. Not that we hurt them, but that our actions cause them hurt. Before I tried to leave the League, I was sent to Guyana for a local diplomat named Suarez. I slit his throat in his bed and his kids found him the next morning. They had to see that, because of what I had done. After that, I started questioning what I was doing, trying to reconcile it with the person my parents had raised me to be and when I couldn’t,
I ran.”

“I wish you had talked about it with me, Beloved. I could see you starting to struggle, but before I could talk to you, you were gone. I was hurt that you left without saying goodbye, because I believed that you loved me as much as I love you. Then, when I found you, I was conflicted between fulfilling my duty and my love for you. I have learned from that mistake and the League is no longer lead by someone as narrow minded as my father. If Sin were to have troubles, do you doubt that my husband would release her?”

“No,” Sara said with a smile, looking over at Oliver.

“Now, why don’t you order us all something to eat while I pack. I know that Oliver wants to return home and refocus his attentions onto the League as a whole,” Nyssa told them before getting up and going into her bedroom.

Sin slid the room service menu over to Sara with a smile. Sara called down and placed orders for eggs, bacon and home fries for the four of them, along with some fresh fruit as well. As she was doing that, Sin went and got them some coffee. It felt good just being here with Sara, kinda like those mornings in the clock tower when she’d bring by takeout and just sit, enjoying feeling cared about. She had missed this.

“Will you train me?” Sin asked. “Train me to be like you.”

“Do you even have to ask?” Sara said, giving the girl a little smile. “But not to be like me. I’ll train you to be stronger, teach you to fight, give you the tools to be a better you, not another me.”

“Besides, one Sara is more than enough,” said Oliver from his place on the couch.

“Jerk!”

Oliver just laughed as he got up off the couch and went for a cup of coffee. He had gotten a little sleep and figured that he could sleep some more on the flight home. Right now, he wanted to spend some time with his friends before it was time to go. He smiled when Nyssa came out of the bedroom, dressed in a fashionable pant suit and hat, her coat over her arm and the suitcase trailing her. Oliver’s own outfit was a pair of black dress slacks and a blue dress shirt. A black suit coat and tie were draped over the back of the couch. His clothes were a little rumpled from his nap, but no more than if he had been in the car.

When room service arrived, the plates were put on the table and everyone sat down. The closer it came to them leaving, the more somber the mood became. None of them really wanted to leave the other, even though they knew that it had to be. The good thing was, Nyssa and Oliver were flying back on a private jet, so they had a little more flexibility as to when they left. Still, it could only be delayed so long. Oliver was the first to get up from the table, going over to collect his coat and tie, then putting them on.

Nyssa was next, with Sara and Sin standing as she did. Sara and Nyssa shared an embrace and a kiss goodbye. When Nyssa turned to Sin, the young woman was slightly surprised to be hugged as well.

“Take care of her for us, Ta-er Aswad,” Nyssa told her.

“What does that mean? Ta-er Aswad?” Sin asked.

“It means Black Bird, Sin,” Sara replied with a smile, recognizing that Nyssa had just given Sin a League name. Even better, it was one that clearly was a play on Sara’s own name of Ta-er Al-Sahfer or Yellow Bird, The Canary. Sin’s would likely be The Raven, as The Crow would sound too much
like the title of a bad 90s movie. “Think of it as Nyssa’s way of saying you’re family now.”

“Sara is quite correct. I know you are like a sister to her and she is family to both of us, which makes you family as well. That will always be there for you, no matter what.”

“And, remember, this family takes care of one another, always,” Oliver told her. “Sara will make sure you have a number to reach us. If you need us, call and we’ll come running.”

“Thank you both.” Sin could feel a few tears tracing down her cheeks, even as a smile crossed her face. It had been a long time since she’d had a family, since that day her father went missing. She’d often wondered what had happened to him, suspecting that his plane had crashed somewhere. If that was true, then she would take this as a sign that he was watching over her and trying to give her what he had been unable to.

Oliver gave both the women hugs, then he and Nyssa left. Sara decided that she didn’t want to spend the rest of the morning in the suite missing them. No, she and Sin would spend their day going and picking up listings for places to rent in the city. That way, they could get out of there and the League could stop paying the high price for the suite. Not to mention, if she was going to be here long-term, it would be nice to have a place of her own.

So, Sara and Sin went out to a convenience store near the hotel. Sara bought a newspaper and took the free magazines that came with rental listings. Then the pair walked down to a cafe and settled into a pair of chairs, mugs of hot coffee in front of themselves. Sara gave Sin a list of minimum requirements for what she was looking for: at least two bedrooms, near the Glades but not in them, a gym or near one. She didn’t plan to train there, that would be done at the safe house. The gym was so that they could get Sin into the kind of shape she would need to be in to survive her training. Because, while she wouldn’t go as hard as a League trainer would, she would still push the young woman to learn and learn quickly.

By the time that they were done, Sara had found six that she thought were good. Two were houses, three condos and one apartment. She called and set up appointments to see them over the next couple of days. For now, it was time to take Sin shopping. If they were going to start her training, she was going to need some clothes to exercise in.

Nanda Parbat

November 25, 2015

Oliver and Nyssa were both glad to be home after the long flight. They had spent last night sleeping until late this morning, giving their bodies a chance to overcome the jet lag they were suffering. Now, however, it was time to get back to work. Oliver made his way to his office, so that he could go over all the reports that had come in since he left. He would also have his Horsemen brief him about what they had observed while he was gone. He was coming to trust these advisors almost as much as he trusted Nyssa.

As for Nyssa, she went towards the League’s training rooms. She wanted to see what areas needed improvement, what students were either falling behind or outright failing as well as make sure that the teachers were doing their jobs. She also would watch the more experienced assassins, looking for anything useful. She would file that away and ask them if they could teach her it when they had a chance. As Bride to the Demon, she could simply demand their time, but she was learning it was
better to ask.

Nyssa walked into one of the bigger rooms, set up for archery training. The only one currently in the room was a young woman. She was standing near the middle of the room, a semi-circle of quivers positioned in front of her. Nyssa watched as the woman knocked and fired, moving rapidly through the targets and quivers. She smiled as she wondered who would win a competition between her husband and the woman. Not only was she fast, she was accurate as well.

When the quivers were empty, the woman walked to the targets and removed them. It was as she turned from the targets that she saw Nyssa standing there. Nyssa smiled when she realized that the woman was not startled to see her and wondered how long she had known she was being watched.

“You’re very talented,” Nyssa told her.

“Which is why I practice as much as I do,” the woman said. “Hard work will take you places that talent alone can’t reach.”

“Are you passing along your skills to others?”

“Yes, Ra’s al Ghul has commanded that I train the newest recruits. He was, uh, disappointed in the lack of progress that they had been making.”

Nyssa laughed at that. She wondered what had happened and wished that she could have seen how her husband had chosen to punish the offenders. She was certain he had been creative, unlike her father who would have most likely killed the former teachers later in a training session.

“And have they improved with you as their teacher?” Nyssa asked.

“They have. All are now able to consistently hit near the bullseye. Today, they move on to moving targets,” the woman told her, pointing toward an object, towards the side of the room. Nyssa looked and spotted a moderately sized target. Looking closer, she saw it was connected to a post and that post was connected to a rafter near the ceiling of the room. It took her a second to work out what it was for, before realizing that this would be the moving target.

“When I tested it, the target would continue swinging for almost thirty minutes before it has to be reset. To do that, you reconnect the pull rope and drag it off to the side, building the momentum back up.”

“And how well do you expect most of your students to do against this?” Nyssa asked.

“I expect them to fail spectacularly the first time. It takes some getting used to, judging a target’s speed and then adjusting your aim to correct for it. But, they will learn,” the woman told her.

“They will indeed. What is your name?”

“I am Artemis, Nyssa.”

“It is indeed a pleasure to meet you, Artemis,” Nyssa told her. “I hope that at some point, you can spare a little time and train with myself and Ra’s. I think we could learn much from you.”

“I would be happy to, as I believe I could learn from you as well,” Artemis replied, as her students came into the room.

“I will not keep you from your lessons, but I will find you later and we can arrange a time for us to practice.”
“Yes, Nyssa.”

With that Nyssa stepped to the back of the room and watched. The young woman had certainly not been exaggerating the difficulties that her students would have. Only one of them managed to hit the target at any point during their first attempts. As they gathered their arrows, she watched Artemis going from student to student. From the hand gestures and how she was moving, she was clearly giving them instructions. Nyssa smiled as she watched the second round of attempts, because whatever Artemis had told them was working. This time, all but one was consistently hitting the target. Not near the bullseye, true, but they were hitting the target. The one student who was still having troubles got more extensive instruction from his teacher this time around.

By the time Nyssa left the room, all were now hitting the target. She would have to talk to her husband about the young woman. While she might be an assassin, it was clear that her talents would be more useful here in Nanda Parbat as an instructor. Even if she was named for the Greek goddess of hunting. Nyssa moved on to Oliver’s office, hoping that see if he would be free at some point so that they could train together. When she went inside, she found him reading over one of the reports that had come in. So, she took her place behind him, reading over his shoulder.

“What do you think, Nyssa?” Oliver asked when he was sure she was finished reading.

“Wait until we have more information. I do not believe that those behind this have been fully revealed. I know the dangers that poses, but if we don’t fully destroy this organization, they will only emerge somewhere else. More cautious and harder to defeat,” Nyssa told him.

Oliver sighed, not because he disagreed with her. No, this was the product of knowing what their delay could lead to. Human trafficking rings were something that attracted a special form of attention from the pair. When it was girls as young as ten that were being taken, Oliver had to fight down his impulse to unleash the full force of the League immediately. As he read the reports coming in, in his mind he kept picturing Thea at that age.

“Come, husband. You need to focus on something other than this and I have the perfect idea.”

If it had been anyone other than Nyssa, he would have thought that was code of sex. But it was Nyssa and that was something that had crossed neither of their minds regarding the other. So, he was left to wonder what she meant as she lead the way through Nanda Parbat. When they finally stopped, he was surprised to find them in a room near the top of the fortress. Nyssa went out to the balcony and sat down, with Oliver joining her as he took in the view.

“Nyssa, this is….“


For the next hour, the pair focused on nothing else but the view and relaxing. The sun painting the desert in a variety of colors, so vibrant and clear here. As they watched, Oliver could actually feel the tension flow out of him. He needed to do this more often, find time to just be. Appreciate the moment because, unless he resorted to using the Lazarus Pit, there were a finite number of such moments and that number was constantly diminishing.

“Thank you, Nyssa,” Oliver said.

“You’re welcome, Husband. Perhaps now, you will tell me what is bothering you, besides that report.”

“You’re coming to know me too well.”
Nyssa sat and waited, letting Oliver decide when he was ready to tell her what was troubling him. She was fairly certain that whatever it was had to do with their time in Starling City. She felt that Oliver had adjusted well to being Ra’s al Ghul and living here in Nanda Parbat. During those times he was awake on their flight home, she’d put the bleakness she was seeing down to how clearly exhausted he was. Now, however, he was reasonably rested, yet that heaviness was still there.

“Going back to Starling was the wrong decision,” Oliver said quietly.

“In what way?”

“In a lot of ways. And before you say anything, I don’t regret what I do with Waller. I just regret letting the darkness within me have such free reign. I mean I could feel you and Sara watching me, shocked at what I had done. It was just knowing that she was responsible for so much of the hell I went through, that she planned to drag Dig and Lyla through something similar in an attempt to get to me and that she had held Felicity’s father prisoner for almost two decades. I reached my limit.”

“If it wasn’t that, then what was it?” Nyssa asked, although she was getting an idea.

“Seeing my sister like that filled me with such happiness and having to leave her again, it just hurt more than I expected it. And I know you’ll tell me I should go and spend some time with her, but doing that adds the risk of one of the others seeing me. The last thing I want to do is put Thea in the middle of that and then have to leave, while she has to deal with it day in and day out. Because, I’m surprised that Felicity at least hasn’t pieced together that I’m now Ra’s al Ghul,” Oliver said.

“Yes, that does surprise me as well. All the pieces are there, yet they continue to miss what they all mean, what connects them all.”

“Or, it could simply be that they don’t want to believe what they are seeing. That their perception is influenced by their history with me and the League. The me that they want to remember is the one who’d basically renounced killing, while the League seems to be all about killing. Yet, neither of those things are absolutely true. I still killed when necessary, while the League only killed the truly evil.”

“Yet, one would think Miss Smoak or Mister Diggle would look at what has occurred and at least ask why? They know my father was killed, therefore there has to be a new Ra’s al Ghul. You leave the city at the same time. Six months later, I show up with a cure for Thea’s blood lust offered as a gift from Ra’s. Then, Sara is resurrected and allowed to return to Starling City, even though she’s still in the League and then we have the League helping your former team against their enemies. What do those all have in common besides Oliver Queen?” Nyssa asked rhetorically.

“And that’s what worries me. What happens when they put those pieces together and realize that is the only answer? Not to mention they’ll have another piece once they learn Waller is dead and how she died,” Oliver replied. “And we both know their reaction when I joined the League while your father was Ra’s was to try and save me.”

“So, maybe you need to reveal this all to them. Find out, once and for all where they stand, because right now, you’re living in an in-between. Just think about it, Husband.”

Oliver just nodded, understanding what she both was and was not saying. So, for now, he would honor her request and think about all that had been said. He knew that he didn’t need to make a decision now, but knew that the longer he waited, the worse the possible reactions.
A man dressed in a gray suit walked out of the Starling City library, a messenger bag slung over his shoulder. He’d spent the morning going through the back copies of the city’s newspaper, collecting everything about Oliver Queen. He did not know why his employer was interested in the man and he didn’t care. All he cared about was doing his job as thoroughly as possible. That was why when he’d found the article about Oliver being arrested for being the Hood, he’d also started searching for articles about the vigilante as well.

He had noticed things as he was researching. The way that the articles about Oliver Queen had diminished over time, going for a flood around the time of his rescue to a none over the last nine months. Yes, part of the lack of media interest was tied to the fact that he was no longer ‘Oliver Queen, Billionaire’, but rather ‘Oliver Queen, former Billionaire’. It wasn’t just that, though. He’d checked and found that his sister Thea still made the news on occasion. Yet, there was nothing about him in the last nine, almost ten months. Interestingly enough, that was almost the same amount of time since the last sighting of the Arrow.

Now that he had the basic information covered, it was time for the next phase of work that had been requested. Time to dig deeper into Oliver’s friends and relatives. The relatives was easy, as there was only his sister. The friends was what would take some time, as he would have to pour through all of the news articles he had collected and look for names that were repeatedly featured with his target’s. Once he had a list of them, he could look into them as well.

As he walked down the sidewalk towards the Jitters that one of the library staff had directed him to, he passed two women, one a blonde and one with black hair. Both were dressed in a black leather jacket and blue jeans. He smiled at the blonde, but the only reaction he got was an eye roll from the other woman. He wasn’t too surprised, given that he was rather ordinary in appearance and she was attractive, plus he now suspected that the woman with her was her girlfriend or something.

For herself, Sara didn’t even notice the guy. She was more focused on finding their destination. She had an appointment with a Realtor to see a condo. The place had sounded nice in the listing, but then so had the other places that they had already toured. None of those had ended up passing inspection by her and Sin. The one that they would see today looked promising on paper, but would it be similarly appealing in person?

Arriving at the building, they were greeted by the Realtor, a Mrs. Hurst. She lead them inside and got them registered with the building’s security desk. Then she took them up in the elevator. Sara was impressed with the elevator needing a key to access the floor, even if she was certain that any member of the League would be able to get up to the condo if they tried. Stepping off the elevator, they found themselves in a small entryway, facing a solid looking door. Mrs. Hurst unlocked the door and motioned them inside, where they found a large open area. Sara suspected that this was a combination living room/dining room, which was confirmed when they came further into the condo and found the kitchen on their left. The counter top there could serve as a breakfast bar. On the far side of the room was a set of glass doors that led out to a balcony.

Sara walked over to the doors and stepped out onto the balcony. It was good sized, running the length of the condo and had plenty of room for an informal get together, as well as offering an additional private entryway for her fellow League members. After looking around, she went back inside and inspected the four bedrooms. All four were good sized, so that they could have friends stay over with them, something she was hoping Nyssa and Oliver would do the next time they came
to Starling. All told, Sara really liked this condo.

“We’ll take it,” Sara told Mrs. Hurst.

“Then, we just need to fill out the paperwork,” Mrs. Hurst told her as she opened her organizer and pulled out everything that they would need.

It took over an hour, but when all was said and done, Sara and Sin were the new occupants of the condo. With keys in their possession, the pair next went out and started looking at furniture, linens and everything else that they would need to make this their home. Their shopping spree ended up taking most of the day, but by the time that they were done they had everything that they believed they would need. All of it would be delivered on Saturday, so Sara made sure to stop back at the building and let security know of the coming invasion.
Thea walked into the lair that night not surprised to see that Laurel and Dig were already there with Felicity. She was curious though when she saw that Lyla and baby Sara were there as well. She walked over to the computer that they were gathered in front of and gave a little gasp when she saw the picture on it, drawing the others attention to her.

“Who is that?” Thea asked, not recognizing the face.

“That is what is left of Amanda Waller. We found her this morning,” Lyla told her. “As I was telling John and the others, an autopsy is pending but I think the cause of death is fairly obvious.”

The others didn’t dispute that. It was clear that the woman had been beaten to death. The only real questions was were what with, by whom and for what reason. It concerned Dig, Felicity and Laurel that there was someone in their city who was capable of such violence. Yes, this time it was directed as someone like Waller, but what if next time it was someone less evil.

“The team that went with her was found yesterday, by the SCPD at another location. They were loaded into the back of two moving trucks and their bodies were moved from where they’d been killed to a warehouse that the Triad operates out of. At this point, every agent that left ARGUS Headquarters with Waller is confirmed dead. Homeland Security is scrambling to figure out how over twenty agents were all killed on a single operation.”

“Have they told you who or what Waller was after?” Dig asked.

“No,” Lyla said. “Either she was playing this close to the vest or there’s a reason that they don’t want me to know. Considering that she was just threatening us about Oliver, it could be that she left something behind that makes them suspicious of me. Or they know she was looking for Oliver and that I have a connection to him.”

“So, they may still be looking for my brother?” Thea asked.

“It’s one possibility, Thea. Whether we like it or not, he would be a viable suspect in their eyes. Not sure how he would have managed to kill all of those agents by himself, though. And there’s the fact that last we knew, he was in Spain.”

“One way to try to confirm that,” Felicity said as she reached for the phone, while she got her tracking program set up. When she was ready, she pressed the speed dial for Oliver and waited.

“Hello, Felicity,” Oliver said when he answered.

“Hi, Oliver. We’re calling about Waller.”

“I haven’t forgotten about her and I’m still working on a plan to deal with her.”

“You can stop your planning. She and a team of agents went out on a mission of some kind and were killed. Lyla just told us,” Dig said.
“I can say I’m not exactly surprised, given the line of work she was in. It would only have been a matter of time before a bigger fish bit back,” Oliver replied.

“Be that as it may, this isn’t exactly all good. If they know that she was looking for you, they could try to pin this on you. Not to mention that whoever did this, man. This wasn’t just killing her, they beat her to death and now I’m worried that this killer is still in the city, man.”

“Dig, what do you want me to say? That she didn’t deserve this? That she should have been exposed for what she was? You know, or at least you should know that wouldn’t have worked. She would have gotten out of it and been back at work in a day or two. Because there are those in positions of power who were willing to look the other way while Amanda Waller did those things she thought necessary. Things like ‘rescue’ me off Lian Yu only to make me her personal killer. Why? Because the rest of the world thought I was dead already, so I was expendable. So, sorry but you won’t get any sympathy for her from me, because I know what an evil bitch she was.”

“No matter how bad you might think she was, nobody deserves to die like that,” Dig told the man.

“Waller would disagree with you, Dig. She once told me that ‘There are people in this world who deal only in extremes. It's naive to think that anything less than extreme measures will stop them.’ Amanda Waller was about as extreme as you’ll find, so maybe someone decided that they needed to do something extreme to stop her. Look, we can argue this all day and I doubt either of us will change our minds. Talk with you another time,” Oliver said before he hung up the phone, leaving his former team in shock.

“Did he just try to justify beating someone to death?” Laurel asked. “Or am I wrong?”

“You’re not wrong,” Felicity replied, looking at her for a moment before going back to her computers. “However, I think we can eliminate Oliver from our suspects. His phone is currently in Cape Town, South Africa. Which is a bit of a trip for him to have made, going from Malaga to Starling on to Cape Town.”

“I’ll let my people know what you found,” Lyla said, thinking about what Oliver had said as well as the flash drive that had been found on Waller’s desk. There were operations on there that weren’t even in the ARGUS system, not even as Director’s Eyes Only. There were people in the agency who were absolutely terrified about the information getting out. For herself, she was wondering if the information was tied to what had happened to Waller.

Thea wasn’t really paying attention to the rest of them. She was going over Oliver’s words and how surprised the others seemed by them. She almost wanted to ask them if they didn’t remember how Oliver was as the Hood. It had taken her some time after he came home from those five years to realize that this wasn’t the Oliver that had left on the Gambit, that he was harsher than before, though he tried to hide it. Add on the three years he’d been back and of course his view of things was different. Didn’t make him wrong or right, just different. Yet, here were people who hadn’t gone through a tenth of what her brother had suffered and they felt like they could judge him.

“Thea!” Dig called, sounding like it wasn’t the first time he’d tried to get her attention.

“Yeah, Dig.”

“Get suited up. We’ll head out on patrol for a few hours.”

While Thea left the room to go and get changed, Lyla took baby Sara and left for the night. Because Laurel was already changing, that left Felicity and Dig more or less alone for the moment. He had noticed that the blonde IT girl was a little off tonight and was concerned enough to ask her about it.
“Felicity, what’s wrong?” Dig asked.

“Nothing’s wrong, exactly. Just something my dad said when he was first released. It just keeps rattling around my head. I feel like it is important, but I don’t know why,” Felicity told him.

“What did he say exactly?”

“I asked about what had happened to him and he was telling me that two people helped him escape. When he asked them why, all they said was ‘A life for a life’. It feels important, but I just don’t know why or what context. Did my father do something that saved one of them?”

“I see what you mean. Just another mystery from a day full of them, though,” Dig said. “Your father gets rescued on the same night that Waller and a small army of agents get killed. It feels like they have to be connected, but how? What was so important about your father that they would break into ARGUS to get him and only him out.”

“I don’t know. And I really don’t want to ask him about what he was doing for ARGUS. I mean, we went out for lunch today and we had to sit in a booth near the back, where he could see the entrance and not have people behind him. I think he’s still worried that ARGUS is going to grab him again and take him back,” Felicity told her friend.

Dig nodded at what she was saying. He’d seen people with that sense of hyper awareness, that need to keep their backs protected, eyes moving and seeing everything that is happening around them. A part of him hoped for her sake that her father could make the adjustment to life outside of a cell. Maybe once Lyla got ARGUS to officially back off, they could share that with Mr. Kuttler as well as the fact that Waller was dead. See if that gave him a sense of peace.

Seeing Laurel and Thea returning and ready, Dig put on the rest of his costume and joined them at the van. After driving into the Glades, it was time for the two women to take to the rooftops. Dig drove around on the streets, following a path placed on his GPS by Felicity back in the lair. She kept track of where they’d patrolled previously and varied the route based on that as well as police reports. By doing this, there was no pattern for the criminals to try and take advantage of.

The next three hours were a whole lot of nothing except a couple of corner store holdups and assorted other minor crimes. Dig gave it that long before calling his partners back to the van so they could go home. There was a part of him that worried about the calm, but it was overridden by the part that just wanted to go home and enjoy a full nights sleep.

Starling City

November 28, 2015

Sara and Sin left the hotel early, making sure they would have enough time to stop for coffee and muffins before they needed to be at the condo to let the delivery people in with their new furniture and everything else they had bought. They had stopped at the new place yesterday for a couple of hours, just so that they could plan out where everything would go and who would get which room. Sin had surprised Sara when she said that the other large bedroom with the private bathroom should be reserved for when Nyssa and Oliver visited. She didn’t say who would sleep in that room, but her grin had made it plain she had no doubt whoever didn’t was most likely to be found in Sara’s room.

As they walked into the lobby, both women stopped and introduced themselves to the man on duty
at the desk. Sara was pleased to see that he was focused on his job, checking theiridentifications as well as the occupant information for the condo they were going to. The man assured Sara that he was aware of the deliveries that were coming, also. The pair were just about to go to the elevator when she saw the first truck pull up. The man just smiled and said he would get them to where they needed to be before he left the desk and went outside to direct the truck to the rear of the building.

Sara and Sin reached the entryway for the condo and went inside. It took her a moment to remember where the back door was, but then she had that opened and saw the large freight elevator located there. A few moments later, the first load arrived. Sara was pleased to see that this was two of the bedroom sets. She figured if they got the bedrooms in first, it would be easier to maneuver the rest of the furniture into position. Seeing the size of the beds, she knew that these went into the two larger bedrooms.

The pair got out of their way as the men brought in the load and put it where directed. They kept to the kitchen, drinking their coffee and eating the muffins. The second load arrived by the time they were finished. This was the other two bedrooms. Once those were in, two of the men set about putting the beds together while the other two brought up another load. By the time that they had all of the bedrooms put together, the living room was done, the bags of linens and such were in the condo, and the dining room table and chairs were on their way up, as well as small kitchen appliances, like coffee maker, toaster and microwave, and dishes and silverware.

Sara looked at the living room and smiled. There was a large couch, two stuffed chairs and a coffee table. The way that they were positioned made for a nice conversation area or a place to watch the TV that would be brought later. She and Sin had gone to an electronics store for that, as well as smaller TVs for their bedrooms and computers as well. With the last load from the truck in, the delivery people left and the two women got to work putting away the smaller stuff. They managed to get a few boxes done when the next delivery truck arrived. This was the electronics, so it was just a matter of showing them where they wanted everything and their techs got to work getting it both installed and set up, meaning the TVs were set to their optimum resolution and picture for where they would be viewed from. The computers were powered on and connected to the internet, then updated and had user accounts created on them. She’d had to pay extra for that, but it was definitely worth it. Otherwise, she’d have likely had to call Felicity and had her explain it all to them. That, or come over and set it up for them.

The good thing was that all of the major appliances had been included in the condo, so the stove, refrigerator, dishwasher, washer and dryer were already there and ready to go. They were already making use of that, as Sin had loaded the sheets for the two bedrooms that would be hers and Sara’s into the washer as soon as she’d found them. The next load was of towels for their bathrooms. Once all of that was done, they would do the rest of the linens. At least this way, they could check out of the hotel in the morning and move their clothes over here, officially moving in.

Sin was especially excited about that, as it would mean the start of her training with Sara. She knew it would be hard, she didn’t expect anything less. Most of her life had been hard and she had survived by being willing to fight back. So, she would fight back in training, not against Sara, but against her own body. She would learn whatever Sara had to teach her, she knew she would. Not just because she wanted to learn, but also because she refused to fail Sara, her sister in all but blood.

“Thank you, Sara,” Sin said as she came up behind her and gave her a hug.

“You’re welcome, Sin, though why are you thanking me today?” Sara asked.

“Because you found me, took care of me. I know I’ve thanked you before, but knowing that we start my training tomorrow, I just felt the need to say it again.”
“Actually, I should be the one thanking you. Finding you, helping you made me feel better about myself than I have in a long time. I needed someone like you, to show me that there was still good inside of me. Then you stayed and became my friend before becoming my sister.”

“OK, before I start crying, we should make a choice about dinner. Do we want to order something to eat here and have out first meal in the new place? Or do we want to go back to the hotel and have one last room service meal?” Sin asked.

“I vote for the room service meal. We’ll do dinner here tomorrow,” Sara said.

Nanda Parbat
November 29, 2015

Oliver walked down the halls of the fortress, heading for the room Nyssa had told him about that morning. His schedule had finally aligned with Artemis’ so that they could train together. He had caught her training yesterday and taken a few moments to watch the woman. She was a skilled instructor, he would give her that. Now, he was curious to see what he could learn from her himself.

Walking into the room, he found the two women were already there. Nyssa was the one firing the bow, while Artemis observed her. The target was a small disk that was thrown across the room by an assassin. It acted like a Frisbee, but was much smaller than ones he remembered. That small size, especially from the edge, made it a difficult target. Yet, Nyssa was managing to hit most of them. Only when she had emptied her quiver did he step closer.

“A very novel training device,” Nyssa said with a smile.

“That’s what I thought when my sister showed them to me,” Artemis told her. “If a student can hit these consistently, they’ll be able to hit almost anything.”

“I agree,” Oliver said from behind them. Nyssa and Artemis both turned, with Artemis bowing to Ra’s. “No, today I am here as your student. I can’t have you bowing to me while you’re trying to correct me, now can I?”

“No, Ra’s. My apologies. Let’s get a quiver of arrows for you and we can begin.”

Artemis walked over to collect a full quiver and brought it over to Oliver. Taking it, he hefted it onto his back and made some adjustments. When he was settled, he looked at Artemis and almost missed the first disk that was thrown. Smiling as he hit it, he realized that she was going to push him. No breaks, no “are you ready”, just go. Another disk flew and he knocked and fired an arrow at it as well. After that, he was too busy going through his progressions to notice or really care if he had hit any specific target. Before he even realized it, he had emptied the quiver.

“Your form is excellent, your speed from quiver to release is good but I think we can make it better,” Artemis told him as she hefted a quiver of her own. “Watch.”

Oliver stepped back a pace and let the woman take his spot. Then he watched, really watched as she went through her entire quiver. He couldn’t pinpoint exactly what she was doing different, yet he could tell that she was just that little bit faster. He also noticed that she did not miss a single disk.

“Now, tell me. What did you see?” Artemis asked.
“I saw that you were faster. Not by a lot, but just enough that I noticed it when watching you. But I don’t see how. You do the same movements that I do,” Oliver told her.

“The same or similar? Look at how my quiver is positioned compared to yours, then think about the movement to reach back for an arrow. Every little thing contributes, either adding a second or subtracting one. So, let me do this and then we’ll have you try again.”

With that, Artemis helped Oliver on with his quiver, but adjusted it how she would wear it rather than how Oliver usually did. The next hour was spent getting him used to the different position. He was surprised to find that he didn’t need to reach as far for the arrow, which meant that he was quicker to knock and fire than he previously had been. It also felt a little more natural than his previous position had. Yet, what he had been doing was all he’d known. It was the way that Yao Fei and Shado had shown him and it had worked for him. It wasn’t until now, being shown something different that he realized he could do better.

Once Oliver had the feel of it down, they moved on to him showing targets. They all knew that it would take time and practice before this would become ingrained muscle memory. Neither Nyssa or Oliver had expected this to happen. They, as well as Artemis, had expected a simple training session against someone on their skill level. But seeing the improvement, Oliver was definitely glad for it. Two hours had passed by this time and Oliver felt slightly bad that he was cutting into his instructor’s free time. Before he could speak, Artemis did so.

“Do you have any appointments you need to keep?”

“Nothing that won’t keep. Why?”

“Because I want to keep working with you on this. Or, we can schedule a daily time that I can train with you, until you get as comfortable with this as you were previously,” Artemis told him.

“Let’s keep going. And we’ll work out a time for all three of us to get together and train. Perhaps in the evenings, if that would work for you,” Oliver told her.

“As you wish. Now, lets do another quiver full, this time at the disks.”

Oliver fitted another loaded quiver, taking a moment to make certain it was how she’d shown him. Ready, he turned back in time to see the first disk in the air. As he reached for an arrow, he could feel himself getting faster, smoother with each repetition. He could also sense that he was hitting the targets as well. Before he realized it, it was over.

“Very nicely done, Husband,” Nyssa said with a smile. “Though I should be disappointed that you are getting to have all of the fun.”

“My apologies, Nyssa. I promise, next time you’ll get your turn,” Oliver told her with an answering grin.

“I look forward to that. For now, we have kept our instructor long enough, don’t you think?”

“I suppose so. We will see you tomorrow, then, Artemis. Unless you would care to join us for dinner?”

“Regretfully, I have other plans for the evening. My sister is back from her last mission and I would like to spend some more time with her before she is called away again. In fact, she was so eager to spend time with me, that she agreed to throw the targets for us today,” Artemis told them, as the other assassin removed her hood revealing a face that was similar enough to Artemis’ that it was clear that they were related. “I doubt she will make that mistake again, right Cheshire?”
“Throwing your toys isn’t that difficult, normally. Just wasn’t planning on so many in one session,” the older of the sisters said. “But my sister didn’t need to give you much instruction, which meant I had more work to do. It is an honor to meet you both.”

“Thank you,” Oliver said. “We’ll leave you to spend some time together.”

“Thank you, my lord,” Artemis said as she and her sister bowed.

With that, Oliver and Nyssa left the room and the sisters. Nyssa did notice that some of the good mood that her husband had been in seemed to have slipped away. She knew he was thinking about his own sister and how little time he’d spent with her recently. So, she left him to his thoughts as they walked back to their rooms, waiting for him to speak.

“What do you think about us going back to Starling? Over the holidays and spend a few days with Thea, Sara and Sin?” Oliver asked her.

“I think it would do you and them a world of good, Husband,” Nyssa said.

“Then, we do it, as long as there is nothing that requires my being here. Get there on the twenty-second, so that we have time to get a few gifts. Come back on the twenty-seventh, that gives us four or five days with them.”

“That sounds great. Even better if you keep it a surprise for your sister. When it gets closer, we tell Sara and only Sara that we are coming to see them. She will keep it a secret.”

“Yes, Sara’s very good at keeping secrets,” Oliver said with a grin.

With that, the pair went and got changed. Tonight, they would go and join the communal dining, spending time with the other members of the League. When her father had been Ra’s, Nyssa had noticed that his presence dampened the mood. With Oliver there as Ra’s, it seem that it actually improved the mood. He would spend about half his time walking among the tables, listening and speaking with various members. He didn’t just sit at the head table with a serious look on his face. Tonight would no doubt be more of the same.

Starling City

November 29, 2015

Sara and Sin had brought their clothes over from the hotel early that morning. They spent an hour or so getting everything put away in their rooms. After that, they headed out for breakfast. When they were ordering, Sara had cautioned Sin to eat lightly, as they would be training when they got back to the condo. So, the dark haired girl followed her friend’s lead and stuck with oatmeal, fresh fruit and orange juice. Once they were done, they went back to the condo and changed into workout clothes. Sin didn’t really have anything other than a t-shirt and a pair of shorts.

“Don’t worry. We’ll go out later and get you some other stuff,” Sara told her when she saw the outfit. Sara, on the other hand, was wearing a neon orange sports bra and yoga pants so tight they might as well have been painted on. Any guys in the gym this morning were definitely in trouble, Sin thought as they left the condo and went down to the fitness center.

When they walked inside, Sara took a quick look and found what she was looking for. Near the
windows was a treadmill, a stationary bike and a StairMaster. She lead Sin to the treadmill and had her get on.

“I’m going to set this at a jogging pace, Sin. We need to build your overall cardio fitness before we get started on any martial arts, so for now lots of running, lots of weight training.”

Sin opened her mouth to object, but then the treadmill started moving and she was focused on keeping up with that. Sara watched her for a few minutes, then increased the pace. After another few minutes, she increased the pace again. Sin now found that she wasn’t jogging, she was running. She glanced at Sara, afraid she was about to increase the pace again but instead found her standing there with a smile on her face. Sara then got on the stationary bike and began peddling. Sin didn’t watch her for long, as all of her focus needed to be on what she was doing.

Sara, as she was riding the bike, keep her attention not only on Sin, but also the rest of the room. She could feel a couple of sets of eyes on her, catching the pair of guys who were supposed to be working out. She noticed that they hadn’t lifted a weight in a few minutes and smirked a little. A part of her wondered if either of them would have the courage to do more than look, not that it would do them any good if they did try. She preferred who she was with now, thank you very much.

Looking back over at Sin, she could see the sweat dripping off the younger woman. She also saw that she was keeping the pace, but was having to work at it. She figured that was enough for now, so she got off the bike and went over to the treadmill, gradually slowing the pace. Sin looked at her gratefully, breathing hard and clearly a little tired.

“Good job, Sin,” Sara said. “We’ll keep doing that daily until you can maintain that pace easily for a half an hour or more.”

“A half hour at that pace? Kill me now,” Sin said with a glare.

“Why do people run, Sin?”

“Because they’re crazy?” Seeing Sara’s look, she answered again. “Because they’re trying to get away from someone.”

“That or to catch them,” Sara said quietly. “If you can’t run and keep running, you’ll never catch your prey or escape your adversary, Ta-er Aswad. That is the first lesson. Yes, it is difficult right now. But don’t think about how hard it is right now, think about how good you’ll feel when you can do it and do it easily too.”

“Yes, Sara,” Sin said quietly.

“Cheer up. I could be doing this the League’s way and just start with the martial arts training. This way is a lot less painful, trust me. Now, let’s move on to weights.”

With that, Sara led Sin over to a Nautilus machine. Setting a weight, she coached her student on the correct way to do the exercise before having her start a set of reps. They worked on her arms first, then her legs and then her core muscles. Sara took Sin through three sets of ten, with those guys watching her every move.

“Hey, beautiful. Do you offer private lessons?” one of them called to her.

“I do, for people who actually have potential,” Sara snarked back at him.

“Give me just five minutes and I can show you how much potential I have.”
“That’s odd, because I figured you as more of a one-minute man.”

“Damn, dude. She’s awesome,” the other guy told his friend with a laugh.

“Nah, more like a frigid bitch,” the first guy said.

“Sara, don’t,” Sin said as she caught the fury that flashed in her friend’s eyes.

“I’ll be good, I promise,” Sara told her with a wicked grin before turning to the two men. The one guy had the good grace to look embarrassed by his friend.

“See, your friend here is reasonably polite. I knew he was checking me out, he was somewhat obvious about it, but he let it go at that. You, on the other hand, have been dating your palm for so long that you’ve forgotten how to talk to a lady. So, I’ll give you a piece of advise. Calling one a bitch because she doesn’t fall for your bullshit is stupid and will get you hurt one day. Now, be a good little boy and run off before I forget my promise to my friend over there and decide to hurt you.”

The look in Sara’s eyes wasn’t hard to miss, but at the same time they guy didn’t want to seem like he was backing down. So, he stood there and stared at her for a good minute before turning to get his stuff. The nice guy gave Sara a look and mouthed an “I’m sorry”, so she gave him a little smile and nod before he went after his friend. Sara didn’t blame the guy for his friend being a jackass and he was sort of cute. If she saw him again, she’d get his number and maybe pass it on to Laurel. She’d consider Thea, but didn’t know if she was looking for a new relationship after Roy.

Turning back to Sin, the pair shared a smile. Seeing Sin was done with the exercises, they went back over to the treadmill and got her running again. Sin tried, but she wasn’t able to go as long this time as she had the first time. Sara, however, was very pleased. She figured that they would go upstairs, rest and order in some lunch. Then, in the afternoon, they would come back down to the gym and do the exercises all over again. If they could keep to that schedule, Sara figured that Sin would be ready to start with martial arts training in a week. When they did that, they would go to the gym in the morning before heading over to her safe house in the afternoon. But that was for the future. For now, they went upstairs and Sin headed straight for the couch. She collapsed own onto it with a sigh, while Sara took one of the chairs.

“I’m so tired, Sara, yet I feel like I’m full of energy too,” Sin said.

“You’re tired from the work you put in. The energy is kind of your body’s way of saying ‘Done good, kid’.”

“Well, I’m gonna take a nap. Wake me when food gets here.”

Sara smiled as Sin turned and fell asleep. Sara chose to follow her example, heading for her bedroom and stretching out on the bed. Checking her phone, she found no messages or missed calls. So, she closed her eyes and rested.
Oliver was in his private training room, practicing his swordsmanship against two of the League’s horsemen. The trio had been going at it for over an hour, starting with one versus one before progressing to two versus one. In the two versus one, the pair had managed to consistently cut the room in half and worked to move him into a smaller, more confined space. He was still struggling with effectively stopping that from happening. Not because he had a problem fighting in tight quarters, but rather because allowing it gave his opponents an advantage and he refused to allow that.

As he was beginning another attempt to break out of that trap, an assassin walked into the room and knelt.

“My apologies, my lord. Nyssa requested that I summon you on an urgent matter. She awaits you in the communications center.”

The two horsemen stepped back at that and bowed to him, as Oliver sheathed his sword and strode from the room. It was a matter of minutes before he reached the communication center. Nyssa was standing off to the side, a phone to her ear as she listened to the other side of the conversation. So, he nodded to her and walked over to look at the various reports that had come in since he’d been given the overnight reports that morning. Nothing critical was listed within them, so they could wait until they were brought up to his office for further study and reflection.

“We have them, Husband,” Nyssa called to him. “We’ve identified all the major players of the ring in Nice. They are requesting another four join them, so that they can take them all out at the same time. However, we will need to hurry as there is an auction scheduled for two days from now.”

“Could we try to take them at the auction?” Oliver asked, just to confirm what he already believed.

“I would not advise that. Not only would there be increased guards at the site, but we would be putting too many innocent lives at risk by doing so.”

“Agreed. Do we know where the girls will be held before the auction? I don’t want to take a chance of someone surviving and deciding to eliminate witnesses.”

Nyssa went back to the phone and spoke to the other party briefly before flashing Oliver a rather predatory smile.

“Nyssa, select five others to join you. When you reach Nice, you are in command of this mission. You know what to do, but let me make it clear, not one of the traffickers is to survive. One of us will stay with the girls until they have been rescued by competent authority,” Oliver told her.

“You know my belief, husband. No woman should suffer at the hands of me,” Nyssa replied. “I look forward to this, trust me.”

“Always. Now go and select your team.”

Nyssa gave a last few instructions on the phone, then left the communication center. Oliver had to
fight his temptation to follow her. This was her mission, she was in command and he had to trust her to do what she believed was best. If he followed her, others could think that he didn’t trust her completely. They would be wrong, but appearance was just as important as fact. So, he waited a few minutes, then went to check on the training that was taking place.

When he got to the training rooms, he found Artemis was there training her students. She saw him enter the room and bowed to him. Oliver nodded back to her and gave her a brief smile. He then took a place along the wall and settled in to watch. After the students had all emptied their quivers, he watched her direct them to retrieve their arrows before walking back to him.

“My lord,” Artemis said, watching him.

“Your students are learning well, I see,” Oliver told her, meaning it. All of them had fairly solid groupings on their targets.

“Thank you, my lord. Is that all you are here for?”

“More or less, yes. I know you are an excellent teacher, but if I don’t show an interest in all aspects of their training….”

“Then they might think it doesn’t matter or that they don’t have to try as hard,” Artemis finished for him.

“Exactly. And that’s not good for them or the League,” Oliver said, looking at the students returning. It was clear that they had all seen him standing there, talking with Artemis. And it was exactly what he wanted. “It looks as if they are ready to continue, Artemis, so I will leave so that you may do so. I will see you this evening for our training session?”

“Yes, my lord.”

Oliver ignored the bows as he left the room and moved on through several others before heading to his office. There, he found that the stack of reports from the morning had been replaced by those reports that had come in since then. He settled to work on them, giving each his due attention. Looking at the stack, he figured he’d be here until dinner at least. Just as long as he made it to his evening training session, that was all that mattered.

Starling City

December 1, 2015

Sara and Sin went down to the gym in their building. Both were dressed in matching gray sports bras and yoga pants. The pair had gone shopping after Sin’s first day of training and picked up some outfits for her and a few new ones for Sara. When they went inside, both were pleased to find it deserted, so that they could exercise in peace. Sin went over to the treadmill, which is where Sara had her starting. Today, she was able to get up to a run much quicker than previously and she set the timer for thirty minutes. She wasn’t sure she would be able to do the full time at a run, but she intended to push herself as far as her body would take her.

Sara had caught what Sin did and smiled a little to herself. Her student was getting better with each trip to the gym and was willing to push herself, which made training her easy and a challenge. Easy in that she didn’t always have to push her to work harder, go faster or do more. A challenge in trying
to make sure that she didn’t overdo things simply because she refused to back down. So, Sara got on
the bike and started to ride, while also keeping an eye on Sin as well. When she finally caught the
younger woman tiring, she saw that twenty-five minutes had passed.

“OK, Sin, start slowing it down,” Sara told her, pleased.

“I can do it, Sara,” Sin managed to get out in gasps.

“Sin, start slowing down now.”

Sin obeyed this time, though it was clear she wasn’t pleased. Once she came to a stop, she got off the
treadmill and stalked over to the Nautilus machine. Sara got off the bike and followed her, knowing
that she had to address this here and now.

“Sin,” Sara started, only to be interrupted by Sin.

“Why did you stop me, Sara? I could have done it. I was close, you know I was.”

“And what would you have accomplished if I’d let you keep going? If you had gotten hurt because
you pushed too hard?”

“I’d have proven that I’m ready for you to start training me,” Sin said.

“I am already training you, but you don’t see that because you’re looking too far ahead,” Sara told
her. “You’ve seen me fight, Sin. How do you think I’m able to do some of those moves?”

“By training?”

“Training teaches you the way to do something. But being fit and strong, that give me the ability to
execute what my training has taught me. For example, I can show you how to climb a wall, but if
you don’t have the arm strength to take your weight as you climb it, you’ll never make it to the top.
This is about giving you the strength to do what I’ll teach you.”

Sin went silent at that, absorbing what Sara was trying to teach her. As she did so, she sat down on
the Nautilus machine and began working on her arms. She kept on thinking as she went through her
first rotation on the machine. She realized that she was wrong. She was so focused on the goal, what
she wanted to accomplish, that she wasn’t seeing that Sara was building the path that would take her
there. She just wanted to get there, so that she could be like Sara, like Nyssa and join the League.

“I’m sorry, Sara,” Sin said, as she added a little more weight, then began her second circuit on the
machine. “I just want to reach the point where I can be out there with you and not just running in
place, staring out a window.”

“Hey, I get it. Let me tell you something an old teacher of mine told Oliver and he told me. ‘There
once was a young boy whose father dropped him off at a Shaolin monastry to study Kung Fu. After
a year, the boy came to visit his family. When asked what he’d learned, the boy hung his head in
shame. All the monks had him do was slap water in a barrel for a year. The family didn’t believe him,
so he showed them. He raised his hand and hit the table they were eating on. It broke in half.’ Now,
would you rather be doing this or slapping water in a barrel?” Sara asked, her grin tinged with a hint
of sadness as she thought of Shado, one of many who had died on her own path.

“What did this teacher teach Oliver?”

“She taught him how to use a bow. She had him slapping water in a bowl to build up his arm
strength. She told him that story when he was complaining about what she had him doing.”
“Is that why you’re telling it to me?” Sin asked.

“No, I’m telling it to you as a way of showing you that even though you may not understand the reasons I’m having you do something, I do have a reason and that this is all part of my plan to help you become what we both want you to be,” Sara told her.

As they had been talking, Sin had finished her third rotation on the Nautilus machine. Getting up, she went back over to the treadmill. This time, she set the timer to twenty-five minutes when she started to run. Sara smiled in approval, as she started a rotation on the Nautilus herself. She also wondered if she might not have to up her timetable for the younger woman.

Starling City
December 1, 2015

Felicity was in her office at Palmer Technologies when Lyla came to visit her. Seeing that she was alone, the blonde’s mind began to race as to the reasons for the visit. She had to take several calming breathes before instructing her EA to show her in.

“Hi, Felicity,” Lyla said as she approached her desk.

“What brings you by, Lyla. Not that you can’t come by, it’s just that you usually don’t. At least not without Dig and he’s not here. Is he OK?” Felicity asked in a ramble.

“John’s fine and so is baby Sara. They’re at home. I’m actually here on official business for ARGUS. This is your father’s file. And this is a notarized statement that Noah Kuttler is not the subject of any ARGUS investigations at this time. So, nobody from ARGUS is looking for him and it will stay that way as long as he doesn’t appear back on our radar.”

Felicity took the file and the letter from Lyla. She put the file on her desk, then opened the letter and read it. She would have Laurel look at it as well, but it appeared to be exactly what Lyla had said it was. With that, her father was completely free. She didn’t realize she was crying until she noticed that the letter was blurry. She removed her glasses and wiped her eyes, knowing she’d have to step into the bathroom when the other woman left and make some repairs to her makeup.

“Thank you.”

“I’ve also been asked to apologize on behalf of the Secretary for Homeland Security. DHS was not aware of what Waller had done to your father and it was never authorized. Task Force X, for all of its faults, was authorized and the people selected were actual criminals who were given a choice,” Lyla told her. “There’s no way we can give back what we’ve taken from him. In his file is contact information regarding any civil suit your father may wish to file.”

“I’ll let him know that,” Felicity said. She knew that they could look at a case against the government for what happened to her father, but would it really change anything. She had no reason not to believe Lyla when she said that others hadn’t known about what was done to her father. The person responsible was beyond answering for what had happened. There was also the fact that it would force her father to essentially relive what had been done and she didn’t want that. Not for whatever money the government would throw at them to make them go away.

“I’d offer to make the apology in person, but I doubt your father would want to see me or anyone
else associated with ARGUS right now.”

“True, but I think this will go a long way to relieving his fears. In time, he may be ready to hear it from you.”

Lyla just nodded at that. She’d done what she came for and she was sure that Felicity had a busy day, so she made her farewells and left. She was wrong, however. Felicity had had a busy morning, but her afternoon was remarkably free. The only thing scheduled was a meeting with Curtis about the status of his project. So, she called down to his lab and asked if he could move the meeting up. She would do that now, then take the rest of the afternoon off.

Curtis didn’t have a problem with moving the meeting up. It would allow him to work the rest of the day uninterrupted, so he saw it as a win. The pair went over the timeline and the budget. They were still on track, but had started to drift a little over budget. Curtis explained that this was due to a manufactured defect in a component of the Power Cell, which had necessitated a new shipment to be made. They believed that they would recoup the loss from the supplier, but until they did, it was still on their books. Felicity made a note to look further into that tomorrow.

With that, the meeting was done and Felicity could leave. Going down to the parking garage, she got into her red Mini and drove off. Thea’s condo wasn’t too far and the traffic was fairly light, given the time of day. It did take her a minute to find somewhere to park, but once that was done the rest was relatively easy. She knocked on Thea’s door and waited.

“Hey, Felicity,” Thea said as she let her in. “We just got done watching a movie, so perfect timing.”

Felicity could see her father by the couch, coming over to her. The pair of them shared a hug.

“Yeah, Thea has decided that she needs to get me up to date on the movies I’ve missed. Today, it’s been the Star Wars prequels,” Noah said with a laugh.

“Well, I have something that will make today even better, then,” Felicity told him. “ARGUS has officially stated that they are not after you. There are no investigations open on you, nothing. Lyla brought it by earlier and I wanted to come over as soon as I could and tell you.”

“So, it’s finally over.”

“Yeah, Daddy. It is finally over. You’re free now, completely free.”

“Have you told your mother about me?” Noah asked.

“No. I wanted you to be ready before I unleashed her on you,” Felicity said. “You know how she can be.”

“So, still hyper-excitable and you’re not sure if she will hug me or slug me when she does see me?”

Felicity just nodded her head. She loved her mother, but there was no way she’d ever understand her. She knew that the years after her father disappeared had been tough, on her mom even more than her, and she didn’t know how Donna would react to seeing Noah again. She hoped that her mother would listen and let them explain what had happened, but it was just as likely that she’d go off on an epic rant at him, punch him in the face and then rush off as fast as her six-inch heels would take her.

“Don’t worry about it, Felicity. Whatever happens between your mother and I, you are still our daughter and I promise we will always love you. Just as I went through things after ARGUS took me, so did she. She was left to figure out how to explain to you why daddy wasn’t there anymore,
how to put food on the table, a roof over your heads and all the other things that I had done. We all suffered in different ways because of this,” Noah told her.

“So, do you want me to call and have her come for a visit? And just see what happens?”

“That sounds fine. Maybe have you ease her into it, instead of just springing me on her. That way, if she’s completely against seeing me, she doesn’t have to.”

“Good, I’ll call her in the morning and let you know when she’ll be here. Now, you said you guys were watching the Star Wars prequels? Which one are you on?” Felicity asked.

Soon, they were all settled down to watch Revenge of the Sith. Felicity and Thea each had a glass of wine, Thea’s in spite of the look thrown at her by the older woman. Once the movie was over, they ordered delivery from a local Chinese restaurant for dinner. Felicity stayed when Thea went to the lair, telling her quietly to call if they needed her. The rest of the night passed with her telling her father about her childhood. It wasn’t the same as being there, but it was like manna from heaven compared to what he’d had before. As Noah thought about it, he remembered something from a book he read while held, "For of all sad words of tongue or pen, The saddest are these: 'It might have been!'" So, he would regret the lost years, but he would remember to keep his focus on the present and the future, not the past.

December 2, 2015

Nice, France

Nyssa and her group of assassins arrived at the League safe house earlier in the day. While the others unpacked, she went and spoke with the man who had been in charge of the mission. Once she told him that she was taking over, he bowed and motioned her into a room that they were using to plan the mission.

“It is good to see you again, Nyssa al Ghul,” Navid told her.

“It has been what, seven months?” Nyssa asked.

“Since your husband became Ra’s, yes. I was honored to be given this mission, but as it grew, I knew that we would need more than just those of us here. So, I’m happy to see you and Cheshire here. The others, I don’t know as well.”

“Yes, they are relatively new, but they are all fully trained and have been bloodied. This is too important to bring new assassins on.”

“If I may, I believe our best course of action would be for you and Cheshire to take these two targets. We have determined that they are the overall leaders, so their elimination is the top priority,” Navid told her.

Nyssa looked at the maps, then at the board. She saw that Navid did as she normally would, order the targets in terms of importance. So, as she looked, she began to plan who would be assigned to which target or targets. The biggest would be the warehouse where the girls were being held, just in terms of sheer size. Because of that, they would need multiple assassins there to take out the guards and free their captives.
“We’ll need to hold going after the warehouse until last,” Nyssa said. “Assign one member to keep watch and act if absolutely necessary. As we complete our assignments, we will group here, the top of this building. When we have sufficient numbers, we take the warehouse.”

“I would say two, just in case. We can double up on these two targets, given how close their residences are.”

“And their security?”

“No where near as good as I would choose if I was in their line of work,” Navid told her. “A couple of guards at most and a home security system. One of our shadows works as an installer for several of the companies in the area and has given us the system codes of all of our targets.”

Nyssa wanted to laugh at that. It was shocking how easy it was to compromise the security of their targets. Bringing Cheshire felt almost like overkill at this point, but she knew the woman had a hatred for human traffickers that rivaled her own. The reason why was something she didn’t know, but it felt personal to her. She had once asked her father about the sisters, as except for her and her sister, she had never encountered another pair in the League. From what little he had said, Cheshire was already a skilled killer, though unrefined when compared with someone with League training. Al-Owal had encountered her while on a mission and brought her before Ra’s. When she was offered a place in the League, her only request was that a place be found for her sister. The younger sister was somewhat skilled with a bow, but as yet not a killer. Ra’s had taken a day to consider her request before granting it.

In the years since, Nyssa had worked several times with Cheshire but they had rarely spoken. The other woman preferred to focus all of her attention on the mission at hand. Nyssa knew that many in the League considered the woman arrogant, but none could deny her skills. Now, Nyssa called Cheshire over to her and had her look over the targets and the maps.

“What do you think?” Nyssa asked.

“It is very doable, Nyssa. Either you or I could take the two targets that are close together. Unless you’ve slowed down since your marriage,” Cheshire said with a grin, knowing such a thing was bordering on the impossible.

“I take it that means you want the two targets?”

“If you don’t mind.”

“Be my guest,” Nyssa told her. “With that decided, we leave at dark.”

Nyssa then walked over to Navid and together they gave out the rest of the assignments. She did place Navid at the warehouse, telling him that she wanted him to attack it as soon as he had sufficient forces. She also wanted him to monitor communications, not just the League’s but also the local police. She didn’t expect anything to happen, but she would rather be safe than sorry.

As they waited, members checked and rechecked their weapons. It had little to do with nerves, but rather was something that had been drilled into them. Finding out that you have a problem with your weapon when you were facing your target was the absolute wrong time. All of them were ready and eager when darkness fell. They left from the roof of the building, sticking to the shadows as they made their way to their targets.

Cheshire was passing the house of her second target when she was gifted a golden opportunity. The man had stepped out onto the balcony outside his bedroom. She paused and waited, watching the
man as he extracted a pack of cigarettes, placed one in his mouth and went to light it. As the lighter flared, she struck. Knowing that she still had the more important target to take care of and not wanting to alert anyone, she’d thrown a dart into the side of his neck. The man’s fingers had just barely touched it when he dropped to his knees, as the poison took his life.

Moving quickly, Cheshire made her way to the other home. She spotted two guards patrolling the grounds, so she waited for a gap and then jumped to the roof of the house. A moment later and she was hanging outside her target’s bedroom window. She took a knife out and used it to force the latch on the window, then slowly raised it. She then slid into the bedroom and approached the bed. Her hand covered his mouth as she thrust the knife into his heart. The man’s wife barely stirred beside him, not knowing that she was now a widow.

Cheshire went to the window and fired a grapnel arrow at the next building. She waited for the guard below to pass, then launched herself off into the night. Making her way back to the rooftops, she headed for the warehouse. She was hoping that they would leave something for her, but was not overly disappointed to find that the warehouse was liberated by the time she arrived. Getting to watch those girls being freed was a worthy second prize, she thought, remembering another time, another warehouse. Everything she’d gone through, everything she’d done to get there had all culminated in those few seconds when her eyes had found her sister’s and it was at that point that she’d known her calling. Joining the League had enabled her to protect her sister by getting her the training she needed to never be a victim again, while also offering her a world of similar villains upon whom she could visit justice.

Monastery in Tibet

December 4, 2015

Talia and Adrian Chase were sparring against one another, as she worked with him to improve his swordsmanship. She was holding nothing back, pushing her student onto the defensive repeatedly. He would find an opening and try to exploit it, only to be blocked with her sword or have her spin out of the way. She did not try to injure him, however, for if she did so, it might be necessary to use her Lazarus pit and she did not want to have to do that. The pit was intended for her and her alone. No matter how useful he might be eventually, he was still a pawn in her own game, nothing more. If he fell, she would simply find another to replace him with.

“Mistress, the package you were expecting has been delivered,” one of Talia’s followers said from the doorway.

“Come, let us see what they have uncovered so far,” Talia said to Adrian as she left the room and made her way to her office. There was a file box sitting on the desk, tied closed with string and tape. She took one of her knives and cut through the bindings, before lifting the lid off. Inside was a stack of folders, containing everything for newspaper articles to police reports. She lifted out a stack and handed them to Chase.

“Start reading. Make note of anything that you deem important. We will both go through these files, then compare what we find.”

“Yes, Talia,” Chase told her as he took the first folder from the stack and started to read the documents that it contained.
Chase had to give it to whoever had complied these, they were exceedingly through. He found clippings that had only a single mention of Oliver Queen’s name, from charity galas and news announcements regarding Queen Consolidated. Those articles were essentially useless, which meant that the time wasted on reading them could have been put to better uses. Still, he knew Talia and she expected him to read every single piece of paper, no matter how important he might think it was. So, that is what he would do.

For Talia, she was finding information. Whether it would end up being useful or not, was the question. The stack she was going through all concerned the trial and acquittal of Oliver’s mother for her part in the destruction of the Glades and the deaths of over five hundred people. She wondered how Oliver had come to terms with the fact that the disease that he had returned home to cure his city of originated from the people closest to him. Not just his father, but also his mother and the father of his best friend. Did that feeling of betrayal burn, burn as badly as being told by your own father that you are not worthy of being his heir only to first see your younger sister named thus, then an outsider that you yourself had saved and trained.

His mother might have been useful as bait, but she had been killed. There was his sister, though. The last living member of his family. What would Oliver sacrifice to save her, Talia wondered as the put the last article back into that folder and closed it. She then took the next folder and found police reports, including from Oliver’s arrest for being the Hood. Not the most imaginative name, but then, she did not expect much better from police. She read those reports slowly, seeking any details. She laughed when she read that he was let off because the Hood was spotted miles away from where he was confirmed to be at a party. She looked at that and instantly suspected he had a partner, or at least an ally. The police looked and simply said, ‘Must be innocent’.

With that realization, she looked to see if there was anything more about Starling City’s vigilante included. She was rewarded with two large folders full of documents. So, she put them to the side for her to go through next, then turned her attention back to what she had been reading. Only when she was done did she start on the other files. Reading the articles, she looked for pictures, comments, anything that could give her a lead on the person or persons she was certain were working with Oliver. There was at least one, just from the fact that someone went out in his costume to draw suspicion away from him.

Sadly, for Talia, the few pictures that were included in the articles were too poor quality to be useful. Eyewitness reports told of a man occasionally being seen with the Hood, but the descriptions was universally worthless. Some said that he was black, others said he was white. He was tall and muscular in one, shorter and more wiry in another. There were even a couple of sighting of a woman in black with him, but there were also reports of that same woman working solo. So, was she a partner or had their interests aligned in specific situations?

By the time that they were done, they still had no sense of clarity. No idea of targets except for two, Thea Queen and Laurel Lance. Thea, because she was Oliver’s sister, and Laurel, because she was a woman Oliver had loved and Talia believed still did. There was still a lot more work to do before she would even consider moving in such a bold fashion against Ra’s, because she knew any move she made in that direction would draw an immediate and deadly response. So, such a move would only be as a last resort or after she had removed other pieces from the board. If she could only find the pieces.
Sara smile as she rode into the garage of her safe house. As she parked the bike, Sin slipped off the back and stood looking around. When Sara had said they were going someplace, she had never expected something like this. She looked around the old garage, curious as to why they were there.

“Come on, Sin,” Sara said, drawing the younger woman’s attention, then leading the way upstairs.

“What is this place?” Sin asked.

“Think of it as a replacement for the clock tower. This is my safe house. Remember where this is, OK?”

“Got it, Sara.”

“Now, let’s get changed and then we’ll start training,” Sara told her.

“Training? There weren’t any weights or stuff downstairs,” Sin replied as she started changing into workout clothes. Since it was cooler in here than it had been in the gym, both of them opted for sweatshirts and yoga pants. Once they were dressed, Sara took them back downstairs and to the far side of the garage, where there were some mats laid out over the concrete.

“So, I think you’re ready for us to add something more to your training. Today, you will begin learning Jeet Kune Do.”

“What?”

Sara just smiled at Sin before taking off her shoes and stepping onto the mats. Sin copied what Sara was doing. They started slowly, working on blocking attacks first. Sara would demonstrate the move first, then have Sin attempt it. They would work on that move until Sin was able to successfully block at full speed, then they would move on to the next type of block.

Once Sin had a good grasp of blocks that she could use, Sara started showing her attacks. Just like before, Sara demonstrated and then Sin would attempt it. Sara was impressed at how quickly Sin seemed to be picking things up. So, she started throwing attacks in with her blocks of her student’s attacks. The first caught the younger woman off guard, but then she began expecting them. Both women had smiles on their faces by this time. Sara then started increasing the speed at which they went until they were full on sparring, using the simple moves that Sin had learned thus far.

The pair only stopped when Sin was breathing hard and having trouble defending. At that, Sara led them back upstairs and got Sin resting on the slightly battered couch. There was a small refrigerator in the corner, out of which she took two bottles of water.

“So, how do you feel?” Sara asked.

“Slightly tenderized, but as soon as I get a little energy back, I want to do it again,” Sin told her.

“Not today. From now on, we’ll hit the gym in the morning and come here after lunch and a break.
Eventually, we’ll move to three mornings in the gym and the rest of the time, we’ll be here. We’re going to train every day. When you’ve gotten a solid grasp on hand-to-hand, we’ll move onto weapons. At that point, we’ll need to try a few until we find what weapon works beside for you.”

“And when will I be able to go out there with you?”

“When I feel you’re ready, I’ll test you. Pass the test and I’ll let you join me. Fail and we continue with your training and then test you again at a later time,” Sara told her.

“But how will you know?” Sin asked.

“Trust me, I’ll know. Now, get changed, so we can head back for dinner.”

December 5, 2015
Nanda Parbat

Oliver stood in the hall where the Lazarus Pit was located, looking at the waters. His shoulder ached from the cut that he had received in training that morning. It was relatively minor, compared to many of the wounds he’d received in the past. His horsemen had suggested he use the Pit to heal the wound, but he had resisted. He was prepared to suffer a little discomfort if it meant he might not have to deal with the potential of blood lust.

A smile crossed his face as he turned. He had felt Nyssa and her team enter the room. He waited for them to kneel, then gestured for them to rise. Walking forward, he looked them over, pleased with what he saw.

“You have done well,” Oliver told them. “The ring is destroyed, the girls freed and we have leads to where we might find other girls, but also the scum that bought them. You are all off for the next three days. You may train if you wish to do so, but otherwise, you have no duties. Report back after three days for your next assignments.”

The assembled assassins bowed before leaving the room.

“So, how did you manage without me, Husband?” Nyssa asked with a smirk. She had noticed him slightly favoring his left arm and suspected a training accident of some kind.

“You know, don’t you?” Oliver asked her back.

“That you are injured, yes. But not how it happened.”

“Got a little overconfident in my swordsmanship and had to be reminded that I’m not yet as good as I think I am.”

“How badly?” Nyssa asked as she moved behind him.

Oliver undid the buttons on his tunic enough so that he could expose his shoulder and the wound. Nyssa simply clicked her tongue against her teeth and sighed. The wound was not bad and there would be no ill effects on him once it healed. For now, he would just have to deal with the pain, which he seemed to be handling. For the most part, she amended as her fingers hit a spot that had him jerk away.
“Not too bad. So, other than that, how are you?”

“I’m good, actually. Until this heals, I can’t train much, so I’ve been reading some and spending time watching training classes,” Oliver told her.

“Ah, spending time with Artemis?” Nyssa said with a grin. “Please don’t tell me I missed the contest between you and her.”

“What contest, Nyssa?”

“Why, to see who’s the better archer, of course.”

Oliver laughed at that, recalling Malcolm saying something similar when they’d faced off. He believed that he was the better archer, but he was certain that Artemis would claim she was. It wasn’t arrogance that made them feel that way, it was a need. For, if they did not have that belief, then they were already giving the advantage to their opponents. That confidence in his skills had seen him through many a fight. Sometimes against opponents that any reasonable observer would have said he had little hope against. Although, if he was being completely honest with himself, many of those had just been his refusal to give up.

Such a contest against Artemis would be enjoyable for them both, he suspected. A chance to pit themselves against someone of equal skill without the risk of death being the end result. But not just yet, not while his shoulder was still injured. It would have to be when both were in their best condition, to make for a completely level playing field.

Nyssa watched her husband as the idea of a contest played through his mind. She could see how much the idea appealed to him, from the smile that crossed his face to the way his fingers twitched. She remembered having such contests herself, against other members of the League as a way to test herself. She thought of something she’d been told, ‘To be the best, you have to beat the best’. Watching her husband compete against Artemis would be interesting on many levels. She suspected that they both would push the other to new levels.

Across the compound, Artemis was finishing a training session when her sister walked in. The pair exchanged a brief smile before she turned her attention back to her students. Still, she was glad a few minutes later when the session ended and the students left. Now, she was able to go over to her sister. As she approached, she noticed the expression on Cheshire’s face and frowned.

“What’s wrong, Jade,” Artemis asked.

“Nothing, Artemis. Just my thoughts going in the wrong direction, is all,” Cheshire told her.

“The mission?”

“Kind of. It was human traffickers, again. And we took them down again. And in a month or two, a new group will rise up and take their place.”

“I know, sis. We do what we can to save as many as we can,” Artemis told her.

“And I get that. But then I see those young girls and it’s like the last ten years never happened and I’m back on that dock…. Cheshire said.

“And it’s me that you’re there to save. Except this time, there is no League, no help. Just you and your knives and Sai against how many Triad? 10, 20?”

Cheshire couldn’t speak, couldn’t bring herself to say the words. However, the look in her eyes said
plenty and her sister was easily able to read her. So, Artemis led the pair to a corner of the room and settled down, her sister in front of her. There, they began going through various meditations. Because, as her sister had been talking, she’d been remembering her own part in that night. How the men had talked freely about the fate that awaited a young girl such as herself. She’d sat in that warehouse among the other girls and prayed for a deliverance that she knew was not likely to come. Something to save her from a life of slavery and sexual servitude. When her sister had appeared, that first flicker of hope had flared as her mind struggled to comprehend what it was seeing. After it was over, she remembered hugging her sister. Then, a month later, they were in Nanda Parbat and begin a life of servitude that was entirely different than what she’d previously been about to face. Here, they had taken her and shaped her into a deadly warrior, skilled not just with her bow, but a whole host of weapons and more importantly, weaponless as well. Never again would she be the victim. As for her sister, Jade had become Cheshire, a most feared assassin.

It took time, but eventually both sisters were able to find their center again. Looking at each other, they shared a smile and hug. Nothing in their training had been able to break the bond between them. Not that Ra’s had really tried, because he knew that bond was the key to unleashing the full potential of both sisters.

December 6, 2015

Starling City

It had taken her a couple of days to get someone to cover her shifts, but Donna Smoak was finally able to come to Starling. Her curiosity had been running overtime since Felicity had called her. She loved her daughter, but the two of them did not have the greatest of relationships. Donna was a free spirit more into fashion and men than her genius of a daughter. Felicity was a geek and socially awkward, mostly because she kept getting pushed ahead in school. Going to classes with kids two or three years older than you made it hard to make friends. College was even worse, considering that the world of bars and frat parties was pretty much off limits when you’re underage even when you graduate. All combined to give the two women little to actually bond over.

So, Donna now found herself approaching her daughter’s home and wondering if this time would be different. She knocked and waited, hearing the sound of heels on hardwood from within. A moment later, the door opened and she gave a squeal of delight at seeing her daughter. The pair ended up in a hug that lasted a couple of minutes. When they separated, Donna took a good long look at her daughter. She didn’t see a ring on her finger and it didn’t exactly look like she had put on any weight, thus seeming to have eliminated two of her immediate guesses.

“So, what was so important that you needed me to come as soon as I could?” Donna asked.

“It’s about Dad, Mom,” Felicity started. “He’s been found.”

“OK, so what does that mean? The police finally caught him? Or...you don’t mean his body was found?”

“No, Mom. He was found. He’s here in Starling City. It turns out, he didn’t just leave us that day. An organization called ARGUS basically kidnapped him. They needed a hacker who was, lets say, ethically challenged and Dad fit the bill.”

“And why was he released now?” Donna asked.
“Someone broke into ARGUS for some reason and found him there. They released him and dropped him off at my work. We don’t know why this happened,” Felicity told her, feeling a little bad about lying to her mother. Then again, telling her the truth would mean bringing her into a different world and it wasn’t like she’d be better off knowing more. Felicity knew the more and she was still having trouble figuring it all out.

Donna went quiet at that, feeling the enormity of the revelation. She’d spent the last two decades believing that her husband had walked away from her and their daughter. In time, she could have forgiven him leaving her, but not the pain he’d put their little girl through. He hadn’t had to cope with the crying, the screaming, the begging for Daddy to come back. Promises that she would try to be better if Daddy would just come home. Felicity, Donna suspected, had never gotten over that feeling of abandonment. Combined with what Cooper had done to her and it was small wonder that her daughter rarely went out, rarely dated. Instead, she threw herself into her work and her computers, a world of machines that were almost always there for her.

Donna freely admitted she’d never understood that world of gadgets and gizmos. She’d tried her best for her daughter, but it was so far beyond her she was lucky to catch the edges. Still, she’d done her best to be both father and mother to her genius child and where she couldn’t understand the what, she could cheer on the accomplishments. The math championships won, the first prizes in the science fairs, the scholarships. All the while, she cursed Noah Kuttler for being a coward. Only now to find out that he hadn’t left of his own volition, but had been taken. Not for any criminal act, but simply because he had skills that some group had needed.

“If you found him, then why isn’t he here?”

“I think I should see him,” Donna said, “and see where we go from there.”

Felicity took out her phone and called Thea. If either of the women had been in the loft and seen Noah for the last hour or so, their decision would have been much easier. Thea had worked to keep him calm as his mind played out all kinds of scenarios for what might take place. Coupled with his emotions running wild and he was something of a mess by the time the call came. The answer was obviously a yes, as the young woman went to grab her car keys and pocketbook. Yet, Noah found that he wasn’t able to rise from the couch he was sitting on at that moment. It took, in fact, a long moment of deep breathing before he was finally able to stand and then walk somewhat unsteadily to the door.
The drive across town didn’t take too long, or so it seemed to him. Noah was thankful when Thea didn’t try to make conversation on the way over to Felicity’s house. He didn’t want to seem rude and not answer her, but too much was going on inside for him to uphold his part of a conversation if she had tried. It seemed a matter of moments before he felt the car stop and Thea touch his arm.

“Her place is the door on the right,” Thea told him, pointing out the window.

“Aren’t you coming in?” Noah asked.

“No, this is something private. Don’t worry, though. I’ll be out here waiting, I’ve got a book loaded on my phone too. So, take all the time you need.”

“Thank you, Thea.”

With that, Noah got out of the car and walked up the path to his daughter’s home. With every step he took, the nervous feeling increased. If it wasn’t for his daughter opening the door and stepping out, he might have fled. Yet, Felicity’s smile and open arms beckoned him forward and he was powerless to fight their appeal. Stepping through the front door, he saw her again and he was completely unashamed of the tears running down his cheeks. She was as beautiful as her remembered her, those memories and a couple of pictures of her with their daughter all he’d had for nineteen years.

Donna watched this and felt her own tears forming. She’d thought herself prepared, only to find that she wasn’t. Whatever anger she’d felt previously evaporated as swiftly as water in the Nevada desert. This wasn’t the man she remembered, not even physically. This man had been broken by what he’d endured, things that she knew nothing about. She knew it would not be possible to go back to how it was before, because neither of them was who they were before. But, perhaps they could work to build something from who they were now.

“Hello, Noah,” Donna said. “How are you?”

“Adjusting slowly,” Noah told her. “Felicity’s friends have been a godsend.”

“Oh?”

“Yes. Her friend Thea is letting me stay with her. She’s nice, doesn’t try to pry or get me to talk. She’s actually getting me to watch movies she says I have to see.”

“You used to hate when I would try to get you to take us to the movies,” Donna said with a smile. “You’d call them a waste of time.”

“I know. But that was when I had the freedom to do other things. While I was held, all I could do was work, read or sleep. The first couple of years, I used to dream of all the things I would do when I got out of there. I’d dream of spending more time with you both. Then, I stopped dreaming because I’d always wake up and be right back in that cell. It was better for me not to dream of things that would never be, I told myself,” Noah told her.

“Do you have any plans now?”

“No, you don’t, Dad,” Felicity told him. “I don’t blame you for what that witch did to you, to all of us.”
“None of which she would have done if I hadn’t been doing what I was. If I had been a normal person, working a normal nine to five job, there would have been no reason for Amanda Waller to have ever noticed me. But, because I wanted more, I became a criminal instead. So, yes, I’m to blame for all of this,” Noah told her. “All the pain, the struggles, the headache that you both suffered is because of me.”

Felicity wanted to pinch herself, because this felt like a bad dream. She’d heard similar words before, from Oliver Queen. She’d thought that man was the king of self-blame, but nope, here was her dad vying for the crown. And doing a masterful job of it, too, if she did say so herself. And just like Oliver, he was ignoring the fact that other actors played a major role in what they were blaming themselves for. She wondered if she’d have better luck getting her father to accept that than she ever had with Oliver.

Thinking about Oliver got her to start wondering about the man. He’d been gone for more than six months now and she wondered if he was ever going to come back. Because in some respects, this was starting to feel a lot like after Malcolm Merlyn’s Undertaking, when Oliver had fled the city. Except this time, he wasn’t trapping himself on some deserted island, cut off from the rest of the world. Now, he was traveling all over the place and keeping somewhat in contact with them. But something about that just didn’t feel right to her, the more she thought about it.

Felicity was brought out of her thoughts by the sound of her mother’s voice calling her. Blinking a couple of times, she realized that both of her parents were looking at her in varying degrees of concern.

“Sorry, I was thinking about something. You needed me?” Felicity asked.

“We were thinking about dinner,” Donna told her. “But Noah was concerned because Thea has been waiting for him.”

“She has? I told her when I called that she could just drop him off and I would make sure he got back.”

“I think she was concerned that if things went badly,” Noah said.

“That you would be stuck here with no way out,” Felicity responded with a grimace, realizing that she hadn’t considered that when she’d called.

Felicity called Thea and let her know their plans. She invited the younger woman to join them, but she begged off. Thea felt that it was more important that they spend this time as a family and didn’t want to get in the way of that. She did tell the blonde IT genius to call her when Noah was ready to leave and she’d come back and get him. So, it was just the three of them that went to Big Belly for a fun family dinner.

December 8, 2015
Starling City

Sara smiled behind her veil as she raced across the rooftops of the Glades. She had decided to go out tonight as Ta-er al-Sahfer and hunt some of the criminals of the city. She hadn’t been out since they had stopped ARGUS and Amanda Waller and judging by what she was seeing, she was wondering if team Arrow had been out either. Or, it might just be that the team was no longer enough of a
deterrent for the criminals of the city. Because what she was seeing was a target rich environment. As such, she was going to take her time and see if she could find the higher tier players, not the corner dealers and the runners, but those above them.

Right now, she was following a man who looked to be in his twenties. She’d watched him hand over a backpack to one of the corner dealers and take a large wad of cash off him. She suspected that he was the next step up the chain, so she was tracking him in hopes that he would lead her to a bigger fish. When she saw him duck into an abandoned building, she took her bow and fired a grapnel arrow across the street. Once on the roof of the building, she found the access way and went inside. Slinging her bow, she took her batons and carefully worked her way down the staircase.

She was about halfway down when she heard the sound of a body fall, along with a grunt. Sara decided to make the most of the noise and picked up her pace, while trying to determine where the sounds were coming from. As she hit the landing on the second floor, she looked down the hall and saw two men on the floor. Taking a chance, she moved in that direction just as another body was tossed out the doorway of a room up ahead. She noticed that it was the person she’d been chasing and began to wonder what was going on.

A figure stepped out of the room and stopped Sara dead in her tracks. The man was wearing the Arrow costume that Oliver had when she was working with him. She focused on the details, trying to see if there was anything that said this was a copy. But no, everything she saw was exactly as she remembered it. The only difference that she could see was the man in the suit. He wasn’t as tall as Oliver, nor as muscular. He was also wearing a mask, she noticed as he turned to face her, rather than the grease paint that Oliver had used.

“Who are you?” the man asked as he knocked an arrow and aimed it at her.

“I could ask you the same thing, Fake Arrow,” Sara replied, her batons held low but still ready. The voice sounded familiar, the man not using a voice modulator.

“Look, I’ll ask you one more time. Who are you?”

That voice, Sara thought with a smile. “You already know who I am, Roy,” Sara said softly as she took a step forward. “But we’ll talk about all that later. Did you get anything out of these guys?”

“I got enough,” Roy said, watching her carefully. He felt like he should know her, but it wasn’t clicking for him. The outfit told him she was a member of Nyssa’s group, that League. Maybe they had met during the battle against Slade or something.

“Good, then we can call this in and go. I have a feeling you’re going to have a lot of questions and this might take a while.”

With that, Sara talked back down the hall and then up the stairs. Roy took a moment to make a phone call to the SCPD, then followed after her. She waited on the roof for him, then led the way across the rooftops until they reached the roof of her safe house. He kept his head on a swivel, just in case this was some form of trap. The last couple of weeks hadn’t been the best and he worried that the trend would continue. When they reached what seemed to be their destination, his alertness went up a notch. The assassin went first, leading the way through a hatch on the roof down a ladder into a garage. He noticed that there was a training area off to one side before following her up the stairs into what looked like an apartment.

Sara took a seat in a chair and watched Roy look around. A part of her wished she’d let Sin come with her, at least this far. The problem with that would have been getting her to stay here, instead of trying to do some extra training or go out on her own. So, she’d waited until the younger woman
went asleep before venturing out. If she had woken up and caught her, Sara would have just said she was going for a ride or some such.

“Alright, so tell me. Who are you?” Roy asked her.

“Once you know, your life will never be the same,” Sara said, smiling as she remembered telling Oliver something similar when he’d asked the same question.

“I’ll handle it.”

With that, Sara got up and faced Roy. Reaching up, she undid her veil and let it fall to the side, then pushed back her hood. She caught the moment that recognition hit the young man. He took a step back as he processed what he was seeing. He shook his head, then closed his eyes and looked away. A moment later, he looked back at her and just stared.

“How is this possible?” Roy asked. “I mean, I saw you. You were dead and we buried you. So, how are you standing here?”

“Oliver and Nyssa brought me back is the simple answer,” Sara told him. “I can go into the details if you want.”

“Oliver? Where is he?”

“He’s away. I’ve got a phone number we can call him on and you can talk to him. But, what are you doing back in Starling? Because, I was told that they faked your death and got you out of the city after you confessed to being the Arrow.”

“Yeah. I went to Monument Point, got work in a garage. Kept a low profile. It wasn’t great, but it was definitely better than prison would have been. Then, about three weeks ago, some guy started asking around about me. First, it was at the garage, then the neighborhood corner store. I don’t know how he knew, but he wasn’t calling me by the name Felicity had set up for me. He said he was looking for Roy Harper. When the garage owner started asking about it, I decided to get out of town. I headed here to talk with the team, but the lair is trashed, there’s no sign of Oliver anywhere and I can’t exactly show my face on the street, so I can’t go to either Felicity or Thea. I figured I’d stick to the Glades while I figured something out,” Roy said.

“And going out as the Arrow is what? Your way to announcing you’re back?” Sara asked.

“No, it’s my way of trying to make things a little better for the people here. Nobody else seems to be. I haven’t seen the team at all, which considering Oliver is ‘away’ doesn’t really surprise me. I mean, with me being gone and now Oliver, who’s left? Dig, Felicity and Laurel?”

“And Thea, too. She’s been going out there, too. But, yeah, they’re not as good at it as Oliver, Felicity and Dig were. That’s history, though, and maybe they’ll get better in time.”

“The city doesn’t have time for them to get better, Sara,” Roy said. “Because, while they’re getting better, the criminals are getting organized, stronger, smarter.”

Sara couldn’t argue with that. It was why the League usually went with a scorched earth attitude. Just taking out the head of an organization was like cutting the exposed part of a weed. As long as the roots were there, it would grow back. However, if you dug deep and removed the weed, roots and all, it never was going to return. And if you did it right, you might just scare others off, lest they suffer a similar fate.

“Where are you staying? And where did you get a costume?” Sara asked.
“I’ve set up in the old lair. Looked like nobody had been there in a while, so I thought it would due for now. As for the costume, let’s just say that it was easier than I thought to break into the police evidence warehouse and take a few things. The costume, a bow and a couple of quivers full of arrows. Figured that would be enough to get me started.”

“Not bad, short term. But once the police get wind that the Arrow is back, that will be on their list of places to check. Go back there tonight and gather your stuff, then bring it here. I’ll stop back around noon and we’ll call Ollie, let him know what’s going on. Between us, we’ll get things figured out.”

“Thanks, Sara,” Roy said.

“No need to thank me. I know you’d do the same for me,” Sara said as she gathered her clothes and walked into the bathroom to change.

When Sara came out, she found that Roy was gone. She wasn’t surprised, given the hour. She knew he would want to get back to Verdant and gather this things, so he could get back here before daylight. The darkness and night were his allies now, keeping him hidden from the rest of the city. Putting her uniform away, she went downstairs to the garage and got on her motorcycle. A moment later and she was on her way home. The coming day promised to be interesting, she thought as she drove, a smile on her face.
Roy woke up to sunlight on his face. Groaning, he started to roll over when he realized that something was off. There shouldn’t be sunlight, should there? Opening his eyes, he took a look around. This definitely wasn’t the office at Verdant, which is where he’d been sleeping since he arrived in town. When he’d found it deserted, it had made sense to him to just stay there rather than find an abandoned building somewhere. Verdant was clean and safe, at least after he’d done some cleanup upstairs. The leather couch was good enough for him and the building still had running water and heat.

What it didn’t have, at least in the office, was windows that looked outside and let the sun shine in. Getting up, he padded out of the bedroom and found himself in a somewhat run down apartment. It took a moment, but then he remembered what had happened last night. Running into the mystery assassin and coming back here with her, only to find out it was Sara. He still couldn’t believe that, even after talking with her. Going back into the bedroom, he opened his bag and took out some clothes, then opened the closet, thinking he could store the rest there. Seeing the Canary costume hanging there brought a smile to his face, as well as confirming that this was real. Seeing a couple of hangers, he used them to hang up the Arrow costume.

After a quick shower, Roy toweled dry and then got dressed in jeans and a red hoodie. He went into the kitchen area and found some cans of food. Finding some beef stew, he fixed that and some rice. Once he was finished with that, he did the dishes and cleaned the kitchen, just to have something to do. He’d ditched his phone when he’d left Monument Point and he hadn’t wanted to take a chance purchasing a new one. He still didn’t know how that guy had found him, so he was going to stay as off the grid as he could.

When he was done cleaning, he went downstairs to the garage. He hadn’t been able to get much of a look last night, either time that he passed through it. Now, in the daylight, he was able to check things out and he really liked what he saw. In some ways, it was like being back in the old Arrow lair. There were mats for sparing off to one side, as well as a Wing Chun dummy. Against a wall was a rack of weapons, from boes and Escrima sticks to swords and archery sets. Looking at a bow, he remembered Sara once aiming an arrow at him when he’d been under the influence of the Mirakuru, so it didn’t surprise him that much that she would have these here. Plus, she was a member of the League and he’d seen what they could do with a bow and arrow.

The other thing that came to him as he looked at the bow was how much he’d missed them. Oliver, Thea and the team had been the closest thing to family he’d had in years. And even though he’d done it for the best of reasons, having to leave Starling and them behind had been almost unbearably hard. Making it even harder was the need to keep as low a profile as he could. So, he didn’t go out with the guys after work, he didn’t date. Just get up, go to work and then back home, rinse and repeat. It had been sort of normal, but so boring at the same time.

The sound of a motorcycle engine broke through his thoughts. He looked over and saw one of the garage doors was now open and a Kawasaki Ninja was rolling inside. He started to walk over when he realized that there were two people on the bike, making him step back. When the pair got off, the one that had been in back ripped off her helmet and rushed him. Roy wasn’t prepared for the punch
that came when he saw that it was Sin.

“Ouch. Damn that hurt, Sin,” Roy said, rubbing his jaw.

“Serves you right, Abercrombie! You let yourself get arrested, then I hear that you died and now you’re standing here like everything is normal,” Sin told him.

“I had to do it, Sin. Oliver was just going to serve himself up on a silver platter to the police. Me, I was a nobody from the Glades who should have ended up in prison or dead long ago. Oliver, he’d saved us, the least I could do was save him.”

“You’re a special kind of stupid, aren’t you? You had Thea and you gave that up to bail out her brother, who I’ll bet didn’t even ask for your help? Only you, Abercrombie.”

Sara stood by her motorcycle, letting the two have a moment. She hadn’t told her friend about Roy when they’d left their apartment, just to see the surprise. She’d been surprised as well, thinking Sin would have gone with a hug in greeting, not a particularly good right cross. Now, though, the pair were hugging, which brought a smile to her face. As she watched, she reached into her jacket pocket and took out her cell phone.

“Roy,” Sara called as she waved the cell phone.

When she had his attention, she pointed upstairs. Sin and Roy followed her up into the apartment. Sara took one of the chairs, while Roy and Sin sat down on the couch. Sara selected the correct speed dial and called, putting the phone on speaker.

“Hello, Beloved,” Nyssa said when she answered the phone.

“Hi, Nyssa. Where’s Oliver?” Sara asked.

“He’s taking a shower.”

“Go get him. It’ll give you an excuse to see your hot, naked husband dripping with water.”

“You do know you’ll pay for that the next time I see you, right?” Nyssa threatened.

“Oh, sorry. Thought you newlyweds were still in the ‘Can’t keep our hands to our selves’ phase,” Sara replied with a laugh, drawing one from Sin and a grunt from Roy.

“Who else is there with you, Beloved?”

“Sin and someone Oliver is really going to want to talk to. So, please go get him.”

“No need, thank you. He just came back,” Nyssa said as she pulled the phone away, obviously handing it to Oliver.

“Hi, Sara. How are you doing?” Oliver asked as he took the phone.

“I’m doing really good. I’ve been training Sin, like we talked about, and I’ve started going out on patrol by myself,” Sara told him.

“As the Canary or…”

“As Ta-er al-Sahfer. Let’s just say that your former team and I had something of a difference of opinions, so I decided to let them do their thing and I’ll do mine.”
“Let me guess. John said something about how much more aggressive you are? That the team doesn’t do things like that?” Oliver asked, rather rhetorically, Sara thought.

“Basically,” Sara said. “So, I went out in my League uniform, rather than as the Canary, so that anything I do doesn’t reflect back on them,” Sara said. “And while I was out, I ran into someone I wasn’t expecting.”

“Hi, Oliver,” Roy said as Sara motioned for him to say something.

Oliver was glad he was sitting, as that was about the last voice he expected to hear. Roy had left town after the team faked his death. He shouldn’t be anywhere near Starling City, yet he was there. Why and why now?

“Roy. How are you?”

“I’m good, now. Had to leave Monument Point after some guy started asking around about me, rather than Jason. Figured I’d come here, talk to you guys and try to decide what I should do next. Went to the lair, only to find it totally trashed. Went looking for you at night, but didn’t see you out and couldn’t risk going to the loft.”

“Yeah, too many cameras around there, not to mention the building’s own security staff. Be the same trying to approach Felicity, too,” Oliver said.

“Exactly. So, here I am and as I was looking for you, I noticed how bad things had gotten. I decided to try and do something about it, while I worked out what to do next. Broke into SCPD’s evidence warehouse and took your old uniform, plus some other stuff. Been going out as the Arrow the last couple of nights. Last night, I ran into someone dressed like one of Nyssa’s people who seemed to know me. So, I took a chance and followed them. Imagine my surprise when she lowered her hood and mask to reveal Sara. Never been so happy to see someone in my life,” Roy told him.

“I’ll bet, Roy. Also bet you have some questions, so let me fill you in on a few things, including some things that even the team doesn’t know. The night you left Starling, Ra’s upped the ante by stabbing Thea. He then made me an offer. He would allow me to use something called the Lazarus Pit to save her life, if I acceded to his demand that I become his Heir. I accepted, while making plans of my own to defeat him. To prove my loyalty, I had to do things that pitted me against the team, including taking Lyla hostage to force the team to surrender Nyssa. Needless to say, by the end of it, when I finally defeated Ra’s, none of them were on my side.”

“One of the bargains I made was with Malcolm Merlyn. In return for his help, I was to surrender the League to him once I defeated Ra’s. Fortunately, Nyssa was able to show me the mistake I would be making if I did that, so I killed him instead. Now, I am Ra’s al Ghul and Nyssa is my wife, because her father forced us to marry and the only way out is for one of us to die. The team, however, does not know that I am Ra’s. Thea, Sin and now you are the only ones not in the League who know this,” Oliver told him.

“And Sara?”

“How is she alive? Nyssa and I used the Lazarus Pit and some help from a friend to resurrect her. We sent her back to Starling City to watch over our families, as well as have some time with hers.”

“Well, like I said, I’m glad she’s here. I really needed to see a friendly face,” Roy said after spending a couple of minutes thinking about what Oliver had told him. While he wasn’t thrilled with some of it, he could understand why he’d done it. It was life on the street, you do what you have to in order to survive. His biggest objection was to Oliver allying with Malcolm Merlyn, but then he’d corrected
that mistake in the best way possible. If Merlyn was truly dead, then Thea was safer and that was all
Roy could ever want for her.


“No, but if I get in a tight spot and need someone to watch my back, I know Sara can fight. I’ve seen
her kick ass. Can you do that?”

“Not yet, but we’re going to get her there, right Sin?” Sara asked with a grin.

“I’d say you’ve got two people to watch your back, Roy,” Oliver said. “And if you’re interested, I
know we’d have a place for you in the League.”

“I appreciate that, Oliver. I really do. I’m just not sure…”

“Hey, I understand, Roy. Just know that the offer is there if you ever want it. And don’t think that
my friendship or our assistance is tied to you joining the League. No matter what, you’re family Roy.
And we take care of family.”

“I know, Oliver. I’m just thinking about Thea. She came to see me once, in Monument Point, about a
month after I left. I figure Felicity told her where I was. And as much as I love her, I knew that a life
on the run wouldn’t be what you or I would want for her. So, I left. Found a new place to live and a
new job, all the while wishing things could be different, that we could have a normal life. No more
Arrow or vigilante work, no more getting into trouble. It would be boring, but safe. And I would do
that for her. That life isn’t meant to be right now and maybe not ever, but I have to hope that
someday, someway, we can be together,” Roy said, looking down at his shoes.

“And you know that, as protective as I am of Thea, that there is no way I’d want her to join the
League. That I would try to force you apart, like I did when you were infected by the Mirakuru,”
Oliver said. “I’m sorry, Roy. Sorry that you had to give all of that up for me.”

“Don’t be, Oliver. It’s like Felicity says, ‘My life, my choice’. I made my decision with my eyes
wide open and if I had to make that choice again, I’d do the exact same thing. Like I said that night,
you’d saved all of us multiple times, this time, we had to save you. Besides, if it hadn’t been for you
and Thea, I’d probably be in prison or dead by now. Stealing her purse was probably the best worst
decision I’d ever made.”

“Yeah, maybe it was. Look, stick around Starling for a bit, while we get this sorted out. Sara and Sin
will make sure you have food and such. And if you want to keep going out as the Arrow, I have no
objections to that. Just keep your head on a swivel, OK?”

“Got it,” Roy told him.

“Sara, work with him. He still needs some more training, especially if he’s going to be out there
essentially alone. And Roy, that wasn’t a shot at you. You’re used to working with a team. Things
are a little different when you’re out there alone. Sara’s more used to that, because a lot of times,
that’s how the League does things,” Oliver said.

“I’ve got absolutely no problems with Sara training me. Felicity told me about the time you and Dig
went up against her and she was having no problems with the pair of you.”

“No, she wasn’t,” was all Oliver said with a laugh.

“How do you want me to handle it if I go out there with Roy?” Sara asked.
Oliver went silent at that, thinking about it. Having the Arrow back could help things, he knew. But people would likely associate him with the rest of the team and Oliver wanted to avoid tying the League too closely to them. Especially if Roy’s problems somehow followed him home from Monument Point. No, if she went out there with him, it would have to be as the Canary and the team would just have to deal with that.

“If you go out together, use the Canary costume. Also, I need you to go see Felicity. We need to figure out how they found Roy, see if that leads back to who it was that found him and why they’re looking for him. It’ll also help for when the team learns that someone’s going out as the Arrow.”

“You want them to know?” Roy asked.

“I’d rather they figure know about it than have them run into someone one night wearing my old suit. Might save you from a bullet in the back. Because, I’m not sure if Dig would or wouldn’t shoot me if he thought I was back out there,” Oliver said.

“Damn. When you said things happened, I didn’t expect it to be that bad. I figured Dig and you walked away to sort things out and the next time you saw each other, you’d work it out.”

“Maybe someday we might. But right now, he’s still mad about the decisions I made and the fact that he feels I trusted Malcolm Merlyn more than him or Felicity. Until he can come to terms with that, I don’t think we’ll be able to fix things. And that’s not even getting into the whole ‘I am Ra’s al Ghul’ problem.”

“Mister Diggle still equates the League with my father and his actions. He does not see the good that the League has done, nor would he accept that my husband is trying to change the League. Those changes will happen slowly, but they are happening,” Nyssa said.

At that, silence fell on both ends of the line. Only Sara and Nyssa knew the change that Oliver had already brought to the League, just by being who he was. Nyssa’s father, for all his years and wisdom, had often been blinded by the blood lust he himself was suffering from his use of the Lazarus Pit. Once he became fixed on an idea, he expected instant obedience to his command and refused to listen to advice to the contrary. Oliver, on the other hand, listened, even if he might not always take the advice offered. Also, Oliver was more concerned that innocent lives be spared than Nyssa’s father had been. Not that he didn’t care about innocents, just that they were less of a concern than the League accomplishing their goal. Or, when cleansing a city, they were of no concern at all.

“Well, I’m going to get to work with Sin, so we’ll call you later,” Sara said, knowing that she was supposed to be training Sin. Now, she’d have to train them both as well as find time today to go and see Felicity. All told, it was going to be a busy afternoon.

“Good. And Roy, make sure you call if you need anything, understood?” Oliver stated.

“I will, Oliver. Thank you,” Roy replied before Sara hung up the call.

“Don’t think you’re getting out of this, Roy. You’re going to be training with us, too. Remember?”

“Looking forward to it.”

“Yeah, you say that now, Abercrombie. Just wait until she puts you on your ass for the tenth time and we’ll see if you’re not singing a different tune,” Sin told him with a grin.

Sin and Sara went and got changed, then the three of them went downstairs to the garage and over to the mats. Sara decided to start with Sin, as she needed the most training. They went back over the strikes and blocks that she had already learned, making sure that she had those down first. After that,
it was combinations of the strikes as well as working on footwork. Roy leaned against a post and just watched, somewhat surprised at how well his friend was doing. He wondered how long she’d been training with Sara.

When Sin started to tire, Sara switched to working with Roy. Oliver had trained him in archery predominantly, but also mixed in as hand-to-hand. Sara decided to teach him Jeet Kune Do was well, feeling that it would work well with what he already knew. Because he had some experience, he was able to pick things up faster than Sin had been. He was also in better shape than she was, so it took him longer to tire. By the time he did, Sara was also beginning to get tired as well.

“So? Still looking forward to it?” Sin asked with an evil grin, considering Sara had knocked him to the mat over a dozen times.

“Yes, I am. Though, I am curious about why you are training this hard,” Roy said, looking at her.

“Because I want to join the League. Nyssa and Sara want me to think it over more, though. While I do, Sara’s training me. Even if I don’t join the League, I still want to be a strong as they are.”

Roy thought about that, not exactly surprised to hear that Sin wanted to join the League. It wasn’t like there was much keeping her here in Starling City. Really, the only difference between him and her was that he had Thea, he hoped. Though, he did have to wonder if she had taken his letter to heart and decided to move on with her life. Or, if she would ask him what had changed between them, which would force him to admit that nothing had really changed. He was still dead in the eyes of the world and if it became known that he was actually still alive, he’d be wanted by every law enforcement agency in the country. There was no way that he wanted to drag her into that, because she deserved so much better than that.

Sara checked her phone and saw that they would have to get going if she wanted to see Felicity today. So, the three of them went upstairs and the ladies got changed back into their street clothes. After taking it over with Roy, they decided that they would bring dinner back with them tonight and then the Arrow and Canary would hit the streets following up on the drug traffickers they’d been after last night. Sin knew she wasn’t ready yet to join them, so she would figure out a way to make herself useful while they were out. Sara put his order into her phone, so that she’d have it and then they left.

December 9
Starling City

Felicity was sitting in her office, but she wasn’t getting much work done. Or, at least not work for Palmer Technologies. Instead, she was trying to figure out the mystery of Oliver Queen, which is basically the same thing she’d been doing the last couple of days. She’d started the day after her mother and father reunited. Her first move had been trying to trace his cell phone history, to see if she could get a more complete history of where his phone had been since he left Starling City back in May.

While that was processing, she’d moved on to item number two, Amanda Waller’s killing. Something about that just didn’t feel right, so she hacked into the SCPD and downloaded all of their files on the case, as well as photos of the evidence. She wanted to talk with Dig and maybe Lyla about this, see what they thought. The biggest thing that jumped out at her was the lack of physical
evidence at the location that the body was recovered. There were some microscopic pieces of metal in her wounds, but very little blood or other biological evidence found there. To her, that sounded like somebody had moved the body, which is exactly what the SCPD’s report stated as well. But why would they move the body, but make no attempts to really hide it?

The other thing that she was starting to question was in regards to how convenient it was that somebody murdered Waller as soon after she started searching for Oliver and planning to use Dig and Lyla as he fall guys if she couldn’t get to him. It struck her, thinking about it now, that it was too improbable to be a coincidence. But if it was Oliver, how did he get here, get through all of his ARGUS agents she had with her and then get her body to where he dumped it. So, she broke things down and then created searches based on what she needed to look for. First, how did he get here? Assuming he’d left Starling City back in May, he had to have come back into the city in some way. So, she started on the surveillance videos from the airports and train station, running them through facial recognition software. Next, where did the actual fight where the ARGUS agents were killed and Waller was captured take place? She had to hack into ARGUS and get information on the vehicles that the agents had been assigned, so that she could then get license plate numbers and also see if they had GPS trackers installed and enabled. Finding that they were not equipped with trackers made the job harder, but not insurmountable, not for Ghost Fox Goddess. She set up another program to check the city’s traffic cameras for the license plates and then update a map with their location.

Felicity tried to turn her attention to something else, because she knew a watched search never completed. But she just couldn’t get her mind to focus, as so many random thoughts were running rampant through it. So, she was somewhat glad to see Sara walk into her outer office. She didn’t know what the blonde assassin wanted, but whatever it was would definitely distract her from what she was currently thinking about. When she came into the office, Felicity got up from her desk and came around to give her a hug.

“We haven’t seen you in a little while,” Felicity said.

“Yeah, Dig and I talked after the last time I went out with the team and he kind of made it plain that how I do things isn’t welcome on the team,” Sara told her. “And I can’t stop the part of me that sees putting down the bad guy as preferable to one of the team being put down.”

“Hey, I get that and I’m sure Dig does too. But even if you don’t go out with the team anymore, that doesn’t mean that you’re not our friend. We can get together for dinner or something, you know?”

“I know. But right now, I’m looking for a job, as well as handling some League business in the city. Not a lot of time for a social life. But that’s not why I’m here. I need your help with something.”

“Sure. What’s going on, Sara?” Felicity asked.

“So, I went out last night to take care of something and I came across someone in Oliver’s old suit,” Sara said, looking Felicity in the eye so she’d understand exactly what suit she was talking about. “Anyway, I talked to the guy and turns out it’s Roy. He said someone was looking for him, not Jason, in Monument Point. So, he came back here, but couldn’t find Oliver and couldn’t chance getting in touch with you or Thea.”

“What about the untraceable satellite phone I set up for him?”

“He said he trashed it, just in case that was somehow the way the guy had found him.”

Felicity couldn’t help wincing at that. The phone wasn’t exactly cheap, plus she hated the thought of any piece of technology being abused. Besides, when she’d told him that phone was untraceable,
she’d meant it. There was absolutely no way that whoever had found him had done so from the phone.

“How can I help him?” Felicity asked.

“How can you dig in and see if you can figure out who found him, so that we can figure out the why part of it?” Sara asked.

“Certainly. I can get some searches started. I still have all of the details about the identity I crafted for Roy, so I’ll start with those. Once I get where he was living and working from that, I can look for CCTV footage, like traffic cameras, ATM machines, things like that. See if I can spot anyone who looks out of place and run their backgrounds.”

“Thanks, Felicity. I know Roy will appreciate it, he’s a little worried about this. I mean, nobody in Monument Point should have put Jason together with Roy Harper. Somehow this guy did and then found where he worked.”

Felicity nodded at that. She’d thought she’d set up the perfect cover identity for Roy. Maybe that had been the problem, maybe it had been too perfect, too bland. Roy had had a rough life and it showed in many ways. Yet, when she’d crafted Jason, she hadn’t made his life as rough as Roy’s had been. She’d been looking at it from the standpoint of him flying under the radar. Maybe she should have added some rough patches to it, things that would have made Jason a bit more like Roy. Giving her head a mental shake, she refocused.

“I’ll take care of it. I’ll also get you another phone for him. Just tell him not to destroy it this time, please,” Felicity said. “If he does, he gets the Loud Voice.”

“I’ll tell him you said that, Felicity,” Sara said with a grin. “Can you make sure the team knows that Roy’s back in town and going out as the Arrow?”

“Sure, leave that to me. Thea’s going to be over the moon, I’m sure, so don’t be too surprised if you run into Speedy while you’re out there.”

“I’ll warn Roy to wear some extra padding.”

The two women looked at each other and laughed. Felicity wished there was some way to convince Dig or Laurel to wear some sort of body camera, just so she could watch Thea’s reaction when she found Roy. Because she figured it could go either way. Thea might squeal with joy and jump into his arms or she might try to take one of her arrows and shove it up Roy’s ass for pushing her away only to come running back to Starling the first time he had a problem. OK, so the second was a little over the top, she thought, but only a little.

The pair talked a little more before Sara left. She wanted to grab some coffee on her way back to the apartment, but knew she needed a nap more. She’d get the coffee on the way to the safe house tonight, along with the promised Big Belly Burger. When she got outside of Palmer Technologies, she found Sin at the motorcycle waiting. Going over, she climbed on and waited for Sin to get on behind her. Once she was settled, they took off for the apartment. Meanwhile, Felicity was working on getting the various programs and searches crafted to look into how Roy had been found. Once that was done, all she could do was sit back and wait while trying to work on the work for her day job.
Felicity sat in the lair waiting for the others to arrive. Her computers were online and still processing the searches that she has running. The ones on Roy had established his apartment and former job in Monument Point, which she’d then used to figure out the locations of possible cameras she could access for surveillance footage. Now, her programs were running to get access to those camera and whatever footage remained for the past month. She went that far back, because she didn’t know when Roy had discovered that someone was asking about him. She also couldn’t be sure that whoever it was hadn’t done some watching and checking before going that route.

The ones on Oliver were still running. She’d made sure to check both before she’d left her office and went out for a quick supper as well as when she’d first settled into her station in the lair. Felicity saw that the deep dive into Oliver’s cell phone’s location was producing results, quite a bunch. The programs were producing both a list of the results as well as a map, with the date and time available once you hovered the mouse over the red dot. Once that program was done, she’d start additional searches for things like clearing customs and airport security video.

Felicity was so engrossed in what she was doing that she didn’t hear Dig enter the lair. If fact, she didn’t become aware of him until he put a hand on her shoulder. She would have catapulted out of the chair if not for that hand.

“Easy, Felicity. It’s just me,” Dig told her.

“Frack, Dig. Don’t do that,” Felicity said, trying to calm her racing heart.

“What are you working on that has you so absorbed that you didn’t hear me call you twice?”

“A couple of things, actually. Sara came to see me today. She said she was out doing something, for the League if I had to guess. Anyway, she ran into someone wearing Oliver’s old Arrow costume.”

“You mean the one that the police took off of Roy? The one that should be in SCPD’s evidence storage?” Dig asked, surprised by this.

“Yep, that one. She confronted the person wearing it only to find out it was Roy,” Felicity told him. “Somehow, somebody came looking for Roy Harper in Monument Point. And that shouldn’t be possible, I did a good job on the background I created for him, even if it was sort of a rush job. I mean, there is no way that somebody should have been able to crack that, not in only six months. So, I’m running various searches to see if I can figure out what happened and who did it.”

“So, who’s going to tell Thea?”

“Tell me what?” Thea asked from the entrance to the lair, having just barely heard that last sentence as she came down the stairs. She definitely caught the look that Dig and Felicity shared.

“That Roy is back in Starling,” Dig said, watching her. “Sara ran into him last night and told Felicity about it. He left Monument Point after someone came around asking about Roy Harper. He came back here looking for help, I would guess.”
“How long has he been back?”

“I don’t know. Certainly long enough to figure out that Oliver is gone, because when Sara ran into him, Roy was wearing a full Arrow costume.”

Thea was worried and upset. The worry was about how someone had found Roy, why they were even looking for him in the first place and what did that mean. As well, she was concerned about him going out there all alone as the Arrow. She knew that Oliver had done it when he’d first returned, but that didn’t make it any less dangerous. She was upset because he hadn’t reached out to her or any of the team, if she was understanding this. Instead, he’d just happened to run into Sara and then had her let Felicity know that he was back. Typical, she thought, steaming.

On the other side of that was how much she missed him. Missed the way that he could find the one thing to say that would make her feel better. The feel of his arms around her while they relaxed on the couch watching movies. The fact that despite the lies that he’d told her, the things that he’d kept from her, he’d never misled her about the way he felt about her.

“Are you going to be alright, Thea?” Felicity asked her.

“I’ll have to be, won’t I? The criminals in this city aren’t going to wait while I have myself a good cry or something,” Thea told her, trying to keep her voice level.

“Well, why don’t you go and get changed. We’re still waiting on Laurel to get here and for it to get a little darker before we go out, so take all the time you need,” Dig said, watching as she went over to where her uniform was hanging. Once she’d pulled it down, she headed off to get changed. When she was gone, he turned back to Felicity.

“You said you were working on a couple of things. Roy’s situation is one, what is the other or others?”

“Something that’s been nagging me for a while. It really came into focus a couple of days ago when my mom reunited with my dad. I was thinking about how what he’d gone through was kinda similar to what Oliver had. From that, I started thinking about when Oliver left after the Undertaking. Where did he go then?” Felicity asked.

“To Lian Yu,” Dig said, looking at her with a slightly puzzled look on his face.

“OK, so the last time he needed to get away from the city and everything that had happened, he goes to the most deserted place you can think of. But two years later, he needs to escape and he does what? Go on some kind of globetrotting adventure?”

“Maybe he did that because he figured the first place we’d look would be Lian Yu. Not to mention, Slade Wilson is imprisoned there as well. After everything that happened, I doubt Oliver would want to be on the same island as him.”

“I agree, as far as it goes. I just think that Oliver would find someplace remote and stay there for a while. This,” Felicity said, pointing to the screen where the map of all the places Oliver’s phone had been was displayed, “doesn’t make sense. I mean, he’s all over the place and rarely in the same place for more than a couple of days.”

Dig looked at the map, his brow furrowing. Seeing this, the way Oliver moved from place to place, he started to share Felicity’s concerns. The pattern of movement didn’t make any sense and was definitely not how most people would have laid out their travel. The question was, what did it mean? Because to him, this looked like one of two things and neither of them were exactly good. Either
Oliver was running from something or Oliver was the one doing the hunting. But if Oliver was running from something, why wouldn’t he ask them for help? And if he was the one doing the chasing, why?

“OK. For now, I think we keep this between just the two of us. At least until we have more to show that just this map and guesses about what it all means. Because Oliver sounded fine when we’ve talked to him on the phone, or anything that would raise any red flags. So, keep digging and we’ll see what it tells us and go from there,” Dig said.

Felicity looked like she wanted to say more, but they both saw Thea coming back. So, for now, their discussion had to be tabled. Dig decided to get ready himself while they waited for Laurel to arrive. Laurel finally came in as Dig was changing. Felicity brought the older Lance sister up to date regarding Roy, which meant that the entire team was now aware that he was back in town. She was also looking for criminal activity significant enough to send the team after. Otherwise, they would just go out and patrol the city. Thea, who was looking over Felicity’s shoulder, hoped that they would just go on patrol, as that would increase the likelihood of them running into Roy.

Laurel went and quickly got changed. When she came back, Dig had decided that it still wasn’t dark enough to go out. They spent the next hour training and sparring, the two women against Dig. Then it was Dig and one of them against the other. Knowing that they would be hitting the streets soon, they didn’t go full out. They only did that on nights that they wouldn’t patrol.

“Guys, the police are tracking a very large drug shipment,” Felicity called out, her voice bringing training to an end.

“Where at, Felicity?” Dig asked.

“Looks like it’s going to be the docks, which one is the question. I’m looking to see if there’s a specific pier mentioned.”

“Alright, let’s get out there and see if we can find this.”

“Dig, the police will have this covered. Do we really want to make it a three way battle, especially considering what happened at Kord Industries,” Laurel said.

“And what if they don’t? Do you want to risk all of those drugs getting into the city, not to mention all of the money that the criminals in this city will make off those drugs? That money will enable them to buy protection from police officers who aren’t like your father, buy bigger guns so that they can take on those officers who do stand up against them. Next thing you know, we have another situation like The Mayor or Brickwell,” Dig responded.

Laurel nodded at that. They most definitely didn’t need another Brickwell-type, bent on taking a part of the city for themselves. If Oliver hadn’t shown up as the Arrow, they would have lost that fight. And in losing, they likely would have ended up getting a lot of innocent people killed. As it was, Ted Grant had been killed, as had others. They couldn’t let something like that happen again. They couldn’t be put into a situation where something like that was necessary. So, Dig was right. They had to make sure this drug shipment didn’t get into the city.

“Let’s go.”

December 9, 2015

Starling City
Roy and Sara were at the docks. This was the information that Roy had gotten from the drug dealer he’d confronted last night. The shipment was supposed to be massive, big enough that several of the city’s gangs had been willing to put aside long standing issues to work together on it. What worried Roy was what would happen afterwards. Once the gangs had split the shipment and returned to their respective parts of the Glades, now with a lot of drugs to sell. With that kind of power, they’d be able to either push the smaller gangs out or take them over.

Looking out at where the gangs were all gathering, Sara frowned. That was a lot of firepower, making her wonder. How much did these groups really trust one another? A few of them keep looking inward, instead of outwards, as if they expected the threat to come from there. She was thinking about how they might be able to use that when Roy nudged her. Looking to where he was pointing, she smiled. Laurel and Thea were just visible on the rooftop two buildings over.

The sound of three semis pulling up got everyone’s attention, as did the four SUVs that accompanied them. The trucks parked in such a way that their trailer doors were facing the group of gang members. But what got Sara’s attention were the men who got out of the SUVs. She could see well enough to make out the tattoos that were visible and alarm bells started ringing. Glancing over to the other building, she saw that Laurel and Thea were getting ready to strike. Swiftly, she pulled Roy’s bow from his hands and grabbed an arrow. Taking careful aim, she fired it, just missing her sister.

“What the hell, Sara,” Roy asked, though he took care to keep his voice low.

“Those men are Bratva, Roy,” Sara said, as she caught her sister’s wide eyes and waved her back. “This doesn’t feel right, OK? The Bratva is trying to take over crime in this city, yet is going to sell drugs to three of the biggest gangs in the city? Drugs that will finance those groups for months to come?”

“So, if it’s not a drug deal, then what is it?”

“An execution,” was all she could say as the trailer doors opened, revealing not the promised drug shipment, but rather three M-134 Miniguns. As soon as the doors cleared, the men manning the weapons opened fire. The rest was a foregone conclusion, as the gang members were virtually cut in half by the streams of bullets. After a minute, the guns stopped and the men from the SUVs advanced, looking for survivors. The few that were found were ruthlessly dispatched while the trucks pulled away. Once this was done, the Bratva soldiers got back into their SUVs and followed them.

Sara and Roy stood up as they Bratva men left, looking down at the scene below. Roy was stunned, as nothing that he had ever seen had prepared him for this. This was like something out of an action movie or something. Yet, looking at the bodies down below, he knew it was all too real. It was also a major game changer. Bows and arrows seemed useless against that kind of firepower. The sound of footsteps behind them got the pair to turn. Unfortunately for Roy, his turn took him right into the fist of Thea, which caught him flush on the jaw.

“Son of a bitch,” Roy muttered, as that was the second time today he’d taken a fist to the jaw. Thea followed that punch up with one to the belt line, which doubled him over.

“You fucking bastard,” Thea yelled at him. “You left me in bed, no note, no nothing. I had to go to your job to find out that you were leaving. Couldn’t you at least have had the courage to tell me to my face?”

“I deserved that.”
“You fucking better believe you deserved that.”

Seeing her prepare to deliver another punch, Roy took her and wrapped her in a hug. Thea struggled for a good minute or more, but he just held on. When she stopped, he loosened the hug and raised his hands to her face, his thumbs stroking her cheeks.

“I couldn’t face you, because I knew if I did, you’d be able to talk me out of leaving. And this life, it isn’t what I want for you. It isn’t the life you deserve. I mean, I made it all of six months before someone was on to me and I’m back on the run again. Even if I can come up with a new identity, that’s what my life is now, a life on the run,” Roy told her. “And I love you too much to put you through that.”

“And you didn’t think that I deserved to have a say in this?” Thea asked hotly. “That maybe I was willing to take that, if the alternative was to not have you at all. Damn it, Roy Harper, I love you.”

With that, she pulled him in for a kiss. It was deep, full of passion and probably would have lasted much longer than it did if not for Sara mischievously clearing her throat. Roy and Thea turned to glare at her, only to find that both Lance sisters were grinning at them. It was only then that the sound of police sirens seemed to reach their ears. Incredibly close sirens at that, which was clearly why they needed to come back to their senses and go.

Roy and Thea looked at each other and then both fired lines off into the distance. Sara and Laurel followed along behind them, as they moved from rooftop to rooftop. Once they were away from the scene, Roy stopped and waited for the others to join him.

“Where to, Sara?” Roy asked.

“Verdant is probably the best place. That way you don’t have to go downtown and we don’t have to expose a League safe house,” Sara said.

“And you think having us there would expose it?” Laurel asked her sister.

“I’m not necessarily saying that. But the way that Dig and Felicity seem to feel about the League makes me wonder if the day might come where we’re on opposing sides. So, I’d rather keep this a secret.”

“And because the League was after us last year, I’d argue that some mistrust is bound to be left over, Sara. I mean, you weren’t here. They tried to frame Oliver for murder, which is why Roy is now on the run. When that failed, they nearly killed Thea. And when Oliver gave in and went into the League, he was tasked to bring Nyssa in. He did that by kidnapping Lyla and leaving your namesake all alone in an apartment. Plus, there’s the whole bio-weapon attack that could have killed thousands.”

“You seem to forget that it wasn’t the League that did all that. They acted at the direction of one man, Nyssa’s father. And he was killed by Oliver, in order to save this city,” Sara said. “But you’re right, I wasn’t here. I was dead and I still would be dead if it wasn’t for Nyssa and the new Ra’s al Ghul, but I guess that doesn’t count.”

“That’s not what I’m saying and you know it, Sara. Too much happened for all of us to easily accept that the League is now our friends. It’s just the way it is,” Laurel said.

“On second thought, Roy, I’ll see you back at the safe house.”

With that, Sara turned and ran to the edge of the roof. Jumping to the next building, she raced as fast as she could across the rooftops. She didn’t stop running until she reached the safe house. Going
inside, she didn’t see Sin in the living room or kitchen, so she went to the bedroom and undressed. She then went to the shower and stepped inside, turning the water on and getting it hot. She just stood there and let the water pelt down on her, letting her tears flow. Because listening to her sister had made her feel like they were now on opposite sides of the fence.

When she’d come back to Starling, she’d been so happy that Oliver was giving this to her. Now, though, it felt like the worst decision she’d ever made. She wondered if things wouldn’t have been better off if she’d just let them believe that she was still dead. The people who loved her best were Oliver and Nyssa and they would have still been there. She would have still had them and her family could have gone on mourning her. Instead, she’d come home and while that initial homecoming was everything that she could have hoped for, the rest wasn’t. Her father was busy with his work, as was Laurel and they’d barely seen each other since that first night back.

Feeling the water go cold, Sara turned it off and stepped out of the shower. Taking a towel, she quickly dried off before going into the bedroom. Putting on a clean pair of underwear, she looked at the bed for a moment and decided that she was just too tired to go home tonight. So, she climbed under the covers and curled up on her side before closing her eyes and falling asleep.

December 10, 2015

Nanda Parbat

Oliver was feeling good today. His shoulder felt like it was well healed and he had managed to get caught up on League business. The later was largely helped by having Nyssa back, he would be the first to admit. Her wise insights into many of the issues enabled him to find a solution quickly. It also helped to have someone to bounce ideas off of, especially when making plans. So, it was that after his morning training and breakfast that both he and Nyssa had the rest of the morning free. This, in turn, had lead them to go to the large training room that was set aside for archery training.

Oliver wasn’t the least bit surprised to find Artemis there, for this room seemed like her personal domain. When they walked in, she was shooting at targets at the very far end of the room. They both stayed back while she finished off her quiver, seeing her sister Jade sitting on the floor next to a rack of bows and quivers.

“Your skills continue to impress,” Nyssa said.

“Only because I continuously practice them, Nyssa,” Artemis replied.

“Perhaps you have time for some friendly competition against my husband.”

“It would be my honor, Ra’s. What do you propose?”

“Those disks of yours were fun. How about we use those again? I noticed that you had different colors, so we could do one color exclusively yours and the other mine. Closest to the middle the most number of times, say twenty-three to eliminate chance as much as we can,” Oliver said after thinking about it for a moment.

“That sounds interesting and fun. You’re on,” Artemis told him before walking away with her sister to gather up the required disks. It took them a little while to sort through and separate out enough of the disks, but they returned with forty-six disks in two stacks. One stack was bright yellow and the other was a lime green color. In order to pick who would go first, they had Nyssa put both of her
hands behind her back and extend a number of fingers. Oliver and Artemis each would pick a number and the closest to the actual number had the right to choose. Oliver picked eight, while Artemis went with four. Nyssa actually grimaced when she pulled her hands from behind her back, showing all of the fingers on one hand extended and the other a closed fist.

“It’s your choice,” Nyssa said to Artemis.

“Ra’s may go first.”

Oliver stepped over to the rack and found a quiver of arrows. Setting it on his back and adjusting the straps, he walked to the firing line once he was ready. Jade was once again pressed into service to toss the disks. She waited for him to be fully ready and then nod before she threw the first disk into the air. Oliver reacted swiftly, drawing, knocking and firing before the disk reached its apex. The torn disk fluttered to the ground, while the arrow impacted the wall beyond. Nyssa ran out and gathered up the disk, bringing it back to the others with a smile on her face. The arrow had torn a hole in the disk about half an inch from the center.

Artemis nodded at that, then stepped to the line for her turn. When the disk was launched, she was just as quick off the mark. This time it was a red disk that fell to the floor with a hole in it, never reaching the midpoint of its flight. When Nyssa brought this one back, there was a collective whistle from the three of them before Nyssa ran from the room. To the naked eye, it was identical to Oliver’s shot. Nyssa had gone to fetch a set of calipers so that they could more accurately judge the distance from the small nub at the center of the disks.

When Nyssa returned with the instrument, she checked each of the disk and then had Jade check them as well. Artemis and Oliver both exchanged a look, thinking roughly the same thing. This was going to be a long day if they had to do this every time.

“This round goes to Artemis,” Nyssa declared. “By two millimeters.”

“Wow, that’s close,” Artemis said, as Oliver chuckled softly before stepping back up to the line.

And so it went for the next twenty-one sets of disks. Oliver would shoot first, followed by Artemis. Once the disks were gathered, their “Judges” would inspect them and then be forced to measure. The winners disks went into a stack, while the losing disk was disposed of into a large garbage can. Things like plastic were rare in Nanda Parbat and as they had no facilities to handle such waste, it would be separated out later and then taken on a supply flight to a large city to be disposed of. Or perhaps, Oliver thought as he looked at the damaged disks, they could be repaired and used again.

Approaching the line for the last disk, he knew it did not matter. Artemis was already ahead by two disks. All he was shooting for now was his own pride and the knowledge that he had given it his best effort. He could have cursed Nyssa for thinking of the calibers, which had reduced this contest down to one of fractions of an inch. He could have cursed his shoulder which had started to ache about ten arrows before. But, those would have just been excuses and he wouldn’t denigrate Artemis’ performance by doing something so petty. If he had had to lose such a contest, he could at least take satisfaction in the fact that if was against a truly worthy opponent.

Both of them took the same care with their last shots as they had with their first. Neither was prepared to just give this point away, which earned Artemis an additional measure of respect from Oliver. She had this won, she could have just fired off a useless last arrow and it wouldn’t have changed that. But, she was going to still make him work for that point. Once the shots were done and judged, Oliver ended up losing 12 to 11, his last shot being only 1 millimeter better.

“Well done, Artemis,” Oliver told her as he removed his quiver and shook hands with the woman.
“That was everything I had hoped for in a contest against you, except perhaps the result.”

“I agree, my lord,” Artemis replied. “Though I am pleased with the result, it still could have gone either way with how close some of those were.”

“Agreed. I think before I try this again, I will have to make sure those calibers are hidden or lost.”

“No, you will not, husband,” Nyssa told him sternly. “In a contest such as this, it is only right that it be judged as accurately as possible.”

“I agree, Nyssa, even if those likely cost me the match,” Oliver said with a smile. “But, perhaps it is better this way. Soon the whole League will know that Artemis has bested Ra’s al Ghul in an archery contest, which will make the others listen more closely when she is instructing them in the art. Don’t you agree, Navid?”

“Yes, my lord,” came a response from the rafters as an assassin dropped down to the floor and bowed before Ra’s. Nyssa was impressed that Oliver had noticed the man, as focused as he had been on the contest. For herself, she’d heard him come in around the third set of disks. There were a pair of additional League members up there as well, but she ignored them for the present. She judged that they had likely come in after Navid, as whispers of the contest had started to flow through the fortress. She knew, without Oliver uttering a single word, without Artemis needing to boast or brag, that this would spread quickly through the League. And with each telling of the tale, Artemis’ feat would grow all the greater. Looking towards the rafters, she noticed that all had left. Navid was the only one left and likely had remained only because Oliver had singled him out.

“Return to your tasks, Navid.”

“Yes, my lord.”

“Well done, Artemis,” Oliver said to her, resting a hand on her shoulder. “May your students be blessed with your wisdom, that they might become archers in your image.”

“You do me a great honor, my lord,” Artemis said as she knelt.

“No greater than the honor you and your sister do to the League. Now, we will take our leave, so that you might enjoy your time together.”

With that, Oliver and Nyssa left the room. As they walked, Oliver rolled his shoulder, trying to ease the ache that he was feeling. He’d thought this morning that he was fine, but after that, he knew that he still needed to heal some more. He ignored the whisper that told him the Lazarus Pit could take care of that, that he didn’t need to wait. No, he had no intention of using the Pit for this. Besides, he’d fought through worse pain that this and would again in the future.
December 10, 2015
Starling City

When Roy woke up, it took him a moment to realize where he was. A rueful smile came to his face as he slowly turned in bed and saw Thea still sound asleep next to him. He knew he shouldn’t have done this to either of them, but right now, he didn’t really care. This was what he’d dreamed about, when he allowed himself to dream about the future. He and Thea together, happy.

Taking care not to wake her, he slipped out of bed and got dressed. He could see the sky was still dark, but getting lighter. He couldn’t be seen here, not only because he was supposed to be dead but also because he was dressed as the Arrow. Pausing for a moment once dressed, he looked for a pen and paper. It took some searching, but he found what he needed. Writing her a quick note, he left it on his pillow before leaving the bedroom. Taking the stairs slowly, he went thru the lower level of the loft and out onto the balcony. From there, he fired off a grapnel arrow and launched himself out into the city.

For her part, Thea had woken when she felt Roy get out of bed. She’d chosen to remain silent and pretend that she was still asleep, so that this night could end on a good note. If she’d shown she was awake, they would have talked and if they’d talked, she would have asked him to stay even knowing that he couldn’t. She didn’t want to do that to him. Now that she could no longer hear him, she rolled over and pulled the pillow he’d used to her, sighing contently as she felt its warmth and smelled the lingering scent of Roy on it. She also felt the piece of paper that Roy had left for her.

“Thea, I’m sorry for leaving without saying goodbye. Just know that this time, I’m not running away. Somehow, we’ll figure out a way to be together, to have our future. Know that I love you, always. Roy”

Getting up, Thea slipped on a sweatshirt and a pair of yoga pants before leaving the bedroom. Stopping in the kitchen, she started the coffee maker. She then walked over to the balcony doors and stepped outside.

“I love you too, Roy,” Thea whispered to the wind, knowing that he wouldn’t hear it, but needing to say the words none the less.

Roy used a number of lines to get from Thea’s loft to the edge of the Glades. From there, he was able to run across rooftops to make his way to the safe house. By the time he reached it, day was breaking and the chances of him getting spotted increased. So, he was thankful to go through the roof access and be out of sight. Going into the apartment proper, he walked through to the bedroom he was using and went inside, stopping as he took in the bed. A smile came to his face and he really wished for a camera in that moment, because this would be perfect to send to Thea and Oliver. Sometime during the night, Sara had been joined by Sin in the bed, the smaller woman spooned up against the blonde and hugging her.

Sara opened her eye at that moment, meaning his chance was absolutely gone. So, he settled for a grin before gathering some clothes and heading for the bathroom. The sound of the shower coming on woke Sin up as well. Sin gave her best friend a squeeze before letting go and rolling out of bed.
“Did he just get in?” Sin asked as she came around the side of the bed.

“I think so, so hopefully things with Thea went well. Or that she didn’t hurt him so badly it took him this long to make it back here,” Sara said with a laugh, drawing one from Sin as well.

“I’ll go get started on breakfast.”

“Thanks, Sin. Make sure you make a lot, because I’ll bet Roy’s hungry.”

Sin laughed again as she left the room, humming what definitely sounded like cheesy porn music. Sara was still chuckling when Roy came out of the bathroom. He was dressed in a pair of jeans and a t-shirt, carrying the Arrow costume in his arms. Going to the closet, he hung the costume up.

“So, I take it things went well with Thea?” Sara asked.

“Yes, we talked and ….” Roy started, only for Sara to cut him off.

“It that what they’re calling it these days? Well, I suppose that is one form of communication.”

“Sara, you are so bad.”

“Oh, come on, Roy. This is your girlfriend, whom you haven’t seen in months. I’d be disappointed if all you two did was just talk,” Sara told him. “I mean, Nyssa and I were insatiable when we’d get back together after a long mission and that was usually only a matter of a couple of weeks. Heck, I’m actually surprised that you’re even here instead of wherever you guys were.”

“We were at her loft and I left because I couldn’t take the chance of anyone seeing me around there,” Roy told her. “But, before I left, I left her a note saying that I’m not running away and that we’ll figure this out.”

“We’ll be there for you, you know that right?”

“I know and it means a lot.”

Alright. So, plan for the day is breakfast followed by training. We’ll take a break and I’ll call Oliver, because he needs to know that the Bratva is making some major moves. If I’m right, taking over Starling City will just be the beginning. Once they have the city, they’ll spread out to Bludhaven, Monument Point, maybe even Central City, building off of what they’ve accomplished here. And if last night was any sign, they’re already too well armed for the team to take care of,” Sara told him.

“What are you thinking?” Roy asked.

“I don’t know, exactly. Maybe have Oliver bring the League back here, but I don’t like the idea because of the amount of innocents that could get hurt. Maybe Oliver will have some ideas.”

“Yeah, he should.”

“Breakfast is ready,” Sin called from the kitchen.

Roy and Sara came out of the bedroom and headed for the table. There were three plates set out and it was evident that Sin had taken her friend’s humorous comment to heart, as one of the plates was piled high with eggs, bacon and hash browns. Roy gave them both a look when they took the smaller plates, but that didn’t stop him from doing a masterful job of clearing the plate before him.

“Worked up an appetite, Abercrombie?”
“Don’t let anyone kid you. Running across half the city on roof tops is hard work,” Roy told her.

“That’s the story you’re going with? That it’s because you were running across roofs?” Sin asked with a smirk. “I wonder if I should call Thea and see what she’s having for breakfast.”

“Probably pancakes or waffles.”

“But how many, that’s the question. And does she do the Eggo waffles or homemade with a griddle? Because she might be too tired to go to all that work this morning.”

“Ha ha ha, Sin,” Roy said. “So funny.”

“We thought it was. Right, Sara,” Sin told him, looking at her friend for confirmation.

“It is kinda funny, Roy. But we’ll be good from now on, right Sin?” Sara offered.

“OK, we’ll back off the teasing, Abercrombie.”

Once everyone was done eating, Roy cleared the table and took the dishes to the sink. All his life, he’d never had a dishwasher and this place was no different. So, he filled the sink with hot water and dish soap, then set to scrubbing. He did the dishes first, then tackled the pans that Sin had used. Sara came over to help, taking on the drying for him. By the time they were done, the dish rack was empty, the sink was clean and the dishes were put away for the next time.

The trio went downstairs and headed over to the mats. Sara started with Sin, working on combinations of movements so that she could both defend and attack without missing a beat. The younger girl was progressing nicely, the blonde assassin thought before picking up the pace and adding in a couple of new moves. Sin stumbled back the first time, but quickly adapted to the new moves. Sara then slowed down, so that she could show the best way to use them as well as defend against them. Once she saw Sin had the hang of them, the faster pace resumed. She also took care to mix up her movements, so that there was no pattern for her student to pick up on and then make her moves based on that.

Sara and Sin trained together for an hour, then it was Roy’s turn. Their training was much the same, beginning by review of what was previously taught before adding in new attacks. As he was a little further along than Sin was, Sara decided to start incorporating some kicks into the moves she taught him. These were all low kicks, aimed for an opponents shins, knees and thighs. She liked these because they were quick strikes that if done right would take an opponent off their feet. She wanted to get Roy and later Sin used to the idea that taking an enemy out as fast as you can is the best option. She didn’t think that would be a problem for either of them given their backgrounds. For her, it hadn’t taken too long after everything she’d experienced on Lian Yu before joining the League.

Sara smiled when she took a second to look away from Roy and saw Sin practicing on the Wing Chun dummy. That second almost cost her, though, as Roy tried to use her distraction to his advantage. She was just able to block the punch and sidestep the kick aimed at her shin. She needed to block a couple of more strikes before she was able to turn things around and move back to the offensive. Still, she nodded at Roy, liking that he was fighting to win even in a training session.

“Nice, Roy,” Sara said. “Next time, though, kick first. Because of it being lower, it can be harder to see. Use the punch as a followup move. Like this.”

Sara kicked for his right shin, which he was able to avoid. However, this opened him up for the punch she threw, as well as the followup strike towards the throat. Roy grimaced, knowing that in a
The real world situation, he’d be out of the fight if not fatally injured. Stepping back and centering himself, Roy got back into the flow of attack and defend. They trained for an hour as well, then Sara called a halt.

The trio went back upstairs and settled into whatever seat happened to be closest and looked the most comfortable. Sara stopped in the bedroom and retrieved her phone before finding her seat. She and Sin were on the couch, while Roy was slumped in an armchair with his feet up on the coffee table. Once she was comfortable, she put the phone on speaker and dialed Oliver.

“Hi, Sara,”

“Hey, Ollie.”

“I’m going to assume something happened, which is why you are calling,” Oliver said.

“Yeah, you could definitely say that. So, when Roy and I ran into each other, we were both running down leads about drugs in Starling. We found out that a big shipment was supposed to be coming in last night, so the Arrow and Canary went out to stop it. When we got to where the deal was supposed to go down, we found three of the biggest gangs in the city gathered. Moreover, it was clear that they were all waiting for the same thing,” Sara told him.

“A fourth player, the one who was selling the drugs.”

“Exactly. As we were waiting, we spotted Thea and Laurel a couple of rooftops over. As we watched, three semis pulled in, along with four SUVs. I watched the men get out of the SUVs and they were Bratva, Ollie.”

“So, the Bertinelli family is gone, the Triad is crippled and the Bratva is the only major criminal organization in Starling. It doesn’t make sense for them to do a major drug deal with these gangs. Some deals for a kilo, maybe. Money’s money, after all. But something as big as you’re talking about, no Bratva captain would approve that, let alone Anatoly,” Oliver told her.

“I know, which is why I warned Thea and Laurel before they attacked. Turns out we were right, because this wasn’t a deal. It was a trap. The trucks had M-134s in their trailers and they used them to cut those three gangs to ribbons. At this point, Ollie, the Bratva effectively controls crime in Starling, because I’m sure that the rest of the criminals in the city are going to hear about this and get the message. Work with us and survive, perhaps even thrive. Compete with us and die,” Sara said.

“You need to warn the team about what we suspect, because this is just the beginning.”

“Yeah, Ollie.”

Oliver picked up on Sara’s lack of enthusiasm and realized that something happened with her and the team, something new.

“What’s wrong, Sara?”

“After we watched what had happened, we met up with Laurel and Thea. Laurel seemed kind of indifferent to Roy being back,” Sara said.

“It’s no big deal, Sara. Your sister and I barely knew each other, except as part of the team. We weren’t buddies, we didn’t hang out together or really anything,” Roy said, not really defending Laurel but rather trying to explain why Laurel reacted the way she did.

“Alright. Anyway, we started talking and Laurel made it clear that she and the rest of the team still
have major trust issues regarding the League. They’re ignoring the fact that it was not the League, but rather Nyssa’s father that was the problem or that without the League I’d still be dead, Thea was still suffering from blood lust. I almost wish I hadn’t come back to Starling City.”

Sin looked at Sara, pain in her eyes. It took Sara a moment to realize what she’d said and how the young woman might have taken it. So, she did the one thing that mattered most right now, she wrapped her arms around Sin and hugged her. Roy knew that Oliver was still on the phone, but knew that this right here was more important. So, he picked up the phone and quietly left the room, going downstairs into the old garage and over to the training area. Taking the phone off speaker, he put it to his ear.

“I’ll take care of informing the team, Oliver. Right now, Sara and Sin need to talk,” Roy told him.

“How are you going to inform the team without being spotted?”

“I’ll figure it out. Maybe wear something to shade my face, like a hat, and keep my head down. I mean, that works all the time in the movies, doesn’t it?”

That got a chuckle out of Oliver.

“What do you want them to do, if they ask?” Roy asked.

“Nothing, because Oliver Queen knows nothing about this. Tell them that Sara spoke with the League and that she suggests that the team avoid the Bratva at all cost until she hears back. Hopefully, Laurel and Thea told John about what happened and he’ll be smart enough to know that they’re outclassed,” Oliver replied, hoping that that would be the case.

“Got it. I’ll let them know.”

“Take care of yourself, Roy.”

With that Oliver disconnected the call. Roy went back upstairs and found the pair of women still talking. He did think that Sin looked a little less upset, so hopefully she’d come to understand that Sara hadn’t meant what she’d said the way that it had sounded. Still, he figured that he’d give them some more time and went to grab his coat. He also took Sara’s Starling City Rockets hat, figuring he could use it to shield his face. Ready to head out, he started towards the stairs again.

“Where are you going, Roy?” Sara asked.

“Figured I’d leave now and head out to find the team. By the time I find them, it should be dark enough that I’ll be able to meet with them,” Roy told her.

“Or, you could just use my phone, which you still have by the way, and call Felicity.”

Sara held out her hand for the phone and Roy handed it over. She pulled up her contacts and found the one for the blonde IT genius. So, she pressed dial and put it on speaker.

“I’m still working on that phone, Sara, but I’ll call you as soon as I have it done,” Felicity said quickly.

“Not why I’m calling, but OK,” Sara told her.

“Sorry, now’s really not a good time to talk, OK. I’ll call you back as soon as I can.”

The three of them look at the phone in confusion when the call disconnected.
“Turn on the TV, Sin. Maybe whatever is going on is on.”

Sin got the TV turned on and they didn’t find anything that gave them a hint as to why Felicity couldn’t talk right now. Maybe there was something going on at Palmer Technologies, something she couldn’t step away from. If other people were listening and she was worried about vigilante business being discussed, then it was only right to stop the phone call. And it wasn’t urgent, as the team most likely wasn’t out in broad daylight.

December 14, 2015

Moscow

Oliver walked into the bar of his hotel. The suit that he wore marked him as not just a foreigner, but a rich one as well. He’d selected this hotel so that he wouldn’t stand out too much. He’d also chosen it as his initial meeting place with the man he’d come to see. Going to the bar, he ordered a vodka and drained the glass. He then held up two fingers and pointed to a table near the back of the room. The bartender nodded and turned away while Oliver went over to the table he’d selected.

Out of habit, Oliver selected a chair that gave him the best view of the bar and the entrance. He let his eyes trail over the men gathered here and found three that he pegged as Bratva. He saw little glimpses of tattoos and the telltale bulge of a concealed pistol under their coats. He honestly would have been surprised if there weren’t members of Bratva present. The fact that there were didn’t bother him in the slightest.

The drinks were brought over to the table and Oliver pushed them both to the middle. Oliver kept scanning the room with his eyes, barely moving his head. It was one of the advantages of how he was sitting, that almost everything and everyone were within his field of view. Finally, he spotted the person he had come to see, trailed by two men who Oliver instantly placed as bodyguards.

Once he had been spotted, Oliver rose and extended a hand as the other man approached the table. He was somewhat surprised when the hand remained unshaken, causing him to lower it before things became awkward.

“You should know that you are not welcome in Russia, Oliver,” Anatoly said as he looked at his former friend and colleague. “Not after what happened with Alexi Leonov. You know how it works, one hand washes the other. You seek favor, must give favor. You did not.”

“I agree. I didn’t grant the favor Alexi sought, because there was a more pressing problem, Slade Wilson. And I couldn’t afford to divide my focus,” Oliver replied.

“That fight was your fight, not ours. And yet, by forcing Alexi to do your bidding, you made it ours and we suffered for it. It has taken almost two years to rebuild what we lost, though it would have taken longer if not for your actions, ‘Arrow’. You broke the Italians for us, you crippled the Triad. Without that, we would still be picking up the pieces.”

“I didn’t do those things for you. I did them so that the people of my city could have a better life. A life free of criminals preying on them every day, a life where the elite few weren’t conspiring to hold them down in the name of greater profits.”

“So, what now? You are here to threaten me, to make me leave ‘your’ city. No. My men like Starling City. They like the weather, the easy money to be made and how ineffective the police are.
They say that they have not even seen ‘the Arrow’, just a few wannabe vigilantes. But most of all, they like the women, especially these two,” Anatoly said, as he removed his phone from his coat pocket and slid it across the small table to Oliver. “They are quite beautiful, I agree.”

“Threatening them would be a grave mistake, Anatoly,” Oliver said flatly.

“Oh, this is not a threat. This is a simple example of cause and effect. I knew, when we began expanding in Starling City that eventually this might occur. Despite all we have done for one another, I knew you would not allow us to do what we must. So, I prepared for this day, by learning all I could about those closest to you. Your sister and Miss Lance were fairly obvious choices.”

“Anatoly, what you propose would be the gravest mistake that you could make. I’m sure that you’ve heard of the League of Assassins, how they are headed by a man named Ra’s al Ghul?”

“Yes, I have, but I do not see what that has to do with you. Ra’s al Ghul is not a name you simply drop in conversation trying to frighten someone. He is a very serious and deadly man,” Anatoly said, fixing Oliver with a stare that didn’t faze the American.

“Yes, my predecessor was. I fought the man twice. The first time, he nearly killed me because I wasn’t prepared to do all that was necessary to defeat him. The second time, I was and that is why I was able to defeat him, kill him and take his place as the Demon’s Head, Ra’s al Ghul. So, this is not the man you once knew, he is dead, alive only in the past. He has been reborn, first as Al Sah-him and then as Ra’s al Ghul. So, I would advise you listen carefully. Your men will leave Starling City and there will be peace with the League. Or, you will ignore me and remain in the city, attempt to take my sister and Laurel as hostages to prevent an attack. If you choose the second option, you are condemning the Bratva to death. Not just in Starling, but around the world,” Oliver said.

“You’re assuming you’ll walk out of here,” Anatoly told him, snapping his fingers. All five of the Bratva men stood and faced the table.

“I could say the same for you.”

With that, twenty people in the bar all stood and faced the table. They formed a semi-circle around the Bratva men. Outwardly, none appeared to be armed, but it would be a mistake to rely on outward appearances. Anatoly looked at those surrounding him and then focused back on Oliver.

“They are not exactly what I would expect, if you were speaking the truth.”

“Well, people in black robes with hoods and veils tend to stand out in someplace like Moscow. So, they are dressed as people who would frequent this establishment are. Deception and theatricality are powerful agents, I have learned. Now, back to the business at hand,” Anatoly told him.

“I cannot leave Starling City,” Anatoly said. “We need to expand and as other brotherhoods have already staked their claims on the eastern United States, we are forced to focus on the western part of the country. If we don’t expand, then the brothers will think I am weak and seek to take what is mine.”

“I understand.”

With that, Oliver got up and walked away. The assassins in the bar followed along behind him. He had suspected that this was how their meeting would go, but he had hoped the other man would see reason. Sadly that was not to be, so they would have to use other methods to end the Bratva’s presence in Starling.
After Laurel and Thea had seen what happened to the gangs at the hand of the Bratva, the team had pulled back. Dig had explained his concerns and the group decided that it would be for the best if they limited their activities to basic patrolling. When they attacked, it was only low level street criminals, relatively easy prey. At the first sign of trouble, Dig was pulling them back. The others all understood why, but it didn’t make things any less frustrating.

They has seen Roy out a couple of nights, doing work at the Arrow. Sara, however, was nowhere to be found. None of them thought that she was gone, but rather that she was focusing more on League business, whatever that might be. After her call a few days ago, Sara hadn’t tried to get back in touch with the team. However, the team also hadn’t made an effort to get in touch with her either. It wasn’t necessarily either side’s fault, but rather the usual condition of the squeaky wheel getting the grease. Felicity was getting more wrapped up in her searches and when Sara hadn’t tried calling back, she simply assumed that it was no longer important, had never been important or had been handled by the blonde assassin. So, the IT genius had pushed it to the side and returned her focus to what she considered more important matters.

Right now, the searches she had running were the more important matters. She’d made great strides in finding out who had been able to find Roy in Monument Point. And sadly, it had all turned out to be a really bad, completely terrible case of wrong place, wrong time. An off-duty Monument Point police officer just happened to be in the shop at the same time that Roy Harper was. Said officer had a brother-in-law on the SCPD and the officer happened to remember hearing all about the Arrow from his rather smug in-law over the labor day holiday. So, while he might have been off-duty, his cop brain hadn’t turned off. Rather it had gone into overdrive at sighting someone who looked a lot like the supposedly dead Roy Harper, aka The Arrow. This had caused the man to keep digging, especially with his gut telling him that even if this turned out not to be that person, there was still something wrong about the guy.

She’d left that information along with the phone at Sara’s apartment building. She’s also left a note that she was working on another identity for Roy and that next time, it might be a good idea for Roy to get further away from Starling City. Not Gotham, that was not a viable option unless Roy was looking to get killed. Maybe someplace in the Midwest, somewhere quiet and relatively crime free.

Her other set of searches were not going so well. Or rather they were, but the information she was getting was not the information she had wanted. Because, so far, she had not been able to find a single verifiable piece of data putting Oliver where his phone data said he was. Nothing in customs, nothing at any hotels, motels or bed and breakfast spots. She’d even gone so far as the check on people who simply matched his general description and had passed through that city at the same time his phone was there. Those people had all checked out to be who their information said they were, meaning another dead end.

Yet, his phone data said that he was there. So, the question was, which was lying? Because, while she hadn’t gone through all of the data, she’d gone through enough to have reached the very firm conclusion that he wasn’t where they thought he was. And if that was true, then where in the world was Oliver Queen. A whole raft of questions followed that one, but that was the most important one. Which is why she was now working on tracking down when exactly he had left Starling City. There was a part of her that wondered why she hadn’t started with this, but she knew the answer all too well. Despite everything, there was a part of her that still wanted to believe Oliver, even when all of
the available evidence told her that she shouldn’t.

The long hours in front of the computer, between working for the team and working at Palmer Technologies, meant that right now Felicity wasn’t as sharp as she usually was. This was probably the reason that she missed the blinking icon in the lower right corner of one of the displays. She definitely didn’t miss the results of the missed warning, as an electrical surge went through her computers and the lights blew in the underground room. By the time the emergency lights came on, she could smell the burnt electronics. Getting up from her seat, she walked into the small server room she’d built and began going through the equipment to try and determine what was a loss and what might be salvaged. She knew that she had spare equipment. Heck, whatever she might not have, Palmer Technologies certainly would. The only downside of taking it from there was having to create the fake paper trails to explain where it had supposedly gone to. Sighing, she realized that none of her searches were going to get anywhere tonight and depending on how long it took her to replace everything that was down here, maybe not for a couple of days.

Across town in an old house, a young woman with brown hair and glasses sat before a computer workstation that had been assembled in the old dining room. A total of five monitors had been arranged around her. Three were for the task that she had been performing, while the other two monitored CCTV feeds from her target’s location. Or had monitored, as her electrical feedback strike had taken them off line at the same time it had damaged the rest of the electronic equipment on site. So, at this point, she was blind to what Ms. Smoak was doing or would be doing. But, that was not her concern at the moment. Rather, it was the fact that she had performed the task assigned to her.

“She asked the man standing behind her, a man that had been her guard and guardian since she’d been brought her.

“Yes. You have done well,” Salah told her with a smile. “And you will still be able to gain access after she repairs the damage you have done?”

“No doubt about it. Once she replaces the hardware, she will reinstall the base software and download the rest from one of her offsite backups. Her backups also have the same Trojan embedded that I was using to gain access. The only way for her to find that would be by a line by line check of the source code, which would take additional time as every program would have to be checked to find the one that has it, assuming there is only one.”

Salah had understood little of what the young woman said. What he did know was that she was a master at finding information online. The decision made six months ago by Ra’s to spare her had proven to be of great benefit to the League. She had uncovered several human trafficking rings around the world, including the hidden backers who financed them. By the time she was done, those ill-gotten gains had been transferred to the League’s coffers and the men and women who had profited from the suffering of others were dead. Now, she was blinding the vigilantes of this city while the League’s shadows gathered the information necessary to destroy the Bratva in the city.
Thea was sitting in the dining area, reading over the various documents that her lawyers had completed so that she could reopen Verdant. The biggest hurdle had been trying to get the liquor license back. The license that the club had been operating under had been in Oliver’s name as owner. That license had been revoked after his assets had been frozen, alone with her own, when he’d been arrested for being the Arrow. What her lawyers had worked out with the state had been a stroke of genius, with the law firm holding the license and Thea agreeing to hire a General Manager for the club who was of age. So, the plan was to have the club open in time for a big New Years Eve bash, just as soon as she found her manager.

In some ways, she was surprised at how quickly the year had gone by. In others, it felt as if time had crawled. The biggest were the two people who would be missing this Christmas. Oliver was in Nanda Parbat doing who knows what with the League of Assassins and Roy might be in Starling, but he certainly couldn’t show up for Christmas at the loft. When she’d decorated this year, it had been mostly to remember the Christmases of the past.

The smell of coffee and sausages wafted out of the kitchen, causing her stomach to rumble a little. She looked down at the paperwork again and realized what was really holding her back on the club. Starling didn’t feel like home any more. Every person she loved was either dead or gone. Roy promised that they would find a way to be together, but she couldn’t see how. Maybe they could go somewhere that didn’t have extradition to the United States and live out their lives? The very idea seemed boring in the extreme. She’d gotten a taste of being a vigilante now and she enjoyed the feeling too much to go back to what everyone considered normal. There was also the fact that they were doing some good out there and stopping would erase all of that.

“I see you’re thinking deep thoughts this morning,” Noah said as he brought a plate of eggs and sausages over to her, along with a mug of coffee. “Anything I can help you with?”

“I wish, but it’s something I need to figure out for myself,” Thea told him.

“Ah, then it must be about a boy.”

“I didn’t say that.”

“You didn’t have to, Thea. If it was about something in those papers in front of you, I’m fairly certain you’d accept help. So, if it’s not that, then it’s either you’re trying to figure out how to ask me to leave or it’s about a man in your life. Since the first involves me, I know you’d want to talk to me about it, which leaves only the last. And with that being said, I’m not going to pry into it any further,” Noah stated before going to get his breakfast.

“It’s not that I couldn’t use some advice, it’s just that the situation is really complicated and I don’t think it would be right to get you involved in it,” Thea replied.

“One could say the same about my situation and yet you involved yourself without hesitation. It would be ill-mannered of me not to do the same for you.”
“And I appreciate that greatly, I do. It’s just that this involves other people’s secrets and I just think that I shouldn’t break their confidence by telling someone else.”

“I understand, Thea,” Noah told her. “So, let me try this. Do you love him?”

“I really do,” Thea said.

“Then, you need to trust that whatever the problem is, your love for each other will see you through it. That’s what I’m doing with Donna, trusting that the love we share will bring us back together. Now, I’m not foolish enough to believe it will be easy, but we’ll get there eventually.”

“Thank you, Noah.”

Thea was about to reply when her phone rang. Not seeing on the table, she got up and walked towards the couch, finding it on the coffee table. Picking it up, she saw an unknown number and hoped that it would be Roy calling.

“Hello?”

“Hi, Speedy,” Oliver said. “How are you?”

“I’m alright. Just wishing you could be here for Christmas, but I’m sure you have something more important going on.”

“Well then, this is your lucky day. Nyssa and I are going to be in town for the holidays, just to spend some time with you.”

“Are you serious? How long will you be in town for? More than just the day, I hope,” Thea told him.

“We’ll be arriving in town on the twentieth or twenty-first and leaving around the twenty-eighth, so we’ll have the better part of a week to spend together. Nyssa and I may have some business to take care of, but it shouldn’t take more than a day and other than that, we are all yours,” Oliver told her.

“This is going to be so great. Are you going to see the others while you’re here?”

“Maybe, but this is primarily so that we can spend some time together. That’s what I want to focus on.”

“I can’t wait to see you, Ollie,” Thea told him, her voice filled with joy. She’d spent too much time without her brother already.

“I can’t wait to see you too, Speedy,” Oliver told her. “I miss you. Now, I have to go, but we’ll be together before you know it. We’ll get out Raisa’s recipe for gingerbread and make a gingerbread house, just the way we did as kids.”

“That sounds wonderful. And maybe ice skating, too.”

“We’ll see. Rather do a Christmas movie marathon, though.”

“You know me, I’ve got bunches of them,” Thea said.

“Well, have them ready and we’ll do that,” Oliver told her. “Love you, Speedy.”

“Love you too, Ollie.”
A few tears escaped when Oliver ended the call, but they were tears of joy. Joy not just that she’d be seeing her brother soon, but also at the happy memories he’d evoked with his comments. The gingerbread houses that Raisa would make for them, which she’d then steal the gumdrops off of and blame Ollie for. The movie marathons in the entertainment room, where they’d watch things like “Frosty the Snowman” and “Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer” early for her, then watch “White Christmas” or “It’s a Wonderful Life” later. Thea always fell asleep on the couch before those were over, but that just meant that Ollie and her would end up sleeping on the couches.

December 16, 2015

Starling City

Roy sat on the ground, watching as Sara and Sin trained. He’d been impressed with how far she’d come and so had Sara, clearly. Yesterday, she had introduced a new element to their training by added Escrima sticks and teaching Sin how to use them. From now on, they would be doing half of their time unarmed, while the rest would be weapons training. As petite as Sin was, weapons like Sara’s bo or a katana didn’t really suit her. Something like Laurel’s tonfa or perhaps a Sai would be a better choice for her, which is why Sara had already made plans with An-Nur to assist with that when the time came. The Sai were her personal weapon and Sara knew she was very good with them.

Roy had already had some experience with Escrima sticks training with Dig and Oliver, so he had gone first. Sara had used him as her visual aide, as she’d shown Sin the basics. Then she and Roy had really sparred, where Roy got to see that the difference between Sara and Oliver was night and day. Oliver was bigger, stronger and hit harder, while Sara was all speed and agility, lighting quick strikes that had him working simply to block them. And by forcing him to work hard on blocking, she was leaving him with little opportunity to stage his own attacks.

Roy watched as Sin blocked a strike before attempting one of her own. The sound of the sticks hitting together had a strange musical quality to it that he found soothing in its own way. The occasional groans of pain when Sara would catch the younger woman with a strike only served as a counterpoint. He smiled as he watched them circle one another before the next set of strikes and blocks were made. This went on for another ten minutes before Sara stepped back and raised her sticks.

“Very good, Sin. So good in fact, that I think you’ve earned a reward,” Sara said, as she took Sin’s sticks as well. Putting them on the weapons rack, she led the way upstairs. There on the table sat a large box. Both Sin and Roy knew that it hadn’t been there before they’d gone downstairs for training and were curious about where it had come from, as they could not remember having seen the box before.

“Nyssa had this made for you at my request. Now is the time for you to have it, Ta-er Aswad.”

With that, Sin opened the box and began removing the clothing within. Once everything was laid out, she looked it over. It was different from Sara’s Canary costume, that was for certain. The hood reminded her of the Arrow’s, but still it wasn’t the same.

“This is a League uniform, Ta-er Aswad. You will wear it tonight and you’ll accompany me on my mission. Your mission is to observe and stay hidden,” Sara told her.
“Thank you, Sara,” Sin said.

“Tonight, you’ll address me as Ta-er al-Sahfer. Sin and Sara don’t exist tonight. Tonight, you’re just another member of the League and I am in charge. That means what I say, you do. Understood?”

“Understood, Ta-er al-Sahfer.”

“Good. Remember that, in case we run into other members of the League while we are out. People impersonating a member of the League face swift justice. If one approaches you, you are Ta-er Aswad, student of Ta-er al-Sahfer. Should that not suffice, tell them to speak with Nyssa al Ghul, bride of the Demon,” Sara told her.

“What about weapons?” Sin asked.

“I’ll give you one of my bo, broken down as batons. Do not lose them.”

“I won’t. Probably won’t even need them, but just in case.”

“You can’t go out there expecting not to have to use them. You need to go out there prepared to use them, if necessary to take someone’s life. Because if you’re not prepared to do just that, you’ll hesitate and that could get you killed,” Sara told her. “If you can’t do that, then you can’t accompany me tonight.”

Sin went silent at that. She wanted to go with Sara, but was she ready to do that. To kill someone. It was a big step, especially when everything society had taught her said that killing was wrong. Yet, she’d spent enough time with Sara and Roy, not to mention on the streets, to know that there were times when killing was right. And Sara wasn’t asking her to kill someone in cold blood, but rather to be prepared to take a life to save her own or that of someone else. She could do that, she thought.

“I can do it,” Sin told her.

“Then, grab all of that and follow me.”

Sin picked the clothing off the table and followed Sara into the bedroom. Sara had her strip down to her underwear, then showed her how to put on the uniform. It wasn’t much different from normal clothes, but there were a few tricks to get everything where it needed to be. The biggest difference was the long coat that went with it. This was something that Sin wasn’t used to wearing, but she found that she liked it. Once she had everything on except for the hood and some kind of face covering, Sara then took her own uniform from the closet and got dressed. Sin felt it was like looking into a mirror, one that was just a little taller. She also noticed the golden yellow trim on Sara’s uniform and looked at her own. She could just barely make out the different shade on hers, between the black and a midnight blue color.

“What’s this?” Sin asked, holding up the veil.

“That’s your veil. It has several purposes. Firstly, it hides your features, so that an enemy only sees your eyes. Second, it prevents blood from entering your mouth when you kill someone, especially if you slit your enemy’s throat or such. Lastly, it is a fine mesh, so if someone throws a powder at you, it will keep most of it from reaching your mouth or getting in your lungs. I haven’t had to put that to the test, but I know Nyssa has,” Sara told her, as she helped her get it positioned correctly.

“How do I look?”

“Good, just need your weapons and you’d be ready to go.”
With that, the pair exited the bedroom and found Roy sitting on the couch. When he caught sight of them, he smiled and nodded his head. Sara headed back downstairs, while Roy went into the bedroom. Sin wasn’t surprised to see him come back out dressed in the Arrow costume by the time Sara was coming back upstairs with a pair of bo staffs, as well as a bow for herself.

“Where do you think you’re going?” Sara asked Roy.

“Just going to do some light patrolling, that’s all,” Roy told her.

“Stick towards the edge of the Glades, then. We’re going to be towards the docks and there will be other members of the League out as well.”

Roy nodded his acceptance of Sara’s instructions. He knew that the League wouldn’t go out of its way to engage him, as they would instead be focused on their tasks. But, it was still better that he be warned, so that he didn’t interfere by mistake. Besides, there was more than enough crime here that he’d still be fairly busy just in that part of the Glades. Looking out the windows, he could see that it was dark enough. One of the benefits of this time of year, the longer hours of darkness meant more time for people like him to patrol the city. The fact that criminals used those same hours of darkness to ply their trade could make it seem a wash, but he’d take what he could get.

Sin was fairly bouncing on her toes, nervous energy coursing through her. She was so looking forward to this, the chance to get out there with Sara and help her city. Yeah, she knew that they were supposed to stay hidden and just watch, which was not much different than what she’d done before for the blonde assassin. Yet, this time felt different, felt like she was doing more. And she wanted to do more, to be more than just the lookout, the girl who took care of the Canary and got her food. Sin knew she wasn’t there, yet, but soon she would be and today was the next step on the road to getting there.

“We’ll see you later, Roy. Let’s go, Ta-er Aswad,” Sara said, heading for the ladder to the rooftop hatch, not waiting to see if Sin followed her.

Once they were on the roof, Sara motioned for Sin to follow her and set off. Sara kept the pace relatively easy, both to benefit Sin and also because there was no real hurry to get to their destination. Even so, it didn’t take them long to reach their destination, an abandoned office building that overlooked a trucking company’s freight yard. On the surface, it was surprising that they company had stayed in the Glades or even Starling City for that matter. Add in the fact that the company had never been robbed, at least according to police records, and it was an outright miracle. It was only when you dug deeper that the truth began to emerge, that this was a front for the Bratva.

Sara’s mission tonight was to try to identify the players, because there were certainly some people working here who weren’t Bratva. Most would be people from the Glades, grateful for any job they could get. They were innocent in the League’s eyes and as long as they didn’t try to help their employers, they would be left alone. Settling into the shadows, she took out a pair of small notepads and pens and handed one of each to Sin.

“We need to get license plates and physical descriptions. Pay special attention to men with lots of tattoos, as those are likely to be members of the Bratva,” Sara told Sin, keeping her voice low.

“Got it, Ta-er al-Sahfer,” Sin replied, a smile evident in her voice.

While Sin settled in to do as ordered, Sara looked the building over. She was looking for infiltration points, guards who might be patrolling the exterior and any other security measures. She also sketched out the building, noting doors and windows. When she had that done, she joined Sin in watching the comings and goings from the building. She also made sure to be mindful of her
surroundings, which was something that she would have to teach Sin as well. Still, as the hours passed, she was pleased. Sin had managed to remain relatively still and hadn’t once complained, even when Sara left her alone a couple of times so that she could move closer to the other building in order to get a better look at something.

By three in the morning, Sara felt that they had seen all they needed to see. So, she got up and motioned for Sin to follow her. They began jumping between the building, making their way back to the safe house. They’d gone about a mile when Sara slowed up, causing Sin to look over at her quizzically.

“Down!” Sarah shouted, dropping as an arrow flew past her head, followed by two more in quick succession. “This way, Ta-er Aswad!”

Sara moved them to cover behind the rooftop brick house of the stairway. She took her bow and knocked an arrow, listening. Sin, seeing this, took out her batons, earning a nod from her teacher. There, just a faint sound but it was enough. Whoever it was that was out there, she knew where they were now. Stepping from cover, she rapidly fired a pair of arrows at their attacker before catching sight of who it was. She gave a barely audible curse as she stared at the woman across from her wielding the custom crossbow.

“Why are you watching that building?” Helena asked as she advanced.

“The League does not explain itself to the likes of you, Helena Bertinelli,” Sara replied.

“The League? So, you’re not Yakuza or Triad, looking to take revenge on the Bratva for muscling you out of Starling City, just like they’re trying to do in Coast City?”

“You insult us to think that we would work with either the Yakuza or Triad, Miss Bertinelli. What is your interest in the Bratva?”

“They’re scum, just like my father. They don’t care who they have to hurt to get to the top and they’ll do anything they have to in order to stay there. And there seems to be a lack of people willing to do what’s necessary to stop people like them.”

Sara paused at that, wondering. She didn’t like the woman, doubted if she ever would. She remembered her taking all of those people hostage, including Laurel, in her quest to kill her father. Her goal was worthy, it was her methods that were questionable at best. But then, that might just be that she had never been shown a better way, though Sara remembered Oliver had tried once and failed. Maybe Nyssa would have better luck, she thought as she made a decision. Taking her notepad out, she quickly wrote something, then tore it off and held it out for Helena to take.

“What’s this?” Helena asked.

“A new start, if you’re deemed worthy. Go there and ask to be taken to Ra’s al Ghul. Tell them that Ta-er al-Sahfer sent you. If you are deemed worthy, you will be trained to become a member of the League of Assassins. If you are not, you will be killed, so consider your choice wisely,” Sara told her.

“I’ll consider it.”

With that, Helena turned and walked away. Sara just stood there and watched her go, curious as to what her choice would ultimately be. She was also curious how Oliver and Nyssa would react if former Mafia princess showed up looking to be trained. She thought Oliver might give her a chance, even though he had initially failed to turn her from her path of vengeance. He might see something
within her worth the League’s time and effort or he might conclude that she was too far gone, too dangerous to be trained and in need of being put down.

“Who was that?” Sin asked as she came up next to Sara.

“That was Helena Bertinelli. Her father was Frank Bertinelli, the Mob boss. She realized that he was evil, so she tried gathering evidence against him to turn over to the FBI. Her father found out, but thought it was her fiancé who was the informant and had him killed. So, she started a one woman war against the Bertinelli family. She got on Oliver’s radar when she nearly killed his mother while she was targeting one of the family’s soldiers. Oliver stopped her, but thought he had found someone like him and decided to try to show her a different path. He failed with her. She disappeared for a while before coming back when her father was supposed to testify at a trial. She and a group of mercenaries took the courthouse hostage, including my sister. She forced Oliver to trade her father for my sister, so she could kill him. He did die that night, just not by her hand and she was arrested,” Sara told her.

“Guess she got out somehow.”

“Yeah, she did. Last I had heard, she was in Gotham picking off the last remaining members of the family. Guess she finally did and decided to broaden her horizons.”

“And you’re offering her an introduction to the League?” Sin asked.

“Yep. Whether Ra’s decides she’s worthy or not, that’s an entirely different matter. Besides, people seek out the League for a variety of different reasons, just as people join the military or any other calling. Now, let us continue before it gets light out,” Sara told her before setting off again.

Sin followed along behind, pushing herself to keep up with the pace that Sara was now setting. She was never more glad to see anything that when the rooftop of the safe house came into view. Once they were inside, they changed their clothes and put away their uniforms before heading down to the garage. Getting on the motorcycle, they left for the drive across town to their apartment. If they were lucky, Sin figured they would get up in time for either a late breakfast or lunch before heading back to train, unless Sara had something else in mind for the morning.

December 18, 2015

Starling City

Felicity sat back from the server rack as she waited for the new equipment to finish its self tests and come completely online. She would have to do a little configuration work at the console here, then she would be able to bring the new system fully online and get everything loaded. Taking a moment to think, she figured it would likely be the work of a couple of hours to get everything done. At that point, she would be back in business and so would an important part of the team. After what had happened, she’d been forced to rely on her secondary systems. Those were barely enough to get by on, but not to do the in depth searches that she’d had running previously. For those, she needed the full power of her custom servers or to chance using public resources which could be traced.

After the rack came online, she started her downloads to get it fully operational. While those were going on, she turned and looked at the box full of damaged equipment that she had removed. At first, she’d been stumped. The industrial grade surge protector hadn’t faulted, nor had it been damaged. In
fact, all of the damage was exclusively within the old server rack. Given how extensive it was, she couldn’t determine the root cause. So, she was going to make sure she checked and rechecked everything before too long. She’d really wanted to do it before she brought the rack online, but she was concerned about leaving the team blind for too long. So, she was just going to have to use whatever time she had to go over everything while the system was running.

Instead, she’d upgraded the network firewalls and added another set to routers between her server and the internet. She was confident that those measures would be enough to keep someone out of her system. Because she was almost positive that what had happened had to be the work of someone trying to get control of her system and somehow causing the overload. If she could figure out who it was, she’d send the team after them. It had hurt her, in her very soul, to see that much precious technology destroyed.

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw the monitor showing her login screen. Typing in her credentials, she got access and checked her programs quickly. Everything tested out, meaning that she was back in business. She pulled up her searches and got them running again, then logged into the city’s CCTV camera system and confirmed control before getting access to the city’s emergency services system so that the team could monitor that as well.

Glancing at the clock, she saw it was late. So, she left the searches to run, while she headed upstairs to the apartment Ray had created. One that she was coming to spend more and more time in, not that either of them minded that state of affairs. When she got off the elevator, she was pleasantly surprised to find that the light in the office was already turned off. So, she entered the apartment and smiled at the sight of Ray already asleep in bed. So, she hurriedly undressed and slipped beneath the covers to join him.

By the time she was asleep, someone else was in her computer system. Knowing it would be too much of a coincidence to have the system self-destruct, the hacker settled for something a little more subtle this time. Pulling up the searches that were currently running, she checked the parameters and made two small changes, so small that they were not likely to be found until the search failed to produce results. As such, this would only slow Miss Smoak down, because if there was one thing the hacker was coming to appreciate about her opponent, it was her tenacity. In all likelihood, she would simply run a different variation of the search.

“Is it done?” Salah asked from behind her.

“For now,” the woman answered. “This will only slow her down, not stop her. Though, I don’t understand why Ra’s al Ghul is so interested in this search for Oliver Queen.”

“All you need to know is it is the will of Ra’s al Ghul, al Qarasina.”

“Yes, Sir.”

With that, she turned back to the computer and got to work on her other project, searching for information on the license plate numbers and descriptions provided by the League’s shadows. This would be invaluable when action was eventually taken against the Bratva and from the sound of things, that was going to happen soon. So, she took another drink from her energy drink and plowed ahead. She’d already developed a list of names, now she was looking for police records, known associates and anything else she could discover relating to these men.

As she worked, she thought back to that night six months ago that had changed her life. She had been a member of Helix, under Cayden James. She’d been drawn in by his promises of using hacktivist tactics to make the world a better place. It was only when she saw what he was actually doing that she realized this wasn’t for her. James didn’t really care about making the world a better place, all of the damage was exclusively within the old server rack. Given how extensive it was, she couldn’t determine the root cause. So, she was going to make sure she checked and rechecked everything before too long. She’d really wanted to do it before she brought the rack online, but she was concerned about leaving the team blind for too long. So, she was just going to have to use whatever time she had to go over everything while the system was running.

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place, he cared about lining his own pockets and had been selling the group’s services to the highest bidder. One such group had come to the attention of the League, using Helix to take over a country’s power grid and holding it for ransom. What that group didn’t know was the leader of that country had pledged loyalty to Ra’s al Ghul. As such, the League viewed this attack as an insult and exacted a bloody revenge.

When the League managed to find the site where Helix was working from, they’d captured her along with James and three others. Looking at the figures in the black robes, with only their eyes visible, she had been certain she was going to die that day. She’d watched as James and the others had been executed, for there was no other word that came to mind for what was done to them. When the man with the sword had turned to her, she was confused when the sword stroke never came. Instead, her hands had been bound behind her back and she’d found herself carried from the building and loaded into an SUV.

From there, she’d been taken to Nanda Parbat. She learned that the man who’d spared her was Ra’s al Ghul, the leader of the League of Assassins. She had been offered a choice, to join the League and swear her loyalty or to be executed for her crimes. She’d readily chosen the first, not then knowing that there were days when that choice would feel like the worst of her two options. For three months, they’d trained her while she’d also trained some of them. She’d learned various martial arts, while she taught her skills with technology. By the time she was done, there was a team of hackers in the League and she had been reborn as al Qarasina. Alena Whitlock was forgotten, she was alive only in the past.
Oliver stepped off the transport aircraft that had brought him and his group from the League’s airfield near Nanda Parbat. He had used the flight to go over the plan with them one last time, so that every member knew what their assignment was. Now, he watched as they filed off the plane and went to the waiting SUVs, where they met with shadows that were stationed in and around Moscow.

“My lord, we are ready,” Cheshire said from beside him.

“Good,” Oliver told her as he pulled out his satellite phone and dialed a number.

“Yes, Husband,” Nyssa said.

“We have arrived and are proceeding to our targets. Give us one hour and then begin phase two.”

“Very well. We will be cutting it close to daylight, I assume you know.”

Looking at his watch, he saw it was three in the afternoon. That made it four in the morning in Starling City and by the time they attacked, the sky would be lightening up. Still, he judged it was a risk worth taking. He wanted to avoid, if possible, one group alerting the other. Not that it would likely matter, but he was going to seize every advantage he could.

“I understand. Be quick and be safe, my wife,” Oliver told her.

“I’ll see you when you arrive in Starling, Husband,” Nyssa said as she hung up the call.

Oliver took one last look before joining Cheshire at the SUV that was for them. Once they were inside, the driver took off and lead the small convoy away from the airfield towards the metropolis. He settled back, letting his memories wash over him as he thought about his time in Russia. Anatoly had been a friend then, their bond from surviving Lian Yu and Ivo mutually beneficial. He couldn’t help thinking about that time and regretting that things had come to this.

When they reached the city, the convoy split apart. Each SUV had a specific target. Oliver had Cheshire with him as their target was actually four. Anatoly was something of a creature of habit and Oliver knew that he and his top captains would be meeting at the bar that served as the home of Anatoly’s office. It served as a way for him to keep informed about what was going on and to make sure any misbehavior was dealt with swiftly. Unfortunately, it also made for a prime opportunity for his enemies, if they were bold enough, to take out almost the entire command structure of the organization.

At present, Anatoly did not believe there were any so bold. Yes, Oliver had threatened him, but he was quite certain the younger man was trying to bluff him. Kapiushon was a formidable opponent, but he was not capable of defeating the Bratva all by himself. Still, he had added some extra guards and put their people in Starling City on notice, feeling that if an attack was to come, it would be there.

So, Anatoly and his men sat in his office enjoying vodka and cigars as they discussed the day. The
office was soundproofed so that no one outside could hear what was being discussed. He also had a pair of former KGB officers on his payroll who swept the office for electronic surveillance devices on a random schedule. This evening, the soundproofing worked against them.

The SUV containing Oliver and Cheshire stopped in an alley a block from the bar. The pair of assassins got out of the vehicle and quickly made their way to the rooftop. There, they were able to see guards on the roof of the bar. The outside guards had been dispatched quickly, shot down with arrows. Cheshire may not be as skilled with a bow as Oliver or her sister, but she’s still more than up to the task. Once the outside is clear, they crossed over to the roof of the bar itself and went for the access hatch into the bar itself. This would be the most dangerous point, as it was only a small port barely big enough for one man. With one of them going through, they would be vulnerable to anyone below them and the person left above would be unable to help.

At the hatch, Oliver and Cheshire exchanged a look before he pulled the hatch back. A quick scan revealed nobody below, but Cheshire still moved quickly as she dropped through the hatch, a knife in each hand. There! The knives were thrown, as she grabbed another pair, not noticing Oliver come through behind her as her eyes searched for other Bratva men. Just as she spotted another, a flechette was embedded in his throat. Together, the pair of assassins moved forward into the bar as a whole. There were a few innocents who immediately took flight as they came into the main area, forming a crush at the door to the outside. They ignored this as they engaged the Bratva men who were trying to retrieve their weapons from where they’d concealed them. Only one managed to get a pistol out, but wasn’t able to fire a shot as an arrow pierced his heart.

Once the men out there were dead, they headed back through the bar for the office. As they walked, Oliver lifted one of the bodies off the floor and carried it with them. Cheshire raised an eyebrow at that, only to be met with a look that she interpreted as a smirk. It was when they got to the door that she figured out what he was doing, as she saw the small sliding window in the door. Oliver held the body up in front of the door, so that the face was aligned with the window, before he banged on the door.

“What is it?” Anatoly called in Russian.

“Someone here to see you, Pakhan,” Oliver replied, deepening his voice.

“Tell them to wait. We are meeting.”

“He says it’s about Kapiushon, Pakhan.”

Oliver smiled when he heard the shutter slide back and a moment later, the welcome sound of the deadbolt being released. As soon as it was, he turned the nob and shoved with all of his strength. The body of the dead Bratva member virtually catapulted into the room, ending up on its knees with its head on Anatoly’s desk. The only man to survive the initial onslaught was Anatoly himself, as the three captains died where they stood. Two were by Cheshire’s knives, one from a flechette from Oliver.

“I take it this is it, eh?” Anatoly said as he stood from behind the desk.

“It would seem so,” Oliver said with a nod.

“And this is how you repay me, for helping you after Lian Yu?”

“I repaid that when I helped make you Pakhan, helped you take out Kovar and Gregor. This is because you could not accept limits on how far you could go. I told you to remove your men from Starling City and you refused.”
“Because to back down as you demanded would have left me vulnerable to the other Bratva organizations. All this will accomplish is to make them stronger, as they fight over my territory and former members,” Anatoly told him, resigned to his fate.

“No, they won’t. Because we will be visiting them as well, once we have finished with you. And after they have seen the example we make with your organization, they will be more open to acceding to my commands,” Oliver told him just before he pulled his sword and plunged it through his former friend’s heart. Pulling the sword out, he then swiftly decapitated the man before taking his head and sitting on the desk facing the door. The body, he placed in the desk chair with the hands on the desk and positioned so it looked like he was reaching for his severed head.

Walking from the office, the pair left the way that they had entered. On the rooftop, they could hear the sound of sirens approaching. They moved quickly over to the other building and down to the SUV. Once inside, they removed their robes and shoved them into bags. Checking their faces and hair, they made sure that there was no blood visible and that they simply looked like another couple being driven through the city, dressed for a night out. They were two blocks away when the first police cars raced past their SUV. As they continued to drive away, Oliver couldn’t quite contain the smirk that came to his lips. He knew that the bloodbath that they had left behind, along with the work that the rest of his assassins were performing that night would make not just national news, but international news. And that those in the know would quickly realize that the League was just as powerful and just as brutal as ever.

December 19, 2015
Starling City

When she hung up the call, Nyssa placed the satellite phone onto the table and looked across at Sara. Her Beloved was already prepared for the night. What was surprising was the fact that Sin was as well. Sara had told her about the younger woman’s first time out and she agreed that it had gone well. However, she knew that this was a mission on another level and she did not believe that the young woman was ready for such a task.

“Ta-er al-Sahfer, your student is not ready for what we are about to do,” Nyssa said.

“To actively participate, no she is not. To watch and learn, though, might be of use to her,” Sara responded.

Nyssa thought about that. If the younger woman stayed at a distance, kept to the shadows and simply watched, she should be safe. And she might learn something about how the League operated which would be helpful if she did chose to join the League. Nyssa was certain that she would, but she hadn’t repeated her request. Granted, they had been busy since the transport carrying the League members had landed in Starling a few hours ago. Most of the team with her had used the time to sleep, so that they would be at their best when it came time to perform their duties. She, Sara and Artemis had gathered around the table with Salah to go over the map of the city.

Every Bratva holding had been labeled and ranked in order of importance, going from the large trucking depot that Sara and Sin had scouted out on down to the garage Alexi Leonov used to run the Bratva’s operations in the city out of. The smaller ones were going to get a visit from one assassin each, while the larger ones would get anywhere from two to eight in the case of the trucking depot. Once the smaller sites were taken care of, those assassins would be released to take out any Bratva
members that hadn’t been accounted for at the businesses. Nyssa and Sara were certain there would be no more than a dozen at their homes, given that the night hours were the best for criminal activities such as those the Bratva profited from.

“Ta-er Aswad, you will accompany myself. You will go where I say and do only what I order you to do,” Nyssa told Sin.

“As you command, Nyssa al Ghul,” Sin said.

“We will be going to the trucking company that you and Ta-er al-Sahfer observed. Myself and Artemis will be providing cover with our bows for Sara and her team on the ground. Once the outside threat is eliminated, Artemis and I will join them inside. You will remain on the roof and observe. You will have one of our communications devices. If you see anything, alert us immediately while staying in the shadows.”

“I understand.”

“Sara told me that you did well the other night. This will be similar, only that some of the time you will be on your own,” Nyssa told her.

“You’ll be fine,” Sara said. “Just remember how we did things the other night. Stick to the shadows.”

Sin nodded. She wasn’t afraid, except of making Sara look bad. So, she would do what she was told to do and try to learn as much as she could. She was also thankful for Nyssa giving her this opportunity, knowing that she didn’t have to. Together, the trio went and collected their weapons, with Sin again taking another bo of Sara’s, broken down into batons. Sara had her bo, her bow and quiver and a full set of throwing knives as well. Nyssa, however, was the most heavily armed with her dozen knives, bow and quiver full of arrows, sword and a pair of batons as well.

When they were ready, they joined the other assassins in the main hall. There was no need for any speeches, they all knew why they were assembled. This was a task that the League had performed many times in the past and would continue to carry out many more times in the future. Who it was and where they were was irrelevant in the overall picture. What matter was that they would replace evil with death this night. The assembled assassins all knelt as Nyssa walked through their ranks, a mark of respect for the Bride of the Demon.

Outside, there were a host of SUVs waiting for them, subtly marked so that the groups could find their ride to locations near their targets. There were too many of them for all of them to be running across rooftops without someone potentially taking notice. At best, the police would be notified in that case. At worst, it might result in the Bratva being tipped off and scattering or being prepared for the fight to come. Yes, they were assassins and experts at stealth, but preparing for the worst made the worst less likely to happen.

Down by the docks, two SUVs dropped off Nyssa and her team. They moved quickly to the rooftops and proceeded to the building where Sara and Sin had had their observation post. Nyssa and Artemis exchanged a look and the archer moved to the next rooftop, then the one beyond that. This allowed them to cover the entire front of the building as well as the sides. Sara and the assassins that would go with her silently dropped down to the ground and got ready. They waited for a few minutes, so that they could get a feel for the guards patrol pattern, then Sara led them on a path that kept them to the shadows as they approached the building.

On the rooftop, Sin tried to follow them with her eyes, but quickly lost them in the shadows. Nyssa had no such problems, because she could anticipate where Sara would be. The pair had worked a
number of similar missions together, so they instinctively knew where the other would be. Watching the Bratva men on guard duty, she was also ready with an arrow when one of them got too close. Artemis and the others took this to mean that they were free to open fire, as it were. In less than a minute, the outside guards were all down and the few innocent employees that had been outside were running away from the building.

At this point, they all knew the clock had truly started. Nyssa and Artemis both descended to the ground as well, while Sin remained on the rooftop watching in awe. The young woman wanted to be like them, to be with them. She knew that when she had the chance, she was going to talk with Sara and Nyssa again about actually joining the League and not just being trained like them. Doing things like this, stopping criminal organizations from destroying people’s lives, protecting the innocent by bringing violence to violent people, it just felt right to her.

Before Sin could think any further, she heard gunshots erupt from the building. It began as a flurry, before dying down to what sounded like one or two guns, then silence. Watching, she saw a stream of men and women running from the building in something close to a panic. Many of them were dressed only in their underwear with clear plastic ponchos over top of it. This struck the young woman as funny and she had to fight to stifle a chuckle at the picture, especially of the couple of men who were wearing now soiled tight-y, whiteys. Talk about scaring the crap out of them, she couldn’t help thinking mischievously.

When Sara, Nyssa and the others came out, they were running. Sin wondered why briefly, as she didn’t see any signs of pursuit or the sounds of more gunfire. Then, she got her answer as the building erupted into flames, followed shortly after by an explosion that felt like a punch had struck her to the young woman on the rooftop. The building still burned afterwards, but now part of it had also collapsed as well. So intent was her focus on the building, she didn’t notice Nyssa and Sara join her on the rooftop while the other moved across them towards where they had left the SUVs.

“We are done here, Ta-ae Aswad,” Nyssa told her, causing Sin to jump before whirling around to face them.

“What happened in there?” Sin asked.

“This was their main narcotics distribution center. We didn’t have time to really check, but from what we were able to see, there was cocaine, heroin, oxycodone and even some marijuana. So, we burned it and that explosion was from some of the chemicals they were using. That’s why once we started those fires, we ran to get out of there,” Sara told her.

“Based on the size of this building, I think they were processing the drugs here and then moving them to other cities to be sold. So this should significantly impact other criminal organizations beyond the one we are targeting tonight. Now, we should go before the police or fire departments show up to investigate.”

With that, Nyssa led the way back to the SUVs. Before she descended from the final rooftop, Sin took a quick look back. Even from here, she could see the light of the fire. She wondered how far that light would be seen and how far what it signified would reach. And even though she’d had no part in it other than to watch, she couldn’t help feeling a sense of pride in what had been done.

December 19, 2015

Starling City
Quentin Lance stood watching the firefighters continue fighting the blaze at the trucking depot. He and a handful of his officers were there because the first firemen on the scene had radioed in for police to respond as well. It wasn’t all that hard to see why, as several bodies were still laying where they’d been found. He grumbled to himself as he watched, knowing that a lot of useful evidence was being washed away by the water that was being dumped on the building. But, if they didn’t get those fires under control and keep them that way, there were a score of other buildings in the vicinity that might also go up in flames. Still, enough was enough, he thought.

“Collins, Garcia,” Quentin called out. “Get a couple of others and start processing those bodies. Work from the furthest out towards the building.”

“Got it, Captain,” one of the men called as they started to go forward.

“Captain Lance, I would not recommend doing that,” Chief Raynes said. “We’re still fighting this fire and I can’t be responsible for the safety of your officers.”

“In case you haven’t noticed, this is also an active homicide crime scene. We need to get as much evidence as we can, so we can start figuring out who is responsible.”

“Those arrows sticking out of them should be a fairly big clue, wouldn’t you say? I mean, I’m not a police officer or anything, but when I see dead bodies with arrows sticking out of them, I think our of city’s very own vigilante, don’t you?”

“Except he uses green arrows and those are, as near as I can see, red, yellow and black arrows. So, unless he’s decided to just use whatever, this looks like the work of more than one archer. See, its things like that that are the reason my men need to get in there and start gathering evidence,” Quentin told him, trying to keep a civil tone.

Chief Raynes had the good grace to step away at that, as there was really nothing he could say in response. Quentin turned back to the scene and watched as his men tried to gather as much evidence as they could. One of them was taking pictures while the other would take measurements. Once they had a body gone over as best they could under the circumstances, they would move on to the next and repeat the process. There was little point in looking for fibers, hairs or anything similar, as whatever the water hadn’t washed away was hopelessly contaminated.

Turning away, he looked at the crowd gathered behind the barriers. He wasn’t surprised to see a large number of lookie-loos, as this passed for high entertainment for the Glades. Certainly better than anything on TV at this hour of the morning, where the choice was either news programs or talk shows. A part of him wondered how many of these people might have been eye witnesses, not that any of them would be likely to tell him if they were. Especially if this was what he thought it was.

“Captain,” one of the officers calls out, holding up a police radio. Walking over, he took the handset from the young man.

“This is Lance,” Quentin said.

“Captain, we’ve got a problem. Police radio is blowing up. We’re getting 911 calls from all over the city, approximately thirty at last count. All reporting finding dead bodies,” the dispatcher reported.

“Call in all shifts, starting with the homicide detectives. Work on getting cars to every location, even if only to sit on the bodies until we can get an investigator on scene. Once you’ve done that, reach out to the county sheriff and see if there’s any way they can give us some backup. If they can’t, we’ll
have to have the city’s leadership get in touch with the governor’s office.”

“I’ll get the calls started, Sir. But, you’ll need to be the one to escalate this.”

Quentin grimaced at that, because he had a feeling in his bones that they would have to escalate this. He doubted if there was a city in the United States that was equipped to handle a surge like this. And if all of these calls proved to be the real thing, rather than some clowns thinking that it would be funny to get the police spinning their wheels this morning, well, they didn’t have the manpower to cover something like this and protect the city as well. Maybe if it was all in one place, like a mass shooting or a train crash, they would be able to handle it.

Knowing what he had to do, Quentin took a moment to center himself. Then, he handed the radio microphone back to the officer and walked over to his unmarked car. Getting behind the wheel, he ignored the few reporters who shouted questions at him. There would be plenty of time for them later. Right now, he needed to do what it took to protect this city.

December 20, 2015

Starling City

Oliver walked down the escalator into the Starling City International Airport, Cheshire and three other assassins following behind him. Their flight from Moscow had landed in Ireland, where he and his party had gotten off the plane and been whisked through customs by officials of the Irish government. The League had aided the Irish government several times in the past and as long as they didn’t bring violence to their country, they were able to freely move men and arms through.

From Ireland, they had boarded a flight to London, then another to Starling City. Oliver had made sure that they flew first class on the flight from London, so that they could sleep. All told, they had been on the go for over forty-eight hours by the time the plane took off for Starling and even with assorted naps along the way, they were all in need of sleep. So, as soon as the plane had leveled out after take off, that is exactly what they had done. The flight was non stop and long enough that they could get about six to seven hours of sleep and still enjoy their meal.

When they had landed, Oliver had hung back so that the others could reach customs first. They were all traveling on foreign passports and would take a little longer. He was reentering the country on his own passport, so he should have few problems. Once he saw Cheshire get through, he stepped into line and was quickly up to an agent.

“Good evening. The purpose of your travel?” the agent asked.

“Personal,” Oliver told him, while the man looked through his passport.

“Anything to declare?”

“Nothing.”

“Welcome home, Mister Queen,” the agent said, handing back his passport.

“Thank you,” Oliver replied with a smile as he took his large suitcase with him. While on their layover in London, he’d availed himself of the airport shops and gotten a few things for Thea and the others. He would like go shopping for Christmas in the next day or so, but he’d wanted to be
Walking on outside, he saw the others getting into a van. When the figure by the door turned, he smiled. Sin was the last person he had been expecting to see, but he was happy none the less. Where Sin was, usually Sara was close at hand. Going to the van, he looked the young woman over.

“It is good to see you, Sin,” Oliver said, noting a few people near them.

“You as well, Mister Queen,” Sin replied.

Getting into the van, he saw Salah was in the driver’s seat, while Sin took the front passenger seat. Once the doors were closed, he pulled away from the curb and into traffic. Only when they were on the road and at speed did Sin turn slightly in her seat. She handed back five small bags, one for each of the passengers.

“Complements of Nyssa. One burner phone and six knives each. She thought this would be less likely to be questioned in case we had an accident or something. The rest of your gear is at the hotel. The usual arrangements are in place for security, according to Nyssa.”

“Thank you, Ta-er Aswad. I see from your hands that Ta-er al-Sahfer has been taking care of your training.”

“She has, Ra’s. I’m enjoying it a lot. Nyssa even allowed me to accompany them yesterday, so that I might learn more. In fact, I asked if I could see you today, so I could make a request,” Sin said, somewhat shyly at the end.

“From that, I take it you came to a decision,” Oliver said. “Don’t be afraid.”

“I want to join the League, if you deem me worthy.”

Oliver looked her in the eyes, taking the full measure of the young woman. He was pleased to see that she didn’t back off or look away, she held his gaze openly. There was a little fear there, which he felt was a good thing. He was curious what she was afraid of. Was it him and the power he now held over her very life? Was it failure, that in not being accepted into the League, she would be failing not only herself, but Sara and even Nyssa as well? Or was it, as he suspected, a fear of being left alone once again? He knew bits and pieces of her story, enough to know she was an orphan and until Sara came along, had been on her own for several years.

“I will ask this one time. Are you quite certain this is what you want? This is the commitment of a lifetime and must be something you accept with your whole heart.”

“I am certain, Ra’s. I wish to join the League,” Sin said firmly.

“Then, Wing Ta Lao Wo Chey,” Oliver said.

“And that means what?”

“The tale to be told begins thus’. It’s what Nyssa’s father told me when he asked me to join the League and be his heir. To him, it meant that he had already written out the path that my life would take. But to me, it means that you have taken the first steps on your new path, your path within the League. Once Ta-er al-Sahfer completes your training, she will bring you to Nanda Parbat where you will officially join the League. You will leave Sin behind and only be Ta-er Aswad.”

“Thank you, Ra’s,” Sin told him.
“Don’t thank me just yet. You still need to complete your training with Ta-er al-Sahfer. On the days when it gets tough, when you hurt more than you ever thought you could, I don’t want you to curse me or her or even yourself. I want you to remember that you chose this for yourself, because you want to be something more than you currently are,” Oliver told her.

By this time, the van was pulling into the garage of the Starling Grand hotel. When Salah pulled up near the elevators, Cheshire and one of the other assassins were the first ones out. The other two waited for Sin and Oliver to get out before forming up behind them, creating a protective box. The luggage would wait until they got him into the elevator, whereupon two of them would hang back and empty the van along with Salah.

The elevator arrived at the top floor and they all stepped out. Sin had room keys for the others, while Oliver already knew where he was going. Sara was standing in the doorway, a smile on her face that grew even bigger when she saw the one Sin was wearing. When Oliver stepped up to her, he opened his arms for a hug and kissed her cheek.

“You look well, Ta-er al-Sahfer,” Oliver told her.

“I am, thank you, Ra’s,” Sara replied. “It is good to see you again.”

“And you as well, pretty bird.”

“I take it from Sin’s smile that you told her yes.”

“I did. Once she completes her training, you will bring her to Nanda Parbat,” Oliver said.

“I’m happy for her,” Sara said quietly. “Even if I’m also a little worried.”

“You, Nyssa and I will be there for her. I know you think of her like a sister,” Oliver said as he guided Sara and Sin into the suite. “Well, that makes her our family too. And this family takes care of each other, always.”

“Speaking of family, Husband,” Nyssa said. “I thought we might visit your sister this evening.”

“That sounds perfect. I do want to get cleaned up first, especially after that long flight.”

“And Sin and I will see you later, then.”

“I think not, Sara. You and Sin are coming with us. I figure with us just dropping in, it will probably be pizzas or some other take out and movies,” Oliver told them. “Now, which room is mine?”

Nyssa pointed and Oliver went into it, heading for the bathroom and a much needed shower. The water had barely been turned on when there was a knock at the suite door. Opening it, Sara found a member of the League with Oliver’s suitcase. She took it from him and carried it into his bedroom, laying it on the bed.

What no one in the hotel was aware of was that another person was also aware that Oliver was in Starling. Felicity had been on her way to see Ray when her phone chimed with an alert. Among the searches that the blonde IT genius had running was an active search of customs for any time Oliver Queen’s passport was scanned. Looking at the notice, she did a double take as she saw that it was for Starling and only an hour ago at that. Taking out her trusty tablet, she started a search of the CCTV camera in and around the airport, looking for pictures. She also started a search to see what flight he’d arrived on and where it had come from. The last thing she did before stepping into Ray’s office was send a text to the team, asking them to meet in the lair in an hour. She figured that would give her enough time to sit down with Ray about actual work and for her searches to produce some result.
Felicity was the first one in the lair, beating Dig by about ten minutes. During that time, she pulled up the results of her searches. She also thought about her feelings about Oliver being back. A part of her was happy that he had come back, but she had to wonder why now? Why not a month ago, when the team could have used his help with Waller and everything. Had he finally found whatever it was that he was searching for, or was there another reason for his return. And was this just a temporary thing or was he back permanently.

As Dig was arriving, he’d seen Laurel pulling into the lot as well. So, he’d slowed up so that the pair could go in together. They got out of their vehicles and walked over to where Felicity’s workstation was set up. They looked around for Thea, but didn’t see her. Felicity was also wondering where the young woman was, so she picked up her phone and called her. When no answer came, she hung up and tried again. Still nothing. She wasn’t too worried, considering that she could be somewhere that her phone had no signal or she had the ringer turned off for some reason. Besides, they could fill her in later.

“So, what’s going on?” Dig asked.

“Well, you know how I’ve been playing ‘Where in the world is Oliver Queen’? I found him today and you’ll never guess where,” Felicity said as she started bringing up the information.

“Is that…?”

“Starling City International Airport? Why, yes it is. Oliver flew in on a British Airways flight from London about two hours ago.”

“So, he’s back.” was all Dig had to say as he looked at the CCTV footage of Oliver passing through customs and being met at curbside by a van. “He’s certainly not trying to hide.”

“Since Roy took the fall for him, he doesn’t need to,” Laurel said with a grimace. “Even if there are a number of police officers who still think Oliver’s the Arrow, starting with my father.”

“I was able to track the van to the Starling Grand hotel, where it went into their parking garage. I’ve hacked into their registrations system and they have no record of him being a registered guest of the hotel. Other than the top floor of the hotel being closed, the entire hotel is booked,” Felicity said.

As Felicity said that, something started to ring in Dig’s mind. The top floor of a hotel being closed. Then he remembered from back in May. The top floor of the Essex hotel had been taken over by a Damien Darkh, the most bitter enemy of Nyssa’s father. Could Oliver be taking a page out of that playbook? And if so, was it a trap, like Damien had set, or was it actually where Oliver was staying.

“Frack, frack, frackity fracking frack.”

“What?” Dig and Laurel asked almost on top of one another.

“I’ve found who that floor is being rented to and everything is so much clearer now,” was all Felicity said as they all stared at the name on the monitor in front of her: Nyssa Raatko.
Christmas at Ground Zero

December 20, 2015

Starling City

Thea stood in the living room of her loft, looking at the Christmas tree that she had just gotten set up. Knowing that Oliver and Nyssa were going to be visiting, she decided to go all out and make this like the holidays they remembered from when they were kids. So, she’d had a live tree delivered, she dug out the boxes of decorations that Oliver had saved for her from the mansion and she put on some Christmas music.

She’d been in the process of stringing lights when she’d thought she heard her phone ring. She couldn’t be sure over Burl Ives singing “Holly Jolly Christmas”, so she ignored it. Besides, she was on a ladder at the moment and trying to concentrate on getting the lights up to the top of the tree. Once that was done, she’d be able to start on the ornaments. She was going to leave the antique glass star for last. It didn’t take her too long to get the tree done after the lights, though it was a little longer than she expected as she’d stop on occasion and sing along to the songs she loved.

When the tree was decorated, she gathered up the boxes and went to put them back where they had come from. While she was doing that, her phone rang twice more. She was coming back when the second time ended. It didn’t ring again, so she decided that it wasn’t urgent and decided to carry on with her decorating. With the tree done, she moved on to hanging a wreath on the door to the balcony, as well as putting out a nativity scene by the fireplace.

Thea looked around after that and decided that was enough. She went into the kitchen and took out a bottle of red wine. Filling a glass, she went to the couch and settled back to enjoy the music and the fire. She soon lost herself in thought, wondering if she would have celebrated the holiday if not for Oliver saying he was coming to visit. She hadn’t the five years he’d been missing, nor the first year he’d been back despite the party he’d thrown for the family. The last two years, she’d celebrated but that was largely because of her big brother. If he had remained away, she wouldn’t have had much of anything to celebrate. More than likely, she’d have gone to Dig and Lyla’s for dinner, spent some time with little Sara and then gone back home. Noah had left for Las Vegas yesterday at the invitation of Donna. Donna hadn’t been able to take time off for the holidays, so she couldn’t come to Starling City. Yet, she knew Felicity would probably be working the entire time too, so having Noah come and visit her just made sense.

Thea was sipping on her wine when a knock came at the door. Getting up from the couch, she walked over to the door and opened it. Her face lit up when she saw her brother standing there, Nyssa, Sara and Sin grouped around him. Standing aside so they could enter, she pulled Oliver into a hug, one she never really wanted to let go of.

“It’s good to see you, Speedy.” Oliver told her as he returned her embrace.

“I’m so glad you came,” Thea replied.

“We told you we would. Unless there’s an absolute emergency, we’re all yours for the next week.”

“I know you said that, but with everything that’s been happening, I worried that you wouldn’t be able to.”
“Everything that’s been happening?” Oliver asked.

“Ollie, I know, alright. It was the League that eliminated the Bratva the other night,” Thea said, looking at them. “I just don’t know if all three of you were there when it happened.”

“Nyssa and Sara were in charge of the Starling City end. I was in Moscow, making sure that they wouldn’t be returning.”

“Do the others know?” Sara asked.

“I’m sure they suspect. Arrows aren’t that common and with Ollie gone, it’s either the League or Roy as the most likely culprits. They’d look at the League before thinking it was Roy.”

Oliver and Sara nodded at that. That fit with what they knew about Felicity, Dig and Laurel. In this case, they would also be absolutely right. But thinking that it was the League was a long way from proving it was the League or even that such a thing as the League of Assassins even existed. Besides, he was here to enjoy spending time with his sister and that was what he intended to so.

“So, I see dug out the decorations,” Oliver told her.

“Yeah. I figured since you’d be here, we could try to make it like the Christmases when we were kids. I did leave the star on top of the tree for you to do,” Thea told her.

“Where is it?”

“On the counter top, in its box.”

Oliver went and retrieved the star from its box, then carried it over to the tree. Taking a look, he realized that this was just a touch too far for him to safely reach. He definitely didn’t want to drop the star, which had been in the family for four generations. Thinking about it for a moment, he walked over to Nyssa.

“Come with me,” Oliver told her as he guided her over to tree and handed her the star. “You just need to get it on the point up top.”

With that, Oliver wrapped his hands around Nyssa’s waist and lifted her into the air. She was surprised, but also oddly touched. It seemed clear to her that this was something important, yet personal in the Queen family and here he was having her do the honors. It was just another way that Oliver showed her a degree of love she’d never gotten from another man in her life. She carefully placed the glass object and made sure it was secure. As Oliver went to lower her, a knock came at the door.

“Did you invite anyone?”

“No. I didn’t even know you were going to be here today,” Thea said as she walked back to the door. “You’d said the twentieth or twenty-first. My plan was to decorate and then relax for the rest of the day.”

Opening the door, she was surprised to see Felicity, Dig and Laurel standing there. She could count on one hand the number of times any of them had come to the loft since Oliver had left and still have a finger or two left over. When they did get together outside of the team, it was at Dig’s apartment. Yet, from the looks on their faces and the vibe she was getting, this didn’t seem to be a social call.

“Hey, what’s up.”
“We just found out that...” Felicity started to say as they came inside, only to see a sight that she was most definitely not expecting to see. Oliver, with his hands on Nyssa’s, in the act of lowering her to the ground. “What the frack?!?”

Oliver finished setting Nyssa back on her feet, then they both turned to face his former team. Laurel looked a little shocked, but also happy to see them. Felicity just looked stunned, as for once her seemingly automatic mouth was on shutdown. Dig, though, Dig just looked angry.

“So, you’re back,” Dig ground out.

“For a little while, yes. I wanted to spend the holidays with my family,” Oliver said, trying for a light tone.

“Then where? Back on your magical mystery tour? Or should we just cut the bullshit and be honest?”

“If you have something to say, just say it Dig.”

“You’ve been lying to us all. Lying to us for months. You haven’t been traveling, you’ve been a member of the League,” Dig spat out, looking at a man he’d once called friend. What was worse, however, was what he saw from the corner of his eye. He’d expected some kind of reaction from Thea, anger or disbelief or hurt. Not this smiling acceptance as she walked over to stand next to her brother.

“You knew, didn’t you Thea? How long have you known? Have you been a part of this, playing us, playing on our sympathies for you being left all alone and the whole time you knew exactly where Oliver was?”

“I’ve known since right after Waller was killed. Oliver was at the hotel when I took Sin to find Sara,” Thea replied. “And I didn’t say anything because it wasn’t my secret to tell.”

“So, while Felicity was wasting time and resources to track him down, you didn’t say anything? Time and resources, I might add, that we could have used for real problems here in Starling,” Dig said, his anger now focused on the young heiress.

“Like you’ve been doing that great of a job on the threats here in Starling,” Oliver said, a touch of anger creeping into his voice now.

“We’ve been trying, which is more than can be said of you.”

“You left, Oliver,” Felicity said. “Roy’s not here. It’s Dig, Laurel and Thea now and they’ve done the best they can. But how would you know? I mean, do they even have radio in Nanda Parbat? Or the internet? So, don’t come back here now and act like you know it all.”

“I left, because I had to. I knew it that night at Palmer Technologies. But it wasn’t to be a part of the League, it was to become the new Ra’s al Ghul.”

“Wait a minute. Did you just say that you’re the new Ra’s al Ghul?” Dig asked.

“Yes. Because Ra’s and Malcolm backed me into an impossible situation. I needed to join the League to save Thea’s life and stop what Nyssa’s father had planned for Starling City. I needed Malcolm’s help so that I could defeat Ra’s. The problem was that there are only two ways to leave the League, either you die or you are released by Ra’s al Ghul. Which meant that when I killed Ra’s, I had to become Ra’s or hand that power over to someone else,” Oliver told them.
“Malcolm Merlyn tried to use this to be made Ra’s himself,” Nyssa said. “His price for aiding my husband was that he hand over the ring after my father was defeated. But there was a trap built into this. If Merlyn did not release him, then he would still be bound to the League. I informed my husband of this after we survived the crash.”

“So, let me make sure I have this straight. Not only did you trust Malcolm Merlyn over us but you were also willing to hand over the League to a man who’s avowed mission in life is destroying the Glades and killing thousands of innocent people?”

“Well, like I told you that night, my plan was to sabotage the plane, killing Ra’s and destroying the virus. What would have come after that wasn’t my concern, because I would have died too.”

“And when that failed, then what? If Nyssa hadn’t warned you about what she suspected?” Felicity asked.

“What do you want me to say? In all likelihood, I would have honored the bargain I had made. I was so focused to protecting my sister and stopping Ra’s that I wasn’t considering...” Oliver said.

“You weren’t considering anything, other than what mattered to you. Your mission, your plan, your choices, yours, yours, yours,” Dig said. “You kidnapped my wife, endangered my daughter and would have killed us all if your vaccine plan hadn’t worked and for what? Because looking at you right now, I think you’re just another madman, no better than Malcolm Merlyn, leading a group of killers. And Thea, don’t come back to the lair. You’re off this team, because I can’t trust you.”

“You’re a hypocritical ass, you know that?” Thea said, glaring a Dig. “Or did you forget that your ex-wife works for the organization that kidnapped and held Felicity’s father hostage for nineteen fucking years? And you can say that was Waller’s doing all you want, but Lyla’s first reaction to finding him in Felicity’s office was to try and take him back to ARGUS.”

Oliver started to laugh at that, he just couldn’t help himself. How was Dig that ignorant of what ARGUS did? Maybe it was time to drop some truth bombs on his former friend, as well as the rest of his former team. Not just about ARGUS, but also what he had been doing the last seven months.

“Leave Lyla out of this. She’s not responsible for what happened and you know it.”

“Maybe not for that, but she had run Waller’s pet hit squad in the past. You know, the one Waller wanted to put the both of you on if you didn’t deliver me up on a silver platter. She’s also high enough up to know all the shady stuff that Waller was doing, especially to me. See, my third year away wasn’t spent on Lian Yu, it was in Hong Kong. ARGUS ‘rescued’ me in order to have a disposable, deniable asset. After all, nobody’s looking for you if you’re dead. I tried to escape, got as far as logging into my email before I was recaptured. Next thing I knew, I was sent out to kill someone. And as I was about to squeeze the trigger, my target turned and it was Tommy. See, I was no good to Waller if people were looking for me and Tommy was because I’d triggered an alert when I accessed my email,” Oliver said.

“After my handler and I managed to convince Tommy I wasn’t in Hong Kong and that it was a trap, a means to extort money from a wealthy American, Waller started my ‘training’. I learned how to track people, how to torture people for information, how to escape and evade. But most of all, I learned that everybody is expendable to Amanda Waller, even kids. See, my handler and his wife had a son, Akio. And he was killed because we couldn’t stop the release of the Alpha/Omega virus and he wasn’t vaccinated. When it was all over, I left and thought I’d gotten away until Waller found me again. She kidnapped me and dropped me back on Lian Yu for another mission of hers.”

“Is that why you beat her to death?” Laurel asked, speaking for the first time.
“Partly, it was. Partly, it was for threatening Dig, Lyla and baby Sara. But mainly, it was because I wanted her to suffer as she had made thousands of others suffer. To feel the pain that they must have felt as they were tortured for information. To know that there was no one coming to save her, just like there wasn’t for the agents she abandoned when they’d gotten her what she needed. I took my time with it too, telling her who or what each blow was for before I delivered it,” Oliver told her.

“You’ve truly turned into a monster, man,” Dig said, shaking his head sadly while Felicity looked sick. Neither of them could believe that this was Oliver. They’d thought that he’d seen that there was a better way to do things, that he didn’t need to kill everyone.

“No, I’m just no longer encumbered by the false morality that ‘killing is wrong, we’re better than them because we don’t do things like that’ that was coming from you and Felicity. I asked you both once, what had we really accomplished. All the people we put away got back out, the city was no better off and crime wasn’t down.”

“And I told you if you became Ra’s, then all the sacrifices you’d made and all the people you’d lost would have been for nothing. Guess that was right,” Felicity said.

“Perhaps, but I also look at all the good I’ve done as Ra’s. The scores of sex trafficking rings we’ve destroyed, the thousands of people we’ve saved from doing that alone. The sale of nuclear material to a terrorist group planning on making a dirty bomb, the destruction of the Bratva here in Starling and that group of armed thieves that we assisted you in stopping. Those are just a few of the things that the League has done in the last six months alone,” Oliver told them.

“And how many people have you had to murder to achieve that? And how many more will you kill in the coming years to keep your power?”

“A lot less than would have died if we had done nothing, Dig. But, since you’re so concerned about all the people that the League kills, I’ll make you a deal. Say the word and I’ll remove the League from Starling. We won’t return until the crime and corruption reaches a point that the city needs to be cleansed. The city will be your responsibility, yours, Felicity’s and Laurel’s.”

“Not mine,” Laurel, said causing all eyes to go to her. “I’m not saying I’m on Oliver’s side, just that I’m not on yours either. We were barely holding the line with you, me and Thea out there. We can’t do it, just the three of us and considering everything that’s going on between me and my father, I’ve been thinking about moving to Central City. Maybe, maybe I just need to get away from here and make a fresh start somewhere else.”

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“You don’t mean that Laurel,” Felicity said. “This is your city, your home.”

“Is it, really? My father and I barely speak, I’m doing menial work in the District Attorney’s office, Tommy’s dead and Sara’s not going to be here either. Maybe, maybe I just need to get away from here and make a fresh start somewhere else.”

Laurel turned and walked out the door, leaving a startled collection of people with varying feelings about what had just happened. Sara was happy for her sister for several reasons, beginning with how toxic things seemed on former Team Arrow and that it was probably a good things that she got away from that. She also felt that her sister would be happier in Central City than she seemed to be here. Nyssa’s happiness was more on the fact that Laurel leaving upset both Dig and Felicity. While she had a respect for the blonde IT genius, she did not have the same for the so-called leader of this team. He was supposed to have been a soldier, yet seemed to not understand that in a war, there were casualties. Sin didn’t care much either way, since she wasn’t really involved.

Thea and Oliver were feeling a mixture of happiness and sadness. Laurel Lance had been a part of their lives for most of their lives. They were happy that she was leaving Starling City, because they
knew things were only going to get worse here. They wished her happiness wherever she might go, because despite everything that had happened between Oliver and her when they were dating, she was still their friend. They were sad because with Laurel gone, the only thing left in Starling City for them to come back for was Walter. And Thea had heard that he was thinking about returning to England, so he might not be here much longer either.

Felicity was mostly sad to see Laurel possibly leaving. They had had a rough start, but she had come to view the lawyer as a friend or as close to one as she’d had. She’d try to stay in touch, but would they really? Between their work schedules and everything else, she could sadly see things like calls or Skype getting pushed to the side until the day came that they had just drifted apart. Dig, on the other hand, was livid. He felt like this was all part of a plot by Oliver to cripple the team so that the League wouldn’t have to deal with them when the League operated in the city. That Oliver had come here solely for that purpose and was using his sister on behalf of that.

“I’ll talk to Ray, see if he’d be willing to help. And I’ll call Roy….”

“Good luck with that,” Thea said. “Because I doubt if he’d help you once he finds out Dig there kicked me off the team and the reason why. Not to mention, he’s still a fugitive according to the law, so I doubt he’s going to want to hang around Starling City any longer than he has to. All it would take is one cop getting lucky and he’s back in prison, where everybody thinks he’s the Arrow and there’s no way they’ll fall for the fake death again. But, you can try to explain why that shouldn’t matter, how you need him to step up and help save the city, all in the name of honoring a man he respects but whom you consider a murderer psycho on the level of Malcolm Merlyn.”

“Oh, or we could just release evidence that Oliver was the true Arrow and that he convinced Roy to take the fall for him,” Felicity said. “I’ve got plenty on the DVRs back at the lair.”

“Go ahead,” Oliver said with a smile. “Because those recording would also show you and Dig in most of them. So, if I go on trial, neither of you would be far behind. Assuming that they could hold me long enough, that is.”

“Oh, or we could offer to give additional evidence against you. I’m sure an ambitious ADA would jump at the chance to be the one who put the Arrow away,” Dig said.

“If I’m the man you think I am, then what would stop me from making sure that neither of you lived long enough to make good on that threat.”

Felicity froze at that, because she’d heard that tone of voice before, just never directed at her. It was the voice of the Hood, used when he was confronting the Dark Archer. A tone of voice that said that he intended to make good on what he’d just told them. It also had her questioning every decision she had made since the moment she had met Oliver Queen. Taking him to the foundry instead of a hospital when she found him in the back of her car with a gun shot wound being her first major mistake. Joining his crusade, even if it was provisionally at first, was her second. Even getting involved with Cooper didn’t rank up near either of those. To this day she couldn’t definitively say why she’d done either of those things. Mainly, she blamed it on her desire to fix broken things. Plus the fact that Oliver Queen was ridiculously hot, like four alarm fire kinda hot and the fact that he had needed her help just made her a little giddy. So, she’d helped and slowly gotten sucked in, to the point that here she was, now having that same man threaten her life.

“Now, if there is nothing else, I’m here to spend time with my sister, not either of you. The door’s behind you, show yourselves out,” Oliver said, his tone colder than an Arctic winter.

Felicity and Dig turned and walked out. The others just stood there watching them leave, as Oliver went over and locked the door. When he turned back around, he was shaking his head in disbelief.
“So, I guess I’ll have a lot more free time now,” Thea said, trying to joke about being kicked off the team but her tone didn’t match her words. The team had given her life a sense of purpose, something she hadn’t really had before. She was going to miss that, as well as helping people by being Red Arrow, as she preferred to think of herself. Speedy was only for special people and after what had happened, she found herself regretting letting them call her that. The way they’d turned on her brother and her showed her exactly what kind of people they were.

“Well, you’re always welcome to hang out with me and Sin,” Sara said, a twinkle in her eye. One that Oliver noted and disapproved of. He was definitely going to talk to Sara before she put any ideas like the ones he suspected she was having into his sister’s head.

“Yes, that might be a good idea,” Nyssa chimed him, having seen the look that crossed her husband’s face and thoroughly disagreeing with it. Because, while she might not wish her sister-in-law to join the League, she did desire for the young woman to be stronger, better able to take care of herself. Sara could help her with that, just as she had been helping Sin. And if Thea should wish to join the League, as long as she made an informed decision, it was her life and she was an adult.

“I’d like that a lot. Now, enough with all the drama. I say we order up some pizzas and get this party started with a good Christmas movie.”

“That sounds great to me, Speedy,” Oliver said as he put his arm around his sister and hugged her to him.

Thea leaned into it for a moment, then pulled away so that she could get her phone. A brief discussion was had regarding toppings and sizes before the group came to a consensus of three large pizzas, one meat lover’s, one Supreme and one Hawaiian. The Hawaiian was at the request of Sara and Nyssa, or mostly Sara with Nyssa agreeing, supporting her Beloved after seeing Thea’s look of disgust at the thought of Pineapple on a pizza. This led to some teasing comments about what were and weren’t acceptable toppings for pizzas before they moved on to selecting a pair of movies for the evening.

There was a large selection of movies for them to choose from. They finally decided on keeping it non-serious and ended up settling on three, since two of them were really TV specials and therefore fairly short. First would be ‘The Grinch Who Stole Christmas’, follow by ‘Frosty the Snowman’ and lastly ‘The Muppet Christmas Carol’. The last one had been chosen when Nyssa had looked at it and expressed confusion over what a Muppet was. As soon as she made the remark, the others knew they had to watch it, if only to introduce the Bride of the Demon to the wonders of Jim Henson’s creations.

By the time the pizzas arrived, they’d almost finished the first movie. They elected to pause it so that everyone could fill a plate and grab something to drink. When they were all settled back in front of the television, Thea started it playing again. After that, it was something of a free-for-all as far as people going back for more. Nyssa and Sara had been especially enterprising. Since no one else wanted the Hawaiian pizza and they were sitting next to each other, they simply brought the box with them and placed in on the coffee table. That had led Oliver to grab the other pizzas and bring them over as well, only to find that there was no convenient way to arrange them there and therefore, it was best to return them to the kitchen counter.

When the last of the movies was over, it was late but nobody wanted to be the first to leave. They were all enjoying their time together. Nyssa especially was surprised at how much fun this had been. She’d never experienced a Christmas really, though she and Sara had exchanged gifts. But this, this was normal, something she’d never expected to experience. She looked forward to what the rest of the week would contain. It was only when the clock struck midnight that the guest decided they
should leave, but not before they all shared a round of hugs and made plans for getting together during the day. They called Salah, who came with the van and picked them up. Sara and Sin were dropped off at their apartment first, then Oliver and Nyssa were taken to the hotel.
After they had left the loft, neither Dig nor Felicity had said anything on their way down to the van. Both were trying to process what had just happened and how badly shattered things were. The fact that Oliver had matter of factly told them that he would kill them before allowing them to give evidence against them, well that was just the cherry on top of the shit sundae that today had been. They hadn’t gone over to Thea’s planning to confront Oliver. They had hoped to talk to him, to find a way to get him away from the League.

Seeing him with Nyssa, especially to see him holding her up like he had been when they walked in. It had been shocking, like something from one of those Hallmark movies her mother likes to watch. It had also, thinking back on it, pointed to the fact that Oliver was happy. Felicity had clearly seen the smile on his face, as well as the joy on Nyssa’s, which had surprised her since she didn’t think the assassin was capable of an emotion like joy.

Now, as they pulled into the garage of the Arrow lair, she looked over at Dig. He was tense, his body almost throbbing with barely contained anger. She hated this, she thought as she got out of the van and walked over to her workstation. She collapsed into the chair, feeling as if all her strength had finally evaporated. She heard Dig walk over and stand across from her.

“I’m gonna ask it, just to ask it,” Felicity said, looking up at Dig. “We’re not getting them back, are we?”

“No, we’re not,” Dig told her. “And even if they wanted to come back, I don’t think I could work with them ever again.”

“Even Laurel?”

“Laurel made her choice, Felicity. I think things with her dad are still tense, but we’ve been using her as our go-between with him. Then you add in the fact her sister is back, but a member of the League. Maybe, maybe she was thinking about leaving the team before. But tonight, it just crystallized for her, that she would be stuck in the middle again. So, she decided to do what is best for herself. I don’t know. I just know that we need to respect her choice.”

“So, what do we do now?” Felicity asked. “Because we, we can’t do this alone. And I know I said I’d talk to Ray and Roy, but I can already tell you Ray’s answer. He, we came close to dying in Nanda Parbat and he’s not ready to be in a situation like that again. If it was a one time, the world is ending thing, then maybe. But not as a permanent part of the team. As for Roy….”

“As for Roy what, Felicity?” Dig asked.

“I think Thea was right. I think that asking him to rejoin the team, especially considering if he gets caught, it’s an immediate return to prison, plus charges for his escape which would mean even more years behind bars. And I know this isn’t want you want to hear, but he’s our friend, first and foremost. This is his chance to be free and maybe we’re being selfish if we ask him to give that up.”

“You’re right, that wasn’t what I wanted to hear. Because, without them, this, this is done. Oliver
tried before he brought me in and I know he got close to being caught or killed several time. I can’t risk that. I’ve got Lyla and Sara to think about. I saw how hard it was for Carly after Andy died, trying to raise Andy Junior on her own. I can’t do that to Lyla.”

Felicity couldn’t think of a thing to say to that, because she agreed with everything he’d just said. Still, she couldn’t help the sadness that washed over her. This was the end and taking everything into consideration, all she could think was that they had failed this city. So, she took Dig’s hand and gave it a squeeze before just holding it. They stayed like that for a few minutes before Dig broke away and walked over to one of the medical carts. Opening a drawer, he removed a bottle and two small glasses, which he carried over to the desk. Filling the glasses emptied the bottle, he saw with a small smile. Seemed kind of appropriate, if you asked him.

“What are we drinking to?” Felicity asked.

“Prochnost. It’s Russian for strength,” Dig told her, sliding a glass over. “Seems as good a toast as any.”

“I think to us is better. You’re my brother, John.”

“I know, little sister.”

Tapping the glasses together, they drank the vodka down, though Felicity coughed a little as she did so. Neither of them spoke, each lost in their own memories. And even though they were looking at the new lair, in their minds it was the foundry basement that they were seeing. Back to a time before Oliver had made a deal with the devil, before people were enhanced with a Japanese super soldier serum. Back when it was just the three of them and the Dark Archer was the scariest thing out there.

Eventually, Dig shook his head and sighed. Wrapping an arm around Felicity, he gave her a hug.

“I’ll see you later,” Dig told her.

“Yeah, see you later, Dig.”

When Dig had left, Felicity just sat there and looked at the monitors for the longest time. Then, she did something that she’d never done. She logged into the system and executed a system shutdown. She watched as the system went through the process and waited until only the monitors were still powered on. She then pushed the buttons on them to turn them off, before getting up and taking one last look around. Walking over to the exit, she stopped at the electrical panel and threw the master breaker, shutting down the entire level. Then she got in the elevator and headed up to Ray’s apartment.

December 21, 2015

Starling City

Thea grumbled as she rolled out of bed, the knocking on the door just would not go away. Looking at the clock on the bedside table, she cursed a little when she saw it was only seven in the morning. She was plotting murder and mayhem in her mind as she pulled on a pair of yoga pants and a loose top, then walked down the stairs and opened the door. A part of her had expected it to be Oliver, not Sara and Sin. Both women were looking at her with grins as they walked past her into the loft.
“Not that I’m not happy to see you, but what are you doing here?” Thea asked as she watched them take seats at the breakfast bar after they deposited a white paper bag and a tray of drinks. Coffee from Jitters if her nose wasn’t mistaken.

“Well, I mentioned training last night and you were interested, so we came to pick you up,” Sara said as she opened the bag and pulled out a blueberry muffin. “So, grab a coffee and muffin. We’ll eat this quickly and then head out.”

Thea and Sin each made a grab for the bag, which Sin won and therefore got the next muffin. Thea took the last one and unwrapped it. As Sara had said, it was quick and then they were up and on their way. When they went outside, Thea saw that there was a van waiting for them. Sara got into the front passenger seat, while Sin and Thea took the back.

“Thea, this is Salah. Salah, this is Ra’s sister, Thea.”

“Nice to meet you, Salah,” Thea said.

“And you as well, my lady,” Salah said, not taking his eyes from the road as he drove, as well as scanned for possible threats. “Nyssa and Ra’s will be waiting for us outside their hotel.”

The drive to the hotel was short, with Salah pulling the van under the overhang and waiting. Oliver and Nyssa came out a moment later, looking more ready for a day of shopping than exercise. Oliver was carrying a small bag with gym clothes in it for both of them, but they had decided to wear better clothes. After the training session, they would be going shopping and then to the Starling City Zoo for their Christmas lights display.

“Good morning,” Oliver said as he got in the van. He squeezed past Sin and settled into the rear-most seat. Nyssa joined him.

“Morning, Ollie,” Thea said, drawing a grin from Sara and Nyssa along with a somewhat shocked look from Salah. “Nyssa, it’s good to see you again.”

“And you as well, sister-in-law. I see you accepted our invitation to train you,” Nyssa said.

“Definitely. I’m looking forward to it, especially in something other than archery. No offense, Ollie, but I need more than that if I’m going to be good.”

“It should not offend him, Thea. In fact, he should be and is proud of you for wanting to excel at something.”

“And Sara’s a really good trainer, Thea. I’ve learned a lot from her in just a couple of weeks,” Sin said with a grin. “I mean, it was really hard and painful at first, but every day it got a little less so because I was able to do more.”

“Don’t worry, Thea,” Sara told her. “We’ll use today to see where you are and go from there.”

“And while you are working with her, I will work with Ta-er Aswad,” Nyssa told them, smiling as she saw the younger woman start. “It will be fine, I just want to see how well you are doing and offer you some pointers.”

“Now, we just need to figure out what Ollie will be doing while we do all the work,” Thea put out there.

“I’m sure we’ll figure something out.”
The other ladies laughed at the knowing smirk that Sara shot at Oliver. Salah was shocked at this behavior, so used as he was to the previous Ra’s al Ghul. Nyssa’s father would definitely not have approved, thinking that this was not proper behavior for not just the Demon’s Head, but any assassin. As the drive went on, though, Salah found this to be more enjoyable than the usually silence filled rides he normally took.

When the van arrived at the safe house, they pulled into the garage and parked while Oliver and the ladies got out. Then Salah left, with Nyssa telling him that they would call when they were ready to leave. The group made their way upstairs, where they found Roy sound asleep on the couch, still dressed in the Arrow costume. Sara, Sin and Nyssa went into the bedroom to change, while Thea and Oliver just looked at Roy for a moment before Thea walked over to him. Pressing a kiss to his lips, she waited for his eyes to open.

“Morning,” Roy said, still half asleep. It took him a moment for his mind to catch up, then he jerked to his feet. “Thea, what are you doing here? How do you even know where this is?”

“We brought her,” Oliver said from behind him, a smile on his face as he took in his former protege. “How are you, Roy?”

“Oliver, man am I glad to see you. I’m good, still trying to figure out what’s next. For now, I go out and try to help where I can.”

“Well, if you’re hoping for Felicity to come up with a new identity for you, I wouldn’t count on it,” Thea said, a touch of bitterness in her voice.

“What happened, Thea?”

“The team is pretty well done. They found out last night about Ollie being Ra’s and it didn’t go well. Especially when Dig found out I had known and didn’t tell them. He threw me off the team, basically said I was a spy for the League. I mean, never mind that Laurel was close to Nyssa or that Sara helped us while being a member of the League. Those weren’t problems, but me honoring my brother’s wishes and keeping his secret was.”

“And Felicity agreed with this?” Roy asked.

“I wouldn’t say agreed, so much as didn’t argue against it. They were more focused on Darth Oliver, this was just a bump in the road to getting him to turn from the dark side,” Thea said.

“Damn. I mean, I have just never got it. How do two rational people continue to make irrational decisions when it comes to you, Oliver. The team was your team, until you did something one of them didn’t like and then it wasn’t. I mean, I hated that you were working with Malcolm Merlyn, but I trusted you enough that you had a plan, a reason, even if we didn’t know it or see it yet. I just never understood why they couldn’t.”

“So, yeah. If you go to Felicity for a new identity, she’s going to ask to you stay and rejoin the team. Especially after Laurel quit when the battle lines were being drawn. She’s not on Team League, though. More like on Team Laurel. She’s moving to Central City and starting over.”

“Which will be good for my sister,” Sara said as she came out of the bedroom.

“We’ll figure something else out,” Roy told Thea.

“Corto Maltese,” Oliver said. “Malcolm’s house is still there and you inherited it, Thea. The only thing will be getting Roy from here to there. We’ll need paperwork for that.”
“Al-Qarasina should be able to handle that,” Nyssa told him. “Perhaps, even come up with a way for him to return one day. We will ask her.”

“Who is al-Qarasina?” Thea asked.

“She’s the League’s Felicity. Just without the moral high horse that Miss Smoak has a fondness for perching on.”

“Enough chitchat, we need to be training. I’ll take Thea, Nyssa has Sin which leaves Oliver and Roy. So, come on.”

With that edict from Sara, the women all headed downstairs while Roy and Oliver scrambled to get changed and follow them. When they got down there, they saw Sara and Thea sparring on one set of mats while Nyssa and Sin were doing the same on another set. Not wanting to get distracted, they each grabbed a pair of escrima sticks and went to work. Oliver was impressed, seeing how Roy had improved since he’d last seen him. When he tried one move, Oliver knew that he’d been paying attention while Sara was training him, as that was a move the blonde assassin was fond of.

Over on the mats, Sara was also finding herself impressed. Thea was better than she thought she’d be, obviously due to the training she’d undergone at the hands of Malcolm Merlyn. Still, she could see room for improvements and more advanced training. So, she started picking up the pace, pushing the younger woman. Thea responded to the challenge, calling on everything she’d learned already to try and slip inside Sara’s guard and land a blow. She finally found what she thought was an opening, only to find herself flat on her back. Still, she didn’t let that slow her down, as she tried to sweep Sara’s legs out from under her before flipping herself back onto her feet.

Nyssa and Sin were going a little slower, with Sin instigating the attacks and Nyssa both defending as well as assessing the skill that she was showing. She knew that the younger woman was not yet ready to join the League, but she was showing a definite talent. So, with that in mind, she started to pick up the pace as well as launch attacks of her own. Next, Nyssa started adding in things that she believed Sin could use, teaching her various attack combinations as well as kicks and tosses.

Eventually, Oliver called a break so that they could switch opponents. Oliver wanted a chance to measure how well Sin was doing and felt that Roy could benefit from Nyssa teaching him as well. Sara would continue working with Thea. Sin eyed Oliver cautiously when he faced off against her, as she had never faced someone as big as he was. This was why Oliver had suggested this and why he made the first move, throwing a strike at her. Sin nimbly dodged out of the way, as well as the next two strikes.

“Good, Ta-er Aswad,” Oliver told her. “Use your speed and agility to buy space. But be careful not to get back into a corner. When you do strike, aim for my lower body.”

Sin listened and watched. On his next attack, Oliver left his legs vulnerable and let her strike. It was a solid blow to his thigh.

“Good. In a real fight, though, aim for the knees. If you take his knees out, now he’s your size and you can aim for his eyes, throat, arms and hands.”

“That sounds harsh,” Sin said, before thinking it through. “But, I guess they’d do worse to me.”

“Indeed they would and that is something you should never forget. If you let them, they will try to do much worse to you,” Oliver told her.

They continued on like that, as Oliver helped her learn how to take down a bigger opponent. Once
she had the basics, he moved them to more open sparring. Now, he wasn’t giving her openings, rather he was forcing her to find or make her own. Because of this, she was also learning to be more patient, not forcing things as much as watching, waiting and then striking. He held back, because this was all about Sin learning, but that didn’t mean that he wasn’t getting a decent workout as well. Just not the same type that he would have gotten if it had been Nyssa or Sara that he was sparring against.

When they were finally done, Oliver looked over at the others. Nyssa and Roy were talking, while Thea and Sara were laughing quietly about something and Sin was going over to join them. So, he just stood there for a moment, enjoying this. Seeing happiness on his sister’s face, he just wants to freeze this moment and hold on to it as long as he can. Because he knows, the path he’s chosen won’t allow for as many of these as he might wish.

December 21, 2015

Starling City

Laurel looked around the living room of her apartment and sighed. She’d woken up that morning and gone out to buy packing boxes. What she was looking at now was the results of several hours of concerted effort. She’d already taken care of the kitchen, not that she used it that much. She hadn’t needed either Ollie or Tommy’s whispered opinions to know that she couldn’t cook to save her life. That’s why there was a large stack of takeout menus in one of her kitchen drawers.

When she’d had the kitchen done, she’d moved on to the living room. Dismantling her candle fireplace had taken the most time. She’s blown the candles out that morning, so that they would be cool by the time she went to pack them away. Now, they occupied three boxes, including one for the metal framework. She’d also gotten her pictures put away, all but one of them. It was the one with the most meaning, at least to her, showing her and her sister next to the bird cage holding Sara’s canary. Even when she’d been at her lowest, filled with hatred for Oliver and Sara and what they had done, she’d never been able to put that picture away. She’d held onto it and the memories that it carried as tightly as she could, trying to remember the sound of her voice, her laugh, everything that made Sara who she was.

Seeing her yesterday, standing with Ollie and looking so at peace, had been hard. She’d had two chances at happiness and watched both of them be snatched away from her. She didn’t begrudge Sara finding some for herself, she just wished an uncaring universe would let her do the same. That’s when she’d known that the only way for that to possibly happen would be if she left town. Starling held too many bad memories for her. Memories she’d tried to bury in pills and a bottle, in the Canary and taking our her demons on the city’s criminals. Before she could truly be free to have that new start, she would need to finally lay those memories to rest.

Laurel had already spoken with her mother and arranged to stay there for the time being. Finding an apartment was priority number two on her list, with finding a job being first. She also called a storage company when she’d stopped for lunch and rented a unit that should be big enough for everything. Her winter clothes would make the trip to her mother’s, while everything else went into storage until she found her own place.

Finished with as much of the living room as she planned to do at present, Laurel made quick work out of her guest bedroom. Her plan at present was to spend Christmas here and maybe see her father. At the very least, she needed to let him know she was leaving the city. Given where their relationship currently was, she doubted if he would care too much but he was still her father. And after
everything that happened with Sara, she wouldn’t just disappear on him too.

Having done as much as she intended to today, she went to the kitchen and found a menu for pizza. She ordered a large with everything, figuring whatever she didn’t eat tonight would be lunch tomorrow. She then took out her laptop and started looking for jobs in Central City. She’d have to take the bar exam before she could practice as a lawyer, if she decided that’s what she wanted to do. A part of her did, she’d enjoyed her time at CNRI, helping people get some measure of justice. But she’d also seen how ineffective the law could be and she wondered if she wanted to go back to that system. So, she ended up just staring at the screen while her mind debated what direction it wanted to go. Even when the pizza arrived, she was still locked in her own mind, going over various pros and cons of various ideas for the future. She ended up falling asleep on the couch, the half finished pizza still sitting on the coffee table next to a glass of diet Coke.

December 21, 2015

Starling City

Al-Qarasina sat in front of her workstation, fingers flying across the keyboards as she entered various commands and queries. It was part of her daily routine now, accessing the system for Team Arrow, finding out what they’d learned about Ra’s as well as crime in the city. Except today, she wasn’t able to get in. At first, she’d thought it was a new firewall blocking her, that somehow the technical person on the team had deduced they were being hacked and taken measures to stop her. She tried a few tricks and when those had failed, she’d taken a step back and examined what was happening. When she did so, she reached a somewhat shocking conclusion, that she wasn’t able to hack in because the system wasn’t online.

Getting up from her workstation, she walked into the kitchen and filled a large mug with coffee. Taking a sip, she pondered what that could mean. Because, as long as she’d been here, that system had never been entirely offline except when she’d taken it down with her attack. It was always there, scanning, searching, seeking knowledge. She couldn’t think of a reason for this to suddenly stop that was good. She took another sip, letting the warmth seep inside of her. Even in jeans and a sweatshirt, the house was cool and a little drafty.

She was walking back to her workstation when the front door opened. She was not surprised to see Salah, as he was responsible for keeping an eye on her. It was the man who followed him that did surprise her, as she bowed her head and waited for her orders.

“Good morning, al-Qarasina,” Oliver said as he walked into her work area. “Please sit down.”

“Good morning, my lord. How may I serve you today?” al-Qarasina asked.

Oliver looked at the woman, again struck by how much she looked like Felicity. Oh, there were differences to be sure, but the similarities were all too easy to see. He wondered again if that was why he’d chosen to spare her and not just that the League could make use of her talents. That the thought of killing her felt too much like killing Felicity, which was a line he knew he’d never cross.

“I have an assignment for you. I need a complete new identity for someone, one good enough to stand all but the most comprehensive background screening.”

“The difficult I can do immediately, the impossible may take a little longer. I’ll assume you want
identification cards, valid social security number, credit history?"

“Everything he could possibly need,” Oliver told her with a smile.

“Give me a few days and I should have it ready. I will need him to come by for photos for the IDs,” al-Qarasina replied

With that, she turned to her computer and began. She asked Oliver a series of questions about the person she was creating the identity for, just things that she would need so she could make what she created fit the person it was for. Once she had that, she began hacking her way through a whole host of government agencies, building the necessary files and forms within the system.

Seeing that she was falling into the zone and knowing full well what it meant from having been around Felicity, Oliver stood. He and Salah left the building quietly, walking out to the van. Salah would take him to his hotel, then return here with some dinner for al-Qarasina. Oliver planned to enjoy another evening with his sister, this time they would gather at the hotel for dinner and then go out to the Starling City Zoo where there was a Christmas lights display.
Decisions, decisions

December 23, 2015

Nanda Parbat

A pair of people walked out of the valley that led to the approach to Nanda Parbat. Both were so bundled in winter clothing that it was impossible to discern much beyond that they were both adults. One carried a large pack over their shoulders, while the other was unencumbered. Before they were able to go much further, they found themselves surrounded by a host of assassins. The person who was carrying nothing seemed unbothered by this, while their counterpart had practically jumped out of their skin when the black clad figures appeared from seemingly nowhere.

“What brings you here?” one of the assassins asked.

“I’m here to see Ra’s al Ghul. I was send by Ta-er al-Sahfer,” Helena Bertinelli said, as she pushed back her hood.

“You will have to wait, I’m afraid. My lord is not here.”

“Do I need to come back, then?”

“No, Miss Bertinelli. Once you have come here, you stay here until Ra’s al Ghul has seen fit to judge you,” the assassin told her. “Come, I will show you to a room.”

The person who had accompanied her turned and began the trek back to their village. This task was one he’d performed since he was a young man and one he would eventually hand over to his son, just as his father had to him all those years before. This was how they served the League, by being a guide and guardian to the League. Being trusted to misguide those who were not seeking to serve the League, but rather to locate it so that others could then attempt to destroy it. The man had personally stopped three agents of HIVE and an ARGUS attempt to plant a spy within the League.

Helena followed the man who had spoken to her down the path towards what looked like a large temple carved into the mountainside. She noticed that the others had surrounded her, making it so that she could only go in that direction. At this, she was beginning to understand what the woman, Ta-er al-Sahfer, had meant when she’d told her to consider her choice wisely. It had taken her a day to fly here from Starling City, after she spent five days weighing her options. When she’d begun on this path, it had been to get revenge on her father for killing Michael and all of her anger had blinded her. Only when he had been killed did that lessen somewhat. She’d escaped from SCPD custody and left Starling, making the decision to hunt down the rest of the Bertinelli crime family.

Her fight had taken her to Gotham, where she’d finished the family once and for all. She’d also run across the city’s resident vigilante, who’d made it plain that she wasn’t welcome. She’d managed to escape by the skin of her teeth and vowed she’d not return to Gotham any time soon. She hadn’t planned to return to Starling either, until she’d been in Coast City and seen what was happening there. She’d targeted the organized crime families there, finding out that they had come there from Starling because the Bratva was muscling everybody else out of town. So, she’d headed home to look into the threat and run into the League of Assassins. She’d heard enough about them from her father and others, always spoken of with a measure of respect uncommon for men such as them, that she knew she was lucky to have been able to walk away. She certainly hadn’t been expecting an
offer to join them, if she was deemed worthy.

The walk through the fortress took some time. When they had first come inside, most of the other assassins had departed, leaving only a trio with her as they proceeded further. What she didn’t notice was that there were others watching the procession from the shadows. Eventually, they came to a doorway and the assassin who had greeted her opened it, showing her into a rather spartan room. There was a double bed, dresser, a pair of wooden chairs and a small table. A small brazier was in the corner, providing both warmth and light to the room. The man waited until she had gone inside and followed her, while the other two assassins waiting just outside the doorway.

“This will be your room. Your meals will be brought to you. Until you have been judged by Ra’s, the rest of the fortress except the library is off-limits to you,” Navid said.

“Thank you,” Helena said. “I think I’ll rest. The journey was longer than I expected.”

“As you wish.”

With that, Navid left the room and she could hear the sound of a lock being engaged. Shrugging her shoulders, Helena set to work emptying her pack. She put the clothes into the dresser, then checked the pair of doors she had noticed. One was to a small closet, the other went to a bathroom. After a moment of debate, she decided to take a quick shower and hope that the water was hot enough to get rid of some of the chill she felt from the long hike.

While Helena was getting settled in, Navid walked to the League’s communication center. He needed to inform Ra’s of the newest potential recruit. She had claimed to have been sent by Nyssa’s Beloved, which was something that was guaranteed to get his lord’s attention. Whether that was good or not was not something Navid was prepared to speculate about.

December 23, 2015

Starling City

Oliver put the phone away, unable to hide the dark look that was on his face. Why had Sara sent Helena Bertinelli to the League and more importantly, why hadn’t she told him that she had done so? She knew that he had failed with the former Mafia princess when he tried to get her to abandon the path that she was on. So why did she think he would succeed now where he had failed before? Or was she using this as a means of getting revenge on Helena for what she had done to Laurel? He didn’t know and making guesses like he was doing wasn’t the answer. So, he decided on the direct route and looked over at where Sara sat talking with the others.

“Ta-er al-Sahfer, Nyssa, I need to speak with you,” Oliver said, the harshness in his voice getting looks from them as well as Roy, Thea and Sin.

“What did you do, Sara?” Sin asked softly.

“Must be something pretty bad to get the Hood voice,” Roy said helpfully.

The pair followed Oliver downstairs while the others got back to finishing their after training lunch. Walking into the middle of the garage, he stopped by one of the training mats and looked at Sara. It wasn’t Ollie looking at Sara, this was Ra’s looking at Ta-er al-Sahfer and Ra’s did not look happy. Nyssa knew her role in this, as she came to stand beside her husband and facing her Beloved, feeling
more like she was caught in the middle no matter where she stood.

“Is there something you failed to tell me?” Oliver asked.

“If there is, I am not aware of it,” Sara told him.

“Then, I will have to remind you. Helena Bertinelli.”

“Oh, shit. She actually did it?”

“By did it, you mean accept your offer to potentially join the League? Because Navid just called saying that she was in Nanda Parbat seeking an audience with Ra’s al Ghul and that she had been sent by you. Seeing the look on your face, I know you made the offer, my only question is why?” Oliver asked.

“I know that you failed with her when you tried to train her, but that was because you were trying to change her more than you were trying to train her. When I looked at her, I saw somebody who I think could be an asset to the League, with the proper training. Training by somebody who wants to harness her aggression, not suppress it. Somebody who can show her that her way is too messy and that she lacks refinement. Someone like Nyssa or Cheshire, perhaps,” Sara told him.

“And our history had nothing to do with this?”

“Which history? The part where she held my sister and a score of other people hostage in an attempt to murder her own father? Or the part where you actually slept with her while trying to train her, which I have to say is an interesting motivational technique.”

“Jealous?” Oliver asked with a smirk, his temper having receded.

“Not hardly. Hell, I knew before the Gambit how you were when it came to women and from what I understand, that didn’t change after you came back. I mean, there was Helena, McKenna, Laurel, Isabele and me. Just a question, but except for Felicity, was there a woman who crossed your path for more than five minutes that you didn’t try to screw?” Sara asked with a grin. “Maybe Nyssa, but that’s because she’d have tried to feed you your balls if you’d made a move.”

“Funny, Sara. And for the record, McKenna and I never went there.”

“As entertaining as this is, we have gotten off the topic. What do you wish to do about Miss Bertinelli?” Nyssa asked.

“My first reaction is to reject her. But, I don’t know if that is the rational part of me making that decision or my emotions telling me that she’s betrayed me before, that she’s hurt people I care about in her quest for vengeance. So, I will let her sit while I consider whether I can look past my history with her and see what Sara has seen,” Oliver told her, his eyes taking on a distant look.

“What are you thinking, Husband?”

“An idea, one that I need to think about more before I go further with it.”

Nyssa remained silent at that. She was coming to know her husband quite well and pushing him to reveal his thoughts or feelings never worked well. So, she trusted that he would tell her when he was ready. As for Oliver, a glimmer of an idea had shown itself to him. It was a plan for the future, one that was far too incomplete to speak of. It would take time and effort, but if he could find a way to bring it about, the results would be interesting to say the least.
Together, the trio walked back upstairs, only to find a visibly upset Thea Queen waiting for them. Sara and Nyssa both easily guessed that her anger wasn’t with them, given the daggers she was glaring at Oliver, so they moved around her and on over to the table to finish their lunches. Oliver just stopped and waited, choosing to let his sister get out whatever she needed to get out.

“Were you ever going to tell me?” Thea demanded.

“Tell you what exactly, Speedy? Can you give me a hint?” Oliver asked in return.

“That you offered to let Roy join the League? Or that Sin has joined? And before you get all upset, Roy only said something because he figured that you might have told me that you wanted the man I love to run away to Nanda Parbat. But, I guess you’re still keeping secrets from me, Ollie.”

“And if I had told you, but then told you that I won’t let you join. What then, Speedy?”

“I’d argue why not? How would I be different from any other person seeking to join the League, other than the fact that I’m your sister?” Thea asked. “I mean, it can’t be that I’m not physically fit enough. And I already have more training than most people who seek out the League, I’d bet. So, give me one reason, other than being your sister.”

“That’s all the reason I need, Speedy,” Oliver told her. “Because, I’ll always want to protect you, even if it means protecting you from me.”

“What does that even mean, Ollie?”

“That I would want nothing more than to have you with me, because I love you. I’ve love you from the first moment I set eyes on you. You’re MY sister. But, that the emotional side of me talking. The rational side knows what the League is, what it does and how it can change a person. Knows that there is no place for sentiment or feelings when I am making decisions as Ra’s, that a time might come where I would have to send Nyssa or Sara or you out on a mission that got you killed. And while it would be hard enough dealing with it if it were Nyssa or Sara, it would be crushing if it was you, Speedy.”

“And I get that, Ollie,” Thea told him. “But you need to understand that I’m a big girl now and I can make my own decisions. I don’t need or want you or Roy or anybody else making them for me. Not to mention that Roy and I are kind of a package deal, because as soon as I can talk some sense into him, I plan on dragging him off to an altar and marrying him.”

Oliver couldn’t help it, he had to laugh at the look on Roy’s face. The younger man clearly hadn’t been expecting that. Sin, Sara and even Nyssa were grinning at that.

“I know you can make your own decisions. But I am Ra’s al Ghul and my will is binding on the League. And I will not allow you to join the League,” Oliver told her. “I want a different future for you, Speedy.”

“So, it’s fine for me to go out as a vigilante and help keep the city safe, but it’s not okay for me to join the League?”

“Because, when you go out there as Speedy or Red Arrow, you’re looking to stop the bad guys. The League isn’t like that. We replace evil with death. Before I came here, I was in Russia, as the leader of the group of assassins there to stop a branch of the Bratva. Their leader was a friend of mine and I killed him, with no hesitation, because he and his group were a danger that needed to be stopped. I know that what I did was necessary, but I also know that it is slowly changing me. Just as surely as my time on Lian Yu changed me”
“And that’s why you need me, Ollie.” Thea told him.

“No, Thea. We’ll train you, if you want. It would help you if you decide to continue as a vigilante or for self-defense purposes. But, I will not allow you to join the League,” Oliver told her.

Thea punched Oliver straight to the face, then shoved past him and ran down the stairs. Roy looked at Oliver for a long moment before running after her. Nyssa, Sara and Sin were all giving him looks ranging from frustration to amusement.

“If you have something to say, just get it out.”

“I would congratulate you on how spectacularly stupid that was, Husband,” Nyssa said, a laugh in her voice. “You seek to protect your sister, while failing to realize that not only doesn’t she want to be protected but that she is at more risk being left out there on her own.”

“What do you mean, Nyssa?” Oliver asked.

“Simply that you and the League have enemies, powerful enemies. Enemies that will not hesitate to view the sister of Ra’s al Ghul as a powerful bargaining chip or as simply a target in their fight against the League.”

“So, you’re saying that I should let her join the League, even though that comes with its own set of dangers?”

“Dangers that you can minimize as Ra’s. We can train her until she is as good as either of us,” Nyssa told him.

Oliver walked over to the couch and sat down, burying his head in his hands. He didn’t want this for Thea. He wanted her to have a normal life, one where she and Roy lived in a nice house with a white picket fence, had good jobs, a couple of kids and maybe a dog. That was part of what he’d been fighting for as the Hood or the Arrow. It had been to right the wrongs done by his family, to be sure, but also to give his sister a safe city in which to have a future. Instead, all he’d given her was pain and suffering. A madman seeking to make him suffer had killed their mother right in front of her. She’d been taken by Malcolm Merlyn because Oliver had failed to kill the man. She’d been kidnapped by Nyssa in order to draw Malcolm out. She’d been stabbed by Nyssa’s father in order to force him to join the League in order to save her and because he’d joined the League and then defeated Nyssa’s father, he was now Ra’s al Ghul and his sister faced threats because of that.

A part of him wondered if things wouldn’t have been better if he’d never returned. Yet, he knew the answer to that. He’d seen the path that Thea was on, the partying, the drinking and drugs, the stupid behavior like breaking into stores. It was the path he’d been on before the Gambit. And while she might have eventually found her way, it was far more likely that she could have died from a drug overdose or a car accident while driving under the influence.

“I know what you’re thinking, Ollie,” Sara said softly, as she sat down next to him. “But not everything bad that happens is your fault. We all make our own choices in life. And yeah, being Ra’s does carry with it some baggage, but it also means that there is an entire League of people behind you. We can make sure Thea is as safe as possible. But, that might mean having her join us. I know you don’t like it and if it was Laurel, I’d probably be feeling the same way. Just think about it. Because that flat NO you gave her, that’s going to push her away. And if you lose her, you’ll likely lose Roy too.”

“I’ll think about it,” Oliver told them.
When Thea and Roy came back, neither of them said a word. Oliver sighed softly, trying to think about how he would fix this. The problem was, he didn’t have a clue where to start other than to let her join the League and that was just a step too far for him at the moment. Before the silence could get too oppressive, they heard the sound of Salah’s van pulling into the garage. Thea elected to stay behind and spend time with Roy, rather than ride back with them or more specifically Oliver.

December 24, 2015
Starling City

Oliver was sitting on the couch in their suite when Nyssa came out, dressed for the day. A maroon blouse paired with black slacks and flats under a long coat. He didn’t have to ask, as he knew she would have at least three pairs of knives on her. As for himself, he was barely awake, having been up most of the night. He was still wearing a t-shirt and sweatpants as he stared out the window, his mind running in circles as he tried to come up with a solution for Thea.

“I will return later, Husband,” Nyssa said.

“Where are you off to?” Oliver asked.

“I am meeting Sara and Sin for breakfast at a nice little bistro near their apartment. We will likely go shopping afterwards, which should be interesting.”

“I imagine so.”

Nyssa looked at him after that response, because she knew that he knew she disliked going shopping. She could see in his eyes a far off look and knew that he wasn’t really hearing her. She wondered what was going through his mind that had him so distracted. Nothing had happened last night and she knew of nothing this morning, which left her thinking about yesterday afternoon as the likely cause. But was he thinking about Miss Bertinelli or Thea, that was the question. Turning from him, she decided to leave and let him think. When he was ready, he’d talk to her about whatever it was, she was sure.

Oliver sat there just thinking for another hour, then stood and walked to his room. After a shower, he got dressed in jeans, a gray hooded sweatshirt and a pair of boots. He tossed on a heavy coat, then went downstairs and into the hotel’s garage. Finding the motorcycle, he climbed on and headed out. He spent the ride over to his sister’s considering the course of action he was about to take, wondering if this was his reason or his emotions dictating his actions. When he arrived at her building, he got off the bike and went inside, nodding to the doorman who recognized him. Taking the elevator up to her floor, he got out and went to her door.

“Why are you here? Back to tell me again how I’m not good enough?” Thea asked bitingly when she opened the door.

“No, I was hoping we could talk,” Oliver said calmly, hands up in a gesture of surrender.

Thea stepped out of the way and Oliver walked past her. Taking a moment, he looked and then decided the best place was for them to sit at the table. So, he made his way over and sat there, waiting for his sister to join them. Thea took the seat across from him, folding her hands in front of her.
“So talk.”

“I need to apologize for yesterday. Not so much for what I said, but how I said it. I was abrupt and dismissive and I’m sorry. I told you before, my instinct is to protect you, to keep you safe. But Nyssa and Sara both pointed out to me that pushing you away might actually be increasing the danger you’re in.”

“What do you mean, Ollie?” Thea asked.

“The League has enemies, as do I. Enemies who would think nothing of using the sister of Ra’s al Ghul to exact their revenge, as bait in a trap or a leverage. Any of those means danger to you. Now, I’m not saying that because of that, I’ll let you join the League.”

“Then what are you saying?” Thea asked.

“That, just as Sara and Nyssa told Sin, you need to really think about this. Joining the League isn’t like a gym membership or your cell phone contract, where you can walk away if you’re not happy. The League is a lifetime commitment, where you only leave when you’re dead or if Ra’s al Ghul releases you. Also, if you join the League, I’ll treat you like any other recruit, if not worse. Because other members will be looking to see if I show you any favoritism and if they perceive that, it would make things worse for you and me,” Oliver told her.

“Does that mean you’ll let me join the League?”

“I means that I will make you an offer, no negotiation. Take it or leave it. You’ll spend the next six months being trained, while you also take that time to consider everything that you will be giving up should you join the League. At the end of those six months, should you still want to join, Nyssa will test you. If you pass the test, you will join the League.”

“And if I don’t? Pass the test, I mean,” Thea asked.

Oliver just gave her a dark look, which filled her with a sense of foreboding. He didn’t want to tell her what would happen if she failed, that he would be called on to do what every Ra’s al Ghul did to recruits who weren’t accepted into the League. It was something he couldn’t back away from, because it was part of what helped keep the League a secret. Letting Thea leave, solely because she is his sister, would be considered a weakness and invite problems from other members, one of whom might take it upon themselves to challenge him for leadership.

“I take it failure is not an option.”

“No, it’s not, Speedy. Failure means death. And it wouldn’t matter that you’re my sister, I would still have to do it. That’s why I want you to be really sure before you do this,” Oliver told him.

“OK, so I train with Sara for the next six months while I think about this? I agree,” Thea told him.

“Now, I’ve still got a bunch of Christmas movies and they’re not going to watch themselves.”

Oliver laughed as he got up from the table and went over to the couch facing the television. Thea got a bottle of wine and two glasses from the kitchen, then carried them over. She took the seat next to her brother and opened the wine, pouring two glasses. The siblings settled in for the afternoon, watching movies and just talking, getting back the holiday spirit that had been dampened after their argument yesterday.
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