Once More (From the Top)

by writewithurheart

Summary

In the aftermath of his fight with Ras Al Ghul, Oliver finds himself somewhere unexpected: his hospital room when he first came back from the Island.

With a second chance to right the mistakes he’s made since coming back to Starling City, what will Oliver do to save the people he’s loved and lost?

Will he be able to change his past or will he be forced to watch history repeat itself?

Notes

So I got a prompt from someone a long LONG while ago on ff.net suggesting doing something where Oliver’s mind from now got sent back to his body from the pilot. I ADORED the idea, but I got it just as season 3 was starting and I didn’t want to work on it while new stuff was coming out. And then the mid-season finale happened and I was like ‘BAM! This is perfect!’ So, it took a little while for me to actually write it, but I wanted to release a little tease to see if people like the idea. I’m currently working on more if people are actually interested (please PLEASE let me know if you want more because I will happily
write it). I hope you like it!

**Edit: I have updated the chapter to include the entire first chapter instead of just a snippet and I am most definitely continuing this fic!!!

DISCLAIMER: I do not own Arrow. Significant quotes below are taken from the tv show. Chances are, if you recognize it, it isn't mine.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Cold.

Pain.

That’s all he knows in that first moment of stunning clarity.

He can’t breathe through his crushed windpipe and the sword angled through his chest certainly isn’t happening matters. The Head of the Demon speaks in Arabic. Even if he had the mental capacity to understand, Oliver’s not present in the moment anymore.

Before his eyes, he sees everyone he loves on display in terrifyingly clear quality:
Dad...Mom...Thea...Felicity...

He clings to the last memory: that simple kiss in the hospital hallway that feels like years ago. He should have taken the chance. He should have held her close and loved her while he had the time. He shouldn’t have pushed her away. Now, he’s never going to get to see her again, to hold her, to love her in all the ways he imagined.

He’s falling, plummeting from the cliff. At first, he thought it was just his spirit leaving his body, but he feels the weightlessness and the rush of the wind flying him. He can’t feel the pain anymore. He’s numb to all but her image in his mind – that moment in the hospital branded into his eyelids with no hope of escape. So he embraces it and closes his eyes, waiting for the impact, waiting for everything to end. There’s no way he can survive his injuries, let alone the impact with the ground. At least he told her he loved her before he left.

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He should be dead by now. It doesn’t take this long to fall off a cliff. He doesn’t even feel like he’s falling anymore. The air’s not whipping past and it’s almost like he can feel solid ground under his feet. It’s almost like he’s standing...

Frowning, he opens his eyes and his heart seizes in his chest. This isn’t possible.

Sprawled out in front of him is Starling City – the Glades still standing? The glow from hundreds of windows illuminates the night sky, bringing light to a city that should probably be asleep. It’s home, but irrevocably different. He doesn’t know when, but he got used to the destruction left in the aftermath of the Undertaking and the new buildings that sprang up in its wake. Looking at the old skyline, he feels lost, like this place is mocking him, showing him what he was unable to save.

He looks down at his white t-shirt and blue scrub bottoms, an interesting choice for...wherever he is because this must be some version of Heaven or Hell, right? God forbid it’s another Purgatory.

His body’s all in one piece or so it seems: no pain, no open wound spouting blood, no limbs hanging at odd angles. He flexes each of his joints in sequence from toes to his knees, taking careful stock of each movement. It’s like years have been erased from his body. His damaged knee no longer grinds. He almost feels...lighter on his feet. Hip, spine, shoulders, all the way down to his fingertips yearning for the familiar feel of a bow and arrow: they all respond and react with defined clarity. His heart has resumed pounding in his chest. As far as he can tell, he’s alive...somehow. Or at least possesses the illusion of life.

But there’s something about his surroundings: the view of the city, the antiseptic smell of the hospital room, the starchy feel of the clothes. They don’t feel familiar exactly, but the memory of them echoes faintly in his mind. There’s something about them that pulls at the edge of his conscious, begging him to remember something. It’s almost like...but that can’t be right.

“Oliver?”

The familiar voice stops the heart in his chest and ever so slowly he turns away from the window. “Mom.” It escapes in a strangled gasp, sounding almost foreign as he takes a step closer. Maybe this is his personal hell showing him everything and everyone he failed to save because this absolutely isn’t possible. She died with a sword through her chest. And symmetry of him dying the same way isn’t lost on him.

But that simple fact doesn’t stop Oliver from taking two quick steps forward and enveloping her in a hug because right now, for the moment, she is as solid and real as he is. She’s right here in front of him and she died thinking he didn’t love her. He relaxes into her touch, enjoying the familiar warmth that he didn’t realize he missed so much until now.

“My beautiful boy,” she whispers in his ear as her tears hit his neck and he wrestles with his own emotions.

“I missed you, too. Mom.” He pulls back, drinking her in with a sad smile. So this is the afterlife. It might not be so bad. They’ll get along without him in Starling. Digg, Felicity, and Roy can handle it on their own. Maybe they’ll do the smart thing and forget about the mission altogether and move on with their lives. He just wants them to be happy.

Moira smiles happily up at Oliver. Reaching out reverently, she strokes his face. “Five years. I thought you were dead for five years and now you’re back. My beautiful, beautiful boy.”

That’s the first clue that has him stopping in his tracks. Five years? That...
He lets her pull him into another hug as his eyes lock onto the muted TV on the wall and the bright green banner across the bottom of the screen: Oliver Queen Alive?

It hits him then and tears the breath from his lungs: He’s lived this day before.

He doesn’t know how this is possible, but this is the day he got back from the island, at least the official day anyway. Somehow he’s back here again. Or at least, that’s what appears to be happening because now the clothes and the hospital room all make sense. It clicks into place with the memory he has of coming home to his family again. It’s more than just familiar. It’s the exact same.

“What do you say we get you home?” His mother asks, pulling back and squeezing his arms. “The doctor said you could be released and I’m sure you want to see Thea.”

Looking at her expectant smile, he swallows hard as he realizes that it really doesn’t matter if this is real or some fabrication because right now he’s been given an opportunity, a chance to change how he did things. He can save the Glades, Tommy, and his mother. He can save Sara. And even if this is just his mind playing tricks on him, he doesn’t have a choice because it’s worth the risk. He can change everything for the better.

So he nods with a sad smile to his mother, reaching over to grab the wooden chest he dragged back from the island, its weight familiar and comfortable in his hand. He turns back to her, thinking about his homecoming and seeing Thea again for the first time in years. “Yeah. I’d like that.”

...It’s surreal reliving the first day back from the island like it’s never happened before. He just keeps wishing he could go talk to Felicity or Diggle to sort this thing out, but right now he doesn’t know either of them...not yet. Which is really a pity because he get the feeling that Felicity would be great with the whole time-travel thing. Or at least that’s the conclusion he drew from her diatribe after he asked about the blue, square police box mug she had in her cabinet. But she’s not here to assist right now, so instead he lets his mother baby him, ushering him into the mansion with a big smile.

While everything unfolds the way he remembers it, his reactions are different. He can’t help it. His regard for the people around him has changed so much over the past couple of years that he can’t image brushing Walter off the same way. He could. He could choose to act this out the way he remembers it happened, but after everything Walter’s done for him (or will do for him), he can’t insult the man.

So when he walks through the door, he willingly shakes Walter’s hand because he respects the man more now: he’s actually family. He lets out a laugh or a genuine smile this time because he’s not dragged down by recent horrors. He’s reveling in this chance to be around his loved ones again while they were still happy and carefree. He wants them to stay that way, ignorant of all the horrible things that may or may not come. He just doesn’t know how much he can actually change, if anything, or how much he should change because how can he change the events if it means losing Diggle and Felicity? Because what he does know for sure is that he can’t make it through this without them.

And later, in the peace and quiet of his own room, after his first real shower in a while, Oliver pauses in front of the mirror, staring at the scars decorating his body. He doesn’t usually do this, doesn’t take the time to stare at the scar and think about how he got them. Some of them are still the angry red of currently healing injuries, but that’s not what draws his attention.

It’s the absence of scars like the bullet wound from his shoulder – the one his mother gave him, the one that brought Felicity on to the team. Or the other grazes he’s acquired over the years that were
dutifully stitched up by Diggle or Felicity or even Sara. And then there’s the new ones he almost expected to be shown, the ones he just received from Ras Al Ghul. He never realized how much the new scars told a story and how their absence makes this whole things seem so much more permanent. His body is now living proof that he’s rewriting history and he’s not sure how he feels about that.

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“What did I tell you? Yachts suck.”

Now that he knows what’s going on, he’s prepared this time as he turns to face his best friend with a bright grin. He’s missed Tommy almost as much as his mother, more because he’s been gone longer. “Tommy Merlyn.”

“I missed you, buddy.” Tommy pulls him into a hug, clapping him on the back in a familiar movement that cannot be erased by years of absence. This is his friend, the friend who isn’t mad at him for committing murder.

Oliver smiles, the words ‘me too’ caught in his throat. And he vows in this moment that this time he’ll stop the Undertaking completely. The Glades won’t fall and he won’t lose Tommy. They’ll shut down the machines, both of them, before anyone can get hurt. He can change things.

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He’s antsy. He can’t seem to stop his leg from bouncing under the table as Tommy attempts to update him with some pop culture, but all he can think about are the movie marathons at Felicity’s with Diggle and Roy that they started over the past summer (or two summers in the future? He really doesn’t know how to label that.). He knows this needs to happen. He needs to hear these things or they’re going to get suspicious when he knows things he shouldn’t.

More than that, though, he has to go through the motions. He has to do these things in order to get to know Diggle and Felicity. He’s been given an incredible opportunity, but he feels like he’s just going to mess it up and at times like this Felicity’s nerdy babbles about time travel would be incredibly helpful. Plus, he just misses her.

“What was it like there?”

Thea’s abrupt question drags him from his thoughts. Quiet descends and Oliver smiles politely. “Cold.” He’s not about to change that answer. It’s short, sweet, and true. There’s no way he’s about to explain everything right here and now. That would ruin all his future plans considering one of the people behind the Undertaking is sitting at the other end of the table. He needs to get his whole operation running before he can explain this to them...if he explains it to them. He’s still not sure about what he’s going to do on that account.

“Tomorrow. You and me, we’re doing the city. You’ve got a lot to catch up on,” Tommy declares in between mouthfuls of food.

“That sounds like a great idea.” His mother smiles down the table over her wine glass. Even he can’t help the royalty comparisons in his head because she always reminded him of an actual queen.

“Good. Then I was planning to swing by the office.” There’s a blonde IT girl he has to meet so he can get her to fall in love with him. More than that, he just needs to hear her babble. He needs to know that she’s okay, that everything’s fine, and that he can get them back on track. He needs to know she’s safe. He’s going to go crazy if he does hear her, see her.
“Well, there’s plenty of time for that. Queen Consolidated isn’t going anywhere.” Walter diverts and Oliver fights back amusement at the glance Walter and his mother exchange. They think they’re being covert.

Motion stirs his periphery. Without looking, Oliver catches the bowl of fruit and hands it back to Raisa, brushing away her apologies with some whispered Russian and ignoring the questioning glances. He smiles at her, patting her hand carefully. She stares back at him.

“Dude, you speak Russian?” Tommy blinks, eyes wide in surprise like he didn’t think Oliver had the attention span to learn another language.

“I didn’t realize you took Russian in college, Oliver.” Walter watches him from down the table with polite interest. It feels very British of him.

“And I didn’t realize how much I missed family dinners.” He smiles, deciding to spare them the scathing comment he remembers: ‘I didn’t realize you wanted to sleep with my mother’. Instead he leans back in the chair. “I suppose I should say congratulations on the wedding.”

His mom and Walter freeze at the other end of the table, glancing at each other with wide eyes. The rest of the room tenses, like his words were a bucket of ice water on an otherwise pleasant conversation.

Thea holds her hands up. “I didn’t say anything.”

He chuckles. “She didn’t have to. I was able to figure that one out on my own. Welcome to the family, Walter, even if I am a little late in saying it.” He picks up his fork, but none of the food on his plate looks particularly interesting. He hasn’t eaten anything rich since the island, except for the occasional meal, so he just pushes food around his plate, lifting the fork to his mouth only occasionally.

“Oliver, I just want you to know that we-“

“It’s fine, Mom.” He cuts her off with a smile because it really is. He’s gotten used to it. Walter is just like family to him and he understands her need for comfort. His mother found somebody. Without Walter, he would never meet Felicity or save the company from Isabel Rochev. He sighs and stands. “May I be excused?”

His mother nods and he ignores the still-tense atmosphere around the table, pretending they aren’t going to start talking about him as soon as he leaves. He slips an apple from the bowl Raisa almost dropped, patting Tommy on the shoulder and winking at Thea as he saunters out of the room. Let them talk. He has better things to do.

Tossing the apple in the air as he makes his way back to his room, Oliver considers his options. Last time, he waited a few days to set up the foundry and almost killed his mother in the middle of a nightmare. That’s not something he really wants to repeat. Then again, the nightmares aren’t as common anymore. He doubts they’re going to return now.

He munches on the apple as he considers his options. He could do everything the same way he did last time, going through the motions to get his team back together and then once Digg and Felicity are on his side, he can try to change things. If he changes too early, he might never meet them, but there are certain things he cannot do again. He won’t watch Tommy die, and he doesn’t want to be the killer he was the first time. No more taking lives. From the start this time.

Should he search out Digg and Felicity, get them in on this now? Would they agree to it? Felicity
would probably be intrigued by the idea, but Digg would call him crazy. No. He can’t let them in sooner.

And that’s another thing. Constantly worrying about Felicity and her safety...does he really want to do that again? Can he manage this without bringing her into the life? Without putting her in danger?

No. He shakes his head at himself. That’s not what he wants, and he knows exactly what she would say if she were here: her life, her choice. Plus, it’s not like he can find another computer hacker who could do her job.

He sighs. So he’s going to have to wait to contact Digg and Felicity. He met John Diggle after the kidnapping his second day back, which means tomorrow.

Oliver grimaces as he starts to pace his bedroom. The kidnapping. He killed all their kidnappers last time because they knew his secret. They can’t know his secret, but how is he supposed to fight to save himself and Tommy without being seen? It’s not possible. He groans. He forgot what it was like to work solo.

The storm assaults the windows outside as Oliver continues to ponder his options until he can’t take it anymore. He has to do something, so he slips through the house on silent feet and out to the garage. He flips the same light switches and everything livens up.

With the rain, he bypasses his motorcycle and pulls the keys to the plain black sedan from the hook on the wall. He doesn’t want something flashy right now. Something normal feels right, even if he misses the quick navigating he gets from the Ducati. It’s worth it that he’s comfortable and not drenched.

He pulls to a stop in the parking lot of the convenience store Felicity buys her ice cream from. The rain falls slower now, the thunder further in the distance where it can’t stir up as many memories. He slips from the car and down the sidewalk towards her apartment. He slips between the buildings, sticking to the shadows. The fire escape creaks at his added weight and he nearly slips three times before he finds himself at her window, peeking in like the stalker he’s apparently turned into. The light in her living room is on, the same bright colors vividly on display as she sits, curled in the middle of her couch, munching on popcorn in her fuzzy, oversized pajamas.

He smiles as she yells tearfully at her TV. “Why would you do that Rose? You know he loved you!” That’s his Felicity. It’s all he needs to soothe his soul. He feels more comfortable now, knowing that she’s okay. He’s seen her with his own eyes. Water soaks through the seat of his pants as he sits on the fire escape and just watches her watching Doctor Who until she falls asleep sprawled on the couch.

It’s a huge invasion of privacy and she would chew him out if she was awake, but he opens the window and slinks into her living room. Oliver smirks at the lack of a Robin Hood poster. He knew she bought it only after working with him. He picks up the blanket from the back of the couch and drapes it over her. He would move her into her room, but he doesn’t want to freak her out when she wakes up.

He brushes the hair back from her face, running a thumb over her smooth cheek. “I promise I won’t mess this up again,” he whispers before pressing a light kiss to her forehead, heart rate accelerating when she presses back into his touch.

Flicking off the lights and TV, Oliver makes sure all the doors and windows into her apartment are locked before leaving through the window. Walking back through the dark streets, the rain a distant
memory, Oliver finally feels at peace, no longer worried about the consequences of his actions because he has confidence in what he’s doing and that it will lead her back to him.

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Chapter 2

The light filtering through his window illuminates his room slowly. Long before it’s chased the shadows back into the farthest corners of the room, Oliver’s up and moving steadily though his morning routine, pushing himself until his muscles burn and the only thing left to do is run laps around the property.

The cool morning air greets him as he immediately takes off over the gravel path. It helps clear his mind, granting him that blissful peace as he surrenders to the pounding of his feet on the ground. He’s sure no one else in the house is moving. Tommy’s going to be over around ten, at the earliest. He doesn’t need to check if the factory is there this time, but he’ll probably do that anyway. It would be a great opportunity to talk to Tommy about...things.

It’s the end of his seventh lap of the property when he decides he’s done. The sun sits visibly in the sky, so he’s probably not the only one awake now. His suspicion is confirmed when he jogs across the back patio towards the kitchen only to be confronted by his mother. An audible sigh of relief escapes her throat as she lays eyes on him, her long silk robe suggesting she just jumped out of bed. Like a punch to the gut, it hits him as he watches her wring her hands together in worry: how much she loved – loves – him and Thea, how much strength it must have taken to protect Thea once he and Dad were gone. He never really thought about it before. Of course he knew deep down, but he was never aware of how deep that feeling must be until right in this moment. She had been left to protect Thea against a mad man all by herself. It’s hardly any wonder she would sacrifice herself on Slade’s blade.

“Morning, Mom.” He presses a quick kiss to her cheek, or rather the air over it as he tries to keep his distance because he’s pretty sure he doesn’t smell like a bouquet of roses at the moment.

“I woke up and you were gone, Oliver. I was worried.”

He winces at the fear in her voice and realizes that she could be thinking along the same lines he was right before he fell asleep: that this was all a dream. “Sorry. I’m used to getting up early and moving. I’m back, Mom. I’m not going anywhere.”

She relaxes slightly at the words, nodding like this is old business as she turns back to the kitchen. Her hand lands on his arm. “We couldn’t handle losing you again, Oliver.”

“Like I said: I’m not going anywhere, except to my room for a shower.”

Oliver’s heart leaps as his mother smiles and shakes her head. That’s a good sign. He’s making a
difference this time, instead of being the broody cut-off person he was. It feels better, and he can’t even seem to remember why he was like that when he first came back, until he realizes it has a lot to do with a certain blonde IT genius.

He sighs: his good mood dampened. His girl isn’t even his girl yet, and since he’s already thinking depressing thoughts, his mother is still involved in the Undertaking. He has to do something about that. He needs to come up with a game plan...fast.

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“I have something for you.” With a smirk Oliver holds out the hozen for Thea, her eyes cutting over him suspiciously.

“You did not come back from a deserted island with a souvenir,” she chuckles, shaking her head.

He pushes down his smile as he explains it to her. He needs her to understand what he’s attempting to do: reconnect. And this time he means it a hell of a lot more than he did the first time. He’s actually going to talk to her, spend time with her, and be her older brother. Of course, she’s probably not getting that out of his speech, but that’s what it means to him. He’ll be surprised if she even remembers a single word.

“A rock! That is sweet! I want one of those t-shirts that says, ‘My friend was a castaway and all I got was this crappy shirt’,” Tommy grins at the two of them as he approaches, proud of himself for the sassy comment. Oliver smiles openly at his friend’s cheekiness, the thrill that Tommy is still alive buoying his spirits again.

Thea shoots their intruder a look. “Don’t let him get you into too much trouble. I just got you back. Take it slow. I don’t need to get out of school to hear you’ve been arrested on your first day back.”

Oliver laughs. “Can they even arrest you if you’re still officially dead?”

Tommy pats him on the back, laughing. “Exactly! That’s the spirit. Well, the city awaits! Catch ya later, Speedy.”

Her arms quickly wrap Oliver in another hug before he can walk away, a hug he’s pretty sure she does just to remind herself that he is real and physically safe back home. He smiles at her, messing up her hair as she pulls away. Despite her disgruntled look, he can see the lightness in her eyes as he and Tommy flee the room.

“Have you noticed how hot your sister’s gotten?”

Oliver stops in his tracks at the comment, frozen in chilling realization.

“Because I have not,” Tommy quickly corrects, continuing to walk down the hall. He stops a couple steps later and turns back to a statuesque Oliver. “I was just kidding, dude. I’m not hitting on your sister.”

He gives a gruff nod and forces a smile, placing one foot deliberately in front of the other as they walk to Tommy’s car. Tommy picks up the easy banter once more, not fond of silences, but Oliver’s mind is still reeling.

Sister. Their sister. Thea’s not just his sister, but Tommy’s, except Oliver’s the only one who knows that. Well, Oliver and Moira. Somehow, in the shock of everyone being alive, his mind has glazed over the fact that Thea was related to both him and Tommy. The three of them were siblings. Of all the things he could have forgotten...
“Are you sure you’re okay, man?” Tommy asks, pausing at the driver’s side of his car, a frown drawing his face in.

“Yeah, I’ll be fine.” He smiles, but it’s forced by the looming prospect of the lie that’s being covered up right now. His mother and Tommy’s father slept together. They’re both Thea’s brothers. She deserves to know that – she and Tommy deserve to know that, but how the hell is he supposed to tell them when he shouldn’t even know that fact himself?

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“Your funeral blew.”

The chuckle bursts from his mouth and Oliver shakes his head to clear it. “You got lucky?” He misses this: the friendly banter, the joking back and forth. He hasn’t seen this side of his friend in so long. He’s back in the time when they only talked about girls, drugs, and getting laid. Later, they’ll bond over more mature matters: business, which is almost laughable to consider right now. And then, Tommy will spurn him as a murderer...unless he can do something to stop it this time.

“Fish in a barrel,” Tommy smirks at the memory, turning to look at Oliver with the playful glint in his eyes. “They were so sad…”

Oliver starts shaking his head, refusing to hold back his laughter. It’s nice not having Tommy hate him. “No no no no…”

“And huggy. And I am counting on another target-rich environment for your welcome home bash.”

“Welcome Home Bash?” He repeats with a smile, knowing exactly where this is headed. He can see the not-quite-sincere glint in Tommy’s eyes. Tommy’s already serious about Laurel. It might not be official yet, but his best friend knows how he feels, even if he hasn’t admitted it to himself.

“You came back. From the dead. This calls for a party. Tell me when and where and I will set it up.” Tommy laughs and Oliver can tell this is the most fun his friend has had in a while. The feeling is clearly infectious as he wants to laugh again.

Actually, what he really wants is to share his amusement with her. Oliver can practically see her sitting here, shaking her head while smiling at Tommy’s enthusiasm. She would share an exasperated look with him and then indulge Tommy’s idea. His two best friends getting along like peas in a pod. And they would get along. One babble and the two of them would be thick as thieves, leaving him and Diggle to stare at the two of them talking a mile a minute. He chuckles at the image. God, he wants that.

“This city has gone to crap,” Tommy mutters as they stop at the traffic light with a perfect view of two corners crowded with ratty homeless. The buildings here have fallen into disrepair when a block away they look pristine. “Why’d you want to drive through this neighborhood anyway?”

Oliver spares a glance for his father’s factory, but turns back to Tommy with a smile. “Being stuck on an island for five years got me thinking. I want to do something with my life. I want to help people.”

Tommy frowns, eyebrows drawn together in confusion. “You were stranded on an island for five years and you want to come back and help the homeless? You can do that with a donation.” He turns back to the road dismissively.

“I was thinking of a more hands-on approach.” Oliver comments, watching Tommy for his reaction. The night club will be a good start, especially with Tommy’s help, but this time around he knows
they can do more.

“You’re serious?” Tommy twists back as he stops at another traffic light.

“As a heart attack.” He can see the consideration in Tommy’s eyes. It’s a start. He’s not shrugging the idea off, but he’s also not jumping on the bandwagon just yet. He needs a shove to push him onto this path, a nudge in the right direction. Tommy has a strong moral center. That much is obvious from his anguish over discovering Oliver was the Arrow. He has the opportunity to change that now.

“So what? You’re going to stand on the corner and hand out sandwiches?”

Oliver shrugs, turning back to look out the windows. He had expected more support, to be perfectly honest. “Maybe, but I was thinking something more beneficial to the community. Something like your mom’s old clinic.”

“What?” Tommy wonders.

Oliver bites back a smirk. He hadn’t been sure what he wanted to do, but the inspiration struck him here in the car. Malcolm announced he was shutting the clinic down a couple weeks prior to the Undertaking, but he could get involved, get Tommy involved, now. He could do something.

“Your mom’s clinic. It’s still open, right?”

“Yeah, but unless you went to medical school on that island, you’re not going to be much help there.” Tommy pulls the car over to the side of the road to give Oliver his complete attention.

Oliver chuckles, shaking his head. “No. I didn’t get a degree, but there has to be something I can do to help. Don’t you get tired of all the partying? Don’t you ever just want to make a difference in this world?”

Tommy’s fingers tap out a pattern on the steering wheel as he considers Oliver’s questions, glancing periodically back at his friend. “You’re actually serious?”

He nods. “I told you. I want to make a difference.”

He runs a hand through his hair, falling back against the driver’s seat. Tommy nods slowly, chewing on the inside of his cheek. “Actually making a difference, huh? Helping people?”

Oliver nods, watching the options flit across Tommy’s face as he takes stock of Oliver’s attitude. He can see it in his friend’s eyes when Tommy realizes Oliver has changed. He’s not the same person anymore and this time he’s letting Tommy see it from the beginning.

“So what are we going to do to help people?”

“I don’t know.” He plasters his foolish smile on his face, the happy façade popping up because he’s not ready to divulge his plans and he can’t move too fast right now. “I just want to do something useful.” He shrugs again, running a hand bashfully though his hair like he doesn’t have a clear idea.

“So...less partying, more helping people, and somehow getting involved in my mother’s clinic. Did I get all that?” He raises a single eyebrow at Oliver.

“Yup. That’s the plan.” Oliver grins. “Maybe I’ll go to medical school after all.”

Tommy snorts, rolling his eyes. “Uh-huh, sure, Oliver. I don’t think you could sit still long enough to take a class, so we’ll find something else for you.”
Oliver agrees with a nod of his head. Tommy knows him the best. The only medicine he knows comes from firsthand experience. He really wouldn’t be able to sit through a class. “You’ve got a point there.”

“We could volunteer at a soup kitchen,” Tommy offers, shifting the car back into drive and turning to check for oncoming traffic.

“We could run our own soup kitchen.” Oliver’s suddenly seeing the possibilities. He needs the club to cover his base of operations, but with his money, he can also open a soup kitchen in the Glades and run that at the same time. He could get his mother and Walter to invest. They would love that and it would be great publicity for Queen Consolidated.

Tommy laughs, shaking his head and bringing their conversation back to the light and easy conversation they started on. “So...what did you miss most? Steaks at the Palm? Drinks at the Station? Meaningless sex...”

He almost laughs as he remembers his first answer – Laurel. He can’t even imagine answering that way now. There’s only one girl he’s missing right now and Oliver Queen hasn’t met her yet. “Everyone.” Felicity.

But Tommy knows him too well. He sighs. “Laurel, Oliver? Really? Everyone’s happy you’re alive and you want to see the one person who isn’t?”

“I didn’t say Laurel.” Tommy’s disapproval seeps out of him and Oliver finds himself wondering how he never noticed Tommy’s feelings before. He can see it so clearly now.

“But you had that look you get when you’re thinking about a girl. You’re a horrible liar, Oliver.” Without prompting, Tommy heads over towards CNRI and Oliver groans. He doesn’t really want to go there and Tommy doesn’t really want to take him.

“I wasn’t thinking about Laurel.” Oliver’s mind is instead locked on Felicity’s subconscious response to his kiss last night, even now making his lips twist in a subtle smile and his heart expand in his chest.

Tommy shoots him a disbelieving look as he pulls to a stop in front of the CNRI building. “Alright, if not Laurel, then who?”

“It’s complicated.” As in he really wants to talk to her, but he hasn’t officially met her yet. And he’s not about to mention the borderline stalking that happened last night...or the actual stalking. That wasn’t really in any sort of gray area. It was a violation of her privacy. As much as he wants to pull her into his arms and never let her go because the last thing he said to her was ‘I love you,’ he can’t say that. He has no right to say that. Not now.

“One of the girls you cheated on Laurel with?” Tommy frowns.

Oliver wrestles with a chuckle. “No. Not anyone like that.” She’s so much more than that.

“Then who?” Tommy twists to face him.

“Although, I should talk to Laurel,” with that brush off, he exits the car, pushing his mind off Felicity. He can’t just go up to her at QC without a tech problem that needs solving. Damn, he needs to get his focus back on the matters at hand. She’s safe and happy right now. He can bring her in when the time’s right.

“I’m not so sure that’s a good idea, Oliver. And can we get back to the girl in-question? There’s no
way you’ve met a girl yet. You haven’t even been back twenty-four hours.” Tommy follows him into the building. “Seriously, have I met her before?”

Oliver shakes his head, a smirk on his lips. He slips through the halls with familiar ease he probably shouldn’t have, but he wants to get Tommy off the subject of the girl he’s preoccupied with. He reaches Laurel’s desk just in time to hear: “You don’t need to go outside the law."

“To find justice: Your dad’s favorite jingle,” Laurel’s friend finishes, her eyes landing curiously on the two billionaires now standing beside Laurel’s desk.

Oliver suppresses a wince as Laurel turns to face him. He has a feeling this isn’t going to go any better than it did last time. “Hello, Laurel.”

“Oliver.” Her voice cracks, the pain evident in her eyes and the tension that immediately stiffens her body.

“I know I don’t have any right to ask this, but can we talk?” She should say ‘No!’ and yell at him to get out of her office, but he knows she won’t. Part of her is still in love with him because they were safe and familiar. It’s why she kept taking his sorry ass back and why he kept crawling back to her in the first place. Their relationship wasn’t really healthy for either of them.

Her eyes dart to Tommy before coming back to Oliver. He knows what that means this time and he has no intention of getting in between them.

“I just want to tell you...I’m sorry,” he says before she can really answer. “I was never good for you and I’m sorry that I invited Sara on the Gambit. I understand if you don’t want to talk to me ever again, but I had to tell you that.” He can’t tell her Sara’s really alive because right now she’s part of the League of Assassins. He also can’t bring himself to say that she’s dead when he knows for a fact that she isn’t. That’s all he really needs to tell her. So he nods to her dumbstruck face. “I’ll meet you in the car, Tommy.”

He hopes that buys him enough time for the kidnappers to take him alone, leaving Tommy safe with Laurel. He’s committed to not killing them this time. He’s NOT going to kill them this time. He made that decision, a decision it’s a whole lot easier to stick to if Tommy’s out of the equation. He can handle whatever they throw at him if he’s by himself. He can wait for the police rescue and not worry about the torture because he did make a promise – no killing – and he intends to keep it.

He went over this time and time again while driving around last night, searching for some way to escape the taser-torture and kidnapping. The only conclusion he could come to was making sure Tommy wasn’t there. He can’t fight them and leave them alive, they would know his secret and he can’t have that. But he knows he can take their torture when he doesn’t have to worry about Tommy.

The van’s brakes squeal as it stops in the alley behind him. He forces himself to spin dramatically slowly, turning back at the commotion down the alley only to feel the prick of the tranq-dart. He puts up enough of a fight trying to get away that it doesn’t look suspicious until the tranquilizer kicks in and he collapses to the pavement with a final swoop of triumph in keeping Tommy out of this mess.

Right before darkness closes in and he blacks out, he watches as the manager of the ice cream parlor they’re parked behind opens the door to take out his trash only to be shot several times in the chest. He feels it like he’s the one they were shooting. Shit. He should have known he’d forget something.

He has enough time to let the guilt wash over him before he succumbs to sleep.

...
He starts awake as the black bag is ripped off his head. Only now can he appreciate the lengths the kidnappers went to in order to avoid harming him, especially since they didn’t show the same courtesy to the man in the alley. He’s been woken up by far worse in situations like this. His surroundings slowly come into focus, the three masked figures all in black. Despite the demonic faces on the rubber Halloween masks, the figures seem hesitant, lurking nervously around the edges of the room. Knowing now why the men were hired, he finds himself more able to assess their attitude.

“Mr. Queen. Mr. Queen!” The voice is menacing, but the taser the kidnapper buzzes in his face is laughable compared to what he faced on a daily basis on the island. “Did your father survive that accident? I ask the questions, you give me the answers and nobody gets hurt.”

Oliver stays silent, still shaking off the stupor of the tranquilizer. The goons exchange worried looks before the questioner turns and presses the taser to his shoulder, eliciting a shout. Did it deserve that? Probably not, but he doesn’t want them to think he’s too strong. He doesn’t want them connecting him to the Arrow, when he finally goes out and meets with Adam Hunt.

“Did he make it to the island? Did he tell you anything?”

“What? What are you talking about? Who are you?” Oliver asks, letting a note of desperation and terror that he doesn’t feel slip into his voice. He doesn’t like the electric shock. Hates it, really, ever since the incident with Slade. Besides he’s faced much more effective methods of torture without breaking. This guy doesn’t stand a chance, especially since it appears he’s been ordered to go easy on Oliver.

“ANSWER THE QUESTION!” The men around the room shift at the roar.

Oliver makes sure he flinches backwards and then wonders if he’s overacting. “I-L...my father is dead! He died on that boat!” Well, that’s the truth at any rate. He never specified which boat, and his father never made it to the island. “What do you want from me?”

The only thing that would make his story better would be tears, Oliver thinks, barely holding back a grin. This is almost fun. He should have played dumb the first time. Although this is probably only fun because he knows he’s not really in any danger. That much is clear from the kidnappers’ relaxed stances and unwillingness to use their weapons to cause him permanent physical harm.

“So your father went down with the ship? He didn’t tell you anything?”

“He...he lectured me on my life choices. Wh-what does this have to do with anything?” adding a little twist of fear in his tone made a nice touch. Maybe he should be an actor. “Who are you? Why would you-“

His interrogator makes a hand movement a moment before he feels a second prick to the back of his neck, feeling the serum seep into his bloodstream. Once more he fights the instinct to keep fighting, to burst from the chair and attack. Before his world fades to black he watches the men relax, their last words staying with him.

“At least we didn’t have to kill him.”

Chapter End Notes
Thank you so much for reading. Let me know what you thought in the comments below. Bookmarks and Kudos are always appreciated too.

And special thanks again to mabscifiromantic for editing for me!!
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Oliver deals with the aftermath of the kidnapping.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 3

“Mr. Queen...Mr. Queen, can you hear me?”

Lights and face blur before Oliver’s eyes and he finds himself starting, instinctively lashing out at the shapes before they come fully into focus. It’s too similar to the last time he woke up: he doesn’t like waking up in unfamiliar places: it’s happened far too often.

Several blinks later, he’s finally pushed off enough of the drug in his system to process his surroundings. This isn’t the old, iron warehouse. He’s lying sprawled on a lawn, grass soft under his back. Beyond the people, he sees blue sky, townhouses, and the telltale vans of the nearby news stations. This isn’t want he wanted to happen, but he also hasn’t killed anyone so he’ll take the win.

“It’s okay, Mr. Queen. You’re safe now.”

Oliver’s attention snaps back to the blue-uniformed people milling around him, carefully keeping their distance in an effort not to spook him. Two EMTs hover right in front of him, the closer one holding out a friendly hand as he speaks, his medical bag in the other hand. He smiles as he takes another tentative step closer.

“We just need to check you out.”

The words are slow getting to him, like he’s hearing them through syrup. It takes him a moment for his groggy brain makes sense of the sounds and then another before he nods, fighting the nausea that hits him at the motion.

EMT 1 and 2 immediately move, taking his vitals and asking him questions rapidly. He holds up a hand and grimaces at the sudden influx of noise directed at him. They pause, still tracking his vitals, but now watching him carefully.

“How are you feeling, Mr. Queen?” EMT 1 asks slowly, holding up a flashlight to look in his eyes.

Oliver blinks against the light. His words are coming through clearly now, no longer looking like a video on sound delay. “Just a little woozy.” He moves and grimaces. “And a little sore.”

“Okay. Can you tell me what year it is?” The flashlight falls back into the bag and he hands Oliver a bottle of water.

“2012.” He reaches back to rub the sore muscles in his neck. Moving slowly to mask the discomfort from the taser burns on his chest. Hopefully no one will notice the marks on his clothes. He refuses to expose himself for these people. The last thing he needs is more ogling at his scars. Or worse, his
tattoos. The police, for one, would undoubtedly recognize the Bratva tattoo and that’s not something he needs to deal with.

“And can you tell me where you are?”

Oliver nearly glares at the man, but instead takes another look at his surroundings, noting the police barrier holding back the masses of people. “I’m guessing Starling,” he responds acerbically.

The man scowls at him, unamused, unlike his partner who chuckles in the background. “This is serious, Mr. Queen. I’m trying to assess your cognitive function.”

He points towards the ambulance where Starling City stands out in blue paint. “Well, last time I knew where I was, I was outside CNRI. I don’t know how much time has passed, but based on who’s here, I think Starling City’s a safe bet.”

EMT 2 grins. “He’s got a point, Artie.”

Artie glares at his partner. “Fine. You still feeling woozy, Mr. Queen.”

He blinks away the returned blurriness, frowning. What was in those tranq-darts? “Yeah. A little...they gave me...something.”

The EMTs share a glance. “Alright, we’re just going to take a sample of your blood, but otherwise you seem fine, Mr. Queen. If you develop any more symptoms, contact your physician or call an ambulance.”

He nods, letting his eyes wander over the milling police officers as they take his blood. Inside the police barrier, officers are talking with a couple civilians, probably the ones that called the police and witnessed whatever happened. He’s still stumped that they dumped him in a public area. They clearly wanted him to be found quickly. But if he had to guess, this is a dead zone, surveillance-wise, not even a traffic cam in a four block radius. They’re not going to find his kidnappers. He’s sure the men have vanished with just a hefty wad of cash in their accounts.

The news crew and, based on the crowd, at least a dozen cell phones are capturing this moment. It might yield him more paparazzi interest, but it lets him play up the helpless angle. Maybe he won’t have to be arrested this time. That’s a plus.

As the EMTs retreat, two plain clothes detectives approach and Oliver shakes his head at the sheer number of times Detective Quentin Lance ends up working cases involving him. Lance is already glaring in his direction, a scowl taking over his face while his partner appears to be talking him off the edge.

Oliver rests his head in his hands, wishing he could shake the effects of the drug off quicker. He’s not really in the mood to deal with Lance’s anger. He had hoped to be more clear-headed for the inevitable confrontation. He’d also hoped for less of an audience because it’s not going to be pretty.

“Mister Queen, looks like you’ve gotten yourself into trouble again. And you haven’t even been back a week!”

Oliver feels at a distinct disadvantage looking up from the ground. He could stand and face the detective head on, fighting against the fatigue and dizziness, but that’s not something his public persona should be seen doing so he continues to look up at them.

He grimaces against the bright afternoon sun. “Detective.”
Lance glares, but his partner steps forward with a not-so-subtle glance at his partner to stand down. “Mr. Queen, I’m Detective Hilton of the Starling City Police Department, and you’ve already met Detective Lance. We just need to ask you a couple questions.”

Oliver nods with a wry smile. “Well, I was kidnapped, so that makes sense. You should have heard all the questions they asked when I got off the Island.”

Neither detective looks particularly amused by the comment, but Hilton muffles a snort. Lance crosses his arms over his chest.

“Well, we can ask the questions here or we can ask them at the station,” Hilton offers.

Oliver glances around the open area. He’s not particularly receptive to the idea of going to the station, but he doesn’t like being out in the open like this.

“Actually, Detectives, you can interview him back in the comfort of our home. I think my son has had enough excitement for one day.”

He’s not sure if he wants to groan or laugh at the sound of his mother’s crisp voice. Clearly, Detective Lance isn’t too pleased with the development either based on the deepening scowl on his face.

“My lawyer assures me that should be just fine.” Moira tilts her head to the side with a pleasant smile and all the royal condescension of a true Queen. She gestures gracefully to the woman at her side. “So why don’t we leave this crowd behind? Oliver will be at our house, when you need him for questioning. I’m sure you remember how to find it, Detective.”

Oliver pulls himself to his feet, swaying a little as the effects of the drug hit him. Hilton automatically reaches out to stabilize him and Oliver nods in thanks.

“You know, Moira, I would have thought it would take you longer to get here. Officer Stein only called you ten minutes ago.” Quentin turns his suspicious gaze on Oliver’s mother, cool contempt filling his tone. “You come down to protect your boy from the evil law enforcement one last time.”

“The law enforcement is on my son’s side, this time. Or have you forgotten, Quentin? He was kidnapped.”

Oliver shakes his head at their antagonism. “Mom, it’s okay.”

“No. It’s not, Oliver. This is harassment.” Moira turns to her lawyer, who nods in agreement.

Oliver nearly groans. This is definitely not what he wants to be doing right now. Sure, Lance is pissed at him and his mother wants to defend him, but he doesn’t need her to save him from Lance and he definitely doesn’t want to get into this here, not in front of all the cameras and witnesses.

“Mrs. Queen, I apologize for my partner.”

Lance snorts at Hilton’s apology. Hilton sends him another quelling look, but Lance is done holding his tongue. “This son of a bitch killed my daughter.”

“Now, Detective Lance that is an unfounded accusation,” the lawyer starts and Oliver can feel the situation getting out of hand. There are too many people involved in this.

“No,” Oliver whispers, but his voice catches their attention. He looks up at the curious faces and shrugs. “He’s right. What happened to Sara is my fault.” He’s not about to tell them Sara’s alive.
That would pit them against the League of Assassins and he’s not going to be responsible for their deaths. He refuses to let himself be a part of that.

“Oliver...” His mother shakes his head. “Don’t say that-“

“It’s true,” he says with a grim expression, still speaking quietly so he won’t be overheard. “I asked her to come on that boat with me. It’s my fault.”

Detective Lance doesn’t seem to know what to do with his confession. His anger quickly drains from his body. Hilton stands awkwardly by and Moira seizes the opportunity. She pulls Oliver back into her arms, rubbing small circles into his back as she sighs into his ear.

“You aren’t back even a whole day and you were nearly taken from me again.” She steps back and sighs, running hands up and down his arms to convince herself that he’s really there in front of her. She shakes herself and pastes on her public smile. “Let’s get you home.”

...

The silence in the town car is oppressive. The driver and his mom’s lawyer are stoic as normal and he forgot how tense the silence in a car could be, especially with his mother worriedly clasping his shoulder. He can still feel the drug lingering in his system, but he’s shaking off the last of its influence now.

“How...” His mother’s head shoots up at the sound of his voice and he has to swallow in order to ask the question. He forgot how much she could worry. “How long have I been missing?” How long has she been freaking out?

She offers him a watery smile. “Too long, Sweetheart.”

It’s not much of an answer, at least not the kind that he’s looking for, but he squeezes her hand while offering a reassuring smile. She squeezes his hand back.

“Tommy saw them grab you and called for help. Your sister is beside herself. She’ll be happy to see you. I’m happy to see you.” She reaches up to stroke his face, searching for contact as the only way to reassure herself that he’s all in one piece. “Oh my beautiful boy.”

Oliver pulls her back into a hug, glancing at the clock on the dashboard. It’s been about four hours since he last checked the time, most of it drugged into unconsciousness. That’s a long time for him to have been gone compared to the few questions they asked. That thought, coupled with the statement about killing him, sends a shiver down his spine. This could have been so much worse.

...

“Oliver! You’re okay!”

Thea crashes into him as soon as his head clears the car, her momentum nearly dumping them both back into the backseat. Resettling them both on their feet, Oliver holds her tightly, eyes meeting Tommy’s over her head. “I’m fine.” He assures them both with a small smile.

Moira pulls Thea into her for a hug, allowing Oliver to close the car door. “I told you he would be alright.” Her voice now confident and soothing, all traces of her distress from the car ride vanished into nothing as she reassures her daughter.

“Glad you’re okay, buddy.” Tommy pulls him into an unusually emotional hug before turning to follow his mother and Thea into the house. He throws a final glance over his shoulder at Oliver but
seems to realize that he needs a moment.

The last of the drug’s effects have vanished from his system, leaving him lucid and desperate for a few private moments just to gather his thoughts.

“Oliver? Aren’t you coming in?” his mother calls back, her concerned tone resurfacing. Behind her Tommy and Thea’s matching looks of concern, only remind him that they’re related.

“I...just...need a few minutes, Mom. I’ll join you soon. I told you: I’m not going anywhere.”

Her features settle from trepidation into understanding, the acceptance a vast improvement over the worrying he’s witnessed for the past half hour. She nods and closes the door behind her, leaving him alone with his thoughts.

Oliver breathes deeply. The quiet of the estate washes over him and he tries to recapture the peace he felt this morning. He can feel the warm sun on his face, the balmy breeze riffling his hair, but neither compare to the comfort of her smile, the electric contact of her fingers grazing through his stubble. The constant need for her isn’t anything new, but the fact that they have no connection, at present, sharpens the ache. With this whole twisted situation, just the chance to touch her would ease him – his hand on her shoulder, the press of her hand, or if he was really lucky, a hug – but that wasn’t an option here, where he hasn’t met her yet.

His forefinger rubs his thumb in agitation. There will be no comfort from her today.

A man died today because someone wanted answers. He can’t help thinking that he could have avoided this. If he had remembered the man, he could have done...he doesn’t know what he could have done, but he should have done something, anything.

The slamming of a car door breaks his train of thought and suddenly the gunshots in the alley are drawn into stunning focus in his mind. They’re not the first he’s ever heard and they’re definitely not going to be the last, but this was his first test at changing the future and he’s already failed.

“You okay there, Queen?” Quentin asks, a taunting lilt coloring his voice. Just underneath the mocking contempt, he hears the accusing undertone of his voice and he knows he deserves nothing more.

“I thought it was over once I got off the Island,” Oliver whispers to himself, staring past the detectives like they’re not there. He’s making an active choice to continue his crusade, and right now it’s really hitting him. His crusade could have been over once he got off the Island. He’s choosing to continue it, so he can make the rules. He can choose to be happy: he can choose her.

At this second mention of the Island, he can feel the uneasiness and sympathy radiating off Detective Hilton. It’s handy how uncomfortable the Island makes people. Lance’s partner shifts and can’t meet Oliver’s eyes, but Quentin scowls and steps closer, anger now clearly displayed on his features. Clearly, he hasn’t calmed down on the drive over, but this discussion needs to happen sooner or later.

“And my baby girl, Queen? Did she even make it to the Island or did you leave her to drown?” So much for letting his anger go.

Oliver takes the verbal hit, physically wincing as he averts his eyes. “She didn’t drown.”

Lance freezes, the words shocking him out of his ire, “Wha...”
It escaped accidentally a moment ago, but now he makes a conscious choice: “Sara didn’t drown.”

That was the last thing they expected from him. He takes a deep breath and looks Lance directly in the eye as he repeats the truth, ignoring Hilton’s astonishment. He waits patiently now as Quentin clenches his jaw, searching for the courage to ask what he wants to know.

Lance pivots and strides away, back towards the car, scowling and running an agitated hand through his hair. Oliver tries to ignore the unease in his gut. Should he be doing this? Should he tell Lance the truth? He knows Lance and Sara had always been close, but he can’t share the whole truth right here and now. It wouldn’t be right. And if the Undertaking never happens, who’s to say she’ll come back.

But the damage is already done. He can’t take back what he said.

Hilton remains silent, watching his partner, waiting for the calm to end in the storm of anger he knows is coming. The guilt Oliver feels as he watches Lance’s anguish reminds him why he only spent time with Quentin as the Arrow: Quentin Lance hates Oliver Queen. And with good reason, too.

Oliver wants to hunch his shoulders and hang his head, to make himself seem smaller, less threatening. Instead he stands tall, refusing to flinch away from this now that he’s made his decision.

“What do you mean: ‘She didn’t drown’? Is this some sick joke, Queen?” cutting the silence, Lance finally asks the question Oliver’s dreading.

Hilton stands silent and stoic.

Oliver sighs, staring at ground as his fingers glide together in repressed agitation. “It’s a long story. And it’s not a nice one.”

“Did you leave her to die on that Island?” Lance advances on him, clearly no longer needing distance. The hate-infused glare stops just at the edge of his personal space.

_Your daughter’s stronger than you realize_, Oliver thinks, even back then. Out loud he says: “She didn’t make it to the Island at first. She found a freighter...it wasn’t any better than the Island, really.” He takes a deep breath, wondering how much about the Island he should reveal. He’s telling the truth, so he would hate to ruin it with a lie. “I ended up on that freighter a year later and I found her there.”

He can’t continue from there. He has to pause to think about how much he wants to say. He’s so absorbed in his thoughts that he only now realizes that Hilton has moved to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with his partner and both men are staring at him with wide eyes. He takes a deep breath.

“The man who kept her there was experimenting on people. He didn’t do anything to her, at least not that I know. We got away from him for a while...We lived on the Island for some time...We tried to use the freighter to get home, but there was an accident.” He pauses for another shaky breath, dragged back to the moment in the freighter. “She got sucked out of the ship and I couldn’t find her. Again. I passed out and by the time I woke up, there was no hope of finding her. That was the last time I saw her.”

Lance’s hands dig into the leather of his belt until his knuckles whiten from the pressure. There are tears in his eyes and he can’t meet Oliver’s gaze. Oliver stares him in the face all the same.

“I know I don’t have any right to tell you this, but I’m sorry I ever invited Sara to come with me that day. I did everything I could to make sure she was okay and to get her home once I knew she was
alive.” And he’ll figure out a way to get her back again. The League of Assassins will make it trickier, but he’ll figure out a way. “I’m sorry, Detective.”

Knowing there’s nothing he can willingly add to his story Oliver makes his way inside to join his family.

...

Every member of the house congregates in the living room to witness the interview. Oliver waits for the interrogation. At least this one won’t include torture. Although with Lance conducting it there might be...

It’s always Lance who questions him. He’s always the lead, so Oliver double-takes when Hilton hesitantly steps forward.

“Um, Mr. Queen, can you tell us what happened?”

Oliver nods. “Tommy and I went to see Laurel. We spoke briefly. I left her and Tommy to talk and when I got to the car, a van pulled up and these two guys came out of nowhere. One of them got me with a...dart-thing?”

“A tranquilizer. We’re running it at the lab now, and checking it against whatever was in your blood,” Hilton supplies for the benefit of his mother and Walter. Both are perched on the edge of the couch across from him, hands clasped, the picture of concerned parents. “And what happened next?”

The memory of gunfire jerks him back to reality. “What happened to that guy? The one from the alley?”

Hilton shifts, shaking his head. “I’m sorry, Mr. Queen.”

Oliver closes his eyes, wrestling with the guilt. Today is turning out to be far more emotional than he thought it would be.

Deep breath.

Time to focus.

This time instead of using this to feed them a story of the vigilante, he’s going to use this to discredit him as a possibility. If they don’t think he can handle stressful situations, they won’t come after him as the vigilante.

“I woke up in a warehouse...tied to a chair.” He’s channeling his worst moments now, letting his hands shake and uncertainty creep into his voice. As his audience shifts, he knows they felt the difference. Now all he can see in front of his eyes is Ra’s al Ghul’s sword plunging into his chest.

He coughs to pull his head back into the moment and the story he’s supposed to be telling right now. “There were...three men. They asked me about the Island and if Dad made it off the boat. Then I guess they hit me with another dart-thing and I woke up where you found me.”

He swallows thickly. He didn’t expect the memory to hit him that hard. That’s apparently what happens when you relive last moments before getting kicked off a cliff.

“Can you describe the men?” Hilton asks, glancing up from his miniature notebook.

Oliver shrugs. The men were meant to be ghosts and with no dead bodies, there’s no way to identify
the men at all. “Red devil-masks, dark clothes, similar heights, I think. I didn’t catch of glimpse of any faces.”

“Voices?”

“Only one guy asked me questions. He sounded...normal...aggressive...”

“Weapons?”

He could name each of their weapons and possible places they could have acquired them, but it’s better to play dumb in response to this question. He doesn’t need to raise more questions while answering this one. “Two had big guns, the other guy just had the shock-thing.” He gestures for a moment before finding the word with a snap of his fingers. “Taser! He had a taser. That was the guy who questioned me.”

“So the man with the taser questioned you. What did he want to know?”

“Just questions about my father? How is this relevant?” He frowned in confusion at the Detective’s line of questioning.

“Just trying to figure out why they took you, Mr. Queen.” He smiles tightly, glancing at Moira and the lawyer lurking around the room. Hilton clears his throat and continues. “And did this man use the taser on you?”

Oliver glances down at his hands, clenching them together before forcing himself to relax as he lets out a breath. He looks back up and nods slowly. “When I didn’t answer fast enough.”

Hilton glances at Lance in alarm. “Did the EMTs check those?”

“No,” he says quietly but firmly. He’s not going to change his mind on this one.

His mother squeaks, making a noise of protest at the question. “Why didn’t you get them checked?”

Oliver’s fingers dig into his knees. “I didn’t feel the need to put myself on display, Mom.” He rubs the burns through his shirt. “Besides, I’ve been through worse.” She’s heard about the scars. She knows.

“Honey, that doesn’t mean you need to suffer...”

“I’m okay, Mom.” He forces a smile at her before turning back to Detective Hilton. “Any more questions for me, Detective?”

“I have one,” Lance interrupts. “What did you tell my daughter?”

He nods slowly in understand, careful of his words around Lance. “Just that I was sorry and I understand if she’s mad and never wants to see me again.” He meets Quentin Lance’s assessing gaze, conveying that he didn’t share his story about Sara with her.

Lance nods abruptly, stands, and turns on his heel. “Let’s go, Hilton. We’ll let you know if we find any leads on who was behind this.”

His mother walks them to the door and Oliver stands, unable to sit still for a minute longer. The agitated feeling is back, and he wants to see her.

“We’re glad you’re safe, Oliver,” Walter nods his sentiments before slipping from the room. No one
seems to know what to do in the aftermath of the kidnapping.

“Are you okay, Ollie?” Thea asks, glancing at Tommy worriedly.

“I’m fine, Speedy.” He turns back to the living room, fingers rubbing together. He misses his bow and reigning in his instincts has taken more of a toll on him than he expected.

“Really?”

He sighs. Of course, he’s not fine. He sighs, opting to continue his path of honesty despite his desire to let his sister live in blissful happiness.

“Of course, I’m not okay. For the past five years, nothing good happened. I finally make it home and something horrible happens in less than a day, but I’m moving on. I need to move on. Like I said, I’ve had worse happen to me.”

“Ollie…”

“I’m as fine as I can be, Thea.” He cuts her off before she can really get going. “I’m just trying to go back to a normal life. Let’s just put this behind us,” because a kidnapping is the least impressive thing that could happen. He forces a smile. “I need to get some rest.”

Back in his room, he looks over the computer at his desk. He can’t help wincing at the five-year-old setup – especially since it’s more like seven from his perspective – knowing that Felicity would be yelling at him as she started rearranging things and creating a list of what he actually needs. She’s been too much of an influence on him: he can’t even fathom using that computer.

He wants to see her, to tell her what his day was like, to hear what happened to her, to listen to her fingers fly across the keyboard as he spars with Digg. Tomorrow Digg enters his life. And with that thought, Oliver wonders if he can bring him in sooner, ideally without a life-threatening poisoned bullet.

But he’s already done too much thinking. He needs to do something, like set up the Foundry.

Suddenly, he can’t be in his room any longer and bursts out the door, neatly twisting around to avoid colliding with Raisa in the hallway. For the second time in two days, he steadies the tray before it can crash to the ground.

“So sorry, Mister Oliver.”

“It’s no problem, Raisa,” he tells her in Russian. Her eyes widen in surprise and he smiles at her. “Thank you for taking care of me. I missed you.”

“No cook on the Island.” Lifting the tray to showcase the meal she brought him.

“No friends either.” He smiles and moves to open his door for her. So much for escaping quietly. He can’t leave when she’s just now bringing him dinner.

Raisa sets the tray down for him. “You’re a good boy, Mister Oliver.”

“I didn’t used to be, but I’m trying to change that.” He sighs. One more night at home won’t hurt. Maybe he needs to be here. “So, Raisa…what did I miss?”
Hey guys!!! Thanks for reading! I hope you liked this chapter. It was a doozy to write (and rewrite because it was causing a lot of trouble).

A huge thanks to everyone who commented, left kudos, or bookmarked. Your support has been amazing. I always appreciate any feedback below.

And as always a HUGE thank you to mabscifiromantic for editing!!

And if you really want, I'm also on tumblr so you can follow me there:
Username: writewithurheart
Blog: War Against Reality
Chapter 4

Oliver pauses on the stairs, cursing the extra weight of his trunk. Last time he lowered it out his window. He thought this would be easier, but he forgot how the heavy trunk would throw off his ability to walk silently down the old stairs.

He glances around the open area, looking for movement, but there’s nothing. Nothing moves, not that he expected it at three in the morning. He keeps walking once more, sneaking into the garage and sliding the box into the trunk of a convertible.

Oliver repeats the motions from the first time: joking with the guard about a girl and tipping him so he doesn’t tell anyone he left the property and consequently freak his mom out.

Reaching the Glades, he parks the car a couple blocks away and works his way through back-alleys to the Foundry. Only once he’s there does he open the chest and pull out the burner phone. Methodically, he goes through his, newly updated, inventory of needed supplies and starts making the necessary calls to order what he needs. Felicity usually funnels it through several dummy corporations and makes the shipments untraceable. He doesn’t have her as a resource right now, so he uses the next best thing: his money. Money can buy a lot of silence, especially when it can’t be traced back to him – courtesy of the Bratva.

Two hours of making calls and organizing shipments take their toll on him, and by 5:30 he’s more than ready to head home. He really needs to get the club set up. At least that helped him disguise the deliveries. Fortunately everything is paid for and coming by private courier with detailed times and locations so he doesn’t need to be seen.

Oliver stows the box in the basement, covering it as best as he can before he turns around and heads home to go about his normal day. It’s going to be a long one.

... 

Sweat pours down his face as he wraps up mile ten. Everything aches, but he feels like he could
keep going, like he’s outrunning something instead of just running in circles around the Queen property. He slept several hours longer than his body is accustomed to at this point, fueling his urge for life to move forward, for him to put today on fast-forward, put everything on fast-forward so he can get to the good stuff.

On the bright side, everything’s set to be delivered to the Foundry and though the work will be exhausting, setting it up should be easy. He would be happy with that fact except that he’s now going stir crazy. The waiting is killing him and it hasn’t even been two days. Had he really been this restless before?

No one greets him when he walks in this morning, the whole house asleep as he pads through the kitchen. He pours himself a glass of water and makes himself a bowl of oatmeal. The mansion remains in sleepy silence as he contemplates his options for the day – like he didn’t spend enough time stewing in his own thoughts last night.

It’s barely seven in the morning, but Raisa is already moving around the kitchen, passing him a glass of orange juice as he wonders if he has enough time to run into the city and check on Felicity before he has to come back and meet John Diggle.

He sighs into his oatmeal. He probably has the time to spare before Digg arrives, but not before the rest of his family wakes up. If he worries them now, staying in last night was for nothing. Oliver stabs his spoon into the bowl, wondering why he decided to care so much because it was so much easier the first time around when he wasn’t so preoccupied with how his family felt.

Then again, he’s doing things differently now because of them, because of what they mean to him.

He moves to the sink and washes his dishes, ignoring Raisa with a charming smile as she tries to wave him away. A couple more hours biding his time at home and then he’ll ditch Diggle and get to work on the Foundry. He considered not putting Digg through hell this time, but ultimately, he decided he could make it up to him later.

Walking through the living room, he spots Thea’s tablet. Ignoring the pink, sparkly cover, he deftly navigates his way onto the internet. She really should have better password-protection. Felicity would be ashamed.

... 

He scans the internet after his shower, searching for any general information to supplement what he already knows about his targets from last time. Partially, he wants to see if he should mix up the order he goes after these guys. Or if he can go after Malcolm sooner. Or maybe he can hit Malcolm in other ways.

Oliver already knows he’s not restricting himself to the List this time. He’ll keep doing his patrols and protecting the innocent. It’ll help with telling Felicity, Digg, and Tommy. All three of them disliked his inclination to kill and his obsession with the List. He’s not going to make those mistakes twice. If he’s going to change things, he needs to get a better look at the bigger picture.

It doesn’t escape him that Malcolm’s goal originally was to better the Glades. He even entertained the idea that by saving the ordinary people there, he could convince Malcolm to forget the Undertaking. An idea he quickly dismissed because there’s no way he could count on Malcolm’s sanity or his judgment.

He moves on to the next name in the book, pausing as he rereads the name.
“Son of a bitch,” he whispers to himself in astonishment. Isabel Rochev. Damn. How had he missed that the first time?

He shakes his head. It doesn’t matter because he’s not going to let her get her claws into his company this time around. He knows better now. He turns to his new notebook and writes her name under “Caution”. It’s taking longer than he thought it would, but he’s sorting the names into “Harmless,” “Caution,” and “Dangerous.” Malcolm falls into a category all his own, but he’s moving through the pages slowly, researching everyone he doesn’t know. There are a lot of people involved, but as far as he can tell, most are just low men on the totem pole, grunts Malcolm used to go his dirty work. He doesn’t need to go after everyone, but he should keep an eye out.

“Oliver, I have someone I’d like you to meet,” his mother calls as she opens his door with her usual air of command. He nods, careful to keep the book out of sight as he drops Thea’s tablet on to the desk. He fights back the smile at the familiarity of this, schooling his face once more as he follows her out to the room. “You know, honey, I didn’t even think about it, but we should get you a new computer.”

He grimaces at being caught with Thea’s tablet. “I just thought it would be a good idea to get caught up with technology. A lot’s changed in five years.”

Moira chuckles, smiling openly. “Yes, well, I think we can afford to get you your own. Speaking of technology,” she pulls a slim black rectangle from her pocket and holds it out to him, “I had a new phone set up for you. Thea took everyone’s picture and programmed the numbers in for you.”

He flips through the numbers, grinning at the pictures his little sister managed to take that are both endearing and clearly unexpected for the subjects. The thoughtfulness of the gesture warms his heart.

“What can you get someone to teach me how to use this, too,” he jokes with a laugh.

“That can be arranged,” his mother nods. “I’m sure Walter could recommend someone from Queen Consolidated.”

He grins to himself. If Walter were to recommend someone, he’s sure it would be someone babbly, blonde, and brilliant. And that’s definitely what he wants: to meet her. If Walter can set that up, it would be so much better than him awkwardly introducing himself.

The sight of his soon-to-be friend standing at attention at the foot of the stairs, drags Oliver back to the moment, back to what he needs to do now.

“This is John Diggle. He’ll be accompanying you from now on,” Moira introduces with a pleasant smile.

John has his serious face on as he stands straight in his suit. Is it horrible of him to say he’s going to have fun dodging his friend for the next couple of days as he sets up his operation? He can still sneak away from Digg and become friends, right? Besides, he can’t bring Digg in from the start. He has nothing to build on. He can’t just jump in feet first and hope everything will go to plan. That’s not how this stuff works.

“I don’t need a babysitter,” he comments with a friendly grin, making sure to convey amusement this time.

“Oliver, you were kidnapped yesterday. I don’t want to spend all my time worrying about you. This is something I need. Please.” His mother squeezes his hand, pleading.

He nods stiffly, fully aware that he never intended to get rid of Diggle completely and that this will
help his mother’s peace of mind. He couldn’t become the Arrow without Felicity and Digg. He’s not going to lose his closest allies. So he saunters past Digg to the car. “Fine. Does this mean you’re driving, John Diggle?”

Oliver sits in silence, stroking his finger over the new phone, staring at each new picture (including the stoic one Digg just begrudgingly added), and grinning like an idiot as he remembers all the great times he’s had with the man who just met him for the first time. “So...John Diggle, how did you get saddled with this job? Watching spoiled billionaires can’t be fun.”

John huffs in the front seat. “You can call me Diggle or Digg.”

Oliver glances out the window blandly, like he didn’t know the information he’s forced to wrestle out of Digg. He also notes how he neatly avoids commenting on babysitting billionaires. “Ex-military?”

“Yes, sir. 95th Airborne out of Kandahar. Retired. Been in the private sector for a little over four years now.” Good old Digg. Only speaking as much as he needs to in order to be understood.

This is the part where Digg sets him straight about what his protection will mean in his bland way that says how much he hates this job. But Oliver’s not going to stick around for it this time either, taking the opportunity to slip away to the Foundry.

“Sorry about this,” Oliver mutters as he rolls out the door and takes off down an alley, just like he did the first time. He feels a twinge of regret but pushes on towards the Foundry anyway. A quick stop, and a moment to remove the battery from his new phone which undoubtedly has some tracking device, then Oliver Queen: playboy, castaway, heir to QC, disappears. Minutes later an anonymous man in a canvas jacket emerges carrying bags of gear and blends into the city as he works his way towards the Foundry.

Courtesy of his calls this morning, there’s a shipment waiting for him. New equipment and materials, a sleek motorcycle, with multiple sets of plates, and cases containing the green leathers he had custom made before leaving China – all thanks to the contacts he made through ARGUS, and money from the Bratva mostly. It’s blood money – not clean by any stretch of the imagination – but no one would be able to trace it back to him, except maybe Felicity if she knew his connection to the Russian mob and had a reason to look.

He can’t manage an impressive computer set-up like what she had, so he doesn’t attempt it, settling on something close to what he created the first time around. It takes a full day of work to set up the basement. It’s not the set-up he’s used to: the computers aren’t as central as they will be, there are no glass cases to spotlight costumes or his weapons, there’s no sparring mat or training dummies. But those things will come in time.

Then comes the forging, sharpening and testing of his arrows. It’s soothing in a way. It keeps his mind focused on what has to be done right now in order to make his overall mission more successful.

One of the perks of coming from the future: he’s able to do so much more now. Instead of just making lethal arrows, he constructs more trick arrows as well. He’s not going to be the killer anymore, so he needs an arsenal before he can be of much good to the city, a non-lethal arsenal. It might be slow going, but it is worth it. He can have it all: his life and his mission.
Two days home and it’s time.

The Foundry’s set up and he’s ready to move.

Tonight’s the night: his first act as a vigilante. Tonight he goes after Adam Hunt. He contemplated it, avoiding the little fish and going after Malcolm Merlyn instead – that was one of his first ideas, but his mantra has been that he wants to do things right. That means he needs to catch Malcolm in the act with enough evidence to convict him and send him to jail for a long time. He can’t do that without the earthquake machines. Granted, a prison won’t hold a League of Assassins assassin, but it would put him in one place for Ra’s Al Ghul to find him.

Oliver lifts his hand unconsciously to cover his chest. While no scar mars his skin, the trauma still resonates in his dreams and at times like this he can feel the blade slide between his ribs. He doesn’t regret going to that mountaintop to fight Ra’s. He did that for his sister, but he’s sure as hell not going to let that situation happen again. Thea’s never going to be put in a situation that makes that necessary. He can pit Ra’s and Merlyn against each other without getting in the middle.

But he doesn’t have proof yet. He still has to bide his time.

Refocusing on tonight’s mission, Oliver double-checks Hunt’s location for changes. While he had considered changing up the men he went after, Hunt was still going to be first. Last night, after recreating the Foundry as much as possible on his own, he went out on patrol. He didn’t search for trouble, but he did manage to stop a mugging and a possible rape. He called both in and waited for the police to come. There’s already at least one story floating around about an archer dressed in green.

Oliver smirks as he slides through the shadows of the parking garage towards Hunt’s car. It feels good to be out, working again, doing what he does best. There are only three men around the car. It’s too easy.

He takes out the lights the way he used to before Felicity took control of the power box: with a couple well-aimed arrows. Two tranquiler darts to the guards have them collapsing before they can shove their boss into the waiting car. It makes him smirk. Digg could do a far better job than those two bozos. Hunt falls to the ground scrambling to get away as Oliver approaches. He lets an arrow loose to sink into the pavement next to Hunt’s head, eliciting a shout he didn’t expect from the other man.

His bow feels good in his hands, solid, even if it’s still the one from the Island and not the customized one Felicity got him. He approaches as Hunt sputters:

“Whoa! Whoa! Just tell me what you want!” His hands rise in surrender, shaking subtly in the flashing sparks from the not-quite-expunged electrical lines even as he summons his courage.

He hauls the man to his feet. “You are going to transfer 40 million dollars into Starling Bank account 1141 by 10 pm tomorrow night.”

“Or what?” Hunt demands, his jaw clenched in determination.

“Or I’m going to take it and you won’t like how.” Oliver shoves the man back a step. He can feel Hunt’s bravado returning as he realizes he’s not going to die right now. He spins and walks away. He didn’t see a gun on Hunt so he’s not worried about turning his back.

“If I see you again, you’re DEAD!” Hunt declares.

Oliver smiles before spinning and shooting a three inch hole through the back window of the town
car Hunt was about to get into. Hunt falls back a step and Oliver disappears. Mission accomplished. Put the fear of God into Adam Hunt: check. It’s almost a pity that he knows Hunt isn’t going to transfer the money.

...

Still in his hood, Oliver swings by Roy’s house. He wants to check in on the kid. He never did get the full story of how they met out of Thea. He only knows Roy was involved in some bad stuff.

Roy isn’t at home (surprise, surprise), but he would recognize the red hoodie he sees in the alley anywhere. Roy’s not exactly hanging with a good crowd based on the conversation he’s hearing, but they’re not getting into trouble either. He’s uneasy with the whole thing, worried about leaving Roy there.

“Dude, you need to lighten up!” One boy declares, swinging his liquor bottle in Roy’s direction.

Roy scowls back. “I told you. I don’t do anything like that. No rape, no beat-downs.”

“It’s not rape. We’re just going to frighten her a bit, scare her. All fun, no harm.”

Roy shakes his head. “Doesn’t matter. Count me out.”

The other kid shakes his head incredulously and Oliver smiles. Roy’s a good kid deep down and that much hasn’t changed. Roy won’t do anything horrible. He decides to stick around anyway, keeping an eye on the group. He waits until the group stumbles their separate ways to follow Roy. Unlike the rest of the group, he’s only nursed one beer the whole night.

Oliver follows him back to his place, sticking to the shadows as Roy walks home alone, hands shoved in his pockets. He pauses halfway down an alley, twisting to look behind him. He walks a couple more blocks before he stops again, spinning angrily.

“Who’s there?! I know you’re following me! Show yourself!” His irritated shout echoes around the alley as his hands curl into fists. “I said COME OUT!”

Hood still firmly in place, Oliver steps forward slowly, letting light throw him into sharp relief.

“Who the hell are you?” Roy demands, face screwed up in confusion. “Why are you following me?”

Oliver steps closer, entering the light more, but he doesn’t speak, just waits to see what Roy will do. “You know Halloween’s still a month away, right?”

Oliver smirks.

Roy shifts his feet, waiting for a response until it becomes clear he’s not going to get one. “What’s your damage, man?”

He starts circling Roy, sizing him up. Roy’s just as angry as he remembers, but now there’s no Mirakuru enhancing the rage. He’s got a good heart and that’s what matters. He’s been focusing so much on Diggle and Felicity it never occurred to him that maybe he could bring Roy into the fold first this time. It might even be his best idea yet.

“You mute or something?” Roy demands.

“No,” he answers gruffly. He just hasn’t decided what he wants to say.
“So what’s with the costume? And the bow. Isn’t that a little old-school?”

“I like old-school.” Oliver grins at the comment. “Besides, it has a lot more finesse than a gun.”

Roy snorts. “Yeah, well, you look like an idiot.”

Oliver shrugs. “Maybe, but I get things done.”

“Why were you following me?”

He shifts the bow in his hand as he searches for the right words, words that aren’t creepy and stalkerish. “I’m intrigued by a gangbanger with a sense of morality.”

That gives him pause. Roy turns, eyes following Oliver as he crosses his arms over his chest. “Who are you?”

“Someone who cares about the people in the Glades.”

Roy snorts derisively. “No one cares about the Glades.”

“You do.” Oliver watches him for his reactions.

“No. I don’t. I would get out of here if I had the chance.” Roy turns back to where he was going, hands shoved back into the pockets of his hoodie. “You’re just a nut job if you think any different.”

Oliver watches him walk away. “You could really make a difference, Roy Harper,” he calls to the kid’s retreating back.

“No one can make a difference.” Roy throws his hands in the air. “You know what’s happening in this city? The rich get everything and the rest of us are left with scraps. No one gets out of the Glades and no one can save the souls stuck here, especially not some delusional idiot dressed in green leather.”

Oliver grins. “We’ll just have to see about that.”

He leaves Roy behind as he loops back to his motorcycle. Roy’s always had a thick head, but he’s hoping this plants the seeds for their partnership later on. He’s got a good feeling about Roy.

...

It’s not that late, not for a Friday night, so Oliver has to skirt a couple rowdy partiers as he makes his way to Felicity’s, his suit returned to the Foundry on the way. Tommy tried to convince him to go out tonight, but he made his excuses, of course telling Digg that he was going out with Tommy. He’s not sure Digg believed him.

He doesn’t even stop to think that Felicity might not be home. It’s the crowd of scantily clad clubbers leaving her building that remind him of the mistake he might be making. He thinks about turning around, but he needs to at least lay eyes on her. He finds himself lurking outside her window once again, relaxing at the light that falls on the fire escape.

This time she’s not curled up on the couch watching Netflix. The TV isn’t even on. Her kitchen table is scattered with the leftovers of dinner, two burned-out candles, and two empty glasses of wine. He can hear her laughter from down the hall, even though she’s out of sight. His heart sinks.

A date.
She’s on a date, a date that started with a romantic dinner and probably ended with dessert in the bedroom, if he had to guess. He groans. Why didn’t he ever consider the possibility that she was involved with someone?

“Have you seen my shirt?” Felicity’s voice approaches the living room and he turns away.

_I shouldn’t be here for this_, he chastises himself and turns to leave. He doesn’t want to see this, but then he hears another familiar voice:

“I think it’s behind the couch.”

The voice paralyzes him. His hand clenches the railing of the fire escape. This can’t be happening. This...it isn’t possible. Needing to see the proof with his own eyes, Oliver twists to see a shirtless man handing Felicity what he assumes must be her shirt. Finally the man turns enough that Oliver can see his face, but it doesn’t matter because Oliver would recognize his best friend anywhere.

His chest feels hollowed out, like his heart’s been scooped from chest.

This is a thousand times worse than Ra’s blade.

_Tommy Merlyn._

_Felicity Smoak is sleeping with Tommy Merlyn._
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

Hey guys! Sorry for the incredible delay! Editing this chapter has been a roller coaster ride, but I wanted to post this soon. Thank you for bearing with me.

I'm going to try to keep updates consistent. My next goal is to start posting the companion story which is called "Do I Look Like a Barista to You?" That will explain the whole Tommy/Felicity thing of the last chapter.

Again, sorry for the delay! I hope you like this chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 5

Felicity...

And Tommy...

Nope. He still can’t wrap his head around it, and punching the heavy-bag until his knuckles bleed isn’t helping. Deep down Oliver knows it won’t make any difference, but that doesn’t stop him from pouring his anger into each strike.

Logically, he knows he shouldn’t be this angry. He keeps saying he just wants her to be happy, and as much as it pains him to admit it, they looked happy last night. He’s just...caught off guard. Of all the things that could happen, this completely blindsided him. He thought Tommy and Laurel were together. He swore they were a done deal already. Hell, he didn’t even realize Felicity and Tommy knew each other.

Well he was wrong about that.

He shoves away from the bag, snatching his leather jacket from his single chair at the bottom of the stairs. All night. He’s been here all night, pounding his feelings out through his muscles until it hurts, until it burns. His body doesn’t have the same stamina he’s accustomed to after two years of regular meals and modern medicine. His nightmares still haunt him on occasion but even his sleeping patterns have vastly improved. During his last stretch on the Island before being ‘rescued’ he never truly slept. It just makes it all the more important to get his life on track now.

Oliver reaches for the door and notices for the first time the warm, red liquid seeping from the worn cracked skin spread over his knuckles. A groan escapes him as he turns around to grab the med kit. He can’t go home bleeding. He forgoes dressing them for just dabs of ointment. The bleeding isn’t too bad and he can hide that from his family.

On second thought, he grabs a couple rolls of gauze, wrapping a few lengths around his right hand, then his left, hoping to keep them clean while he drives home. He loves the motorcycle, but there are some downsides. He quickly wraps it as he walks back through the Foundry to the loading bay where his bike is hidden behind a couple ubiquitous pallets. He chucks the remains of the roll into the compartment under the seat and shoves his helmet onto his head, repeating over and over in his
head that as long as they’re happy, he’ll be happy for them.

He can do that...

Right?

...

Once he gets home, Oliver quickly changes into a pair sweats and sneakers he stashed in a hole in an old tree along the running path he’s been taking every morning. For a moment, he just stands there, breathing in the cool, crisp air. He’s tired. He barely got any sleep. He’s sweaty and exhausted, but he just wants to continue to sweat this out of his system. It’s the only way he knows of dealing with this information.

A tall glass of orange juice waits for him in the kitchen after a handful of laps, accompanied by Raisa’s winning smile as she slides a plate piled with eggs in front of him along with a bowl of oatmeal covered in chopped apple and a dusting of cinnamon. This breakfast thing is becoming a habit.

Moira catches him as he eats at the kitchen counter, pausing long enough in her morning routine to press a kiss to his cheek and extract a promise of lunch together that afternoon. She’s smiling as she saunters out of the kitchen to what he’s sure is a long list of social gatherings for one fundraiser or another.

Raisa, in her infinitely maternal way, steals his empty dishes before banishing him to the shower with a chiding smile.

He extracts himself from the kitchen. He doesn’t know where he would go, even if he hadn’t promised his mother to stick around. The Foundry’s not really an option with his body’s current beat-up shape. He worked himself too hard last night (this morning?). If he pushes himself any harder, he won’t be able to face Adam Hunt tonight.

He wanted to spend the morning letting Thea distract him with her questions and general business, from back when she was just happy he was finally home, but he forgot one crucial thing: school. So instead of getting her to bombard him with questions or force him to watch a movie with her, Oliver finds himself trapped in the house by his own actions.

He meanders his way outside flexing his hands to work out the string of the tiny cuts stretched over his knuckles. They’re threatening to burst and leak blood again. He should have been more careful, should have wrapped his knuckles. He wouldn’t have this problem if he had been more careful.

“Looks like you had an eventful night, Mr. Queen.”

Oliver closes his eyes, curling his hands into fists before releasing them to turn and face Digg with an ironic grin. “This isn’t something you couldn’t protect me from, Diggle. Don’t sweat it.”

The other man stares back, unimpressed. “Those are some nasty cuts on your hands. I know what it looks like when someone’s fighting without hand-protection. What were you doing last night, Mr. Queen?”

“Just checking in with old friend,” which is mostly true. He did tell Digg he was with Tommy...and he did see Tommy.

“Now, why don’t I believe that?”
“Because you’re not stupid,” Oliver offers. He knows he wasn’t convincing and he’s not going to insult Digg’s intelligence like that.

He nods, eyebrows raised. “There something you want to tell me, sir?”

“Lots of things, Digg,” he mutters, hating the plea for understanding that sneaks in. “Call me Oliver.”

“There something you want to tell me, Oliver?” Digg repeats. His tone a little less harsh, apparently having heard the muttering.

This is so much harder than he expected it to be. Why had he thought it would be easy?

Blowing out a ragged breath, he attempts another half-truth. “I...” The man he trusts most in this world is standing right in front of him and Oliver finds himself torn. John Diggle is (was...will be) his conscience, the man who calls him out when he ends up with his head jammed up his ass. He supported him, in everything including his relationship with Felicity. He was Felicity’s best friend, Oliver’s best friend and he just wants to cut the crap.

Truth: “I was checking on a friend last night. I found out some things that...”

_Breath dammit._

“I guess I should have expected...that things would be different.”

At least Digg is looking at him with compassion and understanding instead of pity or distaste. Thank God that hasn’t changed.

“So...?” The amount of meaning Digg can put into one word is astounding.

“So...” _Don’t lie to Diggle, “I hit the gym.”_

“Sure that’s the only thing you kit?” He almost smirks at the rampant skepticism that graces John’s demeanor.

“The bag wasn’t complaining while I worked through things.”

That earns him a snort from Digg. “You should be more careful, Oliver.” Knowledge shines from John as he imparts his warning.

“Okay. You win. I should have wrapped my hands. Although, in my defense, there wasn’t any tape on the Island.” He shoves his hands in his pocket as he phone vibrates from an incoming text. “I’m glad my mother didn’t fire you.”

He huffs, amused despite himself with the comment. “Sometimes I wonder why I spend my time...” He trails off.

“Babysitting billionaires?” Oliver grins back at him. “I can’t blame you. Must be a sucky job.”

“Mr. Queen, I get that this isn’t the best situation. You don’t want me following you around. You want your privacy. But I am here for your protection. It is my job to protect you and I can’t do that when you keep running off.”

Oliver nods slowly. “I don’t need your protection.”

“With all due respect, you don’t want my protection, sir. But your mother is the one who hired me and I will do my job.”
Oliver observes him before he asks. “Why do you do this, John Diggle? Why do you waste your time guarding the spoiled elite? It can’t be very fulfilling.”

John Diggle crosses his arms defensively over his chest, standing tall and silent, refusing to answer the question. Oliver didn’t think he was going to. He knows why Digg does this. It’s because he needs a job, he needs to make money.

“You’re not going to find your brother’s killer guarding the rich.”

Digg’s eyes narrow, at the new information. “How do you know that?”

Oliver shrugs. “I still know how to Google.”

“That was never in any article. You can’t know that.” Digg steps closer. “Who are you, Mister Queen?”

He wants to blurt it all out, tell Digg everything, but Digg’s the skeptic. He’s not going to believe until he can see the evidence right in front of him. So instead he smirks and steps back, shrugging. Digg glares. He doesn’t want to back down from this because he’s right: there’s no way Oliver could have known that.

“Oliver?” His mom sticks her head out one of the garden doors, smiling fondly at him. “You ready for lunch, honey?” She nods stiffly to the bodyguard. “Mr. Diggle.”

“Yeah. Let me grab my coat.” He saunters past her, Digg trailing behind.

“First, Oliver...what happened to your hands?” She shoots Digg a purposeful look, like the injury is somehow his fault.

Oliver turns his gaze to the floor, running a hand over the back of his neck. “It was...a nightmare. I...overreacted. I’m fine.”

Moira’s face shifts from blame to worry in an instant. “A nightmare? Oliver...”

He shrugs off her touch, shaking his head. “I’ll be fine. I just bruised myself a little.”

“This is not a little, Oliver!” She grabs one of his hands, holding it firmly in two of hers as she scrutinizes it. “Your hand is all torn up.”

The angry red must stand out more than he previously thought for both of them to notice it. He needs to get in the habit of wrapping his hands, even when anger drives him to take his aggression out on the fighting dummy. He doesn’t need this scrutiny. It’s not like him to be this careless. He should have thought further ahead.

“It’s nothing. I’ve had much worse.”

“Was it the kidnapping? Are you having nightmares about that?”

He chuckles at the idea that the kidnappers are more terrifying than the things he’s experienced in the last five, or even seven, years. “Mom, I have more terrifying nightmares of the last five years. Those are the nightmares haunting me.”

She doesn’t look happy with the revelation. “Do you need to talk about it?”

Does he want to talk about seeing the love of his life with his best friend? No. Doubly so in regards to any other nightmares he may or may not have.
“No, Mom.” He summons a smile, squeezing her hand. “Just a rough night. I’ll be fine. It’ll just take some time for them to go away.” If they ever do.

“Oliver, we can get you someone to talk to,” her words are soft, pitched lower as if she doesn’t want Diggle to hear, but it’s not a psychologist he needs.

“That’s not necessary.”

She looks disbelieving and Diggle doesn’t appear that impressed either. They watch him carefully, but he shakes his head and forces the smile back to his face. “Lunch?”

His mom nods, slowly and reluctantly. She’s smart enough to know when she’s not going to make any headway with her son, but she’s just happy he’s finally back, finally home and safe. Finally.

... They know something’s wrong: his mother and Diggle. Neither of them is close to guessing, of course, but they know something’s up. His mother shows it in her attention, how she’s careful what she says around him, how she watches him throughout their meal and the rest of the afternoon. She barely leaves him alone for her worry.

Diggle shows it in his wariness. He’s watching Oliver differently now, like he might actually be more than a billionaire playboy. It’s the way he used to look at Oliver sometimes, like he might need to stop Oliver if he crosses the line, like Oliver might be the real threat to the world. It feels bizarrely familiar, but the context is completely different.

He finally caves and answers Tommy’s calls when his phone blares at 8 pm, mainly because answering gets him out of the overprotective bubble his mother has insisted on since she saw the scrapes. It’s like she thinks that leaving him alone for a moment will result in another nightmare, another self-inflicted injury.

“Tommy,” he answers brightly before wincing, because it might be just a little too bright. It definitely sounds false to his own ears.

“Dude! Have you been avoiding my calls?”

He grimaces, hearing the general hubbub behind Tommy’s voice as he shouts into the phone. He shakes his head, voice tighter than he wants it to be when he talks. “No.”

Shit. He hadn’t meant to lie. So he just tells a version of the truth, even as it pains him to get the words out: “I’m not used to carrying one of these things on me. Plus, this phone is nothing like the flip phone I used to have.”

Tommy laughs on the other end. “I forgot how much everything’s changed in five years.”

“Tell me about it,” Oliver mutters. “I can barely work my phone.” He actually remembers how much he struggled when he first came back.
“I know someone who can help you with that.”

He smiles despite the sinking in his stomach, letting a teasing tone enter his voice. “Really?”

“Yup. Cute. Blonde and standing right next to me. I can introduce you at the party tonight.” He pushes back the raging jealousy, trying not to think about the fact that they spent the night and a whole day together. She’s probably been following him around making sure he doesn’t forget anything. She’s probably babbling on about the drinks and the music and trying not to talk herself into a hole. He doesn’t want to think about what that means.

“Tommy! I told you I couldn’t make it!” He hears in the background. The familiar voice sends another pang to his heart, just when he thought it couldn’t hurt any more.

“And I told you, you didn’t have a choice,” Tommy teases.

“I’m not going, Tommy.”

“Yes, you are.”

She says something else, but Oliver can’t hear her over the phone. He pulls the phone from his ear to spare himself the slow torture. He only hears Tommy’s loud laugh and it cuts him to his soul. He can see the two of them, standing next to each other, touching. They would be innocent touches, like the ones he and Felicity shared. He can’t stand the thought of them sharing those private moments too. Now he just wants to get off the phone, away from their delirious happiness. He can’t be around it without getting angry.

Tommy’s voice comes back through the phone louder, directed back to him. “Just wanted to make sure you were getting ready. The hot girls are already lining up!”

“Tommy!” He can almost imagine Felicity slapping his arm in exasperation.

“What? They’re hot and he’s been stranded alone on an island for five years. I’m ready to play wingman, maybe hook him up with a hot brunette. Sound good, buddy?”

Oliver’s fists clench as he grits out, “Yeah. See you in an hour.”

“Yup. I’d say don’t be late, but who are we kidding! See you when you get here!” Tommy’s laughing salutation echoes in his ears as he ends the call.

He can hear their flirtatious voices on repeat in his mind, driving him slowly crazy. He’d give anything not to feel this right now. Yes, he was pushing her to Ray, as much as he hated the guy, but that was before he realized the true depths of his feelings, before he decided to embrace them. He loves her. She’s the only one he wants for the rest of his life, but now there’s another obstacle in the way.

Oliver shakes himself from his stupor and heads up to his room. He needs to get dressed for a party.

...  

His mother watches him saunter down the stairs, her hands folded patiently in front of her. He leans down to press a kiss to her cheek. “Don’t worry, Mom. It’s just a night on the town with Tommy. Booze and girls. No kidnapping. I promise.”

She purses her lips and swats his arm in remonstration for his teasing attitude, but the look in her life is pure relief and joy at having him back. She’s pushed the worry over his nightmares away, but it
still lurks in the corner of her eyes. “I’m just...happy to have you back,” She whispers as she pulls him into yet another hug. “Try not to have too much fun.”

“I make no promises on that account.” He squeezes her arm as he pulls away.

“Have fun tonight, Oliver.” Walter adds in, smiling congenially at the happy atmosphere.

He grins. “I plan in it.”

Oliver doesn’t stick around for their bemused looks, sauntering right outside to the waiting car. He slides into the backseat of the town car to find Diggle there next to him. Digg continues to give him hard looks and Oliver can’t get comfortable with it. How does everyone seem further away now when he was supposed to be bringing them closer?

Digg smirks coolly. “Put on your seatbelt, sir. We wouldn’t want you to miss your party.”

...

The party is just the way he remembers it: hordes of noise, bright flashing lights, alcohol, and scantily clothed women. Tommy’s trying to get him drunk and laid by introducing him to every woman they approach. But no matter how much Tommy pushes him at women, his eyes keep searching for a head of blonde curls and with black glasses balanced on her nose.

He knows she’s here somewhere. She’s here for Tommy. And it stings like a knife to the gut, but it also fills him with hope and warmth. She was here the first time and he never noticed it. Maybe he’ll meet her properly now.

Tommy catches on quickly, handing him another drink from the bar. “You’re looking for your mystery girl, aren’t you?”

Oliver sighs and takes a larger-than-normal gulp from his glass. Apparently he’s drinking whiskey. He shouldn’t be this obvious. “She’s not going to be here.” If only that were true.

“But you’re still looking,” Tommy points out with a knowing smirk.

“I’ll always keep looking,” Oliver mutters, knowing he can’t be heard over the pounding bass. This isn’t her scene, but he knows she’s here, somewhere.

“Oh, look, it’s Laurel.” Tommy turns to the brunette and Oliver shakes his head, downing his drink quickly. He can’t deal with this. He doesn’t want to talk to old flames when he knows his best friend is sleeping with Felicity.

He’s not afraid of falling down the rabbit hole and sleeping with someone he doesn’t intend to. No. He may have been basically celibate for his last six months, but he’s not tempted by any number scantily clad women around him.

“Um, Oliver...can we talk?” He blinks at her. That’s unexpected. “Somewhere where it’s not so noisy?”

Tommy frowns at her question. Oliver nods slowly, but before he can answer, his eyes catch on the blonde laughing and dancing across the room. He’s seen her dance before, down in the Foundry, while she sings along to whatever song blasts out of her speakers, but this is different.

She’s wearing red...the color he always associates with her. The dress criss-crosses her back and clings to every curve.
It’s a challenge to drag his eyes away from her. Instead, his eyes land on Diggle, the man watching him from across the room, drinking in his every move as if he might reveal his darkest secrets in the middle of the party.

He twists back to Tommy and Laurel, smiling congenially and gesturing towards the hallway. “Okay. Let’s talk?”

She frowns at him and nods slowly, glancing warily at Tommy before leading the way. Halfway to her exit, his eyes lock onto his sister and the guy slipping her bag of pills.

“One second,” he tells Laurel before spinning on his heel to take Thea by the hand and drag her away from her friends.

“Ollie! Hey! This party is sick!” He can smell the alcohol on her breath from a foot away.

“Who let you in here?”

“I believe it was someone who said, right this way, Miss Queen.” She smiles up at him, like it’s the best joke he must have heard in a while.

“You shouldn’t be here. I’ll get Digg to bring you home.” He turns to look for his bodyguard, who he knows won’t be far away.

“Ollie, I’m not twelve anymore.” The joking tone evaporates from her voice as she glares at him now, eyes hard with iron determination.

“No. You’re seventeen.”

“Look, I love you, but you can’t come back here and judge me for what you used to do when you were my age.”

“Hey, I know it wasn’t easy for you while I was away—“

“Away? You died. My brother and my father died, and you don’t get to come back here and tell me what to do. I went to your funerals. I had to deal with all of that on my own. Mom had Walter, and I was all alone. So I took care of myself and I became who I had to to survive. It doesn’t matter if you don’t like it. Let’s bounce.” She turns to her friends, barely noticing Oliver slip the drugs from her purse.

He grits his teeth. There doesn’t seem to be any easy way to deal with this. He walks over to his shadow, clenching his fist. Digg’s watching him only serving to him as a reminder that this friend is just suspicious of him. Digg doesn’t know what to make of him. His whole support team has vanished, disappeared even though they’re easily within reach. Hell, they’re all in the same room.

Oliver grinds his teeth in frustration at his powerlessness. He knows so much, but he can do so little.

“Digg, can you make sure she gets home?” He meets Digg’s eyes, hoping that the man can recognize his honesty, how much he needs his sister home and safe right now even beneath all his suspicion.

He shifts uneasily, glancing from Oliver back to Thea before sighing. He nods, recognizing the importance of this job. “I can get the driver to take her back.” Oliver nods and starts to move away, but Digg stops him with a light grip on his arm. “But I’m still here as your bodyguard, sir. I’ll be right back.”
“Thank you.” Trusting Digg with his little sister’s life, he turns on his heel and rejoins a frowning Laurel.

“What was that about?” She asks, glancing behind them as he propels her into the much quieter hallway, glancing down at his phone once more. It’s getting close to that time.

“Nothing. I just needed to get my underage sister out of here. What did you want to talk about?” His eyes scan Adam Hunt’s building, already striving to remember how many men he’s going to find when he gets there.

“What did you say to my dad?”

His head jerks over to Laurel, who levels her gaze at him. She crosses her arms over her chest, stepping closer. He immediately shakes his head. “Laurel...”

“What did you say? I found him sitting in the dark, staring at a photo album. He hasn’t done that in years, so what did you say to him?”

He can’t hold her eyes, averting them to the ground and shoving his hands into his pockets. “I just told him the truth.”

She scowls disbelievingly. “Really? And he didn’t kill you?”

“Surprisingly, no.” He smirks, a smile that slips from his face as he meets her furious gaze. He sighs and grimaces. “Laurel, he caught me at a bad time and I told him what happened.”

“So tell me what you told him.”

He swallows his words. “Laurel, you don’t need to hear this, especially not from me.” His phone beeps and he glances down at the screen. It’s just another thing on the list of things not going his way. At least he expected this one. Adam Hunt didn’t transfer the funds...surprising no one. “I have to go.”

“Go? Go, Ollie? Where exactly do you have to go?”

“I asked someone to do something for me and they didn’t do it.”

She snorts derisively. “Really? Someone didn’t fall at the feet of the recently resurrected billionaire playboy? Oh, no, call the cops.” It couldn’t have gone worse if she spit on him. “Go do whatever the hell playboys do when people don’t do what they say.” She brushes rather forcefully past him, turning back to add: “You know, I’d hoped you’d rot in hell a lot longer than five years.”

He pauses a beat before heading to kitchen and his carefully stashed duffel bag. Laurel’s anger and disapproval doesn’t even rate on the list of ways today has gone wrong.

“Anything I can help you with, sir?”

He smiles as he turns to Digg. “I just need some time to myself.” This was more convincing the first time when Digg wasn’t already suspicious.

“I would believe you, sir, if you weren’t so full of crap.” Oliver smiles at the comment, wishing he didn’t have to do this, but apparently getting his sister out of the party hadn’t bought him enough time. “The party is this way. We don’t need you getting into trouble.”

Oliver pulls at the door, half-heartedly. “It’s locked.”
Digg crosses his arms over his chest, clearly no believing a word out of his mouth. “Why don’t you try it again, Mr. Queen?”

He grits his teeth and clenches his jaw. “I can’t deal with this right now, Digg.”

“How about you explain to me what you’re doing then, sir? Because something about you isn’t adding up.”

Oliver glances around the kitchen. “I’ll tell you about it when I get back.” Digg opens his mouth to object but Oliver moves first, swinging at Digg’s head so the man ducks and he can get behind him. “Sorry,” Oliver whispers as his hands wrap around his friend’s neck until he passes out. As gently as he can under the weight of the ex-military bodyguard, Oliver maneuvers him into a nearby chair before continuing on his way. He can’t have Digg interfering just yet. It’s still too soon.

He slips into his suit and begins his assault. Smirking as he cuts the power to the floor. He learned that trick this morning. It was surprisingly easy. He doesn’t use the real arrows this time, instead opting for the trick ones to disable and tie up the guards. They don’t hold back in their assault, at all, firing guns in his direction every chance they get, so he just makes sure they don’t have the time.

Three men are still in the room with Hunt, if he remembers correctly. He crashes through the glass, coming up out of a roll to take out the two gun-toting guards as quickly as possible and shooting the wireless transmission arrow into the wall before engaging in hand to hand combat with the last guard. In his periphery he notices Hunt flee from the room and he realizes vaguely that if he had Felicity, he wouldn’t have needed to go through any of this in the first place.

With a final, solid punch his opponent collapses without managing to know him senseless for a couple minutes. He sticks around for a moment anyway, waiting so the police can see him before he crashes through the window and ziplines back to his party, smiling to himself long after he’s changed out of the suit.

He did it. He accomplished his first mission without killing a single soul, and he managed to get all the money. Not bad work for an ex-killer without his trusty team by his side.

Now if only his best friend wasn’t sleeping with his...Felicity. And he didn’t just knock Digg out in the kitchen because he hasn’t heard the last of that either.

How could everything be so right and so wrong at the same time?

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Please let me know what you think!
Chapter 6

“You have some explaining to do, Mr. Queen.”

 Oliver pauses on the first step of the stairs at Diggle’s voice. After the police busted up his Welcome Home party, the party-mood evaporated pretty quickly. He was able to get home much quicker, especially since he wasn’t in the mood to stick around either. For the first time since he got back, Oliver doesn’t seize the opportunity to be introduced to Felicity. He saw Tommy talking to her from across the room, but he didn’t approach. He couldn’t deal with their closeness right now.

He managed to last through the entire ride home before Diggle brought it up. He was actually hoping he managed to avoid the mess altogether. He’s sort of regretting it now. He should have known better. He shouldn’t have said anything to Digg. He should have just waited to bring him in, should have thought it through more.

“Not now, Digg.” He can’t do this. Not tonight.

“Yes, now, Mr. Queen. I need to know who I’m working for. I think a whole hell of a lot more happened on that island than you admit. You know things about me that you shouldn’t. I want an explanation.”

He turns away from the stairs, jaw working as he walks back towards Diggle, fingers clench before he runs them through his hair and over his head. He drops them to his side as he stops a couple steps from Digg, who looks unimpressed. He lets out a huff of laughter, remembering all their different arguments in the Foundry.

If he’s doing this...he has to do it right.

“We can’t do this here,” Oliver mutters.

Digg raises his eyebrows, but shows no sign of moving.

Oliver groans and turns to stare up at the ceiling. He takes a deep breath. “Fine. Let’s go.”

Digg follows him out the door, slowly as Oliver walks across the driveway to the garage. His first choice would be the motorcycle, but Digg’s never been the kind of friend he rode with on the back of a motorcycle. Instead he snags the sedan’s keys from a hook. It’s the plainest car his family owns, which is what he needs for a drive through the Glades.

He rolls down the passenger window as he pulls the car forward and looks up at Digg. “Let’s go for a ride.”
He remains impassive, staring down at Oliver from his position by the front door. “I don’t have time for this, Mr. Queen.”

Oliver sighs. “John. I’ve had a crap day. If you want an explanation, I can’t give it here. There are too many listening ears.” Digg stands like a statue, watching blankly. Oliver misses the level of respect he used to get from him. He grits his teeth and reaches for the last trick in his arsenal. He hadn’t wanted to use it. “If you want me to help you find your brother’s killer, get in the car.”

Digg glances around, eyes landing specifically on the lost-looking driver standing by the garage. Oliver finally breathes again when Digg reaches for the door and climbs into the seat.

“This better be a damn good explanation, Mr. Queen.”

...  

Diggle thinks he’s crazy. Then again, Oliver gets it. He would think the same thing if Digg was the one driving him to an empty warehouse. The building looks like it’s falling apart. It’s nowhere near clubbing standards yet. He hadn’t exactly planned on having visitors.

It definitely doesn’t make the impression he wants it to make.

Digg probably thinks he’s a serial killer.

“What are we doing here, Mr. Queen?” he asks, stepping out of the car.

Oliver leads the way, taking long strides to the door he fixed yesterday. “You might as well get used to calling me Oliver, Digg.”

“Okay. What’s going on, Oliver?”

Instead of answering, he gestures the bodyguard into the building. Digg shakes his head, grinding his teeth before stepping into the building. He walks into the large open space before pausing in the middle of the room.

“So is this the part where you kill me?” Digg asks, hands landing on his hips as he turns.

“You’re the one wearing a gun, Digg.”

Oliver flips the breaker and the space illuminates. He pulls off his suit jacket and drops it on top of an empty crate that used to be full of computer equipment. He rolls up his sleeves and starts pacing as he searches for the words.

“Care to explain something to me, Oliver? Maybe start with what we’re doing here.”

Oliver clenches his hands into fists and releases them. He stares at the floor and the inches of dust already gathering on his shoes. He should just do this, just jump in feet first.

“Here is safe.” It’s the easiest answer he has. This place, even without the club, with all the memories, is home.

Silence hangs in the air, putting strain between them, but Diggle’s giving him the chance to talk.

“You were right,” he starts. “I shouldn’t know about your brother, but the story’s more complicated than that, and I need you to listen to the whole story. Can you do that?”

Digg raises his chin and crosses his arms again. “I’m listening. That’s all I promise.”
Oliver stares at his friend, assessing the best approach and decides to start small: “The name of the Island is Lian Yu. It means Purgatory. Technically, it’s a prison: First for the Chinese government, now, it belongs to A.R.G.U.S.” That’s all it takes to get Digg’s full, undivided attention.

“When the boat sank, Sara was pulled under. I couldn’t find her. Instead, my father pulled me into a raft.

“We drifted for days, then my father made a choice. He told me to survive, to right the wrongs he did to this city then...” ignoring the mental echo of the gunshot, Oliver presses forward, “he shot himself in the head.”

Diggle clenches his jaw, but otherwise shows no outward signs of distress or sympathy, for which Oliver is grateful. This is hard enough to share without adding someone else’s emotions to the mix.

The memories between that moment and finding the seagulls trying to make a meal of the body are so hazy for him that it’s easier just to move on. “When I finally landed on the Island, I collapsed. Somehow, I managed to drag the raft ashore. I was delusional with thirst and hunger, but I buried him as best as I could.”

A glance at Digg tells him the man’s still hanging on to his words. His eyes fall back to the floor – the floor he hadn’t realized he was staring at – and an old flyer sporting his father’s face stares back up at him, giving him the strength to continue.

It wasn’t in his plan, but...

Digg understands scars. It’s the best way.

Unbuttoning his dress shirt with quick fingers, yanking the tails out of his pants, he turns to face Digg, stripping the shirt as his eyes flit to the bodyguard’s.

A flare of understanding washes over John’s face as he methodically traces each one with his eyes. He can see in Digg’s calculating gaze that he recognizes some of them: torture, gunshot, knife...

When Digg’s brown eyes meet his, Oliver turns and allows the same scrutiny of his back. After a slow count of fifty, Oliver reaches over his right shoulder to point to a small puckering near his shoulder blade, “This was the first: an arrow through my shoulder,” turning back to show the exit wound.

“I was walking away from my father’s grave. That was the moment I realized I wasn’t alone on that Island.” Talk about a rude awakening.

“His name was Yao Fei. He was an exiled Chinese general.” He cuts off. He doesn’t know how to go on, how to describe what happened on that Island, with all the twists and turns. It came out slowly last time and he doesn’t know how to divulge it all at once.

He must be silent for too long because Digg actually weighs in.

“He tortured you.”

Oliver chuckles, shaking his head. At least he’s able to laugh about it now, in retrospect. “He made me kill a bird. He wouldn’t feed me until I killed it myself.” He can still remember the old, Chinese man, strong and agile, forcing him to learn the tough lessons that would let him survive.

“I was tortured by Billy Wintergreen, ex-agent of ASIS, and Edward Fryers. They were looking for Yao Fei and I refused to give him up.” Digg’s eyes are back on the scars, guessing which ones came
from that traumatic event. Oliver pointed. “Billy had a thing for swords.”

“Sounds like a rough five years,” Diggle agrees, wincing at the idea of swords.

Oliver chuckles darkly. “That was only the first couple months. By a year later, Yao Fei, Fryers and Wintergreen were dead, and I was working with Yao Fei’s daughter, Shado, and Wintergreen’s ex-partner, Slade Wilson.”

He shifts his stance as he recalls Slade’s attack in his memories, phantom pain shooting through his knee even though he knows it won’t be hurting in the near future. For the first time, he wishes he could have gone back even further. Maybe then he could save Shado, and in turn, Slade.

Oliver shakes his head. That’s not the point right now. He didn’t bring Diggle here for that.

“They taught me how to fight, how to really fight. I was useless before Shado put a bow in my hand. If it weren’t for her, Slade would have eventually left me for dead or slit my neck in a mercy killing.” But that’s not what he wants to convey either. It’s important to who he is, but that’s not what Diggle needs to know.

“I spent another year on the Island. Shado died at the hands of a mad scientist, Anthony Ivo, and Slade lost it. He blamed me for her death.” He turns to display the unfinished dragon tattoo on his shoulder. “He gave me this so I’d always remember that she died because of me. She had a matching one.

“We both loved her and it destroyed him.” Shit. He hadn’t meant to bring emotions into this.

Briefly, he contemplates telling the entirety of Slade’s story, because he knows it will be important when the man himself comes back, but again, that’s not his goal here. He’s trying to tell Digg how he got here. How he knows things he shouldn’t know. And Slade’s not a part of that, not yet.

“There...there was a fight,” It’s such an inadequate word, but it’s all he has to describe that last skirmish on the freighter. “I woke up in Hong Kong with Amanda Waller.”

His eyes dart back to Digg’s to see him start in surprise at the name, but he continues without pause: “For the next year, A.R.G.U.S. used me as an assassin and interrogator.” He winces, thinking about the year where he slowly lost his soul. “I was the perfect minion. She could kill me and ‘no one misses a dead man’.”

Oliver shrugs his shirt back on, but doesn’t button it back up just yet.

“So you work for A.R.G.U.S.?” Digg’s distrust grows, if that’s at all possible. He should have expected it as soon as he mentioned that little tidbit.

He scowls, face twisting in disgust at the thought. “No!”

“You expect me to believe that? Waller doesn’t just let people go.”

“No. I saved her life in Hong Kong. We came to an...understanding.” He stuffs his hands in his pockets and takes a step forward.

“An understanding?”

“She owes me.” He shrugs.

Digg scoffs. “Waller wouldn’t let herself be indebted to anyone.”
“She didn’t really have a choice.” He doesn’t want to think about the bloody past he left behind in Hong Kong anymore. “...while working for Waller, I found a video from my father, asking me to help the city, the people in the Glades. But I wasn’t ready. So I went to Coast City.”

John frowns, but he doesn’t ask any more questions. He just listens.

“I went to find an old friend of my father’s, Martin Jordan. I ended working at Ferris Air. Learned to fly from Hal Jordan. Ended up in deep with the Bratva.” He pulls back the edge of the shirt to show off the star tattoo. “I saved the life of the Bratva leader my second year on the Island and he brought me in. I honed my skills until I was ready to come back.”

And then so much more happened. Oliver reaches up, rubbing the blank expanse of skin where his mother shot him the night he brought Felicity into the fold. The lack of a scar only reminds him how much hasn’t happened yet.

“Ready to come back to do what?”

Digg’s ready to fight him, that much is obvious from his confrontational stance. If Oliver hadn’t spent years training with him, he might actually be intimidated. He likes that Digg’s still motivated to protect people when he sees a threat.

“To save this city.”

Diggle snorts. “And you’re what this city needs? You just admitted to murder and torture. What are you going to do? Kill everyone who threatens you? Torture lowlifes?”

“No.” Oliver smiles, shaking his head as he rolls up his sleeves and buttons his shirt. “I’m doing it differently this time.” He grins and walks away. Is he over-dramatizing considering he’s still ready to collapse from exhaustion? Probably. But he still has a knack for theatrics.

“This time?” Digg follows Oliver down the staircase to the basement.

“Tonight, I used the party to go after Adam Hunt. He was stealing money from hundreds in the Glades. I didn’t drop a single body and all those people will wake up in the morning with their money back in their bank accounts. And this,” Oliver holds up a USB, “is the evidence I’m sending to the police. This, in conjunction with the recording they found at the scene will give them enough to send Hunt to jail for a good long while.

“And Hunt’s bodyguards all live to tell the tale.” He’s proud of that particular fact. His team would be proud of him for this decision.

“That’s where you – What is this place?” Digg cuts himself off to demand, eyes darting around the room, landing on the bow, the computers and finally Oliver’s costume as he unpacks it from a duffle bag. He almost misses that ridiculous glass case.

“This is the...Foundry.” Now she’s got him almost calling it the Arrow Cave. He grins at the memory, eyes latched onto the hood as that memory flits through his mind. He slides the grin from his face and glances over his shoulder. “I’m turning the upstairs into a club. It provides a steady alibi people will believe fits with Ollie Queen.”

“A club with a lair in the basement?” Diggle shakes his head, muttering something about the fancies of the idle rich before raising his voice once more. “So why are you telling me all this?”

Oliver plays with his grip on Yao Fei’s bow before lowering it to the work table and turning around. “Because I want you to help me. I need a team. I can’t do this all by myself.”
“So you trust some guy you barely know?”

No. He trusts his best friend, his brother in arms. He gets that it doesn’t make sense and he grimaces at Diggle’s description.

“You realize, I don’t know how to use that antiquated weapon.”

Oliver chuckles. “That’s not why I’m telling you this. I need someone to watch my back, someone to keep me on track.”

“And you just chose the first person you met? That’s not speaking to your sanity.”

“I did my research. There’s your brother, who was killed by Floyd Lawton while on a job. Lawton, also known as Deadshot, doesn’t miss, so the question is who paid him to go after your brother?”

Digg steps closer. “And who’s funding this if you’re not working for A.R.G.U.S.?”

Oliver shakes his head with a smile. “Fine. If you don’t believe me, ask your ex-wife. Lyla should be able to tell you I’m not working with them.”

His hand jumps to the gun at his waist, face contorting in anger at the very mention of Lyla. “How do you know that name?”

“Whoa. Calm down, Digg.” He holds his hands up in surrender, stepping away from the table of weapons.

“Calm down? How do you know my ex-wife?”

Because in the future we rescue her from a Russian Prison. As that explanation questions his sanity, he withholds it.

“Explain!”

His face twists into a grimace because he knows this is a stupid decision, knows it with all his heart, but he’s still going to do it. He wants his friend back.

“Okay. The story I was telling you...There’s more.”

...

Oliver sits in his chair, watching Digg look over the computer from across the room. He distanced himself from the weapons, just to make Digg more comfortable. He knows the man is checking the computers for any trace of A.R.G.U.S., but he’s not going to find any.

Those computers are the bare bones, a blank slate for Felicity to work with when she gets down here. He learned a bit about securing computers in Coast City and more from the blonde genius, herself. It’s enough to get by for now.

He waits until Digg pushes away from the computers before speaking.

“Satisfied?”

The man scowls at him.

“I don’t work for A.R.G.U.S. I haven’t since Hong Kong two years ago.”
“So how do you know Lyla?”

Oliver closes his eyes. “This is going to sound crazy.”

“Well, I’ve got news for you, Oliver. You already sound pretty messed up.” At least he’s not threatening him anymore.

Oliver lets out a rough breath. “I know Lyla because we’ve met...about a year and a half from now, in Russia.”

Diggle snorts derisively. “That’s bull.”

“It’s the truth.”

“And now you can see the future. Great. I’m talking to a crazy person. Let’s get you to the hospital, Mr. Queen. I think you’ve hit your head.” He reaches for Oliver’s arm to pull him out of the room.

“I’m serious, Digg.” He’s all in now. “I’ve lived this all before.”

Desperation seeps into his voice. He needs to convince Diggle he’s telling the truth. He needs him to believe. He needs at least one team member on his side. Since he’s spilling the truth, he might as well go all in.

That’s not true.

He just desperately needs to tell someone everything that’s swirling around his mind.

“I’ve met you before. It was just like this, but I didn’t bring you in until you were shot by Deadshot. I cured the Curare that he laced the bullet with and saved your life. You joined me.” He searches for something that will convince Digg he’s telling the truth. “You took me to Big Belly Burger and I met your sister-in-law, Carly. You have a crush on her.”

Digg pauses, one foot on the metal stairs, his shoulders rigid at the words.

Oliver closes his eyes and takes a deep breath, centering himself to speak in a more even tone. “I know it sounds crazy, but it’s the truth: I’ve been back for about two and a half years. I...I died and woke up in the hospital a couple days ago.”

Digg turns and takes a step back into the room. “All this,” he gestures to the equipment in the room, “is insane, but I get it. Time travel...that’s impossible. You need some help.” Digg starts walking up the stairs before he turns back. “And I quit.”

Pain, like a punch to the gut, knocks the breath from Oliver’s lungs and he blinks back tears.

He thought it would work.

He was wrong.

...

He can’t sleep with his mind racing in complicated circles. There’s something compelling about Oliver’s story, as crazy as it sounds. The scars on his body, the story he told...

Digg was on board until Oliver started talking about time travel.

It was easy enough to look up Carly, but the crush?
He doesn’t know what to believe.

John stares out the window of the coffee shop, the normally busy city slowly waking up beyond it. He’s probably the first and only person to visit the coffee shop this early in the morning. He runs a hand along his jaw as he contemplates his options.

That boy is going to get himself killed.

“Oh, John.” He freezes. He would know that soft voice anywhere. The fact that she can send his heart racing even when he knows she’s coming confirms that he’s not over her yet, no matter how much he wishes he was.

“Lyla.”

“It’s good to see you, John.” She slips into the seat across from him, eyes scanning the almost empty shop before coming to rest on him. “What did you need that was so important?”

He sighs, noticing they’re all business again, no emotions whatsoever. “Did you find what I asked about?”

“China, two years ago?” She leans back, pursing her lips. “All I could find out was that there was an operation that went south, and all that is just rumor. Anything else is classified.”

“Classified, as in you can’t tell me anything else?”

“Classified, as in higher than my pay-grade. Waller’s the only one with clearance. But whatever it was, it was bad, which is saying something considering this is A.R.G.U.S.”

“Two years ago?” Diggle double-checks, needing to bury the last of his doubt. That makes this so much more complicated. There’s some truth to Oliver’s story after all.

Lyla nods, and then frowns, pausing halfway through the nod. “How did you know about it, Jonny? No one knows about China.”

Crap. The kid was telling the truth. He needs more sleep before he decides what he’s going to do with this. More sleep or maybe just a lot more coffee.

Because if the story about the past is true, what are the chances that the time travel is too?

And if Oliver is telling the truth, what is he going to do about it?

Is he going to do anything about it?

...

Chapter End Notes

I hope you liked this chapter!! Let me know what you thought in the comments!
Comments/Kudos/Bookmarks are always appreciated!!

Also, special thanks to lynslogic and lazyarrowwatcher on tumblr for their help on this
Stay classy!
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Olicity Meeting!!

Chapter Notes

I know you guys have been waiting a long time for this, so I hope you like it!! Enjoy!!!

Disclaimer: This is my first chapter without a beta. All mistakes are mine.

Chapter 7

“Your honor, we move to nullify the death in absentia filed after Oliver Queen’s disappearance on the Queen’s Gambit five years ago.”

Oliver leans back in chair, more than happy to let the lawyer talk. He’s been through the weekend-from-hell. The last thing he wants to do is relive his life on the Island for an audience. No. The past few days have been a new kind of torture: he lost Diggle and was forced by circumstance to spend most of the weekend with Tommy. Not that he hates Tommy, but spending time with him was a poignant reminder of the distance between him and Felicity, a distance his best friend stands in the middle of.

This is actually less painful.

He acts on autopilot as he tells the fictionalized story of the sinking to confirm the deaths. The courtroom setting isn’t the place for such private truths. He refuses to tell them here with all the world as eavesdroppers. His mind purposely focuses on better times, on a fern and a bright smile. His heart is only a couple blocks away in Queen Consolidated and after the Digg Debacle, he needs to see her smile.

His emotions are too close to the surface with this retelling and he drops back into his chair, drained. The energy in the gallery is still piqued. Like leeches, they feed off the tragedy of his story, the drama of his return, and the mysterious tale of how he survived five years.

They wouldn’t be quite so intrigued if they knew what that survival entailed.

“Welcome back to the land of the living, Mr. Queen.” The gavel cements the judge’s final words and the gallery claps happily.

He grins like he’s expected to, waving triumphantly to the crowd like the prince he is. Thea envelops him in a hug before passing him to Tommy and then his mother. Their touch is a comfort, but it’s not their comfort he craves. He needs his team now more than ever. He needs to know that someone has his back.
“Next stop is Queen Consolidated...”

Oliver just nods along as his mother highlights their itinerary. This. He’s going to do this better this time. He’s going to do his best with the company, be someone his family can be proud of, someone she can be proud of.

He follows his mother and Walter down the steps, passing Laurel as she purposefully ignores them, giving them a wide berth on her way to the courtroom. It’s one problem he’s happy to avoid. If he can keep his distance from that and get her and Tommy back on track, everything will be fine.

He has to keep believing that.

He tries not to notice how Rob trails him to the car instead of Diggle. Part of him wants to give the man the slip right now, but he’s playing the dutiful son today, doing everything that’s expected of him in a way he couldn’t last time. So he’s not going to do what he wants: he’s not going to ditch his shadow and pound his feelings into a punching bag.

“Oh, shit!”

Oliver turns around, spinning to face Tommy where’s paused in the middle of the courthouse steps, staring at his phone. His eyes widen in panic as he runs an agitated hand through his hair. He jogs forward to catch up with Oliver and Rob.

“Sorry, guys, but I’m going to take a rain check. I forgot I had to meet someone earlier and I’m a dead man. Oh, god! She is literally going to kill me. Ugh! I need to work fast! Glad you’re back from the dead, buddy! I’ll text you later!”

He watches with a frown as Tommy dashes off in the opposite direction still muttering under his breath and running an errant hand through his hair. Next to Oliver, Moira frowns.

“I wasn’t aware Tommy was seeing someone. Did he say anything to you, Oliver?” She looks up at him expectantly, but he just shakes his head and forces a bland smile to his lips.

“No. He didn’t say anything to me.”

Moira smiles pleasantly. “Well, we’ll just have to get an answer out of him at the next dinner.” She takes a moment and then claps her hands. “Okay! Let’s go. I want you to meet all the executives before lunch.”

Oliver conceals a groan and ducks into the car with his mother. Meeting all the executives sounds boring, time consuming, and – according to his mother – a necessary evil.

Or maybe just evil.

...

“Oliver, I was just talking to Mister Fowler about your little technology problem.”

He jerks his head up from his perusal of his phone, where he was very obviously ignoring the present conversation. “Hmmm?”

Moira sighs pointedly and Mr. Foster smiles politely. He’s bug-eyed older gentleman who looks like he’s permanently glued to his chair, but as soon as they walked into the room he was all smiles and eagerness to please.
“Yes, there must be a lot for you to catch up on technology-wise after five years. I imagine it could be quite overwhelming.” There’s absolutely no reason for his patronizing tone nor Oliver’s sudden desire to strangle the man standing between him and going to Felicity for help. If this man offers to help him instead...

He takes a controlled breath. No. He needs to be civil.

So Oliver forces a smile to the simpering Head of IT.

“Yeah.” He drags out a light laugh, summoning a smile. “It’s more than a little confusing.” He holds up his phone like he wasn’t just using it to play games or surf the web. “I press a couple buttons and get somewhere completely different.” The charming playboy smile makes an appearance. “I’m obviously underqualified for any sort of technical overseeing, but I’m more than willing to learn.”

Fowler definitely has that smiling politely to the higher-ups thing down. He’s sure the man doesn’t believe a word he just said. He probably doesn’t think Oliver Queen can learn anything technology related except how to navigate porn websites.

“Perhaps there’s someone in your department who could help?” Moira suggests with a sunny smile, tilting her head as if the word were really a question instead of a veiled order.

Fowler’s grin is most definitely stapled to his face. “We have a very competent IT staff here. Anyone would be more than happy to help. As Head of IT, I’m very busy, but I believe Ms. Smoak is available.” He leans forward, scribbling on a post it note before handing it over.

Dumbly, Oliver takes the slip of paper. He hasn’t really heard a word since ‘Smoak.’ That was all he needed to hear really. This. This was his chance to meet her, to spend time with her, to get to know her outside of Arrow business. This is exactly what he needed.

Mr. Fowler is good for something after all.

His joy deflates just as quickly as worries assault him: What if he does something wrong? What if he goes too fast and loses her completely? He can’t lose her and Digg. That would probably kill him. He can’t fail in this.

“Thank you, Mr. Fowler. Oliver, why don’t you go talk to Miss Smoak while I talk to Mr. Fowler about a recent project?”

He nods, leaving his mother to probably discuss Undertaking details with the corrupt head. He wouldn’t be surprised. But he’s too focused on the info in his hand, his own holy grail. He doesn’t bother reading the slip of paper as he walks down the hall to her office, gently running his hand over the engraved name plate.

He sighs, shaking his head at his own nostalgia. He hasn’t even met her yet.

A deep, bracing breath later, he steps around the corner into her office and a smile quirks his lips as soon as he lays eyes on the red pen between bright pink lips. Apparently, some things are meant to be.

... 

She hums lightly under her breath as she types idly away at the computer, her head bobbing to the song as she works. He bites back his smile, tilting his head to hide the smile taking over his features as he steps further into the room.
He coughs lightly and she spins to face him, those adorable eyes wide in surprise as she rapidly pulls the pen from her mouth.

“Felicity Smoak?” The grins returns no matter how he wants to force it back down. He can’t stop the smile and he doesn’t want to. “Hi. My name is Oliver Queen.”

“I know who you are. You’re Mister Queen. Your name’s on the building. Which sort of makes you my boss. And oh, my god, I’m babbling. Why can’t my mouth just stay shut like a normal person?”

He chuckles, trying to remind himself that she’s currently not available. She’s seeing his best friend. She doesn’t even know him yet. “You can just call me Oliver. Mr. Queen was my father.”

“Right, but he’s dead, I mean, he drowned. But you didn’t which is why you’re here listening to me babble, which will stop in 3...2...1...”

It’s so adorably familiar, like the scene can’t help but be played out the same way. But it also hurts because he knows she’s still just out of reach.

“According to your supervisor, you’re the best person to help a poor castaway adapt to modern technology.”

She tilts her head to the side, eyebrows cocked in disbelief. “Poor castaway?”

Oliver shrugs, looking away bashfully. “Poor was a bad word choice.” He grimaces. “But do you think you can help? I am utterly hopeless with this thing.” He holds up his phone.

Felicity purses her lips and he’s not at all surprised that she can see through his lies. “And Mr. Fowler sent you to me?”

It’s then he realizes she thinks Tommy sent him.

He hands over the post-it as evidence and she glances casually at it before turning her attention back to him. Oliver could drown in those blue eyes and he revels in the opportunity to bask in her presence. “So, can you help?”

“I’m not quite sure what you want from me, Mister Qu...Oliver.”

“How about lessons on how to use this?” He tosses the phone on the best between them. “I’m sure everyone I know will appreciate it. The last phone I had was a flip phone. I can barely turn this one on.”

She bites her lip, obviously holding back a comment as she looks at the phone. She flips through it slowly and then looks back up at him, unimpressed. “Well, it looks like you found the games pretty easily.” Felicity turns the phone around to show his current game of Tetris.

He chuckles, shrugging. “As far as I can tell, that’s the only good use I have for the phone.” It’s true enough. It’s the only thing he’s been using the phone for despite actually knowing how to use the phone.

She opens her mouth in surprise and it comes out as a laugh. Oliver’s heart skips a beat at the sound, gladly immersing himself in the musical brilliance he’s missed so much.

“So what are you having trouble with?”

He accepts the seat she gestures to, scooting it closer to her desk, making a conscious effort to not
breathe in her shampoo because that would be pushing his control too far over the line. It still takes
him a moment to gather his thoughts to speak. “I...uh...I’m having trouble with texting and calling,
answering calls. I somehow managed to get onto the internet at one point. I’m still not sure how that
happened. Oh, and Tetris was something my sister downloaded for me from somewhere or another.”

Felicity smiles at him and pulls a cord from a drawer, plugging the phone into the computer. “I can
put some more user-friendly programs on your computer. Androids can be a little more complex. As
you get the hang of the different functions, I can expand the apps or anyone else. It doesn’t have to
be me.”

Her fingers fly across the keyboard as she changes the programing from her computer.
“Unfortunately, phones are more a learning than a teaching kind of thing. I mean, I’m sure you
already know how to use the internet. And Facebook and Twitter really aren’t all that different from
Myspace, which, by the way, is no longer a thing.”

“I never had a Myspace.”

She snorts, barely pausing in her code before she continues. “I would have thought the playboy
billionaire would have one.”

“This Playboy Billionaire wasn’t much for the internet, even before he was stranded on an island.”

She pauses, blinking a couple times like something just occurred to her, but she’s holding it in with
what little verbal filter she has. A second later, she shakes her head and unplugs his phone, holding it
out to him. “So this is set up to just allow text and calling. I assume you know how to use those. And
I left you Tetris.”

“Thank you, Felicity.” His hand lingers against hers as he takes the phone back. No matter how
much he tries to hide his reaction to her proximity, he can’t. It’s too much to ask.

She bites her lip, turning a faint shade of pink. “It’s my pleasure. I mean, my job. It’s my job. This is
what you pay me for. Well, not you, but your family. Oh, god, I’m babbling again. Why couldn’t I
just say you’re welcome?”

Oliver chuckles, looking over at the embarrassed blonde covering her face. God, he loves her so
much. “I guess I’ll come back when I get the hang of everything.” He’ll see her in two
weeks...maybe less.

“You.” She pops the ‘p’ and he wrestles back another smile. “Bring it back here and I can put a
couple more user-friendly apps on. I designed them myself to be single touch apps. Of course, you
could also go to anyone else. But don’t go to Ed. He has no idea what he’s doing.”

“Thanks again.” He forces himself to stand, to leave the room, to stop staring at her like she’s the
sun. But his feet don’t seem to get the message as he holds her gaze for longer than appropriate. He
shakes his head and finally manages a step closer to the door. Unfortunately he’s not paying attention
and he smacks into a solid person who basically bounces off him.

“Whoa!”

Oliver blinks at Tommy’s voice, not exactly surprised, but he doesn’t have to fake the frown on his
face at his best friend’s appearance. “Tommy?”

The man in question stares at him over the coffee and paper bags in his hands. “Ollie? What are you
doing here?”
“Me? I was looking for help with my phone.” Oliver echoes, not wanting to touch Tommy’s question with a ten foot pole. He also most definitely doesn’t want to be around when the happy couple reunites.

“Great! So you’ve met Felicity!” He brushes past Oliver.

“Tommy,” she sighs. “What are you doing here?”

“Begging for forgiveness. And I bring gifts.”

Oliver feels like he’s intruding on a private moment, but like a train wreck, he can’t look away as Tommy presents the bags to Felicity.

“You favorite coffee, a muffin, and – because I really messed up – lunch from Giodorno’s.” Tommy produces the last one from a paper bag with a flourish. “Because I know I am the worst for skipping out on our weekly breakfast. I’ll burn in a special level of hell yada yada yada. Please forgive me.”

Oliver watches Felicity sputter as he feels his heart breaking further. This love, this dedication from his friend only proves how important, how consequential this relationship is to Tommy. How could he not have heard about this the first time around?

How does Tommy go from this to being head over heels in love with Laurel?

“Tommy, how many times have I told you, you can’t so this at work? My supervisor is going to kill me. I’m supposed to be doing work.” Her icy glare is still present, but she still takes the coffee.

“I’m pretty sure no one’s going to yell at you when the boss’s kid is standing in your office.”

Oliver shifts at the sudden reminder he’s an onlooker, an intruder in this personal moment. He offers a grim smile. “I’ll just get out of your hair, then.”

“No! Ollie, stay!” Tommy cries, grabbing his arm. “I’ve been trying to introduce the two of you anyway.” He claps his hands together decidedly. “We should get lunch. All three of us.”

“Tommy, I have work. I can’t leave the office you want to have lunch.”

He pouts. “Hey, I just want my best friends to get along.”

Oliver pauses as soon as he hears friends. But it doesn’t mean anything. They could be friends and still have a relationship. Right? He can’t jump to conclusions, even if he wants to.

Felicity rolls her eyes. “Then how about another time, when I don’t have work.”

He recognizes that she’s on edge, that she doesn’t want to deal with this right now. It’s evident in the set of her shoulders and the way her hands grip the desk. She’s on the verge of using her loud voice, which is something no one really wants.

“How about dinner? I know a great burger joint.” Oliver suggests, smiling politely by the door.

“You know a burger joint? Dude, you just got back from an island in the middle of nowhere.” Tommy stares at him, but he shakes his head at Tommy.


Oliver wants to bang his head into a wall. Of course, he knows she likes burgers. He knows exactly
what she likes on her burgers – cheese, onions, lettuce, ketchup and mustard. He could order for her – she also loves the milkshakes – but he’s being too straightforward. He’s acting like he knows too much.

Tommy frowns at him while Felicity smiles. “I love burgers.”

He grins back, unable to stop the joy that wants to bubble out. Finally, something is going right.

... “Well, I’m glad you’re in a better mood,” Moira comments as Oliver joins her by the elevator with a reproachful Tommy Merlyn in tow. “Did Miss Smoak help you?”

“Yup. She worked some magic on my phone.” He holds the phone up and then slips it in his pocket.

“Good. Maybe you’ll actually answer my calls.”

Oliver rolls his eyes, but smiles good-naturedly. He’s in a much better mood since talking to his girl. He couldn’t explain it to anyone if they asked. He wants to laugh and joke with his best friend again because he can. He’s walking on clouds. Tommy might be with her now, but he got to talk to her and everything looks a little bit brighter now.

“I thought you were apologizing to a girl, Thomas,” Moira mentions as they file into the metal box. A teasing glint flits in her eyes as she watches them out of the corner of her eye.

“Oh, yeah. But she yelled at me for interrupting her at work.” He smiles. “She tends to do that a lot.”

His mom raises one delicate eyebrow. “Your girlfriend works for Queen Consolidated?”

“No! Felicity’s not my girlfriend.” He laughs it off, shaking his head. “She’s like my little sister. She grows on you like that.”

Oliver’s heart skips a beat at the news. They’re not together. It’s hands down, the best news he’s had today.

“Felicity? She works in IT? What’s her last name?” Moira asks, drawing Oliver back to the conversation as he schools his face.

He’s barely hanging on to the conversation going on around him. He doesn’t have to worry about stepping on Tommy’s toes now. He can get to know Felicity outside of everything. He could tell her what’s happening. Felicity’s probably the one most inclined to believe him with all her sci-fi show comments.

She can help him convince Diggle.

“Smoak,” Tommy answers as Oliver fantasizes telling Felicity his secret. “She’s way too smart for your IT department, by the way. Just don’t tell her I said that.”

“Felicity Smoak, the woman who helped Oliver with his phone...I can’t say that rings any bells.”

“Walter hired her straight out of MIT. She graduated top of her class in Cybersecurity and Computer sciences. But she’s a certified genius. She’d kill me though, if she knew I was talking her up to you. She really is the best at what she does.”

Oliver nods in agreement, falling back to lean against the back of the elevator so neither his mother nor Tommy could see the pride he’s sure still shines through his eyes. He hasn’t been this happy
since she said yes to dinner.

His day just got a whole lot better.

...

Felicity takes a contemplative sip of the coffee Tommy gave her, groaning at the rich taste washing over her taste buds. The smell of tomato sauce assaults her from the take out container and she has no doubt the muffin is cinnamon chip, her favorite. She hasn’t forgiven him just yet, but Tommy’s well on his way there.

No, the official weird part of her day, the part that she doesn’t know how to deal with just yet, is the Oliver Queen Encounter. And now she has dinner lined up with him and Tommy, she’s not sure what to make of their meeting. He was sweet enough, even a little flirtatious, but not overly so.

She had expected more Tommy-Merlyn-picking-up-chicks and less ordinary-guy-who-just-really-need-help-with-his-phone. He had been polite and friendly, far more so than she anticipated. It was a nice change of pace. She had only babbled slightly more than usual, which in the face of his gorgeousness, she considered a win.

Contemplating her new food, Felicity leans back in her chair. She sways from side to side, wondering how she got from a terrible day to having dinner with Starling City’s hottest bachelors. How many women would kill to be in her shoes?

She shakes her head, turning back to her work. And to think, this all started because an impatient billionaire needed a cup of coffee.
Currently operating beta-less so all mistakes are mine.

Enjoy!

Chapter 8

By 3pm Oliver’s done shaking hands and smiling through gritted teeth at people who are only playing nice because his family owns the building. He’s hiding the majority of his displeasure, but his mother’s side-eye tells him he’s not being as successful as he thinks.

It takes them another thirty minutes to shake off the Head of Merchandising. By the end of the meeting, Oliver is more than ready to ditch Rob and head to the Foundry to work out his nerves, which is crazy because he shouldn’t be nervous about dinner with Felicity and Tommy. The elevator ride gives him time to check his watch and wonder when his tour will be over.

Tommy ducked out right after they left Felicity, citing the need to meet an old buddy. They all know he just didn’t want to spend hours meeting the entire staff of Queen Consolidated. And as much as Oliver agreed to do this, he wishes he could sneak out and escape the same way.

“Thank you for doing this, Oliver.” His mom squeezes his arm. “I know you didn’t want to do this, but it means a lot that you came in today. You were great with everyone.”

Oliver smiles. “Thank you, but I want you to know, I’m not going to remember even half of that.”

Moira chuckles, shaking her head. “But you’re trying, which is more than you would do before...” her voice drifts off, leading to an awkward silence.

“You can say it, Mom. It’s not taboo.”

She nods slowly, sorrow dimming her features for a moment before she pulls herself back together. “Well, thank you. You were wonderful. We might be able to get you working next week.”

“Mom-“

“I know it’s not ideal, but it’s a good way to restart your life.”

“Mom. That’s not something I’m ready for just yet. I’ve never had a job in my life. I know nothing about the business.”

“And you will learn,” she asserts with her self-assured smile.

Oliver sighs, thinking about how to delicately approach the situation instead of just showing up drunk to the Applied Sciences ceremonial opening. Or rather to pretend to be drunk. He can still have a playboy persona without pretending to get irresponsibly drunk.

“I think I need to try some things on my own before I get involved in the company.” Like a club.
And what he was talking about with Tommy: helping out Rebecca Merlyn’s shelter.

Moira frowns. “Like what? I know you wouldn’t be doing much at first. Obviously being stuck on an island for five years will have some long term effects that you might not even be aware of yet. We don’t want you to get in over your head. But you should be doing something. You can’t just sleep late and drink your life away.”

“I’m not drinking my life away, Mom. I’ve barely had a drink since I returned and I don’t need to. I just want to try building something for myself.”

A prideful smile graces her face. “And I get that, honey, but this is the smarter option.” It’ll do wonders for your career. One day you can take over the company, just like your father wanted.”

Oliver sighs. “First, I’d like to try to run something by myself. I was thinking about opening a night club.”

She frowns. “A night club...Oliver, are you sure? I don’t think-“

“Actually, I already talked to Walter about using the old steel factory. He said since it was sitting vacant there would be no problem with it. I’m using my trust fund to rent the space. We’ve already talked it over.”

“Oh.”

He smiles charmingly at his mother’s shock. She never expected he would be able to think ahead and move forward on his own. But he’s had the past couple days to think about it. He needs to get his cover in place. “Walter and I were going to talk to you about it tonight.” Well, not really, but it sure sounds good.

“I don’t know, Oliver. That doesn’t sound like the best idea. We’ll just get you a nice desk job-“

“No.” He cuts her off with a frown, ignoring her scowl. “I can’t sit around all day, every day. I know about clubs, and it keeps me active. We can still work something out where I come in once a week or something like that.”

His mother purses her lips but nods grudgingly. He’s sure his mom will find some way to get him to work. She’s a master at getting what she wants and he’ll somehow end up spending more time here than he intends to, but it still fits in his master plan and he’s still going to get Verdant up and running. He can get Tommy to help with that.

“We should have you come in on Mondays and Tuesdays. Maybe Wednesdays. Those are good days to come in. Maybe the occasional Friday.”

Oliver sighs, following his mother as she heads for Walter’s office, heels clicking against the stone floor. Right. This is why he took the path of least resistance and make a drunk spectacle of himself” his mother wouldn’t dare go against public opinion, which would mean she couldn’t force him into a position at QC, not right then.

Although, he has to wonder when she thinks he got his business degree. She’s treating this like it’s been the big picture all along and he didn’t spend the last five years cut off from any and all technology. Strictly speaking, that wasn’t true, but for all intents and purposes it is.

“And here we finally have Walter’s Office! Good afternoon, Marsha,” she greets his secretary with the closest thing Moira Queen has to a sunny smile.
“Mrs. Queen. Mr. Steele is expecting you.” The woman has a grandmother’s warmth while looking fierce enough to scare away any unwelcome visitors. She smiles kindly at Oliver as he follows his mom through the glass door.

He lets them talk as he turns to take in the familiar view out the window. So much has happened in this office: crashing out this window to escape the Hoods, Felicity getting kidnapped by the Count, finding out Isabel Rochev’s masterplan, his own mom shooting him and nearly killing him. But all that is undone and some of it he hopes doesn’t happen again...actually, most of that he never wants to do again.

“So, Oliver, how was your tour?” Walter asks, dragging his attention from the sidewalk far below and the people of Starling going about their daily business.

He turns, smiling genuinely. “There were a lot of people. I’m amazed Mom can remember half their names.”

With a chuckle, Walter nods. “I know what you mean. But don’t worry. You’ll get the hang of it. Your father liked that personal touch of learning everyone’s names. He once told me that knowing everyone’s names and back story saves you from becoming a mindless machine whose only focus is the bottom line.” The mood darkens slightly, but Oliver likes that Walter isn’t afraid to speak of the dead when everyone else is on their toes about everything. “He truly cared about the people of Starling.”

“He did,” Oliver agrees, flashing back to that life raft and shouted words about righting his wrongs.

“He cared about you, too, Oliver,” his mother whispers, running a hand up his arm with a soft smile. “He would be happy to see you here, taking his place.”

“One day,” Oliver concedes, not ready to argue with her about the when, but not giving in either. It’s the pressure of legacy, the cage that holds him in opposition to the freedom his money gives. As wild and reckless as he got, there were always the equally strict rules on decorum everywhere else in his life.

“Soon.” Moira pats him on the shoulder and Oliver feels like he’s been talking to a brick wall this entire time. “So, I think we need to set up a time for Oliver to meet...”

He knows what she’s doing: acting like he agreed with everything until he gives in and just does what he says. The longer it goes on, the more he just wants to revert to the pretend drunken spectacle. You’d think not repeating that display would be an easy correction to the timeline.

“Actually, Mom, I have some errands to run and then I’m meeting up with Tommy for dinner. So I will see you at home tonight...probably.” He purposefully leaves it hanging, like they might go out clubbing instead of just to Big Belly Burger. It’s not a drunken spectacle, but it’s a gesture to show that she can’t control his life, that he’s capable of acting on his own.

“But we have so much to discuss.”

“And we can talk about it tomorrow.” He leans into press a kiss to her cheek, heedless of the disgruntled pursed lips. Walter can handle his mother, but he still has some work to do.

He smiles congenially at Rob as he plots his escape on the elevator ride down to the parking garage. Even Oliver has to admit that Rob is remarkably aware of their surroundings as they walk through the concrete maze. Apparently, Rob had been warned about Oliver’s habit of disappearing and decided not to go get the car ahead of time. Unfortunately for Rob, his awareness of his surroundings
catalogues everything but the man he’s supposed to be guarding.

Oliver takes his chance as Rob rounds the first corner, slipping into the shadows and away. He doesn’t turn back at the man’s shout as he walks up the stairs to get to the ground level.

He has work to do. Rob would only get in the way.

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Felicity didn’t say anything about disabling the GPS locator on his phone, so he turns it off as he takes the walk to the Foundry to consider what he’s going to do about Martin Somers. If he threatens Somers, Somers gets the Triad to kill Laurel and he doesn’t plan on being at Laurel’s tonight to conveniently stop that.

Plus, avoiding China White seems like a pretty good idea.

But that also allowed him to get a taped confession.

He sighs. Thinking everything through is exhausting and he keeps finding himself running in circles. He likes to know the lay of the land before he bursts in, guns blazing. But he can’t do that here. He needs to consider all the outcomes, how much changing one action changes everything else. Obviously, he wasn’t thinking too clearly when it came to telling Diggle and he can’t make mistakes like that again.

Then again, Somers’s Triad connection helped lock him up.

Oliver groans as he reaches the Foundry. He is going to have to do this, just like last time. Only this time, he’ll be waiting when the Triad comes for Laurel outside with his own gear. Unless he can think of a better plan, that’s probably as good as it’s going to get.

The breaker flips easily, bringing light to his cave. He’d never admit it to anyone, but in his head he’s still been calling it the Arrow Cave. The roof is no longer open to the floor above, which brings out the dinginess. He managed to patch the leaky pipes and the ventilation system is working. The bathroom still needs work and there’s a lot left to be removed in terms or random debris, but all around, the room looks much better than it did. Turning the factory above into a suitable club is the next step.

But that’s not why he’s here today. Fixing up the upstairs will be an official visit, probably with a bodyguard and Tommy in tow.

No. Today is about training again and making more arrows. He needs to make sure his body can keep up with everything his mind knows he can do. He’s learned some new tricks over the years and his body needs to catch up.

He changes into his workout gear and pulls the dummy out of the corner. Bouncing on the balls of his feet in front of the punching bag, Oliver can’t help but smile. His life is back on track. He’s on top of everything.

And in three hours he’s having dinner with Felicity and Tommy.

It’s a good day.

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“Dude! Where have you been? Rob’s been freaking out!” Tommy practically shouts over the phone.
Oliver holds the phone from his ear. “Yeah. I just needed some space. Mom’s trying to push a job on me.”

“And not answering your phone? I thought Felicity fixed it so this wouldn’t be a problem.”

He winces at the accusation and subsequent admission. “I turned off the phone.”

“Why would you do that?” He can hear the agitation in Tommy’s voice that he knows is replacing worry. The kidnapping hit Tommy harder than he thought it would.

“It’s just...after years in isolation, so much noise is disorienting. I’m working on it.” He did need a couple hours isolation, but he’s already almost to Big Belly Burger a little more than thirty minutes early.

Tommy sighs, the annoyance leaving his tone as he audibly relaxes. “Next time, just put the phone on silent, okay?”

“You’re starting to sound like my mom, Tommy.”

He listens to Tommy’s laugh, able to fully appreciate it since he looked through Felicity’s window. His eyes look over the interior of the restaurant, landing on a booth in the back and a familiar, burly back.

John Diggle. As expected, he’s talking to Carly and he appears uneasy.

“Hey, think you can give me a ride home?” He asks, although it’s more a courtesy than an actual question.

“Of course. Just do me a favor and text your mom so she’ll stop annoying me.”

“Got it. Thanks, Tommy.”

“No problem. See you soon.”

He ends the call and shoots off a quick message before entering the restaurant. Carly looks up as the bell above the door rings. He smiles congenially, shoving his hands into his pockets as he saunters forward.

Digg turns around, curious about Carly’s distraction. A frown settles on his face as he looks over Oliver before turning back to Carly and the food.

“I’m sorry, but I’m on break. You can still order from the counter.” Carly smiles politely, pointing him in that direction.

“I’m-“

“He’s here to talk to me, Carly,” Digg says, cutting off Oliver’s similar response.

Oliver nods at Carly’s questioning gaze. She purses her lips and nods to Digg. “Call me if you need anything.” She shoots Oliver another look. “Mr. Queen.”

He lets her pass before sliding into the seat opposite Diggle. Instead of starting a conversation, Digg lets him stew in silence while he finishes the French fries in his basket. Oliver leans back, taking in his surroundings and relaxing. He wants to speak, to clear the air, but that’s not how Digg works. He knows that.
“No new bodyguard,” Digg observes, dusting his hands of residual salt.

“Oh, I ditched Rob hours ago.” He turns his attention back to Diggle with a twitch of his lips that’s almost a smile. “He’s not up to the task.”

“With your background, I’m not surprised. A.R.G.U.S. teach you that trick?”

Oliver grimaces, but vaguely nods. “Some of those skills were picked up trying to get away from Waller. You talked to Lyla.”

John narrows his eyes. “Still think you’re from the future?”

All in all, it could be going a lot worse. There are no men coming to take him away to the loony bin. Oliver grimaces, shifting in his seat. “I shouldn’t have jumped in and said that.”

“So you lied.”

“No.” That wasn’t what he meant to imply. “I didn’t mean to sound crazy. I was telling you the truth.”

“And I’m just supposed to believe you? No chance.”

Oliver points to the TV, going through footage of the Martin Somers case. “Martin Somers has Chinese Triad connections. When the vigilante threatens him tonight, he’ll hire China White to take out Laurel Lance. Last time, you and I stopped the attempt. The vigilante got a recording of Somers’s confession and turned it over to the police.”

“Speaking in the third person really doesn’t help your sanity case.”

“When China White went after Laurel Lance, I raised your suspicions by nailing China White with an unweighted kitchen knife.”

Digg snorts. “That was a stupid move.”

“I wanted you to find out.” He can admit that now. “That, the incident at the party, and then there’s a sniper at an auction in a week. You’d basically put the pieces together before I told you anyway. You quit then too.”

“So what are you trying to prove here, Oliver? You didn’t come to make small talk.” Diggle clasps his hands and leans forward.

A sigh slips out and his eyes are drawn to the door. Felicity and Tommy are laughing as they stumble in. Looking at them getting along, he finds a surprising answer to Diggle’s question. He didn’t realize how much he missed out on. And he wonders why he never knew they were friends. There could have been so many nice memories.

“I just wanted to clear the air. Whether you believe me or not, there’s a spot on my team for you. You know where to find me.” He smiles and stands, waving to Tommy as he and Felicity stake out a different booth.

“Aren’t you worried I could go to the police?”

Oliver turns back to Digg with a grin. “Then I’ll have to deal with that.”

Diggle levels him with an assessing gaze. “You actually trust me with this information, don’t you?”
He shrugs. “My door’s always open. Whatever you do.”

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Tommy glances back at Oliver before leaning across the table to Felicity. “Just so we’re clear. No Laurel and me talk, okay? Oliver doesn’t know about us and I want to keep it that way.”

Unimpressed, Felicity stares back at him. “Tommy...”

“No. Look. I know I have to tell him, but not now, okay? Not tonight. He’s had a busy day.”

She sighs, hesitantly nodding in agreement. “But I’m not going to lie about it. You know I can’t lie to save my life. Got it?”

He eagerly shakes his head, grinning like a maniac. “You are a goddess!” He lifts her hands to his lips and she rolls her eyes at the dramatic gesture. “Now if only those updates actually got Ollie to answer his phone!”

Felicity blinks at the change in subject, until she realizes from a chuckle that they have company. She jerks sideways to the handsome blonde who walked into her office earlier today and she wonders once more how the hell this managed to be her life.

Although Oliver leans towards her side of the booth like he might slide in next to her, he appears to think better of his choice and sits next to Tommy instead. “I told you, Tommy. I needed some peace and quiet, so I turned my phone off.”

“You could have just turned the volume down to 0.”

Oliver just shrugs and smiles at her. “Seemed easier.”

“You’re worse than my mother. And I didn’t think that was possible,” Felicity mutters before holding out her hand. “Can I see it?” Flushing she rushes in to correct any misunderstanding. “And by it I mean your phone. Obviously. What else would I mean?”

Yeah. That was smooth.

He grins as he hands it over and the table falls into awkward silence. Felicity glances up from the phone and then immediately back down at the phone, happy for the excuse not to engage in conversation.

“So...” Tommy starts, but he trails off without a point as Felicity finishes tapping the phone screen.

She spins the phone around, pointing to the display with her mint green fingernails. “So, if you press this, it’ll turn off alerts. You’ll still get texts, but it will forward calls to your voicemail.”

“You didn’t have to do that.”

Felicity scrunches her nose. “Please. If I didn’t do that, this one,” she gestures at Tommy, “would be complaining all the time. He called and texted me seventeen times in the last four hours.”

“It was seven!” Tommy protests.

She shoots him a look.

“Alright, maybe eight, but that’s it.”
Felicity raises her eyebrows, because her phone says otherwise. She barely got any work done after three because her phone was going off almost constantly. “You asked me to track his phone.”

“Last time he was left alone, he got kidnapped!”

Her eyes rove over the castaway billionaire, trying not to zero in on the muscles evident through his shirt and failing miserably. Felicity shakes her head to get her train of thought back, blushing at Oliver’s knowing smirk.

“Well, he didn’t get kidnapped. Obviously. Because he’s here.” Looking incredibly handsome, which has her frazzled. Not that she hasn’t spent time around good looking men because she’s friends with Tommy, but there’s a different level of intensity to Oliver and it’s making it hard for her to think around him.

Oliver grins and Tommy throws his head back laughing.

“I said all of that out loud, didn’t I?” She asks, turning bright red.

Oliver nods, solidifying her shame.

Groaning, she stares up at the ceiling, asking the Powers that Be why they do this to her. Maybe she can duck out of this now.

“Why don’t we get some food?” Oliver offers, ignoring Tommy who’s still laughing.

She nods, grateful for the excuse.

“So, how did you and Tommy meet?” He asks as they walk up to the counter.

Felicity grins. Now that’s a story she can tell without any awkward innuendos. “Well, I was at MIT...”

**If you haven’t read it yet, now would be the perfect time to read “Do I Look Like a Barista to You?”**

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Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

So, there's a little bit of information in the beginning about how Tommy and Felicity met, but if you want the whole story, check out "Do I Look Like a Barista to You?" (that's the last time I'll make that note. I swear.)

Chapter 9

“A coffee shop?” Oliver repeats, at a for loss words as he imagines the situation they’re explaining.

Tommy chuckles, waving a French fry around as he talks. “Felicity, here, was goth. I know! Hard to imagine, but it’s true. It took all my charm to win her over.”

“Pfft!” Felicity sputters. “Excuse you! I took pity on this poor dope because he was searching for his best friend in all the wrong places.”

Oliver stops mid-bite, glancing between the two. “You...were looking for me?” He leans back into the seat in shock. He hadn’t expected that.

“Yeah. I wasn’t lying when I said she was the best person in the world with computers. The third year you were gone, someone logged into your email from-“

“Hong Kong,” Oliver whispers in awe, staring at Felicity. He had known how good she was. He had just never realized that she had gotten involved so soon. She never mentioned it, even after he revealed he wasn’t always on the Island, but it also explains her lack of surprise.

He blinks then as he notices the lack of talk at the table, which is exceedingly weird given his friends’ proclivity to talk. They’re both staring at him with wide eyes, food forgotten in front of them.

“You were in Hong Kong?!” Tommy crows, tossing the fry back onto his plate. He twists, frowning, to face Oliver directly.

Oliver winces. He hadn’t meant to say that out loud.

“Uh,” He glances at Felicity who’s watching him with a curious head tilt as she tries to puzzle him out. Her look isn’t any less disconcerting so he turns back to Tommy.

“You were in Hong Kong,” he repeats. “Did you know I was there? You could have come home. I don’t believe this! Why would you stay away for five years?”

Oliver runs a hand over his jaw. “Tommy...it wasn’t that simple.”

“Wasn’t that simple?! I went to Hong Kong to bring you home! All you had to do was come with me! You knew I was there!”

“Tommy...”

“No! You could’ve come back years ago,” He shouts, drawing attention from the rest of the
“Tommy,” Felicity whispers, reaching out to rest her hand over his.

“I’m sorry, Lis, but I can’t.” He twists back to Oliver. “Do you know how much we mourned your death? You could have stopped that grieving and you didn’t!”

“I—"

“No! You don’t have the right!”

“I couldn’t, Tommy!” Oliver finally explodes, hands clenching into fists at the loss of control. He takes a deep breath, knowing he has their attention. He glances back at the restaurant, to see who else is watching the spectacle, only to see Digg showing the last person out the door.

“They wanted me to kill you, Tommy.” Oliver’s voice comes out low and dangerous. He can’t keep eye contact so he stares at the red table like it holds the answer to everything. He has their attention and he’s fairly certain Felicity is the only thing keeping Tommy from another outburst.

This isn’t how this was supposed to happen. He wasn’t supposed to tell them this here. This was supposed to be normal, fun. The breath catches in his chest and he feels the familiar drive to run. He’s cornered here and his body is screaming at him to escape.

He could. He knows he could just tell Tommy he doesn’t want to talk about and storm out. His friend would grudgingly accept it and probably not talk to him for the next month, which is exactly what he’s trying to avoid.

He just never guessed that Hong Kong would be a topic of conversation tonight. Of all the things he prepared for, this had never been one of them and he’s handling it horribly.

“Hey.”

Oliver’s hand automatically uncurls from its fist as Felicity touches him, slipping her hand into his. The breaths come easier and he doesn’t want to run anymore.

“You don’t have to tell us,” she whispers.

Tommy sputters, but she cuts him off with a glare.

“I, for one, didn’t come to dinner to discuss morose topics. However, there is one matter we need to discuss.” Felicity primly starts eating her fries again, like there was no scene caused in the middle of Big Belly Burger that nearly ended in a fight. “Custody.”

Oliver finds himself at a loss. Tommy shrugs at his questioning gaze, still looking a little miffed at the previous argument.

“I’m done with him showing up at my apartment whenever he’s sad or bored. So you’re going to have to pick up some slack, Queen. Oh, and drinking and clubbing...yeah, you can join him on all those activities. I’m more of a Netflix and wine kind of girl.”

She takes a bite of her burger and then continues talking when neither Oliver nor Tommy move to fill the silence. “But you can’t monopolize his time. I still want to see my best friend. There’s enough time in the week for him to spend time with you, me, and Laurel. In deference to partying, I will let you have most of the weekends.”
“So we’re also sharing time with Laurel?” Oliver banter, anxious continue moving the subject as far away from Hong Kong as he can.

Felicity snorts. “Oh yeah! Big time. Although that’s more booty calls than hanging out. Unless you count him following her around like a love sick pupp-OW!” She pouts at Tommy as she reaches down under the table, probably to run her shin. “What was that for?”

Oliver smirks knowingly as he follows her look to a miffed looking Tommy.

“Look, man, there’s nothing going on between me and Laurel. Honest.” He holds his hands up in surrender. “We’re just friends.”

Felicity chokes on a laugh, shaking her head at Tommy as he shoots her another look. Oliver raises an eyebrow, grinning at her. She bites her bottom lip to stop herself from smiling too and Oliver winks before turning back to Tommy.

“So, you and Laurel?” Oliver asks, setting Tommy on edge and successfully getting him off the topic of China and what happened there. He shifts nervously under Oliver’s gaze, apparently at a loss for words, so he turns to Felicity. “He’s in love, isn’t he?”

Never mind that he knows the answer and they might think he’s making a huge leap. It’s worth the risk to see her conspiratorial grin as she leans forward, completely relaxed with him, eyes dancing in amusement.

“It’s disgusting. Every time she ditches him or goes out on another guy, he ends up at my apartment completely wasted. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve heard gorgeous, beautiful, smart, amazing, and fantastic in connection with the Magnificent Laurel Lance. It would be romantic if it didn’t make me want to hurl.”

“That bad, huh?” He jokes, mostly just to continue to see that smile.

“Yup.” She pushes her glasses up her nose. “That’s why we’re splitting custody. Now it’s your turn to deal with the drama.”

“Nope. Nu-uh.” Tommy intervenes, shaking his head. “Not happening. This is not happening. No, no, no, no, no. Nope.”

“How about this,” Oliver offers, ignoring Tommy as he leans across the table, “I’ll take Mondays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays. We can split Fridays.”

“Nuh-uh.” She shakes her head. “You can have Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. We split Fridays. I get Sundays and Tuesdays. I’ve had to deal with him for the last three years.”

He pretends to consider her, like this deal will decide their entire future. If he had his way, he would be spending every one of those days with her. It’s not really something he needs to contemplate anyway.

Tommy groans, desperate to pull them away from this conversation. “Come on, guys! Are we really doing this?”

“Okay, but every other Thursday we share.”

Felicity nods, holding out her hand to shake.

He wraps his hand around hers and pulls her closer. “I also want a standing lunch date with the
stunning computer genius in my best friend’s life, every Friday, so we can get to know each other.”

There’s a pause after his offer. Tommy says something, but Oliver’s entirely focused on the blonde whose breath just caught in her throat. He recognizes the sound as the one she makes when he leaned too close into her personal space or when she caught him shirtless unexpectedly. But he also knows it’s too early for this offer. He just got caught up in their little game.

She’s going to turn him down. He’s already steeling himself for rejection, putting distance between them when she shakes his hand and says one word that sends his soul soaring once again: “Deal.”

“We still need to talk about Hong Kong,” Tommy whispers while they wait for Felicity to grab her milkshake.

He grimaces, but nods in agreement. “It’s...it’s not easy to talk about, Tommy. Believe me, if I could have gone home with you, I would have. I was on that Island for most of the last five years, and when I wasn’t on it, I wasn’t free to go home either.”

Thankfully, Tommy doesn’t argue with him, or probe for more information. He simply nods in agreement and turns his attention back to Felicity as she gets her to-go cup.

“And, Felicity? She’s off-limits.”

Oliver frowns. “What?”

“I mean it, Ollie. No flirting, no hooking up, nothing. This girl is like a sister to me. She’s my best friend and I’m not going to let your track record with women ruin it. If you do anything to hurt her, I’ll have no choice but to kick your butt. Got it?”

He opens his mouth to object, but then Felicity’s there and he knows exactly what her reaction would be to an overprotective figure so he just smiles at her like nothing happened.

Truth be told, he didn’t consider he would have to convince Tommy he would be a good fit for Felicity. Considering this never happened in his timeline, he wonders. He also wonders why he never heard about this in his timeline.

But then he remembers Felicity bowed over Tommy’s grave, too overwhelmed by sorrow to cry. He’d been numb and hadn’t thought about it when he got back to the Foundry to her bawling her eyes out. He’ll probably never know why they didn’t tell him in his timeline, but it’s a blessing that he can see it firsthand right now.

“So what are we talking about?” Felicity asks, bouncing on the balls of her feet.

“Going out for drinks!” Tommy declares. “You in?”

Oliver shakes his head. “I can’t, Tommy. I should get home.”

“Fair enough. Lissy?” He turns to Felicity.

“Do you just constantly forget that I have work or do you do this on purpose?” She asks, curiosity inspiring her head tilt.

Tommy groans. “When did I become the fun, irresponsible one?”

Oliver slaps him on the back. “Don’t worry about it, buddy. How about we meet up tomorrow for
lunch? I’ve got something I want to show you.”

He nods, frowning. “Sure.”

“We can talk then. About everything. It was great getting to know you, Felicity. See you soon.” In deference to Tommy’s warning, Oliver resists the urge to wink or shoot her anything other than his friendliest smile.

She nods. “You too. See you around.”

“Catch you later, Ollie.” Tommy shouts as he walks with Felicity in the direction of a familiar red mini cooper.

He waves at them, shifting as he senses Digg joining him just outside of the door.

“Need a ride?” Digg asks.

He glances at the hulking ex-bodyguard. “You offering?”

“You’re going to see Somers tonight. I want to see what you do.”

Oliver nods and points him in the direction of the Foundry. “Then let’s go.”

...

John’s not sure what convinces him to trust a potential mental patient. Maybe he sustained his own head injury, but when he heard Thomas Merlyn yelling at Oliver about coming back sooner, he felt that he needed to do something.

He might not know all the details about Hong Kong, but if Amanda Waller was involved, he’s sure it couldn’t have been easy for Oliver.

That the kid was making an effort at all with his friends was shocking. He’d known soldiers who had been unable to cope with normal life, especially after working with Amanda Waller. Oliver was functioning and trying to make amends.

Regardless of his mental state, Oliver should have someone watching his back. And something he said about making a difference, helping people...It had resonated with him.

He’s been lost since he got back from Afghanistan. Leaving a war zone is never easy. Losing his wife didn’t help his unease. Home never really felt like home after that.

Oliver Queen, the billionaire who stood in a gloomy basement displaying his scars...that man understands the struggle of coming home after a prolonged absence. He’s the kind of man Diggle wants to work for, not the spoiled brat he originally thought. He’s had enough of bored days guarding overgrown children as they partake in less-than-legal activities.

While vigilantism isn’t legal by any stretch of the imagination, if it helps the poor people of this city, Digg’s willing to give the man a chance. If he worked with A.R.G.U.S., Queen must be good at what he does. He’s also capable of killing.

He hasn’t made up his mind on the matter, but he’s willing to give Oliver a chance to prove himself. Carly set him straight earlier. If he’s true to himself, this is worth the risk.

Of course, he didn’t expect to find himself in the basement of the Foundry again in front of an impressive set of computers listening to Oliver over a comm unit.
“Are you sure about this?” Digg asks the microphone, watching the feed from a small camera on the strap of Oliver’s quiver.

“We need proof of Somers’s Triad connections. This is the easiest way.”

Digg shakes his head at the voice modulator. “By sending China White after your ex-girlfriend.”

“We’ll be there to stop it.”

“After she breaks into Laurel’s apartment, right?” Digg asks. “I’m not stupid. She needs to be able to testify that the Triad attacked her.”

A gruff grunt acknowledges the truth of his statement.

“I wouldn’t send an assassin after my ex.”

Oliver chuckles. “Lyla can handle herself.”

“And Laurel Lance can’t.” Diggle concludes. Putting an innocent woman in danger isn’t something he can agree with, even if it solidifies the case.

“There’s no other way to prove Triad connections. If you have a better idea, I’m all ears.”

Digg contemplates the situation, wishing Oliver wasn’t on his way to Somers’s warehouse right now. But the man had been impatient and ready to move.

“What if you bug his phone? Record him talking to China White.”

“Only a plausible connection.”

“But it’s a start,” Digg argues.

“Except I don’t have the equipment nor the time to bug his phone.”

That brings John Diggle’s plan to screeching halt. He’s okay with computers, but Oliver seems more adept than him. There’s no way he could jerry-rig something to fit. So he comes out with the only comment he can think of:

“You mean you didn’t learn how to do that in the future?”

...

Oliver grins from his position facing the warehouse. He’s feeling more like himself now with Diggle at his back.

“In the future, there’s someone else on the team who handles the tech.” He smiles as he remembers the perky babbling in his ear.

“So there’s someone else on this team?”

He grins at Diggle’s dry tone.

“And how do you convince him to join?” Digg asks when Oliver doesn’t elaborate.

“She helped us with a few cases before she joined.” He grimaces, purposefully omitting the part where he nearly bled out in the back of her car.
“And this mysterious ‘She’ has experience with military grade technology?”

Finding he doesn’t actually know the answer to that question, Oliver shrugs. “She’s a certified genius. Graduated MIT with a masters in computer science and cyber security at 19 and a talent for hacking.”

He can practically hear the wheels turning in Diggle’s head over the comms, so he cuts that off before more questions are asked of his methods.

“I’m going in.”

Slipping in is simple, like retracing steps he’s taken a thousand times. He’s here to put the fear of God into Somers. And he pulls the first arrow with just that intent. He’s here to put on a show, just like he did at his welcome home bash. It’s not something he was taught by Waller. This is pure him. Showmanship can be used for all sorts of purposes.

He takes out a light and then aims for the body guards. It’s not as important this time that the shots aren’t fatal. These men aren’t innocent, but the more he can put on trial the better.

It takes ten seconds to fell the guards and take Somers, knocking the man out by applying pressure to his neck. In and out without being seen. Almost exactly like last time.

“What do you plan to do now?” Diggle asks in his ear.

“Put the fear of God into him.”

... 

“If you’re trying to convince me you’re not crazy, this really isn’t helping,” Digg offers.

Oliver smirks as he watches Sommers sway, suspended from the crane at the port by his feet. He’s sure it looks insane and Digg has been constantly questioning him over the comms, but this is his favorite part.

Martin Somers jerks awake, screaming, his body swinging more as he struggles.

“Martin Somers,” Oliver starts, deepening his voice.

“Who are you?!” The man demands unable to stop fighting the swaying.

“You have failed this city!” He draws an arrow and releases it, grazing Somers’ cheek, a line of blood welling on his face.

Somers is sobbing, chanting ‘no’ over and over.

“Really?” Digg comments in his ear. “That’s what you’re going with?”

“You’re going to testify in that trial. You’re going to confess to having Victor Noscenti killed. There won’t be a second warning.” He fires another arrow, severing the rope holding Somers up so he falls to the ground.

By the time Somers pulls himself upright, Oliver is gone.

“Alright. That’s terrifying, I’ll give you that. But what did that accomplish?”

Oliver sighs, swinging a leg over his bike and pulling out of the alley before he answers. “If it works,
Somers testifies and a guilty man goes to jail. If he doesn’t testify, I slipped a bug onto his person, so we’ll hear who he talks to.”

“I thought you didn’t have a bug.”

Oliver grins, blood racing through his veins as he takes the turn a little too fast. “I didn’t have a bug for his phone.”

“What was with that line-“

“Digg, I’m a minute out.”

“Got it. Talk then.”

The line cuts out and Oliver nods, clicking the button on his vest that controls the modulator. Tonight was a good night.

... 

“That went well,” Felicity comments as she pours two glasses of wine, handing one to Tommy, having given in when he convinced her that hanging out would stop him mooning over Laurel while she was preoccupied with her trial.

“Pfft! Don’t get soft on me, Smoak. You weren’t supposed to fall for his charm. And you told him about Laurel.” Tommy glares at her, but his heart isn’t in it.

“And he was happy for you!” She smirks at him as she takes a sip of red wine. “Besides you said there was someone else. And I didn’t fall for his charm, even if he is nice to look at.”

“Yeah, well, I didn’t like the way he was looking at you either,” Tommy mutters.

“Please. He was a perfect gentleman. No lewd staring or anything.”

“Exactly,” Tommy declares triumphantly. “I don’t trust him.”

Felicity rolls her eyes. “You’re the one who wanted us to meet.”

“I wouldn’t have suggested it if I knew it would turn out like this.”

“Like what?” Felicity asks, frowning at him. She doesn’t get it. She thought dinner went well. She had fun.

Tommy murmurs something unintelligible, turning away from her to sit on the couch and pull up Netflix. “Let’s just watch that show. The one with the hot chick doing all the fighting stuff.”

She snorts, dropping to sit next to him. “Buffy the Vampire Slayer?”

“Yeah. That one.”

...

“Why didn’t you just tell me you were bugging him?” Digg asks, examining the extra bug Oliver pulled from his quiver.

He shrugs. “I forgot I had it on me until I was already in the boatyard.”
“So what now? We keep an eye on Laurel? Listen to the feed?”

Oliver winces because now he sees the problem with the bug. Felicity could probably write a program to filter out certain words so they didn’t have to listen to everything, but that is far beyond his capabilities.

“Bet you wish you’d brought your tech girl in earlier now.” Digg laughs. “Looks like it’s up to us to use the old-fashioned method.” He turns to the computer, pulling the feed back up, but all they’re still getting is Somers freaking out.

“No. She’s not ready yet.” Oliver reaches past Diggle. “And this can wait until tomorrow. Nothing’s going to happen tonight.”

“You can’t be sure,” Digg argues as Oliver starts to shut down the computer except for what’s necessary to receive the bug’s feed.

“The only thing different about tonight, is that last time, you weren’t here. Everything should happen exactly the same.” He’s sure nothing will happen tonight. It’s too late. And because he went into Queen Consolidated today, he hopefully won’t be dragged in tomorrow to hear about the new Applied Sciences position.

Although, with his mother’s motives, he wouldn’t be surprised if she ushers him in tomorrow anyway.

There’s only one more thing left to ask. He meets Digg’s eyes from across the room, unsure if he’s ready for the answer.

“So…Are you in?”

Digg sizes him up, his jaw working as he puzzles through the thoughts that must be spinning in his head. Oliver waits with bated breath until Digg holds his hand out.

“I’m in.”
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

Yay! Here's another quick update!

A thousand thanks to geniewithwifi for betaing for me!!! xoxo

Chapter 10

“Mr. Diggle? I thought you quit?”

Oliver pauses at the top of the stairs, sinking into the shadows just out of his mother’s view, so he can watch their interaction. Digg, who had been patiently waiting for Oliver to meet him, turns in the entryway of the mansion to face the petite blonde matriarch. She’s watching him politely, hands crossed in front of her, but her eyes are cool, calculating.

John Diggle musters a smile. “Actually-“

“I rehired him,” Oliver calls, jogging down the stairs with a bright smile for his mother. Digg doesn’t have to face her disapproval over Oliver's actions.

“What about Mr. Scott?”

He grimaces. “Rob wasn’t up to the job.”

Digg scoffs at his excuse, like he’s not even sure he’s up to the job. But then again, Oliver doesn’t really need a bodyguard anyway. Digg was a thousand times better at keeping up with him than Rob anyway, forget about getting his friend back. Diggle was the better choice.

Moira turns an icy scowl on her son. “Oliver, I didn’t hire a bodyguard for you to ditch him the first chance you get and then rehire them later. What was wrong with Mr. Scott for that matter?”

“He couldn’t keep up. Digg was learning, which is why I offered him his job back.” Oliver grins at his mother, shoving his hands into his pockets as he shrugs.

“You...Oliver, are you sure you know what you’re doing. No offense to Mr. Diggle, but you did slip away from him several times too.” She purses her lips, giving Digg a tight smile.

He refrains from commenting at her condescension, turning away to stare at the wall. With his face averted Digg rolls his eyes. Oliver is the only one that notices.

Oliver bites back a sigh of exasperation at his mother’s cutting words, especially right in front of the man whose abilities are being questioned.

“I’m not paying your bodyguards to lose you in the middle of the day,” She returns, scowling in his direction.

“Well, then it’s a good thing you’re not paying him,” Oliver cuts in, pressing a kiss to his mother’s cheek as he adjusts his jacket. “I'll see you tonight.”
“Tonight?” She asks. “And what do you mean you’re paying him?”

He turns back from the door that Digg is holding open with exasperation written on his features.

“I mean, he works for me now. And I don’t need you to hire me a new bodyguard,” he calls over his shoulder, Diggle falling into step behind him as he hops down the steps to the waiting town car.

He knows his mom isn’t too happy. She’s probably frowning and tapping her foot. Oliver knows she had plans today, plans involving him and the new Applied Science division at Queen Consolidated. It’s why he made his escape quickly. He doesn’t want to deal with that. Instead, he’s headed to check out a building a couple blocks from the club.

He’s moving fast. He knows that, and it’s going to make everyone question his choices, but he’s also realizing he can’t wait. Yes, he’s impatient. And yes, it’s risky, but he’s decided it’s worth the risk, especially with what came of telling Digg earlier...and meeting Felicity. He wants to do more, help more people, sooner rather than later.

He wants Oliver Queen to make a difference.

“So what is this place we’re going to?” Digg asks, breaking Oliver’s concentration.

He shakes his head slightly, returning his attention to the man in front of him. "Hmm?"

“This address. It’s in one of the worst parts in the Glades. It’s scheduled for demolition.”

“Oh. Yeah. I’m thinking about turning into a shelter or a food kitchen. It needs some work, but I think it can work.”

“A charity? Did that work last time?” Digg asks.

Oliver rolls his eyes, at the man’s still sarcastic mention of his ‘time travel’ adventure. “It’s not something I did last time.”

Digg raises an eyebrow at him in the rearview mirror before turning his attention back to the road.

“Last time I came back, I...I put a lot of distance between me and everyone I cared about, the whole world. I went after my dad’s list with a vengeance. It was only when Fe- when our tech signed on that I branched out to do more things. I figured I could get a jump on it like this.”

Oliver shakes his head for almost using Felicity’s name. Sure, Digg’s not stupid, but the longer he can put off the other man’s judgment, the better he feels. He’s sure John’s already connected the dots and knows that their ‘tech support’ means more to him than he’s saying. He just doesn’t want to deal with the knowing looks that he would get if Digg knew Felicity was the tech he’s talking about.

“And finance it with your trust fund?” Digg asks, pulling him back to the conversation.

“Initially,” he consents. “But later I figured, we could cover some of the costs with the profits from Verdant.”

“Verdant?”

“The club,” Oliver responds.

“Really? Verdant?” Digg doesn’t say anything else, but the judgment in his voice is clear.

He chuckles, shaking his head at the reaction. “I know. It’s a bit on the nose, but when Oliver Queen
opens a nightclub, people show up.”

“And the name with the green leather won’t be a tip off?”

Oliver cringes. “I’ve got a contingency in place. It’s only a matter of time before someone puts the pieces together. Oliver Queen returns at the same time the vigilante appears? People aren’t that stupid.”

“Why do I have a feeling the contingency plan involves me?” Digg grumbles, turning down another side street.

“It does.” He knows Diggle’s support is still a little shaky. The man may have agreed, but how this case with Somers turns out will affect a lot of their partnership. He doesn’t want to lose this friend and this case will be his first of many changes to his life this time around.

They lapse into silence as Digg navigates the streets, pulling up to a garbage littered street. Without waiting, Oliver slides out on to the sidewalk, stepping over old candy wrappers and bits of newspaper. The building rises two stories above the pavement, bricks chipped on the faded exterior.

“Quite the place,” Digg comments as he takes in one door hanging half off the frame and three broken windows. Grime coats every glass panel, the lock is clearly busted, and the smell from the street is nearly intolerable. “You bought this place?”

“It needs some work,” Oliver allows, walking up to the broken door and testing the knob. It twists in his hand, which is a relief because he thought it would fall off as soon as he touched it.

“What about the factory? You still need to get that set up.” Digg crosses his arms over his chest, surveying the damage as they step inside. “That’s a lot of work for a rich playboy and vigilante.”

“I already have the plans for the club, and I can hire people to do this. Plus, I’m trying to get Tommy’s help.” Oliver steps over a dust covered beam, noticing piles of filth where someone was living. It smells terrible, but the bottom floor looks pretty much just as he thought it would: wide and open.

There are a couple holes in the ceiling, and the debris would have to removed. It would probably result in gutting the whole place.

Oliver pushes the swinging door to the back room open. The smell of stale urine and garbage assaults his senses and he has to step back into the main room, waving his hand in front of his face. Eyes watering from the stench, he glances back at Digg who meets his gaze, unimpressed.

“Yeah. Only a little work.”

He rolls his eyes at Diggle’s sarcasm. “It’s got good bones.”

The bodyguard glances around again and nods begrudgingly. “I assume you’re hiring the work out.”

Oliver looks at the room, wishing he had a sledgehammer in his hands so he could take aim at a wall and begin clearing this place out. He actually doesn’t mind the hard work. He did a lot of the work on the club last time by himself. He could do this.

Although, time-wise, he should get someone else in to do the work.

“So this is your plan? Help the world and open a nightclub?” Digg asks, moving a pile of trash with the toe of his boot. “Is there enough time in a day?”
Oliver sighs. “The nightclub is a convenient alibi. Plus, it’s expected of Oliver Queen. He’s a screw-up, a public drunk, a compulsive cheat...”

“You know, it really freaks me out when you talk about yourself in the third person.” Digg pops a stick of gum into his mouth with a wry smile.

Oliver chuckles. “And all of that is true.” He checks the watch on his wrist. “We need to get going. I promised Tommy we’d meet him at noon.”

Diggle nods, turning for the entrance immediately.

Oliver stays back, turning around the room. There are now footsteps in the dirty floor, but he can see the future. This is something completely new for him to do. He can make a real difference with this.

It’s a good choice.

... “I think you need to rethink your use of the word fun,” Tommy comments as he follows Oliver and Digg into the dark interior of the Foundry. The door to the basement is covered so the shiny new metal doesn’t declare the recent construction.

The floor is patched so the main level no longer has large gaps leading down to the basement. It’s nowhere near clubbing standards – no construction on the actual ‘club’ part has even started – but the open, clean layout is ready for the next modifications.

“It’s the perfect location for a club!” Oliver declares, turning to showcase the space with a flourish of showmanship right from his pre-Island, playboy days. “It just needs a face lift and people will be lining up to get in the door.”

Tommy turns around again to get a better look at the space.

Oliver’s already started lining up local contractors, especially those who live or work in the Glades. It wasn’t a priority last time, but now he wants to hire locals. It’s a business move he that never crossed his mind earlier: bringing money back to the neighborhood. It means some tweaking to his former plans for the club. But right now this venture is the only thing between him and his mother pushing the Applied Science position on him.

If he spends all his time working on the plans for the club and the shelter, she can’t complain about him being idle and he doesn’t have the time to indulge in her Queen Consolidated dream. Plus, he has Walter on his side.

Walter was a bit skeptical about the club, but he agreed it was good business experience. As soon as Oliver brought up the shelter he wanted to open, Walter jumped on the idea, saying he hated that QC didn’t do enough to help those in the Glades. He was already talking about expanding them so more shelters were open. Oliver himself was surprised to learn that the soup kitchens in the Glades had dried up in the last five years, although he suspected Merlyn had a hand in that. Even Rebecca’s Clinic was falling into disrepair: all of Malcolm’s puzzle pieces falling into place.

“Well, if you call is Queen’s, I think you’re going to get a different clientele than you’re expecting.” Tommy finally lays down his verdict with a smirk.

Oliver smiles back. “No. I’ve got something else in mind, but I had a question for you.” He glances around at the building, fighting the smile that wants to burst from his face as he turns to face Tommy.
“Of course I’ll endorse the club for you,” Tommy agrees preemptively. “But it’s going to require some major modifications before you open.”

He chuckles, shaking his head. “Actually...I was wondering if you wanted to help with more than just the advertising.” He pauses, unsure how Tommy’s going to accept the proposition. When Tommy came to him last time, it was because he was cut off and needed to earn money. He was in a tough spot, but he had loved the job until he found out Oliver was the Hood.

And he would be the first to admit that Tommy was damn good at his job. Now, he suspects he had Felicity’s help balancing the books, which isn’t to say he doesn’t think Tommy could do it on his own, only that Felicity would want to ensure his success and had probably offered to double check everything for him. It makes sense.

“Sure. I can be one of your backers!”

Oliver snorts. Yeah, this is definitely not working. “I don’t need your money. I need a partner, someone who can be here overseeing the work when I can’t. I’m also opening a shelter down the street with Walter’s backing and I can’t be two places at once as things are going down. And who knows the club scene better than the two of us?”

“Wait. You want me to work on this with you...like a job?” Tommy blinks at him, incredulity spreading across his features, like he never considered this scenario in his life, which is probably accurate.

“Exactly.”

“So I would work for you?”

Oliver runs a hand along his jaw. Of course, that’s how it worked last time, but pulling Tommy in like this would be something different. “No. We’d be partners.”

“But you don’t want my money? If we weren’t best friends, and you wanted all my money, I would accuse you of trying to con me,” Tommy jokes, but Oliver hears the unease and apprehension in his voice. Things aren’t adding up for him, a fact that Oliver can’t ignore or explain because how do you tell your friend his father will cut him off without arousing suspicion.

“I figured, going into business by yourself is daunting and there’s no one I’d rather start a club with than my best friend. And the building already belonged to my family. I’m technically renting the space from Walter. I don’t think my mom’s thrilled with the idea. She’s just happy I’m trying something for myself.”

He takes a deep breath. This is probably the longest speech he’s made since he got back. Felicity’s rambling might be getting to him. “I know your dad. I figured he might be on your case, too. And, look, neither of us wants to work for our parents, at least not right now. I figured this could be a good solution.”

Oliver finally looks back at Tommy, bracing himself for whatever meets his eyes. Surprisingly, Tommy watches him, assessing, jocular attitude vanished in light of the conversation. This. This is the meaty conversation he needs to have with his friend, a conversation he’s terrified to have and completely unprepared for.

“I’d like that, but I think we first need to talk about Hong Kong.”

He sighs, glancing at Diggle lurking in the shadows of the room like an exemplary bodyguard. In his mental plan, he had mapped out this conversation, figured out exactly what he wanted to say when it
came to revealing what happened in Hong Kong to Tommy, but here – in the building that housed his base of operations, the building that became more like home than the mansion – here, he has to tell the whole story. He sees the opportunity for what it is: the chance to tell Tommy everything.

“Okay.”

...

After that quick, decisive response, Tommy hadn’t expected Oliver to turn around, heading to a dark corner of the club. Actually, that was pretty much the last thing he could have seen happening. He figured they would leave the steel and concrete box of his soon-to-be club and find somewhere to sit down for lunch and talk.

He glances over his shoulder to find John Diggle still there, strangely at ease with his client walking into dark, shadowy corners where killers might lurk. Shrugging, he follows Oliver, frowning when he reaches a shiny metal door with a state of the art keypad.

Nonchalantly, Oliver punches in the code and the door unlocks with a click.

A thousand thoughts flash through his mind ranging from bizarre (Oliver’s James Bond) to terrifying (Oliver’s a drug overlord), but, despite his misgivings, Tommy follows him down the metal steps only to come up short at the bottom of the steps.

Because that crazy idea, the whole James Bond thing, now seems like a completely plausible explanation.

The basement of Oliver’s club is very clearly a base of some sort. There’s an area of training mats, what Tommy will swear looks like a med station, a computer area, and most shockingly, a neatly arranged wall filled with arrows, a bow casually displayed in the middle.

It’s not until his eyes land on the green hood that Tommy finally connects the dots. The man in the green hood, the Robin Hood Detective Lance was looking for when he broke up Oliver’s Welcome Home bash.

“You’re Hood guy,” Tommy whispers, turning to face Oliver and Diggle, who rests against a concrete pillar just behind his boss. “Laurel can’t stop talking about how you returned that money. You’re freaking Robin Hood.”

Oliver winces then, shaking his head emphatically at the name. “I’m not Robin Hood. Believe me.”

“But you stole from the rich and gave to the poor. Isn’t that the schpeal?” Tommy asks, stepping into the basement, eyes darting over the whole room. “What I don’t get is why this is under your new club? Or why you’re telling me this now...” Or where this sudden altruistic attitude came from.

His friend sighs, walking into the room, to a work bench. He picks up a little black book – and the humor in that isn’t lost on him – and turns to face Tommy again. “Because this connects to Hong Kong.”

“Where you were told to kill me?” Tommy offers, quirking an eyebrow because that’s something he’s been thinking over since the night before, something that makes absolutely no sense.

Oliver drops the book again, moving jerkily, like he wants to do something but can’t figure out what exactly he needs to do. Tommy’s seen him agitated like this before, and it’s relieving to see that not that much has changed. Granted, the last time he saw Oliver this out of it, Laurel had asked him to move in with her and this situation was nothing like that.
So he just waits for Oliver to speak.

...

Oliver knows Tommy’s waiting, but he’s still not sure how to approach this. He can’t take the same tactic as with Digg. Tommy won’t understand the implications of his scars, the torture he endured, the situations he found himself in. He can’t just show Tommy the book and say, ‘your father wants to destroy the Glades.’ No. He has to go about this rationally.

So he takes a different tactic, turning on his heel and grabbing his bow and a dull arrow. He places them both on the table closest to Tommy.

“The Gambit was sabotaged. No one was supposed to survive, and I was the only one to make it to that Island. But I wasn’t there alone. I had to fight for my survival, and to do so I learned how to use this.”

He’s not sure Tommy’s getting it as he stares at him instead of the bow.

“I’ve killed people with this bow, Tommy, killed people, and not always just for my own survival.” He wants to make this absolutely clear to the man who wouldn’t talk to him after that revelation last time.

“That. That bow is why they took me off the Island,” he says, stepping back. He focuses solely on Tommy as he finally focuses on the weapon on the table, ignoring Diggle as he gets the new information.

“It was an organization called A.R.G.U.S. They wanted me to use my skills,” he spits the word, disgusted with himself still for what he had to do during that year, what he chose to do, “to torture people for information. When you came to Hong Kong after that email, they wanted me to kill you.”

His hands curl into fists. “I was across the street with a rifle aimed at your head when I realized you were the target. It was either kill you, or get you to stop looking.”

Suddenly, something clicks with Tommy and his head whips back around to pin Oliver in place.

“You...you kidnapped me?”

“It was better you thought I was dead.”

Tommy turns away at the information, eyes wide as he processes the new information.

“They threatened to kill you and my family if I stepped out of line.” He can’t hand Tommy a name to cling to, despite how much he wants to pin everything to Amanda Waller. In the end, she was despicable, but she wasn’t the ultimate villain, the orchestrator that turned him into the torturous monster Waller had wanted him to be.

When Tommy looks at him there are tears in his eyes. “I can’t believe you had to go through that.”

Oliver closes his eyes. It was so much worse than Tommy thinks it was. He can’t see that sympathy. It’s not what it was like. “Tommy, going through something like that...I turned into the monster they wanted me to be. I turned into a soldier in their war. I turned into a killer.”

He opens his eyes to Tommy’s set face. “And now you’re playing Robin Hood to make up for that.”

“I told you, I’m not Robin Hood.” He runs a hand across the back of his neck. “But yes, I’m trying to be something better...a hero.”
“And the club...that’s your alibi?”

Oliver nods, grinning when Tommy throws his head back in a genuine, full-bellied laugh.

“That’s good.” He wipes a tear from the corner of his eye, shaking with laughter still. “Don’t worry, buddy: your secret’s safe with me.” He claps Oliver on the back.

He wants to be happy, to revel in his best friend’s acceptance of his path, and he could, if his eyes weren’t drawn to the little book that damns the elite, the book that Tommy’s father created, the book that lists everyone involved in his plans to level the Glades.

...

“Why are you so bummed?”

It’s been hours since they parted ways with Tommy, and apparently his anxiety on how to deal with telling Tommy about Malcolm Merlyn is still evident enough for Digg to comment on it as they wait for China White to attack.

From his perch across the street where he has a perfect look into Laurel’s living room, Oliver sighs, eyes darting to Diggle in the side alley. “It’s nothing.”

“Bull. You’ve been like this since you told Merlyn, and that went better than I thought it would.”

“Me too,” Oliver admits. He had been ready for the yelling and name calling. He’d been prepared for the worst case scenario: losing his best friend.

“So, what’s the problem?”

“The pro-“ Movement in the street catches his eyes. He draws the bow, ready to take out the Triad agents before they can kill the police officers, but the lone figure walking down the street isn’t a member of the Triad. “Shit.”

“What?” Diggle asks. “What is it?”

Oliver closes his eyes, wishing he had some way to ensure their safety because the stakes just got a hell of a lot higher. With only Laurel in the apartment, he was sure if one of the Triad got past them, she was smart enough to run for cover until they got there. He knows she’s got at least one gun in her apartment. She can take care of herself well enough that the risk to her was minimal.

But now.

“It’s Tommy.”

He’s really starting to wish Tommy didn’t keep showing up at people’s apartment’s at the most inopportune moments.

There’s more movement on the street, because this mission couldn’t get any worse, and Oliver tightens his grip on the bow. It looks like they have to deal with the changed circumstances. “Look alive, Digg. They’re here.”
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

Another week, another chapter! Yay!

And this one is a longer one, and incredibly different. Here comes the Merlance!

Enjoy!

Chapter 11

Tommy fidgets nervously, staring at Laurel’s door, readjusting his grip on the paper bag of Thai food from her favorite restaurant. It’s his peace offering, his olive branch, because after his talk with Oliver, he doesn’t want to just wait complacently. He wants to woo her, to win her heart.

Thai food doesn’t scream ‘I love you,’ but it’s guaranteed to get him in the door.

He hopes.

One, deep, bracing breath and he raps the door, still unsure of what sort of welcome he’s going to receive. In fact, he’s now wondering what he’s doing here. Maybe it would be better if she doesn’t even open the door. Then he can go home without the embarrassment of her sending him away.

But before he can turn tail and run in an uncharacteristic bout of cowardice, he hears the click of a lock and the door swings open to the warm brown eyes that feature in his dreams. She smiles for a brief moment before it fades into a frown.

“Tommy? What are you doing here?” She leans against the door, sizing him up.

He holds up the bag. “I figured you might be hungry.”

“You can’t just come over, Tommy. We’re not in a relationship. You can’t just-“

“We’re still friends though,” he says with a wry smile to cover the hurt at her objection. “And friends hang out. I brought your favorite: Thai.”

Laurel purses her lips, considering him. Shaking her head, she steps back with a smile, gesturing him into her apartment. “What brought this on?” She calls as she walks into the kitchen to grab napkins and utensils.

Tommy grins, dropping onto the couch, still a little dazed that she let him in. He starts pulling the little white boxes from the bag, arranging them on the coffee table after pushing away the little bits of clutter she managed to accumulate on every available surface. It wasn’t ever really messy, but she just always managed to gather stuff.

“You do realize I have an actual table, right?”

He can’t resist the smile at her cocked eyebrow and classic Lance sass, instead he holds out a food container.
“After what we did on that table last time, I figured we could eat over here.” He had been aiming for the couch that time, but the table ended up being at a better height. At least before they made it into the bedroom.

She reluctantly nods, a smile turning up the corners of her lips as she joins him on the couch.

“Alright, Tommy, what’s your endgame?”

He watches her for a moment as she takes a bite of her food, eyes locked on him speculatively. He wants to tell her he loves her, and that he just wants to spend time with her. He likes this: just hanging out with her, talking. The sex is nice. It’s just not all he wants.

“There’s no endgame,” he replies, breaking her gaze to start his own food. No. He wants to say more than that, show his heart on his sleeve a little more, so he lifts his eyes again and flashes her a soft smile: “I just want to spend time with you.”

Laurel truly smiles then, a soft smile accompanied by a blush as she looks away. He seizes on that smile like it’s a prize. Her pleased little smiles have been so rare over the past five years, and each time he sees it, it warms his insides. He wants to see that smile all the time. Laurel deserves to smile all the time.

And he’s a sap about her because he wants to be the one to make her smile.

...

“They’re here.”

Oliver grimaces as he draws back his bowstring. This day just went from great to terrible. He isn’t strictly opposed to killing Triad members, yet he could already see that ending this decisively would take more than just a couple trick arrows.

China White wouldn’t be brought down by a couple trick arrows, anyway: Her accomplices, on the other hand, possibly.

Oliver lets the arrow loose as the first henchman raises his gun at the two officers in the car, knocking the weapon from the man’s hand. The movement finally garners the attention of the cops in the car who immediately reach for their weapons, yet they’re almost too late as the other henchman emerges from the shadowy alley, gun aimed.

Oliver already knows he’s going to be too slow as he twists to yank an arrow from his quiver. He’s about to release the arrow on instinct when the man crumples to the ground and Diggle’s voice echoes in his ear:

“I hate this thing. Remind me why I couldn’t use my gun, again?”

Not wasting the arrow strung in his bow, he turns back and sends the arrow through the first man’s shoulder, missing every major organ and artery while effectively felling the man. The officers are on him in an instant, muttering about the arrow. One faces outward, with his gun, searching for the archer as the other cuffs the criminal.

Only after he’s secure do the officers go towards the second guy, calling in the incident over their radios.

“A crossbow with green arrows will be attributed to the vigilante. If you shot him with a gun, they would know there were two of us. And guns are a lot easier to track.” Oliver scans the street, watching for the telltale glint of white hair signaling China White’s position.
“Well, this crossbow is more trouble,” Digg mutters, reluctantly ceding Oliver’s argument.

“Where’s China White?” Oliver asks, a sinking feeling in his gut that she’s already in the building, his feet moving already.

“I didn’t see her,” Digg responds, “but the police are about to take command of this block.”

Oliver nods, preparing to vault from the roof he’s on to Laurel’s building. “Get out of here, Digg. I can handle this.”

“Roger.”

He jumps from the roof, catching the railing on the fire escape to swing down to the next level, scurrying down until he comes to a stop outside Laurel’s window. A quick glance inside and he freezes at the cozy image Tommy and Laurel make snuggled together on the couch.

Oliver slings the bow across his back, turning from the private scene. He doesn’t want to intrude unnecessarily, and China White is obviously not there. He moves back into the shadows, conscious of the sirens and flashing lights now gathering on the street.

Either she’s running for cover now or she’s headed up here to quickly finish the job.

*Crash!*

“Ahhhhhhhh!”

Without thought, Oliver jumps through the window, covering his face as he rolls, tranq-dart already in hand that he sends flying at China White with a flick of his wrist. As expected, she dodges the dart, but it gives Laurel and Tommy a chance to run and Oliver the chance to close the distance between them.

He remembers a time when fighting Chen Na Wei was a challenge, when it left him bruised and battered. Fighting her now, after all his trials in the future, was almost easy. Every punch, every kick, dodge, block: it’s a constant rhythm, a familiar melody he knows by heart.

The sirens are louder now, blaring and time is running out. Any minute now the police will come bursting down the hall, he knows it and China White knows it too. She’s going for kill shots, a slash at his neck, a jab to his gut.

Oliver ducks under the blade when it comes at his head next, twisting her knife arm around behind her back and giving a quick jab to the back of her neck, knocking her out cold, so she collapses on the ground.

“Don’t move!”

He freezes as he hears Laurel cock the shotgun. Ever so slowly, he lifts his hands, pressing the voice modulator as he pivots to face her. The police have to at least be in the building right now. He doesn’t have much time before he gets out...

It’s then that he notices the trail of blood, a trail that scares him because it means *something* went wrong, something that should have been fine.

“Are you hurt?” He asks, moving slowly forward, aware that Laurel will shoot him if she feels threatened.
“I said, ‘Don’t Move’,” she repeats.

The blood’s not hers. She might have blood on her, but it’s all residue, the byproduct of trying to help someone injured: Tommy. “The police should be here soon. Go help your boyfriend.”

Her mouth falls open in confusion at his words, but before she can react, he leaves through the same window he came in from, shooting a grappling arrow and swinging away over the heads of the gathered police.

He makes it three blocks to his bike, with ease, torn between worry for Tommy and the drive to follow through with the mission, to find Somers and get his confession.

“Digg?”

The answer is instantaneous: “What’s wrong?”

“Tommy’s hurt. Listen to the radio and let me know what’s wrong.” The bike roars to life under him, lurching forward onto the road.

“Where are you going?”

He weaves around a bus, narrowly avoiding a car and zipping past an ambulance moving in the opposite direction, towards Tommy. He’s done all he can here. He can check on Tommy later, in the hospital. Right now he has other things to attend to.

“To get Martin Somers’s confession.”

...

A nice dinner was all he had wanted, a nice dinner where he could talk about nothing and everything with the woman he loves. Things were going great: she was resting against him, letting down her walls, relaxing.

He was getting ready to ask her out on a real date when the door had burst in.

“Oh, God! Tommy!”

He frowns at the desperation in Laurel’s voice, wondering what’s wrong. She sounds like she might be crying, but that doesn’t make sense. Why would she be crying?

“Tommy! Come on! Talk to me!”

He should just open his eyes.

“Oh my god! Tommy! Please!”

There’s something wet dropping on his face and it shocks him enough to open his eyes just as another of Laurel’s tears lands on his cheek. The relief in her eyes is palpable. He tries to move to comfort her, a move hindered by a spasm of pain that leaves him sprawled on the floor as his memories come rushing back.

A woman with white hair, an archer in green, flying knives, jumping in front of Laurel...and then the pain. So that’s what happened: he was hit with a knife. He remembers staggering from the room, Laurel half-carrying him. He must have passed out at some point because he’s fairly certain she didn’t have that shotgun earlier.
“What happened?” His voice is hoarse and his eyes drift down to the silver handle of a knife sticking out of his chest.

“Shhh,” Laurel whispers, pressing a wad of cloth against the wound without removing the blade. “Don’t try to move.”

“Laurel!” Quentin Lance’s voice calls out, hoarse with worry. “Laurel!”

“In here!” She calls through the open doorway, eyes locked on his.

Tommy lifts his hand to hers over his wound, pressing down. It hurts but he’s no longer feeling faint. All the red isn’t making him feel better, but he doesn’t feel like he’s dying. Although, when Detective Lance comes storming into the room with his gun out, he thinks for a minute the man is actually worried about him. It might be the first time the detective hasn’t threatened to shoot him before.

“We need a medic in here. NOW!” Detective Lance roars, dropping to the floor to apply more pressure to his wound.

“I’m surprised you’re not the one who shot me,” Tommy mutters, forcing a smile to his lips.

The detective shoots him a dark look. “If you can joke like that, there’s still hope for you, Merlyn.”

“Does that mean you’re not going to shoot me?” Joking takes away the pain...until he attempts to chuckle and then it come screaming back with a vengeance, forcing an unwelcome groan from his lips.

“I’ll wait until you stop bleeding first,” the detective mutters back, stepping out of the way as the EMTs arrive and start checking him.

Tommy nods, ignoring the medics, because if he looks down or thinks too much about what they’re doing, there’s a good possibility he’d get sick. “Sounds good. I look forward to it.”

He knows he must be delusional when he sees Lance’s approving nod as the EMTs roll him away: there’s no way that man would ever approve of him dating his daughter. Yeah, he’s pretty sure the man wasn’t joking about shooting him.

...

“Tommy’s fine. In fact, the cops are on their way to your location as we speak,” Digg announces over the comms.

Oliver relaxes underneath the hood, letting out a breath he didn’t know he was holding as he sizes up Somers from across the open room, arrow aimed at the man’s head. There are already two arrows pinning the man to the giant crate behind him by his clothes and he’s practically shaking where he stands.

“Please! You’ve got the wrong guy! I never did anything! I’m innocent,” Somers protests, terror raising his voice an octave.

“You’re lying!” Oliver growls, releasing an arrow that thuds into the wood inches from the his head.

“It wasn’t me! It was the Triad!” Somers latches onto the idea: “The Triad killed Victor Nocenti!”

“Acting on whose instructions?!” Oliver’s not about to let him take this out. It’s not going to take the
police long to realize who must have sent the Triad after Laurel Lance. And he needs Somers’s confession to make it stick. And all it will take is one last arrow, which he releases with a final shout: “Whose!?”

“Alright, alright! It was me!” Somers cries, cringing away from the arrow that lands so close to his head that it cut a few hairs.

Oliver smiles. Now the police have Somers and Chen Na Wei.

He saunters up to Somers, content that he’s got time to spare before the police arrive. The man squirms, trying to get away while only able to turn into the arrows millimeters away from his head.

He clips the blinking recording on Somers’s shirt, where the police can easily find it as the first, faint wail of sirens reaches him. Perfect timing.

“What’re you doing?” Somers demands, pulling as far away from the vigilante as he can.

Oliver smirks. “Making sure what they have sticks. You went after a detective’s daughter. Not a good choice.”

Shouted pleas and whimpers echo behind him as he leaves the premises, this time without nearly getting corned by the police. The pride at successfully changing the way the mission panned out is severely subdued at the cost: Tommy.

Tommy, who was never involved before, who hated his crusade, who wanted him to quit, was hurt by the shift. Something he changed put Tommy in danger, and who knew what little thing it was. He had shifted so many things in regard to Tommy.

He needs to get to the hospital, to check on his injured friend, but Oliver Queen doesn’t know Tommy’s hurt, so instead of racing to the hospital, Oliver moves through the city on his motorcycle, back to the Foundry where Diggle’s waiting for him to debrief.

“Help! He-Ahhhhhh!!”

Oliver whips the bike around towards the scream before he can think through the decision, veering sharply to the machine into a nearby alley to leave the bike. He slips the bow from his back and heads towards the commotion as fast as he can.

“Stop! Please!” A woman’s voice pleads before it’s overpowered by muffled sobs.

“Shut up, bitch!” A man’s voice hisses as Oliver rounds the corner.

There are four of them pinning the girl to the wall, one effectively covering her mouth as tears stream down her face and she struggles against the other hands holding her down to no avail.

Oliver pulls an arrow, nocking it and preparing to fire, when a familiar red hoodie bursts from the other end of the alley, stopping short as he sees the commotion. Oliver holds his position, watching the scene with interest. He doesn’t know this Roy well. He isn’t the kid who followed the Hood with awe.

“Hey! What are you guys doing?” Roy demands.

“Unless you want to join, get out of here, Harper.” One of the guys shouts.

He swallows thickly and Oliver adjusts his aim. He shouldn’t be waiting to see what Roy will do on
his own: he should be taking out the would-be rapists.

“Come on, guys. Let her go. You don’t want to do this.”

One of the guys drops the girl, rounding on Roy. “You wanna take her place?”

“I’m not going to let you rape her.”

Oliver nods in approval at the boy standing up for something even though his voice shakes and he’s clearly out of his league.

“What are you going to do? Rob us?” Another of the goons laughs, relaxing his grip on the girl, who’s watching the display with desperate fascination.

Reluctantly, Roy’s hands curl into fists, and he sets up to fight. “You don’t have to do this.”

“Look on the bright side, Harper: that rank hoodie of yours will hide the blood.” Cracking knuckles, two of the boys move toward Roy, intent on fighting.

The other two turn back to the girl who starts struggling again, lashing out as much as she’s able, but she can’t stop them from ripping her shirt. The arrow flies from the bow the instant he sees them grabbing at her clothes, impaling an arm to pin one assaulter to the wall.

“Step away from the girl!”

Six sets of eyes jerk to his, but then, an arrow sticking through someone’s arm will do that to a group of people.

“Get out of here, freak.” The last guy holding the girl pulls a gun from his waistband, pointing it sideways, gangster style at Oliver. He releases another arrow, knocking the gun from the kid’s hands.

“Last chance;” he growls. The girl is now free, and she kicks the guy in front of her in the balls before racing towards the end of the alley, still shaking and whimpering in terror. She makes it several steps before another boy appears from down the alley, holding her in place.

“Let’s get him, boys!” the kid yells, reaching down to grab his gun.

Three arrows is all it takes, three arrows to fell the boys attempting to rape a girl in an alley: two caught in the same net arrow, one hit with a tazer, one sent running by the commotion, and the last – the one who had been the ringleader – was taken out by a solid punch from Roy.

“Digg;” he whispers into the comms. “Call the police. You’ve got my location.”

“Roger.”

He hops down from the dumpster, striding past Roy towards the head of the alley were the girl is curled, sobbing. “Hey;” he whispers, squatting down beside her, cautious about her reaction to another male presence. “It’s okay. You’re safe now.”

She whimper and then throws her arms around him, pulling him down into a hug. She squeezes him tighter, breath coming in quick relieved breaths. “Thank you,” she mutters, over and over again in his ear. “You saved me.”

He pats her on the back and pulls away. He glances back at Roy wiping blood from his face. “Let’s get you to the alley. The police are on their way. They’re going to need you to make a statement.”
He leads her with an arm at her back to the bright ring of a streetlight, throwing a look back over his shoulder. “You too, kid.”

“Okay.” She nods numbly.

Seeing that she’s capable of standing on her own two feet, Oliver backs up slowly, slinking back into the shadows so he can disappear into the night.

“Wait. Where are you going?” She asks meekly, wringing her hands as she watches him. “I...I don’t know if I can do this alone.”

“The police are less than five minutes out,” Digg announces in his ear.

Oliver’s eyes lock on the shivering girl, her big brown eyes staring into his, damaged and terrified. He can’t just leave her in this state. He would never forgive himself if anything happened to her.

“The police are almost here. I’ll be watching.” He pulls out a grappling arrow. “You’re safe. Roy will stay with you.”

The boy in questions looks startled as they both look at him, but he nods slowly despite shifting uneasily.

“Wait!”

Oliver turns back.

“What’s your name?” She immediately shakes her head. “I mean, what do they call you?”

Oliver pauses, struck by the question because he hadn’t really expected it. He’s not the Hood, like he was the first time, and he’s not really the Arrow either. What sticks in his memory is a name tossed around by Malcolm Merlyn at a dinner party. It might not be great, but it was still better than Robin Hood: “Green Arrow.”

Roy snorts indignantly but the girl nods slowly as Oliver flies up in the air just as blue and red lights round the corner for the third time that night. Life was never this hectic the first time, but he’s thankful he was here this time to save the poor girl from her assailters.

... “You’re lucky, Mr. Merlyn. The knife missed all the major organs. There was a lot of blood, but a faction of an inch in any direction and we would have been hard pressed to save you.”

He nods groggily at the doctor in the white lab coat, focused more on the brunette in the chair beside his hospital bed, clutching his hand. She’s still here, and he can’t believe it.

“You did suffer a minor concussion, which is why you blacked out, but as you were fine overnight, we can actually release you later today. You just need to take it easy and not pull a stitch. I’ll send you home with some pain meds. And we’ll have you back in a couple weeks to take the stitches out.”

“Thanks, Doc.”

“Yes, thank you Doctor Moss,” Laurel repeats, squeezing Tommy’s hand.

The elder gentleman nods again, leaving them in private. Tommy’s grateful for the chance to return all his attention to the woman next to him. She’s still wearing last night’s clothes and she looks like
she’s barely slept. He remembers her being there when they woke him up every couple hours throughout the night, yet he has no idea why they let her stay in the room. Wasn’t that usually only for family members?

“How are you doing?” He asks her softly, squeezing the hand clasped in his.

“Shouldn’t I be asking you that?” She raises her eyebrows at him, worry still lining her face despite her confrontational words as her eyes scan him like maybe the doctor missed something.

“Yeah, well, I’m pretty sure that woman wasn’t there to kill me.”

Laurel presses her lips together, glancing at the hospital door and back. She takes a deep breath, nerves close to the surface as she turns her attention back to him. “Her name was Chen Na Wei. She’s a member of the Chinese Triad. Martin Somers sent her to kill me, just like he sent her to kill Victor Nocenti.”

Tommy blinks. He hadn’t expected that much news. He was only sort of joking about her wanting to kill Laurel. It makes sense the more he thinks about it, but he doesn’t like thinking that his girlfriend was a target of the Chinese mob (or was it mafia? He doesn’t know the difference really).

“The man in the hood, the one who burst through the window...he was apparently very busy last night. He recorded Somers’s confession and left it for the police, and then stopped an assault and attempted rape.”

Oliver...

Tommy stares at her, eyes wide. “What?”

She shakes her head. “That’s not important. What matters is that everyone involved is in jail, and that where they’ll be staying for the foreseeable future.” She smiles at him. “And my dad’s just waiting outside to get your statement.”

He nods numbly, still processing how much worse this would be if Oliver hadn’t been there to stop the white-haired woman, he probably wouldn’t be alive right now, but more than that, he had gotten a confession from the man behind everything and saved some innocent girl from rapists. No matter what he said, Oliver definitely did have a Robin Hood complex. It was just ridiculous.

“How you feeling, Merlyn?” Lance stands at the foot of his bed, looking grim as ever in his rumpled blue button up and worn jacket.

“Been better,” he answers honestly, aware of the holstered weapon on the man’s belt. Not that he thinks Lance will shoot him in a hospital after protecting his daughter, but he’s in the habit of watching out for guns owned by the fathers of girls he’s dating.

“Are you okay to answer a couple of questions?”

“Ask away.” The sooner this is done, the sooner he can leave, and the sooner he can talk to Oliver about what happened.

“Alright, what were doing in my daughter’s apartment?”

Laurel groans. “Dad...”

“Having dinner. I got Thai and we were just talking.” And it had been pretty damn nice until the door was kicked in.
“And what’s your relationship with my daughter?”

He opens his mouth and then realizes he doesn’t know the answer, because while he wants them to be more than friends, he’s not even sure she sees him as a friend. However, now, Laurel has had enough.

“If you don’t have any more relevant questions, I’m going to have to ask you to leave.” She glares at her father.

Lance sighs. “Fine. What do you remember from last night?” He slips to a page in his little notebook, pen poised.

Tommy thinks back to last night, to cuddling on the couch and the events that followed. “We were sitting on the couch, eating dinner, when the front door just flew open.” He tries to slow the scene down in his mind, to remember everything he can, anything that may be of use to the detective. “I remember she had white hair and knives. I pushed Laurel out of the way and ended up with a knife in my side. Then there was glass breaking and there was another guy with a bow dressed in green leather.”

He wonders how much more he can say, because that’s pretty much everything he’s got. Lance still waits for him to continue as Tommy searches for the words.

“Then the guy in green-


Tommy frowns. “What?”

“The guy in the hood and green leather. He apparently calls himself the Green Arrow, like he’s some kind of superhero.” Lance huffs, shaking his head.

“Okay...so the Green Arrow started fighting the white-haired woman—“

“China White,” Lance offers again.

This time Tommy just nods and continues. “And Laurel and I ran into the other room. I must have passed out then and I woke up right before you came into the room.” He shrugs nonchalantly. “That’s all I know.”

“AAlright, thanks, kid.” He slips his notebook back into his pocket and freezes for a moment. Then he stiffly holds out his hand. “Thanks for saving my daughter, Merlyn.”

In a daze, he shakes the proffered hand, smiling meekly. “Always.”

The resulting nod of approval has Tommy’s heart soaring, even though the detective looks pained at the action, like he forced it against his will. He mutters, “yeah, yeah,” as he walks from the room. It’s clear the detective doesn’t approve entirely, but he’s also not objecting.

“Sorry about that,” Laurel sighs, “And thank you.” She leans forward, pressing chaste kiss to his cheek.

After getting stabbed last night, it doesn’t seem as scary to just ask, “Laurel, would you like to go out to dinner?”

The bright smile that follows is totally worth it.
Chapter 12

“Oliver? What are you doing here?”

He blinks, turning to face the door to Tommy’s apartment, the door he was trying to get the supervisor to open. Felicity stands there, head tilted as she takes him in and then turns to the building’s supervisor.

“Don’t worry about him, Doug. Oliver’s a friend of Tommy’s.” Felicity steps out, closing the door behind her.

Oliver notices the panda flats on her feet and looks away before she can catch him grinning.

“I can take it from here. Thanks, Doug.”

“Always a pleasure, Miss Smoak.” The ornery man he had been arguing with just moments before vanishes into a blushing fool who can’t make eye contact with either of them. He disappears quickly into the elevator, glancing back only as the doors are already closing to catch a glimpse of Felicity.

Oliver turns back to her only to find her watching him expectantly, curiously. “So what are you doing here?”

“I heard Tommy was in the hospital. I thought he could use some-“

“Clothes?” She asks innocently, holding up the bag clasped her hands.

He opens his mouth, at a loss for words. “How did you get in anyway?” It’s the only question he can think of at the moment as those amused, blue eyes stare at him through those glasses.

She holds up a shiny piece of metal. “Tommy’s too lazy to open the door when I knock, so he just gave me a key.”

Sounds like Tommy. Oliver chuckles, shaking his head. “I should have guessed he’d ask you to get his stuff.”

“And why’s that?” She frowns at him.

“You’re his best friend now, right?” Oliver asks as he shoots her a wink.

Felicity shakes her head at him and leads the way to the elevator. “You’re still his best friend. We just have shared custody.” She smiles at him, leaning against the side of the metal box as they start to descend. He wants to press her up against the cool metal and kiss her so hard she forgets her name, especially when she smiles up at him like that.
“Do I have something on my face?” The moment shatters as she turns to look in the reflective panel.

“What?” Oliver asks, blinking at the sudden change in conversation.

“You were staring,” she says, turning back to him, content with her appearance. “So did you hear what happened? Tommy didn’t give me any details over the phone, well, it was Laurel’s phone, so I know he was with Laurel and that he’s in the hospital because they gave him some pretty strong meds. But I can’t imagine she knows I was the one he called. Not that she doesn’t like me or anything. She doesn’t even know me...”

Her nose scrunches as she thinks of an incident, a memory involving Laurel, a memory he has to stop himself from asking about as she continues to speak:

“Anyway, he was at Laurel’s and something happened. That’s all I’ve got. It must have been pretty bad to get him sent to the hospital,” she mutters, “but it couldn’t have been too bad because he actually sounded like he was smiling.”

He nods, a hand moving to rest on her lower back without thinking as they walk out of the elevator. She glances back at him, but otherwise doesn’t comment on the contact. Instead of withdrawing his hand, he continues to guide her out of the building. He spots her red mini cooper down the street, a couple cars down from where his town car waits with Digg leaning against the side.

“I’d offer you a ride to the hospital, but you’re all...” she gestures at him vaguely, “big and muscle-y, and my car is all teeny tiny. And, oh god, please tell me I didn’t just say that out loud.” She makes a pained face as Oliver chuckles.

“We’ll meet you at the hospital, Felicity,” Oliver says, hand dropping from the small of her back just outside her car.

She turns back to him, tilting her head like she’s trying to puzzle something out. He copies the motion with a friendly smile. “What?”

Felicity points to her car. “How did you know this was my car?”

He briefly entertains the idea of lying to her, but knowing she sees right through him, he just smiles softly. “You drove Tommy home from Big Belly Burger the other night.”

Contemplatively, she nods, but he can see the wheels spinning in her head as she watches him. “Uh-huh.”

“See you at the hospital, Felicity.” He can feel her eyes on him the whole walk back to the car, and he can’t resist looking back as he slides into the car. It stops him short as he locks eyes with her. She’s still looking at him like he’s a puzzle for her to solve, an enigma. And he knows without a doubt, she’s going to figure everything out faster this time. He can’t say it worries him too much.

... 

Oliver Queen, Felicity muses as she watches him walk back to his town car, is a peculiar person.

He’s what her mom would call “Sex on a Stick,” which was a phrase she never really understood but seemed to be the only description she could come up with to describe the physical specimen in front of her. Not that she’s looking. She’s definitely not staring at his ass as he walks away from her.

She jerks her eyes up, frowning at the back of Oliver’s head in contemplation. Tommy described him as a flirtatious playboy, a capricious lover, a compulsive cheater, and a loyal-to-the-end best friend.
The man in front of her, the man who rested a hand on the small of her back, who chuckled, who hovered almost protectively was none of those things. He was...aware. That’s the only word she can think of to describe him. He controlled himself, knew how his actions affected those around him. He was more cautious. And he cared.

Well, she couldn’t know that for certain, but she had a feeling.

He turns when he reaches his car. She expects a playboy smile, the kind Tommy throws over his shoulder whenever he leaves. Instead his lips quirk up at the corners in an almost smile, while his eyes remain serious as he takes a moment to look her over, almost like he’s checking to make sure she’s safe.

The next second he’s sliding into the car and pulling away.

Felicity draws a shaky breath, wondering what just happened as she walks around to the driver’s side of the car. She couldn’t shake the feeling that Oliver knew her. His actions – the hand on her back, the protective stance, the staring – were more personal than she would have thought of a man who was alone for five years on an island, who hadn’t even met her before everything.

She turns the key in the ignition, her mind drifting the Martha Jones’s first meeting with the Tenth Doctor – how he knew her, but she just thought he was crazy. She shakes her head. *Time travel.* Purely sci-fi and it has no place in her normal life. In normal life you don’t get dragged on adventures every day or explore new places. She did all her exploring online, and she’s past the whole hacking thing. She’s going legit.

The engine rumbles to life as she turns the key in the ignition. Her eye catches on the worn white envelope sitting in the seat next to her, thoughts of Oliver Queen vanished in a moment.

It’s the letter she’s been waiting for, from the Head of the new Applied Sciences division. She knew they were slated to work on some highly promising new projects, so she had applied. Her work potential was stifled in the IT department with a boss who envied her ability. Her previous supervisor, Becky, had been moved to the new department in its beginning stages, and Felicity had hoped to join her there, somewhere she could use her brain for something more than deleting viruses.

But by the looks of the small white envelope, her boss had stonewalled her progress yet again.

She sighs as she pulls out into traffic. Maybe it’s time to start looking for another job. She’s sure Becky would be able to give her a glowing recommendation, even if her boss, Foul Fowler, was determined to give her a bad one.

Felicity purses her lips as she thinks back to the offers she received out of school: STAR Labs, Wayne Enterprises. It might take longer than she wants since she’d have to move, but it’s something she should start to consider. Tommy would be sad to see her go, yet he would probably be the only one to miss her in Starling. Except maybe her neighbor’s cat who inexplicably would escape and find its way into her living room.

She’ll have to talk to him about it after the hospital...that’s not going to be a fun conversation.

A spot opens up close to the front door as she drives by and she fist bumps her good luck, pulling into the opening with a happy smile. At least the universe is still sending some good things her way. Maybe her luck is finally turning around.

She shoots Tommy a text as she slides from the car to let him know she’s here with his clothes. She’d nearly had a heart attack when he called her this morning to ask her to go to his apartment. He
sounded so casual about it, like it was as normal as him inviting himself over for a movie night.

A minute later she wanted to slap him upside the head when he started to prattle on about how Laurel was there with him and how she said yes to dinner, which was how she knew he was fine. Worrying about Tommy would have her going prematurely grey. He was like a little kid who didn’t know right from wrong and always ended up in trouble.

Finally looking up from her phone, Felicity catches sight of something peculiar in the parking lot: Oliver Queen helping a woman in labor walk slowly through the parking lot. She’s only a couple cars down from them, but even from here, she can see the woman digging her hand into Oliver’s arm. He’s remarkably calm about it, talking to her softly.

It’s a curiosity to see the former playboy interacting with a pregnant woman without freaking out.

She approaches them slowly from behind to hear:

“He’s not in the picture.” The woman stops again, groaning in pain at another contraction.

“I’m sorry to hear that,” Oliver offer, his voice soft, genuine. She’s surprised because she knows Tommy would be worried, but Felicity would still have to pull him along to help.

“That’s okay. Queen Consolidated offers a pretty good maternity leave and there’s daycare for employees, so thank you for that.”

Felicity blinks...she knows that voice.

“So you know who I am.”

“Hard not to,” the woman gasps as another contraction hits.

“Becky?” Felicity asks as the pieces finally click, stepping forward to grab her other arm. “I thought your due date wasn’t for another two weeks!”

She can feel Oliver’s eyes darting toward her now, even as he steps out of the way to let the nurses maneuver Becky into the wheelchair they pulled out.

“You and me both,” Becky mutters.

Felicity shoves the bag of Tommy’s clothes at Oliver and continues to walk with Becky as the nurses wheel her in, her hand clasped in Becky’s as one of the nurses asks Becky rapid-fire questions from a clipboard. She rubs circles into Becky’s arm, whispering words of comfort and even a promise to call and check in during the week, even though her mother was sleeping over to help her adjust to life with a newborn.

She stays with Becky until they wheel her into the elevator to take her to the maternity ward, squeezing her hand one last time before she disappears.

...

Oliver knows he’s staring at her, his angel who cares so much about everyone else. He’s somewhere else right now, imagining a day in the future where Felicity’s the one in the wheelchair, squeezing his hand like it’s her only lifeline.

But that’s too far in the future.

He shakes his head, turning away from the blonde only to catch Digg’s eyes. Diggle had been
watching him the entire time. He could see the understanding in John’s eyes, knew that he didn’t have to explain anything.

Felicity just turns back, reaching the bag of clothes in his hand. “Sorry,” she apologizes. “Becky works in the IT department. She was my direct supervisor when I was first hired.”

Oliver moves the bag out of her reaches he presses the elevator button. “So what floor is Tommy on?”

She shakes her head, unimpressed by his show of chivalry, but she lets him keep the bag as she presses the button for the fourth floor. Instead of questioning it, she turns from him to Diggle, holding out her hand. “Hi. I don’t think we’ve met. I’m Felicity...Smoak. I’m a friend of Tommy’s. Weren’t you in Big Belly Burger?”

“John Diggle. And yes,” he admits reluctantly. “I’m Oliver’s bodyguard.”

“Nice to meet you, John.” She smiles radiantly. “Must be terrible following this guy around all day.”

Oliver snorts and shakes his head, facing forward as his lips twitch upward in a smile.


“So you haven’t been treated to any all-nighters at strip clubs yet? Those are some of Tommy’s favorite stories about their antics.”

Oliver rolls his eyes. He knows the stories Tommy would share and there’s no danger of those events repeating themselves. Unless it works for an alibi, and Diggle knows that.

“No scandalous stories?” She teases, leaving the elevator with Diggle before Oliver, so he’s left following them.

“Not even a one night stand,” Digg says, playing along.

“Really?” Felicity turns over her shoulder to look at him, an eyebrow raised. “Not a single rendezvous for the former playboy?”

Oliver grins. “Five years on an island can change a person.”

She watches him, nodding, that thoughtful expression returned. Of course, that’s the moment her filter disappears. “I can see that.” Her mouth falls open and she shakes her head. “I didn’t mean that. I just meant that you’re obviously not the same person. There’s your hair for one. This haircut is so much better than that serial killer look you had going on. Not that you looked like a killer...I was...I’ll just stop talking. Now.”

Oliver chuckles, a hand coming out to grip her elbow as they round the corner. “It was a ridiculous haircut.”

“Ollie?”

Felicity stiffens beside him and Oliver closes his eyes, not wanting to face Laurel, but knowing he doesn’t really have a choice.

“What are you doing here?” She asks, crossing her arms over her chest, looking a little less than put together after a night in the hospital. Despite the animosity between them, he’s still happy to see that
she’s okay. He put her life at risk last night too.

“I just wanted to check on Tommy.”

“And who are your friends?” Her glare lingers on Felicity, her upper lip curling slightly in distaste.

“Clean clothes! Thank God!” Tommy declares, racing from the room in the white hospital gown to grab the bag and disappear inside before anyone can ask a question, flashing them when he turns around. “Felicity, you are a goddess!” He calls through the closed door.

Laurel turns to the blonde and Oliver fights the urge to step in front of Felicity, to protect her.

“Hi,” Felicity waves to the other girl. “I’m Felicity. You must be Laurel, gorgeous Laurel.”

“And who are you?”

“We talked on the phone that one time...” She winces at her own tactlessness and starts wringing her hands, waving them about like she does when she’s nervous. “I’m just a friend of Tommy’s so you have nothing to worry about. He’s like a brother. That’s it. There was this one kiss thing a couple years back, but it meant nothing. He’s in lo-”

He doesn’t know if it’ll work, but he knows that if she keeps talking Laurel’s likely to blow a gasket and the hospital isn’t the place for this. He lifts his hand, lightly pressing his hand into the small of her back. It’s enough to get her to cut off mid-word as her brain catches up with her words.

“We’re just friends,” she sums up with a smile.

Laurel frowns at her, eyes darting to her entire audience. They linger on the hand Oliver has pressed to Felicity’s back, but he refuses to remove it under Laurel’s scrutiny. Instead of escalating, she turns away to talk with Tommy, now dressed in normal clothes and ready to leave the hospital.

Tommy meets his eyes over Laurel’s head, the “we-need-to-talk” look loud and clear. Tommy knows he was the one in the green suit last night, and now he wants an explanation. That’s not going to be a fun conversation.

He nods. His hand withdraws reluctantly from Felicity’s back and she raises her eyebrows at him, but he just shrugs.

Pleasantries and stilted conversation follows: he tries to get along with Laurel and she barely attempts to talk with anyone. Felicity babbles her way through the conversation, acting as a light-hearted diversion from the tension. It does little to help and they part ways soon after. Laurel isn’t too happy to spend any amount of time around Oliver and, he suspects, also Felicity.

Digg keeps an eye on him as they walk Felicity back to her car. He takes the hint and walks past her car towards the town car. Oliver lingers, searching for the words to express what he wants to say, without stuttering or speaking in sentence fragments.

“What are you doing?” Felicity asks as she turns to face him. “You’re following me,” she adds at his confused expression.

“Oh, sorry.” He shakes his head. “I was wondering if you wanted to get lunch Friday.”

“Friday?”

“Part of the custody deal, remember?”
Her mouth opens in an ‘Oh’. “I thought that was...You really want to have lunch?”

He shrugs. “I could use someone to talk to who didn’t know me before.”

The wheels are turning in her mind again: He can see the calculating look in her eyes, but she nods in agreement. “Okay. Big Belly Burger again?”

Oliver grins, nodding. “Great. See you then.”

...\n
His hand grazes her arm in goodbye, but she doesn’t think he notices. He’s been doing it all morning, little touches to her arm, her back, her shoulder. They’re almost unconscious, like he needs the contact, like it centers him. It’s familiar, almost a habit for him.

It’s like he knows her better than he should. He’s familiar with her, relaxed. It should probably bug her that he’s overly friendly, but since she found herself sinking into his touch, she can’t help but think there’s more to it.

He stopped her babbling earlier easily, like it was a habit, like he knew she was getting herself in too deep. She’s never had someone do that for her before.

It’s conflicting and confusing. He’s Tommy’s best friend, practically a stranger to her, and yet...She agreed to lunch with him, lunch that sounds suspiciously like a low key date. Or she would think it’s a date if it was anywhere else. The way he asked her...

No. You’re being ridiculous, she scolds herself. He’s not some fantasy action figure come to show her a new way of life. She needs to get her head out of her TV shows. She’s been watching too much Netflix lately.

He might look like he could star in some action movie with those muscles and that stubble, but she’s not cut out for that life. She needs to get back to reality, where she needs to start looking for another job, a better paying one where she’s actually challenged and appreciated.

A couple hours later, she finds herself contemplating jobs across the country. Sure, she has an in with Merlyn Global. Tommy has said on more than one occasion that if she really wants, he can get her a time to speak to his father. Although, after hearing some of Tommy’s stories, she doesn’t want to get involved with a man who basically abandoned his son.

None of the other tech companies in Starling City offered the type of opportunities she was looking for. She wanted to do groundbreaking work, to test the limits of modern computer sciences, of modern technology. It left her with limited options: Queen Consolidated (who didn’t want her in Applied Sciences), STAR Labs in Central City, and Wayne Enterprises in Gotham (which involved moving across the country again).

She had already sent an email to Barbara Gordon, a friend from MIT who currently worked in Wayne Enterprises IT Department, and was working on a message to Harrison Wells of STAR Labs since his HR department was apparently non-existent. The man did all the hiring himself and she wasn’t sure it that boded well or not. Wells was a genius. It would be an honor to work with him, but there would be some details she would need to work out.

Felicity slouches back in the seat as she hits send. Two emails and she’s exhausted. He didn’t realize how much she loved Starling until she decided she should contemplate leaving. Starling had become her home.
She just can’t stay at a job where her potential is being wasted.

…

“What’s up with the blonde?” Digg asks, glancing sideways at Oliver as he takes another sip from his water bottle. The cool air of the Foundry now humid and ripe after their intense sparring session.

Oliver looks up, brushing the lingering sweat off his forehead. “That’s Felicity. She’s a friend of Tommy’s.”

“Am I supposed to believe that?”

Oliver turns to the laptop on the table before him instead of looking towards Digg. He doesn’t say anything: he doesn’t need to. Digg’s probably already seen through him.

“So who is she?” Digg repeats, taking his silence for the answer it is.

“No one.”

Digg snorts. “Please, you can’t tell me that girl doesn’t mean something to you, or future you anyway.”

“Felicity Smoak,” he admits in a single breath, finally turning back to John Diggle, “Tech guru and all around genius, graduated MIT at 19 with a Masters in Cyber Security and Computer Science.”

“That girl is your tech support?” Digg asks, slamming his water bottle down on the table with more force than is strictly necessary.

“She’s good at her job.”

John scowls at him, disapproval clearly etched in his face.

Oliver sighs. “John, she signed on fully aware of what we were doing. She makes her own choices. Although this time...we need to train her more.”

“You’re going to bring her back in?” Diggle demands. “That girl wouldn’t last five minutes in your illegal, vigilante-filled world!”

“You’d be surprised,” Oliver grins, remembering her words: “my life, my choice”. He chuckles as he glances over his shoulder at Digg. “Besides, like I said, she makes her own choices.”

Digg doesn’t look like he’s done with the conversation, but Oliver doesn’t give him the chance to continue the interrogation. He spins the laptop to face Diggle. They’ve got other things to worry about:

“Our next target is Sam Holder, and he is being targeted by Floyd Lawton, alias Deadshot.” Oliver pulls up what little information he could find on the small laptop. “In two days, Deadshot will attempt to take out Holder on the roof of his apartment building. He’s hired to take out the buyers for the Unidac Auct-“

Bang bang.

Oliver breaks off mid-sentence. He and Diggle both turn to the metal door at the top of the stairs, Digg’s hand on his firearm at his waist. He waves Digg off as he walks up the stairs, wishing he had installed the camera already.
“Oliver! I know you’re there! You weren’t at home so you must be here.” Tommy’s voice rings through the door and the banging starts up again.

Digg’s hand drops from his gun and he returns to his seat. Oliver sighs, swinging the door open. He steps aside to let Tommy in.

“Good. I didn’t know where else you would be.” Tommy walks gingerly down the stairs, one step at a time as to not jostle his stitches too much.

“You should be resting at home, Tommy.” He follows his friend down the stairs. “You were stabbed last night.”

“Yeah, but Laurel and I are all in one piece because of you.” Tommy holds out his hand to Oliver. “Thank you.”

He stares at his best friend and can’t bring himself to shake his hand. “It was nothing, Tommy. Really.”

“It wasn’t nothing! You saved our lives!” He insists, taking another step closer to Oliver.

Oliver shrugs. He’s not going to let his friend thank him for putting his and Laurel’s lives in danger.

Tommy falls back a step, the distance between them grows exponentially with the frown that flits across his face. “The one thing I can’t figure out is why you were there. How did you know something was happening?”

Oliver runs a hand through his hair, conscious of his bad decision that’s come to bite him in the ass. A sigh escapes, and Tommy knows immediately there’s something Oliver hid from him.

“We were waiting outside to apprehend China White and her two men,” he admits with faltering words as he waits for the reaction he knows is coming.

“Waiting? You knew they were coming?!” His voice raises in anger. The words echo in the still mostly-empty basement.

Digg winces, but falls back to let Oliver handle the questions.

Oliver closes his eyes. He doesn’t want to answer the question, to confirm Tommy’s suspicion and condemn himself. Unfortunately, that’s all the answer he needs to give.

“You asshole!” With his eyes closed, he doesn’t see anything, but he definitely feels Tommy’s punch collide with his jaw. He rolls back with the punch to lessen the impact, yet restrains the instinct to hit back.

“You knew what was going on! You knew we would be attacked, but you let them?! You used us as bait!”

Tommy swings again. Oliver ducks this time, weaving under the sloppy punch. It’s during that motion that he spots the blotch of red in Tommy’s side. He grabs Tommy by the shoulders to keep him from hurting himself further.

“Digg, grab the med kit!” He wrestles with Tommy, maneuvering him back to the table. “Tommy, you pulled your stitches. We need to stitch you back up.”

“You knew!” Tommy repeats, louder than before. “How could you do that? You put both our lives
in danger!"

“I didn’t know you were going to be there,” he confesses.

“So what? It was okay when you thought it was just going to be Laurel?! That you could just use her for bait?!”

“It wasn’t- It’s not-“

“Not what, Oliver? Not important? You put a woman you claimed to love to in danger! And for what? To catch a criminal! Laurel could have been killed!”

“She was safe, Tommy! We did everything to protect her.”

“I took a knife for her, Ollie! If I wasn’t there, she would have died!”

“You don’t think I know that, Tommy?! You think I haven’t been worried about that for the past day! I’ve agonized over this! You’re hurt because of me and there’s nothing I can do about that. It’s already happened.” His anger gets the better of him. “But I’m doing my best! I’m trying to do better this time!”

“This time?” Tommy asks.

Digg moves, jabbing a needle into Tommy’s side.

“Ow! What the hell?” Tommy frowns, hand pressed against his side where the pinch of the needle still stings. “What was that?”

“An anesthetic.” Digg pushes Tommy back, gets him to sit on the med table with little resistance.

“Wh-why?” his voice slurs. “Whad wazzin dat?”

“I need to stitch you up.” Digg pulls out his thread and lifts Tommy’s shirt. “And trust me: you can’t do with without a numbing agent.”

“And you can...,” Tommy trails off. He gestures down at the now-exposed black stitching on white skin.

“I had medic training in the Army.”

“That must come in handy,” he adds caustically.

“It does.” All eyes jump to Oliver and he shrugs at the stares. “It does.”

“I’m still mad at you,” Tommy mutters, but his heart isn’t in it anymore. He’s no longer angry, instead he’s resigned. “Don’t risk my girlfriend’s life again, okay? Huh...that’s the first time I’ve called her that...girlfriend.”

Oliver rolls his eyes. He turns away from the med table and looks back at the laptop.

Deadshot. Unidac Industries.

This was when he brought her in last time, when he started going to Felicity. But this time: he doesn’t need her because he already knows where Deadshot is going to strike. He will not bring her in if he doesn’t have to, not when he already has a lunch date with her.
Oliver contemplates the laptop.

He might not need her to find Lawton, but that doesn’t mean he couldn’t use her help.
Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

So sorry for updating late! Life got in the way, and the update was delayed, but HERE IT IS!!!! I hope you enjoy it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 13

“So remind me again why we’re going after a guy who’s going after the guys on your list,” Diggle asks over the comms.

Oliver adjusts his hood, pulling it lower to throw his face in shadow. He can’t decide if he misses the mask or not. The mask used to occasionally jab him in the eye or cause sweat to accumulate on his forehead. However, the grease paint gets everywhere.

“Because no matter what he’s done, James Holder doesn’t deserve to die on the top of this building.” Oliver adjust his grip on the bow. His eyes search the shadows for the figure he knows will appear soon: Floyd Lawton.

“But I thought this guy was on your list, in the notebook thing. If some other guy is killing him, why stop him?”

It takes Oliver a moment to adjust to hearing Tommy’s voice over the comms. He was hesitant about Tommy’s participation, but in the interest of truthfulness, he handed Tommy a comm and told him to watch the computers. His best friend wasn’t anywhere close to a good substitute for Felicity. Oliver was just hoping Tommy picked up a couple things from their favorite IT girl.

“Because Holder needs a chance to right his wrongs. And this isn’t about the list.” It’s about Unidac Industries and the earthquake machine. It’s the one puzzle piece Malcolm needs snatched up by someone else. Warren Patel hired Deadshot to kill the bidders. Even with the assassin, Malcolm had multiple people on his list in the bidding for the company. Although he can’t believe Malcolm would ever put his mother in real danger. His mother was Malcolm’s soft spot. If he ever thought Moira was in danger, Malcolm would have taken out Lawton himself.

“So it’s just a coincidence?” Diggle asks, disbelief echoes in his tone even over the comms.

“Not entirely. It’s still tied to the notebook.” And all this talking isn’t helping him hide in the shadows. “We need radio silence.”

“Roger.” Diggle responds.

“Wait. What? Why-” The comm cuts out and Oliver assumes Digg forcefully took the device from Tommy.

Oliver breathes a sigh of relief, adjusting his stance as he watches the vantage point where Lawton shot Holder from last time. He works better without unnecessary voices in his ears; Digg and Felicity were never unnecessary. Sure, Felicity could babble over the radio but it was usually relevant. Not to be hard on Tommy, but his contributions weren’t exactly helpful.
Lawton moves stealthily, slinking through the shadows with purpose. Oliver almost misses him. In the end, it’s Lawton’s confidence in his perch that allows Oliver to observe him from his hiding place.

Oliver allows him to get into position before emerging from his position, arrow nocked and pointed straight at Lawton’s back.

“Step away from the rifle.” The deepened, growl of the voice modulator brings sudden noise to the previously silent rooftop.

Lawton stiffens. He twists his head back and lets out a harsh laugh as he catches a glimpse of Oliver. “Sorry, Robin Hood. I don’t take orders from men in tights.”

He spares a grimace before he releases the arrow to impale Lawton’s arm. He’s not about to pull any punches when it comes to Floyd Lawton, even if they used his assistance later on. A couple temporary injuries aren’t going to hinder him months from now. After all, he got over getting stabbed in the eye. Hindsight says that’s not a reliable way to kill anyone.

“Shit!” Floyd curses. With a twist, he yanks a knife from his boot and throws it at Oliver’s throat. Oliver blocks it with his bow, ducking as Lawton pulls a handheld gun from some holster hidden on his body. A bullet grazes his arm and Oliver releases a string of swear words that would make his mother livid. In a fit of arrogance, he had left his herbs in the Foundry.

He ducks behind a pipe, pulls an arrow from his quiver, and turns to shoot back. Floyd already has his shot lined up and he pulls the trigger at the same time Oliver fires. The arrow clips Lawton’s shoulder, but the man is already in motion. He discharges a couple more bullets over his shoulder, leaving his rifle at the scene as he flees.

Oliver manages to fire off another arrow before Lawton gets out of range. He would pursue, but without the herbs, the curare will catch up with him before he manages to catch Lawton. And those shots will be called in soon.

“Digg,” he calls into the comms. “I’m coming in.”

The comms crackle back to life. “Roger.”

“I’m going to need the bag of herbs from my chest.”

He shoots the grappling arrow across the street, swinging down to his motorcycle as he starts to feel the effects of the poison. He races through traffic, focus solely on the road ahead as the curare starts to work its way into his system. He definitely got a larger dose than last time. Last time he was able to make it back to the foundry before he felt any mal-effects.

//So did you manage to stop him?// Tommy’s voice comes over the comms.

Oliver grits his teeth as he takes a corner too fast. He doesn’t want to snap at Tommy, so he keeps his mouth shut. The drug slows his reactions, affects his senses as he stumbles from his bike, clumsily aimed at the door to the basement.

The stairs prove to be another challenge after he manages to punch in the keycode on his third try.

“Dude, what’s up with you?” Tommy asks from the bottom of the stairs.

Oliver ignores him, eyes shut as he struggles to get down the stairs without falling. “Digg, the herbs.”
Tommy catches his arm, finally doing something useful as they hobble to the med table where Digg holds the pouch. Ignoring the confusion on their faces, Oliver grabs the bag and gestures to the waterbottle on his workstation.

Tommy complies, passing the bottle over as Oliver tosses a pinch of the herbs into his mouth and chases it with the water. Like always, he nearly gags on the taste, but he takes another swig of the water. He already feels the blackout coming on.

He meets Digg’s eyes and gestures to the wound in his arm. “Curare. I’ll be fine. Just need...nap.”

The black on the edge of his vision takes over and he’s gone.

...“Oh my God! Oliver!”

Diggle ignores Tommy’s frantic voice, instead reaching out to feel for Oliver’s pulse. It races under his fingertips, but it’s slowing down so whatever he did with those herbs must be working. Satisfied Oliver’s not in any immediate danger due to the poison; John turns his attention to the graze on Oliver’s arm.

It’s more a through and through than a graze with how much it cuts into the skin, but Digg’s seen much worse. The stitches are easy to find in the drawer. All in all, the med station is both well-stocked and organized, which truthfully makes Diggle a little uneasy considering it’s something Oliver from the Future thought necessary. Are there really that many injuries in their future?

“What are you...” Tommy frowns at him.

“I need you to help get this jacket off him,” Digg orders. It takes some effort to keep the annoyance out of his voice. Oliver isn’t a rich playboy anymore – he’s a soldier before anything else – but Tommy’s still the frivolous idiot and this is his trial by fire. Digg doesn’t have it in him to coddle the rich partyboy right now.

He expects questions, but Tommy just reaches for the zipper. Digg lifts Oliver’s dead weight as they work the jacket carefully off the injured arm. He lowers Oliver back to the table as Tommy tosses the jacket to the side.

“I need an IV bag, gauze, and medical tape from the cart,” He points in the general direction. He pulls on blue gloves and finally picks up the thread to stitch closed the wound.

“Heh! Man, that’s disgusting,” Tommy comments as the needle pierces skin for the first time.

John continues to ignore him as he methodically closes the open wound. It’s been a while since he had to use his Army medic training, but stitches were always the easiest.

“Hold the bag up to get the fluid dripping.”

Tommy holds the bag up immediately, high over his head in an overzealous effort to please. “So you’ve done this before?”

Diggle sighs as he finishes the last stitch, reaching over to hook Oliver into the IV. “I was trained as a medic.”

“And now you’re a bodyguard-slash-vigilante-sidekick?”
John sighs, pressing gauze over the cleaned stitch area. “Your friend’s convincing.”

Tommy chuckles. “That he is. How do you think we got into so much trouble?”

He nods, but he can’t say Tommy truly understands what’s going on. Oliver isn’t the boy Tommy remembers. The man in front of him deliberately puts himself in harm’s way. He’s been through so much that Tommy Merlyn just isn’t capable of understanding simply because he’s never been forced into those kinds of situations. But for this Oliver, the Oliver who thinks he’s from the future, who’s learning from past mistakes, this Oliver needs the playfulness of a friend unaffected by the darkness of the trauma he’s experienced. He needs the normalizing influence Tommy provides just as much as he needs Diggle’s tactical support.

“Is he going to be okay?”

Diggle nods. “He knows what he’s doing. He just needs to sleep it off.”

“Are you sure?”

Tommy’s worry for his friend is admirable, but completely unnecessary, from Diggle’s point of view. Oliver’s strong enough, and surprisingly enough, seems well adjusted to the point that he knows when to ask for help. It’s one of the things about Oliver that makes him consider that time travel is actually a thing.

Diggle crosses his arms as he leans against the workstation. Now that the immediate work is over, he has the chance to contemplate what Oliver told him.

There’s only one assassin he knows of with that MO, one person who could have done this, and that one person shot and killed his brother. And this Oliver from the future...he knew that already. He’d known who he was going to face.

He should have had back up on that roof. The only reason he wouldn’t ask for it was because he knew. The question was why he didn’t want Diggle there, why he wasn’t interested in killing Floyd Lawton.

That was a question he would have to ask Oliver when he woke up.

...

Tommy watches the sullen soldier as he glares off into the distance, and sighs. He gets the feeling he shouldn’t be down here. Whatever Oliver and his bodyguard – Diggle, he corrects himself – are doing, they don’t need him getting in the way.

He drops into the computer chair, spinning as he glances back at the laptop on the table. He can’t help but look at the computer set up with Felicity’s eyes. She would be personally offended by the lone laptop which looks like it’s suffered no small amount of abuse.

Mindlessly, he fiddles with the computer. It’s far more technical than his usual operating system, rigid looking. Felicity would know what to do with it. She’d probably harangue Oliver for such a pitiful set up and then spend hours setting up a new system.

Tommy shakes his head, chuckling at his own thoughts. Felicity’s not going to end up down here, let alone fixing up the computer in the basement. Sure she might get into some less-than-legal stuff when it comes to hacking, but she’s not into physical violence of any kind.

And it’s not like Oliver seems to really need that much help with the computer side of things.
“Do you think he got the guy who did this?” Tommy asks, breaking the silence. He can’t stand it anymore. In the silence, he keep imagining hearing the scampering of little rat feet. Or at least he hopes it’s his imagination because he would hate to be down here with vermin.

“We haven’t heard anything over the police scanner,” Diggle responds stiffly.

“So? Wouldn’t the police be keeping it quiet?”

Digg lets out an exasperated sigh. Apparently Tommy’s asking all the wrong questions, but it’s not like he has any experience with this stuff. It was a mistake to come down here. This isn’t his world like it is Oliver’s and Diggle’s. He’s out of his depth.

“If they caught the sniper, it would be all over the radio.” John moves over to the laptop, pulling up the scrolling radio transcriptions. “They found the rooftop, arrows, blood, shell casings, but no bodies. He’s gone. And he probably thinks Oliver’s dead.”

“He does.”

Tommy jumps at the hoarse sound of Oliver’s voice.

He sits up with a groan. “He’ll assume I’m dead. And he still has a job to do.”

“You didn’t tell me you were going after Deadshot.” Diggle’s voice is cold, confrontational.

Oliver lets out a tired groan. “Yes, I was going after Deadshot.”

“And why didn’t you tell me? You know what he did to my brother!”

“Because now is not the time for your revenge, Digg!” Oliver shouts back.

Tommy can only look between the two as they face off. He’s not stupid enough to get in the middle of two men who are practically made of muscle. Sure, he’ll throw himself into a fight to help a friend even when he knows he can’t win, but getting involved now would probably only result in getting punched in the face.

“So you’re just going to let my brother’s killer walk free?!” Digg explodes. Any semblance of nicety is destroyed in an instant.

“It’s-“

“Don’t give me some bull shit reason for what you did, Oliver!”

Oliver glances at Tommy before responding to the livid soldier. “I can’t kill him, Digg.”

“You can’t? That man murdered my brother, something you promised to set right! If you won’t do this, then I guess I have to take matters into my own hands.” Diggle grabs his jacket as he storms from the room, leaving Oliver and Tommy in heavy silence as the door slams solidly behind him.

This would normally be the time Tommy said something to lighten the mood, but one look at Oliver’s face and he knows that won’t help the situation. Oliver sits with his eyes closed, face upturned, almost like he’s praying, for what Tommy doesn’t know.

A second later his eyes pop open and he turns to Tommy, blinking in surprise at seeing him still here.

“Hey. Sorry about...all that,” Oliver mutters. He crosses the room and throws on a shirt, which to be honest, Tommy is kind of relieved about. Not that there’s a problem with Oliver shirtless. And yeah,
the scars are disorienting, but it’s really Oliver’s abundant muscles that have Tommy feeling flabby even though he knows he’s in shape.

“You okay, man?” Oliver looks like a kicked puppy, so Tommy just has to ask.

“Yeah, fine. I thought you had a date with Laurel.”

Ignoring the extremely obvious change of subject, Tommy nods. “Yeah. I did.”

“So why are you in a dank basement and not with her?”

The question could be taken as callous or biting, yet Oliver sounds almost defeated. Tommy frowns as Oliver lowers himself into the chair opposite him. He looks tired, like the weight of the world is finally getting to him. He has no idea when his friend started taking on that much responsibility. In fact, he’s starting to realize he doesn’t really know his friend all that well anymore.

But he refuses to give up on the man who helped him over the years, who was there when his mother died, there when his father neglected him, the man who invited him back to Queen Mansion whenever he was lonely, who practically made him a part of his family. He can’t give up on a bond like that.

“She got called away by Johana. There’s some client or another who needed help, so she was working late. We’re going out tomorrow instead.”

Oliver huffs. “The Tommy I remember would have pulled out all the stops and brought her dinner instead.”

Tommy runs a hand through his hair. “Why do you think I’m here? I want to do this right. I don’t want her think I’m the playboy.”

“Piece of advice, Tommy: when you find the girl, don’t let her go.”

His head jerks up. Oliver’s not making eye contact, lost in his own thoughts, sad thoughts if the droop in his shoulders was any indication. It almost sounds like he’s speaking from experience.

He opens his mouth to respond, but Oliver’s eyes meet his and all he can see is profound sorrow and regret, more powerful than anything he’s ever seen from Oliver before.

“Go to her, Tommy. Bring her dinner. Show her she’s important to you before it’s too late.”

“Ollie...” He can’t think of a way to respond to the feeling he witnesses in his eyes. “I didn’t...I never...if you’re not okay with me and Laurel...”

The deep chuckle of amusement from Oliver cuts him off. “That’s not what this is...I don’t feel that way about Laurel.”

Tommy frowns. Oliver’s talking from experience. He can see that clear as day, but if he’s not talking about Laurel, then who is he talking about?

“What’s her name?” The question escapes unbidden and he sucks in a breath as he waits to see if Oliver will answer.

Instead he smiles, a secret, intimate smile at memories only he has. It’s the smile of a man in love. And it’s the exact moment Tommy knows he doesn’t have to worry about Oliver and Laurel ever again. Oliver comes back to himself a second later, shaking his head as he grows somber again.
I’ll tell you, one day. But right now...we both know Laurel’s still slaving away at work. She probably had a microwave dinner. Pick up some food and go.”

He watches his best friend for another minute. Oliver’s dead serious, something he never was before. Or rather, something he never chose to be before the Island.

“Are you sure you’re okay?” His mind’s already on the pizza place around the corner that he knows will be closing in the next hour. He can pick up Laurel’s favorite calzone. As soon as Oliver nods, Tommy pats him on the back and sprints up the stairs.

He’s so excited he almost misses Oliver’s belated response of “I will be.”

... Everything’s going to hell. Lawton killed Holder, he got shot and poisoned, Digg was pissed, and he had no team to rely on. These are the days before he had a steadfast team to fall back on. Physically, he’s fine now, but emotionally he’s lost. He wants someone to talk to about everything that’s been going on, now that Digg’s gone overboard.

So, of course, he finds his way here: to her apartment.

But where else could he find himself after that talk with Tommy?

That conversation, it led him right here. In his timeline, he would be at her door right now, knocking in the hopes that she’d forgive him, that she’d let him. He’d wrap his arms around her and kiss her until oxygen became a problem. He’d take back everything.

It’s different seeing her now, knowing he’s in love with her when she only knows his name. Yet she still sees through everything. How stupid was he to give up such an amazing woman because he was afraid?

“Are you stalking me?”

Oliver starts at the words, more surprised someone had managed to sneak up on him than scared. He looks up at the blonde that appeared to be summoned by his thoughts.

“Not that you would, because you’re Oliver Queen and women are probably throwing themselves at you. Plus you don’t seem like the stalker type. I’ve had a stalker before, but that was just a smelly lacrosse player in college. And you’re not a lacrosse player...or smelly...but you are sitting outside my townhouse at midnight with a forlorn expression on your face.”

He leans back into the back of the bench, looking up at her. He gives her the only thing he can: the truth: “I needed to get away from everything for a little while, and I found myself here.”

Felicity raises an eyebrow, tilting her head in that familiar puzzled expression. “And your feet took you here? Why would they do that?”

Since he can’t tell her the truth, he just shrugs.

“Without your bodyguard?”

“He needed some time to himself too,” Oliver offers with a smile, enjoying her amused disbelief.

“You’re a terrible liar,” she announces as she drops down next to him on the bench. She rips open a bag of gummy worms and offers him the bag. “Worm?”
Oliver grins as she takes a bite and rips the worm with a satisfied smirk. He shakes his head. “My body’s not used to sugar anymore.”

She nods sagely. “Right. Because of the whole island-thing. I’d say that’s unfortunate, but it’s really working for you.” Blatantly, she checks him out and Oliver chuckles. It takes her a moment to realize what she said. Her cheeks flush bright red. “I, uh, didn’t mean it like that. I meant to say...that is...”

He cuts her off with a friendly smile. “I know what you mean.”

“No, you don’t,” Felicity disagrees. “I mean, you can’t. I babble. It doesn’t make sense to normal people.”

Oliver laughs, a soft huff of air really more than an outright laugh. “I understood.”

Felicity contemplates him for a moment before digging back into the bag. “You actually did, didn’t you?”

Oliver shrugs, wincing at the pull on his stitches.

Felicity frowns at him, but doesn’t question the wince. She turns to face her apartment building, content to just join him in companionable silence.

It might not be talking, yet the time together soothes his troubled mind. He breathes deeply. Oliver sinks back into the bench, almost reaching out to hold her hand. This silence gives him time to think, time to formulate a plan, and her sitting with him gives him peace of mind.

“Thank you,” He whispers thirty minutes later, giving into the urge to squeeze her hand.

She smiles back, patting his knee as she stands. “Happy to help. And next time? Just knock. It’s warmer inside.”

“Wait.” Oliver stands, running his hand over his head because this is a risk, a different kind of risk than going after assassins or jumping off buildings. She turns and looks over her shoulder, the light behind her circling her head like a halo.

He probably shouldn’t do this. He should just walk away and come back to her tomorrow with a laptop riddled with bullet holes. The problem is that he wants more than that. He doesn’t want to come to her with petty lies.

Ultimately it’s her open, trusting face that does him, that drags the words from him lips, words that could damn them both:

“What do you know about Unidac Industries?”

Chapter End Notes

I’d love to hear what you thought! There will be another chapter up in a week!
Chapter 14

“What do you know about Unidac Industries?”

Felicity spins back to face Oliver Queen. What could he possibly be getting at? Was this why he showed up outside her apartment at midnight? But why her?

“Unidac? As in the company Queen Consolidated is bidding for?”

He nods slowly, more serious than she thought he could be. Although, she’s started to realize there’s much more to him than what’s visible on the surface. “You know, I’m not going to get in the middle of some Shakespearean tragedy.”

Oliver chuckles. “No. It’s nothing like Hamlet.”

She blinks in surprise. She didn’t expect him to get that reference. She flounders for a moment, searching for the right words. “I didn’t think you’d know that. No offense, but you don’t seem like the kind of person who read Shakespeare.”

“I didn’t. The most I remember is that he liked to make up words.”

Felicity frowns at him. “Then how did you know I meant Hamlet?”

He stiffens and she knows he put her finger on something he was worried about. He seems to scold himself internally before he covers with, “I must have heard the plot somewhere.”

Her gut tells her it’s not a lie, but there’s something more there, below the surface that he evaded. So she does the one thing she can, the one thing she always does because she absolutely hates mysteries: she presses on. “Really? What’s the plot?”

She knows she has him pinned in a lie before he even opens his mouth. His eyes dart around desperately for an answer, any answer that will make sense. “Hamlet’s...stepfather kills his mother and he tries to take over the kingdom with his father’s ghost?”

Felicity snorts. “That’s surprisingly accurate considering you made it up on the spot.” She still doesn’t buy the story, but she’ll let him evade and hide behind half-truths for now. “So what do you want to know, Oliver?”

For someone coming to her, he seems suspiciously nervous as he runs a hand through his hair. “Can we...can I ask you something?”

It doesn’t escape her notice he could be a serial killer as she nods. Sure, they’re out in the open, but they’re also alone in the middle of the night. She’s that person in the beginning of a crime show who meets the suspicious and good looking murder on a late night walk. Oh God, she’s the cautionary tale that ends up brutally murdered.

“I’m not a serial killer, Felicity.”

She winces as she lowers herself back onto the bench. It’s not even worth it to ask if she said that out loud. “But you are acting a little suspicious.”
At least he has the grace not to deny it. He just nods stoically. She watches him as he surveys the street again, face a mask as his eyes dart from shadow to shadow and pause for a moment on the Robin Hood poster over her TV, which you can see from the street. She thought she closed the blinds before she left...oops.

For some reason that she just chalks up to another mystery of Oliver Queen, his lips twitch in a smile at the sight of the poster before he turns back to her.

He just checked their surroundings almost like she heard ex-soldiers do. He’s hyper-vigilant, which is most certainly not a side-effect of his years as a playboy. It goes on the list of things about Oliver Queen that start to make sense. His knowledge of Hamlet on the other hand is still very firmly in the list of things that don’t add up.

“So...?”

His finger and thumb rub together in an agitated gesture as he mulls over whatever he needs to say.

Felicity leans back into the wooden bench, the slats press into her back and she wishes she was inside. She was ready to sleep, but if this was important enough for Oliver to seek her out at an ungodly hour, she should probably be awake for him to break the news to her.

“Do you know why QC wants Unidac?”

She purses her lips and stares into his bright blue eyes, eyes filled with desperation and sincerity. Truthfully, those eyes are the only reason she trusts the words coming out of his mouth at all at this point.

“They want the tech for the new Applied Sciences division,” she says with a shrug. That’s the best guess she has. The new department needs material to work with. If she was actually in the department, it might be easier to confirm.

His look of concentration tells her his mind is working a mile a minute. He’s really concerned about what he says to her, which puts her on edge.

“Do you know what tech?”

Felicity scowls and then forces a smile. “Well, if I actually worked Applied Science then I actually might, but unfortunately, they declined my application. If you want that information, I can suggest a couple people to talk to. I, on the other hand, need some sleep before I head into work tomorrow, so I don’t have time to answer your questions, Mr. Queen.”

He winces at the chill in her voice. “Sorry, I didn’t mean it like that.” Then he blinks in surprise. “You wanted to work in Applied Sciences?”

“Well, I didn’t want to work in IT my whole life,” she counters. She also won’t have to. She got two job offers today: one from STAR labs and the other from Wayne Industries. Surprisingly, the one from Wayne was actually from the CEO, Lucius Fox. There had also been an equally interesting offer from Palmer Tech. How Palmer knew she was looking for a job was beyond her and honestly, made her feel a little uneasy.

“Obviously. You’re a genius. I just didn’t know you’d looked into a job in Applied Sciences.”

Felicity narrows her eyes, snapped from her internal ramble by the personal comment. It almost sounds like he’s speaking from firsthand knowledge. “Why would you know if I had?”
He jerks at the question. “Oh, um...Tommy...might have...said...”

“I didn’t tell Tommy. I didn’t tell anyone.” She narrows her eyes. This is the oddness she noticed earlier.

Oliver flounders for any reason, but even she can see he’s coming up empty. So he does the only thing he can think of: he changes topics. “They’re idiots if they don’t want you.”

She purses her lips. “Actually it’s my supervisor stonewalling me, but that too.”

Oliver’s face twists in displeasure at the movement and she waits for his offer to fix it, because it’s what she’s heard from Tommy every time it comes up. Instead, his hands curl into fists and he looks out the window, almost as if counting to ten to relieve his ire. It’s a curious reaction to her news that she didn’t expect.

When he’s calmed down, he turns back to her. He watches her watching him for a moment. His head tilts to the side and he asks the last question she expects: “Why do you stay at QC? You could be literally anywhere else.”

It surprises a laugh from her. “When I graduated MIT it had the best opportunities for advancement. Walter interviewed me himself. I was doing some pretty great stuff for a while, then my supervisor got promoted and we got Fowler. He hates anyone with an ounce of talent.”

She stops just short of telling him she might be moving. She wants to get it off her chest, but Oliver is a stranger, not a confidant. If she tells Oliver, he’ll probably pass it on to Tommy. Besides, he’s still a mystery to her. He knows things he shouldn’t, doesn’t react the way he should to new information, almost like he knew it before. And she shouldn’t make assumptions based on the way people are “supposed” to act, but her gut is telling her that something’s not right and she wants to know what it is.

“So why do you stay?”

Felicity shrugs and offers the only reason why she hasn’t jumped on the offers she received this morning. “Because Starling is home: the people, the buildings, the terrible job. Its home.”

...Oliver watches her wallow, the woman who never had a problem telling him how much she hated her job. God, he had been such an unbearable ass to make her his executive assistant. She only stayed because of what they were doing to save the city, and he had taken advantage of that without even thinking about it. That needs to change this time around.

“Felicity, something tells me you could make new friends wherever you land. And Tommy has a private jet. If you don’t think he’d visit you, you don’t know him very well.”

It’s almost painful for him to admit that to her, but he won’t hold her back this time. He won’t argue with her choice if she stays, but he can see that she wants so much more.

Oliver stands to leave. He can’t watch her internal debate when he would push her to leave for her own good. And he knows that’s what will happen when she starts to get excited about one job or another. He has to give her this option. He refuses to reveal the Arrow to her in a desperate attempt to get her to stay.

She stayed the last time around and he has to trust that will happen again. And if it doesn’t, he’ll have to deal with the consequences.
“Wait! Oliver,” she calls.

He looks back, hand on the handlebar of his bike.

Her astute eyes look him over as he waits for the next words to fall from her mouth, the question he won’t be able to answer with anything more than a cryptic smile. The question hangs on the tip of her tongue, a breath away. Instead of asking, she swallows the question and smiles softly. “Thank you.”

He nods and pulls the door open. “Goodnight, Felicity.”

It’s a grown up decision. It was a mistake to ask her about Unidac Industries. He almost spilled the beans on the Markov device and that would have lead to a whole other discussion, one that he wasn’t prepared to have, especially in light of that last confession on her part. Telling her about Unidac would be too close to telling her about the Arrow, about him, about how much he loved her. He can’t do that, can’t bare a part of his soul if she’s just going to leave. But he’s not about to force her to stay.

It feels like his heart is being pulled in two different directions and he has no idea what to do.

So he focuses on something else.

Oliver climbs back on his motorcycle as his eyes follow her, making sure she makes it into her apartment safely. It’s still early in the night for him. He could go back to the Foundry, work out, or go on patrol. Yet the thought of doing it alone, leaves him feeling profoundly empty, so he turns the bike toward home. There’s not much else he can do tonight.

... 

Morning finds Oliver standing outside Digg’s apartment. He hasn’t heard from John since he stormed out of the Foundry last night and he didn’t show up to the Queen Mansion this morning. It’s like he’s on a first date, nervous to knock on the front door. Apologies were never his strong suit.

His fist hovers over the door for a moment before he brings it down to pound in the solid door. In the echoing silence that follows, he listens for movement in the room beyond. He waits a couple minutes and tries again.

Twenty minutes later, far longer than he probably should have waited, Oliver leaves the building with sore knuckles and a rejection complex. If Diggle was already gone and not back in his apartment, the man was avoiding him. He swings by Big Belly Burger, just in case, but comes up empty again. He checks his phone incessantly, and is forced to admit he’s acting like a man in the middle of a lovers’ spat when he’s told for the third time:

“Don’t worry. They’ll come around.”

He wouldn’t be quite as annoyed about the response if he wasn’t worried about Digg. John had done some pretty crazy things to get back at the man who killed his brother. He’s worried what his friend will try next. Somehow he doesn’t think it will be anything peaceful. All Oliver wants is a chance to explain himself, explain how Deadshot has saved Digg’s life, Lyla’s life. Then he might have a chance of reasoning with him.

“So what did you do?” The foreman – the last one to tell him not to worry – asks.

Oliver frowns. “What?”
The other man looks up from the blue prints for the shelter he’d been showing Oliver for the past half an hour. “I’ve been there with my wife more times than I can remember. I know the look.”

He grimaces at the other man. “Not a wife, or girlfriend, for that matter. Just a friend.”

The other man chuckles. “Been there too.”

That surprises a laugh out of Oliver. “He’s more like a brother to me.” He sighs. His phone hasn’t gone off once since this morning, nothing from anyone. It sets him on edge.

He met the foreman today to sign off on the plans for the shelter. He hasn’t been able to focus on the blueprints for any length of time. The foreman has already signed a confidentiality agreement considering his involvement in the whole affair. He can’t have his name attached to a shelter a couple blocks over from his nightclub. The nightclub needed his name to draw the crowd, the shelter didn’t.

“But these plans look good.” He claps his hands together. “And your workers?”

“All men from the Glades, men I would trust with my life.”

“Glad to hear it. Then we have a deal.” Oliver shakes the man’s hand with a smile.

“We’ll start immediately. There haven’t been many jobs in the Glades lately. My men are ready to work.”

“Glad to hear it.” Oliver makes his goodbyes and heads over to his other construction project.

He still needs to talk to Tommy about the design, but he’s excited for the chance to knock down a couple walls himself. He needs to work out all the tension and frustration and the salmon ladder won’t cut it today. There’s too much going through his head.

Oliver practically races into the basement. His shirt is the first thing to go, thrown off and tossed in the general direction of his work station, too consumed with the need to beat out his feelings. The sledgehammer fits nicely in his hands as he trudges up the stairs to the main building. There’s a couple walls he wants to open up.

He throws himself into the physical labor. Muscles ache at the exhaustion. Dust clogs the air as he busts through the cinderblock bases. The metal railings require a more physical push and pull. He drips with sweat after the first one is removed.

“Wow...that looks disgusting.”

Oliver glances over his shoulder to where Tommy watches him with raised eyebrows, hands stuffed inside the pockets of his expensive jeans.

“I thought you were hiring people to do the heavy lifting,” Tommy comments, nudging a chunk of loose concrete with the toe of his shoe. “Besides, should you even be doing this with those stitches?”

He points to Oliver’s arm and the angry red line where Diggle stitched him up. Oliver stares at it, amazed that the little black lines are still intact. He hadn’t even thought about them. Of course, now that Tommy brought them to his attention, he feels a twinge of pain.

“Hey, Tommy. What are you doing here?” He asks as he heads back to the basement so he can grab his shirt.

“Well, see, my best friend wanted to start a night club with me, but then wouldn’t answer his cell
phone, so I had to visit everywhere in the city he might be. Silly me, I should have started with the abandoned factory.”

Oliver lets out a huff of air that could almost be construed as laughter. “Sorry. I’m a little...”

“A ngry?” Tommy offers brightly.

“No. Frustrated. I didn’t get a chance to talk to John today.”

Tommy nods, sagely. “Well, fighting with your better half will do that to you.”

“Why does everyone keep saying that today?” Oliver mutters. He swears it was never this bad before. It just seems like everything is working against him when it comes to what Felicity dubbed “Team Arrow.”

Digg disappeared off the face of the Earth, as far as Oliver can tell, and he can’t talk to Felicity without telling her everything and potentially ruining another option, which he will not do intentionally this time around. Just like that, his support has vanished. Tommy might still be here, but he’s not the tactical or technical support he needs right now.

Right now, Oliver needs Digg to help take down Lawton, and Felicity to find his location. Because he might have a decent memory but it’s not good enough to remember an address for Lawton’s safehouse.

Tommy can help him with none of that.

“So how did it go with Laurel last night?” He asks because it’s a safe question, as far removed from Team Arrow as possible.

The sappy grin that lights Tommy’s face is answer enough. “It was great. She was actually really happy to see me. She took a work break while we ate, and then I stayed as she worked, which is...uh, actually why I wanted to find you today.” He pulls a wad of folded papers from his back pocket and starts to unfurl them. “I used those couple hours to brainstorm ideas for the club.”

Oliver reaches out for the papers. Tommy yanks them back.

“Nuh-uh! First, you need to stop dripping sweat. It is disgusting how much you sweat.”

He huffs in exasperation. Who would have thought Tommy Merlyn would ever be so serious about business plans. If the shower was set up in the back, it wouldn’t really be a problem, but he doesn’t even have running water here yet. That’s the next thing on his list.

Instead he grabs a nearby towel, and turns back to his best friend, happy for the distraction. It gives him something to focus on instead of Digg’s disappearance and the bad feeling that leaves him with.

...“Have a drink, Johnny.”

John Diggle glares at the cup of water Lyla sets in front of him on the bar. “Come on, Lyla. You know I’m not drunk.”

“You kind of sound like you are.”

“I was never a drunk.” He takes a sip of the water anyway. “I know it sounds crazy, but it’s true.”
She lets out a heavy sigh as she stares at the back of the bar, her eyes focused on anything but him. It’s been the same since she arrived and he started his story. She can tell she’s not buying it, not yet. “It’s not that I don’t believe you, John. The shooting you mentioned, it sounds just like Deadshot, but...I’ve got this from higher up the food chain: we don’t mess with the man in the green hood.”

He snorts. Of course not. Somehow Oliver worked out a deal with Waller. Why isn’t he surprised?

“So, what? You won’t help me?”

Lyla finally looks back at him, brown eyes full of reserved sorrow. “Johnny,” she whispers, a hand rests on top of his on the bar. “I know how you feel about Deadshot: he killed your brother, but A.R.G.U.S. isn’t going to get involved.”

“You won’t even ask?” He’s not a big fan of Waller. He would love to stay as far from her as possible, but at this point, as long as he gets his way, he doesn’t care. His brother deserves justice.

She sighs. “You don’t want me to ask. Trust me. Waller won’t want Deadshot taken out. She’ll want him taken in.”

“She’ll make him an asset?” That’s something he can believe: one of those reasons he could never work for Waller. It was one of those things that drove a wedge between him and Lyla: she was willing to blur the lines and live in the grey area, he wasn’t going to work for someone without a soul.

Lyla shrugs. “He’s talented. Waller likes to collect talented people.”

Now John wishes he was drinking. The news would be easier to take.

“Why don’t you just talk to the Green Arrow? From what Waller says, he should be able to help you.”

“He made it clear he’s not willing to kill Lawton.” Diggle’s hands reflexively tighten around the cup. Lyla raises an eyebrow. “And here I heard that he tried to stop Lawton from eliminating his target last night.”

“But he refuses to take him out.” Diggle grits his teeth in frustration.

“Have you asked why?” Lyla squeezes his arm in comfort.

His mouth twists in a grimace. “It’s probably some bull shit reason. He refused to say anything else.”

“You should talk to him, Johnny. He has to have a reason.”

“I’m sure he does. It probably has to do with some time travel crap.”

Next to him Lyla freezes. “What?”

“He thinks he’s lived all this before, that he travelled back in time.” Diggle chuckles darkly. “I’d have called him crazy except he’s not acting like a crazy person. Still, I take everything he says with a grain of salt.

Lyla pales, the blood rushing from her face as his words sink in. “And when did he say he came from?”

Digg blinks. He didn’t expect such an understanding response. Laughter, disbelief, exasperation:
those would be appropriate responses, not a curious response. “He claimed two or three years.” He shrugs. “But like I said, he’s probably not all there in the head. Five years on an island and doing A.R.G.U.S.’s dirty work can do that to a person.”

“John, did he say how he traveled through time? Or why? Think carefully.” Her once reassuring grasp turns painful as she demands his attention.

He frowns at her. Why is she so interested in the insanity of a billionaire? “He didn’t explain it. I didn’t ask any questions. Why does it matter?”

“It doesn’t. I gotta go. Good seeing you, Johnny.” She grabs her jacket and leaves the bar at a brisk clip, to anyone who didn’t know her as well as John, it would look calm, but he could see the panic in her eyes. Something about time travel spooked her, something she didn’t want to share. It almost sounded like she believed time travel was a possibility.

John throws a couple bucks on the bar for the beer he didn’t drink and wanders out into the street. The sun shines in his eyes as it settles lower on the horizon. It hits him with an unexpected problem: he’s spent most of the day looking for Deadshot, only to come up empty handed. And if he were willing to bet, he’d say Oliver, the man he was avoiding, probably had better luck.

He wanders to his car, mind lost in his dilemma. He could go to Oliver, but he’s not ready to listen to some hair-brained tale about how he shouldn’t get revenge on the man who killed his brother. As much as it pains him to admit it: he can’t hate Oliver for not wanting to kill a man. That doesn’t mean, however, that he’s going to help Oliver with whatever plan he has up his sleeve.

No. Instead, he’s going to go home and have a beer. Then tomorrow, he’ll go to work same as usual and tell Oliver that he won’t help with Floyd Lawton. He’s not sure what has Lyla so on edge about the idea of time travel; that just means he’ll keep a closer eye on Oliver until he can get to the bottom of this, green tights and all.
Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

Sorry this update took so long! Life happened, but here’s an extra-long chapter that will hopefully make up for it!

Let me know what you think!

Chapter 15

Halfway through breakfast with his mother, Oliver gets the text from his Bratva contacts with Lawton’s location. He resorted, rather unwillingly last night, to going to the Russians for information, much like he had the first time around.

Did it feel like a hit to his soul to give in to the darker side of his past?

But he wasn’t perfect. He couldn’t remember an address he only needed once two and half years ago. It was ridiculous that he thought it would be that easy. On top of that, he had forgotten Lawton’s second victim, a man killed while he was in the garage talking to Alexei.

These past few days haven’t been that great, to say the least. As nice as it is to have a meal with his mother, her company isn’t necessarily improving his mood.

“If you’re not doing anything today, Oliver, I would really love to show you the new Applied Sciences building.”

Now, they’re back to the Applied Sciences debate. She’s brought up subtle hints every time they’ve been in the same vicinity ever since the tour of Queen Consolidated. Walter, at least, seems apprehensive of the idea. He sends Moira guarded looks every now and then when she pushes the issue. Oliver wants nothing to do with it.

“Moira,” Walter warns as he walks into the dining room. “Oliver doesn’t need you to push.”

She frowns, obviously in disagreement. She just purses her lip, presses them together to keep her silence.

Oliver uses the moment of silence to his best ability: he scoops the last of his scrambled eggs into his mouth and downs the rest of his coffee. He leans down and presses a kiss to his mother’s cheek to pacify her.

Moira huffs grumpily. He’s stonewalled her, stopped her from getting her way. It’s not something he was able to successfully accomplish based on the sour expression she continues to wear.

He jogs to catch up with Walter before he leaves. “Walter, would it be possible for me to meet with you later today? I actually wanted to talk to you about something.”

Walter stops by the town car door and waits expectantly. “You know you can talk to me about anything, Oliver.”
“This...,” he takes a deep breath, “I actually wanted to talk to you about something related to Queen Consolidated, and the Applied Sciences Division.”

Walter frowns. “I didn’t think you wanted to take up the position your mother offered.”

Oliver shakes his head. “And that’s definitely not what I had in mind.”

He shouldn’t be doing this for so many reasons, least of which that he’s already gotten involved in too many projects. He and Tommy are meeting with contractors for the club this morning, and the work on the new shelter is well underway. He’s now looking at hiring a discrete manager, someone to run the shelter and give him regular reports. It surprised him when he started his search just how much his plan relied on his friends: Laurel would be able to give recommendations, or Felicity would be able to sift through the applicants to find the truly good people.

Unfortunately, those aren’t options. And that’s not the point, not the reason he’s talking to Walter.

“It’s going to be an odd request,” he stalls.

“Well, you’re always welcome to come visit. Although, with everything else that you’ve talked to me about, I don’t know why this requires an official visit.”

“It’s about a friend from the IT department,” he admits.

Walter raises an eyebrow. “Let me guess: Felicity Smoak.”

Oliver blinks. “Yes.”

He chuckles. “Don’t look so surprised. She’s bright, brilliant, and does far more work than her counterparts. Her supervisor says she’s irreplaceable.”

“And she could do so much more elsewhere...like in Applied Sciences.” Okay, so he said he wasn’t going to do this, but he can’t stand the idea of her hating her job so much she leaves the city.

Walter’s considers him, aware that there’s a lot Oliver’s left unsaid. “I’ll see you at noon, then.”


The nip of the autumn air forces him to zip up his jacket before he takes off, rocks from the gravel driveway spray into the air as he lurches forward at a speed that would make his mother worry to no end. He zigs around Walter’s town car and out the gate, his mind already miles ahead. Scheduling everything for today: his talk with Walter, meeting the contractors, it was all to distract him from what he really wanted to do: find Floyd Lawton.

The sooner he finished with Lawton, the sooner he could mend things with Digg, the sooner he could focus on the next task, the sooner he could bring down the Undertaking. This whole being-from-the-future thing is starting to weigh on him. Sure, he’s being more honest about himself, but the stress of lying about the giant Time Travel elephant that follows him around weighs on him more than he ever considered it.

He’s stretching himself too thin.

If he had his team, it wouldn’t be so bad. Everything would at least be manageable. Instead, of the two people he brought in, he lost Digg over Lawton, and Tommy is useless in the Arrow Cave.

And yes, now he’s calling it the Arrow Cave in his head, not that he would ever admit it to anyone.
Just the name makes him feel closer to his former team. God, he needs them back. He needs back the
people he could talk to about anything – not that he talked that much but he liked that that was an
option. He needs his partners back, the ones who knew each other so well they didn’t need words,
who reacted as a unit, who knew when to pull him back from the edge.

He sighs, sliding off the bike outside the Foundry. That’s not possible, not right now. But it’s the
reason he’s focusing on other ways to help outside of the suit. It’s the reason he’s going to talk to
Walter about Felicity. He knows two days ago he vowed he’d let her find her own way. Yet it
wouldn’t hurt to push Walter a little in her direction, right?

He’s trying not to think about what her reaction would be to his interference. She’d be good at the
job. It’s not even about access to the Markov device at this point, although that’s a definite benefit...if
he can get her on board for this team. And right now he’s starting to doubt his team-building ability.
It’s amazing he even got them together to begin with.

Then again...maybe he wasn’t the one keeping the team together at all...

With that depressing thought, he pushes through the swinging door in search of Tommy and his
grand plans for Verdant, plans he knows will work just as well, if not better, than the original that he
knows.

Today is going to be a long day.

...

“So what’s with the green fixation?”

Oliver turns to stare at Tommy. “What?”

Tommy leans past Oliver to press the elevator button for the IT floor. After four hours and three
contractors, Oliver had escaped to his planned meeting with Walter and Tommy had followed him to
visit Felicity.

“The suit, the club. What? You didn’t think anyone would notice? I always thought your favorite
color was blue.”

Oliver lets out a huff of air. “The hood...it’s a tribute to a mentor. And green: it helped me blend in.”

“So why name the club after that? Isn’t that making it a little obvious?”

The metal of the elevator is cool on his back as Oliver leans against it with a nonchalant shrug. “If
you have a better idea for a name, be my guest. I figured this was mysterious and memorable. That’s
what we want, right?”

“Well, if you call it Queen’s I don’t think you’re going to get the clientele you usually go for,”

Tommy comments cheekily.

Familiar with the joke, he chuckles. “Which is why I didn’t even think about it. And no royalty
references either,” he adds as Tommy exits the elevator. Tommy’s buoyant laugh echoes as the door
closes, leaving Oliver with a smile as the metal box continues up to the top floor.

When he gets out, he’s hit by the familiarity of the moment. He worked here for almost a year as
CEO. He actually misses it, which is something he had never anticipated.
He walks up to Walter’s secretary, unsure how official his visit is. Before he can open his mouth, she smiles up at him.

“He’s expecting you, Mr. Queen.”

Oliver glances at her name plate with a smile. “Thank you, Sheila. And it’s Oliver.”

She returns to the smile and gestures him on through into Walter’s glass fishbowl office. He wonders if Walter feels as on display as he did.

“Ah! Oliver! It seems your tendency to be late was exaggerated by your mom. You’re actually early.” Walter smiles up at him with clear approval. “This and the work with the shelter and club...I can’t speak for your parents, but I’m proud of what you’ve accomplished in the short time you’ve been back.”

Oliver runs a bashful hand through his hair. “It’s not much.”

“On the contrary, Oliver, it’s something to be proud of. What you’re doing? It’s going to set you up in great standing when it goes through, better than what Moira has set up with Applied Sciences.”

“That’s not why I’m doing this.”

Walter chuckles. “The Board will be happy to see you taking initiative, especially when it’s your turn to take my place.”

Oliver stills, this isn’t happening. This isn’t supposed to be happening, not now, not so soon.

“Which won’t be for a long time,” Walter adds as he takes in the terror in Oliver’s eyes at the implication. He laughs as Oliver visibly relaxes. “You want to make a suggestion for the Head of Applied Sciences, and you’re trying to tell me you’re not interested in the future of this company?”

He grimaces. “That’s not what I’m trying to do.”

“So you weren’t going to recommend Miss Smoak to lead the Applied Sciences division?”

He struggles to ignore the amusement in Walter’s eyes. Was he trying to get her that position? He knows she’s capable enough. Hell, she basically ran Queen Consolidated while he was CEO. He doesn’t want to just throw her in the deep end though.

“She’s brilliant, but she’s still inexperienced,” Oliver says slowly. “But I think she could be a good addition.”

Walter raises his eyebrows. “Sounds like an employer talking.”

Oliver shrugs. He doesn’t know how to tell Walter she can run a company. She works best under pressure: it’s then she truly shines.

“But you’re right,” Walter announces. He holds up a manila folder. “She’s way too smart for IT. The awards she’s won. I’m willing to give her a chance. The interim Director has agreed to stay on to train the new one. Of course, Moira’s hoping it will be you, but I already have a meeting with Miss Smoak for two.”

The breath rushes out of him. “Really?”

“I pulled her records after our talk this morning. She’s a sound choice if we want to move forward with this department. Miss Smoak’s a forward thinker, the kind of person we want at the head of the
department. It’s a solid choice, Oliver, the kind of risk that would be extremely beneficial to the company.”

“All I want is to see QC flourish.” And it’s true. He might not want to be a part of it now, but he does want to see it succeed.

Walter contemplates him for a moment. “Do you want to be here for the interview?”

Oliver shakes his head as he rises to his feet. “No. I have my own meeting this afternoon.” And he doesn’t want Felicity to know. He’s pretty sure Walter can read that in his eyes.

The CEO watches him carefully before he nods sagely. “I’ll keep your name out of it.”

“Thank you, Walter.”

They stand and shake hands, all firm grips and macho stares. Having Walter’s respect: it feels good, nice, to be seen that was as Oliver Queen. It makes him feel at least a little bit better than he did before. His life is still going to hell in a handbasket, but at least he was able to do something right. Felicity was going to be amazing.

...

The afternoon sun still shines strong on the roof across from Lawton’s apartment where Oliver waits and observes the man in question. It’s too bright out, and he feels vulnerable in his green leathers without the cover of darkness. He can’t ever remember being out in the suit while the sun still shined. At least, not for long periods of time. But this wasn’t exactly something he wanted to do as Oliver Queen.

That said, Leather and Stakeouts: not the best combination...at all.

Was it his intention to wait on the roof, watching Deadshot prepare to go after more Unidac bidders? No.

But neither was snatching the laptop and running.

No, this was about stopping Lawton from going to the auction at all. He couldn’t kill Lawton because he’s instrumental in saving Digg’s life and Lyla’s in the future. He can’t risk his actions now costing his friends’ lives in the future.

He’s not opposed to still taking out one of Lawton’s eyes. The man seemed to almost like the eyepatch in the future, so it’s not like repeating that would be the end of the world for either of them.

Which was just one of the things he had time to consider while waiting on top of that roof, that got steadily cooler as the sun descended in the sky.

As much as he tried to, he couldn’t stop his mind from wandering to the meeting Walter must have had with Felicity. He wants to know what she thought, if she was considering the job, if she wanted to stay with Queen Consolidated. If she’s happy, sad, conflicted, angry with him...he wants to know that too.

God, he’s so in love with Felicity Smoak, it’s driving him a little insane.

It isn’t until the sun starts to dip below the horizon that Floyd Lawton starts packing his bags for the auction. He’d spent the better part of the afternoon cleaning his rifle, expert care clear in every
focused movement, every precise action. It was his meditation before a job as much as Oliver’s workout or how he sharpened his arrows.

The grappling arrow he needs to swing across the street is already nocked and ready to fire. Oliver takes careful aim, remembering his first attempt at this in Hong Kong: He’s gotten much better at crashing through windows since then.

Glass smashes into the room, effectively decimating the neat interior Lawton spent the afternoon maintaining. Like a true soldier, the action only startles Lawton for a moment. In the next instant he’s shifted into a fighting stance.

They’re too close for Oliver to use his bow even as Lawton pulls out a Glock and a hunting knife. Oliver’s left hand flexes, aware of the antidote he has stored in the hidden compartment at the bottom of his quiver. There won’t be any mistakes born of arrogance this time.

“You’re back. Have to say, I’m surprised. I thought the Curare would get you,” Lawton leers, adjusting the grip on his blade.

“It takes more than a little poison to bring me down,” he growls. It flashes through his mind that all it takes is a sword wielded by the leader of the League of Assassins, but he tamps down that feeling of unease and discomfort, the ache of phantom scars, to face the real enemy in front of him.

“Sorry, String Bean, I’ve still got a job to do.”

His first shot goes wide, but then it’s just a distraction from the swipe of the knife. Oliver uses his bow to parry the knife, jumping back as he dodges the barrel of the gun. Lawton’s a good fighter, even at hand to hand when Oliver manages to knock the gun from his hand.

Oliver had contemplated drawing the fight out to make sure Floyd Lawton never made it to the auction, yet the planning seemed unnecessary. Lawton could hold his own. He wasn’t on the same level as Slade or Ra’s by any stretch of the imagination. He probably would have been defeated by Diggle in hand to hand, if it ever came to that, yet the man was doing amiably.

Oliver still had the situation in control though and they both knew it. He was the one on the defensive, yet he didn’t break a sweat while Lawton fought to get through his guard. Lawton, not about to go down without a fight, drops his offensive tactic, instead raises his gun.

He dodges the first shot, arrow now in hand to deliver the blow to blind the assassin. He notices Lawton’s back up a second to late, just as he pulls the trigger. Oliver’s already in the air, lunged, hand with the arrow outstretched.

The force of the bullet tearing through Oliver’s shoulder sends him flying backwards, but not before his arrow makes contact with Lawton’s eye. Their howls of pain mingle in the air from opposite sides of the little apartment.

Oliver, with quick jerky movements, extricates a vial of the antidote from his quiver and stabs himself in the thigh with the needle. He staggers to his feet, aware of the amount of blood leaking from the wound.

It looks like he’s going to get that scar where his mother shot him after all. Just from a different source.

Oliver staggers to the window with enough presence of mind to scale down the fire escape.

As his feet touch ground he’s left with one inescapable fact: there’s no one who can save him.
There’s no Felicity here to drive him to the Foundry, no Diggle to patch him up, no help whatsoever because Tommy would probably be the least helpful person ever in this situation. Oliver slumps against a wall. The blood loss leaves him exhausted, too much to travel even a couple more feet to his bike.

He’s going to die here, in the middle of an alley in green leather, and all he wants to do before he dies is hear her voice. Blindly, he pulls Felicity’s number up on his phone and hits send.

The phone clatters to the pavement as he passes out before she can pick up.

...

Felicity sits in her apartment, bundled up in yoga pants and an oversized sweater, a pint of mint chip ice cream in her hands and a mug of steaming hot chocolate on the table. She hasn’t moved since she got back to her apartment two hours ago. She’s processing right now.

And the worst part of the whole situation is that she’s not even sure she can process her way through this.

She was preparing to leave Starling for better jobs and then this?

Felicity relives the moment she was called into his office on loop in her head, a desperate search for any hint she could have found of what was going to happen. It’s all sort of a blur in her head right now.

She remembers busting into his office some sort of rant/babble hybrid about how she shouldn’t be fired, and an amused response from Mr. Steele. After that, things get murky. Somewhere in there she sat, and he started asking questions:

“What are your thoughts on office management?”

“Quantity or quality?”

“Explain to me your Masters’ thesis.”

“What do you want to accomplish at Queen Consolidated?”

Another gulp of hot chocolate slides down her throat. God, she can’t even fathom what her answers were. She must have said something though, because he asked more. She recalls thinking it sounded like an interview, especially when asked:

“How do you work under pressure knowing that people are counting on you to complete a job?”

Now that response she remembered...mostly. There was a rant that involved her going into detail about her thesis and a less-than-legal virus she may or may not have created, which she probably shouldn’t have brought up to her boss, but it ended with her asking the question she cites as leading to this cataclysmic decision in front of her:

“What is this about, Mr. Steele? If you don’t mind my asking, because this is starting to sound like a job interview.”

He nodded and leaned back in his chair. “That’s because it is. You submitted an application for the new Applied Sciences division, correct?”

Felicity’s mouth fell open in shock. “Well, yes, but I was told all the positions were filled.”
“There’s one position that isn’t, one I feel you would do very well in.”

The smooth melting of the ice cream in her mouth soothes her even as her memories send her reeling all over again. This wasn’t what was supposed to happen. It was insane, in the basest sense of the world. Only someone devoid of logical sense would make her that offer.

Because there was only one position left in Applied Sciences, one they hadn’t been able to fill, rumor has it, because it was there for the returned Queen Scion: Head of Applied Sciences.

Felicity laughs. “Uh-huh. Sure, you’re considering me for Head of Applied Sciences!” It was a good joke.

“Yes, Miss Smoak, I am. In fact, you’re at the top of my list.”

His sincerity stopped her laughter short. “You can’t be serious. I mean, you sound like you are, but I’m just a lowly IT nerd. I have no experience, no references, no precedent running a major division. Asking me to lead it would be like asking my mother to fix a computer program, and she can barely work her phone half the time.”

Walter smiled. “Your master’s thesis. You worked with a group of undergrads to create the most secure firewall anyone in the industry had ever seen. An entry level job in IT is far below your pay grade.”

“And managing a division is far above it. I’m nowhere near prepared for anything like that!”

“Well, then, Miss Smoak, how do you feel about a trial by fire? Because we’d love to have you.”

The file he then handed her with all the job specifics and the contract, her signing bonus, and everything else sits next to the Doctor Who mug on her coffee table. She hasn’t opened it yet. She doesn’t have the courage required yet. She’s sure someone must have put him up to this. Not that the CEO can’t come up with his own ideas, but she wouldn’t have been someone who came to mind unless someone brought it up first. She’d love to think it was Becky, yet she’s still on maternity leave so probably not. Tommy must have said something, or Oliver...

She’s not sure if she should thank them or unleash her loud voice.

This job offer, it’s better than anything she’s seeing from STAR Labs or Wayne Enterprises. She’s pretty sure Wayne would up the ante after hearing about Mr. Steele’s offer. They’d already suggested sending their private jet so she could see what her job in Gotham would require. But this job...

It wasn’t her dream to head up a department, but she was also looking at complete creative freedom. She would be on the forefront of advancement with one of the biggest companies in the World. She could make news, save lives. It fit her dreams and aspirations to a T. But was it too fast?

Felicity always imagined she would slowly work her way through Applied Sciences, climb the ladder on merit of her contributions to the company. According to Mr. Steele, her merits were the reason she was chosen, but it was still a huge risk on his part, a risk with the newest department.

“Great risk equals a greater reward, Miss Smoak. We need a brilliant young mind to lead, and you come highly recommended. Besides, I wouldn’t worry too much. You’ll have a wonderful support team. Take your time. Consider the offer.”

The problem wasn’t Felicity’s desire to live up to expectations, although she could already imagine the pressure of such a position: if the department went down in flames it would be her fault.
In spite of that, in spite of her deepest reservations, she really wanted to take the job.

Her phone ringing shocks her from her internal diatribe. She scrambles for her phone, almost knocking it to the floor in her haste. She ends up sprawled half off the couch in expectation of it being Tommy. She could really use a friend to talk to right now.

She frowns at the name on the caller ID: Oliver Queen.

Why would Oliver be calling?

Just before the last ring, she lifts it to her ear. “Hello?”

There’s silence on the other end.

“Oliver?” She frowns as no response. “Did you butt dial me? Oliver?”

She hears a scuffle and a muffled shout.

“Oliver?”

The call cuts out.

It’s probably nothing.

Right?

Oliver probably butt dialed her while he was out or something. It doesn’t mean anything. Felicity tosses her phone to the side so she won’t be tempted to do something crazy and impulsive, like track his phone.

That resolve lasts all of five minutes before she reaches for the phone and starts trying to call him back. It rings three times before she gets redirected to voicemail. Without thinking about it, she immediately redials. She reaches seven this time before she’s redirected to voicemail. She sends off a text and tentatively drops the phone back on the couch.

She reaches for the ice cream again, determined to get back to her conundrum. Finally, she reaches for the folder and flips it open. She doesn’t make it through the first sentence before she turns back to the phone, calling Oliver again. It rings through and Felicity’s now worried.

It’s a huge violation of privacy, one she reprimands herself for even as she grabs her laptop and taps into the GPS locator on Oliver’s phone. She doesn’t pause to consider what she’s doing: as soon as she sees the location is an alley in the Glades, miles away from where Oliver Queen should be, Felicity grabs her keys and runs to her car.

...  

Oliver comes back to consciousness slowly, the fuzziness of the world clears as he blinks. He’s propped up, hood yanked down over his face and a throbbing pain in his shoulder. The room around him is sterile, clean in the way only a medical facility could be. But also definitely not the Foundry.

He glances down. His jacket hangs half off, open so he can see the white gauze taped over his chest. He lifts a hand to the wound, probes the area.

“Marie stitched you up.”

His head jerks to his right where he’s greeted with a familiar red hoodie.
“She didn’t look under the hood. Even if she did, she wouldn’t say anything. Sarah, the girl you saved the other night, is her little sister.”

“Where are we?” Oliver asks, his voice raspy as he shifts to the edge of the seat and slides his arm back into the sleeve of his jacket.

“The Merlyn Clinic,” Roy answers, leaning forward. “Figured you wouldn’t want to go to a hospital.”

“Thanks.” He yanks the zipper of his jacket closed and casts around for his bow and quiver. His bow enters his periphery as Roy holds it out. He reaches out to take the weapon back but Roy maintains a firm grip.

“So why does Oliver Queen run around at night saving girls from rapists?”

Oliver stills.

“I only said Marie didn’t look. Besides you were pretty out of it. I was close to stripping you and claiming it was a mugging gone wrong. Then I figured Oliver Queen in the Glades would draw more attention than it was worth.”

He closes his eyes. This wasn’t how he wanted this to happen, but it’s better than when he was brought in after he was dosed with Mirakuru. He straightens, stops avoid eye contact with the kid.

“So, what do you want Roy?”

The kid straightens, crosses his arms over his chest. “I want to help you, to do what you do, to help people.”

It’s not his plan, but nothing else has been going flawlessly, so he might as well jump in. “If you do this, you follow my rules, got it?”

“As long as you keep helping the people of the Glades, I’m in.”

Oliver takes back his weapon and quiver. He can feel whatever painkillers the mysterious Marie gave him as they slow his movements. The world tilts as he shuffles forward a step before his equilibrium rights itself.

“So when do we start?” Roy demands, hands stuffed in the pockets of his hoodie.

“First off, you’re not going into the field until we’ve got you properly trained, so don’t get too excited. You’re doing this my way. It means no questioning my orders and not going off on your own half-cocked.” He knows Roy’s penchant for recklessly doing whatever he wants. He can’t afford that as he moves forward. “That means no more involvement with gangs.”

He rolls his eyes. “Yeah. I kinda got that, but you know any places willing to hire a high school dropout known for doing less-than-legal activities.”

Oliver chuckles. “Sure: bartender/heavy-lifter or cook/food server/heavy-lifter?”

Roy stares at him. “Just like that? You’re willing to trust a con just like that? You’re crazier than I thought.”

“You faced off against four guys to stop them from raping a girl. That tells me about all I need to know. You just have to promise me you’ll stay on the straight and narrow. You work and you’ll be
paid. It won’t be glorious work, but if you work hard it’ll pay off.”

“Are you going to keep talking all night?” Roy challenges. “Or do you want to get out of here before Marie comes back from her rounds?”

Oliver rolls his eyes and turns on his heel. Fine. If Roy wants to go, they’ll go. He shouldn’t be hanging around here anyway.

The shelter is about three blocks from the Foundry. It’s a close enough walk, which won’t aggravate his injury any further. He’s brought up short by his bike in the alley. There’s a dark splotch of blood that no doubt came from his wound.

“Yeah, that seemed to be the quickest way to get you here. Sweet ride by the way.” Roy fishes the keys out of his pocket and tosses them to Oliver.

Oliver climbs on the bike with a smile, alright more of a grimace than a smile. “Thanks.”

“So when does my training start, boss?”

“Tomorrow. 7pm. The old steel factory.” That means he needs to find a nice water bowl. It’ll be fun to see Roy learn that trick all over again. With any luck, Digg will be back on board then too, if Oliver finally gets the chance to talk to him.

Roy nods. “Got it.”

The engine roars to life, but Roy stops him before he can tear off, pulling out a black rectangle from his other pocket.

“Oh, and before I forget: your girlfriend keeps on calling.”

He stops short, heart skipping a beat as Roy holds out his phone. He snatches it back with a glare and chooses not to dignify that statement with a response. Instead he peels out of the alley and heads toward the Foundry.

Five minutes later, once he’s safely back in the Foundry, as he gently maneuvers his arm into his shirt sleeve, his phone blares from the work table. He can’t help the smile as he sees her name light up the display, Roy’s words come back to him. He lifts the phone to his ear. “Felicity?”

“Oh, thank God!” He freezes at the palpable relief in her voice. “Way to scare me, Oliver! What the hell happened?”

He frowns. “What do you mean what happened?”

She snorts into the phone. “Oh, I don’t know how about you calling me and then me hearing some pretty violent sounding noises. Then you don’t answer your freaking phone. How about that?”

Shit. He forgot he called her before he passed out. He casts his eyes around for an excuse, a reason for that call to make sense. “Yeah, sorry, I didn’t have cell service.”

“Uh-huh. Sure. Well, Tommy and I have been out searching for you. We thought you were mugged!”

“You thought he was mugged,” Tommy’s muffled voice contributes from the background.

“Yeah well, I’m fine, Felicity. There’s no need to worry.” Oliver grabs his jacket and calmly walks up the stairs. “I promise.”
“Not good enough, Mister. I’ve been looking for you for the last hour, so how about you came out from wherever you’re hiding so we can check on you in person?”

Oliver pauses in the hall. The metal door clicks shut behind him, the beep of the electronic lock to verify no trespassers. “Come out?”

“Yeah, we’re at the club,” Tommy explains rather reluctantly, as he tries to put so much into that response.

Except Oliver doesn’t hear it through the phone. He hears Tommy’s voice from the other side of the wall that shields the door from view of the rest of the building.

This is going to be a long night.
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

Firstly, I want to thank all you fabulous readers for your patience as I struggled to get out this update. Hindsight says, I shouldn't have scheduled updates on the few days of the week that I work. Plus life went from about 5 to 350 overnight, so my writing time has been severely disrupted and I want to thank you all for bearing with me.

Secondly, my update schedule may be changing. I have a job interview tomorrow/later today, so that will affect my schedule and it might take me a little while to get used to the new time constraints. My goal is to continue with weekly updates, the day of the week I update might be changing though.

Thirdly, which probably should have been mentioned first, a HUGE thanks to geniewithwifi for editing this while she was busy and getting it back to me within a couple hours!!

And now without further ado, Chapter 16!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 16

Roy wouldn’t call it fate that he happened to be in the alley as the Green Arrow managed to swing down from an apartment window. If anything, he would call it the perfect time to give the guy grief over his chosen moniker. Green Arrow? Really? What sort of cheesy name was that? Couldn’t he come up with something better?

Then the masked crusader had stumbled into a brick wall.

That had been the first tip off that something was wrong. It was the trip that brought the trail of dark liquid to Roy’s attention.

Whoever the man was, he was bleeding, badly.

He might not be a doctor, but he knew enough about injuries to know this was a take-him-to-the-hospital kind of bleed. Roy doesn’t have a chance to make his presence known before the figure groans and collapses to the ground in a heap of bones. A phone skips across the pavement at the force of his landing.

“Shit.”

Roy takes off at a run as he grabs a spare t-shirt from his bag and immediately presses it against the hole in the man’s chest.

“Alright, come on, dude! We need to get you some help.” He lunges for the phone, snagging it with his fingertips as he applies pressure to the gunshot wound. Yeah, he’s seen enough of those to know what they are too.

“We can call this in, call it a mugging. I just need to get you out of th-“ Sounds stop coming out of
Roy’s mouth once he gets a look at the face under the hood. Because his plan is a great plan, something the police would buy. A mugger was provoked, shot his victim and took his clothes: believable. Oliver Queen in the Glades at this time of night: not so believable. And there goes his complete cover story.

Roy knows what he should do, what anyone in the Glades would do if they were here: walk away. Bad things happened in the Glades all the time. People go shot every day (or close enough honestly). No one would be surprised a man parading around in tight green leather was shot, that he died here in the street.

Oliver Queen, on the other hand, was a different story. People would care that he died. Roy just didn’t care about those people, about the one percenters who spent their money on frivolous things. He could count how many times he ranted about the ridiculousness of people like the Queens. He would even think this was a joke if not for the warm, red blood, soaking through his t-shirt and the fact that this man had saved a girl from getting raped.

The girl: Sarah. Her older sister worked in the clinic.

The idea’s only half-formed in his head as Roy starts moving. He obviously hasn’t thought it through completely because he staggers almost immediately under the vigilante’s weight. Seriously? How...

He shakes his head, refocusing on the task in front of him. It’s only with a combination of walking and dragging that he manages to get Oliver Queen slung over the back of his motorcycle. Roy’s sure that any other time he would be in trouble for even contemplating this, but desperate times call for desperate measures. Besides, how hard can it be to ride a motorcycle?

... “Lis, what is so monumentally important that you’ve called me three times in the last thirty minutes?” Tommy grumbles into the phone in an effort to disguise the sleep in his voice, like he hadn’t fallen asleep looking up information about night clubs.

“You weren’t picking up your phone. Listen, are you with Oliver?”

He blinks at the non-sequitur and glances around just to make sure he’s not passed out with his best friend somewhere. “Nope. No Oliver here.”

“Are you sure?” She almost sounds desperate.

It’s the pleading tone that has him sitting forward in his chair, a frown sliding in to replace the natural smile. “Yeah. Pretty sure, Smoak. I’m in my apartment. Why?”

He can practically hear her gnawing on her bottom lip with worry. What is going on?

“He called me.”

Tommy’s eyebrows draw together in confusion, wondering what he’s missing. “Okay...” Unusual, but not exactly reason for her to call and ask if Oliver was there.

“Then there was a thud and a chhhx and the line died and he hasn’t picked up since then. I’ve been calling.”

The frown deepens. He chooses to ignore her terrible sound effects. “Are you sure it wasn’t just a butt dial? No offense, but if he was at a club or somewhere he didn’t want to be interrupted then he wouldn’t answer the phone.”
“Not unless his usual hotspots are in the middle of the Glades.” Her hard voice carries through the phone and Tommy pauses with a forkful of his cold, leftover Chinese food hovering in front of his mouth.

“The Glades? Where in the Glades?” Then he realizes the larger fundamental question he should be asking: “Felicity, did you track his phone?”

Silence is his answer. It’s all he needs really. It was really the only obvious choice.

“I thought you stopped hacking.”

“Technically, it wasn’t hacking.”

Tommy snorts. There’s no way it wasn’t hacking.

“It wasn’t! Someone had the GPS locator activated since his kidnapping. I just...tapped into the signal, which I guess you could argue is hacking, but hacking is just such an ugly word...”

“Oh, so where in the Glades are we talking?” Tommy interrupts, perfectly aware that if he’s anywhere near the club, it’s nothing to worry about. She rattles off an address about as far from the Foundry as you can be and still be considered in the Glades.

That probably means he’s on Green Arrow business and there’s no way he wants Felicity anywhere near that mess of violence and justice, or whatever Oliver’s calling his crusade.

“I’m sure everything’s fine, Felicity.” He switches her to speaker as he shoots Oliver a text from his own phone and then another one to John Diggle. Sure, John walked out the other night, but he should be back now. Oliver wouldn’t have gone out without back up, right?

“Well, then, you won’t mind checking with me, will you?” She asks.

His finger hovers over where he just pressed the send button. Nope. Uh-uh. This is not happening. This is so not happening.

“Felicity-“

“I’m outside now. Either you’re coming with me or I’m going into the Glades alone.”

He groans. At least she had the common sense not to go alone...right?

“I’m on my way.”

Seeing her drumming her fingers against the steering wheel of her red mini, he almost confiscates her eyes and takes over the driving, but she apparently already knows where they’re going because she drives flawlessly through twisting streets until she gets to what he can only describe as a haunting alley.

If it were up to him, he wouldn’t get out of the car. Shadows dance spectrally in between the brick buildings. He knows they shouldn’t be here. Oliver would probably tell them the same.

He checks his phone for a response to his text from either Oliver or Digg as Felicity tries to call his phone again. She’s barely stopped trying the entire drive over. Tommy’s weighing their options and the chance of survival should they exit the car when Felicity throws all that planning out the window by opening her door.

“Wha-“
“Are you coming or not?” She demands, flicking on a flashlight he didn’t even realize she had on her.

“Got an extra flashlight?” Is the only thing he can think to ask as he follows the fearless blonde into the daunting alley. Honestly, he’s scared out of his mind, but he’s not about to let Felicity venture into a dark alley alone. Who knows what she’s going to find.

“I think there’s a little one on my keychain.”

He glances back at the car and decides not to dash back when she’s only going to walk further into the darkness. “What do you expect to find?”

With any luck, they’ll find nothing. Or maybe Oliver’s abandoned phone. That would be a nice tidy explanation. Simple even to explain that away.

Tommy doesn’t understand why Felicity stopped at first. She just halts in front of him, flashlight fixed on the wall and a spot of pavement. It takes a moment for his eyes to register what he’s staring at. It hits him at the same time Felicity’s flashlight starts frantically darting down the alley.

Dumbly, he stumbles after as she tracks the trail of red, almost-black liquid – blood, he corrects himself as bile rises in his throat, Oliver’s blood. It leads them to motorcycle tracks that head out of the alley and Felicity starts running for her car, flashlight bobbing manically.

Tommy makes it to the car seconds after she does, watching as she pulls up a program on her tablet. Felicity mutters under her breath as her fingers fly across the screen. He’s helpless to do anything, but text Digg frantically again.

“I’ve got a new read on his GPS location,” Felicity announces triumphantly, already snapping her seatbelt together.

She shoves her tablet into Tommy’s arms as he closes his door and she twists the keys in the ignition. “Guide me.”

He nods, but finally lets out a long breath. At least it’s a location he recognizes: Oliver’s at the Foundry. It must not be as bad as it looked.

... 

Oliver braces himself and steps out from behind the wall with a forced smile. “Hey. What are you doing here?”

Tommy laughs it off. “See, Smoak! I told you it was nothing! He looks fine.”

Oliver, however, freezes at the cool, calculating look on Felicity’s face as her eyes size him up. And they’re darting everywhere. This is worse than he thought. Her jaw is clenched, just barely containing her loud voice. She must have heard something in that phone call because she brushes right past Tommy, arms crossed over her chest as she continues to size him up.

And his heart is breaking a little bit. This isn’t how he wanted her to find out. He wanted to sit down at tell her, not over loud voices in the gutted warehouse that will one day be a thriving club, if only because its run by millionaire playboys.

“I’m fine, Felicity,” he whispers, the force of her gaze off-putting. God, he wishes they were at that point where she would be touching him just to double check, but he quickly chastises that part of his mind for thinking like that.
“Well, excuse me if I don’t believe you. There was a lot of blood in that alley.”

If possible, his heart sinks even lower. “Alley?”

“Yeah, alley. Where your phone was?”

Oliver blinks at her. Of course she knew where he was. She traced his phone. It really shouldn’t surprise him, her thinking out of the box like this, but he’s completely unprepared for this. Granted he was just shot and given some sedative or painkiller so thinking up excuses probably isn’t going to go too well for him.

“Oh, yeah, I went to visit a friend.” He tries not to wince at that. He really does. It just doesn’t matter so much because he forgot to address the most important part of what she said. “But I wasn’t bleeding. There’s no blood on me.”

It’s a huge state-the-obvious moment. It’s like his subconscious doesn’t want him to be subtle in the slightest.

“Really? You expect me to believe that Oliver Queen has a friend in the Glades that he meets late at night? And then randomly calls people he knows. And that on top of all those things, there just happens to be a huge amount of blood in the alley?”

Oliver just nods.

“What’s your friend’s name?”

“John. Diggle.” A deep voice comes from their left and three heads turn simultaneously to focus on the new arrival. “Friend and bodyguard.”

He’s never been so relieved to see Digg.

Felicity turns to him with that disbelieving scowl still fixed upon her face. “You live in the Glades?”

John just nods.

Oliver releases a quiet breath of relief, an expression he shares with Tommy who looks clearly unhappy with the turn of events.

Oliver barely get his mask up in time as Felicity swirls around, eyes darting from Oliver to Digg to Tommy. She turns back to him.

“And this is the story you’re actually sticking to?”

Part of him wants to say no. It’s a crappy story that’s just dragging everyone into the lie. Another part wants to change the subject without having to lie to her anymore. And a small sliver just wants to just wants to tell her everything, to beg for her help, to get her back into his life for good instead of this tentative line he’s been toeing.

Instead, he looks her in the eyes – those beautiful eyes he gets lost in every time, the ones he wants to memorize every detail of, the ones that haunt him as he falls asleep – and says, as sincerely as he can, “I promise you, Felicity, I’m fine.”

He doesn’t say the blood isn’t his, doesn’t say he wasn’t hurt, doesn’t deny or confirm anything. It’s not a lie. It’s just a man telling the woman he loves that he’s okay. Which is the truth.

Her eyes search his, looking for more.
They both know there’s more to the story than what’s been told, but she’s not going to push. She’s picking her battles. It’s a conscious decision not to keep asking the questions he can see flitting in her eyes, just begging to be asked. This isn’t the end, but it’s something he doesn’t have to answer tonight.

But he can already tell that it’ll have to be soon.

“We’re still on for lunch?” She asks suddenly.

Oliver swallows...yeah, that’s going to be an interesting lunch. “Yeah. Big Belly Burger?”

“Noon.” She nods.

Oliver agrees despite the frown Tommy’s sending his way, eyebrows drawn together in consternation.

“See you then. You coming, Tommy?” She turns on her heel and walks away.

“Yeah, I’ll be out in a minute.”

Oliver shifts uneasily, uncomfortable with Felicity alone in the yard of an abandoned building by herself in the middle of the worst part of town. He glances at Diggle, who seems to have premeditated his request and already started to follow her.

“Let me walk you out.”

Feeling slightly better, Oliver turns to face Tommy’s scowl.

“Lunch?”

“Part of our custody agreement,” Oliver evades. He doesn’t want to get into this talk with Tommy. He’s pretty sure it’s going to be similar to his first talk with Digg about her, except Tommy’s more emotionally invested in keeping Felicity out of this.

“That was a joke, dude.”

He sighs, sitting down on a crate to relieve some of the weariness from this evening. “Maybe, but we agreed to lunch.”

“You agreed? And when did this happen?”

Oliver sighs. “The hospital.”

“The hos- Do you even remember what I said? She’s off limits, Oliver!”

He sighs. “It’s not a date, Tommy.” And it isn’t. Not that he wouldn’t be opposed to one should the opportunity present itself. Hell, if she ever hinted she’d reciprocate a kiss he’d go for it, regardless of Tommy’s feelings on the matter.

Sure, it hasn’t happened here yet, but Felicity and Digg became his best friends even before Tommy died. It might not be selfish of him, yet he’s not about to let her walk away because of her friendship with Tommy. She chose his crusade last time, and he hopes that will happen again.

“Off limits!” He repeats, poking Oliver in the chest, although thankfully nowhere near the stitched up wound.
Oliver raises his arms in surrender. “It’s just a friendly lunch.”

Tommy narrows his eyes in pure disbelief based on his less than perfect past. Yes, the Oliver Queen Tommy knows wasn’t the kind of person who could have female friends. And sure, his track record with the opposite sex is as far from stellar as one could be. He gets it. Tommy’s worried about his friend. There’s no way he could know that Felicity is the exception for him, that he’s already figured that out, that there’s nothing he wouldn’t do for her.

He tries to convey that all in just a couple words.

“Okay.” Tommy finally relaxes, although some wariness remains in the tenseness of his shoulders. “I’m just glad you’re getting along.”

There’s a strained moment before Tommy throws his arms around Oliver. He barely stifles a groan at the sudden pressure on his wound as Tommy releases him just as quickly.

“You had me worried there, Ollie. There was a lot of blood in that alley.” He takes a deep breath as if to calm himself down. “But you’ve got to get better at those lies or everyone’s going to end up finding out your secret.”

“Right,” Oliver agrees with a tight smile. “I’ll work on that.”

Tommy nods and heads out the door. “Glad you’re alright, buddy!”

Oliver waves, falling back against the wall as soon as he disappears from sight. His eyes close as he breathes through the pain and attempts to figure out if he can bring Felicity in without raising any red flags with Tommy. What he’s trying not to think about is the conversation he’s going to have with Digg now about Lawton, which is regrettably hard to forget considering the man in question is walking up to him.

“It seems you had a close call tonight.”

He doesn’t bother opening his eyes to stare at Digg. “I stabbed Lawton in the eye, he shot me through the shoulder.”

“I thought you weren’t going to kill him.”

Oliver sighs, an eye cracks open to look at the bodyguard. “It didn’t kill him last time, but I didn’t stick around to check his pulse.”

Diggle nods slowly as he processes the news. He doesn’t know how to take it and Oliver can’t blame him. His eyes finally open as he leans forward. His face twists in a grimace as the stitches in his shoulder pull. Digg glances at it, but Oliver shakes his head.

“I’m fine. It’s been stitched up.” He draws in a deep breath. “The reason I won’t kill Lawton, the reason I can’t is because he saves your life, Digg. He helps you rescue Lyla from a Russian prison and he gets captured by A.R.G.U.S. And…” He braces himself because this is game changing news for Digg, “Deadshot killed your brother because he was the target.”

Digg frowns. “No. He was after the man Andy was protecting.”

He knew this wasn’t going to be easy. It made so much more sense that Andy, a man Digg looked up to, his brother, would be the hero who saved a man’s life. That Andy was the target, that he had done something so terrible that someone paid to have him taken out; it’s untenable to the intricately moral John Diggle.
And it sucks that Oliver has to be the one to tell him that.

Oliver runs a hand over his head. “I’m sorry, John.”

Digg shakes his head adamantly. “You’re wrong.”

“I wish I was.” The words are more to himself than John. Nothing he can say will change this or make it better. It is what it is.

Oliver pulls himself to his feet. “I get it, Digg. I get why you walked off, and I’m glad you came back.”

“Tommy texted me about the blood in the alley. You good?”

“I got stitched up at the clinic.” And he needs to tell Digg about Roy...

Digg starts, narrows his eyes. “And no one asked about the green leather?”

It hurts him to admit it: “I don’t know.” Digg freezes. “I was unconscious.”

“I thought it wasn’t bad.”

“It’s fine,” Oliver insists, wishing he had just swept the whole thing under the rug. “The doctor was the sister of a woman I saved. And Roy will be here tomorrow night.”

“And who is Roy?”

“Roy Harper. He grew up in the Glades.”

Digg crosses his arms over his chest. “Another member of your team?”

“I didn’t plan on bringing him in this early, but yeah. He rescued me in that alley, Digg, and he made sure I had help.”

“Right,” Digg says, the word stilted in disbelief. “There seems to be a lot you don’t know despite this ‘from the future’ business.”

He spares a glare for Digg. Yes: he’s aware of the problems incorporated in changing the future and that it’s killing his credibility with an already-skeptical Digg. Instead of answering the tacit question, Oliver just pulls on his motorcycle jacket, grimacing at the pull of his wound.

“It’s not an exact science, Digg. Believe it or not, I’ve never done this before.” He swallows hard. “If you believe in this mission, then stay. If not, then not calling the police would be greatly appreciated.”

“That’s it? Don’t call the police?” Digg asks incredulously.

Oliver shrugs as he turns back, jacket now firmly in place. “John, I’m not going to convince you I’m from the future, but I could still use your help, whatever you decide.”

He turns away, unable to wait as his friend sorts through his choice, Oliver heads back out for his bike. He can’t be here to watch as Digg decide something so game-changing. He’s thought this whole thing would be resolved when Digg came back or didn’t. That they would talk or spar and then everything would be fine. But obviously it’s not that simple.

Nothing ever is.
Oliver yanks on his helmet almost aggressively as he reaches his bike. He really needs to get another one specifically for his vigilante alter-ego. It took the incident tonight for him to realize he overlooked something so simple. That and he needs some way to hide the bloodstains from his mother. Boy, would that be a terrible conversation.

Digg approaches him just as he kicks the bike into gear. His stern face gives no indication of the choice he’s made, so Oliver just waits it out. Digg nods, holding out a hand.

“I’m in.”

Euphoria spreads through his body in an instant, numbing the pain in his shoulder as he grins and shakes Digg’s hand. “Good.”

An instant later he’s off. And despite the near-fatal wound, Oliver can’t help but grin at his own success. Two out of three members on board.

Now he just needs to convince Felicity.

...

Felicity stares into her morning coffee for the seventh time this morning. With chasing Oliver around the Glades last night and worrying about the large pool of blood in the alley, she barely got any sleep. The last two cups of coffee are the only way she’s hyper-alert right now.

Hyper-alert and hyper-worried.

No matter how she thinks about it, she still thinks there’s something Oliver isn’t saying, and she hates mysteries. Oliver didn’t seem hurt, but technology doesn’t lie. He was in that alley, an alley full of blood. He even looked a little piqued last night, although the more she thinks about it, the worse she remembers it being. There wasn’t any blood on Oliver, but the factory building he was in was virtually empty. Tommy claimed they were preparing to open a club, but it still just looks like an abandoned building.

Not to mention, he was lying through his teeth about visiting Digg. She didn’t even have to look it up, not that she wasn’t tempted. She was definitely tempted, just to confirm her suspicions. She’d broken down enough that she took out her rusty hacking skills and listened in to the police scanner. There had been only one call about gunshots in the area, one call where police apparently arrived and summarily dismissed it as a nuisance call. No one found the blood in the alley.

The real question is what Oliver was doing in the middle of the Glades?

If he was shot in the Glades, why would he go so far from the safety of his home?

The only reason she can think of is drugs. But she’s fairly certain rich playboys can get their drugs elsewhere (not that she has personal experience with that), and that fits far better with Oliver pre-island. It doesn’t fit the man she’s met at all.

So, basically, she has no idea what Oliver was doing in the Glades, why he was shot, or why he would lie about it. It just further compounds the thousands of questions she has regarding the new and improved Oliver Queen.

She’s practically itching to look into him, to shift through all the files she can find online. She’s managed for years with no (minimal) hacking. Now her fingers are just itching to get to work. She should be working on the inane pile of work on her desk, but it’s all just busy work – getting rid of viruses, turning on and off computers, and fixing a million little bugs in firewall code.
Felicity shakes her head to clear it. She still has two and a half hours until her lunch with Oliver. She can get some answers then. First, she has to actually do the legal job she gets paid for.

Ten minutes into the tedium that constitutes the life of an IT gremlin, Felicity’s mind wanders back to the folder on her coffee table at home, the one Walter handed to her with that incredible job offer. She doesn’t want to be stuck doing this job for the foreseeable future, and she doesn’t want to leave Starling City.

Really, the choice is clear.

Still, she finishes the stack in record time, which leaves her exactly thirty minutes before she has to be at Big Belly Burger to meet Oliver. She grabs her paperwork to hand in and saunters through the IT department, a smile on her face as she thinks this might be the last time she ever has to do this banal activity.

Fowler smiles stiffly as she walks in with her pile of folders.

“Is there a problem, Ms. Smoak?”

“I’m just here to turn in my reports for the day.” She smiles politely.

He frowns. “I hope you did your due diligence. I won’t tolerate shoddy work.”

Her smile stretches further, fake in sincerity, but full of the knowledge that she won’t have to deal with him much longer. “Everything’s in order.” She drops the folders on his desk with a perky smile.

“Well, since you did such an exemplary job, I guess you can spend the rest of the date cleaning up the servers. They’ve been dragging for the past week-”

“That’s because someone’s been downloading questionable software.” The words are forced out with gritty politeness. She wasn’t the only one who had argued with Fowler over his choice of software at the last department meeting. They had been overruled, as per usual, but then he expected them to fix everything. Wow, she was not going to miss this job. At all. “But first, I have a follow up with Mr. Steele.”

The sour expression that crosses her face gives her a perverse sense of joy as she turns on her heel to leave. Honestly, she feels free and happy for the first time in a long time. This job...it will be challenging and tough. She’ll be way out of her depth, but she’s looking forward to everything she can accomplish.

As she steps out onto the executive floor, Felicity realizes she didn’t even think about the possibility that the CEO might have other meetings, or wouldn’t have time for her. She wasn’t big in the company, after all, or at least not yet. Or maybe he changed his mind...

Her feet make the decision to turn around before her brain catches up. A female voice stops her short:

“Miss Smoak?”

She turns timidly back with a smile to Mr. Steele’s secretary. “Yeah, sorry. I was just leaving.” With an awkward gesture to the elevator she just exited, Felicity tries to make a quick exit, only to turn too fast and nearly collide with Moira Queen.

The woman looks her up and down, clearly unimpressed as Felicity blinks. It takes her a moment for her erratic brain to catch up and she starts spewing apologies.
Moira waves her off dismissively, turning to the secretary instead. “Hello, Sheila. Is my husband in?”

“Yes, Mrs. Queen, and his lunch is on the calendar. He just wants to meet with Miss Smoak first.”

Felicity freezes at that, mouth falling open as both women turn their gaze to her. “He’s expecting me?” she asks stupidly. “I mean, I didn’t set up an appointment and I probably should have, because hello, he’s CEO. I can come back later. I just...you know what? I’ll come back later.” She turns to make a hasty retreat before anything worse comes out of her mouth.

“No need, Miss Smoak. He said, if you came up to send you right in,” Sheila responds happily.

Felicity blinks, struck dumb by the information. “Oh.”

“You can head on in,” Sheila prompts again, no less friendly than before although Moira surveys her with arched eyebrows and pursed lips.

Felicity hopes she manages something like a polite smile as she slips past Moira to the glass office door and walks in wringing her hands nervously as she approaches Mr. Steele’s desk.

“Ah, Miss Smoak, I was hoping you’d stop by.”

His warm smile and kindly British accent both relax and heighten Felicity’s nerves, if that was even possible. It’s a relief that he wants to see her – she hadn’t quite believed Sheila, despite her insistence – but just walking in here and talking to Mr. Steele reminds her of yesterday’s interview and gets her nervous all over again.

“You were?” Then she shakes her head. This isn’t the time or place to voice her insecurities. Get your head on straight, Smoak! Your mother raised you better than this. He wants you to lead a department so prove that you can.

“I’m here to accept the job.” She says as formally as possible, her hands clasped in front of her to curb the urge to fidget.

Walter beams at her. “Excellent. I was hoping you’d say that. I have a meeting with the project heads and interim director at three and I was hoping to introduce you then.”

“At three?” She asks, the strangled, faint quality returns to her voice.

“Is that a problem?” He asks.

Felicity shakes her head. “No. That will be...great.”

“Fantastic. We’ll have you work with Mr. Hardy, the interim director, for the next month or so, so he can show you the ropes. And I’ll let your supervisor know about your job change. Unless of course you want to finish out the month—”

“No!” Felicity cuts him off abruptly and then smiles as she realizes how overeager she sounded. “Not that IT isn’t great, but I’m ready to move on.”

Mr. Steele nods knowingly.

“And you might also want to tell him to change the software he updated back to the original because the new ones are slowing down the servers.”

He actually chuckles at the comment. “Thank you for your input, Miss Smoak. I’ll see you at three.”
Felicity grins and heads out of the office. Today turned out to be a good day after all.

Chapter End Notes

Up next: the Lunch you've all been waiting for!!
Chapter 17

“Sorry, I’m late!” Felicity announces as she slides into the seat across from him without a single glance thrown his way.

Oliver smirks at her distraction. She’s almost harried as she drops her bag onto the bench of the booth he had taken over while waiting for her. His worry that she’s still frazzled from last night is banished when she turns a glowing smile on him.

“It’s fine. You’re actually early.”

She blinks in surprise, her eyes cast around for a clock. “What?”

“Ten minutes early, in fact.” Oliver turns his phone to show her the time. “I thought you didn’t get off for lunch until a little later.”

Okay, so he’s fishing for information. She wouldn’t be this happy about an ordinary day in the IT department, which means Walter’s talk with her went well. Oliver knows better than to assume her sunshine-y mood means she forgot about last night, but he’s content to focus on the reason for that smile for now.

“First, it’s creepy that you know that,” Felicity points out, leaning back into the seat. “Second, I got out early.”

The bright smile turns pensive as she surveys him. “I got a job promotion. You wouldn’t know anything about that, would you?”

He wrestles with a grin, but manages “So Walter offered you the Applied Sciences job?” with a mostly straight face.

Felicity’s eyes narrow and he knows he didn’t get away with sounding nonchalant. She can see through his question. “What did you say to him?”

Oliver shrugs. “I might have mentioned your name. He offered you that job on his own.”

“You’re a terrible liar,” she comments almost conversationally, but the smile still graces her face. “I should probably be mad with you for going around my back, except I just can’t figure out why you did it.”

Because she’s brilliant. She just needs the opportunity to shine. He’s just thankful Walter was willing to give her a chance, to believe in the genius hiding in the IT department. He doesn’t want to cheapen it with a line, and anything he has to say right now will come out sounding like a line.

“Why did you do it, Oliver?” She demands after the silence drags on too long without an answer.

He doesn’t bother to hide the small smirk that settles on his face. “To get my mom out of my hair.”

She raises her eyebrows skeptically.

He nods, knowing that wasn’t enough for her. “Plus I figured you would like working in Applied Sciences.”
With that statement her smile dims to a frown. Her eyes light with that calculating, analytical stare, the one she gets whenever she’s trying to figure out a puzzle. She’s latched onto something. As far as he knows, he didn’t say anything too damning. There’s no way she’s connected him to the Green Arrow that the news is starting to pick up on and spin stories about.

There was no bullet-ridden laptop, no silly excuses, no syringe full of Vertigo. She couldn’t have figured it out. There was no way. There was no connection she could make.

She considers him. Uncomfortable with the path of the conversation, Oliver turns his attention back to the menu.

“We should order,” he announces.

Felicity continues to stare, even as she flips the red, laminated menu open with graceful ease. Oliver averts his eyes in favor of picking his burger even though he knows what to get. He knows both their orders.

“Why were you early?”

Her question catches Oliver off guard. So much so that he looks up from the menu. “What?”

“Tommy tells legendary tales about your tardiness. And now you’re *early*.”

Oliver shrugs. “Is there a question in there?”

She tilts her head. “You’ve changed over the last five years, but it’s more than that.”

Felicity’s on a roll, following some train of thought and Oliver honestly had no idea where it will take her. She couldn’t know about his secret identity, yet she obviously seems to know something.

“You’ve already scoped out this whole place, right? And you’re protective, like crazily so. Your first instinct is to protect others. And don’t think about denying it. You don’t get that way without training.”

Oliver swallows thickly as his hands clench into fists under the table. He’s aware of that instinct, and he knows he hasn’t kept it contained. It couldn’t lead her anywhere, though. Right?

“What I don’t get is why you walk around with a bodyguard you clearly don’t need or what you would be doing out in the Glades in the middle of the night.”

She leans out onto the table and Oliver swallows, unaware as to how she managed to get so close to the truth without any relevant information. And Felicity focused on a mystery is a dangerous thing to someone hiding a secret, someone like him.

“But I am figuring some things out. See, I’ve been thinking about it, and I’m willing to bet you didn’t actually need my help with that phone.”

His nails dig into the flesh of his palms at the necessity of that question. Horrible liar as he may be, he’s sure he got away with at least some of the lies. To know she saw through his ineptitude with the phone is staggering.

“Which begs the question,” she barrels on without any regard for his escalated apprehension, “why did you bring it to me? And why did you come to my apartment and then convince your stepfather to make me head of Applied Sciences?”
“If you ask me, that sounds like a plan for something greater, something you want me to do, which is crazy because you don’t know me. But then you go and say things that make me think you do, that you know me really well.”

He is uniquely terrible at containing himself around Felicity and now it’s about to bite him in the bum. Why couldn’t he for once just hide himself from her? Oh, that’s right: it’s because he’s head-over-heels in love with her.

“And it took me a while to put it together because it sounds so crazy and self-involved,” she babbles, “Then the more I thought about it, the more I realized there are only a few explanations. I don’t know which one’s crazier. Maybe I’m just crazy.”

Oliver watches her face as she continues to talk, all the intensity there below the creeping self-doubt, the explanation he’s starting to dread even before she’s voiced it. What astonishes him is that she’s almost there. She’s almost to the too-crazy-to-believe truth.

Felicity takes a deep breath and delivers her final verdict: “But either you’re a creepy, psycho-level stalker or you’re from the future.”

...

Lyla pulls her slightly singed hair back from her face and into a low, messy bun. She hated missions with explosives, especially with her penchant for getting caught just inside the blast radius. These past couple days went well, and the mission went off without a hitch: no friendly casualties, which was how she liked her missions.

She’d been debriefed by Waller herself and was cleared to go home, but she had something to do first.

The secondary computer lab is far from empty in the middle of the day, full of field agents doing their jobs, but Lyla manages to snag one in the corner.

After her talk with John in that bar, there’s been a thought lingering at the back of her mind. It was her first mission for A.R.G.U.S., some guy had tried to bust their transport. They brought him in alive and the whole way he had been raving about being from the future. Waller had dismissed it as the ravings of a mad man, but almost immediately after, she had heard of a new project: Operation Wells.

No one could ever said Waller doesn’t appreciate literature.

Back then Lyla didn’t have the clearance to look at the project. Now as a team leader, she just might.

She avoids the desire to look around the room knowing it would be far more suspicious if she did. Not that looking up files is against protocol here, but considering she couldn’t look up anything involving Oliver Queen, she’d rather not take the risk.

The file opens easily with a double click.

A couple windows pop open, none of which say much at all other than accounts of the torture of the man. It seems Waller was successful in the interrogation. The man spilled his guts, testified to a future where superheroes exist. To Lyla, the entire thing sounds too much like a comic book, too fantastical to ever happen in this world. Any names in the file are redacted, deemed too important to share, which lends some credibility to the man, even if unintentional.

By the end of the first document, Lyla’s positive the man’s a raving lunatic. He’d been cool and
logical from what Lyla could remember of their encounter, but his predictions of the future were ridiculous.

The second file is a timeline of the coming years as the future man declared them. Except here everything is covered with the black lines. It’s got to be the juicy details of the account that were redacted in the other document, so she moves on quickly.

She clicks on the third window.

It opens to a letter submitted to Waller from the head of the project:

*Director Waller,*

*It’s happened. We were waiting for some sign he could be telling the truth and it happened today. It was something small: a firefight in Bialia, but it’s on his list. We need to talk about what we’re going to do if everything he said is true. There are circumstances we need to prevent, matters of national security.*

*We don’t know how he time traveled, but I’ve still got scientists working over his DNA to see if we can find any hints there, but as far as we can tell nothing had changed. The background check finally came through.*

*Demarco was a college student in his third year after one tour in Iraq. He just woke up one day and dropped out of school. From that point on, his life was geared towards training. He’d successfully managed to divert several shipments before we caught him in the act. So there’s not another Anthony Demarco running around, but there’s also no signs of a mental break.*

*We’ll keep working on it, but I need more men on this.*

*Agent Fraser*

Below in a neat red stamp it says: *Motion Rejected 8/2010*


If only Lyla believed that was the end of it. There’s no more record of the project, but Waller wouldn’t pass up the opportunity to garner more knowledge about a possible future: she value knowledge too much. This just means the end of the electronic trail she was following. Whatever the outcome of the project was, Waller believed in it.

And if John was to be believed, there’s another time traveler out there.

It looks like she needs to talk to Oliver Queen.

...

*From the future...*

He stares at her in shock, mind split in two different lines of thought: There’s no way she can know that; and he wonders how she can still manage to surprise him.

She’s figured it out against all odds.

And yet he doesn’t know how to begin to describe or respond to anything she’s just declared, except: “I’m not a stalker.”
Felicity blinks at the statement. “What?”

Oliver shrugs. “I’m not a stalker.” He’s actually managed to render her speechless. He smirks. “I’ll order lunch.”

He walks up to Carly, alternatively jubilant that Felicity figured out, nervous about what this means, and terrified about what will come next.

Carly glances behind him as she jots down his order. “You know, I thought Oliver Queen would have swankier places to bring his dates.”

“This isn’t a date,” Oliver corrects. “It’s just two friends getting lunch.”

She snorts. “Please. If you want anyone to believe that, stop staring at her like she’s your entire world.”

Oliver resists the urge to protest her teasing, instead he throws a glance back over his shoulder at the woman contemplating him from the booth with a combination of wonder, doubt, and analytical thinking.

“Yeah, that’s the look,” Carly announces as she sets the milkshake he ordered in front of him along with a glass of water. “Watch out or your face will get stuck that way.”

He rolls his eyes, but smiles good-naturedly. “Thank you, Carly.”

“Uh-huh,” she nods as her hands shoo him back to the table with the drinks.

He slides the milkshake across the table as he takes his seat. “I figured today was a good day for the chocolate.”

She blinks down at the milkshake in front of her and then looks back up at him. “How...”

He watches her as she struggles to come to terms with this confirmation and the conundrum it creates. Oliver leans back to wait for the questions that will fly from her mouth as soon as she can wrap her mind around the truth that he’s told her.

Felicity snaps to attention a moment later, confusion shattered in favor of calculating intensity. This is it. The questions come next, questions he can finally answer without being labelled crazy.

“So you’re trying to tell me, you’re not only back from the Island, but also from the future?”

Oliver nods. It’s a concerted effort now to hide the uptick of his lips. He probably shouldn’t find her scrutiny and focus a turn on right now.

“A future where you know me?”

Another nod.

“How well do you know me?” She narrows her eyes at him and Oliver can’t resist the chuckle that slips out.

Because how is he supposed to answer that loaded question. He knows everything about her. She’s his heart and soul. “You’re my best friend,” he offers instead.

“You best friend?” She repeats, disbelieving. “How far in the future?”
He shrugs. “Two and a half years, give or take.”

“Is this some sort of prank Tommy convinced you to pull? Because just know that if it is, I will demolish your and Tommy’s credit scores. I don’t care if you’re billionaires, I’ll still do it.”

Oliver grins. “Believe me, I know.”

“How?” She demands.

“I’ve seen you work your computer magic.” Her eyes are still boring holes into him, a silent demand to elaborate. “I’ve watched you hack. It’s impressive.”

She stiffens. “What?”

Carly chooses that moment to drop off their food. She takes one look at the tension and makes a quick exit.

Oliver grimaces. The only way he can think to smooth this over is to bring up the Arrow business, but that wasn’t something he wanted to drag her into immediately. “You’ve helped me on some less-than-legal exploits of my own.”

There. That’s a diplomatic approach.

She snorts. “Uh-huh. Sure. And what sort of activities were those because I can tell you right now that you’re barking up the wrong tree if you think I’m some sort of criminal or helping you get drugs or something.”

“Felicity,” he says; a thrill of desire runs through his system at the intimate use of her name and he’s glad to see she’s affected by it as well. “You just said I wasn’t a selfish playboy, that I wanted to protect people, so why would I be into something like drugs?”

She frowns at his words. He has a point. “So, what is it? What do you do? Why do I help you? Does it have to do with why you lost a ton of blood in an alley in the Glades last night? You were hurt, right? That wasn’t someone else’s blood?”

Her eyes are once again scanning his body for any damage.

“I got shot, but I’m fine.”

“Fine?” She repeats. “Oliver, that alley was covered in blood. You can’t be fine.”

He chuckles. “But I am. I got stitched up and everything.”

“You can’t be shaking off a gunshot like it’s nothing.”

Oliver glances around, serious once more. “I’m not. It...was pretty bad. Roy Harper, a kid in the Glades, took me to the Merlyn Clinic for help. But I’ve got a clean bill of health.”

“What exactly were you doing in the Glades at that time of night?”

He pops a French fry into his mouth, a movement that prompts Felicity to acknowledge her own burger. She takes a large bite of the sandwich and then moans in surprised contentment.

“Just the way I like it,” she mutters, eyeing Oliver suspiciously.

“I told you. In the future, we’re best friends. You’ve saved my life more times than I can count.” His
minds falls back into the future that will never be. He’s already changed enough that everything’s happening differently. He’s no longer on the same path.

A small hand squeezing his pulls him back to the present.

It’s amazing she can still do that, still pull him back to the present with a single motion.

“The future is a dark place, huh? Is that why you came back? To change it?”

Oliver takes the opportunity to grasp her hand back, to run a calloused thumb over her knuckles. He can’t meet her eyes, just stare at their joined hands. “I don’t know how I came back, but yes, I want to change it.”

Felicity nods slowly. She draws back, breaks their connection to turn her attention to her food. Oliver follows her example reluctantly.

“You do realize that once you change one thing, everything else changes too, right?”

He laughs at a vivid memory of excitedly waving hands and long diatribes. “Yes. I’ve actually listened to a couple of your rants on the subject. Something about a butterfly effect, and sci-fi. There was a particularly memorable one when that X-men movie came out.”

She pauses for a moment and then nods jerkily. “Right. So what have you changed?”

Oliver sighs, finally meeting her probing eyes again. “Everything.”

... 

He’s from the future. The future.

Felicity swears her brain has taken over with all the questions, but the rest of her is still floundering for a logical reason. It had been a joke, a suggestion borne from the simple fact that it fit even though it was impossible. She didn’t think he would take it and run with it. She didn’t imagine she’d ever be sitting here actually considering its real. In the end, she’s forced to push aside the how to focus on the why and what now. Because as crazy as it sounds, it does make sense...in a weird kind of way.

And God does she want to know everything.

But they’ve got other problems. If he’s changing things, if the future was that bad that he needed to, then what’s going to happen now? And how can she help? It sounds like she did something with her computer skills. And he’s helping people so that’s a...wait...

“You’re the Green Arrow.”

Oliver freezes across from her. “What?”

“It totally makes sense!” Felicity declares with a smile. She would totally volunteer to help a superhero. She always had a thing with wanting a hero, but since she didn’t have any great physical abilities aside from being able to squeeze into small spaces to connect wires, it didn’t really seem like an option. And the hacktivist thing obviously didn’t work out.

“No, it really didn’t,” Oliver agrees, looking weary.

Felicity pauses mid-internal dialogue. “That was out loud, wasn’t it?”

Oliver nods. “And by the way, Cooper isn’t dead. He’s working with some government organization
and he’s going to use the virus you wrote, but that’s not important just yet.”

“Cooper? How do you...the virus?” She frowns at him. Cooper killed himself after he was arrested when he took the blame for her computer virus. She’s let that plague her for years. It’s not possible. She doesn’t know how to deal with that.

“We stopped him...actually, you stopped him, with your mom’s help.”

“My mom? That’s less believable than the time travel thing,” To say her mother is inept when it comes to technology would be kind. Her mother doesn’t know how to use a cell phone correctly. Oliver laughs then, and she can’t help but think he should laugh more because that sound? It’s magical. She wants to hear that sound again. But he has a far-away look in his eye and a smile she’s never seen on him before, a genuine smile that suits him remarkably well.

“You used the wireless on Donna’s watch to contact us. I showed up just in time to see you pistol-whip Cooper.”

Well, if she doubted him before, pulling out the names of her ex and her mother’s pretty convincing. Still...“Donna?”

“Your mom’s definitely one of a kind.”

That’s the nice way of putting it. But back to the important part of this conversation. “So, in this future I help you with your superhero mission?”

Oliver sighs, the smile slips away to a more serious expression as he lowers his burger. “Yes, but it’s more than that.”

“We’re friends,” she says. “Have you told Tommy all of this? Because he was acting weird the other night.”

“No,” Oliver grimaces. “Tommy’s doesn’t know about the time traveling.”

“But he knows about the green leather thing?” Felicity would be lying if she said she didn’t enjoy the way he squirmed at the leather comment.

“Yeah. He knows.”

“But what does this have to do with Applied Sciences?” Because that’s the one piece she can’t quite manage to fit into the puzzle. “Did they send you back in time?”

He runs a hand over his head, worry seeps into his eyes. “I don’t know how I got here.”

“Well, what happened?” She asks and then immediately regrets it as he grows somber. “You don’t have to tell me.”

He shifts uncomfortably, avoids eye contact. “Last night, Queen Consolidated purchased Unidac Industries. There’s a project Unidac’s been working on that might be a threat to the city.”

There’s no might about it. He doesn’t have to say it: she can see that just fine. “So that’s why you wanted me in the department.”

Oliver bows his head, chagrined. “It wasn’t my intention. That job’s perfect for you.” He sighs, “although, I can’t say access to the device isn’t a perk.”
“What makes you think I can do this?” The question bursts from her. It’s the question that almost made her turn down the job offer when Walter asked, the doubt that’s plagued her since the job was mentioned.

He just grinned. “You’re brilliant, inventive, and you can kick butt, Felicity. In two years, running that department will seem like child’s work. Plus, I owed you one.”

She tilts her head. Not that she doesn’t love the compliments, but it’s the last sentence that triggers so many questions. “Owed me?”

“I may have done something,” he grimaces, “underhanded and selfish that put you in a bad position, or rather future-you. This is better all around.”

Felicity narrows her eyes. “I don’t want to know what you did, do I?”

“I’m not stupid enough to tell you.” And he isn’t. He might tell her further down the road when they can both look back at it and laugh.

The settle into silence as they dig into their food, questions momentarily abated in honor of growling stomachs and cooling food. Felicity keeps sneaking glances at the billionaire across from her, the one who is a self-proclaimed time traveler and vigilante. And God help her, but she believes him.

Maybe it’s only Oliver talking, maybe he has magic words, maybe Felicity’s a little too invested in her sci-fi, but she believes the veracity of his statements. And she desperately wants to be the woman he described with those glowing words and that adoring look in his eyes. She really thinks this could work, that they could be friends, that they could save the world. So she moves off the heavy topics to something simpler:

“So, how did we meet in your future?”

...

Oliver’s sure he looks like an idiot as he walks back into the Foundry with a giant smile pasted on his face. Lunch with Felicity couldn’t have gone any better. They needed to have a longer talk, but now there was finally someone who believed him, all parts of him, someone he didn’t have to hide from because she knew everything.

He didn’t have to lie to her.

If his past taught him anything, it’s that something is going to go very wrong very soon, yet for the time being, he’s actually taking the opportunity to be happy.

“What has you so smiley?” Tommy’s suspicious tone is enough to let the smile slowly slip from Oliver’s face with a slow sigh.

“Lunch went well,” is all Oliver offers as he walks over to the plans Tommy has laid out on a wooden crate in the middle of the open space. “How did yours go?”

“And by went well, you mean?” Tommy asks, a tacit refusal to accommodate Oliver via a change of subject.

“We talked and it was good.” He holds his hands up in surrender. “I didn’t hit on Felicity.”

Out of the corner of his eye, Oliver sees Digg roll his eyes, but he elects to ignore the man insisting that they maintain the illusion of bodyguard and employer.
“Good,” Tommy announces definitively. “Now, about those building permits.”

Talk of business is enough to pull Oliver from his happy thoughts to actually focus on the matter at hand. The finalized plans and the money for the inspection sorted out, they finally head to the permit office to get everything squared away. And if Oliver doesn’t approve of the special treatment they get because of their names or the size of their wallets. He doesn’t let it get him down. Because today has been a great day.

And tonight all of Team Arrow will be in the Foundry once more.

...
Chapter 18

Oliver had never been a fan of the word giddy. To him, it always applied to excited girls like his little sister, jumping around in jubilation for whatever flight of fancy that claimed their attention: Barbies, boy bands, clothes. Not that there was anything wrong with that, but as he got older the association shifted to girls who threw themselves at him with little or no dignity. As a young man growing up, he enjoyed the attention, even if he never returned it. Still the word unsettled him.

However, right now, as he prowled the Foundry, restless and buzzing with nervous excitement, Oliver realizes there’s no other word to describe him.

He should probably be more anxious about something going wrong. After all, he’s reached that point: there’s too many good things happening. Something bad must be around the corner. Yet no matter how much he tries to convince himself not to get too excited, he can’t dim the smile he’s been wearing since lunch.

Tommy’s been watching him warily. He even asked if he should cancel his date to take Oliver to the hospital because he must have sustained a head injury. Oliver had laughed him off, of course. Laurel and Tommy’s date was actually a stroke of luck.

Oliver now has the perfect opportunity to bring Roy and Felicity on without having to confront Tommy. While conspiring behind his friend’s back is probably something he should be worried about, Oliver pushes the guilt into the far corners of his mind. Really, it wasn’t that bad. Right?

No. That’s a lie.

He knows it’s terrible. His best friend is back and he’s happy about it, really. The problem is that despite the sorrow Tommy’s death brought, Oliver’s moved on. He made his own friends, his own family, and now he’s suddenly forced to figure out where Tommy fits into that dynamic.

And how their whole team is going to mesh. Digg and Felicity both know about the time travel thing, but only Felicity believes him. Roy...probably wouldn’t care about it so long as he protects the needy of Starling.

“Tommy was right. You are strung out,” Digg’s voice comments, his voice echoing slightly in the open space.

Oliver turns to him with just a stiff nod.

“All this just for a street kid?”

Oliver rolls his eyes as Digg crosses his arms. “It’s not just Roy. Felicity’s coming too.”

The bodyguard blinks in surprise. “Are you sure that’s wise?”
“She confronted me over lunch,” Oliver offers. “I couldn’t really deny it.” Well...he could have. He just chose not to lie.

Digg’s snort tells Oliver just how much he believes the words.

Oliver twists away to avoid the skepticism he knows to seep from Digg. It doesn’t allow him to escape the words:

“I think you’d’ve found a way if she wasn’t quite so blonde and pretty.”

“I take offense to that!” Felicity announces, her high heels click on the bare pavement of the factory floor. She drops her purse on the crate with Tommy’s designs still strewn across them, and faces the bodyguard head on even if she doesn’t come up to his shoulder in her heels. “Not that I’m not blonde or pretty. Well, I’m not naturally blonde, but I figured it out on my own. So you can’t really blame it completely on Oliver.”

“It’s a bad idea to bring you in,” Digg argues. “This isn’t going to be a walk in the park. It’s dangerous.”

“I’m just here for my computer skills, Mr. Diggle.”

“And if she decides to stay, she’s going to get trained,” Oliver adds. Digg and Felicity both face him: his best friends together and yet so different in their attitudes toward each other.

“I am?” She sounds skeptical.

Oliver sighs. “Felicity, you have to be able to protect yourself.”

She contemplates him before nodding. “I was actually expecting some sort of macho we-can-protect-you mentality.”

He grimaces at how much she hit his thought on the head. Honestly, part of him was still screaming that fact even though he knew how strong she was first hand. “Yeah, well, I’m not saying you’ll be an expert, but knowing how to defend yourself is important in this line of work.”

She narrows her eyes. “Is this another thing you’re changing based on some future tale?”

“You told her?” Digg cries.

Oliver huffs, eyes raised to heaven for patience. “She guessed.”

“She guessed?”

“Genius-level IQ,” Felicity announces with a bright smile. “Sure, I was sort of joking about it, but that was just because I didn’t think it was possible. Which reminds me, we need to figure out how that happened. It seems like that might be something important to look into.”

Those last moments on the cliff come rushing back to Oliver and he shakes his head adamantly. “No. That’s not important.”

“Actually, it could be really important,” Felicity protests. “Besides, I hate mysteries.”

“And you believe he’s from the future?” Digg asks, stuck on that simple fact.

Felicity shrugs. “It fits. Otherwise, I have no idea how he knew where I live, or other random things about me, like my ex-boyfriend. I looked into that, by the way...and you may actually be right about
“I didn’t lie to you, Felicity,” Oliver repeats with a small smile at how he can now say her name all the time.

“I just had to check. You seem trustworthy enough, but I’m not just going to blindly follow you. Let’s just get that straight right now.” She adds a glare of emphasis to her words before ruined it with a complete 180: “So when do I get to see the secret lair?” She claps her hands together in joy.

“We’re waiting on someone,” Digg answers, a look of approval settled on his face as Felicity mentioned verifying his statements.

“Roy,” Oliver adds.

He shifts as Felicity continues to watch him with a little tilt of her head. It lasts for about a minute, a prolonged silence that unsettles him. “You really did change everything, didn’t you?”

Oliver sighs. “It didn’t exactly go well the first time.” He was a killer and a terrible person. He’d say this beats that.

She purses her lips in disapproval as she contemplates him. He gets the feeling she’s holding in a rant about the dangers of changing the past, but she doesn’t know how unbearable it is to be in a position to change terrible things and not do anything. He doesn’t regret his decision.

And he won’t.

...

The blonde’s spunky.

John has to admit he likes her, even with his reservations about having her on the team. She doesn’t trust blindly, she questions things. She’s good for Oliver, actually, if he had to say. Despite what Oliver claimed – that she was part of their team – John still has reservations.

At first glance, Felicity doesn’t appear to have any kind of martial training. A second glance only solidifies the outward innocence that is clearly more than just skin deep. John’s pretty sure the blonde hasn’t even thrown a punch before.

“You do realize he might just be crazy, right?” He asks as Oliver wanders around while they wait for Roy.

Felicity spins back to him with lips pursed in thought. “Yeah. But he also knew both my mom and my ex by first name. Plus, you have to have realized that he knows things, does things that don’t fit with what you’d expect from a man who just returned from a hellish island. Aren’t you curious as to why?”

John’s eyes drift back to Oliver, who in turn watches them curiously. Felicity has a point. Even with the knowledge that Oliver wasn’t always on the Island, there are some parts of him that are more well-adjusted than he has any right to be. Sure, there are ways around that, but none quite as simple as time travel, which is probably the same conclusion the blonde next to him came to.

His gaze returns to Felicity with a little more awe than a second before. Guileless blue eyes latch onto his. “Besides, I could never resist a man in need.” She freezes. “Not that he’s a damsel in distress or something. He just...seems like he could use some help.”
Digg’s eyes track back to Oliver who tries deceptively hard not to look like he’s listening in to their conversation. He agrees that Oliver’s struggling. Oliver puts on a brave face and acts like he’s confident, yet Diggle’s sure the smallest tug could unravel him.

“And you’re the person to help?”

She shrugs and meets his eyes again. “I don’t know. But I think it’s worth a try.”

Which is basically his reason for agreeing to this. Maybe it won’t be so bad to have her involved.

“What has he told you about it?”

Felicity searches his face, to see if this is him making fun of her, but John just stares back. He doesn’t believe the Time Travel nonsense. How could he? It was pure science fiction. But it doesn’t change the fact that to some extent, Oliver has solid intel. Anything he possibly knows can help.

“You mean besides him being the Green Arrow and looking for tech support? Nothing.” She turns back to where Oliver’s checking the door, her voice lowered in a whisper to match his. “But if he’s been changing things, then it probably won’t stay the same for long. And he’s going to need our help.”

Exactly his thoughts. “So we help him.”

“We help him,” she agrees. “And figure out what’s going on after.”

Digg nods.

“So,” Felicity looks around with newfound interest, “where are my computers?”

“Your computers?” Digg can’t help the question because she hasn’t even seen the Foundry or anything in it. There’s no way she has any proprietary claim.

“Yes. My computers. Because let’s get one thing straight: if I am setting up those babies to my specifications, then no one is touching those computers without my express permission. Understood?”

John’s lips twitch in an almost-smile at her sudden narrowed eyes and strict look as he nods. Yeah, he can see why Oliver brought her on.

... 

“Are you sure he’s okay, Roy? I mean, I really shouldn’t have let him out of here without some pain meds.”

Roy rolls his eyes at the flustered med-student. “Marie, it’s fine. He rode of here on a motorcycle.”

“No, it’s not 

fine,” she whispers back. “I’m not a doctor, Roy. It shouldn’t have been me stitching him up in the first place.”

“You’re almost done with med-school!” Roy protests as he yanks up the zipper off his red hoodie. It’s closing time for the clinic and he’s not about to be late to his appointment with the vigilante.

“Aren’t you here for residency or something?”

“I’m here to help out because no one wants to work in the Glades.” Marie reaches out and slaps his hand away from the bowl of lollipops they keep out for the children. “And I told you this was a one time thing. The two of you might have saved my sister, but that doesn’t give you a free pass. You’re
lucky no one noticed anything off with the medical supplies.”

“I’ll make sure it doesn’t become a regular thing,” Roy promises, hand raised in the air while one rests on his heart. He can swear that, right? It’s not like he has any control over it, but he can try.

Marie’s scowl tells him just how much she believes that.

“Thank you, Marie,” he calls as he slips out of the clinic through the front doors with a smile. He doesn’t need to look back to know she’s rolling her eyes and muttering under her breath about him being a nuisance.

He pulls his jacket closer against the fall chill that increases as the sun falls. He’s as close to on time as he’s ever been in his life, which equates to ten minutes late, which is positively early for him.

BAM!

As he rounds the final corner a little too fast, something meaty connects painfully with his face, pushes him backwards into another blow from behind, which in turn sends him reeling to land on his ass. The world around him spins as Roy struggles to get to his feet, His feet stumble to compensate for his distorted sense of balance.

It doesn’t help as Roy finds himself shoved up against a brick wall. Four faces come into focus then, with more figures milling around the background. Two of the faces he recognizes from the alley. And even if he didn’t their bruises and healing cuts are a dead giveaway. They can only be here for one thing: revenge.

“Where’s the hooded freak, Harper?”

His spinning mind can’t quite make sense of the faces swimming in front of him. He dimly has enough sense to realize that’s not a good sign after a head hit.

“Where is he?”

Roy can barely form words, let alone a coherent sentence, as they demand the location of the hooded vigilante. It’s not that complicated. He knows where the vigilante’s waiting for him. Yet he wouldn’t tell them, even to save his own life. His life isn’t worth the vigilante’s.

The glint of weapons catches Roy’s eye as pain blossoms in his lower abdomen from a blade he hadn’t noticed earlier. The pain is unbearable and blackness starts to encroach on the edge of his vision. He’s going to pass out and they’re going to kill him. It’s not even a question at this point.

He can only hope Oliver gets here to help him before that happens.

...

“Where’s the kid?” Diggle asks, coming up behind Oliver to look out into the darkening Glades.

“Late,” Oliver answers gruffly. He glances down at his watch. “Too late. Something’s wrong.”

“Maybe he just changed his mind,” Felicity offers as she comes to stand next to him.

“No. I’m going out to find him.” Oliver spins on his heel for the basement. He doesn’t look back once as he heads for a door Felicity hadn’t noticed before.

Felicity glances curiously at Digg who nods and starts to follow Oliver. She doesn’t have long to wonder what their base of operations looks like before she’s greeted by the damp basement. The
lights strategically placed around the large basement are construction-grade work lamps and don’t help the creepy atmosphere.

She can hear water dripping somewhere in a dark corner, but the lights mostly illuminate the central area, where she spots a collection of green arrows, work table with what looks suspiciously like a grindstone, a table with medical supplies atop with a cart nearby, and finally a table with a heavy-duty, military grade laptop. Next to the table she notices several boxes of computer parts, all untouched.

“Well, this is welcoming,” Felicity notes sarcastically.

Digg chuckles as Oliver disappears back to some room in the back of the basement without a backwards glance. “We don’t exactly spend long hours down here.”

“I can tell.” Felicity absently taps the keyboard of the laptop, pulling up a password screen. A couple more commands and she’s bypassed the password to view the computer. She purses her lips. The laptop is annoyingly simple and not at all the type of equipment she could work with. “Well, this is a disaster.”

“I’ve got equipment you can set up to your specifications later,” Oliver says gruffly, emerging in green leather to grab his quiver. “Anything else you need, I can get. But first, we have to find Roy.”

He slips something into his ear and holds a case out to Digg. The bodyguard in turn hands the box to Felicity. She picks up one of the oddly-shaped, flesh-colored buds and follows Digg’s example of slipping it into her ear.

At first it sticks oddly in her ear, but she rotates it ninety degrees, and it slides evenly in. She picks up the last one to examine it. “This is actually kind of cool, but I bet I could come up with something better. Whoa. Echo.” She muttered as she heard her voice through the comm with a slight delay.

“I’ll call if I need back up,” Oliver says over his shoulder, already half-way up the stairs with a green quiver in place on his back.

Felicity stares at his retreating back and then glances back at Diggle. “Is that normal? Because that felt kind of abrupt. I mean, isn’t there something I can do to help him find Roy?”

“I don’t have a phone number for you to trace, Felicity, but if you want to check police scanners that could help,” Oliver’s voice comes through the ear piece.

She jumps in shock and turns to Digg with wide eyes. “Right. Ear buds are comm units. But yeah...police radio?”

“Can you pull up the feeds on the laptop? Or there’s a police scanner in the back of the Foundry.”

Digg nods and goes in search of the radio, while Felicity stares at the computer in confusion. She’s at a loss for what to do. If it was just transcribing the radio, she could find a program to do that, or build one. She hasn’t spent nearly enough time with this system to have any clue at how to proceed.

“I got the radio,” Digg announces, depositing it on the long metal table, as if it’s nothing. He flips a dial, but instead of buzzing to life, it stays dead.

Felicity abandons the laptop she hasn’t done anything with to fiddle with the radio. She casts around for any tools. When she can’t find any she twists back to Diggle. “I need a screwdriver.”

He pulls a multi-tool from his pocket and hands it to her wordlessly.
A few seconds later, after she fiddles with a couple of wires, the radio blares to life and Felicity adjusts the scanner, zeroing in on the right station. She sits back on the chair and shoots Digg a grin.

“No chatter on the radio.”

“Are you expecting to hear anything?” Digg asks, question aimed at Oliver.

“It’s the Glades, so probably not. But better safe than sorry. I’m heading west.”

“Roger,” Digg responds, leaning closer. “Felicity, what can you pull up on that computer?”

She twists back to the laptop and grimaces. “Well, I guess we’re going to find out,” she mutters. She can easily figure out the little computer won’t have the processing power or speed she really needs to set up everything running through her mind.

“What I really need is a satellite view...” she whispers to herself. “It’s a pity I don’t have a satellite...so it looks like...I’m just going...to borrow...yours.” She grins as the hack proves successful even with her slower-than-it-really-should-be connection.

“YES!” The triumphant shout leaves her quickly and instinctively.

John Diggle’s lips quirk up in amusement. “I take it you got it.”

“Yup,” Felicity pops the p and starts typing in coordinates and the map zooms in on the Glades. “So what I am looking for exactly?”

“Any suspicious activity.”

Diggle leans over her shoulder, an extra pair of eyes on the grainy footage. “Head north,” he directs, “there’s a group of kids barely a block away, looks violent.”

“Got it.”

Felicity spots the moving target she presumes to be Oliver. With an open window she types in a couple commands, and a green dot appears on Oliver’s moving figure.

She starts at the thuds and thwacks that come through the comms as Oliver’s dot makes contact with the cluster of kids. With each sound, she winces until John rests a steady hand on her shoulder. She glances up at him, relaxing as the sounds stop. At least until she hears Oliver’s next words:

“Call an ambulance. This is bad.”

...

Roy’s pulse flutters under Oliver’s fingers through the material of his glove. He just didn’t like the dark pool of blood seeping out the wound nor the trail of blood leaking from the corner of his mouth.

“Roy, I need you to stay with me, stay awake,” he stresses, pressing a sweatshirt he pulled off one of the goons who had been kicking Roy. He’s in rough shape. Oliver doesn’t like the look of his injures: the broken ribs, stab wounds, bruises blossoming on his face. This is about the worst thing that could happen.

“Stay with me, Roy,” Oliver orders. “Felicity, how far out is that ambulance?”

“They’re waiting for a police escort.” Her worried voice shows she knows just how desperate the situation is.
“He doesn’t have time. Digg?”

“On my way to you.” Digg’s deep, calming response soothes him only a second until Roy takes a shaky breath.

“Damnit. We need that ambulance here now.”

“I’m working on it.” Felicity insists, her breath heaves unexpectedly almost as if she’s running. “I’m almost to the clinic.”

Which would be because she is. Knowing that she’s running through the Glades, unprotected at night jolts him into action. “Felicity-“

“Digg’s coming to help you, and I couldn’t not do anything. I don’t care if they’re closed. There has to be someone here who can help!” He hears her pounding on the door through the comms, but Digg’s arrival draws him back to the present.

The bodyguard drops to his side, face serious as hecatalogues the injuries. He meets Oliver’s eyes with the clear implication that there’s not much they can do.

“We’re saving him.” Oliver insists. There is no way Roy is going out like this. He has such a good life ahead of him and it will not get cut short now.

Despite his obvious doubts, Diggle starts pulling out bandages and medical supplies he brought with him, keeping track of Roy’s fading pulse.

They’ve already had to shock him back to life once before they hear the sirens.

“The ambulance is almost there. You guys have to bail,” Felicity cries in his ear.

Oliver lifts his eyes to Diggle. If he leaves, Roy’s as good as dead. The medics in the ambo aren’t going to care about some gangbanger from the Glades. John has the same thought because he nods.

“I’ll stay with him. Get out of here.” He pushes the defibrillator into Oliver’s hands.

He nods and disappears into the shadows as the flashing red and blue lights race across the wall. He stays back to observe as Diggle explains to the paramedics he was a medic in the army and passing by, watches as Roy’s loaded into the ambulance and it races off without a backward glance.

“Oliver?”

He blinks in surprise at the soft female voice behind him. Felicity stands with a tablet in her hand. She offers him a comforting smile and then gestures to the tablet. “While Digg was talking to the paramedics, I went in and altered his medical records. Roy has no next of kin, so I figured we should put someone we know as his emergency contact, but I don’t know him and neither does Digg-“

“Put me,” Oliver says without hesitation.

“Are you sure?” She asks, the glow of the tablet illuminates her disbelief. “Oliver Queen vouching for a street kid?”

“He’s a new employee. We can say I took him under my wing.” He runs a hand over his jaw as Felicity types the relevant information into the tablet.

“And now we need to go,” she insists. Felicity attempts to push him down the alley, but once her first attempts fail, she grabs his hand and drags him along. Oliver stumbles after her instinctually, an
impulse to follow wherever she’ll lead him, a deep-seated trust.

“You have to change back into Oliver Queen clothes and wash off that blood. Then we can go to the hospital. Well, you can go to the hospital. I mean, I’ve never even met the kid, so it wouldn’t make sense for me to be there, but you should,” Felicity continues to babble the whole way back to the Foundry, which isn’t all that far.

Oliver would protest her being seen with a known vigilante if he wasn’t so worried about Roy, and if they weren’t already inside the old steel factory. He doesn’t really need her hand to tug him along, into the basement.

He also knows better than to question how she knows the code he never gave her.

Felicity finally releases his hand on the Foundry floor, moving towards the computer table. “Get changed. I’ll wait around for Digg.”

Oliver follows her instructions woodenly. This thing with Roy is all his fault, the cataclysmic response to his meddling in the future. Roy wouldn’t have been out there without Oliver’s suggestion. And he couldn’t deny, even to himself, that he hadn’t recognized a couple of those guys from the attempted rape the other night.

This is his fault.

He doesn’t even know if Roy’s going to make it.

Rinsing his hands in the back sink, Oliver splashes cool water into his face before he rejoins Felicity in the well-lit center of the basement.

“Digg’s staying around to make a statement and then he’s going to head home,” Felicity announces. “Your phone should be ringing soon with Roy’s condition. Wait for that call before going to the hospit-“

The phone held out in the palm of her hand starts to blare and Oliver grimaces as he plucks it from her hand. His answers are robotic, on autopilot because there’s only one thing he wants to know:

“How is he?”

The other side of the line goes quiet for a moment, a pregnant pause that allows Oliver to image every worst case scenario, before she finally responds.

“Roy Harper’s in a coma, but he’s hanging on.”

And suddenly breathing comes a lot easier.
Chapter 19

“How’s he doing?”

Oliver’s head jerks up at Felicity’s soft voice, snapped into wakefulness from a nap he would swear he wasn’t taking. He has to blink a couple times to convince his eyes to stay open. The travel mug Felicity hands him tells him she knows exactly how long he was at the Foundry last night after she left.

Two weeks with no change in his condition, and Oliver still comes to visit Roy almost daily. It’s his daily torture to remind him that changes to the timeline have dire results.

Felicity always shows up to keep him company, since that first day. She doesn’t say anything to placate him, just sits there and babbles into the silence. Without their shared past, she still knows when he needs tacit support and somehow he falls more in love with her with each conversation, each cup of coffee.

She’s kept him busy, kept him from drowning in self-hatred through a combination of hunting down criminal and assembling the computers in the Foundry to her satisfaction. It’s a first for him: hooking up the servers she uses with such dexterity. Every little pieces as its intricacies and each circuit reminds him how tenuous the future is.

“He’s the same,” Oliver answers. The coffee nearly burns his throat as he swallows a large mouthful. “Don’t you have work?”

Felicity shrugs, nonchalant. “Actually, I needed to talk to you before I went in.”

Oliver nods, still staring at Roy’s almost-lifeless body. Machines buzz around them, to keep him alive if this could even be considered alive.

“Oliver, what you did with Brodeur, with Declan...you let yourself get caught on camera,” she whispers.

He glances at her, face set. She can’t change his mind about this. “The police will suspect me sooner or later, so-“

“No. They won’t, Oliver,” she states, eyes cold with determination. “I already looped the footage so no one will see anything. And I don’t appreciate you deciding to do this without telling Digg or I. We’re supposed to be partners. I don’t care if that’s how you did it the first time. This,” she points at Roy, “doesn’t mean that everything was better before you messed with the timeline. This just means that there are consequences, but you don’t have to deal with it alone.”

He shakes his head. “I’m not, Felici-“

“Yes, you are,” she reiterates, not interested in his protestations. “You let Digg and I help with the standard rounds, but you’re still secretive about that little book you have. You’re pushing us away like it’ll keep us safe. And we’re not the only ones. When was the last time you actually met up with Tommy?”

Oliver pulls his eyes from Roy to meet Felicity’s soft eyes.
“You’ve been avoiding him since Roy got hurt. He’s starting to wonder if it’s connected to him getting serious with Laurel, if you’re not actually over her,” gently, she reaches out to squeeze his arm.

He shakes his head. “That’s not it. Laurel and I...we were never good together.”

“He said you coming to her on the Declan case started some sort of crush...”

Oliver snorts. Of course. In this timeline he didn’t nearly beat a guy to death and scare Laurel away from him. Just because he wasn’t interested anymore didn’t mean there wouldn’t be some sort of attraction between them. It was just one-sided this time. “I just needed a lawyer.”

“Yeah, well, Tommy’s not too pleased,” Felicity mutters around another sip of coffee.

“He told you that?” Oliver frowns. As far as he knows, Tommy doesn’t know Felicity knows and vice versa.

“Well, he didn’t say you, but he was peeved with the Green Arrow.” Her astute eyes sweep over him. “And he wasn’t too happy the code to the basement changed while he was yelling at a metal door last night when you were out on patrol.”

Oliver winces.

“You know you can trust me, right?” Felicity asks. “With everything. I’m here whenever you want to talk.” She squeezes his hand gently and rises. “But for now I’ve got to get to work.”

She grabs her bags and pauses at the door to turn slowly back to him. “You should probably talk to Tommy first, let him see what we’re doing. And then we can talk about what happens next.”

“The Restons,” Oliver says, voice a little choked with emotion after her speech. He coughs and tries again. “The Reston family. They’re going to start robbing banks.”

Her blue eyes lit with understanding swell his heart as she nods. “I’ll look into it on my lunch break.”

Oliver watcher her leave as a weight lifts from his shoulders.

She hasn’t pushed him on this for the last couple weeks, hasn’t demanded answers, but he knows her. Felicity probably wants him to make a detailed list of everything he can remember from his personal past so they can track what he changed and what’s the same versus what’s different.

With Roy incapacitated because of him, Oliver had shut down and he could see Digg and Felicity talking behind his back. They had different ways of dealing with him, but everything was wearing on Oliver and he was going to break soon.

But Felicity was right.

The first thing he needed to do was talk to Tommy.

...

“Miss Smoak!”

“Oh! Mr. Steele! Sorry, I was working on the latest processor. There were some bugs Jim just couldn’t work out.” Felicity pushes back from the work station with a bright smile at the CEO. She doesn’t want to think about how many times he had said her name. The smirk on Jim’s face was too much of an answer already.
It had been an interesting adjustment, but things were starting to smooth over with the Applied
Sciences division. It was still a little tumultuous with some of the older staff who saw her as a usurper
or something of that nature, but she’d gone a long way in proving she was qualified when she’d
saved the servers from crashing when one of their cyber security programs went haywire.

Well, it was actually a security robot with cyber components, which she thought was preemptive.
There were some things better left in human hands.

“That’s fine, Miss Smoak. Perhaps we can talk in your office.” His smooth accent soothes her, as if
there’s nothing wrong with the department head distracted in a small office of one of her underlings –
not that he calls them underlings out loud.

It’s also terribly unfair how put together his accent makes him sound. All the time. It’s disconcerting
for someone like her who tends to babble every five seconds. Even her inner monologues are
babbles.

“So, what can I help you with, Mr. Steele,” Felicity offers as she leads the way into her glass-
encased office with a nod to her assistant, an assistant she’s still leery about.

“I was hoping you could take a look into a discrepancy in Queen Consolidated finances. I wouldn’t
ask with your new responsibilities, but you’re still the best IT tech and this needs to be done
discretely.”

Felicity frowns. “What’s this about?”

“There’s 2.6 million missing from two years ago. It’s a matter of some delicacy.”

She nods. It shouldn’t be too hard to follow. “I can handle it, Mr. Steele. I’ll let you know what I
find.”

He smiles. “Thank you. So how’s the new job coming?”

Felicity can’t hold back the grin. “It’s fantastic. I haven’t had this much fun since MIT. The
developments we’re making are amazing.”

“I’m glad to hear it. I heard there were some concerns...”

No doubt from one of her naysayers. Felicity shrugs it off with a smile. Her work speaks for itself,
which is how she got this job. Sure, she spent her first few days floundering in all the new
responsibilities, but if there’s one thing Felicity Smoak excelled at, it was rising to a challenge.
Running the department was no different.

She’d definitely landed on her feet.

“It was a rocky start, but I think everything’s coming together,” she responds with a cheerful smile.

Mr. Steele nods. “It certainly looks like it. I like what I’m seeing. Keep up the exemplary work.”

Felicity grins at his back as Mr. Steele exits before dropping herself into her seat with a huff. But
enough of that. She needs to get back to work.

She now has bank records to check as well as the Reston Family. The busy never sleep.

And, honestly, she loves it.

...
Oliver’s eyes skim the discarded construction equipment scattered around the Foundry, all pushed to the side after a long work day. The building is finally looking more like a club, even if it still looks a bit industrial in the harsh overhead lights. The colorful club lights are only partially installed alongside the fluorescent ones.

He heads over to the bar and glances around for Tommy.

“Oh, good! You’re here,” Tommy’s voice declares behind him, echoed in the large space.

Oliver turns to find Tommy on the stairs, two boards in his hands. He flips them both around as he reaches the club floor to expose two potential layout plans.

“I know we agreed to go with the industrial look, but what do you think? Gears or Scaffolding. Because the gears look really cool, but the scaffolding look has a lot of potential.”

Oliver redirects his gaze to the photos and the scantily clad dancers on the scaffolding design, much like dancers in cages. Otherwise, the pictures are nearly identical, with the green highlight lighting and lots of space.

“The gears,” he answers with a nod to the picture.

Tommy glances down. “You’re right. The scaffolding is just ridiculous.” He tosses the picture away so it crumples and dents on the concrete floor. “So...” Tommy’s easy demeanor falls away as easily as the paper he just threw away, “you’ve got something to tell me?”

Oliver sighs, and runs a hand over his jaw.

“About Laurel,” he hints with a tight smile.

“Yeah...” Oliver stalls because these words aren’t going to be easy. “I...I needed a lawyer and she’s the best one I know.”

“So you went to her as your vigilante alter-ego? Because let me tell you, I actually believed you for a while when it came to not wanting Laurel, but then you go and do something like this!” Tommy’s shout echoes around the room as his anger breaks the surface.

“It’s not like that, Tommy,” Oliver repeats. “I should have just found another lawyer.” He looks to the ceiling. Of all the things he didn’t change...

But who else could he find who would have believed him, who would have accepted his words for truth?

“Damn right! You put Laurel in danger!” Tommy shouts. “And you’re back to your perpetual circling! Your on-again-off-again relationship with Laurel. I can’t believe I was stupid enough to think there wouldn’t be a time when she was the sun and stars for you!”

Oliver doesn’t know how to respond to this, how to convince Tommy, because this doesn’t have to do with his actions as much as it has to do with Tommy’s insecurities when it comes to Laurel’s affections.

A metal door slams at the entrance and a female voice drifts to them.

“I’m telling you, Digg: the Restons are the ones behind it. Everything checks out with what Oliver said...” Felicity’s voice fades out as she and Digg realize Tommy is in the club. She smiles guiltily at them and waves. “Hi!”
Oliver takes a deep breath, closing his eyes against the impending scene. It’s all going to explode for Tommy at once, and there’s nothing to stop it now.

Tommy’s eyes dart between Oliver, Felicity, and Diggle standing at Felicity’s side. His eyes on the to-go food Digg carries.

“What the hell is going on?!” Tommy shouts to the audience in general. “Felicity, what are you doing here?”

Her mouth opens and closes like a fish before she offers weakly: “You needed help with your security system?”

Tommy scowls as he twists back to Oliver. “You got her involved in this, too! I told you: Felicity was off limits! What were you thinking? She could get hurt!”

Oliver opens his mouth to respond, but Felicity’s loud voice cuts him off and Oliver steps back. That’s not something he wants to get in the way of.

“I’m what?” Felicity asks, voice deadly as she advances on Tommy. “Thomas Merlyn, please tell me you didn’t say what I think you did.”

Tommy’s too angry at this point to realize the hole he’s buried himself in. “You shouldn’t be here. You shouldn’t be involved with this, Felicity! It’s dangerous! Not to mention illegal!”

“And what? You think that just because we’re friends you can make choices for me? Because let me tell you how wrong you are! I’m a strong, independent genius. And you know what that means?”

Tommy’s finally wised up enough not to answer the rhetorical question.

“It means I can make my own damn choices. Including to get involved with Oliver.” She winces at the phrase, but Oliver’s soul soars at the words. “I mean, with this crusade. We’re helping people, people who need help because it’s not coming from anywhere else. This is what I want to do with my life.”

She turns to head to the lair, but then stops for an afterthought. “And if I ever hear you make some king of misogynistic comment about a woman being off-limits, so help me, I will destroy you, Merlyn – years of friendship be damned.” She spins back toward the lair again, muttering: “I swear, I don’t know how Laurel puts up with you sometimes.”

Diggle, a smirk set on his face, follows Felicity, amusement radiating off of him. Oliver fights the urge to smile in favor of meeting Tommy’s eyes, the anger that lurked there deflated by Felicity’s ire. Instead, all that’s left is a slowly simmering cocktail of unease, worry and distrust.

“You brought her in,” he accuses quietly.

He sighs, unable to stop his gaze as it wanders to the padlocked door. He has nothing to say in his defense, nothing that Tommy will accept and move on from. The only paltry comfort he can offer is: “She figured it out herself.”


He brushes past Oliver to head down to the basement. Tonight is definitely going to be interesting.

...
Tommy stops short at the bottom of the stairs. It hasn’t been that long since he was last down here, but the place looks completely different. It’s not the dingy basement it was three weeks ago.

Hell, last time he was down here, there was one tiny laptop where now three computer monitors sit, all with lines of code scrolling down them. And there definitely weren’t large server columns against the back wall.

The whole place was transformed: no more dank smell or shadowy corners. Actually, there were still shadowy corners, definitely, but they weren’t creepy for all the darkness.

There’s light everywhere now: over the different work stations, by the weapons, the med cart. But the most shocking thing, isn’t upgrades: it’s that everything that was in boxes and crates seems to have been unpacked into a perfect hero-cave. And somehow, Felicity and John Diggle fit in naturally down here. He can’t imagine separating Felicity from that computer set-up or even consider Oliver working down here alone.

He hadn’t expected that.

Oliver pats him on the back and passes him for the med table that currently holds the to-go containers where the delightful scent of Italian wafts from. John Diggle passes him a Styrofoam box and Oliver moves to a work station full of half-made arrows. Felicity pops hers open in front of her computers, and John leans against the med-table to eat his meal.

Tommy’s suddenly feeling hungry and left out. This trio...they’ve been working together for longer than he wants to know. They’re a team, able to work in tandem without explicit instructions. They probably don’t even know it.

“So this is why you’ve been MIA?” He asks Felicity as much as Oliver and both look up at him somewhat guiltily.

“I knew Oliver was running around in green tights, but I didn’t…” He doesn’t want to dig himself in deeper here, doesn’t want her to raise her voice again, but he’s already in too deep. “I didn’t think vigilantism was something you’d be interested in.”

She contemplates him as she thinks. He knows that face: it’s the I’m-thinking-over-everything-I’m-going-to-say-before-I-open-my-mouth-so-I-don’t-embarrass-myself-again face.

“Do you remember Cooper?” The words are slow, practiced, measured as if each word is precious.

How could he forget the dark, broody boy who the scary goth girl had crushed on when they met in that coffee shop?

“Well...when I was with Cooper, I wrote a computer virus, one that could break down any firewall.” She takes a deep breath, the gravity and strength of her words unprecedented in their entire friendship. “We called ourselves Hacktivists. We wanted to give power and money back to the people. Cooper used the virus to hack the Department of Education and delete thousands of loans. He committed suicide in prison after taking the fall for it.”

Tommy stares at her in shock. In fact, Oliver’s the only one who looks less than astounded by the revelation.

Felicity glances at them before she continues with a stronger voice. “After that, I stopped hacking and I moved here, to a simple job in IT where I could fly under the radar. This,” she gestures to the basement emphatically. Her eyes linger on Oliver for a moment before she continues: “all of this, it gives me that chance to do good, to help people who need it.”
Tommy doesn’t know how to respond to that.

So he falls back on his standard humor as he turns to Oliver. “How do you manage to ensnare all the women in my life?”

Oliver chuckles with a shake of his head. “I’m sorry about Laurel, Tommy. That wasn’t my intention. I just needed her kind of help.”

He doesn’t like it, but Tommy understands.

“Great! Now that everything’s settled: let’s talk about the Restons!” Felicity announces with a clap of her hands as she spins back to the computers.

If Tommy notices how close Oliver stands to Felicity or how he rests his hand on her shoulder, how she leans into the touch naturally, he ignores it. Because there’s no way that will ever happen...right?

... The Restons didn’t rob banks at night, not yet anyway.

It created some understandable problems with their team and how they worked. Namely: Felicity had to be at work and couldn’t co-ordinate from the Foundry as the habit had become. Somehow that led to her working from her office in the new QC building.

Oliver wasn’t crazy about the idea, but from his perch across from the bank the Restons were currently robbing, he didn’t really have a choice.

“Felicity?”

“Hang on. I’ve almost got it,” she responds, an irritated edge to her voice. “And we should really use codenames over these comms, Green Arrow, since they’re unsecured and everything.”

A silent laugh shakes his chest at her comment. “After we deal with this, we’ll find you a codename.”

“I’ve got eyes,” she announces. “There are hostages. Now would be the time to announce what you know, Arrow.”

Oliver sighs. “The stress is too high right now. If I burst in, someone could get hurt. I’ll wait for them to exit.” He doesn’t want to just take them out without giving them a chance, but it didn’t matter last time. He’s not sure that would change now.

“What is it, Arrow?” Digg’s deep voice intervenes.

He doesn’t respond, unsure what to say in response.

“Oliver?” Felicity this time.

He shakes his head. “Last time, I offered Derek Reston a deal. I thought he would take it, but then there was another robbery.” Oliver takes a shaky breath at the memory. “Derek died before the arrest.”

Silence greets his revelation. If they had been in the Foundry, he would bet they exchanged looks. He pulls out his bow and prepares to attack the van he spotted in the alley. Dollars to donuts that’s their getaway vehicle.
“Do you think you can get through to him?” Felicity asks softly.

Oliver grits his teeth as he remembers their conversation. Derek was in this situation because of his father, because he closed the steel factory, because Malcolm’s plan involved shutting down the Glades. He could offer them a better deal...maybe...

“I don’t know,” Oliver whispers, regret like a punch in the gut.

There’s another beat of silence over the comms as he nocks an arrow.

“They don’t kill anyone?”

Oliver closes his eyes at Felicity’s question. He shakes his head. “Not this time.”

“Okay,” Her voice now decisive. “Let them go. Maybe leave a tracker. We’ll try Derek Reston again.”

He’d be lying if he said he wasn’t relieved Felicity made the decision she did.

“Are you sure that’s wise?” Digg’s reluctant voice echoes over the comms. “It would be easy to take out this van, stop the robbery. Isn’t that what we’re supposed to be doing: stopping crime?”

“Everyone deserves a second chance,” Felicity insists.

“So what does that make us?” Digg questions. “Judge, jury, and executioner?”

His words hit Oliver to the core. That’s definitely what it was last time he embarked on this crusade. And he was far from infallible in that regard; Helena was evidence enough of that. But here...here Oliver couldn’t ignore that this was directly related to his father’s mistakes, that he could actively right one of his father’s wrongs.

“Digg...” Oliver takes a deep breath as he comes to a decision as the hostages burst from the bank. He doesn’t have time to carefully think. The Restons will be here any second. He needs to make a decision now. “Let them go. My father did this. I need to try to make it right.”

He just hopes it’s the right choice.
Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

Hello, Lovelies!

Thank you all so much for your patience! Writing this chapter has been a crazy exercise of futility and zealous endeavor of emotional turmoil. It took forever to write and for that I am sorry, but I am immensely proud of this final draft and the side-story it spawned.

I'll let you be the judge of if it was worth the wait.

I hope you enjoy this long chapter!

Chapter 20

This was a mistake. This was all a huge mistake.

The Restons, everything.

It shouldn’t have gone down like it did.

He should have done something different, anything different.

Oliver runs his hands over his face and the longer-than-normal scruff. God, he was an idiot. He should have expected this, expected something to go wrong, because of course it would. Things had been going too well lately. There was Roy in the hospital, sure, but he was going to be okay.

This?

This was never going to be okay.

His panting breaths echoed around the empty hall of the bank as he pursued the Restons. He had to catch up with them before they made it into the back alley. Their escape route was supposed to be under the bank, that’s what had happened last time. The back alley was supposed to be safe.

He couldn’t let them back there, back to where Felicity was left unprotected.

Oliver stares down at the blood on his hands, blood that he should have washed off hours ago, when it was clear he wouldn’t be getting anymore on it.

He can still hear them echoing in his mind: the gunshots.

BANG BANG BANG

They stand out in sudden clarity against the rest of today’s events. In his mind they’re final, an abrupt and definitive end.

“FELICITY!”

His roar echoes around the alley as Oliver bursts through the metal door. Light blinds him to all but
the vaguest shadows, yet his mind makes sense of them without conscious thought. There are five figures in the alley and only one is on his side.

The figures clear as he looses the first arrow on the nearest masked figure. Three more arrows follow and the Royal flush gang collapses in various poses like some grotesque dance.

Only Felicity is left standing, staring at him in shock as she lifts a hand slowly to press against the blood blossoming from her shoulder before she collapses to the pavement in an ungainly heap.

The memory is too much for Oliver and he shoves the chair back from his workstation and moves back to the med table where the machines beep steadily and Felicity’s chest rises and falls steadily, if a little shallowly.

Oliver’s hand moves of its own volition, slipping into hers and squeezing just to reassure himself that she’s here, that her heart still beats and blood still pumps through her veins.

His free hand lifts up to brush some loose blonde hair from her face, but his eyes drop to the gauze-covered patch on her chest.

It was a close call today. The bullet just grazed her artery. It was almost identical to the wound Oliver got the day he revealed himself to Felicity in the other timeline. She’s okay now, but he can’t help but think that she never should have been hurt this badly to begin with.

“The King and Queen are headed to the back alley,” Felicity’s voice announces through the comms. “I think I can talk them down.”

“No!” Oliver shouts as he jumps behind a desk to avoid the barrage of bullets. “Wait for Digg. He’s getting the hostages out and then he’s coming to you.”

“Derek doesn’t want to do this. I can talk him into surrendering, Oliver. I know I can,” Felicity insists.

“Wait for Digg,” Oliver repeats before throwing himself back into the fray. He needs to end this. As quickly as possible.

Oliver runs his thumb over Felicity’s knuckles.

He wishes there more he could do, some comfort he could give her, some closeness he could take advantage of. He wants so desperately to lean down and press a kiss to her forehead, but in this reality they haven’t achieved that level of closeness.

He wishes they had, that he was free to hold her in his arms and never let go, to keep her safe by his side. Yet that’s not the case, and to take such liberties would be despicable, especially with her in this vulnerable state.

“Uggghhh,” Felicity groans, shaking Oliver from his thoughts as his hand squeezes hers. “Why does everything hurt?”

“Hey, shhh,” Oliver whispers, leaning closer and trying not to compare this to what happened after the explosion at the restaurant. “You’re okay. You’re okay, Felicity.”

It takes her turning into the hand stroking her cheek for Oliver to even realize that’s what he was doing. He goes to pull it away, but she makes a discontented noise, and who is he to take away something she wants?
“Oliver?” She asks blearily, blinking her eyes open to look up at him. “What happened?”

“What do you remember?” His words are gentle, soft, meant to soothe her before she starts to freak out about the stitches on her chest, and on her arm and leg where two other bullets grazed her.

Felicity pauses, contemplates her answer before she opens her mouth, a look of steadfast concentration on her face. “I was in the alley...you needed me to cut the power and I couldn’t do that from off-site.”

He nods, swallowing thickly. It’s just another example of something they could have worked around, something he could have changed to keep her out of danger, to prevent this from happening.

Her brows furrow as she remembers. “Derek and his wife. They came out the back and I tried to...” she trails off, her grip on his hand increasing with the memory. “I was shot.”

She scrambles to move. Oliver, expecting the change, leans forward and presses her into the table, keeping her still so she doesn’t pull a stitch. “Hey. Shhhh. You’re okay.”

“How can you say that?” She demands, eyes wide in delayed shock. “I was shot.”

“And you almost bled out, but you’re safe now. Digg stitched you up.” Oliver keeps his voice calm. His fingers continue to move in soothing circles, one on her cheek the other on her knuckles. “You’re not going to want to move until we get some painkillers in your system. And Digg went out to get some supplies.”

She does a little wiggle against the cold metal table. Her face scrunches in discomfort, but at least it’s not outright pain. “What supplies?”

“Soup, some pain meds. He didn’t think you’d want anything too heavy to eat,” Oliver mutters, starting to pull himself away from her.

Felicity nods in understanding, like that makes sense. She only resists when Oliver tries to separate their hands. Her grip tightens and he can’t do anything, but maintain contact. He could never say no to her, not when it comes to stuff like this.

“How are you so calm?” She asks. “Don’t take this the wrong way, but I figured you’d be one of those people who freaked out about stuff like this.”

He focuses on their joined hands.

Oliver is freaking out, it’s just all internalized. He knows that pushing her away does nothing, and he’s not going to revert to that Oliver.

No, what’s plaguing him in this instant are the questions, the constant loop in his head of what ifs. What if he hadn’t brought her in early? What if he hadn’t brought her to the bank? What if she’d died?

She was only in this situation because he brought her in earlier than he did in the past. But he’s changing so many things, who can tell what alteration – if any – actually caused this to happen?

It also begs the question: should he keep making changes?

Roy was hurt and he kept trying to change the future. Now Felicity almost dies. That’s not a good track record. And it can only get worse. Next time someone could actually die. Roy’s still not out of the woods and they’re just lucky Felicity wasn’t hurt worse.
“Hey.” Felicity squeezes his hand to get him to focus on her once more. “Where’d you go there?”

“Just wondering about some things,” he whispers back as the lock on the door beeps, allowing Diggle entrance to the Foundry.

Oliver drops her hand and steps back.

“Good. You’re awake,” Digg announces as he holds up a plastic bag.

He brushes past Oliver like he’s not there. Watching Digg help Felicity into a sitting position, Oliver mutters some half-hearted excuse about needing fresh air before he turns on his heel and exits the Foundry.

The truth is he needs time to think, to decide what he’s doing with his knowledge of the future. Because, as twisted as it is, this incident makes him question the rationale of changing the future. Roy could have been a fluke. He brought Roy in over a year before he planned to. It altered so many factors in the future that him getting hurt could be written off as the byproduct of Oliver’s overeagerness and being unable to see the consequences of his choice. With Felicity, Oliver has to face the idea that every change he makes might get someone he loves hurt.

*That* is not an acceptable loss.

And maybe if he had realized it when Roy got hurt, this never would have happened. And if that’s the case, how can Oliver ever forgive himself for hurting Felicity this way?

...

John tries to ignore the tension in the Foundry. He really does, but he’s also seen things this evening he can’t forget.

He found Oliver in the alley behind the bank, pressing against the gunshot wound on Felicity’s chest in an attempt to staunch the bleeding. Honestly, Digg had expected him to be level-headed in the face of injury, but the cool calm hadn’t been one of rote. No, Oliver Queen had attained the disjointed calm of a man who had to forcibly separate himself from emotions to deal with the woman bleeding out in front of them.

And Oliver had maintained that stoicism until the moment the heart monitor flat-lined. He maintained it through cutting off the blonde’s clothes to get to the wounds, through stitching her up, through finding blood for a transfusion. As soon as the horrible tone emanated from the monitor, John Diggle had witnessed Oliver Queen break.

The man had immediately started chanting “no” and he’s fairly certain Oliver didn’t even realize that’s what he was doing.

And then Felicity’s heart started again, Oliver had cried.

Diggle had experience wars, battles like the ones that hardened Oliver into a warrior. He knew what it took to get men like that to cry.

Felicity was more than just an IT girl, more than just a friend to Oliver.

His reaction finally convinced Diggle that Oliver was from the future. That depth of emotion could only be explained that way. And it was the first truly honest reaction he’d seen from Oliver, or at least the one he trusted most.
“Is he okay?”

John blinks down at the blonde staring after the brooding vigilante.

“He seemed off,” she elaborated, meeting John’s eyes.

He just sighs. Whatever’s between them in the future, he gets the feeling it’s going to bleed into this past. And it looks like Oliver’s not the only one affected. “He’s fine.”

Felicity gives him a look. “You don’t believe that.”

John shrugs, pulling back the gauze to look at the stitches on her chest. “Maybe not right this instant, but he will be.”

He steps back and grabs the bottle of pain killers, tipping out one heavy-dose pill and holding it out to her. “Here. This will help with the pain.”

For him or Oliver, the pill would probably work better. For the slim blonde, it’s probably going to give her a good high. But she’s also got a lower pain tolerance, so he’s not too worried about it.

“What is that?” Her eyes narrow in suspicion.

He wonders if she can see well enough without her glasses to read the label. However, he maintains a straight face as he lies: “Aspirin.”

She looks dubious, but takes the medicine. “Are you sure this will help?”

“Yes,” Digg answers with a chuckle as she swallows the Oxycodon. It’ll definitely help.

“Good. How long does it take to kick in?”

He hands her a bottle of water. “Not long. Finish this and then have some of the broth.”

She hums in agreement. “And then can I go home?” She yawns thickly. “I need to get some sleep.”

“We’ll make sure you get home alright,” Digg tells her, grabbing a pillow off the cot in the corner. He sets it on the med table and guides her down to rest her head on it as she stifles another yawn. “Just rest for a little while.”

“Ooookayyy,” she hums as she snuggles into the pillow.

John smirks, shaking his head at her antics. He drapes a blanket over her to keep her warm before he starts cleaning up the Foundry. He uses a wet rag to clean up the spots of blood from the rest of the surfaces.

He’s just finishing up when the door beeps again and Oliver comes down the stairs, taking off his green, leather jacket as he walks. His eyes go immediately to the med table where Felicity doses.

Digg watches him as he walks into the room, his eyes fastened on her sleeping figure, a hand lifted as if to touch her until he draws himself back. Instead of going to her, he throws his jacket at its case with unnecessary force.

The force of Oliver’s feelings hits him as Oliver throws a longing glance in Felicity’s direction before turning his restless energy on the punching bag. He contemplates wrecking that brood-fest, but ultimately decides to let him sort it out himself, at least for another hour while Felicity naps.
About forty-five minutes later, Felicity stretches out of her nap, a whimper escaping her as the movement pulls at her fresh stitches. Oliver is at her side in an instant, hand lifted as if to caress her cheek before he thinks better of it and drops it to the metal table.

“Mmmmm,” she hums as she turns to look up at him. “Hi.”

Digg busies himself with cleaning his gun as he avoids looking at them. He can hear the smile in her voice and he decides it’s probably not the best time to burst in on the love birds.

“You’re all sweaty,”

Digg shakes his head, a smile creeping on his face at her drunken sounding voice.

“And what’s up with your face? It’s all...ser, sinc,er, sincerious. Sincerely.” Her voice slurs on the drugs and Digg finally turns to get a look at the couple. Felicity is drunkenly trying to figure out what she meant to say, and Oliver’s staring at her in something akin to adoration.

Oliver glances over at him. “Oxycodon?”

Felicity frowns. “Nooooo. Digg tol’ me it was aspirins. You said aspirins.”

John shakes his head at her ridiculousness as she stares at him in look of pure betrayal. “Are you feeling better?”

She pauses as she contemplates her answer. “I feel tingly.”

“I think it’s time to get you home,” Digg suggests, rising to help her to her feet, but she’s a couple steps ahead of him.

She slips from the med table only to squeal and jump from the chill of the concrete floor. It quickly turns into a yelp of pain.

John bursts forward to help, but Felicity’s already in Oliver’s hands. He scoops her into his arms bridal style and then pauses a second later as he realize what he’s done. Oliver looks down at the blonde in his arms who’s looking down at the ground in surprise, like she can’t understand what just happened.

She turns her wide eyes back to Oliver. “You’re really strong, you know that?”

Digg crosses his arms over his chest as he watches their interaction. Felicity’s hand seems to be stroking Oliver’s chest in dazed fascination.

“How are you so hard?”

Diggle chokes at the words and Oliver gapes at her. Felicity just snuggles further into his chest.

“I should tell you to put me down, but you’re surprisingly comfortable.”

Oliver glances at John with a nervous, shifty look in his eyes, like he’s uneasy about the position he’s gotten himself into.

He decides to take pity on the billionaire who looks like he’s having an emotional crisis. Then again, if Digg found himself in a past where he and Lyla weren’t together but he knew their history, he would probably have a similar emotional breakdown.

“I can take her home,” he offers just as his phone chimes.
Oliver nods and leads the way to the town car – Felicity still cradled in his arms. Diggle falls back a couple steps, slowing his pace as he glances at yet another text message from Lyla demanding he call her as soon as he’s able, that it’s urgent, that it isn’t that hard to respond to a text message. Although, when it’s from your ex it’s far more complicated than it should be, which John is sorely tempted to point out just to get her to shut up.

In fact, John would rather send that to Lyla and deal with her not-so-great reaction than have to see more this newer, sappier Oliver. Sure, it’s sweet and he could really get on board with a relationship between them, but he doesn’t want to see all of it.

“I’ll send you updates,” Digg says as he starts the car, looking across Felicity curled in the seat beside him. Oliver nods.

“Thank you.” The two words are loaded with meaning, but Digg understands. Oliver’s trusting him to look after the most important person in his life while he clearly sorts through some personal issues on his own.

Quietly, Digg turns on the tracking app Felicity set up on their phones before driving towards her townhouse.

An hour later, when Oliver’s blinking dot settles on Starling City General Hospital, Digg relaxes. If Oliver’s visiting Roy, he’s working through his issues in a more productive way than murdering punching bags. And that, at least, is a start.

...

Felicity wakes with the worst hangover of her life.

Okay, that’s not strictly true. She’s had some crazy nights with Tommy that ended far worse. Yet those weren’t typically accompanied by searing pain her chest...or arm...and leg. It takes the un-fun aspect of a hangover to new levels as she drags her bleary eyes down to the bandages she’s sure cover stitches she only vaguely remembers getting in the Foundry.

“Well, that’s the last time I run into a bank during an attempted robbery,” she mutters as she forces herself up and out of bed.

There’s a glass of water on her night table. It’s the simple kind gesture that finally makes Felicity wonder just how she got back to her apartment and what she’s going to have to deal with once she goes into her living room.

Wait. What’s she wearing?

Felicity fingers the black t-shirt and oversized sweatshirt. Her cheeks heat up as she realizes the clothes are Oliver’s from the Foundry. They’d had to cut off her clothes to stitch her up.

Well, that wasn’t how she expected Oliver to see her naked the first time.

She freezes at the errant thought and then shakes her head to clear it, laughing at her subconscious. It’s not like she seriously considered Oliver would sleep with her, right? Despite all that weird time travel stuff and the vibes...

Felicity scowls. No. This isn’t logic. This is her hormones talking. There’s no way Oliver’s that interested in her. He’s got too much other stuff going on.

The smell of coffee wafts down the hallway and Felicity takes a fortifying breath of the aroma before
she starts towards the delectable scent. Whoever’s in her apartment is more than welcome purely because they had the foresight to make coffee.

Her leg pangs with the movement as the stitches tug at her bare skin, but after a couple steps the pain fades into the periphery. Her head still feels wooly and thick from what she assumes are the pain meds handed to her last night. It must have been some good stuff to have such long-lasting side effects.

“Oh, Thank Google!” Felicity announces as she shuffles into the kitchen and spots John Diggle with two full mugs of coffee. “You are an angel, John Diggle! I could kiss you.”

“How about we don’t do that and I just give you more pain meds instead?” He offers, lifting a white bottle she hadn’t noticed before.

She smiles and continues to zero in on the mugs on the counter. “As long as I get my coffee, I don’t care.”

A pitiful whine escapes her as he moves the mugs out of her reach just before she actually reaches the counter. “Hey! What was that for?”

“Caffeine dehydrates you. We need you to get better, which means more water and less caffeine.”

Felicity pouts as she stares at the mugs forlornly. “But you poured two...”

“One for me and one for Oliver when he gets here.”

She turns her big blue eyes on Digg, not that that particular move has ever worked on a guy before, but it couldn’t hurt to try. She pouts. “Please. Oliver would let me have some.”

Digg snorts and shakes his head. “But he’d also insist you drink all that water and another glass first.”

“He’s right, you know,” Oliver supplies from behind her and Felicity nearly jumps out of her skin.

“When did you get here?” She demands, hand pressed over her rapidly beating heart.

“Just now. Are you okay?”

His eyes sweep over her, his look overly concerned and disorienting in its intensity. She suddenly remembers whose clothes she’s wearing and turns bright red. “Um...I just have to go get changed if I’m going to have company.”

She makes a break for hallway. She would have made it too, if she hadn’t pulled the stitches in her leg and released a squeak of discomfort.

On the bright side, she now knows how quickly her boys will react whenever she’s in pain. If she had actually fallen, they would have caught her halfway to the ground. As it is, they’re both at her side immediately, checking her over as she swats them away.

“I’m fine. Fine! I just moved too fast.” She scowls at them and Oliver backs away, still looking guilty.

Digg is far less intimidated. He just holds out the pill he tried to give her before Oliver appeared. “Just take this first.”

Felicity narrows her eyes at it. “Is that the same thing you gave me last night?”
He nods.

Adamantly, she starts shaking her head. “Nope. Nuh-uh. Not going to happen.”

“Felicity, you’re in pain,” he says slowly.

She shrugs and then tries to hide the pain that causes her. “So give me some Motrin. I can’t have your drugs there impeding my thinking. I have work today.”

Digg stares at her in disbelief and, if she’s not mistaken, Oliver rolls his eyes.

“You were shot three times.” Each word out of John’s mouth sounds like it ends with a period, like each has its own distinct significance.

Felicity folds her arms in front of her chest. “I thought it was one bullet wound and two grazes.” She hadn’t had enough drugs in her system at that point to forget what she was being told. “And it’s not like this would stop either of you.”

She glances at Oliver who merely stares back at Digg with amusement, waiting for his response. It seems they had this conversation before.

“Oliver and I have been shot before. And I’ll tell you the first time it happened I didn’t go back to work the next day and I’m sure Oliver didn’t either.”

She turns to look back at Oliver, who shrugs.

“I got up the next day,” he responds, amusement dances in his eyes at his ability to hamper Digg like this.

Felicity tilts her head because she knows there’s more to that story.

“It was an arrow,” he elaborates, “and I was on a semi-deserted island. There wasn’t much time for nursing it back to health. But I was a whiny spoiled brat so I probably would have stayed in bed for a month and then used the scar to pick up chicks.”

She stares at him for a moment longer because she can’t believe that’s his reaction to all of this. He had been worried sick on her behalf last night. The pain in his eyes made it look like his heart was ripped out, which was something she really didn’t want to consider given the whole from-the-future thing he had going on.

Anyway...

“Well, I’m now in charge of a whole division of Queen Consolidated. I can’t just take a sick day.” She pushes past them to get to her room. “Just hand me some Motrin and I’ll be fine. So far, it’s nothing worse than the cramps I get every month.”

Felicity freezes in the doorway to her room as what she just said sinks in. Slowly, she turns back to the stunned men at the other end of the hall who stare at her with wide eyes. “Please tell me you didn’t hear that.”

Digg holds his hands up in the air. “That was more than I ever wanted to know. I’ll get you some Motrin.” He backs away into the kitchen.

Oliver shakes his head before his serious face returns. He looks her over again, seemingly checking her for injuries another time. “Just promise me you’ll take it easy, okay?”
Felicity nods shakily and Oliver relaxes. His smile returns like a dim reflection of what it was a day ago.

“Thank you,” he whispers.

She offers him a small smile in return. “Anything for you.”

Oliver blanches, staring at her with eyes filled with awe. That’s a dangerous expression, one she could get used to staring at, one that makes her question her feelings and emotions. Yeah, Oliver Queen is dangerous. Not physically, not to her anyway, but that man could definitely wreck her heart if she let him.

But boy she want to let that man in.

...

Bzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz. Bzzzzzzzzzzzzzz.

Oliver glances down at the vibrating phone balanced on his leg. It’s the fifth time since yesterday before the bank robbery that the unknown number has called him. He would probably have Felicity trace the number if he wasn’t trying to avoid her, to spare her further pain and anguish during her injury. And yet despite that resolution, he’s never been more sorely tempted to call her to get him out of a situation, because he was right: Carter Bowen is in town.

He was just a little off with the timing. Tonight is the dinner his mother insisted he show up to. So he’s currently seated across the table from Thea, exchanging meaningful looks as Carter drones on about his book.

Oliver might have a better idea of what they’re talking about this time, but he can’t resist a little dig when Carter’s declared the “next Doctor Oz”:

“Why would you want to be a wizard?”

Walter’s lips twitch, but his mother does an admirable job of keeping a stern look on her face. Thea rolls her eyes.

“Please, for all of our sakes, learn some pop culture.”

Carter sneers at him, but effectively ignores the comment. “Well, actually, a network approached me-”

“Sorry, Raisa, but this really is important!”

Every head around the table jerks towards the door as Tommy’s voice echoes down the hall from Oliver’s left, as if no one had any interest in hearing Carter Bowen’s story in the slightest.

“Sorry to interrupt your dinner party, Moira,” Tommy schmoozes with a kiss to her cheek. “But I’m in the middle of a crisis and I need to talk to your son. His single-word text responses just aren’t cutting it.”

“Tommy,” she responds sternly even as Oliver pushes his chair back to stand. “My children assured me they could be here tonight.”

“Well, I’m sure you know the struggles of a start-up business. I’ve got suppliers trying to give me the run around and the permits from the town are stuck in limbo until I get your son to talk to some
people.” Tommy offers his most charming smile.

Moira releases a reluctant sigh. “Why don’t you join us for dinner for a moment.”

It’s not really a question and Tommy accepts her offer with a brilliant grin. “You have the heart of an angel, Mrs. Queen.”

He’s laying it on a little thick and Oliver really wishes he’d fought his mom on it a little more, but then...

“And you know I hate to decline an offer of delicious food, but I’ve actually got a friend waiting in the car who I may have strong armed into helping with the club and Laurel’s fundraiser.”

“Fundraiser?” Mrs. Bowen asks politely.

Moira raises a delicate eyebrow. “Friend?”

Oliver perks up, removing his napkin from his lap in preparation for a quick - but excruciatingly polite - getaway. Bless Tommy for rescuing him from the Dinner from Hell.

“Believe it or not, I do have friends. And yes, there’s a fundraiser for CNRI, the City Necessary Resources Initiative. Hosted, hopefully at the up and coming Verdant.” He glances at Oliver who frowns.

“Are you sure we’re ready?”

“This is why I need to talk to you,” Tommy exclaims.

Oliver’s hope of escape dissipates, shrinks away, now that he knows what Tommy wants to talk about. This isn’t going to be the reprieve he wanted. He’d wanted to keep more people out of this. Tommy could do with some distance from his hooded persona, not to mention Laurel. Hosting the gala...that’s just bringing things a little too close to home.

But he can’t really say no to Tommy.

Especially when he sees his best friend standing beside their shared sister. He’s been avoiding that revelation by never seeing the two of them together, but it’s like a switch: now that he knows, he can’t help but see it. Especially when they stand next to each other.

How hadn’t anyone figured it out before he has no idea.

“It’s business,” Oliver says apologetically. “Plus, it’s rude to leave his friend waiting in the car.”

Carter Bowen snorts. When everyone stares at him, he shrugs. “It’s just that Thomas interrupted our dinner.”

“Which I warned him about.” Oliver twists at the familiar voice, unable to control his reaction. Felicity leans against the doorway where Tommy appeared from looking better than expected for someone who was shot yesterday and had been working all day today. “But trying to talk Tommy down from something he wants to do is like talking to a brick wall.”

Based on how she’s leaning against the doorframe on her uninjured leg – and the bleary edge to her eyes – she’s in pain from her injuries. He frowns in worry, which prompts her to push off from the wall with a smile and move around the dining table which puts her right behind Oliver. It has the added benefit of enabling her to squeeze his arm in reassurance that she’s fine, even if he doesn’t
believe it entirely.

“Sorry for interrupting your dinner, Mrs. Queen, Mr. Steele. I’ll get Tommy out of your hair.” She throws him a meaningful glare across the table, but before she can pull him back, Carter stands and offers a hand to Felicity.

“Hi. Carter Bowen. I don’t believe we’ve had the pleasure.” His slimy leer has Oliver’s hands curling into fists.

Felicity’s hand lands on Oliver’s shoulder before he can stand. She’s leaning a little heavily on him, whether to keep him in place or because she can’t hold her own weight, he doesn’t know.

“Felicity. Smoak.” There’s a polite smile in her voice that just barely covers the weariness, the pain she must be feeling.

“Enchante,” Carter whispers in French as he kisses her knuckles.

“Um, yeah.” Felicity glances around nervously. “Nice to meet you too. You’re the guy who wrote that book.”

“So you’re a fan,” Carter practically oozes. “I love meeting my fans.”

Felicity’s hand clenches on his shoulder. “The book was okay...great, but okay.”

“Is everything alright, Miss Smoak? You look a little piqued,” Walter observes quietly from the head of the table.

“It’s just been a long day. There was an issue with Project 32 that had everyone scrambling at the end of the day. It’s been stabilized now and Johnson assures me the problem’s been fixed. I think I may have scared him a little with my loud voice,” she adds as an after-thought.

“Smart man,” Tommy mutters, and Oliver nods in agreement.

Walter chuckles. “Well, if you managed to frighten Dave, then I guess I chose the right woman for the job.”

“This is Director Smoak?” Moira asks, her voice short, barely polite.

Sensing that this is about to enter into tiring territory, territory Felicity definitely doesn’t need to encounter in her condition, Oliver rises to his feet. He smiles tightly at everyone around him.

“Sorry for the interruption, Mom, but it looks like I have business to attend to.” He nods towards the Bowens. “Please excuse us.”

Felicity lets him usher her out of the room by a hand on the small of her back, at least until they round the corner and then she falls back a little more into his hand. He slows down a little to match her pace, his arm moving to wrap around her waist.

“Felicity,” he whispers when she stumbles a little in the foyer.

“I’m fine. I just need to sit down.” Her strained voice cuts him to the core and he makes eye contact with Digg waiting by the door. The bodyguard immediately opens the back door to the town car so she could slip in.

Oliver slides in after her so Digg and Tommy can sit in the front of the car and Felicity immediately kicks her heels off and collapses against him. Maneuvering around her, Oliver reaches for the First
Aid kit under the seat and pulls out a little packet of Advil. There’s no water in the back seat, but Felicity takes the tablets anyway with a grateful hum before she settles back against him.

He doesn’t mind the weight of her head as she falls asleep on his shoulder, but the knowledge that she got hurt because of what they do plagues him. She’s brave, braver than he could ever be. She would rush headlong into danger if she meant she could save someone’s life, regardless of her own safety and this just proves it.

It’s his first real glimpse at what it must be like for her whenever he goes out into the field or does something stupid, and honestly, he doesn’t know how she could do it – and the Felicity he loves has done it for years. He was a wreck as soon as she walked into the building and it hasn’t let up since she got hurt.

The worst torture was knowing that he loved her but being unable to act because she didn’t know what she meant to him. She didn’t have a single idea.

Digg parks the car outside the Foundry as Oliver realizes what he has to do.

It’s time.

He’s going to tell them about his future.
Hello Lovely Readers!!!

Sorry for the longer-than-usual delays between updates. Life keeps happening, especially this close to the Christmas holiday (and since I started working in a cafe, it's been particularly busy). I'm working as diligently as I can and I really hope you enjoy this chapter! I think it's worth the wait, but I'll let you be the judge!

Enjoy!!

Chapter 21

Oliver meant to spill the proverbial time travel beans as soon as they got to Verdant.

He really did. He was going to call Digg, and they'd have a team meeting. It was past time to tell Tommy the whole truth.

It's just hard to confess his closest secret when the first thing he sees upon entering the soon-to-be night club is Laurel Lance. It's that exact moment that he realizes something he probably should have picked up on sooner: Tommy really does want to talk about the CNRI fundraiser.

Beside him, Felicity groans, an exact echo of his sentiment, except he wasn't shot three times last night. He also didn't spend the whole day working with only mild pain killers, so he's not actually in physical pain unlike her.

Taking his cue from the tired blonde, Oliver gestures to the bar and the only seats currently available above ground as Tommy greets his girlfriend. Felicity smiles gratefully at him as she hobbles over to the stools, leaning on Oliver a little more than he would like. Not that he has a problem with her leaning – the exact opposite, really – but she's pushing herself beyond her limits now. She should be resting, not following Tommy all over the city.

"How are you feeling?" Oliver whispers as he helps her onto the stool, trying not to hover too much and failing miserably.

She snorts. "Like I got shot and then decided to work all day."

Sounds accurate. He smiles wryly at her words. "You look like you could use some sleep."

Felicity nods in agreement. "And some of Digg's aspirins-that-aren't-aspirin."

It worried him that she's gung ho for the meds she refused earlier, but he can't say he blames her. "You could sneak off to the basement."

She starts shaking her head halfway through the offer, and Oliver bites back the protest on the tip of his tongue. He just wants her to feel better, but he knows better than to argue with Felicity.

"So, are you going to introduce me to your girlfriend, Ollie?"
His head jerks up in surprise at Laurel’s snarky question. In doing so, he realizes how close he got to Felicity. He’s practically surrounding her, enveloping her to protect her from their view, from any kind of threat that might be lurking.

Oliver reaches for something to say in response as Tommy bursts into laughter. “Smoaky isn’t Ollie’s girlfriend.”

He doesn’t find the situation quite as funny as Tommy apparently does. Oliver’s more than a little insulted that his best friend finds the idea so ridiculous, so he decides to ignore it for the sake of introductions. Plus, he’s not about to comment on the status of his personal relationship with Felicity, especially not in front of Laurel.

“Laurel, Felicity. You guys met at the hospital.” When Laurel continues to stare at them like she doesn’t recall that event ever taking place, he continues: “when you were attacked by the crazy lady with the white hair and Tommy got hurt.”

Laurel still looks politely lost, but it’s almost aggressively faked and Oliver knows this isn’t going anywhere good, so he stops trying. Felicity keeps going though.

“And on the phone that one time.” She’s annoyed Laurel is dismissing her. Oliver can tell by the shortness of her words. That combined with her tiredness is definitely going to lead to a rant: “You accused me of sleeping with him. Not that I blame you, because I would’ve thought the same thing, but it’s not like you were dating at the time, so I was totally justified in yelling back. In my defense it was also early in the morning and I hadn’t had my coffee. Pretending to forget me is just insulting.”

Oliver squeezes her uninjured shoulder and Felicity shoots her irritated glare at him instead of Laurel. He raises an eyebrow and she lets out an exaggerated huff before turning back to Laurel with a strained smile.

“Sorry. I’m just really cranky and tired. Too much coffee and not enough sleep. I really do need that nap,” she adds in an undertone.

Laurel looks between him and Felicity skeptically, especially since they haven’t put any distance between them at all. She doesn’t look pleased in the slightest with the current development, almost disgusted that she’s here with them. Oliver can’t really blame considering she pretty much hates his guts. So he’s not really surprised when she ignores them and turns to Tommy.

“Did you ask already?”

Tommy frowns at all of them. Oliver pities him for the naïve belief that the four of them would easily get along. He’s not entirely sure about the incident Felicity’s talking about but Laurel’s reaction doesn’t really endear her to him at all.

“Yeah,” Tommy says slowly, still unsure what went wrong with the meeting. “I mentioned it earlier. So what do you think?”

Laurel crosses her arms, like she expects him to turn Tommy down just because she’s there with him. Honestly, Oliver’s still conflicted. It’s too close to home, too early. But he can’t say no to his best friend returned from the dead by the miracle of time travel.

Besides, the club is basically finished.

“If you think you can get it ready and servers hired, I don’t see why not. But no cutting corners.” Or paying off inspectors to ignore the basement. But then, Oliver doesn’t need to bring that up, because the inspectors have already come in and the basement was deemed up to code – and of course absent
of any Arrow equipment.

There’s really no reason not to host the gala.

Tommy grins, happily bouncing like he’s not the only one in the room that’s not glaring. “I’ll get everything handled.”

Laurel glances between them with an incredulous look. “Who would’ve thought the famous playboys would open a club, let alone that their first event wouldn’t include strippers? You do realize this is a charity gala, right?”

“Yes, Laurel, I do realize what CNRI is,” Oliver responds dryly. He barely resists the urge to roll his eyes.

“You’re missing a prime opportunity to pick up chicks.”

He raises an eyebrow at her acerbic observation. He probably shouldn’t be surprised given how she’s been so far in this conversation, but he had expected cordiality around Tommy at the very least.

“I’ll be helping get qualified lawyers for those who can’t afford it. It’s a good cause.”

“And that attitude alone can pick up chicks,” Felicity points out with a sunny smile. “Who doesn’t love a billionaire with a heart of gold?”

Laurel purses her lips in more evident distaste. Felicity shrugs in response only to wince as the movement pulls at her stitches.

“Liss? You okay?” Oliver’s hopes that Tommy didn’t notice vanish as he asks the question.

She offers him a ragged smile. “I just pulled something today. No big deal.”

He frowns at her again, but Oliver butts in before he can question her further, changing the subject.

“Believe it or not, Laurel: I’m not doing this to pick up chicks.”

She obviously doesn’t believe him, if the look she shoots him is anything to go by, but her phone rings and she drags Tommy with her to answer gala questions.

Oliver deflates as they walk away and Felicity nearly collapses against the counter, her head coming to rest on her arms as if she could fall asleep right there.

“I really want to like her,” she mutters into the bar, “but then she opens her mouth and I have to resist the urge to Gibb’s slap her.”

Oliver doesn’t understand the reference but he chuckles at her frustration. She peeks over her arms to glare at him. Her intention is probably to look scary, but Oliver just finds is adorable.

“How did you do it?”

He shrugs good-naturedly at her question. His relationship with Laurel started off right, but he never loved her as more than just a friend. Which is something he learned only in retrospect. “I didn’t exactly handle our relationship well, did I? She has reason to believe what she does.”

Felicity sighs. “Well, that doesn’t excuse rudeness.”

“No,” he agrees. “It doesn’t.”
A glance over his shoulder reveals Tommy and Laurel deep in conversation. Oliver throws a glance at the padlocked door. “Come on, let’s get you some drugs.”

Felicity groans as she straightens and then slowly lowers her feet back to the floor. If they didn’t have company, Oliver would sweep her into his arms and carry her. As it is, he’s forced to walk behind her as she hobbles along to the door in her too-high heels. Tommy and Laurel are still preoccupied as they sneak down the stairs.

Once the large metal door slams behind them, Oliver gives up on the pretense and picks Felicity up. Instead of scolding his presumption, Felicity settles into his arms with a whimper. He feels it like a pang to his core.

“You shouldn’t’ve worked so hard today,” he sighs.

She hums into his chest in agreement. That more than anything convinces him that today was so much worse than she would ever admit out loud. She’s been hurting. Yet she’s still putting on a brave face. Part of him wants to smile. That’s his girl, through and through: brave and selfless, determined.

He sets her gently on the cot and walks over to the med station for the oxycodone. He contemplates the bottle for a moment before pouring several pills into a little cup and turning back to the cot. He pauses at the sight that meets his eyes.

Felicity’s already kicked her heels off and has her shirt partially unbuttoned and hanging off her shoulder as she checks the bandaging on her wounds. Oliver turns back to grab some more gauze pads and medical tape before he rejoins her, kneeling on the floor in front of her as he takes over.

His hands skim over her smooth skin as he checks the stitches. The area is red and inflamed, but everything looks to be holding together well. There’s minimal blood on the bandages he pulls off, so he’s not too worried.

Felicity just relaxes quietly under his ministrations, trusting him to take care of her. When he’s done, he holds up the little cup and a bottle of water.

She takes one glance at the cup and shakes her head adamantly. “Just one.” She picks out a single pill. “I have to be lucid to talk to Tommy and Laurel.” She swallows it in a single gulp, head tossed back.

A sigh escapes him. He just wishes he could do more. “You could just stay here. I’ll tell Laurel you took a cab home. I was planning on staying late anyway.” It’s a lie. But in order to give her time for a nap, Oliver can find something to do for a couple hours. “I’ll take you home when I leave.”

“Nope,” she announces. Felicity reaches for her heels on the floor, her face twisted in displeasure. Oliver moves without thinking, pulling the shoes out of her reach and forcing her eyes to meet his as he kneels in front of her. Crystalline blue eyes lock onto his, completely open in her tiredness. He wants to pull her into his arms, to completely take away her pain, but he can’t do that so he just takes her hands in his.

If he could, he would convince her to stick with his plan. Yet the determination in her tired eyes tells him he won’t win the fight simply because of her stubbornness that rivals his. Oliver’s smart enough to realize he’s beaten when it comes to her.

He loves her. He’d give her whatever she asked for.
Oliver picks up her heels again. “You don’t need to put these death traps back on. I’ll carry you up the stairs.”

Felicity narrows her eyes at him. “I want to make this clear: I’m only allowing this because I got shot. Okay? Carrying me everywhere is not going to become a habit.”

He chuckles. “I promise to only carry you if you’re hurt, asleep, or if you ask.” Because he can’t resist adding the last condition.

She stares at him for another moment before nodding her assent. He pulls her close again and carries her over to the stairs.

“Did you do this often in the future?” She whispers into his chest.

He grimaces at the memories her words invoke – after the car accident during Slade’s attack and after their disastrous date. He must tense because her head jerks up to him.

“So not good memories then.”

Oliver takes a deep breath, moving a little slower as he looks for words. “You were unconscious both times.” He answers honestly because he doesn’t want her freaking out as she imagines a thousand possibilities, including her probable death. Because that’s just how Felicity’s mind works. She won’t ask for details, but Oliver feels compelled to give them. He was going to tell her anyway. “A minor concussion once, and an explosion the second time. You were fine both times.”

“Explosion? Did someone blow up the Lair? That doesn’t sound good.”

“Not exactly.” Oliver grimaces. She’s too smart for any of his evasiveness to be very effective, especially when she’s asking. “The Lair was fine.”

“So I was targeted then. Was it related to this?” She gestures to the room at large.

He stops halfway up the stairs to explain as best he can. “You weren’t the target, Felicity. I was. I was tagged in the field and didn’t realize.” The guilt hits him anew along with the conviction that he’ll be better this time.

“And let me guess: you blamed yourself.” She pats him appeasingly on the chest.

“I was distracted,” he confesses with a sigh as he resumes walking.

“Hot date?”

Her ability to accidentally discern the truth surprises a laugh out of him. “Yeah, actually.”

“But then, why was I...,” Felicity trails off. “Oh.”

Oliver’s lips quirk as he shoulders the door open and lowers a shocked Felicity to her feet.

“Then...we...?”

“First date,” he whispers, watching carefully for her freak out at this new information. He knows Past Him would not have handled it well if future her was telling him this.

She nods slowly as she processes it. “Well...I’ve had worst first dates.”

He snorts. “So you said. I’m almost afraid to ask.”
Felicity tilts her head to look at him consideringly. “So are we a thing where you come from? Is that what this is?” She points between them.

Oliver sighs. “It’s...” complicated, but that’s also not the right word, even if it is true. “There’s something there.”

The words are inside him, bubbling just below the surface. He wants to tell her he loves her, that she loves him, but he’s an idiot who hadn’t accepted happiness while it was within his reach.

“So between my abandonment issues and your stupidly noble crusade, we got stuck,” Felicity concludes with her usual exactitude.

Oliver meets her eyes and he’s certain she can read every emotion on his face. There are a thousand questions in her eyes, but she suppresses them as she turns back to the hallway to the club. It’s a conscious decision on her part not to find out more. Oliver’s not relieved exactly, but he does feel like a weight has lifted from his shoulders.

“You know we’re going to end up sitting down and talking about your future, right?” She pauses. “Wow...I didn’t mean for that to sound that ominous.”

He chuckles again as they round the corner. “I know. I was thinking tomorrow would be good if you’re feeling up to it.”

“I’d like that,” she responds with a bright smile.

“Like what?” Tommy asks suspiciously as he comes up behind them. Then he catches sight of the royal blue pumps in Oliver’s hand. He raises his eyebrows. “Got something to tell me?”

“Oliver likes wearing women’s shoes,” Felicity shoots right back.

He opens his mouth to protest, but ends up just shaking his head as Felicity smirks up at him. She just looks too adorable and they need something to bring their conversation back to lighter topics.

“I think blue could really be my color,” he adds.

Tommy opens and closes his mouth, eyes darting between them like he’s just realized there’s something more than just his two friends getting along.

“Come on,” Oliver continues. “It’s getting late. We should probably head home.”

“You don’t want to work out the details?” Tommy asks.

“You’ve got it handled,” Oliver repeats with a shrug. “So you don’t really need me here. Not right now. I’ve got my bike out back. I’ll take Felicity home.”

“She hates bikes.”

“I’m tired enough to make an exception,” Felicity interrupts. “We can talk about your gala tomorrow. For what it’s worth, I think this is a great idea, Tommy.” She rises up on her tiptoes to press a kiss to his cheek. “We’ll talk tomorrow about the sound system requirements.”

Tommy nods slowly as Felicity reaches back to take her shoes from Oliver. “And you better have an extra helmet,” she adds as she heads for the back door.

Oliver nods to Tommy. “See you later, buddy.”
The last thing he hears before the doors slam shut is Tommy asking the empty hallway: “What just happened?”

...

Oliver was just a giant teddy bear, Felicity decided as he slowly rounded a corner on the back of his bike. She squeezed him a little tighter even though the turn wasn’t all that scary since he was driving slowly. She might not be a fan of motorcycles, but she definitely knew how to appreciate the closeness riding on one afforded, even in her sleepy, injured state.

And Oliver Queen on a motorcycle?

That was too delicious not to get in at least one or two not-strictly-necessary squeezes.

Besides, with his earlier confession and how much attention he paid her, Felicity got the feeling that he wanted to be close to her too. She’d suspected something from the beginning, but summarily dismissed it. Her friendship with Tommy was an anomaly: it wouldn’t repeat itself.

Yet apparently it had. This man she hadn’t wanted to meet was steadily becoming one of her closest friends. And if he’s to be believed, it would have happened regardless of the time travel factor.

Then there’s also the confusing idea of how to deal with this new information.

Oliver might be patient with all of them most of the time when it came to the topic, but it couldn’t be easy for him. Physically, they were all the people he knew, but without the experiences of years of teamwork, were they really the same people?

Felicity was once told in one of her mother’s saner speeches that a person is the sum of their experiences. So this Oliver is who he is because of three years of additional experiences that the rest of them don’t have. And they’re not his best friends because they’re lacking in those experiences.

It’s sadness – deep, harrowing sadness – that hits her as Oliver parks his bike in front of her townhouse. She might be Felicity Smoak, but she’s not his Felicity. She’s someone else. She hasn’t reached that point where she can be what he needs, what this version of Oliver needs, no matter how much her heart tells her she wants it.

“Stop thinking so hard,” he whispers, meeting her eyes over his shoulder.

“I was just realizing, I’m her, but I’m not her, right? Your Felicity?” Curse her filter’s sudden but inevitable betrayal. Well, maybe it wasn’t so sudden, but she loves that line too much not to use it at times like these.

He sighs and swings himself off the bike. “Let’s talk inside.”

Felicity follows him willingly, staring at their joined hands as he leads her and wondering why he doesn’t let go. She must seem like an imposter to him, a fraud in comparison to his girl. In a daze, she even hands over her key without a thought so he can let them into her apartment.

She hates this.

It’s too natural with him, but it’s not real.

Oliver flicks on the light and guides her to the couch, helping her out of her heels along with way. He sits on her coffee table across from her as he finds the words. She can’t do anything more than wait for him to say something. It feels like she’s waiting for a judge to lay down a verdict.
“You’re...,” he pauses as words fail him and his gaze meets hers. “You’re Felicity. There’s little differences, but you’re still the same. There was still that damn red pen when we first met, and it almost felt like the universe was telling me I was doing the right thing even though I was changing history when I saw that.”

She frowns, wondering if the drugs were stronger than she thought and she’s hearing things. “Red pen?”

“When we met – both times – you had a red pen in your mouth.” He explains it away with a wave of his hand like that’s not the focus, but the small loving smile says differently. “The point is: you were never the one who wasn’t ready. It was all me. I was a single-minded crusader who didn’t care about the body count the first time and you were the hacker with a heart of gold who gave our mission purpose. You haven’t changed, not really. As far as I’m concerned, you and her, you’re the same people. Same with Digg.”

He smiles at his own joke as he shakes his head. “Tommy’s got some growing up to do. There are things that aren’t the same where I’m from, yes, but you aren’t one of them.”

Felicity blinks at him and blurts out the first thing that comes to her mind. “I didn’t want to meet you.”

His mouth ticks in the mimic of a smile.

“Tommy wanted to introduce us, but I didn’t find the idea that appealing and then I was planning on moving anyway, so it didn’t seem like it needed to happen.” He frowns at her moving comment, but Felicity’s on a roll. “I wanted a better job. I had offers out, but obviously I didn’t go through with it – then or now.”

Her tiredness is now just a faint memory in the back of her mind as she contemplates the time traveler in front of her.

“So how did we meet? Where you came from?”

A little smile takes over his face, lighting up his eyes. It’s a smile she’s seen on him a couple of times and she knows she wants to keep seeing that look, that smile as he starts a story about a blonde IT girl who didn’t take any of his lame excuses and who figured him out, all while demonstrating how strong and caring she was.

Felicity drifts off to sleep to the sound of Oliver’s voice recounting his various encounters with Felicity Smoak, IT grunt. She has to admit they sound amazing, but she wouldn’t trade it for how close they are now. She likes this closeness, this openness to their new relationship. The girl he’s talking about sounds pretty amazing.

She wonders how she measures up.

...

Click.

Oliver startles into wakefulness at the sound of a key turning in the lock. In less than a second he’s positioned behind the door. When his mind finally catches up to the fact that he’s not in his home, the door swings open and Tommy saunters in with two coffee mugs and a cheerful shout of: “Felicity!”

“Are you ready to go? You promised you’d help me figure out the tech of the sound system and I brought your favorite coffee as a bribe. And by the way, a fake rock to hide your key? Really? I
found it in all of three seconds.”

With an inaudible groan, Oliver recalls falling asleep on Felicity’s couch after their late night conversation. She’d offered it to him as she stumbled into her room with barely open eyes, and he wasn’t really in the mood to head back home at that time. He didn’t want to deal with his mom and Thea after baring his soul to Felicity.

Then again, it now leaves him in the awkward position of having to stop Tommy from bursting into Felicity’s room and waking her after she stayed awake until the wee hours of the morning. Oliver steps from his hiding spot before Tommy can break down her bedroom door.

“She’s still asleep.”

“Shit!” Tommy jumps about a foot in the air as he spins around. “You scared the crap out of me! What the hell are you doing here?”

Oliver runs a hand over his face before reaching for the crumpled blanket in a pile at the foot of the couch. He folds the cloth to keep his hands busy as he contemplates his answer. His talk with Felicity got him thinking, really thinking about Tommy and his involvement in everything. Because, Felicity and Digg, he wants to tell them as much as possible about the future, about their triumphs and failures and get them to help him change what he can.

For Tommy, all he wants is for his friend to live, for Tommy to be happy. He’s happy Tommy knows, that he’s on board with Oliver’s secret, his crusade, but he’s also fine with him not being more involved.

“I crashed on the couch.” Oliver responds with a shrug, avoiding direct eye contact so he doesn’t come across as confrontational.

Tommy opens his mouth to ask a question, when Felicity comes shuffling out of her room with a huge yawn. She’s stretching tentatively so as to not pull any stitches and suffering from a slight case of bedhead.

“Please tell me you brought more of those aspirins from the Lair. Also, I could use your help with the bandages. One of them came loose and I can’t reach it. You know, I should probably keep a med kit here.” She stops mid-stretch when she spots Tommy in her living room.

“Aspirin?” Tommy’s eyes dart between them, worry overtaking his expression. “Bandages? Am I missing something here? Are you hurt?”

Yeah. This was definitely not how he wanted Tommy to find out. This is pretty much the exact opposite of how Tommy should have found out. He kind of hoped Tommy wouldn’t find out at all, even if that was nearly impossible.

Felicity glances at Oliver like an unexpected spotlight just found her and she has stage fright.

“There was an incident,” Oliver offers vaguely, knowing elaboration is inevitable but attempting it anyway.

Tommy sets the mugs on the table before crossing his arms. “What exactly happened last night that resulted in one of my best friends getting hurt?”

Oliver grimaces.

“Nothing happened last night,” Felicity protests, which is the truth, not that that will be much comfort
“Then how did you get hurt?”

“Ummm...,” Felicity mumbles.

Neither of them wants to tell Tommy because he’s not going to take this well. Oliver sighs at the painful look on Felicity’s face and realizes he’s going to take the hit for this.

“We went after the Royal Flush Gang, and things got out of hand.” His hands curl into fists as the memories come back to him. He’s accepted that it happened and he can’t change the past, but that doesn’t mean he’s happy it happened. Not even close.

“Out of hand?” Each word is clipped. Oliver braces himself for a punch, because Tommy is definitely going to blame him for this turn of events.

“They managed to get outside the bank and they ran into Felicity.” Oliver reaches for his jacket and pulls out a couple of the tablets she turned down last night. He holds them out, but she only takes one, just like last night.

She tosses the pill back and swallows as she grabs a half-full water bottle from the counter to wash it down.

“I got shot,” she announces with a grimace.

“You...” Tommy stares at her with growing horror before he turns on Oliver, anger overtaking reason. “YOU! You did this to her. You and your crusade!”

Oliver jerks at the truth in his words, but he also knows what Felicity’s response will be, what it always is when he tries to distance her from the cause: it’s her choice. “It was a mistake that won’t happen again. But this job, it isn’t risk-free.”

“It’s not a job!” Tommy’s hands curl into fists. “And if you want to throw your goddamn life away, then fine, but you don’t get to drag my best friend into it as well! You could have died! She could have died. You could be an ass before, but now you’re a sanctimonious douche who can’t even be bothered when he puts innocents in danger!”

He leans back with the punch to his face to lessen the pain inflicted by Tommy’s fist. He tries to tell himself it’s not really his fault, that Felicity would do whatever it took to help people. It’s a little hard to believe when his best friend wants to use him as a punching bag.

One hit becomes two, becomes seven. Oliver could take more, but he lets the last one knock him over and back into one of Felicity’s chairs. He wipes at the edge of his jaw.

There’s blood on his hand, but it doesn’t hurt much. He’s been through worse.

He looks back up to meet Tommy’s eyes, but Felicity has positioned herself in front of him.

“You don’t get to do that to him, Tommy! This is not his fault! He told me to get out of there but I didn’t listen. Now stop being a dick.” Felicity glances over her shoulder at him. “You okay?”

His lips quirk. “I’m fine.” Her concern is touching.

“Really, Tommy. You saw me yesterday. I’m perfectly fine. Just a little discomfort.”

Oliver moves to stand beside her, his eyes on her injuries. The gauze pads on her shoulder look fine,
but the one on her arm is gone, exposing Digg’s neat line of stitches. They’re not perfect but she probably won’t have much of a scar.

“Oh my god! You have stitches, Felicity! How could you possibly be fine?” Tommy shouts, his attention finally drawn to the evidence on her arm.

“Because they got me out of there! Oliver and John saved my life, Tommy! I can’t just turn my back on people who need my help! And if you know me at all, you know that!”

“Felicity,” Oliver warns. He can see where this is going and he doesn’t want to be the cause of a rift between them. It’s the last thing he could ever want.

“No, Oliver! I need to say this.” She turns her steely gaze back on Tommy. “I thought I made this clear before but let me say it again: I make my own choices and deal with the consequences. I don’t need any overzealous males trying to tell me what I can and cannot do. Got it?”

She looks to Oliver to reinforce her point. He backs off and sits down again.

“Felicity, you’re putting yourself in harm’s way. I can’t let you do that. It’s harmful behavior.”

Oliver feels suddenly like an intruder in their conversation. He looks for something, anything else to occupy himself as they keep talking. He needs to call Digg, to get him to the Foundry so they can finally have their big talk.

Yet it also doesn’t feel like an appropriate time to excuse himself. His phone is all the way across the room, anyway, and most likely dead since he didn’t bring a charger with him. Felicity will probably have something to say about that when she finds out.

“I can’t watch you hurt yourself!” Tommy shouts.

“And yet, it’s fine when Oliver does it!” Felicity protests.

Yup, he should have disappeared. This is definitely a private conversation.

“Oliver has training! Oliver isn’t the girl who nearly fell to pieces when her ex committed suicide in jail! He’s equipped to handle things you can’t!”

“Because he has a penis?!”

Oliver winces. Yeah, that’s definitely not an argument to bring up.

Tommy flounders for a moment. “No. Because he was trained to deal with stuff like this.”

“But he can’t do the things I can with a computer. This is my choice. You can’t tell me what to do!”

“Felicity –“ Tommy pleads.

“No! You can leave, Tommy. I’m tired and in pain. I don’t want to deal with this. Go!”

Oliver wants to stop her. She’s going to regret this decision later, but right now she’s made her mind up and in her defense, Tommy was being more than a little presumptuous.

Tommy glares at her, eyes burning with emotion, before he storms out of the apartment. He pauses in the doorway. “I just worry about you, Felicity.”

She nods in acknowledgement, but doesn’t stop him as he leaves.
“Felicity,” Oliver whispers. He wants to step in and try to help her sort this out.

Instead, she wipes angry tears from her face, and shakes her head to get her bearings. She turns back to him, suddenly all business. “Come on. We’ve got the future to talk about.”
HAPPY NEW YEAR!!! It's been a while since I posted, so here is the big chapter you've all been waiting for! Hopefully you agree that this is worth the wait!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 22

Tommy makes it all the way to the car before he registers anything past the anger pulsing through his veins. It starts with the pain in his hands, pain he got from punching his best friend.

He collapses into the leather seat of his car and rests his head against the steering wheel as tears well up. He punched his best friend. Seven times. What kind of person did that? He was a monster.

He stares at bruised knuckles through bleary eyes.

The stairs to Felicity’s apartment were right there, but it might as well be a million miles. He can’t just turn around and apologize. She’s not going to accept it. Hell, she’d basically yanked him off Oliver when Oliver was just taking it. Oliver could have put him down in seconds, but instead he had received every punch without a sign.

And Tommy hadn’t stopped.

It makes him sick to his stomach as he remembers what just happened. If he was Felicity, he wouldn’t forgive himself either. He’d reacted completely out of anger, the deep-seated ire that blinded him. It was the rage his father turned on him when he couldn’t do something right after his mother’s death.

He was terrified: of himself, of what could happen to Oliver, to Felicity. The most blinding fear was that one day he would find out they were dead in an alley somewhere. And he probably wouldn’t even hear it from them: he would find the words as a side note in the newspaper. It had rankled him the most about what happened with Felicity.

They had been silent on the subject until he caught them unawares. He’d been in contact with Felicity all day, had spent most of the evening with her talking over planning strategies for the CNRI gala, and she hadn’t said anything. They used to talk about everything.

But now she knows about Oliver and she’s suddenly keeping secrets from him.

Tommy turns the key in the ignition and sits up, wiping his face. He was angry, sure, but what he did in there was uncalled for on so many levels. He knows better than to say half those things, even if he was worried. Right?

He just needs some space, time to think, as much as Felicity does. And he can only hope she’ll forgive him for that epic blunder.

On second thought, Tommy grabs his phone and shoots her a text saying his sorry, he’s just worried, and he needs some time to cool down.
Knowing she’s not going to respond any time soon he tosses the phone into the passenger seat and roars away from the curb. He hasn’t taken the time in years, but he thinks it’s time he had a talk with his mother’s headstone. It was the one place he always found serenity after her death.

Maybe it can help him with this.

...

“Alright, Lyla, what did you want to talk about?”

John Diggle slides into the seat across from her, his body slightly twisted away so they can both keep their backs to the wall while still able to converse. It feels natural, and they really have to stop doing these coffee-shop meet ups if this is what John’s starting to consider normal. He’s having a hard time forgetting why he and Lyla ever had problems.

“I need to talk to Oliver Queen.”

Whatever he expected this meeting to be about, it wasn’t that. He’d be prepared for any number of things – Deadshot, Andy, A.R.G.U.S. – but Oliver? It hadn’t even crossed his mind.

“I tried calling his cell, but he isn’t answering.”

John shakes his head, trying to think straight. “Wait. How did you get his phone number?”

“It was in Waller’s file,” she answers with a dismissive wave of her hand. “But I have news on the time travel front. I just need to talk to Queen first.”

Her stipulation doesn’t instill the greatest confidence with John. As much as he’d love to trust his ex-wife, and as much as the cloak and dagger routine reminds him of happier times, he doesn’t trust her boss or the organization she works for.

“Johnny, this is really important. Did you ever wonder what we could do with knowledge of the future? I know you’re skeptical but I have proof he’s not the first person to time travel. I just have to talk to Queen to be sure.”

Her hand clasps his warmly, squeezes it like she used to when they talked about having kids. Once upon a time it was his undoing...and maybe once upon a time isn’t as far gone as he wants it to be because he finds himself capitulating, wrapped around her little finger again.

This is why meetings with her were dangerous. Secret drops in the middle of the night he could handle. Those were all business. Anything else felt too much like pleasure. I was confusing.

And John Diggle did not like being confused.

Beep.

The text saves him from caving immediately to her wishes, until he sees the body of the message:

Need to talk about the future. Meet at Foundry. 15 minutes.

His gaze shoots back to Lyla watching him expectantly. He presses a button before placing the phone to the side and leaning across the table.

“Why are you doing this? Why are you so interested in time travel?” Because he knows it’s not her style. Lyla is practical to a fault. Logic and precision beat out feelings and sentimentality for her...at least in most things. Their marriage was never one of them, but then, that hadn’t really worked out,
“Because that’s a lot of valuable information right at our fingertips, Johnny. Think about it.”

He leans back. If she’s trying to appeal to him, this isn’t the way to do it. He’s been around Oliver long enough to know that he’s changing things he remembers and that it’s not exactly going his way. “Did Waller put you up to this?”

She shakes her head. “Waller doesn’t know I’m here. And she doesn’t know about Oliver. This is strictly a fact-finding mission. I just want to talk.”

Her eyes ring with truth and Digg can’t seem to come up with a reason to doubt her. But he might be emotionally compromised on this subject.

Digg lifts his phone to his ear. “What do you think?”

Lyla’s mouth parts in surprise, but John refuses to feel bad. It was never his decision to make.

In the background of the phone, he hears Felicity say, “Oooh! Digg’s wife? I want to meet her!”

“Ex-wife,” he corrects politely, but Oliver just chuckles.

“Use your judgement, Digg. As far as I’m concerned, she’s welcome to join us. I’m not a fan of A.R.G.U.S. but Lyla is a good person.”

He doesn’t want to think about the serious tone Oliver’s voice takes, or what it means in terms of how active Lyla is in their future.

“She knows when to stop digging for answers, at any rate, which is more than I can say for the rest of us,” Oliver adds as an afterthought.

Digg doesn’t need any qualifications on that one. Lyla was always good with drawing the line when it came to plausible deniability, and she knew when to cut her losses and walk away. John would keep fighting for what he believed in until his breath left his body. It’s why he had such a hard time letting her go in the first place.

“See you in fifteen,” Digg responds, ending the call.

He picks up his coffee mug and stands. “Come on. You wanted to talk, we’re going to talk.”

..."So Lyla is Digg’s wife-not-wife who he’s going to have a kid with in a couple years?” Felicity asks, bouncing on the balls of her feet as she waits for the coffee to finish brewing. Her eyes are locked on Oliver’s amused ones across the bar.

He nods in response, content just to watch her muddle through the mess of time travel that’s always circling through his head.

“But they’re divorced right now.”

“Yup,” Oliver agrees, moving around the counter as the coffee pot finishes dripping. He grabs two mugs and pours the coffee carefully.

He takes a sip, expecting the sub-par coffee that usually comes out of a bar, surprised by the rich flavor.
“Coffee’s the only thing I can make that doesn’t taste terrible,” Felicity admits with a wry grin as she sips her drink. “Good thing too, because usually bar coffee is terrible.”

Oliver casts a dubious glance at the coffeemaker. “You made this from the coffee here? Tommy got the cheapest coffee he could. No one orders coffee at a bar.”

Felicity grins. “Trade secret.”

He shakes his head.

“What? Never had coffee I made?” She asks, taking a deep sip.

She’s teasing him, flirting, and it feels nice. Oliver can’t deny it. It’s nice to have everything out in the open.

“Once,” he admits, remembering the whispered one from where he sat at the desk brooding. But the memory still brings a smile to his lips. “I had a bad day.”

She pauses, narrowing her eyes at him. “You expect to believe we were that close and we never got each other coffee.”

Oliver laughs, shaking his head. “Oh, I brought you coffee, especially if you were mad at me.”

Felicity lowers her mug to the counter, eyebrows drawn together in confusion. “You brought me coffee as a peace offering?”

Coffee, food, and tech: the fastest way to Felicity Smoak’s heart...and climbing the salmon ladder shirtless in front of her...all the time. His lips quirk at the ramble he remembers from the first date. He learned all the best ways to get back into her good graces...or he thought he had until after that disastrous date.

After that, they had established a new normal, but it was never the same. These interactions now were different, and he couldn’t help that he liked this so much better. They were closer, more intimate. Oliver wanted that. He wanted it so badly it hurt.

“Do I want to know why you needed coffee as a peace offering?” Felicity asks again, eyes narrowed.

He steps up to the counter across from her and leans slightly forward. No way is he going to tell her about the Executive Assistant thing unless absolutely necessary. He was an idiot to force her into that position knowing that she would agree because it meant the chance of them being a better crime-fighting team.

It wasn’t his best moment.

“Felicity, I was idiot who did some stupid things. Sometimes I still do stupid things, and your loud voice really is scary.”

She pauses for a moment and then nods judiciously. “Okay then.”

Oliver waits patiently as amusement flits through her eyes, showing all the way down to the twitch in her fingers before she loses the battle and her face splits into a smile. “It’s really that scary?”

A grin threatens to split his face in half. She just looks so adorable with her wide eyes and innocent hope, like she could never imagine being scary to a vigilante. If you asked Oliver at the beginning of
his crusade if he would ever find a blonde IT girl scary, he would have laughed in your face, or pinned you to the nearest wall in a choke hold. But witnessing firsthand what Felicity could do with a simple computer, Oliver had a very healthy appreciation for what she did. She was the heart of their team.

“You’re terrifying,” he tells her with a smile.

She snorts disbelievingly at his tone and turns back to her coffee. Let her think that he’s patronizing her. She’ll see soon enough that she’s far stronger than she ever realized, which was the scariest thing about her. Her faith – her belief in what they did – empowered all of them. It inspired their team and it was irreplaceable.

_Bang._

Felicity spins on the stool and almost falls sideways off it in her haste. With accuracy and efficiency, Oliver rights her with an arm around her waist and places himself between her and the door.

Of course, as soon as Felicity has her balance, she peeks over his shoulder and shouts, “Digg!”

Oliver sighs as she moves around him to embrace John. Oliver’s gaze instead goes to the woman behind the newcomer. He wasn’t sure if she would actually come. She’s cautious, but not hesitant. Lyla’s body language is loose, ready to move if necessary.

She’s a warrior through and through, with additional training from Waller and A.R.G.U.S.

“You came.”

Lyla rests her hands on her hips, no doubt to makes sure she has easy access to the firearm on her.

“You know who I am?”

“Lyla Michaels.” He shrugs.

“Can you prove you’re from the future?” She’s straight-forward and precise. It’s nice not to play games as they dance around the truth.

“That’s what I hope to do now.” Oliver takes a deep breath look at the interested faces around him. They’re standing in a circle, but it isn’t right this isn’t how they need to talk. He feels like he’s on display, like he’s on stage. “We should move downstairs.”

Abruptly, he turns on his heel and heads for the basement. Down there, where everything he actually remembers took place, he can actually tell them what he needs to.

“Holy...” Lyla whispers as she catches a glimpse of the basement. Her gaze returns to Oliver again, more level and calculating. “What did you do for A.R.G.U.S. exactly?”

Oliver glances around at the equipment everywhere and sighs. Those aren’t happy memories.

“Waller used me for interrogation and recon mostly.”

Her eyes narrow and Oliver takes it to mean she knows what he isn’t saying. Catching Waller’s eyes wasn’t exactly a good thing. It worked on Oliver’s side for training, but it cost him bits of his soul. Waller preferred her goons soulless.

“So what did you bring us here to tell us?” Digg finally interrupts the stare down, his eyes darting between Lyla and Oliver with a furrowed brow.
Oliver shrugs. “Everything.”

“Everything?”

He nods in response, face grim. “Let’s start at the beginning...”

“Really? You spilled coffee on it?” Diggle asks, glancing skeptically at Felicity. She isn’t as surprised by the news, which means she must have heard it before. He shakes his head. No one in their right mind would ever confuse bullet holes for a spilled coffee.

“She didn’t buy it either.”

The enamored smile on Oliver’s face as he glances at the blonde tech genius has Diggle rolling his eyes. Well, it certainly didn’t take them long to get cozy.

“So that’s how she found out,” Lyla deadpans, clearly willing to move past this point and get on with the story. John gets it: she’s here for the plain and simple facts. All this emotional stuff is nice, but not particularly important to her.

Surprisingly, Oliver shakes his head. “No. She didn’t buy it, but she looked into the laptop anyway.”

“Really?” Digg snorts. In his limited experience, Felicity doesn’t seem to be the type to just let a paltry excuse like that slide.

“You should have heard some of the other excuses,” Oliver says with a wry grin. “You were there for a couple of them.”

John raises an eyebrow, unimpressed thus far. A man living his life in secrets should be able to lie.

Oliver chuckles. “The most memorable was the energy drink in a syringe.”

He snorts at the paltry excuse.

“I said I ran out of sports bottles, and that was when you walked away from me.”

Damn straight, Digg thinks. There was no way Felicity didn’t see straight through that. There was only so much that could be explained away as the eccentricities of the idle rich.

“She found out shortly after that.”

“Please! Could you be any more obvious?” Felicity demands. “The only reason I would do anything with that ridiculous is because your name was on the side of the building.”

Oliver nods along with John. “You made it clear that you didn’t believe a word out of my mouth.”

“So basically you only got as far as you did because of dumb luck.” Lyla crosses her arms over her chest in distrust of the whole operation.

“In the beginning,” Oliver agrees. “Why do you think I brought these two in earlier?”

No one has a response to that, and Oliver continues.

...
“Wait. You were shot by Deadshot, and you didn’t think you needed to tell me?” Lyla demands of John.

He turns from Oliver with a sigh. “I wasn’t shot, Lyla. Oliver’s saying that happened in his...” John searches for the word. He doesn’t want to say Oliver’s past because it’s not really the past, but it’s not the future.

“Alternate reality,” Felicity answers confidently. Her sci-fi shows are finally paying off in real-life application.

Everyone turns to look at her, various frowns on their faces.

She shrugs. “Well, if he already lived this year, but it was different. Each choice changed it more. So either each choice branched out into another reality or his future is gone and all that exists is this one. Which could be really terrible if you were trying to return, because then who knows where you would end up. But you don’t seem to be trying to do that because you want to change things.”

She’s already miles ahead of anyone else. Felicity might as well be talking to herself for all the confused glances, but she’s now caught on another point:

“Why aren’t you trying to get back?”

Oliver swallows visibly and his eyes suddenly become very interested in everything other than her, which is of course the biggest giveaway.

“Well, if he already lived this year, but it was different. Each choice changed it more. So either each choice branched out into another reality or his future is gone and all that exists is this one. Which could be really terrible if you were trying to return, because then who knows where you would end up. But you don’t seem to be trying to do that because you want to change things.”

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“Why aren’t you trying to get back?”

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“Based on what little I know about your future, it seems to me like you would be trying to get back...unless something terrible happened there that you’re trying to fix.”

He lets out the breath he was holding slowly, like a hiss of air from a deflating balloon. Large, sad eyes that Felicity can only describe as puppy-dog meet hers, the blue almost liquid in sadness. “I lived with my mistakes. Sure, there are countless things I want to change. But the last thing I remember was falling off a cliff after a sword was yanked out of my chest. My future doesn’t hold anything for me.”

Felicity notices his hand run over his chest as he says the words, as he remembers just where the blade must have pierced him. Sure, she knew the future wouldn’t be perfect, but there wasn’t a single scenario in her mind where the man before her was dead. He seems to invincible right now, but maybe that’s just because he knows so much.

“So what about the rest of us, future-us, I mean?” Felicity asks before she can think better of it. “If you’re dead, does that mean the rest of us...”

Oliver shakes his head before she can even finish the question. “All of you are alive, but that part...it’s not important. We can avoid that. We can avoid a lot of things, but first you need to let me tell you what I remember. Can you do that?”

She doesn’t want to let it go, doesn’t want to drop all the questions swirling around her head like children on a merry-go-round, but the look of determination on Oliver’s face silences her.

Felicity can wait for her answers.

...
sure murdering mobsters isn’t the worst thing she could do, but she almost shot your mother. That’s not the kind of thing you forgive. My mom and I barely get along and I’d still, you know, go after someone who tried to hurt her. Of course not in your *grrr* way, but in my computer, master-of-the-universe way.

“Unless, of course you were doing something ridiculous like sleeping with her.”

Oliver shifts nervously at the end of the rant and Felicity’s mouth falls open in shock.

“Oh my god! You totally were sleeping with her!”

Digg shakes his head. “Dude.”

“Well, that’s not going to happen this time around,” Oliver insists, eyes lifted heavenward as if praying for guidance.

“You sure?” Lyla asks pragmatically. “Oliver Queen does have a reputation.”

He glares at her this time as he growls, “Not anymore.”

“But won’t that change the timeline?” Felicity asks suddenly. “Like maybe she’ll now be successful in starting a mob war that devastates half the city.”

Oliver runs his hands over his face. “I’m not sleeping with Helena.”

“Why not? It’s not what you came back hoping to change, is it?” Lyla watches him carefully for his reaction.

“It’s not going to happen,” Oliver repeats with a heated glare at Lyla before his eyes dart over to Felicity.

The way his gaze softens as he looks at her takes her breath away and for a moment, Felicity forgets where she is. She’s lost in that look, a look that promises her the universe. His feelings are there, out on his sleeve.

A moment later she remembers that it’s not her he’s looking at. He’s looking at the other-her, the parallel universe her that he’s probably in love with. It’s getting harder and harder to convince herself of that when he keeps looking at her like that, especially after what he said last night about how she’s still the same Felicity he knew.

When he was joking with her and teasing it’s easier to pretend it’s just flirting and that he isn’t remembering a whole other her. She likes their relationship right now. It’s easy and fun, as simple as breathing.

There’s definitely no part of her that wants something more.

Maybe if she keeps telling herself that it will seem less false.

...  

“Whoa, whoa, whoa, wait...Dark Archer? There’s a copycat?”

Oliver looks to the sky in silent prayer. He wants to get this story over with, but he wants to do it properly without revealing everything all at once.

“He wasn’t a copycat,” Oliver explains with a groan. “He was killing people from the list that I
rendered useless and using it to send a message to the Hood. He wanted to draw me out into the open.”

He waits for the expected outburst, but none comes, so he continues:

“We fought.” It’s harder to get the words out as he can’t help but compare that fight to the one he had with Ra’s that ended up with him back here. Of course, Malcolm only barely failed to kill him while Ra’s succeeded. “I barely survived. John saved my life and I was...unable to fight for a while.”

No one looks happy about that announcement. Felicity chews on a bright blue nail and Digg and Lyla stare at him.

“What happened with him?” Felicity asks first.

“He got away,” Oliver answers simply. “Until we found him again later.”

“He left you alive?” Digg clarifies.

“That wasn’t intentional, but he defeated me for a time.” He’s not proud of it. That fight decimated his will to fight for the people of Starling until that firefighter attacked the gala at Verdant.

“Physically or mentally?”

Oliver’s not surprised that Digg’s the one to ask the question. His partner was the one who forced him to get over his fears long after his injuries had healed.

“Both, but I had a friend talk me back into it.” Digg nods in acknowledgement of Oliver’s nod to future him and Oliver takes a deep breath before he moves on as efficiently as he can.

“While I was fighting the Dark Archer, something else was happening...”

... 

“Mr. Steele was kidnapped!” Felicity interrupts with a squeak.

Oliver patiently turns to her with a sigh. This is taking a lot longer than he hoped, but he probably should have expected that given he was recapping three years’ worth of events. “That’s why you got involved: you wanted to save Walter.”

“Why does he get kidnapped?”

He feels like he’s been over this a thousand times because it’s ancient history to him. He needs to remember that everything could change this time around. “He found a book.” Oliver pulls out his copy. “It’s a list of the people involved in the Undertaking. The one he finds belongs to my mother.”

Felicity points at the book hesitantly. “Can I?”

Oliver hands it over, watching as she flips through it. The pages are stiff and worn as she turns them.

“And this is the list you were originally working off of?”

He nods.

“Don’t you think someone would put the puzzle pieces together?”

A chuckle escapes him, earning him a couple surprised looks. “Someone does.”
Felicity’s mouth falls open in a silent “oh,” a blush coloring her cheeks. “So...”

“Walter gives you the notebook to look into. I don’t know how you discover the names, but when he went missing, you brought the notebook to me. Oliver, not the Arrow.”

“Then how did I find out-“

“I’m getting to that.”

...

“Ted?” Digg asks, voice hard. “I don’t believe it. There has to be another explanation.”

And he really doesn’t. The man was his commanding officer, a hero, an upstanding man who would never mastermind a group that robbed armored trucks. He’d stake his life on that.

Oliver just looks at him sadly. “That’s what you said last time.”

“And you went after him anyway?” He doesn’t actually need a confirmation this time. The look on Oliver’s face is plain enough. “So what? Did you deem him guilty?”

“John...he forced you to work for him by threatening Carly. I helped you get out of it.”

That gives him pause. He doesn’t want to believe he could be so deceived by his mentor, but Carly hasn’t really come up before. And he wonders what it means that Oliver’s bringing her up. Not that anyone would have any success holding Lyla as collateral.

“Carly?” Lyla asks suddenly, a sideways glance at him, and John grimaces. “Your sister-in-law?”

Oliver nods, but doesn’t say anything more.

John doesn’t like the knowing glint in his eyes though. He’s going to have to remember to ask Oliver about Carly later, when Lyla isn’t within earshot.

...

“YOUR MOTHER SHOT YOU?!”

Oliver nods solemnly, accepting of this interruption, because, while Felicity is the most vocal, Lyla and Diggle also have looks of shock and disbelief written on their faces.

“And that’s how I found out? You showed up shot in my car?!”

He can’t resist adding: “And you took it a lot better that time.”

Felicity glares at him, crossing her arms over her chest. “Oh, sure. I bet I just smiled and took you to wherever you wanted to go. It was here, wasn’t it?”

There’s not any point in denying that. “All you said was: ‘everything about you just became incredibly clear.’”

“I find it hard to believe that’s all I said.”

Oliver winces at the memory of passing out in Felicity’s backseat. “You started babbling about something, but I passed out from blood loss.”
Felicity purses her lips, finding that idea not very comforting. Oliver just shrugs. It’s his past. And it’s something he’s already changed. He doesn’t have to go to his mother demanding answers this time around.

... “Wait, Deadshot shoots Malcolm Merlyn and he survives?” Lyla asks slowly. Curare is a hard poison to get an antidote for, especially with how much Lawton coats his bullets in. An ingested poison will take longer, but Lawton introduces it straight into the bloodstream. Not to mention, he never misses a target.

“Malcolm wore a bulletproof vest,” Oliver explains. “And I set up a blood transfusion with him and Tommy...that’s how Tommy found out I was the Arrow.”

It’s a decision he regrets. That much is plain from his grimace. Lyla can’t disagree with him there. She knows the toll secrets take on any kind of relationship.

“But Tommy knows now, so you don’t have to worry about that, at least,” Felicity says cheerfully. Lyla watches Oliver though and he doesn’t seem quite as sure as she does. There’s something else he’s holding back and she can’t help but wonder what it is.

But he doesn’t address it, just continues with his story. Yet it suddenly clicks with her what he’s doing: Oliver’s telling the story so they can go over everything like it’s the first time. For him, at least some of the holes have been filled in, but he’s leaving them open so the big surprises are just as big for them.

There’s some big reveal about this “Undertaking” that Oliver wants to keep secret. It’s like he’s testing them, to see if they can solve what they weren’t able to figure out the first time he lived it.

... “I left,” Oliver whispers. “Lyla was there with A.R.G.U.S. to capture Lawton, but you and I were going to kill him before Waller could get her hands on him.” Oliver’s focus is completely on John, watching for his reaction. “I left to protect Laurel, Tommy, and the kid from an assassin and you went after Deadshot on your own.”

Lyla stiffens from her spot and Oliver’s gaze darts to her.

“Lawton was aiming for you and John pushed you out of the way, almost got shot too, chasing after Lawton.” This is the part of the story that it’s hardest to tell right now. He’s still afraid of John deciding to walk away right now. There’s no way he can see him and Felicity continuing this fight with the same success without John Diggle.

“You quit after that...for a while.”

“How long?” is John’s only question.

Oliver laughs. “Until Felicity made me apologize.”

... “In this hypothetical future, do you let the small blonde girl walk into all the dangerous situations?” Oliver sighs in Lyla’s direction as John nods in agreement.
Felicity snorts. “I grew up in Vegas. I know how to handle myself in a casino, even an underground one. The only way they would have caught me counting cards was if I let them.”

John and Lyla turn to stare at her as Oliver smirks. “Did I mention she can count cards?”

“And how did you find that out?” She demands of Oliver, unimpressed.

“You told me when you informed me you would be walking into the casino because we had no other choice.”

“Of course she did,” Digg groans. “I’m starting to think she’s the stubborn one.”

“Hey!”

Diggle raises an eyebrow to silently question her objection.

She frowns as she grumpily backs down. “It was the right decision. We do save Walter, right?”

Oliver nods and braces himself for one last secret. “It didn’t work out the way we hoped. Alonzo swore Walter was dead.” The worlds are tough for him to get out, caught in the back of his throat. “I told my mom and she ran to confront the man who kidnapped Walter.” He lifts his eyes to gauge their reactions to the big reveal. “Malcolm Merlyn.”

“Malcolm Merlyn!” Felicity looks like he just pulled the rug out from under her. She has to sit down, except she’s already sitting so she can’t really do anything.

John and Lyla look just as shocked, both jumping upright in shock, as if their enemy was in the room to fight.

“It gets worse,” Oliver cautions. “We broke into Merlyn Global to find out his game plan.” Another deep breath. “He plans to set off two earthquake machines in order to level the Glades, machines developed by Unidac Industries.”

Felicity’s head jerks up. “Unidac Industries, like the recently added to Queen Consolidated Unidac Industries?”

Oliver’s nod has Felicity’s mind spinning in a thousand directions.

“As in the company under my department’s guidance? The one working on top secret projects where the orders come from higher up than me? They’re not working on anything earthquake-related.”

“It’s called the Markov Device,” he supplies.

He can practically see as she mentally flips through all the files that have crossed her desk since her promotion, thankful for her stellar memory recall. There are lots of projects that fall under her purview and it’s hard to remember everything, but then:

“That’s not a machine designed for creating earthquakes. It’s a smaller device...there was something about medical or military uses.” Felicity frowns as she searches for the answer in that beautiful brain of hers.

Oliver cuts off her mental search. “Malcolm weaponizes it and puts two in the Glades.”

“And we stopped him, right? Because this Foundry is in the Glades. And I refuse to believe that you would be standing here if the Undertaking actually happened. I hate to think about it, but you’d probably die before you let anything happen to the people of Starling City, right? Which is terrifying
in and of itself...” She trails off as she realizes she went on the rant, but Oliver just smiles at her blush before continuing the story.

“Digg and I confronted him, and Lance was able to disarm one with your help.” Oliver runs a hand through his hair. “But we thought there was only one.”

Three horrified gasps fill the lair.

“503 people died in the earthquake.” And he knows every single name by heart. They all weighed heavily on his mind.

“Oh God,” Felicity whispers, a slight greenish tinge to her skin at the revelation.

“And Malcolm?” Digg asks, focused on the perpetrator.

It earns another grimace from Oliver. “At the time we thought he was dead. I stabbed him through the heart with an arrow. But it turns out it didn’t stick.”

“What’s our timeline?”

Felicity nods in agreement with Digg’s question. They need to know how quickly this is going to happen so they can plan to stop it. Because obviously that’s what they’re going to do: stop it.

He’s thankful they don’t ask for more detail about Malcolm because how could he begin to describe that complicated relationship? “About six months.”

“Six months?” Felicity gasps. “I thought we were talking years here. This all happened within a year of you coming home? What about the other two years in the future?”

Oliver shrugs. He doesn’t know what to tell them about the upcoming years. His hope is that by changing this first year, it will alter everything enough that things will change. He’s not sure exactly what he’s hoping for, but the problem with Slade was that he had no idea who he was fighting until it was almost too late. Now that he knows, he has the upper hand.

“Well, I left for a while, which won’t be happening again,” Oliver assures them. He won’t give Isabel Rochev the change to get her claws into his family’s company. “And the next year turned out to be orchestrated by Slade Wilson, a...former friend from Lian Yu.”

“Whoa! Hold up. What about the other people on the Island with you?” Felicity demands. "Is this something we have to worry about? Is this going to be a problem? I mean, no one else was rescued with you? Did any of them survive too? Is this going to be a reoccurring problem?"

“Yes,” Oliver answers simply, not specifying which question he's answering. “And I didn’t spend all five years on that Island, but that’s not the point. The point is, so much as changed already and there’s so much more we need to change...we should worry about this first. The Undertaking: it needs to be stopped.”

He knows Felicity’s going to let him end their conversation like that, but she recognizes the importance of this, the importance of focusing on one goal at a time and the first thing is the Undertaking.

Felicity straightens, rising to stand as she faces Oliver. He’s thankful for her support more than he can ever say when the next words out of her mouth are:

“So how do we stop Malcolm Merlyn?”
Let me know if you're interested in reading the deleted scenes of the reveal! I've got a couple snippets that were cut if anyone's curious.
Chapter 23

“A little longer than usual, so I hope that makes up for the delay!

Huge thanks to geniewithwifi for her beta-ing!

Also, I’ve started posting some deleted scenes as a part of the series, if you’re interested. I hope you enjoy this new installment!

Chapter 23

“Felicity found something. Sounds like Helena,” Oliver announces as he reaches the bottom on the mansion stairs where John Diggle waits as impassively as possible.

“Are you sure this is a good idea?”

Oliver frowns. “What?”

“Interfering with time. Several people have been hurt already because of your meddling. Don’t you think that maybe we should just let events play out as planned?”

“There is nothing that happened with Helena that bears repeating.” And no way in hell he could stomach that happening again. He’s sure there’s a way to bring Helena back from her darkness, but there’s no way he’s going about it in anywhere near the same fashion.

For one: he’s not sleeping with her.

“She’s not part of your bigger picture. We could just leave her alone. It looks like she’s going to get herself killed at this rate,” Digg points out as he scans the article.

“Not before she starts a gang war that will decimate the Glades.” Oliver thought through this days ago. All the possibilities are on a loop in his head. He’s not bad with strategies, just not that great at them either. “Hundreds of innocent people dead and Malcolm feels even more justified in the Undertaking.”

“Should we even be talking about this here?”

Oliver follows his cautious gaze around the main level of the mansion with a nonchalant shrug. “I’m pretty sure no one’s home.”

“Oliver! Good. I was worried you’d disappeared already.”

Digg shakes his head and steps away from Oliver as Moira strides into the room with purpose. He offers his mom a smile and pointedly ignores Digg’s reaction.

“Nope. Still here. What can I do for you, Mom?”

She smiles politely. “Well, since you disappeared in the middle of dinner with the Bowens, I figured
you’d have no problem coming to the CNRI gala tonight.”

Oliver’s face twists in distaste with the idea. He’s not crazy about Carter and not looking forward to seeing Tommy really either after how they left things. Plus tonight they were supposed to discuss plans to change the future.

“You will do this for me, Oliver, and you will be on your best behavior. Are we clear?” Moira insists with her usual tenacious grit.

A pained smile over gritted teeth and Oliver feels like he just signed his life away. But it satisfies his mother and Moira’s pleasant smile returns.

“Good. Now then, the gala starts at seven. At least try to be on time.”

“Of course, Mom.”

She purses her lips and turns to John to verify her order is heard. Yeah...Oliver’s not getting out of this. There’s only one thing that could make this better.

“I’ll just have to make sure my date can attend on such short notice.”

Digg frowns and his mother pauses halfway to the door. With an arched eyebrow, she waits calmly for the punchline. “Date?”

“Yes, Mom: date. I did have plans for this evening, you know.” Oliver congratulates himself on a brilliant plan. With Felicity there, they can still talk about the future and it gives him a reason to be around Felicity, a reason he fully supports.

“And this is an actual date, not one of those gold diggers that you seem to attract like a magnet?”

“She’s not interested in my money, Mom. She’ll be on her best behavior.”

Moira purses her lips as she assesses Oliver’s sincerity before turning back to the door. “Fine. I look forward to meeting her.”

“Felicity’s not going to agree to this,” John points out after Moira’s out of earshot, stepping up to stand just behind Oliver.

The truth prompts a grimace to twist his face. Yeah, it’s not his smoothest plan, but he thinks he might have the perfect way to smooth it over. He grins at John. “You may be right, but I’ve got a plan.”

... Remind me why I agreed to come here, again?” Felicity mutters to Oliver before downing a glass of champagne.

“Because you’re a good friend,” Oliver supplies with a smile.

Felicity shoots him a glare. Because he’s right: that’s exactly why she agreed to come to the CNRI gala after a night of almost no sleep. She spent almost the whole night creating a timeline of the events he shared last night and looking into Malcolm Merlyn. Which is what they should be talking about tonight.

But no, instead they’re mingling with rich people at a gala she would never have attended. All she wanted to talk about was how they can change the timeline, not be looked over by the city’s elite as
the arm candy of Starling’s most eligible bachelor.

Oliver sighs and turns towards the center of the room. “Can I have this dance?”

Felicity snorts. “You don’t seem like the dancing type.”

He shrugs and she sees it again, the amusement and adoration he gets occasionally when she does something or says something. She’s not sure what to do with the looks. They set fire to her veins and make her want things she can’t have. Much like the heat of his hand on the bare skin of her back.

“I’ll dance with you.”

He doesn’t mean to say it, she can see that reflected in his eyes and the way he clams up. This whole evening since he asked her has been a discovery of his feelings for her, the her that he knows. And honestly, the looks he keeps throwing her way are pulling her under. She’s getting swept away in those heady emotions, made even harder when he says things like that.

How the hell is she supposed to say no when his words make her weak in the knees like that?

His hand feels rough and warm in hers as he pulls her onto the dance floor. His arms wrap around her, loose enough to give her room to break his grip if she wanted. She sighs and relaxes into his hold, swaying with him to the soft music.

“You have to admit: Tommy does know how to throw a party,” she mutters under her breath as she sees the man introducing Laurel to the smarmy Carter Bowen.

“That he does. He’ll come around, you know.” Oliver’s deep voice in her ear unsettles something in her, something that causes her heart to skip a beat and makes it hard to make eye contact.

“Even when we go after his father?” Somehow Felicity thinks that might be too much for Tommy, even if his father was possibly the worst father in the world.

“He didn’t believe me, when I told him.” Oliver whispers, which feels like a confession. She leans away at his tone so she can look him in the eyes.

“Last time?” It doesn’t hurt to verify because she needs to know what they’re dealing with.

He nods, casting his gaze in the direction of their friend. “I told him about the Undertaking and even with everything his father’s done, he didn’t believe me. By the time he figured it out...”

The implication stops Felicity cold in the middle of the dance floor. The heat in her veins turning to ice as her mind connects the dots. Now’s one of the times she wishes she was a little dumber. It’s a mystery solved. One she’s not thrilled about. “He...The earthquake? Oh God!”

“Hey! Shhhh.” Oliver drags her off she floor. His hands rub up and down her arms as he mutters soothing words. “Hey, that’s one of the things we’re going to change.”

“How could you not mention that yesterday?!” It’s rhetorical. She knows the answer. She wouldn’t have told her past self that information either.

Is her chest supposed to feel this tight?

And now she’s feeling faint. Is the room closing in? God, she should be doing something like taking deep breaths, right?

While her body can’t figure it out, her mind races a mile a minute. This information huge. It’s huger
than huge. It’s gigantic! And she’s not sure how to cope with it.

Tommy dies. Where Oliver comes from, Tommy is dead, and has been dead for years. It’s cataclysmic for her to consider that her best friend could be dead in a few short months. Not talking to him, seems like the cruelest punishment now.

“Felicity.”

She can hear voices. Just barely. Like they’re getting farther away.

Tommy’s like family. She honestly doesn’t know any way to fill the gigantic gap his death would leave in her life. But there’s no way in hell she can waste the rest of his time here giving him the cold shoulder.

Oh God. What if they couldn’t change it? What if he still died in the Earthquake? What if by interfering they make his death worse? Is that even possible?

Should they tell him? Should they warn him about what’s going to happen?

“Fe-li-ci-ty.”

It sounds like they’re saying her name. She wants to shout back, to tell them that she’s here, but her breath gets caught in her chest no matter how many times she tries to get air in, it’s not enough. If only she can get a full breath.

“Damn it.”

That doesn’t sound ri-

Something covers her mouth, cutting off her air. She flounders for a moment, desperate for life-giving air to sustain her. It’s a pressing of flesh against flesh, intimate.

Lips.

A kiss.

Felicity’s eyes fly open in shock and Oliver leans back, her face still cupped in his hands. She presses her fingers to her lips as she stares at him. He smiles softly at her, regretfully like he hadn’t meant to do that. His thumbs trace circles into her skin as her breathing returns to a normal rhythm.

“Oliver...what?”

“You were having a panic attack,” he explains calmly as her heart rate slows to the rhythm of his massaging fingers. “When I kissed you, you held your breath.”

“Right. That’s all it was. Just a way to get me to calm down.” Felicity repeats it to herself over and over again, but after the first time, it’s all internal. Hopefully.

“Hey,” Oliver whispers, drawing her eyes back to his. The raw emotion in his eyes makes it hard for her to breathe all over again, but in the best way. She feels sort of like she’s flying. He huffs out a breath as he suppresses a smile.

“Hey.” Does her voice always sound this breathless?

No. That’s not the point. She has other things she needs to be thinking about, things that were just revealed in the worst possible way.
“So...,” she swallows thickly to dislodge the difficult words from her throat. “Tommy dies? How?”

He sighs, glancing to his right where she spies Digg. That’s what it takes for her to realize they’re no longer on the main floor of Verdant with the rest of tonight’s rich. The hallway is just as bright and every couple minutes one of the catering staff flies by a tray or two of tonight’s goodies fresh from the kitchen.

Oliver must have moved them in here and forced her to sit, neither of which she noticed in her panicked state. He squats in front of her, her hands tucked securely in his, his thumbs once again drawing patterns on her skin.

“Tommy went into CNRI to save Laurel, knowing that there was an earthquake machine going off and that Laurel was too set on saving what she could to leave when she should have. He saved her, but...” Emotion steals his voice and Oliver flounders for the right words.

“Hey, shhhh. It’s okay,” Felicity soothes as she sees the tears in Oliver’s eyes. The fabric of her dress catches on the chair as she slides forward to wrap him in a hug. “We’ll stop it. I promise.”

He doesn’t give in to the tears, but Oliver wraps his arms around her waist. Felicity would be a liar if she said she didn’t enjoy the feeling of his arms engulfing her. Over his shoulder, Digg shifts uncomfortably, but Felicity doesn’t move to let go. She waits for Oliver to pull away because he needs this hug.

Almost a minute later when he pulls away, Oliver shakes his head to clear it. “We should probably get back, and add this to the list of things we need to talk about.”

She meets his eyes. “And when are we going to talk about the giant time-traveling elephant in the room?”

Oliver glances at his watch. “Forty-five minutes? That’s the earliest we can leave without my mother freaking out about decorum.”

“Since when have you cared about decorum?” Digg asks with a snort.

“Since my mother blackmailed me into this so we could present a dignified front to the Bowens.” He grimaces at the thought.

Felicity rolls her eyes. “Rich people are crazy.”

John nods in agreement, and Oliver just looks put upon.

“We should head back in,” he presses with a guided hand on Felicity’s back.

“You’re just saying that so Digg and I will stop ganging up on you.” She grins triumphantly at the eye roll and partial smile she receives.

“You do realize that with your new salary you qualify as rich, right?” he whispers.

She stops short, laughter caught in her throat. She opens her mouth a couple of times and then shakes her head. She’s not dealing with that right now. Her college loans will probably deplete a portion of it – and she hasn’t really looked at her paycheck recently – and she’s fairly certain she would never rank among the elite present tonight.

She’s the daughter of a cocktail waitress. She’s a master of saving money and finding deals on shoes and clothes. She’s frugal and sentimental. Her biggest expense is technology, which she splurges on
happily, and she only buys cheap wine and frozen meals. Then again, the frozen meals are just the only things she can cook.

What she means is that she most definitely doesn’t fit in with this crowd.

“Why am I not surprised that you can’t cook?” Digg asks the group in general, much to Felicity’s embarrassment.

“I really need to work on my brain to mouth filter.”

“Oliver!”

He turns automatically, but Felicity tries to negotiate with the universe to swallow her whole instead of making her turn to face the owner of that voice.

Oliver bursts that bubble with a simple: “Mom.”

Felicity summons a smile before turning around to face the calculating blue eyes that looked at her with such displeasure the other night. “Mrs. Queen.”

“Miss Smoak,” the woman responds with a cordial head tilt before refocusing on her son. She exhaled slowly in relief that she wasn’t on the receiving end of that look any more. “And when do I get to meet my son’s lovely date?”

Or not. Definitely not. Is it too late to pretend she’s not here as Oliver’s plus one? How large a donation would she have to make? All she needs is an escape route. John should be good with those, right?

Nope.

Too late.

“Mom,” Oliver’s hand on her back tucks her into his side, “Felicity is my date.”

Disapproval radiates from Moira as she turns back to Felicity. And yeah, she kind of wants to run away, but it’s not like she’s done anything bad, right?

“Hi,” she waves awkwardly.

Moira smiles tightly. “Nice to see you again, Felicity. Happy you could make it.” Immediately she turns away. “Oliver, can I have a word?”

It’s not a request and Oliver winces. “Mom-”

“It’s okay,” Felicity squeezes his arm. “I have to go to the ladies’ room anyway.”

And she makes her escape before the situation can get any more awkward than it already is.

... “Oliver, we need to talk about this girl you’re seeing.”

Felicity’s barely out of earshot and already she’s yelling at him about his life choices. He sighs. “Mom, her name is Felicity.”

“I don’t care what her name is! You’ve known this girl, what? Less than a month? Do you actually
know anything about her?”

He closes his eyes and counts to five before answering. “You never seemed to care about who I dated before.”

“You mean the girls you slept with? We both know that Laurel was your one serious girlfriend. You never brought any of those other girls to galas.”

Oliver smiles politely at a society wife looking curiously in their direction. His mother wouldn’t want any attention focused in their direction. So he responds through gritted teeth. “And what exactly is your problem with Felicity? That she’s not Laurel?”

Her put-upon sigh conveys far more than her words. “That’s not what I meant.”

“But it is. Felicity is smart, loving, and the most remarkable woman I’ve ever known. She’s not here because of our money, or our name. She’s here as a friend, one I care about.”

“How well can you know her after four weeks? I’m just worried about you, Oliver. You’ve been through so much already. I don’t want you to get hurt.”

Oliver softens at her touch. “And I get it, Mom. But...she makes me smile.”

Moira watches him thoughtfully. “She does, doesn’t she?”

He nods, waiting for her judgment to come down.

Her warm hand lands on his cheek, drawing his eyes back to her for a moment.

“My beautiful boy...” Her eyes sparkle with emotion. “You love her.”

He wants to say something, to speak. He couldn’t deny his feelings, yet he can’t confirm them either. He knows his mother isn’t asking a question. She knows what she’s talking about.

“How?” She asks with a frown. “Did you know her before?”

“No,” Oliver whispers with a shake of his head. “It’s...It’s hard to explain and we’re just friends now, but,” he spots her across the room, “for the first time, I can see a future for myself with someone else.”

She blinks in shock, as surprised at his words as he is. It’s way too soon by her accounts for him to have come to such a momentous revelation, but Oliver’s never been more sure of it than in this instant. If he was back in his time, if he hadn’t died on the top of a mountain, he has no doubt he would have pulled her ring out of the vault soon...or at least as soon as he pulled his head out of his ass.

“Oh, Oliver.” She gasps, “You mean it, don’t you?” He shifts uneasily under her scrutiny and she releases him. “Well, then I guess you better get back to your date.”

He knows his mother and Felicity never really got along. It could be pinned to the moment Felicity told him about Thea’s parentage. Or rather, that’s when he noticed it, and that’s when it came to a head.

“Thank you,” he whispers.

She smiles sweetly. “I just want you to be happy, and despite everything, you seem to be in a good place.”
“I’m getting there,” he admits with an honest smile.

“Good.” If he didn’t know better, he’d say his mother was blinking back a tear. But Moira Queen was never subject to displays of emotion.

“The doctor warned me you might not be the same Oliver who left,” Moira confides before he can take more than three steps. He turns back. “But it’s more than that isn’t it?”

He smiles softly. “And I wish I could tell you all of it.” But he can’t. Because – as much as he hates it – she’s part of the Undertaking. She’s still working with Malcolm Merlyn. And he wishes he could convince her to trust him to protect her, but first he needs to figure out how to tell her.

Her nod is jerky and unfocused. “Don’t forget to mingle, Oliver.”

“Mom,” He wants to say something, to warn her about her future after a rare heart to heart. It would be so easy to say: “Stay away from Malcolm Merlyn.” It would raise her suspicions, but after this conversation she already knows something’s up. He can’t risk her making a pre-emptive move against Merlyn that gets her killed.

He can’t say what he wants so he settles for: “I’ll see you later.”

This just makes it more important for them to figure out what is happening next. He needs this resolved as quickly as possible and this is what it took for him to finally realize that.

...

They’re here. Both of them.

Tommy didn’t think it would happen, but both Oliver and Felicity are here. What he certainly didn’t expect to see was the two of them here together. He knows the two of them, and he’s fairly certain Felicity doesn’t recognize the meaning in Oliver’s looks or his lingering touches. Or the blatant fact that they were dancing together.

Oliver doesn’t dance. He’s used his mother’s dance training once or twice to impress girls, but as a rule, Oliver’s not inclined to dance. Tommy’s the one who did that.

He wanted them to be friends, but this is beyond that. He’s not jealous – at least that’s what he tells himself. He’s happy with Laurel, and finally convinced Oliver’s not trying to get back together with her.

Now if they would actually talk to him, it would be a huge improvement.

He doesn’t like the fact that they’re keeping things from him. Felicity and he were always shockingly open with each other, closer than siblings. And he gets Oliver’s reasons for keeping things bottled up. He hasn’t talked about it, but Oliver runs around the city at night in green leather fighting crime: he’s got some issues he’s obviously working through.

“Hey, this is amazing.” Laurel links her arm with Tommy’s, pressing a kiss to his cheek. “Thank you so much.”

He grins down at her, a prayer of thanks sent up to Thea for the great advice. “Well, this is important to you, so it’s important to me.”

“You are an amazing man, Thomas Merlyn.”
He grins down at her. “All these people are here for you. I just provided a place and some mini hotdogs.”

“You did a little more than that.” She wraps her arms around his waist. “And this place is beautiful, Tommy.”

He’s inclined to agree, and not just because Verdant is basically his baby. The bright lights and festive decorations required to drag the city’s elite out for the charity remove some of the club’s darker charm, but all in all he thinks it functions nicely. He hadn’t been sure the kitchens were up to the task: people didn’t come to a bar for the food. But everything was functioning beautifully.

“So what’s going on with you and them?” She pulls away subtly.

He frowns at her. “Who?”

“Oliver and Felicity. You keep looking at them like a lost puppy.”

It surprises a laugh out of him because of course she’s that observant and caught on to that. “We got in a fight.”

“About what?”

He sighs. “It’s...She’s been spending a lot of time with Oliver and I was worried about her. I really stepped in it, and they both got mad.”

“Please tell me you’re not the one who did that to his face.”

He grimaces at the reminder of the bruises on Oliver. It was a low point and every look at Oliver sent him spiraling with guilt. “I got angry. And I became the worst parts of my father, something I vowed would never happen.”

“Tommy...”

“I tried to make a decision for her. I was wrong. I thought Oliver was somehow forcing her into it and I overreacted.” It hurts to admit it, but their presence here and the fact that he’s not getting a complete freeze out tell him he has a chance to redeem himself.

“You didn’t,” Laurel protests, a warning in her voice.

He chuckles darkly at himself. “I did. Like the misogynistic asshole she accused me of being.”

“Tommy—”

“No. I don’t want to rain on your parade. Tonight is about you and CNRI, not how I’m struggling to not turn into my father. Let’s just enjoy getting money out of these rich schmucks.”

Laurel glances across the room and back to her boyfriend. “Okay, you want to tell me what else has you looking like that?”

She was always good at seeing right through everything about him except for his feelings for her. It shouldn’t still surprise him, but it did.

“You’ll notice my father isn’t here.” She agreed with pursed lips. Nothing good ever accompanied Malcolm Merlyn, not in any of Tommy’s stories since his mother passed. He kept searching for the loving family man his father used to be, but it was getting harder and harder to see the man he used to be. “He isn’t thrilled about the club. We got into a fight about it, which led to me storming out this
morning.”

“I’m sorry. I know you’ve been having trouble lately.”

“He’s closing my mother’s clinic. He said he wasn’t going to announce it until later this month, but he said there’s just too many problems in the Glades to solve them with gentrification. He called the club frivolous and idiotic. But I look around at all the business Oliver’s bringing back to the area – it didn’t look the same a month ago, I can promise you that – and I can’t help but think he’s wrong.”

He takes a deep breath. “He’s disowning me. Apparently our fight today was the final straw. My rent’s paid up until the end of the month, but after that I’ll have to figure something out.” Tommy shakes his head as if that could dispel all the bad things said between him and his father today. “But this isn’t about me. Tonight is about raising money for CNRI. And we should probably start networking.”

Laurel smiles sadly, but takes his cue to change the subject and leads him over to sweet talk Carter Bowen.

Yeah, that guy is still a douche.

He’s not too thrilled that Laurel’s seemingly flirting back, but one of her hands remains in contact with his arm and he’s seen his father schmooze enough investors to know what it looks like. He still tosses back a glass of champagne to deal with his jealousy a little better, which doesn’t really help in the slightest save for giving him a distraction.

“You really did a great job with the place, Merlyn. I’m impressed.”

Tommy’s head jerks up with a grin at his best friend’s compliment. “Thanks, Smoak. Wasn’t sure the high brows were going to like it.”

Felicity smiles at him. In place of the usual sparkle in her eye is a hint of censure that stops him from throwing out a more joking tone. This is a peace offering, but not forgiveness.

“You look beautiful, Laurel. I can’t believe how much CNRI has done for this city. I had no idea.”

He looks to Laurel, unsure how she’s going to respond based on their previous encounter, but she smiles genuinely back. “Thank you! We do a lot of work helping those from the Glades unable to afford representation and the money raised tonight will let us help that many more people. The Glades has a bad representation in the media but most of the residents are honest people just trying to make a living.”

Felicity raises her hands in surrender. “Oh, you don’t need to convince me. I think it’s about time more was done to help the citizens of this city.”

“I didn’t know you were a philanthropist, Miss Smoak,” Carter cuts in, his attentions shifting to the blonde, something that makes Tommy even more uneasy.

“If people have the ability to make a difference, I think it’s their obligation to do so, don’t you?” Felicity offers with a smile. Tommy stares in awe as she expertly maneuvers Bowen. He’s so used to her awkward rambling that he forgets that under it all, Felicity Smoak is a badass through and through. “Obviously, Ms. Lance and her colleagues agree with the work they do. I was actually talking to Mr. Steele earlier today about using some of the Applied Sciences projects to give back to the city.”

“That would be great PR,” Carter agreed easily as he shifted a little uncomfortably.
“But it’s not about PR, Carter,” Oliver bursts in, sliding not-so-sneakily between Carter and Felicity. “It’s about helping people. That’s what this club is about, what this fundraiser is about. Sure it doesn’t hurt that it’s good PR, but there are some people who do this for the sake of humanity.”

“Next, you’re going to say that the vigilante,” he spits out like a curse, “is a blessing for the city.” He attempts to laugh it off, and Felicity and Oliver seem willing to let him, but Tommy won’t stand for it.

“Maybe you haven’t noticed it from your book tour, but I’ve heard the staff here talking. A lot of them only feel safe working late here because of the Green Arrow.” Tommy shrugs at the four pairs of surprised eyes that stare back at him. “You know the situation’s bad when women applying for jobs also ask if late night shifts mean they can possibly sleep here.”

“Seriously?” Felicity demands, pale at the implications.

Tommy shrugs. “That was one of Lucy’s huge concerns. She liked the job because it was close to home, so she could walk to work. I added bunk beds to the employee lounge and a shower. Told them they could stay if they were afraid of walking home, but to tell me if they planned on staying. The safety of our employees comes first.”

Carter is the only one in the group who seems unsettled by the idea, which was the point, if Tommy’s being honest with himself. He just wanted Bowen to shut up.

“That sounds inspired.” Moira steps into their circle, a surprise to everyone there. Mrs. Bowen is right beside her. “Aren’t you worried about thievery?”

Tommy glances at Oliver who shrugs. He knows Oliver is here most of the time anyway. It’s probably one of the most secure buildings in the Glades.

“Not really,” Tommy answers truthfully. “Everyone we hire has been vetted and the pay is generous. We had some underage people applying. If they otherwise checked out, I offered to pass their names on as babysitters for the single parents. We don’t have a giant staff right now, but most of them are working tonight and all of them are hard workers.”

“You’re far too trusting, Thomas,” Mrs. Bowen sniffs, looking down her nose as a member of the wait staff passes them. “I give it a month before you’re robbed blind.”

His father would agree with her, but Tommy’s got a higher opinion on the inherent goodness of humanity.

“I prefer to think that we’re bringing at least a little stability to the Glades and safety to our employees.” Oliver smiles at her as if her comment was humorous in some way. “Most people steal because they need something to survive or they’re in trouble. I’d be more worried about you stealing from me.”

Tommy chokes on his sip of a drink at Oliver’s lightly teasing words, but he recognizes the steel underneath it. Felicity struggles with a smirk, and Moira’s lips twitch. The Bowens just look insulted.

“What would we need your money for?” Carter asks derisively.

Over his shock, Tommy rolls his eyes and takes another sip of his drink. Carter and his mother obviously aren’t getting the point.

“I’m a bestselling author. A doctor about to have his own TV show. But the people in Glades-“
“Have to deal with ignorant elitists like you,” Oliver cuts in with a shrug. “I learned a lot about how much someone will do to survive over the last five years. Getting even a little bit of help gives someone hope, and hope is all someone needs to decide to live another day.”

...

The whole circle quiets at the mention of Oliver’s missing years, everyone except Felicity.

“You know what I could use right now?” She asks the group at large, drawing everyone’s attention. “A burger. No offense to your fancy hors d’ourves, but all I want is a cheeseburger and a milkshake.”

Oliver chuckles next to her, glad she’s here to alleviate the tension from the bomb he just dropped. “I think we could make that happen.”

“You’re buying,” she announces with a grin. “You owe me for dragging me here when you know I got like zero sleep.” A second later the implications of that sentence catch up with Felicity and she flushes bright red. “Not know that, as in first-hand knowledge, but because I said it earlier. That’s all I meant. We’re not actually sleeping together or anything.”

“Not that that’s any of their business,” Oliver feels the need to add.

“A burger sounds fantastic,” Moira agrees out of the blue. “Laurel, your office already has our check. This was a lovely party. We have to have the two of you for brunch on Sunday.”

“That would be wonderful, Mrs. Queen,” Laurel responds with a slightly strained smile. It’s gotta be awkward to have that kind of meeting with your ex’s family.

“And Felicity, too, of course.” Moira nods in the blonde’s direction, which is far more deference than she’s ever shown in the past. At least it shows his mother is willing to accept change in his life. “Now, let’s go get those burgers, shall we?”

The scandal of the moment is written all over the Bowen’s faces and Oliver hides his smile until they’re out the door. Moira Queen is a force to be reckoned with, which is how they all end up at Big Belly Burger reteaching her how to eat a burger.

It might not be planning how to stop the Undertaking, but for Oliver, the night is still a win. It’s family bonding and he wouldn’t change it for anything.
Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

Hi there! It's been a while.

How are you? Is life going well?

Me? I'm doing well. I just got back from skiing in Vermont so I'm great! I'm reviving my job search again in hopes of finally landing something in publishing and/or somewhere I can write for money (wouldn't that be fantastic?). I'm hoping to start posting regularly on Tuesdays again *fingers crossed* and keep working on my original work.

Thank you all so much for reading and for your support of this story!

xo Nicole

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 24

“Oliver...why is your mother texting me?”

He blinks at the information, glancing up at Felicity from where he leans against the wall of Roy’s hospital room. “What?”

“Moira Queen is texting me.” She crosses the room to shove her hand in his face. “How did she even get my number?”

He stills the shaking hand in his face to read the screen, her hand soft under his. Since their dinner at Big Belly, his mom kept asking about Felicity, gently prodding to gauge his reactions. Thea had taken up the line of questioning shortly thereafter.

His amusement at the situation dissipates as he catches a glimpse of the text. “She’s asking—“

“About the Markov Device, the one you claimed was going to destroy half the city. Why would she ask me about that?” Felicity’s eyes widen in shock.

“She’s probably checking in. Malcolm’s been keeping a close eye on it.” That has to be all, just Moira worried about Malcolm’s interest. It’s not as if she’s willingly helping him at this point, right? Even if he is Thea’s father. He won’t tolerate Felicity in danger.

“Still it’s weird. With the stuff Walter asked me to look into...” She stiffens and bites her lip.

“He gave you the notebook?” He’s not happy about it, but he’s resigned to it happening. It’s not like he can change everything. Besides, she brought the notebook to him anyway.

“No...” she whispers. “Not a notebook. A money trail...something to do with your mother.” She shifts nervously.
Oliver blinks. “What?”

“You didn’t know about that?” She asks with a frown.

“Yeah...,” he says hesitantly. Because the only time he found out about that was a year later when Felicity told him about Thea’s parentage. “But not now. What have you found?”

He wasn’t ever aware what started Felicity looking into the project to start with, but if Walter asked her back when he first knew her...it made sense that instead of him just handing her the notebook.

She shrugs. “A warehouse. But Walter asked your mom about it and apparently she explained everything, so I don’t know if he ever looked into it.”

“Do you have an address?” He asks softly. This is new: information he didn’t have last time. He needs to make the most of it, to find out what secrets his mother’s hiding exactly.

“Oliver, are you sure this is a good idea? We’ve got a lot going on here,” she gestures to Roy’s sleeping form and with a jolt Oliver remembers why they’re here:

Roy.

They stopped the drugs keeping him in a coma this morning and now they’re just waiting for him to wake up. All the doctors keep saying is that it’s up to him to wake up now. So, here he is, waiting. Digg’s gone to get coffee for them since last night was a late night.

But Felicity’s got a point. It’s not time to go running off haphazard for something that may or may not be important.

“We still need to talk about Helena. I mean, the deaths haven’t caught too much attention, but even I can tell the police are getting antsy. This could turn into a mob war. I’ve never experienced one, and I really don’t want to. If movies are anything to go by – which is another conversation – that would be BAD, with a capital B...and all capital letters really-“

“It’s worse than the movies,” Oliver responds tersely, remembering the carnage of Slade’s attack.

Felicity freezes a his conviction. “Oh...you’ve-“

“ We’ve ,” he corrects with forced levity.

“What?! There’s a mob war coming!”

He shakes his head, already regretting bringing it up at all. “Not exactly. A...former friend tried to take over the city my second year back. But we took him down...thanks to you actually.”

Oliver can’t help the small tug at the corner of his lips. It’s a small smile as he remembers her stabbing Slade in the neck, remembers how brave she had been to go through with the plan at all, especially with her concussion. But he doesn’t dwell because then he remembers the danger she was in, the sword at her neck, the kidnapping, everything that could have gone wrong.

He could have lost her that day.

Felicity’s snort drags him back from a mini downward spiral. “Yeah, right. I’m sure I saved all our asses.”

“You did.” It was suddenly very important that she know how much her actions meant to him, to the team, to the safety of their city. “You were the only one he wouldn’t expect to fight back, the only
one who could get under his guard. It had to be you. You stopped him.”

Her face twists in complete discord with the idea Oliver presented her with. It’s adorable. Her facial expression, that is, not her lack of confidence in her abilities.

“Are you sure this other me didn’t have kung fu training or something like that?”

Oliver can’t help but laugh. “Felicity, I told you, you’re the same person. Maybe a couple more self-defense classes courtesy of Digg and Sara, but you’re brave all on your own.”

Her mouth falls open in surprise at the statement of fact. She wants to believe him, but he can see she still doesn’t believe it entirely. It’s too good to be true.

“That’s sweet and all, but who are you? And where am I?”

Felicity squeaks at Roy’s voice and jumps back from the bed. Oliver leans forward.

“Felicity, why don’t you get a doctor?” Oliver turns back to Roy as she scurries out of the room. He takes in the sleepy but assessing look in the boy’s eyes. “Roy, what’s the last thing you remember?”

“Isn’t that a little cliché?” The boy grumbles, shifting a little higher on his pillows with only a small wince of pain.

Oliver chuckles. “But it’s a valid question.”

Roy looks around at the room and groans at the hospital white. “I was jumped before I made it to your secret base.”

He nods as Felicity rushes back to the room with a nurse and a doctor in tow. Oliver moves to the side as the staff starts taking note of Roy’s vitals and the doctor starts his questioning.

Oliver has to stifle a laugh at the glare Roy levels at the man when he asks: “What is the last thing you remember, Mr. Harper?”

... 

“We need to do something about Helena,” Felicity persists, practically running in her heels to keep up with Oliver’s long strides.

John follows behind them at a more sedate pace, his lips twitching at the picture the two people in front of him. Felicity barely comes up to Oliver’s shoulder, but she’s fearlessly pushing the fierce vigilante to act when he doesn’t want to. And Oliver’s a complete mush under her demands. It’s comical to see the rigid warrior leaning into her touch and gravitating towards her.

“Yes, we do. But right now Roy’s wellbeing is important too.” Oliver’s kept up the same line for a while now, insisting that keep an eye on the kid in the hospital, but Felicity refuses to be cowed.

“So what’s your plan then? Are you going to sleep with her again?”

Digg stifles a laugh at that. If it weren’t so obvious that Oliver was in love with Felicity, that question might be justified, but Oliver clearly wasn’t considering it at all. He, for one, can’t wait until they bring the kid down to the lair. At least then he won’t have to deal with the unresolved sexual tension by himself.

“No,” Oliver stops short, throwing a glare at Digg too for good measure. “I am absolutely not sleeping with Helena. We need to find another way to make her stop. One that preferably doesn’t
“We could probably do with a few less mobsters,” John points out, despite himself, curious to see Oliver’s scowl as he points angrily in Digg’s direction. Before he can speak out against John, Felicity butts in, much to Digg’s great amusement.

“Well, I sort of agree with Digg on this subject, but the main point of this is Helena.” Felicity taps a few keys on her keyboard, lighting up the three computer screens with pictures of the woman in question. “She’s the impetus of the rising tensions between the Triad and the Bertinellis. And honestly, I never dreamed I would need to know this much about the mob. Truly. I looked into this a crazy amount. Did you know Helena’s fiancé, Michael, was killed because her father thought he was an FBI informant?”

Oliver nods, like he’s already aware. It just sounds like a worse mess to John. Yeah, nothing’s going to go wrong here.

“But when I hacked into the FBI database that wasn’t what I found.”

“You hacked the FBI?” John demands, rising from his relaxed position leaning against a table.

Felicity waves him off dismissively. “Yup. Easy as pie. But what I found there is the real kicker. Apparently, the mole wasn’t Michael, but Helena. So this whole thing is very vendetta-like. So Helena wants to kill her father for killing her fiancé when really it was her who should have died. She’s got this whole survivor’s guilt thing fueling her crusade. Which means we have to key into that somehow to get her to stop.”

She spins back to them with a cocky grin. “So, boys: any ideas? Mr. Inscrutable who survived a shipwreck when no one else did?”

John nods as he turns to face the authority on Survivor’s guilt: Oliver Queen.

“She needs someone to talk to, someone who grounds her. That’s what she lost when Michael died, but I don’t know anyone who can do that for her.” Oliver runs a hand through his hair. “Not to mention, that didn’t work so well last time.”

“Probably because you played off each other too much,” John points out, although he’s sure that should be fairly obvious. He’s thinking pre-Felicity Oliver was a bit of a handful.

“Probably,” Oliver concedes. “And then I trained her and made her more deadly, but she’s just as dangerous now. Except now, civilians are getting caught in the crossfire.”

“Can’t the friendly neighborhood vigilante just put the fear of God in her or something,” Felicity asks, twisting idly in her chair as she plays with the end of her ponytail. “I mean, normally I’m a huge advocate for just talking out decisions, but this seems like a ‘fear of God’ situation. You’re supposed to be good at that, right?”

Yeah, John’s willing to bet that won’t be nearly as successful as they hope. He’s also pretty sure Oliver’s aware of that, but he’s just as sure that they have to try. They’re trying to fit in the bracket of “heroes,” which means to some extent that they have to try peaceful negotiation before elevating to violence. John likes to think that heroes at least try to take the higher road.

Yet the only way he sees this ending is in death.

Oliver nods. “A warning. And then we step in. No deaths.”
Felicity grins at him, and spins back to her computers. “Great. Now that that’s settled: if you don’t need me tonight, I have to go get my apartment ready for a moody teen-whatever.”

“Look, Felicity, it’s really okay if Roy stays at the mansion-“

“Come on, Oliver,” she sighs as she shuts down her computers to the basic search settings. “Roy doesn’t want to spend the rest of his recovery at Queen Mansion. No offense, but that place is seriously intimidating. I’m sure he’ll be more comfortable in my modest apartment.

“Thank goodness I got one of those couches that pulls out to a bed or this could never be possible.” Felicity beams at them and sweeps out of the room as gracefully as she entered.

John waves goodbye and moves toward the computers the blinking dot that shows the current location of Helena’s cell phone. He twists back to Oliver to comment, only to find him staring up at the door Felicity just disappeared through with a longing look on his face.

Rather than groan at the lovestruck smile on Oliver’s face, Digg just clears his throat, startling the hardened man out of his trance, which if Diggle gauges correctly was on Felicity’s ass.

“We need to talk about that,” he says calmly.

“Roy staying at her apartment?” Oliver’s brows draw together in confusion. “No. I think it’s fine. I mean, I would prefer if he was at the mansion, but it’s not critical.”

“I wasn’t talking about Roy.” And he’s pretty sure Oliver knew that, too. He’s deflecting.

“Digg.”

But he ignores the warning tone. He needs to get this out there. “Look, I don’t know what’s between you in the future – hell, I’ve seen enough to know you love her – but that amazing woman isn’t the one you left behind.”

Oliver collapses into his work chair, eyes drifting to the computer screens, a serious look overtaking his face. “You think I’m not aware of that, Digg?”

John honestly has no idea what he is and isn’t aware of.

“She and I already talked about this.” Oliver lets out a woosh of air and straightens in preparation to release some hard news. “Of all the people in my life then and now, you and Felicity are the ones who changed the least. I brought the two of you in separately, but from the start we clicked. You were there for tactical back up and she...she called me on my shit.”

If he had any doubt Oliver considered all angles of this, they were gone now at the look of complete focus in Oliver’s eyes as he spoke. This wasn’t the first time something like this had occurred to Oliver. It’s probably a good sign that they’ve already talked about this, even if it now makes Digg feel like he’s intruding on something personal.

“Even when we added people to the team or lost members, the three of us were a well-oiled machine. And the fact that it happened again, in this repeat, just reinforces it.”

“Just because that worked out doesn’t mean that the two of you will.” John hates to burst the bubble, but Oliver needs to be told the harsh truths of the world. It’s possible they could be happy together and just as in love as they appear to be in the future.

It’s also possible the whole thing goes up in flames.
Oliver’s fingers twitch in his personal tell. “Believe me, Digg, I know.”

“I’m not sure you do, Oliver. I’ve seen the way you look at her.”

“I died coming here,” he admits brokenly, staring at the cement floor.

John doesn’t know how to respond to that, how to react when he finds out that precious bit of information. It wasn’t what he expected. He knew this was unintentionally from Oliver’s clumsy, unsure approach to changing his past, but he hadn’t expected something so dramatic.

“I accepted a challenge from a dangerous man and I went to fight him.” Oliver’s hands clench into fists. “We all knew there was a good chance I would die if I went, but I left anyway. My sister’s life was in danger if I didn’t. And...Felicity and I...we weren’t together, because I was an idiot.”

He takes a shallow breath and continues again. “We weren’t together. We’d shared one, earth-shattering kiss before I ended it. For her safety...or that was my excuse.” He glances up at John with a hint of a smile. “You didn’t approve. Told me to stop being a jealous fool when I was the one to let her go.”

Sounds like him, John agrees. It also sounds like an Oliver still dealing with the trauma five years on an island can cause. That wasn’t the team-oriented thinking he saw in the man before him.

“The last thing I said to her was ‘I love you.’”

The confession echoes around the Foundry, his words ringing loud and clear. They resonate in the room like they do with the man who uttered them.

“That was your goodbye,” John points out, frowning. “You knew you weren’t likely to come back. You wanted her to know and you wouldn’t have to commit.”

Oliver nods in agreement, leaning back. “You’re right. I wasn’t thinking like I was going to come back. And now I’m here, and all I see, John, are possibilities.”

John blinks in surprise at the smile returned to the man’s face as he lights up at the word.

“I look around and I see more than what I’ve already lived through. I see a chance for a future, a better one than I had. I see things working out and lasting, far longer than I could have ever hoped for.”

“That’s only because you know what’s coming, man,” Digg disagrees. “You’re only seeking this out because you know about the threats and can stop them before they happen. If that weren’t the case, you wouldn’t be doing this to yourself, or to her.”

Felicity. She’s the center of this. Digg can tell she’s resisting the Queen charm for now, but it can’t be easy to ignore a man who looks at you like you hung the moon.

Oliver sighs. “You think that’s not a bonus? But if anything, the Restons proved I can’t predict everything. Do you see me running for the hills after that?”

Digg concedes the point, begrudgingly. “And what if something else happens and you decide she can’t handle this again?”

It sounds like a very real possibility from what he’s seen.

“She’s stronger than we give her credit for, Digg. Do I want anything to happen to her? Of course
not...” He trails off, lost in a memory Diggle doesn’t know. “In my future, she would always remind me that this was her choice. And I’m sure that now she’d say the same thing. She’s more selfless and brave than either of us. We just need to make sure she’s as safe as can be.”

John lets everything sink in, all the details revealed to him, before he backs down from the argument, but not before adding: “You know, if you hurt her-“

“Trust me, Digg. We’ve already had this conversation. If anything like that happens, I’ll stand there while you punch me.”

The man is dead serious. John’s not sure if it’s impressive or just plain stupid, but he has to give the man credit. So he turns to face the computer screens, allowing the subject to drop. “So...where is the Green Arrow going to have a little chat with Miss Bertinelli?”

...

“Helena Bertinelli, you have failed this city!”

Digg snorts through the comms, and Oliver’s lips twitch, just barely. His aim doesn’t waver, an arrow pointed directly at the center of her chest. She’s wearing the old black outfit and motorcycle helmet she wore before Oliver turned her into a more efficient killer.

He’d found her in the middle of a hit, Digg waiting around the corner as back up should he need it. Two of Bertinelli’s enforcers are already dead on the floor with large pools of scarlet blood slowly expanding.

She spins on him, her gun leading the way as it locks on his figure. She tenses as she recognizes him, but her gun stays locked on target. “How do you know that name?

“Stop this vendetta now! Before innocent lives are slaughtered!” He roars, not answering her question.

Helena rips the helmet from her head and throws it at the ground. Her dark hair cascades around her as she stares fiercely back at Oliver. The fire in her eyes burns enough to scare a meeker man, it leaks into the disdain of her voice. “Innocent blood has already been spilt. I’m merely repaying the debt.”

“Vengeance isn’t the answer. You’re stirring a mob war that will kill more innocents. I can’t allow that.” Oliver’s fingers tense on the bowstring, preparing to fire.

“Then stop me,” she challenges.

“You don’t need to start a turf war because your father killed your fiancé.” He doesn’t want to escalate to violence, a problem he always had with Helena. He related to her on too many levels to not see a bit of himself in her.

“Don’t talk about things you don’t understand,” she growls.

“I understand more than you know.”

Helena scowls, like it couldn’t be more obvious. “Sure, you do, archer. I’m sure you don’t go around doing this at night without losing someone important in your life. Who was it? A girlfriend? Wife? Mother? Did mobsters kill her?”

Oliver doesn’t dignify that with an answer. “You need to stop this.”
“Would you stop if someone told you your fight could kill innocents?”

“I would find another way.” And he has. Even before he came back, he’d eliminated collateral damage. “There’s always another way.”

“You’re not going to shoot me,” she asserts, lowering her gun. “If you’re not going to help me, stay out of my way.”

“Oliver,” Digg cautions in his ear. “Was that your great plan? Because I’m kind of underwhelmed here.”

His teeth grind audibly. It had been a vain hope that she would listen to him, that she would see reason. He knew going in that Helena would be a tough nut to crack, and he hasn’t gained any ground in the slightest. Oliver can’t say he’s inclined to let her roam free either. Sometime soon she takes a shot at his mother, of all people. Not that she’s more important than anyone else, but it makes him all the more eager to resolve this now.

He could put an arrow through her. As much as the idea roils his stomach, it’s still a viable option. But that would only fuel her anger.

“You want revenge?” Oliver asks slowly. “Go about it the legal way, Helena. Work with the FBI, like you were doing before.”

Her surprise that he knows she was a mole lasts a few seconds only to be banished by a derisive laugh. “You think I can do that again? My father has moles in the FBI. And it’s not like he’ll have any trouble killing his own daughter to protect himself.”

“They’ll put you into witness protection,” Oliver argues.

“You think that will stop my father? Then you obviously don’t know the kind of man he is.”

“I know that down this path lies only death and emptiness. You kill your father and then what? What will you do once you succeed?” He remembers her: beaten, broken, lost once she achieved her goal. It didn’t bring her solace or relief, only emptiness.

“I’ll be better off.” Her hiss could scare off young children.

“You can’t honestly believe that,” Oliver counters. “Killing your father won’t bring you peace.”

“I told you you wouldn’t understand,” she mutters, scooping her helmet off the ground. “Stay out of my way.”

As she turns the key in her motorcycle, Oliver releases his arrow into the front wheel, followed swiftly by an arrow into the back one. “I’m offering you a chance to stop on your own before I put an end to your crusade.”

“Well, then I guess you’ll have to put an end to it.”

Oliver scowls, but he refuses to hesitate. All the dart takes is a flick of his wrist to embed itself in the flesh of Helena’s neck. Her face contorts in confusion at the prick before she collapses sideways into a heap on the ground.

“She’s down.”

“Please tell me you didn’t.”
Oliver grimaces as he walks up to her inert body. “We have a holding cell in the lair we can take her to.”

“A holding cell?” John asks as he rounds the corner. “And show her right where our base of operation is?”

He barely withholds a scoff. It may not be the best plan – or any plan at all, really – but Oliver’s not stupid. “There’s a separate room. She wouldn’t be able to see us.”

John scowls at him, but helps him move Helena into the back of their van with a shake of his head. As he climbs into the driver’s seat, Oliver swears he hears Digg mutter, “Knew we shouldn’t do this without Felicity.”

But he doesn’t have time to question it before they go speeding off towards the lair and the consequences of Oliver’s maybe-not-so-smart decision.

Because Digg has a point: Felicity is going to be pissed.

Chapter End Notes

**deleted scenes can be found in The Second Time Around (the next work in this series)**
Chapter 25

“ARE YOU INSANE?”

Felicity’s voice echoes in the Foundry, bouncing off the concrete walls and the pipes that still drip sometimes despite her yelling about the danger to her precious computers. Oliver’s arrows might even shake a little in his quiver at the annoyance radiating off her. What she knows for sure is that the man in question visibly winces at her shout while Digg shoots him a what-did-I-tell-you-man look.

Honestly, she can’t even believe John went along with it.

“You brought a potentially unstable VILLAIN into our SECRET LAIR? What the hell are we supposed to do with her now? Make friends? Have tea? Maybe throw a party? We can all share our feelings and sing Kumbya! Not that I know that song. It’s an expression people use, which you probably know, but seriously, Oliver, what were you thinking?”

He doesn’t look nearly as chagrined as Felicity would like.

“I needed to do something, Felicity. She wasn’t going to stop.” He runs a hand through his hair. His face is tired and drawn as though this decision aged him overnight. “We needed to get ahead of her somehow.”

“And kidnapping was the best alternative?”

“Considering last time I slept with her, yes.” Oliver crosses his arms, firm at least in that decision.

“And how does this help? You’re just going to lock her up until she agrees not to hurt her father? I hate to break it to you, Oliver, but it’s more likely that when she finally gets out, she’ll kill us along with her father.”

“So we teach her another way,” Oliver responds, conviction in his voice with doubt in his eyes.

Felicity rolls her eyes. “Isn’t that what you tried last time? You know, the thing that didn’t work.”

“Well, that’s what happened last time.” At Oliver’s shocked look she continues: “Look, I’m not advocating murder, but these are bad guys doing bad things. I’ve already found information on money laundering, smuggling, weapons deals, drugs. I mean, the only other thing that could preserve the timeline is turning it all over to the FBI and making sure they can wrangle everyone, which, for the record, is my suggestion.”

“And if they can’t?” Digg asks. “Both sides are going to want retribution for tonight. Not to mention,
Bertinelli’s going to realize his daughter is missing.”

“So the mob war already started? Great.” Felicity deadpans. “So what’s your plan, Oliver? What do we do next?”

He drops into a chair, running his hands over his face.

“How about we start with the woman in our holding cell?” Felicity insists, pulling up the video feed. “The holding cell that we apparently have, which raises a bunch of other questions, but what exactly are we going to do? Because I will not be an accessory to kidnapping.”

“If there was a way to drop her off at the local FBI office with all the information Felicity’s gathered, we can just monitor the situation and protect people the best we can.” Oliver’s fists clench like he can’t believe they’re making this decision.

Felicity squats in front of him to get him to look her in the eye, a furrow between her brows as she looks at the conflict in his face. “Hey,” she whispers softly, “what’s bothering you?”

The blue of his eyes feel like they could pierce her soul as filled with emotion as they are. She’s never seen him look this lost. Oliver always managed to look purposeful, even when things were going wrong he kept going because he had a purpose. Here he looked like he’s been dropped into the middle of something and he didn’t know what the right thing to do was.

“Helena said her father had men in the FBI. What if we report everything and nothing changes? What if it just gets her killed? I failed her one time, Felicity. I don’t think I can do that again.”

She wants to pull him into a hug and chase away all his fears. She’s never seen a man who cares so much about the world, so much that each small choice weighs on him, that it destroys him when he has to make tough choices. Sure, he can blunder through everything, working on the fly, but then each choice comes back to haunt him. It’s the reason he’s so broody, so serious. He internalizes and blames himself for everything.

Being from the future really doesn’t help that.

“Oliver, I’ve been through the FBI files.” Which could land her in so much more trouble than just their vigilante activities, but she doesn’t like to think about that. “Basically, their case is dead because they lost all their leads from Helena after Michael died. But I can find someone trustworthy inside the organization, and I might even be able to find the moles. Money always leaves a trail.”

She slides over to her computer with well-practiced movements and immediately starts typing. The sound of the clicking keys soothes her, sending her into almost a meditative state as she starts to run her searches. Never did she think she would become this proficient in hacking...again.

Although this whole endeavor was sufficiently more heroic and honorable...if still very very illegal.

Felicity pauses as she lets the computer do its job. “So, we’re agreed?”

Diggle and Oliver seem to be in a standoff when she turns to face them. She must have zoned out for a bit there because she can’t remember what went on that lead to them standing on opposite sides of the lair, arms crossed, glaring at each other. Everything about their body language speaks to an argument that she doesn’t remember them having.

“We’re turning her over to the FBI, right?” She leads with a gesture to the back where Helena’s locked up. “So that’s all settled.”
“Right,” Oliver agrees, eyes locked on John as the other man nods.

Felicity frowns, catching the reluctant undertone. “Okay. So what are we going to do with her in the meantime? She’s going to be waking up soon.”

“I’ll handle it,” Oliver announces.

Felicity sighs and spins around again, going full circle. She’s tired of their stand-off between the guys and has no interest in sticking around the testosterone-filled lair any longer than necessary. Not to mention, she doesn’t really want to be party to kidnapping any more than she already is.

Tonight seems like the perfect night for a glass of wine and some Netflix. She’s got a bottle of sea foam green nail polish she’s been meaning to use. Maybe she’ll get some ice cream on the way home too.

Or not. She’s been eating a little too much fast food lately. She’s going to have to step up her workouts on the stairmaster. Pun unintended.

“Alright. I’m out of here. The computers are doing their thing. I’ll have a name in the morning, if not in the next couple hours. Think you guys can handle that?” Felicity flicked her earring and fighting a yawn as she contemplates Oliver and Digg, swaying in her chair.

“I think we can.” Oliver rolls his eyes, as if the suggestion was that ludicrous.

Felicity purses her lips. “You sure about that? Because last time you did something on your own, you kidnapped someone.” She gestures vaguely toward the back of the Foundry.

The matching grimaces confirm that she’s right and Felicity points at Digg.

“You’re in charge. Make sure he doesn’t do anything stupid.”

He nods solemnly and even Oliver doesn’t argue with that. Maybe she’s finally getting through to him.

...

“LET ME OUT OF HERE!”

Oliver grimaces at the video feed of the cell as Helena rages and screams. There’s a crazed look in her eyes as she shakes the bars and continues to shout. The threats get more and more explicit as time draws on, much to Oliver’s exasperation and Diggle’s amusement.

“Your psycho ex is creative, I’ll give her that.”

He shoots Dig a look. “She’s not my ex.”

“But she was,” John points out with a grin. “I’m starting to see what why you didn’t work out.”

“You’re enjoying this too much.” Being with Helena is the last thing he wants to talk about. Really, it should be a moot point. Why did he tell them about that again?

Digg continues to shake his head as he reaches out and mutes the sound. “You should probably go in and talk to her.”

Oliver glares at him, but pulls the green leather up over his face again. Digg has a point. If he can convince Helena to go to the FBI willingly, this will be a lot easier. At the very least he can get her to
calm down a bit.

Hopefully.

He pauses in front of the sound-proofed door for one last adjustment on his hood. This Helena Bertinelli has never met Oliver Queen. It shouldn’t be easy for her to recognize him, which – he’s realizing – is integral to their plan. So much of the reason Oliver helped her in the other time line had to do with the fact that she knew his secret. She could out him at any time, so for this to work she can’t have any inkling.

Maybe he should have sent Digg in wearing the suit.

The door is soundless as it swings open, but Helena’s shouts continue to echo off the soundproof walls inside the room. She doesn’t notice him at first, too busy ranting at the camera in the ceiling. Her knuckles are bloody from pounding the metal bars and her face twists in rage.

“You CAN’T KEEP ME IN HERE! MY FATHER WILL COME LOOKING FOR ME!” She pauses a beat before trying again. “WE’RE ON THE SAME SIDE HERE!”

“Those statements seem to be contradictory.” The modulator garbles his voice, pitching it lower as he talks to her.

Helena spins toward him, her fists rising to float by her cheeks in a defensive posture. Slowly they drift down to her sides. Despite a hint of fear in her eyes, Helena continues to face off against him through the bars of the cage.

“Which is it?” He asks, genuinely curious how she’s going to approach this.

“I’m trying to get rid of the gangs. Isn’t that what you’re doing? Trying to make the city safer? Isn’t kidnapping me counterproductive?” She slinks closer. Her strategy morphs from confrontational to seductive. “You and I are doing the same thing: protecting the innocents. I could help you.”

Oliver scowls. He didn’t think she would go for the direct approach, but here it is. She’s even playing with the zipper of her leather jacket, pulling it down to give him a hint of the skin underneath.

“I don’t particularly like your brand of help.”

“Some people don’t deserve to live. Every man I killed as murdered innocents. They don’t deserve your protection.”

“I didn’t lock you up to protect them,” Oliver rumbles. Was she always this annoying? “I locked you up to protect you and the innocents who would get caught in the turf war you started.”

“Except you failed, didn’t you?” Helena counters, her face twisted in a snarl. “The consequences for tonight will be brutal because you kidnapped me. How does that fit into your master plan?”

“It was a calculated risk.” One he calculated at the last minute, but still a risk he considered. They just need to drop her off at the FBI before the Bertinelli’s start their return strike. “You’re going to give everything you have to the FBI.”

Helena falls back, arms crossed over her chest as she immediately closes off. “No.”

“We’re outing your father’s mole as we speak. You’ll go into witness protection, and maybe, if you testify, you can cut a deal.”
“You wouldn’t. You can’t. Not without endangering yourself.”

Oliver raises his eyes eyebrows under the hood and purposefully let’s a chuckle escape. “And how would that endanger me?”

She flounders for an answer.

“There were no witnesses. You don’t know who I am, or where we are. You have no leverage here.” And just like that, Oliver feels at ease with this decision, the last of his anxiety slipping away. This might not be the best course of action, but now at least he was confident in the decision.

He turns away from her and walks out without a backward glance. “I’d get some rest if I were you.”

...  

“Why did I decide to do this?” Felicity mutters to herself, wrapping her jacket closer around her to fight off the wind.

She’s exhausted after one too many nights with too little sleep; her head has developed a low-grade headache that’s just enough to irritate her, and to top it all off she got it in her head that this was a good idea. In hindsight, she really should have mentioned to Oliver or Digg or anybody really that she was planning on going into the Glades by herself at midnight.

Her hand wraps around her phone in her pocket. All it would take was a quick call, one press of a button really since they were on speed dial. One button and either of her boys would be here in a heartbeat with a stern word about putting herself in danger. And then Oliver would insist on going with her to the warehouse.

She knows he wants to see the warehouse himself, that he didn’t see it the first time. He hadn’t even been aware of it until she mentioned it in Roy’s hospital room. If she’s being honest, that’s exactly why she didn’t want him to see it. What if what’s in it alters the timeline further? It might not even be that important. He already knows his mother is a part of the Undertaking. Maybe it won’t even help them now.

It’s for his protection. Oliver doesn’t have to take on everything himself. So instead of doing the smart, the logical, thing, Felicity told the boys she was preparing her apartment for Roy’s stay and took off into a questionable part of the city without back up.

Yesh. Really not the smartest plan.

Maybe her brain decided to take a well-earned vacation.

This is how you get yourself killed, Felicity, she reprimands herself. She doesn’t even know how to throw a punch. The most experience she has in martial arts is watching Oliver and Diggle spar, and she can’t replicate most of those moves. If she’s really lucky, she might be able to throw a decent punch.

The building in question looms over her, a simple warehouse by the docks, surrounded by a bunch of other similar looking warehouses. The exterior is so unremarkable, she double checks the number before walking up to the keypad-locked door. Discretely, she glances around her as she walks to make sure she’s not being followed. That’s what you’re supposed to do in these situations, right?

Which is how she misses the cameras at first. The blinking red light alerts her to the presence of surveillance and she scrambles for her phone.
“Shoot,” she whispers to herself as she uses her phone to hack the security system of the warehouse. She’s too tired for this. “Should have looked for cameras. I should have expected cameras. But no I had to look for a tail first because suddenly I’m in a spy movie. And done! I should have just gone home and gone to bed.”

With the cameras disabled, Felicity walks up to the door, using her phone to hack the keypad as well. That alone removes any doubt that Moira owns the warehouse, and that people need to try harder with their passwords. Because “Robert”? Not a great password. She probably could have guessed it.

She doesn’t know what she expected to find hidden in the giant building. The first thing her mind conjures up as she pushes the door open is thousands of filing cabinets, but she knows that’s ridiculous. This isn’t a sci-fi movie.

The lights click on as she steps into the spacious room, the sudden intensity causing her to blink rapidly as her eyes adjust.

“Oh my god!”

The floor of the warehouse is covered completely with ship wreckage, debris scattered in a simulation of what the boat must have looked like when it was intact. The Queen’s Gambit looks monstrous even strewn in parts across the floor. But what really catches her eye is the hull of the ship.

The metal is pulled away – and she’s not an expert in any sense of the word – but to her, it looks like an explosion occurred from the inside. She zooms in on the torn metal and takes a couple pictures to examine later. She lowers the phone to look at the scorch marks in person.

She hasn’t looked into the report of the sinking of the Queen’s Gambit yet. There just hasn’t been time between Applied Science business and Arrow stuff at night. She knows the basic details, just like anyone who has a TV, because understandably, it’s not one of Oliver’s favorite subjects. But this definitely doesn’t look like weather-related damage.

Turning her back on the wreckage is harder than she thought it would be, but Felicity’s skin pebbles with goosebumps. There are eyes on her. She can feel someone watching her, a feeling so unsettling she double-checks that the camera feeds as she moves quickly for the warehouse door.

Her hand wraps around the metal handle of the door as she hears the electronic beep, the only clue of her about-to-be intruder’s arrival. The wall is cool on her back as Felicity presses against it to avoid the door as it swings inward. Of course, she continues to act like she’s in some movie, sucking in her gut, turning her face, and standing on her tip toes to avoid the cool metal door, which is really the least of her problems.

Because this isn’t a movie. As soon as the door closes, the new arrival will see her and Felicity will be busted. She’s either going to die or be arrested.

“Alright, boys! You know our orders! Let’s clean this mess up!”

A triangular block of wood is shoved under the door to prop it open inches from Felicity’s nose as she listens to the gruff grunts of men moving around the warehouse. Fear – useless and debilitating – races through her system and she’s forced to bite back a whimper so they won’t find her.

Her feet ache from holding herself still and her lungs fight for breath she doesn’t dare to draw. She can still hear them moving around, the sounds of large bits of debris moving around. They’re clearing out the warehouse, which doesn’t bode well.
Not that Moira keeping the wreckage did either, but getting rid of the evidence means someone found out and she has reason to hide it. If she has a reason to hide the wreckage, Felicity really doesn’t want to stick around to see how badly Moira wants to keep it a secret.

She doesn’t know how long she waits there, poised in the shadow of the door. Her muscles all ache from prolonged tensing and she can’t hold the posture any longer. Her headache intensifies as the moments drag on, her exhaustion banished by the onslaught of adrenaline. The sounds of movement are further away and Felicity decides to risk it.

She can’t stand here a moment longer.

Ever so slowly – as if that could allow her to be silent – Felicity peeks around the edge of the door. Six men in all black move around the warehouse floor. None of them are looking in her direction, so she slips around the door and out of the warehouse the way she came in.

Once her heeled feet reach the bottom of the metal steps, Felicity yanks her phone back up and hits Speed Dial 1.

Oliver needs to see this.

“Hey! You there!”

Felicity doesn’t turn around to see the man behind her before she takes off. Her feet and heels pounding the pavement – literally pounding in her case. Huh. So that’s where the term comes from.

Her lungs burn as she tries to breathe in fresh air. She’s not used to prolonged endurance. This is probably what they mean when Oliver and Digg tell her she needs to do more training.

Step after step, she runs, eyes locked on the corner of the warehouse in front of her. A turn: that’s what she needs to put between her and her pursuer. It’ll buy her the time she needs.

She didn’t realize she could run in heels until now. Heavy footsteps echo behind her, urging her on towards her goal.

The corner is within reach, a few steps in front of her, when she feels a leather glove clench around her wrist, jerking her backwards and wrenching a cry from her throat. Her head collides painfully with the side of the building, but the adrenaline still pumping through her system prompts Felicity into moving.

Yeah, she was right: she doesn’t know how to throw a punch correctly because it feels like she breaks something as her hand connects with the man’s jaw.

It stuns him just enough that his grip loosens and she can dart away. She lost a heel in the debacle and she pauses to pull the other one off and chuck it at the goon following her. She must hit something because he groans and calls her an unflattering name.

Felicity doesn’t look behind her as she runs again. There isn’t time for that. She has enough of head start that she can run. She’s not a captive, not yet. So she runs with everything she’s worth.

Did she mention she could use some more training?

That might be a good idea if she ever does manage to get over the clench of her lungs. She can’t even tell if someone’s following her with the sound of her heartbeat in her ears. Luckily she knows exactly where her car is parked.
But she can’t run there.

“Stupid stupid stupid,” she mutters to herself as she takes a sudden left instead of a right one building over. The only purpose is to find somewhere to hide. Behind a dumpster seems like a good option, so she throws himself into a corner and waits, struggling to control her breathing so the ragged sounds don’t give her away.

Despite the rancid smell coming from the dumpster, Felicity presses closer to the cold metal of the dumpster. Once her heartbeat slows and her breath calms, she can finally hear that there’s no pursuit, no one coming up behind her.

That was too close.

She glances down at her phone. She’s not sure if she’s relieved or terrified that her call didn’t go through to Oliver – he would be pissed if he found out but if things had been worse, he would be the best back up.

Her adrenaline rush spent, Felicity now feels the thousands of little cuts and pebbles stuck in the bottom of her feet. She hisses softly in pain and plops on the concrete, heedless of the grime she’s undoubtedly covered in now.

Everything’s fine now, relatively speaking. She’s alive, (mostly) unharmed, and there’s no one chasing her. Her head just feels a little fuzzy, like it's floating or something. She knew it was too long since she exercised.

She waits another thirty minutes, the cold leeching into her body, before she walks back to her red Mini Cooper. She’s dead on her feet, stumbling like she’s drunk. The throbbing in her head really isn’t helping.

By the time she makes it home, Oliver’s texted to tell her he dropped Helena off with the FBI, which Felicity for one finds ridiculous. Who the hell is awake at 4am to accept a murderer with inside information on the Bertinellis. Then again, who wouldn’t be.

She opens the text to respond, but suddenly the room spins as her exhaustion catches up with her. The headache, which until now was just a dull ache at the back of her mind, spirals out of control with a burst of dizziness. It’s enough to make her forget her texts. Oliver can wait until morning. What she really needs is one good night of sleep. With that thought, Felicity collapses onto her bed, passing out in a heap of exhaustion, not bothering to change or even crawl under her covers.

She just needs some sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Intriguing update, no?

So, I have good news and bad news:

Bad News: There will be a longer-than-normal wait between chapters coming up because...
Good News: There's a SPECTACULAR twist coming up that I need to make sure is done wonderfully!

Geniewithwifi (my wonderful beta) and I have been trying to figure out the best way to present and cultivate the plot bunnies for the upcoming chapters so I want to thank you in advance for bearing with us as we sort through everything. I hope to have the next chapter up in a month and then a couple quick updates.

And I hope you enjoyed this chapter! Thanks for reading!
Chapter 26

Knock knock KNOCK.

Oliver grimaces as the pounding starts to wear on his knuckles. He doesn’t know what’s wrong, but something’s up. Felicity’s never five feet from her phone and she hasn’t picked up. It’s almost ten am and she hasn’t shown up at work. Something’s wrong.

He could climb the fire escape and break into her room. It’s a risk in broad daylight, but for Felicity, he’d do it in a heartbeat.

Diggle, right next to him, has other ideas.

“Before you bruise your knuckles,” John interrupts, pulling a shiny piece of metal from his pocket, “I should probably mention that I have a spare key.”

Oliver scowls but steps aside to allow Digg to do his own thing. It pains him to stand still on Felicity’s porch, like the thought she might be in danger doesn’t scare the living crap out of him. He wants to kick down the door. At least that would be doing something.

As soon as the door unlocks, Oliver pushes through, John on his heels. He barely spares a glance for her apartment, already familiar with the layout and more concerned with the missing blonde. His eyes skim the colorful interior as he moves directly down the hall for her bedroom.

Through the open door he can see a body sprawled on the bed, spurring him down the hallway faster. He falls to his knees beside the bed, his fingers finding her jugular in a desperate motion. Her pulse is slow under his fingers, but definitely steady.
“There’s a nasty bump on her head, and a little bleeding. I’m calling an ambulance,” Digg announces. “We don’t want to mess with head injuries.”

Oliver nods as Digg leaves the room to make the phone call. He gently rolls Felicity over on to her back. “Felicity,” he murmurs. “Felicity, I need you to wake up, okay? Please. Just open your eyes.”

“Ol-verrr,” she groans, shifting.

His chest loosens slightly. “How are you feeling?”

She frowns, eyes fluttering and then shutting down with a groan of pain. “Like I have a hangover. What happened? Why are you here?” She pulls herself up into a seated position, her feet landing on the floor a millisecond before she pulls them back with a whimper and falls back against the bed. “Why does it hurt worse now?”

“Hey. Just stay still. You might have a concussion. Digg’s calling an ambulance.” He slides his hands down her legs to look at the bottom of her feet. “What happened to you, Felicity?”

The scrunching of her face would be adorable if he didn’t know she was using it to hide something from him. And she is hiding it. Her feet are torn and cut up like she was running barefoot over pavement. He’s willing to bet that head injury wasn’t self-inflicted or accidental either. Felicity doesn’t hide things from him. It’s unsettling.

“How did you hurt your head? Your feet?” He presses.

“Bad guys,” she mutters into the blanket, moving closer to Oliver without opening her eyes.

That gets his full attention. “What bad guys?” he demands. The blood in his veins pounds as his hands curl into fists. Anyone who goes after her will have to answer to him and his hooded alter-ego.

“At the warehouse,” she slurs. “Boat. The boat was there.”


“Mmmhmm,” she hums with a small nod, her eyes finally opening for more than just a moment.

“What were you doing there by yourself?” He wants to be mad, to scream and shout, to knock some sense into her, but all he feels is fear for her. Why the hell didn’t she call him when she was in trouble? He could have saved her.

“Investigating. You know. I’m feeling better now.” She pushes herself up into a seated position, the glassy quality to her eyes mostly gone.

His hand supports the small of her back as she tests her muscles. “Felicity, you could have died. Falling asleep with a concussion is risky.”

“I didn’t hit my head that hard,” she whispers, her hand rubbing the bump. She winces. “Okay, maybe it was a little harder than I thought.”

“I’m going to need you to tell me exactly what happened, but first,” he glances down the hall at Digg letting in the blue-suited paramedics, “you’re going to get checked out. I need to know you’re okay.”

Her blue eyes bore into his for a charged moment before she nods and turns her attention to the paramedics.
“Hello, miss, I hear you have a head injury.” One of the men says, kneeling in front of her.

Felicity frowns but nods. “Yeah. I hit my head last night. I didn’t think it was that bad.”

“And how long ago was that?” The man asks, shining a light in her eyes as his partner starts to look at her torn up feet.

“Around 4 am. I think,” Felicity mutters, blinking against the bright light.

The man raises his eyebrows at that. “And can you tell me your name?”

“Felicity Smoak. And let me just get all this out in the open: the year is 2012. Today is a Thursday. It’s November 29th. I’m the director of Applied Science’s at QC. And I’ve never had a concussion before. But my roommate did and they asked her all these questions. Personally, I think they’re a bit overkill. I mean, I get why you have to ask them. I could have amnesia or something, but they seem a bit ridiculous. Don’t you ever wish you could ask more interesting questions?”

The paramedic raises an eyebrow and glances at Oliver. “Does she always...”

“Babble?” Oliver asks, lips quirked in amusement. “Yup. That’s part of her charm.”

Felicity glares at him. “Hey! It’s rude to talk about someone when they’re sitting right here. I can speak for myself, thank you very much.”

“I know you can.” Oliver fights the grin that threatens to overtake his face. “They just want to make sure you’re okay.” He cups her cheek. “We need to know you’re going to be okay.”

Felicity leans into his touch, eyes slipping closed as she nods against his palm. She turns to the paramedics and holds her hands out. “Alright! Fix me up!”

“We can patch your feet here, but we do need to take you to the hospital for a couple tests. We have to make sure you didn’t do any permanent damage to your head.”

“Is the stretcher really necessary?” She looks pained at the very idea.

The man looks around and sighs. “If you think you can make it, we can walk, but if it looks like you’re going to fall over, we’ll need to. We don’t need you hurting your head anymore.”

“Thank you.” She stands and then winces and sits right back down. “I forgot about my feet.”

Oliver watches her take a deep breath, weighing her options. He knows she’s always had a kind heart, and that she’s independently strong. It just hurts him to see her resist help so much.

“I can carry you.” He will carry her anywhere she needs him to. He’s there for her, even if the paramedics don’t look pleased with the offer.

“No.” The resigned sigh she gives off hits him in the gut. “I’ll take the ambulance. You and Dig have work to do.”

Like look into the warehouse where she got hurt. Oliver’s forced to acknowledge that she has a point. He takes a step back to allow the paramedics to help her into the stretcher. They keep her seated and Oliver hears her babbling away as they take her down the hall, the only thing that convinces him she’s going to be just fine.

“If you want to follow us to the hospital, we’re taking her to Starling General,” one of the medics
announces. “They’ll probably only hold her for as long as the tests take.”

“Thank you,” Digg answers with a smile. “Take care of our girl.”

The man nods as he walks through the door, leaving Oliver and John alone in her apartment.

“So, where are we going?” Digg asks.

Oliver looks back at the rumpled bed where he found Felicity unconscious in one of the scariest moments of his life. It was worse than when she hit her head during Slade’s invasion because at least then he knew what happened and was able to rouse her. This time he didn’t know anything: how she got there, how she was hurt, how long she had been out.

And it was terrifying.

She wants him to go look into the warehouse and whatever happened, but he can’t do that. He needs to make sure she’s okay first. He has his priorities. “We’re going to the hospital.”

“You sure?”

“Someone should be there with her,” Oliver insists, moving to follow the paramedics out the door. He almost doesn’t hear Digg’s whispered:

“You’re going to hear her loud voice again.”

…

“I told him you had work to do,” Felicity harrumphs as soon as she spots John in the hospital doorway. She even crosses her arms over her chest.

“And what work are we supposed to do exactly, Felicity? We have no idea what happened to you. What should we be investigating?” Oh, John would love nothing better than to punch someone for hurting the woman in front of him - she looks so small and fragile on the white hospital bed - but he can’t find someone to punch until she points them in the right direction.

“Do you have my phone? I don’t remember grabbing it.”

He holds out the device, aware that she would be freaking out without it, if only because Oliver had reminded him repeatedly on the way over.

Felicity snatches it and immediately starts shifting through it until she finds what she was looking for with a “aha!”. She brandishes the phone in his direction. “That!”

Digg takes the phone from her hand, unimpressed with her theatrics. He seriously doubts a picture is worth her injuries, especially a picture of a destroyed boat…

“Wait. This is-”

“The Queen’s Gambit,” Felicity crows, probably louder than necessary. “Dredged up from the bottom of the ocean, for what? Is this some new, nefarious plot? Because, let me tell you, the guys who were in charge of hauling it out did not give me the warm and fuzzies. It was more a Big Bad vibe - and that’s with two capital Bs.”

John frowns at the picture, zooming in on the scorched hull. “I thought damage from the storm sank the boat.”
“That was the theory,” Felicity agrees, leaning forward. “But it doesn’t look like that there, does it?”

Not unless weather made the hull explode from the inside. John hands the phone back, feeling unsettled with the development. “And you said this was warehouse belonged to Moira Queen?”

“Yeah, I don’t like it either.” She shifts through the phone again. “And those men. Someone hired them. I’d help look into it, but with my head still being a little wonky and, you know, these pesky, hovering doctors, I’m not going to be much help.”

John nods. “The important part is that you get better. Oliver and I can do some digging.”

“I was hoping you’d say that! Can I see your phone?” She makes a grabby motion with her hands and John sighs as he relinquishes his relatively simple device. He doesn’t have tons of apps or gizmos or whatever on his phone. It texts and makes calls. What more does he need it for?

Felicity hums to herself as she fiddles with the two phones, in a way that flummoxes John, but he trusts her to not completely destroy the device. He positions himself between Felicity and the door, twisting so he can keep the doorway and Felicity in his line of view.

“What exactly happened last night?” He asks softly as she works.

She glances up, shifting uncomfortably. “I went to look into the warehouse and ran into some guys.” She’s striving for blasé, to be unaffected, but it’s not quite how she comes off.

Digg snorts. “If you think I buy that, they must be giving you the good meds.”

Felicity deflates, shoulders slumped as she continues to work. “So it might not have been that simple.” The words are almost nonexistent, mumbled toward the ground.

“Why don’t you start with why you were out there alone?”

Large blue eyes meet his, pleading with him to understand. “I just…” She takes a deep breath, eyes dropping back to her phone. “I didn’t want Oliver to have to deal with this on top of everything.”

“So you decided to run in without backup?” John doesn’t get it. Sure, Oliver does reckless things, but he’s been trained. Felicity can barely protect herself.

Felicity at least looks sheepish when confronted with the knowledge. “Yeah, well, it seemed like a good idea at the time.”

“And the men who attacked you?”

“They weren’t there at first.” She holds his phone out. “I put a decryption algorithm on there. It’s the green square. Just click on it and point it at whatever electronic lock needs to be unlocked. There are some exceptions, but as long as there’s some sort of wireless signal it should work. Otherwise use a USB connection. That should get you in anywhere you want.”

He accepts the phone but not her change of subject. “Did you run into the men before or after you left the warehouse?”

She grimaces. “They arrived as I was leaving.”

A tick of his eyebrows and she scrunches up her nose, aware that it’s still not enough.

“I hid. One of them noticed me when I escaped. But I clocked him pretty good, if I do say so myself.” She imitates a punch and Digg notices the slight purpling around her knuckles. “It’s a lot
harder than it looks when you and Oliver do it.”

“They nabbed you?” This is sounding worse and worse the more he hears about it. It’s probably for the best Oliver isn’t in the room right now.

“I got away. Lost a good pair of heels, but I’m safe so I guess it was a fair trade.”

John sighs, running a hand over his jaw. “You’re here and you’re okay. Oliver’s making arrangements for you and Roy to share a room.”

“Oh, he is, is he?”

John chuckles at her stubborn attitude. “It makes sense. It’ll be better to have company anyway.”

“So you’re not going to stand vigil until the doctors give me the all clear?”

While he’s sure Oliver would love to do that, Felicity’s right: they have other things to do. “We’ll probably leave some sort of security.”

“I will be fine, you know,” she says, leaning back into the pillows propped up behind her. “You don’t need to hover.”

“Don’t worry, Smoak. You’ll be out of here soon enough.”

Her fingers cease their nervous twisting in the white sheet. “I guess I just don’t like hospitals. They always want to stick you with needles. I hate needles, all pointy objects really, which is ironic considering who we work with.”

He’s chuckling as Oliver walks into the room with a disgruntled female doctor on his heels.

“Miss Smoak, Mr. Queen, here, is insisting that you be moved to room with a Roy Harper. I told him we couldn’t do that without your consent, but he is remaining...stubborn.” The doctor levels Oliver with a stern gaze, one he must not be used to receiving from pretty women.

Felicity sighs. “That’s fine. Roy’s like my little brother.” A little white lie, but John knows she’s only agreeing for Oliver’s sake.

The doctor purses her lips and glances at John, but eventually she nods. “Alright. I’ll make those arrangements, but first we have a couple tests to run, and for that,” she turns her gaze to Oliver, “your visitors have to stay here.”

“Don’t worry, Doctor-”

“Vonskaya,” she responds with a smile. “Elaine.”

“Don’t worry, Doctor Vonskaya,” Digg continues with a grin, “we’re leaving now. But please, if anything changes, give us a call.”

Felicity rolls her eyes as she scoots to the edge of the cot. “Yeah, yeah. They’re overprotective. Let’s get this over with.”

A nurse rolls in a wheelchair and helps Felicity from the bed into the chair. Moments later they vacate the room, abandoning John and Oliver in their wake. Oliver looks distressed as he continues to stare down the hallway where Felicity left.

“She’s strong,” Digg observes in place of empty comforts.
Oliver nods. “Stronger than anyone I know. Doesn’t mean I don’t worry.”

John gets that. It was part of what pushed him and Lyla apart: he kept wanting to save her and she didn’t need saving. “She wants us to look into the men she ran into at the warehouse.” He takes a deep breath. “Oliver, she found the Queen’s Gambit, or the wreckage of it at least.”

Oliver remains stoic at the information, a mask against his true emotions. “She mentioned something about a boat.”

The explosion is coming. John’s sure of it. There’s no way this information is just going to seamlessly blend into the rest of Oliver’s life. This is new information to the archer. Time Travel doesn’t solve everything and calm people don’t clench their jaw with quite that much force.

“She took pictures.” He keeps his eyes latched on Oliver’s twitching facial muscles and his agitated fingers. With Oliver’s already sour mood, he’s not about to share the information about sabotage. Today has already involved too many heightened emotions. “She wants us to look into the men in the warehouse.”

“We have any leads?” Oliver asks softly.

“Other than the fact that your mother owned the warehouse?” Maybe he should be poking the metaphorical bear with a stick, but he has no other avenue to approach this with. Felicity would be the one who could look through records and sift through bank accounts to find the electronic trail. His only lead is Moira Queen.

The tension saps from his shoulders as Oliver runs a hand along his jaw. “Damn.” He drops into a chair. “I have to talk to her.”

If John saw any other way, he’d suggest it. He can’t imagine how difficult it must be to be forced to confront his mother. Mama Diggle would slap him upside the head as soon as he opened his mouth. Moira doesn’t seem to be that physical, but somehow John thinks that might be worse.

It also changes things. He can’t let Oliver walk into this without all the details.

“As her or as the Green Arrow? I hate to break it to you, but I’ve seen the pictures: the hull of that ship was blown open from the inside. That means your mother must know something.”

“What?” The iron returns to Oliver’s voice.

John pulls the picture up on his phone and turns it around. “The metal curls outwards and the scorch marks…”

Oliver’s fist collides with the wall before he can reign in his anger completely, sheetrock crumbling out in white specks as he pulls it out of the new hole. He continues to breathe deeply, eyes closed as a vein continues to pulse around his forehead.

“We just need another minute,” John tells a curious nurse walking by. He looks skeptical, but nods and leaves them alone.

“You’re sure?” Oliver finally asks, his voice approaching calm, but not quite there.

“As sure as I can be. Felicity agreed. I take it you didn’t know.”

Oliver nods, jaw set and a new determination in his eyes. “I suspected. I just never…” He swallows hard and brushes past John to exit. “I need to talk to my mom.”
Digg trails behind him, stopping the same nurse on the way to say that the Queens will pay for the damage to the room. The nurse’s eyes bug out of his face, but John’s already walking to join Oliver at the elevator. There better not be any more big surprises today. He’s not sure how much more he can handle.

... She’s in his father’s old office.

The sight of Moira leaning over papers at his father’s desk stops Oliver in his tracks. It stems his ire, suppressing it from a raging fire to a just a smoldering one. Surrounded by dark woods and books, she looks majestic and infallible. And that’s all it takes to make him second guess his decision to do this without his bow, even though he’s positive that would result in another bullet wound he’d barely survive.

No. This is a conversation he needs to have as Oliver Queen, a conversation he never had the chance to have when she was alive in his timeline.

He takes a deep breath and knocks on the doorframe.

Moira looks up with slight annoyance at the interruption, but it morphs quickly into a genuine smile. “Oliver! I thought you left a couple hours ago!”

He moves into the room, letting his anger bolster his nerves so he can have this conversation. “Actually, I was hoping we could talk.”

“Oh course!” She stands and gestures him into the room, moving over to the couch so they can sit without a desk between them. “What do you want to talk about?”

Oliver closes the door behind him and turns on the anti-bug app Felicity uploaded on his phone that should get rid of any electronic eavesdroppers. Something on his face must give him away because she tilts her head at him.

“It’s serious then?” his mom asks, although she still looks comfortable in her skin.

“I need to talk to you about Malcolm Merlyn.” Oliver watches her face for a reaction to his name. She blinks in surprise, but covers just like he expected.

“Malcolm? What about him?”

Oliver sits down across from her, sure to keep eye contact she he can get a good look at her reactions. His emotions threaten his precious control the more he thinks about it. “About your affair, his threats, the Undertaking...did I miss anything?”

She grows paler with each word. He probably wouldn’t notice the shift if he wasn’t watching quite as carefully. “I don’t know what you’re talking about. There’s nothing between me and Malcolm.”

“I know, Mom,” he whispers, gritting his teeth. Oliver can’t force this out of her. He doesn’t want to either. He knows what she’s doing right now. It’s what she did last time: keeping him in the dark because she thinks it’s protecting him. But he doesn’t need protection.

Her face stiffens into a mask. “And what is it that you think you know, Oliver?”

“Thea is Malcolm’s daughter.” She freezes at the information she didn’t think he had. It’s the only card he has to prove he knows exactly what he’s talking about. He takes a deep breath and
continues, letting the anger he felt in the hospital come surging back. “He sabotaged the Gambit when Dad didn’t want to follow through with the Undertaking and you’ve been doing what he wants to save me, Thea, and Walter.”

He’s extrapolating, but as the words come flying out it all clicks together.

“Oliver-“

“Don’t,” he bites out. He can see the lies on the tip of her tongue. Her first instinct is still to keep him in the dark for his own protection. “I know Malcolm wants to destroy the Glades and he’s using you and other one percenters to do it. And I know you salvaged the wreckage of the Gambit. Walter found it and Malcolm’s going to kidnap him to keep you in line.”

“How do you-“

“What’s important is that you stop helping Malcolm.”

“I can’t do that, Oliver! You have no idea who he has on his side. He will kill us all if need be.” For the first time in a long time, Oliver sees fear in his mother’s eyes. She’s genuinely terrified of Malcolm Merlyn. “He has men on his side who are trained assassins. We can’t fight that.”

Oliver shifts to the edge of his seat. He needs her to fully understand him. “Mom. I know about Malcolm. I know his history with the League of Assassins.”

She frowns. “How?”

“It’s...complicated.” The right words seem to slip away as soon as he picks them out. “But I know I can beat him.” He’s been training since he got back with the express intent of fighting Malcolm. This body still needs to hone itself to that level.

“You can...Oliver, you’re talking nonsense. There’s no way you can fight-“ She trails off as she takes in his serious expression, finally catching on to what she’s missing in this whole scenario. “What happened on that island?”

He finally breaks eye contact and stares down at his hands, at the scars and callouses that he’s earned in the last five years. “I had to survive. I learned. And I came back to save our city.”

“But when you were kidnapped, you didn’t say anythi-“ she cuts herself off, teeth clicking as her mouth slams shut.

Oliver chuckles darkly. “Yeah, well, when you know they don’t really want to hurt you, it’s easier to hold out against torture.”

Moira looks pained. “Torture?”

“If they had seen my scars, they would have realized they would have to try harder.” He shifts uncomfortably at the reminder of Fryers and Wintergreen his first year, and the subsequent years when Waller turned him into a soulless interrogator. “Malcolm didn’t want them to hurt me though. That would have alienated you.”

She blinks and stands to pace the room. Oliver can hear her brain processing all the new information. She stops in the middle of the room and sighs. “If we’re being honest here, Oliver, there’s something I have to tell you. It wasn’t Malcolm.”

“What wasn’t Malcolm?” As far as Oliver knows everything involved with the Undertaking is
spearheaded by Malcolm, so what is it that his mother thinks Malcolm hasn’t done?

“Malcolm didn’t have you kidnapped. I did.”

Silence.

The sound of rushing blood echoes in his ears and Oliver feels sick.

And oh so angry.

The dam that until now had done a decent job of holding the anger at bay breaks. Instead of screaming and fighting, Oliver’s body is washed in a cold, calculated calm. “You had me kidnapped?”

The only other time he remembers feeling so detached was with General Shrieve. And that didn’t turn out well.

Moira holds her head up, straightening with her conviction. “It was either me or Malcolm, and he wouldn’t have pulled punches.”

“So you subjected your son, your newly-returned son, to TORTURE at the hands of mercenaries! I almost killed them, mom! What would you have done then?” The strength of his voice seems to rattle the pitcher of water in the center of the table as he stands to face his mother head on.

“Oh, Oliver, you were always too soft for murder. I’m your mother. I know you better than anyone. I had hoped they got you to crack at least to placate Malcolm.”

She’s still not understanding the serious problem here.

“You don’t know me anymore.” She winces at his statement, but Oliver’s done pulling punches, his anger at the forefront. “You want to know what happened the last five years? Well, it started with watching my father shoot himself in the head to save my life and only got worse from there. So, NO, you don’t know me.”

Her mask is finally ripped away to reveal her horror at his words, but Oliver can’t find any triumph in the victory. In fact, he feels nauseous for the revelation.

“Robert-” Moira can’t seem to piece together a sentence.

Oliver winces, guides his mother back so she can sit on the couch.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to tell you like this.” He hadn’t planned on telling her at all. Knowing doesn’t help anything. It just hurts.

“Oh, God.” Her eyes are wells of tears and she’s fighting her emotions for the words she wants to say. “And you-”

He nods to stop the words, squeezing her hand. It’s not easy to talk about this and he’s had years to deal with it. He wants to leave it there, to forget the memories in the past, but his mother’s pleading eyes are impossible to ignore.

He’s never seen her ask for anything. Ever.

A deep breath braces him for about four words: “We made it to…”

Gray clouds as far as the eye can see. Splashing waves.
Arguing over water.

“The lifeboat.” It’s choked, cut off in his throat. His mom’s hand digging into his bolsters him. “We were running low,” a ragged breath, “on supplies and he-”

He’s not paying attention. He doesn’t care about the water or the food. He just wishes they could die right here and now. They’re not going to get rescued. No one’s coming to help. Maybe it’s better if they just die now.

BANG.

“I didn’t even know he had a gun.” Back then, Oliver had never considered touching a gun. It was unfathomable to him that his father kept a weapon on him.

“He said he wanted to be able to protect himself,” his mother fills in, a watery smile and a hand squeeze of encouragement.

Oliver nods. Although he can’t see it helping against Malcolm Merlyn it makes sense in a twisted way. “Well...he...”

Blood.

It didn’t gush from the dead crewman’s body. It seeped slowly, so slowly that when Robert pushed him from the raft, none of the blood remained as evidence.

“He shot the only other survivor in the head.”

Right my wrongs, son.

“And then...” He rubs his cheeks and the back of his hand comes away wet. When did he start crying? “He turned the gun on himself.”

Moira whimpers, rocking in the seat.

Oliver pulls her into a hug, breathing heavily through his nose to calm himself. “I buried him on the island myself.”

A pile of stones was really the best he could do. Here, as a memorial to his father. He was never Father of the Year, but he had been Oliver’s father. He’d never doubted his father’s love. And how can Oliver die now knowing what his father did for him?

“I found the notebook on his body.”

Moira jerks away with a sob, eyes wide.

“I almost burned it, but then the names appeared. Dad told me to right his wrongs, and the best way to do that is to bring down Malcolm Merlyn. We have to save the Glades.”

“Oh my boy, my beautiful boy!” His mother engulfs him in a hug, her tears soaking into his shirt as he hugs her back.

Moments stretch into minutes as Moira pulls away and regains her composure. She wipes at her cheeks and Oliver waits for the questions that will inevitably follow.

But Moira simply nods, the composed matriarch reappearing before his eyes. The redness of her eyes is the only sign she was crying moments before. “And how do you plan to stop Malcolm and his
allies, Oliver? As soon as he realizes you’re after him, he will send his man after your loved ones, which puts your friends in danger, one Felicity Smoak in particular.”

“Felicity and Digg know what they’re getting themselves into,” he asserts. Maybe he’s revealing his hand to his mother too soon. And maybe winning against Malcolm is still a long shot, but Oliver knows what he’s fighting this time. “Malcolm’s plan violates the League of Assassins’ codes, which will make him a target for their organization.”

“So we tell them,” she announces with conviction, standing now that she has a plan of action. “Simple. We don’t need to get our hands dirty.”

“It’s not that simple,” Oliver cuts in, remembering the feel of a sword through the chest on a cold mountain top. “The cost won’t just be Malcolm’s death.” He takes a deep breath, “If he eludes them - and he probably will - it could also mean the death of his bloodline in retribution for the hundreds of innocents he killed.”

He meets Moira’s eyes, his meaning clear if the hitch in her breath is any indication. “Thea.”

“And Tommy,” Oliver agrees. “Which is why I have to stop him myself.”

“And how do you plan to do that?”

This is the tough sell. “I need you to testify against him.”

Moira spins to face at him. “You can’t be serious.”

“I want to bring him in legally.” Oliver wants to make this case airtight, not a supposedly-dead man they have to deal with in the future, even if Malcolm gets out of jail eventually.

“Men like Malcolm don’t stay in jail,” Moira protests. “The only way to end this is to eliminate the problem.”

Oliver grits his teeth. “I know. But I have to try this first.”

Her scowl tells him she doesn’t agree. She has doubts about his plan, plain as day on her face. But he needs her help for this. He wants it.

“I can’t do this without you, Mom.” His hands curl into fists. “I will respond to deadly force in kind, but if I can bring him in, I will.”

In his mind, he hears Felicity tell him to kill Ra’s Al Ghul, and he knows deep down it might come to that, to him killing Malcolm. But he’s going to exhaust every option until then.

He can do this.

Moira nods. “Fine. I’ll do it.”

…”

“They should have board games or something. This is so boring!” Felicity whines, flopping back on the hospital bed only to groan in pain. “Owwww!”

Roy watches the blonde from the other side of the room with raised eyebrows. His first solo interaction with the blonde is leaving him with quite the impression. She’s certainly a character and she likes to talk. But he’s clever enough to know she’s not talking about anything important. It’s all nonsense.
“How did you stand this for so long?”

Roy snorts. “Well, I was asleep for most of it.”

Felicity blinks in surprise at the wry answer and then throws her head back in a laugh, jovially sitting back up so she can face Roy better. “Well, since you’re going to be living with me for a while, why don’t we get to know each other a little bit better?”

“Um…” she searches for something to say in her bubbly fashion and Roy wonders if they gave her any drugs, particularly the good kind. “Oh! What’s your favorite color? Is it red? Because you’re wearing the red hoodie again.”

“Do you always answer your own questions, Blondie?” He watches her pause as she thinks about the answer.

She grimaces. “Sorry. I’m just used to being the smartest person in the room and sometimes my mouth runs ahead of my brain. So? Red?”

Roy nods as he takes her in. “Yeah. Red. And let me guess: pink?”

“It’s blue, actually,” Felicity responds with a happy chirp. “Don’t get me wrong, I like pink, it’s just not my favorite. Pink just happens to look amazing on me. Although green is starting to grow on me too.”

A laugh escapes him unexpectedly and Roy finds himself smiling at Felicity. She grins back at him.

“For what it’s worth, I think you’re going to be a great addition to the team.”

He grins back at her. “Thanks. We make quite the pair, don’t we?” He gestures to her bandages and back to his.

Felicity pokes at the bottom of her feet and scrunches her nose in distaste. “Yeah, but we’ll be back in action soon enough.”

Roy grins back at her. He knew he liked her. “You and I think alike, Blondie.”

She purses her lips. “What are the chances I can get you to stop calling me that?”

“Nonexistent.”

“That’s what I thought,” she grumbles. “It’s like what I imagined having a younger sibling would be like.”

Roy grins. As an only child, he knows the feeling. Yeah, he likes her. From what little of her he’s seen, she’s a bit of a mess with a big brain and a bigger heart. She wouldn’t last a minute on his home turf, but he already feels the need to protect her from the gruff people he knows. She’s grown on him, even if he won’t openly admit it. It would ruin his reputation.

“Hey, did you hear that?”

Roy blinks, looking around with a frown. All he can hear are the normal hospital sounds.

“Oh! Nevermind!” Felicity shakes her head as if to clear it. “This headache is just getting to me more than I thought.”

He slumps back into the pillow at his back. What he was going to do, he has no idea. He’s injured,
so it’s not like he could actively fight anyone off. But people always say ‘did you hear something’ in horror movies right before the bad guy attacks, so it’s not really his fault for reacting that way.

“You should drink some water,” Roy suggests as a new nurse walks into the room. As terrible as it is, he’s gotten used to the comings and goings of the hospital staff, so he doesn’t immediately question it when the nurse checks his IV before pulling out a syringe. “Hey. What’s that?”

But the plunger is already down and Roy feels his eyes starting to close of their own volition.

“Roy? Roy!” Felicity cries as the nurse turns on her.

The last thing he sees before blacking out is Felicity getting stabbed with another needle and passing out as the man moves her to a wheelchair and rolls her from the room.

Chapter End Notes

Let me know what you think! Comments, kudos, and bookmarks are greatly appreciated!
Or you can hop over to my tumblr: writewithurheart.tumblr.com
Chapter 27

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much everyone for your amazing comments! I hope you enjoy this chapter! It’s a bit of a roller coaster ride!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 27

“Oliver, you don’t understand!”

That seems to be all his mother can say to him when they don’t see eye to eye on this subject.

“Malcolm has leverage on everyone in that notebook and that doesn’t even include the bigger players.” Moira is pacing again, worrying a path in the large oriental carpet.

“If we bring down the big players the rest will follow. We just need you to collect information. I’m sure you can get others to testify against Malcolm too.” He knows no one trusts Malcolm, if only because Malcolm doesn’t trust anyone else. He’s always looking out for his own needs and damn everyone else.

“No one knows his exact plan, Oliver.” She patronizes, turning to look at him sternly. “Somehow he’s planning an earthquake to level the Glades, but I only know that because-

“But Malcolm trusts you more than anyone else,” he fills in with a grim smile.

She looks alarmed as she turns to face him.

“Please, Mom. He basically transferred his feelings for Rebecca onto you. He cares about you on some level, and once he finds out Thea’s his...” He’ll twist her thoughts and try to train him as his personal weapon. But he can’t tell his mother that.

“That will never happen,” Moira disagrees. “I won’t let it get out.”

“Malcolm’s smart enough to extrapolate.” He sighs, rubbing his temples.

“No. This has stayed buried for eighteen years, it’ll stay that way.”

Oliver looks to the ceiling for guidance. “Mom, Thea’s going to find out one day, and it will sound better coming from you.”

“We are not telling Thea.”

Oliver’s phone starts to ring at her final words. He doesn’t recognize the number so he sends it to voicemail, prepared to argue with his mother-

“And what aren’t we telling Thea?”

Both Oliver and Moira freeze at the cool, curious voice, turning in surprise to the now-open door to the office and the tiny brunette who was the subject of their conversation.
“I was just coming to tell you I was home, but this sounds more interesting.” She walks into the room, crossing her arms over her chest. “So, what is it you should tell me?”

“Nothing, Thea. Your brother’s just concerned.”

She turns to Oliver, unimpressed and silently daring him to do better.

He glances at his mom’s stony expression. He could push it, force the situation. He knows how Thea feels about lies, but he also knows that once she finds out, she’s going to want to get to know Malcolm as her father, no matter how he tries to convince her Robert was her father in every other way. She was a total Daddy’s girl and Robert spoiled her. He was far preferable to Malcolm at any rate.

But he’s not sure he can deny her and Tommy bonding time.

“All right. What’s really going on? Because it’s clearly not ‘nothing’.”

“Mr. Queen,” John interrupts. Oliver opens his mouth to ask for another minute before he sees John’s face. “The hospital called.”

His blood freezes in his veins. Oliver’s halfway across the room before John can even continue with the bad news. “What happened?”

“Felicity’s not in the hospital. The nurse claims she signed herself out against medical advice, but Roy’s saying she was kidnapped.”

Oliver curses. With their track record, Roy’s the one who knows the truth. If she’s been kidnapped it means someone tracked her down from the warehouse. He spins back to his mother.

“Who did you hire to clean out your warehouse?”

She blinks in surprise. “My warehouse?”

“The one where you were keeping the Gambit.” He has no time to waste. Malcolm kept Walter alive for leverage. He can’t use Felicity for leverage. Only the kidnapping gives him hope that she’s alive. Why go through the trouble of a kidnapping when you’re just going to kill the person?

“You knew?”

“Yes. Now, who did you hire?” If they’re working alone, it’ll be easier to track them.

“I didn’t hire anyone. Malcolm was taking care of it,” Moira stutters out.

“The Gambit?” Thea protests, but her duress is buried under the rest of the urgency in the room.

“We need to get to the hospital now. See if we can pick up the trail,” Oliver tells Digg, the other man nodding in agreement as he pulls out the car keys.

Oliver yanks out his phone and tries calling Felicity. He doesn’t know what to hope for. A ransom demand? Something else to help jump start their search, a search that would be so much easier with Felicity tracking the phone.

Crap.

He should have had Digg stay with her.
John’s *trying* to be the voice of reason. He really is. But the main problem is that he agrees with Oliver: Felicity was kidnapped, which can only mean bad news. She finally stuck her nose into trouble she couldn’t get herself out of.

He can hear Oliver growling from the back seat as he repeatedly tries her phone and grumbles something about putting a tracker on her. John would voice concerns about her privacy, but seeing as Oliver wouldn’t acknowledge it, he keeps that thought to himself.

So, he’s the one that makes the executive decision to stop by Felicity’s apartment first. If, on the off chance, she did check herself out, then that would be her destination. It’s only a couple blocks off the fastest way to the hospital. And yes, he did memorize the route. It seemed like a good idea in light of how Oliver spent his nights.

“Where are we going?”

John rolls his eyes. Of course, Mr. Oblivious in the backseat would notice the car making a detour when he missed the honking and cursing from cars Digg had inadvertently cut off in the effort to arrive sooner.

“We’re checking her apartment.”

“What?” Oliver shakes his head. “NO! We have to get to the hospital, Digg. The trail could be getting cold.”

He sighs, not changing course. “Oliver, it’s been a long day, man. We need to go at this logically. If she signed herself out, she’d go home. So we check there first. It’ll take five minutes.”

The grumbling takes a new direction but Oliver stays in the car, so John calls it a win.

Felicity’s apartment complex looks as deceptively calm as it did this morning, just now bathed in the rays of the setting sun. There are a couple little girls on the sidewalk playing hopscotch, and a dog chasing a ball. It’s all delightfully mundane.

Until a worried vigilante storms from the car before Digg shifts into park.

He sighs as he slowly gets out of the car. Meanwhile Oliver’ bounds up the steps three at a time and pounds on Felicity’s door. Digg adjusts his suit as he strides up the walkway, smiling at the onlookers as Oliver shouts at the door for Felicity to answer.

“She’s not home. Let’s go,” he growls, making for the stairs just as Digg joins him on the landing.

Digg holds him back with a hand on his shoulder and holds up the other one with a key. “Let’s not jump to conclusions.”

He brushes past Oliver to slip the key into the lock and swing the door open.

“I don’t get why you’re doing this. We both know she’s not here. This is a waste of time. We could be saving her right now!”

“From whom, Oliver?” Digg demands, turning to face the grown man currently acting a little too much like a toddler for his liking. “We don’t know who took her. We don’t have any leads. And your head is not in the game.”
Oliver scowls, crossing his arms over his chest. “Fine. Then what do you suggest we do?”

“Not rush in for starters.” He turns and looks around the room, searching for anything out of place. No one’s been here since this morning so it should look the same. “It doesn’t look like anyone’s been here.”

“No,” Oliver agrees, grudgingly. “It’s just like we left it.”

“So, if she was kidnapped, how did they find her at the hospital?” It’s a nagging thought, but it has the utmost importance right now. How could they have tracked Felicity down? Without knowing more than just her basic description. And let’s face it there are thousands of blondes in Starling City.

Oliver frowns.

Digg can’t make sense of it. If they had her name, it wouldn’t be too hard to find her, but they would go first to her apartment or Queen Consolidated.

“The hospital.” Oliver turns to the door at the realization. “If they had legal clearance, or a hacker, they could see hospital records. They would just have to look for patients with matching injuries. We shouldn’t have brought her there.”

Oliver doesn’t wait for John to catch up this time, going straight for the driver’s side he hold out his hand. John rolls his eyes but tosses over the keys before sliding into the passenger’s seat. He barely gets the seatbelt to click into place before Oliver tears down the street, speeding around corners to get to the hospital in half the time.

“If they saw her records...” John hates to think what that means.

“It means they have someone in the hospital system, someone that works for Malcolm.” The car skids to a stop by the front doors and Oliver tosses the keys to Digg again. “Wait here. I’ll get Roy’s story and then we’re leaving.”

Digg doesn’t agree with the method, but he flicks on the hazard lights and waits.

They’ve got to get their girl back.

Tonight.

... 

“Roy?” Oliver asks as he inches into the dark hospital room, frowning at the unmoving lump on the hospital bed.

“Queen, I’ll admit I was surprised at hearing you were footing Mr. Harper’s medical bills.”

Oliver stiffens as he turns to look Quentin Lance in the eye. “Detective.”

“So how does a billionaire know a street kid?”

“We’re not here to talk about me, Detective.”

“No,” Quentin agrees with a stiff nod. “You’re here because Harper claims Miss Smoak was kidnapped this evening. Did you know there is absolutely no one who can corroborate his story? Even her doctor claims she signed herself out.”

“She’s not at her home. We’ve already checked,” Oliver grits out. He doesn’t have time for this. If
there are no leads here, He only has one choice: He has to go after Malcolm to get his girl back.

“Who is this girl to you, Queen?”

He gets it. This is back in the days where Quentin blames him for Sara’s death, where the entire Lance family hates his guts. Not that Quentin’s started to like him better, but he at least respected the hood, and Felicity.

“She’s one of my best friends. What happened to Roy?”

“He was causing a scene. They gave him something to calm him down.”

There’s definitely a Doctor here under Malcolm’s thumb. And Oliver has no desire to continue following dead ends until he comes around to what he already knows: Malcolm is behind this.

Forget waiting for his mother to gather evidence, forget the focus on doing this right. Oliver’s tired of waiting. And this is the final straw.

Malcolm Merlyn goes down tonight.

Dead or alive.

Oliver’s not picky.

“Where are you going, Queen?”

For about the thousandth time that night, a growl rips from the back of his throat, but just like before he’s too blinded by emotion to be embarrassed about it. “To find Felicity since your department can’t do anything about it.”

He leaves at that, bypassing the elevator for the speed of the stairs. He thought the fear was bad before, but it’s worse now. It’s all encompassing, deep in his bones, taking over his rational thoughts.

It’s worse than when Slade took her. With Slade he knew she would still be alive until their confrontation and he knew she would be brave enough to stab him with the cure. He was worried – beyond worried really – but he knew that it was their only chance. It was a conscious choice.

Malcolm has no reason to keep her alive, none whatsoever. He could kill her and be done with it. There is no guarantee that he’ll ever see her again and that tears him apart. He couldn’t care less about the timeline because she’s gone.

And that changes everything.

“We’re going to the Foundry,” He announces as he slides into the car with John.

“You have a lead?”

Oliver doesn’t answer, glaring straight out the window as John drives. He already knows the other man won’t approve of this choice to confront Malcolm head-on. Felicity – for all intents and purposes – has disappeared into nowhere, but Malcolm doesn’t vanish so easily.

He’s going after the target he can see.

His fingers tap out a pattern on the dashboard as the car rolls through the streets, drawing Diggle’s curious gaze. Oliver stills his hand, and his leg starts bouncing. He’s so goddamn nervous he can’t stay still.
He needs to be doing something.

“Oliver, are you sure this is a good idea?” John slows down for a traffic light, taking entirely too much time for Oliver’s liking. They could have made it through the yellow light.

“It’s the only idea, Digg. We need to get Felicity back.”

“What happened to preserving the timeline?”

“This deviates from the timeline.” Digg knows something’s up, Oliver’s caginess not slipping past his radar.

“In the original timeline, Felicity wasn’t on the team yet. She was still doing odd errands for Oliver Queen. She worked in IT. None of that’s the same and it was stupid to assume everything else would fall into line the way it did before.”

One of them should have stayed at the hospital. Oliver should have left Digg there just to keep an eye on Roy and Felicity. He had grown complacent, cocky in his knowledge of the future. And he’d thought a couple weeks ago that Felicity getting caught in the Reston’s crossfire was the worst that could happen.

“I get that Oliver, but there are smarter ways to go about this.”

He understands that, on a rational level. He really does, but the rational part of his mind isn’t exactly at the forefront. He doesn’t have the patience to wait when it comes to Felicity. Not when she’s in Malcolm’s clutches.

Oliver opens the door as Digg pulls into the lot behind the Foundry. “You can be my back up or you can stay here, but one way or another I’m bringing her home tonight.”

...

Oliver’s lost his mind.

Of all the things that could have broken him, Felicity’s disappearance is probably the worst. He barely even takes the time to pull on his leathers before turning around and walking to the door, his motorcycle the only goal in mind.

John looks on disapprovingly as he snatches his bow and leaves.

He should care more that Digg isn’t there for back-up. He’s never actually faced Malcolm alone and won. It should trigger some warning in his mind. The only overriding thought is that right now he knows what he’s fighting for.

That has to be enough.

“Oliver,” Digg cautions.

“John,” he responds, pausing with one foot on the stairs. “I’d love to go in knowing you have my back, but I can’t sit around.”

“Do you have any idea where you’re going?”

“I’m going to find Malcolm.”

“What then?” John demands, following Oliver up the metal steps. “What are you going to do? March
right up to Malcolm and demand answers? Tie yourself to Felicity? That just puts her more in his gaze.”

He stops short a yard from his bike. His voice falls cold, galvanized by his conviction: “If he thinks she knows about the Undertaking, he’ll kill Felicity. There’s no choice to make.”

John doesn’t have anything to say as Oliver hops on his bike and speeds off into the night to find the one man he can blame for all of this.

...

It’s a stroke of luck Malcolm is in the first place he looks.

Merlyn Global’s headquarters wasn’t a long shot to begin with. Malcolm threw himself into work after Rebecca’s death, after he came back from Nanda Parbat. He’s been planning the Undertaking for so long, it’s no surprise that he wants to stay on top of it as the deadline approaches.

Felicity won’t be here. He wouldn’t incriminate himself like that.

Oliver could wait, see where Malcolm goes, tap his phones and see who he calls. It would be the smarter approach, the approach Digg keeps urging him to take from his position on the ground. From the top of a neighboring skyscraper, Oliver is content to ignore him in favor of this action. Even if he doesn’t win, Malcolm will know he could use Felicity as leverage. It gives her value, prevents her death.

Which will not be the case, Oliver reminds himself.

He lines of the grappling arrow and it flies across street, embedding itself a couple stories below the top floor. If he could, he would have come at the building from above, but Merlyn Global is the tallest building around and he didn’t have to time charter a plane to come at the building from above, so this was the best option.

He loses a bit of the element of surprise, but that doesn’t matter. He knows his way around Merlyn Global. This isn’t going to pretty but he sure as hell is going to make it worth it.

“Digg, if I don’t get out, promise me you’ll rescue her.”

“I don’t like this,” Digg repeats for the thousandth time, but they both know Oliver’s not paying attention.

He’s already jumped, flying along the zipline straight for a slide glass window. With a flick of his wrist he releases two fletchettes into the glass, cracking it before he finally makes contact and shatters the glass completely.

The roll to recover is shaky despite frequent practice. He’s not used to the urgency of this fight. It’s never been like this before.

Yet he’s been so conditioned Oliver’s moving across the floor before he can process how his focus is all over the place. He takes a deep breath as he moves through the hallways, curious as to the lack of alarms considering he just smashed through a window.

He pushes Felicity to the back of his mind as he races to the stairs using fletchettes to take out the key card systems. It’s not as contained when Felicity isn’t there with classier methods of infiltration.

There should be body guards and security lined up between him and Malcolm. Men he has to fight
through to get to the evil mastermind.

He’s in the lobby that leads to the CEO’s office. There should be someone here now, someone between him and Malcolm, but the open space is empty. Oliver nocks and arrow as he turns the corner to point the arrow right at Malcolm’s chest.

“The Green Arrow,” Malcolm muses quietly, his eyes shifting over the space. “I had a feeling I’d see you sooner or later. Although I can’t imagine what this is about.”

Oliver doesn’t say anything. He’s not buying the act that Malcolm is half-heartedly portraying anyway.

Malcolm flips around the ballpoint pen in his hand. It’s a casual gesture, casual but deadly in the trained assassin’s hands.

“Rumor has it you go after the city’s elite for evils they’ve committed. What exactly am I guilty of?”

“Earlier this evening, you had your men kidnap a woman. Felicity Smoak,” he elaborates when Malcolm’s brow furrows. “Where are you holding her?”

“Felicity Smoak? I think you have me mistaken for someone else. I certainly don’t hire men to kidnap innocent women.” He moves paper around his desk, bored with the conversation.

“Miss Smoak was investigating a warehouse in the Glades, a warehouse you hired men to clean out.”

Malcolm frowns, still maintaining his act. “I run a clean business, Arrow. No illegal dealings here.”

Tired of the games, Oliver releases an arrow straight at Malcolm’s head.

As expected, he dodges, pulling a wicked looking dagger from somewhere and sending it flying across the room with wicket efficiency. Oliver knocks it away with another arrow. Malcolm watches him from across the room, a sword from a nearby display in his hands.

Now he looks ready for battle.

“Who are you?”

“Someone who wants to save this city.”

Malcolm scoffs. “And what do you think I’m trying to do, boy?”

“Destroy the city.”

“To rebuild it anew. Better.”

Oliver’s lip curls. He doesn’t it have time to deal with this. “Felicity Smoak. Where is she?”

“I thought she had to be working with someone. A pretty blonde like that? She had to be connected. I just never imagined it was for you. Who is she? A flame?”

Oliver attacks, shooting an arrow before turning to wield the bow as a melee weapon.

The sword and the bow aren’t close to being evenly matched. Oliver’s getting horrible flashbacks to the fight with Ra’s. He’s been training as much as possible with the weapon that killed him, but this is first experience with a member of the League.
He snatches a sword from the wall to catch a downward strike of the blade. There’s a pause, a moment rest where they struggle for dominance, the metal of the blades grinding against each other.

A moment later, it’s done. Both men jumping back to catch a breath. Malcolm narrows his eyes appraisingly. “Who trained you?”

Oliver answers with a swing of his blade. It’s different than hand to hand, or shooting his bow. He hasn’t practiced enough to make these motions instinctive. His mind has to race and keep up with Malcolm’s precise strikes.

His arms start to burn with the effort of keeping up with Malcolm’s strikes.

It starts with a slice that barely grazes his arm. With the angle and his leather, the hit mostly slides off, but it’s a turning point nonetheless.

He’s tiring.

Malcolm knows it. Oliver knows it. He no longer has the strength to keep up with the speed of Malcolm’s strikes. His body’s not used to the demanding motions of a blade and if there were any way to get inside Merlyn’s guard and disarm him, Oliver would take it. But there’s not.

The next strike to make it through his guard nicks Oliver’s cheek, cutting the side of his hood with no effort. Oliver counters, almost landing a hit to Malcolm’s side.

With infuriating grace, Malcolm sidesteps and almost lazily thrusts his blade into Oliver’s abdomen. Pain.

Burning pain rushes through him.

It’s as bad as the mountaintop with Ra’s. It feels like a lung has been punctured and Oliver’s paralyzed, body unable to move from shock.

“I was going to ask who you were. But it really doesn’t matter anymore.” Malcolm moves them backwards, toward a shattered window.

Oliver vaguely realizes he doesn’t know when it broke. It must have been sometime during their fight, but hell if he knows what did it.

“Goodbye, Green Arrow.”

Oliver falls.

...

Malcolm turns from the window before he sees where the hooded man land. He tosses the sword to the side. The Green Arrow was a nice icon for a time, but his death – just like his crusade – won’t mean anything. It doesn’t matter. He was just a small fish trying to make it in the ocean. He would have been eaten up eventually.

Tugging at his cuffs, Malcolm checks his reflection in a mirror. A few hairs shifted back into place and he looks presentable again. He lifts his cell to his ear as he lifts the green compound bow, examining it.

“The CEO’s office needs a clean up. Quickly and quietly.”
He hangs up without waiting for an answer.

Twirling the bow in this hands, Malcolm opens the door to his safe room. “You had impeccable taste, Green Arrow. It’s a pity you were so inexperienced. You could have been a formidable foe.”

He places the bow in front of his own and turns to leave. Now, he has other business to attend to. Like Felicity Smoak, for instance.

The girl just became far more interesting.

He exits the building, nodding to Bob, the night security man as he heads straight to his car. He likes Starling at night. It’s quiet, and deceptively peaceful. He could almost imagine the vermin of the city don’t lurk just out of sight.

Classical music plays through the speakers of his car as he rolls slowly through the streets. Normally, he would prefer a driver, a benefit of the rich, but he tonight he’s glad to be on his own. Things are turning out in his favor it would appear.

Miss Smoak, while a helper to the late vigilante, might prove useful. If she can be turned. She has the best access to the Markov device, and her intelligence would benefit his master plan. She’s become quite the intriguing chess piece, far more than the annoying pawn he thought she was.

The building he arrives at isn’t decrepit. It’s not one of the abandoned warehouses lesser villains like to use. No. Malcolm’s not that stupid. The property itself houses the offices for Hasta Luego Vacations, a travel company under a shell company that belongs to Malcolm himself. The structure is unremarkable. The true masterpiece lies in the large underground facility: soundproof and moving under the neighboring apartment buildings, which he, of course, owns and rents out as well.

With purpose, Malcolm walks to the basement door, punching in a code. Three more layers of security follow: fingerprints, retinal scans, and voice recognition. He’d had the men he hired to discreetly remove the Gambit bring Miss Smoak through the back door, less secure, but necessary.

Two men guard the huge metal door to the chamber, relaxed. Because what threat could a small blonde woman be?

“Is she awake?” He asks as they jerk to attention at his presence.

“Yes, sir. Woke up about an hour ago. Started asking questions.” One man reports, studiously avoiding eye contact.

Malcolm nods. “You can leave. The money has been wired to your accounts.”

The men exchange a glance, but nod and walk out the way they came without a backward glance. Ah, the delightful morals of men for hire.

Malcolm straightens his tie and enters the room as soundlessly as possible.

Miss Smoak looks unremarkable in the dank light of the dungeon. Her wrists and ankles are secured to the wooden chair via metal manacles. Her blonde hair is a mess, her glasses cracked on one frame, and she’s wearing nothing but the flimsy hospital gown they kidnapped her in.

Despite all that her posture is positively regal. She sits upright in the chair like it’s a throne and not a prison, her eyes cool and defiant. She surveys him with pursed lips and haughty disregard. She looks like a woman who knows something.
He continues to watch her for signs of weakness, like the redness around her wrists and ankles where she tried to break free. The shiver that runs through her as the cool air sucks the heat from her skin.

Oh, Malcolm knows he has all the power here. He just wants to know how she can act like she’s perfectly safe despite the overwhelming odds against her. Is she really so sure her Green Arrow will rescue her?

“There won’t be a rescue coming,” he tells her, voice echoing slightly in the large room. “The Green Arrow can’t save you now.”

She doesn’t react to his words, continuing to stare him down with cold eyes.

“I have to admit, I didn’t see that twist coming. I thought you were just some little minx who Walter dragged into my trap. But no, you’re working with the Green Arrow. It’s a pity I killed him.”

He’s both disappointed and impressed that the reveal doesn’t elicit a reaction from the woman. Instead her brow furrows as her gaze zeroes in on something. Her eyebrows draw together in a frown and her first words are nothing like he expects:

“Since when do you have both hands?”

... 

END OF PART 1

Chapter End Notes

What do you think? Big twist? Let me know in the comments below! And thank you so much for reading!! I hope you liked it!
Chapter Notes

I am completely and utterly blown away by the response to the last chapter. I mean, I knew there were a lot of people reading this, but WOW! You guys have my biggest, sincerest thanks! And I know you're all excited to find out what happens next, so I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

PART II

Chapter 28

Numb.

All Felicity feels is paralyzing numbness. It’s funny. She remembers getting shot hurting more. With vivid clarity she remembers the shooting pains (no pun intended). It was piercing. And it hurt like hell.

Now, she just feels empty.

She can’t feel her toes, her fingers, even her face.

It’s bad.

Felicity’s eyes flutter open, sound finally piercing her ears. There’s screams and her name repeated over and over again by John Diggle as he presses his hands to the wound she knows she should feel. She should be in excruciating pain right now. But she’s not.

“William?” Her voice is a croak, a whisper. All she can manage.

John’s crying over her as he nods. “He’s fine, Felicity. You did it. You saved him.”

Relief floods her system as she fights to stay conscious for this. “Good. Tell Oliver...tell...him...” she has to get this out. “I...love...him...”

Darkness takes over. She can still hear them, desperately calling for her to stay awake, to open her eyes, but it’s too much. She can’t.

And the last thing she hears is Oliver’s voice, her name a strangled cry of desperation ripped from
his throat.

...

The numbness is replaced with cold, a damp chill slowly seeping into her bones. Without opening her eyes she waits for the pain of her injury, of the bullet she took to protect Oliver’s son. She must be the hospital now. It explains the flimsy gown she feels covering her.

God, she remembers the gown all too well after the weeks spent there after the limo incident. But she’s sitting upright in a chair so that can’t be all that’s happening.

A drop of frigid liquid lands on the bare back of her neck and slides slowly down her spine, leaving chills in its path and Felicity jerks at the sensation. Her eyes fly open to a startlingly dark room. Her first reaction is jump and run away, to place herself facing the only door with her back against the wall. It’s what Oliver and Digg would do in that situation, right?

But her wrists and ankles, instead of moving freely, dig painfully into metal cuffs. The sensation draws a cry of surprised pain from the back of her throat. Her skin is already raw at the points of contact, like she’s been pulling at them for a while.

How is she here? How did she get here? And where is here for that matter?

John and Oliver wouldn’t let her be taken. They would make sure she was safe and then they would hunt down the bastard who hurt her. Even with her and Oliver on the outs, she never doubted he would come for her.

You couldn’t just change your feelings because a trust had been broken. She may have handed back the ring, but Oliver still owned her heart. And his feelings were clear in every longing gaze he tried to hide since the incident.

Felicity glances down with a frown. She’s unharmed.

Sure, her head hurts, but her body itself is fine. There’s no gushing blood…

Wait. That’s not true.

Felicity shifts in her seat. There’s some lingering pain that reminds her of the healing wound after she took that bullet for Sara. It seems she has a habit of protecting people with her body.

She pushes it aside, forgetting her thoughts to focus on the current problem: figuring out where she is.

The room is made of grey concrete, damp with condensation and probably cold to the touch. Her toes on the floor are chilly enough. Speaking of, why is she barefoot?

And in a hospital gown?

Her first thought based on her surroundings is that she was kidnapped. The only logical conclusion to follow is that she was kidnapped from the hospital where she was being treated. Ergo...she survived.

Which shouldn’t be all that surprising. She did wake up, didn’t she? She certainly hadn’t been expecting that as her body slowly started losing sensation. She’s picked up a little medical training during her time with Team Arrow. That numbness she felt: that was her dying. She was sure of it.
So being alive - even if she’s kidnapped - is a miracle.

“Oh, good. You’re awake.” Her head jerks up to find a man in all black stepping through the door to her jail cell. “He’ll be happy to hear that.”

She means to ask who, but the man slams the solid, metal door before she can get the words out. From the look of him, Felicity would call him a goon, a henchman for the evil guy, which would narrow it down to Damien Darhk or Malcolm Merlyn.

Probably Malcolm knowing her luck.

She would have thought that Oliver cutting off his hand would be enough to dissuade him. Or maybe the dramatic failure of having William kidnapped.

Felicity leans back into the chair to wait. She has nothing to pick the locks with - if she even knew how to pick locks, which is a valuable skill. She should probably learn how to do that.

So she waits, like a freaking damsel in distress, Felicity’s forced to wait for her boys to rescue her.

She sighs. This is the part she hates: the minutes ticking by as she waits for something to happen.

Anything.

Minutes drag on, or it feels like they do. Felicity’s terrible when it comes to gauging time without a clock. Sometimes five minutes passed in the blink of an eye, but other times it felt like an eternity. So yeah, she sucks at this waiting thing.

The interruption is welcome.

She doesn’t hear the footsteps coming down the hall or muffled voices through the door. Her only clue that something - anything - is happening is when the metal handle twists on the door. It strikes Felicity as odd. If the room was meant to be a prison, why would you leave a handle on the inside?

Felicity sits up straighter, affecting her most disinterested face.

The Malcolm who walks in the room looks off from what she remembers, but she can’t place it. Only the fact that she expected him to come in keeps the surprise from her face. It encourages her to stare back blankly. She refuses to show this overgrown bully fear.

“There won’t be a rescue coming,” he tells her. He sounds like gloating villain who knows something she doesn’t. “The Green Arrow can’t save you now.”

What’s his game? Why’s he acting like he doesn’t know about Oliver?

“I have to admit, I didn’t see that twist coming. I thought you were just some little minx who Walter dragged into my trap. But no, you’re working with the Green Arrow. It’s a pity I killed him.”

Now, that’s not right.

She tilts her head, looking him over again. Clearly this has to be some delusion of her injured brain. Malcolm doesn’t know about Oliver, and killing Oliver? That’s…

His hand.

More specifically, both his hands. There. On his person.
“Since when do you have both hands?” It slips out. This isn’t the man she knows. Whether it’s a trick of her brain or some sort of hell she’s being forced to live, and probably relive again and again.

He frowns at her. “What?”

Malcolm Merlyn caught off guard?

That’s a new one.

“Is that a new trick? Re-growing hands?”

He glances downwards with a frown and back up. “I wouldn’t know. I’ve never lost a hand,” he whispers slowly.

She blinks, not understanding what’s happening, so she tries another route. “And why have you brought me here as your prisoner, huh? Was it for my witty conversation?”

Her dry tone throws him for a loop.

“I just told you, Miss Smoak: because you’re working for the vigilante. And I want to know how much you know.”

Yeah, she has no idea where this is going, except that she’s not going to tell Malcolm a damn thing. He must see the defiance in her eyes because just smirks.

“I want to know where you get your targets.”

She raises an eyebrow, genuinely surprised by the direction. “Targets?”

“Adam Hunt, Martin Somers...”

Felicity’s heart starts to race in her chest. Those names...they’re from the notebook, back when Oliver started his whole crusade.

“So you do know who I’m talking about.” Malcolm looks pleased. “So, where did you get your targets?”

Unable to form a cohesive sentence with the realization that the man in front of her is living some sort of warped version of Oliver’s first year trying to stop the Undertaking. The question is who does Felicity Smoak – nobody IT girl – end up in a warehouse with him?

“Don’t make me ask again, Miss Smoak. I have ways of making people talk.”

She snorts. She doesn’t mean to. No, Felicity should be taking this whole thing very seriously since she’s locked up with a mass murderer and assassin. But instead she can’t help but laugh at the insanity of the thing.

Malcolm’s response is to pull out a knife and stab it into the flesh of her arm, pinning her to the chair. Her laugh morphs grotesquely into a scream of pain.

“Where?” He growls, getting in her face.

Felicity sneers through the pain. She had to walk away from the man she loves and yet still interact with him on a daily basis. She can face down Malcolm. “Where do you think he got them? Your precious Undertaking isn’t as well-concealed as you thought.”
He twists the knife and a whimper escapes Felicity. She glares at him through the tears.

“How do you know that name?”

She breathes out through her nose. “Can’t we just talk like adults? You don’t need to keep stabbing me. It hurts and I don’t exactly have a high pain tolerance.” Why does he want to know about the Undertaking anyway? It makes no sense. Did someone wipe his memory?

“Answer the question.”

“You want to use the Markov device to level the Glades.”

Malcolm freezes in surprise. He was not expecting that answer.

So Felicity has a beat to get ahead of him. “It won’t work. And you’ll just make yourself a target for the League.” She might as well play into his delusion. She still has no idea what’s going on, but she does know about the Undertaking and Malcolm.

Malcolm steps back, releasing the knife in her arm. “How do you know...”

“How do you know about the League?” She leans back with a smirk. She likes this. She likes being ahead of Malcolm for once instead of feeling like a pawn in his game. Even chained up, she has the upperhand.

He rips the knife from her arm and presses the blood-soaked tip to her neck. “Explain.”

“I’ve stared down Ra’s Al Ghul without flinching. You don’t scare me.” She’s an excellent bluffer. “I mean, sure the bloody knife at the throat is intimidating, but you want information from me, information you won’t get if you slit my throat open.”

“I can cause you more pain,” he threatens.

“And here I thought you were more the shoot-me-with-an-arrow-from-a-distance kind of man. Or the train-your-underlings-so-that-pain-no-longer-effects-them kind.” Felicity watches him carefully for a reaction. She learned some of that from Thea. Does he know Thea’s his daughter? Because honestly, she has no idea what’s going on beyond that she appears to be talking to a 2012 version of Malcolm Merlyn.

“I have no underlings.”

Felicity rolls her eyes. “Of course not. There’s just people you blackmail into doing your bidding. How’s that working out for you?”

“How do you know about the Markov device?”

“You mean the invention you had Queen Consolidated purchase for you?” She leans back from the blade as much as possible. “The one you’re going to steal and then kill everyone working on it. I mean, sure it’s a decent plan. No one can connect it directly back to you. But really? I don’t think anyone has to look that hard either to make the connection.”

That makes him pause. “If you know that much, then why do you still have the Applied Sciences Division working on it.”

“Me-?” Felicity’s mouth slams shut. She’s lost here. Her advantage is disappearing, and like a shark around blood, Malcolm can sense it.

“I know all about you, Miss Smoak. Intriguing history: you graduated high school at fifteen, MIT
with a Masters at 19, but something happened your senior year, right? Your boyfriend got into some trouble with the law. It’s all been sealed and marked confidential, but after that you took a low paying job, until a couple months ago when Walter Steele promoted you to Head of Applied Sciences, quite out of the blue.

“What I can’t figure out is how you got involved with the vigilante.” Malcolm runs the blade up and down her arm lazily, leaving a smear of drying blood on her pale skin.

Malcolm’s finally succeeded at knocking her off-balance. Most of that story is right...up until the director Applied Sciences part. That didn’t happen until Ray Palmer offered her a job. And yet, somehow she guesses he’s right.

Must be some weird dream world that she would really prefer not to be in.

Why would she conjure Malcolm of all people into her dream world? For heaven’s sake, she has far more terrifying people in her life if this is supposed to be her personal hell.

For starters, she could be forced to relive every moment Oliver broke her heart.

“How does a brilliant young woman with her whole life before her get mixed up with a good-for-nothing thug on his hopeless mission?” Malcolm wonders aloud.

Felicity tilts her head. He knows about the Green Arrow and all about her, but he doesn’t know Oliver’s identity. He has no idea how they met. “I guess you don’t know everything about me.”

“There is very little I can’t find out.”

“Only that your son is my best friend. Seems like a big thing to leave out.” Unless that didn’t happen in this bizarre dream world either...

Malcolm blinks.

“Or maybe you just still think I’m a bottle blonde gold digger.” That hadn’t been a pleasant meeting. It wasn’t even a meeting really. He saw her in the background of one of Tommy’s video chats and made assumptions.

She just needs to keep him talking, to keep Malcolm’s attention focused on her instead of the people on their way to rescue her. God, what is taking Digg and Oliver so long? Sure, she’s better with the Lair’s computers, but honestly she set up the tracking program for just this reason.

All they need to do is call in Curtis. He’s smart enough to figure it out.

Malcolm purses his lips as he stares at her, clearly unsure what to say next. Felicity decides to take what she learned from this conversation and use it to her favor: She’s head of QC’s Applied Science Department. She’s literally overseeing the creation of the device that’s going to level half the city according to Malcolm. But she’s also helping Oliver on his crusade...

Maybe this is Earth 2 or whatever Barry was dealing with in Central City because this was definitely not her universe. Or maybe she’s in a coma.

Either way, she can make it out of this situation...probably...

... Today could not get any worse.
John would happily give his left arm not to be in this situation right now. Because how do you explain to Moira Queen that ‘yes, your son was hurt and I know I said he was mugged, but really it wasn’t my fault he rushed into Merlyn Global and Malcolm stabbed him’. Instead, he’s getting the stink eye from the Queen matriarch.

He really should have expected that when he had to cut Oliver’s suit off him just to get him to the hospital before he died of an abdominal wound. If the blood loss didn’t kill him, the stomach acid probably would.

Oliver undoubtedly has nine lives. John doesn’t know anyone else who would be able to stab a grappling arrow into the top floor of a skyscraper and then hold on as he fell thirteen stories with an abdominal wound.

He’s almost inclined to believe that Oliver Queen has some sort of superpower, if that weren’t completely ludicrous.

And tonight was miracle after miracle: Oliver had survived, Digg had gotten in and out of Merlyn Global undetected, Oliver had made it to the hospital. He was still in surgery but the man had high hopes.

“Care to explain what happened, Mr. Diggle?” Moira finally asks from across the private waiting room. “Last I heard you and my son were headed to this hospital.”

“Miss Smoak appeared to be missing,” John filled in tersely, reminding himself that this woman paid his bills even if Oliver didn’t really need a bodyguard. “Mr. Queen decided to find her himself since certain staff members were under the impression she checked herself out. He slipped my watch. I’m lucky he called me when he did.”

Moira doesn’t seem to buy the story, raising her eyebrows. “And Miss Smoak?”

He grimaces. “We still haven’t located her.”

“And you’re sure she’s missing?”

“Yes, Ma’am. The other person in the room was drugged, but he saw her taken. Her apartment is also empty.” If Oliver’s already talked to her about Malcolm, then telling her the truth seems like the best course of action. All that’s really clear to John is that he needs help.

“And this wild goose chase was good enough reason to leave my son’s side ?!”

Digg’s spine stiffens. “All due respect, Mrs, Queen, but your son made that decision on his own.”

“I hired you to protect him.”

“And I can’t protect him if he refuses to keep himself safe.” John’s had enough of her BS. Oliver is fully capable of making his own decisions and stubborn enough to follow through with stupid ones. He’s a grown ass man with superior fighting ability. If he didn’t have a penchant for jumping into dangerous situations, this would be John’s easiest job ever.

“Well, if you can’t do your job, you’re fired!”

John nods abruptly and walks from the room with a straight back. It’s her prerogative to fire him as his boss, but Oliver’s become closer than that in the last couple months. And Felicity...she wormed her way into his friendship in even shorter time. He has no choice but to attempt her rescue.
He makes his way to Roy’s room, where the teen angrily stabs at the green jello on his hospital tray.

“What happened? Did you find Blondie?” He asks immediately, moving as if to climb from the bed.

Digg pulls out his phone and places it on the table next to Roy’s tray. “I’ve got a friend looking into it. She’ll call when she—”

The phone sputters to life in a blaze of noise and colorful lights. Roy gapes at it and Digg fumbles for it, recognizing Lyla’s picture.

“You got something?” he asks, breathless with anticipation.

“I know where she is.”

...

She’s walking through a dark, cold, Starling night, shivering even through her jacket. She walks through a maze to a warehouse, one she’s been looking for. Hacking into the security system is a breeze, she’s prepared for it.

When the door swings open, her breath catches in her throat: she doesn’t expect to see the Queen’s Gambit.

Then she’s not alone. She has company: men in black that she barely avoids. Yet she makes it home only to collapse, woken seconds later by Oliver shaking her.

His eyes bore into her as he asks questions, the worry clearly written on his face. He’s so much younger than she remembers, younger even then he looked in Bali. And her apartment looks different, like she’s living alone.

Digg and Oliver follow her to the hospital and she talks John through what happened. About a warehouse owned by Moira, and Roy in the hospital.

There are tests to check her higher functions, to make sure she’s okay. Until she’s left alone with Roy until they’re content to release her. The interactions are awkward at first, stilted as they try to figure out where they stand, but it soon relaxes into teasing banter.

And then the men in black are back and

Felicity comes back to consciousness with a gasp. It’s like a dream, but it feels too real, like a memory. Except it’s not, it can’t be. She remembers finding the address for Moira’s warehouse, but she never visited it. And she certainly didn’t know about Oliver’s little green secret then.

What in the world is going on with this whole scenario?

She takes a deep breath and brushes the hair from her eyes. She frowns and glances down.

She’s still in the uncomfortable wooden chair, but the manacles holding her in place are gone and her arm is stitched up and wrapped. That’s more care than she would expect from a mass murderer.

The man in question watches her from across the room, idly playing with a knife. It looks less intimidating now that it’s not sticking out of her arm.

“You stitched me up. Why?”

“Because you intrigue me, Miss Smoak,” Malcolm drones, stepping away from the wall. “You’ve
got a fighting spirit, but it doesn’t seem like you have any actual martial training. I can’t decide if your brazen attitude is brave or foolish.”

“Probably a bit of both,” she confesses honestly. She knows he can kill her easily and yet that’s not what she’s scared of, not right now. Malcolm always walked a fine line between enemy and friend. He would never hurt her because it would alienate Oliver. She’s not so sure that applies any more if this is some altered version of 2012.

“Either way, I’m curious as to what you’ll do without your hero.” He pulls the door open. “I considered killing you – you know too much – but it would be a pity to waste a mind as unique as yours.”

Felicity scoots to the edge of the chair. “So, you don’t plan on killing me? Or kidnapping me - continuing to hold me, I mean? I could go right to the authorities.”

“But you won’t. You would only incriminate yourself.” He walks up to her. “And if you disrupt the construction of the Markov Device or my plan in any way, I will rethink my position on letting you live. Are we clear, Miss Smoak?”

She stands. She won’t do that. She won’t compromise her morals for this man. “Then you might as well kill me now, because I will find a way to stop you.”

Malcolm pushes off the door, face turning serious in an instant. “You will do as I say, Miss Smoak, or your mother will be the first to feel my wrath. Then I’ll destroy everything that matters to you before finally drawing out your final demise. Your choice.”

Felicity grits her teeth, knowing he has her backed into a corner...for now. Her leverage of outing him to the world won’t do her any good here, and his threat of physical violence far outweighs her threats of destroying him electronically. He’s won this battle, and they both know it.

“I think we’re done here.” Malcolm announces, sliding his knife into his waistband. “You can go out that way.”

She gulps and shuffles past him, becoming aware of her bandaged feet as the cloth snags on the uneven concrete floors. Step after step, she moves slowly down the hall, glancing back to see Malcolm watching her with a menacing air. It weirds her out even more when she thinks about how the back of the gown must be gaping.

The stairs are a bit trickier to navigate, and her feet are aching profoundly before she makes it up the first step. The slow pace allows her time to think.

Malcolm has her dead to rights, and he knows it. He said he killed the vigilante, and if this is another world, she needs to figure out if he’s telling the truth. Her Oliver is more resilient than that. And if he’s dead, she’ll have to figure this out on her own. Preferably with Diggle’s help and without Malcolm finding out.

“This would so much easier if I actually knew where I was,” she mutters reaching for the large metal door at the top of the stairs. The early morning light blinds her as she emerges at street level, thankful it’s at least not freezing out even if she is freezing in just the hospital gown.

“She spins around, hands curling into fists before she recognizes the couple in front of her. “Digg! Lyla!”
Heedless of her battered feet, she races over the pavement to wrap Digg in a hug. “Thank God! You would not believe the day I’m having.”

“Felicity? How did you get here? What about your kidnappers?”

She pulls away. “It’s a long story, involving Malcolm Merlyn and a bunch of threats. Where’s Oliver?”

“In the hospital. Are you sure you’re okay?” His eyes land on the freshly wrapped wound around her wrist.

Felicity pulls away, wrapping her arms around herself, wondering just how much Digg knows, if she’s the only one aware that this isn’t the way things actually went down. Should she bring it up? Or should she just go with it?

“Aside from needing a change of clothes? I’m peachy. So he’s alive?”

Digg shrugs off his jacket and Felicity gladly takes it. “Oliver’s alive. Moira kicked me out of the room before I heard anything.”

Well, at least now she won’t be surprised when she picks up a newspaper and looks at the date. If Moira’s alive, it has to be in the early years of Oliver’s return. It really must be some alternate version of his first year back. So the Undertaking really is happening, and somehow she’s more involved in it.

“Let’s get you home so you can change, and then we’ll check in on Oliver,” Lyla says, directing Felicity to their car.

Felicity nods in agreement, but the entire way back to her apartment, she makes a mental list of what to research, how to stop the Undertaking while under Malcolm’s thumb, and things she need to stop. Not to mention the giant elephant of how this happened.

Since when did her life get more complicated than helping a green-leather-wearing, ex-fiancé of a vigilante protect a city while ruling over a multi-billion dollar tech company by day?

Felicity closes her eyes against the killer headache forming between her eyebrows. God, she needs a good night’s sleep. Maybe then this will make a little more sense.

Or maybe she’s going crazy.

The big question is: what does she do now?

Chapter End Notes

Let me know what you think!
Chapter 29

Looking at her old apartment is more than a little trippy for Felicity as she moves over to her old closet. It looks the same, of course, as she remembers. She just really hopes she has more than just the chunky blouses and skirts. Not that she didn’t like them, but she’s gotten used to her new fashion choices.

On the plus side, she now has her panda flats back! She lost them last time to a blood stain she just could not get out. Oliver had offered to buy her new ones, but they just wouldn’t have been the same.

Felicity frowns at the brightly colored dresses in her wardrobe. Well, it looks like her promotion gave her the money to update her style a little earlier. That’s going to take some getting used to.

But the dresses are not what she needs. Nope. Jeans and comfy shoes are called for. Preferably something with long sleeves to cover her new wound.

She snags her trophy panda flats and tosses them on the bed, going next for her dresser. There’s a couple old pairs of jeans in the dresser and the first one she slides on fits like a second skin, a little tight as she tries to buckle them up but otherwise nice. Shirts are a little tougher, but she ends up settling for a t-shirt with a jacket thrown over it before striding back out into the main room.

Talk about weird: Lyla and Digg are studiously avoiding each other as they gaze around her apartment.

So definitely not her world where they have a daughter together. Got it.

Just another item on the checklist of things in this world that are different than her own.

“Ready to go?” She asks, reaching for her back and checking to make sure she has everything. The tablet makes her pause until she realizes it’s not just her, the tablet is a couple series older than the one she uses in her time. This whole thing is going to suck technology-wise.

John assesses her for a moment and then nods. “We can go.”

“Good,” she heads for the door. The sooner she can get eyes on Oliver, the better she’ll feel. She needs to know where everyone stands in this world before she decides what to do going forward. Time and alternate realities...if sci-fi has taught her anything, it’s nothing to be messed with.

“That’s it? You don’t have anything you want to share about your kidnapping?” Lyla asks, rounding
her couch with suspiciously narrowed eyes.

She shrugs. “Malcolm had me kidnapped. He thinks our green friend is dead.”

“So he let you go?”

Right. Lyla is the underling of the most conniving woman to ever rule a government organization. Of course she knows an incomplete story when she sees one. Felicity smiles blandly. “He said I intrigue him. Plus a few threats to make sure I stay in line. No big deal.”

She’s not fooling anyone at this point, but she shrugs it off and pulls open the door to signal the end of a conversation. The formerly married (soon to be remarried) couple falls into line and marches out the door.

“Are you sure you’re good, Felicity?” Digg asks as Lyla takes the lead, falling back to talk more privately.

She sighs, and takes stock of herself for a moment before answering. “I’m sore and a little beaten down, but I’ve had worse.”

“What did he say to you?”

“Usual bad guy threats? Don’t interfere or I’ll kill your loved ones.” She tries to put on a menacing voice, but going off John’s face it’s unsuccessful. She drops the act and stops walking so he has to face her head on. “My mother. He threatened my mother and everything else that matters to me if I interfere. But said he’s intrigued by my brain and doesn’t want to rid the world of my talent.”

Knowing Malcolm felt that way about her makes her feel dirty.

Digg scowls. “We can protect you, and your mother.”

“Don’t worry, John. We’ll figure it out. I probably shouldn’t go to the Lair anytime soon, but I can work remotely. I’ll show you how to set that up.” She purses her lips as she contemplates her mother. “And my mom...she’s my mom. She can handle herself most of the time.” Around cocktails and drunk, grope-y men...assassins might be another matter...

“Felicity-“

“Digg,” she places a hand on his arm before he can continue. “I’m in this with you. It’s my choice and I’m here. Okay?”

He sighs and nods. “Alright.”

“You could at least pretend to be a little happier about it,” she teases as she starts walking again. Were her boys always this worried about her? Stupid question. Of course they were. They saw her as a walking trouble-attractor.

Digg grumbles as he slides into the driver’s seat and Felicity pulls up the latest news feed on her tablet.

Time to get reacquainted with her new present.

...

“Blondie!”
Felicity blinks, looking up from her tablet in shock as Roy marches right up to her. She can tell from his gruff exterior he isn’t used to the closeness she’s used to in the future. She moves for him, pulling him into a close hug.

“I’m fine, Roy. No need to be worried, scarecrow.” She’s missed him. Even if this isn’t the Roy she knows – not yet – she’s still comforted by his familiar presence.

He snorts into her shoulder, not putting distance between them as he responds to the hug in kind. “A Wizard of Oz reference? Really?”

She smiles as she pulls away. “Yup. What are you doing out of bed?” She might not remember what happened to him to land him in the hospital in this twisted version of things, but she can see a couple casts, so he can’t be all better.

“They released me.” He announces playing with his red zipper. “About time too, I was getting sick of that hospital gown.”

“So why are you still here?”

“Digg told me to wait for news about Oliver. I couldn’t get into the private waiting room, so I figured that was the next best choice.” He lowers himself slowly into the worn hospital chair.

Felicity drops into the chair next to him, closing her eyes. She might as well at least get some semblance of sleep while they wait. “Works for me.”

“Felicity?”

She blinks her eyes open, frowning at the voice she vaguely recognizes. “Mrs. Queen?”

“Mr. Diggle, it appears you’ve found Miss Smoak,” Moira continues, voice notably cooler as her gaze settles on the bodyguard in question.

Felicity didn’t even realize Moira knew her name before they got Walter back and that whole awkward hospital room meeting. She glances at Diggle with a question in her eyes. What the hell is going on?

“Mr. Diggle claimed Oliver was hurt looking for you, something about you being kidnapped.” Moira looks her over suspiciously.

She shifts. “I was. Kidnapped, I mean. Terrible experience. Wouldn’t recommend it.”

“Did you get the police involved?”

“Digg found me,” she responds with a smile. “Also, it’s kind of hard when your kidnapper just lets you go.”

Moira frowns. “You know who kidnapped you? We can report them-“

“I don’t think that’s necessary. What would I say? Yeah, hi, Detective Lance, I was kidnapped by the CEO of an international conglomerate who is planning to level the Glades. He tortured me for a little while, then stitched me up, and let me go after threatening everyone I care about. That would go over really well. Especially when he can follow through with his threats.”

Moira pales. “What did you say?”

Felicity stills as she realizes what she just said out loud. “I said...um...it seems pointless to file charges
“Come with me.” Moira’s hand wraps around Felicity’s wrist to drag her away. It would work too, but the moment her hand closes on her wrist pain draws a surprised yelp of pain from her throat, drawing looks from everyone around.

Moira releases her hand immediately and Felicity cradles her wrist.

“Sorry,” Felicity smiles at the worried looks. “I’m fine. My wrist is just a little sensitive.” She waves off a hovering nurse, flashing the professional looking bandage to prove her point.

“What happened?” Moira asks, gently examining the wrap.

Malcolm stabbed her with a knife, but she can’t really say that aloud. “Nothing. I had a run in with a sharp object.”

“Felicity,” she leans forward, speaking softly so Roy and Digg will have more trouble hearing. “I think we need to talk.”

This whole world is too wacky. Moira Queen seems to actually like her. The whole universe is upside down. It’s like someone just told her that what she spent her whole life thinking was an orange was really a pineapple: It makes no sense.

“What do we have to talk about?” she asks quietly with an unsure smile.

Moira looks her over, seeing resolve in the young woman’s face. In response she takes a step back. “You should come wait with us. I’m sure Oliver will want to see you when he gets out of surgery.”

And the world is still lopsided. “No thanks. I’ll wait out here.” She purposely slouches, leaning sideways to rest her head on Roy’s shoulder as she tries to sleep or at least pretends to.

“You can come with us,” Moira announces, the picture of hospitality even if her eyes are like flint.

Felicity blinks in surprise and looks sideways at her boys. John shrugs, leaving the decision up to her. She sighs and pushes her glasses up her nose.

“I guess that’s better than waiting out here.”

“Are you sure you’re alright?” Moira asks, slipping her arm around Felicity’s back like they’re the best of friends, and seriously, this is freaking her out to the extreme. The Moira Queen she knew hated her guts, for revealing the truth about Thea to Oliver, for stealing her son. And she and Oliver hadn’t even been together at that point.

“I’m fine, Mrs. Queen.”

“What have I told you? Call me, Moira.”

This is definitely an alternate universe. There’s no way Moira would like her otherwise. “Right.”

“Please, Mom, she’ll start calling you Moira when hell freezes over,” Thea chides as they enter the private room, her eyes scanning the new company and carefully sizing up Roy. “Who’s the new guy?”

“Manners, Thea! This is Felicity, and her friend.”
“Roy Harper,” Felicity fills in, not particularly happy that Moira is still glued to her side. It’s like she wants to talk, and Felicity would really rather do anything else.

Roy nods in her direction and heads directly for the corner of the room furthest away. Felicity wants nothing more than to join him there or Diggle standing guard by the door, but Moira apparently has other ideas as she steers Felicity to a couple private chairs.

Given no other choice, Felicity lowers herself into the chair and shifts nervously under Moira’s gaze.

“I’m surprised he let you live,” Moira whispers, not making direct eye contact.

Felicity rests her hand on the knife injury. “You and me both.”

“So he doesn’t know you and Oliver are trying to foil his plan or is he the one behind this attack?”

She jumps and turns to stare in shock at Moira. “You know?”

Moira blinks. “Oliver told me last night, before he found out you were missing.”

“About all of it?” she asks, her voice rising in pitch. She mimes shooting an arrow.

Her eyebrows draw together.

Felicity’s head is starting it hurt even more from trying to figure this world out. So far her conversation with Malcolm has been the easiest to understand. Moira might as well be talking Chinese for all Felicity understands her.

“Is Malcolm behind Oliver’s mugging?”

Felicity blinks once at the cover story, but years of paltry excuses have her shaking her head. “No...no...”

Moira continues to watch her with hawk eyes. “That was my first thought, but then I realized if it was him, he would have killed my son, would have killed anyone who stood in his way that he couldn’t bring under his thumb.”

Felicity contemplates her next step. This Oliver Moira’s talking doesn’t seem like the Oliver she remembers. Oliver-from-this-time had been cold, calculating and full of terrible excuses. He was never open with the people around him, not like this. Hell, he still wasn’t open with the important things in her world. It was the reason she had ended things.

“Oliver...” Felicity searches for the words. “Let’s just say, he may think Oliver’s dead.” She tilts her head as she clarifies, “well, he just doesn’t know it was Oliver. He doesn’t really care who it was, but Oliver’s not in any more danger than he was before. And, once he’s better, he’s going to learn how to beat Malcolm.”

She’ll find Sara if she absolutely has to.

“Learn how to? Malcolm did this? Not his man?”

“His man?” Felicity asks. “No. He doesn’t have a ‘man’. Well, he probably does, but Malcolm does his own dirty work, unless it’s part of a larger masterplan where he blackmails someone into fighting his enemies. Then he pretends to be sorry about it, but really he’s just a dick. I’m glad he loses a hand.” She clamps her mouth shut an instant later, aware of her faux pas and just hoping Moira didn’t notice. She’s just stress babbling now.
For her part, Moira just continues to gaze at her curiously. “There’s something different about you, Miss Smoak.”

“Different? Me?” She grimaces at the sit-com feel of her words, and she slouches back into the chair with a defeated groan. “Can we just blame this on the stress of my kidnapping? What’s important is that Oliver’s not in any danger, at least not from Malcolm, not any more than he ever was.”

Thankfully Moira nods in acceptance, although her eyes tell a different story. There’s going to be questions later, but for now Felicity has a reprieve.

A doctor steps through the door an instant later. “Oliver’s out of surgery.”

...

“Can I have this dance?”

Oliver looks like sin in a suit. And the dopey sap looking down at her reminds her of every moment they were alone since they drove off into the sunset. Bali. And dancing barefoot on the beach in the moonlight. She can’t be sure which she prefers honestly.

He’s sweet and loving, the perfect gentleman. She can see the obvious love in his eyes as he stares down at her. The whole thing is romantic and moving, at least until Oliver drops that time bomb on her and she starts freaking out.

The kiss.

It’s unexpected, shocking her into breathing correctly. It’s also something only Oliver would do. She was freaking him out, so he did the only thing he could to calm her down.

The scene melts into meeting Moira, and the iciness she’s used to receiving from the woman dedicated to protecting her son. The scene shifts again, moving too quickly for Felicity to make much sense of anything.

Some pompous ass is talking about how great he is, about how the Glades don’t need to be saved...and Felicity witnesses a spectacular smack down. And then she ruins the moment talking about a cheeseburger.

The dream shifts, the bright colors of the gala shifting into the bright red of Big Belly Burger. Moira laughs, Oliver flirts, and Felicity manages a cute sort of awkward. Moira even prods her and Oliver together. Felicity pulls away, gun shy.

Moira just looks between them and smiles, a little too much like Thea’s “I have a plan” smile for Felicity to be truly comfortable.

“Hey,” a gentle hand shakes Felicity awake and she squints against the bright hospital lights. Moira smiles kindly down at her. “He wants to see you.”

She yawns and stretches, trying not to wince at the kinks in her muscles that seem to augment the dull pain she’s been in for the last day or so. Hospital chairs really aren’t that comfortable to sleep in, but she didn’t think she could sneak home for a couple of hours with the Queens watching her like they were.

Standing, she shuffles behind Moira to the door to Oliver’s private room – not in ICU, she’s happy to see. There have been enough ICU rooms in her past. She doesn’t need any more.
She pauses by the door, looking through the little window in the door at the man she loves with all her heart, the man she walked away from. He’s staring out the window, anxious lines written into his face. He looks years younger, which she guesses he is, technically.

Felicity turns to ask Moira a question, but the woman is already gone, back to the waiting room probably. Suspicion doesn’t begin to describe her complicated feelings for the latest version of Moira she’s been a witness to. It’s becoming clear now that her dreams are memories. The changes are more extensive than she thought at first. Nothing like that happened the first time. From what she can tell, in her timeline Oliver only would have visited her for shadier and shadier tasks.

The metal door handle warms under her touch as Felicity contemplates her options. She could walk away. He hasn’t seen her yet. He never has to know she stood here and decided to walk away.

But she has to know he’s okay, more than just seeing him through a door. She needs to hear him deny the pain even though they both know he’s badly hurt. She needs to see that resilience to remind her why she walked away and that going back doesn’t change anything, it makes it more defined.

Oliver’s head turns to her the moment the door squeaks open, relief immediately easing the stress lines on his face and the corners of his lips ticking up in an almost-smile. It’s an easy look, so natural on him. Felicity hasn’t seen it since she ended things between them.

“Hey,” she whispers as she shuffles to the seat pulled next to his bed, reaching out to grasp his hand. She thought she would feel the difference between his grip now and from her world. She doesn’t. On closer inspection she can see the difference in the little scars she’s become so accustomed to.

“Hey,” he whispers back, voice low. “You okay?”

Felicity drags her eyes back to his expressive eyes. “Shouldn’t I be asking you that? Malcolm said he killed you.”

He sighs, running his thumb over her knuckles. “He stabbed me, pushed me off a building, but it takes more than that to kill me.”

Felicity makes a pained sound and pushes away from him to start pacing the room. It’s too much. No. That’s too much like when she thought he was dead at the hands of Ra’s Al Ghul. “How?” she whispers, voice choked with restrained emotion as she refuses to meet her eyes.

“Grappling hook,” Oliver whispers, his eyes tracking her movement. “Digg must have found me. Just like he found you.”

She spins to face him. “Please tell me you didn’t do this for me.”

“He had you, Felicity,” Oliver says, his voice cracking as she remembers a time in the lair when he said the same thing, the exact words he echoes now: “He had you and he was going to hurt you. There was no choice to make.”

“Don’t ever say that!” Tears threaten to fall down her face as Felicity faces Oliver. It’s too much for him to say. It’s a declaration of love she can’t stand to hear, not here, not now. “Oliver, you almost died.”

“I had to try to find you, Felicity. I can’t lose you,” he argues, trying to sit up in the hospital bed.

Felicity walks over and pushes him back down gently, her hand moving to cup his cheek. “Oliver...all you did was nearly kill yourself. Malcolm let me go.”
He frowns. “What?”

“He thinks the Arrow is dead, and he wants to keep an eye on me. If I try to stop the Undertaking he’s going to kill everyone I care about.” Then she pauses. Does he know about the Undertaking? Or did she just reveal a whole other realm of stuff he doesn’t know? Fudge.

“Hey.” Oliver grabs her hand, his brows drawn together in confusion. “We’ve been over this. Of course I know. And I know we agreed to wait for the completion of the Markov device to act, but he had you, Felicity. I couldn’t stand by and do nothing.”

“So, you did something stupid,” she fills in. *When the hell did they talked about the earthquake machine and how did he know about it in the first place? What is going on?*

“I didn’t tell you what happened last time around,” Oliver whispers, his thumb drawing the soothing circles into her knuckles again.

Felicity opens her mouth to ask a question. She snaps it shut a second later as Oliver continues, lost in some memory:

“We never talked about *how* I came back.”

Now she does have a thousand questions because *WHAT THE HELL DOES THAT MEAN*?!?

“I didn’t just hop in a time machine, or anything like that.”

_Time Machine? Oh hell no.*

He takes a deep breath and sad, blue eyes bore into hers. “Thea...was in a bad spot.”

No. No nono nonononono. She can’t deal with this. She can’t deal with him claiming to come from the future too. Not now. Not on top of everything. Because if he says anything like what her brain has already jumped to, she may lose it. If he’s from her time...how the hell is she supposed to reconcile that with the memories she has?

Is he from the same time as her? Did he watch her die?

Thea being in a bad spot...that doesn’t clarify anything. For a twenty-something girl, Thea’s been in a lot of tough situations. So the question is, what made him come back. Did he have to die to do it?

“I offered my life for hers,” he whispers, caught in his memory. “I challenged a master assassin to a duel to the death to clear her name.”

Felicity now knows what he’s trying to explain and the tears won’t stop falling as she shakes her head like she can will it to stop without words. That moment, those weeks, she thought he was dead: she can’t relive those. And she doesn’t want to.

“Hey,” Oliver whispers, the familiarity astounding her, and all she wants to do is curl into his arms. Then she remembers where she is and *when* she is. She remembers just happened between them, the timelines colliding massively, and so she doesn’t seek comfort in his embrace, leaning into the hand that cups her cheek instead. “I’m not telling you this to upset you. I just want you to understand.” He takes a deep breath as her blurry eyes find his. “I died. I was stabbed through the chest and pushed off a cliff.”

She closes her eyes against the tears, forcing the saltiness from her eyes. “Oliver.”
“I died and somehow woke up in the hospital, Felicity. I got a second chance to fix things. I’m not going to let you pay for my mistakes.”

Felicity stands and kisses his forehead, lingering for a moment before she pulls back. She pushes her emotions back, forcing herself to think logically. All this new information, it explains the changes she doesn’t recognize in her timeline: Oliver’s been making changes. She needs some space to figure it out.

She meets his blue eyes, the innocence and emotion there causing her heart to skip a beat as she cups his cheeks in her hands. “We each make our own choices, Oliver. There were smarter things to do in this case, but it doesn’t matter. Right now, you need to get better, and then we’re going to stop Malcolm.”

“No. Felicity, he knows who you are now. It’s too dangerous-“

“I’m going to stop you right there, Mister.” Felicity narrows her eyes at him, still fighting tears for the remembered pain, for the pain he must be feeling. She needs him to rest, to understand it’s okay to heal right now. “My life, my choice, remember? We’ll figure it out.”

He relaxes at her assurances and Felicity settles back into the seat. Oliver drifts off to sleep, his hand clasped in hers as if letting go would sever his lifeline. Her thumb rubs soothing over his knuckles as his breathing evens out. She sits with him, taking solace in his company.

He’s her Oliver, her Oliver. He’s the man who wanted to be with her but hadn’t figured out how to make it work yet. He’s the man who would do anything to protect her, the one who misguided worked with Malcolm to spare the rest of the team, the man still so stubborn he refused to use his team.

Yet her memories are painting a different picture. The memories, the dreams, paint the picture of a man who stares at her like she hung the moon. He doesn’t look at her and fear what might happen. And maybe that’s just because he thinks he knows what’s going to happen, maybe he’s not ready yet, but it’s something.

This version of Oliver apparently told her about the future, told her what would happen. He’s not keeping secrets. But he’s changed so much too.

She doesn’t know the state of this brave new world, doesn’t know what else has changed. Action and reaction. There’s far more happening here, and she needs to figure it out. Oliver’s never been one for subtlety.

She just needs to find her place in this future and see what Oliver changed. Then she needs to figure out how the hell they got here...

If it doesn’t hurt her brain too much just trying to wrap her mind around it.

She’s going to need another nap.

Or five.

Chapter End Notes

Let me know what you think! Comment, kudos, message me on tumblr!
Just to give you a warning, my work schedule is going a bit crazy in the next couple weeks. My hours are going from 32 hours a week to almost 50. I'm a bit ahead of posting, so it may not effect posting, but I'll keep you informed of any delays on tumblr!

BIG NEWS: Wondering where in the future Felicity came from?? There's a side story coming soon that answers just that question! No title yet, but it'll answer some questions!

Thanks for reading! *hugs for all my amazing readers*
Thank you so much, guys, for the continued OUTSTANDING response. I am so grateful to have such amazing readers. The comments have blown me away and I hope you guys enjoy this chapter!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 30

“Felicity.”

She scrunches her nose and burrows into the warm blanket. It’s not time to wake up. She needs more sleep. Sleep is good. She likes sleep.

“Felicity, you need to wake up.”

“No,” she mutters into the blanket, snuggling closer. A deep chuckle fills her insides with heat, and Felicity swats at Oliver. “Sleep now.”

“Not that I don’t appreciate the cuddling, Felicity, but the doctor’s going to be here any minute.”

Doctor?

Felicity shoots upright, suddenly remembering exactly where she is. The hospital. With Oliver. Her Oliver. But she’s not his Felicity.

She slips from the bed, struggling to remember when exactly she joined him in it, but her memories of last night are fuzzy at best. She was trying to think through everything that happened and her head was pounding...

And she must have forgotten herself somewhere along the way.

Her legs shake under her weight and Felicity lowers herself into the chair by the side of the bed. She remembers more of this body’s memories now. She remembers getting shot three times by the Restons, and how Oliver brought her onto the team this time, how he revealed he was from the future. Apparently all she needed was a good night’s sleep. But they didn’t feel like her memories. They felt like something she watched on a screen, distanced from everything there. She knew the facts, the bare minimum, what was important. The rest was a mystery.

“How long...” Her voice is thick with sleep, and she clears her throat. She can’t look Oliver in the eye. “How long was I asleep?”

They haven’t been this intimate since the split. And this Oliver hasn’t lived through that. She just has to remember that.

“About twelve hours.”

“Twelve?” She shakes her head violently, ignoring the twinge of pain as she reaches for her purse. “I
have to get to work. I’m going to be so late. This is how I lose my job.” Her new job, the job she hasn’t really done before, the one overseeing the device that’s going to bring down half the city.

Oliver chuckles. “Your meetings have all been moved. Mom and Walter saw to that. You needed your rest.”

Felicity stills halfway through the door, looking back over her shoulder. She wants to tell him that her resting isn’t his concern anymore, that she can handle herself, that she needs space, but that would be exploding at a man who didn’t wrong her by lying about his son.

*This is a man who doesn’t know he has a son.*

That sobers her up quickly, but that’s a problem for another day.

“What’s wrong?” He asks quietly.

They were always too good at reading each other to be at odds.

“I’ve just got a lot to think about.”

“You know, you can always talk to me about it.”

He looks adorable, staring up at her with those big blue eyes that make her feel like she’s flying. He’s open and willing to share with her. He’s not pushing her away, and that alone is staggeringly different from the first two years they knew each other.

She wonders how much that some courtesy extends to her. Has this version of Oliver changed so much that he shares everything? Have his circumstances changed him that much?

Before she can summon up some kind of answer, the door bursts open and she spins around to face the new entrant.

“Oh thank God you’re both okay!” Tommy wraps her in a hug before she can do more than react and it hits her all at once.

Her connection with Tommy is filled with regrets, regrets that they drifted away when Oliver returned, regrets that she didn’t try to connect more when he was still alive. And here he is, in the flesh, smiling and joking like nothing’s happened. And to him it hasn’t.

Despite whatever memories she has from this time around, she can’t forget the devastation of hearing him die through the comms, the grief of standing over his grave. She’s been haunted by his smile, his laugh, his infectious charm for the past three years. Hell, she imagined what he would say at her wedding. Because of course he would have been there for all of it. He would have made the best speech, embarrassing the crap out of both of them.

Felicity pulls him in tighter, fingers digging into his back as she clings to him. A sob might escape her. She’s in no capacity to judge what might or might not be escaping her. Tommy’s like a brother and she, by some miracle, got him back.

“Whoa, Smoaky! It’s okay. I know we left things on rocky terms, but I’ll always be here with you.”

She presses her head into his shoulder to keep the tears at bay, taking a moment to get her emotions under control before she pulls away. “Yeah, well, I missed you.” Her voice breaks, but she manages to keep the smile on her face. His worried grey eyes almost break her, but she just turns away.
Which isn’t such a great idea as it puts her right in Oliver’s gaze. His brow is furrowed in concentration, his eyes probing. “Are you sure you’re okay?”

“Fine.” Her facial muscles contort into something resembling a smile. “I’m fine. Really.”

Oliver narrows his eyes. “Felicity, you were kidnapped. No one expects you to be okay.”

“Kidnapped? You were kidnapped?” Tommy moves around to stand in front of her again. “Why is this the first I’m hearing about it? Are you okay?”

She needs to get out of here. She can’t deal with worried looks from two of the most important men in her life. Not when they don’t even know the half of it. She doesn’t want to be there. She can’t be here right now, not without freaking out.

She’s going to have another panic attack.

“I just...” she waves them off, spinning for the door with confidence that Oliver can’t follow at the very least. “I need some space.”

She finds Thea waiting just outside the room. Digg is handing out fresh coffee from her favorite shop and Roy tags along with a bag full of yummy goodies. The decadent smell of caffeine calls to her, but Felicity pushes past all of them. There’s too many conflicted feelings to deal with right now. She can’t do it.

She can’t face them right now.

Oxygen gets stuck in her throat. It’s happening, another panic attack. Which is ridiculous. She’s never been prone to them. Logical thinking is her friend. She’s calm and collected. So why do the hospital walls feel like they’re closing in on her?

She makes it to the elevator.

The doors close as she makes eye contact with Roy and Diggle. She’s not sure her smile does anything to alleviate their worry, but she needs some distance to collect herself. Waking up like that, seeing a dead friend alive…it was just too much for her.

She never thought she would see Tommy again. It never even crossed her mind when she was talking to Malcolm that he would be alive, that she could hug him again.

She could save him.

Although that’s probably already on Oliver’s To Do list. Because let’s be real: Oliver’s a control freak. He’s already got plans, plans that clearly aren’t going the way he thought they’d be going if her kidnapping was any indication.

She’s arrived to a huge mess.

They’ve got to figure it out now. But how did Oliver from a year and half ago her time get back to his first year home?

How did she get here?

“Felicity?”

She jumps at her name, not realizing the elevator stopped let alone that the doors opened.
“I thought you’d be upstairs,” Moira Queen continues, stepping slowly into the elevator, “with Oliver.”

“Yeah, everyone’s up there,” Felicity says distractedly, stepping out of the elevator. She turns back to the other woman and offers her a weak smile. “I’m sure they’ll be happy to see you.”

Moira stares at her calmly, her gaze definitely not missing the flush of Felicity’s cheeks or the crazed look in her eyes. “Perhaps we should talk.”

She wants to protest, to burst out that this is not the way their relationship works. She and Moira barely tolerated each other. She’s fairly certain Moira hated her guts even before she told the woman she knew who Thea’s father was.

Part of the reason might have been she thought her son was sleeping with his pretty blonde secretary, which Felicity both understands and abhors. Just because her mom is a cocktail waitress doesn’t make her a golddigger. Honestly!

Despite the unfairness of the judgment, Felicity’s still at a loss as to whatever made Moira disregard that fact this time around. She doesn’t know how this relationship formed that allows Moira to leader her unceremoniously from the hospital to the park next door.

She sits on the first empty bench and looks up expectantly at Felicity. When she doesn’t move, Moira leans back and pats the spot next to her. “You look like you need someone to talk to, dear.”

Felicity’s laugh sounds hysterical. She’s aware of that, but it doesn’t stop the sound from escaping. Her situation is epically ridiculous: she’s stuck in another world while everything has shifted; she’s being blackmailed by Malcolm Merlyn; she doesn’t know who to talk to; she doesn’t know how to go about changing things, or even if she should. And the person who wants to listen is Moira Freaking Queen.

How is this her life?

Felicity drops onto bench beside Moira and lowers her head into her hands. She doesn’t even know where to start with this.

“How about from the beginning?”

Felicity barks out a laugh, realizing she spoke out loud. “You wouldn’t believe me if I told you.”

“Try me.”

She blinks at the challenge and turns to stare at Moira’s impassive face. Her blue eyes are still shrewd and always intimidating as Felicity contemplates her. “I was kidnapped.”

Moira nods, but doesn’t interrupt, which Felicity is glad for. She needs to get it out there.

“From the hospital,” Felicity jerks her head towards the building. “The person who did it had the leverage to make it look like I signed myself out. He had me taken to a basement, tortured me, blackmailed me, and then let me go. And in helping him, I could hurt thousands of people, but if I don’t he goes after everything important to me, starting with my mother.”

She glances at the woman beside her, panic rising as she realizes this woman is in the exact same position as her: she’s being blackmailed by Malcolm Merlyn. “But then I guess you know all about that.”
“I wasn’t aware you knew of my situation.”

Felicity freezes. “Oh, um...” Did she just reveal too much? Was she not supposed to know Malcolm was targeting Moira? Could she play it off as Malcolm told her? Or was that out of character? It was hard to tell with Malcolm, so it really could go either way. “What I meant was that...um...”

Yeah, she couldn’t think of even a halfway decent excuse.

“Oliver didn’t tell you?” Moira asks politely, very obviously answering her own question. Her smirk tells Felicity Moira was very aware she had no excuse.

There’s no surprise from Felicity. Oliver not telling her anything is hardly a novel idea. Oliver not talking to her is what broke them up. But this...if her knowledge is correct then Oliver must have spoken to her around the time Felicity was kidnapped.

In the silence, Felicity can practically hear the gears turning in Moira’s mind. It’s terrifying. She’s plotting something and Felicity really doesn’t know where they stand. Is she on Moira’s side or is Moira against her?

Felicity straightens, refusing to be cowed by Moira Queen. No matter how this talk ends.

“What did Malcolm ask you to do?” She asks quietly.

But Felicity’s not focusing on that: She’s back in the basement of the Foundry as the Markov Device wreaks havoc on an already tumultuous city. The room is shaking around her, the lights flickering with the disrupted electric lines. She’s stumbling through broken streets to the sounds of terrified screams. The death toll climbs with every passing hour.

*The whole city mourns.*

She can’t let that happen again. She can’t condone the continued building of the Markov device without a plan to stop it. So that’s where she needs to start.

Moira voices her next question aloud:

“So what do you plan to do?”

Well, if she knew the answer to that her life would be so much easier, wouldn’t it?

“Nothing,” she answers, falling against the back of the bench, staggered by the realization. There’s nothing she can do right now. There’s no way for her to protect her mother all the way in Vegas. She can’t disrupt construction of the Markov Device, not when Malcolm will be keeping a close eye on her.

She might be able to sabotage it...

“Whatever you’re thinking, it won’t work.”

Felicity glances sideways at Moira. “What?”

“You can’t do this alone. Aren’t you and Oliver trying to gather information? This places you in a good position to testify.” Moira states calmly, eyes drifting over the park in front of them. “You’ll have to be more vigilant, but unless your objectives have changed...”

Of course...Oliver’s still on his “no kill” spree. He’s going to do whatever he can to fix this without death. Felicity’s more than willing to make an exception where Malcolm is concerned, but this
Oliver…probably won’t be.

A sigh escapes her. It looks like they’re doing it his way.

...

“Is she okay?”

Tommy’s words jerk Oliver back to the hospital room. His eyes hadn’t left the door since Felicity high tailed it out of there. Something going on with her, something she’s not telling him. It doesn’t sit right with him.

And her reaction to Tommy…It’s almost as if...

He shakes his head. No. That’s not possible.

“It wasn’t just me, right? She was acting weird,” Tommy gestures over his shoulder at the doorway.

“It wasn’t just you,” Oliver mutters. There was something in her eyes. She was scared. He really needs to talk to her about the kidnapping, and what Malcolm talked to her about, why he let her go.

“Was she actually kidnapped?”

Oliver props up the bed, gritting his teeth against the pain in his abdomen. “I was trying to find her.”

Tommy frowns. “Like green leather you? And this happened?”

He nods, preoccupied with his racing thoughts. Malcolm wouldn’t have let her go easily. There’s something she didn’t say. Last night, he’d woken from a nightmare to Felicity curling up against him, soothing him with her closeness. Digg had come in later and told him a bit about how Lyla had tracked Malcolm and how Felicity had walked out on her own.

But what had Malcolm said to her?

What had freaked her out so much? And what had he asked of her?

Malcolm wouldn’t have let her go without demanding something.

“But you got her back,” Tommy reinforces, grabbing Oliver’s attention again.

“No,” Oliver says and then pauses, “well, yes, but that’s because the man who took her let her go.”

“The same man stabbed me through the chest and picked me off a building.” Oliver moves forward in the bed only to fall back with a grunt as pain spikes in his gut.

Tommy frowns. “But doesn’t that mean he knows Felicity works for the guy in green?”

“Which is why I need to find out why he let her go,” Oliver grits out. He’s confined to this damn bed and Felicity ran. Someone should be out there with her, keeping her safe. She was just kidnapped for God’s sake.

“Digg’s got eyes on her.”

Oliver’s eyes leap to Roy in the doorway. He’s finally out of the hospital gown and back in his
traditional red. He looks good for a man who woke up from a coma not long ago. Oliver nods to him.

“How’re you doing, Roy?”

He shrugs nonchalantly. “Well, I’m fairly certain the police still think I’m a lying gangbanger, but Felicity’s okay and who cares what they think anyway.”

“I thought you said she was annoying,” Oliver teases, knowing that despite Roy’s brute exterior, the blonde meant something to him. She has a way of doing that unexpectedly to the most stoic of people.

Roy glowers. “She’s okay.”

Tommy snorts, seeing through the charade. “Uh-huh, and who is this ray of sunshine?”

“Roy, Tommy. Tommy, Roy.”

They shake hands and exchange cordial greetings, or as cordial as Roy gets. Oliver’s not really paying attention, choosing to focus on Thea lurking in the doorway instead of the two men currently sizing each other up.

“Hey, Speedy.”

The stern look melts from her face, pools welling in her eyes as she suddenly surges forward and throws her arms around his neck. The various wires pull on his skin, but he wraps her in his embrace, pulling her as close as possible without causing too much pain.

“You really scared us, Ollie. Don’t you ever do that again,” she whispers into his neck, words thick with her relief.

“I’ll do my best,” he whispers back, closing his eyes against the emotions that threaten to overtake him now. Since the Island, he’s been callous with his own life. It’s not that it didn’t matter, just that others mattered more than himself. If he dies saving people, doesn’t that help balance out all the evil he’s done?

But coming back, returning to this time, Oliver sees everything in a different light. His actions are important. And Thea...Thea deserves some good things in her life. She deserves better than a brother who can so callously throw his life away like it’s nothing.

His whole team deserves more than that.

And Oliver can give them that. He can live up to their expectations.

“Where’s Mom?”

“She’s with Felicity.” Thea pulls back, she says, brushing tears from her face before she punches him in the arm. “And if you ever scare us like that again, I will kill you myself.”

“Got it,” he agrees, frowning. “Why is she with Felicity?”

Thea chuckles. “If I were you, I would be worried too. She actually seems to like this girlfriend.”

“She’s just a friend, Thea.” Oliver ignores Digg’s snort and Roy’s raised eyebrows. His sister just rolls her eyes.
“No one in this room actually believes that.”

Oliver sighs, the desire to argue the fact diminished by the machine dispersing more pain meds into his system. His eyes are starting to close, the lids heavy, but Oliver’s not ready to sleep yet. He needs to see Felicity again before he can rest. “Can I get off these drugs?”

He reaches for the needle in his arm, intent to pull it out. He doesn’t need drugs in his system. He wants the capacity to think clearly, he needs it.

“You can’t just pull it out,” Thea protests, clamping her hands over his. “Those drugs are for you.”

“And you can tell the doctor I don’t want them.”

She doesn’t give in and Oliver feels the drugs slowing him down, clouding his mind. “They shouldn’t be giving me the good stuff,” he states, working hard to keep the slur from his voice and only partially succeeding. “Drugs and addicts don’t mix well.”

Tommy snorts. “I might worry about that with Thea, but you were never an addict, Oliver.”

Oliver narrows his eyes at his best friend. While that might be strictly true – pre-Island Ollie was much more into alcohol and merely dabbled in the harder stuff – it was a convenient excuse to get lighter drugs. Then his foggy mind catches up with Tommy’s words.

“She grimaces, scrunching her nose. “I’m clean, but Tommy’s right: They probably wouldn’t give me the good stuff. You should just enjoy it for now. Sleep, big bro.”

He glares at her, but it loses some of its effect because his heavy eyelids are begging him to sleep. He won’t let it though, not until he sees Felicity again. Not until he knows she’s okay.

“Don’t worry, Ollie. We’ll make sure she’s here when you wake up.”

He frowns. Did he say that out loud?

Roy laughs. “Someone should totally be recording this!”

“Be nice, Roy.”

Oliver forces his eyes to the door. He knows that gently chiding voice. “Fel-iss-y.” That’s not right. Why doesn’t her name sound right? Oh, yeah...the drugs.

“I’m here, Oliver. You can sleep now.”

He nods at her words, letting his eyes drift shut as darkness engulfs him. It’ll be okay now. She’s safe.

“...”

“That was amazing!” Felicity blinks as Thea whirs around to stare at her with wide eyes. “Can you show me how you did that?”

Felicity shrugs. Her body is telling her to walk over to him, to run her fingers through his hair or over his stubbled cheek. She wants to offer him comfort, but her brain keeps her in check, reminding her
why it didn’t work out with them: he kept making decisions without her. They weren’t true partners and she has no right to act like they are when she knows it won’t work.

“But how? He was fighting it and then you walk in and BAM he just falls asleep!” Thea protests.

A sigh escapes her. She knows exactly what happened. It was the same thing that they talked about while they were away: he wouldn’t let himself sleep until she was there beside him. He liked to know she was okay, and she understands it. Its part of his PTSD, part of all the stuff they’ve been through over the years.

But those months they spent apart, helped ease him of the habit. It became something he did because he wanted to, not because of a compulsion or a series of terrifying imaginings of what could be happening. Her kidnapping must have terrified him even more.

“He just needed to know I was okay,” Felicity admits with a small smile, lowering herself into the chair across from the bed.

Thea frowns. “What?”

She meets the girl’s eyes. “You haven’t noticed?” She probably shouldn’t be saying anything, but if she can help him get some relief now, she will. “He has night terrors, dreams you should never try to wake him from. He probably prowls the house before he goes to sleep, checking on all of you before he can finally rest. Even then he wakes at the slightest sounds unless he’s stuck in a nightmare. Any time he’s with you one on one, he keeps his eyes on the exits and if there’s a loud noise, he moves himself between you and the disruption just in case it’s something dangerous.”

Thea is the only one in complete shock. Moira looks more resigned, but slightly surprised that Felicity knows that much.

“You can’t tell me you never noticed,” she insists, looking at the people gathered around. “He doesn’t like to talk about it, but it’s not like it’s hard to see.”

“I’m surprised you’ve noticed that much, Miss Smoak,” Moira says with a small smile.

She shrugs again. She just made sure he had someone to talk to in her future. If he can find that now...she can’t deny him that.

“So you and he?” Thea grins at her, wagging her eyebrows suggestively. “You’re seeing each other now.”

Felicity stares at her speculatively and turns back to the rest of them. “He’s just worried because of my kidnapping, which I guess means I’m staying here.” Her gaze shifts to Digg. “Think you can bring my laptop by? And maybe a change of clothes?” She adds as she glances down at her rumpled outfit.

Digg nods. “Lyla’s already on it.”

“Good,” she mutters. “I can at least get some work done today.”

“Yeah, the two of you are definitely seeing each other,” Thea announces. She jumps up. “Now, if you’ll excuse me I have to get back to school. Missing too many classes is ‘frowned upon’.” She uses finger quotes for emphasis, winking at Roy as she flounces from the room.

The boy just rolls his eyes, holding his hands up in surrender when Moira narrows her eyes at him. “Hey! Don’t look at me! I actually finished High School, thank you very much.”
Felicity tunes them out, focusing on the man in front of her. The new memories of the last six months playing through her mind paint a very different picture than what she remembers. This Oliver shares and talks. He smiles and laughs. He reminds her of the Oliver she spent the summer with, the man she lived in Ivytown with, the one who proposed.

But she knows him. She knows him better than she knows herself. The only reason he’s this forthcoming is because he’s not scared about what could happen. That’s why he keeps secrets: to control the situation and his fear.

She wants him to stay happy and light. She wants that for him.

Oh, she doesn’t know how she’s going to do that and stop the Undertaking, but she will. And right under Malcolm’s nose too.

If anyone’s up for the challenge, it’s her.

Chapter End Notes

Coming soon: Felicity's future - a tale about the events that transpired prior to Felicity's death in her future

Please comment, kudos, bookmark! Let me know what you thought about this chapter!
Chapter 31

“And there’s no way to sabotage it?”

Oliver frowns at his mother’s voice by his bedside. What is she talking about?

“I could probably install some fail-safes but any direct sabotage and Malcolm’s going to go after me, so while I get that he’s not going to kill you, I’m not so confident about my own survival.”

He turns his head towards the second voice, a smile flitting across his lips before he processes her words. It slips away just as quickly when he realizes she’s right: Felicity has no protection against Malcolm. She’s lucky he ever let her go in the first place.

“Malcolm is unpredictable. Who knows who he will or won’t kill,” Moira responds, weariness evident in her voice.

“You and Thea are safe, Mom,” Oliver grumbles, opening his eyes finally to see the two women sitting beside his bed, Felicity’s tablet in her lap.

“You’re awake,” she moves forward, displacing Felicity slightly to squeeze his hand. “How are you feeling?”


She leans back into the chair with a sigh, brushing her hair back from her face. “The Markov device. Apparently, the Applied Science division is running more efficiently under my command. It’s going to be ready ahead of schedule.”

Oliver frowns. “So he wants you working on it?”

“No.” She frowns, picking her words carefully. “He just wants me to continue to oversee it. I don’t know if he’s got other plans for me, but as soon as it’s finished...we’ll find out how much he really wants to kill me then.”

“He’s not going to kill you,” Oliver protests. He can’t let her go through life thinking Malcolm can get to her. That’s the one thing he won’t allow.

Felicity nails him with a look. “I know, Oliver. But it is a reality we have to face.”

“He’s not getting anywhere near you,” he growls.

She rolls her eyes. “You can’t be around me all the time.”

“Watch me.”

That earns him another glare, one that he’s quite familiar with. It tells him he’s not getting his way this time, at least not right now. But he’s not going to back down about personal security.

“Then Digg stays with you.”
She leans forward. “I don’t think so, buddy. You’re the one who got hurt in a mugging while looking for me.”

As if he didn’t remember their cover story. “Then we’ll find someone else,” Oliver answers smugly. He has the upper hand here. “You were kidnapped after all, it does make sense that you would have personal security. We could say it was someone trying to get to QC secrets. It would make sense for the company to hire a bodyguard to protect one of their greatest assets.”

Moira nods in agreement. “I can get someone. I’m sure Walter would agree. We can up security in the whole building.”

Felicity sighs in exasperation. “Really? I’ve been fine up until now.”

“You were just kidnapped,” Oliver stressed. “Digg can stay with you and I’ll take on someone new.”

He doesn’t like that idea. It means another bodyguard to ditch, but he’d rather have someone he trusts unconditionally with Felicity.

“If I agree, will you talk to someone?”

He blinks at the suggestion, startled. “What?”

“If I agree to John as my bodyguard temporarily, I want you to agree to talk to a therapist.”

“No.”

“Oliver…”

“I don’t need help.”

“Then I don’t need protection.”

He did not expect that because to him it’s extremely obvious. Felicity’s independent, but there’s no way she can defend herself against a threat of Malcolm’s caliber. Hell, she might not even last ten minutes in the Glades.

Besides, he’s never talked to a therapist before and he doesn’t want to. He’s not the kind of person to open up to anyone, especially a stranger. The things he’s been through…it’s not palatable to most people. But to make sure Felicity’s safe, he’ll do anything.

Just not this. What she’s asking, it doesn’t make sense. Being the Green Arrow is enough, it allows him to use what he’s learned in the last couple years for something good. It’s his personal brand of therapy, better than any shrink.

He opens his mouth to object when she cuts him off:

“And by talk, I mean talk. No just staring into space and brooding. You actually have to try to talk. I’m not asking you to share your deepest darkest feelings and thoughts, but I want you to try.”

Her gaze is steely, unwavering as she stares him down. “It’ll give you something to do as you heal up.”

“I’m fine, Felicity,” he protests.

She scowls at him. “You were stabbed in the chest. That makes it kind of hard to physically beat your feelings into submission.”
He shrugs as much as he can without inciting an onslaught of pain, which is a barely-there movement. “I’ll be fine. I’ve had worse.”

She snorts. “I think we both know that’s not true.”

Oliver blinks at her in surprise, but she ignores him and continues.

“I know you’re used to roughing your way through things with physical violence, Oliver, but there are other ways to deal with your emotions, to get your nightmares under control. We’re talking about your mental and emotional health. It’s just as important as your physical health.”

Oliver frowns, but she’s backing him into a corner with her reasoning and his mother nods along in agreement even as she watches the exchange with interest. His entire being resists the call to speak to someone, protesting to his very core that talking means showing his deepest fears and darkest moments with someone else. It means being vulnerable.

He doesn’t want to be vulnerable, ever. If there’s one thing his five years away taught him, it’s that being vulnerable gets you hurt, killed, or forced to watch the people closest to you die.

But to ensure Felicity accepts John as her personal bodyguard…

“You’ll keep Digg or another bodyguard with you?”

Felicity purses her lips as she watches him for a moment. It drags on for what feels like an eternity before she lets out an aggressive: “Fine. If, and only if, you go to therapy.”

Oliver grits his teeth, but nods in agreement. “Fine.”

“I’ll keep Digg with me during the day. I’m not going to make him stay at my apartment all night. Roy’s there with me. I’ll be fine.” She explains calmly, meeting his eyes the whole time.

Oh, he’s most definitely not happy with this at all. She likes her independence and he remembers her fighting for it when they were going after Slade, but she also accepted their protection. It feels like she slipped that little bit in there and he’s not happy about it. If he has to, he can keep watch over her in his green uniform all night. Roy’s definitely not fit to protect her right now.

“I know that look, buster, and don’t even think about it.” Felicity turns back to her tablet, unconcerned with the rest of this argument, apparently confident in her win. “I’m only agreeing to this for your peace of mind…and because I like Digg. That’s it.”

He sighs. Somehow she got the upperhand in these negotiations. He can’t afford to lose her, not now, not ever. He has to make that clear to her, but for now, he can live with Digg watching her. “Felicity, you’re in real danger. Two bodyguards, one to work nights, the other the day.”

“Oliver.”

“I’m serious. You do this and I’ll talk to a therapist. I just need to know you’re safe. Please.” He can tell it’s the please that finally breaks down her resistance. Felicity melts under his gaze and he knows they finally have an accord.

Oliver sighs, wondering how he’s going to keep his end of the bargain. He can talk to someone. Or at least see a therapist like she asked. He’s man enough to admit that he could probably use one.

For her: he’ll try.
It takes hours before Oliver agrees to let Felicity out of his sight.

Well, agree might be a strong word. More like she waits for the opportune moment to slip away when Tommy bursts into the room with a huge smile and a deck of cards. She would tell Oliver he’s being ridiculous, that he can’t protect her in his condition, but she knows its more about seeing she’s alright with his own eyes.

John’s on her heels when she enters the hall and takes a huge, gulping breath. Oliver wasn’t suffocating her exactly, but his eyes constantly on her when she was trying to reconcile her future Oliver with this version was not helping. His eyes were too distracting.

“How is he?”

Felicity jumps at the unexpected voice, twisting to the voice as the breath leaves her lungs.

Gorgeous Laurel looks as beautiful as always: her brown hair a pristine curtain of curls, her make up flawless, her pose regal even if she looks a little worried. She offers a hesitant smile. “I wasn’t sure he’d want to see me, but Tommy insisted I come…”

Felicity shakes her head, blinking back tears at the sight of a second friend blessedly alive. “No. I’m sure he’d like to see you. You’re Laurel Lance.” Her breath catches again as she remembers the eulogy, the beautiful eulogy Oliver gave declaring her bravery and selflessness to the world. “I don’t think there’s a time he’d turn you away.”

Laurel chuckles, looking away in embarrassment. “Except when I insult you.”

The new memory pops to the forefront of her mind and Felicity reaches out to grab Laurel’s arm. She waits until Laurel’s eyes rise to hers before speaking with a soft smile: “I’ve got a thick skin. And I think, if you give me a chance, we could be good friends.”

She chokes on the last few words, remembering a time when Laurel’s presence on the team was as ludicrous as her olive branch must be to Laurel right now. But there’s no way she can’t offer it after all they’ve been through.

Laurel’s looking at her like she just blurted out that she was from the future - that is to say she looked at her like she’s insane. Felicity laughs it off good-naturedly. “I mean, we both know just how crazy Tommy and Oliver can be. I haven’t really had to deal with the two of them together, and I would love my own partner in crime.”

It’s fairly obvious by her surprise that Laurel thought Felicity would hold a grudge for their previous interactions.

She wants to pull Laurel into a hug, but they’re not at that point in their friendship, not yet. And she’s not her mother who exchanges hugs as easily as handshakes. So Felicity settles for squeezing Laurel’s arm, the contact making her heart clench.

“When Tommy pulls something ridiculous, let me know and I’ll give you some dirt to use against him.”

Laurel allows herself a quiet chuckle as Felicity waves goodbye as she saunters down the hallway. It isn’t until she’s standing in the elevator, subtly wiping the single tear that had slipped down her cheek, that she remembers she’s now dragging John with her everywhere she goes. And he refuses to drive around in her mini cooper, so she’s stuck in the shiny black sedan he carts Oliver around in.
She reaches for the black door to the backseat, prepared to slip into the role of ‘protectee’, but when her hand wraps around the handle the memories hit her:

*She had been happy, so happy. The happiest she had ever been in her life. She was sitting beside the love of her life with a beautiful diamond band around her ring finger, the only ring she hoped would ever sit there.*

*The gem on her finger winked and sparkled in the light, captivating in it’s ethereal glimmer. The man beside her was equally entrancing as he smiled at her like she was his entire world. She would wake up to that face every morning for the rest of her life.*

*And she wouldn’t have it any other way.*

*Then it all crumbles to the ground as the limo jerks to a stop.*

*Bullets fly as a scream escapes her throat.*

*Oliver, her Oliver, protects her with his own body, just like he always does.*

*Then there’s pain, so much pain.*

Felicity holds back a sob as she jerks her hand back and reaches for the front door instead, slipping into the seat as she struggles to get her breathing under control and prays John didn’t notice the change. She thought it would be okay, but apparently it’s still too soon for her to be comfortable sitting in the back of the car.

She’d made Oliver drive them everywhere after that, but he probably did that for his own sanity as much as hers.

“For Oliver dragged you into this,” Felicity says, leaning towards Digg. “Although I guess this is better than standing outside a hospital door.”

John chuckles. “We’re both worried about you. Lyla and I’ll be switching off guard duty for the next couple weeks, until this dies down a bit and Oliver’s back in fighting shape.”

“Doesn’t she have a job?” Felicity asks lightly.

“Her home base is here for the time being. She’s more than willing to help out.”

Felicity frowns as another thought occurs to her. “Her or her boss?”

John blinks.

“Because, no offense, but I’m not particularly interested on landing on Amanda Waller’s radar. That doesn’t seem like a good place to end up.” She pauses in the reapplication of her lipstick when Digg reaches out and shuts off the radio. She glances sideways at him.

“How do you know Waller?”

Oh, right. That’s her mistake. She’s not supposed to know who that is. Not that she was ever a big fan of the woman, but she doesn’t need to be on her radar. Waller specializes in intelligence and covert operations. Felicity’s all about intelligence, specifically the electronic kind. But she would never agree to work for that woman.

“I’ve just...heard things...hacked into A.R.G.U.S. a couple times,” she mutters under her breath. Technically it didn’t happen for another three years, but she’s proud of that achievement since she’s
fairly certain Waller’s goons never picked up on it before she died.

“Felicity, you got something to tell me?” John asks, pulling over to park in front of QC.

She shrugs. “Not much to share. Let’s head up, I have to grab some stuff.”

Her heels pound out a nervous staccato as she rushes ahead of Digg to the elevator. They don’t need to have this talk, not now. Now she needs to focus on how to undermine Malcolm without alerting him to the movement. She just needs some resources here so she can reach out to a friend.

John respects her silence, allowing her to maintain her nervous twitching in silence.

Felicity makes a beeline for her office, nodding to a couple project managers along the way in their offices. A head of dark hair catches her eye in the last office and she recognizes the one and only Malcolm Merlyn meandering around the office of the last head of Unidac Industries, the man in charge of their projects, most notably the Markov device.

She glances behind her at Digg before detouring into the office.

“Mr. Merlyn,” she says brightly, “I didn’t expect to see you here.”

He turns to face her with a smile, cunning eyes cutting directly to John behind her before zeroing in on her. “Miss Smoak, you’re looking well. New bodyguard.”

“Mr. Diggle’s here because there were some concerns about my personal safety. I told my bosses I didn’t need him, but they’re worried.” She walks over to him calmly. “So what brings the CEO of Merlyn Global to our humble offices?”

He grins at her. “Just checking in on an old friend.”

“Good,” she mutters. Then she pastes on a smile, the one she perfected once she took over Palmer Tech, the one that presents her as fearless and confident even when she’s not. “Because I’d hate to think it was corporate sabotage since you slipped your personal guide.”

Malcolm glances at Digg as he steps closer. “Now, Miss Smoak, why would I need to do that when I have your help?”

She grits her teeth. He’s right. He doesn’t need another link to her department, but it needles her that he has it anyway. She remembers the fate of the Unidac team the last time she lived this: they all died. They knew too much.

*She* knows too much.

“Well, I wouldn’t want to keep you from your...friend.” She turns away before she can see Malcolm’s smirk. If she gets a look at that smug face, she won’t be able to resist lashing out, violently.

“It’s always a pleasure, Miss Smoak.”

Digg brow clenches in worry, but she shakes her head before brushing past him to her office and walking straight to her desk. She turns to her computer and notices Malcolm watching through the glass walls of her office. Slowly, she lowers herself into the chair and logs into her computers, surprised at how the passwords come to her. She was worried she’d have to hack her own computer.

“So we’re not just picking up things?” John observes casually as he takes the seat across from her.
“I’m not leaving that man alone on this floor.” Felicity starts typing on her computer, familiarizing herself with the files other-her has been working on for the past few months. She doesn’t recognize many of the names, but a few jump out. Mainly she just notices there’s no Curtis Holt. It would be nice to have someone to talk with about the more technical aspects, someone she knew she got along with. But apparently he either was hired by Ray, or wasn’t working here yet.

It’s a pity. He might have had some insights on the whole time travel thing. As well as being good company.

“Sorry, Digg, but this could take a while.”

He shrugs. “I’m just trying not to shoot him in the face.”

Felicity snorts. “If he gives you cause, I’m not about to stop you.” She goes back to the schematics, the memories coming in bursts that leave her temples pulsing.

She groans and drops her forehead to the cool glass of her desk, face twisting at the pain as sharp as a stab wound - and she would know considering the recent wound to her arm courtesy of Malcolm Merlyn. It’s not just the concussion – that was just a dull ache – no, this was more. It’s like her memories don’t want to mesh with the other-Felicity’s memories. Trying to get them to work together...it’s like pounding her head into a brick wall.

“You need some rest.”

Her head comes off the glass far enough for her to glare across the surface. But just the movement aggravates the headache and she moans. “Maybe you’re right.”

“Come on. Let’s go back to your place.”

“But Merlyn-” Her words die on the tip of her tongue as she looks through the glass and sees nothing. The room is dark, the lights almost blinding in intensity. She frowns. When did that happen? Had she really been absorbed for that long?

“He left two hours ago. But you were...” He gestures at the computer. “You could probably use some food too.”

“Mmmmm, food.” She stands, collecting files. “Pick up take-out on the way?”

Digg laughs. “Sure. What’re you in the mood for?”

She snorts. “Like there’s any question! Big Belly.”

“I think we can manage that.” Digg says with a grin. “But after that, you need to get some sleep.”

“Sleep,” she sighs wistfully, “in my bed. Have I ever told you you’re the real brains of this operation?”

He shakes his head as the elevator opens for them. “Yeah, yeah. You’re just trying to butter me up.”

Felicity laughs and leans into him as she pulls off her heels. It hurts the cuts on the bottom of her feet slightly less than the four inch heels. She holds them in one hand and falls back against the cool metal of the elevator wall. It feels like heaven against her aching body.

She really needs to figure out what’s going on with the whole time-jump-alternate-reality thing. Somehow it has to tie in to her current migraine and she’d feel better if she knew what the side-
effects were.

But at least she now has what she needs to make contact.

...“We need to start your training.”

Roy glances up in surprise at Oliver Queen staring him down from his hospital bed. His eyes dart around the room and he realizes for the first time that they’re alone. He’s losing his touch if he didn’t notice either of the Queen women leave.

He’d opted to stay at the hospital instead of Felicity’s empty apartment. Even if she kept insisting that it was going to be his home as much as hers, it still felt foreign. He felt like a freeloader, but it’s not like she needed any help around the apartment. Everything was neat and in its place. Nothing was leaking or broken, and he wasn’t about to lounge around all day watching TV.

So he’d decided to camp out in the hospital with Oliver and the Queens. Mrs. Queen kept shooting him calculating looks as he just sat off to the side fiddling with the Rubik’s cube he found in Felicity’s apartment.

Honestly, he was just having a hard time reconciling the gruff Arrow with his entitled, rich family.

“Yours and Felicity’s,” Oliver elaborates, his fingers rubbing together in agitation.

Roy snorts, tossing the cube onto the small table beside his chair. “And how are you supposed to train us when you’re in the hospital and Felicity’s staying away from the Arrow Cave?”

Oliver frowns. “What?”

“With Malcolm gunning for her, we agreed she’d distance herself from the cave.”

If the line between his eyebrows is any indication, Oliver didn’t get the memo. Roy seriously didn’t get it. Felicity and Oliver acted like a couple, an old, married couple. If anyone asked, he would swear up and down that they were an item. He’d been around them for less than a week and it was obvious.

Yet now they were very evidently not on the same page.

Felicity was pushing Oliver away, and he’s not sure Oliver’s realized it completely yet.

It’s been a weird couple days.

He hasn’t known Felicity long – since he woke up – but the woman he’s been interacting with...she doesn’t seem to need the protection Oliver insists on. Hell, he woke up to her exercising in her living room this morning and muttering about how she really needed to get back in shape, and had she always been this physically inept.

And yes, there was her less-than-stellar attempt to follow an exercise video, which amounted to four sit ups for every ten on the video, but then she had moved on to shadow boxing routines and other maneuvers that clearly displayed a martial arts background of some sort.

“And she’s fine. Especially if you have Digg following her around.”

“She needs to know how to defend herself.”
He’d argue that anyone who messes with her is going to have another thing coming, but Oliver doesn’t look like he wants to hear it. He just shrugs. “I think she’s already able to defend herself against most assailants.”

Oliver doesn’t look convinced, his scowl scary even if Roy knows he’s confined to that bed for the time being. There won’t be any intensive training in his near future. Roy’s aches are still persistent, but he’s getting jittery.

Maybe that’s why being in Felicity’s apartment is so hard. It’s nicer than his place has ever been and yet, listening to her talk about growing up in Vegas just shows that they’re not that she grew up not that differently than he did.

Except for the drugs.

Her mother never got dragged down into the dark world of drug addiction, never dragged her child with her, barely remembering to take care of him until finally she just stopped coming home altogether. Roy still checks in on her from time to time, but the crack den she’s squatting in now isn’t fit for humans. The only time she comes around on her own is when she’s looking for money.

That’s why, despite his questionable life choices, he’s never touched drugs. That’s not a door he wants to open. But it is why he had to resort to purse snatching, and other...less savory activities to keep himself alive. He just barely finished high school after his mother disappeared, and his criminal record prior to that had been due to fights from trying to get to his mother. But no one wanted to hire a criminal.

Oliver’s opportunity was something he was never going to get again, and he’s determined to make the best of it. And he’s just as determined to act like it doesn’t really matter that much to him in the long run.

“You can start weight training without me. Digg can show you,” Oliver says, interrupting Roy’s frenzied thoughts.

“And the job?” He may have gotten beat up shortly thereafter, but he remembers the job offer. He’s not a freeloader and he’s not accepting charity. He doesn’t have a hope of paying the hospital bills back anytime soon, but he sure as hell isn’t going to make Felicity pay all his living expenses.

Oliver nods. “Yeah, we can use you there too. I’ll let Tommy know to start you off slow—”

“No, I’ll start tonight.” He’s going to go crazy if he doesn’t do something.

Oliver grimaces as he twists to level a look at Roy. “Tomorrow, Roy.” He chuckles darkly, sending a slither of unease down Roy’s spine. “Enjoy your night off. After this it’ll only get harder.”

Then it looks like he’s going to be around for Felicity’s TV marathon. He’d rather do something more physical after lying in a coma, especially with everyone telling him to take it easy. He’s supposed to be helping people, to be helping the Green Arrow do good in Starling. Instead he’s been deprived of that chance and now has to wait for God knows how long.

He wants some action, to feel like he’s making a difference, something he thought Oliver would understand, but the man’s obviously preoccupied with other things, like a certain blonde judging by his frequent glances at the phone resting on his bedside table.

Realizing he’s as good as dismissed, Roy snags the cube back from the table and decides a walk back to Felicity’s apartment would help with the surge of energy. “Sounds good.” He walks from the room, feeling slightly awkward with the stilted goodbye.
He shoves his hands into the pockets of his red hoodie, ducking his head so the hood covers most of his face. He’s still got a couple fading bruises and he prefers slipping unnoticed through official buildings like hospitals.

The white walls and pastels of the nurse’s scrubs make Roy feel dirty by comparison so he keeps interaction to the minimum as he slips into the elevator to head to the bottom floor. There’s a nurse he recognizes from the clinic that looks him over before nodding to him and leaving at the second floor.

Fresh air greets him like an old friend as he exits through the sliding glass doors of the hospital and immediately turns left for Felicity’s apartment. He slows his steps though as he spots a familiar brunette lurking at the corner of the building, talking to a guy dressed in a black hoodie, a guy he recognizes from the streets.

Roy knows without a doubt that she’s buying drugs. It’s not a question. And the part of him that’s kept his head down for most of his life screams that he needs to walk away, to just keep moving past without acting. But the rest of him, the part that he’s just started to act on yells something entirely different.

How would he ever look Oliver in the eye if he didn’t help his little sister?

With a groan at his own stupidity, Roy sends a prayer heavenward and veers in the direction of the drug deal as the exchange is made. The dealer leans in close and Thea laughs at whatever he says, but then the boy notices him and pulls back.

Roy’s close enough to hear, “See you later, sweetheart,” before the lowlife takes off.

Thea turns to walk back to the hospital, almost running directly into Roy as he steps into her path. She stumbles a step backwards in her teetering heels to avoid direct contact, her hands tightening around her purse and the concealed drugs.

“Oh, hi.” Thea looks him over. “I thought you were with my brother.”

He levels her with a solid stare. She’s not high now, but she jonesing for a fix, her hand shaking slightly. “Yeah, well, I figured I should head back soon.”

“Well, I guess I’ll see you later, Red.”

He snags her arm when she tries to walk past him.

“Excuse you,” she snaps, spinning on him. “Get your hands off me!”

Roy holds his hands up in surrender, keenly aware of the people around them, all of whom would gladly jump to the rescue of Thea Queen. “Hey, I just wanted give a piece of friendly advice.”

She scowls, crossing her arms over her chest as she turns to face him. “Yeah?”

Well, she hasn’t run away screaming yet, so that’s got to be a good sign, right?

He leans closer. “There are better ways to solve your problems than the smack in your bag.”

Thea’s eyes widen in shock, but her stance doesn’t relax as she counters: “Yeah? And what would you know about my problems, Red?”

She scowls. “I know you’ve got a mother and a brother who love you, and that’s a whole hell of a lot more than I’ve got. Don’t take it for granted.”
Roy backs down. He doesn’t want this to escalate, not here, not outside a hospital in a city where Thea is practically royalty. She’s itching for a fight and he’s not going to let her have one right now. “When you’re ready to beat that problem, come find me.”

“That’s never gonna happen, Harper!” She shouts after him, but the irritation in her voice lets him know he made an impression.

It’s a place to start.

...

Felicity sends her message from her laptop while Digg’s making a pot of coffee and Roy’s getting dressed: Two small transfers to an offshore account she memorized a couple years ago. It takes all of five minutes. As far as Felicity can tell, it’s still the same account, which should mean she might have some back up soon.

Hopefully. She didn’t get this information for another year and a half in her timeline, when Sara left for a second time with Nyssa. She can only hope the assassin knows what it means and that she’s curious enough to investigate.

If not, it’s not like she’s out that much money.

“Oliver’s going to be in the hospital for at least another week or two,” Digg calls from the kitchen. “ Doesn’t sound too happy about it.”

“When is he ever?” she mutters, closing the laptop and sliding it onto the coffee table. Her headache from last night is gone, disappeared with a good night’s rest and an evening relaxing with friends.

Her phone beeps from the couch beside her and Felicity does a double-take when she sees who her new text message is from. It’s going to take a while to get used to the “friends with Moira Queen” thing. Or maybe just the “Moira has her phone number” thing.

**Oliver is asking for you.**

It’s kind of disturbing to think of Moira texting. It seems like she would have someone who does that for her, like Thea, or a personal assistant or something. Moira just seems too dignified for something so...mundane.

She picks up the phone and texts back: **No. He isn’t.** Oliver wouldn’t be that open about it, even if he is in love with her. He just gets stoic and surly. He broods.

Her phone beeps again.

**You’re right. But he needs you here.**

Felicity closes her eyes, praying for the strength to deal with this. She hasn’t stopped to think too hard about what all this time travel and reality jumping means. Because the Oliver here is the one who told her he loved her. He’s also the one who came back and betrayed them all in order to trust Malcolm Merlyn.

Despite that, in the here and now, this Oliver is open and caring. He *talks* about things, and it’s wonderful. He has his family. He’s happy. It’s different.

She wants to explore it.
But she can’t be everything that keeps him grounded. He needs to find that for himself. She knows him. He’s in control now because he knows what’s going to happen. It allows him to share and open up.

Or that’s how it started. What he shared at the hospital? When he told her when he came from? That was new territory. It made her question everything that happened with William, everything that happened in their future.

It made her think there was a chance for them here.

But there was also the whole time travel thing.

Oliver had come to the past and made changes. He’d made a choice that had obviously altered the whole course of their future. He’d traveled at a time when he was basically dead from a stab wound to the chest. She traveled after a fatal shot to the chest.

Only she didn’t go back in her own time stream, she traveled back to this version of events.

And she has to wonder at the timing.

Oliver traveled back to his first year back in Starling. It’s a life changing moment for him.

But time wasn’t preserved for her. She died almost a year and a half after he did when he time traveled, but she went back in time to almost six months after Oliver did. There was no time correlation, no integrity preserved.

Not to mention, she has no idea at all how she traveled through time. There were no speedsters whisking her away, no magic words spoken over her dying body, no gadgets strapped to her wrist. She couldn’t think of a single reason they had been transported.

And now her headache is back.

She needs to get in contact with someone more in touch with the magical realm. Felicity rubs her eyes as she groans. She knows exactly who she needs to help with this, except John Constantine has always been hard to track.

This is going to take a while.

...

John watches Felicity, deep in thought as they enter the QC lobby. She’s been like that since her apartment, giving simple answers with minimal rambling. He keeps having to steer her out of people’s paths in her distraction.

He waits until they’re in the elevator to ask, “You okay, Felicity?”

“Hmm?” She glances up at him in surprise. “What did you say?”

“Are you okay?”

Felicity shakes her head like she’s reorienting herself. “Yeah, fine. Just lost in thought.”

“You’ve been acting weird since you were kidnapped. Are you sure you should be back at work already?” John watches her carefully, seeing her stiffen at the mention of the kidnapping. “You could take another day off.”
“If I wasn’t here, I’d be at the Foundry, but since Merlyn knows I’m connected to the Arrow, that
doesn’t seem like the best place to go. He can’t get into my computers here anyway, but I might need
you to do a couple things on my computers in the Lair.”

Oh, she’s definitely not telling him something. She’s too composed and she has been for the last
couple days. Sure, there have been a couple rambles, but they’re not nearly as frequent. And she’s
more in control, more aware of her surroundings. And that’s not due to their minimal training.

“But only the things I talk you through, got it? There will be no surfing the web, or posting on social
media, and absolutely NO solitaire!” She glares at him accusingly, like he would dare touch her
computers without express permission. “And you better not have messed anything up when I was
kidnapped.”

“Actually, I had Lyla look for you. I didn’t go near your computers.”

“And Oliver was probably too hotheaded to do anything other than attack Malcolm,” she grumbles
as they walk over to her office. “Either that or he destroyed them and you’re just covering his butt.”

He waits for the expected babble about how it’s a nice butt – not to say he’s noticed personally, but it
seems like something Felicity would mention. Surprisingly, he’s met with silence. She glances
sideways at him.

“What?”

Diggle shakes his head. “Nothing.”

She nods. “Okay.. I guess you’re in for a boring day of staring at me type. Hope it’s not too dull for
you.”

“Oh, I think it’s going to be interesting,” he says with a smile, but there’s still a nagging feeling that
won’t leave, like a fly buzzing around his head. Something’s not quite right with her. It was in the
way she carried herself, as though she was used to dealing with some amount of pain and discomfort
in her daily life, as if she was used to dealing with corporate tycoons with the power to crush her in
an instant.

He’s making it his business to find out, before Moira at least because she definitely knew something
was up.

So John idly observed her all day as he considered the possibilities.

Maybe she hit her head in the kidnapping and was suffering from some selective amnesia: There
were several moments when she had trouble remembering people and projects, or when she seemed
to do a double take as someone spoke to her.

Or maybe she was suffering some side-effect of her encounter with Malcolm: She acted skittish
around several people as if she didn’t know how they would react to her.

Maybe Malcolm replaced her with a clone.

John laughed at himself for that one as he waited by the door of a lab working on hologram
technology. It was ridiculous because Felicity obvious knew things only Felicity would know. In
fact, she almost knew more than she had any right to know. He hasn’t forgotten that comment about
A.R.G.U.S.

The only other – slightly less ridiculous – idea that passes through his mind is that she’s from the
future, like Oliver. But then why wouldn’t she have revealed it before?

Besides, that was a fluke. It couldn’t happen again.

So John just continues to watch her throughout the day, trying to find a reason for the little things about her to be off.

“Just ask, Digg,” Felicity finally said, glancing up from her computer around six pm. They’re one of the last people left in the building and both Moira and Oliver have been calling him for the last several hours.

And he knows Felicity turned off her phone around noon after sending a couple texts.

“I know there’s been something on your mind all day, so what is it?” She watches him expectantly and he sighs.

“I wish you would talk to me. You’ve been acting off all day. If it’s about Malcolm, I can help.”

She deflates into the desk, losing her careful posture. “It’s not just Malcolm.”

He waits while she collects her thoughts. The wheels are spinning in her brain and he can practically hear them from across the room. But he lets her think if over, content to just exist in the silence.

“Have you ever wondered if you should share something with someone? Like if it was a good idea or if it would bring everything crashing down?”

“Felicity, if Malcolm is threatening you, we need to know about it,” he says gently. “It doesn’t matter what it is.”

“That’s not it. Malcolm’s threats are Malcolm’s threats. He’s not going to kill me until the Markov device is complete as long as I stay out of his way.” She waves it off before she sighs into her hands. “I’m worried about Oliver.”

Now he’s confused. “Oliver?”

“His recovery,” she clarifies as she meets his eyes again, having come to a decision. “I’m worried that my kidnapping will set him back.”

“So that’s why you’re distancing yourself today,” he concludes.

She nods in agreement, worrying her earring. “I just...I don’t want him to need me to find peace. I want him to be able to find it for himself. But I hate lying to him, you know?”

He frowns and slides into the chair across from her. “Felicity, I’ve seen men come back from war with less issues than that man has. Oliver’s been through a lot, and something about this mission, about fighting crime with us, relaxes him. You’re getting him to talk to someone. That was a good start, but Oliver has to choose to talk. It’s going to take him a while to get back to normal, even if he does have another two and a half years under his belt.”

“And my kidnapping didn’t help,” she mumbles under her breath, eyes lifting toward the ceiling.

He can’t resist the urge to shrug. “Maybe. He cares about you, and the kidnapping scared him senseless. It’s made him a bit more cautious.”

“But he wasn’t cautious when he went after Malcolm.” Tears brim in her eyes. She’s given this a lot more thought than he originally thought. “He knew it was probably a suicide mission and he rushed
in any way! How am I supposed to be okay with that?!”

That’s what’s been on her mind, he realizes with a sinking feeling in his gut. That’s why she’s been so preoccupied. “He’s not suicidal, Felicity, but he will do whatever it takes to rescue you.”

“At the cost of his own life? I can’t accept that, John.” She pushes away from the desk and starts pacing. “I can’t. We need to make sure he doesn’t do this again.”

He nods agreement. “Then you need to talk to him.” He pulls out his buzzing phone to show her the picture on the caller ID. “Soon.”

Felicity pulls off her glasses, pinching her nose in frustration as she takes a deep shaking breath. “Okay.” She straightens with a deep breath. “Good. We can go there now.”

John doesn’t say anything as he watches her gather her stuff, brushing away the remaining tears when she thinks he won’t see. And it makes since that that’s why she’s been off, why she’s been distant since the kidnapping.

So why does he have a nagging feeling that there’s something more going on here?

...

She feels sick to her stomach with the lies she told Digg. Sure, she’s worried about Oliver’s suicidal tendencies, especially considering his mindset during the whole thing with the League. He almost crashed a plane and killed himself. It terrified her, in the same way that him facing Malcolm when he’s not properly trained terrifies her.

But he’s not going to back down: they all know that.

So she’s called in the big guns. She just has to bide her time for them to show up...

She glances around the car at the dark buildings and wonders if help is already here, lurking in the shadows. And God, how is she going to explain this to Oliver?

Felicity takes a shaky shallow breath, fighting tears. Her grip tightens around her phone in her hand. She just doesn’t know how to come clean with this. There’s so much she knows, but she can’t get Oliver to grow on his own. He needs to come into realizations in his own time.

If she tells him everything, who knows how he’ll react?

And if she doesn’t?

It could be worse.

But how ready is he for the truths she’s holding close to the chest? And if she tells him, how much more damage could that cause to the timeline?

She needs to figure out what she wants to do. Quickly.

Chapter End Notes
A day late, but over 7000 words of goodness, which I think makes up for it. Comment and let me know what you think!

Thank you for reading! <3

Also there will NOT be a new chapter next week! Instead I'll be posting a fic about Felicity's future before she's transported back in time, tentatively titled Mountains to Climb
Chapter 32

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the slight delay in today's chapter! I got summoned for jury duty yesterday and then forgot that I had to post it until later. Oops! But I hope you enjoy this chapter! There's some exciting stuff happening!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 32

Two weeks. Two weeks and she still hasn’t decided what to do with Oliver, what she should tell him.

She’s stalling, distracting herself with all the new projects on her desk. And she’s not fooling anyone, especially Digg who’s tagging along with her all the time now. It reminds her too much of her future and the weeks leading up to her death there. At least she assumes it was her death...or maybe it was a fatal injury.

Either way, Digg following her around reminds her too much of that. She much prefers Rob’s stoic silence to John’s brooding. At least then she doesn’t feel guilty about the hundred and one things she’s not telling him. She could tell him all about the ups and downs and amazing friendships he hasn’t made yet. She could tell him about his life.

But if he doesn’t get that here...

The future she’s from might never happen, so should she bother telling him what might never be?

So basically she couldn’t be around any of her team without thinking about telling them and worrying over the consequences of doing just that. Only Roy kept her enough at ease not to freak her out, and he probably has the most tumultuous future of all of them.

And therein lies another problem: the fallout of Oliver’s actions.

He’s been making changes that result in worse fallout than what happened originally: Roy’s beat-down, her getting shot, her kidnapping. Everything has changed, and she’s nervous about where that puts her.

Malcolm knows she works for the Green Arrow, and it’s not the friendly let-me-show-up-and-intimidate-you-but-I-won’t-really-kill-you Malcolm. No, this is the Malcolm who’s convinced that destroying the Glades is the only way to bring peace to his city, the Malcolm still searching for revenge for his wife’s death. He doesn’t have his hooks into Thea yet. He doesn’t have a use for their team, which makes him infinitely more dangerous to all of them, especially her.

There’s a chance she won’t make it out of this alive, a chance she’ll die because Malcolm knows she’ll be able to stop it. There’s a chance this Oliver can’t beat Malcolm. Which is why she tried to contact Sara, but it’s already been two weeks and she’s heard nothing.

She can’t get closer again only to have him come apart when she dies.
And oh, it's *this Oliver* that is making it hard. He’s talking to her, and she can tell he’s trying with the therapist. He’s trying to figure out how to move forward with his plans, and she doesn’t want to reveal anything, so she stays quiet unless the plan will very obviously go sideways.

Oliver’s getting restless, but he’s still in recovery so at least he can’t jump into the streets and get himself killed. She can’t go into the lair because of Malcolm, and she uses the same logic to convince him to stay away. But it doesn’t work.

Of course it doesn’t work. They were always on a collision force and this Oliver knows what he wants this time around. It’s like resisting gravity.

The only thing that allows her to hold on is the fact that she *needs* Sara, she needs Sara to teach Oliver, to teach him how to beat a member of the League of Assassins. And even *she* might not be enough. It took almost four years for him to win against Malcolm. That might not be the kind of thing he can win, especially if his defeat at the hands of Ra’s Al Ghul is still looming over his head.

Not to mention the fact that she hasn’t gotten a single hint that Sara got her message, nor have there been any sightings of a woman in black in the city. So if that doesn’t pan out, she needs to come up with another plan and her knowledge of sword-wielding assassins who would train Oliver is severely limited.

And no, Slade Wilson does not count. She’s already got practically a whole server in the Foundry keeping tabs on that man. Turns out, he wasn’t all bad. He was actually home in Australia for several years before Oliver showed back up in Starling. He was a trained special agent again...until he went nutzo and killed every agent who tried to kill him and his wife and son.

So, yeah, no chance convincing him to let the blood-feud go, but she figured that might be the case. So there was no nipping that problem in the bud. She has a little while to figure that out though.

No, what’s the bigger issue is the Markov device, which she’s supposed to be helping with.

Malcolm’s definitely got someone on the inside working on that project. Other-her wasn’t exactly being helpful with the destructive device. She was just keeping tabs on it, making sure the whole department ran smoothly. Apparently, that was enough to speed up the testing elements.

It was also the reasons for the late nights pouring over the schematics for any possible way to stop it. She knew the long way and she knew where one of the machines was going to be, but beyond a large section of the Glades, she had no idea where the second machine would be.

She could probably interrupt the transport of the machines, but that’s a huge question mark and they aren’t done yet so it’s a moot point. If they were asking her help with design, she could finalize a fail safe, but if the project manager really was the man in Malcolm’s pocket, he was definitely treating all her suggestions with the utmost suspicion and so far none of them had appeared in the plans.

Actually, she’s surprised she’s still getting the plans. It means Malcolm’s probably going to kill her because who cares if she knows when she’s just going to be dead?

“Miss Smoak?”

She jumps slightly at the quiet voice, eyes darting up to meet Lyla’s stoic mask. She’s filling in for Digg tonight since Oliver needed his help at the Foundry. Felicity’s happy to finally have a woman around, especially one who doesn’t ask questions and shoot her weird looks when she does something outside of her regular behavior.

“Felicity,” she corrects, glancing at the clock. It’s approaching 7:30, but still not terribly late yet.
“Mrs. Queen and Mr. Merlyn are here to see you.” Lyla remains stoic as Malcolm and Moira brush past her into the room with the regal authority they both carry so easily.

“Thank you, Lyla,” Felicity says, standing to face them. Lyla balances in the doorway, clearly unwilling to leave the room, but aware that it’s what’s expected of her. Felicity nods briefly in her direction and lowers herself back into her seat. “To what do I owe the pleasure?”

Dealing with Malcolm is a lot like dealing with an overbearing Board of Directors who think she can’t do her job, except that he will kill her. It should be more terrifying, but the similarity actually calms her nerves significantly. If she can deal with the board from her wheelchair, she can deal with Malcolm and Moira.

“I was wondering, Miss Smoak, what’s taking so long?” Malcolm purrs, playing with a pen he lifts from her desk. “The Markov device? Why isn’t it finished?”

Felicity snorts. “Because it doesn’t work.”

He pauses. “You’ve tested it?”

She pulls up the lab footage on her computer and turns the screen toward Malcolm. “This is the lab. That computer is plugged into the mechanics and goes through the programing. Right now, there’s a major difference between the theory of what’s supposed to happen and the actual end result. Not to mention the scale. All this is good for right now is mixing paint.”

Malcolm frowns at the screen, pen gripped tightly in his hand. “How long?”

Felicity shrugs. “How should I know? I just get reports on their experiments and updated data, which says they hope to have a working model in...six weeks.”

“You were supposed to expedite this project,” Malcolm growls. “You’re making me reconsider sparing your life.”

Felicity raises her eyebrows at him, even as her heart races in her chest. “This project doesn’t need a computer specialist, and your lackey isn’t interested in my input. There’s only so much I can do on my end and I’m doing it.”

“Malcolm,” Moira warns, shooting Felicity a warning glare at well. “Six weeks is still ahead of plan. There’s nothing to worry about.”

“I just think perhaps Miss Smoak needs a little more incentive,” Malcolm whispers stepping forward. Rather than push back, Felicity stands, bringing herself closer. Malcolm’s really not any scarier than Damien Darhk. He’s tried to kill her before and at least right now, Lyla’s watching carefully through the glass wall with her hand firmly on her gun.

“Like what? You’ve already threatened everything I care about, and frankly the posturing gets a little old.”

Malcolm’s dark eyes flash with anger, but he takes a step back and lowers the pen to her desk. “And you should learn not to anger the man holding your life in his hands.”

Felicity rolls her eyes. “Yeah, I’m not one to quietly walk to the execution block, but thanks for the advice.”

He has the gall to laugh at her words, even relaxing so far as to sit across from her with a pleased
smile. “I knew I liked you, Miss Smoak.”

Moira blinks, the closes Felicity’s ever seen her to complete shock at the turn of events.

“You know who taught me and yet you continue with these brazen words. It’s surprising.”

Felicity sits back down and scowls as she remembers her couple visits to Nanda Parbat and the conversations she had with the Demon Head. “Your master appreciates someone with a bit of fire in them,” she mutters, “so long as he gets what he wants in the end.”

He tilts his head at her. “And what did the Demon want from you?”

“My heart,” she answers, immediately looking away when she realizes what she said.

Moira’s steely demeanor vanishes at the confession and her eyes dart between Malcolm and Felicity in stunned silence.

“And did he get it?” Malcolm wonders aloud.

“For a time,” Felicity admits, remembering the dark days when an apparently-brainwashed Oliver kidnapped Lyla. “I thought I had lost him, but he found his way back to me.”

“The Demon doesn’t give up what’s his.”

Felicity meets his eyes as she contemplates what to say. She can’t tell Oliver about the future, as hypocritical as that may be, but she wants to throw everything back in this man’s face. She wants to tell him how Ra’s fell, but she can’t. “There are those that he releases,” she says instead.

“There have only been a handful, and I know all their names.”

She doesn’t doubt it. She just shrugs. “I can’t speed up your time table. These things take time and I’m not particularly incentivized to assist genocide.”

“Then look at it as ensuring your own well-being. Since I don’t see any assassins looking out for you, I don’t think you’re as well-connected as you say.” Malcolm stands, fixing his suit.

Felicity doesn’t say anything. She doesn’t want to give herself away, even if the damage is already done.

“And if your champion was the Green Arrow...he’s incapacitated.”

“The Green Arrow never trained under Ra’s Al Ghul. You fought him. You know this.” Yes, she’s rising to the bait and if Lyla’s already called Oliver and Digg, she’s going to be in trouble, but she can’t just stay silent right now. She was never good at that. “If he had, I’m willing to bet the fight would have been worse. You didn’t get a single scratch.”

Malcolm chuckles. “And yet I think we both know he somehow survived. He never hit the pavement. He’s clever.”

Felicity shrugs. “It’s possible. He’s not that easy to kill.” She can see Moira starting to connect the dots, to understand the picture presented to her at least a little bit. She suspects something. They’re walking a tightrope here and she just prays Malcolm doesn’t figure it out first.

Although Malcolm was always a fan of Oliver’s...otherwise they would have killed each other a long time ago in her timeline.
“So you haven’t seen our green friend in the last couple weeks?”

Felicity leans forward, “I haven’t reached out. And I don’t know who he is behind the mask.”

“Somehow I doubt someone of your caliber never figured out his identity.”

“Plausible deniability,” she answers with a tight smile, leaning back.

Malcolm’s smirk deepens and his eyes darken in concealed anger. He rises, straightening his suit. “You’re walking a thin line, Miss Smoak.” He flattens his blue tie. Menace oozes from him.

Felicity can’t pinpoint exactly what it is that Malcolm does differently, but his threats now permeate the air. It’s more than playful banter. He’s not toying with her anymore. He’s completely serious when he says:

“I hope your mother’s doing well at the Bellagio. She got some hefty tips last night from what I understand.” He turns and heads towards the door. “Get my machine done, Miss Smoak. Quickly. For your mother’s sake.”

She could have been petrified for all she was able to move. Felicity can’t even breathe properly until she hears the ding of the elevator. Then her whole body deflates into the chair, the air leaving her lungs on a shaking breath.

...

Roy glares across the foundry from his little corner of the dank basement, securely away from any electronics with his bowl and a pitcher of water. His entire front is splattered with water and there’s a puddle around him on the concrete floor. The muscles in his arms ache with the repeated slapping of the water in front of him and he knows mopping up the mess isn’t going to help that soreness.

He’d thought that with Oliver finally down in the Foundry again, he’d finally be cleared to move on from the childish exercise. Because that’s how it felt to slap water repeatedly: like a pouting child. It didn’t help that when he told Felicity about it, she shook her head and laughed at him.

When John had escorted Oliver down the stairs tonight, Roy had abandoned his water bowl and walked over to join them, but despite his best hints, Roy found himself ushered back to the bowl of water with some sensei-sounding comment about learning control.

“You shouldn’t be here, man.” Digg’s low voice echoes around the room, carrying farther than he probably intended. “You’re still hurt.”

“Yeah, well, I was told to get back to regular activities.”

“I don’t think your doctor meant jumping off buildings.”

“It was my therapist, actually.”

Roy blinks at that open declaration. That wasn’t something the people he grew up with would advertise. Not that anyone he knew could afford it. Anyone who talked to the school counselor was ridiculed. It just wasn’t something you did. You couldn’t be scary when you had to talk to someone about your problems.

Oliver obviously didn’t get the memo.

Or maybe when you run around in green leather with a bow and arrow, those same rules don’t
count.

Although, Roy’s not stupid: Felicity’s the only reason Oliver’s in therapy right now.

That and his injury.

Based on his personal experience – and the repetitive slapping of water Roy’s currently undergoing – Oliver’s more likely to fight his way through his problems. While it will probably help the guy in the long term, it doesn’t take a genius to see that Oliver’s going a little stir-crazy otherwise.

“Still pretty sure your therapist wouldn’t want your jumping off buildings either.”

“And what do you expect to do down here if you’re not fighting crime?”

Roy rolls his eyes and splashes the water again, more violently this time, as if he could draw their attention and maybe remind them that he’s waiting to be trained. Sure, Oliver’s injured, but he can still teach, right? Roy’s more than ready to move on with his training after nearly two weeks of slapping water.

Sure, Digg’s been going over forms with him and working to hone the rest of his body, but Roy’s looking forward to getting his hands on a bow. He already knows how easy it can be to point a gun, and for once, he’s ready to hone the skills it would take to fire a bow.

But slapping this bowl of water repeatedly doesn’t seem to be getting him anything except soaking wet.

“Roy!”

He jumps a little, head jerking back to the conversation he was trying to eavesdrop on moments ago. “Yeah?”

Digg and Oliver stare at him expectantly, but he just scowls back. Did he miss something while he was caught up in his own thoughts? Probably.

“What?”

“How’s Felicity?”

It’s probably not the best idea to laugh at your hard-ass teacher, yet Roy can’t help but chuckle at the combination of softness and desperation in his mentor’s voice. It’s the same way Felicity sounds when she tentatively asks each night.

“Why don’t you ask her yourself?” Why they can’t just talk to each other, he doesn’t understand.

“Malcolm’s going after-“

“I’m not talking about her coming down here or interacting with the Green Arrow,” Roy clarifies, cleaning up the mess he’s made while slapping water tonight. He really should have just worn a bathing suit. It would make so much more sense.

“We just don’t want to-“

“You’re friends, right? Oliver Queen and Felicity Smoak? So the two of you can meet up for coffee or something and stop bothering me.” Roy throws the wet towel over one of the punching dummies to dry and turn back to the scowling vigilante.
A moment later, he realizes Oliver’s sulking as he mutters. “She’s avoiding me.”

“Yeah, well, she keeps asking about you too, so you’re obviously both in denial. Just...go to her office or something. Bring a peace offering.” They’re idiots as far as Roy’s concerned.

He glances at Digg who looks equally amused.

“I don’t know. If she wants to keep her distance...”

Roy’s phone buzzes and he glances over at where it rests safely on the dry table, well away from the bowl of water. “Well, it looks like you might be seeing her sooner than you think.”

“She’s texting you?” Oliver just barely manages not to look like an overeager puppy dog by narrowing his eyes.

“No,” Roy defends, slipping the phone into the back – dry – pocket of his pants evasively. He’s not sure where he stands with Oliver, but sharing texts with his little sister probably isn’t the best way to solidify their relationship. “But we’ve been invited to the mansion for dinner, so - assuming she says yes - you’ll see her in a couple days and the two of you can avoid talking to each other in person.”

Digg chuckles across the room despite Oliver’s grumpy frown.

Roy walks past him to dump the pitcher of unused water and only refrains from a fist bump because of Oliver’s disapproving eyes. Yeah, there’s no reason to invite Oliver’s wrath when he still doesn’t know how involved Roy is in helping his little sister get clean. No matter how pure his intentions, Roy doesn’t take Oliver as the kind of man not to threaten the men in his sister’s life.

“So...she’s doing well?” Oliver’s shoulders are hunched, his arms crossed as he sheepishly inquires.

Pity at Oliver’s awkward middle-school attempt to get information of his crush prompts Roy to finally divulge the same information he’s given whenever he runs into Oliver. “She’s doing alright. She’s a little stressed, but she manages. She’s been updating the systems from her apartment.”

He shrugs. They don’t have long talks about their feelings. It’s mostly movie marathons and conversations about nerd culture whenever Felicity decides Roy’s knowledge is lacking. They don’t talk about their pasts. He only knows about her mother because he accidentally answered the phone and went deaf from a screech.

He’s fairly certain Donna knows they’re not dating any more.

Probably.

“So she’s good?”

Roy glances at Digg. “Don’t you see her all day? Why doesn’t he ask you these questions?”

The bodyguard huffs. “He asks me for hourly updates.”

“Seriously?” Roy chuckles. “You’ve got it bad, man.”

Oliver scowls at them. “I’m just worried.”

“And you’re micromanaging.” Roy meets his challenging stare with a nonchalant shrug. “You want to hit something or someone, but you can’t. So you go to therapy, and learn about your family company, and work on the shelter down the street, but sometimes you just want to beat your frustration into some lowlife criminal.”
“You volunteering?” Oliver growls.

Roy hops back a step, raising his hands in submission. “Whoa! Hey, not me.”

Digg gently pushes Oliver back and into a chair, somehow restraining the other man with surprisingly little effort. “Calm down, man. Nothing to get riled up about.”

“Nothing?” Oliver demands. “NOTHING? Malcolm’s running around with free-reign of the city as I heal up, Felicity’s forced to stay away from us for everyone’s safety, we don’t have a plan for how to stop him, and because we can’t do anything she’s still in danger. And yet there’s nothing to worry about?”

Roy winces. Well, when he puts it like that...

...  

“You’re playing a dangerous game, Miss Smoak,” Moira whispers quietly.

Felicity glances up at her from here her head rests in her hands. Hiding her surprise at Moira’s presence behind a tired look. “You’ve been telling me that for weeks.”

“You don’t have to make it worse by taunting him.”

Moira has a point: Felicity’s taking out her frustration with the current time travel situation on the evil mastermind of a grand plan to destroy the city. Definitely not the smartest course of action.

For a genius she needs to get her head on straight.

“Oliver misses you.”

Papers crumple in Felicity’s hands. God, she misses him too. But she can’t handle any more time around him than she already does. Because he is different, and she wants to tell him. Great Google does she want to tell him. But dealing with Malcolm is not the time to drop a truth bomb on him. Telling him about Samantha and William now, won’t end well. And there’s no way she can pretend to be from the same the same time he was.

She refused to go back to that dark period she called the Ra’s Al Ghul mess.

“We’re having a family dinner in a couple days, and I would love for you to be there.”

A laugh bubbles past her lips despite the stress of the past couple weeks: “Dinner with the Queen Family?”

“Yes. Your roommate...” she waves as she flounders for a name.

“Roy?” Felicity fills in with a slight smile at Moira’s disapproving face. Thea started hanging out with him at Oliver’s club, and in her apartment, and just hanging around him in general. It’s cute, knowing what she knows about the first time. It’s far more innocent than Thea tracking Roy down when he stole her purse.

“Yes, Roy can come as well. I believe Thea is inviting him.” Moira looks a little pained at the thought of Thea bringing a boy home.

Felicity raises her eyebrows in surprise. After the Undertaking, Roy had Moira’s support if only because he protected Thea and put her safety above his own. He’s also the reason Thea started talking to her after finding out what Moira did. And since those things hadn’t happened yet, she
honestly expected Moira to be harboring a little more dislike for the kid.

Moira purses her lips. “As much as I hate to admit it, he seems to be helping her.”

“He’s a good guy,” she responds.

Moira nods, eyes faraway as she contemplates her statement. The moment drags out in silence, and Felicity starts closing out of her computer screens, turning to slip the sensitive information on her desk into the safe behind her. She twists back to Moira who stands regally, brushing invisible dust off her skirt.

“So we’ll see you then. Dinner is served promptly at 7. Don’t be late.” With that last warning, Moira sweeps from the room with her head held high, like she didn’t just witness Malcolm threatening Felicity and then just invite her to dinner.

Felicity shakes her head at her life for the thousandth time in the last two weeks. Her life is more surreal now than when Ray named her CEO of Palmer Tech. Seriously.

She needs someone to trust, someone she can talk to.

So where the hell is Sara?

Arms laden with files and her laptop, Felicity stumbles over to the door, allowing Lyla to take half her load, as they leave the office. The building is practically vacant, half the lights extinguished to keep the electric bill down or something along those lines.

“Are we stopping for food on the way back to your apartment?” Lyla asks as the elevator moves slowly down through the building.

Felicity chuckles, closing her eyes as a wave of exhaustion hits her. “Digg told you I like to do that.”

Lyla smirks. “He might have mentioned something about the lack of food in your apartment.”

“Well, let’s just say, I prefer not to call the fire department every time I attempt to cook.” Lyla doubts her, for some reason no one believes her when she says she can’t cook. It’s not like she’s making up stories. The Smoak women can’t cook. Never could. She survived on bar nachos from the Grand and Poptarts until she was about 7. Even microwave food turn into a small disaster in her hands.

She’s gotten a bit better over the years. She can now make spaghetti...most of the time. And she no longer burns *every* meal. It still doesn’t taste all that great, but at least it’s edible for the most part.

Lyla laughs. “So what kind of food are we getting?”

“I’m thinking Chinese.” Felicity purses her lips. “There’s this great place down on 12th.” Oliver used to order it from there in Chinese, like actual Chinese. And yeah, it might have been a bit of a turn on.

“You frequently visit places the Triad operates out of?”

Felicity pauses before the doors. “Triad?”

Lyla chuckles and holds the door open for her. “Don’t worry. They also make authentic food.”

“I wasn’t worried, per se. I’m just now wondering why my boyfriend picked that restaurant.” She pulls her jacket closed against the cold bite to the air.
“It’s not like he would know it was a front.”

Felicity shrugs as she contemplates the idea. Yeah, Oliver definitely knew it was a front. He wasn’t that oblivious. Although the food-enthusiast in him, probably just liked the authenticity of the food. It’s not like he was actually involved in the Triad.

Lyla’s hand lands on her arm and Felicity twists back curiously. She stills as she sees Lyla glancing around the open square. “Let’s get to the car.”

“Is something wrong?” Felicity whispers, walking a little faster toward the sleek black car at the curb.

“Something’s off.” Lyla answers tersely, propelling her along as her hand drifts down to her sidearm.

Instead of looking around to see if she can see something since she knows she won’t see anyway, Felicity pulls out her phone and remotely sets the QC security feeds to search for suspicious activity. Another click and the results are programmed to send to the Foundry.

The courtyard is silent, the only light coming from the streetlights along the street. Their footsteps echo and Felicity has to admit it is the perfect scene for a terrible murder to occur. Her pace increases incrementally as she tries so hard not to panic and let the start of every crime show trigger her overactive imagination.

Lyla pushes the keys into Felicity’s hand. “Start the car.”

Felicity would protest, considering the only car she’s actually driven in combat was the van...and she liked to hit people with that...Brick, Isabel. In her defense, they were evil, but something tells her the town car isn’t quite as indestructible as she likes to think the van is. Or will be?

“Are you-”

“Felicity. I need you to do what I ask. Get to the car, lock the doors, and keep it running.” Lyla’s no longer even looking her way as she talked, too busy surveying the shadows. “And call Johnny.”

Ice runs through Felicity’s veins. She honestly didn’t think it was that bad, just overactive imaginations until Lyla asked her to call in backup. She’s been around badasses too long. She knows how truly bad the situation must be in order for backup to be called.

Luckily she can keep her head.

Felicity’s halfway to the car when Lyla fires her first shot. She breaks into a run, refusing to look back with her eyes fixed on the car.

She stumbles when the heel of her shoe gets stuck in the pavement for a moment, but she keeps moving, fumbling desperately with the keys like they’re her only chance of surviving an onslaught, which seems completely ridiculous.

She needs a better weapon.

“Eeeep!” Felicity shrieks as she ducks away from a whizzing sound, that she would swear is an arrow aimed at her head.

“I guess Malcolm decided you weren’t worth keeping around,” she mutters to herself as she desperately hits the unlock button for the car and the lights blink in response.
Relief floods her system as her hand wraps around the handle and she pulls the door open.

A hand shoves the door closed again, an unseen opponent yanking Felicity back from her safe haven and coming to rest a cool metal blade against her neck.

Felicity closes her eyes against a whimper.

*So this is it. This is how I die.*

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Let me know what you think!
Chapter 33

HELLO LOVELY READERS!!! I apologize for the slight delay in this chapter. I would have posted it last night, but with the season finale, I got distracted.

BUT HERE IT IS!!!

I hope you like it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 33

“Tell me why I should not kill you,” the figure at her back whispers in Felicity’s ear.

She gulps down her fear even as she recognizes the smooth seductive timbre of Nyssa’s accented voice. Knowing the assassin holding a sword to her throat, isn’t exactly a comfort at the moment. Nyssa might have mellowed out a little over the years, but in the present she’s an assassin. True, she’s in love with Sara, that’s probably not going to help Felicity at this point.

But it might be enough to make her pause.

“I’m a friend of Taer Al Safer,” Felicity says, squeezing her eyes shut. She can hear Lyla fighting an opponent in the distance, and she prays that’s Sara.

“We have been watching for a week. She says she does not know you.”

Felicity whimpers as the blade starts to bite into her skin. “Not yet. She doesn’t know me yet.”

The assassin stills. “What did you say?”

Felicity breathes a little easier as the blade lifts from her throat just slightly. “I said she hasn’t met me yet.”

“Explain yourself.”

Taking her continued heartbeat as a good sign, Felicity takes another risk. “I knew how to contact you because I’m from the year 2016. And I’m friends with Sara.”

“That is impossible.”

“You’ve seen people brought back to life in a magic pool and you don’t believe in time travel?” She would laugh if she didn’t think that would leave her partially decapitated.

“You know of the pit.”

“Yeah. Your freaky pit with the disastrous side-effects? Yes, I am intimately familiar with it.”

The assassin’s grip loosens a little more. “I would have known if you had seen the pit.”
“In three years, your father offers use of the Lazarus pit in return for a favor.”

“He would never."

Felicity snorts. “He thought he found the man destined to succeed him.”

Nyssa freezes behind her. “What did you say?”

“How about you agree to let me go and we can talk about this like two semi-normal adults? I only say semi-normal because you’re an assassin and I’m a genius with a tendency to babble in inappropriate moments. Normally it only happens with unintended sexual innuendos, but scary women holding swords to my throat...Yeah, that’s enough to make a girl babble. So what do you say?”

Nyssa releases her violently after a moment of contemplation, stepping back so when Felicity whirls to face her they’re standing about five feet apart.

“Nyssa Al Ghul, Heir to the Demon,” Nyssa introduces, her face a stony mask.

“Felicity Smoak, MIT Class of ’09.” She glances over at Lyla and Sara. “Think you can get her to stand down? In the interest of talking?”

Nyssa stares her down before barking out orders in Arabic. Sara and Lyla freeze in a tentative truce, each poised to strike again. Lyla’s breathing hard, knuckles white on the baton she pulled out after her gun proved less than useful.

Sara hasn’t even broken a sweat.

“Where do you suggest we talk?” Nyssa asks.

Felicity glances around. “Somewhere private. Malcolm knows I have some connection to the League, but I don’t think he’d be happy to see you here.”


“Yeah...he may be watching me or my apartment.” She frowns trying to think of a place where they could talk uninterrupted. “Scratch that, he’s almost definitely having me watched. We’re lucky he hasn’t appeared before now.”

“There is no one here. And all cameras have been looped.”

“I’d still prefer not to do this in public.” Felicity can’t quite relax now, even though obviously it was Nyssa and Sara’s presence that was ominous.

Nyssa nods. “We have a location.”

Felicity copies the motion. Shoving her joy at the progress she’s made below the surface. She wants to fist pump her success. She wants to beam and bounce on the balls of her feet, but the warriors she’s facing probably wouldn’t appreciate it right now. As far as they know, she hacked their bank account and used a secret code she shouldn’t have had.

Sara bursts out in rapid fire Arabic, sparing a couple glares for Felicity and Lyla as she speaks.

“Calm down, beloved,” Nyssa replies softly, her eyes on Felicity. “I think we should hear them out.”

Beneath her mask, Felicity can’t make out Sara’s face, but the woman’s demeanor is far from
welcome. She’s cold and distant. It strikes Felicity that she’s never seen Sara in official League of Assassins garb before. She has to say, the instant comparison she makes to Malcolm Merlyn is disturbing.

“I will guide you. Taer Al Safer, you can follow.” Nyssa opens the car door and steps to the side. “After you.”

Felicity glances at Lyla. With hesitant, wary steps, Lyla walks over and slides into the driver’s seat. Her whole aura exudes confidence and determination. Felicity rounds the car to sit in the passenger seat and Nyssa climbs into the back of the car.

Lyla turns partially in Felicity’s direction. “How do you know about the League of Assassins?” She hisses.

That’s a complicated question. One Felicity doesn’t really care to answer at this moment in time, but this is it. This is her chance to come clean, her chance to have support in her mission, and as crazy as it sounds, Nyssa and Lyla might be her best chances at stopping Malcolm and saving Starling.

“It’s complicated. I’ll tell you when we get to the safe house.”

“You know where we’re going?” Nyssa asks calmly from the back of the car, amusement coloring her tone instead of suspicion for the first time.

Felicity shrugs, facing out the window. “Seems it would be smart to have a safe house in the city where her family lives.”

There’s no acknowledgement from the back seat, but Felicity takes it as a good sign when Nyssa starts directing them.

This is either a fantastic decision or the worst choice she’s made in her life.

She’s not sure which yet.

...

Lyla reloads her gun before leaving the car and entering the seedy-looking apartment building. She feels eyes on her, but when she looks at the Heir to the Demon, Nyssa watches her with lingering approval. That’s not really a comfort to Lyla as it just means the assassin’s confident in her ability to disarm Lyla before she can cause any harm.

John never gave her any indication that this job would become this complicated. In fact, she’s certain no one else knows about Felicity’s plan. Knowing assassins, she wouldn’t put that past Oliver, or anyone who’s had interactions with Amanda Waller. But Felicity?

Felicity was the least likely of their group to know assassins. The woman was a shining star of goodness – excepting her involvement with the local vigilantes. There were no blemishes on her record according A.R.G.U.S. She was fearless, and she wanted to do good.

Yet there was a dark side to her, a vein of steel that told Lyla the computer tech capable of doing whatever it took to protect her friends and family.

The stairs creak on the way up to the top floor. Garbage litters the floor and at one point Lyla sees a needle on the floor. She watches Nyssa and Felicity for their reactions. Nyssa looks just as calm as ever, barely sparing a glance for the disparity of the building.
Felicity’s eyes dart around and she doesn’t look pleased, but she also carries on, like she’s doing this for a greater cause.

That terrifies Lyla.

When someone has conviction, there’s no telling what lengths they’ll go to.

Nyssa throws the door wide open and gestures them in before her. “There are no bugs, or cameras in the area, and Al Saher does not know of this location. We will be undisturbed here.”

Lyla wanders around the room, feeling the sharp eyes of the two assassins on her as she positions herself in a corner, facing the whole room, the windows, and doors. Felicity’s the only one who remains in the center of the room and she twists to look at all of them, spinning in a small circle.

A clocktower strikes Lyla as an odd choice for a pair of assassins, and certainly not a safehouse she would ever want to stay in. There’s no bathroom, no accommodations...This whole night is just bizarre.

“Who’s Al Saher?” Lyla finally asks, breaking the silence with a question.

“The Magician,” the assassin who came with them says calmly. “You know him better as-“

“Malcolm Merlyn,” Felicity cuts in with a grimace.

“And your friends?” Lyla watches Felicity wince at the accusation in her question. It’s not like she can deny she knows the women who attacked them. She seems to be pretty chummy with the brunette while the other assassin is content to keep her face hidden.

The brunette steps forward before Felicity can speak. “I am Nyssa Al Ghul, Heir to the Demon. And my companion is Taer Al Safer, The Canary.”

“And how do you know Felicity?”

Nyssa looks over at the blonde. “I do not. She is the one who contacted us. It is your turn to explain.” The menace in her voice has Lyla reaching for her gun.

“Lyla,” Felicity says gently, gesturing for her to put it away. “There’s something we need to talk about.”

She slowly lowers her hand from the firearm. “Please don’t tell me you’re an assassin now.”

Felicity snorts. “No. Of course not.”

“Then what’s going on here?”

A bunch of assassins appear out of nowhere saying Felicity contacted them. That’s not something the Felicity in the A.R.G.U.S. files would do. No, this is the act of a more calculating woman. Digg had said there was something off about Felicity since her kidnapping, but they’d both attributed it to the stress. Yet somehow, under constant supervision, she’d manage to contact two assassins without her or John finding out.

Lyla feels like she’s been working blind for the last two weeks.

Felicity takes a deep breath. “This is going to sound a little crazy.” She grimaces. “Actually, a little more than a little bit crazy. You might call it really crazy, but considering that we live in a world of Lazarus Pits and covert government organizations and earthquake machines, it’s probably not that
weird. Unbelievable, sure, but also completely plausible.”

A frown screws up her face as Lyla waits while Felicity paces, waits for the inevitable onslaught of words to come spewing from the genius’s lips.

She stops pacing and opens her mouth as if to speak. She runs a hand casually over her hair. “This is a lot harder than I thought it would be.” Felicity shakes her hand to get rid of her jitters. “There’s no other way to say this: I’m...I’m from the future.”

There’s no outward indication of surprise on any of their faces, yet Lyla for one is confused. It wasn’t that long ago that she heard a similar story from the lips of Oliver Queen, one she was only inclined to believe after testimony and support from A.R.G.U.S.’s files. And if it was the truth, why hadn’t Felicity come out then? Or maybe it was a little more complicated? It would explain some things.

“And we’re just supposed to believe that?” the Canary asks, drawing Felicity’s attention.

Felicity shrugs. “I can offer you proof. I’m from four years in the future. You and I are friends, that’s how I knew how to contact you.”

“I don’t have friends,” the Canary says dismissively.

Lyla holds in a snort, remaining as stoic as possible as she faces off the assassins. She doesn’t know about friends, but there’s definitely something between the Canary and the Heir to the Demon.

A.R.G.U.S. doesn’t have much concrete evidence on the League. They know a handful of names, Nyssa being one of them. But otherwise there’s mostly just a series of blurry pictures that could be any shadowy figures.

“You have family,” Felicity says quietly. “Here. That’s why the safe house. I didn’t realize you had this place for so long. How’s Sin doing?”

The Canary freezes. If Lyla hadn’t been watching, she wouldn’t have noticed how the woman went from relaxed to stiff in an instant. “How do you know that name?”

Lyla’s getting used to rolling with the punches. Team Arrow, surprisingly, seems to be better training for that than A.R.G.U.S., despite the famous antics of Amanda Waller. She’s got her own set of pressing questions for Felicity with this big reveal, but for now she’s able to put aside in order to protect her as best as she can.

Did she mention she was facing assassins? That her client had contacted?

This is almost as bad as Waller.

Felicity sighs. “I told you. I’m from the future. She’s a good kid. A little rough around the edges, but I guess that’s why you get along so well.” A beat of silence and the assassin’s impassive mask staring gets Felicity talking again. “Laurel’s doing well. She’s dating Tommy now. They’re happy.”

She seems to choke on the words, but the next moment the emotion in her face is buried. “Actually, your dad and my mom...” She shivers, “but I try not to think about that too much, cause EW.”

So the connection to the Canary is personal. Lyla frowns. She thought the League members cut all ties to their former lives. Most of the assassins - as far as she was aware - joined the League after tragedy killed their entire family. What’s more, to have a prominent one from a Starling family?

If she worked for anyone other than Waller, she’d be wondering how everything magically worked
out. Instead she’s wondering who pulls the strings.

The Canary pulls off her mask to reveal her face for the first time. Her blond hair is pulled back in braids, her lips clenched together as she glares at Felicity. Her gaze is cold and Lyla wonders how two such different people could be as close as Felicity’s claiming they are. “Wouldn’t listing my favorite colors or something be more convincing? All I can say is that you know who I am. That doesn’t prove anything.”

Felicity sighs. “I know you don’t come back to the city permanently until after May of next year. Malcolm Merlyn sets of an Earthquake machine, the Green Arrow’s team only manages to shut off one. Half of the Glades are decimated. You return to keep an eye on your family, and in your down time defend the women of the city from rapists and muggers.”


Lyla blinks. The Canary knows Oliver?

Her mind starts a rundown of all the people Felicity just mentioned, flipping through her mental catalogue of people in the lives of Team Arrow. She was an intelligence officer after all. And she recognizes the names...

Felicity smiles. “Come on. We both know he’s a little dorky.”

The realization hits her like an armored tank: Lance. Sara Lance.

She turns to the assassin, tilting her head as she calls to mind the old photo from Oliver’s A.R.G.U.S. file. It wasn’t clear before, but she can see it now. The eyes are different, haunted, just like every child that’s faced a personal war.

But she has a personal investment in this. Whatever Felicity’s plan is, it just might work.

“This proves nothing,” Nyssa interrupts. “It’s a nice story, but it proves thing.”

If Nyssa buys into the idea.

“She broke her vows when she returned to Starling,” Felicity says, playing with her necklace as she attempts to remember. “Your father sent...Al...Al Oh...Aloha? Some big bad assassin guy after her to bring her home or kill her.”

Lyla watches their faces, knowing it’s the truth as she watches the assassin’s faces. If she didn’t believe Oliver’s story, this might have gone a different way, but there’s also the fact that if this was an invention of Felicity’s imagination, she wouldn’t have been able to contact the assassins.

“When he fails, you come to bring her home instead,” Felicity says to Nyssa. The assassin blinks in surprise this time, the only thing to slip past her mask. She waits a beat: “You don’t succeed. You release her instead,” Nyssa sputters, “because you’d rather she live here than die instead of going back.”

The assassins glance at each other and Lyla can tell Felicity has them cornered. Her scenario must make perfect sense to them, which means she’s telling the truth. Felicity’s played them nicely. It’s actually scary how it reminds her of a less ruthless Amanda Waller. Considering up until now they’ve been dealing with an IT genius who just wants to help people, this version of the blonde is...unexpected to say the least. But she can see the computer genius is still the same person. She’s just a more confident, assertive version of herself.
She’s seen things, and Lyla has to wonder if it’s just association with Oliver and his crusade that’s changed her or if there’s more to it.

“You’re really from the future.”

Felicity turns to Lyla with a grimace. “Yeah.”

“Like Oliver.” It seems like it’s safe to use his name considering the Canary knew who Felicity was referring to. At this point it’s just clarification. Because the huge question in her mind right now is: Why doesn’t Oliver know? And if she hasn’t told him, then what is her end goal here?

Felicity scrunches her nose in distaste. “Yes and no. Yes, I’m from the future, but I’m from later than Oliver. By about a year and a half.”

“So are you from a different future or the same future? How does that work?” This brings a whole new dimension to the “from the future” perspective of it all. If they’re from the same future, is it intentional or not? Did they figure out how to control it...

Felicity shakes her head. “No. No, I think it’s the same future. At least the moment where this Oliver comes from isn’t where he died in my reality, which means I might not have died. It certainly felt like I was dying. And I have no idea how this happened, but it happened.”

Well, that’s not helpful. Two people from different futures, coming back to the same past? That’s one hell of a coincidence. “So you’ve known about the future this whole time?”

“No,” Felicity shakes her head adamantly. “I was still normal 2012 Felicity until Malcolm kidnapped me. Then...something happened and I woke up in the basement.”

“Al Saher kidnapped you? And released you?”

Lyla glances at Nyssa, unhappy with the interruption to her line of interrogation. She lets it go for the moment to follow the conversation, but she’s still confused and unsettled with the change of events. “I take it that’s unusual.”

“The League only kidnaps with reason. To kidnap a woman and then release her a couple hours later...it serves no purpose.” Nyssa scowls. “What is it that Al Saher wants?”

“To level the Glades,” Felicity says. She fiddles with her earring as she starts to pace.

Lyla already knows this, already filled in by a future Oliver. She just hadn’t realized how connected Malcolm was to the League. That’s a bigger issue than Oliver’s group would be equipped to handle as far as she can tell.

“That would violate the laws of the League. His life would be forfeit.”

“Unless he found someone to fight Ra’s Al Ghul and defeat him in single combat.”

Lyla shakes her head, unable to believe what she’s hearing. “What?” She knows the League had antiquated laws of governance, but she’s completely lost now. How did they go from an earthquake in Starling to fighting the Head of the Demon?

“That’s how Oliver ended up in the past. He challenged Ra’s Al Ghul in mortal combat. He was stabbed through the chest and kicked off a cliff.” Felicity explains it as if it’s nothing. As if it’s simple and obvious.
The whole story is spiraling as Lyla just tries to wrap her mind around what kind of timeline they’re
talking about. It makes about zero sense to her, although it appears to be clearer to the two assassins.

“Why would Oliver fight Ra’s for Malcolm?” The Canary asks with a scowl.

“For Thea. Malcolm put him in an impossible situation. And let me tell you, if I thought I could kill
Malcolm in one blow, he’d be dead. I mean, a year later, Oliver cut off his hand, but it didn’t feel
nearly as satisfying.”

And now Lyla’s just getting dragged along for the ride, making a note of everything to she can figure
out a timeline later. But seriously? And she thought covert ops was a tough field. Vigilantism sounds
far worse.

“This Oliver...he survives my father’s blade?”

Felicity nods.

The assassin’s voice is wrapped in meaning and Lyla can’t stop the question from slipping past her
lips: “And that’s a big deal?” It’s not like anything they’ve talked to up until this point has been
unimportant, but why are they focusing on this one idea?

“There’s a prophecy,” the Canary says, her eyes still visibly on Nyssa, “that says the man who
survives the blade of Ra’s Al Ghul will be the next Ra’s Al Ghul.”

“My inheritance.” Nyssa’s hiss echoes menacingly around the room.

Something tells Lyla you don’t want to get between the scary lady assassin and what she believes
should be hers.

“If it helps, you get it eventually.” Felicity smiles calmly back.

“So, you know both the Canary and Nyssa from your future. Oliver gets mixed up with the
League...but what does that have to do with Merlyn and why they’re here now?” Lyla wonders
aloud, trying to get them to focus back on the issue at hand..

The assassins look up at the question too, turning in tandem so both are staring at Felicity as she
takes a shaky breath.

“Right. You’re here,” she pauses, obviously bracing herself before she drops another bombshell,
”because we need your help.”

And there’s the real reason.

Lyla can’t help but shake her head. This is either a terrible idea or a brilliant one.

If only she could tell which.

...

“And what do you need our help with? It sounds as though you handled it last time without our
help.”

Felicity turns to Nyssa. She’s feels like Leia Organa sending a note to Obi Wan when she’s not even
sure he’s alive anymore. This could be a major victory for her or a complete shot in the dark. It’s a
long shot in any case.
“Because last time Oliver bested Malcolm, he thought he killed him, and that man has been nothing but a thorn in our side. Oliver won’t kill him...” She trails off, unable to finish that idea. There’s no reason to drag Thea into this, not yet. “And how he is right now, he can’t beat Malcolm, which is why he needs to be trained by a member of the League.”

“And so you summoned us here? To demand something of the Heir to the Demon! You have no right!” Nyssa’s sword presses into her neck, the fiery anger in her gaze burning Felicity on the inside.

Felicity forces herself not to flinch although she’s fairly certain her hands are shaking. “I wasn’t going to ask you.” Her gaze shifts to Sara. “He needs a teacher.”

“I thought he was also from the future,” Sara says, eyebrows drawn together in thought.

“Yes.” Felicity starts to move forward until she feels the press of the blade against her skin. “But from the moment Ra’s pushes him off a cliff. He’s learned a lot, but not enough to fight Malcolm. He’s almost died at Malcolm’s hand once already and I’m not going to let it happen again.”

“You love him,” Nyssa says.

Her head moves so fast the world spins for a moment as Felicity faces the assassin. “What?”

“Only a person in love would be so foolish as to summon two assassins.”

At least the sword is gone from her throat. Felicity crosses her arms over her chest. “Yes, I love him. It was either do this now, or see if we can stop both machines this time. And I don’t like to have just one plan.”

She likes back-up plans and contingencies, sure ways to win against evil maniacs. She’s not a fan of putting herself at the mercy of two assassins who don’t know her at all in this time. And while she’s really happy they’re not extensively questioning her about the future, she’s also is on edge waiting for some indication of what they’re going to decide to do.

“Oliver Queen isn’t capable of love.” Sara plays with a knife Felicity swears she didn’t have moments ago. “He’s a serial cheater and a murderer.”

Felicity purses her lips and nods. “Sure. He was and he is, but I think you’ll find that you’re not as familiar with him now as you once were. He’s changed.”

“He cheated on my sister with me. He’ll sleep with anything with a pulse. You’re breaking your own heart.”

“You’re right, but not because he ever cheated on me.” Felicity shakes her head as she fights back tears at the memories. “He’s just terrible at confiding in people. But you’re also wrong. Because whatever his faults, I’ve never doubted that Oliver loved me. Even with Slade...I knew he was telling the truth.”

“Slade Wilson?” Sara finally looks up from the blade in her hands. “He came here?”

“In a year and a half.” Felicity resumes her pacing as she tugs on her necklace again. “He wants revenge on Oliver, to kill someone he loves, blah blah blah.”

“And does he?”

Felicity glances back at her and the panic in her features. Laurel. That’s who Sara thinks she’s talking about. “Moira. He kills Moira, alienates Thea...he kidnaps Laurel, but Oliver and I were able
to convince him that it wasn’t Laurel he needed.”

“So Laurel...”

“She survived.” Then. But Felicity’s not planning on sharing that news now. “Oliver defeated Slade and no one else died.”

“So you manage to kill him? Mirikuru and all?”

Felicity laughs, probably sounding a little crazy. But remembering stabbing a syringe into the neck of a supersoldier will do that to you. “We found a cure. Slade was locked up.”

She needs to get them back on track. Her eyes latch onto the inside of the clockface of the tower. It’s the same one Lyla blew up to save them from some of Slade’s men. But it also looks a little less rundown, which makes sense since it was probably hit by the quakes in her future.

“Are you willing to help?”

“You didn’t kill Slade?” Sara demands, ignoring the question as she closes in on Felicity. “Even without Mirikuru in his system, the man’s insane. He won’t stop going after Oliver.”

“Yes. I got that when I jumped in front of the gun he was aiming at Oliver’s son!” Felicity shouts back, tired of the back and forth. “That’s the last thing I remember before I woke, tied up, in Malcolm’s sketchy basement. Now, if you don’t want to help, thank you for your time, but I have to go find another back up plan. If I don’t hear from you in twelve hours, I’ll assume you’re not interested.”

Felicity spins on her heel and heads toward the stairs.

She’s walking out on her best chance for Oliver. She has no idea what’s going to happen next, how she’s going to get out of this situation. There are no better options, not currently and certainly not with her resources. For all she knows Lyla could manage something, but she had really been counting on this. It’s not as if training is her forte.

Lyla follows on her heels, her face twisted into a scowl. She’s clearly just bursting to say something. The silence lasts longer than it should; stretching out for the nearly twenty minutes it takes them to get back to her apartment.

Felicity doesn’t push the issue, doesn’t probe what she expects is going to be a loud, vocal argument. It doesn’t even start when the car pulls up to the curb and Lyla gets out. Felicity knows she’s going to be in trouble – and she’s glad this isn’t happening out in the open – but she’s not exactly looking forward to the yelling part of this.

Lyla walks into the apartment space, quickly clearing the space before turning to face Felicity.

Silence surrounds them for another drawn out moment. Lyla’s blue eyes bore into hers as she crosses her arms over her chest.

The storm breaks a moment later.

“What the hell were you thinking?!” Lyla erupts, “Assassins??”

“Oliver needs someone to train him,” Felicity says. “In order to beat a League member he needs to be trained by one.” She needs to explain herself. She needs Lyla on her side, to understand what’s going on.
“So you called two assassins, one of them the daughter of their leader. What if they had decided to kill you? I can barely defend you against one.”

“It was a risk I had to take.”

“I don’t think you’re grasping the severity of this situation.”

“No. I’m not.” Felicity steps closer to Lyla. “Because last time I died I woke up here. Who knows what’s going to happen next? And if lets us stop the Undertaking, it’s worth it.”

“But with no warning? No heads up? We could have been prepared for this!”

Felicity shakes her head adamantly. “I couldn’t. Not yet. Oliver’s got his own agenda, but he’s living moment to moment and I’m looking at the bigger picture. He needs to learn this now. I have a year and a half on him. This is the right path.”

“So why not tell your team? You shouldn’t be holding this back.”

“You’re right. And I know you’re right, but there’s so much more to consider here. I know things – truths – that this Oliver isn’t ready to hear. I want to tell him.” Tears well in her eyes. “Oh, google, I want to tell him, but he’s shattered my trust too many times for me to just accept his help. He keeps secrets, and he doesn’t trust the people closest to him. But if I can find someone to train him...”

“Felicity! No offense, but I don’t think Oliver’s the man you remember. The man I’ve met is open and cares very deeply. He’s not revealing the entire future, but I think he deserves some honesty from you.”

Lyla’s voice is calm, compassionate, pragmatic. Felicity’s well aware that she sounds like the crazy person in their scenario, but how can she explain what happened to her before she traveled back in time. She’d thought they were getting closer, that they were mending bridges, and then she finds out he was keeping secrets the whole time.

She collapses into her couch, her head falling into her hands. She takes a deep, gasping breath as she tries to center herself. “We were engaged.” The words fall heavy from her lips, reopening old wounds in her heart. “He still has my heart, but trust...once broken, it’s hard to repair.”

Lyla takes a moment to respond, choosing her words. “You’re both working toward the same goal. And it doesn’t make sense to hide integral information from your allies.”

Felicity releases a slow breath. Lyla’s not telling her anything she didn’t know before. She was just too stubborn, too set in her goals to change anything. Google help her, she was having trouble reconciling her past with this present. Everything had changed. And if she can’t get back she at least deserves a shot at happiness in the now.

She nods jerkily as she raises her head to meet Lyla’s eyes. “Okay. I’ll do it. After dinner at Queen Mansion.”

Lyla leans against the arm of the couch and sighs. “Good. So what do we do now?”

“We wait to hear from Sara and Nyssa,” Felicity says, fiddling with her earring. “And if not, we need a new game plan.”
“You wish to stay.”

Taer Al Safer stares out at the clockface at the roughest part of the city. She watches the lurking gutter rats slink from shadow to shadow, breathes in the thick scent of garbage, hears the shouts and sounds of a city still clinging to life.

It may not be pretty, but its home.

“You don’t have to stay with me,” she says. She doesn’t bother to turn around from her perch. She doesn’t want to watch Nyssa’s reaction when she decides not to stay. Technically they both have obligations, duties that prevent them from truly staying. They don’t have this luxury no matter how much Sara wants to. The League won’t allow this.

“It’s not that simple, Beloved. I cannot allow you to stay without me.”

Sara finally pushes back from the window and twists to face the love of her life, the love that’s starting to chafe when it comes to all the killing. She hasn’t said anything, hiding it under an immobile mask. It already feels like Ra’s Al Ghul is watching her carefully without her abandoning her post. “You don’t have to.”

Nyssa stares blankly at her. Her dark eyes bore into Sara, reading her and calculating her options. Sara’s familiar with the look. Nyssa’s trying to figure her out. It’s difficult for her to understand because Nyssa’s only loyalty has ever been to the League.

She doesn’t understand the concept of loyalty to a place or a family not held in place with contracts and fear tactics. Sara’s relationship with Nyssa has been rocky from the start. It took a while before the assassin moved beyond just seeking physical completion and started to develop real emotions for Sara.

Nyssa still gets confused where emotions are involved.

“I think it would be wise to remain and observe Al Saher. If what your friend says is true, it would be wise to keep an eye on him.”

Sara blinks in surprise. “What?”

“I will let my father know that we will be staying.”

“You want to train Oliver?” That’s what it sounds like, and Sara’s pretty sure that means she’s losing her mind. Nyssa would never agree to that. She - the Heir to the Demon - would never stoop to training the stranger.

“No,” Nyssa says calmly, pulling her bow from her back and placing it on a nearby box. “But you do. These people mean something to you, and so we’ll stay.”

She must have hit her head sometime on her way here. She’s got to be suffering a head injury to have been through today. Tracking the bank transfer to a QC computer tech, bringing the two people they found back to their hideout, stories about time travel...

Her head spins. She hasn’t seen anything this crazy in the past five years, which is really saying something.

Sara steps away from the window. “I’ll go share the good news.”
Nyssa nods and Sara rises slightly on her toes to press a kiss to Nyssa’s cheek. “I’ll be back soon.”

“Be careful, Beloved. Al Saher should not learn of our presence.”

Under that advisement, Sara takes the time to change into her civilian clothes. The exchange of dark leather for black jeans, a t-shirt, and a leather jacket doesn’t make a drastic change, but it’s enough that she feels years slip away as she walks down the street.

It’s odd. The feeling that nothing has changed and yet the feeling that she can never return to what she was. Walking down the street, it could be five years ago when a carefree Sara was laughing with her friends as she went from club to club. She would be wearing brighter colors, but she had always walked down the streets with brash confidence, even then.

At the same time, nothing is the same. She looks at the street and sees everything. She sees the threats shifting in the shadows, and every potential weapon and escape. She hasn’t laughed in years. There’s no part of her that actually believes she can be that carefree girl ever again. And to be honest, she doesn’t really want to.

She’s learned her strength and she owns it as she twists through the streets to the hacker’s address.

Felicity Smoak was a surprise, but she had a guileless way about her. Plus, her account of the future had only verified the path Sara herself had been considering ever since she heard Oliver had returned to Starling. She’d imagined seeing her father again for the first time, which was probably what she was looking forward to the most.

She and Laurel had always had a rocky relationship, and she’s certain her disappearing with Oliver on the Gambit wouldn’t help things. And her mother had never really clicked with her. She was a daddy’s girl through and through.

Felicity Smoak’s apartment is easy to find, but Sara takes the additional time to check her surroundings for signs of surveillance. The neighborhood itself is orderly, a clear change from the Glades just two blocks over.

She walks up to the front door of the apartment and knocks decisively before shoving her hands in her pockets. One hand wraps around the cold handle of a knife, just in case.

The bodyguard opens the door partially, suspicion clouding her features. “You decided.”

Sara nods, even though it’s not a question.

The whole apartment is absurdly bright, from the walls to the furniture. She wants to ask about the Robin Hood poster on the wall since she knows Oliver’s preference for the boy and the color green, but she withholds her judgement as the blonde stands to greet her.

She ends up facing the two women after thoroughly taking in their surroundings. The whole room is tense, stifled. Sara doesn’t find herself driven to talk, but she’s still searching for something to do. She doesn’t like being idle.

“So, I know you, but we didn’t really get to the introductions.” Felicity’s smile looks a bit forced, but her eyes are a bit relieved at Sara’s presence. “I’m Felicity. Smoak. Felicity Smoak. MIT. Class of 09.”

Sara’s lips twitch in something that might have resembled a smile. The blonde is truly adorable.

“And this is Lyla Michaels.”
She nods at the bodyguard. The woman was a decent fighter. A little too reliant on guns for Sara’s taste, but she’s not the kind of person to go down easily. She had good aim.

“Where did you learn to fight?” Sara asks curiously.

“Covert government agency,” the woman answers. “So? Are you on board?”

Sara bobs her head in agreement as she starts to pace. “I will train Oliver. Nyssa will not get involved, not until there’s evidence of Merlyn’s transgressions. Deal?”

“Deal,” Felicity says with a smile, holding out her hand.

Sara hesitates a moment before shaking her hand. “So... when do we start?”

Felicity opens her mouth to respond, but they’re interrupted by a loud bang from the door.

The knife is poised to throw before Sara registers that the red blur is actually a teenage boy with a scowl on his face and a red hoodie yanked over his head.

“I don’t know what’s gotten into you two, but you and Oliver have really got to talk to each other. I can’t deal with another training session full of sullen glares and unsubtle probing. At first it was cute, but now it’s just annoying. And can you get him to stop with the water-slapping already?”

Felicity jumps between Sara and the boy with a nervous smile. “Roy! Hey!”

Guessing he’s a friend, Sara lowers her blade and slides it back into her pocket. She looks the boy over again. And she can see some of the potential. He’s athletic enough by his appearance, but she never thought of Oliver as the apprentice-having type.

He notices her a moment later, his guard rising as he takes in Sara’s appearance.

“Who’s Blondie 2.0?” He gestures almost aggressively at her.

“Roy, this is...” Felicity pauses, eyes drifting back to Sara.

“Sara,” she says into the silence. She needs to get used to responding to her name again. It’s been so long since she’s heard it spoken aloud. No one in Nanda Parbat uses her former name, not even Nyssa.

“Sara, Roy,” Felicity completes the introductions with a forced smile. “Sara’s going to be helping us.”

“Us?” The boy looks skeptical as he continues to glare at her. “And Oliver knows about this?”

“He will,” Felicity hedges, immediately moving around the apartment as if it would distract the boy from what she’s not telling him.

Roy crosses his arms as he looks at Sara, a furrow between his brows. “Somehow I don’t think Oliver’s going to like this. And we don’t need a grumpier Oliver. Just because you’re avoiding him...”

“I’m not avoiding him!” Felicity protests, looking scandalized.

Roy snorts. “Yeah, sure.” He nods at Sara. “So what do you do?”

She grins. “A little bit of everything.”
Let me know what you thought! I love to hear from all you wonderful people. <3

And there will be no new chapter next week, and possibly the week following. I'm away next week and I'll need time to catch up, but then we're back in the final stretch!! Only about 7 chapters left to go!
Chapter Notes

The Reveal Part II

Sorry for the wait, but this chapter...This chapter was a doozy to complete, but now it's finally ready. It's emotional and HUGE! And I really hope you like it!

Chapter 34

Roy can’t say he’s been to many awkward dinners in his life as a gangbanger, but even if he had, he’s pretty sure this one would take the cake.

He’d assumed – wrongly, he might add – that during dinner with her family, Thea would turn down the flirting she’d been doing. Instead she seemed more determined to declare her interest, if her foot stroking his leg was any indication. Which would have been all fine and good except that her brother – and Roy’s very scary mentor – was sitting across the table glaring at him. Mrs. Queen seemed inclined to ignore it for the moment, just happy he was helping Thea get clean. Still she had a menacing edge that assured Roy she’d just as easily cut him down should something go wrong.

Then there was the palpable schism between Oliver and Felicity that everyone was clearly aware of and not doing anything about.

They were sitting next to each other. Every so often one of them would lean closer to the other as if drawn by invisible strings, only to pull sharply away and turn their attention to something else. It’s like neither knew how the other would react to any sort of interaction, so they were trying to avoid it completely. While they’re minds might have decided, their bodies haven’t gotten the memo apparently.

And Roy’s not the only one who noticed.

In between her formal smiles and well-manicured responses, Moira keeps sending speculative glances their way. Every now and then, Thea will frown at them over her fork. Only Walter is content to ignore them as he eats and makes conversation.

Walter is most definitely the least threatening person in the room.

“I’ve been meaning to thank you, Roy. Since she met you, Thea’s actually been passing her classes.”

He blinks at Moira for a moment. “Oh. Um. That doesn’t really have anything to do with me.”

She levels him with an unimpressed stare. “And I’m sure your influence has nothing to do with her sobriety.”

He gulps guiltily, although he doesn’t know what he has to be guilty about. It’s a good thing, right? That Thea’s drug-free. And it was really her decision anyway. He was just a person for her to talk to, someone to listen when she needed one. That’s all he’s done really. And he was no sort of influence when it came to school. He’d barely made it out of high school as it was.
“That was all her.”

“Don’t sell yourself short, young man,” Walter intercedes. “There have been far less...incidents recently and we’re aren’t so oblivious as to have missed the cause.”

Beside him, Thea glares sullenly at her parents. “And I couldn’t just do this on my own?”

Moira directs her stern gaze to her daughter. “We’re not doubting your abilities merely Roy’s influence in your transformation.”

He shifts uncomfortably in his seat. “I really had nothing to do with it.”

A single glance around the table tells him no one is buying what he’s trying to sell and decides to give it up. He really didn’t do anything. It feels wrong to take credit for a transformation that had nothing to do with him. It was all Thea. Even if he did feel a little responsible for her. What he had trouble wrapping his head around was why she continued to hang around him.

“So, Oliver, how’s your little project going?” Moira suddenly asks, allowing Roy a reprieve from uncomfortable attention.

Across from him, Oliver frowns, obviously not liking “project” to describe his successful nightclub. “It’s doing well,” he says slowly. “We’re full most nights.”

Moira raises an eyebrow. “Really? I would have thought attendance would be down on weeknights.”

“I think not everyone works Mondays through Fridays,” Oliver says tightly with a forced smile.

Roy nods in agreement. He’s very familiar with odd jobs and taking days off whenever they come. Weekends aren’t really a thing, not for him, especially with the job at the nightclub now and occasionally volunteering days at the shelter down the street. He’s not sure if he’s cut out for a “typical” job. Nine to five days never seemed that great to him anyway.

“Well, I suppose that’s true.” Moira leans back in her chair, still somehow maintaining her straight back and majestic bearing. “Who would have thought a nightclub in the Glades would be such a hit?”

“I think it has more to do with the names behind it.” Oliver doesn’t look too pleased to admit it. It’s hard for the hero, the man trying to rewrite himself, to admit that his success it owed in part to the notoriety of his younger self.

Roy tries to put himself in Oliver’s shoes and shifts uncomfortably. If he was ever comfortable with the choices his younger self made, he most definitely isn’t now. He never wants to be reminded of the darkest days of his life, much less attempt to capitalize on those moments. Every time he thinks he has Oliver figured out, he learns another piece of the man.

He stabs a little harder at the chicken on his plate. He’s glad he finally has someone who can put him on a path of light. He’s got a mentor who cares that he succeeds. He’s meeting incredible people, learning awesome skills. It’s unbelievable.

But it just pulls his doubts into blinding spotlights.

Who is he to be a hero? What right does he have to run around a dangerous city at night saving lives? How did he of all people manage to become the apprentice (for lack of a better word) of a superhero?
Not that he hero-worshiped Oliver. That wasn’t it. But what Oliver does? He risks his life for people he doesn’t know. He gives selflessly of himself. Meanwhile Roy is doing this for his own selfish reasons. He just wants to prove there’s some good in him, to himself and everyone else.

“That might be why they came at first, but since there haven’t been any incidences of drunken debauchery, I think we can assume they’re not just there for the spectacle anymore.” Felicity smiles at Oliver, and then seems to realize what she did. Predictably she immediately turns her attention back to her plate as if she never came to Oliver’s defense.

It’s ridiculous.

“I’m just saying: You’re doing a good job.” The rest is mumbled into Felicity’s plate as her free hand fiddles with her pendant.

Oliver preens in her praise, only to falter when he notices she’s not looking at him. He shakes it off a moment later. “Yeah. We’re doing really well. We’re even turning a profit.”

“That’s fantastic, Oliver.”

At least Walter appears to be a supportive step-parent, Roy reflects as he chews slowly on the green beans on his plate. In her own twisted way, Moira obviously wants what’s best for her children, but she also has a very clear idea of what best is.

“Yeah, the club is great,” Thea says as she helps herself to more chicken.

Moira’s eyes jerk to her daughter, narrowed.

“Not like that.” Thea takes a bite of her food, answering the challenging look with complete disregard to the etiquette her mother instilled in her. She brandishes her fork at her mother. “I wasn’t drinking or anything. I just drop by and visit Roy from time to time.”

And now he’s not looking like such a great influence...

Roy avoids eye contact, only risking a quick look at Felicity, who gives him a sympathetic grimace.

“Ollie has me blacklisted at the bar anyway,” Thea says off-handedly.

“It’s true.” Roy shrugs. “Not that I would give it to her anyway. But Oliver and Tommy were surprisingly scary with that order.”

Thea frowns. “Really? They intimidated you into not serving me?”

He resists the urge to roll his eyes or laugh, knowing it wouldn’t be appreciated. He shrugs. “They’re scary.”

“I thought it was just because you owed Oliver!”

Roy shrugs. That’s true. He wouldn’t server her either way. Intimidation or not. The debt he owed Oliver was too huge to betray his trust that way. He partook in his own amount of underage drinking, but with Thea...

“Aren’t you supposed to be sober?”

“I never would have pegged you for a Goody-Two-Shoes.”

“When I’m at a table with your whole family,” Roy mumbles.
Thea kicks him and Felicity quickly stifles a laugh.

“Did you say something, Roy?” Moira asks politely.

“Nothing, Mrs. Queen. Just that she’s doing such a good job staying clean and should definitely not be drinking.” Maybe he should add a salute with all the sucking up he’s doing.

Moira hums lightly in amused agreement.

“The food is delicious, Mrs. Queen,” Felicity says, diverting the conversation.

“Thank you, Felicity. It’s one of Oliver’s favorite dishes.”

That makes four less-than-subtle attempts by Moira Queen to prod Oliver and Felicity together. He’d had a good laugh when she had forced them to sit next to each other. Even Thea looked gleeful at the maneuvering. Oliver didn’t protest too much either.

Felicity smiles warmly. There’s a knowing glint in her eyes that has Roy burying a frown. She’s been doing that lately: seeming oddly knowledgeable about things she shouldn’t know. And after Oliver’s I’m-From-The-Future talk, his gut is telling them the blonde’s hiding something similar. Her being from the future does explain most of her peculiarities...other than the general nerdiness he’s been witness to.

But it’s just a gut feeling right now. There’s no physical proof.

A moment later, Felicity noticeably shakes herself out of her thoughts. “I want to thank you again for inviting me over for dinner...and Roy.”

Moira waves her off. “Nonsense. You’re a family friend. And you’ve been working too hard lately.”

Roy would definitely agree with her, but he knows it’s got more to do with Malcolm Merlyn than anything at QC.

Felicity laughs. “Well, since it’s to your benefit-“

“You need to find some time to relax,” Oliver disagrees, cutting her off with a serious tone.

Like some shifting of the cosmos, Felicity and Oliver finally make and hold eye contact, each trying to express their displeasure through solely their gazes. Roy would be lying if he said he didn’t enjoy seeing the most stubborn people he knew facing off against each other. They’d been using him to avoid each other and their feelings for too long for him not to rejoice in this clash.

“I have plenty of time to relax. This project has a deadline.” Felicity scowls at Oliver and the rest of the table might as well have disappeared.

“But you have help on this project, a partner who can take up some of the burden.” Oliver’s having trouble keeping his voice polite and casual, almost slipping into the growl Roy’s only heard when his mentor was under his green, leather hood.

“Not until he’s a hundred percent,” Felicity responds with a tight smile.

“I think that you’ll find he’s more than capable of pulling his own weight.”

“Oh, I don’t doubt that. But I’m not going to accept that until the doctors agree with his assessment.”

Roy’s the only one at the table with remotely any idea of what that back and forth’s about. Although
Moira’s brain is racing to conclusions that Roy would rather not be around to hear. Oliver’s not about to admit to not waiting for doctor’s approval, which Roy’s almost positive Felicity knows.

This is really not a conversation they should be having at the Queen dinner table. No, this is a conversation for the Lair. And quite possible by themselves because Roy does not want to get mixed up in any sort of charged sexual tension. He doesn’t want to be scarred for life. Thank you very much.

“Is there a particular project causing you grief?” Walter is either oblivious to their stare down or making a subtle attempt to dissolve the tension.

Felicity gracefully pulls herself from Oliver’s narrowed gaze. “There are a couple troublesome projects, but nothing I can’t handle.”

Oliver huffs and drops his fork on his only half-finished plate. Contrary to his pervious covert glances, now he’s staring openly at Felicity. It appears they’re now going to have that conversation that’s been long overdue.

“You should be more careful,” Moira says lightly. “You don’t want to bite off more than you can chew.”

And there are the veiled references to Malcolm Merlyn that he’s not supposed to understand.

“Okay, is there something we’re all missing?” Thea asks, eyes darting between Moira, Oliver, and Felicity. “Because all the cryptic answers are seriously weird.”

Roy, an observer as always, noticed Walter looking equally suspicious.

Felicity is the one to break the silence with a laugh. She smiles at Thea and it appears genuine. “Of course not. I’ve just been venting some of my frustrations to Oliver. Honestly, it’s not a big deal. I just need to complain somethings, but it’s nothing I can’t handle for now.”

Her response seems to placate everyone, but Roy can’t be the only one to notice that, while the answer addresses their concerns, she didn’t actually reveal any more information about the topic of their conversation.

Walter’s phone blares out in the lull of conversation and he glances at it before pushing out his chair. “Sorry, I have to take this.”

The conversation lulls for a moment as plates are cleared. Roy’s a little shocked at the sheer amount of food still uneaten on the table. So much was prepared and it all smelled so good, yet there are whole trays still heaping with food. The Queen’s don’t seem like the kind of people to eat leftovers even if the remains of this meal could probably feed an army.

Moira stands imperiously at the head of the table as the food is clear from the table by the kitchen staff. “Perhaps we should take a little break before dessert.”

Chairs scrape against the floor as everyone stands, Roy raising a hair later than everyone else having not received the silent cue.

Everything’s really just as awkward now, except now they’re all standing up. On the bright side, Thea can no longer distract him by placing her hand on his leg under the table. (It’s incredibly distracting when he has Oliver glaring at him from across the table.) The downside, however, is that she’s now gripping his arm and Oliver has a visible focus to his discontent.
You’d figure the man from the future would’ve seen this coming.

“Thea, why don’t you show Roy the gardens?” Moira says off-handedly. It’s a thinly veiled excuse to get rid of him and Thea that everyone can see through. Roy is more than willing to escape the awkwardness, but at this point, he’s not sure it’s such a great thing to be left alone with a touchy-feely Thea.

It looks like Oliver’s of the same opinion.

Thea narrows her eyes at her dismissal. A moment later her mood turns sunny as she wraps her arm around Roy’s and starts to drag him out of the room. “Sure!” Her voice is as bright and fake as can be as she practically molests his arm. “I’ll just give him a tour, shall I?”

Roy casts a futile look back at Felicity, begging for help.

There is no way he’s leaving this house alive. Either evading Thea’s advances will destroy him, or Oliver’s training later will kill him. There’s no winning here.

Suddenly he’d rather be back at the awkward dinner table, or try to navigate Felicity and Oliver’s tricky relationship. Anything not to be here trying not to give in to the incredible woman that is his mentor’s little sister. Because he really does want to kiss her...

If only he could be sure Oliver wouldn’t break every bone in his body if that happened.

... “Are you sure about that, Mom?” Oliver asks, watching Roy and Thea disappear and trying not to think about their relationship in the future. It doesn’t matter that it’s happened before: he’s still not comfortable with the idea of his little sister and dating.

She waves her hand at him. “Relax, Oliver. He’s a good kid.”

He huffs, but can’t really refute that. He throws a glance at Felicity and catches her amused smirk.

“You did far worse at his age,” Moira says conversationally, leading them from the dining room towards her office.

“Which is why I’m worried.” And he is, at least slightly, worried about his sister and Roy. He trusts Roy but not this early with someone so precious to him.

“Relax, Oliver,” Felicity says, not hiding her grin. “I think Thea’s more likely to jump Roy than the other way around.”

“Not helping,” he growls, fingers curling into a fist. That’s his little sister. In his mind, she still forces him to sit through Disney movies with her.

Moira turns to pin him with a stern look. “Oliver Jonas Queen, you will not ruin this for your sister.”

He holds his hands up in surrender, knowing fighting this is useless, not just because of his future knowledge but because his mother’s on their side. He can’t think of anything that was ever able to stop Moira from getting something she wanted. And her stamp of approval? Oliver can’t really go against that.

But he can’t stop the nervous glance at the door Roy and Thea disappeared through.

His mother’s clap drags his attention back to the moment. “We all need to talk, but first, I have to go
check in on Walter. I’ll be back.”

He could dismiss it as his mother just wanting to see her second husband, but as she leaves his mom grips his forearm and whispers to him: “Talk to her, Oliver.”

She’s gone before he can voice any objections, leaving him staring after her in shock.

By the time he turns back to Felicity, she’s already been distracted by the shelves and shelves of books covering three-quarters of the walls. He takes the time to watch her as her finger glides slowly over the spines of the books in awe.

He hasn’t really seen her for more than a couple seconds in weeks and he finds himself drinking her in from across the room, struggling to memorize everything about her. She looks comfortable in her skin as she reads titles, her lips mouthing words, absorbed completely in her own little world.

He takes a moment to admire how her red dress skims her curves. It doesn’t take his breath away quite like the one she wore on their first date, the one with the cut outs, but it’s so Felicity in the way it exposes the skin of her back and flows loosely to land halfway down her thighs. He’d be doing her an injustice if he didn’t say it really showed off her legs.

“You’ve been avoiding me.” He didn’t mean to accuse her of that at first. He’d wanted to ease into a conversation, to convince her the time was right to come back to the Foundry, to persuade her to let him back into her life.

She pauses, facing away from him as her hand slides from the spine of the dark red book. It hurts when she doesn’t object to his observation, immediately correcting him.

Felicity glances over her shoulder at him, slowly turning. “I didn’t want to lead Malcolm to the Arrow.”

He crosses his arms over his chest and looks away as he tries to think calmly and logically about a response that won’t sound childish or sulky. “That doesn’t mean you couldn’t visit Oliver Queen.” He knows he’s looking up at her with what Thea might call his puppy dog eyes, but he’s hurt. He can’t help it. He’s missed her too much.

She moves closer to him with a sigh. “Oliver, it was too risky. Malcolm’s been keeping tabs on me. I wasn’t about to put you in danger. You’re still healing.”

“I’m all cleared,” he counters, holding his arms wide as he steps closer. “And I’ve been seeing a therapist.”

“I’m glad,” she whispers, stopping just out of reach.

She’s not giving him much. He takes another step closer and her head tilts up to maintain eye contact. “Will you come back?”

Felicity chews on her bottom lip, shifting nervouslly. “Oliver...”

He wants to free her lip, but that’s going to cross a thousand boundaries and he knows he has no right. Not yet. “Felicity...”

She huffs in amusement and meets his gaze again. “He wants me to work more on the earthquake machine.”
Ice freezes Oliver’s gut. He’s never liked the idea of Felicity on any of their opponent’s radar, and right now he can’t decide if Malcolm’s worse than Slade or not.

A small hand lands on his arm, squeezing lightly. “Hey, I’m fine. He’s not going to hurt me.”

“You can’t know that,” he tells her. Oliver’s hand untangles from his crossed arms to wrap around her elbow, pulling her a little closer almost unintentionally, but she steps forward easily, now completely inside his bubble. “Malcolm is dangerous and unpredictable. And I can’t have you getting hurt.”

She smiles softly up at him, sort of sad like those forced smiles after their date-from-hell. “I could get hit by a bus tomorrow or fall dead of an aneurysm or choke on my morning muffin. The point is: Malcolm already let me go free once, and I can handle myself.”

“He nearly killed me, Felicity.” He shakes his head, able to imagine all too vividly Malcolm turning around and murdering Felicity. “You don’t have my training. You’re an easy target.”

“And I get that you’re worried.” Her fingers rub soothing circles into his arm. “But there are more important things we need to focus on, like the earthquake machine.”

“Last time you weren’t on Malcolm’s radar.”

“And now I am. We’ve established that. We can’t change it, not now. So we find another way: We just have to figure out how to stop him before they complete the Markov device.” Her voice is firm with conviction. Because she won’t say it out loud, but they both know as soon as the device is done, her chances of survival go way down.

It’s not something Oliver wants to think about.

“You say that like it’s so easy.”

Felicity shrugs and pulls away slightly. “I believe in you.”

The simple words take his breath away. Oliver finds himself transported back to a clocktower on a dark night when he thought all was lost and the hope she inspired in him. She was always his light, the beacon of hope when all seemed lost.

She can’t know what the words mean to him, can’t possibly fathom how much he wants to kiss her in this instant.

Or maybe she gets some of that intent off him because Felicity pulls back a step, too far away for him to maintain contact. He watches her take a deep breath and regain her composure before she continues with their conversation. “We need to focus on your training, on beating Malcolm.”

He shakes his head with a grimace. “I can handle my training. I can beat Malcolm. The important thing is your safety.” If he has to kill Malcolm to guarantee that, he’ll do what he has to do.

“So I’m just supposed to pretend everything is fine and dandy? You’re in real danger and you just want me to sit on the sidelines? I’m asking you to trust me to ask for your help when I need it. The same goes for you.” Felicity lashes out, shouting back.

Oliver blinks in surprise, eyes wide. He doesn’t want to banish the moment they just had, their previous intimacy. He doesn’t want to keep arguing about it. He can get by. He did last time, he can do it again. He can do this and make sure the people he loves are safe.
He just has to get her to understand it.

“Felicity...Last time it took both me and Digg. I thought I had learned enough to beat him, but apparently Malcolm’s been holding back.” Which rattles him. It shakes him to his core to know that the first time around, Malcolm has never faced him with true killing intent. Had they ever been on the same playing field or was he always just a pawn to the assassin?

He never guessed. It makes him feel like a naïve newbie.

“How am I supposed to protect you if you won’t let me? And what if when the time comes I can’t win?”

Felicity narrows her eyes at him. “You need a teacher,” Felicity says, decisively.

His brows draw together as he contemplates that. “I guess.”

“Someone who can teach you how Malcolm fights.”

She’s leading him. He scowls at the thought. It’s almost like she has an idea and wants him to reach the same conclusion as her. But how could she know?

“The only person who could do that would be a member of the League of Assassins and I’m not inviting one of them into my city.”

The puzzle doesn’t seem to make much sense. It’s not possible for her to know he’s talking about Sara. She’s just picking up on his cues. That has to be it. He shakes his head. There’s no way she could know exactly who he’s talking about.

Felicity sighs. “Oliver.”

“No! Felicity, that would just make things worse. Trust me! We do not want to attract the attention of the League!” His words are hard, but he keeps them quiet. He’s not going to let this escalate into a fight.

“Why not? If they would help defeat Malcolm, why not?”

“They’re murderers!”

“And with their help, you could save lives,” she counters. “If you know someone who could help, someone who could train you to beat Malcolm, you have to call them. It’s the only way.”

“Someone who could help? Felicity, the only thing calling the League would bring is death. And I doubt they’d stop with Malcolm Merlyn!” He’s struggling to explain, to have it make sense to someone who wasn’t there to see the force of the League when they decided to go after Sara’s killer.

“You need someone to train you! There has to be someone, someone willing to help you, someone who will help you for you!”

He’s trying to banish the idea, but Sara still pops into his mind, in black leather with her half-smirk. She would be the perfect ally against Malcolm. Her training would be invaluable. He shakes his head. No. He can’t do that. Not after Malcolm was the one behind her death. He’s not going to invite her back into Malcolm’s sphere of influence. He’s back in time and vowing to prevent the deaths of those closest to him.

He won’t put Sara at risk.
“I won’t do it.”

“Won’t?” She demands, arms crossed over her chest. “What if that’s the only way?”

If the Markov device doesn’t go off, there’s no earthquake, Sara never comes home, and she never dies. As backwards as it might seem, staying with the League might just save her life. He won’t risk bringing her back early. He’ll find a way to do this without her help, without any help.

“Then I’ll find another way. I’ve got it under control,” he grits. “This is the safest choice.”

She snorts. “Really? For whom? Me? Digg? The city? What about you? You can do this without dying? You just admitted you don’t know if you can beat him, not without help!”

“I’ll find a way!” Is she really doubting him?

“Well, I’m not willing to risk your life based in your stubborn pride.” She throws his words back at him and Oliver flounders.

“What?”

“I’m not willing to risk your safety because you think you’ve got this under control!”

“I do have this under control!” Okay. That might be a stretch, but he doesn’t like her accusation that he doesn’t know what he’s doing. He’s the one who’s lived this before, he’s the one who knows what’s at stake, he’s the one who knows what he’s doing!

“Stop being so stubborn!”

“I’m being stubborn?”

“Yes! You want me to have bodyguards and help the Arrow all in the name of keeping me safe, but you won’t contact someone to help you! You’re secretive and protective. It’s okay to let someone in, to trust people! It’s not a crime to ask someone for help!”

“Not when they might die in the process! Did you ever think of that?” He regrets the words as soon as they fly from his mouth. He grimaces and turns away from Felicity. A deep breath calms him barely enough to finally explain: “If I call her and she dies as a result, I will never forgive myself.”

“She’s an assassin, Oliver. I’m pretty sure she can take care of herself.”

Oliver winces at her loud, emotional voice, but turns to face Felicity yet again with forced calm. “I won’t call my friend to her death. Not again.”

Felicity steps forward, calmed by his pain-ridden declaration. “And I get that, I really do. But you can’t live in fear of the future.”

“I’ve watched her die too many times to let it happen again.” He voice is soft, melancholy.

She searches his face with her eyes and deflates at something she sees there. “You have to trust that she can take care of herself.”

He knows she’s right. Sara is able to take care of herself. The only reason Malcolm got the drop on her was because he used Thea as his weapon. It would selfish to ask her back now just to teach him.

“Hey,” she whispers, reaching out to squeeze his hand until he meets her eyes. “I get that this is hard. I can’t imagine how hard it must be for you. If I could help you, I would or John would, but you
need more than that. I just need to know that if you fight Malcolm – if he has you and he’s going to
hurt you – I need to know that you can win. If it’s between your death and the possibility of hers,
there’s no choice to make.”

Oliver, slowly turning to a puddle at the fierce love in Felicity’s eyes, suddenly freezes, turned to
stone by the words she uttered, words that ring unerringly familiar in his ears. He remembers the
exact moment he said very much the same thing to her in the Foundry. He remembers it with
stunning clarity.

That was the night he realized he was in love with his partner, the moment it all clicked into place.
As soon as he got that phone call from the Count, nothing had mattered but saving her, his Felicity. It
had been just an inkling before that, a whisper in the back of his mind. After that night, it was a
raging inferno he could no longer deny.

Earlier, when she had spoken those four words that meant more to him than I love you – ‘I believe in
you’ – he’d dismissed it as a coincidence, but ‘there’s no choice to make’...those words shake him to
the core.

“What?” He asks, voice deathly calm.

It’s just the timeline playing tricks on him, it’s got to be. Everything that’s happened...time just wants
to happen. He’s messed up the timeline, but like the red pen, things want to stay the same.

That’s all it is.

Nothing more.

Felicity tilts her head at him. “I said there’s no choice to make.”

The air in his chest escapes breathlessly. “No choice?”

His brain is in turmoil, a storm of information clashing in his head, a battle between logic and
emotion. Because his heart is telling him ‘no, she wouldn’t do this’ while his head and years of
suspicion on telling him something’s off.

“You need to trust your teammates to keep themselves safe and you need to remember to ask when
you need help.” Felicity reaches for her bag, oblivious to the turmoil in Oliver’s mind. “I know
you’re a big, strong vigilante, but that doesn’t make you immortal, which is kind of ‘duh’. What with
you getting stabbed through the chest and falling through time, but you really could use a reminder
every now and then.”

“Felicity,” he says quietly with slight amusement. But her babbling is working: it’s soothing the
voice telling him something’s wrong, that this isn’t the Felicity he met for the second time a couple
months ago.

She continues, caught in her own little world. “I get it. You’ve been alone for the last five years,
well, I guess not the last five years with the whole time travel thing, but you spent five years only
able to rely on yourself, which makes sharing hard. You have Digg and me now though, so you
don’t have to worry about that.”

He huffs a laugh at her familiar babbling as it finally silences the voice inside him. “Felicity. Alright.
I’ll call her. You’re right.”

Felicity grins up at him, obviously happy with his agreement. He really wants to see that look on her
face as often as he can for the rest of her lives. It hits him again how much he loves her, how it stands
out in comparison to where they were last time. All this intimacy, after so long not seeing her, it’s reminding him of all he lost when he went to fight Ra’s.

He’s not going to make that mistake again.

How could he have thought this woman was anything other than amazing? Just because she said some familiar things doesn’t make her suspicious.

Felicity turns away from his gaze with a faint blush. “Good. You really need to remember that. We’re a team. We’ve got to stick together. No more of this lone wolf routine. No more planning by yourself when you can get help. Although, there are some plans we can skip, like the whole trick-Slade thing? We will not be doing that again. Ever. Being the one to stab him was cool, but I’d rather not be held by a mad man again. Got it?”

The world could have disappeared under his feet and Oliver wouldn’t have felt it as the voice of doubt returns, screaming louder than ever.

She knew about Slade. He hadn’t shared that. He’d purposely kept that to himself because he couldn’t bear to have that lie out in the open again. He’d only shared about Malcolm and that first year, thinking they could deal with Slade as he came. He hadn’t wanted to complicate things right now.

So the only way she could possibly know...

“Oh,” Felicity whispers, spinning around, her face a mask of shock. “I wasn’t...I didn’t...Frack.”

…

Of all the times for her mouth to override her brain...The only way it could have been worse was if she said ‘do you understand?’. How could she be so stupid?

There’s hope that he didn’t realize the implications of her words, or at least she tricks herself into thinking that before she turns around and meets his shocked, wide eyes.

Frack frack frackity frack FRACK!

Felicity watches Oliver’s face morph with understanding and wishes she could blink out of existence. She’d determined to tell him, but not like this, never like this, not after a whole other emotional discussion. She should have been more tactful, more on guard.

She was supposed to wait until after whatever conversation they were going to have was finished. She was this close to getting Oliver to call Sara in on his own. And now it’s all blown to hell.

“What did you say?” Oliver’s voice is a low growl of barely suppressed anger.

“Oliver...” She doesn’t know how to calm this particular beast. Her controlled scenario involved sitting him down and talking calmly. Their emotions are both running too high for this conversation and he’s not the man she was engaged to, not yet. He hasn’t become this eerily calm person to talk to, a person so in touch with his emotions nothing seems to shake him.

“No! You don’t get to ‘Oliver’ me! What did you just say?”

Saying he’s angry would be the understatement of the century. It’s evident in the way his hands curl into fists and that muscle jumps in his jaw. She’s not sure she’s ever seen him this angry at her, not since Barry. Not that she’s afraid he’d hurt her, but that might be her completely nonexistent self-
preservation instinct.

“I.”

“YOU KNOW WHAT HAPPENS TO SLADE, DON’T YOU!” He shouts. “YOU KNOW!”

Each word hits her like a physical punch. She nods, fighting the tears threatening to build in the corners of her eyes. Felicity nods in place of speaking, not trusting words to come out coherently. There are no secrets between them now.

“How?”

The accusation in his voice feels as painful as breaking every bone in her body. Now that it’s out in the open, Felicity can’t avoid the subject. “The same way you know what’s going to happen.”

“Since when?” He spits out.

Words fail her. It’s her big mouth that got her into trouble and now they’re not helping her get out of this.

“Felicity, how long have you known?”

“Two weeks. Give or take.”

“TWO WEEKS? WHY DIDN’T YOU SAY ANYTHING!” Oliver’s pissed, that muscle jumping in his jaw as he glares at her.

“HEY! Don’t yell at me! I woke up in the past tied to a chair, held captive by Malcolm Merlyn. Then heard he’d stabbed you through the chest! I’m sorry if something slipped my mind!”

Logically she knows he’s just angry because she kept this from him. And he has every right to be angry. She would be just as bad if this was reversed, she was this bad, she reminds herself. But there’s been far too many secrets between them, far too many painful reveals for her to just sit calmly and listen to his angry shouts. Not that she was ever one to take anyone’s words quietly.

“Something? You’re from the future. That’s more than a little something! You knew when I told you what happened to me. You knew...”

“I DIDN’T KNOW. Not until you told me!”

“WHY DIDN’T YOU SAY ANYTHING?” Oliver’s face is red, ragged. He closes his eyes and forces a couple deep breaths before continuing calmly. “Once you knew everything, why didn’t you tell me?”

She tilts her head, pleading with Oliver wordlessly as she struggles to explain with herself. “Would you have listened?”

“YES!”

Felicity snorts at his loud affirmation. “Uh-huh. Sure. Because you’re so open and sharing.”

“You have no right! I have been completely honest about everything since I have returned.”

Oliver’s getting closer, anger flowing off him, wave after wave.

“REALLY? You’ve been honest?” Felicity spits, just as angry at him for judging her. “I didn’t tell
you for the same reason you didn’t share about anything past the Undertaking! You like your secrets! I know so much, what the hell should I share and what should I keep to myself? Or should I just lock it all inside like you do? But then I’m the bad guy for not telling you everything. You’re all worried about making sure everyone else is safe, did you ever consider yourself? And your own honesty?”

“That is not fair and you know it! I thought we were partners.”

“We are!”

“Apparently not!”

With two words, he rips her heart out. She can’t think straight, can’t come up with an intelligent response. And it’s all her own fault. She grabs her bag.

“Fine. I guess I’ll show myself out.”

“Fine!” Oliver screams back.

Felicity stops at the door and glances back. Curse him for meaning so much that she can’t just walk away. “Sara will meet you at the Foundry tomorrow night.”

She doesn’t give him the time to object as she walks away, right past the startled faces of Walter and Moira. She might even see Roy and Thea as she slams the door of her mini cooper. She trusts Roy to find his way back home.

Halfway home, Felicity pulls over to the side of the road, parking as she finally releases all her pent up emotions. It all escapes in a painful scream that bursts from somewhere deep inside her.

It’s not just tonight’s emotions that come bubbling up, but the frustrations of the last two weeks that bursts out. It rips from her throat, leaving her hoarse.

She runs out of air and the next breath burns her lungs as she forces out another frustrated shout. Fresh, salty tears pool in the corners of her eyes.

The breaths keep coming as her screams echo around the inside of the car and the tears start slipping, hot and thick, down her cheeks. Her chest hurts from the abuse and she just wants to stop, but her emotions and the stress are finally catching up with her.

Felicity closes her eyes against the pain.

How is she ever going to make this right?
Chapter 35

“So it's been forever and a half since I posted...sorry about that, but there were friends to visit with, jobs to do, and even a NEW JOB that starts today!! Yay! Anyway...that's why it's been so long.

There are only about five chapters left after this :(  
I don't know when the next chapter will be posted, but I'm getting ahead with writing. I've been hit with inspiration so hopefully it'll be posted in the next two weeks and this can be finished up before the new season starts!

Anyway...ENJOY the new chapter! And let me know what you think at the end!

Chapter 35

“Oliver.”

“We’re not doing this.”

He brushes past Sara to cross Verdant’s scoffed and dubiously clean dance floor. He tries to ignore the way the sunlight glints off the slick floor from the windows high in the walls of the club, the way it shines off Sara’s blonde hair and reminds him of the woman who lied to him. Sara’s not Felicity, but right now he doesn’t want to talk to either of them. And Sara isn’t the one he would want to see anyway.

She stands in the middle of the floor and Oliver’s more than aware that he should accept her help, should let her train him. She *is* here after all. This is his chance to keep her alive...

Maybe he is too stubborn for his own good.

“Your girlfriend asked me to train you. That’s why I’m here.”

Oliver stops, his back towards her. It’s definitely Sara’s voice, sharp with the same edge of sarcasm. Her sense of humor isn’t quite how Oliver remembers it, not hard won through the years since she’s been back in Starling.

“To be honest, when I imagined seeing you again, I was looking forward to the complete shock at the fact I was alive. But apparently you’ve lived this before.”

His hands curl into fists. “So Felicity told you everything.”

Her soft snort echoes around the room. “I wouldn’t say everything, but she said we were friends. And how she knew how to contact me…Let’s just say we must be really good friends.”

He twists then to look at his friend for the first time since her body sat on the table in the Foundry. She looks much the same as always, dressed in all black with wavy blonde hair falling gracefully around her shoulders. She looks carefree and powerful…invincible.
“You are,” he says quietly. “She took a bullet for you.”

It hurts to look at her, the grief he felt at her latest death crashing over him. But he keeps staring, choosing to remember her like this: badass incarnate.

“Damn. And I thought she couldn’t get more awesome. You’ve got a winner there.”

Oliver shakes his head. “She’s not my girlfriend.” The anger from last night has faded. He still has questions, a thousand and one questions that he wants answers to, but that doesn’t mean all is forgiven and forgotten.

“She’s exactly your type. I bet she doesn’t let you get away with shit,” Sara continues as if he hadn’t spoken.

He blinks and runs a hand through his hair. “She doesn’t.” The memory draws a chuckle from him as he turns away and heads to the secret door.

“Where are you going? We have training.”

“If you’re going to train me, you should see where we work.” He quickly types the code into the electronic pad and yanks the door open.

Sara snorts. “A secret base under your club? Why am I not surprised?”

His eyes lift to the ceiling as he fights the need to roll his eyes. He only came in because he wanted to punch something, he needs to punch something after having to deal with the rest of his family last night. He spent the hours after Felicity left dodging questions and then wallowing in his own mind. He couldn’t get away last night and he’d hoped for a couple hours to himself to work out his aggression.

“Did you come here to talk or to fight?”

Oliver throws his jacket to the side, off the mat and into a heap in complete disregard. He rounds on the assassin, prepared to dodge whatever she might throw his way.

She laughs without amusement. “I don’t fight angry, Ollie.”

“What?”

“I don’t fight angry. So as long as you’re angry, I’ll wait.” Sara drops into a chair, legs crossed, hands clasped as she settles in to wait.

His jaw clenches, a muscle twitching. “That’s Felicity’s chair.”

Sara glances down and then back up at him with a smirk. “Felicity’s, huh?”

Oliver’s hand freezes, half curled into a fist. “What is that supposed to mean?”

“Nothing,” she says as she stands, holding her hands up in surrender. Sara pulls out the chair by his work station and drops into it. Her feet lift onto the table as she leans back. She wants to say something, Oliver can tell.

He turns away from her, unable to face that knowing smirk. He focuses instead on the punching dummy. The last thing he wants to do is talk about Felicity. It needs to happen. He’s aware of that, but first he wants to wallow.
So he wallows his way through three dummy arms, through the aches, pains and protestations of his body. He pushes himself through drills and exercises until sweat pours from every part of his body, until he’s drenched in it like a physical representation of his emotional and mental turmoil.

He tries so hard to work until he can’t remember the problems assaulting his mind.

But he can’t.

No matter how he pushes himself to be faster, to punch harder, to jump higher, he can’t push Felicity’s face from his mind. He sees her in front of him: the Felicity from his time as he tells her he loves her and leaves, the Felicity he saw when he first got here, the Felicity sitting at his bedside after escaping Malcolm, the Felicity he faced last night in Queen Mansion.

His body loudly protests the motions, complaining after weeks of disuse and the abuse of an injury. Each movement pulls at the freshly mended skin on his abdomen. He didn’t notice it at first, high on anger and adrenaline. Now that he’s faltered, slowed enough to calm his heartbeat, he can feel the tugging on his skin.

“Here.”

Oliver blinks at the ice pack in Sara’s hands. “What?”

She sighs and shoves the ice pack against his chest. “For your hand, dummy.”

A quick glance down reveals red, irritated skin on the knuckles of his hands. Any movement of his fingers sends sparks of pain up his arms. If he doesn’t ice them, they’re going to swell and he’ll feel it in the morning.

He should have wrapped his hands before starting.

“You’re an idiot. You know that, right?”

Since there’s a lecture obviously in his future, Oliver drops into the seat Sara vacated with a groan, the only sign of how much pain he’s in. “You’re going to have to be a little more specific.”

“The woman you love just handed you the answer to all your problems and you’re shutting her out of your life.”

“She lied to me.” Felicity took his trust and his love, tore it up, and threw it back in his face. She knew the danger of her situation and continued to stand against Malcolm, to place herself in danger despite her foresight. She didn’t trust him enough to tell him everything.

“And how many times have you lied to her?”

“I told her everything! Do you think this has been easy? Reliving my past? But I trusted her with it. I trusted her more than anyone. I loved her.”

Sara scowls. “And the first time around? Did you tell her everything then? Because I hate to break it to you, Oliver, but that girl dealt with your shit before. She probably knows you better than you know yourself.”

Oliver scowls, upset that she’s able to so easily punch holes in his logic. If she remembers the first time...she remembers Slade...yeah, Felicity might have a valid reason or two not to trust him... “If she’s from my time...”
If the last thing she remembers is their moment in the Foundry...Oliver’s not sure how he feels about that.

“You should talk to her,” Sara says. Her brisk tone catches Oliver’s attention.

“You know. You know when she’s from.”

Sara purses her lips, staring blankly back at him.

It’s more than answer enough: she knew. Oliver growls. “So she can tell you everything, but telling me is crossing a line?”

“She wasn’t exactly talking to me.”

“How far?”

Sara’s eyes dart heavenward as she sighs. “You need to talk to her.”

“She’s not here,” he all but rumbles. The chair slides back as he stands, advancing on the assassin. “Sara...”

Impassively, she shakes her head. “Not going to happen. You want to know? Talk to her.”

Oliver throws the icepack at the med table, not caring where it lands. It gives him an odd sense of satisfaction that he can just drop it without caring what will happen when it lands. “So you’re not going to tell me anything. You’re not going to train with me. So what the hell are you doing here, Sara?”

“I just said I wouldn’t train with you while angry.”

He narrows his eyes at her as the padlocked door at the top of the stairs unlocks. He recognizes Digg’s footsteps without needing to look.

The jittery energy that propelled him during his “training” is back with a vengeance and Oliver knows deep in his bones that he needs to do something big tonight. He turns away from his stalemate with Sara. With only a fleeting look to John, Oliver grabs his suit from the display case.

“I’m going out tonight.”

The token protests are ignored as he goes to change. All of them know it’s a stupid decision, but Oliver’s not thinking with his head. No. This time he’s reacting purely to heart.

... 

**John:** *I don’t know what happened, but you have to get down here.*

Felicity groans as she stares at the text on her phone. Then she reaches for the bottle of wine on the coffee table. It’s just far enough that she has to lean forward and ruin the perfect resting posture she’d achieved so far. It turns out that drowning her sorrows in wine and ice cream – while detrimental to fitting into her new wardrobe – proved to be at least minimally satisfying.

She was almost able to forget Lyla and Roy were watching her. Neither were particularly supportive of her decision to live on the couch and pig out on dairy and alcohol, but they didn’t try to stop her either so that was a win.

**Felicity:** *He doesn’t want to talk to me right now.*
Instead of a response, across the room Lyla’s phone buzzes. It’s too much of a coincidence. Before Lyla even glances up at her, Felicity knows it’s John. She groans.

“No! Tell him I won’t do it!”

Lyla looks up at her unimpressed. “Johnny says he’s going out tonight.”

Felicity pauses with the rim on her wine glass pressed to her bottom lip. It wouldn’t take much for the sweet alcohol to tip into her mouth and down her throat. “Did the doctors clear him?”


“He promised,” Felicity says before she realizes what’s wrong with her argument.

Yes, Oliver promised to wait for the doctor’s approval. And then he found out she was from the future. Her betrayal took all deals off the table. In his mind, it nullified everything.

If he got hurt in his stupid crusade to prove something tonight, she was going to kill him. Idiotic, unreasonable man.

“Damn, Blondie. I didn’t realize you had such a violent streak.”

Felicity blinks. “I said that out loud?”

Roy and Lyla both nod.

She sighs, resigning herself to another sip of wine before picking up the two little bottles in front of her. “Well, I might as well do something useful tonight. Blue or pink?”

Roy stares at her like she’s lost a couple marbles as she holds up the little bottles of nail polish.

“Because pink is more sedate and normal for a VP of Applied Sciences. But I like this blue. It’s my favorite. I was wearing it when Oliver called me his girl.” Felicity smiles sappily at the hazy, drug-filled memory.

“Maybe you should stop him from trying to kill himself?” Roy suggests. He glances at Lyla for help, but she just shrugs.

“Blue it is!” She decides, unscrewing the cap and starting to paint her nails. She’s had far too much experience painting her nails while drunk, a fact she decides as the polish slides on perfectly even as the world in her periphery seems to be tilting.

“You need to talk some sense into her!”

Felicity sighs and looks up at Roy pointedly. “He’ll be fine...probably. Today, despite being an emotional wreck, I successfully sabotaged the device Malcolm’s going to use to level half the city. We probably won’t know for sure it works until he tries to use the machines, but that’s what I did today. At the expense of my emotional turmoil. So tonight, I’m going to drink wine, eat ice cream, and paint my nails. Oliver can beat his feelings into some poor criminal. We each cope in our own ways.”

“That’s...”

“Grown up?” Felicity supplies for Roy. He looks scared to contradict her, like she might lash out at him if he says the wrong thing.
“I was going to say creepy.”

“Passive aggressive,” Lyla says. “She’s not actually lashing out, but she’s letting his propensity for violence do it for her.” Lyla snags the pink nail polish, shaking it lightly, and starts lazily painting her own nails. “Although, maybe that’s the best course of action.”

“He’ll beat his feelings out and then I can talk to him like a civilized human being,” Felicity says with a bright smile.

“You didn’t tell him you were from the future. Correct me if I’m wrong, but I don’t think it’s going to be that easy.” Roy frowns at her.

Felicity drops the nail polish brush back into the container and turns her complete attention to Roy. He shifts under her gaze and she internally fist bumps herself. “Of course it won’t be easy. Why do you think there’s wine and chocolate?”

“I don’t understand women,” Roy mutters, grabbing his cell phone. “If you’re not going to stop him, I’m going to see what I can do.”

Felicity waves. “I have fun dealing with Mr. Grrrr.”

The light atmosphere dissipates in the silence that pulses between Felicity and Lyla as they do their nails. The buzz of the wine is wearing off and Felicity can’t seem to find the carefree attitude she had since getting home from work.

Yes, she managed to create a back door that would hopefully let her gain access to the machines without physically being present to shut them down. It would save time and a whole hell of a lot safer. So long as Malcolm’s goons didn’t find the hidden protocol.

It had been a tricky operation. They would be suspicious of any contribution on her part, so she’d had to convince one of her underlings that an app on a smartphone would be the most convenient remote for the devices.

But she couldn’t come right out and say it.

Technically she’s been working on the idea for a week, but it finally took. She got the revised plans today and even though it wasn’t on the specs, there were enough gaps that Felicity could read between the lines.

She might have hacked a couple computers just to verify.

Felicity wasn’t stupid, and she wasn’t just in turmoil over the fight with Oliver.

She wanted to talk with him, to confide in him finally, to swap stories. Mostly, she wanted her Oliver, the one who listened and talked and was incredibly sweet. But she’d dug her own grave when she decided not to tell him. Was it the smartest choice? Hell no.

And thinking about all the other ways she could have told him just makes her want to eat her feelings.

But she made a choice. If there’s one thing she’s learned, it’s that she has to accept the consequences of her actions. A year ago, she wouldn’t be this calm. But only months ago (to her) she killed thousands of people to save millions. Her scope of right and wrong is skewed in a way she never wanted it to be, but that doesn’t alter the fact that she’s not the same person she was last time she was in 2012.
She made a choice not to tell Oliver. After all the secrets he’s kept from her over the years, she knows just how terrible it feels to be kept in the dark. In her mind, Felicity likes to justify it as she’s just not telling the whole truth, it’s selective truths, she’s just not saying everything. Predictably, the words are just as hollow in her own head as they were when Oliver kept things from her.

She’d never seen herself as petty or vindictive, however, with this whole incident she might need to rethink that. If Oliver hadn’t lied to her about Slade’s escape after everything they’d been through, would she had wanted to keep the secret so much?

It’s the ‘what if’s that are killing her.

Logically, not wanting to disturb the timeline sounds nice, but it’s a flimsy excuse. Really, she was terrified of how Oliver would reaction. This Oliver, the one who faced Ra’s, believed suicide missions were justifiable, that siding with an enemy was a viable option, that keeping secrets to protect your loved ones was fine, that you could make deals with murderous madmen. He was unpredictable because he acted out of fear.

She couldn’t deal with that in the past.

She needed to be methodical, so she was. And now she had two plans to take out Malcolm Merlyn and stop the Undertaking. If the app failed, Oliver would succeed, aided by the training of a member of the League of Assassins.

So he hated her.

It tore her up, but she could live with it.

“He’s going to come around.”

Felicity sighs, moving on to painting her toes. “It doesn’t matter if he does, as long as he lives.”

Lyla huffs. “That’s very noble, but it’s clearly tearing you apart.”

“What can I say?” Felicity flops back into the couch as she stares at the Robin Hood poster although her eyes are seeing another man in green leather with a bow. “He’s right. I should have told him. It wasn’t fair. Besides, the Markov device is almost finished. I might not survive the week.”

Wine isn’t meant to be chugged, but Felicity couldn’t care less as the cool liquid slides down her throat as she empties the glass and grabs the bottle.

“Malcolm’s not going to get to you.”

Felicity smiles at Lyla. “No offense, Miss A.R.G.U.S. agent, but I’ve seen that man do impossible things and I’ve only seen him beaten once. Oliver’s not ready for that. Not yet.”

He doesn’t have the training or the drive he had when he cut off Malcolm’s hand. If it comes to a fight between them – with Malcolm fighting all out – Felicity has no idea how it will turn out. It terrifies her to the very core. Even with her meticulous planning and her back up plans, they could still lose this battle.

“If you’ve already given up, why are you still here?” Lyla’s voice is brittle, angry, just short of a shout. “Why haven’t you run away yet? It’s not like you’re helping anybody.”

Lyla’s lashing out to get a rise out of her. Logically, she knows that, but it still rankles.
“Because I woke up in the middle of this mess and they’re my team. I’m not leaving them behind to die!”

“So are you going to stay cooped up in this damned apartment throwing yourself a pity party or are you going to go out there and get your man in order?”

Felicity scowls at her. She’s being played like a fiddle, manipulated into doing what Lyla thinks she should do. She huffs as she stands.

“Fine. But we’re not going to the Foundry.”

...

“So you’re just going to follow me around?” Oliver glances at the silent woman in black next to him. It’s not her Canary leather outfit. He can see accents of the League of Assassins in the buckles. Although the leather jacket is all Sara. She doesn’t bother with a mask, just wraps a scarf around her head with a flap hanging loose to tuck in and cover her face if necessary.

He’s stopped a mugging and threatened off some drug dealers, but Sara hasn’t emerged from the shadows to interfere yet. She just catches back up with him as he takes off.

“So we’re not talking then...,” he mutters under his breath. He’d gotten used to the talking over comms and tonight it just feels too quiet. Not that he would admit it out loud because that would be tantamount to confessing he missed Felicity.

Oliver makes it back to his bike and pushes off before Sara catches up. She’s keeping an eye on him, probably for Felicity. He doesn’t get it. She’s practically been his shadow all day. She doesn’t know Felicity, so why is she doing this?

Eeeee Oooooo Eeeeee Oooooo eeeeeeeeeeeEEEEEEEEEEeeeeeEeeeee

Oliver swerves out of the way, scraping the tip of his boot against the pavement with the severe motion. He curses under his breath. He’d gotten used to the talking over comms and tonight it just feels too quiet. Not that he would admit it out loud because that would be tantamount to confessing he missed Felicity.

Oliver makes it back to his bike and pushes off before Sara catches up. She’s keeping an eye on him, probably for Felicity. He doesn’t get it. She’s practically been his shadow all day. She doesn’t know Felicity, so why is she doing this?

Adrenaline thrums through his cells, igniting another wave of energy as he throws the bike back into gear and takes off towards the disaster zone. He speeds through dark streets, goaded on by the rushing night air and the faint sirens in the distance. The lights of the street blur together as he swerves around cars and people in his rush to get to his destination. Vaguely, he’s aware of Sara on his tail, but it’s all about the adrenaline now.

The back of his bike spins to the side as Oliver-skids around the corner and to a stop, staring up at his goal. It’s a tower – not one he’s familiar with but an industrial building all the same. The firefighters mill around the base of the building and orders are shouted into the night as gear is pulled from the trucks.

Oliver lifts his eyes to the flames leaping from the windows as he recalls the villain in this scenario: a downed firefighter seeking retribution from his brothers who left him to die.

He doesn’t have to stop this. It’ll be weeks before someone connects the deaths in the fires. The man wants revenge and he wants to stop it. It seems fitting that this is how he redeems himself again. Last time, this fight restored his faith in his mission after his defeat at Malcolm’s hands.
It can do the same this time.

“OLIVER!”

He ignores Sara’s shout as he swings from the bike and takes a running jump through the side door. Smoke assaults his lungs, but he pushes forward.

It’s time to be a hero.

...

“He did WHAT?”

Tommy jumps at Felicity’s loud voice in his ear and glares sideways at her from the driver’s seat of the car. “You can’t shout like that when I’m driving.”

“Well someone has to get him out!”

He sighs. Well, she’s not listening to him, that’s for sure. And whoever’s on the other end of the phone must be regretting calling her right about now.

“I don’t care, Roy! You can’t just let him run into a burning building!” Felicity slams her hand down on the console and Tommy winces sympathetically, resisting the urge to rub his hand over his precious car to make sure it’s okay.

“He’s a pig-headed idiot with no sense of self-preservation...I get that, John, but he can’t just...Well, where’s Sara?”

Tommy glances into the backseat where the stoic woman Felicity introduced as her bodyguard sits with her hands folded in her lap. He’s seen her hanging around Felicity since the kidnapping incident, but he hadn’t realized it was in an official capacity until they showed up at his apartment and demanded entrance:

“We need you at Verdant.” Felicity brushed past him into the apartment grabbing his jacket and car keys for him. She pushes both into his hands and shoves him out the door. “Come on!”

“What? No. I’m meeting Laurel-”

“No. You’re not. You already texted her apologizing. So let’s go.”

“You hacked my phone?”

“I need your help getting through to Oliver.” Felicity forces him into the elevator and presses the button for the garage.

“Is kidnapping people a normal thing for you?” He asks the shadow in the backseat.

She – Lyla, he vague thinks – throws him an enigmatic smile. “It’s more common than you might think. Although normally they don’t drive.”

Scary bodyguard: Check.

Tommy resists the urge to question her response on the grounds that he’s pretty sure the answer would be something along the lines “If I tell you, I’d have to kill you.” Oliver’s bodyguard is intimidating and all that, but at the moment Tommy’s finding Lyla far scarier.
“WHAT?!”

The green sign shines in front of them and Tommy sighs as he turns to pull around back to his designated parking spot.

“We’re here. I’m coming down.” Felicity doesn’t even wait for Tommy to park before she’s racing to the back door, Lyla on her heels with far more controlled grace than the computer geek.

Tommy takes his time pulling the keys from the ignition and locking up the car. The metal door crashes shuts with a reverberating SLAM, cutting off the thudding bass that managed to leak out when Felicity rushed in and leaving just the click of his locks the bounce of the brick walls.

Punching in the access code, Tommy trudges behind them into the club, pulling out his phone to check the text Felicity claimed she sent to Laurel.

“You cancelled my date so I could drive you and your bodyguard to my nightclub?” Tommy stares incredulously at the blonde over the roof of his car. “Seriously?”

“It’s important,” Felicity says, her blue eyes boring into his displaying her fear and worry. He sighs, unable to deny her anything. “Fine. But you explain on the way.”

She hadn’t gotten to the explanation part when her phone rang. Tommy can only assume it has something to do with Oliver’s little green secret...but he doesn’t see how much he can help with that. He doesn’t see how he can help with that at all. Heroism and leather aren’t his areas of expertise.

Well...there was that one time...but that hardly counts.

Rrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr
“Now you really better get home soon.” Her breathy voice sends desire straight to his groin, but before he can get her to convince him to leave now, she cuts the line.

Tommy takes a couple moments to compose himself before he pushes off the wall and punches in the code to get downstairs. All the lights are on and he knows before the reaches the floor that whatever’s going on is major.

Felicity slides around her work station, zipping from screen to screen with practiced ease as she fires questions at Roy and John. At the occasional perfunctory answer, she turns to glare at one or the other. Lyla stands off to the side, scowling.

“What about their comms?” Felicity asks, voice deceptively calm as she pulls up a radio signal on one screen and news footage on another.

“He didn’t take the comms.”

Felicity whips around. “Excuse me? What do you mean he didn’t take a comm?”

She doesn’t stay still long enough to get an answer as she propels herself across the room to a small case. She tosses it to Digg. “Go. Find them. And take Tommy!”

He raises his eyebrows and looks at the large bodyguard. “So you did bring me here for a reason?”

She stares at him with a frown. “Yeah.”

“Care to tell me what it is?” Because he doesn’t see himself being useful right now. Not in this emergency.

“I need you to talk some sense into Oliver. He won’t listen to me or Digg apparently, so you need to talk to him.”

Tommy blinks. “You guys are fighting.”

She scowls at him and shoves his jacket at him for the second time that day. “Just go.”

“And what are we supposed to do once we get there?” He’s not equipped to respond to any sort of emergency, especially if it’s anywhere near the nasty looking fire on the computer screen. “Last I checked none of us were fire fighters.”

“John!”

The loud cry from the speakers has Felicity flying back to the computer before she can unleash her wrath on Tommy. He watches curiously as she desperately starts to move through the screens as a female voice talks to Digg.

“I got him. We’re fine.”

Tommy moves silently around the edge of the area, eyes locked on Felicity’s face. The relief washes over her visibly, from the slouch of her shoulders to the relaxation of the creases in her eyes. She doesn’t smile, but her whole body manages to sigh, an exhale of air palpable in the basement.

“What happened?” John asks point blank, arms crossed over his chest with a protective glance towards Felicity who remains suspiciously silent.

Tommy walks closer the screen that’s obviously a GPS overview that appears to be honing in on the woman’s signal since it gets closer the longer they talk.
“He ran into a burning building that’s what happened.”

Then a man’s voice that sounds further away. “I told you. There was a murderer in there. If you’d left me-“

“If I’d left you, you’d have died!” The woman shouts. “We’re heading back now.”

“Got it.”

Tommy glances down at Felicity as her fingers tap a rhythm into the desk and her eyes follow the now-moving blinking green dot. “Since it doesn’t look like you need me...”

“Don’t need you?” She frowns at him. “Of course we need you.”

He glances at the screen. “Oliver’s on his way back. Whatever you needed me for is done.”

“No. I still need you to talk some sense into him.” Felicity announces, swiveling away as she grabs her purse again. “You guys need to stage an intervention.”


He notices how everyone in the room is watching Felicity as she sighs. She looks tired, defeated, as she rubs her temples. Big, blue eyes meet his, ripe with unspoken sorrow. Felicity takes a deep breath and lets it out slowly.

“He needs friends right now, people he can trust. He has to know you guys are there for him. Especially you, Tommy. Just...please? Trust me on this. He needs you.”

He couldn’t say no when she looks at him like that, like her heart is on the line. She’s got him wrapped around her finger when she looks at him like that. Mostly because he knows she wouldn’t ask if it wasn’t important. She knows what this is costing him.

“Thank you.”

“Wait!” He frowns as she walks past him. “Where are you going?”

Felicity glances at the computer with the GPS and then points above their heads. “The club.”

“What about all that ‘Oliver needs people he can trust’ nonsense?”

“Tommy,” she sighs, drawing out his name as if it was a whole sentence.

“What? You dragged me down here and now you’re not even going to talk to him! How does that make sense? The Felicity I know would march right up to Oliver and tell him to pull his head out of his ass!” She wasn’t a coward, she was never afraid to say what was on her mind.

“He doesn’t want me here.”

“Bull shit! He’s half in love with you!” Tommy’s not blind. He’s seen the looks, the touching, the eye sex. Oliver can’t seem to pull himself from the blonde. If there’s anyone he’d listen to it’s her. She made him go to therapy for Christ’s sake.

Felicity avoids his gaze, her hands curling into fists. “That was before. He doesn’t want to talk to me now, which is why,” her eyes lock on to his, “he needs you here.”

Tommy frowns. “What happened?”
“We had a fight. We’ll be fine, eventually. But I’m the last person he needs her right now.” Her phone beeps and she looks at it. “Besides, I’m needed at work.” She turns away with a not-so-reluctant smile. “Have fun, boys.”

The tapping of her heels echoes around the room, a tight staccato that plays off the tension in the room as she leaves. Roy groans when the door closes between her and the body guard and moves away from the computers.

“This is going to be fun.”

In complete agreement with the sarcasm, Tommy snorts. “You’re telling me. It wasn’t fun to deal with him when he thought heavy drinking was a solution. Now he’s beating up bad guys. I don’t really want to deal with him now that I know he can punch.”

Roy snorts. “He’s fighting with Felicity. That’s what this is.”

“So why are we talking to him?”

“Preaching to the choir,” John mutters under his breath.

“They’re both...” Roy purses his lips as he searches for the word.

“Stubborn idiots?” Tommy says in an attempt to be helpful.

“To put it mildly,” John agrees as the key pad above them beeps and the door is thrown open to stampeding feet racing down the stairs.

“I told you I was fine. Now that fire fighter is going to murder again!”

“You were not equipped to go rushing into a burning building. Honestly, I didn’t believe Felicity when she said you had a death wish, but obviously it’s true.”

“Felicity told you I had a death wish?” Oliver rounds on the woman trailing behind him, his voice echoing around the basement.

“Yeah, she did.”

“And with what you just pulled we’re inclined to believe it.”

He whirls around to face Tommy, his face showing genuine surprise. “What are you doing here?”

“Me? I’m hoping to appeal to your humanity. I got dragged away from a perfectly good date for this.” Blonde hair catches his eye and Tommy turns to glance at the blonde. “Sara?”

“Merlyn,” she smirks.

The surprise takes him a moment to get over, but after one friend returned from the dead, it’s not that hard to imagine that she survived too. He’s honestly proud of himself for rolling with the punches as he says: “Welcome back to the land of the living. When did you get back?”

“I’m only here to keep this idiot alive.”

“Which is hard when he runs into burning buildings,” Tommy concludes. “I’m guessing this current streak has something to do with the fight you had with Felicity.”

Oliver’s jerks around to brandish his direction, his jaw clenching, the muscle twitching. He looks for
all the world as if he wants to say something, to shout back, but Sara jumps in first:

“He’s all twisted up in knots, but the idiot refuses to talk to her.”

He’s not the staunchest supporter of Felicity and Oliver together, he’d rather see his best friends separately happy, but he’s witnessed them together too much to doubt that there’s genuine emotion there...on both their parts. Felicity wouldn’t have dragged him here if it wasn’t monumentally important that he be there.

“We’re not talking about her,” Oliver growls.

“You’re right. We’re talking about how you need to talk to her,” Roy shouts. He backs down a moment later when Oliver glares at him.

Tommy steps between them, his arms crossed. “Kid has a point. You need to talk to Smoak.”

“I think we can all agree on that.”

Tommy finds a grim satisfaction in their united front as Oliver spins around to stare at each of them. The anger and annoyance that used to explode out in their younger years now simmers under the surface, evident only in Oliver’s steely gaze as he stares them down. Tommy has to hand it to Oliver: he definitely lives up to his scary alter-ego.

“Fine. I’ll talk to her.”

Tommy lets out a breath. That took less time than he thought. There’s still time to get to Laurel.

“Tomorrow.”

It’s clear from the snorts and groans that Tommy’s not the only one who doubts Oliver. Tommy steps forward with a scowl. He’s already been forced to cancel a date with Laurel, he’s not about to waste any more time than he has to. And if Felicity feels like dragging him in here every time she and Oliver fight, he’s not letting this get out of hand.

“How about tonight?”

Oliver doesn’t react outright, but his eyes flit nervously to Tommy and then towards the computers. “She’s probably asleep.”

“Nope. She got called into work,” Roy says, drawing Oliver’s attention right to him.

“Work? This late?” Oliver scowls.

“Yeah. Probably something to do with that Markov device thing. They supposedly finished that today,” Roy says off-handedly.

“What?” Tommy jumps at Oliver’s shout. Before he has a chance to process Oliver’s already storming past Sara, right for the stairs at a dead run. “We need to go. NOW!”

“What is happening?” Tommy mutters.

“Only one thing makes a man run like that,” Sara answers, a phone already raised to her ear. “Felicity’s in danger.”
Chapter 36

I'm BAAAAACKKK!!! I hope this was worth the wait! I'm seriously nervous about publishing the last five chapters, so let me know what you think! Oh! And there will now be weekly updates. I think I'll go back to my normal Tuesday update schedule next week.

Enjoy!

Chapter 36

In all her years with Team Arrow, Felicity’s reasonably proud of the level head she’s developed. Somehow she’s managed to get over the paralyzing fear of coming face to face with mass murderers.

Is that good for her self-preservation?

Probably not.

But she’s still here so that has to count for something.

Felicity knows enough about dangerous situations by now that she’s able to recognize her predicament as soon as she walks out of the club. Lyla is telling her they can take the town car and Roy will drive John to her apartment to pick it up later, but Felicity’s looking around at the dark night as her hand squeezes her phone.

She’s gotten late night calls from work before. It’s not unusual. If they hadn’t finished the Markov device today, she might have been able to overlook the call. But there were no major malfunctions, nothing being tested: tonight is clear and calm. There shouldn’t be any catastrophic meltdown that needs her immediate attention.

Ergo: It’s a trap.

Felicity climbs out of the car and turns back to Lyla. Lyla can’t save her from this. If Malcolm’s finally coming for her, then she’s not going to jeopardize her friend’s future by dragging her along.

“Wait here,” she says quietly, with as much of a smile as she can summon. “I’ll be right back.”

Lyla frowns at her. “Felicity...”

“I just have to run to my office. I won’t be more than ten minutes. I’ll be fine.” She pats the car door and saunters over to the elevator. She smiles back from the elevator as Lyla steps out of the car, worry written in her face, but then her phone rings, successfully distracting her long enough for Felicity to quickly shut the elevator doors.

The ground under her feet lurches, and Felicity braces herself as she forces air in and out of her lungs normally. Felicity carefully pulls her phone from her pocket and stares at it for a moment. She might be imagining this whole scenario. It’s not likely, but it’s possible.
It could be just another normal work emergency.

Maybe if she says it enough, she’ll relax a little bit...

“Leaving your bodyguard downstairs: not a smart move Miss Smoak.”

Only years of having Malcolm emerge from shadows keep Felicity from shrieking at the assassin’s appearance in what had been an empty elevator seconds before. Instead she glances sideways in what she hopes he’ll consider disdain and not fear.

“I didn’t want to get her killed. That’s what you’re here to do, right? Kill everyone involved in the project.” Her hands are shaking around the phone. It wouldn’t take long to call Oliver, just the press of a single button really. Even if they’re fighting, she knows that if she calls, he’ll always pick up. Always.

“Your phone, Miss Smoak.” Malcolm’s voice is far from menacing as he holds his hand out. Felicity hands it over. Her breath catches in her throat as she realizes he’s dressed in his assassin garb. This could be it.

She’s going to die in this elevator.

“I wanted to test the machine here,” Malcolm says. The lightness of his tone is unsettling. It’s always unsettling, but here, alone with him in an enclosed box, Felicity finds herself struggling to dig up her usual anger towards the man, if only to calm her fear. “But Moira made me promise the building would be unharmed. I thought it would be fitting: an invention gone wrong. Just to ensure you didn’t succeed in sabotaging the device.”

Felicity finally turns her head to look at him. “That would be smart.”


She does not like that sly tone. Nope. She can deal with malicious, antagonistic Malcolm Merlyn, but not clever, plotting Malcolm. He’s got a plan and Felicity’s positive she isn’t going to like it.

“I really do have to thank you, Miss Smoak. After all my planning, this last stretch has been a little anticlimactic. And then you came along. It’s really put some life into this whole operation.”

“You like to listen to yourself talk,” she says dryly. Their reflections are blobs in the foggy metal doors of the elevator. Felicity refuses to give in to her heart-pounding fear. She’s not going to stare at Malcolm with wide eyes. He’s not going to kill her yet. And she’s not going to give him the benefit of seeing how much the suspense is killing her.

“I really will miss you, Miss Smoak,” Malcolm sighs as the elevator reaches the top floor.

The doors open just as Malcolm places a cold blade to her throat.

“Really. It’s a shame you know so much.”

...

Felicity.

Felicityfelicityfelicity.

Oliver’s mind is too full to think of anything else. God, how could he have been so stupid? How could he have forgotten she was in danger?
Right. Because he was stubborn.

He should get ‘Idiot’ permanently tattooed on his forehead. If he’d agreed to talk to her, this could’ve been avoided.

Oliver spots a congestion of cars ahead as he enters the true heart of the city and veers off onto the sidewalk. Pedestrians scatter as he cuts the corner and he catches a few flashes from phones. A moment later, they’re gone and QC looms on the horizon...and beyond that: the new Applied Sciences building.

He leans forward and pushes the throttle as far as it can go. The engine of his favorite bike starts to whine and grind. The noise grates his ears and makes him grind his teeth, but he has his destination. Right there in front of him.

He can almost taste it.

EeeeeeooOOOOooooooeeeeeEEEEEeeeoOOOOOoo

Blue and red lights paint the buildings around them as the cop car peels out of a side street in a squeal of tires.

Cursing creatively under his breath, Oliver starts weaving between cars. He doesn’t have time to deal with this. Right now, Felicity could be dying from an arrow to the heart and he’s too far away to do anything. He needs to get there and he can’t have the police interfering.

Felicity.

How could he have thought pushing her away was the answer?

She stood by him through all his ups and downs. She was there to support him when he lost everything. Just the thought of her brightened his day. No matter when she’s from, that can’t have changed that much. He loves her more than life.

Why did he let even a day pass without letting her know that? Angry or not.

Another motorbike growls beside his and Oliver spares a long enough glance to recognize the leather jacket before focusing on the building ahead again.

“THIS IS THE POLICE! PULL OVER TO THE SIDE OF THE ROAD!”

Oliver snorts at the loudspeaker and swerves around another car. Yes. The vigilante is going to pull over for a police car.

The motorcycle slides close to the ground as Oliver takes the turn around the QC building, going so low, the tip of his boots nearly grazes the pavement for a moment before he rights himself again.

And finally finally the Applied Sciences building appears. Without regards to property damage or practicality, Oliver adjusts his trajectory and runs the motorcycle up the million dollar sculpture his mother must have picked out to demonstrate the power and wealth of the company. He’s sure she’ll frown at his usage, but it provides the perfect ramp, catapult: sending Oliver – bike and all – crashing through the third story of the Applied Sciences building.

The police sirens increase along with the lights flashing outside the window, but Oliver turns his back on all of it, shutting out the noise and the lights to face the man he knows is here to kill everyone.
He can’t allow that to happen.

... “Do you think the Green Arrow will rescue us?”

Felicity turns to stare incredulously at Matt, the Markov tech crouched beside her. He’s low-level, a gadget guy who got wrapped up in a project far bigger than him, a guy Malcolm decided wasn’t worth paying off. So here they are, crouched in front of a work table as Malcolm – in full League of Assassins regalia – oversees the checking of the Markov device. She can feel the line of blood from Malcolm’s knife still seeping down into the neckline of her shirt, a reminder of the dangerous situation she’s in.

“No one’s seen him in weeks,” she says. Of course, if anything can pull Oliver from hiding, it would be this. If he finds out. If he’s smart and thinking rationally...”He’s not coming.”

Not that he’s ever thought logically when it comes to her.

“Now, Miss Smoak,” the Dark Archer scolds, “You can’t know that for sure. Unless you know something we don’t...”

Felicity bites her tongue as she stares into Malcolm’s black, soulless eyes. They both know the Green Arrow’s not dead. Although Malcolm’s probably only suspicious at this point. He can’t know for sure. Oliver hasn’t shown his face in that mask since he fought Malcolm when she was kidnapped.

His dark eyes challenge her, daring her to say something until Malcolm turns back to Eric working on the device. “Everything in order?”

The man nods nervously, smearing dirt and sweat across his forehead in that moment. “It’s fine.”

“Fantastic. Thank you for your cooperation.”

Matt’s voice rises in a screech as an arrow spouts out Eric’s back. It slices through his body like a knife thought butter as Malcolm impales him. Felicity clamps a hand over her mouth to stifle the sob and keep herself from throwing up.

In that instant, it all comes rushing back:

*She’s in front of a computer, a doomsday clock ticking in red on one screen as she types line after line of code, her father by her side. People are screaming at her to DO SOMETHING!*  

*Her heart beat echoes in her ears, her fingers ache from their race against time. The GPS shone as a mockery of her inability to hack another computer. She’s losing, in a field that’s supposed to be her domain. This should be easy for her.*

*Failure.*

*But there’s no time to wallow: decisions need to be made. Now.*

*With a few taps of her fingers she condemns thousands to death. In a couple seconds, she kills more than Malcolm and Slade combined.*

*She’s a murderer.*

“Alright. Who’s next?”
Felicity swallows thickly. This Malcolm...He’s playing with them. He wants to sow fear. She doesn’t remember that last time. Last time this was a means to an end. Now, he’s trying to draw Oliver out into the open. It’s like a cat pawing at an already-cornered mouse.

Legs shaking, Felicity rises to her feet. Her limbs almost give out under her, like her first attempt at walking after the accident. She needs to use the work table to keep herself upright as she faces Malcolm. Matt’s scared out of his mind. And she’s not going to let an innocent man die.

“Why don’t you stop beating around the bush? You’re going to kill me, right? So just do it!”

Even with his hidden face, Felicity can make out Oliver’s reluctance in the way he slowly raises his bow. “The world needs more courageous people like you.”

He draws back the black arrow and Felicity closes her eyes in preparation for the death blow.

_I am so sorry, Oliver._

Except the arrow doesn’t find its home in her chest.

...

Oliver doesn’t contemplate the elevator, opting for the stairs. He takes them at a run, surprising himself that he knows exactly where Felicity’s office lies in the building. He knows the corner of the building, the floor, the layout of her office. It’s all deeply seated in his memory.

“They’re in the lab on the fifth floor,” Sara says.

He veers, changing course without a word.

“I can’t fight him with you,” she cautions. “The League won’t allow it. Not until he acts against their code.”

He grunts in acknowledgement and skids to a stop outside the door to the fifth floor. Sara holds out an earbud for him. Oliver reluctantly takes it. He stuffs it in his ear and Sara grabs the handle of the door, preparing to yank it open for him as Oliver pulls out his bow.

The hallway is empty, every third light lit to save electricity overnight. Frosted glass hides offices and tech labs from view. He steps slowly down the hallway. He moves as quickly as he dares while staying silent.

“Down the hall. Second door on the right,” Diggle directs in his ear.

He pauses in a doorway. “Lyla?”

“At the other end of the hallway. Felicity ditched her in the parking garage.”

“Do you have eyes?” He’s going in the room one way or another, but he could use all the advantage he can get.

“Negative.”

Oliver adjusts his fingers on the arrow and his grip on the bow. He takes a deep breath, the silence not sitting well with him. There should be some noise coming from that lab. And he refuses to believe they’re already dead, that he’s too late to save them.

“I’m going in.”
The still-healing injuries on his chest ache, but its nothing compared to the heart-wrenching feeling of spotting Malcolm Merlyn with an arrow resting against Felicity’s jugular. He’s been Malcolm’s position, knows exactly how much pressure he needs to apply to slice through skin and puncture the jugular. If Malcolm gets that chance, Felicity could bleed out in seconds.

And he’s trying not to think about the other two bodies in the room and the black arrows sticking out of them.

He keeps an arrow aimed true at Malcolm’s eye over Felicity’s shoulder as his gaze finds hers. Her bottom lip quivers in fear, her hands desperately grip Malcolm’s arm that holds her in place in front of him.

Felicity’s eyes, however, were clear. He saw the same conviction in them he had when Cooper held her hostage. But Malcolm isn’t Seldon. She can’t disarm him and easily rip his weapon from his grasp.

If the cut on her cheek is any indication, she tried to get away already.

“Hmmm...Seems I was right: the Green Arrow is alive after all.”

The mask covers Malcolm’s face, but his eyes crinkle in a smile, the kind that means bad news. “I knew it would just take the right pretty face to bring you crawling out of your dark hole. You seemed fond of this one last time.”

Felicity simpers as the tip of the arrow nicks her skin. Blood wells around the point, an almost black bubble that then starts to run down her neck. The red stands out brilliantly against her pale skin. She should never be in danger like this.

If they hadn’t been fighting...

Oliver’s fingers clench reflexively on the bow as he tries to control his emotional reaction.

“You okay?” He asks gruffly. Relief seeps through his system as he realizes his voice modulator is still on.

“Been better.” Her voice is breathless as she squirms away from the point of the arrow, but it’s doesn’t waver.

“A heartwarming reunion.” Malcolm takes a step forward, pushing Felicity to advance at the same time. “So this is your lover, the one released from Ra’s Al Ghul?”

Oliver blinks. What?

*Released by Ra’s Al Ghul? What the hell does that mean?*

“I have an offer for you.”

That’s unexpected. Oliver watches Malcolm blankly. The only thing to be said for the man I that he only cares about himself. Any offer he has...Oliver’s only listening because he can’t risk Felicity and Lyla needs time to get into position.

“I’ll let you and your girlfriend here go. I’ll promise you safety, if you work for me.”

Oliver smirks under the hood, playing up his attitude. “And why would I do that?”

“Because if you don’t, I’ll kill you both. Slowly and painfully.” To emphasize his point, Malcolm
digs the arrowhead a little further into Felicity’s neck. “One flick of my wrist and she bleeds out in seconds. We all know I can.”

“You’re planning to destroy half the city. I can’t let you do that.”

The Dark Archer scowls. “I’m going to rebuild half the city. Our city is diseased, infected. It needs to be purged.”

“I think you’re underestimating them.”

“More importantly: I underestimated you.” The assassin adjusts his stance. “I didn’t think you would give up the love of your life for people you don’t even know.”

“Lyla’s in position,” Digg interrupts.

Oliver meets Felicity’s eyes again, holding her gaze. He hopes against hope that the message is clear in his eyes. He needs her to move. He needs an opening, but only if she’s willing to risk it. He’s not going to do anything she’s not comfortable doing.

Her head barely nods, just like with Slade, just like with Cooper. They’ve been in far too many similar situations for Oliver’s liking. In this moment, it helps. But it never needs to happen again.

He’ll make sure of that.

For now...

With quick, precise motions, Felicity moves just how Digg taught her, the same way she took down Cooper: her left foot stomps violently into Malcolm’s instep. Oliver can’t be sure from his angle, but it looks like the heel manages to embed itself in Malcolm’s instep. He doesn’t pause for a second look though. His arrow flies as soon as Felicity ducks out of the way.

It misses, flying past him. It lands in the wall and Oliver has another nocked.

BAM.

BAM BAM.

Felicity runs out the door in a crouch, passing Lyla as the bodyguard races into the room. It’s all Oliver can see before Malcolm comes at him.

He ducks the first blow, swinging his bow out as a melee weapon. It connects with Malcolm’s arm with a thwack!

Knowing Malcolm’s got to be trying to kill him right now, Oliver swivels to protect himself from the black arrow now flying towards his eye. Felicity’s blood still drips from the point as Oliver wrenches it from Malcolm’s hand and turns it around to embed it in Malcolm’s side.

“We’ve got company, Arrow. We need to move!” Lyla shouts.

Malcolm shoves Oliver back a couple steps.

BAM BAM BAM!

Lyla doesn’t hit her mark. Her shots shatter the frosted window behind them, letting in the flashing red and blue and police sirens. They pause, distracted by the sudden interruption.
“THIS IS THE STARLING CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT! COME OUT WITH YOUR HANDS UP OR WE BREACH THE BUILDING! THIS IS YOUR FINAL CHANCE!”

Malcolm pulls the sword from behind his shoulder. It’s the same one that was rammed through his chest last time, the one that created the hole in his jacket currently being held together by hastily stitched thread.

Ducking down, Oliver yanks a hunting knife from his boot. It diverts the blade, but it’s not going to last long.

“Get her out of here,” he growls into the comms.

“What about Merlyn?” Sara asks.

“I’m handling it.”

Malcolm’s blade slashes towards his weak spot, the place he caught the blade last time. He prays to whoever’s listening that he just told Sara the truth. He wants to have that talk with Felicity, about their future.

He just has to get out of this alive.

...

Felicity kicks off her heels as soon as she makes it out of the lab. She swallows more bile at the blood staining the bottom her left heel. She takes them in her hand.

Instinct kicks in and she ducks as the gunshots sound. It’s not headed in her direction, but after the way she died...after Slade shot her...

She needs an out. A direction to run that leads to safety, somewhere out of here, a way for her to get back to safety, to the Foundry. She won’t be safe until she’s home again. The Foundry – Oliver – has always been home.

She’s in the middle of the hall: an equal distance from one staircase to the other. She doesn’t trust the elevator to get her out of here fast enough. She’s stuck, until she sees a shock of blonde hair peeking out from the staircase to her right.

Her feet lead the way almost before her mind process what she’s seen. Her stocking feet slip on the tiled floor as she races towards the opening. She hears shattering glass, gun shots, impacts of punches in the distance.

Felicity latches on to Sara’s arm as she skids to a stop beside her in the stairwell, breathing harder than a short sprint should warrant. The hand not holding her soiled heels clamps down on the cut on the side of her neck. It trickles blood, not enough to be life-threatening but still more than she would like.

Sara brushes her hand aside and tilts her head to get a better look at the wound. She pulls a wad of cloth from her jacket and presses it to the side of her neck. “You’re going to be fine. Won’t even need stitches.”

“Good.”

Sara frowns and as she turns away Felicity spots the nearly invisible ear piece in her ear. “What about Merlyn?”
Felicity frowns. Oliver must give her some orders because she turns around and starts to pull Felicity down the stairs.

“What? What’re you doing? Oliver’s still up here!”

Sara scowl at her, annoyed. “And the police have this place surrounded. We’ve got to get out of here.”

“I have to stay here. There were hostages. There are two bodies upstairs and I’m a witness. I have to stay here, give my detailed account. I can say the Green Arrow saved me. It’s not even a lie.” Felicity pulls back and turns off at another floor.

“Oliver told me to get you out of here!”

“But—“

“No!” Sara shouts, getting into Felicity’s face. “We need to get you out of here. Consider this you getting taken into protective custody.”

Felicity scowls. “Then take me to your father, on the other side of the police line.”

Sara glances around and groans. “Fine. But we’re going out the parking garage. Lyla will meet us there. She’ll corroborate your story.” She looks away. “Got that?”

Felicity turns and starts down the stairs toward the basement. “We’ll still meet you back at the Foundry, but we have to do this. It’s got to be official.”

Sara doesn’t like it, but she follows Felicity down the stairs. One step at a time, Felicity considers her plan. She’s been here. She needs to talk to the police. She can tell them about the machine, tell them about the dangers of it being out there. She owes it to Matt and Eric to tell what happened.

It’s a sound choice, right?

...

His world is a fight to survive.

And Oliver’s a survivor. He always has been.

Right now his life is a haze of red, the pounding of punch after punch raining down, of slices of a sword and thin cuts decorating his skin. The pain has faded to insignificance in light of everything. He’s barely living moment to moment. He’s covering Felicity’s escape, but he’s also mindful of the machine behind him in the room, the machine that levels half the city.

He won’t be able to fight much longer. His entire body protests the continued movement, screams for him to back off.

“SWAT’s entering the building!” Lyla calls.

Oliver knows the warning his for him, but Malcolm backs up to the table and grabs the blueprints off the nearest worktable.

“Nice fighting with you, Green Arrow. Until next time.” He doesn’t know where it comes from, but suddenly there’s a helicopter shining light through the shattered window.

It’s not the police helicopter he thinks it is at first. He knows as soon the cable latches on to the
Markov Device. He dives for it, aiming to disrupt that part of the plan, to stop the mass murderer from getting his hands on the device that destroys the city.

But he’s too late.

The wire is too thick for his arrows to damage it and it swings out the window with Malcolm clinging to the side.

“Crap!”

Lyla runs up to the opening with him, her gun held at her side. “Damn.”

“We’ve got to get out of here.” Oliver falls back from the opening. “Where’s Felicity?”

“We’re in the parking garage,” Sara says. “But we’ve got a problem: she wants to stay and give the police a statement.”

“What?” Oliver yells, spinning on his heel as he heads for the stairs. “Why?”

“She says they need to know what’s going on...it could work to our advantage.”

He races down the stairs, headed for the basement. “I need to know she’s safe. No questions about it.”

“Oliver, she has every right to be here. She’s the director. They’re going to ask her about the event one way or another. It won’t make a difference if she makes the statement now or later.” Lyla’s logic rolls right off him.

Oliver doesn’t care one way or another about her logic. All he cares about is getting his eyes on her.

He just has to see her.

The metal door bangs open in the sublevel basement. He doesn’t break his stride. He walks straight to the town car. Each step forward relaxes him a little bit more. Each step brings Felicity’s face just a little more into focus. He feels his muscles uncoiling, the tension breaking. But it’s not completely gone, not until he wraps her in his arms.

Oliver pulls her in close, pulling her in tight to his chest, a hand cupping the back of her head as he leans down to kiss the crown.

“You’re okay.”

“I’m okay,” she agrees, voice muffled by his leather jacket. Then she pulls back, a shaking breath the only thing to hold back her tears. “But I’ve got this. You need to get out of here.”

“I’m not leaving you alone.” There’s no way in hell he’s going to leave her alone to deal with the fallout.

“Unless you brought a change of clothes, I don’t think you can stay.”

Oliver glares down at the green leather in distaste. “Or you could come with me.”

“I’m not. I’ll get to the Foundry as soon as I’m done here. Promise.” She squeezes his hand. “Now get out of here.”

Oliver scowls but nods. “Fine. But when you’re done here, we need to talk.”
Chapter 37

Chapter Notes

The talk you've all be waiting for!!! It's SUPER long and I hope it lives up to everyone's expectations!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 37

“A break-in last night at Queen Consolidated left three dead and only one survivor. The company declines comment but rumor has it the survivor owes her life to the presence of Starling’s very own vigilante.”

It’s nice that the news isn’t crucifying him, but Oliver really could care less at the moment. He just needs to see Felicity, alive, moving around. Anything. Unfortunately, the camera man doesn’t get the message. The footage doesn’t cooperate, switching back to the newsroom where the speculation starts up as to what the mysterious killer could have been after.

Oliver glares at the TV. He shouldn’t be here. He should be with her. The coiled tension that’s only grown in the hours since he left her in the parking garage nearly snaps as Tommy places a mug of steaming coffee in front of him.

Hands curl into fists as Oliver stifles the urge to lash out in annoyance. The rich aroma hits his nostrils and he instinctively lifts the cup to his lips, waving away Tommy’s offer of cream or sugar.

The rest of the world could burn for all he cares. Verdant could fall to pieces around him and he would keep searching for Felicity. The only reason he’d acquiesced was because it was Felicity. She was protected: by Lyla and the police. Malcolm wasn’t going to strike again tonight.

He grimaces at the bitter taste: both from the coffee and the truth that was tough to swallow. He wouldn’t have been helpful there.

Kind of like how useful he was here right now.

Careful not to spit the sludge Tommy called coffee back into the cup lest he hurt his best friend’s feelings, Oliver slid the mug away from him as he forced the liquid down his throat.

He’s never been a huge fan of coffee, not like Felicity. She savors the taste and gets pride from cultivating the perfect cup. He drinks it purely for the caffeine. It’s not as good a rush as adrenaline, but it was enough.

But he has to draw the line somewhere.

“She’s fine,” Tommy says as he drops onto the stool next to Oliver. “They’re probably just holding her for questioning. I could probably get Laurel to go in and check on her. God, that’s awful.” Tommy spits his own coffee back into his mug and grabs the creamer to pour another healthy dose of liquid sugar into his cup until it’s more cream than coffee.

Tommy holds the creamer out to Oliver again, like that could possibly salvage his attempt at coffee.
He ignores the offer as he pulls out his phone. Lyla should be texting him with another update any moment now.

If not, he’s going out to find them himself, Felicity’s plan be damned. He should be with her now. He wants to work everything out, to make sure she’s okay after her close call with Malcolm Merlyn.

Malcolm.

His nails dig into his palms. Malcolm hurt her. He drew blood. It’s unforgivable.

“Well, don’t you two look morose.”

He’s on his feet before Felicity finishes her clever sentence.

“I guess morose isn’t the right word. Maybe just worried, but you don’t have to because I’m okay. See? Not dead. Perfectly fine.”

Three steps later, she’s in his arms and pulled flush against his chest. She makes a muffled squeak of surprise, but not even a moment later she relaxes into his hold and hugs him back. He tries not to think about how he melts a little when she buries her head in his chest and whispers. “I’m good. Really. Quentin just had a lot of questions and you know how he can be.”

Oliver closes his eyes and breathes in her slightly floral shampoo. He missed these moments the last couple months, the private moments where he could just soak up her presence without freaking her out.

“Ahem.” An overtired Lyla still acting as bodyguard purses her lips at him, unimpressed.

Oliver straightens from the hug, but keeps Felicity pressed against him. The physical contact is a balm to the nerves of the last couple hours. “Lyla, why don’t you head home. I’ve got Felicity covered.”

“John’s coming-”

“I can handle it.” He meets her eyes as forcefully as he dares. She has to understand. They’re two of a kind, him and Lyla. She’s seen enough – she knows enough – to understand that he just needs to stay with Felicity right now, he needs to be with the woman he loves.

She purses her lips in indecision. “I-”

Felicity heaves a patronizing sigh and pats Oliver’s chest. “I’ll be fine, Lyla. Go get some sleep or spend time with your ex...whatever.”

Oliver huffs, a bit miffed at Felicity’s diplomacy when he’s fairly certain he just basically said the same thing. She gives him a look and he just smiles at her, glad they’re back to their usual antics, even if it is just for the moment.

Their talk is not going to be smooth sailing.

Lyla finally capitulates, her eyelids fighting gravity to keep her awake. “Fine. But I expect her back in perfect condition.” Oliver feels like a teenager being warned off a girl he’s about to take on a date.

He almost salutes. Almost.

He acknowledges her with a nod. “Got it. If you need somewhere to catch some shut eye-”
“I’ve got a place,” she says quietly. “I’ll be back at 1700.”

Commanding as always, Lyla sweeps from the room. Maybe he should text Digg to check on her...

“Is that coffee?” Felicity makes a beeline for the bar. “Please tell me there’s more!”

“There is,” Tommy says slowly, “but it kind of tastes like crap.”

“After the night I’ve had, I don’t care.” Instead of waiting for Tommy to go around the bar and pour her a new cup, Felicity hops on Oliver’s recently vacated stool and lifts his cup to her lips. She winces at the taste, the bitter bite making her shiver as her face scrunches up. “Yup. That tastes disgusting.”

Tommy snorts. “Believe it or not, Oliver drank that straight.”

“Of course he did.” Her confident gaze on him causes his heart to skip a beat. “He doesn’t like sugar. It messes with his equilibrium.”

He blinks. He never told her that. He never told anyone that. He doesn’t think he’s ever vocalized it before. The Island – and everything else he lived through – forced a notable change in him. His change in diet was indubitably the easiest to explain, and definitely not something he openly advertised. Although, with all the time they spent in close quarters it’s not surprising that she would know.

She’s smart like that.

He probably didn’t even have to tell her.

Tommy snorts. “Or his taste buds are dead.”

Felicity grins and says matter of factly: “You haven’t had his cooking.”

_He cooks for her..._

It’s a shock and yet it makes perfect sense.

He doesn’t cook. Well, he does, just not for other people. He cooks late at night to calm his crazy mind. He hasn’t gotten the courage to let anyone else taste it. Although, Raisa keeps giving him looks and leaving out recipes he might want to try. Apparently that changes in her future.

His insides fizz around in pleasure at the idea that one day he’s able to cook for her, for the love of his life. The idea of a future _with her_ inspires a hope he hasn’t felt in months. The talk they’re about to have seems both a little less daunting and a little scarier. On one hand, he’s confident they’ll work everything out. On the other...there’s obviously a lot he doesn’t know.

“This guy?” Tommy laughs. “I’ve never seen this guy make anything other than toast!”

Oliver bristles and has to remind himself that in the original timeline he hadn’t learned that yet. His best friend isn’t being purposefully dismissive. The smile still feels slightly forced as he says: “I’m full of surprises.”

The character feels false on him. Tommy doesn’t deserve this: the fake mask he puts on in front of the general public. He doesn’t want to lie to Tommy this time around, whether outright or implied, so he drops the smile quicker than usual.
Felicity squeezes his forearm in solidarity. Her hands are as soft as they’ve always been, like silk whispering against his arm. Until this moment, it hasn’t hit him how much he’d grown accustomed to a certain familiarity between them before everything was ruined when that damn restaurant that was blown to pieces.

No. That’s not true. He knows he missed it. He just didn’t realize how his whole body would relax when he finally found himself home with her again. Knowing that she’s fully aware of all he’s done and all they’ve been through...that just makes him unusually warm and fuzzy on the inside.

Tommy shakes his head with a wry grin. “You sure learned some interesting skills on that Island.” He pushes off the counter. “I’ll handle the shipments today so you two can do your talk thing.” Always one for the dramatic, he waits until the last second to call over his shoulder: “And you owe me, Smoak. Remember that!”

Oliver returns his gaze to the woman next to him still nursing his coffee. How is she still drinking that? “Owe him?”

“I might have cancelled his date with Laurel to get him to talk to you.” She grimaces slightly but shrugs. Maybe there’s a little regret, but he’s not changing her mind. It’s a dramatic change from the rambles and insecurity he remembers in her 2012 self and he’s surprised he didn’t see it sooner. She’s not waiting for him to take the lead either. That’s new.

Her confidence in her choices is a reminder that she’s changed, that she’s been through growth he hasn’t. The Felicity he left behind would be at least a little nervous for that action. She’s curiously unaffected.

Oliver steps back with a nod toward the secret entrance. “After you?”

Felicity swallows hard. “Yeah. Time for that talk.”

... Tension in the Arrow cave is not a new concept. If they could go a week without some sort of tension there, it would be a miracle. And Felicity’s not just talking about the sexual tension so thick she could barely breathe. There were too many stubborn people down there for it to ever be an easygoing room.

Or there was some big bad who managed to infiltrate their sanctum, which happened way too often.

And Felicity can’t exactly hide behind her computer screens this time. She has to participate in this talk, to lay her heart on the table, to bare her soul to Oliver. She’s never been good at the talk-about-your-feelings moments. Her roommate in college called them “Come to Jesus” talks. They were supposed to be moments of emotional epiphany.

But, no. Felicity’s always been inclined to bottle up those feelings. Ironically, her and Oliver were somehow able to bring out the strongest emotions in the other. Somewhere along the way, they got used to talking.

But figuring out where to start?

That’s always been the hardest part.

Oliver wanders the basement for a couple minutes. His hands reach out as his fingers brush everything within reach as if they would give him sudden purpose. He pauses in front of his work station, examines the training dummy, his suit, and even her computers before he finally turns to face
her, his blue eyes more than a little lost.

He’s just as at a loss as she is.

That comradery soothes Felicity, grounds her. At the very least, she’s not alone. His intense gaze breathes life back into her crazed mind, sorts her thoughts out in a somewhat organized way.

His eyes rove over her body. They pause at the patched cut on her neck and for a moment the love in his gaze is compromised by guilt.

“You’re from the future,” he says to kick things off.

He jumps right into the deep end. So much tact.

Felicity sucks in a sharp breath as he looks up at her from under his lashes. His resemblance to a puppy dog is disturbingly unfair, especially in moments like this. Those eyes slay her.

She can never say no to him.

They’re really doing this then. They need to, desperately, but something deep in her had doubted it was actually going to happen. Shouldn’t there be some big, evil thing happening right now to ruin the special moment?

The cosmos remains silent, so Felicity drops her coat and her bag on her chair, kicking off her heels for good measure. If they’re doing this, she needs to be comfortable. She doesn’t like the more distinct height advantage he has now, but she can’t stand around in those shoes for much longer, not when she’s already starting to develop blisters.

“Um, right. The future.” Her feet move as her mind whirs. The physical motion really helps with the thinking. “From after the whole Ra’s thing.”

Oliver averts his eyes.

“He nearly killed you, which you obviously know since that’s when you’re from, right? That fight on the mountain?”

He grunts in an affirmative. “And you’re from after that.”

It’s not a question.

She’s about to open her soul and lay everything on the table and he can’t even look at her. She’d spent the past hours at the police station debating how much she should tell him – *what* she should tell him – and she settled on everything. It doesn’t make sense to hide it from him any longer. It should all be out there in the open.

That could also be her guilt talking.

Her eyes zero in on the end of his work table, next to the wheel he uses to sharpen his arrows. The cold metal under her fingers sinks through her skin and reminds her of past horrors.

“Malcolm brought back the sword Ra’s shoved through your chest as proof of your death.” She drags her hand over the cold metal where it sat for far too long, that painful reminder of all that was lost. “And of course it was your blood. We all took it differently...”

She wants to turn around, to say this all to his face, to make him look her in the eye as she shares the painful truth, but the gleaming metal holds her captive. “It took me a while to come to terms...” Her
breath catches in her throat. God, she should she was over this. “To terms with your death...”

Words clog her throat, weighed down by her emotions, about the emotions she worries are going to make Oliver push her out again. There was a reason she didn’t tell him in the first place.

She didn’t him to be burdened with the truth she knew.

“Was I...Did I...?”

Felicity spins around to face him, crossing the room to grab his hand, to banish the question: *He hadn’t died. He had never died.* ”You showed up three weeks later. Made a huge scene, even though you should have been taking it easy.”

He nods and then finally meets her eyes. “And...us?”

...He frowns as Felicity stares blankly back at him.

His heart sinks the longer it takes her to answer. Something must have gone wrong. In the last twenty four hours he couldn’t help but imagine what their future could have possibly been like. In all of them, him making it back from the fight with Ra’s always involved a joyful reunion.

He didn’t like to think about the futures where he actually died.

Felicity snorts. Her shoulders shake in silent laughter that soon grows and echoes around the Foundry.

What was so funny about his question?

The last thing he said to her was that he loved her. The last thing he saw before he thought he died was her face. It wasn’t a laughing matter. If he returned alive the first thing he would do was pull her into his arms.

He knows that in his soul.

“What?”

“Sorry. I shouldn’t be laughing.” Chuckles break up her words. “It’s really not that funny. It’s just...that’s as far from what happened as possible. When you got back...” Felicity’s laughter dies abruptly and she purses her lips in displeasure. “Oh, believe me, I was ecstatic to see you...until you announced your intent to partner with Malcolm Merlyn to learn how to defeat Ra’s Al Ghul. That’s when you lost me.”

She drops his hand.

Apparently she still wasn’t over his little oversight. “But I thought-“

“There was a rough patch.” She reaches out for his hand again and her thumb over his knuckles, focusing on their hands instead of him.

He’s starting to get an idea of why she didn’t trust him with the truth.

Is it wrong that Oliver wants to strangle himself for what he’s put her through? He’s seen her with Malcolm: He knows how awful that announcement must have been for her.
He couldn’t even imagine making that choice.

“You and Malcolm,” she spits the name, “come up with a stupid-ass plan to get Ra’s to stop coming after you. It still pisses me off, so I’ll just give you the highlights: Ra’s stabs Thea, you trade your soul for her life, we try to rescue you, fail, and then you come back, kidnap Lyla to get Nyssa, marry Nyssa – still pissed about that by the way. She should really stop referring to herself as your wife.

“Where was I?” She frowns at him.

“Uh...marrying Nyssa. But she was with Sara...”

Felicity sighs, “I’ll come back to that. So yeah...you marry Nyssa, almost kill all of Team Arrow – very stupid of you – and then come back to Starling with Ra’s in an attempted suicide mission. Oh, yeah, and in the middle of that whole” she gestures vaguely, “mess, we finally act on the whole ‘I love you’ thing. After I yell at Ra’s, of course, because I have zero self-preservation instinct. I mean, seriously? Ra’s, Slade, Malcolm, Darhk? I have a terrible track record.

“Anyway...you kill Ra’s, I save your life in Ray’s ATOM suit. And then we literally drive off into the sunset.” She claps her hands, but her body still radiates tension.

God, does he want the happy ending, even if it’s not him him, but that can’t be it. She’s glazed over...probably a lot, downplaying everything. Besides, if they had been happy, then she would have told him right off the bat.

Right?

If everything was great, she wouldn’t feel the need to hide things from him.

Still, her confession steals the breath right from his lungs. He didn’t think there would ever be a moment of happiness. He’d braced himself for the worst. His hand tightens around hers. He must have misheard her. “What?”

He shouldn’t sound that breathless.

She smiles softly up at him. The unadulterated love in the depths of her eyes threatens to make his breathing problem permanent. He rotates their hands to intertwine their fingers, seeking out her other hand.

This. He wants this. No walls between them, no forced distance. He wants to feel free to seek out her presence, to take comfort from her, to support her.

She licks her lips and it turns his stomach in knots. It’s like he’s a freaking teenager again, like it’s always been since he realized what he was feeling.

“After everything with Ra’s, we left the city, left it all behind us.” Her smile is genuine, lighting up her face. She gets caught up in memories, her eyes taking on a far away look. Awe wells inside him slowly: He’s the one who inspired that look. For a moment, at least, they were happy. In some universe, on some plane of existence, they were happy. It’s something.

But it won’t ever be enough.

Besides, he knows there’s more. The depraved masochist in him can’t help but ask: “And then what?”

Her eyes drop to their hands. His emotions mirror the action. He’s already preparing for the
inevitable, the fallout. Something has to go wrong.

“We come back?” He prompts.

She takes a shuddering breath and lifts her eyes back to his. “We traveled for a bit. Basically went around the world. Of course, you spoke like 12 different languages.”

He laughs at her exaggeration. He revels in the picture she paints:

They must have travelled like he always imagined: walking or hitching rides, going to baazars, meeting locals, enjoying the fresh air. It was a treat he hadn’t experienced since the Queen’s Gambit sank, but with Felicity he’d started to imagine it again.

To imagine actually enjoying himself...

“We bought a house in a place called Ivytown. It’s a couple hours away. It’s like a little suburban bubble. We...we were happy, well, you were happy. You were going to propose.”

Propose...

The hollow feeling is back. Of course something terrible would happen when he was that happy. “But I didn’t.”

Felicity continues, undeterred: “You had this fantastic dinner ready and then right before you could actually ask, Laurel and Thea showed up and said they needed us back in Star City. And of course we left. It was enough for you, but that life...it was never for me.”

She sighs softly to herself.

A quick shake later: “And we got back here, moved into Thea’s loft.” She tugs him closer, a small smile pulling at the corner of her lips as she gets lost in happy memories. Oliver’s glad he was able to at least give her those. It wasn’t a complete failure then. “There was an adjustment period, but we grew closer...you decided to run for mayor.”

Oliver snorts. Maybe she’s starting to make things up. “I’m sure that went over real well. Did I get laughed out of town?”

Felicity laughs and shakes her head with a bright smile. “I’ll be honest: I didn’t see it at first. When you told me, I didn’t think it would work, but then you made the announcement and...it just felt possible. You were brilliant. The people of the city love you. You inspired them as Oliver Queen.”

He grins at the idea, so foreign to him. “Really?”

“Definitely,” she says seriously. “There were some highly motivating speeches by Star City’s own prodigal son.”

He tries to imagine running a city during the day while still saving it at night, but the idea sounds ridiculous. He ran his family’s company into the ground. The city couldn’t possibly trust him, could they? He always failed at everything but fighting.

Except now he was failing at that too...

“You...” She falters for a moment, and looks up at him. “Are you sure you want to hear everything? The past has already changed so much, it’s unlikely any of this will happen the same way. And some of it...you’re not going to like it.”
He’s not stupid. She’s said all the good things first. As good as everything’s been, he knows it’s going to be just as bad.

She’s giving him an out.

If he was smarter maybe he’d take it. But he doesn’t want her carry the knowledge alone. And he has to know, despite how it could hurt, he has to know how bad everything got.

“I need to hear this.” He puts a little more distance between them but refuses to drop her hands as he braces himself for the truth. This is about more than truth-telling. She’s already proved that she’s willing to share. No. This is about supporting her, about being there for her, about not being afraid of facing the future with her. “What happened?”

She chews on her bottom lip. “Do you remember Samantha Clayton?”

...  

His hands stiffen in hers and his shoulders tense as the name hits home. She didn’t know until the words passed her lips that she was going to share this much. But she knows William means the world to him. She hates the choices Oliver made in regards to his son, without considering her, but she can’t keep this from him.

“She...”

Felicity smiles sadly. “You had a pregnancy scare. She told you she lost the baby.”

He’s too smart to miss the implied words. His mouth falls open as he flounders for words. Felicity gently guides him back and lowers him into his computer chair. She crouches in front of him and squeezes his hands.

“You’ve got a son.” The boy’s bright smile pops into Felicity’s mind and she can’t help the twitch of her lips. “His name’s William. He’s clever and kind. He’s got your smile. You’re just getting to know him, but you love him.”

He stares at her in wonder. “How...”

“I got a garbled version from you and Barry, but as far as I can tell, you ran into them in Central City and got a DNA test. Samantha gave you an ultimatum: walk away from your son or keep his existence a secret from everyone.”

His eyes lock onto hers in dawning realization. “I didn’t tell you.”

The sorrow washes over her briefly, but it’s an old hurt, mended a little by time. “It comes out when Damien Darhk – the big bad we were fighting – kidnaps him. But you get him back,” she rushes to assure him when panic flashes in his eyes. “You rescue him.” She rolls her eyes lovingly. “And are oddly proud when Green Arrow becomes his favorite superhero.”

Oliver smiles sadly. “But it changes things. Me having a son.”

Felicity nods. “There were other things going on...”

God, how does she explain everything they were going through in those months?

He watches her expectantly. He’s braced himself for bad news.

Felicity sighs. She’s been over this argument with herself before, to the point that she now
understands why Oliver did what he did. But understanding was never the problem: the problem was that he hadn’t talked to her about it before making a decision.

Her current situation shed some interesting light on his thought process.

“You have to realize: Damien Darhk was powerful on a scale we hadn’t faced. He’d trained as an assassin and he had dark powers on his side. We were fighting that, and you were running for mayor. There’s no way I can possibly explain to you how much we grew and evolved. This all just skims the surface.”

She pulls away and starts pacing, playing with her earrings. “My mom found the engagement ring. It was months after we left Ivytown and I thought you had just gotten it. And then I realized you’d been planning on proposing all those months ago and I thought you changed your mind. And we had the emotional talk of a lifetime and confirmed that we were partners in everything. In the middle of a highly dramatized kidnapping, mind you.

“It was after you found out about William, but you hadn’t told me about him...” She takes a deep breath and turns to face him. “You proposed.”

He sucks in a breath.

“And I said yes.”

... 

Oliver knows this is going to downhill fast. He wants to stop it, to yank it back into the happy picture it was. They were happy.

Yet it’s so easy to see now why she didn’t want to tell him sooner.

If he let her walk into their engagement without telling her about his son...

And wow...talk about a shocking revelation. He has a son. He’s a father.

“So...” he rises to his feet so they’re on more of a same level. “We get engaged and I still don’t tell you?”

He wishes he could say it’s hard to believe, but the truth is it’s not. Here and now, seeing the obvious backlash, Oliver would tell her in a heartbeat. But without that fore knowledge, he couldn’t guarantee he would make the right choice.

No wonder the truth is so hard for them.

Felicity groans. “I hate to say this: but it’s not that simple.” She rests her hands on the back of her chair. “We’d just dealt a blow to Darhk’s operation and he decided to strike back at you through the ones you love.”

His heart stops in his chest at the confirmation of his worst fears. Something happened. She got caught in the line of fire and he couldn’t rescue her. Oliver crosses the room and tilts her chin up so their eyes have to meet. “Tell me,” he says softly. “Please.”

He needs to know.

“If he hadn’t gotten to us...maybe you would have told me...but Darhk’s henchmen...they came after us, shot up our limo, minutes after the proposal. You got us out of there, but...”
Air doesn’t enter his lungs, his heart doesn’t beat in his chest, he can’t move a muscle if he tried. If he thought the idea of her getting hurt plagued him before this, it’s nothing compared to now.

Except now he’s not terrified about her dying. With Slade, with the missile into the restaurant, all he could think about was protecting Felicity, about making sure she lived her life as fully as possible.

That’s not what he wants now.

Of course, he needs her to be alive. He needs it like he needs sustenance. And even if the time they have is short, he wants it, he wants her. He wants her close to him for as long as he can possibly have her.

Epiphany is a train slamming into him.

It’s her. He just wants her. Her life, her choice. And for some reason she chose him. He wants to choose her too.

“I got shot. Paralyzed from-”

He cuts her off with his lips covering hers. His hands cup her neck, his thumbs running over her jaw. He presses his lips against hers firmly. They’re so soft under his rough, calloused hands.

She doesn’t react at first, just a whimper muffled against his closed lips. He makes no move to deepen the kiss, until she melts into him. She presses up against him, her arms wrapping around his neck to pull him down closer to her level.

He stumbles a little as she forcefully yanks him down to her level with a low moan he feels everywhere their bodies meet. He growls in response, his hands moving of their own accord. One arm wraps around her waist, the other hiking her up against him as he moves them. In two steps, he lifts her onto his work table as the kiss continues to deepen.

Her fingers card through his hair, nails gently scraping his scalp. The noises she makes go straight to his core. It’s a pleasure he’s never had before, hearing her like this, being with her like this.

The one kiss at the hospital wasn’t enough. And he realizes now it would never be enough. He could have a thousand kisses with her and it still wouldn’t be enough. He can’t get her close enough.

Felicity’s hands curl into the hem of his shirt, pushing the material higher. He’s never been prouder of his physical fitness than when she pauses her ministrations to trace his muscles.

He freezes as her hands ghost over his most recent injury. He pulls back to get a look at her face. She bites her lip as she pushes the shirt up. In a trance, he lets her. Watching the awe that plays on her face as she runs her hands over his arms.

“You look the same,” she whispers, her hands lingering over the new scar. “Even this one. It’s the same place Ra’s stabbed you...You’re just missing a couple...”

A lock of blonde hair falls into her face that he brushes back behind her ear. Oliver buries his nose in Felicity’s hair and inhales the light floral scent. She’s here, warm and well in his arms. He would love to explore this more, love to learn her body as well as he knows her mannerisms, but they were in the middle of an important talk.

He can’t keep putting off talking.

“As much as I would love to continue this...”
Felicity nods, almost to herself. “...we need clear the air. We agreed to never go to bed angry.”

There’s another story there, but he doesn’t ask it. With willpower he doesn’t know he had, Oliver takes a small step back, just enough so Felicity’s no longer pressed completely against his body. “Good rule.”

Felicity’s chuckles. “I’ll tell you the story sometime.” Her face shifts again as she goes back to their discussion.

“We can go back to this later,” he offers.

“No.” She shakes her head. “No. I can to do this.” She takes a shaky breath. “I was shot. And I got paralyzed from the waist down.”

Oliver breathes out slowly through gritted teeth, unable to imagine the pain.

“You...You’re amazing.” And for some reason, she’s comforting him now. “You put up with my craziness, and I put up with you going after Darhk with a vengeance. We’re fine for a while and then.”

Thoughtlessly, Oliver plays with her hand, bringing it up to his face so he can press a kiss to the inside of her wrist. “And then Darhk kidnaps William.”

“Bingo.” Felicity extracts herself from his arms, hopping down from the table as she starts to pace. “You know, I could live with the choice Samantha forced you to make. It wouldn’t have been pleasant, but we could have moved past it. But then you sent them away.”

He pauses. How does that change things irrevocably? He doesn’t understand. Wasn’t that the logical option?

“You did it without talking to me. One second they were thrown into our lives and the next you’re telling me that you sent them away. We were starting out lives together and you were making arbitrary life decisions without talking to me about any of it before hand! How could I know that you wouldn’t one day make that same decision to send me away because it got to dangerous?”

Oliver plops into his chair, dropping his head into his hands.

He still sees the logic of it, the necessity of protecting those he loves. It’s easier to protect a secret than a living, breathing person who places themselves in danger. But he also sees Felicity’s point: it’s the same one he made when they were fighting at the mansion. They’re partners.

“They’re supposed to talk about things.

“And I get that it’s not you you,” Felicity babbles. “It’s a different version of you so don’t get all high and mighty and take the guilt on yourself, but it’s so damn frustrating. Everything was going so well, we’d gotten passed my paralysis. Hell, you believed in me more than I did at times and then you had so pull something like that. What if one day down the road we had kids and you tried to send us away?”

She wanted kids with him.

Yeah, he should have taken away more from her rant than that, but everything else turns to white noise for a moment. Kids? Just the word evokes an image in his eye, the same things he imagined when he walked into Lyla’s hospital room a day after their failed date and witnessed Felicity cooing over Baby Sara:
A little bundle that barely fits in his arms, who cries with a vengeance but laughs and giggles more than anything. A baby girl with his eyes and Felicity’s smile. A boy who always manages to find a puddle of mud. Lord knows any kids they have would be a handful. But he and Felicity would raise them right, raise them with love, and teach them how to defend themselves.

Heaven help him, Oliver’s never wanted anything so much.

His next breath is shaky as he draws himself back to the reality of the story Felicity’s telling. “So we break up.”

“And I walk again. It’s all appropriately dramatic,” she says wryly, wringing a smile from him as he looks up at her.

She really would be a wonderful mother.

“We manage to defeat Darhk?” He clears his throat, hoping it’ll also clear his head.

Felicity resumes her pacing with a brisk affirmative. “With some help from my father, of all people. I got my hacking from the man himself, and he’s kind of a bad guy with a lame name. Who would actually call himself the Calculator? Seriously. But it’s not all fame and glory. I have to redirect a missile and end up killing thousands. Lyla, of course, insists it’s not as bad as the millions it could have been, but…” She swallows thickly.

“It stays with you,” Oliver finishes in a whisper. He knows the feeling. “It changes you.”

He never wanted this for her. When he brought her onto the team, he never imagined she’d do more than just direct them from afar, never imagined a scenario where she would be unprotected, where she would have to make the tough choices.

And boy had she proved him wrong.

Felicity is a warrior for justice. She stands up for what she believes is right. She protects others. She’s the reason he believes so much in the symbol the Green Arrow can be. He wanted to keep her in that warm light, to never drag her down into his darkness, to the world of death and questionable morals.

Her eyes are haunted now. He did that to her.

But it’s always been her choice to stay in this fight, to stay with him, and it’s a choice he’s had to learn to respect. Because she makes him better. And because this fight gives her something that was missing in her life.

For a control freak like him, it’s hard to reconcile those ideas.

“We stopped him,” Felicity continues, undeterred by the spinning thoughts in Oliver’s mind. “You give one hell of a speech – as Oliver Queen, I might add – and the city rises up to fight with you. After that, you’re a shoe-in for mayor. Thea, Digg, and Lyla leave the city. And it’s just us for a while-”

Just them...at a time when there’s a rift between them bigger than the Pacific ocean.

Oliver shakes his head. “Wait. What about Roy? Laurel? And are we even going to talk about how you brought Sara back to the city and the man who orchestrated her death?”

He tenses as he remembers the conversation that brought them here.
Felicity crosses her arms and starts to systematically end his objections. “Laurel brings Sara back to life when she finds out about the Lazarus pit against everyone’s advice. As far as I know she’s still working on the side effects. Roy claims to be the Green Arrow and fakes his death in the middle of the whole Ra’s thing. Although he’s doing well for himself now. Laurel...”

Her voice breaks on her name.

The floor disappears under him. Laurel may have her issues, but she will always have a special place in Oliver’s heart. She was the first person to love him, the most constant person in his life, even after they hurt each other. They were friends first, and they were actually good at it. That something happened to her, it breaks his heart. “What happens to Laurel?”

The melancholy in her eyes answers the question for her.

Oliver collapses back into the chair with an inhuman gasp. His fingers dig into the arm rest, tearing at the material. Tears threaten to spill out, so Oliver slams his eye lids shut.

Laurel’s life was never all that easy. She put up with him for far longer than she should have and heaven knows Oliver caused her a lot of pain. And then she had to lose Tommy. And then her life became a downward spiral of loss and heartache.

“How?” Oliver chokes on the word. “How does it happen?”

He has to remind himself that she’s not dead. Not right now. Right now, Laurel Lance walks and breathes just like any other human being. She’s somewhere in the city probably pining for his best friend.

He can still save both of them.

“Darhk kills her because Quentin betrays him. She dies a hero.” Her hand slips into his, once more offering him what silent comfort she can.

The moment drags on as Oliver desperately tries to filter through the wealth of information thrown at him. And that’s when he realizes she hasn’t told him one important thing:

“So what happened to you? How did you get thrown into this mess?”

Felicity blinks in surprise and the one word she says surprises the hell out of him: “Slade.”

“Slade?” The man went after her and failed. He was locked up on Lian Yu with no hope of escape. It’s impossible.

She laughs bitterly. “And the crazy part is he wasn’t even aiming for me. He was after William. I just got in the way. All this time worrying about protecting me, of course the biggest danger to me is me.”

“What?” He is not amused by this chain of events. Not in the slightest. Not only Felicity was killed, but apparently William was also in danger.

Her manic laughter dies out as she purses her lips at him. “Well, apparently, Slade gets off Lian Yu and goes after William and Samantha. Samantha comes back to Star City, to get your help. You’d think after everything we’d been through, you’d warn me about Slade Wilson being back. But apparently, you get the harebrained idea I don’t need to know, so naturally, I don’t find out it’s Slade until William wanders away from you and you call me desperate to find your son.
“I didn’t take it well.”

Oliver’s derisive snort spurs her on. Yup. Future him is an idiot.

“You call Digg back to help. He and I are with Will when Slade appears.” She lifts her hand to her chest slowly, caught in the memory. “He was spouting the same nonsense about making you pay. But he wasn’t after me this time. He wanted Will. And I couldn’t let that happen. Digg tried to stop him, of course, but I was the one who got there in time.”

Oliver swallows thickly.

Felicity Smoak: always the hero even though she’ll fervently deny it. So Slade had kept his promise, had taken the one person he cared about most away from him.

“I was bleeding out in the lobby. And then I woke up tied to a chair in a smelly basement and met 2012 Malcolm Merlyn.”

Just the thought of that trauma has his hands curling into fists. Malcolm was the first person she saw. Malcolm Merlyn. That on top of time travel. She deserves better.

He got kicked off a cliff, but he woke in comfort, greeted by a mother who he knew to be dead. She died saving his son and ended up in the hands of an enemy she hated.

Where was the justice in that?

“I didn’t tell you to piss you off. I just wanted you to know: what happened? It was my choice. And I’d make it all over again. I make my own choices, remember?”

He remembers the talk. He doesn’t like that she stopped a bullet with her body, but he accepts it as part of who she is.

Oliver scowls. “I should have been there. I should have never let Malcolm take you.”

“Oliver, I know you would have if you could. Malcolm told me he killed you. I know you would have saved me if you could.”

The breath of air escapes her in a gust. “Oliver, unless you’ve figured out a way to control this, it’s not your fault. Right now, the common denominator is dying in another timeline...,” she frowns, “and you getting stabbed in the chest, but I’m pretty sure that can’t be it.”

His serious eyes land back on hers and Oliver realizes how close they’ve gotten, how easily he can reach out and touch her, how he can see every emotion in the depths of her blue eyes. Yeah, he’s still such a goner for this woman.

He reaches out to cup her cheek, his thumb running over her bottom lip and ratcheting up the tension between them. He sighs and rests his forehead against hers, his eyes fluttering closed.

“So...what do we do now? About Malcolm, the time travel...us?”

Felicity’s runs up his cheek, mirroring his posture. “Malcolm should be our first concern.” She pulls away from him a bit so she can look him in the eye as she nervously fiddles with the hair at the nape of his neck. “As for the time travel...I’m trying to find John Constantine. Turns out, it’s a lot harder
“You’ve met Constantine?” He furrows his brow. The few times he met the Brit in the five years he was away, he wasn’t very social.

“Once. You needed to find Sara’s soul. And then you called him when we were fighting Darhk and he sent us to a blackjack playing witch. But I figure this whole thing must be mystical because science sure as hell doesn’t explain it.”

Flawless. Her logic is flawless.

“I can call him,” Oliver agrees easily. “Done.”

“As for us...” Her face furrows in thought and all Oliver wants to do is smooth it out. They’re on such unequal footing here, but that kiss earlier was magic.

“How about,” he starts, “we take things slowly. Future-me made some...”

“Idiotic?” she suggests with a smile.

“Stupid,” he fills in, “decisions. But I’m not him. Coming back here, doing things over, it changed me. And I don’t want to lose you now because of something he did. So...” he looks down at the woman smiling in his arms. “Felicity Smoak, would you like to go on a date with me? And yes, I mean a date.”

Felicity grins at the allusion and settles her arms more comfortably around Oliver’s neck. “I would love that.”

Let me know what you think!
This is it, guys: the final stretch. After this there are only two chapters and an epilogue. I seriously can't believe it. Thank you so much for all your wonderful comments and support with this crazy story. These last couple chapters are a whirlwind, but this might be one of my favorites. It took three drafts, but I think the final product was worth the trouble.

I hope you enjoy it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 38

He’d let them get away.

And it pissed the hell out of him.

There weren’t supposed to be any witnesses to his theft of the Markov device, just a couple dead scientists with black arrows that made the police scratch their heads in confusion. No one was supposed to see him in his League garb.

No one was supposed to know Al Saher was involved in the Undertaking in any way, shape or form.

The League of Assassins doesn’t sit around watching TV, especially not in Starling, but Malcolm’s not naïve enough to think that Ra’s won’t hear about this. He was in the man’s honor guard for years. The man learns things from all corners of the globe. It’s only a matter of time before he decides to investigate his former student.

Shit.

It’s because he let himself get distracted.

He had a master plan: to restart the city, to rebuild the Glades from the ground up, better than it had ever been before. He was going to rise from the rubble as a hero.

The plan had been cultivated years ago. He’s taken down every obstacle in his way and now, now that he was almost done, it was falling apart.

He let himself get distracted by the new, costumed do-gooder in town, the man with a bow and arrow who ran out every night in futile attempts to change the attitude in the Glades. But a one-man war on crime isn’t what the city needs. The city needs a complete reboot.

But that’s right: the Green Arrow isn’t alone.

He has Felicity Smoak, who he came to rescue.

He should have killed her back when he first kidnapped her. It might have pushed back the success
of the Markov device, but then he’d probably have gotten away with the Markov device without anyone the wiser.

But she’d piqued his curiosity, damn the woman.

That was enough of that. She’s now a genuine threat to his plans. She knows about the devices, and she – more than likely – knows how to stop them. He didn’t come this far just to fail.

He just needs to plan this out.

If he plays his cards right, he can take care of Miss Smoak and the Green Arrow: two birds with one stone.

…

“When you asked to go out, this is not what I thought you meant.”

Felicity snorts without looking up from her tablet screen. “A little higher…aaaaand…to the left. A little more…a little…PERFECT!”

The compact electric drill hums loudly as he forces it into the concrete. Where Felicity got a drill this strong and thirty compact security cameras, he has no idea, but he’s sure his bank account’s the one reflecting the purchase. “That the last one?”

Felicity reaches into her bag and pats around. “Yup. That’s it! We should know when and where Malcolm delivers the devices. And what did you think this was? A booty call?”

He shakes his head at her grin. “When the first thing out of your mouth is, ‘I need you’, I don’t think that’s an out of place assumption.” He tucks a lock of hair behind her ear with a smirk. “Although I should let you know, I don’t put out on the first date.”

It has the desired reaction, drawing a disbelieving laugh from her chest. “Uh-huh, sure, Mr. Virtue.”

“And it’s got to be a good date,” Oliver continues as his arms wrap around her waist. He pulls Felicity in close, dipping his head so their foreheads touch. “Wine and expensive food only. No cheap stuff.”

“I’ll keep that in mind.” Felicity wraps her arms around his neck, leaning closer. “But you see: my plan worked! I’ve lured you to somewhere dark and secluded to have my way with you.”

Oliver’s nose brushes hers as he grins. “Oh, really?”

Their close proximity is making it hard for Oliver to breathe. Her pupils are dilated and her eyes dart down to his lips. Oliver’s hand grazes her cheek without thought. His thumb drops a little lower, tracing the curve of her bottom lip.

“All part of my masterplan,” she whispers. On tip toes her lips brush his in an almost-kiss. He follows her as she pulls back.

It hasn’t even been a day since their talk and he’s already insatiable. He would have spent the entire day by her side if Sara hadn’t appeared to ruin the moment. Watching Felicity walk away after that talk, was both upsetting and wonderful. For the first time since she got back he finally let himself look at her the way he wanted. He’d let his eyes follow her as she walked away.

And yes, his eyes stayed on her ass for longer than appropriate.
Sara had made sure he knew he’d been caught.

“Well, apparently training to beat a member of the League of Assassins is a daunting feat.” He’s forgotten what it feels like to not be sore. He can feel every muscle in his body with every move he makes and he’s only been training with her two days.

She has a talent for pushing him just far enough so it doesn’t kill him.

Felicity nods, her fingers playing with the hair at the nape of his neck. “It took you three months last time, and we don’t have that kind of time right now. We just have to pray it’s enough.”

Oliver glances around the abandoned subway tunnels. The underground is cool and damp, not a place to store anything for long. The entrance they’d come in through a couple blocks away definitely still saw some use, but the further they got into the maze of tunnels, the less evidence of life they saw.

There had been a couple piles of debris that shifted or shook, more than a couple rats, and cobwebs so thick they looked like something out of a haunted house. The tunnels are still unused, older than memory for most occupants of the city. He’s sure some people remember them, but only in passing. They were a failed project that disappeared long before the major companies started outsourcing their work to China.

“I’d say we should get something to eat now, but everything I can think of is closed.”

Felicity nods as she pulls back a little further. Her hands slide down his arms until she’s holding his hands. “Yeah, we should get out of here. This place gives me the creeps.”

“You were the one who wanted to come down here.”

“I know you’ll protect me.”

He grins at her confidence. He yanks her back into his embrace. Her whole body melts into his. Her hum of contentment rumbles through his chest. She’s small he can wrap his arms completely around her back to cup her sides. One hand fits perfectly in the nip of her waist. The other follows the curve of her spine to cup the back of her neck. “Always.”

There is nothing he wouldn’t do for the woman in his arms.

“Thank you for doing this with me,” Felicity whispers into his chest.

The limited light of their lantern glints off one of the hidden cameras behind her. “If it’s you asking…”

She chuckles. “I love you. I know it’s a little early to say that, but I do.”

He holds her tighter and kisses the top of her head. “I love you too. Come on, let’s get you home.”

…

For an ally of the Green Arrow’s, Miss Smoak’s apartment is pitifully easy to break into. Her deadbolt isn’t even locked. All it takes is a slip of his blade and he walks through the open door in broad daylight.

The other night, he’d been trying to get information from her, to draw the Arrow out. He hadn’t expected his back up and the police. There were witnesses to his heist. Moira couldn’t cover up the
theft with a few dismissive words.

The world knew he had been there.

Someone had to pay for that.

He needed to know the identity of the Green Arrow. So he decided to pay a visit to their mutual friend. It would be easy: a second kidnapping. Or maybe he’d just kill her outright and taunt the Robin Hood imitator into battle. At most, it would take a day to be done with the worst thorns in his side.

Except after a minute, it was painfully obvious Miss Smoak wasn’t in her cramped apartment.

The apartment was excessively bright, just like the woman’s colorful wardrobe. She was also, apparently, a bit of slob. The table was covered with bits of wires and computer chips. There were food wrappers on the counters and dirty dishes in the sink.

Malcolm steps over a blanket in the middle of the hall on the way to the back bedroom.

He twirls his knife in his hand as he debates the pros and cons.

If he kills her now, he won’t have to worry about disposing of the body. He can leave that to the Arrow. He isn’t one for dramatic deaths, but for the people trying to stop his Undertaking after years of planning, he’s willing to make an exception.

But her death will be quick. He respects the woman enough to give her that.

Or…he could kidnap her. It had driven the Green Arrow to hysteria last time. The man who confronted him in Merlyn Global had been unhinged. She was more than just a comrade in arms. Taking her would make him emotional, make him easier to kill.

A man who already lost the woman he loved wouldn’t have anything to lose…

So he won’t kill her.

He’ll just have to leave a clear trail for the Arrow to follow. Simple enough.

Malcolm grins as his hand wraps around the door knob and swings the door open.

This might actually be fun.

…

They’re not sneaking into Queen Mansion when Moira finds them. Absolutely not.

Felicity knows what it looks like: she’s got dirt smudged on her face and she’s not wearing make-up. Not to mention her hair is a complete mess. Oliver’s shirt is all wrinkled. There’s dust in his hair and he lost his jacket somewhere along the way.

She’s almost positive his jacket’s still out in the car.

“At night, Oliver?”

Felicity freezes behind him. Her hand curls into the back of Oliver’s shirt as she cowers behind him. Moira might like her this time around, but that doesn’t mean she wants to test Moira’s compassion to the women her son brings home. Not that Oliver’s been bringing other women home.
“Mom.”

Stuck by the insane desire to laugh, Felicity buries her face into Oliver’s back. A couple days ago she and Oliver got into a huge fight in the office and now they’re back here and noticeably not angry. It’s ridiculous.

“Felicity.”

Well, there goes the hope that Moira hasn’t noticed her.

She pulls away from Oliver and peeks around his massive form with a sheepish smile. “Mrs. Queen.”

“Moira,” she corrects primly as she lifts the mug to her lips.

“Moira.” Yup. Still weird. There will never be a dimension where this will be normal.

“I’m glad to see you’re doing well. And Walter will be happy to hear that as well.”

Of course, Moira looks just as poised and elegant as always, even in her silk pajamas. Felicity still wears patterned pants and ratty t-shirts to bed. Eventually, she might be able to commandeer a couple of Oliver’s shirts, but there’s still no way she will ever look as groomed at 6am as Moira Queen looks.

Maybe it’s the whole mansion aesthetic.

Oliver shifts and Felicity’s grip on his shirt tightens. Nope. She is not ready to face Moira, not in her dirt covered clothes, with her crazy hair. She really doesn’t know why she allowed Oliver to convince her this was a good idea. Oliver twists to wrap his arm around her shoulders. Reluctantly, she lets him pull her against his side.

“And what have you two been up to?”

Felicity is not a fan of the scheming look in Moira’s eyes as they dart between her and Oliver. It’s a lot nicer than the threats she got in her time, but just as unsettling.

“Nothing. We weren’t up to anything. I mean, of course we did something just not like something something. There was no sex. We didn’t have sex.”

Her mouth falls open. “Oh, god. Just ignore that. Let’s pretend I didn’t say anything. At all. In fact, we could just forget the last two minutes. That would be good. Why didn’t you stop me?” She slaps Oliver’s chest.

“I like your babbles.” Oliver kisses her forehead and Felicity melts on the inside. She can’t be annoyed with him, when he’s sweet. Her heart doesn’t stand a chance.

“I just babbled about sex to your mother.” She grimaces. That’s an experience she could have lived without.

His chuckle shakes his chest. His hand runs soothingly over her side. “It was bound to happen eventually.”

Felicity smacks his chest again and forces herself to face Moira again. “Sorry. Sometimes words just slip out and its problematic. I also haven’t had my coffee, which makes it worse. And I haven’t really slept. We were up all night. But not like UP up…I’m just gonna stop talking…in 3, 2, 1…”
Oliver wraps her closer to shield her with his body. “Did you need something, Mom?”

“We need to talk about what’s going on with…Malcolm.”

Felicity pushes off Oliver’s chest at the whispered name with a frown. “What about Malcolm?”

Moira gives her a polite smile. “Oliver and I have a dinner with the Merlyns.”

“She knows, Mom.”

“Wait. She knows??” Felicity leans away from Oliver to get a look at this face. “Like knows? Everything??”

…

*She’s NOT here!*

Malcolm’s knife quivers from where it’s embedded in the padded headboard. He growls as he rips it out, pulling foam out with it. The bed doesn’t even look slept in, the covers actually in place. He shouldn’t be surprised. If the Arrow’s smart, he’ll be keeping her close after an attempt on her life.

His fist clenches around the handle of the knife. He’s getting tired of this game of tag.

“How am I supposed to keep an eye on her if she keeps running off?” The boy slouches down the hall with a yawn. He extracts his phone from a deep pocket and lifts it to his ear in a familiar motion. “Hey…Is Felicity with you?”

The kid knows the Green Arrow too? Really? Did the idiot have a legion who knew his identity? Seems careless to leave them so unprotected. Malcolm could have killed the kid easily several time in the last two minutes alone.

“Yeah. Okay. I’ll let Digg know…Uh-huh…you really should remind her to lock the door though. It’s kind of hard to protect her from herself…Okay…Yeah…got it. Meet you there in a couple hours.”

Malcolm lingers in the room, his eyes locked on the fire escape, his best exit.

He could kill the kid, but it seems superfluous. He’s obviously an ineffectual bodyguard, if that’s what he’s supposed to be. He doesn’t pose a threat to Malcolm himself or to the plan. He just needs to know where Felicity is. If torturing the kid is the only way to do it…
“Digg?”

Malcolm grins. Or he could just listen in.

…

“Yeah, I didn’t get the chance to tell you, with the kidnapping and everything,” Oliver says quickly before his little green secret comes flying out of Felicity’s mouth. If the babble earlier proved anything, it’s that her filter is non-existent on zero hours of sleep. “She doesn’t know everything.”

Moira raises a sculpted eyebrow. “I don’t?”

He glances at his mother and back to Felicity. “I told her I know about Malcolm. And that you and Digg were helping me take him down.”

“I wasn’t aware Miss Smoak was privy to our family secrets.”

Great. Now his mother is getting territorial. Just when she was starting to accept her place in his life.

“Felicity traced the account you used to pay off the midwife.” Just thinking about it fires him up, especially with the new information he’s gotten in the last couple days.

“Oliver…”

Like she always does, Felicity knows what he’s building up to. She squeezes his arm, but that doesn’t do anything to stop the words from blurring out: “Which also happens to be the account you used to pay off Samantha Clayton to tell me she lost the baby.”

The annoyance has been simmering since Felicity told him about William. He’s a father and he can’t help but wonder how that would change his whole life. The fact that his mother kept that from him…

“Oliver—” Felicity grimaces. She’s already regretting telling him. Maybe it wasn’t the best idea to tell him about the whole his-mother-paying-off-his-one-night-stand thing. But he’s glad she did.

“I have a son that I never knew about, Mom. He’s five years old now. He could have been a part of our lives years ago.” He’s just trying to get her to understand how her secrets have hurt him, how they damaged their lives. The Queens shouldn’t be keeping secrets from each other.

His mother doesn’t seem to get it. “I didn’t know she kept the baby. She would have ruined your life, Oliver.”

“It wasn’t your choice to make!”

Felicity huffs at that and shoots him a significant look, the meaning of which is not lost on him.

“You weren’t ready to be a father.”

Felicity steps between them. “Alright. Enough! First off, Oliver will be an amazing father. Secondly, this is NOT a conversation we need to have now. Yes, it needs to happen, but our priority right now is stopping the Undertaking. So, what do you need to talk about in regards to Malcolm?”

Moira’s levels her death stare at Felicity. “Is that really your business?”

“Well, at least we’re on familiar ground,” Felicity says. “Which probably diminishes my chance of getting some of that delicious smelling coffee. I bet you’ve got that gourmet coffee that tastes like heaven.”
“How about we talk over breakfast?” Oliver’s hand drifts to her lower back, gently nudging her along. “And get you some coffee.” The babbling is only going to get worse the longer it takes her to get coffee.

Felicity groans openly in appreciation. If she was more awake, she’d probably be more embarrassed. “You are a God send.”

He chuckles. “I'll even make you an omelet.”

“With onion and cheese and broccoli?” She’s unashamed of her begging, pouting openly at him. Like he would ever be able to say no to her.

…

“Raisa has the day off.” Moira says unhelpfully as she trails them to the industrial kitchen Felicity’s only been in when she was waiting for Slade to come kidnap her. She even tried to stab him with one of the kitchen knives.

It wasn’t successful.

Oliver ignores his mother, moving around the kitchen with practiced precision. He sets a bowl and whisk in front of her, and Felicity plays with them as Oliver pulls food from the fridge. The metal makes a cool click against the side of the glass bowl. The sound brings a smile to her sleep-addled face. It sounds almost musical.

“You want to whisk the eggs?” Oliver asks.

Her heart races at his smile, but she shakes her head. He obviously doesn’t get her entertainment. “Nope. You do not want me anywhere near any food. Trust me. 32 omelets have been sacrificed in my training. And I only burned about 31 of them. The last one was undercooked. None were edible.”

He laughs. “Not the best cook?”

“I take after my mother.”

Oliver chuckles. He makes chopping vegetables look like an art form. She’s always found it just as captivating as the Salmon Ladder. “Donna can’t cook?”

Remembering an evening of ruined chicken cordon bleu in an apartment far, far away, Felicity leans over and steals a bit of broccoli. “Yeah. Don’t ever leave her alone with chicken. Bad news.”

Oliver playfully brushes her hands away from the food. “That bad, huh?”

She nods with a huge smile. “I grew up on nachos from the bar. We stopped buying microwaves after the third microwave died when she left a metal spoon in. She did master heating up soup though.”

Her mother would never win any awards, but she had done her best. And she never lacked in love, even if it felt like her mother sometimes smothered her.

“You want some, Mom?” Oliver asks. He’s more closed as he asks her, but he’s reaching out to his mother.

“No, thank you,” Moira says primly. “I thought you wanted to talk about Malcolm.”
Felicity makes grabby hands at the mug of coffee Oliver holds out to her. She groans at the taste. It really is just as good as she thought it would be. It’s the perfect mix of sugar, milk, and coffee. “Malcolm can wait five minutes.”

“I’m not so sure you’ll feel that way when you find out what he has planned.”

“He still has to replicate the machine,” Felicity says after a healthy sip of coffee.

Moira frowns. “He stole the machine to use it. It’s powerful enough that he doesn’t need more than one.”

Felicity stares at her for a moment and shrugs. She knows she’s right, even if Moira doesn’t.

“We’re on top of it,” Oliver says as he sprinkles onions, broccoli, and cheese over the eggs.

Moira doesn’t look impressed.

…

**Queen Mansion.**

He didn’t expect that. Malcolm expected somewhere more covert, secure. Queen Mansion’s security scared off the riff-raff. It could even ward off most professional thieves or kidnappers, or at least make them reconsider their approach. Malcolm himself has only snuck past on a handful of occasions – usually it’s not worth the trouble.

Miss Smoak though…

She’s trouble, more trouble than he had expected.

He hadn’t expected a trip to Queen Mansion today, least of all for the computer tech turned Head of Applied Sciences. Moira didn’t typically invite employees into her home, even the more important ones. He’d thought he’d heard Felicity’s roommate wrong when he said that Felicity was with Oliver. The added “at Queen Mansion” had made the meaning crystal clear, even to Malcolm’s whirling brain.

It struck him as odd that Miss Smoak had managed to befriend Oliver as well as his son, but it hadn’t occurred to Malcolm until he was halfway out of the city that perhaps there was another reason for Felicity to choose to hide away in Queen Mansion.

After Oliver’s successful kidnapping and interrogation, Malcolm had let go any suspicion, more for Moira’s sake than for actual peace of mind. But the idea that there was more to Oliver stuck in his mind. He’d fought the Green Arrow – and while he’d been an underwhelming opponent – the idea that the man he considered almost a second son might have his same killing instinct excites him.

Staring at the trio through the glass doors to the kitchen only solidifies the idea.

Now that he’s looking for it, Malcolm can see what he was blind to for so long. Even cooking, Oliver stands tall, his eyes darting to his surroundings every couple seconds. The grace with which he moves around the kitchen, the way he handles a knife, the way he keeps all the entrances in the room in sight at all times speaks to the warrior he’s become.

Instead of dying with his father, Oliver had overcome and survived to get to where he is now.

Malcolm admires it in a man.
He also admires his dedication to protecting those he loves.

*It’s a pity our goals don’t align,* Malcolm thinks as he lines up his shot.

…

“Agent Michaels.”

Lyla pauses with a foot off the stairs, seconds from her great escape. Two weeks without laying eyes on Amanda Waller would be too good to be true. Her mask falls into place as she pivots to face her boss. “Ma’am?”

“Have you got somewhere to be, Michaels?”

She sighs. It’s a rhetorical question, of course. Waller won’t tolerate her fleeing and for some inconceivable reason, Lyla’s become important to her operation. Besides, she’s just meeting up with Johnny. “No, Ma’am.”

“Good. You seem to be enjoying your time here in Starling.”

Lyla clasps her hands behind her back. Waller doesn’t ask questions; she pulls answers from unsuspecting prey and fills you with fear from her knowledge. “Yes, Ma’am.”

“And your ex-husband: how is he?”

Are they really doing this? “Ask what you want to know, Waller.” She’s not in the mood to beat around the bush. She’s been going back and forth between A.R.G.U.S. missions and trying to help Team Arrow dismantle Malcolm’s plot. It’s getting stressful.

Should she lose her patience with her bloodthirsty boss?

No. But that’s what she’s doing. And bizarrely, Waller seems to respect it.

The woman nods as she continues down the stairs in her precarious heels. The woman’s ability to look fierce in completely inadequate clothes is a superpower. “How is Oliver Queen?”

Only years of working for the Queen of Darkness keep the surprise from her face. After all, she did look into Oliver’s history with A.R.G.U.S. She knows Waller’s connection to the man.

“Mr. Queen is fine.”

“Hn. And how exactly did you end up working for him?”

Lyla sighs. “I’m working security for Felicity Smoak. There was an attempt on her life.”

“Yes, yes, from the Dark Archer. The question I have is: why? What about Miss Smoak is so fascinating?” Amanda tilts her head.

Lyla stares at Waller for a moment, thinking of a list of amazing things about Felicity but none Waller would accept. “She’s Head of the Applied Sciences Division of Queen Consolidated?”

“And there was a second attempt on her life two weeks ago, while she was under your supervision. Are you falling down on the job, Agent Michaels?”

Lyla snorts. “No, Ma’am. She walked into that building knowing she might die, and left me outside on purpose. She’s stubborn and tougher than she looks.”
Her words have a stronger impact on Waller than she thought. They give the woman pause before she nods decisively. “I thought so. Several years ago there was a computer virus that tore through government firewalls. Cooper Sheldon confessed, but I always liked her for it. Good to know my instinct is good. Keep an eye on her.”

“Ma’am?” Lyla frowns.

“Just consider it an extension of your current job.” With a sharp nod, Waller turns on her stiletto heel and walks away with her usual bluster.

She can’t do what Waller asks. There’s no possible way Lyla divulge half the things she’s involved in. Waller can’t know about the time travel. She already knows Oliver’s the Green Arrow. Now her interest in Felicity…

Oliver’s not going to take that well.

With less spring in her step, Lyla walks out the door.

Brrrrrringgggg.

Lyla lifts her phone to her ear. “I’m leaving now, Johnny. How’s Felicity doing?”

“That’s why I’m calling. We’ve got a problem.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Comments and kudos are always appreciated!
Chapter 39

An arrow travels at an average of almost 225 miles per hour. It’s slower than a bullet, but still fast enough that Oliver can’t get to Felicity in time.

It’s chance that he spots movement in the bushes when he slides the omelet across the counter to Felicity, instinct that has him moving before a thought can fully form in his mind, and desperation that draws the anguished cry from his throat as he vaults over the counter. His hip skids across the cool marble in an effort to protect the love of his life, a desperate gambit that feels like a race against time.

He crashes into her as the sound of shattering glass reaches his ears along with a shrill scream.

“OLIVER!”

Blood.

Scarlet blood against the white stone floor.

He waits for the pain to piece his adrenaline fueled brain, to prove to himself that he did it: he saved her. But the blood’s not his.

He shifts, Felicity with him, and she whimpers in pain at the movement. He closes his eyes against the brief shock of anguish. She’s hurt, but she’s okay. He needs to focus on that.

“Oliver!” Beside him, his mother grabs his arm, nails digging in desperately. “We need to move!”

Like his worst nightmare, Oliver stares down at the black arrow sticking out of Felicity’s shoulder, so close to a fatal shot. If he hadn’t moved when he did…

But he has other things to worry about because there’s only one person he can think of who would be aiming to kill Felicity with a black arrow.

Malcolm Merlyn.

That spurs him into motion. He scoops her into his arms as another projectile flies through the now-shattered window and skitters harmlessly across the floor. Pained noises escape Felicity as he drags her and his mother from the room, dodging another arrow in the meantime, this one exploding in the doorway moments after Oliver passes through.

With wide strides he crashes into the solid wooden doors of the study. They swing wide open and slam into the walls on either wide with enough force to leave dents. He moves toward the corner, toward safely as a wet warmth covers his shoulder from where Felicity’s pressed against him, dripping down to the floor. He tries not to think about the iron scent of blood.

“The panic room,” he says to his mother, lowering Felicity to the couch. He grabs a spare chair and wedges it under the doorknobs of the double door before returning to Felicity.

“Oliver,” Moira repeats from her position by the open, heavily armored door. He brushes past her
into the room without a word, reverently laying Felicity down on the cot within. “Is she alright?”

He glances up, surprised to see the door closed and the alarm light blinking: the police were on their way.

While that’s a new issue to deal with, his more pressing problem is Felicity. She’s pale, far paler than he’s ever seen her, and her breaths come in harsh pants. There’s more blood than he’d like to ever see coming from Felicity, but the flow has ebbed and he’s not as concerned about her bleeding out anymore. He grabs a blanket from beside the bed, ripping a piece off to press it against the wound.

The arrow looks problematic.

The shaft isn’t wood, so he can’t break it and just pull the arrow out. He can’t back it out the way it came in: the damage would be catastrophic and any luck they had with it missing her aorta would be destroyed. He has to leave it in: It’s too close to her heart for him to risk anything else.

He brushes hair from her face. “Felicity. Talk to me. I need you to say something, honey.”

“Ol’vr.”

“Hey, shhhhh, I got you. I got you. You’re going to be fine.” He supports her back with his balled up jacket and the blanket.

Her blue eyes flutter open, clouded in pain and looks down at the arrow bursting from her chest. “I r’ly hate pointy things.”

The chuckle escapes him on a relieved breath. If she’s cracking jokes, she’s not going to die in the next couple minutes. “I know. My mom’s going to watch you. I’ll be right back.”

“Wai’! You cn’t go out th’re.” Her arm latches on to his, her nails digging into the skin.

“I have to, Felicity.” He lifts his phone to the bed and puts it on speaker as it ring. “Tell Digg what’s going on. I’ll stall Malcolm.”

“You don’ have your bow.”

“There’s a gun and a spare bow in the office.” He doesn’t like guns, but between that, the bow, and the iron poker, he might stand a chance against Malcolm.

“Oliver,” Diggle answers in his own abrupt way.

“Hey. Malcolm’s at the mansion. Felicity’s shot. We need back up.” He glances at Felicity. He wants to say he loves her, but that’s not going to be a thing he does. He doesn’t want “I love you” to be the thing he says before walking away to a fight he might lose. “I’ll hold him off.”

Felicity shakes her head as much as she can. “Oliver-“

He meets her eyes. He needs her understand: he can’t stand back idly while there’s a threat lurking. Her voice is too soft, too strained, even if she appears to be slightly more alert. She doesn’t have time and he can’t help her here.

She lets out a shaky breath. “Be careful.”

He would give anything to take her pain for her, but he can’t. He knows how painful an arrow through the chest can be. He’d passed out for God knows how long when it happened to him. She’s awake and talking. She’s amazing.
How did he get so lucky to have this incredible woman in his life?

He presses a kiss to her forehead. “I’ll be back.” Then he turns to his mother. “Keep an eye on her. Don’t let her pass out.”

“You can’t go out there, Oliver. He’ll kill you.”

He pulls up the camera to get a view of the office. Wherever he’s disappeared to, Malcolm’s not in range of the camera. “I can handle Malcolm. Or at least hold him off until Digg gets here.”

“Malcolm? I’m not worried about Malcolm right now. I’m worried about his man. That’s an assassin out there, an assassin who failed. He’s not going to stop coming for us until we’re dead. You can’t go out there. The police are already on their way. They’ll be here soon.”

He can’t leave Malcolm to his own devices. “I’ll be back. Lock the door behind me.”

Oliver pulls the knife from his ankle sheath and slips out the door. He moves along the bookcase, reaching behind a couple books to pull out the bow he stashed there when he came back. His arrows are hidden a couple steps away in a decorative vase.

He slings the quiver over his shoulder, eyes on the doorway. He spares a glance at the windows.

“Oliver.”

The arrow is pointed directly at Malcolm’s heart as Oliver spins to face the man. The assassin is frustratingly unguarded, hands resting by his sides. Felicity’s injured and dying in the other room. He doesn’t have time for a heart to heart with Malcolm Merlyn.

“Malcolm.”

“I think it’s time we talk.”

“You just shot the woman I love and you want to talk? I’ve heard some crazy things from you, but that might be the craziest.”

“We could be great allies, Oliver. You know you’ve always been like a son to me.”

His words leave a sick sensation in Oliver’s stomach. “Well, you’re a shitty father.”

Malcolm sighs and pulls his sword from the sheath on his back. “Look at everything you’ve done since you got back: it’s all amounted to nothing. A couple thugs off the streets? Stopped a couple muggings? A rape or two? What have you really done to better the city?”

“I’ve made a difference without resorting to mass murder. The shelter on Thomson. The soup kitchen. Crime is down.”

“But for how long? You’re fighting an uphill battle. The Undertaking is the best plan, the only plan.”

Malcolm starts to circle Oliver. “Crime isn’t the problem, Oliver. It’s the people, the mindset. They watch violent crimes happen on a daily basis and say nothing! How many people die in the street every year because no one speaks up? How many people die that could have been saved, like Rebecca could have been saved? They’re gunned down by criminals and left to die by people too selfish to speak up. It’s too late to save the Glades, but the rest of the city? It can still be saved. Starling needs decisive change and you can be a part of it.”

“So what?” Oliver asks. “You destroy the city with an earthquake and then step in as the savior
rebuilding it? You kill hundreds of people because they’re just as scared of the gangs on the street as the rest of the world is? And then you teach them, what? Your morals? You rebuild the city in your image? In Merlyn Global’s?"

“Not just Merlyn Global’s. Merlyn Global, Queen Consolidated, all the other big companies in the city, we can build the city back up from the rubble, can make it better! And you can be right there with me. You don’t need to die. All I need you to do is not interfere. And then, when the city is at its lowest, you step in, as a true hero. Agree and I’ll let you get help for Miss Smoak. You’ll survive. You’ll be a hero.”

Oliver lifts his bow. “I don’t think so.”

“We both know you can’t beat me, Oliver. I stabbed you through the chest several weeks ago. And Miss Smoak is closer to death with each passing second. I had been aiming to kill her, but perhaps this is better. The love of your life or the wretched of the city? It’s a simple choice.”

“It really is.” There is no choice, not really. Felicity would never forgive him if he traded her life for the lives of everyone in the Glades. He might have made that choice readily before their talk, chosen her over everything, but she would never look at him again if he did. Besides, he’s not one to back down from a fight. John will be here as soon as possible. All he has to do is stall Malcolm until he gets here.

“You’ll let her die? To stand by your morals, you’ll let her endure a slow, painful death?”

Oliver’s jaw clenches. “If I made that choice, I would lose her anyway. And I would never forgive myself.”

“Tsk, tsk, tsk, Oliver. You’re letting your feelings rule your actions. You need to look past the immediate repercussions. Think about the future. I make a better friend than an enemy.”

Malcolm’s too well trained for any of the usual tells when it comes to fighting. Oliver’s fought him enough times to know to beware. It’s more the lull in the conversation than any tensing of muscles that tells him Malcolm’s about to strike.

He releases his arrow.

And the fight starts in earnest.

…

“Felicity, I need you to keep talking,” John shouts at the Bluetooth in his car as he tosses his burner phone into the passenger seat. Lyla was on her way and calling Sara Lance. John wasn’t taking any chances with Felicity’s life. Or Oliver’s. In a short time, those knuckleheads had come to mean more to him than he would have thought.

“Hhhhhhhhhhhhhmmmm,” Felicity’s fading fast and John’s still ten minutes out. Maybe seven if he really pushes it.

“Tell me about your new computer.” Anything to keep her talking.

A sound comes through the speakers that might have been a snort if Felicity had more energy. “I’snot a com’uter, Digg. I’sa masterpiece.”

He smiles as he rounds the corner sharply, riding up the curb and barely missing the street sign that could have easily taken out his side mirror. “Really? It doesn’t look like anything special.”
If she was in the same room, Digg would probably be running away now. He wasn’t stupid enough to actually insult Felicity’s babies. He just needs to keep her conscious.

“I know wha’ you’re doin’, John.”

He grins.

“And it’s working. Damn it. You know that set-up’s comple’ly custom. I worked on it for days. How could you insult my babies?”

Felicity’s lecture drifts softly into the background as Digg devotes his whole attention to the road. As long as she’s talking, she’s alive.

The accelerator is pressed to the floor under his boot, but cars keep getting in his way, unintentionally slowing him down with their devotion to the rules of the road.

A siren screeches to life behind him.

“Shit.”

“Is that the police?” Felicity cries.

It’s ridiculous. She’s dying and she’s worried about him getting pulled over over.

A glance in the rearview mirror reveals a flash of red and blue. A second look reveals it’s not the white cop car he worried it was but a black SUV. Specifically one he recognizes, one that belongs to a certain ex-wife he’s been reacquainting himself with.

“It’s just Lyla.”

“Oh, good. Ol’ver needs your help.”

Digg spins the wheel frantically as he skids on to the Queen’s gravel driveway, slamming to a stop in front of the huge, iron gates. The guard inside the gate house frowns at him, but opens the gate when he recognizes John.

The electronic system takes forever. The gates open smoothly even with the quiet whirl of the motor. But each precious second drags on. The mansion lies too far from the gate for it to be faster to run, but that doesn’t stop a shadow from vaulting out of Lyla’s car and racing through the opening.

Sara makes a beeline for the mansion and John pulls his gun from his holster.

“Call the police and an ambulance,” John shouts to the stunned guard. “They should be on their way already.”

“What’s going on?” The man demands – Dan, if John remembers correctly.

“There’s been an attack. When the police get here, send them up, but stay back. The threat is more dangerous than any of you.” With that, Digg slams on the gas again, gravel spraying out behind him as the wheels spin for a moment before gaining traction.

“We’re almost there, Felicity. Hold on just a little bit longer.”

…

“You really think you can win? You were lucky to just survive the first time.”
Oliver swings the bow over his head, whipping it around to deflect the sword bearing down on him. He spins in close to Malcolm. Trying to get past his guard, but Malcolm’s three steps ahead of him. The sword whistles as it flies through the air, narrowly missing Oliver yet again.

“Reconsider, Oliver. Think of how much you can learn from me.”

Malcolm’s voice doesn’t even sound as if it’s coming from his body. It seems to drift and float around the room as Oliver ducks and dodges. Try as he might, he can’t seem to get a hit in. He could try harder, push himself further, but that’s not his goal.

His goal is to bide his time.

He needs a better close combat weapon.

The sword over the mantel isn’t ideal, but Oliver spent enough time trying to use it as a teenager to know that it’s solid enough to be effective. He yanks it from the metal stand, swinging it in a broad arc at Malcolm’s head.

The sword rests heavily in his hands as Malcolm steps back to watch him speculatively.

“You obviously haven’t trained with Ra’s Al Ghul, but you’ve trained in swordplay.”

As if Slade was the equivalent of a League assassin. Oliver had failed miserably in that lesson anyway. He was never good with swords. But now, with a clear head and a goal, he’s determined to succeed.

“And you’re not lashing out like last time. That’s progress.”

Oliver chooses to ignore him as he tests the weight of the unsharpened sword. It’s not going to cut anyone, but he might be able to break an arm. Digg should be here soon.

“I’m a quick learner.”

Malcolm nods respectfully. “I love you like a son, Oliver, but I can’t let you destroy my life’s work.”

“And I can’t let you destroy everything I care about.”

Malcolm strikes like a snake, springing forward. It’s all Oliver can do to knock the sword off track, deflecting it so it grazes his arm, neatly slicing the sleeve of his Henley. He pushes aside thoughts and feelings so he can just react. He can’t lose this fight, can’t let himself get distracted.

Muscles burn with the strain of wielding an unfamiliar, weighty weapon as he twists through stances he’s seen far more than he’s actually practiced them. Pure adrenaline races through his system, spurring him on, keeping him one step ahead of Malcolm…barely.

CRASH.

Oliver jumps to the side, away from the cascade of glass as a figure in black jumps through the window. He’d recognize that leather coat anywhere. Backup is finally here.

Sara hasn’t hit the ground before she flings two daggers from her sleeves. She jumps up from her roll to swing half her bo staff at Malcolm’s head.

Malcolm recovers from his surprise succinctly, knocking the blow aside. The follow through passes centimeters from Sara’s side as she dances away from him. Oliver recovers from his surprise and leaps into the fight swinging.
Together, he and Sara manage to push Malcolm back from the panic room, toward the window Sara just crashed through. They have to push him back, to clear the way for John or whoever he can hear running down the hall. Someone has to get to Felicity. Now.

Malcolm pauses, a scowl clouding his face where he once held mild interest. “You’re trying my patience.”

Sara snorts. “Oh no.”

He turns his sharp black eyes to the blonde assassin. Oliver watches his guard raise. While he was relaxed with Oliver, Malcolm is on edge with Sara. That alone speaks volumes to how much of a threat he sees Oliver is, which apparently isn’t much.

Or maybe Malcolm’s just realizing finally that he needs to take this seriously.

“You’ve made yourself an enemy, one you really don’t want.”

It doesn’t mean a thing to Oliver. Knowing Malcolm’s a villain for the last two years has destroyed any relationship he might have once had with the man. The man had always been cold and emotionless. He was most passionate about murder. Not something Oliver liked to talk about, especially with sociopaths.

“You’ve made your choice,” Malcolm continues darkly. “Your love for your city. Now you’ll have to pay the price. Your ragtag team isn’t fast enough to save everyone.”

He jumps from the window. Oliver spins back to the hidden room as soon as Malcolm disappears. The door is open and Lyla stands at the open door, gun drawn. She moves out of the way so Oliver can see in.

“Medical is on the way,” she says quickly.

He nods and moves past her to where John kneels over Felicity.

Her eyes are still open, but glazed. Her head nods, right on the edge of consciousness.

“Felicity,” Oliver whispers her name, squeezing her hand, “I need you to stay awake. Listen to the sound of my voice. Okay? Digg’s got you. He’s going to take good care of you until the ambulance gets here.”

Digg glances at him, worry in his eyes.

He knows it’s bad. And he’s sure the doctors are going to have trouble dealing with the arrow. Wounds like this might be more common in Starling since his return, but pulling out that arrow is still going to be rough.

“The helicopter’s here,” Lyla announces from the doorway, unnecessarily considering the loud whir of the blades drowns out almost everything else. But then, Oliver hadn’t heard them approach either.

He frowns at that. The Starling Hospital had a helicopter?

In the end, it doesn’t matter. Two medics run into the room and head straight for Felicity. Digg falls back to let the professionals take over. Oliver stays close, squeezing her hand.

They have her stabilized in moments, moving with militaristic precision to strap her into a gurney.
“Stop,” it comes out a faint whisper past chapped lips, but the grip on Oliver’s fingers tightens encouragingly.

The medics pause, glancing between the two of them.

“You..haffta stop...Mal...com,” she whispers. “Stop…’im.”

“I won’t let him hurt anyone. I promise. I just need you to get better. Got it?”

Felicity nods faintly, dropping his hand.

Oliver turns to the medics. “Take care of her.”

“Yes, sir,” one of them says with a small salute.

“Mom, go with them. Make sure she’s okay. I’m counting on you.”

Digg raises an eyebrow at that, but Oliver shakes his head. He needs his mother out of the way, away from the news, away from the Glades. If he’s lucky, she’ll get Thea to go to the hospital to look after Felicity as well and he won’t have to worry about any of his girls.

His girls.

He likes the sound of that.

“Lyla…” He says.

“I’m with them. Go save the world or whatever.” She rises on her toes and presses a kiss to John’s cheek. “Call me after you beat that son of a bitch.”

Oliver watches them go, running a hand over his head. He finally catches his breath. He’s pretty sure he hasn’t breathed normally since he saw movement in that bush.

“We need to get to the Foundry.”

John frowns at him. “The Foundry?”

“The cameras. Felicity and I set up cameras in the old subway system to find Malcolm’s earthquake machines. If he’s going to strike now, we need to be prepared.” Oliver grabs his coat. “You good, Sara?”

She nods. “We won’t be getting back up from Nyssa. She can’t move against him until he’s killed an innocent or done anything in direct violation of League rules.”

“We can take him.” Oliver leads the way to the front door as sirens reach his ears, followed by the skidding of wheels in the gravel driveway. John’s car is parked sideways in the middle of the circle, door open and engine still running.

The door to the nearest unmarked car is flung open by a familiar, annoyed detective. Oliver spins on his heel and faces Sara. He shoves his bow and arrows into her hands with only a couple words of explanation: “Your father.”

She pales and darts toward the car, face averted. Digg and Oliver follow her example. They have a plan, a plan that doesn’t have time for messy family reunions.

“QUEEN!”
Oliver grimaces and slowly turns back around. “Detective.”

“Where’s the fire? You got somewhere to be after we got a call of a break in?”

Yes, but that’s not a viable answer to a detective who will then want to know all the answers. “There was an attack. Felicity was hurt, but the helicopter’s already picked her up.”

“Helicopter? The ambulance is right behind us?”

Oliver freezes. “You didn’t send a helicopter?”

“Kid, I don’t think we have a helicopter that could be here any faster than we got here.” Lance frowns.

“What?”

Oliver reaches for his phone only to find his pockets empty. “Digg-”

“Already on it.”

“I’m sorry, Detective, but we’ve got to go. The man who did this is already gone.”

“Queen! I need to ask you questions, figure out what happened, if you want us to get to the bottom of this.”

“We already know who did this,” he says dismissively. “And we’re going to put a stop to it.”

“I don’t know what you’re about, Queen, but you can’t just go running around playing the hero.”

Oliver pauses with a hand on the door handle. “The intruder came in through the kitchen and shot Felicity Smoak with a black arrow. We managed to get out of the room and into the panic room. My bodyguards were able to chase him away. Feel free to take as many samples as you want.”

“You should stay here, especially if they’ve kidnapped your friend…”

He doesn’t stick around to hear anymore. As soon as the door closes behind him, the town car takes off. Sara glances back over her shoulder. “Did I just hear what I thought I heard?”

“That Felicity was just kidnapped after getting shot in the chest? Yes,” Oliver growls, fingers rubbing together in irritation. “Did you reach Lyla?”

“Straight to voicemail. I’ll keep trying.”

“Abercrombie is going to meet us at the Foundry,” Sara says. “If they wanted to hurt her, they wouldn’t have stabilized her first. Let’s take this one battle at a time.”

Digg shares a glance with Oliver. Fat chance of them leaving that alone.

In that instant, Digg’s phone rings. John pounces on it. “Lyla.”

Oliver’s hand curls into a fist, his foot bouncing in agitation. Noticing his distress, John puts the phone on speaker. “Where are you?”

“On the way to medical. They gave Felicity something to knock her out. They have to wait until we land to take out the arrow.”
“Who took you?” Oliver demands from the backseat. “Lance said it wasn’t their medical team.”

“It wasn’t Starling’s, but that’s probably for the best.”

Oliver growls. “How is Felicity’s kidnapping for the best?”


Oliver stills suddenly. He does not want Amanda Waller anywhere near Felicity. The fact that she came without him calling a favor: she wants something. Why would she be interested in Felicity? Amanda Waller’s interest never lead to anything good.

…

“Where’s Blondie?” are the first words out of Roy’s mouth as they walk up to the front of Verdant. Oliver grinds his back molars, hands curling into fists. “She’s getting medical attention.”

“She’s hurt?!”

“She’s going to be fine,” John insists. “Lyla and Moira are with her.” Which would be more reassuring if he didn’t know there would also be an Amanda Waller nearby.

“So what’s the plan?”

Oliver advances on Verdant again. “We’re going to stop Malcolm and then get Felicity out of A.R.G.U.S.”

“And how are we supposed to do that?”

“With the cameras Felicity and I set up last night.” Oliver reaches for the door, jumping back when it bursts open. Oliver’s hand lands on an arrow in the quiver strung once again across his back. John and Sara both reach for their own weapons.

“Whoa! Hey! You guys to realize it’s 9 a.m., right? The club closed hours ago,” Tommy jokes, tossing the keys in his hand.

“Hey, Tommy,” Oliver says, forcing a smile on his face. “How did we do last night?”

“We had a bunch of underaged kids thinking they could get past Hank with their fakes. They put up quite a stink, but they cleared out pretty quickly. Mel made bank with tips last night. Apparently, she pitted these two guys against each other and made out like a bandit. That girl is devious.” He grins. “I’m thinking about putting her in charge of training the new recruits.”

“That’s good to hear. I just wanted to check in.”

Tommy nods, like it’s not odd for Oliver to show up early in the morning with a bunch of guests. “Yeah. We’re good. But if you see Felicity, let her know that she needs to stop ignoring my texts.”

Oliver swallows hard. “Listen, about that…”

A low grumble cuts Oliver off mid-sentence. There doesn’t seem to be a source, just a noise that permeates the air. He frowns at the concrete, watching as a pebble starts to vibrate, moving ever so slowly sideways.
And as the grumble grows, the earth beneath their feet starts to shake.

In the distance, Oliver hears a few started shouts, but nothing too alarmed, not yet. After all, it starts small, just a tremor that would frighten the neighbor’s cat. But he knew how big the quake would get. He couldn’t let that happen.

The timetable was gone. There was no more waiting, no planning: just them.

And they were going to stop Malcolm’s Undertaking.

Now.

Chapter End Notes

DUN DUN DUNNNNNNNN!

Thank you, lovelies, for reading! I really hope you enjoyed this chapter. We've only got two more left to go and a lot to wrap up. The next chapter will be up next Tuesday.

Let me know what you thought in the comments and thank you so much for reading!!
Chapter 40

It was a weird morning for Tommy, to say the least.

Last night had been great for Verdant. The staff was – for the most part – a well-oiled machine. Even the Roy, the kid Oliver had brought in. The little delinquent was surprisingly capable and charming when he wanted to be.

If Thea didn’t spend a good portion of the evening tailing him, Tommy would probably be singing his praises. Sure, he’s glad they’re past her awkward crush, but apparently it’s one of those things where you should be careful what you wish for because now he feels this overprotective streak rising.

That – as abnormal has it had been – was par for the course.

No, the weird thing was his father stopping by this morning, and then bumping into Oliver and his secret vigilante friends.

And now an earthquake.

Tommy can’t remember ever experiencing one in his almost thirty years in Starling. If he had, it had never been more than a faint tremor, a faint disturbance barely worthy of mentioning. Starling wasn’t on any fault lines. Why would he be familiar with earthquakes?

But that’s what this is.

It feels like he’s standing on water, not solid ground as the terrain shifts restlessly in waves. The ground grumbles like dragon waking from a century of sleep, a low, loud grumble that wakes him up in a surge of adrenaline.

“Tommy, get out of here!” Oliver shouts. “Get as far from the Glades as possible!”

Tommy blinks at his best friend’s back as he disappears into the club with his gang right on his tail. He shakes his head and starts toward his car. No matter how heroic his best friend can be, he can’t stop an earthquake.
But it’s harder to walk when the ground’s shaking beneath you and only getting worse by the second.

He reaches his car around the same time screams of alarm start to pierce the air. The city’s already starting to panic. This isn’t good.

Oliver’s right. He needs to get out of here. They should all be getting out of here, but where do you go when there’s an earthquake? It’s not like you can escape.

He freezes with his keys in the ignition. Oliver said to leave the Glades, but he can’t. Not yet. First, he has to check on Laurel. She’s probably pulling extra hours at CNRI and heaven knows she’s more worried about everyone else than herself. He has to find her, make sure she’s safe.

Please, let Laurel be safe.

…

It’s too soon and way too close to the Foundry.

Maybe it’s a blessing that Malcolm moved the time table up even further: there’s only going to be one machine. Oliver grimaces as he shoves through the swinging door. That’s not much of a comfort considering how much damage one machine caused last time. And now, they don’t have Felicity here to help shut the device down.

“We can check the camera feeds in the basement—"

“OLIVER!”

Sara’s shove sends him staggering. He doesn’t fall, but it displaces him enough that the arrow that would have gone through his chest misses him completely. The black arrow mocks him where it embeds itself in the bar.

“MALCOLM!” He rounds to face the assassin, now fully decked out in League regalia except for his mask.

Malcolm grins at him. “I was worried you wouldn’t make it in time.”

“Digg, Roy, take care of the machine! Sara and I can handle this.” It makes the most sense. Of the four of them, Roy and Digg have as good a chance of stopping the machine as him and Sara. He’s not going to dwell on the fact that their pinch hitter in electronics is currently down for the count.

“Oliver, when are you going to learn that you can’t stop this? You’ve chosen a great building, very structurally sound, however, I don’t think it will withstand this disaster, do you?”

The whole building could crumble around them for all Oliver cares, so long as no one he loves dies. Felicity’s life is out of his hands. Waller – as awful as she is – wouldn’t send medics and then let Felicity die if it’s in her power to save her. He can worry about the cost of her assistance later. The Undertaking is the more immediate threat.

“And you think you and Miss Lance can take me?”

Oliver hadn’t realized he recognized the blonde. Which was stupid retrospectively. Of course he knew the Lances, and Sara isn’t wearing a mask. “I’m not going to let you hurt another innocent person,” he responds with more confidence then he feels, pulling the bow from his house out.
Malcolm sighs. “I’ve been trying to tell you: They’re not innocent. These are criminals we’re talking about, criminals and those too quiet to stand against them. This is for the good of our city.”

Roy and Digg start inching for the door to the basement as concrete dust starts to rain down from the ceiling. Oliver’s lip curls in disgust. “And I’m not buying your bull shit.”

Malcolm climbs on top of the balcony railing, looking like an angel of death. “Then let’s end this. I have a city to destroy and then rebuild. I’m sorry you won’t be around to see Starling restored to its former glory.”

Faster than he thought possible, Oliver nocks and arrow and sends it flying straight into Malcolm’s chest. It would have been the end of the fight, if the man hadn’t anticipated the move and dropped from the second story to land in the middle of the dance floor.

Grace and purpose oozes from Malcolm as he shoots off arrow after arrow, moving around the room, making sure to keep them at a comfortable distance. It keeps Sara from engaging him in hand to hand.

It quickly becomes clear to Oliver they’re not going to get past a draw shooting at each other from across the room. He knocks the next arrow aside with his bow and moves decisively, cutting across the center of the dance floor.

Malcolm fires off three more arrows in rapid succession that Oliver deflects with his bow in between firing his own. Sara slips into the shadows, darting around the edge room. The last arrow Malcolm fires, before turning to grab Sara’s staff as she comes at him from behind, clips his cheek.

He ignores the sting and the trickle of blood down his face to continue his attack. Oliver wields an arrow like a knife. He moves with the intent to kill, aiming for the space between Malcolm’s ribs while Sara has him distracted.

But the unevenness of the floor, throws him off, misdirecting his aim.

He follows the jolting action to duck under the responding hit. He doesn’t see the kick coming though, and ends up sprawled on the rippling floor.

This is going to be rougher than he thought.

…

“What are you playing at?” Lyla demands as she steps off the helicopter, walking straight up to Waller.

Waller stares back impassively.

“You don’t do anything unless it benefits you. So why would you go out of your way to rescue, Felicity?”

“Agent Michaels.”

“I won’t let you use a dying woman as your chess piece, ma’am!” She’s never yelled at her boss before. She’s an army brat through and through. She knows the chain of command and understands the need to focus on the bigger picture. But she also knows that if Felicity dies, she will never forgive herself.

“At the moment, Agent Michaels, she means more to me alive than dead.”
Lyla narrows her eyes. “Why? Why Felicity?”

Amanda purses her lips as she stares down Lyla down. But Lyla’s got a backbone. She wouldn’t have gotten to where she is now if she didn’t. She lives in a male-driven world, working directly under the most hard-ass woman in the world.

“We have reason to believe Miss Smoak could be a valuable asset we tried to recruit several years ago.”

Lyla frowns. “So, what? You’re going to save her life in the hope that she’ll work for you?” Waller’s certainly done worse. A few “rehabilitated criminals” come to mind. But this? This is completely out of left field.

“No. But it wasn’t a talent the world should lose just yet. And if this eliminates some of my debt to Mr. Queen... The benefits outweigh the costs. As soon as she’s been stabilized, you’re free to take her... assuming you’re here in your capacity as her bodyguard and not as one of my agents, Miss Michaels.”

Lyla straightens her spine. “Of course.” For some unknown reason, Waller is helping. She’s giving her an out to act without fear of disobeying orders. It’s the unknown reason that concerns Lyla at the moment. With Felicity under Waller’s interest, she’ll survive this.

What Waller wants from this: that’s the problem.

“You should go check on your client.”

Waller has a plan. Somehow it involves saving Felicity, and more than likely it’s because she needs something from Oliver Queen. Lyla doesn’t buy her story. Waller always thinks ten steps ahead.

So there’s some reluctance when she follows Waller’s advice and checks in on Felicity and Moira. She recognizes the doctors working on Felicity through the window into the operating room. She stands alongside the Queen matriarch as the arrow is pulled from Felicity’s chest with great care.

“Your friends are efficient,” Mrs. Queen comments, turning her only slightly. “It seems you know people in high places, Miss...”

“Michaels.” Lyla sighs as she looks around the facility. “And this isn’t for me. This is for her, or more likely for your son, or some combination. Whatever the reason, she’s going to make it through this.”

“Oliver? My son doesn’t know any military organization.”

Lyla shrugs. She’s not about to get into specifics about A.R.G.U.S. with a civilian. She’ll let Oliver field this one, assuming they make it through the disaster zone that will be Starling City.

“How does my son figure into this?” Moira repeats.

“I’m in your son’s debt,” Waller supplies as she steps up to the window. The comparison to the two women on either side of her isn’t lost on Lyla. Both are scary and intimidating. And neither seems above killing to protect what they value above all else.

“And how do you know my son?”

“He worked for me for several years.”
Moira frowns. “How-“

“His involvement is heavily classified, as is this facility. I would have preferred not to bring any unauthorized guests into the base, but time was of the essence.” She presses the speaker. “How is she?”

“Stabilized. There was a small nick in her aorta that the arrow was keeping plugged, but she should have a full recovery.”

“Thank you, Doctor Singh. Let me know as soon as she wakes.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“Waller,” Lyla warns in a low growl.

The woman narrows her eyes as she turns. “Agent Michaels, don’t forget where you are.”

“How could I, ma’am? But if you think I’m going to let you take advantage of an injured woman, you’ve got another thing coming.”

Waller smiles joylessly, an uptick of her lips that’s a stiff mockery of anything resembling a genuine smile. “Just remember: I control your career. One wrong move and you’ll be spending the rest of it behind bars.”

“As if you could find anyone to replace me.” She knows not to get on Waller’s bad side, but she also knows her value. Waller trusts her, and Waller doesn’t trust easily.

Waller’s brows rise in amusement, but she doesn’t disagree. “Call me when she’s awake. I need her help on Rubicon.”

…

A life on the streets might have made Roy sure-footed, but navigating a shifting floor is a new challenge, especially since it seems to get worse the closer he gets to the door to the basement. He punches in the code impatiently and yanks the door open.

“We need to get the camera feeds and go,” Digg yells behind him as Roy clings to the stair railing, stopping once he finally gets a look at the middle of the floor.

“I don’t think it’s going to be that hard to find.”

“What are you- Oh.”

And the understatement of the year award goes to: John Diggle.

Roy throws caution to the wind and continues to stumble down the shaking metal stairs. Concrete dust clogs the air, debris raining from the ceiling. Small fissures and cracks radiate out from the device where it sits right in the middle of the room, a spider web in the floor.

Fear, sharp and bitter, floods Roy’s system. He’s supposed to stop that? He dropped out of High School for Heaven’s sake! He can’t work intricate electronics any better than he could do complicated math. The best he can do is smash, and he gets the feeling that that’s not going to be that helpful right now.

The thing is taller than he is.
It fills the room, from Felicity’s destroyed computer station to the punching bags in the corner. He can see wires in between bits of casing just beyond the moving cylinders, but this whole rig looks like something from a Sci-Fi movie.

“How do we stop it?” Digg asks.

Roy turns to stare at him, eyes wide in shock. “How the hell should I know?”

“You don’t think we can just clip a few wires?”

A panicked laugh leaves Roy’s throat. “Your guess is as good as mine. No chance of getting Felicity on the phone?”

Roy staggers across the uneven floor to grab a knife from Oliver’s workstation. Worst case scenario: he starts cutting wires without prejudice.

“No chance. Even if she’s out of surgery, she’s probably not in any state to help us.”

Great. This is just how he wanted to face the end of the world. “Well, looks like we’re on our own.” He starts forward, reaching for the first bunch of wires he spots.

“What are you doing?” Digg pulls him back, yanking the knife from his grasp.

“Cutting the wires.”

“What if it makes it worse?”

“Can it really get any worse?” Roy demands, gesturing at the crumbling pebbles now falling from the ceiling. Really, it seems like it’s worth the risk at this point.

Digg groans. “Why did you have to say that!”

“Look! I don’t know how this thing works, but I do know that unplugging a computer is just as effective at stopping a virus as going through the programming.” And he’s been spending too much time with Felicity if that’s his analogy. She’d probably skin him alive for thinking like that, but it’s not like they have all the time in the world right now.

“I don’t like this.”

“Well, if you have a better idea…”

Halfway to CNRI, Tommy realizes what he’s feeling: the shaking he felt at Verdant lessened the further he got from the club, like he was headed away from the epicenter. He didn’t remember much about his Earth Science class except that he sat next to Karen Oolzicki, but he’s pretty sure it’s extremely unlikely for Starling to have such a huge tremor.

People are starting to panic with the prolonged tremors that only continue to get worse. No one seems to know what to do, dashing into the streets, screaming, fighting.

A block from CNRI, Tommy’s forced to pull to the side of the road when a traffic light crashes into the middle of the road in a rain of sparks. He narrowly misses colliding with another car and a fire hydrant as he ends up parked half on the sidewalk.

In his haste to reach Laurel, Tommy leaves the car door open and the engine running. Dust fills the
air and the buildings are starting to shake dangerously. He needs to get to Laurel out of here.

The street outside CNRI was full of milling people and he spots Johanna at the back of the crowd, staring back at the building in terror.

“Joanna!” He staggers up to her, grabbing her arm.

“Tommy?”

“Where’s Laurel? Have you seen her?” He demands, breathless. His eyes are already skimming the crowd looking for familiar brown locks.

“She ran back in for some files. I tried to stop her. The building is not built to stand up to a quake.” She frowns worriedly up at the building.

In retrospect, he’ll think it’s a terrible idea, but Tommy doesn’t think about it for a moment. He runs through the door and immediately coughs at the dust and debris in the air.

“LAUREL!”

He coughs on the sudden inhale. Without direction, he heads for her desk in hopes of catching her there. “LAUREL!”

“HERE! I’m here!” Laurel bursts out of the dust with a paper box under her arm. “What are you doing here?”

Tommy grabs her arm, yanking her towards the exit. “I wanted to make sure you were safe and not doing something stupid like walking into an unsafe building.”

The building groans ominously under the stress of quake and Tommy shoves Laurel in front of him towards the door. He can’t highlight how much he doesn’t know about structural integrity, but that sound can’t mean anything good. He came here to save Laurel from herself, even if it hurts him.

“TOMMY!”

With another burst of energy, Tommy surges forward and shoves the door open into the bright sunshine. A moment later, the building groans one last time before it collapses in on itself in an explosion of dust and debris.

Brushing rubble from his hair, Tommy pushes himself into a sitting position. He doesn’t have to look far to find Laurel. She scrambles back over to him, throwing her arms around him.

“Oh, Thank God! You’re okay.”

His whole body aches from his collision with the pavement, but that doesn’t stop him from pulling her close as the world continues to shake around them. They’re both okay. That’s what counts.

…

The shaking ground requires a new equilibrium, adding a dimension to the fight that Oliver had never prepared for. He’s never fought through an earthquake before. But on boats and airplanes, the similarities are there though. Malcolm doesn’t appear to have the same issue and Oliver would be dead by now if not for Sara blocking the blade with a sweeping blow of her staff.

Oliver pushes off the wall and throws himself back into the thick of the fight. He gets off one arrow before resorting to his bow as melee weapon with an arrow as a blade. It’s not the most graceful
formation, but its workable.

For once, Malcolm is silent as they battle. There’s no teasing, no derogatory tone, no condensation. It means they’re actually challenging him.

Malcolm tosses aside his bow and pulls out his sword. Oliver might be imagining it, but it looks like they even make him break a sweat.

“I’ll admit: you’re doing better than I thought. I had hoped to be gone by now.”

Sara breaks her staff into two sticks. “Well, you’ve certainly got moves for an old man.”

He lets out a soft chuckle. “And you’re spry for a dead person.”

Oliver grits his teeth. There’s been enough of the customary banter.

“Thanks! I make sure to exercise daily. It holds off the rigor mortis.”

Malcolm’s lips quirk. “You’ve trained with the League.”

Sara twirls, her baton with a smirk but does not answer.

“Let’s just get on with it,” Oliver growls.

“Patience is a virtue, Oliver.”

“So is compassion,” he counters. The tremors are getting worse and Roy and Digg haven’t come back out of the basement.

“But even compassion runs out. The Glades had their chance and you’ve had yours.” He surveys Oliver. “You won’t win this fight if you continue. This is your last chance.”

Oliver nocks another arrow. “Not going to happen!”

The arrow flies through the air, reigniting the battle from its temporary pause. Oliver is trying not to think about the structures around them as he dodges more chunks of concrete. The machine must be closer to the Foundry than last time. And he’d made sure the building was up to earthquake codes.

He’s sure Malcolm doesn’t want to be here, doesn’t want to face the chance of being caught in the results of his plan. They’re making this harder than he had anticipated. Good. Maybe they could get him to make a mistake.

Malcolm kicks Sara in the gut, sending her back a couple yards and opening himself to another arrow. He’s finally starting to sweat, the moisture allowing the dust in the air to stick to his skin in a fine layer of grime. Oliver can only imagine what he looks like in this mess.

But as problematic as it might be to breathe through dust-clogged air or to move when every tremor sends a fresh wave through the ground, there is more at stake here. He can’t back down because he knows what they’re fighting for.

The sooner this is over, the sooner he can get to Waller and check on Felicity. If Felicity dies, he’s not sure anything can stop him from trying to put an arrow through Amanda’s heart. First, he has to take down Malcolm Merlyn.

Oliver catches another glancing blow with his shoulder. Blood starts to well from the wound as he spins out of the way of another incoming arrow. He’s getting slower. They need to finish this
quickly.

John frowns at the control panel on the machine. For reasons unknown, he thought some of his military training might help him assess the situation, give him some insight into a simple way to shut the machine down.

But no. It was for more complicated than the bombs he had trained to shut down. He’s sure it the right hands, the answer would be simple, and probably elegant knowing Felicity, but they don’t have her guidance and even if they had the plans, they don’t have the time.

He steps back and glances at Roy.

“Time for plan B.”

The boy lifts his knife gleefully and stumbles over to the device, sucking under the revolving pistons with surprising ease considering the ground is cracked and moving like waves on an ocean. Progressively larger rocks are falling from posts and the ceiling. This place will need to be tested for structural integrity when this is all said and done.

Although, to be perfectly honest, John’s not sure he’ll ever be comfortable coming back down here again. Too many bad associations now.

Roy wraps his hand around a large bundle of wires and, without a dramatic pause or a bracing breath, severs them. Which would have been dramatic enough in and of itself if it didn’t take a good deal of sawing just to get through the clump.

John holds his breath as the pistons first start to speed up, the machine making a loud, angry beeping noise. But then he finally severs the last of the wires, the machine peters out with a high pitched wine before stilling.

All his breath escapes his chest and John falls to his knees in relief. It’s over.

The ground still moves and shifts in residual tremors, the effects still being felt, but now it can peter back out.

Digg starts to laugh as Roy collapses next to him, knife stillclutched in his hand and whispering to himself. “We did it. We actually did it….Blondie’s gonna kill me.”

“I think Felicity will give you a pass on this one,” John offers with a smile.

Roy snorts. “Uh-huh sure. You say that now, but she is never going to let me near her beloved electronics ever again.”

John claps him on the back. “We survived a deadly Earthquake machine. I think that gets us some bonus points.”

Roy shakes his head disbelievingly but climbs to his feet, eyes on the metal steps. “Think those are secure enough?”

“Only one way to find out.”

They are. Surprisingly.

Debris has fallen on every surface in the Foundry, including the stairs, but the stairs themselves are
solid as can be. With the exception of a few new dents. John had expected worse. He wouldn’t have been surprised if they managed to get trapped in the basement.

There are almost no tremors left now as they stumble up and out the door.

The hallway is far worse for wear. A metal beam hangs from the ceiling and not a single glass looks to have survived the disaster. Stater glass covers the floor with the occasional block of concrete. It crunches under foot as they make their way onto the open dance floor that makes up the main room of Verdant.

With the distraction of the machine gone, John had hoped that Sara and Oliver would have managed to overpower Malcolm. By all rights, they should have managed before, but then he would have seen them in the basement.

What he does see…is not good news.

…

“Miss Smoak? Miss Smoak, can you hear me? If you can hear me, I need you to squeeze my hand, can you do that?”

Fighting against pain that roars through half her body, Felicity squeezes the hand. Shouldn’t they be giving her the good drugs?

“Good,” praises the calm voice. “Very good. Now, Miss Smoak, can you open your eyes?”

Her eye lids are heavy, but Felicity forces them open, forces them to zero in on the (slightly-blurry because where are her glasses?) doctor standing over her. She’s a small, Indian woman whose face is almost kind, but Felicity can detect an edge to her that says she’s not to be trifled with.

“Excellent. Can you tell me what day of the week it is?”

“Saturday?” Oh. Her voice. Her throat cracks and screams for water, which is quickly offered in the form or a straw from the other side of her bed. She swallows it down before asking. “Where’s Oliver?”

“Yes. Good. You gave us quite a scare, Miss Smoak.” She completely ignores the question, instead going over the chart in front of her. “The arrow nicked your aorta. We were able to patch that seamlessly though. Nothing else was damaged internally although we did have to give you a couple bags of blood. You’ve also been given a dose of Spartazone. It’s been proven to decrease healing time and get soldiers back into the field faster.”

“I’m not a soldier. And where am I?” Normal hospital doctors didn’t give out drugs like that. And this room is too sterile, too quiet.

Felicity turns to the side and can make out Moira and Lyla, Lyla who looks surprisingly comfortable from her position at the door.

“I’m at A.R.G.U.S., aren’t I?”

Her doctor blinks in surprise, but Lyla is the one who nods. “Waller wants to talk to you. She’s probably already been informed you’re awake.”

Felicity grimaces as she pulls back. “Well then I guess the miracle drugs are a good thing. Can I get my glasses back?”
Moira, surprisingly, steps forward to place the black frames in her hand. “Here you go.”

The world comes back in stunning clarity as Felicity tries to sort out her thoughts. She was shot by Malcolm Merlyn in the kitchen at Queen Mansion. She remembers Oliver going to fight him, to protect her and Moira while they waited for back up.

She remembers the medics, how they had sedated her once she was in the helicopter, a clearly military helicopter. Then nothing, nothing until now.

“Where’s Oliver?” She asks again, focused on Lyla. No one else in the room will have that answer. Lyla grimaces. “They’re in Starling. We’ve had reports of a major earthquake. Damage appears to be fairly contained to the Glades.”

“Digg? Roy? Oliver? Have they reported in? Sara?” Panic rises over her in a wave. Where is her team? They’re hers to protect, hers to watch over, hers to care for, and they’re out in the field, blind without her.

Her worst fears are confirmed as Lyla shakes her head and checks her phone again. “Nothing.”

“We need to find them. I can stop the Markov device. Just get me to a damn computer.” Her feet hit the cool tile as she starts pulling wires from her skin. Maybe a super serum med isn’t such a bad thing.

“While I appreciate your dedication, Miss Smoak, I cannot allow you leave yet.”

Felicity spins to face the door and the woman she’s barely met but still knows to be a force to reckon with. “Sorry, Amanda. Can I call you Amanda? Or do you prefer Waller? Ma’am? Doesn’t matter. Thanks for saving my life. I owe you one. Oh! And the drugs. Thanks for the drugs. They’re great. But my team needs me and I don’t leave any man behind.”

“That’s nice, Miss Smoak, but I need your assistance first. Consider it payment for saving your life.”

Felicity freezes in the act of pulling on the yoga pants she found on the night table. “Come again?”

“Before I allow you to leave, I need your help with a complex bit of programming.” How can a woman so skinny be so scary? Felicity thinks it might be the hair.

A scowl creeps over Felicity’s face. “And you can have it! As soon as my team is safe. That is non-negotiable.”

“I’m afraid I don’t work on promises. If you want to help your team, you’ll have to act fast.” Waller tosses a tablet on the hospital gurney like a gauntlet thrown down in challenge. “This needs to be unhackable or the world will die with the next nuclear war. You and your team included.”

Rubicon

That’s the only thing it could be and like Hell is Felicity going to have anything whatsoever to do with it. “You want to keep it from falling into enemy hands? Destroy it! Your welcome. I’m leaving now.”

“Unacceptable. I would prefer not to do this the hard way, but if I have to….” Oh, she’s good at the threats.

Felicity snaps, unable to take it anymore. “You want it protected? Fine! But first we rescue my men.
Then I’ll come back her and create the best protection to ever exist for the God-forsaken device and hell, even your whole base. The only reason I haven’t broken in already is because I can’t afford your processors. But I’m close. So. We get our men, you get your firewall. Good? Good.”

Now that all the words have all escaped, Felicity’s realizing that no one speaks to Waller like that and she’s probably as good as dead now, which sucks because her boys in dire need of help, if experience is anything to go by.

Waller looks her up and down, and then turns to Lyla. “I expect her back at 0700. If she’s late, it’s you job down the drain.”

Felicity relaxes, yanking the zipper up on a plain black sweatshirt. She’s almost disappointed it doesn’t say A.R.G.U.S. but at the same time it goes with the whole spy organization thing. Still, it would be funny.

“Let’s go.” Felicity announces. There’s no shoes in immediately in proximity so she opts for padding barefoot through the military base. She doesn’t need any more delays.

“I’m coming with you,” Moira announces, following Lyla and Felicity.

Felicity turns back over her injured shoulder. She doesn’t like the idea of dragging more people into a possible war zone, especially when they can be a liability, but she also doesn’t have time to argue. All she can offer is a “just stay out of the way” as they climb into a waiting SUV and take off toward a crumbling city.

She just hopes they’re not too late.

…

The difference in shaking as the machine shuts down is immediate. The swells of Earth are slower, more gradual, less of a build-up and more a slow return to normal. It feels like breathing normally again after a prolonged lack of oxygen.

“NO!” Merlyn shouts, hauling off and brutally pushing Sara back. With an arrow through her shoulder, he pins her to the pillar behind her. She yanks it out and collapses forward. She doesn’t move from the haps she falls in.

But Oliver doesn’t have time to worry. Malcolm whirs on him, his eyes burning.

There’s no mercy now. After three violent strikes, his bow breaks, splinters of wood embedding in his hands. Oliver drops it immediately and picks up the pieces of Sara’s discarded staff. He’s fought with Slade and Sara enough to remain competent enough to keep holding Merlyn off.

At least with the sticks, Oliver manages to deflect the blade more.

It is more like death by a thousand cuts. He can’t block every strike, but he blocks and dodges as best as he can, still stumbling on the uneven ground.

Malcolm is lashing out, more violently than Oliver has ever seen. He’s never been more aware of how much better than him Malcolm really is. The fact that he’s actually broken a sweat is impressive in and of itself.

Oliver’s legs and abs burn from the prolonged balancing act. He knew he was in good shape, but this was a test he definitely hadn’t prepared for. He’s barely recovered from his last fight with Malcolm. He really shouldn’t have pushed this.
Maybe he should have tried to attack this from a different angle. Maybe the answer was to get into Malcolm’s good graces. Maybe then Felicity wouldn’t be in an A.R.G.U.S. med bay.

He sees Sara shift behind Malcolm and struggles to hold his ground. If he could hold on until she can join in, until he can get some back up, then maybe they’ll make it through this.

Then his foot slips in the rubble, his stick falling as he attempts to catch himself. A swing of Malcolm’s sword takes chunk out of his arm with an agonized scream. The next blow goes to his already weaker knee, and his leg gives out.

Gravel digs into his hands and his leg.

Pain.

Terrible, awful pain, pain that invades his whole body. He can’t move, paralyzed by pain that silences every other instinct he has.

Malcolm stands over him, sword raised over his head, and whispers the few words he remembers from the top of a snowy cliff in the middle of nowhere, a prayer whispered in Arabic.

Malcolm Merlyn is going to kill him.

Desperately, he tries to lift his arm to block the blow, but his arm refuses to answer, hanging limply at his side.

“OLIVER!”

Felicity.

She can’t be here. It can’t be her voice he’s hearing as he kneels on the edge of death.

He closes his eyes unwilling to see the end. Instead he clings to the pictures he saw the first time, clings to the memories of his parents, his sister, Tommy, Felicity.

New pain flares, strong and overwhelming. This is the end. It’s here. He’s just thankful that he got the chance to save Tommy. And with him gone, Slade won’t come after them. They’ll be safe. It’s not ideal, but it could be worse.

He’s dying.

BANG BANG BANG.

…

Chapter End Notes

Now, before you freak out, remember: There's one more chapter.
Here we are: the final chapter. It's been about a year and I half since I started this endeavor and it seems only fitting that it ends on my birthday. It's been quite the experience of ups and downs and terrible, awful cliffhangers and I want to thank each and every one of you for reading this whole saga and sticking through with it to the end. The response to this story has been more than I ever could have predicted and you are all amazing. Thank you for every single kudos, comment, and bookmark.

There are a couple people I couldn't have finished this without, namely my fantastic betas:
- geniewithwifi, who has put in countless hours and dealt with all my whining about edits and constant changes in what's going to happen. She's been my sounding board and friend through all of this. And there's been A LOT. You are amazing! I couldn't do this without you! <3
and
- mabsifiromantic, without whom this story would have never gotten off the ground. Thank you for all your support and advice, I can honestly say the time-travel-reveal chapters wouldn't have been the same without it. <3

And lastly, thank you to every single person who has commented on this story. From compliments to critiques, you made me think this story through and made sure I knew my characters inside and out. You kept me fueled and writing even when I kept throwing horrific cliffhangers your way. But I promise there's no cliffhanger here. Just a happy ending.

So ENJOY!!

Happy reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

**Epilogue**

“So what you’re saying is that it’s both possible and impossible? How is that even remotely helpful?”

“I didn’t say I’d be helpful, Love, just that I’d found something.”

Felicity glares at the British Warlock. They’ve been looking into this for almost a year now, ever since the earthquake leveled half the Glades, taking just as many lives with it this time. They’d stopped it, but they hadn’t at the same time. She’s learning to live with that.

But this? It’s not something she can just drop. She’s never been good at letting go and she hates mysteries. And this whole going back in time thing? That’s a big mystery.

“This is time travel we’re talking about. It’s not exactly cut and dry, especially when mystical powers are involved.” Constantine lights a cigarette. “Sorry, Lovely. To me it seems like a one-way trip. I
have no idea what threw you back in time in the first place. Hate to break it to you but it not likely to happen again. The chances are, if you die, that’s it. Done. Bam. The end. I’ve seen souls that linger and it never turns out well. Can’t say I’ve ever seen a case of time travel like this one, let alone two.”

Felicity sighs. “So, not a time loop? No chance of waking up from the point we left?”

Constantine lets out a slow exhale, lazily shaping the smoke. “No offense but why would you want to? From what you’ve said, it doesn’t seem that great there.”

Felicity turns to stare out over the rooftops of the city, and the spot where a great number of buildings once stood. They’re rubble now. The clean up crews are working slowly but surely, clearing away the destruction to make way for a new life.

She ignores Constantine’s question, her mind already rushing ahead to another one. “You said you’ve never seen anything like this, so why? Why would this happen to us?”

He glances at her and shrugs. “I’ve seen a lot of crazy things, things you wouldn’t believe. But the only thing I can think of is that your souls are connected, that his called to you through the dimensions to pull you back to him.”

It’s not the craziest thing she’s ever heard. Heck, it’s not something completely out there with everything that went on with Darhk. That doesn’t mean she’s buying it as an excuse. She snorts. “But how did he come back? Wait. Did you say…his soul?”

“Don’t knock it, Love. I’ve seen it: it’s like a perfect run, two people so in sync with each other they practically read each other’s minds. From what I can tell, you and Oliver have that. Seems as good a reason as any.”

Felicity wraps her arms around herself in a hug against the chillin the air, feeling the memories of a thousand hugs from much stronger arms that always made her feel warm and fuzzy. And as bizarre as the idea is, it is a reason. Constantine does have a point. She just doesn’t like to think about that, doesn’t like to think about what she’s lost and what she still can lose.

“So this is it? That’s the only reason we fell back in time? No how or why or anything? It’s just time to stop looking?”

Constantine flicks the end off his cigarette. “I’ve been around enough to know that the universe works by designs. Sometimes you find answers when you stop looking. Sometimes you never find answers. You shouldn’t look a gift horse in the mouth.”

Felicity turns away from the view. “I’m not good at waiting for answers I might never get. Somehow, someway, time travel is possible. It happened - more than once.”

“If I ever find something, you’ll be my first call, Love. And if you ever get tired of Tall and Broody, you know my number.”

She shakes her head in annoyance at the continued lack of answers but she can’t help the laugh that escapes her with Constantine’s antics, the sad cloud she’d descended into breaking at his humor. “I’ll tell him you offered.”

“And where is my taciturn amigo?”

Felicity grins at him. “The bachelor party is tonight.”

“Ah, strip clubs and booze. You worried, sweetheart? Heard he used to be quite the player.”
Constantine flicks his cigarette butt across the roof with a smirk.

Felicity kicks at the roof, with a small smile. “Not at all.”

Oliver’s only doing this for Tommy, hosting a bachelor party for his best friend on his last night as an unmarried man. She knows he has no desire to go to a strip club, no need to go out for a wild night. His version of a wild night is patrolling the city until 3 a.m.

Constantine snorts. “Yeah, I wouldn’t be worried about him either. Well, seems like my work is done here. Don’t be a stranger.”

Felicity watches him go from the top of the roof, breathing in the cool, fresh air. She takes another moment, a peaceful moment all to herself. She needs to leave soon, to rejoin the rest of the world. The Glades still aren’t safe with night falling. She already spotted a couple shady characters on the walk here, at least one with a gun. She could easily call anyone – Oliver, Sara, Digg, Lyla, Roy – and they would come pick her up, even if all she said was that she didn’t feel safe walking to her car. Heck, Oliver and Digg would probably prefer if she did.

She keeps one hand on her cell phone as she walks down the stairs at a leisurely pace, and the other hand on her Taser. Digg and Lyla were trying to get her to carry a gun. She’s a pretty decent shot, but just the idea of killing someone at close range brings back flashbacks to Havenrock.

She gets to the car without any issues, sending Oliver a quick text telling him to have fun, that she’ll be running comms for Sara and then heading home.

They end up calling it an early night, neither willing to risk the bride’s wrath by showing up late to her special day. Sara wanted to crash the bachelor party, but Felicity nixed that idea, saying she was too tired and headed home.

She collapses into bed as soon as she got there, without even enough energy to kick off her shoes.

…

Years ago, Oliver and Tommy had once planned out each of their bachelor parties. Two nights of pure debauchery before they would inevitably be forced to settle down with some woman that fit society’s idea of who they should marry. They had joked about it, coming up with the most outlandish ideas they could all in an attempt to outdo every party they’d ever gone to.

So it hadn’t come as a surprise when Tommy had asked him to be his best man. Although he could have waited until after Laurel had said yes. Not that Oliver doubted she would say yes to his best friend. After all, Tommy and Laurel had been inseparable ever since the Undertaking. Still, it came as a shock when Tommy dragged him away from Queen Consolidated for “lunch”. Oliver hadn’t expected to be dragged into a jewelry store to look at engagement rings.

Which had led to an interesting conversation when Oliver came home and his mother cornered him, demanding to know what business he had proposing to a girl he’d been dating for two months, and what business he had proposing when he was still in recovery from his fight with Malcolm.

And then she’d sighed and told him she’d schedule a trip to the Queen Family Vault for the next day because no daughter-in-law of hers was going to wear something without a bit of history.

He and Felicity were taking it slow. At first it was his injuries that necessitated that. He’d lost a lot of blood when Malcolm’s blade slipped, biting into his shoulder instead of severing his head from his neck. His left arm was out of commission for a long time and he’d been forced to use a wheelchair for his recovering knee since crutches were not an option.
Felicity had been there for him the whole way, offering her own little insights and support. And when he’d finally gotten back to his feet – slowly, far slower than he would like – they’d moved in together. He’d found the loft after three weeks looking. Felicity hadn’t been with him when the agent called, hadn’t seen it with her own eyes, but the apartment had been perfect.

When he had taken her to check it out the next day, she’d been fighting a smile since they pulled up to the building. When he pressed the button for the penthouse she’d had the audacity to laugh.

“What?” He’d finally asked after three-quarters of the way to the penthouse.

She turned to him with a brilliant smile, leaning into him. “You’re taking me to the Loft.”

He smiles back at her even as his brows bunch in confusion. “How did you know?”

She slips her arms around one of his, intertwining their fingers. “Because we lived here. It had your perfect kitchen and plenty of space. Plus, the view was to die for.”

Oliver agrees, yet there’s something more, something she’s holding back. “But…”

“But,” she sighs, pressing a kiss to his shoulder, “but it’s full of memories that you don’t have. I just think we should keep looking, to find something new, for both of us.”

He could never say no to her, which is how they ended up in the spacious apartment on the other side of town. It was closer to the Glades, and their new lair – which he still refused to call the Arrow Cave despite everyone else adopting the name.

It was a new apartment building, made to recent earthquake standards. It wasn’t quite as spacious as the loft, but it had huge windows, a beautiful view, and what Felicity called “his kitchen.” He’d quickly realized she really hadn’t been exaggerating her cooking skills - or lack thereof - when she tried to make him breakfast on his birthday.

But it was home.

Home was that immediate comfort he felt as he stepped through the door and was enveloped by that mixture of unidentifiable scents, that warm mingling of him and Felicity. It’s a relief after the noise and flashing lights of a newly refurbished Verdant where they had hosted Tommy’s bachelor party. The apartment was dark, but Felicity’s jacket thrown carelessly over the back of a chair and her purse slipping haphazardly off the counter tell him she’s already back. He smiles softly as he walks down the hall to their room.

City lights filter through the window, illuminating his beloved sprawled on the bed. One shoe dangles off her foot, hanging on by the very toe. Her blouse gapes open as if she tried to take it off and fell asleep in the middle of the action. He shakes his head with a fond smile as he gently pulls Felicity’s shoes completely from her feet, massaging them briefly. She hums contentedly.

“Ol’vr?”

He brushes her hair back from her face as he leans up to press a kiss to her lips. “Yeah, it’s me.”

“You’re back already?” She clasps her arms behind his neck. “What about your crazy party?”

He nuzzles his nose against hers, stealing another kiss. “ Turns out it wasn’t really a crazy party.” Slowly, she wakes up a little more, demanding another kiss as she tries to pull him closer. Oliver pulls back a little. “We need to get you out of those clothes.”
Felicity runs her hands over his arms. “Hm, we can totally do that.”

Oliver chuckles and pulls back. “Not what I meant, honey. You’re exhausted.”

“And you know just the thing to wake me up.”

The sleep slips from her eyes as she rubs against him. He groans and pulls back. “We have to wake up early. We cannot be late for Tommy and Laurel’s wedding.”

Felicity pouts. “Fine.”

Oliver chuckles and leans back in for another kiss. And another, until he loses himself in her touch, in her taste. She’s his whole world.

He never could say no to her.

…

“We’re going to be late!” Felicity cries from the bathroom.

Oliver chuckles as he pours a travel mug of coffee, adding a little cream and sugar. Felicity comes flying into the room, shoes in hand and hair in a flurry of curls as she spins around until her eyes land on Oliver. Before she can continue her freak out anymore, Oliver passes her a banana.

She stares at it for a moment in confusion before her bright blue eyes meet his. Then he holds up a granola bar and the mug. “I think we can make it.”

“You are amazing, incredible, and I love you,” she whispers in wonder as she takes the mug from him with all the care she would handle one of the precious gadgets.

“Are you talking to me or the coffee?” Oliver jokes. His hand lands on her lower back as they head out of the apartment.

She considers him as she leans back against the wall of the elevator. Her eyes linger suggestively on him before she shrugs and takes a long sip from her mug. “Definitely the coffee.”

Oliver grins, shaking his head as the elevator doors open. “So that’s it? Coffee’s better than your boyfriend?”

“Coffee didn’t keep me up half the night,” Felicity counters, smiling impishly at him.

He shakes his head. “No. It certainly did not, but as I recall, someone was eager last night.”

She turns and smiles innocently at him. “Who? Me?”

The happiness on her face takes his breath away. Every time. This was what he had wanted to accomplish when he came back, he had wanted to make everyone he loved happy. And here he was, miraculously surviving a second Undertaking, along with all his friends and family.

He couldn’t even imagine a future like this before he fell back in time. It was an impossible dream back then, the kind of thing that saved him from his darkest nightmares. It had been a fantasy. Now, it was his life.

Felicity’s hand squeezing his pulls him out of his daydream so he can open the passenger door for her. She lifts his hand to her cheek and presses a kiss to his palm.
As usual, she knows exactly what he’s thinking without him having to say a word. He lets his thumb run over her cheek and brushes a strand of hair behind her ear. He has to pull away in order to move around the car. If they don’t leave now, they’ll never make it to the restaurant in time for pictures and he’s not messing up his job as best man. But as soon as he climbs behind the wheel and starts the car, he reclaims her hand and presses a kiss to her knuckles.

“I love you.”

She smiles back at him. “I love you, too.”

The music over the radio fills the cab of the car, and Felicity keeps up a steady stream of chatter, her hand absently drifting over to land on his or run up his arm. It starts out innocent, but each lingering touch, each stroke of her fingers stirs something in him. With her, he always has trouble getting his emotions under control.

He takes a deep breath as he parks the car. She doesn’t realize she’s moved on to squeezing his thigh. He can tell because she’s babbling on about how her latest project is going to change the world. Gently, he lifts her hand from his leg and intertwines their fingers. “Honey, if we don’t get out of the car now, we’re going to miss the wedding.”

“I thought we were early,” she counters with a flirtatious smile, leaning forward.

So maybe she did know what she was doing.

“We are,” Oliver agrees, closing the distance between them to press a kiss to her lips. She chases him as he pulls away, but he makes sure there’s distance between them. “But if we don’t get out of this car now, we’re going to have a repeat of last night.”

Her bright red bottom lip juts out in a pout. “Fine. But only because Tommy would kill us both if we missed it.”

Oliver moves first, walking around the car to open the door for Felicity. She hooks her arm through his.


“Ha ha,” Oliver deadpans. It wasn’t funny the first couple times she made it. Lately his life seems like a perpetual joke: like Donna Smoak dating Quentin Lance. At first, he was amused when Donna burst into their apartment announcing she had met someone. And then she’d brought Quentin to dinner and all Felicity did was laugh hysterically at his face.

“Actually,” he glances at Tommy and Thea laughing by a rose bush, “Tommy wants you in the pictures.”

“What? Me?”

Oliver laughs at her skeptical look. She forget that he’s seen them together. He knows how close they are. He’s witnessed it firsthand. “You’re like a sister to him. Of course he wants you in the family photo.”

“But now he actually has a sister.” She points at Thea as she takes a selfie with Tommy, both of them making funny faces. She stares wistfully at them.

“If you think that makes you any less special, you really don’t know Tommy at all.” Oliver grins at
her when she looks sharply up at him.

“Smoaky! Ollie! Get over here!” Tommy calls. “It’s picture time!”

“And that’s our cue.”

…

“So, Smoaky, when do you think it’ll be your turn?”

Felicity shakes her head, laughing at Tommy’s question, as they sway on the dance floor. “An hour after you tied the knot, you’re asking me when I’m going to get married.”

“Come on. Even before the family pictures, you and Oliver couldn’t take your eyes off each other. I was a little preoccupied with the most beautiful woman in the room during the ceremony, but I’m sure you two were making heart eyes the whole time. Honestly, I’m surprised he didn’t go ring shopping with me.”

She laughs. “What makes you think he didn’t?”

“Well, for one, he better have asked me for help. He was the first person I told and I expect him to return the favor,” Tommy says defensively.

Felicity glances at Oliver over Tommy’s shoulder. He’s dancing with Laurel, but his eyes drift to hers as they turn. His special smile lights up his face, a slow change that starts with a flickering light in his eyes and a twitch at the corner of his lips. It’s positively radiant.

It’s the look he had when he proposed to her in her future. This is a man completely in love with her, and this time she knows they have no secrets from each other so it’s a thousand time better.

“Something tells me he won’t be giving me a new ring.” The one he had proposed with last time had been Moira’s. Oliver hadn’t told her more than that, but she had a feeling it had been in the Queen family for generations and that she really didn’t want to know how much it was worth.

Tommy stops in the middle of the dance floor. “WHAT?”

She can feel eyes on them as she stumbles in an effort to not step on his toes. She looks up at him with an impish smile. “What?”

He narrows his eyes. “You know something, Smoak. What is it?”

They start swaying again by tacit agreement. She might be barely passable at dancing, but Felicity’s not going to throw off everyone else by stopping in the middle of the dance floor. She remains steadfastly silent on Oliver’s proposal plans. She hasn’t seen a ring, but she had seen that damn soufflé recipe. She’d left a post it on the same page, saying that if he proposed to her with food – and the added choking hazard – she would say no on principle. He’d responded with a green post-it on her pillow saying “If it’s you asking…”

There had been some great sex that night.

“Oh. No. Don’t get that look,” Tommy protests, gripping her shoulders adamantly. “You need to stop thinking about sex with my best friend, right now.”

“Tommy,” Felicity says with a laugh.

“Nope. We’re not talking about that. You’re like my sister and I do not want to think about that.”
Felicity shakes her head with a smile. “I’m not thinking about sex.”

“You’re a terrible liar.”

She can’t bring herself ashamed. It is good sex after all, and after Tommy walked into the Lair unannounced Oliver’s first day back at training and got an eyeful, she’s less embarrassed to be caught thinking about sex. At least she’s not shirtless and draped over his best friend.

“Well, the song’s over in thirty seconds, and you can go back to your beautiful bride.” And she can sneak off with her gorgeous boyfriend for a good make out in the maze-

“Don’t even think about it.” Tommy glares at her. “Oliver is not getting out of his speech and you are not sneaking off.”

Felicity smiles innocently. “I wouldn’t skip your wedding, Merlyn. This is your day. And it’s perfect.”

He grins, glancing back at his bride. “Yeah, it really is.”

That look is how she knows Tommy and Laurel are going to be happy. They never had the chance in her timeline: Oliver had screwed things up (literally – kind of), and then Tommy died and Laurel when off the deep end. She’d been a bit nervous for the two of them in the aftermath of the Undertaking. Obviously, Oliver wasn’t giving any mixed messages about his feelings, so that wasn’t an issue. And Felicity had only even been sort-of-friends with Laurel in her timeline. Their relationship here was rocky…to say the least.

For a while there, Laurel had seemed jealous of her relationship with Oliver, of how close they were. It had led to a few awkward group dates while Oliver was recovering. Without the mission, Felicity really didn’t know how to start a conversation with Laurel. They had been friends once, but the pain of her death was still fresh.

Until she ran into Laurel in the café around the corner from Verdant. It had been a coincidence, purely incidental, but it ended up being perfect. It had been around the time Tommy was going to propose and Laurel thought he was pulling away. They ended up having a great heart to heart at Verdant before they were interrupted by Oliver and Tommy.

Felicity still wouldn’t call them the best of friends, but they didn’t need their significant others around to get along anymore, which she had to say was an improvement.

Then there was the mutual bonding when they realized their parents were dating at a Save the Glades fundraiser gala. That had been…well, fun definitely wasn’t the word, but it hadn’t been a total disaster either so that was nice.

She was just trying not to look in the general direction of the band where her mother and Quentin were giggling. Only years of stomaching her mother flirting with patrons for larger tips has prepared her for watching her mother actually flirt. It still makes her gag a little in the back of her throat.

“You know you’re my family, right?” Tommy asks quietly as the song ends. “You and your mom. I don’t know if I would be in such a good place today if it weren’t for you guys.”

Felicity squeezes his hands and tries not to look into Tommy’s eyes because she knows that she will cry. “You’re a good man, Thomas Merlyn.”

“But I’m not sure I could have made it past my father’s part in the Undertaking if you hadn’t been there for me and Laurel.” He hugs her, continuing to sway even though the song has changed.
“You’re a better person than I deserve. You’re a better person than Oliver deserves.”

“I’m really not,” she whispers back. “I’m just happy you’re happy.”

He laughs. “I’m more than happy. This might be the best day of my life.”

Felicity smiles, releasing him. “Then go dance with your wife.”

Tommy’s face lights up. “Wife. I like the sound of that.”

“Get out of here.” Felicity chuckles as she pushes him towards Laurel. He doesn’t even look back as he takes his new bride in his arms. Oliver sidles up behind her and she leans back into his chest, not taking her eyes from the bride and groom as they twirl and laugh on the dance floor.

“They look happy,” he whispers in her ear, wrapping his arms around her. “We did that.”

Felicity grins, looking up at him. “You did. You’re the one who saved Tommy.”

“I almost died,” he counters, leaning down to press a kiss to her exposed shoulder. “300 people still died.”

“But you didn’t and the damage was worst in a non-residential area. Tommy and Laurel are alive. Malcolm won’t live to kill another day.” She lists. Then she sighs. “If you want me to be sorry for that, I can’t be, even if he was Tommy’s father.”

Oliver holds her just a little tighter. “I’m glad I didn’t have to be the one to do it.”

It’s a quiet confession she can only hear because his mouth is right next to her ear. She runs her hands over his arms, grateful for the comfort he offers.

“You never told me what Constantine said.”

She laughs lightly. “You really want to talk about that here?”

“So no captivating answers?”

Felicity twists in his arms. She clasps her hands behind his neck, trying not to think about how they’re definitely pressed too closely together for any sort of propriety. She rises on her tiptoes to press a kiss to his lips before she takes a step back and leaves some space between them.

“He said something about our souls being connected and more mystic mumbo jumbo. So, basically, after a year of searching, all we know is that it was mystical, our souls are connected – apparently – and as far as we know, this is our new reality.”

“Well, considering my last memory is of falling off a cliff toward almost certain death, I think I like this timeline so much better.”

Felicity sinks into his kiss, closing the distance between them again as if they’re not still swaying on the side of the dance floor with an audience.

“Oh, brother mine!”

Felicity squeaks in surprise, jumping away from Oliver and covering her mouth as she stares bug-eyed at Thea. She takes great pleasure in breaking up their little moments, more pleasure than a little sister should probably get. Oliver says it’s payback for how he’s cock-blocked her since his return from the Island.
He’s also far less easily embarrassed, which is why his arms are still around her, already pulling her back against his side as if nothing’s happened.

“Thea,” he says calmly. “Did you need something?”

“It’s time for your speech, best man, which means, I get to keep your lovely girlfriend company.” Thea slips her arm through Felicity’s and smiles brightly at Oliver. Felicity drags her hand down his arm to grip his fingers.

“Go, move them to tears. I’ll be here, waiting for you.” She beams at him when he leans in to press a kiss to her cheek.

“I love you.”

“I love you,” she mouths back as Oliver makes his way to the stage, grabbing a glass of champagne along the way.

The first thing he does when he gets to the mic is wink at her from across the room. Damn does she love that man.

...

“I can’t believe we had to leave early because of a hostage situation that only took thirty minutes to handle.”

Oliver grins as he kicks the bike into gear, listening to Felicity babble in his ear.

“It was nice of the robbers to wait until after your speech, but couldn’t they have held off another fifteen minutes? Then we could have had cake.”

“You know you didn’t have to come with me? You could have handled this from your phone.” He weaves through traffic as he makes his way back to the Lair. Tommy had given him a quick nod after Quentin had gotten the page from the station. He and Felicity had slipped out the back door after that. Sara had been stuck in the middle of her speech.

“Did you seriously just suggest I leave you to face bank robbers on your own?” Felicity demands.

“But you missed the cake,” he teases as he rounds the corner. “And all the questions about when we’re tying the knot.”

“And don’t forget that your sister thinks I’m pregnant because I wasn’t drinking the champagne.”

Oliver laughs, even as his heart swells. He can see it, years from now: Felicity with a swollen belly waddling around their apartment, him rubbing her feet after a long day at work, a crib he put together himself with one of those spinning mobiles hanging over it. “There’s still time. We can go back.”

Everyone will assume they had disappeared for sex anyway.

Felicity snorts. “Uh-uh, I don’t think so, Mister. You got hurt.”

“It’s a scratch,” Oliver dismisses as he parks the bike in their hidden garage. He glances down at the graze on his upper arm. It won’t even need stitches. “A lucky shot.”

“All it takes is one lucky shot,” her voice transitions from in his comm to right in front of him as the door in front of him swings open, “and then you’re dead.”
He points at the small slice. “It’s nothing.”

“It’s not nothing,” she insists, dragging him over to the medical bay. “Sit.”

Oliver drops to the metal stool, allowing Felicity to help him out of his jacket and clean the scratch that really does not need stitches. Her hair is pulled back in a messy bun, locks of it tumbling out as she bends over his arm to dab at the cut.

He takes the time to admire her dress, the dark green dress he’s been glossing over all day because he knows that the moment he focuses on it is the moment he’s going to zero in on only that. The dress clings to her curves and God, is she beautiful. He wants to run his hands over her. His uninjured hand slides down her side to cup her ass.

“Oliver!” She slaps away his hand. “I am trying to help you.”

He wraps his arm around her waist and pulls her closer. “I told you: I’m fine. And I haven’t had the chance to appreciate your dress the way I should.”

Felicity rolls her eyes and slaps a band-aid on his arm. “You’re incorrigible.”

“Have I told you how gorgeous you look today?”

She smiles at him, running her hands up his arms. “Maybe a couple times.”

“Good,” he whispers, standing and pulling her closer. “So what do you say we break Digg’s no-sex-in-the-Lair-rule?”

She grins up at him, moving to straddle his lap.

He waits for her to move, for her to close the distance between their lips. And she does: slowly. Once.

Twice.

Then she pulls back further. Her lips part in awe as she stares down at him, her hands running over his face, into his hair, down his arms. Her thumb traces his lips.

She’s standing on a precipice and Oliver hangs back, waiting for her to take the final step. This is her choice. When she finally takes the leap, she says the last two words he ever thought he would hear from her sweet, sweet lips:

“Marry me?”

The breath catches in his throat. Two words and he’s speechless. He had a plan. He was going to ask her over a home cooked meal or on the anniversary of the day they met. Both. This kind of ruins his plans.

“I know the guy’s supposed to be the one to ask, and you had a truly amazing speech last time. This is probably as far from romantic as it gets, but I just had to ask. I mean, it just came flying out. I didn’t mean to ask that. God, I feel so stu-“

“Yes.” Only shock stopped him from interrupting her babble sooner. To hell with his plans! This is more them, anyway.

“Yes?” She frowns.
“Yes, I’ll marry you.” He grins as a smile overtakes her face.

“Really? You just…” She grabs his face and kisses him, laughing. “We’re getting married?”

Oliver stares at her, unable to process the intense joy. “I’ve…” He gestures back in the general direction of his tux where it’s crumpled on the bed in the corner. “I got a ring.”

Felicity beams, her hands running over his chest. “We can deal with that later. Right now, I can think of more important things.”

He chuckles, pulling her with him toward the cot. It’s slow going as they stumble along in between kisses, pressed up against each other. He doesn’t want to lose contact with any part of her body. She’s warm and pliable under his hands, her moans music to his ears.

She’s all he ever needed in this life.

All of a sudden, she draws away from him, pushing back on his chest. “Do you think we can do this? Is this a mistake? Oh, God, did I ask too early?

Oliver lips twitch upwards in a grin. “No. I think we’ve got this: Together.”

Felicity pulls him down to close the distance between them with another kiss before she whispers the one word that tells him they are going to be fine through whatever comes their way, the one word that confirms that everything he’s done – that they’ve done – in this new timeline is worth it. They will make it through everything:

“Together.”

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Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading!

And if you feel so inclined you can:

Find the rest of my stories here.

Find me on tumblr here.

End Notes

And thank you everyone for reading!!! Comment below with how you like this extended chapter one (and of course kudos and bookmarks are always appreciated as well).

Edit on updating this fic: I am working with a new beta (a thousand thanks to geniewithwifi), and I'm just trying to keep writing. I'm trying for weekly updates, but things happen and since
I'm working on three large fics, it might take a little longer than that. Thank you all for your patience!

HUGS FOR EVERYONE!!!!

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!