This Life of Ours

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/3972898.

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<td>Additional Tags:</td>
<td>Homophobia, Bratva AU, Graphic Violence, Explicit Sex, Child Abuse, Drug Use</td>
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<td>Stats:</td>
<td>Published: 2015-05-20 Updated: 2018-03-16 Chapters: 23/27 Words: 156066</td>
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This Life of Ours

by LadyChi

Summary

There's nothing Oliver Queen won't do to change his sister's fate. Living his life under the thumb of his mob-boss mother, he's sacrificed his soul for the Family name. To protect his sister's innocence, he travels to Russia to enlist the help of Felicity Smoak. With her by his side, and long-time friend and past-lover Tommy Merlyn at his back, Oliver will seek to dismantle the criminal empire that has plagued his city, and maybe rediscover love along the way.

Notes

The entire "first act" of this novel is complete. Each chapter will be posted on Tuesday evening. So mark your calendars.

Beautiful graphic by andyouweremine on Tumblr, always_a_queen on AO3.

This chapter is dedicated, with love and deep affection, to sphereofsilence, who cowrote the first chapter with me.

The entire novel is dedicated, wholeheartedly, to Abbie, Kris, Rosie, Effie, and Ash -- the Google Docs Five, who held my hand, and screamed at me, and cried with me. I love you each so very very deeply.
This life of ours, it's a wonderful life. If you can get through life like this, hey, that's great. But it's very, very unpredictable. There are so many ways you can screw it up.

-- Paul Castellano (Assassinated by John Gotti, 1985)

Chapter One: The Machinations of a Queen

Oliver Queen perched next to a gargoyle, crouched in the shadow of the snarling demonic menace of a decorative water spout. It gave him a near-perfect view of the rooftop across the alleyway and the meeting taking place there. Rooftops were better for this sort of meeting than alleyways where too many innocent bystanders and passers-by had cell phone cameras a pocket’s-reach away, or conference rooms that were certainly hiding microphones and more cameras. Evidence and
blackmail were a thriving businesses.

Most people left rooftops alone. Cold, exposed to the night’s light drizzle of rain, which couldn’t quite make up its mind between being heavy mist with a delusion of grandeur, or proper rain. Oliver, though, found that he liked spending time there. He’d grown used to time spent alone while on the island, and it was difficult to find under his current… circumstances.

The communications unit in his ear crackled. Roy Harper, his sister’s current boyfriend and full-time pain in his ass, spoke. “Hey, Oliver, it’s just like you said. Hopkins is taking a bribe.”

Oliver lifted one corner of his mouth. Of course it was like he said. He could always count on politicians to sleep with the wrong person, to think they could bury the evidence of their misdeeds in paperwork or clever computer hacking. A little old-fashioned spywork and some carefully applied pressure and he could have just about anything he wanted in Starling City. It was almost boring.

“What do you want us to do?”

“Stay in position,” Oliver said shortly, rolling his eyes. Roy Harper was far from his first choice in back-up, but his shadow was out of town on Family business that couldn’t be avoided, so he had to make due with what was available to him. “Gather information. I’ll go see Hopkins tomorrow, as Oliver Queen.”

“Hey, when you aren’t being Oliver Queen, what are you being?”

“Someone who would cheerfully push you off of a bridge.”

“Haha, that’s very funny! I like this joking thing we’re doing with each other now. It’s good.”

Oliver’s eyebrows twitched. It might have been amusement. “No one ever accused me of having a sense of humor.”

“Yeah, I still wouldn’t accuse you of that. But hey, you’re trying.” Silence fell briefly before Roy broke in over the unit again. “So, how long are we ‘staying in position’?”

“Why, do you have somewhere to be?”

“Kind of, yeah. Got a date with Thea tonight, and she’s going to start wondering if I don’t get moving.”

Oliver tamped down on the instinctive irritation. He liked Roy, sort of, but he didn’t like Roy with his sister. He didn’t like any boy with his sister. “You’re not doing a great job of throwing yourself on my mercy here.”

“Hey, it was a last minute kind of deal. You know your sister.”

Oliver nodded, readjusting his hood. He watched Roy leave for several long moments before he headed in the direction of his bike. They were heading in opposite directions -- Roy might be done for the night, but Oliver’s job was far from over. To accomplish what he had to, he would have to be quick, and silent. And subtle.

Leaving his bike unattended, Oliver moved, seemingly without effort, from rooftop to rooftop. Several blocks over, he arrived at a graying, ancient structure, far from the elite business corridors of
downtown Starling City. No, this is was the kind of place a middle-man in a corporation might live. A corporation like Queen Consolidated.

Oliver lowered himself down the face of the building and found the window he needed unlocked. He didn’t so much as sigh at the trusting nature of humanity. He’d given up feeling sorry for people a long time ago. He opened the window and slipped inside, his bow and arrow out instantly.

It wasn’t all just clean blackmail and strongarming politicians. Sometimes, Oliver Queen had to put an arrow in someone, for the sake of the Family. Tonight was one of those nights.

**

Most of the Queen mansion stood dark, a few lights burned from being left on, but only his mother’s office and the entryway were lit because someone was awake and using them. Oliver wasn’t lurking, exactly, when Thea’s car finally pulled into the drive. Or, at least he was lurking in plain sight and in jeans instead of a mask and leather. He lounged comfortably on a short column at the top of the stairs, leaning back as he watched the bright white-blue of sportscar headlights approach and brush over him. Thea spotted him almost immediately.

“What are you doing?” She climbed out of the driver’s seat and kept the car between them, her expression warring between confused and suspicious. Oliver smiled and pushed himself off of his perch.

“Waiting to make sure you got home alright.”

“This protective older brother thing you’re doing?”

“Yeah?”

“It’s super cute and it can stop immediately.”

Oliver chuckled. “Sorry. I trust you. I was just…. restless. Sitting out here looking for you seemed like a good thing to do with all of my excess energy.”

Thea sighed in that dramatic way she still had. “I completely and totally understand that.”

“Something bothering you?” Oliver asked.

“I don’t know. Is something bothering you?” Thea asked.

Oliver had a flash, of wiping his arrow head clean, wiping the apartment down… He pushed it aside. “Nothing worth noting.”

“Hm.” Thea climbed the stairs, plopped down next to him and laid her head on his shoulder. He tried to ignore the alcohol he could smell on her breath. “Ollie?”

“Yeah?”

“Has Mom talked to you?”

Oliver raised an eyebrow. “Recently?” He’d reported finishing up Adam Hunt to his mother earlier that night, but Thea wouldn’t mean that. She knew perfectly well what he did, the kind of person he
was, but she did her best to remain ignorant of the particulars.

“Yeah, recently.” Thea chafed her hands up and down her jacket arms, though the night’s drizzling rain had stopped, and cleared up to be barely even chilly. She was looking at him, but she was looking at him like she wasn’t entirely sold that it was him. Her hands dropped abruptly and she moved to walk past him, tossing her keys at him. “Y’know what? Never mind. Put my car in the garage for me, okay?”

“Hey. Thea. Stop.” He was only half-surprised when she did, and he reached up to grab her arm. “Stay. Tell me what’s wrong. Maybe I can help.”

“You can’t help, Oliver,” Thea said, her voice cracking. “I don’t think there’s anything anyone could do to change her mind. Mom wants to leave everything to me. Everything, Oliver.”

His blood ran cold and he felt a shiver go up and down his spine. Some part of him had known this was coming just from the look on her face. “Everything?”

“Yes. I know what goes on in the dark, Oliver. Behind my back. And maybe I’m an awful human being but I can live with it as long as it’s not right in front of my face, you know? But I’m not Mom. I’m not you. I can’t be the head of the Dearden family. I can’t … be the person I would need to be to do that.”

Oliver swallowed. Moira putting pressure on Thea meant that it was time for certain cogs to start turning. Plans that he had had for years were suddenly set in motion. But he needed to be certain. “Did you… I mean, did you tell her? Maybe -- she can’t leave it to you if you don’t want it.”

“She says it always goes to a woman. And I’m the only one left.” Thea shook her head. “It’s my birthright. Or my destiny.”

Thea started off again, but Oliver held her still. “Thea… wait. Do you trust me?”

She sighed. “Always, Ollie.”

“Good. Then -- just -- give me a few days. I’ll make this go away.” For you.

“I don’t think you can.”

“Speedy, for you I could do far more impossible things, okay?”

Thea bent and kissed his cheek. “That’s really sweet, Oliver. Thanks for trying to cheer me up.”

“I’m not trying. I’m making you a promise. Hey. You remember when I got on the boat? And I promised you I would come back? I didn’t know the storm was coming, and it took me five years and a lifetime of hell, but I got back to you, Thea. I am making you a promise right now that you will not have to do anything in this life that you do not want to do with your life. I will help you fix this.”

Thea’s eyes filled with tears, and she nodded before she ran back up to her room.

Oliver sighed and carded his fingers through his short hair. Fix it. Once he opened this can of worms, there would be no undoing it. What he was about to do would either spell his death or his salvation. Oliver looked up at the office window still lit up on the second floor. He knew where to
Moira Dearden-Queen was the scion of a fine, upstanding family of Irish immigrants, who had roots going back centuries to highwaymen and cutthroats that had, over the last century, turned a tendency of being ne’er-do-wells into a lifestyle. From rum-running, to arms dealing, to extortion, and a fair bit of assassination, the Dearden family held court in them all, and it held certain traditions as dearly as it held family.

The dearest of which seemed to be that the Dearden clan was not beholden to men. Oh, his father, Robert Queen, hadn’t been lily-white. Queen Consolidated owed more than a bit of its success to illicit means. Illicit means that Robert had turned over to his new bride in reverse dowry, which Moira wove into the Dearden ventures, emerging with a comfortable split between Queen Consolidated and the Dearden clan’s matriarch. The two moved together like dark mirrors, or maybe more like a married couple. Oliver suspected the combination of power had been a sufficiently large part of why his parents had married in the first place.

He had, of course, known about the tradition his whole life. He had vague flashes of memory of his grandmother, who had been just as formidable as his mother, commanding the men who went in and out of the Dearden family home. His grandmother had passed on the family responsibilities to his mother, who had taken to it like a duck to water.

But Thea was a different sort of animal… a different sort of person. She could be ruthless, he thought, provided the right incentive, but… he didn’t want that kind of incentive anywhere near his baby sister. He wanted her to be able to be a fashion designer or a nightclub owner or an engineer or whatever it was she wanted to do, and what she wanted to do seemed to change every minute of the day. He’d never felt he had any choice about who he was to become, and he didn’t want that for his sister.

If the family business had to pass on to a woman, then the answer to his problem was simple. He just needed another Dearden woman.

He jogged up the stairs to the second floor. He didn’t let himself stop long enough to think before he knocked on his mother’s door. It took a moment, but she opened the door herself.

“Oliver,” she said with a note of surprise in her voice. “I didn’t expect to see you again today. Did you forget something?”

“I came to check on Thea,” he said. “And it turns out we have something we need to talk about.”

One corner of his mother’s mouth rose. Of course she hadn’t been surprised to see him, he thought, and of course she knew exactly what he wanted to talk to her about. Nothing got by his mother. That was part of the reason why his hands were shaking so badly. “Of course,” she said. “Come in.”

“Mom—” Oliver started, cut off when his mother raised a slim hand between them.

“I know, dear. Thea was not … enthused with my announcement earlier.” Moira smiled, but it didn’t reach her eyes. Those looked sad, with a hint of regret and a solid glint of steel. A fair approximation, Oliver thought, of someone who gave a shit. “It’s not really up to her, though. As it wasn’t up to me, and it wasn’t up to you, either. We are blessed to be head of this family -- truly blessed. But it involves a certain amount of sacrifice.”

His mother turned away from him and walked further into her office, picking up a tablet from the
polished surface of the desk, and leaving the tacit invitation behind for him to enter. Oliver shut the
door behind himself, keenly aware of his sister’s room on the next floor up, and his mother’s room at
the end of the hall.

Walter was probably somewhere in the house, and Oliver didn’t particularly want to have any
conversations about the family business that wasn’t Queen Consolidated in earshot of Walter or
Thea. Walter did a stand up job pretending he didn’t know about his wife’s Dearden affairs, and
Thea had looked ready to snap into small pieces if she thought any more about them.

“She’s scared out of her mind, mom. Really scared. We can’t do this to her. Thea’s not a good fit
for the life. If something must be sacrificed, then… let me be the one to make the sacrifice.”

“I would have said the same of you a few years ago, Oliver,” Moira responded, tapping a few things
out on the tablet’s surface and walking around her desk to sit in an oversized leather chair. “Sit
down before you start pacing, dear.” Oliver shoved his hands into his pockets and dropped into one
of the chairs across the desk from his mother. She looked up from the tablet, setting it back on the
desk and lacing her fingers in front of her. “Thea will adapt. I moved heaven and earth to bring her
into this world and I’m a bit old to have another daughter, and you would never be accepted.”

“Over an old tradition.”

“Over you being completely unsuited to run and organize an operation like this, which is something
Thea excels at when she wants to apply herself. You have several wonderful gifts, Oliver, but you
are not particularly good at seeing the big picture, moving pieces around on the board. Thea could
never do the kinds of things you do -- never be the strong arm the family needs to ensure our
continued place in the city. I need both of you if the family is to survive into the next century.”

Oliver clasped his hands and leaned forward, elbows on his knees. He thought for one long moment.
“What would it take for me to get Thea out of this?”

Moira raised her eyebrows. “Thea hardly needs you to rescue her, Oliver. Certainly no one rescued
me from this life.”

“You wanted it, though.” Oliver stood again, crossed his arms over his chest. “You wanted to run
the family, you maneuvered the merger with Dad’s company, you do it all, and it’s because you love
it, Mom. I had to go through hell to get to the point where I could stomach the things I do in the
name of the family you love. I want to spare my sister that, so…”

“So, what?” Moira asked, her eyebrows quirked up. “What’s your solution, Oliver? Clearly you
have one.”

“A substitute,” Oliver said. “A woman who would be just as well-suited to the job of running the
Dearden family as Thea is, but who would actually enjoy it. Someone the family would listen to,
respect. Someone politically advantageous.”

“I’m afraid I have to keep the family business in the family, Oliver,” Moira said. “We can’t just
outsource the Dearden family matriarchy.”

Oliver sighed. His mother was being deliberately obtuse. She wanted him to say it. “I’m suggesting I
-- marry this person. She would be a Dearden, then, someone the family would accept. Thea’s off the
hook, and you can rest easy at night knowing the family would be in good hands.”
Moira smirked. “Do you happen to be in love with a woman who fits such a bill? That would be quite the development.”

Oliver lifted one corner of his mouth. It was nearly amusing that his mother thought he would consider love a prerequisite for marriage. “No, but I know and respect a woman who would fill those parameters nicely. I don’t think Felicity Smoak would object to a marriage if it was put to her in the proper context.”

“Ah,” Moira said. She leaned back in her chair and steepled her fingers, thinking through the suggestion. “Felicity Smoak. An interesting choice. I’ve always liked her. Of course, you’ll have to pry her away from the Russians.”

“Well,” Oliver said. “What about it?”

Moira waved a hand. “The idea has some merit, and I am, of course, all for you settling down. Convince Felicity that a marriage would be advantageous to you both. Get a ring on her finger. Then we’ll talk.”

Oliver nodded. “Okay.”

He walked the length of the corridor away from his mother’s office, down the stairs, and out the back of the house. He flipped his phone out of his pocket and pulled out his most-frequently contacted list. He selected the entry at the top of the list and waited while the phone connected.

“Hey, it’s me,” he said. “We’re out of time. I’m getting on a plane right now.”

“Be safe.”

Oliver nodded. “You too. See you soon.” He disconnected and left to pack.

**

The streets of Moscow flickered past the window of the rented sedan Oliver was driving, boxy buildings of the outer districts giving way to more boxy buildings - though taller boxy buildings - as they neared the center of the city. The Khamovniki District was different, somewhat. Relentlessly similar high rises - inheritances of the communist glory days - gave way sometimes to ornate buildings and manicured gardens. This part of town, sandwiched between the Boulevard Ring and the Garden Ring, housed more expensive houses - some actual mansions - set along the canal along with a fair number of old wooden houses. The car pulled up to a relatively unassuming walk up, and Oliver let himself out of the car. The driver left him with a nod and silence.

Oliver straightened his suit jacket as he walked up to the door and knocked, shoving one of his hands into a pocket and fiddling with a narrow box as he rang the bell. It took a moment before footsteps approached on the other side and the door opened with a click. Oliver found himself staring up at a
man who would be taller - and imposingly broader - even if he weren’t standing up a step higher. He gave Oliver a hard look before stepping aside and pulling the door open wider with him. “Heard we were expecting company.”

“I’m Oliver,” he said, extending his hand with his bright playboy smile firmly in place.

The man, who, if he hadn’t been a linebacker had truly missed his calling, narrowed his eyes. “John Diggle. You got a last name, Oliver?”

“Ah, you are here!” Yuri was enthused, at least, Oliver thought, absorbing him in a hug. The stocky Russian wore a heavy gold ring on one hand and had inky lines of tattoos creeping from beneath his suit jacket and shirt. “I thought for sure you got caught up, it took you so long to get here.”

“I thought I made excellent time.” Considering he’d left Starling City that morning and made it to Moscow in less than nine hours, it likely felt longer for Oliver than it did for the Bratva boss.

“I am an old man. I may die any time. Nothing happens soon enough.”

Oliver raised both of his eyebrows. “You’re… not… old.”

“My father died of a heart attack at forty. I live on borrowed time. And the antioxidants my niece keeps shoving down my throat. I see you met my new security guard.”

“He appears to be very good at his job.”

“He is indeed. But we are not here for annual employee reviews, no. Come inside, have a drink!”

Oliver nearly groaned. He’d been up for almost nineteen hours straight, and parts of his body were beginning to ache that he didn’t normally even notice, and now, for sure, he would be drinking vodka until the sun came up again.

Yuri waved him further into the house and called up the stairs, “Felicity! Join us! Tell Oliver of your recent excitement.”

“It wasn’t that exciting,” Felicity called down, a door opening and shutting behind her. She was dressed as she would be for any business meeting, in a very expensive dress, one he recognized from the magazines Thea was constantly reading, her eyes sparkling with amusement behind her rectangle glasses. “Just an overly-enthusiastic disgruntled former employee. Oliver,” she said, extending her hand at the bottom of the stairs. “It’s very nice to see you again.”

“Nice to see you too,” Oliver said, trying to hide his nerves behind what had been his most charming smile, in a former life, when charming girls had been something he had time to do. His whole plan hinged on Felicity Smoak having the degree of affection for him that she used to have, and her good nature and willingness to help.

“Come! We drink! We shoot the shit, as you say in America, we discuss business, we conquer the world,” Yuri said enthusiastically.

“Clearly the party started without me,” Oliver said on a chuckle.

“Or me,” Felicity said, rolling her eyes, but she took the proffered shot of vodka and downed it with an almost-professional grace.
Oliver did the same, the strong liquid burning all the way down and settling in the pit of his stomach. Yuri offered him a seat, and so he took it, settling into the chair with a sigh.

“You tell us, now, how it goes with your mother and your sister,” Yuri said, waving a hand. Oliver lifted one corner of his mouth.

“Uh, good, I guess. Mom’s pretty busy. Thea’s got her future on her mind, I think,” Oliver said, clearing his throat. “Which, uh…”

“What’s she considering?” Felicity asked, settling next to her uncle. She patted his thigh fondly and pushed the vodka bottle away from him before he could pour more shots for everyone.

“Fashion, I think?” Oliver said. “She’s got a talent for it.”

“Indeed. She’s always very well put together,” Felicity agreed. “Or so she looks in the tabloids.”

Thinking that the conversation couldn’t get more banal if he tried to push it in that direction, Oliver set his glass aside. “Forgive me for being so blunt, but I’ve come to ask Felicity for a favor.”

“Ah, it is the help of Felicity you wish,” Yuri said, nodding. “Well, then, out with it.”

He rubbed the back of his neck, and tried to keep his cheeks from flushing. “I… would prefer to do it in private.”

Felicity’s lips quirked in amusement. “Oliver, if you want to me to delete something off the internet, something embarrassing, you should know you can just call….”

Oliver felt his palms go clammy, a sensation that hadn’t happened to him since he’d killed his first man on Lian Yu. “Please.”

Felicity tilted her head at him, blue eyes sharp with curiosity and calculation. She put puzzles together - and took them apart for anyone connected or interesting enough to bring them to her. Something about him must have interested her. Maybe the fact he hadn’t slept in 24 hours, Oliver thought ruefully, tamping down the urge to rub against his tired eyes, or over the slight scruff he was acquiring outside of a long-running mission.

“Sure. Let’s go into the …” she looked around, catching her uncle’s eyes for a moment before looking up the stairs behind her and finally settling on a shadowed door half blocked by a stocky potted plant. “Library, okay?”

Oliver nodded and followed her around the plant into a room he’d never spent any time in. No one in the house really used the library much - not evident by dust covering anything because there wasn’t any. The spindly Russian woman Yuri employed to clean would never have tolerated dust accumulating in any room. She’d have dealt with it with many a toe-curling, under-her-breath muttered curse, spoken in a growling mix of Russian and Ukrainian.

The library was immaculate. Immaculate and completely lacking in Yuri’s oft-left pipes, or Felicity’s tablets or absently-scribbled notes. Oliver didn’t even see anything that he could tentatively associate with Diggle in the room. The room’s sterility made it neutral territory. And the locked door - which Felicity snapped into place as soon as she flicked on a few lights and he walked in behind her - made it private.
“I have to admit,” Felicity said wryly as she gestured to a cushy couch with antique lamps on either side, “I was curious when Yuri told me that you were on your way. It’s not like you to come such a long way for nostalgia’s sake, and I was under the impression that you were quite busy in Starling City, given that it’s been some time since you picked up the phone.”

Chagrined, Oliver shrugged his shoulders. “I’m sorry, things have been… intense. Things are changing.”

They sat, Felicity crossing one leg over the other, and Oliver with his legs spread, elbows on his thighs. “You know,” she said, “once upon a time, telling me what was on your mind would not have caused such an expression to cross your face.”

Oliver laughed. “I’m not used to thinking this hard. It’s fatigue that you’re seeing.”

“Don’t do that,” Felicity said quietly, but sharply. “You’re not stupid, and you never have been. You don’t have to play games with me.”

Oliver lifted one side of his mouth in a smile. “I don’t know. We were pretty good at games not that long ago.”

Felicity snorted. “That was pretty playboy-lame, even for you. Spill it, Queen. What’s up?”

Oliver ducked his head and rubbed his hands through the short bristly hair at the back of his head. What to say … my mother is planning to ruin my sister’s life, and I was hoping you’d be her substitute because you’re actually good at this life, and oh right, that means we’re getting married… Oliver imagined Felicity’s reaction would fall somewhere before tossing him out into the Moscow night, or tossing him out and shooting him in the hand. Both ended with a locked door, and lost dignity. He’d a lot of time to think about how to start this conversation and he still hadn’t come up with a way to get it started.

“Oliver?” Felicity prompted, a smile tugging at her lips.

“Is Yuri still trying to introduce you to a line of ‘nice young men’ from ‘good families’?” Oliver asked. It sounded abrupt in his mind, like dropping rocks in a pond, but he remembered a handful of complaints from Felicity, and a comment or two from his mother, in the past. He latched onto them, grasping at the straws they were.

Felicity laughed. “Don’t tell me Moira wants you to come over here and pick out a Russian bride. I’m not sure Dyadya knows any the Deardens would approve.”

Oliver propped his chin on his interlaced hands and smiled a bit despite himself.

“Oh no. You’re smiling.” Felicity sat up straight. “Is there something you need to tell me? Who’s the lucky girl?”

Oliver coughed. “Okay, there’s really no easy way to do this, so I’m just going to jump in, okay?”

“Okay. Sure, Oliver. That’s what friends are for. I didn’t think you hopped on a plane and flew across the ocean to ask for something little, so… spit it out.”

“You have to know that I -- I think the world of you. And there’s absolutely no one in our business
that I respect more.”

“Don’t let Yuri hear you say that.”

Oliver smiled and ducked his head. “Well, it’s the truth. And that’s why I’m here, basically, to uh… propose a merger. Which would be, you know, between the two of us. And our families.”

Felicity blinked. “Wow, Oliver.”

“I know it’s a lot but…”

“Wow, Oliver.” Felicity repeated, standing up. “First of all -- least romantic marriage proposal ever, for the record.”

“I’m sorry, I thought about -- but then…”

“Secondly, wow. This… has potential, but this could also go horribly wrong.” Felicity abruptly sat back down. He could see the moment it all snapped in place for her and he nearly grinned. He adored how clever she was. “This is about Thea, isn’t it?”

Oliver shrugged and studied his hands. “She doesn’t want it. She doesn’t want the life, doesn’t want the blood on her hands. She asked for my help and to be honest, I don’t want it for her, either.”

“Oliver.”

“It’s too late for either one of us,” Oliver said. He lifted his eyes and met hers. “We both had our choices to make, and we made them. But Thea -- the spot she’s in now, she’s got no options.”

Felicity nodded. “You know, I don’t recall you having a lot of choice in your initiation into the life, either.”

“It was necessary,” Oliver said. “Thea… Thea taking the clan under her wing isn’t necessary.”

“Okay,” Felicity said.

“Okay you’ll do it? Or…”

“Okay, I’ll think about it. No matter what happens, there will be pushback. From Bratva, from the Deardens. Not everyone would take such a merger as a good thing.”

Oliver nodded. “I’m prepared to do whatever it takes to secure your safety in Starling and your position in my family.”

Felicity lifted her brows. “That could mean a river of blood.”

“But not.” Oliver shrugged. “It would be a small price to pay for my sister’s freedom, don’t you think? Felicity, I need you. There is no one in the world the Deardens would be more likely to accept. There is no one in the world more qualified to take over, and there is no one I want by my side more than you.”

“Why don’t you just take the reins yourself? You could do it. Screw tradition.”
“No,” Oliver said firmly. “I’m not… I can’t see the web the way that you can. I will be your muscle, your strong right arm, and your partner, but I can’t keep the family alive and together in a town like Starling City.”

“I do have a craving for a good American cheeseburger,” Felicity said. “Oliver, this is a huge thing you are asking of me. That you are asking of Yuri.”

“The world is changing,” Oliver said, leaning back on the couch, more confident now that he had sold her on the idea. “Connections between families could be more important than ever. The Bratva salivates at the idea of our digital reach, and the Deardens… well, we could use more on-the-ground presence. This merger… could be a good thing.”

“A merger, hm?” Felicity crossed one leg over the other. “That’s what you want your marriage to be? A merger?”

Oliver followed the move with his eyes, unable to stop the smile, or the flood of memories assaulting him. “Felicity, I think we both know from experience that this type of merger is…. exceedingly pleasant. For both of us.”

“And you’ll be expecting an heir from me, I assume.” Her lips were pursed, her arms crossed over her chest.

“If that’s your choice,” Oliver said. “The family name could die with me, for all I care.”

“That can be worked out later. I’m going to need some more vodka,” Felicity said, lowly. She uncrossed her arms and her legs, dropped some of the artifice. “I…. I am tentatively saying yes.”

Oliver’s heart nearly stopped in its chest. “You are?”

“Yes. Clearly, since this is primarily a business transaction, the details will have to be worked out between Yuri and Moira,” Felicity said, “and between you and I. I want there to be no miscommunication, no hurt feelings.”

“Get everything written down,” Oliver agreed, “so we know exactly where we stand.”

“Yes,” Felicity said. “That’s exactly it.”

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Felicity took her hair down and ran a comb through it while she stepped out of her shoes. Her hands were shaking and her heart was racing in her chest. When they had walked away from each other three years ago, Felicity had accepted that their friendship would likely remain long-distance. It wasn’t like the Irish and Russian mobs never did any business together. She just wasn’t expecting him to show up in the middle of the night and propose marriage, of all things.

It was so unlike him, so unexpected, that she almost couldn’t trust it, except that she’d known some of what he was going back to, because she’d risked her own life to get him back to Starling some years ago. Oliver, for all of his faults, had one true virtue, and that was his deep and abiding love for his sister. She remembered that he would often speak of her fondly during the short time they were together, and he talked most frequently of how he longed to go home and see her -- that Thea and his best friend were the only things he longed for and missed about home.
It wasn’t, Felicity thought, that she disliked Moira Queen. She just didn’t trust the woman who would send her only child to a deserted island, and then Russia, to turn him into the kind of cold-blooded killer she needed in Starling City. Still, she had business dealings with the Deardens, and they had interacted in the past. It wouldn’t be completely out of line for Felicity to make a personal phone call.

Felicity dialed the international number and waited patiently while it rang through. After she’d spoken briefly to a housekeeper, she didn’t have to wait long for Moira Queen herself to pick up the phone.

“Felicity Smoak,” she said, her voice tinged with put-upon surprise. “I wasn’t expecting a phone call from you.”

Bullshit. Felicity thought it, but she didn’t say it. “Well, it appears we are to be family,” Felicity said, sitting down at her vanity and crossing one leg over the other, a position that always made her feel more powerful, more comfortable. “I thought I had better reach out to you first.”

“So Oliver has arrived, I see,” Moira said. “Congratulations are in order. Best wishes to you and my son.”

“Mm,” Felicity said. “I was just thinking that I might, as your son’s fiancee, want some of the family history explained to me.”

There was a pause on the other end of the line. Whether Moira had been expecting this angle or not, she took a beat to figure out what to say. “Certainly, my dear.”

“Oliver has taken the time to explain the situation to me,” Felicity said, “but I would like to hear more about it from you. You know, after all, how deeply Oliver cares for his sister, and how easily he can be pressed into doing things without considering all of his options.”

It was a risk, making so bold a statement about Oliver. Felicity didn’t quite know Moira well enough to know whether she would be offended or not.

“I’m afraid I don’t follow.”

“Surely there have been times in the past when one of the sons of the Dearden family took over the mantle of patriarch,” Felicity said. “Or perhaps it’s time to break the tradition.”

“My ancestor, Maeve Dearden, married a man she loved very much, Ms. Smoak. But he made his living the best way that he knew how -- stealing from travelers along the highway in County Clare. Now, he died in the way that such men often die, violently, at the hands of one of his victims. Maeve was enraged. She took control of her husband’s men and soon was running the County. When the English drove us out to America, my great-great-great grandmother Ailing went up against Al Capone and won. It has always been a woman, Ms. Smoak, and it always shall be. If it is not you, then it will be Thea.”

Felicity nodded. “I see.”

“Yuri and I often spoke with great hope of the fondness you two had developed for each other over the course of Oliver’s time in Russia. Nothing pleases me more than to welcome you to the family,” Moira said, finally. “I hope to greet you and Oliver back to Starling City soon.”
“Of course,” Felicity said. “It will be nice to finally return home.”

When the phone call was over, Felicity put her cell down and closed her eyes, taking several deep breaths. Interacting with in-laws was always a tricky business, she knew -- or she guessed, from the many conversations that went on around her day after day, but she didn’t know that they were always this… fraught with politics.

There was a knock on her door. Glancing at her phone, she sighed and went to answer it. Apparently she wouldn’t be sleeping tonight.

“I saw the light was on,” John Diggle said. “I can go if you were just finishing up.”

“No, it’s okay,” Felicity said, smiling. “A nice, friendly familiar face is just what I need before I try to sleep. Would you like some tea?”

“No thanks.” John shifted his weight uneasily. “Uh, I was wondering if you would do me a favor.”

“That seems to be a theme tonight,” Felicity said, smiling to take the bite out of her words. “What can I do for you?”

“Let me come with you to Starling City.”

“Your allegiance is to the Bratva, not to me,” Felicity said firmly. “When I leave Russia, I could very well be leaving the Bratva behind.”

“Maybe,” John said, and he crossed his arms over his chest. “Officially, but we all know why I signed on for this tour. Surely Yuri doesn’t want you going over there without someone to watch your back.”

“You can’t tell me Yuri hasn’t been a part of this plan since the beginning,” Felicity said crossly.

“What?”

“Oliver might not see it, well -- not at this moment, anyway, he’s smart, he’s just -- can’t see the forest for the trees, sometimes, but nothing, nothing happens in the Starling City Dearden gang that Moira Queen doesn’t personally intend to happen.”

“Sounds to me like you’re walking into a nest of vipers.”

Felicity shrugged. “With my eyes open, though.”

“Let me have your back.”

Felicity tapped the vanity with her fingernails. “It’s not really my choice.”

“I’ll deal with Yuri. Felicity….”

“All right.” Felicity nodded. “I wanted you to come, anyway. I haven’t been back to the States in a while. I’m sure to get homesick and awkward, like I always do.”

John found a seat in one of the armchairs on the outside edge of the room. “If you’re this nervous about it, I guess I’m wondering why you’re going at all.”
Felicity bit her lip. “You know I owe Uncle Yuri everything.”

John nodded, but his face was carefully blank. “So you say.”

“But here --” Felicity sighed. “Here, Yuri does his best, but he can’t fight old world attitudes for me, you know?”

“You want to be running the show.”

Felicity raised one corner of her mouth. “It has…. a certain appeal.”

“Mm. And that certain appeal wouldn’t be one Oliver Queen, who just happens to be the man who broke your heart three years ago.”

“He didn’t break my heart.”

John scoffed.

Honestly. He didn’t. I knew he had to leave. He knew he had to leave. We had… a moment of weakness.” Felicity very carefully studied her nails. Their moment of weakness had been three blissful weeks of forgetting their obligations to the outside world and getting lost in each other.

“A moment of weakness. Is that what you kids are calling it these days?” Nobody, Felicity often thought, could raise their eyebrows quite so articulately as John Diggle did.

“Hah. Very funny.”

“Well, I ought to let you try and get some sleep,” John said, nodding at her. Felicity met him at the door, and laid a hand on his forearm.

“John?”

“Yeah?”

“It’s probably… going to be a bit messy. Those old world attitudes I talked about? There’s no guarantee how this goes over with the Bratva, or with the Deardens. It’s been almost a hundred and fifty years since someone married into the matriarchy.”

“Your point is?”

“I’m going to do what I can to protect Oliver and Thea, to make the transition as smooth as I can.”

John nodded. “You’re going to have to make some tough calls. People might get hurt.”

“It’s not optimal.”

“That’s this life, Felicity. I knew that when I signed up. I knew exactly what you are and who you are. And I’m still here.”

She felt her mouth lifting in a smile, unbidden. “Thanks, John. Have a good night.”
“You too.”

The door closed to John, to the outside world. Felicity took off her glasses, climbed into her bed and descended into sleep.
Chapter Summary

The union between Oliver Queen and Felicity Smoak is negotiated -- but is Oliver doing the right thing to save his sister?

Chapter Notes

Many, many thanks to Abbie, Kris, Rosie, Ash and Effie. Once again. Those ladies are the real MVPs.

Chapter Two: The Strangeness of a Sudden Change

Las Vegas, 1993

The man visiting her mother wore a heavy gold ring and she saw inky lines of tattoos creeping from beneath his suit jacket and shirt. He towered over her, dark blue eyes and a thin mouth under close-cropped dark hair. “Felicity,” her mother called from beyond the man. Felicity edged closer, skirting him as widely as the tiny house would let her. Once she reached her mother, Felicity hid, grabbing handfuls of her mother’s jeans and only daring to peer out from behind her legs when she felt her mother’s hand settle on head and smooth across her flyaway hair.

“It’s alright, dovotshka,” the man rumbled. “There is no reason to be afraid.”

He had a deep voice, soothing and soft, almost like daddy’s, and a faint accent. He smelled like smoke and alcohol -- things Felicity was familiar with, even then, thanks to her mother’s waitressing job and her father’s habits. Mostly, though, what led her to trust him was his big brown eyes, hidden in crinkly skin, and his smile, which sat on his face like a habit.

“This is your Uncle Yuri,” Felicity’s mother said. “He’s your father’s brother.”
“Hello,” Felicity said, reaching her hand out to shake, like her father had always told her to, but her uncle lifted her hand and kissed the back of it.

“I’m very sorry to not have come to see you before,” Yuri said. “I assure you, had I known….”

“I don’t think Davidov wanted to worry you,” Felicity’s mother said.

“Yes, well. I am here, and I am worried, and from now on, my tulips, there will be nothing you two will have to worry about. Blood takes care of blood.”

Felicity’s mother nodded. “We are thankful. It has been -- a constant struggle since Davidov….”

“My brother had many good qualities,” Yuri said, “but his prideful nature and his unwillingness to accept help from the family was not one of them. I assure you that you two will be well taken care of, for as long as you need the assistance.”

“And -- what do you, I mean, that is to say, the family…”

“Felicity is my godchild, in addition to being my niece,” Yuri said, “It would not be unreasonable for me to expect her to come and visit in the summers, yes? It is most pleasant in Russia in the summer.”

“Of course, but…”

“And then, she gets older, perhaps she would like to study in Russia after high school. It is good for brains like Felicity’s to be challenged. Davidov was constantly searching for a challenge, and I see much of my brother in his daughter.”

Felicity’s mother nodded. “And I… I should come with her, don’t you think?”

“Yes of course. Until such time as Felicity does not need your presence to be comfortable, of course. It is a good deal, Donna,” Yuri said, suddenly kind and soft. “I only want the luxury of spending
time with one of my last living blood relatives in return for…” he gestured. “Peace of mind.”

“We’ll need time to think about it, of course,” Donna had said smoothly. “With David gone, I don’t make decisions regarding Felicity’s future without thinking about what he would have wanted.”

“Of course. This is only right. You let me know when you have made a decision.” And then he turned to walk out of the Smoak household. He paused at the door and pulled something out of his pocket -- one of those gold-wrapped caramels that Felicity often thought of as old-people candy. He offered it to her, solemnly, like the extension of an olive branch, and Felicity reached out to take it. He winked at her, stuck his hands in his pockets, and left whistling.

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**Moscow, Present Day**

Waking in a strange house was nothing new to Oliver. Though for the most part, he had spent his childhood in the Queen Manor, often enough that had been whisked away to other places that he didn’t quite have the jolt of unfamiliarity that he used to. Of course, he had also spent time in this house before, though not necessarily in this wing. No, when he’d been in Russia before, he had been nothing more than a Bratva foot soldier. And Bratva foot soldiers didn’t stay in the palace. Unless, of course, they were sleeping with the princess.

Oliver rolled over and studied the side of his bed that was unoccupied. He laid a hand on the cool pillow and fought the rush of memories that came flooding back to him. Felicity’s hair, spread across the pillow. The way her laugh was husky in the morning before she’d really woken up. How she had curved into his side and asked him not to leave when she thought he wasn’t listening. The way he had wanted to stay. How tempted he’d been to give it all up for her, to walk away from his responsibilities back home.

Not for the first time, he doubted the wisdom of his actions, and questioned whether or not he was making the right choice in asking Felicity to marry him. When he and Tommy had first made their plans, Oliver hadn’t fully weighed the facts. And the fact of it was, he had almost fallen in love with her when he was here before. He was certainly closer to love with her than he had ever been before. Or since. Bringing her back to Starling, inviting her into his life there, meant that he could no longer keep his experience here with her in a box. He’d have to bring Felicity into the clusterfuck of his life.

Which meant Felicity would have to meet Tommy. And Tommy would have to meet Felicity. Up until this point, Felicity was confined to memories and four a.m. phone calls when they world was
falling apart and her voice could put him back together. And Tommy was the anchor of his life in Starling City, the friend and lover who had sacrificed everything to stand by him.

The possibilities were -- daunting, to say the least. He and Tommy knew they needed someone like Felicity to win the war they were planning against his family. Someone who could play the game on the same level as Moira. And Felicity would need Tommy’s quickness of wit, and Oliver’s brutality, to execute her plans. In a perfect world, they would all fall in place together, the way that he and Tommy had been whispering about since he got back from Russia, a unified team.

Or it could go horribly wrong. And Oliver might find himself, like his father, unable to stay loyal to Felicity. Jealousy could rip apart his marriage, his friendships. By inviting Felicity into his life, he could be inviting salvation or damnation.

In his experience, love didn’t survive marriage.

Oh, his mother and father put on a good show. And by all accounts, when they’d gotten married, they had loved each other, although knowing his mother now, he wondered if that had been a show for the press. By the time Oliver had come along, and then Thea, years later, warmth had faded to civility. And by the time of Robert’s death -- civility had faded into constant fighting, griping. It had been painful to be in the same room with them.

Had it been the stress, Oliver, wondered, of trying to manage a company and the mob, destroyed his parents’ marriage? Or had they been doomed from the start?

In any case, he hoped that his relationship with Felicity, for lack of a better word, survived. Seeing her again had been easy, free. They’d picked up right where they left off before. He found it easy to breathe around her, easy to think. When he’d known her before, he hadn’t been quite as scarred, quite as damaged. She knew things about him that no one else did.

Oliver flung his legs over the side of the bed and reached for his jeans. He couldn’t afford to sit around all day and worry about whether or not he had made the right decision. The wheels and machine of the Bratva, of the Dearden family, were already spinning forward, if the texts and alerts on his phone were any indication. Of course, there wouldn’t be an official announcement, not until all parties were satisfied with the negotiations, the pre-nups signed, the living arrangements set. But everyone who was anyone in both organizations would know.

And of course, none of that could happen -- not the negotiations, not any of it, until Oliver went downstairs and faced reality.
When Oliver descended the stairs into the kitchen, he found himself alone with Yuri, a coffeepot, and a plate of danishes in the middle of the kitchen table.

“Sit, eat,” Yuri said gruffly. “Drink my coffee, for soon you will also be walking away with one of the joys of my life, why not take the other?”

Oliver lifted a corner of his mouth. “Feeling dramatic this morning, Yuri?”

Yuri sniffed. “I am Russian. I am always dramatic. Unless I am stoic.”

Oliver chuckled. “That’s true enough, I suppose. Have you seen Felicity this morning?”

“As I understand it, she was on the phone with your mother until late last evening,” Yuri said evenly. “I imagine she will be running late.”

“Felicity…” Oliver shook his head. “Ah, okay, then.”

“She wants the best for you, and always has,” Yuri said, taking a bite of his Danish. “As you want the best for her.”

Oliver poured his coffee into his mug and had a seat across the table from Yuri. “In some ways, I think if that were true, I’d tell her to marry anybody but me.”

“Nonsense. You offer her the opportunity to meet her true potential. And you unite two families that, while allies, have not always seen eye-to-eye. Is smart business decision, and smart personal decision.”

“What are we talking about?” Felicity asked as she came in the kitchen. She was dressed in a bright blue dress and sky-high heels, looking for all the world like she had gotten enough sleep the night before, except for the lack of sparkle in her eyes.
“Nothing,” Oliver said, at the same time Yuri was saying, “Your upcoming marriage, of course.” Ignoring Oliver’s look, Yuri got up and wrapped Felicity in a hug. “Congratulations, my dear.”

“Thanks,” Felicity said, coloring slightly. “I was up last night thinking.”

Oliver’s heart nearly leaped into his throat. This was it. She would say that she’d thought it over, and on second thought, she didn’t really want anything to do with him or his family, and what could he say against that, really?

“Oh?” He managed to choke out.

“I was thinking that we should work as much of the details as we can out between just the two of us, Oliver, before we meet with any of the lawyers, don’t you think?”

Oliver blinked. “Yes, I mean…”

“It’s our marriage. And we can make of it what we want,” Felicity said. “Or what we don’t want, as the case may be.”

“Pfft.” Yuri waved a hand. “This is the talk of foolish children. You cannot plan for every mistake, every little misstep. You cannot put a relationship on paper. It must be lived.”

“And you are a foolish old man,” Felicity said, kissing Yuri’s cheek affectionately. “A foolish romantic old man.”

“There are worse things to be,” Yuri said, patting Felicity on the cheek. “Like old and alone, as I soon will be as you leave me here to the cold Russian winters.”

“Oh yes, because you never go to the States,” Felicity teased. “You just hate it there, don’t you?”

“Miserable place,” Yuri sniffed. “But I suppose I could bear it for the presence of my most beloved niece and her scruffy husband.”
“Hey!”

Felicity giggled and pressed her cheek to Yuri’s once more. “I’m going to steal Oliver, and we’re going to the library before any of your weasels can get at either of us,” she said.

“So it begins,” Yuri said mournfully, “abandoning me to spend time in rooms with the doors locked. Aye, young love.”

Felicity smiled, but Oliver could see in her eyes that she was a little hurt. “Hey, Felicity, go on without me,” Oliver said, smiling. “I’m just going to top off my coffee. I can remember where the library is.”

“All right,” she said slowly, a little suspiciously, as she left the room.

Oliver waited until he could hear her several feet away before he looked at Yuri. “Can you go easy on her, please?”

“Hm?”

“With the love talk, making this sound more romantic than it is.”

“I don’t know, young Mr. Queen, you flew here in the middle of the night to ask for her hand in marriage. Sounds very romantic to me.”

Oliver furrowed his brow. “To save my sister.”

“And yet you could have had anyone,” Yuri said wisely. “Surely there are women in Starling City you and your mother would have found acceptable -- beautiful, smart, capable of running an organization as vast as the Dearden family. But you only think of my Felicity. Why is that?”

Oliver grimaced. “I only thought of Felicity because… she’s… smarter. More capable. More…”
“More beautiful. It is okay to say.” Yuri waved a hand. “I know that she is beautiful. Have since she was a child. It is an objective fact.”

Oliver nodded, a smile twitching at the corners of his mouth. “Okay then, more beautiful. Felicity is the best option I have.”

“And you settle for nothing less than the best.”

“I…”

Yuri nodded. “It is okay. Sometimes, as Felicity would say, you cannot see the ocean for the water. Or something like that. English is tedious.”

“Please. This is going to be hard enough as it is, Yuri.”

The teasing went out of his tone. “Marriage is always hard, Oliver. It is no less hard with someone you love. Or someone you respect.”

“Can you…”

“I will stop. I am only trying to make the two of you see that this does not have to be so solemn. It is a wedding, after all, a marriage, a beautiful thing.”

Oliver could only nod helplessly.

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The walls of the hallway were decorated with old portraits hung in antique frames, and there was a lingering scent of dust and mildew in corners of the house, though the wood gleamed and every
metal surface shined. It was a very well-maintained house, the house of Bratva captain Yuri Smoak, but love and tender care could not hide how old it was. Felicity was familiar with every creaky floorboard and every shifting rafter. Ever since the first time she had come here as a child, she’d felt as though the house in some fundamental way belonged to her, was on her side.

So it didn’t take much to convince Oliver that she’d moved down the hallway. She pressed her ear against the door and listened to his conversation with Yuri for as long as she dared before she took her heels off and darted down the hallway to the library.

She’d chosen this room for the same reason that she’d chosen it the night before. It was where all out-of-town guests and potential clients were sent for the first couple of meetings because there was nothing personal in it. Nothing that could be latched on to, assumptions made about.

In this way, she thought, it was the most neutral ground for her and Oliver to meet and begin to discuss the terms and conditions of their… arrangement. Arrangement sounded better than marriage, although she was going to have to let go of that mental crutch sooner rather than later. Because reality, Felicity knew, was no kind of fickle mistress. Reality was unrelenting and inescapable. And the reality was, she would be married to Oliver Queen.

Oliver Queen, for whom she still needed to unpack her feelings. She’d lied to Diggle, a little, before. Certainly Oliver hadn’t broken her heart -- or not irrevocably so. The saving grace had been knowing that his leaving was coming, she had long ago decided. Otherwise, she might have let herself get attached (moreso than she already had), and those nights when she could practically feel him next to her would be a much more frequent occurrence than they were now.

She never let herself forget that in a previous life, he had been something of a playboy, that he had experience with the type of brief relationship they had indulged in, that he probably didn’t miss her the way that she sometimes missed him.

Then, of course, there was the fact that almost three years had passed -- not very long, if they had been any but the three years she had just endured. The loss of her mother, the solidification of her place in the Bratva hierarchy, it had all come with a cost to her soul. She wasn’t the same barely-twenty-one Felicity Smoak who had slid into bed with Oliver Queen.

She’d had other partners since then. She wasn’t interested in pretending otherwise. Good Bratva boys, as well as men who had no idea what she really did for a living, who she really was under the bright clothes and blonde hair, had no idea what she was capable of.
That would be one advantage to Oliver Queen being her partner in life, she thought, he, more than anyone, knew exactly what she was capable of.

And it wasn’t like they’d gone three years without speaking, without ever seeing each other. Business meetings, sometimes they’d catch each other out of the corner of an eye, a quick handshake, a phone call in the middle of the night.

The door opened with a creak and Oliver stepped inside. “Hey,” he said. “Did you sleep well?”

“I didn’t do much of that,” Felicity said honestly. “And neither did you, by the look on your face.”

Oliver always looked like he was reluctant to smile, but she knew that it was just that he didn’t get much practice. “I think I’m rounding the corner into that area of exhaustion where it’s hard to fall asleep.”

Felicity nodded. She knew it well. Still, she reached for her tablet. “Maybe we can dot a few i’s, cross a few t’s, get that brain of yours to relax.”

“I think that’s asking for a bit much at this point, don’t you?” Oliver asked, humor coloring his tone as he had a seat, not across from her like she was anticipating, but next to her, so that he could easily read over her shoulder. She tried not to stiffen. “Relax,” Oliver said. “I won’t touch if you don’t want me to.”

“Because you know better,” Felicity said, tapping the screen until a legal pad appeared.

“Yes, of course. And because I would never touch a woman if she didn’t want me to.”

Felicity turned to look at him. “I know that, Oliver.”

“Oh, I was just thinking -- we’ve both… done some things in the last few years. I thought you might be worried that I was somehow different than the man you knew.”

Felicity tilted her head. “Are you worried that I’m a different woman than the woman you knew?”
“No.” Oliver let out a quick, huffy laugh. “No, the woman you are now… the woman I knew then was a blueprint for her. The things you’ve done the last three years… I’ve been nothing but proud of you.”

“Keeping tabs on me, Oliver?” She pushed her glasses up her nose and studied him.

He shrugged. “No more than you were keeping tabs on me.” He laid his hand on his knee, palm-up. Felicity laced her fingers between his. “No lies, Felicity. I won’t tell you I was pining away for you. Because it wouldn’t be the truth.”

“No,” Felicity agreed. “Nor I, you.”

“If you want the truth, and I think -- I think maybe you deserve the truth -- the truth is I could have easily fallen in love with you back then.”

“But you didn’t.”

“Not more than half-way.”

“Good,” Felicity said, squeezing his hand. “Because you only half-way broke my heart, too.”

“Felicity.”

“No apologies, Oliver, I knew exactly what I was getting into, and so did you. I don’t regret anything we did. Do you?”

Oliver shook his head. “No.”

“So then. There you go.” Their hands were still entwined. “Our relationship from three years ago, solved.”
Oliver chuckled. “Now I guess we just have to solve our relationship for the next, what… fifty years?”

“Not a tall order at all,” Felicity said, her fingers slowly loosening themselves from Oliver’s grip. He stopped her, though, turning her hand over in his.

“You’re going to need a ring,” he said softly.

“That is the tradition,” Felicity agreed.

“I guess,” Oliver said, self-deprecatingly, “If I had been thinking, I would have come to Russia with one.”

“No,” Felicity said, shaking her head. “If I’m going to be wearing this for the rest of my life, I want some say in what it looks like. After all, I’ll have to look at it all day every day.”

“We could go to the Queen family vault, if you wanted to,” he said, “and you could look through the collection we have there, or we could have one designed for you.”

“I think we have bigger issues to solve than what my ring is going to look like.” Oliver still hadn’t let go of her hand and her heart was beating wildly in her chest and it just wasn’t fair that he could admit that he hadn’t been in love with her the way she had been mostly-in-love with him in one moment and do this to her in the next. It wasn’t the first time that Felicity wished she could turn her emotions off, or at least her reactions to them.

“I know,” Oliver said. “I just… thought we’d start with the little stuff first. But I think, you know. There’s not a ring in my family’s collection that doesn’t come loaded with baggage.”

“Baggage, we already have enough of,” Felicity said firmly.

“Agreed.”
“What’s next?” Felicity asked. “I mean, where do you want to start?”

“Clearly, you’ll be moving back to Starling with me,” Oliver said, “since you can’t very well be the matriarch in Russia.”

“Right.”

“But I thought maybe… if you wanted, we could buy a home here in Moscow. You could have the choice of coming here, if you wanted.”

Felicity glanced at their joined hands. “You know, Oliver, it’s not like I’m making some great sacrifice in marrying you.”

“No, I…” Oliver huffed out a frustrated breath. “No, but it is a sacrifice.”

“But the thought about a home in Moscow is a nice one. We can look into that, after a while. Right after we find a home in Starling City.”

Oliver blinked. “Right. Of course, you wouldn’t want to stay at the manor.”

Felicity smiled tightly. “It’s never a good idea to live with your in-laws, no matter how big the house is, Oliver. We’re going to need our own space. And the very last thing I want is every moment of our relationship scrutinized by Moira Queen.”

Oliver shook his head. “Okay. Moira is going to be… hard to avoid, in general.”

It went on like that for hours -- how would they split their money? What would happen in the event of a divorce? Did they want children together, if so, how many? They talked until their voices were hoarse, Felicity’s fingers flying over the screen as she made notes on their decisions.

Finally, they came to the elephant in the room.
“Sex,” Felicity said finally. “It’s the last thing on my list.”

Oliver’s lips quirked. “Really? Because it’s the first thing on mine.”

“Yes or no?” Felicity asked. “And I’m speaking about with each other, of course.”

“Of course.” Oliver let go of her hand and walked across the room. “It was never this big a deal before.”

“No,” Felicity agreed. “But then, we weren’t thinking of being married before.”

“Honestly?”

“I think that’s your only choice at this point, Oliver,” Felicity said, avoiding how nervous she was by studying the screen in front of her.

“I don’t see how we could be married to each other and not have sex,” Oliver said. “I mean… frequently. Regularly. All the time, even. Everywhere.”

Felicity laughed. “Oliver.”

“It’s a fact,” Oliver said. “I can’t look at you and not want to, so. That’s how I feel about it.”

“Okay.” Felicity nodded. “But if we’re sleeping with each other, we’re not sleeping with anybody else.”

“What we’re talking about sounds suspiciously like a real marriage,” Oliver hedged, sticking his hands back in his pockets.

“Yes,” Felicity said, worrying at her thumb. “It does. Does that… is that too restrictive?”
“My father regularly cheated on my mother.”

Felicity blinked. “Okay. So -- no to monogamy then?”

Oliver shook his head, smiling. “No. I mean -- my father regularly cheated on my mother. When I found out, I could never look at him the same way again. It shook something inside of me. If we’re doing this, and we mean it, then we’re doing it the right way.”

“We can always reevaluate. If you meet someone you really love, then… Or if you have someone already, which I guess should have asked first.”

“Felicity, no.” Oliver’s smile disappeared from his face -- there was a trace of something. Hm. Felicity filed it away. “Maybe you’ll meet someone you really love. I don’t know. But I’m not wired that way anymore.”

Felicity bit her lip. “Okay, then. Monogamy it is. Until we decide otherwise.”

Oliver met her eyes and nodded once. That settled that, apparently.

**

Since her mother had died, Felicity hadn’t spent much time in the States (hardly any at all), preferring to remain in Russia, where she wouldn’t confront memories every time she turned around. If she was being perfectly honest with herself, which was something she was trying to do more often, Felicity would admit that it was easier to be the person she had become on this side of the Atlantic Ocean, to be the person she would need to be in the States, she had to have practice here, where no one knew her before, and no one had any expectations of her, other than she would be what she presented herself to be. Ruthless, cold, brilliant.

Felicity took a handful of dresses on hangers out of her closet, laid them in a garment bag and sealed it, methodically. The complete change in her life, from gothic teenager, to mousy early twenties, to the vibrant hues of her life now, it was all deliberate. She’d chosen these things as carefully as a knight might choose his armor. She’d learned from her mother that clothing, make-up, hair, it was about arming herself against the world. Building up her confidence so no one would dare bring her down.
She quite liked her pretty things, her high-heels, her dresses, her dangly earrings, and so she was packing them herself.

Her door opened without a knock, and Felicity turned to greet her uncle. “Well, hello,” she said, a smile teasing on the corners of her lips. “I thought maybe you still weren’t speaking to me.”

“Perhaps some day I shall be able to draw a breath without feeling the knife you have lodged in my spine,” Yuri said mournfully in Russian. “You go to Starling City and you leave me here alone.”

Felicity laughed, smoothing out a hot pink evening gown with one hand. “Yes, I leave you here alone with all of your comrades and friends, the men you call brothers. I can see how that would be a lonely existence.”

“One without light in it,” Yuri said solemnly. “I will miss the sound of your voice in these hallways, my dear.”

Tears sprang to her eyes. “I will miss you too, uncle. But I know you would not allow such a thing if you didn’t think it was good for me to go.”

“Ah.” Yuri sat on the edge of the bed, watched her careful steps, careful effort to pack her things away just so. “It is true, Oliver Queen would not have gotten through the front door if some part of me did not think this was a good idea.”

Felicity nodded. Of course he wouldn’t admit to having a larger part in what she was sure was a scheme between him and Moira. Yuri often had trouble seeing that she was a fully-grown woman who could tell when she was being manipulated. She let it go, the way she often let things go. “Only some part of you?”

Yuri shrugged. “I know there is more to what happened three years ago than you would admit to me, that you would admit to anyone.”

Felicity felt a flash of anger. First John had implied that Oliver had broken her heart, and now her uncle was making the same insinuations. “You don’t need to worry about me, Uncle.”

“I do not worry about you. I never worry about you, angel. I worry about that boy. He’s going to
need the help of heaven, isn’t he, to put up with you?”

“Ha. Very funny.”

“No, I am not speaking of heartbreak or love. I know, you say you do not feel such things about what happened three years ago. No, I’m speaking of the fact that Oliver Queen saved your life, did he not?”

There was no use denying it. There was no use trying to hide the way that revelation made her feel, how it unsteadied her. “I suppose, if you looked at certain events in a certain way, you might…”

“Felicity.”

“Yes.” She nodded and closed her eyes. “I made a foolish mistake. It would have otherwise got me killed. Oliver… stepped in.”

“This is why I allowed him to go back to Starling City. His mother’s debt was repaid to me when he saved your life, my angel. So if you have accepted his offer because you feel you owe him something, know that you can rescind your acceptance without fear of… retribution.”

Felicity loved her uncle, but she had always known this about him, ever since he’d shown up at their tiny house in Vegas days after her father’s funeral with an offer to save the lives of her mother and herself, or at least, ease up on the burden they would have otherwise felt without her father -- Yuri saw the world on a balance sheet. Checks and balances, credits and debits. You were owed and you owed, you paid and were paid, and in the end, it should all add up to zero.

“I am not used to owing anyone anything,” Felicity said finally. “And I, as you know, am more than capable of taking care of myself.”

“Of course. But we can not be all, see all. No matter how talented we are, or how smart we are, my Felicity.”

“No, of course not.” Felicity smiled briefly. “But I learned something from that… incident.”
“And what is that, my dear?”

“No one else does my dirty work for me anymore.” Felicity said. “I trust no one else to finish what I start. No one but Oliver Queen. You say I need to relax, all the time. That I need to trust someone. This is my choice. I choose to trust Oliver.”

Yuri nodded. “You must trust a business partner. You must trust a life partner even more. I have never found such a person that I could trust. When Davidov found Donna... had you... I was more than pleased, you see, because here was someone I could pass on my legacy to, someone I could train up, to see the world as I see it, to take over some of my burdens when I am gone.”

“So why let me go back to Starling, then?” Felicity asked.

“Because this merger is not just good for me, is good for Bratva as well,” Yuri said. “You know and I know that. But beyond that, I want you to be happy. You have never been happy, here in Russia. You might, perhaps, be more happy in the States.”

“Perhaps,” Felicity allowed.

“You make beautiful mob babies, you find a way to drag the Irish into the twenty-first century kicking and screaming, yes? You enjoy some of the sun off the coast. You smile again, like you used to.”

“Yuri, I…”

“You try. For me.”

Felicity nodded, and watched him leave her room. But privately, she was thinking that she had never been one for smiling while standing in a pool of blood.
The Past is a Candle to the Future

Chapter Summary

Oliver and Felicity prep to move to Starling.

Chapter Notes

I know you're anxious for Tommy Merlyn -- he will appear NEXT chapter. Depending on whether or not I complete Chapter 15 this week, I might post Chapter Four towards the end of the week so that you can finally meet your favorite party boy in this universe.

Moscow, Russia, Three years ago:

He tried not to feel guilty about it, but his every thought was of Felicity. The way she smelled, the way she tasted. The feel of her skin under his hands. He was operating in a constant state of lust, of near-obsession. He hadn’t felt this consumed in years -- not since he and Tommy had first dove into each other’s pants with incredible amounts of enthusiasm, if not skill.

He wished Tommy could see Felicity tonight, in a glittering gold sequin cocktail dress, her legs a mile long. All that pretty skin, all that quick wit -- his friend would be as gone for her as Oliver himself was. But he pushed down the wave of homesickness and concentrated on Felicity.

The gala they were attending was a lush one -- pretty people in evening wear, moving about the Moscow museum exchanging quiet conversations. Tuxedoed waiters and waitresses discreetly carried trays of nibble-able treats and the music was scrupulously appropriate, painfully unoffensive. Oliver privately thought that his mother would be horrified at a display so generic, so… James-Bond-movie upper-class.

They hobnobbed, saying hello to acquaintances of Felicity’s, of her uncle’s. The whole night, Oliver kept his hand on the small of her back. He told himself to behave, that she would very likely invite him to her bed that night, but he couldn’t resist playing, his fingers dipping down as far as he dared one moment, exploring the curves of a shoulder blade the next. After the island, this was the first woman -- first human being he’d let himself touch this way. It was a slippery slope into addiction. He knew he should stop. They were in public. Felicity had a reputation to maintain, relationships to
Felicity shot him a look, and then another, looks that echoed the thoughts he was having. But she didn’t stop him, even leaned into his touch, touched him more than was strictly appropriate. In bed and out of it, she had clever fingers, had memorized the spots that made him shudder. Her thumbs stroked the inside of his palms, fingers played with the fabric of his jacket.

They’d been sleeping together for two weeks. As soon as he earned it, Oliver would be bound for Starling City, his mother’s debt to the Bratva paid, and her son turned into the kind of man she needed him to be. The kind of man who could kill without blinking, the kind of man who specialized in torture, in brutality. He was almost there.

Tick-tock. They could both hear it, the countdown of the clock in the background. It colored everything they did, every decision they made. They wouldn’t have forever -- they were aware enough of their mortality, and he thought maybe they were both worried about the fire underneath of their feet burning out.

Felicity was drinking red wine, and as the night grew older, her smile came quicker, her laugh was louder, and her hands were bolder. She charmed the people around them in Russian and in English. Oliver loved it, loved watching her, loved her gentle teasing tone. He particularly loved it when she took his hand, and gave it one good tug, leading him away from the crowded room down another corridor.

“I used to come here all the time as a kid,” Felicity said in a conspiratorial whisper. “I know every nook and cranny of this place, every little hidey-hole. Which is awesome, when your date looks as good in a tux as you do.”

Oliver couldn’t hold back the chuckle, or the gasp, as she ran a confident hand over the fly of his pants. “I think I mentioned before that you’re incredible in that dress,” he said, as she fiddled with a lock, jimmying it until it popped loose.

She pushed open the door, which led to a room of modern art next to renaissance paintings next to unwieldy sculpture, the oddest hodgepodge collection of fine art Oliver had ever seen. He turned a questioning look to Felicity.

“It’s a storage room,” Felicity said. “And it locks from the inside.” She turned the lock and leaned back against the door. “We can do… whatever we want.”
Oliver couldn’t breathe. For one full minute it was like his lungs were underwater. But then he was crossing the room, lifting her up against the door. He had his hands full of Felicity Smoak, his mouth on hers. Every time they were together it was like this -- fast and breathless, tinged with urgency, like they could feel a fire under their hands, under their fingers. He lifted her hands above her head, crossed at the wrists.

“Shhh,” Felicity let out on a breath, “not so loud.”

“I’ve never been good at being quiet,” Oliver said, grinning cockily. He had two fingers on her clit, panties shoved aside, before she could even blink, and a spot behind her ear he was kissing. “And it should be noted, I’m not the one who can’t stop saying ‘please’.”

“Ugh, you’re a fucking tease. You know what I want,” Felicity said through ground teeth. “Just… do it.”

He dropped to his knees and parted her, his tongue going to work, maneuvering around the silk of the panties he would soon convince her to drop completely. This was his favorite part, to be honest, aside from the more obvious thrill of his orgasm. There was nothing like single-minded, determined, brilliant, Felicity Smoak falling apart under his attentions.

Her hands were in his hair, pulling, but not yanking. The sounds she made were indescribable, perfect. The way she tasted made him ache. All he could think about was making her come, here, in a less-well-used-room in a Moscow museum, with a party swirling outside the door. He slid a finger inside of her, laughing at the way she hissed the word “fuck”, because that was exactly what he planned to do to her.

If he’d been anyone else, he wouldn’t have been able to stop. He would have been lost in the moment, lost in her. As it was, it took him too long to realize that something was wrong. A sound -- something in the air. There was someone else in the room with them. He looked up at Felicity and winked, letting her dress fall back down. “What do you say? Want to go back to our hotel room and finish this later?”

It wasn’t his voice, not really. It was the voice of a man -- a boy, he hadn’t been in a long time. A voice he hadn’t used with her, and brilliant, perfect Felicity knew immediately what that meant.

“I don’t know if I can wait that long,” she said on an exaggerated pout. “Ollie, baby, please.”
Oliver tried to fight the wince at Felicity’s attempt to play at the expected socialite role. He almost succeeded. Felicity took his hand and squeezed it, her eyes still shining with arousal. And something else. Amusement? Perhaps. She liked to play games.

“Let’s go,” Oliver said, his hand on Felicity’s back, but his eyes moving everywhere, ready for the threat, whichever direction it would come. It was a good thing, too, because he saw the man coming for them much sooner than he would have otherwise.

It was a quick and dirty scuffle. The training he’d received had taught him many things -- namely, to fight as rough and tumble as possible, and take down his enemy with as few hits as possible. Oliver got through several punches and was about to deal a blow that would have knocked his attacker unconscious when the unmistakable sound of a gunshot rang through the room.

Felicity’s hand didn’t even tremor as she wiped down the weapon and laid it next to the man. Her aim had been impeccable.

Oliver didn’t blink. “We’ll have to move quickly. No way that gunshot wasn’t heard.”

“Of course.” Felicity stepped over the man and extended her hand to Oliver. “He had a knife, you know. Otherwise I wouldn’t have stepped in.”

Oliver nodded. “I thought as much. And I appreciate the help.”

“His name is Dominic. And I gave the order for him to be killed days ago,” Felicity said, through gritted teeth as they made their way silently down the hallway, looking for the most crowded room they could find. They had been seen at the party -- Felicity Smoak was a recognizable Moscow society person and Oliver’s looks weren’t exactly forgettable -- and they couldn’t just sneak away. The next best bet was hiding in a crowd, of being noticeably somewhere other than where the shooting had taken place.

“Someone didn’t follow orders, clearly.” Oliver laid his arm around her shoulder and she curled into him as they passed another couple moving in the hallway, their voices pitched so softly that no one could hear them but the other.

“Clearly.” Felicity’s face set into a smile that was not any kind of pleasant. “That will have to be
dealt with. Thank you, by the way."

Oliver shrugged. “Just doing my job.”

Felicity laughed. “And you were doing it so well before we were interrupted.”

“Hey. Now. That you don’t pay me for. If you do -- then you are not paying me nearly enough,” Oliver teased, kissing the side of her neck, just to watch her flush. “Based on my results.”

“You’re full of it,” Felicity said, as they slipped into a crowded room where there were a few more-than-slightly inebriated people dancing and swaying to the strains of easy jazz coming from a trio of competent musicians in the corner. “Dance with me?” Felicity asked, as she took a glass of champagne.

“I don’t dance, you know that,” Oliver said, taking the glass from her and allowing himself a sip. Blood was still singing through his veins and his hands shook with adrenaline.

“You don’t want us to look suspicious,” Felicity said.

Oliver smirked, thought of Tommy. What he would have said. “Felicity, the only kind of dancing I want to do with you is the horizontal tango.”

Felicity threw her head back and laughed, a touch too loud and brassy for this particular crowd. Oliver found that, instead of being embarrassed, he very much wanted to kiss her right then, in the kind of way that would lead to them returning to another secluded room to finish what they started. But they were in the wrong kind of crowd, and probably didn’t want to advertise their relationship to the upper crust of Moscow society. “I can’t believe you actually said that to me,” Felicity managed.

A scream ripped through the air and the party stilled, almost universally. Felicity and Oliver exchanged glances. The man had been discovered. Play time was over.

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*Moscow, Russia, present day*
Her new ring, sized and gorgeous, sat on her finger, her belongings were packed and ready to be shipped across the Atlantic, and Felicity Smoak was fully prepared to become Oliver Queen’s fiancee in the eyes of the rest of the world. She sat in her chair at her desk for the last time, looking out of the window towards the street. Yuri had offered her a room facing the garden, once, but she’d always liked this one. When she was young, she would stand and, with the curtains moved to the side, wrapped around her like a cocoon, she would stare out, watching the people of Moscow.

Her view of that street was the very first thing she’d liked about Russia, in the beginning, when she’d been scared and overwhelmed, forced to learn a new language as quickly as she could, instructions coming at her so fast that, for the first time in her life, she had found herself struggling to keep up. It was going to be hard to leave it, she decided.

The first time she’d killed a man, she had come here, she remembered. She’d come here, and stood, and watched all the people still alive move and talk and breathe. She remembered thinking that it hadn’t been the end of the world, that it had been her-or-him, that she made the right choice. The ethical one.

That conversation got easier over time. She never quite grew numb to the weight of it, but she had accepted that this is what she had been trained for, since adolescence. The world of the Bratva turned on harsh decisions made in the middle of night, and Felicity would much rather be the one calling the shots than being the foot soldier, never knowing the reasons behind what they were doing.

She’d been there. She’d spent the least amount of time she could, and worked her way up. Her position as Yuri’s niece had offered her connections, a leg up. Her uncle’s careful guidance meant that she was taken seriously -- more seriously than others. By the time she was twenty-two, she’d been in charge of the Bratva’s new, aggressive interest in digital crime.

And that was when she had met Oliver Queen, infamous playboy and heir to the Queen family fortune, if not the Dearden family, come to Russia by way of China to learn how to be a killer. When Yuri assigned him to her as muscle and protection she’d been a little insulted. Then she’d looked at him. And been grateful. She didn’t need the protection but Oliver Queen was so far from hard to look at it wasn’t even funny, he’d spent four years already becoming one of the world’s most feared assassins, a man whose reputation among the Bratva was… awe-inspiring.

But something had clicked between them then. Like a match on a gas stove.

There was a soft, professional knock, and then her door creaked open. “Just a few more minutes, John,” Felicity said, without turning around. “I’ll be ready to leave then.”
“Not John,” Oliver said.

“Ah.” Felicity turned, lifted the corners of her mouth in a semblance of a smile. “I thought, because of the knock…”

“Old habits,” Oliver said, shrugging. “This place hasn’t changed much.”

“No,” Felicity agreed. “I don’t really have a lot of time for interior decorating.”

“I liked this room,” Oliver said, running his hand over a shelf that had once held knickknacks and odds and ends from her travels, now all carefully packed away.

“Me too,” Felicity said, rocking back and forth on her desk chair. She grinned at him. “A few good memories in here.”

Oliver grinned, something of the playboy he used to be pulling at the corners of his eyes. “The fear that your uncle might kill me if we got caught was always worth it.”

“Oh, Yuri knew.” Felicity smirked. “Nothing happens in this house that Yuri doesn’t know about. Which, now that I say that out loud, that’s a little creepy. I’m just saying if he wanted to kill you over it, you would have been dead the first time you looked at me sideways. Which he wouldn’t. Because he knows better.”

Oliver sat on her bed, which was now only covered in purple sheets, the quilt her bubbe had made for her also packed away in a crate to be moved, once again, across the ocean. “It’s been a crazy few days,” he said, after a beat.


She’d spent the last few days packing her life into boxes, sorting keep and throw-away piles, and shopping for an engagement band. She’d wanted simple; Oliver had wanted big, but classy. They’d settled on something that made them both happy, a solitaire diamond on a platinum band. Friends, Yuri’s and her own, kept stopping by the house to congratulate her, and gape at the ring.
Then there were endless meetings with lawyers, both sides in a rush to defend the resources at stake in a marriage between the heir to a Bratva Captain and the heir to the Dearden-Queen fortune. Oliver and Felicity had sat across the table from each other and listened with varying degrees of attention as their assets were debated, divided, sequestered and sheltered. Felicity had, of course, taken notes, and after a sharp observation of Oliver, she noted that he was voice recording the sessions for his records.

It seemed like a never-ending parade of things that had to be done, on top of the business that she was wrapping up here, setting her desired lieutenants in place, final instructions to be handed out.

“I don’t want you to think I’ve lied to you,” Oliver said finally, after a long exhale, “Starling’s rough.”

Felicity smiled. “I don’t think you realize this, but fighting your way to the top of the Bratva hierarchy isn’t easy, either.”

“No, I mean...” Oliver sighed. “Here, it’s different, you know? You’re not playing the game all the time. You come here, to this room, you close the door, you take off your shoes... you don’t have to be on all of the time. Yuri knows, he watches, but he doesn’t have your room bugged. Your room will be bugged in Starling, I guarantee it. You’ll be watched every minute of every day.”

“It’s okay, Oliver. You’ve told me these things before. We’ll figure out a way to deal with it.”

Oliver nodded. “I just want you to know.”

“Hey.” Felicity crossed the room, took his hand in hers. “You know -- the last time you asked for my help, I got you home to your sister inside of two weeks, remember?”

Oliver chuckled. “I don’t see how I could forget.”

“This -- this will be a little more complex, but we can do the things you want to do, Oliver, if we decide to do them together.” Felicity smiled. “So, we’ll have a few months -- maybe a year, of discomfort. Then we’ll have the rest of our lives to live freely. And no one will be watched.”

“We have to watch out for my mother,” Oliver said, leaning his head against her chest.
Felicity laid her other hand on the back of his neck. “I never keep anything less than two wide-open eyes on Moira Queen at any given moment. Nothing personal.”

“No, that’s smart.” Oliver sighed. “She agreed to all of this too easily.”

“Yes,” Felicity said, drawing the word out. “She did.”

“There are lieutenants that aren’t going to be happy,” Oliver said. “I think any number of them were hoping Moira would turn things over to Thea. She has a reputation for being a much softer person than she actually is. You know, I came to Moira and I asked her to give the family business to me, and I knew she wouldn’t say yes.”

Felicity scratched the back of his neck, and bent to kiss the top of his head. “Traditions matter to your mother.”

“I knew she wouldn’t give it to me, and there wasn’t any part of me that wanted it, because I knew -- even when I was climbing the steps to her office, I knew what I was going to suggest. I knew it was going to be your name. I was hoping you would say yes. Felicity Smoak, I don’t just want you to marry me. I want you to help me save my city.”

Felicity stilled. “What do you mean?”

“I think we have an opportunity here to cure Starling of its mob problem. Moira and Malcolm’s allegiance is tenuous at the best of times, and it’s the only thing keeping the Triad off the streets of the Glades. Moira’s taking meetings with Malcolm she won’t talk about.” Oliver shook his head and finally lifted it to look at Felicity. “Something big is happening and it can’t be anything good. Moira wanting to talk to Thea about passing on the family business -- that was the last straw. I knew something had to be going on.”

“So you got on a plane and you flew all night to come see me in Russia,” Felicity said, her lips curving into a smile. “To ask a Bratva princess to help you take down the mob.”

“What happened three years ago -- I knew I could trust you like no one else. I knew that you didn’t want this life -- you didn’t choose it the way I didn’t choose it. And I missed you. I missed…” Oliver gestured between them. “This.”
“Oh, Oliver.” Felicity straddled his hips, laid her head on his shoulder. “You’re risking a lot, you know, on the strength of your opinion of me.”

“If you choose not to help me, I’m dead anyway. If you choose to help me, we might still die. Or we might come out of this alive,” Oliver said. “Alive and free.”

Felicity breathed. “Wouldn’t that be something.”

“Yes,” Oliver said.

Felicity stroked his ear, kissed his cheek. “We have two hours until we go to Starling.” Oliver’s eyes widened. “You can’t talk me out of it now. Clearly you desperately need my help.”

“Clearly.” Oliver chuckled. “We have a whole two hours where we don’t have to think about this. Is that what you’re saying?” Oliver dropped his hands to her waist, his eyes locked on her lips.

“Yes.” Felicity pushed him back on the bed. Oliver didn’t resist, pulling her with him until they were laying side by side on the bed, hands and fingers interlocked. “I’m saying we have two hours until we leave Russia and this is the very last night I will spend in my bedroom that I’ve had since I was twelve years old.” She kissed him then, and he kissed her back, sweet as any kiss they had ever shared. “Stay with me while I say good-bye?”

“No place I would rather be.”

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Somehow, her eyes had drifted shut, and when she opened them up again, she found herself laying with her head on the same pillow as Oliver. His eyes were closed, but she could tell he wasn’t really asleep -- he was half-aware, ready to snap awake at the least provocation. She remembered that from their days together -- that he found sleep elusive at best, painful and disturbed at the worst. Even in this state, however, she knew she had to be careful with him. She didn’t touch him -- if she did, he would likely hurt her before she could do anything to stop it. Instead, she gently said his name.
“Oliver?”

One of his eyes opened, and she wasn’t able to stop the smile that crept across her face. “I missed your grumpy face in the morning. It’s almost time to go.”

“Almost time?” Oliver asked, reaching for her. She settled in, her lips gently touching his neck.

“Hm, we have a few minutes,” Felicity said.

“Good.” Oliver rolled her over onto her back, touched her lips with his. “I’ve been wanting to do this.”

They took their time. It wasn’t that the heat that had been the hallmark of their interactions before had died away. It was still there, underneath their skin, banked somehow by the knowledge that they would have more time, another chance to do this again. This could be savored. By some mutual agreement they hadn’t discussed, they teased themselves, light touches and quick tongues, hands brushing.

“Do you remember the first time we fucked in this bed?” Oliver asked her as he slowly lifted the hem of her dress.

“It would be a little hard to forget,” Felicity said, laughing as his fingers brushed the inside of her thigh. “You know that tickles.”

“Hm, I remember,” Oliver said, grinning.

“You could take my dress off, you know,” Felicity said.

“This was always your problem. Patience. Good things come if you wait.”

“Yeah well, I would come a lot sooner if you wouldn’t wait. You know, to get me naked. Or you
could get naked. Either of those things would be good.” Oliver didn’t respond, he just slid his thumb underneath her panties, brushing lightly against her clit. Felicity hissed in anticipation and spread her legs. “Oliver, I think you’ll remember slow and steady isn’t one of my strong suits.”

Oliver chuckled, the sound low and rumbly against her chest. “It’s not one of mine, either, but…”

“But?”

“This might sound cheesy.”

Felicity threw her head back and laughed. “Oliver, it wouldn’t be the first time you said something cheesy to me in bed.”

He ducked his head so that Felicity couldn’t see his eyes. “I missed you. I thought about this a lot, and I thought, if I ever got a chance again, you know, I’d do it differently.” Slowly he slid her panties down her legs, wrapped his hand around her thigh, kissed her ear. “I thought I’d take the time and do all the things that I wanted to do back then.”

Felicity’s breath caught in her chest. “Oliver, I…”

“You know, I tasted you, but did I memorize you?” Oliver asked, his voice dipping even lower. “I forgot all the sounds you make, the way you say my name.”

Felicity closed her eyes against the rush of emotion. It wasn’t supposed to start this way. They were both dancing too close to the fire. “Oliver, you can’t…”

He paused in his slow, careful exploration of the skin of her upper thigh with his hands, the persuasion of his tongue against her ear in just the way that had driven her crazy back then, and there was something in his eyes, like he was waiting for her to break his heart and she couldn’t bring herself to do it, couldn’t bring herself to tell him he wasn’t allowed to be honest here, to be hopeful here.

Oh, they were going to get burned, and it was because Felicity Smoak lacked the spine of steel it would have taken to say no to Oliver Queen when he looked as delicious as he did, when he touched her the way he did. When this all blew up, it was going to be her fault.
“You can’t say those things to me when you still have your pants on,” Felicity decided, and she rolled over and flung her legs over top of him, spreading her legs so she could straddle his waist, and slowly pulled the dress over the top of her head. “It’s just not fair.”

Oliver grinned at her like she was a present on Christmas morning. “You are beautiful.” His hands slid up her legs, cupped her ass, the one he’d never quite been able to keep his eyes off of, his hands off of. “Baby, you are… just…”

Felicity bent, her hair falling in a curtain around her face. She kissed him, and they were patient with each other for several long moments, until Oliver bucked his hips and sat up, his hands in her hair. They breathed in great, gasping breaths, mouths never closing.

“Let me see, let me see,” Felicity found herself chanting, as she lifted Oliver’s shirt over his head.

“Felicity, wait…”

But she didn’t. She remembered this, remembered his hesitation about it, the first time they’d done this. He wore the map of his life on his chest and his back. She could trace the scars that had made him into the man he was with her hands, ask the story behind the tattoos on his body.

Except the ones she knew. Bratva, brotherhood, near his heart. A Celtic cross up his right side -- the Dearden family mark. Teardrops on his arms, the men he’d killed for her.

Some new scars on his abdomen, and she hissed in sympathy. An angry, fresh one on his left side. “Oliver, what happened?”

“An enemy of the family took a run at me,” Oliver said, his eyes flat. “It was a pretty good run.”

“He’s dead,” Felicity said flatly. “Isn’t he?”

Oliver shrugged. “I’m not, so… it follows that he is.”
Felicity’s rage didn’t die down as easily as Oliver’s cavalier manner would have her calm down. “Where was your mother, that someone got this close to you?”

“Felicity, you know how my family works. I’m a foot soldier, not an heir -- keeping me safe isn’t exactly the number one priority. There’s exactly one person who watches my back, other than me, and he wasn’t around. And I am perfectly capable of taking care of myself.”

“I don’t like it,” Felicity said. “Oliver, this looks nearly lethal.”

“It was,” Oliver said. “Why do you think I came to get you? It’s become… excruciatingly clear that I need you in every way, Felicity.”

She ran her fingernails down his side, the uninjured side, caressed his jaw. “Oliver,” Felicity said, “I know you want to take this slow but I’m afraid I must insist that you fuck me now.”

Oliver rolled over and shucked his pants in one easy motion. “You were right. We were never very good at slow.”

**

She left Oliver to gather her things into the cab as he had offered to do, and went down the hallway to her uncle’s study. A light poured through the crack in the door, and she could hear the scratching of his pen on paper. He respected her love for technology but did not share it, frustrating her endlessly with his need to have everything in hard copy, his distrust of the internet.

She knocked twice, softly, and then pushed the door open. He would know it was her, and in all likelihood, was waiting for her, though they hadn’t discussed it. She couldn’t leave Russia without saying good-bye, and he couldn’t afford to have an emotional good-bye in front of his men, who would be escorting her to the airstrip where the Queen’s private jet was waiting to take her to Starling City.

“Just a moment, dear,” Yuri said gruffly, without looking up from his desk. Felicity nodded, and walked around Yuri’s study one last time. Of course, she would come back. But she would never live here again, never feel comfortable enough to come in this room when Yuri wasn’t here, and steal one of his many books, written in a language she may or may not understand. He’d painted the room a dark green after reading in one of his magazines that green was supposed to be a soothing color,
and the dark wood of the bookshelves was mostly hidden by his immense collection of book and knick-knacks. Yuri had a fondness for American baseball, and a number of collectibles were displayed next to his hide-bound copies of Tolstoy works.

This was the room she’d allowed herself to grieve in after her mother’s death had forced her to make Russia her permanent home. She’d curled up on the far end of one of the brown leather couches and sobbed, and Yuri had collected her into his arms and soothed her there.

For weeks after that, she’d fallen asleep in this room, arms wrapped around her favorite worn bear named Radar, because her mother had grown up with M*A*S*H playing constantly in the background and hadn’t been able to let the reference go. She’d come to this room to wait, after she’d killed her first man (letter opener, through the heart, no other choice), to give Yuri her full report.

That’s when she’d learned about the secret stash of vodka in the third drawer of his desk, the really good stuff he never shared with anyone.

Except her.

And she was leaving it all behind. It had always been the plan to go back to America, at least for Felicity, before she’d gotten so far into the family business she couldn’t turn back. She’d made peace with the fact that she would live most of her life in Russia with Yuri.

She couldn’t turn down an opportunity like this, though. As much as this place had become her home, and it was hard to say good-bye, especially to leave Moscow for a place like Starling City, she didn’t doubt for a single moment that she was making the right choice.

“So, you leave shortly, yes?” Yuri said, interrupting her train of thought as he laid his phone on the desk.

“Just a few minutes,” Felicity said.

“I have called Anatoly, in Starling City,” Yuri said, “he knows you are arriving, the deal we have made with the Deardens. If you need anything, you call. You are still a princess of the Bratva, a captain in your own right.”
“Of course,” Felicity said. “I can handle myself, though. The Deardens won’t take me seriously if I come running to Papa everytime someone hurts my feelings.”

Yuri waved a hand. “No, no. For emergencies only. It is understood. And I will fly to Starling for the wedding, and before if you need me.”

“Good. I don’t think Oliver and I are going to want to waste much time, so I will see you soon.” Felicity fiddled with the hem of her dress, shifting her weight.

Yuri grinned at her and winked lasciviously. “Of course. You are a beautiful woman, he is a beautiful man. It must be very difficult to keep your hands off of each other. A quick wedding is best in these situations.”

“Whether or not we can keep our pants zipped has nothing to do with this particular decision, Uncle,” Felicity said gently. “It has more to do with Oliver’s preference to secure my place in the family as soon as possible.”

“Right, of course. I forget. This is a business arrangement.”

“Yes.” Felicity nodded firmly. “It’s a business arrangement. Nothing more, nothing less, Uncle Yuri.”

Yuri pursed his lips. “Of course not. Why would I think otherwise?”

“No, Uncle Yuri.” Felicity shook her head. “Let’s not even go there, okay?”

“Pretending you have no heart to break will not save you from the pain,” Yuri said softly. “It is not to be avoided, in this life.”

Felicity nodded, looking away from him. “But I can pretend for a while, can’t I?”

“Perhaps,” Yuri said. “Come, we say good-bye, but not really, because I will see you soon, yes?”
“Yes.” Felicity said, and she wrapped her arms around her uncle, who held her tight without words for several long moments. When they parted, Felicity wiped tears away from her eyes.

A soft knock at the door, and Oliver stuck his head inside the room. “I’m sorry, but we really have to go, Felicity.”

She nodded. “I’m ready.”

**

The Queen family jet sailed through the night sky, away from Russia and towards the western coast of the United States. Felicity wasn’t afraid of much of anything, Oliver knew, but she detested flying, so she had taken a few pills and had settled into one of the cushy chairs, reclining back as far as she could once they were given the go-ahead. Her eyes were closed and she was descending into sleep quickly.

She’d been running herself ragged. But then, she’d done that back when he’d first known her. Some things hadn’t changed. Not the way she’d looked at him, not the way she’d tasted. Not the way she felt. It all meant that this situation could get sticky, fast.

But they both knew that. They’d danced close to the fire the first time and they had managed to escape unscathed. They were older now, wiser. More callous to the ways of the world. It was possible they could both handle it. They would have to -- the kind of game they were going to have to play in Starling, neither of them could afford to have their wits dulled by love.

That was, after all, the reason why he’d gone to Felicity over women in Starling with whom his mother might have agreed just as readily -- Helena Bertinelli, for example, was beautiful, deadly, callous, and smart, but she had nothing on Felicity Smoak. Felicity Smoak who loved computers and whose brain was the most efficient example of one he’d ever seen. He needed her help.

John Diggle unbuckled his seatbelt and stood, rebuttoning his suit jacket as he did so. Felicity had called him a bodyguard, once -- and the man was scrupulously professional, painfully so, actually. Oliver watched him out of the corner of his eye. He hadn’t been too enthusiastic about the prospect of taking the man with them back to Starling City, but Felicity had asked for so little that he hadn’t fought her on it. Besides which, Felicity trusted Diggle, which meant there was no reason for Oliver not to, other than he didn’t trust easily, and that was sort of a learned response to any number of
stimuli. Like his mother deliberately sabotaging his yacht and sending him to a deserted island to be trained by a madman. Among other things.

“You know, it’s going to be a long flight,” Diggle said, as he poured himself a glass of water from the sidebar. “It’s going to be longer if you watch me the whole time. I’m boring.”

“Nothing personal,” Oliver said with a smile that was almost believable. “Job hazard. Where’d you earn your stripes? You’re a military man, I’d bet money on it.”

“You’d win that bet. I did my time in the Rangers, tours in Afghanistan, one in Iraq.”

“How’d you end up working for the Bratva?”

John smirked. “I don’t know, man, how’d you end up killing people for the mob in Starling?”

Oliver snorted, amused. “Fair enough. Neither one of those stories is very happy, I’d wager. Certainly not something you’d tell some asshole on a plane who doesn’t know how to keep his fucking mouth shut, right?”

Diggle raised his eyebrows. “Right. So now we’ve got a situation, Oliver. Just what are we going to talk about on this miserable flight?”

“I don’t know,” Felicity said, irritably opening one eye, “but at this point I would urge you both to whip them out and get a measuring tape or find some middle ground because I am planning to use the precious few hours this Xanax will affect me to get some sleep, so have this discussion somewhere else or pipe down.” She sighed. “You know. Please.”

Oliver laughed. “I’m sure John and I can figure out something to do.”

“Call me Diggle, please,” the man said. “And I have a deck of cards, if you’d like to play a few rounds of poker, Mr. Queen.”

“Oliver is just fine.” Oliver crossed the plane and sat across from John, rolling one of the available
tables between them. “What do you say? Five card stud? Texas Hold ‘Em?”

Diggle shuffled the cards with the expertise of a Vegas dealer, or a soldier who had spent years in tents playing cards when there was nothing else to do, and quickly dealt a round of Texas Hold ‘Em.

Largely, they didn’t speak, except to ante up or pass the blind. Although the bar was fully-stocked, neither of them partook of any alcohol, and they passed the next hour or so that way, playing for pretzels and peanuts.

“I wouldn’t think you’d be that good of a poker player, Mr. Queen,” Diggle said at length. “I figured you for an easier read than you are.’

“That perception helps in my line of work,” Oliver said.

“I can see how that would be useful,” Diggle said. “Kind of a messy character trait to have in a relationship, though, isn’t it?”

Oliver stilled. “I thought we weren’t sharing personal stories on this flight.”

“Just making an observation,” Diggle said. “Just noticing things.”

“You don’t think much of me at all, do you?”

“On the contrary, sir, I have a very high regard for how perceptive you are.”

Oliver laughed, throwing his head back against the chair rest. “No wonder Felicity thinks the world of you.”

“It’s mutual,” Diggle said darkly. “And I want you to know that the reason I am on this plane to Starling is that I am not fully convinced that your heart, such as it is, is in the right spot.”
“Good,” Oliver said, leaning forward, his elbows on the table. “That’s what I want.”

“And why is that?”

“I looked you up,” Oliver said, getting to his feet. This time when he walked over to the wet bar, he did pour a shot of vodka. He shook the bottle questioningly at Diggle, who nodded his head. Oliver poured two shots and carried them back over to the table. “I would have known the soldier thing without your record, of course. Everything about your bearing says military man. But you strike me as a loyal person. You grew up in the Glades, you join the Army, your kid brother follows you, you both get out…”

“I know my life story. Sir.”

“Yeah, you do. And so you know, when I, Oliver Queen, spoiled playboy and the darling of the Starling City news media, when I tell you that our city is corrupt, it stinks down to the very foundation it was built on, you’re bound to be very unsurprised.”

“Goes without saying. I suppose I should be grateful someone in your… position… noticed it.”

“No,” Oliver said. “Not what I’m after at all.”

“Oh? So what do you want then, Oliver? Because the way I see it, you come to Russia in the middle of the night, you drop a marriage proposal on my friend, you tell her you need her help… and she picks up everything she has and follows you across the world. I guess I’m just wondering why she would do something like that for you.”

“Beats the hell out of me. Felicity is a far better person than I will ever be, and genuinely likes helping her friends. But you’d know that, wouldn’t you, Mr. Diggle?” The man shrugged, so Oliver pressed on. “I can’t save my city from what’s rotting it without Felicity, and I can’t save my sister without her. I can’t say for certain why Felicity is choosing to help me. Just that I’m glad she is.”

“Sounds like a hell of a windmill, Quixote.” Diggle shook his head. “Starling’s been rotten since long before you or I walked the Earth.”

Oliver nodded. “So now you know why I needed Felicity. If you’re going to be fighting ancient
demons, you need the best by your side. And Felicity is the best.”

“Agreed,” John said. “But I want to be clear here, my priority, always and forever, is going to be Felicity.”

“Good. Keep her safe. She deserves someone who focuses on her well-being.”

Diggle coughed. “You’re about to be her husband, Oliver, isn’t that supposed to be your job?”

“I don’t know that I’m going to have the luxury of being a very good one,” Oliver admitted.

John grit his teeth. “You might want to rethink whether you think that’s an option or not, or I’ll have to rethink letting you get off of this plane alive.”

“I promise I’ll be doing my best, every single minute of every single day.”

John nodded, stiffly. “Let’s hope that’s adequate.”
Chapter Summary

Oliver and Felicity arrive in Starling and meet the rest of the players.

Chapter Notes

I couldn't resist posting this one a bit early. I hope you guys don't mind. I couldn't hold back Tommy Merlyn anymore!

Moisture hung in the air in Starling City, like it’s wasn’t quite certain what to do -- there wasn’t quite enough of it to be called rain, but there was enough of it to be noticed, and it was this in-between state and the red haze of light pollution in the distance that were Felicity’s first impression of her new home, made a little fuzzy by the fact that Oliver had to shake her awake just a few minutes before they landed.

She gathered her things and took a quick sip of water from the bottle on the mini-bar before she closed the shade on her window. The hatch opened, and Diggle descended first, followed by Oliver, down a steep set of stairs that had been wheeled up to the plane from the tarmac.

Felicity paused as she reached the center of the stairway, looking out across the landscape. From here, there was a vast expanse of green to the west, and an urban skyline to the east. They didn’t fly into the large airport at Starling City International, instead, they’d landed at a private airstrip some distance outside the city.

She tried to imagine, tried to think back -- had it smelled this way when she left? Had she noticed the things she noticed now? Probably not. She’d been young, then, and grieving the loss of her mother. She hadn’t thought that she was leaving America permanently, not the way that it had turned out to be. She’d had plans -- she’d wanted to go to MIT, to spend her life studying computers and… Well. Some things weren’t meant to be.

“Felicity?” Oliver asked, as soon as he reached the bottom and noticed that Felicity wasn’t right behind him.
“Sorry,” Felicity said, shaking her head as if to clear it of cobwebs. “I got caught-- thinking. Taking a moment to look around.”

“Yeah,” Oliver said, and a piercing siren split the air, the distinctive sound of emergency vehicles rushing down a highway. “Taking in the beautiful Starling City vistas, huh. Such as they are.”

“Land of milk, honey, and opportunity,” Felicity said brightly, determinedly. She took Oliver’s hand as she reached the bottom of the stairs, thinking he would help her step down and let go, but he didn’t, lacing their fingers together. He smiled ruefully at her, as if to say ‘okay then’ and Felicity ducked her head in response.

Then she remembered their plan, the one they had discussed to death in the wee hours of a Russian morning not so long ago: present a united front from the start. Oliver’s concern, and hers, too, was that this would look too much like what it actually was for the members of the Dearden family to accept her as the matriarch: an alliance for political gain, easily broken. And so… they planned to lie.

Well, not lie. Just… stretch a version of the truth. To its breaking point. As far as anyone in the Dearden family was to know, Felicity and Oliver had been madly in love for the past several years, pining for each other across the ocean. It was … a touch too sentimental for Felicity’s taste, and she wondered at her ability to pull it off, but it was their best hope at getting Felicity into position in the family without causing a turf war.

Oliver gestured to a beautiful black Lincoln towncar with a uniformed driver standing in front of it, his arms crossed over his chest, head down, a hat covering most of his face. “That’s our car. The driver will see to our luggage.”

“I can carry my own bag,” Diggle said from behind Felicity.

“I’d prefer you keep one hand on your gun and both eyes open,” Oliver said evenly as they strode toward the car. “I don’t have many friends in Starling, and after the news gets out about my engagement to Felicity, I will have fewer.”

The driver lifted his head and Felicity was struck by what a beautiful man he was. He had sharp features, and a quick, wide smile that lit the moment he saw them. She quite liked the crook of his nose and the amusement in his eyes. “Oh, I don’t know about that, Oliver,” he said. “You’ve got at least one.”
“Tommy Merlyn,” Oliver said, grinning from ear to ear and expanding his arms, only a hint of surprise in his voice. The two men embraced with heavy slaps on the back. “You idiot.”

“Had you fooled, though. Couldn’t just sit around and wait to be introduced to your lovely bride,” Tommy said, extending his hand to Felicity. “I’m Tommy Merlyn, and I have the unfortunate distinction of being Oliver’s best friend.”

“Kiss my ass,” Oliver muttered under his breath, but he hadn’t stopped smiling.

Felicity took his hand, ignoring Oliver, and beamed at Tommy. “Felicity Smoak.”

“Oh, I know who you are, and the pictures on his phone from three years ago don’t do you justice. You had him twisted around pretty good when he got back from Russia.” His tone was mild, and Felicity didn’t get the feeling she sometimes got from Yuri’s men when they made a comment on her appearance. She thought she could settle quite nicely into liking Tommy, if she could learn to take a compliment without blushing.

“Uh… thank you, I think.”

Oliver cleared his throat, fiercely red. “Okay, all right, let’s not…”

“You see,” Tommy said, throwing his arm over Felicity’s shoulders and drawing her close. He tossed the keys at Oliver. “Drive us home, good man. Felicity and I have much to discuss. Starting with how to handle you. You see, it all becomes easier once you realize that Oliver likes very much to play stoic and unaffected, but inside he’s really a marshmallow. He’s a grumpy, disillusioned marshmallow.”

Felicity chuckled. “You’re saying all I need is a roasting stick and a campfire and he’ll be putty in my hands?”

“Something like that,” Tommy said, gesturing to Diggle, who was standing back from the group, his hands crossed over his chest. “I heard you brought a friend, who is this?”
“John Diggle,” the man said, his mouth lifting in a close-mouthed smile as he extended his hand to shake Tommy’s. “Nice to meet you.”

“Nice to meet you too. You’re walking into a hell of a hornet’s nest, you know.”

Diggle shrugged. “I’ve been warned. Besides, I grew up here. I know what Starling’s like.”

“Well, I feel like I’ve got a lot to catch up on,” Felicity said brightly, “and not a lot of time of time to do so before I’m thrown in the deep end.”

Tommy shot Oliver a look full of meaning that Felicity couldn’t quite decipher yet, but tossed a chuckle Felicity’s way. “You know, Oliver said you were crazy smart, and so far he is exactly right.”

“Let’s get off this tarmac,” Oliver suggested, as one of the airport employees finished loading their luggage into the town car trunk. “I’m not comfortable standing around in an open space.”

Felicity noticed the way that Tommy and Diggle didn’t blink at that, and filed away that information in the back of her mind. Apparently Oliver’s paranoia was at least somewhat justified. Diggle opened the door for her, and she slid in the back seat. Tommy and Oliver took the front two seats, and soon they were zooming away from the airport and back towards the center of town.

Starling City was nothing like Moscow, and yet somehow inherently the same. Urban architecture made certain demands of its space, Felicity thought, and so of course there were high-rise buildings and mountains of glass in the business district, and well-to-do neighborhoods with well-appointed parks, slums and and bad neighborhoods, blinking billboards and stores with bars over the windows. Everything seemed grayer, somehow, in the unrelenting mist that stretched over everything.

“So I did what you asked,” Tommy said, his arm thrown over the back of Oliver’s seat so he could look at Felicity. “I got you guys a temporary living space, away from Moira.”

Felicity smiled. “You did?”

“Yeah.” Oliver coughed. “I put Tommy on that. Which I probably should have mentioned before now. It’s just… he likes real estate.”
“I do. And nothing’s binding, just yet,” Tommy said, “so if you don’t like it, you’re more than welcome to look at other places, but I was under the impression that Not Being Queen Manor was of the utmost importance.”

Felicity smiled. “I’m sure every little girl dreams of living with their mother-in-law.”

“Not when their mother-in-law is Moira Queen,” Tommy says flippantly. “Believe me, Oliver and I understand.”

“Oh you do, do you?” Felicity asked, charmed by Tommy’s easy inclusion.

“Tommy practically grew up with me,” Oliver said. “He was over at our house everyday. We fought like brothers and raised hell.”

“Right up until we didn’t,” Tommy said, with a grin that belied the seriousness of his words. “But that’s a sucky story, and I don’t believe in telling sucky stories so early in an acquaintance.”

There was a moment of silence as Starling City flew by the window. Then Felicity caught sight of a restaurant chain she hadn’t realized that she’d missed.

“Oh, Big Belly Burger,” Felicity said, laying her hand on the window as they passed the restaurant. “I haven’t had a proper fast food American hamburger in… oh, it feels like ages.”

“You are marrying a woman of taste and discrimination,” Tommy said, very seriously. “Let’s stop and get the woman a hamburger.”

“Sounds like a great idea,” Oliver said. He pulled over onto a side street and got out of the car, waving Diggle and Tommy off so that he could take Felicity’s hand as she exited. “Your cheeseburger awaits, Miss Smoak.”

They stepped into the dimly lit and kitschily-decorated restaurant and Felicity took in a deep breath. It smelled familiar to her -- cooking beef, hot grease, the faintly-chemical taste of cheap American cheese somehow lingering in the air. It felt like home. She’d been over to the States since her
mother’s death, of course, briefly, but not on the kind of business trips that would allow her to come some place like this.

If she hadn’t spent so much time with Oliver Queen, she wouldn’t have believed that he frequented some place like this, either, with plastic never-changing menus and paper napkins. The booths were vinyl-covered with duct tape over the holes in the material, the kind of place she might have visited with her mother back in Vegas, before they moved to Starling in an attempt to escape her father’s business connections.

“This is perfect,” Felicity breathed. “Exactly what I wanted.”

“Welcome home, Felicity,” Oliver whispered in her ear and a thrill went through her.

She broke into a wide grin, unable to help herself. She reached up and patted Oliver’s cheek. “What do you think? Booth in the back?”

“You know me so well.”

Felicity, familiar with Oliver’s particular preferences in seating, took a seat on the bench facing the door and to the inside, so that Oliver could watch the entrances and exits, and get out of the booth quickly, if he needed to. Oliver slid in behind Felicity and laid his arm against the back of the bench, his arm curving around so that his hand rested gently on Felicity’s right shoulder.

Tommy watched this all with knowing eyes, and deferred to Mr. Diggle’s preference to sit on the outside as he slipped inside the bench, as well. Oliver raised his eyebrow at Tommy, who nodded.

Lots of conversations, Felicity decided, happened between Tommy and Oliver when neither one of them were speaking. They must have known each other for a long time. Best friend didn’t quite fit this relationship, Felicity thought. No, these two could only be brothers, or something more. Part of the family he’d been so eager to get back to, years ago -- the brother he thought would take care of his sister in his absence.

She laid her hand on Oliver’s thigh and turned to Tommy, ignoring the way Oliver’s mouth curved in a knowing smile, the way his tongue traced across his lip. Oliver was all too aware of how attractive he was, from time to time. It interfered with her ability to think.
“So, Tommy,” Felicity said brightly. “Why don’t you fill Oliver and me in on how things have been while Oliver was in Russia?”

Tommy blinked. Oliver chuckled and rubbed the back of his neck.

“Well, I, uh… as you know…” Tommy laughed. “How much did you tell her?” He asked Oliver.

“Not everything,” Oliver admitted. “Felicity’s good at filling in the blanks, and there just wasn’t much time. I just gave her a big picture viewpoint.”

A uniformed teenaged waitress came by to take their order. Felicity took pity on her when the overwhelming attractiveness of her companions caught the girl’s tongue and briskly gave her a drink order, while Diggle, Tommy and Oliver followed suit. With a promise that she would be right back, the girl left, and Tommy reached for one of the coasters to fiddle with it.

“Well, as you know, uh, Thea wasn’t too happy about you going to Russia,” Tommy said, shrugging his shoulders. “She gets uneasy when he leaves the continent,” he explained to Felicity. “It’s a hold over from…”

“Of course,” Felicity said, nodding her head. “I would be nervous, too, in that position.”

More quickly than they were anticipating, their waitress was back, and drinks were distributed. Tommy’s predictably fussy hamburger order took the most time, and by the end of it, Oliver was rolling his eyes and Diggle snorted his amusement.

“What?” Tommy asked.

“Nothing. Just -- you couldn’t be more of a one-percenter if you tried, could you?” Oliver asked, amusement coloring his voice.

Tommy shrugged. “I am what I am.”

Felicity squeezed Oliver’s thigh. “So -- Thea’s been nervous. What else?”
“Moira took two meetings this week. One with Malcolm and one with Bratva higher-ups from the Starling branch,” Tommy said, his voice dropping nearly to a whisper. “If I had to guess, these were friendly business meetings letting them know which direction the Dearden family was moving in.”

Oliver’s eyes narrowed. “Malcolm can’t have been happy.”

Tommy shrugged. “It’s hard to tell with dear old Dad,” he drawled. “Predictability was never one of his strong suits. But I can’t imagine that this plays well into his plans, no.”

Oliver shifted, moving his hand to the scar on his side. Felicity’s eyes flew from his hand to Tommy’s eyes and back.

“What sort of plans would those be?”

“For… various reasons,” Tommy said, flipping the coaster his drink was supposed to be resting on over and over in his hands, “It would be advantageous for Malcolm if Thea were the head of the Dearden family.”

“Malcolm being your father,” Felicity said flatly.

Tommy tapped the coaster on the table loudly. “Using that term incredibly loosely, from a scientific perspective only. Yes. The man donated the sperm necessary to bring me into the world. Robert Queen was more of a father to me than Malcolm ever was.”

“Why would it be better for Malcolm if Thea were in charge?” There was a long moment of silence. “I want to help, boys, but I can’t help unless I have all the information, so. Spill.”

“Sorry.” Tommy sighed and rubbed the back of his neck, the way Felicity had seen Oliver do a thousand times before. “We’re just not used to -- saying certain things out loud, I guess.”

“Take your time,” John Diggle said, “but be honest. Felicity deserves at least that much.”
“It would be good for Malcolm if Thea were the head of the Dearden family because he’s Thea’s biological father, as well,” Oliver said, gritting the words out. “And Malcolm is convinced that he can use that to manipulate her into doing whatever he wants.”

“To be honest, that danger won’t entirely pass once it’s official that Felicity takes over,” Tommy said, reaching now for a packet of sugar. “It would be just like my father to make some sort of ploy, to try and convince her that what she really wants is the matriarchy. And then, once he has her where he needs her -- things in Starling become even more interesting. Moira’s not a nice lady. She’s a stone cold bitch, frankly, but she’s not totally evil. Malcolm is.”

“Okay,” Felicity said evenly. “So Moira took a meeting with the totally evil Malcolm, and probably pissed him off. But presumably he was already pissed off.”

“Oh?” Tommy asked.

“It can’t have been that long ago that he almost killed Oliver,” Felicity said, taking a long sip of her soda while Oliver stilled next to her.

“Oliver,” Tommy’s voice dropped to a dangerous level. “What is she talking about?”

“I suspect. I think. I don’t know. I --” Oliver sighed. “I’ve only gone hand to hand a few times with your dad, but…”

“You told me the guy was wearing a mask.”

“He was. That’s why I didn’t know for sure.”

Tommy took a deep breath. Felicity could practically see him counting to ten in his head. “Okay. Oliver, buddy…”

“I didn’t want you to… I don’t know.” Oliver shrugged. “Does it really matter?”

“Of course it…” Tommy looked at Diggle. “Excuse me. I need to go take a quick walk around the
“Sure, man, of course.” Diggle smoothly stepped out of the way and let Tommy storm out. “I’m just going to excuse myself to the little boy’s room for a minute,” he said, once Felicity shot him a look.

“Oliver,” she scolded gently. “Why would you keep something like that from him?”

“I knew he’d take it personally,” Oliver said. “And I don’t. It doesn’t particularly hurt my feelings that Malcolm thinks his life would be easier if I was out of the way. And I don’t want Tommy -- he gets mad, and he goes and -- it was safer, because I wasn’t sure, if I was the only one who knew --” Oliver sighed. “I thought it would be safer. How’d you figure it out?”

“Don’t play poker with me, ever,” Felicity said lightly. “You were playing with your wound the whole time we were talking about Merlyn. You hardly ever bother your scars. I put two and two together.”

Oliver huffed out a breath. “Now he’s going to take the fact that I didn’t tell him personally. I just…”

“Go apologize.” Felicity tapped his thigh with her fingers. “Use your big boy words. Tell him you were trying to do the right thing and you fucked it up. Throw a few punches if that’s what you need to do. But go get your friend back. We need him.”

Oliver nodded and stalked off. Felicity took a moment, alone in the booth, to look around. Then, realizing she hadn’t let Uncle Yuri know she’d landed, she reached for her phone and tapped out a quick message letting him know the flight had gone well and she had landed and was eating her first real hamburger in forever. She crossed one leg over the other and answered a few e-mails.

“Well,” John said, sliding into the bench across from her. “That was very tidy of you.”

“What do you mean?”

“You’re a very observant person,” Diggle said. “You knew exactly what was going on there long before either one of those boys did.”
“Hm.” Felicity swiped across her screen, sending another e-mail to the trash folder. Dasha would just have to figure it out without her.

“Nothing that happened just now happened in a way you didn’t want it to, did it?”

Felicity shrugged. “Honestly? No. They needed to know, both of them. Oliver needed to admit it to himself, and Tommy needed all the information. Oliver has a bad habit of… hm, parceling out information as he sees fit. That won’t work now.”

“Are those boys going to take kindly to being manipulated, though?”

Felicity raised her eyebrows. She hadn’t necessarily thought about it that way. “Perhaps not, given their long history with Moira Queen.” She sighed. “Observation is my strong suit. People skills are… sometimes not.”

“Well, you’re not working with lackeys now,” Diggle said. “You’re telling me you want to marry this guy, be on his team, well, then, you’d better treat him like a teammate, just like you want him to treat you that way.”

“Very Golden Rule of you, Diggle,” Felicity said, smiling.

“Everything I needed to know they taught me in kindergarten. Or so they say,” Diggle said lightly. “Oh, good, here comes our food.”

Tommy and Oliver strode back in, arm and arm, relationship apparently repaired, and returned to their seats, though Felicity could see that there was still a little strain in Tommy’s eyes.

“Are you okay?” Felicity asked Oliver. “I’m sorry, I didn’t realize… no, that’s a lie. I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have pushed.”

Oliver nodded. “We can talk about it later. I think we’re all… tired and hungry, yeah?”

“Yes,” Felicity said, digging into her fries hungrily.
Tommy’s phone chimed impatiently and he picked it up, swiped through the lock screen and sighed. “That’s Moira, Oliver. She wants to know if you and Felicity are staying the night at the Manor.”

“Well, we don’t have more permanent arrangements set up, do we?” Felicity asked. “I suppose, if we’re welcome, and Oliver’s comfortable…”

“It would probably help endear you to Thea, as well,” Tommy said. “She’s been a little skeptical of this whole get-Oliver-married idea from the beginning, and you are going to need her support for this to work.”

Oliver let out a frustrated growl. “ Doesn’t she understand that this is the only way…”

“She’s eighteen, Oliver,” Tommy said gently. “Just… keep that in mind.”

“She can understand it and be conflicted,” Felicity said. “I know I would be nervous, if I had a brother, about him marrying someone I’d never met, particularly given the reason why he’d be getting married in this particular scenario.”

“I think it’s very likely that the two of you will like each other,” Tommy said brightly. “I’ve got a good vibe about it.”

Oliver groaned. “Tommy.”

“No, really, Oliver. I’ve got a good feeling. Thea… she always seems to like the ones you really like, you know what I mean?” Tommy shrugged. “She’ll get how much you like Felicity. It’ll be obvious.”

Felicity, in spite of herself, blushed.

**
Diggle took over the driving for the final leg of the trip. Felicity found herself sitting in the back with Tommy, her head lolling on the headrest behind her, trying not to let the steady rhythm of the car over the road put her to sleep. Queen Manor, unlike the properties that Tommy assured them he would show them, set itself above and just outside of Starling City. Following Oliver’s directions, Diggle weaved his way out of the city and through a wooded park before he turned off a private drive and climbed up a hill to arrive at a stately manor.

New World wealth, her Uncle Yuri would have said with quiet disdain, but Felicity had no such thoughts. The sheer size of the house overwhelmed her, though she managed not to show it. There were far more bedrooms in a house this size than there were people who had ever occupied it at one time, and more bathrooms still. The grounds were manicured, and fastidiously kept, whereas in Moscow they’d not had room for anything quite so ornate.

Once again, Oliver got out of the car and ran around to open hers.

“Am I going to get this treatment every day?” Felicity asked under her breath.

Oliver nodded. “It’s what they will expect.”

Felicity drew in a shuddering breath. “Well, okay then. I’ll just have to do my best to let that not get stifling.”

“We can start to make a few changes later, but...”

“No, of course, not in the beginning.” Felicity smiled up at him. “I understand.”

A streak shot out from the front door, which banged open. Felicity nearly jumped before she realized what was happening -- which was that Oliver soon had his arms full of very excited teengaer. “Ollie!”

“Speedy!” Oliver returned easily. “Did you miss me?”

“Nah, it was quiet around here for once,” Thea said.
“Now that is a blatant lie,” Tommy said, extending one of his arms for a hug, as well. “No such thing as a quiet evening at Queen Manor.”

“A sadly true observation,” Thea said, nodding her head solemnly. “I hear you brought back a souvenir from Russia, Ollie.” She turned to smirk at Felicity, who tilted her head to the side.

“He brought back a partner,” Felicity said, brushing off Oliver’s offense. “Hi, I’m Felicity Smoak. You must be the Thea I’ve heard so much about.”

“I am,” Thea said, and the two of them shook hands. “You’ll have to forgive me, but you seem to know a lot about me, but I don’t know much about you.”

Felicity shrugged. “That’s easily solved. Oliver and I will be staying here for a few days, at your mother’s request.”

Thea scoffed. “Already trying to butter up the mother-in-law?”

“No,” Felicity said lightly. “Just trying to be polite.”

Thea dropped her head and Oliver cleared his throat. “We’re both pretty jet-lagged,” he said. “I think we’ll take our things up to my bedroom. Thea, would you and Tommy show Mr. Diggle to the family wing of the house? I let Mom know he was coming, she would have gotten something ready for him.”

“Mr. Diggle?” Thea’s eyes flew to Tommy’s. “In the family wing?”

Tommy stuck his hands in his pockets and cleared his throat. “Felicity will want him close.”

“He’s a friend of mine,” Felicity interjected, smiling brightly. “He’s here to help me ease back into life in the States. I’ve been in Russia a long time.”

“I see,” Thea said, her eyes narrowing. “Well then, Mr. Diggle, why don’t you come with me?”
Oliver took Felicity’s hand and led her inside the family home for the first time. It was, as on the outside, overwhelmingly gorgeous, with natural wood everywhere she looked. Expensive, well-appointed art hung in tasteful spots throughout the house, and there was a large staircase off to one side. Oliver gestured that they were heading up the stairs, which Felicity figured would be the case.

Her hand in Oliver’s, Felicity let herself be guided up the stairs and down a hallway. They took a sharp left towards the back of the house and opened a door that blended in seamlessly with the wooden walls around it. The house smelled old, the same way the house in Moscow had. Felicity found it soothing, familiar.

Perhaps she would be able to sleep here tonight, although she often found it impossible to do so in new places.

Oliver pushed open the door of his bedroom and let Felicity precede him inside it. It was larger than most apartments in Moscow were, and larger than Felicity’s quarters there, too. The room was sectioned off, basically, into living quarters. A bedroom off to the left, a desk and a sitting area in the center of the room, and an ensuite bathroom off to the right.

There wasn’t much of Oliver in the space, Felicity noticed. Not many pictures or knick-knacks, it was ruthlessly impersonal and professionally decorated. “You don’t spend much time here, do you?” She took off her coat and tossed it aside on one of the couches, collapsing on it to remove her shoes and take the elastic out of her hair.

Oliver shrugged. He put his hands in his back pockets. “I try to avoid it, when I can. I have… other places. It’s ah… I tell them that it’s hard to stay here, after Dad died. They seem to be okay with that.”

“They, meaning Moira and Thea?”

Oliver sighed and lifted his eyebrows. “Yeah.”

“You…” Felicity tilted her head to the side. “You are oddly tense. Is there anything else you’re not telling me?”

“Honestly, Felicity? There’s… a lot. I told you coming here would be complicated.” Oliver flopped
down on the couch next to her. He looked over at the clock above the mantle in his room. “We have a few hours before we’ll be expected downstairs at dinner.”

Felicity laid her arm over his and cupped his bicep gently. “Did your… I mean…” Felicity sighed. “Does your mother know you’re home?”

“You’re wondering why she didn’t come down to greet us,” Oliver said, covering her hand with his own. “

“You’re a smart one, Oliver Queen,” Felicity said. She played gently with his hair, since she’d noticed that seemed to soothe him.

“She knows we’re home, most likely, but she wouldn’t want to greet you in a setting like that. You know Moira -- she wants to meet you on her turf, when you’re already off-step. She wants to take your full measure.”

“Well, if I’m to have my measure taken,” Felicity said, her voice low and teasing, “I should probably use a couple of those hours to get some sleep. Will you join me?”

Oliver squeezed her hand. “I don’t know if I could sleep, but… I will stay here, keep you company.”

Felicity’s eyes scanned his face. “Okay.” She smiled. “Good.”

**

The knock at the door alerted her to someone’s presence, and Moira lifted her head from the documents she was studying. “Come,” she said in a confident voice. The door opened and Raisa, the woman who had been keeping house for her for years, stepped inside.

“Miss Thea wanted me to let you know that Mr. Oliver has returned with Ms. Felicity,” Raisa said, everything in her manner efficient, and a touch cold. Raisa didn’t approve of Oliver rushing into marriage to save his sister, and had her own ways, unobtrusive as they were, of expressing that displeasure. Moira tolerated from her what she would tolerate from very few people, because of the friendship they had shared for so many years, the trust Moira had placed in Raisa in allowing her to help raise Oliver and Thea.
“What do you think of Ms. Felicity?” Moira asked, setting the papers down and removing the reading glasses from her face.

“I have yet to meet her. Mr. Oliver told Ms. Thea they were exhausted from their trip. They went straight to his room.”

Moira nodded. “Ah, young love,” she drawled.

Raisa clucked her tongue worriedly.

“We are safe here,” Moira said, sweeping her arm to encompass the entire office. “I can say what I really think without fear of… repercussions.”

“It’s a good thing, this Miss Felicity does to come and help Miss Thea,” Raisa said.

“Not entirely selfless,” Moira pointed out. “There’s a great deal of power and money that comes from being my heir.”

“And a great deal of pain, and danger,” Raisa countered.

“Mm,” Moira said. “Yes, well, I will have my chance to see them together this afternoon, and we will see then if this… deception is something my son is capable of pulling off.”

“He wouldn’t be the first person in this family to choose to marry politically,” Raisa said. “Now, Mrs. Queen, I do believe I will make Mr. Oliver stroganoff for his welcome-home dinner.”

“Yes, of course. You are excused,” Moira said, and turned back to her work, effectively ignoring the other woman before she’d left. Her phone chimed with a message, and she sighed at the inconvenience of modern living. There was nothing quite worse than being unable to be believably unreachable, she had decided recently.
Examining the message, she nearly cursed under breath, but instead she rose from her desk and opened the door. “Brian?”

A man wearing a suit at the end of the hallway turned and came towards her. He’d been a foot soldier of the Dearden clan since his sixteenth birthday, like his father before him. Moira had a fondness for him -- he still had freckles, bless, but she needed to know whether or not he had the stomach to carry out the difficult assignments that would likely come his way. “Mrs. Queen.”

“Step inside my office. My son will be indisposed on family business this evening, and so I must give this task to you.”

“Of course, Mrs. Queen.”

“There’s a cop that needs some straightening out.” Moira raised her eyebrows. “Feeling squeamish?”

“No, ma’am,” Brian said.

“Good. This cop isn’t listening to reason. He’s got a brand new partner, and we fear her sense of idealism may be interfering with an old business relationship. His name is Henry Davidson. You visit with him, you get him to look the other way on the permits, and if he still refuses…”

“Be persuasive, Mrs. Queen?”

“To the best of your abilities, Brian.”

“Yes, ma’am.” Brian started to exit her office, then turned. “May I ask a question, Mrs. Queen?”

Moira raised her eyebrow. She’d known this boy since he was toddling around in diapers. It was hard not to get attached to someone like that, to grant a little leeway. “You may. No guarantees I will answer it.”

“There’s a rumor going around that Mr. Queen came back today with a blonde Russian bride.”
“Hm,” Moira said, her lips stretching in almost-a-smile. “That’s already going around, huh?”

“Did he do it? Ollie doesn’t seem like the type to pull the trigger, ma’am.”

Moira chuckled. “No, he doesn’t, does he? Well, he’s not married to her. Not yet. Her name is Felicity Smoak.”

“Russian Bratva Felicity Smoak?” Brian sounded shocked.

“Indeed.” Moira rolled her eyes. “It appears they’ve been in love for years, ever since Oliver went over there to apprentice, you’ll remember.”

“Right, yeah, of course.” Brian cleared his throat, a series of questions clearly still on his tongue, but something on Moira’s face must have advised him that he was done, so he nodded his head. “Well, thanks, ma’am, I’ll… I’ll report back to you and let you know how it goes.”

Moira nodded. “Bring me some good news, dear. I can always use some good news.”

The door shut, again, and Moira was alone in her office. She tapped out a quick message to Malcolm -- it will be taken care of -- and closed her eyes. It was a dangerous game she was playing, but then the more sedate kind had never really been her speed.

Her wedding ring caught in the light, and sparkled briefly. By the end of their marriage, Moira had been loathe to come up with anything positive to say about Robert Queen, but now she could say without question that the man had, at the very least, excellent taste in jewellery. If not a very well-developed sense of self-preservation.

Well, that union had given her Oliver, and she would always be grateful for that. In many ways, he reminded her of a brother she’d lost much too soon, Jonas, who had been fierce, and loving, and protecting. Jonas would have stepped in front of a bullet for her the way Oliver was trying to step in the way of Thea’s inheritance.

She wasn’t convinced. Wasn’t convinced that handing the family over to someone outside of it was
the right way to go. Who else would feel her sense of obligation to the men who worked for her, the women who worked for her? Who else would feel the weight of centuries press down on their shoulders.

Not for the first time, she thought that it ought to be Thea. The heir that she had given up so much for. Risked her marriage for, her life for. The universe had given her Thea, as a way to apologize, Moira often thought, for not giving her what she needed sooner.

Oh, Robert had been thrilled that their first-born was a boy, with that sort of typical patriarchal bullshit pride that tethered manhood to the ability to father sons. Moira tried not to take it personally, all of the conversations she’d had with God, late at night, laying in her husband’s arms while they tried to conceive, the pleading she’d done.

And she’d ended up with Oliver. Whom she loved. There was no doubt in her mind, she loved him. He was just… not a daughter. Not what she needed.

And when his father’s influence had become too much, when she’d seen what he was becoming, well -- she had no need for another Robert Queen. Overly attached to the Merlyn boy, uninterested in doing his duty. Constantly underfoot, constantly in her way, and indisposed, drunk and indolent and unable to be useful -- she had to make a decision then.

Starling City wasn’t making Oliver into the kind of man she needed him to be. It was time to send him away. Far away. Lian Yu had presented itself as the perfect opportunity. Lian Yu, and Yao Fei, and the possibilities they represented had been too much to turn down. Send out her spoiled, entitled son. Get back a weapon in perfect working order.

An easy enough sacrifice to make.
Chapter Summary

Felicity and Oliver make their Starling City debut at a Dearden family dinner party, and not everyone is excited about the engagement.

Chapter Notes

Deepest thanks to the Google Docs five for all of their help! I'm so excited for you guys to get to read this chapter! Thank you for taking the time to read and review!

Tommy knocked and then waited outside of Oliver's door, his hands in his pockets, rocking back and forth on his heels. After a long moment, the door opened to a half-naked Oliver Queen with a towel wrapped around his waist. Tommy tilted his head to the side, his eyes sweeping up and down. “That’s a good look, buddy.”

Oliver shook his head and chuckled. “Felicity finally fell asleep and I don’t want to wake her up. What’s going on?”

“Your mother’s farming out your responsibilities for the evening to Brian,” Tommy said softly. “He’s on his way to talk to Henry Davidson.”

“The cop? What’s he done to piss Moira off?” Oliver asked.

“Seems he’s had a change of heart,” Tommy said evenly. “I just thought I’d keep you apprised of the situation, in case something else goes down. You know how Brian gets.”

Oliver snorted. “You mean he’s so even-headed and well-mannered? Yeah.” Oliver rolled his eyes. “I hope he’s ready to handle it.”
Tommy cleared his throat, gestured to the bedroom door. “So. I’m just curious. Sleeping with her already? I mean… I don’t want to go there, because it seems obvious, but you weren’t lying, she is smoking hot.”

Oliver lifted his mouth in a reluctant smile. “Hah. Very funny, Tommy.”

“I feel like if you got it, you’d be laughing more. Because her last name is Smoak. And I said she’s smoking.”

Oliver snorted. “No, I got it, it’s just that your sense of humor is awful.”

Tommy grinned. “Well, someone has to have one around here, and it’s definitely not your strong suit.”

“Ouch, thanks, buddy,” Oliver said, rolling his eyes. “You came up here just to tell me that?”

“No,” Tommy said. “I also came to tell you that Moira has the house crawling with her people tonight.”

“We had a feeling she would.” Oliver sighed. “It’s just not what we hoped for.”

“No, but Felicity seems like she’s got a good head on her shoulders. She knows it’s game time. Do you?”

“I have from the beginning,” Oliver said.

The bedsheets rustled, and Oliver pulled back the door enough that Tommy could see Felicity, wrapped in one of Oliver’s old t-shirts, climb out of bed, showing an expanse of leg that would have made any straight man weep. Tommy pressed his lips together and thought really hard about not whistling.

“Hi Tommy,” Felicity said, stretching her arms over her head. The shirt danced up, up… “I wasn’t expecting to see you before tonight.” She crossed the room and wrapped her arms around Oliver’s
middle, laying her head on his shoulder like it belonged there. “What’s happening?”

“I uh… I just came to give Oliver an, uh… update.” Tommy closed his eyes. Jesus. “There’s one more thing, Oliver.”

“More good news, I hope,” Oliver said with a smirk.

“Neutral, maybe? I hope?” Tommy sighed. “Moira’s invited Laurel tonight. She just pulled up to the house.”

Oliver stiffened, and Felicity pulled slightly away from him. “I’m sensing that there’s something I should know here.”

“I’ll let Oliver take that one. I just couldn’t let you walk in there unprepared, man,” Tommy said. Oliver’s hand clenched in a fist and then relaxed, and Tommy had a brief, unpleasant memory of that fist hitting his face over Laurel Lance. Thank God that had been back before Oliver had really learned to throw a punch. “So. There’s that. Dinner’s in an hour. I’ll see you guys then?”

“Yeah,” Oliver said, his eyes scanning Tommy’s face, looking to read him. “As long as you’re okay.”

Tommy grimaced before he could stop himself, but convinced himself to work his mouth back to a convincing smile. “Why wouldn’t I be okay?”

“I can talk to Moir… Mom,” Oliver caught himself. “Talk to her about all of this… match-making, if you want. Remind her how badly that all ended.”

Tommy preferred not to think about how it had ended, for the most part. It had taken weeks for his relationship with Oliver to recover, and his relationship with Laurel never had. “It’s fine, for the moment,” Tommy said. “I haven’t seen Laurel in a while, so…. who knows? Maybe this will actually be pleasant. I’ve got a good --”

“Don’t say it, Jesus, Tommy --”
“-- vibe about this. It’s all going to be fine.”

“Ugh,” Oliver said, rolling his eyes to the sky. “We haven’t had a pleasant interaction with Laurel Lance since…”

Tommy cleared his throat. The last pleasant interaction they had with Laurel involved a bottle of Jack Daniels, some molly, and increasingly lowered inhibitions that had ended… well. Exceedingly well. Naked well. But maybe that wasn’t something they wanted to share with Felicity right away. “Anyway. You’re probably going to need an hour to explain why this can all go hideously wrong, so… I’m off.”

“See you. And thanks, Tommy,” Felicity said, her polished smile slowly falling off her face, even as the door closed in Tommy’s face.

He buttoned his blazer and turned to leave the family corridor. He walked at a quick clip, at least until he came to Thea’s open door. She had music blaring and was dancing around to an unforgiving beat, her arms whirling over her head. Her head swung wildly back and forth, not quite on the beat.

Something turned in his gut. Not again.

“Hey, Speedy,” he yelled over the din of the music. “What’s going on?”

Thea ignored him, although their eyes caught for a second, and he knew that she had seen him.

“Come on, Thea, this isn’t cool.”

She started to laugh, bending over at the waist. Tommy weighed his options, sighed, and stepped inside her room. He knew right where she kept the remote to her docking system, and killed the music immediately.

“Oh, Tommy, come on,” Thea whined, her pupils too wide and her voice too loud. “Such a great song. Didn’t it make you want to dance?”
Tommy lifted the corners of his mouth. “You know me. I don’t have anything against dancing, kid.”

“Blech.”

“What?” Tommy nearly laughed. “Did I say something wrong?”

“When do I graduate from ‘kid’ to real girl, huh?” Thea asked, rubbing her arms as she leaned in closer to him, a hint of mischief in her voice. “Cause the law says… I’m a real girl now.”

“The law didn’t teach you how to swim,” Tommy said, and before he could stop himself, he added, “and as soon as you stop popping pills every time you feel a little bit stressed, I’ll stop calling you kid, cause that’s how children react to things.”

Thea’s face dropped. “Tommy…”

“Don’t lie to me. You can’t lie to me, actually, because everything you do to get away with this shit, I perfected ten years ago, and you’re lucky Oliver didn’t catch you.”

Thea snorted with laughter. “Oliver doesn’t care. I could jump out the window and he wouldn’t notice.”

Tommy sighed. This conversation was one they had regularly, ever since Oliver had been sent away the first time. Thea had been young then -- far too young to understand, and since Tommy really hadn’t got a good grasp on it, either, he couldn’t help her in a way that would actually be useful, and it never failed to leave him feeling as though he were treading water in a tumultuous sea.

“Brothers who don’t care don’t do what he’s doing for you right now,” Tommy said gently. “He’d slice off his right arm if you needed him to -- and what’s more, you know that. You’re upset about something. Want to be honest and tell me what that really is?”

The mask of youthful bravado fell. “I just feel so… yucky about everything,” Thea said, and she sat, with a huff, on the sofa in her room. “I didn’t want things to go this way.”
“Thea…”

“He’s going to be miserable for the rest of his life, and for what?”

“First of all,” Tommy said, sitting next to her and patting her foot affectionately, “I really doubt he’s going to be miserable. Did you get a look at Felicity? Whew. Plus, I talked to her and she’s got brains to match her ass…ets.”

“Stay classy, Merlyn,” Thea said, rolling her eyes.

Tommy grinned. “I do my best.”

“Besides, if Oliver was miserable, he’d find his way out of it.”

“No.” Thea shook her head, sounding sad, and much younger than she was. Tommy sighed. “No, he wouldn’t. My brother is the self-sacrificing type. He’d stay miserable for years if he thought it was the right thing to do. I guess I didn’t…. think about what I was really asking him to do. I didn’t think this is what he would come up with.”

“Hey, your brother decided a long time ago that he didn’t want you in this life,” Tommy said gently. “You asking for his help just… pushed things along a little bit faster, is all. You gotta trust Oliver that this is something he wants to do for you, that it’s something he needs to do for you.”

“And what am I supposed to do then, huh? Play nice with his Russian-mob mail order bride? Pretend that I’m all excited to gain a sister or some cheesy shit like that?”

Tommy shrugged. “Might be a good idea. Your feeling guilty isn’t Felicity’s fault. She came over here to help out an old friend. She certainly didn’t have to. You owe her the courtesy of a shot, at least.”

“This is all stupid, anyway. Mom should just… give the family to Oliver. That’s what she brainwashed him for, isn’t it? He’d probably be good at it.”
“Hey, now,” Tommy said. “Thea…”

“He’s not the same,” Thea said stubbornly. “I know you think he is, but he’s not. And I know he’s trying to be a good brother, but it’s like he’s not even here and…”

“Of course he’s not the same.” Tommy had had this conversation with Thea in a thousand different ways since Oliver had returned. Sometimes Thea was sober, sometimes she was not. Sometimes Tommy was sober, sometimes he was not. “You’re not the same person he was when he left, either. He had to get used to the fact that you weren’t a little girl anymore, the same way you’re going to have to get used to the fact that he’s just doing the best he can with what he’s got.”

“My brother never would have killed anybody before she sent him away,” Thea said. “And now, I think he does it all the time. He doesn’t tell me, but I think he does.”

“Your brother and I, we do what we have to do to keep you safe,” Tommy said. “Sometimes that means we’ve got to hurt people, for the sake of the family. For the sake of the organization.”

Thea rolled her eyes. “That’s not keeping me safe, that’s keeping your butts alive.”

“Think about it, Thea, if we’re dead, what happens? Moira hands the family to you, and if you think what she did to Oliver was harsh, you have no idea what she would put you through to make sure you were capable of handling the family while she was gone,” Tommy said darkly. Not to mention, he thought, the things that his father would be capable of doing, if he wasn’t standing directly in Malcolm’s path. Better not to think about that, actually.

“What did Mom do to Oliver, anyway?” Thea asked, laying her hand on Tommy’s forearm. She was fading fast, the high taking its toll on her body. “Nobody ever talks about it. One minute, he was dead, the next minute…”

Tommy shrugged. “I don’t get to tell your brother’s story -- that’s his to share, and if and when he does, it will be because he decided he wanted you to know.

Thea let out a long raspberry. “Oliver never tells me anything. He thinks I’m a kid.”

Tommy smiled. “And we circle back around to the beginning, like we always do, don’t we kiddo?”
“Don’t call me kiddo,” Thea said, but her eyes were slipping closed.

“Get some rest while you can,” Tommy said, pulling an afghan up and over her. “You’re going to need it.”

“Hey, Tommy?” Thea called, as he got up to leave the room.

“Yeah?”

“I’ll be nice to Felicity,” Thea slurred. “At the dinner. I promise.”

“Good,” Tommy said, acid turning in his stomach. “She’s going to need someone there that’s on her side.”

“’m on Oliver’s side,” Thea protested.

Tommy smiled, and crossed the room again quickly to kiss Thea’s cheek. “I know, kiddo. That’s why I love ya.”

**

Felicity chose her dress with care, her shoes and her earrings. The dress was daring -- cut-outs in the sides and in the front, with a skirt that clung to every square inch of her ass. She slipped into black strappy heels and secured diamond chandelier earrings to her ears. Her hair she wrangled into waves. The last time she had seen Moira Queen, she hadn’t felt prepared or confident. Oh, she’d faked it well enough, but this time, she would have to be prepared. Moira, after all, would be.

She had a flash of Donna Smoak as she coated her lips with the brightest red she could find. Her mother had never worked a shift without it, because she said it made her feel like she could crush the world under her high, high heels. Felicity would need a little bit of her mother if she was going to go toe to toe with the woman who’d kept the Irish mob alive on the West Coast.
The heir, Felicity thought, of an extensive criminal network that was almost incalculably profitable. And Moira had clung to power, foisted off several coup attempts, maintaining the family’s position of power while they took territory from other families, the Italians, and the Triad.

Felicity didn’t have to like her -- as a matter of fact, she didn’t -- but she respected Moira.

Oliver leaned on the doorjamb of the dressing room attached to his suite and let out a low whistle. “That is a hell of a dress, Felicity,” he said, his eyes trailing over every inch of her body in a way that might have been salacious if it hadn’t been so self-aware.

“Yeah well, I’m a hell of a girl,” Felicity said on a laugh, trying to hide how much the compliment pleased her.

“No disagreement there,” Oliver said. Then his tone changed on a dime. “So uh -- fair warning. It’s going to get awkward down there.”

“I gathered as much,” Felicity said. “Laurel is an old girlfriend of yours?”

Oliver coughed. “And Tommy’s. Mom hasn’t quite given up on the idea of Tommy and Laurel together.”

Felicity raised her eyebrows. “I wasn’t aware matchmaking was one of your mother’s interests.”

“It is, when Laurel’s father is the chief of police,” Oliver said, unmoving from his spot in the doorway. “And Laurel’s the new Assistant District Attorney.”

“Very feudal of her,” Felicity muttered.

Oliver shrugged. “I think she views it as sort of a duty. That’s all her marriage to my father ever was for her.”

“So she just keeps pushing her children into the same crappy situation that made her life miserable.”
“She’s with Walter now,” Oliver said, his eyes carefully aimed at the ceiling. “It seems like they’re happy enough.”

“Back to Laurel,” Felicity said firmly, steering the conversation away from Oliver’s relationship with his stepfather -- which she wanted to observe before she drew any conclusions. “Did that end… badly?”

“Just as badly as anything can end, really. We were all selfish kids, but I took the prize there. I should have seen the way… Anyway. I loved her. I loved her as much as I am capable of loving anyone, it was this all-consuming… drive. I didn’t know how to handle it. There were other things that made it complicated, too.”

“Hm,” Felicity said. “So it just… blew up?”

“I don’t know what to do with -- or I didn’t know what to do with love like that,” Oliver said. “I was already running scared. And Tommy… well.” He sighed. “Mom, right from the start she was all about wedding bells and grandbabies and we were only seventeen years old. I didn’t realize then that she was thinking about how good it would be for the family to be connected to the Lances.”

“It would be difficult to arrest the father of your grandchildren,” Felicity said. “I see.”

Oliver stuck his hands in his pockets and studied the ground. Clearly, this whole conversation made him terribly uncomfortable. “Yes. And I think she knew then that Thea didn’t -- wouldn’t want the responsibility the family would demand from her.”

“Ah.”

“Laurel got swept up in it, too. She’s brilliant. She likes plans and organizers and calendars and I started to feel… crushed. We were together on and off for years. We’d walk away, we’d get sucked back in. We fell in love with other people, we slept with each other, and then we were back together again. I sort of always figured I’d marry her, somehow. That someday I’d wake up and I’d be an adult, capable of being a good partner to her. And then my dad died.”

Felicity raised her eyebrows. It was common knowledge that Robert Queen hadn’t just died. He’d been executed in cold blood by foot soldiers in his wife’s army. In all the time she’d known Oliver,
he hadn’t ever phrased it that way, though, though she knew he knew. She couldn’t blame him.

“Tommy and I started to put the pieces together, a bit… It all got to be too much. I told Mom I wanted the Gambit for a sailing trip, to clear my head. I was going to ask Laurel to go with me, but then…”

Felicity knew this part of the story. “You asked Sara.”

“Who just happens to be Laurel’s sister,” Oliver said, and Felicity’s eyes widened.

“That’s a truly impressive self-destruct button, Oliver.”

“But I’m all fixed now,” Oliver said, smiling bitterly. “So I should thank her, I guess.”

“Oliver, you weren’t broken before,” Felicity said softly. “And you’re not now, you know that, right?”

“I kill people for a living, Felicity,” Oliver said, just as softly. “I’m a little bit broken.”

“But still good,” Felicity said firmly.

“It all worked out fine for me,” Oliver said, clearing his throat. “I mean, I’m still alive. I might kill people but I don’t… I wouldn’t do to you the things I did to Laurel. I might have needed the island. Thea doesn’t.”

“I know,” Felicity said, brushing her hands on her dress and smiling broadly, hoping to interject her confidence into Oliver, so that he would at least smile on their way down to the dining room. They were out of time. “So… we go down there, and we knock the socks off of Moira Queen, and we sell Laurel Lance on our relationship, and everyone else who happens to be in the room. You know what my Uncle Yuri always says?”

Oliver raised his eyebrows. “Have another vodka.”
Felicity laughed. “Yes, he says that, but he also says you conquer the world one rung at a time.”

Oliver smiled at her, some of the sadness leaving his eyes. “Let’s start with the first rung then, shall we?”

“Yes, let’s.”

**

From the moment they stepped into the dining room, all eyes were on them. Oliver had been promised by his mother a quiet family-only affair to welcome Felicity to the clan, but of course, his mother’s definition of family was… broad. And her definition of quiet was -- well, wrong. But he’d been anticipating this, right from the moment she’d said anything.

He could count on very few things in life, he thought, but his mother being anything but cooperative was one of them.

Felicity though, she was amazing. He hadn’t doubted for a single, solitary minute that she would be the perfect partner in this scheme that he and Tommy had put together, but seeing her in action was… something else.

She greeted the Dearden foot soldiers like they were old friends, and quietly poked at Oliver a bit to put them at ease. She charmed Walter and Thea with her hapless grace, all while keeping her hand tucked lightly in Oliver’s.

Tommy watched them from across the room. He’d been given a glass of wine, like Oliver, but like Oliver, he would slowly nurse it over the course of an evening. They’d learned their lesson, the two of them, about when it was okay to lose control. Not here, not now. Not while all of the eyes in the room would be on Oliver and Felicity. And Tommy.

Oliver caught his glance and gave him a smile. It was going well. Better than he had thought to hope for, really. Even his sister’s attitude had turned around.
And then Moira entered, as fashionably late as she could be without being rude. “I’m so sorry, family,” she said, her voice calm but loud enough to carry throughout the crowded room. “I was unavoidably detained.”

“We understand,” Oliver said, crossing the room with Felicity by his side. “Mom, you’ll remember Felicity, of course.”

“Certainly, my dear,” Moira said, her perfectly coiffed hair swinging as she swiveled to look at Felicity directly for the first time. “Nice to see you again, Miss Smoak.”

“Felicity, please,” Felicity said, and the two shook hands.

Oliver felt something swirl in his stomach -- his hands shook ever-so-slightly, something that didn’t often happen to him. But this -- this was a big moment. He took Felicity’s hand again and turned to face the room, which was filled to bursting with Dearden clan members, Laurel and Tommy.

He locked eyes with Tommy, who nodded once again. It was time to set the plan in motion. There was no going back now.

“I have an announcement to make,” Oliver said, his tone jovial as he could make it.

Everyone, of course, knew what was to be said -- half of the people in this room had been in on the negotiations with the Bratva, and still more would have heard through the grapevine. But this announcement, the illusion, it was very important.

“Several of you noted that I was… not the same, upon my return from Russia,” Oliver said, with a self-deprecating smile.

A titter of amusement passed through the crowd.

“I learned much from my time away,” Oliver said, “but one of the things that has, perhaps, been the greatest lesson, is that you can leave home, but home never leaves you. I came back to Starling, but I left part of myself in Russia. It is my greatest pleasure to announce that after much pleading, Felicity has agreed to become my wife.”
Applause swept through the room and Felicity flushed as a chant swelled through the crowd. “Kiss, kiss, kiss!”

Oliver disliked being compelled to do anything by mob rule. But… Felicity pivoted on her heel and tilted her head up to smile at him, her eyes snapping with amusement. “What do you say?” she muttered.

“Please,” he said, and their lips met in the middle.

Kissing Felicity never disappointed. Something sparked on their lips and crackled between them. He nearly destroyed her hair burying his hands in it, but there was no other choice if he didn’t want his hands on her body, and in that dress, if his hands were on her body, the dress would be on the floor.

A wolf whistle from the back of the room interrupted them, and Oliver cleared his throat as they pulled away from each other. Eventually, he figured, the roaring in his ears would stop and his equilibrium would settle.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Laurel quietly get up and leave the room, Tommy following right after her.

They were assaulted then, by well-wishers, starting with his mother, his stepfather, and his sister. Thea clung to him just a little too tightly and whispered a heartfelt thank you in his ear. He only nodded -- the things he wanted to say to that, he couldn’t say in front of anyone but Thea.

While his mother absorbed him in a hug and he inhaled the light floral scent he would forever associate with her and the worst night of his life, he watched Felicity and Thea embrace, and the whispered words they exchanged.

“Congratulations,” Moira said, not releasing him. “She’ll make a beautiful bride.”

“And a worthy heir,” Oliver said flatly.

Moira nodded. “That is a distinct possibility.”
Oliver set his teeth in a smile as Walter extended his hand. “Congratulations, son,” he said broadly.

Oh, that grated. It shouldn’t, Oliver knew. He should be a big enough person to take the casual familiarity in stride.

He wasn’t. Not with so many old wounds being reopened in the name of honesty tonight.

“Thanks, Mr. Steele.”

Oliver was a big enough person to admit that he took a little bit of pleasure in the chagrined look that crossed Walter’s face.

“Oliver, really?” His mother muttered.

Yes, really, he wanted to say. You had my father murdered, you sent me away for five years, I come back and you’re married to this guy and I don’t get to not like it, so he doesn’t get to call me ‘son’ either. But he didn’t. “Just being polite, mother.”

“Yes, well, perhaps we should all sit down for dinner now,” Moira said. “We don’t want the food to get cold.”

Thinking of Tommy and Laurel, and how they had both disappeared several minutes ago, Oliver nodded. “Start the food without me. I need to take care of a personal matter for a few moments. Felicity?”

“I’ll be fine here for a few minutes while you go,” she said, a faint hint of teasing in her tone. “I haven’t quite forgotten how to function without you.” But she squeezed his hand and kissed his cheek, lingering there for a few seconds.

Oliver made his way out of the crowd and down another corridor to the library -- both Tommy and Laurel had spent enough time there that they would know to go to that room for peace and quiet in a large gathering like this. No one came to the library -- not because no one read, but because it was deep enough inside the house that most casual houseguests would not feel comfortable investigating
that far. Laurel and Tommy and Oliver had spent many a party there during their teenaged years with stolen liquor or marijuana.

Now, it’s where they retreated, apparently, to hash out the scars left by old wounds. Tommy had both of Laurel’s hands in his own and he was speaking softly to her when Oliver opened the door. He closed it as quietly as he could and leaned back against it, waiting patiently until either one of them noticed his presence or gave him an indication that they wanted him to be part of the conversation.

Tommy’s eyes were soft in the way they were only soft when he looked at Thea or Laurel, all of the harsh, bold glitter gone from them. He must be apologizing, Oliver thought, and in that, at least, he would be sincere. Tommy never wanted to hurt Laurel -- and the push/pull they did with each other was painful in a unique way for Oliver’s friend.

Because right down to her core, Laurel was a good person. Right and wrong, black and white. She’d always had a hell of a moral compass on her, since they were kids on the playground. She’d been like some kind of avenging angel, Oliver remembered, swooping in to right wrongs. Maybe it came from her father the cop. Maybe it came from her mother the judge. But Laurel would never, ever, look at Tommy with love in her eyes ever again, not since she’d discovered what Tommy and Oliver did for the family, and after all that had happened with Sara...

They’d hurt each other, Oliver thought -- the three of them, they’d sliced with knives because they’d been young enough to think those kinds of injuries healed quickly. They were still trying to fix the mess they’d made of each other’s lives, all these years later.

Tommy looked up and nodded at Oliver. “Come on over, Oliver.”

Laurel wiped her eyes. “So I guess congratulations are in order,” she said, smiling through her tears, though it was brittle and forced, not the kind of smile she used to give him at all.

“Yeah,” Oliver said, feeling awkward, the way he always did around Laurel. He wasn’t sure where to put his hands, or if he should be apologizing or not. “Thanks, Laurel. I’m sorry that Mom invited you here without giving you a head’s up about what would be happening.”

Laurel lifted one corner of her mouth. “I think she wanted to see how we would all react. I won’t lie to you and say it was easy news to hear.”
“Laurel, I…”

“You get my sister killed,” Laurel began calmly, “Only it turns out that it’s worse than that! And you were sleeping with her behind my back while we were planning an engagement party. But it’s all good, Ollie, because you fell in love in Russia, and it’s real this time, so you’ll get your happy ending. I’m so glad I was here for this. Honestly. I wish you a world of happiness.”

He rubbed the back of his neck guiltily. “Laurel, you know if it had been my choice I would have let you know some other way.”

“Fuck you, Oliver.” Laurel’s voice never rose, never shook. “You would have let me read about it in the papers, or sent Tommy, I suppose, since that’s your method of dealing with messy emotional business.”

Oliver had nothing to say, because she was right. Tommy, too, carefully avoided looking at Oliver. There was nothing that could be said in Oliver’s defense.

Certainly not by Tommy.

“You know I’d have you in handcuffs right now,” Laurel said, rising to her feet, “on about sixteen different felonies and three different murder charges, if it weren’t for my family.”

Oliver didn’t move. He didn’t nod, he didn’t blink.

“The second we’re free, I’m hanging every single one of you,” Laurel said. “Don’t think I won’t.”

Tommy raised both of his hands. “Laurel, you’re going to want to keep your voice down.”

“I’m not scared,” Laurel scoffed.

“You should be,” Oliver said softly. “You think you’re not inhibited by sentiment? You know where you are, Laurel, and you just threatened… well. Me.”
“What, your henchmen are just going to come through the door and -- what? Murder an ADA in cold blood?”

Tommy’s voice was gentle. “What happened to your predecessor, Laurel?”

Laurel bit her lip. “You don’t scare me.”

“Okay,” Oliver said. “I don’t want you to be scared. I just want you to be smart.”

“Fuck you. Again.”

“Well, this is the kind of conversation I was hoping for,” Tommy said, sarcasm creeping into his light tone. “Insightful, sympathetic, respectful of all points of view.”

“Ugh.” Laurel tossed her hair. “I can’t stand to be in the same room with you two anymore.”

“Laurel.” Oliver stood in her way, his hands held up as though in surrender. “I am sorry, you know.”

“That’s always the story,” Laurel said. “Go sell it to someone who doesn’t have ten backdated issues.”

The door slammed behind her, and Tommy let out an audible rush of air as he sat back down again on the couch.

“I’m sorry,” Oliver said. “I thought… I don’t know. I thought my being here might help. I don’t know why. It never seems to go well, the three of us in a room together.”

Tommy chuckled, but there wasn’t any real amusement in it. “You know why the three of us in a room together doesn’t work, Oliver.”
“Yeah, and I ought to know better,” Oliver admitted. “I’m sorry. It looked like you were making headway.”

Tommy shrugged. “You’re just saving me from myself, any good buddy would.”

“Tommy, you know when this is all over…”

“I’ll still be a murderer, and she’ll still be trying to solve the world. And even if she did, there’s still… you. Some of us aren’t going to get a storybook ending when this is over,” Tommy said. “And that’s just fine.”

“Tommy --”

“It’s just fine, Oliver,” Tommy said firmly. “Now, drop it. Let’s get back to your wife-to-be before it starts to look bad.”

“This conversation isn’t over.” Oliver said, reaching for Tommy’s arm.

Tommy took his hand and squeezed. “Yes, it is.”

**

The liquor flowed as the guests mingled. Thea swiftly came to Felicity’s side as Oliver left the room and took her arm in hers, like they were the oldest of friends. Thea’s laugh was a little too bright, and her hands were shaking. Coming down from something, Felicity decided. But doing an admirable job of hiding it, which meant that this wasn’t Thea’s first time around that particular merry-go-round.

Felicity stored that knowledge away in the back of her mind. There was nothing she could do about it now, and calling attention to it would win her favors with exactly no one.

But she could, she thought, as she deftly took a glass of wine from Thea, do her best to keep her future sister-in-law, future underage sister-in-law, from being inebriated anymore.
“I thought,” Thea said, bumping her hips with hers, “that I would stick with you while Oliver is grumping around elsewhere. You and I ought to be friends.” She was reaching for another glass of red wine.

Felicity held up her hand. “Thank you, Thea, but I’m afraid even I can’t drink wine that fast. Better leave the glass there, in case someone else needs it.”

Thea shot her a shrewd look. “Is that how it is?”

Felicity shrugged and leaned in close. “I don’t know what you’re on at the moment, but as a general rule, you shouldn’t mix uppers and downers. Leads to nasty consequences. Smile. Your mother is looking at us.”

Thea threw her head back and laughed, gripping Felicity’s arm. “I can take care of myself,” she said with a smile.

“Of course you can,” Felicity said lightly. “I’m just trying to stay on your brother’s good side.”

“Ugh,” Thea said, rolling her eyes. “Why are you worried about that? You’re supposed to be some scary Russian mob queen. You’re supposed to eat people like my brother for breakfast, the way people around here talk about you.”

Felicity grinned, and ducked her head. “I assure you, I could quite happily eat Oliver for breakfast, but perhaps not in the context you’re thinking of. No -- I figure, I need all the help I can get. I need his help, I need your help.”

Thea snorted and shook her head. “You don’t need my help.”

“I do,” Felicity said seriously. “You know, your brother came to me and begged me for my help. All so he could save your life.”

“I never asked him for that.”
“I know,” Felicity said. “But I can’t help but wonder, Thea -- what are you willing to do to save yourself? Everything your brother does -- he does for you, but unless you start helping him out, it’s like rowing upstream.”

Thea reached around Felicity and took the glass of wine. “I’m not drinking it. But I’ll get weird looks if I’m not drinking.”

“All right,” Felicity said evenly.

“Now. What can I do to help?”

“Introduce me around,” Felicity said. “And be thrilled that I’m here.”

“That I can do.” Thea steeled her shoulders and… shifted. And Felicity knew, in that moment, she would know from a thousand paces away that Thea was Moira Queen’s daughter.
Chapter Summary

Oliver and Tommy must defend the Family name after a terrible tragedy befalls a footsoldier, and Felicity has a question answered.

Chapter Notes

This is one of Abbie's favorite chapters, so I hope the rest of you enjoy it as well as she did.

Warning: This chapter contains graphic, brutal mob-style violence.

Oliver and Tommy slipped back into the room, leaving Laurel behind, just before Moira made the announcement that supper was ready and that everyone could take their seats. Oliver found his sister and his fiancee talking with a member of the board of Queen Consolidated, and a third generation Dearden. That would make Donald a… second cousin of some sort, he thought, vaguely. He had so many relatives, hangers-on, riding the coat tails of his mother’s success, he’d never learned to quite hide his disdain for them. Donald was no exception, especially since he was leering at Felicity’s decolletage.

He wrapped his arm around Felicity’s waist and pressed a kiss to her cheek, affecting a drunken joviality he hadn’t actually felt in years. “Hi, baby.”

“Hi, baby. You and Tommy have a good time?” she asked, her tone as indulgent and as fake as it had been that night in Russia when they had been attacked in the museum.

“Mmhmm.” He inhaled the scent of Felicity -- she hadn’t changed it in the years since they’d last met. Some women did that, he knew, picked a perfume and wore it like a trademark. “I’m being rude,” he said, pulling away like it was the hardest thing to pry himself off of Felicity. It wasn’t that far off of the truth, her presence soothing some of the nerves that had frayed during his encounter with Laurel. “How is it going, Donald?”

“Very well. Congratulations, young man,” Donald said stiffly, though he was only all of fifteen years older than Oliver. It took every ounce of control Oliver had not to laugh at the man’s pretension when he remembered Donald having pimples and sweating profusely. “Your fiancee is a remarkable young lady.”
“Yes, well, if I were going to marry, I couldn’t pick anyone more remarkable than Felicity,” Oliver said. “It’s what the family deserves.”

Donald coughed and dropped his head. “Yes, of course.”

“We should take our seats, darling,” Oliver said, extending his hand to Felicity. “We don’t want to offend Raisa, after all.”

“Of course not,” Felicity said, taking his hand in her own and ignoring the way Thea snickered just behind them.

“Laying it on a bit thick,” Thea whispered, standing on tip-toe between them. At Oliver’s sharp look, she coughed. “Not that it’s not super adorable, of course.”

Felicity ducked her head to hide her smile as Oliver led her to the head of the table, where Moira was sitting. They took their spots to her right, across from Walter and Thea. The other members of the family took their seats just as quickly, and then uniformed staff brought the food out.

The china chinked and the conversation never died out past a dull roar. After Felicity and Oliver had visited with Moira for a few minutes, other members of the family would get up from their seats and come over and introduce themselves. Felicity watched out of the corner of her eye as her food grew cold and felt a sinking in her stomach. It had been truly excellent, but it would soon be inedible. Tommy, seated farther down, away from the nuclear family, caught her eye and winked as he took a huge bite of his still-warm food.

Felicity chuckled under her breath. Tommy Merlyn was just the sort of jerk she had a soft spot in her heart for.

She noticed a skinny young man in jeans and a tattered hoodie standing at the entrance of the dining room, his hands in his back pockets. She laid a hand on Oliver’s forearm.

“Who’s the lost puppy?” she asked softly, gesturing to the young man who was still lingering in the doorway, like he was waiting for someone to ask him in. Or notice him.
“His name’s Roy Harper. He’s a stray Thea brought in from the cold,” Oliver said, one corner of his mouth lifting in amusement at his own cleverness. “Still trying to get him housebroken, but he does all right most days.”

“He looks like he wants a seat at the table,” Felicity said. “And I think he might be looking for you.”

Oliver nodded. “I’ll just go… see what he wants.”

“Might be a good idea,” Felicity said, patting Oliver’s thigh as he got up from the table, and then turned her attention to Moira, who had asked her a question about her uncle Yuri. Still, she kept an eye on the conversation that was happening on the other side of the room. Whatever Roy was telling Oliver, he wasn’t happy about it. In fact, he was seething. His hands clenched and unclenched and his face was as carefully blank as it ever was, a sure indication that he was barely holding on to control.

Sure enough, Oliver gruffly sent Roy away and stalked back to the table, lingering over his chair like he couldn’t decide whether to sit in it or not.

“You don’t look happy, darling,” Moira said, raising her eyebrow at Oliver. “Is everything alright?”

Oliver sighed. “You sent Brian on an errand this evening.”

Moira nodded. “So I did.”

“It went south.” Oliver gripped the back of his chair. “Tommy and I are going to need to be excused so we can deal with this.”

Moira bit her lip. Felicity watched a million thoughts cross Moira’s eyes, though her expression never changed. “Of course, dear. You’ll know what to do.”

“Yeah, I think I’ve got this part figured out,” Oliver said.

“Hospital or morgue?” Moira said, wiping her mouth delicately with a napkin and rising to her feet.
“Morgue,” Oliver said flatly.

“I will call Joanna personally,” Moira said. “Felicity, I am very sorry that the night had to end this way.”

“No,” Felicity said, standing as well. “Don’t be sorry. Family comes first, always.”

Moira raised her voice. “Gentlemen, ladies. We have, unfortunately, lost one of our own this evening. A moment of silence, please.”

In unison, the guests dropped their heads. Oliver reached for Felicity’s hand and squeezed it. She could tell in an instant that he was genuinely distraught, quickly settling into coldly furious.

Moira lifted her head. “We mourn as a family, we grieve as a family, we seek justice as a family. You will all excuse Oliver and Felicity and myself as we deal with this.”

Felicity followed Moira and Oliver and Tommy out of the room and back through the house down a private corridor.

“There can be no doubt in anyone’s mind what happens when you cross the Deardens,” Moira said softly to Oliver, as he opened a paneled wall and stepped inside of it. “Be as ruthless as you need to be.”

Oliver nodded.

“Keep an eye on my son, Thomas,” Moira said, a hint of warmth in her voice. “I am counting on you, as always.”

“Of course, Moira,” Tommy said, dropping his head.

Felicity stepped inside the room that had been opened for her. Computers, display cases, ancient antiques, they were all sandwiched in here. Oliver and Tommy quickly stripped off their clothes and
stepped into hoods -- green for Oliver, black for Tommy.

“The green archer has been a tradition in my family as long as we can remember, since before the matriarch,” Moira told Felicity. “I have never been so proud as the day when Oliver was declared fit to wear it.”

Felicity nodded, unable to form words. The green archer was the enforcer, the brutal right hand of the Dearden mafia. Unforgiving, ruthless, cruel. The swift justice of the family came him. They said to wear the hood, a man had to sell his soul and be willing to pay the devil his due. It was the kind of story they told little Bratva girls to keep them up at night. She’d been told all of her life to be scared of it, scared of the person under the hood.

But she stepped forward and pulled the hood over Oliver’s face for him, then did the same for Tommy.

“Both of you, be safe out there,” Felicity said. Oliver wrapped his arms around her and bent to kiss her, the warm of his hood soft against her fingers as she grasped it. “Come back to me in one, live piece, yeah?” she whispered.

“I’ll do my best,” Oliver said.

“Same here,” Tommy said, grinning. “If anyone cares.”

Felicity reached up, and pulled him close and pressed her lips to his cheek for several long seconds. “I care. The brother of my husband is my brother. Be safe.”

“Yeah.” Tommy cleared his throat. “Of course. We’ll be back soon.”

“Okay.” Felicity stepped back, and watched them leave out yet another door.

“Quite a production, Ms. Smoak,” Moira said. “Is it always going to be tearful good-byes with you when the boys leave to do their jobs?”

Felicity whirled and smiled, no warmth in her expression. “I sent my mother out into the night in this
city once, with every expectation that she would come back home to me. She was so mangled by the
time the cops found her, there was nothing left for me to identify. And she wasn’t working for the
family.”

“I… am sorry, Ms. Smoak. I forgot.”

“Lucky,” Felicity said. “I was wondering if you could point me in the direction of our rooms, again?
I’m afraid I’ve gotten completely turned around.”

“Yes, of course,” Moira said. “Then I must make a few phone calls.”

“Joanna,” Felicity said softly. “The widow, I’m assuming.”

“Yes. It’s… unfortunate. Brian was a young man, a few small children. I should remind myself how
many…” Moira shook her head. “There will be flowers to send, arrangements to make…”

A check to write, Felicity thought to herself. This is the way the family worked. She’d lived through
it herself when her father had died for the Bratva -- loyalty, honor, dignity. They took care of their
own. Joanna, whoever she was, would never have to want for anything ever again, because Brian
had taken a bullet for the family name.

It was the way of the world. Money and death.

“This way, Felicity,” Moira said, gesturing out in front of her and down the hallway. “This house
takes a bit of getting used to. I think my late husband’s ancestors took pleasure in designing a space
that seems nonsensical.”

She smiled. “Thank you. I am sure, when I am not quite so tired, I will be able to figure out a way to
navigate it.”

“Get some rest while you can,” Moira advised her, as they went up a staircase. “I know my son far
better than he thinks I do. To compete with his other interests, you’re going to need to get your rest.”

Felicity drew in a deep breath. The woman was trying to infuriate her. Trying to see where the holes
in her armor were. Fascinating. But her implication did solidify something in Felicity’s mind.

“I appreciate the thought,” Felicity said, with a cold kindness that made Moira blink -- clearly she hadn’t thought Felicity capable of this kind of brush-off. “Sincerely.”

“Of course, dear. We’re family now. We watch out for each other.”

Felicity nodded, and, seeing Oliver’s door, crossed to it. It opened with a snick and she turned to face her mother-in-law. “Thanks for having us while we get settled.”

Moira nodded. “I look forward to getting to know you better.”

“It’s mutual.”

Felicity closed the door with an audible sigh of relief. Then she started to laugh, laying her hand on her forehead. Exhaustion, stress… and… Her phone beeped.

Oliver and Tommy, both moving much faster than the legal limit, appeared as two dots on the screen as they buzzed down the freeway into Starling City proper. A tap on either one of the dots gave her readings -- heart rate, respiration. The bugs she’d planted in their hoods were very sophisticated pieces of equipment. She’d know if her boys were okay, one way or another.

**

That the cop who had killed Brian had tried to run at all was more aggravating than it was surprising. It didn’t take Oliver and Tommy long to toss his place, lean on his contacts, and find where he was most likely headed: the place of the woman he’d been sleeping with, a waitress in a diner in the south Glades.

In general, neither Oliver or Tommy were fans of collateral damage. But they couldn’t afford to siege him out -- retaliation had to be swift and brutal. Regardless of what had happened between Brian and the cop, a family member was dead. And when a family member died, someone paid the full extent of the price.
Oliver and Tommy parked their bikes blocks away and navigated the back alleys of the Glades silently, passing through backrooms in Dearden-controlled territory and outside doors to side streets and up fire escapes to roofs that could be jumped. The night wind in Starling was icy enough that it cut through the leather of their outfits and stole the breath from their lungs.

Oliver signalled that they were stopping on a rooftop across from a section eight building.

“What’s the plan?” Tommy asked, under his breath.

“In through the window,” Oliver said, loading his grappling hook arrow. “Knock the girl out. As quickly and as painlessly as possible.”

The cop wouldn’t be afforded the same courtesy. Tommy nodded. What went unsaid was just as important. Then Oliver was throwing himself off of the roof, and Tommy was following right behind. They smashed through the cheap plate glass window and landed in the master bedroom.

Instant chaos -- but Tommy and Oliver had spent most of their lives together in some form of chaos, and in many ways, this felt more real than anything else they did together. It took a moment for their eyes to adjust to the different light and to the sight of their target fucking his girlfriend.

Henry and the woman startled at the same moment, but the cop recovered quickly, rolling off of the woman and reaching for the night stand. The girl was too startled to even scream as Tommy reached for her, and threw her off the bed and out of the way. Oliver, on the other hand, was on top of Davidson in a minute, with all the brutality the Arrow was famed for.

“He --” She didn’t get a chance to finish her first scream. Tommy had her mouth covered with a chloroform-soaked cloth in a matter of seconds. Though she tried to fight back, Tommy had more experience than he would wish for in rendering people unconscious.

Henry Davidson hadn’t been much of a cop, not really. Tommy had read his file. He’d taken bribes and lost evidence for the Deardens, he’d made a living being slimy to the touch and doing the bare minimum. He certainly hadn’t done the people of Starling much good.

But he’d been a hell of a shot. He reached for the gun on the nightstand with his left hand, and Tommy practically flew across the room, his knife extended (an extension of himself), and he brought the weapon down with all of his might. There was a sickening, crunchy-squishing sound, but Tommy didn’t let up. He’d learned the hard way it was better to just get things like this over
Davidson screamed as his hand was severed from his body. Tommy took the hand and threw it across the room. It would serve as a message for the cops who would process the scene.

“Shut up,” Oliver snarled, breaking Davidson’s nose with his elbow. “Quit sniveling.”

Tommy stalked around the edge of the room, wiped his knife on the curtains flapping with the spring wind in the night air they’d let in when they’d broken the window.

“Do you know why I’m here?” Oliver asked, his voice deepened mechanically, in case the room was bugged.

Davidson’s pupils were blown with terror and pain. “I -- I didn’t mean to, it was an accident, I --”

“The way I understand it,” Oliver said through gritted teeth, “you had one task to accomplish, didn’t you Davidson?”

“Oh, Jesus fuck, please, Christ, I didn’t…”

“One task.” Oliver laid his hand on the man’s windpipe and pressed, slowly increasing the pressure. “And you choose not to do it? And then you kill the man I sent to make sure you weren’t fucking up?” Oliver let up long enough to let the man respond.

“I didn’t realize… I didn’t think you and he were close, listen, it was a kill or be killed, you know what I’m saying? He was insane, he was… he said he was going to kill me, kill my girl, I couldn’t…”

Oliver reached in his quiver. “Henry Davidson, you have failed the family.”

Tommy dragged the unconscious girl out to the living room, set her on the couch. He located a blanket and covered her from her neck to her feet. She would wake to discover her boyfriend’s body attached to the wall via an arrow. But it wouldn’t be the first thing she saw, and she wouldn’t wake naked.
Small mercies.

They left the apartment the same way they’d entered it, but took a different circuitous route back to their bikes, drove some distance before abandoning them and changing into clothes more suited for the billionaire playboys they were supposed to be.

Then they went in search of an alibi -- a good, rowdy party where it would be impossible to confirm what time they arrived, and what time they left. The kind of party where they might be able, for a couple of hours, to forget what they had just done.

**

By the time Oliver reached his room, he smelled of alcohol and vomit and cigarette smoke, and every bone in his body ached. He dragged himself into the bathroom, stepped into the shower and watched with some interest as the drain swirled with red -- he must have cut himself going through the glass, he thought, and wasn’t that fascinating.

The door to the bathroom opened and Oliver stuck his head out of the enormous shower. Felicity, dressed in sushi-themed pajamas, appeared in the doorway. Her hair was piled on top of her head and she was wearing glasses.

“How’d it go?” she asked. It was clear she’d been woken from sleep. Oliver thought, under different circumstances, he might feel sorry about that, but he didn’t feel much of anything at the moment.

“Got the target,” Oliver said simply. “Tommy managed to contain the girl, so there wasn’t any collateral damage. We heard from our contact inside the force that the message was received.”

Felicity nodded. “Good. I, uh… I did some more reading on you. Well, not you you.”

“Which not me are you talking about?”

“The not you that leaves a green arrow as a calling card,” Felicity said. “That’s a bold move in an age of forensic wonders.”
“Ah, not my idea,” Oliver said, ducking his head back under the spray. “Tradition thing. And the Starling City PD is almost genius in their incompetency.”

“Hm,” Felicity said. “How’s Tommy?”

Oliver smirked. “Not as drunk as he would like to be, I’m sure.”

“Is he as banged up as you are?” Felicity asked, stepping forward to the edge of the shower and reaching her hand inside to touch one of Oliver’s arms, where there was a two-inch cut.

“I was the first one through the window,” Oliver said. “I took the brunt of it.”

“Okay,” Felicity said. “Let me know when you’re done, I’ll check you out.”

“Hey,” Oliver said, reaching for her as she tried to step away. “You bugged me, didn’t you?”

Felicity lifted one corner of her mouth in a smile. “I did. Just… just a little monitor. Heart rate, respiration, optional audio.”

Oliver wasn’t sure how he felt about that. Somewhere between touched that she cared and… “I’m a big boy, you know. This was a routine, standard operation.”

“You know as well as I do that the routine, standard hits are the ones you get killed on because you don’t consider it a possibility. Besides which, if you didn’t want me to use tech, then you shouldn’t have agreed to marry a tech genius.” Felicity sighed. “This is how I play the game, Oliver. I can’t… not know.”

“Okay,” Oliver said. “All right. I’ll uh… I’ll wear a monitor in the field all the time, if that’s what you want.”

Felicity nodded. “It is. You and Tommy. Possibly Roy,” she said, tilting her head to the side. “I haven’t decided that one just yet.”
Oliver turned to her, a thought brewing. “What do we do about you, though?”

Felicity blinked. “What about me? Oliver, I’m not going to be out killing people. Normally.”

“You’re about to be my wife.” Oliver shook his head. “What’s more, you’re about to be the heir. Yeah, Diggle’s going to stick with you 24 hours a day and I think he’s part mountain, but it would make me feel better if you were monitored, too.”

Felicity raised her eyebrows. “Well, that was a neat piece of maneuvering you did there, but that makes sense, so… now we’re all monitored, all the time.”

Oliver turned the water off and reached across Felicity for a towel. He didn’t miss the way her eyes tracked over his form appreciatively, but she bit her lip and opened the medicine cabinet. She had the first aid kit in her hand and gestured to the counter of the vanity.

“This really isn’t necessary, Felicity,” Oliver said softly as he lifted his body up and sat on the edge of the vanity, his lower half wrapped in a towel.

“It is too.” Felicity smiled momentarily, spreading his knees apart so she could stand between them. “Let me be nice to you, Oliver.”

He opened his mouth and closed it. “Felicity…”

She stood on tip-toe and kissed him, her hands fisting in his towel. Oliver tried to slide off the counter so that he could continue what they started, but Felicity laid a hand on his chest. “Stop,” she said on a laugh. “Let me get a band-aid on this.”

Antiseptic, gauze, tape. Felicity’s quick and gentle hands on his bruised skin. It wasn’t the first time she’d patched him up, and probably wouldn’t be the last, realistically speaking. Oliver couldn’t help but sink into the simple pleasure of someone giving a shit whether he was okay or not.

His grin might have been a little bit dopey. “You’re a good nurse.”
Felicity chuckled. “No, I’m not. I’m impatient and mean. That’s what Yuri always said. Hold still.”

“Yuri’s a baby,” Oliver said, ignoring her to tuck a strand of hair that was falling in her eyes back behind her ear.

“So,” Felicity said biting her lip, her eyes very carefully anywhere but his face. “I’m going to ask you a question. And I want you to be honest with me.”

“Okay,” Oliver said, his heart racing in his chest. Somehow he knew what was coming.

“Tommy,” Felicity said. His stomach sank. “Did you ever…”

Oliver’s eyes widened. “Uh…” He coughed. “Did we ever…”

Felicity’s eyes flashed to his, just a touch impatient. “He’s not just a friend, Oliver.”

“No, he’s not.” Oliver shrugged. Tried to find the words. “Yes… we did. Do things. Sexual… things. We do? Sometimes. It happens. I made you a promise, though. To be with you and you only. I intend to keep it.”

Felicity waved a frustrated hand. “Oliver, I told you I didn’t need that kind of a promise.”

“It’s important to me,” Oliver said flatly. “It’s important to Tommy, too. We don’t… with each other, when we’re with other people.”

“Okay.” Felicity nodded. He could tell she wanted to say more, but she shook her head.

“Hey,” Oliver reached for her hand, squeezed it. “I’m sorry. I should have told you.”

“I’m not hurt,” Felicity said. “Honestly, it took me about three seconds to figure it out. I might be just this side of pissed that you didn’t tell me. But I just wanted to know for sure.”
Oliver blinked. “You’re not?”

“No.” Felicity smiled a bit sadly, squeezed his hand. “It makes a lot of things make sense, actually.”

“I wasn’t lying, you know,” Oliver said. Something like desperation was clawing at him. This was all too easy.

“When?”

“When I told you I’m not wired that way anymore. It’s the truth. I don’t… I just… I love Tommy. Sometimes that results in blow jobs. But I’m not… I’m not in love with anyone. I’m not capable of it.”

Whatever Felicity was thinking, whatever she was feeling, Oliver couldn’t read it in her eyes. “I think…” Felicity bent her head, kissed the bandage she’d just laid on his arm. “I think that’s okay. Yeah. That’s okay.”

**

Tommy flung his shirt off over his head and kicked his shoes off. His jeans went next, and then his socks. He wasn’t drunk, not by a longshot, but the whiskey was making everything more… comfortable. The harsh edges of the world softened, gravity was a little kinder.

He would have to get a new knife -- something to be done tomorrow, when sobriety struck again. He hissed a little as he inspected himself -- he’d have a pretty good bruise on his side, where the woman had gotten a sharp kick in -- and good on her. Might have bruised some ribs.

A knock on his door stopped him from his survey, and he sighed. No one would knock on his door at this hour that wasn’t in the family, so he didn’t feel the need to dress. He opened his door without a thought, leaning drunkenly on the handle.

“Yeah?” he asked. He was bleary-eyed, but he could just make out Felicity in ridiculous pajamas at his door. For one second, he thought maybe he’d lucked into a fantasy coming true.
“Well, this is unexpected.” Felicity smiled at him. “I just got done patching up Oliver. I thought I’d come check on you. He said you were fine, but I also think he was unaware that he was bleeding, you know, so his definition of ‘fine’ and mine are probably different.”

“Felicity,” Tommy said, slightly horrified, as he stepped back into his room. “You can’t be here.”

“Why not?”

Because you’re Oliver’s, he thought. “Because… people will talk.”

Felicity waved a hand. “Nonsense. First of all, no one is around to see, and secondly, if anyone was, I’d simply point out that it behooves me to make sure my soldiers remain in good health. But if you’re really concerned, you could put on some pants.”

Tommy blushed and looked down. “Yeah, just… give me a second. You know, you really ought to trust Oliver…” the world tilted and he tripped, but someone caught his arm. Felicity, again. She must have rushed across the room. “When he says that I’m fine.”

“He also said you weren’t as drunk as you’d like to be,” Felicity said gently. “Tommy, how drunk are you?”

“I’m not sober,” Tommy said evenly, as evenly as he could. “But I am not drunk, either.”

“Well, the first is definitely true.” Felicity sighed. “Okay, first things first. Are you bleeding anywhere?”

“No,” Tommy said. “But, I uh… I might have bruised my ribs, I think?”

Felicity looked at him. “I’m going to touch your side, okay?”

Tommy shook his head. “Yeah, I guess… I mean, yes. That’s fine.”

At her gentle touch, he drew a quick inward breath.
“Definitely bruised,” Felicity said. “We’ll see how the pain is tomorrow. You might need an x-ray, just to make sure there aren’t any fractures.”

“You’re the boss.”

“Yes, I am,” Felicity said, chuckling. “Anything else?”

“No,” Tommy said. “I was just going to… you know. Hit the head, crawl in bed. Pass out.”

“Okay, do those things. Meanwhile, I’ll get you a glass of water and some ibuprofen, okay?”

“Nothing stronger than ibuprofen?”

Felicity’s soft look turned sharp. “I think that’s probably not a good idea.”

Tommy’s stomach twisted. He felt a little like a chastised puppy who ought to have known better. “Yeah, I guess you’re right.”

“Do what you need to do. I’ll be here when you get back,” Felicity said.

Tommy went through his routine, slower than usual -- he took great care lifting his arms to brush his teeth, splash his face with water and cleanser. It hurt to pee -- which was just undignified -- and by the time he was done, the edges of his vision were going a little grey.

Felicity was waiting, just outside the bathroom door. Her eyebrows knit together as she looked him over. She palmed four of the little white pills and gave them to him, along with a glass of water.

“Drink all of it,” she said, when he attempted to set the glass down.

“This isn’t my first hangover rodeo, you know,” Tommy said, waggling his finger at her.
“Oh, I’m aware. Hopefully with enough water you can avoid the hangover all together,” Felicity said brightly.

“Might be too late for that,” Tommy huffed.

“Really hurts now, huh?” Felicity asked sympathetically.

“It’s not… pleasant,” Tommy managed. “It was all right before. Certainly bearable. We’re edging towards painful now.”

“Okay, into bed,” Felicity said, taking his arm and helping him cross the room. “I have your phone plugged into a charger. Call me and Oliver if you need us. I’ll be here first thing in the morning to check on you. I really don’t like the look of you. Maybe we should go to the hospital now.”

“I like the look of you,” Tommy slurred, but it was more effort to be cavalier and charming than was worth it, really. “No hospitals. I’m just fine and I don’t like them.”

“Oh, hush, you know that’s not what I meant,” Felicity said briskly. Then she sighed, a hint of uncertainty in her voice. “If you’re sure… Anything else I can get you before I leave?”

Tommy shrugged. “Don’t know what I’d need. I uh… I don’t usually get taken care of like this, you know?”

“Well,” Felicity said, smoothing down his quilt around him. She tilted her head to the side. “Oliver likes a ‘get better’ kiss.”

“Felicity…”

He couldn’t stop her. Her lips were pressed against his cheek, and her scent was imprinted in his mind -- something light, citrusy, like summer, and it was so perfectly Felicity he forgot himself for a moment.
“Let yourself be taken care of,” Felicity whispered, pushing his hair back from his face. “I appreciate what you and Oliver do for the family. Let me show you.”

“You’re going to get me killed,” Tommy said, closing his eyes.

“No,” Felicity said firmly. “No one dies on my watch, Tommy Merlyn. Especially not you.”
He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother

Chapter Summary

There are unforeseen consequences of Tommy and Oliver's murderous actions the night before.

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much for the reviews on the last chapter! I hope you enjoy this one as well!

Oh, also I'm posting two chapters this week -- one today, one Wednesday. They're so closely linked I couldn't leave you guys waiting long!

Thea hadn’t been able to sleep -- not entirely unusual for her, on a night when she knew Tommy and Oliver were out doing their job. She paced her room back and forth from the time the sun came up until her alarm clock showed it was a reasonable time to expect to interact with other human beings. Then she set herself in motion.

Felicity’s challenge -- that she do what she could to help herself and help her brother, had rung in her ears and stuck in her mind. Asking Oliver for help had been an act of desperation. She was stuck in a corner and had run to her big brother for help -- part of her felt okay with that -- Oliver had always come running when she asked and never made her feel bad about it.

But the bigger part of her was ashamed and worried sick. She hadn’t thought Oliver would… do this. He hadn’t ever really been the kind to stick to a romantic relationship -- definitely not since his relationship with Laurel had blown up so spectacularly, and now he was getting married. Married to Felicity Smoak, who was nothing like the woman she would have pictured for her brother. Not that Thea knew her all that well, but if they were going to be allies, if Felicity wanted her help, then Thea was bound and determined to get to know the other woman.

Her mother didn’t have many girlfriends, and Thea didn’t either -- she had friends she did drugs with, friends who got her what she needed, but other than Roy, Thea didn’t have a friend she could call in the middle of the night, someone she could count on to always be there. Except maybe Tommy -- Tommy who would come bail her out of jail or help her sober up from a bad trip. Tommy who had promised to be her brother when her brother was gone.
Tommy, who also seemed to like Felicity.

Thea checked her appearance in the mirror one last time. Since she’d been unable to sleep, she’d had some time to pick her clothes, style her hair, carefully. She needed confidence, class, grace.

Moira Queen would find those things inherent in herself, Thea, thought. Maybe she’d be there one day. But for the moment, she needed the artifice.

Now all she needed was the courage to open the door and do what she needed to do. She straightened her spine and headed out into the hallway.

For the most part, Moira kept foot soldiers out of the family corridor and rooms, so Thea startled a little when she encountered a massive mountain of a man coming out of a room near Oliver’s.

“Who are you?” She asked before she could stop to frame the question in a less rude way.

“John Diggle,” the man said, extending his hand. Something about him said that he was straight-laced, honest. Not the kind of man Thea usually found walking the hallways of her home. “I’m a friend of Felicity’s.”

Thea’s eyebrows rose. “A friend of Felicity’s.”

“Her, uh -- her bodyguard, you might say. An insurance policy,” Diggle said, smirking.

“Oh.” Thea thought for a moment -- wondered what Felicity’s life in Russia was like that her uncle loved her enough to send a bodyguard with her to America. One that, apparently, Felicity liked enough to ask for him to be placed in the family wing. Interesting. “Are you going to be staying with us long?”

Diggle shrugged. “Felicity is my asset. She also happens to be a friend. I’m here as long as she wants me here.”
Thea nodded slowly, crossing her arms over her chest. “Well, uh… welcome to Starling, then.”

“Welcome back, actually. I grew up here,” Diggle said.

“A Starling City boy working for the Russian mob. That has to be quite a story,” Thea said, smiling in a way that she hoped invited confidence.

“No. I wasn’t working for the Russian mob. I was working for Felicity. And it is,” Diggle said. “But it’s early in the morning for that kind of story. I was hoping to find some grub.”

“Raisa will have breakfast downstairs,” Thea said, “pretty much anything you want, so you’re welcome to ask for whatever.”

“Thanks. You ever get lost in this maze of a house?” Diggle asked, a hint of amusement in his voice.

Thea nodded. “Oh, all the time.” She gave him a wink, waved good-bye, and headed for Tommy’s room.

Tommy didn’t mind if she just walked in his room, so she tapped at the door twice and pushed it open. His clothes were scattered across the floor -- very unlike Tommy, who, no matter how drunk, always took the time to fold his clothes as he took them off and put them carefully away in a hamper or on a hanger. She’d made fun of him often enough for it, when he helped her pull herself together after a long night of partying.

It gave her pause. “Tommy?”

He didn’t respond -- yet he wouldn’t leave his room like this. Cold dread sank into her stomach. She turned and opened the second door -- the one that led to the proper bedroom. Tommy was curled up in a ball in the center of the bed, clutching his side.

“Tommy?” She couldn’t hide the panic in her voice.

“Thea,” Tommy practically groaned her name. “Thea, what are you doing here?”
“I came to ask you some questions. But -- oh God, are you okay?”

Tommy laughed, and then hissed, and then laughed again. “No, I’m not. I’m not okay.”

Thea found it in her to run across the room then, lay her hand on his forehead, pull back the blanket and look at the angry bruise that covered his side. “Jesus, Tommy!”

“Think I have a fever,” Tommy said, shivering, “so if you wouldn’t mind just pulling the covers back up.”

“What happened?” Thea asked.

“The girlfriend of the cop caught my side just right. Broke the shit out of my rib, I think,” Tommy said.

“Tommy…” Thea narrowed her eyes. She had a hard time believing Tommy could be hurt by something as mundane as a stray kick. “What do I do?”

“Go get Oliver,” Tommy said. “He can wrap my ribs, get me some pain meds.”

Thea blinked and pulled away from Tommy. “When did Oliver go to medical school? I really think I should take you to the hospital.”

Tommy chuckled. “He picked up some tricks. More than I care to think about. Mysteries of the island or what the fuck ever.”

Tommy never talked about the island. Oliver never talked about the island. They never talked about Russia or what had happened in between, so hearing Tommy mention it so casually threw Thea even more off-balance. She’d always known that Tommy knew more than she did -- and tried not to begrudge him the easy, confidante relationship he had with her brother. They were closer in age, they were… whatever they were. Lovers, sometimes, she knew that much…
But it still stung. Tommy knew her brother would be able to help him, and she had no idea.

“Okay,” she said evenly. “I’ll go get him. Try not to move until I get back.”

Tommy huffed out a breath. “What do you suppose I’ve been doing all this time?”

She didn’t know what to say to that -- Tommy was very rarely sarcastic with her, very rarely mean, and it was clear he was in so much pain that he wasn’t acting himself. Thea tried to remember her vow from earlier that morning, to be strong and to take charge of her destiny, to start helping.

Well, helping, she decided, included toughening up and ignoring whatever was coursing through her veins at the moment -- she could sort out her emotions later. It probably wouldn’t be a good idea to let anyone know that Oliver’s right-hand man wasn’t in top form in the middle of a power shift, Thea thought. She schooled her face to iron and left Tommy’s room walking as fast as she dared, hoping not to raise suspicion.

The walk back to the family corridor seemed to take forever -- Tommy’s room was further away than Digg’s, even, and Thea tried to forget the clock that was ticking down in the back of her mind. Every extra second it took her was an extra second that Tommy was in pain.

She knocked on the door of Oliver’s room and waited. Unlike Tommy, Oliver was very strict about his personal space, and who was allowed in and out and when. Thea tried not to fidget when she heard a muffled curse and the sounds of people moving around. The door opened. Her brother was shirtless and looked exhausted.

And then surprised. “Thea. What are you doing here at this hour?”

She nearly sighed but managed to hold it back. “It’s not that early, Ollie.”

“It’s before noon. I don’t know that I’ve voluntarily seen you in the--”

“Can we not?” Thea pushed past him. “Close the door.”
Oliver’s face was knitted into concern now, but he did what she asked. “What’s going on?”

“Tommy needs you. I went to… oh, it doesn’t matter.” Thea waved a hand. “He’s in a lot of pain.”

Felicity emerged from the bathroom, her hair around her shoulders, wearing kitschy pajamas. “I went and checked on him last night, I wondered if…”

“Tommy’s very good at hiding what he doesn’t want you to see,” Oliver said flatly. “So if he’s dropping the artifice, it really hurts.”

Wordlessly, Felicity stepped into the bedroom and grabbed a t-shirt for Oliver, and handed it to him. “Let’s go now.”

Oliver looked at Thea. “Thanks for coming to get me, Speedy. I appreciate it.”

“Don’t call me Speedy.” Thea crossed her arms. “And of course I’d come get you. I love… he’s my brother too, you know?”

Oliver didn’t say anything, just nodded and quickly left the room, Felicity and Thea right behind him. They weren’t stopped in the hallway this time, so it didn’t take quite as long, and Oliver’s lengthy strides gave Thea an excuse to almost-trot to keep up.

At Tommy’s door, Oliver paused. And then he coughed. And looked sideways. Thea just knew whatever was about to come out of his mouth would piss her off.

“I’m thinking maybe I should just go in there by myself and take care of him,” Oliver said carefully. “Tommy doesn’t…”

“Oh, for the love of fuck,” Thea said, and pushed him aside to open the door. “We’re back, Tommy!”

Oliver winced, but Felicity chuckled and pushed past him as well, stopping to pick up the clothes scattered about the living area as she did so.
“Tommy?” Thea called his name and was disturbed when he didn’t answer. “Oliver, he was awake when I left.”

Oliver gently moved her aside and approached Tommy’s bed. “Thea, can you get the tape and first aid kit from the bathroom? He should have some pain medicine in there, as well.”

Thea ran quickly to the bathroom, flinging open the medicine cabinet. Her jaw dropped at all of the different orange prescription bottles there. She ran her thumb over the labels -- she was familiar with a number of them and felt a twinge of something like want -- just a little something to take the edge off of this terrible morning, but not while Oliver was in the next room, and selected one of the strongest pain killers there, along with a fever reducer. Her hands shook as she searched the lower cabinets of his vanity for a first aid kit, and tape.

Tommy coughed weakly from the bed as Thea reentered the room, talking softly with Oliver. It appeared to be an intense conversation. Felicity crossed the room and met her, reaching for Thea’s arm. “They’re discussing whether or not to call the doctor,” she said softly.

“Oh,” Thea said, her eyes widening. “Does Ollie think…?”

“Internal damage, probably,” Felicity said bluntly. “Oliver and I agree, but neither one of us are doctors. Tommy is being stubborn.”

“Tommy!” Thea stomped over to the bed, impatient with Tommy’s reluctance to take care of himself. “Thomas Merlyn, you pull your head out of your ass right this very minute.”

Tommy’s eyes widened. “I’m not sure what I’ve done to deserve that. Are those pain pills? You should give them to me. All of them.”

“Let Oliver call an actual medical professional,” Felicity said, laying a hand on Thea’s shoulder. “We’re worried about you.”

“I could go nine rounds with Muhammad Ali right now.”
Thea scoffed. “You couldn’t go nine rounds with the Stay Puft Marshmallow man.”

“Well, that’s just… not nice.” Tommy closed his eyes.

Thea crawled in his bed, careful as to not jostle him, and laid her head on his left shoulder, tucking her head underneath of his chin. She turned her widest, prettiest eyes on him. “You should let us call the doctor. You always make me go.”

Tommy buried his hands in her hair, almost in habit. Thea hadn’t snuck in his bed in a while -- not since Oliver had returned, but it had been a common enough experience when he’d been gone and Thea thought Oliver was dead. Thea inhaled. Tommy smelled much the same as he had back then. It settled something in her stomach that had been unsettled for weeks.

“I always make you go because you don’t want to go because you’re a scaredy cat. I am just… fine.”

Thea sighed, deciding a demonstration of his not-fineness was necessary, and poked him in the ribs. Tommy yelped in agony, tears coming to his eyes. Thea shook her head. “I’m sorry, Tommy, but you’re not. Oliver’s gonna go call the doctor. Felicity’s going to give you a pain pill, and I’m…”

Tommy squeezed her. “Stay right here, okay? Just… stay right here.”

Thea nodded. “Whatever you want.”

**

Felicity handed Tommy the medicine and then followed Oliver into the hallway, where he was making a phone call to the family doctor. She closed the door to Tommy’s bedroom behind her and leaned against it, watching Oliver as he paced back and forth in the hallway.

“Happened last night,” he was saying. “Yeah. Oh, you know Tommy. He thought he’d be fine.”

There was a pause. “I think he’ll live but we’d rather you come sooner than later. Yeah, of course. Raisa will let you in.” Oliver leaned against the wall, just out of Felicity’s reach. “Thanks, Dr.
Felicity waited a beat. “Is the doctor on their way?”

“Yeah, she’ll be here soon.” Oliver tapped the wall with his fist. “Shit.”

Felicity, for the first time since her arrival in Starling, didn’t quite know what to do. What would be helpful, what would… “Oliver, I’m sorry.”

“It’s not your fault.” Oliver shook his head. “I…I should have gone and checked on him. I knew something wasn’t right and I just…” His hands clenched and unclenched. “This is what’s so frustrating about him. He just… hides everything and…”

“Well, I can see why that would be frustrating to someone that’s as open as you are,” Felicity said, her voice flat and sarcastic.

Oliver chuckled and Felicity crossed the hall, took his tense hands in hers. “He can’t do this again, you know,” she said softly. “We have to tell him. If he’s hurt… he has to be honest with us.”

Oliver shook his head. “If you think this is a conversation we haven’t had before, then…”

“Then maybe it’s you and Thea,” Felicity said. “He’ll listen to the two of you together. I’m uh -- I’m good at a lot of things.”

Oliver raised his eyebrows. “I’ve noticed.”

“Hush,” Felicity said, rolling her eyes. “No, one of the things I’m best at is… seeing weaknesses. Finding buttons. But you know that, that’s why you brought me here.”

“One of the reasons I brought you here,” Oliver said firmly. “There were many.”
Felicity smiled and ducked her head. “Well. I would just say -- if Tommy Merlyn has a weak spot at all, it’s how much he loves you and Thea. I think he’d be hard pressed to say no to the two of you.”

“What do you think my weakness is?” Oliver asked, drawing Felicity in close and wrapping his arms around her.

Felicity smiled. “Tommy and Thea. You make a nice little triangle, the three of you.”

Oliver kissed her forehead. “What about you?”

Felicity stilled, glad, for the moment, that their height difference meant that Oliver couldn’t look into her eyes when her head was bent this way. She closed her eyes. “What are my weaknesses?”

“Do you have any?” Oliver asked teasingly.

“I want to belong somewhere,” Felicity said softly, her heart fluttering wildly in her chest. “That’s my weakness.”

“You belong here, with me,” Oliver said, lifting her chin with a finger.

“Perhaps,” Felicity said, avoiding his searching eyes. “I’m certainly doing my best to make that the case.”

“Felicity…”

“I’m a genius, but I’m not infallible. I should have… Will Tommy ever forgive me for not noticing that he was so badly injured?”

“He’s… he’s going to be grateful you noticed him at all. Felicity, I meant it, no one is mad at you.”

Felicity bit her lip. “Except me. I’m mad at me.”
“Well, don’t be.” Oliver shook his head. “I mean it, Felicity.”

Felicity inhaled, anchoring herself in the moment. Her brain could run away with her, she knew that. But here she was, solid carpet under her feet, Oliver’s cotton shirt underneath her hands, his fingers on her shoulder blades, his mouth near her ear.

“This is nothing like what happened in Moscow,” Oliver said firmly. “Don’t think for a minute that it is.”

His voice had dropped to the same husky quality it had when he would call her late at night, those years they were separated, and they would whisper to each other. She ran her fingers along the length of his collar.

“If you say so.”

“I do.”

Felicity buried her nose in his shoulder and inhaled. “I don’t like failure, Oliver.”

“Well, you’re not used to it,” Oliver said. “And you didn't fail, Felicity. Tommy’s a grown man. And an idiot.”

“An idiot that you love.”

“You did say that was my weakness,” Oliver said seriously.

“And it’s your strength. You pulled me across an ocean with the strength of that,” Felicity said. “So - - it’s complicated.”

“Everything is complicated,” Oliver said on a sigh. “Including what’s about to happen.”
“What’s that?”

“Here comes my mother,” Oliver said, his face shutting down. “She’ll have heard about this.”

Felicity squeezed him a little bit tighter and went up on tip-toe to kiss his cheek.

“Well, you two are looking cozy this morning,” Moira said coolly. She was impeccably dressed, pearl necklace and drop earrings in place, tasteful make-up applied. Felicity nearly set her teeth at the disadvantage, but decided to roll with it. Moira would want her off-balance, and Felicity, quite frankly, didn’t want to give her the satisfaction. She’d felt the same way about her fourth-grade teacher.

“Good morning, Mom,” Oliver said pleasantly, but he didn’t unwrap his arms from Felicity. “What are you doing down here?”

“I heard Tommy was injured,” Moira said, gesturing to the door behind them. “I came to check on him.”

“He’s resting,” Felicity said. “We’re just waiting on the doctor to come take a look at him.”

Moira raised her eyebrows. “The doctor is coming?”

“It doesn’t look good,” Oliver said. “We think he fractured a couple of ribs, maybe there’s some internal damage, as well.”

“Oliver, Dr. Michaels is the family’s personal physician.”

“Tommy is family,” Oliver said flatly. “If you don’t agree, then just have her send the fucking bill to me.”

“Oliver, that wasn’t…” Moira looked genuinely taken aback. “That wasn’t what I meant at all. Of
course, Tommy deserves the best care.”

“And Dr. Michaels is the best,” Oliver said. “I’m so glad we agree.”

Felicity squeezed his hand. Oliver was, in general, much better at hiding his frustration with Moira than this, but clearly the stress of Tommy’s injury was wearing on his acting skills.

“It would be painful to move him at this point,” Felicity said, stepping into the conversation. “We decided it would be best for the doctor to come to Tommy.”

“Well,” Moira said, “I trust you will keep me informed.”

“Of course,” Felicity said. “We’re all very concerned about him. We’ll keep you in the loop.”

Oliver watched her go, his whole body tense until she turned the corner. “Thanks,” he said softly. “I didn’t want to deal with her trying to pretend she gives a crap and what she would do when she saw Tommy and Thea together, and… all of it.”

Felicity nodded. “I’m here to help.”

Oliver lifted one corner of his mouth in an almost-smile. “I’m glad you are. Here, I mean.”

“Thanks, Oliver.”

Oliver narrowed his eyes. “No, I mean that.”

“I know.” Felicity avoided his eyes. So he lifted her chin with his fingers, brought his face close.

“Let me show you, okay?”
Butterflies in her stomach, the kind she told herself she wouldn’t get anymore. Oliver kissed her, like she knew he would. She’d never met anyone who kissed like Oliver Queen. The first time he’d kissed her, in her bedroom in Russia, she’d had the thought that all the practice he must have had had served him well, because Oliver Queen kissed like it was his job. He was thorough and patient and demanding, when he had to be, and Felicity was half-convinced his kisses were half the reason she’d picked up and moved across the ocean.

A cough interrupted them. A cough she was familiar with. She chuckled a little as she pulled her lips back from Oliver’s. “Good morning, Diggle.”

“This is quite a party I walked into,” Diggle said, a sardonic smile on his face. “Gettin busy in the hallways already, Queen?”

“Seemed like a good idea,” Oliver drawled. “While we’re waiting for the doctor to show up.”

“Ah yes, your injured friend. I was sorry to hear that.” Diggle stuck his hands in his pockets. “Never easy when it’s your brother.”

“Oh -- yeah.” Oliver tilted his head to the side. Felicity could practically hear the wheels turning in his mind and nearly held her breath. She wanted so badly for the two of them to get along. “We missed you at dinner last night.”

Felicity bounced a little on the balls of her feet. “John has family in town that he wanted to check in on.” It was mostly the truth.

“My brother and his wife live in Starling,” Diggle said. “Carly’s expecting. I haven’t been able to see them in a couple of years, so Felicity let me take some time.”

“I figured I was safe enough in the Queen family fortress,” Felicity said.

Diggle shot her a look, one of the eloquent ones he was so good at -- a hundred and fifty words in a smirk, Felicity liked to say -- and this one clearly said that she was full of shit. Felicity hid her amusement by turning her head into Oliver’s shoulder.

Diggle sighed and rolled his eyes. “I got what you were looking for, as well,” he said. “You’ll find
“Oh, already?” Felicity couldn’t stop her face from lighting up. “Anatoly works fast.”

“Sure does,” Diggle agreed. “Also drinks vodka like it’s going out of style. I think my head’s going to be pounding for weeks.”

Oliver’s eyes scrunched. “You have a hangover?”

“You can’t tell?” Diggle shrugged.

“No,” Oliver said. “I really, really can’t. That’s impressive.”

“Oliver?” A woman at the end of the hallway called his name, and Oliver smiled in relief.

“Dr. Michaels!” His voice was light, the voice he used with people who only knew him as Oliver Queen, billionaire playboy.

“How’s our patient doing?” Dr. Michaels asked, her eyes sliding over to Diggle and back, and then over to Diggle again.

“Thea’s in with him. Trying to get him to rest.”

Diggle himself had gone very, very still. Felicity’s eyes widened. Michaels. Doctor. Oh shit.

“Okay, well. Let’s take a look.” She very pointedly ignored Diggle and swept into Tommy’s room.

Felicity pushed Oliver in after her but stayed behind with Diggle. “I was wondering why you appeared. You knew she was coming.”
Diggle shrugged.

“You wanted to see her.” Felicity grinned. “John, that’s adorable.”

“Okay, what you’re doing right now, you can stop immediately.”

“John and Lyla sitting in a tree…”

“Felicity…”

Felicity waved a hand. “All right, all right, I’ll stop. But for the record, if you’re about to embark on Mission: Mrs. Lyla Diggle, part two, I am willing to co-captain that ship.”

“I think you’ve got enough going on, fixing your own love life.”

Felicity shrugged. “What is there to fix?”

Another one of those looks. It was magnificent, really, how much talking Diggle didn’t do.

“I’m just fine. Everything is under control.”

“Mmhmm. Sure.”

“Have a little faith in me, John.”

“Of course, kid. Always.”

**
Dr. Michaels had been the Dearden family doctor for six months. She’d taken over the position from the man who had worked for the family for twenty-five years. Before that, she’d done her time as a field medic and Army-trained doctor, so she was used to treating the kinds of wounds she saw on a regular basis.

And the money to ensure her cooperation and silence was good enough. Seeing Johnny again was -- unexpected. But she could shove that back in the box where it belonged. Far, far back in the back of her mind, where she kept everything related to that marriage and the way it had fallen apart.

She had a mission on her hands -- that was the way she functioned. A mission on her hands that involved Tommy Merlyn -- and Oliver Queen. In the six months she’d been the Dearden family doctor, she hadn’t treated either one of them. Oliver politely refused medical assistance, it was explained to her, because he hadn’t returned to a doctor since he had returned from his time… abroad. Tommy -- for all she knew, he might have gone somewhere else for help.

It had been explained to her, gently, that he wasn’t Family.

It was nice to know that Oliver Queen thought more highly of his friend than that. She’d met them both, sometimes in passing, sometimes if they brought a Family member in for treatment.

They were charming boys, she thought, with as much affection as she could muster for lifetime members of the Irish mob. Charming boys, but sad boys. Murderous, sad boys.

“Hey, Thomas,” she said softly as she entered the room. “Banged yourself up pretty well?”

“ Took a kick in the ribs. Went through a window,” Tommy hissed. “You know, standard fare.”

“Sure, for a Ninja Turtle,” Lyla drawled. “Hey, Thea.”

“Hey,” the girl said, sitting up carefully so as not to disturb the patient. Lyla had never seen the two of them together. She studied them for a moment, and filed away her observations in another box in her mind. There would be time to think about all that later.

For now, there was an examination to do. A mission to complete. She was quick, professional, and thorough. She ignored the way the man flinched when her hands approached him, even near
unmarked skin.

The stories of boys who chose this life were rarely happy. She knew that. But he was welcoming of the gentle touch of Thea, who ran her hands through his hair and told jokes so that Tommy would keep his eyes on hers.


“Not happening.” Tommy said firmly. The door behind them opened and shut, and Oliver and his fiancée were now both in the room. “Don’t you say anything, Oliver.”

“You look pretty rough for broken ribs,” Felicity said.

“That’s because he sustained internal injuries,” Lyla said. “He needs a blood transfusion and x-rays and tests I can’t perform here.”

“This sounds like a no-brainer to me,” Felicity said. “What do you want me to pack for the hospital, Tommy?”

Tommy’s mouth opened and closed. “Not overnight,” he said.

Lyla lifted her eyebrows. “I can’t make that determination here.”

“I’m just letting you know, I’m not staying in the hospital overnight.”

Thea gripped his arm, stilling him. “Please, Tommy. It’s not that big a deal. One of us will stay with you. You know. If you want. Just… take care of yourself.”

Lyla watched as Tommy nodded, then straightened out of her crouch. “I’m just going to make some calls -- you’ll need to be safely transported there and I’m guessing the last thing you folks want is an ambulance leaving from this building.”
Tommy smiled warmly at her. “She catches on fast, this one. Guess we’ll keep you.”

“I appreciate that, Merlyn,” Lyla said, rolling her eyes. “Lay still until I get back.”

She exited, noting the way Oliver leaned against the wall, his arms across his chest. Of course he would have been there when it happened. Of course he’d feel guilty. Lyla knew that kind of soul from a mile away.

She’d married one.

Shaking her head at her own thoughts, she left the room and palmed her cell phone.

“Excuse me?” Lyla turned and was confronted with the future Mrs. Queen -- the Starling City media had been abuzz with rumors that Oliver was to be married, and her sources had confirmed those reports. She wasn’t exactly what Lyla would expect, but she was pleasantly surprised.

Felicity Smoak was open-faced beautiful, with a quick smile, yellow hair. The kind of pretty Lyla had decided long ago was not in her wheelhouse, but she sure appreciated it.

“What can I do for you, Felicity?”

“Oh, what you can do for me, you’ve already done. Thanks for coming out to take a look at Tommy.”

Lyla shrugged. “It’s my job.”

“Right. Because you’re a doctor. For rich people.”

“Sometimes,” Lyla said. “Other times not.”

Felicity’s smile was so brief she almost missed it. “Right, of course. This is Starling, where everything is made up and the points don’t matter.”
Lyla shook her head. “What?”

“Never mind.” Felicity smiled brighter, more deliberately. “I just wanted to uh -- tell you that John speaks very highly of you. And I don’t want this to be awkward.”

“No, why would it be?”

“Oh, because everything I do is a little bit awkward, but… anyway, I haven’t been in this city long, but I think my chances of developing friendships might be, well… few and far between.”

Lyla’s eyebrows nearly shot up into her hairline. This was… not what she expected. “Oh.”

“Don’t feel like you have to, but… we could do coffee sometime?” Felicity rocked back and forth on her heels.

“If this is because of something Johnny said, then…”

“Only that we might get along.”

“He’s quite the judge of character,” Lyla said.

“Like I said,” Felicity reiterated, “no pressure.”

“I can always use another friend,” Lyla said, unable to turn down such an opportunity. Felicity nodded, and turned back to Tommy’s room.

Lyla reached for her cell phone again and paused. “You can come out now, Johnny. You have all the subtlety of a rhino wearing camouflage sometimes, you know?”

“Only to you,” John said. “Hey there, Lyla.”
“Fancy seeing you here, in the headquarters of the Irish mob,” Lyla said. “Oh wait, I forgot compromising your morals is your new thing now.”

“It’s never been in my code to leave a debt unpaid,” John said evenly, in that tone of voice that she’d come to hate. It was oh-so-rational and oh-so-deep and oh-so-full-of-shit. “Speaking of compromising morals, I’m not the one administering life giving care to murderers and thieves.”

“Everyone deserves quality care. Besides, this pays the bills at the clinic, so.”

“Hey, you don’t have to justify yourself to me,” Diggle said, knitting his eyebrows together. “I know you wouldn’t be here without a good reason.”

“Yeah, well, I’m just going to go arrange medical transport for a billionaire, so…”

“Hey.” John grabbed her arm. Lightly enough she could pull away if she wanted to. “What about your other job?”

“What other job?”

“Let’s take two minutes and pretend I’m not stupid,” Diggle said. “What about your other job, Lyla?”

“Classified.”

“So you are here ---”

“Classified, Johnny. I mean it.”

“So that’s how it’s going to be.”
For some reason -- that look -- tempered disappointment, lost hope, on John’s face, made her stomach sink.

“That’s how it has to be.”

John nodded. “Okay. Good to know. See you around, Lyla.”

“Johnny, wait!”

He turned.

“Carly and Andy, have you -- I mean…”

“Saw them last night. Diggle number three is doing just fine,” John said. “I’ll be sure to pass on your regards.”

Lyla huffed out a breath as Diggle walked away. “Do that.” Then she pushed away all thoughts of her delicious ex-husband, and the damage they did to each other because they couldn’t really let go, and started making phone calls to make sure Tommy Merlyn didn’t bleed out on her watch.

Hell of a morning, she thought, and it wasn’t even ten yet.
Chapter Summary

Tommy spends a day in the hospital.

Chapter Notes

Wow, this chapter. Wow. Okay, so I feel like I have to warn you. Note the rating change. From here on out, the tone of the story gets more... adult.

Warnings that apply specifically to this chapter: Child abuse, Drug use (mentioned), homophobia, explicit sex

Tommy didn’t like hospitals. He loved nurses, in general, the gruff ones with a tough-love attitude, the bright and sunny ones who never seemed to let anything get to them, the cynical ones and the scared ones. He had a thing for nurses. He didn’t like hospitals.

It wasn’t so bad while they were moving, going from room to room, this test and that test, personnel in and out of his room. No, the worst was when they stopped moving, when the IVs were all in place and his ribs were wrapped. And all he had to do was lay there.

Alone.

He covered his eyes with his forearm, a movement that only felt like mild agony thanks to the painkillers they’d pumped into his system.

“Be careful,” Oliver said as he entered the room. “You’re supposed to take it easy.”

“Lifting my arm over my head is not exactly hard labor, Oliver.”

Oliver eschewed the chairs arranged around the bed and took a seat on the edge of Tommy’s blanket. “No, but you do have something like two broken ribs and a couple of cracked ones and maybe you ought to try laying very, very still.”
“Tell you what, the next time you follow that advice when you break a bone, I’ll return the favor,” Tommy said, his voice light and teasing.

“I need you in fighting form, you know,” Oliver said softly. “Can’t do this without you.”

Tommy appreciated the effort, at least, but he knew better. “Well, I’m doing my best,” he said hollowly.

His friend narrowed his eyes. “You know, I keep thinking about the last time you didn’t want to go to the hospital.”

Tommy’s eyes widened. He didn’t want to go over this old ground again. “Oliver, come on… I was eleven, you’ve apologized a million times, let’s just…”

“It’s not going to be like that this time. Any time, actually, ever again. If I’m not here, then Felicity will be. Or Thea.”

Tommy wished he could sit up. “Oliver, that’s really not necessary…”

Oliver leaned in close. “You collapsed on the playground, remember this?"

“Yeah, of course, I…”

“I had to run and get a teacher because no one else knew what to do. You were so pale I thought for sure you were going to die.”

Tommy could still remember the pain. “So did I.”

“They rushed you off in an ambulance and I didn’t get to say good-bye. I didn’t get to see you. All I could think about was that my best friend was going to die and I wasn’t going to be able to do anything about it.” Oliver squeezed his hands into fists and stared at the floor.
“That was a long time ago, Oliver,” Tommy said, hoping that Oliver would just let this die.

Oliver shook his head. “I kept thinking about you waking up alone. I begged Mom to take me, or to go herself, but she kept saying your father would be there… I knew that was a lie. She said it was an appendix, that it was bad, but they’d fix it, you would wake up again.”

“Oliver…”

Oliver’s eyes never left his. “I don’t know if you woke up alone and scared. I imagine you did. We haven’t talked about this much, mostly cause you won’t let me…”

“Yeah, thanks for waiting until I was drugged and immobile to bring this up, buddy…”

“Anyway. I’m not a shrink. I don’t know if that’s why you don’t want to be here. But if that’s the case, I’m not an eleven year old kid anymore, and neither are you.”

“I know it’s stupid, but I…”

“You’re my brother.”

Tommy blinked. “And you’re mine.”

“Okay, good. Glad we’re on the same page there.” Oliver tapped the rail of Tommy’s bed. “Want me to text Felicity, have her bring us some non-hospital food, if you want? Thea will be by in a bit.”

Tommy looked anywhere but Oliver, struggled for purchase. This Oliver -- though he loved him as much as he had ever loved Ollie -- was mercurial, could change direction on a dime. Not that Ollie couldn’t. But… it was more disconcerting now. “How long are you saddled with me? Don’t you have a wedding to a gorgeous blonde to plan?”

Oliver flinched, such a tiny microexpression it might have been missed by anyone but Tommy.
“Tommy, come on,” Oliver said.

“What? This is a good thing, Oliver.”

“We agreed this was the plan, so…”

“Oliver.” Tommy reached for Oliver’s forearm, squeezed it. “You know I’m not upset, right? Besides which, I see the way you look at her. You’re halfway to toast.”

Oliver lifted a corner of his mouth in almost a smile. “You know they burned all of that out of me on the island.”

“Bullshit,” Tommy said evenly. “I say that because you can’t punch the guy on morphine.”

“Oh, I could,” Oliver teased. “I’m just exercising great control right now.”

“I am pissing my pants...I might actually be, I can’t really feel anything. Christ, this is good stuff.”

Oliver laughed, a low chuckle, the kind Tommy hadn’t heard in a while. It sent a jolt right through his spine and he let his grin get a little bit silly. Then Oliver reached up, brushed Tommy’s hair off of his forehead.

“Oliver…” Tommy hissed.

“What?”

Tommy closed his eyes. “I’m high, but I’m not that high. Come on.”

“I’m sorry,” Oliver said, backing off of the bed. Tommy let his hand fall away. “Jesus, Tommy.”
“You are going to have a wife,” Tommy said, leaning back. “A beautiful wife. And you are going to fill that old, stupid, haunted house with kids who are actually going to be loved and wanted. And I’ll come over on Tuesdays and Sundays and we’ll, I don’t know. Whatever the fuck normal people do. Grill steaks or some shit. And we’ll laugh about the times we used to jump out of goddamn windows like idiots. And here’s the best part – we’ll get old, Oliver. You and your wife and your kids, in the house we fought for. And it will be worth it.”

“Where’s your wife?” Oliver asked. “Where are your kids, Tommy? You’ve always wanted those things. More than me.”

Tommy’s eyes were closing. “Never wanted anything more than you, Oliver. You’re going to be happy, just watch.”

**

*Three years ago, Moscow, Russia*

Oliver and Felicity fell together on the bed, laughing as they undressed each other. Felicity had quick hands, and she was naked much faster than Oliver, pulling on his pants demandingly.

“Come on,” she whined.

“Felicity, you’re not helping,” Oliver said, doing his best to kick his shoes off.

“You’re a grown man,” Felicity said, “you should be able to take your own pants off.” But she leaned forward, unbuttoned his slacks, and pushed them and his boxers down around his ankles. Then, quicker than he could blink, she had her mouth around his cock.

“Fuck!” Oliver said, his eyes practically rolling back in his head. “Fel-i-ci-ty…”

Her mouth popped off of his dick and she looked up at him, amusement sparkling in her eyes. “Yes, good, fuck Felicity. That is the end goal.”
Oliver chuckled and gestured. “Come here.”

“I can’t get much closer than this,” Felicity said.

“No.” Oliver reached for her legs. “Let me eat you out, please, baby.”

Felicity shivered. “Does that… work? You eating me out while I suck on you? Seems… complicated.”

Oliver grinned. “I don’t know. We’re pretty gifted. Let’s find out.”

There was no way not to feel ridiculous as Felicity lowered herself over Oliver’s mouth. No way to curb her anticipation as Oliver parted her with a single finger.

“Oliver,” Felicity whined. “Please.”

“Anticipation, Felicity.”

Felicity lowered her mouth over Oliver’s cock and sucked hard on the head. Oliver let out a strangled groan. Felicity laughed. “Not a fan of anticipation.”

Oliver’s thumb teased her clit while Felicity focused on his cock. She wiggled her hips and spread her legs further. “I can’t wait to taste you.”

Felicity laughed, lifting her mouth off of him. “Clearly you can.”

Oliver dipped his finger inside of her. “Didn’t you do this as a kid? Just... a lick of the popsicle. Just a hint.”

“I’m going to fucking kill you if you don’t do something,” Felicity hissed.
Oliver’s cock twitched in her hands and he arched his hips. “Baby…”

Felicity pumped her fist over him. “Consequences, Oliver. There will be consequences.”

“Jesus. Fuck.”

“Use that tongue for something more interesting,” Felicity said, her voice a tease, “if you can.”

Oliver didn’t say anything, he just brought his mouth to her wetness and dipped his tongue inside her. Felicity hummed, pleased with him. Oliver pulled away. “Oh fuck, Felicity, you taste so good.”

Felicity flushed. “You don’t have to…”

“I’m not lying,” Oliver said. “You taste… Hm….” He flicked his tongue against her clit. “There’s nothing like the way you taste.”

“Oliver!” Felicity let go of his cock and laid her head on his thigh. “Please.”

Oliver’s long finger pumped inside of her, his tongue teased her clit. Felicity huffed out a breath. “Oliver…”

“Where’s your motor-mouth now, baby?” Oliver asked her. “Can you take more?”

“Ugh,” Felicity moaned, and the moan turned to a gasp as Oliver nipped lightly at her clit and spread her further apart to accommodate another finger.

“What a beautiful fucking pussy. Hm, I love to watch you.” Oliver sucked at her clit. “Are you going to come all over my face, baby?”

“Oliver Queen,” Felicity gasped, “quit talking and…. Ugh, right there.” Oliver’s fingers had curved inside of her. “Oh, God.”
She closed her eyes and concentrated. The orgasm of her life, it was right there. She could feel it, on the horizon. Everything in her body was tensing. Oliver’s tongue teased and flicked her clit and his fingers stroked inside of her and Felicity panted. She was wet, so wet. It was dripping out of her, onto his face. Her nails raked against his thigh.

Then his fingers hit that spot and it was like electricity went up and down her spine. “Oliver, I think…”

“You’re okay, relax,” he muttered soothingly.

“I want to come,” Felicity moaned. “Please, Oliver.”

But Oliver slowed. “Remember what I was saying, earlier?”

Felicity dug her nails into his thigh. “Not nice.”

Oliver hissed. “Neither was that.”

“I’ll kiss it better,” Felicity said, and dropped her lips to the scratches. “All you have to do is make me come.”

“I’m going to,” Oliver promised. “What do you think, one more?”

Felicity took a deep breath. “Oliver…”

Carefully, he slid a third finger inside of her. Felicity gasped. He was so patient with her body as he worked her into a frenzy. His tongue teased her clit, his fingers were thick and perfect inside of her.

“I’m going to come. Fuck!” He pulled his fingers from inside of her and buried his tongue in her channel. Felicity tensed and shook, waves of pleasure washing over her, little aftershocks pulsing through her body as she felt Oliver lapping at her. “Fuck…” she sighed, kissing his thigh, as her
body slowly calmed down. “Your turn,” Felicity announced, and she swung her legs around to straddle him.

“Kiss me, baby,” Oliver said, tugging on her hand gently. “You’ll see how good you taste.”

Felicity chuckled and bent her head to kiss him, her hair falling all around her shoulders as they did. She’d never tasted herself, certainly not on a lover’s lips, and to her surprise, she found that she didn’t hate the taste. “Condom,” Felicity said, finally pulling back from his lips. “We need a condom if you’re going to fuck me.”

Oliver raised his eyebrows. “Do you want that?”

“Very much,” Felicity said, kissing him again.

“Let me get to my pants, I have one in my wallet,” Oliver said. Felicity rolled off of him and laid back on the pillows, idly touching herself while she watched his truly excellent ass bend and flex while he went through his pants pockets.

He grinned victoriously at her when he found it, shaking the foil packet at her. “Found it!” He crawled up the bed and kissed her neck. “I could watch you touch yourself all day.”

“Yeah, but I want you inside of me,” Felicity countered, and took the packet from him. She opened it easily and pushed him onto his back, securing the condom over his cock. “I’ve been thinking about this all day.”

“Is that so?” Oliver beamed at her.

“Yes, you are both pretty and fuckable,” Felicity said, rolling her eyes and laughing. “I want you, I need you. Oh baby, oh baby.”

Oliver pulled her close, helped her swing her leg over him. “Just for that, you can do the work.”

Felicity sighed. “If I must.” But she gasped in pleasure as she slowly lowered herself over Oliver’s
erect cock. It took a minute to find the rhythm that worked for both of them, torturing sighs and moans out of Oliver and Felicity. It was a rocking, twisting motion and it freed Oliver’s hands up to play with her breasts, down her body to rest his thumb against her clit and rub it in slow, gentle circles.

Felicity closed her eyes against the pleasure slowly rippling through her body. Oliver’s chest was hard underneath her flat palms, peppered with scars he had no interest in telling her the stories of. When she did open her eyes, she met his startlingly brilliant-blue ones.

“Come for me, baby,” he whispered, and she had no other choice but to ride the wave of pleasure through her orgasm. Then Oliver was tensing underneath of her, arching his back, and calling her name, like he had been waiting for her to submit to the pleasure himself.

It was too intimate. Too… close.

Felicity shook her head and laughed, exhaling as she rolled off him and pushed her hair out of her eyes. “Oliver Queen, you are a remarkable specimen and an excellent fuck.”

Oliver laughed, covering his eyes with his hands. “Thanks, Felicity.”

“You’re welcome,” Felicity said, reaching for a pillow to fluff behind her head. Oliver rolled over and wrapped his arm around her middle, his leg flung over hers, his head on her breasts. His hair was right there and she ran her fingers through it. “Have you ever thought about getting this cut?”

“Don’t have much free time for haircuts,” Oliver fairly slurred. “Too busy being a professional asshole for the Russian mob.”

Felicity snorted. “Say that a little louder. I don’t think my uncle heard you.”

“Is this what you wanted out of life?” Oliver asked her, all of a sudden serious, his hands drifting up to play with her hair. “I can’t imagine it was your childhood dream to be a…”

“Mafia boss?” Felicity shook her head. “No, it wasn’t, actually. As a kid, I was good with computers. I kind of thought I’d end up, I don’t know, writing missile codes, or something. What about you?”
Oliver shrugged. “I guess I didn’t think very much about being an actual adult. I thought -- I don’t know. I guess I assumed I’d do something at QC, but that never sounded like fun. Being an adult was less about what I’d do for money than about what I would finally have the freedom to do with it.”

“I remember thinking that I would walk away, when I was old enough to be on my own,” Felicity said quietly, the first time she’d ever said something like this out loud. Oliver took her hand and threaded her fingers through his.

“I am going to get away, one of these days,” Oliver said fiercely, his voice soft. “I can’t undo what I’ve been made into, but I can use the monster for something good.”

“Oliver, you’re not a monster.”

Oliver took her hands and laid them on the scars on his chest. “I’m not Ollie Queen anymore.”

Felicity wrinkled her nose. “Letting that particular nickname go might not be a bad thing.”

Oliver laughed. “I’m trying to have a moment with you here.”

“And I’m listening,” Felicity said seriously, “but I won’t let you -- not see that you’re still a good person, Oliver. Nobody could take that from you.”

“I wasn’t a good person before,” Oliver said, shaking his head. “I was selfish and immature and weak.”

Felicity rolled him over on his back and cradled his face in her hands. “Maybe.” She laid her forehead against his and kissed him. “You know, the first time I ever killed anyone, I was sixteen years old.”

Oliver stilled.
“I didn’t know if I had it in me,” Felicity said. “But he was stealing from Yuri. I thought I could handle it on my own. But uh, he came after me. All I had was a letter opener. I stabbed him in the gut. It wasn’t enough. I had to push the letter opener through his throat.”

“Felicity…”

“Yuri came and found me, but it was too late to do anything but clean up the mess. That’s the trick with neck wounds.”

Oliver kissed the palm of her hand. “You had no other choice, it seems. I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be.” Felicity shrugged. “I’ve killed since then -- more deliberately and with less regret. I like to think not wastefully. But I would not have been in that position if --” She shook her head. “We were shaped into these people, Oliver.”

“We made choices,” Oliver said firmly. “I make them… every day.”

“Sometimes there aren’t choices, there is just… self-preservation. That doesn’t make you a monster, Oliver.”

“I just need to be someone that my little sister can look at and recognize,” Oliver said. “I’m going to go back home one of these days.”

“Hm,” Felicity said. “Home. What’s that like?”

“Starling City?” Oliver shrugged. “You know -- buildings, people. A distinct odor. It’s a lot like it is here.”

“No.” Felicity sighed and rolled her eyes. “What’s it like -- belonging somewhere? Do you have friends? Tell me about your sister. Tell me everything.”

“You’re demanding,” Oliver said on a laugh, rubbing his face.
Felicity’s lips quirked upwards in a smile. “Clearly.”

“I -- uh.” Oliver swallowed. “I burned a lot of bridges at home, the way I acted. I guess you could say I only have one true friend.”

Felicity snuggled into his shoulder. “Tell me about him. Or her. I’m fine if it’s her. I don’t get jealous. At least I don’t think I do.”

“His name is Tommy,” Oliver said. “Tommy Merlyn. And uh -- he basically lives in my house with me. We go everywhere together. When I… when I disappeared, he tracked me down.”

“But you didn’t go home?”

Oliver shook his head. “I couldn’t. I couldn’t go back until I had all the tools I need.”

Felicity tapped one of his pectoral muscles with her fingers, let her thumb brush across his nipple idly. “You know, the rumor is that your mother sent you away.”

“Sent me away?” Oliver snorted. “That’s what they’re calling it, huh?”

Felicity furrowed her brow and told herself to back off. “We don’t have to talk about this if you don’t want to.”

Oliver turned into her touch, but his eyes were shielded, careful. “I used to be really good at trusting people.”

“I won’t say that you can trust me,” Felicity said, “although you can. But that would seem kind of empty, I think. You don’t have to give me your life story.”

“It’s just -- you know. You think you can trust certain things in the world. What goes up comes down. Liquor, then beer. And you think you can trust your mother not to kill you.” Oliver sighed.
“But then -- my mother’s not just anybody.”

“Hm,” Felicity agreed. “I’ve met her, once or twice. She’s… efficient.”

Oliver’s laugh was bitter and hollow. “Yeah, that’s a good word for it.”

“What happened?” Felicity asked.

“Tommy and I--” Oliver sighed. “We got too close to the truth about… some things. Then my Dad got shot in an alley behind a factory he used to own, and Tommy and I… I think we started to become inconvenient.”

Felicity wrinkled her nose. “So she…?”

“The story the press told is mostly right. I was pissed about my Dad. I was scared out of my fucking mind. In my brilliance, I thought a girl and a long sail was exactly what I needed to clear my head. Only I didn’t pick the girl I was seeing. I picked her sister, because that’s the kind of person I was before the island remade me. And I left my best friend at home because I just wanted to shut down and not think. And Tommy -- he was too involved in it for me to be able to do that around him. We hit a storm. The boat failed.” Oliver’s breath went ragged, and his hands gripped her flesh and she could feel how cold they were.

“It’s okay, baby,” Felicity soothed him, pushing his hair behind his ears.

“I washed up on Lian Yu. Sara… didn’t make it. ” Oliver pointed at his chest, a deep angular scar on his shoulder. “That’s when Yao Fei shot me. On my mother’s orders. If the boat didn’t kill me, that’s what he was supposed to do.”

Felicity’s blood ran cold and her heart raced. “Oliver…”

“He decided if I survived the wound, it would show the strength my mother questioned I had.”

Felicity leaned forward, pressed her lips against the scar.
Oliver drew in a shuddering breath. “So. That’s my best friend and my mother for you. And I wouldn’t normally tell you any of this, but…”

Felicity’s heart fluttered in her chest.

“I need someone to know. I need someone to tell me whether or not I’m doing the right thing. I’m starting to doubt myself.”

“What are you doing that you’re starting to doubt?”

“Tommy and I -- we’re going to get my sister out of the life.”

“How are you going to do that?” Felicity asked, sitting up, supporting the weight of her torso on one of her elbows.

Oliver shrugged. “I’m going to be whoever she needs me to be here -- I’ll earn my way back to Starling City. Once I’m there -- I’ll take the first opportunity I can to ensure Thea never has to endure this.”

Felicity read between the lines. He would kill his mother if he had to. “That’s a hell of a thought, Oliver.”

“It’s a necessary one,” Oliver said. “Thea -- she’s the best of me. She’s the best of us. She deserves a better life than this.”

Felicity nodded. “How are you going to earn your way back to Starling?”

“Tommy and I can pass messages back and forth, sometimes. He says she’s waiting for a sign that I can take my place as the Hood.”

“What kind of sign does she need?” Felicity asked, her eyes narrowing.
“Some show of ruthlessness -- she’d need to know the last pieces of the weak little boy I was are dead.”

Felicity nodded slowly. “So what you need is a plan.”

“I… yes.”

“Hm.” Felicity smiled. “I think we can work with this. We can get you back home to Starling within the month, I’m sure.”

“Felicity, I’ve been in Moscow for almost a year now…”

“You weren’t in my bed and you didn’t have me on your side,” Felicity said confidently. “I’m a sucker for a man who loves his sister the way you love Thea. This is a wish I can grant you. It will, uh -- limit our time together, but this was never going to be permanent anyway.”

Felicity sat up, reached for her ponytail holder and her glasses. “Felicity, I didn’t tell you all of this so you would rush in and save the day.”

“That’s all right, I’ll do it anyway.”

Oliver chuckled. “Right this second?”

Felicity’s heart was breaking in her chest. “I’m not… I’m not very good at having friends, Oliver.”

“I don’t think that’s true.”

“No, that’s very nice of you to say, but it is the truth. I am awkward and way too smart for my own good, I’ve been told it comes off smug and… anyway. I don’t often get close enough to people to be genuinely helpful, so. Let me be helpful.”
Oliver sat up as well, and wrapped his arms around Felicity, preventing her from leaving the bed. Gently, he maneuvered them to the edge of the mattress, Felicity on his lap. “You know if it weren’t my sister, I’d stay here, right? I don’t want to go back to a mother who wants me dead and only one friend in the world I can trust.”

Felicity refused to let hot tears spill out of her eyes. “I know, Oliver.”

“And I don’t want to leave you lonely.”

“I’m not lonely.”

Oliver’s nose dipped into her hair and he inhaled deeply. “It’s okay if you are.”

“I…” Felicity shook her head. She didn’t trust herself to say anything.

“You’re a remarkable woman, Felicity Smoak.” Oliver held her for several more seconds before he kissed her again, and they fell back in bed with renewed urgency.

They didn’t, after all, have much time.

**

Starling City, Present Day

Tommy was floating on a cloud of medication. It was a good high, a pleasant high. A coasting on a wave high. He laid his head back on the pillow and sighed as relief swept over him.

“That’s the stuff,” Tommy moaned.

“Making me jealous,” Thea said teasingly.
“This is the kind of high you have to break three ribs and nearly puncture a kidney to get,” Tommy said, grinning. “And you are allowed to do neither one of those things.”

“Policing what kind of life-threatening injuries I’m allowed to get now, Merlyn?” Thea asked. “Super cool.”

“I’m feeling magnanimous today,” Tommy said, waving a hand. “You may stub your toe. But that’s it. No more serious injuries allowed.”

Thea got a strange look on her face -- it was one he’d seen Oliver wear on many an occasion, where there was something right on the tip of his tongue that he wanted to say but he thought better of it for any number of reasons. It looked a little different on Thea’s face, but it was the same meaning.

“You Deardens, you’re all the same,” Tommy said, closing his eyes. “Slay me with those eyes, it would be kinder.”

“Stop getting your ribs kicked into your internal organs, and I will,” Thea said, kissing his cheek. “Felicity’s here.”

Tommy thought about opening his eyes. But the world was hazy and floaty and tinged yellow under his eyelids. “Cool.”

“I’m going to stay for a few more hours anyway, I just need some coffee and a quick minute,” Thea said. “Are you okay with Felicity?”

“Going to have to be,” Tommy said, “She’s here now.”

Tommy opened one eye, saw Thea’s wince. “Oh. you mean. She’s here. In the room. Right now.”

“Hi, Tommy,” Felicity said gently, apparently choosing to ignore his gaffe. “How are you feeling?”
Tommy grinned. “Supreme.”

“Enjoy the good stuff while it lasts,” Felicity said. “Oliver’s going to be by in a few minutes as well. He just had to run an errand for Moira.”

Tommy laughed. “Perpetually. Always, with that woman, something to do. Something to keep him away.”

A long moment of silence stretched between them.

“Can I hold your hand?” Felicity asked, stepping closer to his bed.

Tommy had a flash -- one of those unpredictable perfect-recall moments he sometimes had, of Felicity’s lips on his forehead just before they’d left. How she’d smelled.

“Why?”

“It seems like a nice hand,” Felicity said, “and the person who owns it seems like he needs a little reassurance.”

“Oliver will calm down,” Tommy said, but he took her hand. “I’m not worried about that.”

“Good,” Felicity said evenly. She reached in her bag for a tablet, then gently pushed his legs aside to have a seat on the bed next to him.

“Felicity…” Tommy closed his eyes. What was with these two and boundaries? “You can’t sit there.”

“Thea was just here,” Felicity said, not looking up at him.

“Thea is…”
“Different,” Felicity said, pushing her glasses up her nose. “That’s fine -- she’s a sister, and I’m just Oliver’s… well.”

Tommy’s high took a nosedive and his stomach turned. “I didn’t mean…”

“Of course not,” Felicity said evenly. “This is just how the women in your family act around you, see?” she smiled brightly at him. “No need to worry.”

“The women in my family all end up dead,” Tommy said flatly. “S’not a good thing to claim to be.”

Felicity shot him a look from over her glasses that he should not have found as sexy as he did, considering he was poked full of holes and half-dead, the way everyone around him was acting. The ring she wore on her left hand caught the light streaming in from the blinds and the reflection danced on the ceiling in a pattern that was much more pleasant to watch than to think too seriously about being on the receiving end of Felicity’s glare.

Someday, she’d make a great mother.


“Oops. I said that out loud?” Tommy asked. “Cool, that’s awesome. Under normal circumstances, this is the level of stoned I would be when I would pass the doobie on the left hand side.”

Felicity snorted and squeezed his hand just as Oliver walked through the door, holding two coffees. Reflexively, like he’d been caught at something, Tommy tried to pull his hand away. Felicity held his hand, though, moving with him so it didn’t look awkward.

“Sorry about that,” Oliver said. “I should have known an errand for Moira would take more than half an hour.”

“No problem. I’ve enjoyed having some time with Tommy.” Felicity lifted her face and accepted Oliver’s easy kiss with a smile.
Oliver had always been able to do that, Tommy thought, sink into a relationship and make it seem real. He was good at affection. Good at kindness. Good at remembering to kiss hello and goodbye.

For any number of reasons, his relationship with Tommy had never been… that. Never been a real relationship. Always was an… approximation of one. But Felicity and Oliver looked good together. It looked right. It probably felt right.

“How are you feeling?” Oliver asked, leaning forward to curve his hand around Tommy’s, on top of Felicity’s. Tommy turned his head away and swallowed. He couldn’t bring himself to pull away.

“Oh, you know. I’m on the good stuff.”

“Jealous,” Oliver said briefly, and Tommy huffed out a laugh.

“I’ll kick your ribs in and then they’ll give you this stuff. What do you think?”

“I think I could ask the nurse real, real nicely, and she’d probably give me some.”

Felicity raised her eyebrows. “Is that so?”

Now that Oliver was in the room, Tommy found himself relaxing. He yawned, and then winced at the sudden pain in his ribs. “Ouch.”

“You should sleep,” Felicity said. “We’ll stick around.”

Oliver nodded.

“Feel like I’ve been sleeping all day,” Tommy muttered.

“Good. There’s no magical cure for something like broken ribs,” Felicity said. “Just… lots of rest.”
Let your body do its thing.”

“Okay,” Tommy said, closing his eyes. “Although the last time someone said that to me, Trisha Dugan was very, very disappointed in the backseat of a Camaro.”

Oliver’s eyebrows headed north. “What? You told me that was awesome.”

“I was fourteen, Oliver. Someone touched my dick. It was awesome, from that perspective.”

“Fair enough.”

“I made up for it, though. Senior prom.”

“Trish Dugan was a year older than us.”

“I know. Not ours. Hers.”

Oliver’s eyes widened. “Oh. So that’s what that hickey was about.”

Tommy nodded. “Mmhmm. Trish Dugan and her affection for orange-red lipstick. There’s a thought I could fall asleep to.”

Oliver chuckled. “Sweet dreams, buddy.”

Or at least, that’s what Tommy thought he heard. He was slowly drifting away, to a place somewhere between conscious and unconscious. Trish Dugan and her lipstick and her impressive breasts and quick hands were there, just for a moment.

But then it was Oliver, and nothing but Oliver. Oliver the way he’d been at fifteen years old. Way too skinny to be attractive, really, but with those sharp blue eyes that Tommy could sink in to.
Oliver the way he’d been the first time they had kissed. Oliver the way he’d been when he told
Tommy he didn’t just like girls. He liked boys, too. He liked Tommy too. Oliver’s hands, for the first
time, over the front of his jeans.

Oliver, the one time he’d gotten between Malcolm Merlyn’s fist and Tommy’s face. The rush of
falling into bed together for the first time. He could sink into the memories of Oliver and stay there
forever. If he wanted to.

He stayed there, floating somewhere between dream and a past reality for what felt like an eternity
and at the same time not long enough. He was comfortable in that world, safe and happy in a way he
hadn’t been since his mother was alive.

Slowly, voices interrupted his peace, interrupted his dreams. Each the source of nightmares and he
shuddered, trying to push them out. They weren’t allowed in this pleasant space. He was high and
deserved to float a bit longer.

But then the voices got louder and he could no longer ignore them.

Tommy blearily opened one of his eyes.

“No one thought to call me when my son was in the hospital?”

Tommy closed his eyes. Great. Nothing like dear old Dad. He fought the urge to let out a groan.

voice down, Malcolm.”

“The boy’s been sleeping long enough. You all indulge his flair for the dramatic.”

“The boy is nearly thirty years old,” someone else said. Oliver. Oh Christ. Oliver was going to try
and murder his father in a hospital room. And Tommy was too high to open his eyes and watch it.

“This conversation is getting a little intense.” Felicity. “We should maybe take it outside.”
“I think maybe we should reevaluate the terms of Tommy’s… employment,” Malcolm said. “Clearly, the Deardens are not using his talents… appropriately.”

“Thomas is a high-valued member of our organization, Malcolm.” Moira. Too bad she never said that kind of shit when he was, you know, conscious.

“As Oliver’s lapdog. He’s as loyal as one, to be sure, but clearly the boy has other abilities.” Fuck you, Dad.

“Tommy has four broken ribs.” Thea. Oh shit. Thea. Thea was here to witness this. Someone should tell her to get out. She didn’t need to see… Tommy struggled to open his eyes. “Tommy has four broken ribs and he nearly punctured his kidney.” She was crying. Fucking fuck. “And he is no one’s dog. Now get the hell out.”

Tommy got both eyes open and cleared his throat. “Thea, honey. It’s okay.”

“And you can’t have him back,” Thea continued, her eyes blazing. “You can’t have him back because he’s ours. You didn’t want him. We did.”

Tommy coughed. Malcolm didn’t turn his attention away from Thea, though. “Well, this is adorable. Little bit of a crush on big brother’s best friend?”

Tommy could practically feel Moira’s frozen gaze on Tommy. As if Malcolm’s particular fuckery was his fault.

“I can’t say I disapprove. A union between our families… that would be advantageous, don’t you think, Moira, darling?” A slow, perverted smile crossed Malcolm’s face.

Bile rose in Tommy’s throat. Thea’s eyes were filled with angry tears. Oliver was one breath away from stabbing Malcolm in the throat. Tommy could tell because he was worrying his fingers together, longing for his bow.

“I think I raised Thomas under my roof,” Moira said evenly. “It would be practically incestuous.”
“Time,” Malcolm muttered, “exposure -- we’ll see what comes of it. I would like a moment alone with my son, please.”

“You don’t deserve one,” Thea spat

“Thea, baby,” Tommy muttered. “It’s okay. I’ll be fine.”

Malcolm crossed his arms over his chest. Everyone filed out of the room, though Felicity shot him a worried look and Oliver tapped his chest -- Tommy knew that meant he would be right outside, listening. Thea, though, she crossed the room, and stood right next to Tommy’s bed. Malcolm’s grin grew even more satisfied. Tommy contemplated strangling him with an IV tube.

“I did mean a moment alone,” Malcolm said.

“Why? Are you scared of what a little girl will do to you?”

“No, I’m afraid a Dearden is encroaching on Merlyn family business,” Malcolm said, his face and his voice going flat. Hyper-rational. There was a an eight-year-old inside of Tommy, somewhere, that was still scared of that voice. That voice meant pain -- maybe not physical, but certainly real. The hours he’d had to spend holding his arms above his head, standing in a corner. The times he’d been forced to run until he’d vomited. They all started with that voice.

“Thea, I’ll be okay. Malcolm won’t try to kill me when I’m down.”

Malcolm smirked, and Tommy could practically hear the unspoken, “it wouldn’t be that hard when you were up.”

Thea bent down and kissed his cheek once more. Tommy grinned at her, the best grin he could force out of his tired face and aching body. He grinned and he lied through his teeth. “I really will be okay.”

“You’re not alone,” she whispered it, fierce and harsh in his ear and Tommy wrapped it like a blanket around his heart. And he watched her leave.
“So. You’re halfway to home base with that one,” Malcolm leered.

Tommy dropped any pretense of regard. “Don’t be disgusting.”

“I’m not the one making hungry eyes at my sister. Are you so desperate for love, Thomas? Although, I have to say… that wouldn’t be entirely averse for our plans.”

“Our plans?” Tommy took a shallow breath. The pain medication was starting to fade. “I don’t have any plans with you.”

“No, of course not. That would indicate a level of competence you may yet never reach.” Malcolm waved a hand. “I misspoke. I meant, of course, my plans for you. I’m afraid I need you to come back to Merlyn Global. Otherwise, I’ll need to remove you from the family, permanently.”

“You haven’t been allowed to make plans for me in quite some time,” Tommy said firmly. “I don’t need the family. And whatever you think you’re going to sell me, go take a long walk off of a short cliff.”

Malcolm stepped forward and pressed the heel of his hand on Tommy’s fifth rib. He used his other hand to cover Tommy’s mouth as he gasped for air to ride the wave of pain. “I never did have any use for your smart mouth, boy.”

Tommy closed his eyes and grit his teeth. “And you think the Deardens don’t appreciate me.”

“If you won’t listen to reason then I suppose I shall have to use your pathetic little heart. Listen to me. You want Thea out of harm’s way?” Malcolm grinned at Tommy. “Oh, don’t look so surprised. You were always inconveniently sentimental. I can see it in your eyes. You’d give anything to keep her safe, wouldn’t you? Come and work for me. We’ll bring the Dearden clan down. I make no promises about anyone else, but Thea stays alive. You’ve got no use for Moira Queen. That woman has Labradoodles she treats better than you.”

“I can take care of my sister without your help,” Tommy hissed. “I can do everything I need to do without your help.”
“Come back to Merlyn Global,” Malcolm said shortly. “Perhaps my offer wasn’t sweet enough to begin with. I’m an open-minded man.” He leaned in close, let his voice drop. “I’ll even let you save her half-wit-half-brother. Hm? You can keep him in your bed. Suck his cock any time you like.”

“Piss off.”

“And you do like to suck his cock, don’t you? Little inconvenient now that he’s got a blonde beard coming in from Russia. But that’s easily enough dealt with.”

Tommy looked at him with hard eyes. “I don’t know why you think this is the way you get me to do anything, Dad.”

“I’m offering you the world. You just can’t see it. Ah, well, I figured that would be the case. Just like when you were sixteen, and you walked away from me in Nanda Parbat. You’ve been weak ever since. You know why they call you the Shadow, right?”

“No, why don’t you illuminate me on the subject of my own secret identity.”

“Because you’re only a Shadow of a man. You don’t exist without Oliver Queen. What are you going to do, son, when he’s got a wife and a baby on the way and the only time he ever looks at you for anything is when she’s out of commission and he needs someone else’s ass to fuck? I’ll bet you’d just take it, wouldn’t you? You’d spread your knees for whatever you could get. Beg at the table for scraps. You’re no son of mine.”

“No, I’m not,” Tommy said. “Clearly. You’ve been no father to me.”

Malcolm raised his hand as if to backhand him, but Tommy caught it, his ribs screaming in pain. “Don’t. You. Fucking. Touch. Me.”

“Malcolm!” Oliver was all righteous rage and screaming eyes as he burst through the door. More than a little beautiful right in that moment. “Get away from him!”

“You heard what I said,” Malcolm said through clenched teeth. “And you’ve made your choice?”
“Without a second thought. I belong with Oliver and Thea.”

“What’s done is done.” Malcolm nodded. “I will have the paperwork drawn up.”

Tommy bared his teeth. “Good. Let’s make our mutual apathy legal.”

“You’ve been protected these years,” Malcolm hissed, “by virtue of being my son.”

Tommy waved a hand over his broken body. “Clearly that’s working out so well for me, Dad.”

Oliver pushed on Malcolm’s shoulder. “Get the fuck out. You’ve done enough.”

“I haven’t even started,” Malcolm said.

“Yeah, well, if you want to kill me, get in line,” Tommy said, closing his eyes, “but it’s a long-ass line.”
Chapter Summary

Everybody's Got a Hungry Heart

Tommy heals, slowly. Oliver and Felicity move forward.

Chapter Notes

As always -- many thanks to the ladies who hang out in Google Docs with me, shout at me, cheerlead with me and pick this story apart so that it can be the very best version of itself -- Kris, Abbie, Rosie, and Effie. Love to you ALL.

Oh -- If you're upset about where this chapter ends, I'd check in again on Wednesday.

It was almost impossible to relax in the hospital. For a place that seemed to demand he rest at every turn, they sure went out of their way to interrupt his sleep. Vitals and pokes with a needle at every turn. But Oliver had kept his word, every time Tommy woke up to have something measured or taken out of his body, there was someone sitting in the worn blue chair next to his bed. They all insisted Thea go home once the hour grew absurdly late, but Oliver and Felicity took turns, separately and together sitting next to the bed.

Tommy looked over around three in the morning to see Oliver slumped over in the chair, softly snoring, Felicity running her hands through Oliver’s shorn hair. She was sitting in his lap, staring at the wall.

She caught Tommy’s eyes and smiled. “It’s softer when it’s shorter like this,” she whispered.

“Yeah, I uh…” Tommy coughed and winced. “I like it better that way, myself.”

Felicity paused in what she was doing, shifted. “Can I get you anything?”

Tommy appreciated that she was trying. He smiled. “Six solid hours of sleep without anyone wanting my blood or to know my heart’s still beating?”
Felicity chuckled, pushing up off of Oliver’s lap to come to Tommy’s bed side and take his hand. “I can do my best Diggle impersonation at the next nurse.”

“Is he adequately terrifying?”

“The man has eyebrows that would scare the hair off the hind end of a lion. It’s a gift.”

Tommy snorted. “Ouch. Don’t make me laugh.”

“I can’t help it. I’m naturally hilarious,” Felicity said, fiddling with the edge of Tommy’s blanket. “Listen, while Oliver’s asleep and you’re mostly sober.”

“Tragically.”

Felicity chuckled. “Yes. Uh -- I just wanted you to know that I’m sorry.”

Tommy knitted his eyebrows together. “What are you talking about? I don’t think you’ve been here long enough to offend me.”

“No. But I know that my presence here isn’t… comfortable for you.”

“No, I…”

Felicity patted the blanket. “You don’t have to lie. I know… I mean, I don’t know, I can just see… see what Oliver means to you.”

Tommy blinked and swallowed. “I can see what Oliver means to you, too.”

“I wouldn’t have come if I knew that you two were in love with each other.” Felicity’s voice was soft, and he could see what the admission cost her in the pain in her eyes.
Tommy took a minute to breathe through that observation. He didn’t bother to correct her assumption. What he and Oliver were—well, that was complicated. In love might be the closest shorthand he could find for how he felt about Oliver. “You see that idiot?” He gestured to Oliver, still snoring softly in the blue chair.

“Yeah.”

“Ollie was my brother long before he was anything else, and I’ve known him my entire life. He doesn’t fall asleep in public—not since he got back from the island. But he does now. Maybe you can’t see it, but he relaxes around you. Given half a chance, he’d trip right over his ‘my heart is dead’ bullshit and fall straight in love with you. And he deserves that. You give him that. So don’t be sorry. Thanks for doing whatever it is you do so he can do that.”

Felicity’s eyes filled with tears. “Tommy…”

“Hey, no crying. Normally I’m all about the pretty sobbing women falling into my arms but I think I’ve reached my limit on that this week.” Tommy opened his arms. “No promises, but I’ve been told I give pretty good hugs.”

Felicity climbed into his bed carefully and laid down in his arms, on the right side, so as not to aggravate his injury. Tommy held her close.

“I know what it’s like to—to never belong. My uh—my Russian is good. But I can’t get rid of my accent. I have this problem where my brain gets ahead of my mouth and everything I say is super awkward, which is exactly the type of problem you want to have when you’ve got big burly Russian men listening to you for orders. So… I know exactly what it is you think you’re giving up,” Felicity said softly. “A place to belong—to call home. To be needed and better yet, wanted.”

“Felicity.”

“But you don’t have to give it up,” Felicity said, turning her head into his neck. “You don’t have to give up Oliver. You don’t have to give up your life.”

Tommy tightened his arms around Felicity. What if I want to. Bursting on the edges of his thoughts. But that’s not what he said.

“I am glad you’re here,” he said. “If anyone can get us through this thing—it’s you. Or that’s what Oliver tells me. And he’s scarily accurate about these kind of things.”

Felicity laughed through her tears. “You give excellent hugs, Tommy Merlyn. Broken ribs and all. Can we please be friends?”

Tommy pressed a kiss to the top of her head and lingered there. Oliver slowly opened one of his eyes, caught Tommy’s. There was a strange light in Oliver’s eyes that Tommy didn’t quite know what to do with. In any other circumstance, he would have called it want—desire.

“Yeah, we can be friends,” Tommy said, his eyes locked with Oliver’s. “I can always use another
friend.”

Oliver’s lips twitched upward and Tommy closed his eyes, and fell asleep with Felicity in his arms.

**

Tommy healed -- some in the hospital, some in his room at Queen Manor, and Oliver watched his best friend and his fiancee circle each other towards something like friendship. They were both, in his experience, impossible to dislike, and nearly impossible not to love.

It had never been simple in his mind. He loved them both in equal measure, in different ways. It had never been simple. It had always been easy. There was Tommy and there had always been Tommy. Wanting him, needing him, loving him, that was a building block of his DNA, part of his identity.

What he felt for Felicity was something new -- he was someone different around her. It might be the memory of how things were in Russia that made him more buoyant -- although he was certain it wasn’t entirely that. He was fascinated by the swing of her frequently-worn ponytail, the way she found time to paint her nails a different bold hue every day. He loved her mind, her quick wit and her sharpness. She was as ruthless as he needed her to be, yet she was steady and sweet to him and his family, gentle with Thea, and firm with Moira.

They’d always found each other in bed. And nothing had changed there. Nothing had changed there, except the luxury of time. And the way her diamond ring would catch the light and wink on the ceiling in a rhythm that promised forever. They had all the time in the world. That thought sometimes took the edge of desperation off of their lovemaking. But sometimes it didn’t.

Felicity had fast hands and a quick mouth and an attitude that was something like greed and Oliver loved it.

He loved it even as he caught himself thinking about Tommy. Tommy’s easy grin and his clever hands. What it would be like for them both…

But they’d gone down this road before, with Laurel Lance. Both of them so in love with her. So in love with each other. And when that had shattered -- imploded, really, in a firework of mangled feelings on all ends, it had destroyed his relationship with Laurel. And had nearly taken his relationship with Tommy.

Besides, he couldn’t ask either of them to… make something like that work, not when his heart
wasn’t… functioning properly. Maybe he’d been broken before the island. He probably had been -- spoiled, entitled, sure. Carelessly cruel definitely. But he’d known how to be easy in love, back then. He’d felt more confident of his ability to hold two hearts in his hands.

The thought of that -- the trust he’d need, it made him a little queasy now.

Oliver splashed some water on his face before he applied the cold cream that would get rid of the grease paint. With Tommy still out of commission, he was stepping out into the night without his Shadow. It meant twice the work and four times the paranoia. His mother had suggested taking Harper with him on some of the more difficult missions, but he thought having someone in Tommy’s spot who wasn’t Tommy would be more dangerously distracting than it would be helpful.

A soft knock at the bathroom had him lifting his head. “Just a moment, Felicity.”

“Not Felicity,” Thea said from the other side. “Or did you forget our appointment already?”

Oliver sighed, his chin falling to his chest. “I -- I didn’t forget.”

“Oliver, Felicity and I are asking you to do minimal work on this wedding,” Thea said, in a fair approximation of their mother’s voice. “You could be a dear and be useful, for once.”

Oliver laughed and rolled his eyes. “Scary how you do that.”

“Can I open this door or are you gross?”

Oliver looked down at his bare chest. “Hand me my gray shirt… thing from the chair.”

“This is a henley, Oliver. Jesus, how are we related?”

Oliver smirked. He knew damn well what it was. “Thanks, Thea,” he said, reaching outside the door for the henley and slipping it over his shoulder as he opened the door.

But he wasn’t quite quick enough. “Fuck, Oliver!” Thea’s voice was a little bit panicked. “What the
Oh. He’d... well, he hadn’t quite forgotten. The wound had nearly killed him, after all, and it was healing angry and red and more slowly than he (or Felicity) liked. “Sword wound.”

“Sword wound?”

“Yeah. One of Merlyn’s goons, couple of weeks back.” Oliver winced. “Looks worse than it feels, I’ll tell you that much.”

“I hate that bastard,” Thea snarled. “I thought you were going to kill him in the hospital.”

Too many witnesses and no way to do it in the vicious way the bastard deserved, Oliver thought. “That wouldn’t be very smart of me,” is what he settled on.

“Screw being smart,” Thea said, flinging herself down on a chair while Oliver searched his bureau for socks. “You should have brained him with a bedpan, the things he said about you and Tommy.”

Oliver closed his eyes and breathed in deep. His relationship with Tommy -- how much his sister knew and understood, he didn’t really know. “I wanted to.”

“And the way he looked at me.” Thea shivered. “Definitely the creeper-old-person in the bar vibe. He’s always been weird, but he’s never been…”

Oliver took a seat on the bed, pulled his socks over his feet and thought for a moment. “Well,” Oliver said, because he’d known the cruel and terrifying side of Malcolm since he was eight years old. “You’re seeing him without the mask. You’re seventeen now -- if it weren’t for Felicity, you’d be heading straight for the matriarchy. If something does happen to me, or to Felicity -- well then, that’s where you’ll be. Malcolm wants you terrified.”

“All he managed to do was piss me off,” Thea said, crossing her arms. “I’d order him dead in a heartbeat if I were the matriarch.”

Oliver raised both of his eyebrows. “You would?”
“It would be the one good thing about all of it,” Thea said. “Strike down anyone who messes with my family.”

“If Mom could have Malcolm Merlyn killed, he’d be dead by now,” Oliver said. “But he’s… useful to the family. So he lives. That’s the thing about the matriarchy that’s not good, Thea. You make deals with the devil and you lose your soul. Either way.”

“You didn’t,” Thea said.

“I didn’t what?”

“You didn’t lose your soul. Whatever happened to you while you were gone -- and I know you don’t want to tell me about it, but I want you to know. You didn’t lose your soul.”

Oliver smiled. “Thanks, Thea. So. Ready to go, uh… what are we doing?”

“Queen family tradition, remember? The groom always buys the bride something shiny and new to wear for the wedding.”

“Oh yes. That,” Oliver said, shaking his head. His body ached and his mind was mush and the very last thing he wanted to do was shop, but Thea had her pretty brown hair in those perfect waves that took her an hour to achieve, and she was grinning up at him like she hadn’t grinned at him since the day he’d cut class to take her to Funland.

“Try not to look like I’m hauling you off for a lobotomy,” Thea teased. “It could be worse. Felicity and I spent hours yesterday looking at table linens.”

“I’m begging you not to discuss that with me.”

Thea laughed and threaded her arm through his. “C’mon, brother-mine. Let’s heat up that black card.”
“Can’t wait.”

**

People, people everywhere, Oliver thought. And no good place to take cover from sniper fire. Thea insisted they visit the open-air mall on Queen Memorial Plaza. In the middle of the day on a weekday it wasn’t as crowded as it would be otherwise, but it was still crowded enough. Samson, a Dearden footsoldier Oliver had known from childhood, followed them at a distance as they poked over displays and wandered from store to store.

“You could always have something made for her,” Thea said. “If you’re not finding what you’re looking for.”

“I don’t know what I’m looking for,” Oliver replied, his eyes sweeping over a jewelry display case.

“Grandpa gave Grandma that place in the Alps,” Thea suggested. “Or, you know, Dad bought Mom those pearls.”

Oliver stepped away from the jewelry case. His father had died with six bullets in his chest and betrayal in his abdomen. Jewelry was out. At least for Felicity.

“Oh,” Thea gasped. “Let’s go in there.”

Oliver’s eyebrows nearly escaped his forehead. “Thea -- I’m not sure, I mean… I’ll wait outside. I don’t think they let men inside Wink with their sisters.”

“Not for Felicity, you idiot. For me. I just want to look.”

Oliver glared. “Why would you need anything at Wink?”

Thea crossed her arms and glowered at him. It was Robert Queen all over again. “I have ladybits. They deserve to be clad in high-class pretties.”
Oliver flushed bright red, something he would have sworn he was incapable of, but he kept his head on a swivel and followed Thea inside the boutique.

Places like this always smelled -- too much, Oliver thought. A wall of perfumed flowers and fruit assaulted his senses. Lightly erotic electronic music played in the background. Oliver nearly grinned at the pretension.

Thea let out a high-pitched squeal over a display of over-priced pajama bottoms. Oliver kept an eye on her but moved to the opposite side of the store. They were smart, he thought -- the front of the store was all cuteness and pink lace. Things he could imagine Felicity in, easily. They were arousing, pretty pictures, but nothing hit him in the gut.

He walked further back. Piles of panties, racks and racks of bras with things like “Demi-cup!” and “Full-Figure” emblazoned on big signs with giant, winking eyes met him at every turn. How women made decisions in an environment like this, he would never know.

Tommy might know, though, he thought. Tommy liked this kind of stuff. Fashion and clothes and knowing what size his partners wore and buying them things in wrapped boxes.

He was thinking about Tommy when he saw the corset. It was -- well, it was beautiful. The underlayer was a deep, rich green. Oliver’s mouth twitched upward. There was something -- incredibly arousing about thinking of Felicity in his color, touching her skin. And the overlayer? A beautifully patterned spider-web lace in a deep, dark black.

He thought of Felicity, pulling the hood over his head. Doing the same for Tommy.

Thea appeared at his elbow. “That’s pretty.”

“Yeah.” Oliver rubbed his eyes.

“You know, they have it in solid green over there,” Thea said. “If you really want to make a statement.”

Thea had once told him that she had a crush on her seventh grade math teacher, that she’d stolen a candy bar from a convenience store, that she’d tried molly at a party. Thea had always told him all of her secrets. She was seventeen. Maybe it was time to trust her with one of his own.
“What if this is the statement I want to make?” Oliver asked.

Thea blinked, but then she shrugged. “Felicity’s smart, she’ll figure it out.”

“I mean -- what do you…”

Thea wrapped both of her arms around Oliver’s bicep and laid her chin on his shoulder. “Oh, big brother, you never love the easy way, do you?”

Oliver huffed out a breath that might have been a laugh. “I guess not.”

“Do it.” Thea commanded grandly. “Go bold or go home.”

“You think?”

“Yeah.” Thea shrugged. “But then, you know. I’m just a kid.” She waved her pile of pajama bottoms at him and left him there to think.

**

In the intervening weeks since Tommy’s hospitalization, Oliver and Felicity had taken up residence in a penthouse in the swanky business district of Starling City. Tommy’s taste in real estate, Felicity decided, was impeccable. The building it was housed in was full of modern amenities, a working gym, a fully-functioning spa, but the penthouse was much homier than she was anticipating. Felicity, who had spent the last several years of her life in Yuri’s ancient house that creaked and groaned, with wood paneling on every surface, felt at home in the design of the rooms, which met somewhere in the middle of traditional and modern.

She also found she relaxed. Relaxed into her relationship with Oliver. Into his touches and the look in his eyes when he said her name. Let her hair down and took her make-up off, settled into movies on the couch and “hello” and “goodbye” kisses.
Her days away from the penthouse she spent planning the wedding and watching. Watching…
everything and everyone. Years of it being Oliver and Tommy against the world had done a number
on their ability to trust anyone outside their walled partnership. Felicity was willing to give it all the
time she had, which was swiftly running out.

It wasn’t that they meant, necessarily, to keep things from her. It was that certain information wasn’t
complicit, nonverbally understood. Whole novels could pass between them in a blink.

It wasn’t anyone’s fault and it certainly didn’t hurt her feelings that her ability to nonverbally
communicate with Oliver was incomplete, in comparison with Tommy’s, because she hadn’t known
him all of her life.

So getting Tommy to trust her, to relax with her the way she had relaxed with Oliver, had become
her main focus over the last few days. She called him for advice about how to handle encounters
with various footsoldiers. She asked his opinion on cheesecake as wedding cake. She invited him
over for lunch, supper, to play games or to visit and relax.

She gave him a key.

His eyes had gone bright. “Felicity, I don’t need one of these, you know. I won’t be here without
you or Oliver.”

“Oliver’s a lot happier, away from Queen Manor,” Felicity said. “I think there’s something about that
place -- memories, maybe. I don’t know. It weighs you down. It weighs you
both down. So why don’t you let me give you a place where gravity is a little less… noticeable.”

Tommy’s hand had closed over the key. “I see what you’re doing here, you know,” he said softly.

“What’s that?”

Tommy bent and kissed her cheek, and she could feel from the waves of tension rolling off his body
that it had been an impulse. “You can’t make me love you, Felicity.”

“No, I’m not…”
“I’m halfway there already,” Tommy continued talking over her. “I’m a little like a Labrador that way. Show me a little kindness and I’ll keep showing up at your door.”

“That’s not a bad thing. I very much like having you around,” Felicity had said.

As far her relationship with Thea -- well, it started out rocky. But the younger woman had embraced her, and Felicity found that she genuinely liked Thea. When she had met Oliver, he’d been in at least a dozen kinds of pain, broken and cold and unfeeling -- or so he wanted everyone around him to believe. But the night that they’d met, when she’d gotten him to drink a bottle of vodka with her, he’d talked about his sister.

That had been the tipping point, really, that had thrown the scales in his favor from “Nice to look at” to “would actually sleep with him”. Because Oliver Queen’s love for Thea had made him relatable to her, made him human, made him softer. She remembered begging for a sister, before she’d been old enough to realize that that wasn’t possible with only one parent around.

He’d taken a shot of vodka, his words slurried but serious. Felicity could remember this clearly. “The only thing in the world I’ve got going for me is that Thea thinks I hung the moon and stars.”

So Felicity had wondered about Thea -- in the three weeks they were together in Russia, in the years intervening when Oliver would call late at night.

Felicity smiled as she got down wine glasses, set them on the bar, decanted a bottle of merlot. It was nice to see that the sister Oliver was so over the moon for was a fascinating, strong, independent young woman. Who deserved a little more credit, she believed, than the men in her life were giving her.

Which was what tonight was about.

Oliver’s footsteps were easily recognizable, and so was his mild curse when he forgot to take his boots off in the foyer.

Felicity rounded the corner and leaned on the doorjamb, watching Oliver bend over to deal with the laces on his boots. Tommy was right behind him, and she caught his eye and winked at him -- he’d been looking in the same place she had. Who could blame him? She considered access to Oliver’s ass one of the premium benefits of marrying him.
“I thought you were supposed to be taking it easy,” Felicity scolded Tommy as soon as she processed what he was wearing. “Not running around in a black hood already.”

“Oliver did all the hard work,” Tommy said, toeing his boots off and lining them up against the wall. “I was just running surveillance and providing back-up. Oliver’s got access to some healing herbs from Lian Yu. I really am close to fighting shape.”

Felicity crossed the room and laid her hand on Tommy’s ribs. “That’s funny. These don’t feel like they’re made of titanium.”

“It’s not his fault,” Oliver said briefly, pulling his green hood over his head and leaving his chest bare. “Moira overbooked the support staff. There wasn’t anyone else.”

Felicity grit her teeth. “I’m going to need wine. So much wine. But you know what? No.” She whirled. “The next time she tries to send you out while your ribs are still broken you -- you tell her to go fuck herself.” Felicity let loose in a stream of Russian. Oliver’s face grew more red with every graphic description of what Moira could do to herself and Tommy’s eyes tracked back and forth between the two of them.

“My Russian is more limited to uh -- the classics,” Tommy said. “So I only caught every other word of that. But I think I can safely say that even expressing the main idea of that paragraph would probably get me killed.”

Felicity shook her head and waved an arm. “I am so mad it’s just… Ugh, English is terrible for mad.” She turned to Oliver and spoke in Russian. “She seeks to kill your brother. It would be better for her not to have ties to Merlyn. But she cannot kill him herself.”

Oliver responded in kind. “We thought as much.”

“She does not deserve a kind death.”

Oliver captured her lips in a kiss. He smelled of sweat and gunpowder and blood, but his hands were gentle on her skin. “You are…” he whispered in her ear. “You are… profoundly beautiful.”
Tommy, meanwhile, was shifting from foot to foot, looking anywhere but at them.

“I had Malia turn down the guest room for you,” Felicity said brightly, turning to Tommy. “I took the liberty of leaving some pajamas in the bureau for you permanently. I think I guessed correctly, the things that you like to shower with but if there’s something I missed in the bathroom, you let me know and we’ll have it after the next market run. Once you two are done showering, there are some things I want to discuss.”

“Yes ma’am,” Oliver said, half-seriously, half teasing.

Felicity grinned and slapped his ass. “Hit the showers, Queen.”

Oliver kissed her again and started undressing on his way to the shower. Pieces of his uniform flew everywhere and Felicity turned to Tommy with an eyeroll.

“It’s like living with a permanent teenager sometimes,” she said, and kicked his pants to the side of the hallway. Tommy bent to pick them up. “No! No you don’t!” Felicity slapped at his hands. “We do not indulge this behavior, Tommy Merlyn, we wait for him to break his pretty face on a pair of leather pants so he learns to clean up his own shit.”

Tommy laughed. “I guess I never thought of doing that.”

Felicity laid a gentle hand on his cheek. “You need a shower and a pain pill. Probably not in that order. Go take care of yourself. Oliver’s stuff, and me… we’ll be right here when you get back.”

Tommy shot her one of the looks he was forever giving her, as if her existence was completely baffling to him, but he didn’t object any more, just took himself to the guest room -- Tommy’s room, she called it in her mind (they’d all get there eventually, she was sure) and cleaned himself up.

When Oliver emerged from the shower, his expression was bemused. “Felicity?”

“Hm?”

“I have pajamas with donkeys on them.”
Felicity nodded, pulling the bag of popcorn she’d been microwaving out and ripping it open to dump in a large bowl. “You’ll notice the donkeys are using fans.”

“Yes.”

“And that is because you are a hot ass,” Felicity said with a grin. “You know, it’s not illegal to wear a shirt around the house at night.”

Oliver smiled and shoved a whole handful of popcorn in his mouth.

Felicity threw a kernel at him. “Very attractive, Oliver.”

“You should play Chubby Bunny with him sometime,” Tommy said. Unlike Oliver, he’d chosen to wear a shirt -- the black one Felicity had laid on top of the pajama pants she’d picked for him. It was a touch snug. Oops. Felicity thought. Tragic. “You won’t be able to control yourself. By the way, Oliver, do you see these?”

“Hm?”

“The muffins on my pajama pants have biceps. And that is because I am a studmuffin. Your wife finds me devastatingly physically attractive. Discuss. Oh wait. You can’t, because your mouth is full of popcorn.”

Oliver lifted a middle finger.

Felicity threw a bag of chocolates at Tommy’s head. “Open those. Put them in something pretty. I’m going to go change.”

“We like you just the way you are!” Tommy called down the hallway, chuckling.

“Really?” Felicity heard Oliver ask.
“It just came out. I really couldn’t stop myself.”

Felicity ran a brush through her hair and splashed some water on her face. She undressed unhurriedly, and slipped her pajamas on over her nude form. If Oliver wasn’t going to wear a shirt, well, then, she wasn’t going to wear a bra. And she’d see which one of them got distracted first.

“Of course,” Tommy crowed as soon as she appeared in the kitchen. “You’re a cutie-pie.”

“Goes without saying,” Felicity said. “All right, someone pour me some wine.”

Solemnly, Oliver handed her a glass already filled three-fourths of the way. “Should we stay here?” He wondered out loud. “Or should we go somewhere more comfortable?”

“Like the living room?” Tommy asked.

Felicity shoved a bowl of popcorn at Oliver and took her wine. “Yes, exactly, like the living room.”

Felicity and Oliver had picked out the furniture themselves. It was deep and quashy and delightfully informal, the kind of thing Moira Queen would never allow in her house. Felicity settled into one of the armchairs and folded her legs underneath her. Oliver and Tommy took the couch opposite her, their wine glasses as full as hers.

Her engagement ring caught the light of a lamp, and Felicity twisted it, once out of place, and then once back in, before she took a deep breath.

“I have a proposition for you both,” Felicity started. “It might… require a leap of faith.”

Tommy stilled, but deliberately brought his glass of wine to his lips. She might have missed how on-alert he was if she hadn’t been watching him all of this time, intent on learning him.

Oliver must have picked up on it too. “What are you thinking, Felicity?”

“I’m thinking that we should all lay all of our cards out on the table,” Felicity said, meeting Tommy’s
eyes. “For everyone. I think everyone involved should have all of the information possible, don’t you?”

Tommy set his glass down. “You mean Thea.”

Among other things. “Yes. Thea should know that Malcolm is her father.”

“Why does Thea need to know?” Tommy asked. “What good can knowing that man is her father possibly do her?”

Felicity considered, took a sip of her wine, ignored the way her hands shook. “Malcolm knows he’s her father. Moira knows he’s her father. They’re both making decisions about her life -- you all are making decisions about her life knowing her biological parentage. Not to mention, Tommy, she needs to know about her relationship with you. Clearly, she’s feels a deep connection to you. You need to tell her why that is so that wires don’t get crossed.”

Oliver glanced at Tommy before he turned his gaze back to Felicity. “So we tell her and then… what?”

Felicity shrugged. “Then she’s in on the plan.”

“No.” Oliver’s voice was firm. “I want Thea as far away from this as possible.”

“We need her to have enough of an idea of what’s going on that she doesn’t get in the way,” Felicity said. “You think you’re protecting her by keeping her in the dark, but really, all you’re doing is endangering everyone around us.”

“You said everyone needs to lay their chips out on the table,” Tommy said. “Assuming that we tell Thea and bring her whole world crashing down, what do you have to tell us that we don’t already know?”

“I think you’re drastically underestimating your sister,” Felicity said. “You brought me in because you both thought you were in over your heads. Oliver, I don’t know what more I would need to do to earn your trust, but… can you please just… trust me?”
Oliver looked at Tommy. “The last time we got close to telling her… Moira sent me to the island.”

“It’s different now,” Tommy said, staring at his hands. “We’re not incompetent boys anymore.”

Oliver sighed. “But Thea, she’s just seventeen. Can we expect her to keep the secret?”

“Yes. Because it’s her life,” Felicity said. “It's her life and it's our lives.”

“Okay.”

Oliver’s eyebrows shot up. “Tommy?”

“Call Thea. Get her over here. Please. I’m going to… go for a walk.” He drained his glass and stood up quickly. “I’ll be back by the time she is.”

**

Tommy stepped out onto the balcony of the guest room and launched himself up on the railing. It was an easy enough climb up the face of the building in barefeet to the roof. His ribs screamed in protest and the blood sang in his veins. He laid down flat and pressed a hand to his stomach.

_Eight years old when his mother dies. He crawls in bed and cries for hours. No one comes to tell him it will be okay. Not until the door opens. And Ollie Queen steps inside his bedroom._

_“Tommy?”_

_He should stop sniffing. “‘m here, Ollie.”_

_“Sucks,” Ollie says. And he lays a gentle hand on Tommy's back. Tommy can’t stop crying. Tommy’s dad will hear._
Ollie climbs in bed with him, wraps him up in his arms, tight like spoons in a drawer. Tommy can’t breathe. Tommy’s dad will hear. “Ollie, mom’s not coming back.”

“I know.”

“It’s just going to be me and Dad and…” Men aren’t scared of anything. “I’m scared.”

“Be my family.” Ollie has a way of making things simple. “I’ll give you my mom and dad and Thea can be your sister. She’s not good for much but smelling bad anyway.”

Tommy’s always wanted a sister.

The air is thick on the roof. And heavy.

For years, he’s existed in this in-between place. Somewhere between a lover and a friend with Oliver. Somewhere between a brother and an authority figure and a friend with Thea. Somewhere between a pet and a son with Moira. Somewhere between apathy and outright disdain with Malcolm.

He’d never objected to being called Shadow because, to his mind, that’s all his life was -- echoes of light, reflections of it, a way to mark where it had been once.

The fury was rising inside of him because he hadn’t felt this raw before. Hadn’t been one gaping, vibrating nerve ending before. He resented the fuck out of Moira Queen for putting them all in this situation, Oliver, for bringing Felicity, and Felicity for just… always, always with the insisting. And the pushing and the prodding and the knowing.

It had been a while since someone bothered to look that closely at him. He was relatively sure he didn’t like it.

The soft sounds of Oliver’s full body weight landing on the roof alerted Tommy to his presence. “Thought I might find you up here.”
“I am not as inscrutable and unknowable as I would like to think myself, apparently,” Tommy said.

“You okay?” Oliver crossed his arms, still five feet away from Tommy.

“I will be. You don’t seemed that shocked that Felicity wanted to tell Thea.”

Oliver shrugged. “I had a feeling she would make that argument.”

“And?”

“I was fine with either outcome, so I let you decide.” His tone was carefully noncommittal.

Tommy shook his head and laughed. “Bullshit. You know, there was a time in your life when you wouldn’t even try and hide what you thought from me.”

“Fine.” Oliver took a step closer. “I… think that trying to keep secrets and being two-faced and the constant double-crossing… I think that’s what brought my family down. Felicity’s… more objective than I could ever hope to be. If she says Thea can handle it…”

“Then you think Thea can handle it.”

Oliver nodded. “To be honest, I’m more worried about you. Everything’s changing, Tommy. I just… I need to check in on you. Make sure you’re still good.”

“I am.”

Oliver nodded once more. “You know, there was a time in your life when you wouldn’t even try and hide what you thought from me.”

Tommy sighed. “She’s going to hate me. She’s going to think I… I don’t know, manipulated her, somehow.”
“No.” Oliver covered the distance between them in two steps, clasped him into a hug that was as familiar as anything in Tommy’s life. “No, she’s not going to hate you.” Oliver released him. “You’re family.”

Tommy wiped his eyes. “Well, now she’ll know it’s real.”

“It’s always been real.” Oliver’s face was intense. “Hey, I mean it. It’s always been real. You’ll see.”

Tommy looked down over the edge. Thea’s sporty little Beemer had arrived. “I guess I will. One way or the other. She’s here.”
Worlds Fall Apart

Chapter Summary

Thea finds out the truth.

Chapter Notes

I'm so excited for you guys to be able to read this chapter. It's... it's really a favorite of mine. Thanks, AGAIN, to the Google Docs team -- Abbie, Effie, Rosie, and Kris -- that keep me sharp and cheerlead me. I'm still several chapters ahead, but we will return to our once-a-week posting pattern NEXT week. Unless I write two chapters this weekend. Which has happened in the past. So who knows.

Five years ago, Starling City

Oliver pushed open the door and he and Tommy nearly fell through it, chuckling against each other’s mouths. Tommy had Oliver’s pants unzipped and his cock freed as soon as the door closed behind them, pushing Oliver up against it. Oliver’s eyes nearly crossed when Tommy spit on his palm and wrapped his hand around Oliver’s dick. Oliver spread his legs and worked at the closure of Tommy’s pants. Tommy smelled like weed and he tasted like tequila and he made the most delicious sounds when Oliver ran his thumb over the head of Tommy’s cock.

“I want to fuck you,” Oliver breathed. “Don’t you want that, Tommy?”

Tommy let out a whine and laid his head against Oliver’s shoulder. “No lube in your mother’s office.”

“I’m just saying I want to. Want to open you up. Finger you until you’re crying, until you’re begging me to fuck you.” Oliver wrapped his hands around Tommy’s dick. “Fuck my hands, Tommy.”

Tommy closed his eyes. Oliver’s hands were magic. “Don’t you want me to suck you off?”

“No, I want to hear the sounds you make when you come,” Oliver said. “Don’t hold back on me.”
“Jesus, Oliver, you have hands like a vise.” Tommy shuddered. “It’s a lot.”

Oliver relaxed a little, turned his attention to kissing Tommy’s neck, pumping his hips into Tommy’s hand. “You know I’m going to fuck you tonight, right?”

Tommy hissed. “Promises, promises.”

“It’s true. There’s no one in the world I love fucking more than you, Tommy. It’s been far too long. I’m going to be all the way inside you, I promise you that.”

The picture was too much, too much of what he wanted. “Christ, Oliver.”

“Once I’m there,” Oliver rubbed his thumb over Tommy’s slit, “once I’m all the way inside, you’re going to beg me to fuck you. But I’m going to get you off. I’m going to jack you off, Tommy, while my dick is all the way inside your ass. I’m going to make you come all over yourself.”

Tommy gasped and came, his eyes going wide with surprise. Oliver was right behind him, moving his hands off of Tommy’s dick to clutch Tommy’s shirt as he came.

Tommy started to laugh and then froze. “Oliver,” he whispered as he hurriedly wiped his hands on his pants and button them up. “Someone’s coming.”

Oliver chuckled. “No, we already came.” But then Tommy was zipping Oliver’s pants up himself. “Tommy, would it be the worst thing…”

“Yes,” Tommy said bluntly. “Because you are drunk and I am high as a kite and there is literally no worse scenario I can imagine than our parents finding out in this particular situation that this is what we…. what we do. The two of us.”

“Tommy…”

“Oliver, just… just shut up, please. Help me hide. Where’s that stupid….”
Oliver raised his eyebrows and pulled the book on the bookcase that would open the tunnel that led to the safe room. “You mean this stupid thing?”

“Yes.” Tommy shoved Oliver inside and slammed the door.

They only had a few moments before they could hear Moira and... Oliver’s eyebrows raised. Malcolm Merlyn. His hands automatically fisted.

“--- do not understand why there needs to be any discussion on this point,” Malcolm was saying. “You owe me a favor. Several favors. I’m calling one in.”

Moira’s voice was cold and calm. “And the second you try to call in a favor that is equitable to the one I owe you, I will be more than happy to oblige. Unfortunately, there is no way I could move Queen Consolidated’s interest in UNIDAC to Merlyn Global without causing a stir on the board. Which is not attention I want, particularly.”

“I’m afraid I’m going to have to insist.”

“Or you’ll… what? Please tell me, I’m dying to know what Malcolm Merlyn thinks will terrify me.”

Oliver smirked at Tommy. He couldn’t help rooting for his mother in this exchange.

“Exposure,” Malcolm said, and it was clear he thought he had won. “You’ve entrusted me with quite a few secrets.”

“You’ve entrusted me with your son. Imagine the fallout if Robert and I came out publicly with some of the things you’ve done to your only child. Physical abuse, emotional, mental.”

Malcolm scoffed. “No one would believe you.”

“Why would they disbelieve me? Tommy’s been living under my roof since he was eight years old. You only see him when it’s convenient for you.” Moira tsked. “It’s hardly my fault that you failed to
see the boy’s potential, Malcolm. Although I do suppose I should thank you.”

“What for?”

“Giving him all that rage and hurt for me to work with,” Moira said evenly. “He’s just so desperate to be loved. That’s going to be useful in the coming days.”

Tommy looked away from Oliver, his face flushing red. Oliver lifted his chin and pressed a careful kiss to Tommy’s lips, while helpless, sick anger coursed through his blood. She’d known all along -- and she’d done absolutely nothing to help his friend.

“You’re a snake, Moira Queen.” There was a faint hint of admiration in Malcolm’s voice.

“You’re a bottom-dwelling crustacean,” Moira responded easily. “What kind of monster hits their own children?”

Oliver stared at Tommy, who was shaking his head, going pale. Oliver’s hand gripped Tommy’s, squeezing it as tight as he could.

“The kind of monster you trusted to father your daughter.”

A great rushing sound filled Oliver’s ears. His heart raced. Slowly, he slid to the floor, Tommy sliding with him.

“Exactly,” Moira snapped. “My daughter. Mine. You are nothing more than a sperm donor. And you will not attempt to hold ‘your children’, as absurd a claim as that is, over my head again. China White tested my patience until I eradicated her from my city. I will burn your world to ash if you cross me again.”

Oliver heard nothing else. There was only Tommy’s hand in his, and the sound of the world falling down all around him.

**
Thea checked herself in the visor mirror, turning her head this way and that, brushing some errant power off of her cheek. Perfect. She had plans tonight. Plans that involved several of her girlfriends and a bottle of rum someone’s older brother had gotten ahold of. Then maybe a club. She had the urge to dance until her feet hurt. But first she’d see what Oliver wanted -- he’d sounded so serious and urgent on the phone.

She was still adjusting, again, to her brother not living in Queen Manor, to the fact that Tommy was rarely ever there, either, but she was genuinely happy for Oliver, who seemed to be happier than he had been in years.

Grabbing the wedding binder she and Felicity had been working out of, Thea stepped out of her car and swung her hips as she walked past Roy Harper’s car, tossing him a wink and a wave. He was on bodyguard duty tonight, but Thea was hoping she could distract him adequately later that evening.

She scrolled through Facebook on her phone on the elevator ride up. She sent a few texts letting her friends know she’d meet them once she was done.

And she knew something wasn’t right, because Felicity met her at the elevator. “Hey, Thea,” she said softly. “We’ve been waiting for you. Do you want something to drink?”

“Vodka,” Thea said, only half-seriously. “With whatever juice you have laying around.”

Felicity tilted her head to the side, considering. “Well, normally it offends my soul to mix perfectly good vodka with anything. But… This conversation might demand some compromises of all of us. The boys are in the living room.”

“Is everything okay?” Thea asked. Everything about this encounter was throwing her off-balance. Felicity actually pouring her alcohol, meeting her at the door -- that she couldn’t immediately tell where Tommy and Oliver were by the boisterous sound of their voices. “Is someone dying? Tommy doesn’t have cancer or something, does he?”

“No one’s dying,” Felicity said firmly. “But we do have important things to tell you. It will be okay. But… it’s a vodka kind of conversation, I think.”

“Okay.” Thea took the offered drink.
She adored Felicity and Oliver’s living room. It was unambiguously designed for comfort and for large groups of people to gather. Oliver and Tommy were seated next to each other on the couch, close as they ever sat, Oliver’s hand on Tommy’s back. Thea’s breath caught at the sight of Oliver’s bare chest — something he was usually almost-paranoid about concealing from her, knowing how his scars concerned her.

Then she noticed their pajama bottoms. Her eyes widened. She shook her head once and then cleared her throat. “Nice jammies, guys.”

Tommy jumped a little. “Ah -- thanks. They’re a Felicity-gift.”

“A school friend makes them,” Felicity said, “and I buy them in bulk. Where do you want to sit, Thea?”

“Um... “ Thea had one terrifying moment where she wished desperately that she was still little enough to squeeze between Tommy and Oliver, the way she used to on movie nights, wished she could ask for the comfort that being between the two of them would provide her. “I guess I can... “ she found an armchair near the couch and sat, one leg crossed over the other and her arms across her chest. “Why does everyone have sad face on?”

“Felicity thinks… no.” Oliver shook his head. “First of all, I think…”

“Moira lied to you,” Tommy said, his head bent. “About something important. And we think it’s time that you know the truth.”

Thea’s stomach dropped. Oh God. Moira lied? Was she stuck as the matriarch? She’d allowed herself to hope, allowed herself to think Oliver would be able to save her, but... Tommy continued. “There’s a lot to explain really, but most importantly, she lied about who I am to you. About who my father is to you.”

Look up, look up, Thea chanted in her mind. Let me see your eyes Tommy. Let me know what to think. Tell me it’s not true. Because there was a part of her knew what was coming next.

“Mom tried, for a long time, with Dad, for another child after me,” Oliver said quietly. “I -- I don’t know the whole story. She’s never told me the truth. I know there were other pregnancies. But she uh -- shit. Never a girl. So. She turned to Malcolm.”
Thea stood up. “It’s not true.”

Oliver’s eyes were filled with pain. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s not true.” Thea downed her vodka in one swallow, walked over to the bar. “Robert Queen was my father.”

“Thea --” Tommy protested.

“My father sang me All the Pretty Little Ponies every night before I went to sleep. My father smelled like the cologne Ollie wears now. My father had the best laugh and he would -- he would murder you all where you stand for suggesting something so -- so foul.”

Thea’s stomach roiled. She covered her mouth. Felicity rushed to her side.

“Are you okay? Going to be sick?” Felicity asked.

“Malcolm Merlyn is not my father,” Thea insisted.

“No, he’s not,” Felicity said, wrapping her arms around Thea and drawing the young woman close. “Fatherhood -- that’s what Robert Queen did for you. Loving you, caring for you. Malcolm Merlyn was the donor of the sperm that was necessary to create you.”

Thea caught sight of Tommy’s white and broken face.

“Robert was a good man,” Tommy said softly. “He took me fly fishing. He took me into his house. He absolutely was your father, Thea.”

“I can’t believe it,” Thea said, shaking her head. “I can’t.”

Oliver stood and stepped closer to her, hesitantly opening his arms, and she fell in them. “Ollie…"
Daddy. Did she lie to Daddy?"

“I don’t know, Speedy,” Oliver muttered. “He loved you… he loved you so much. He looked at you like the moon and stars. I don’t think it matters whether he knew or not. He was going to love you like that, either way.”

Tommy hadn’t moved from the couch.

Another horrible thought occurred to Thea. “How long have you known? How long have the two of you…”

“A while,” Oliver said, turning her face to his.

“How long a while?”

“Just before I got on the Gambit,” Oliver said. “Maybe a week. Or two.”

Her stomach pitched. “I’m going to throw up.”

“Breathe,” Oliver said, his voice soft and his hands unmoving.

“You!” Thea turned with rage at Tommy. “I’ve tried to kiss you.”

“Thea, I…”

“I’m going to be sick. I’m going to…”

Felicity took Thea’s hand, led her over to the bar, and handed her the ice bucket before the inevitable happened. Vodka and rage, betrayal and hurt. When it was finally over, Thea was crying and Felicity was moving efficiently, handing her a rag and moving to clean up the mess with another one.
Tommy hesitantly got up. “Thea -- every choice I made, I thought I was protecting you. You have to understand. Oliver and I -- we started figuring things out and Moira as good as killed him. You were twelve years old. You were calling me at night because you couldn’t sleep. I didn’t want to endanger you or make it worse.”

“I had just lost my brother,” Thea spat. “You didn’t think I should understand why?”

“We didn’t understand anything ourselves, then,” Tommy said. “There are still some pieces of the puzzle we’re figuring out now. And I…” Tommy laughed. “I loved you so much, you know? I do love you. God, I wish -- if I could go back, if I could undo this, Christ knows I would. I’d keep you a thousand miles away from my shitstain of a father.”

“I just don’t understand why ‘I can’t sleep with you because you’re my sister’ never came out of your mouth when I was fifteen and more than half in love with you. Or why Oliver didn’t tell me when he got back. Why wait?”

“Because I thought ‘I don’t sleep with fifteen year olds’ to be a pretty fucking honest answer,” Tommy said, rubbing his eyes to free them of tears. “And we waited to tell you until now because…”

“Because keeping you safe was always the top priority,” Oliver said. “And until recently, we were both convinced that you not knowing was the best choice to keep you safe.”

“What changed?” Thea asked.

Felicity spoke up, a fair distance away from all of them, returning from disposing of the bucket. “You. You’re seventeen now and there’s danger on all sides. It would be bad enough if I weren’t here, but I am. I’m going to be a target, as it is, but -- it might be worse for you. Besides, it’s become increasingly clear that Malcolm Merlyn will seek to manipulate you, the way he tries to do Tommy. You need to be armed with all the information.”

Thea laid a hand on her stomach. It was turning again, but there was nothing left inside of it. “He -- in the hospital, he…”

“Hey.” Tommy crossed the room in two quick strides, took her hands and led her to a chair, which she fell back into. He knelt in front of her. “Here’s what you need to understand, okay? If you don’t… if there’s nothing else you remember you keep this in mind. Malcolm Merlyn -- my father --
he’s evil. He likes nothing so much as to make me feel small, feel worthless. He knows how I feel about you. He knows how … pure it is. Uncomplicated. He knows how rare that is in my life.” Tommy huffed out a rueful laugh. “This is the man that knows ‘a sister’ was on my Christmas list for like, six straight years. What he said in the hospital, this is because he knows that the fact that you’re… well, that Oliver allows you to be -- that he shares you with me -- that that’s the biggest joy in my life. He knows that. He wants to see it corrupted, turned foul.”

Tommy drew in a shuddering breath. “I’m so sorry that this touches your life. I never, ever -- I hate that I hurt you.”

Thea captured his hands. “I’m so pissed at you.”

“That’s okay.”

She turned murderous eyes to Oliver. “I’m so fucking pissed.”

Oliver nodded. “I know.”

“But I probably won’t be forever,” Thea said. “I -- I know I won’t be forever. And I think -- once I’m done being pissed. And making the two of you pay. Over and over again. In painful and creative ways… I think…” Thea let go of Tommy’s hands, but before he could move, she’d buried them in his hair, tugging at it affectionately. “I love you, Tommy. You remember, um -- that one year we watched Mean Girls like a solid two weeks in a row?”

“It’s seared in my brain, actually,” Tommy said.

“Or, you know -- the very first party I ever got drunk at and I was so scared because I thought someone was following me home and you showed up like an avenging angel and I knew I was going to be okay? And then you taught me how to throw a punch and bought me a taser?”

“Yeah.”

“I think half the reason I’m so fucking pissed at you is that you were already my brother. And I was already your sister and… you should have just told me, okay?”
“Okay.” Tommy ducked his head into Thea’s hands, laid his head in her lap. “I… be as mad as you want, okay? Just don’t stop loving me.”

“You idiot,” Thea said, catching Oliver’s eyes over Tommy’s head. “I could never. Either of you. It’s because I love you that I am going to make you pay.”

Felicity waited several moments before Thea saw her slip her hand into Oliver’s. “I don’t know if you want to go home tonight. But I thought in case you didn’t want to, I’d make a room up for you. We have extra jammies.”

Thea blinked. “Can we… I mean…”

“Jammies and a terrible movie?” Oliver asked.

“Yeah.” Thea sniffled. “Just… give me a few minutes.”

Thea walked to the bathroom, splashed her face one more time with water and concentrated on breathing in and out. Her hands shook, her stomach was queasy -- but something was shifting inside of her. She had Tommy, she had Oliver… nothing had really changed, there. Except now she knew what her mother was capable of.

When Thea got back to the living room, Oliver and Felicity had pulled the massive couch out so it made a sort of bed and had a movie playing softly on the television. Thea noticed Oliver holding Felicity close with one hand, as he half-sat, half-reclined against the back of the couch. The other hand, he was using to rub Tommy’s shoulder.

“Make room,” Thea demanded, and then launched herself, the way that she used to, across Oliver (now with Felicity) and Tommy. Everybody groaned, but Thea giggled, pressing herself in the space between Oliver and Tommy. She dropped wet, messy kisses on Tommy’s cheek, then Oliver’s, reveling in the fact that she had two brothers -- she’d always had two, but now… now she knew.

The sarcastic commentary started right away, but slowly faded into nothing as one by one, they dropped into sleep. Thea and Tommy were the last ones awake.

“Hey, Tommy?”
“Hm?”

“Malcolm’s not your father, either.”

“Go to sleep, Speedy.”

**

Thea finally dropped off to sleep, curled into Tommy’s shoulder, her arms wrapped around his neck. He savored the moment, the sweetness of her perfume, the curl of her fingers into his hair at the base of his neck. The relief that he hadn’t lost her, hadn’t destroyed their relationship, what she felt for him… What he felt for her. All the things he had been so scared of losing were only more secure in the base of his chest.

Oliver’s hand brushed Thea’s hair, then clasped Tommy’s shoulder. “Is she asleep?”

Tommy held her a little tighter. He wasn’t quite ready to let go of her. “Yeah.”

“Okay.” Oliver got up, climbing over Felicity. He stretched to the ceiling, going all the way up on tiptoe. When he collapsed, he turned to Tommy. “We should put her in bed, don’t you think?”

“Yeah, sure,” Tommy said, kissing Thea’s forehead. “Okay.”

Oliver scooped her up out of Tommy’s arms, and Thea made a slight noise of protest. “S okay, Speedy,” Oliver said softly. “Don’t wake up.”

“Kay,” she mumbled back. Oliver disappeared with her down the corridor to the second guest room. Tommy thought about following, but he thought maybe Oliver deserved a moment with her alone.

“Hey,” Felicity said, scooting over to lay in the spot where Thea had been. Tommy only hesitated a moment before he wrapped his arms around her. “You did good tonight.”
“I’m glad you think so, because I felt like I was upstream without a paddle,” Tommy said on an exhale. “I’m just…”

“Little bit wrecked?” Felicity asked.

“Yeah, that,” Tommy said. “Just a little bit.”

The couch shifted a bit as Oliver scooted in behind Tommy and spooned him, his arms wrapping around Tommy’s middle. Tommy huffed a little. “You guys…”

“Hush,” Felicity said.

Helpless against the two of them, Tommy relaxed, closing his eyes. Then he drifted off to sleep with the furnace of Oliver’s heat behind him and Felicity’s in front of him.

When he woke sometime later, Oliver and Felicity were gone, but he could hear their quiet voices in the kitchen. He groaned and pushed himself off of the couch, his body stiff and sore from so much time spent prone, and hobbled his way into the bathroom.

The sleep had helped but he was still exhausted. He pressed his hand to his side as he left the bathroom for the kitchen. Oliver raised an eyebrow as soon as he saw him. Without a word, Oliver opened a cabinet and pulled out a bottle of pain pills, tossed it to Tommy.

Tommy didn’t have the energy to fight it. He caught the bottle with one hand and popped two of the tablets, accepting the glass of water Felicity handed him after the fact.

“Anybody else hungry?” Felicity asked. “I could go for like -- pancakes -- right now.” She looked at Oliver significantly, who sighed and started gathering the ingredients. “He made me pancakes in Russia, once,” Felicity said to Tommy. “They tasted like home. I’ve been a little nostalgic for them ever since.”

“Yeah well, that’s the only thing he’s capable of making,” Tommy teased, sliding onto a barstool. “Raisa despaired that he would ever be able to feed himself.”
“But I can order Thai food with the best of them,” Oliver said with a straight face.

Felicity moved around him in the space, gathering eggs and cracking them into a mixing bowl. “I want scrambled eggs with my pancakes. Anyone else?”

“Yes,” Oliver and Tommy said at the same time. Tommy coughed. “Is there anything else I can help with?”

“No,” Felicity said firmly. “You just sit there for a while. Try not to lift anything. Or climb any roofs.”

Tommy flushed. “I can do that.” He rubbed his hands on his scalp and then sighed. “You were talking earlier, about… laying all of our cards on the table.”

“Yes,” Felicity said.

“When I was fourteen years old, my father gave me ten thousand dollars to uh, play with, on the stock market. I was supposed to give it back when I doubled the money. Well, I… I sort of tripled it. By then, though, I’d sort of decided being at the forefront of Malcolm’s mind was… not something I wanted. So I told him I’d lost most of it and dumped the profits in a bunch of different phony accounts. Robert actually helped me hide the money. Anyway. Ever since, I’ve been quietly expanding my stock portfolio,” Tommy said, folding his hands in front of him on the counter. “I’m not good for much, but it seems I have a talent in the stock market. This might be irrelevant, but, I…I had a thought.”

Felicity briskly whisked the eggs and poked Oliver with her elbow. “Turn those over, baby, and close your mouth.”

“Dad helped you hide money from Malcolm?” Oliver asked, hastily turning over the pancakes. “You’re some kind of stock market genius and you never told me?”

“I’m a Merlyn,” Tommy said with a shrug. “It’s probably genetic. We haven’t… said much of this out loud. Not in years. But I’m assuming the end goal is still…”

“Moira out of the picture,” Oliver said. “However we have to accomplish that. Malcolm dead in a ditch somewhere. And the whole system burned to the ground.”
Tommy nodded. “There has to be something left, for whoever makes it out of the fire,” he said. “This was -- a bit easier when I was the sole heir to the Merlyn Global conglomerate. But this works just as well. I’ve been quietly buying huge chunks of Queen Consolidated stock.”

Felicity turned, gesturing with her whisk. “Oliver’s got a sizeable minority share already, which will transfer to our joint custody upon our marriage.”

“I could angle for a more significant chunk as a marriage gift,” Oliver mused. “Moira would believe that it would be important to me that my wife sit on the QC board.”

“I’ve been using dummy accounts and third-party representatives,” Tommy said. “There’s no way for Moira or her accountants to be aware that one person is securing such a large share of the company. Once the Dearden structure starts to burn, she’ll look to bury assets in QC holdings.”

“And that’s when you claim your seat on the board,” Felicity said, “and we oust Moira as CEO.”

“It will be a simple enough matter to convince the board that Oliver should take his rightful place,” Tommy said. “There are some crusty old fogies who were never very happy that the company went to Moira, considering that Robert’s murder remains unsolved.”

Oliver banged a plate down on the counter to place the pancakes on a little harder than he probably intended. “Only because the police in this city are…”

“Bought and paid for with Dearden money,” Felicity said, kissing Oliver’s bare bicep as she got plates down for all of them. “I’m sorry, baby.”

“It won’t be long now,” Oliver said. “There will be justice one way or the other. But there’s one hole in this brilliant plan of yours, Tommy.”

“What’s that?”

“I have less than no interest in being a CEO,” Oliver said. “I don’t have the business head for it. That’s why I’m marrying Felicity.”
“Felicity would be an easy sell as well,” Tommy said. “If you really don’t want it.”

“We’ll see,” Felicity said, spooning eggs onto three different plates. “I have some business connections through the Bratva that I have been in contact with. New investment possibilities would probably go far with the board.”

Oliver raised his eyebrows at her. “This is what you’ve had Diggle working on.”

“He has an honest face and a trustworthy soul,” Felicity said. “He seemed like the right choice.”

Felicity’s phone buzzed. “Moira’s inviting us for lunch, Oliver.”

Oliver grit his teeth. “Okay.”

“You won’t have to pretend that much longer,” Felicity promised. “I know it’s exhausting.”

“It’s been harder, for some reason, now that I know it’s almost over.”

“Thea can help a little,” Felicity suggested. “Now that she knows a little bit about Moira, she can be supportive for you.”

Oliver nodded. Tommy took the plate Oliver offered him and smothered his pancakes in syrup. Life, he thought, was so short. And pleasures were so few. Especially ones as rare as this - breakfast with two people with whom, for the moment, he was in complete accord with. It was shaping up to be a banner day.

**

Oliver held Felicity’s hand as they walked through the front doors of Queen Manor. He found it increasingly comforting, Felicity’s constant presence and her reliable intelligence. There had been times when he had wondered if Russia had been some kind of dream -- the one good thing that had happened to him since the Gambit -- but it was clear that it hadn’t been. And though it seemed like
the world was pressing in on them from all sides, with Tommy and Felicity in the same place, both committed to helping him, Oliver was more confident than he ever had been before that they could handle anything.

“Felicity!” Moira greeted them in the salon, spreading her arms. “That is a beautiful dress you have on.”

“Thank you. We have an appointment with the caterer for the engagement party later,” Felicity said. “Thanks for the invitation.”

“I’m so pleased you could come. The house feels a touch empty without Oliver banging around at all hours of the night,” Moira said, pulling Oliver in for a hug.

“We’re just across town, Mom,” Oliver protested, unsure what Moira was angling for.

“Well, I’m looking forward to the wedding all the same. It will be good to have you back in the Manor where you belong,” Moira said grandly. “You know it goes to Oliver once he’s married. Robert, rest his soul, insisted on that.”

Oliver’s stomach turned. “I don’t think we’ve made any decisions yet about where we’ll be after the wedding, Mom.”

Felicity reached for his hand and squeezed it. “I like that we have a place that we can call ours, don’t you, Oliver?”

“Of course, you’d be welcome to make any changes you’d like,” Moira said. “I’ve enjoyed fiddling with the design of several of the rooms myself.”

“Oh, I think we’d have to make some changes to be comfortable here,” Felicity said. “You understand, of course.”

“Of course,” Moira’s smile was broad and plastic.

“So, Mom. What did Raisa put on the menu today?” Oliver asked.
“Not peanut butter and jelly.” Oliver’s eyes widened and a grin spread across his face as he took in the blonde figure standing behind Moira in a black leather jacket. “Much to my chagrin. We must eat fancy food.”

Oliver dropped Felicity’s hand and opened his arms for Sara to hug him. “Hey you. Welcome back.”

He felt Sara dip her nose into the crook of his neck and inhale his scent. “Thanks, Oliver.”

“Felicity, this is Sara Lance,” Oliver said, stepping away. “She’s an invaluable asset to the Dearden family and a lifelong friend of mine. Sara, this is Felicity Smoak, my future wife.”

“I’m so pleased to meet any friend of Oliver’s,” Felicity said, with a wide smile. The two women shook hands.

“Well, this is all very lovely,” Moira said brightly. “I’m so glad this is going well. Felicity, Sara will be your Dearden family security detail until the wedding.”

“I have security,” Felicity said flatly.

“He doesn’t seem to be very committed to the job,” Moira said, waving a hand. “I hardly see him around.”

“I do spend most of my time with Oliver,” Felicity said. “There’s no need to have two overly-protective men watching my every move.”

“Sara is very familiar with the family,” Moira said. “She’ll be able to detect more… subtle threats. This is only for my peace of mind, of course. It’s not that I distrust Mr. Diggle or your judgement.”

“Of course not,” Felicity said, with a smile. Oliver sent her a wink. Not much longer.
In the darkness of the late evening, candles were lit on the dining room table in Oliver and Felicity’s penthouse apartment. A half-finished bottle of wine was uncorked and sandwiched between a mostly-destroyed pan of lasagna and a bowl of salad. Bread, warmed from the oven, had been picked over and parceled out. A dish of butter was melting slowly from the heat of the bread, and olive oil mixed with spices in a small concave plate made the entire room smell of garlic and cracked pepper.

And Felicity was happy.

The food was good, the company was better. Oliver and Tommy had done their best all evening to keep up the banter of lifelong friends -- it was genuine enough, but mostly, she appreciated the river of affection that underlied all of their teasing words. Sara had joined them briefly before she’d been called away for the evening, and Felicity found that the more she spent time with her, she liked the blonde woman, who reminded her more than a little of Oliver.

She laid a hand over her stomach and thought that she could not possibly eat another bite.

“Let me take your plate,” Oliver said, standing, and he brushed a kiss on her cheek as he took it from her.

“Hm, thank you,” Felicity said.

Tommy’s eyes widened. “You trained Oliver how to load a dishwasher? I didn’t know that was possible.”

Felicity grinned over her wine glass. “Oliver’s smarter than he gives himself credit for. And he learns quickly, provided the right motivation.”

Tommy flushed and chuckled. “Well.” He brushed his pants. “I had better start gathering my things.”

“What?” Felicity blinked. She didn’t want the evening to end. “No. Stay.” She reached for the wine bottle, waved it in his general direction. “We still have half a bottle, and you promised me the kindergarten story. I want to know all about what Oliver looked like in his little uniform. Tell me
there were pretentious knickerbockers.”

Tommy lifted his eyebrows. “Are there any kind of knickerbockers that aren’t pretentious? No, I can’t stay any longer. You two crazy kids need some space.”

Felicity looked over at Oliver, who raised his eyebrows at her. “You know we’ve been calling that guest room Tommy’s room,” she said. “It can’t be… comfortable, staying at the Manor.”

“No, but it is where all of my stuff is,” Tommy said briefly. “As much as I love my stud muffin pajamas, I should at least check in on my bed. Perhaps it’s missed me.”

Oliver shut the dishwasher. “You know we like having you here, right?”

“Of course you do,” Tommy said, standing and slipping his sport coat back on. “But you know what they say. Absence makes the heart grow fonder. My evil plot to make the two of you need me desperately only works if I stay strong in this moment,” he said with a wink. “Felicity, you were lovely tonight.” He bent and kissed her cheek. “Thanks for the food.”

Oliver held out his hand, and Tommy clasped it, drawing him in for a one-handed hug and a pat on the back. “See you tomorrow,” Oliver said. “Think Mom has some stuff she wants us to do.”

Tommy sighed. “It’s endless with that woman. Bye, kids.”

The door shut behind him, and Felicity sighed in appreciation, watching him leave. Oliver caught her eyes and his lips twitched in amusement. She waggled her eyebrows at Oliver. He chuckled, and drew her into his arms, kissing the top of her head. “I’m… Is it cheesy to say I’m glad you’re here?”

“We can have a cheesy moment,” Felicity said, inhaling his cologne as she turned her nose into his shirt. “And I’ll say that I’m very happy to be here.”

Oliver’s hand traced her spine, over and over again. Felicity sighed into the easy affection and looped her hands around his neck. Something bubbled in her chest, in the pit of her stomach. Words tickled on the edge of her tongue. Words that would make him run and she wanted nothing more than to make him stay.

“Felicity,” Oliver said, pulling the hem of her dress up so that he could cup her ass, “I want you. Can I have you?”

Felicity lifted her hands over her head and let Oliver pull the offending item off of her body. “You can have me right here.”

Long, slow kisses they traded between them, candlelight flickering on the dining room table behind them. Oliver backed Felicity up against the table, gently persuading her to lay back on it. He swiftly blew the candles out and moved them to the sideboard. Turning back to Felicity, he pushed gently at her knees until they fell open. He kissed up the inside of her thigh, while Felicity giggled helplessly at the mixture of pleasure and absurdity.

Oliver laughed with her, kissing up her body to her breasts. Felicity hissed, first in disappointment, then in pleasure when his teeth hooked onto her nipple through her bra. He was half-laying on her, his weight hot and comfortably heavy, his cotton shirt cool against her skin.

The push of her ponytail against her head was making her uncomfortable, so Felicity half-sat up and let her hair down. Oliver’s hands were drawn like magnets to it, and he busied his mouth with kissing her while he wrapped his hands in her hair. Felicity lifted her hips, twisted them to get
Oliver’s attention.

Oliver was finally persuaded to pull his mouth from hers. A well-practiced flick of his thumb had the front-closure of her bra undone and off of her in seconds. Felicity tried to sit up, reach for the buttons on his shirt, but he pushed her hands away.

“You first,” he said.

Felicity laid back down and smirked. “If you insist.”

Oliver followed the curve of her abdomen with the palm of his hand, his lips trailing behind, teeth nipping her lightly. “I do.”

Felicity chuckled. “Not for another three months you don -- Oliver!” He’d bent to suck her clit through her panties. She arched her hips. The ache that had been a slow, melting burn in her gut was an incessant drumbeat now. “Oliver, Oliver, Oliver…”

His thumb dipped inside of her panties, teasing the lips of her pussy. She was already wet, ready for his touch. It drove her crazy that he teased her so relentlessly, but she wouldn’t have him any other way. Slowly, he pulled her panties down and put his mouth to work. Felicity spread her legs wider and reached down to pull his face closer to her.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck,” Felicity chanted, arching her back when Oliver’s tongue drew quick circles around her clit. Her fingernails dug into Oliver’s scalp as he coaxed her clit, taking his time, sucking it and flicking and... then he slipped a finger inside of her. Felicity dropped her hands from his head and fisted them at her sides before she moved them up to caress her breasts.

Teasing herself, she scraped her nails against her nipples, up and down her abdomen, shivering at the sensations coursing through her. “I’m so close, baby.”

Oliver added another finger, hooked them just so, and... “Holy shit! Fuck, fuck, fuck!” Felicity covered her eyes and bit her lip as she shook through her orgasm.

When she opened them again, Oliver and his smug stupid face was hovering over hers. “That was a good one, huh?”

“I just had an orgasm. On our dining room table,” Felicity said.

“Mmhmm.” Oliver dipped a finger inside of her, drew it back out and tasted her. “You’re delicious, have I mentioned?”

Oliver tugged the shirt up and over his head, undid his slacks and slid them to the ground. “Here, or the bedroom?”
“There’s a mattress in the bedroom,” Felicity suggested. “Unless you want to skip coming inside me…”

“No. I want to come inside you,” Oliver said, and it sent a thrill straight to Felicity’s core. He tugged on her hand and they abandoned their mess to run down the hallway to the master bedroom.

Oliver caught her underneath her arms and tossed her back on the mattress. Her eyes widened. “In the mood to manhandle tonight, are we?”

“I want to have my hands all over every square inch of you,” Oliver said, his eyes sparkling with amusement.

“Well, I want you to fuck me,” Felicity said. “Surely there’s a way we can do both.”

Oliver’s pupils were wide with arousal, his hands quick to push her knees apart again. Almost as if he couldn’t resist her, he settled between her legs and licked her pussy, his tongue dipping side of her for just a second. “Oliver…” Felicity demanded. “You promised to fuck me. Come here.”

He crawled up next to her, and she reached for him. Slowly, she wrapped her hand around him while he watched with amusement, and soon his relaxed arousal turned to need and frustration as she teased him, playing with his balls, swiping her thumb across the head.

“No more, Felicity,” Oliver finally gasped. “Or this will be over very quickly.”

Felicity straddled him, running her hands up his truly magnificent abs. “Have I mentioned lately that the view here in Starling City is exceptional?”

Oliver chuckled. “Not in the last, oh, twenty-four hours or so.”

“Well worth the trans-Atlantic flight and the price of admission,” Felicity said. “You know, the first time I met you, I decided I was alright with you being my bodyguard because you were so downright pretty.”

“Ouch,” Oliver said on a laugh.

“What, do you prefer, I don’t know -- ruggedly handsome?”

“I’d prefer to be inside your pussy,” Oliver said.

Felicity grinned at him, reaching behind her for his cock. “Slow, still sensitive,” she muttered.

Oliver gripped her thighs. “As slow as you need it, baby.”

She sank on top of him, sighing at the way he filled her, the way he knew right away to brace his thumb against her clit, manipulate it in gentle circles. She leaned forward to kiss him once he was fully seated inside of her, then started to rock back and forth on him, gentle movements that sent little waves of pleasurable shock through her pussy.

Oliver’s eyes found hers and he raised his eyebrows before he lifted his hips against hers for the first time. “Oh,” Felicity breathed, bracing her hands on his pectoral muscles. “That’s good.”

His gentle thrusts, right against the right spot inside of her drove her close to another orgasm. Felicity was almost surprised when she slipped over the edge of an orgasm and stilled on top of Oliver. “Um, wow,” she muttered.

“Good?” Oliver asked.
“So good. You might want to drive for a bit,” Felicity said, and Oliver rolled them over, still inside of her. He took a moment just to caress her, down her sides, over the tops of her breasts. He ground their hips together, kissing her neck over and over and over again, exhaling words against her skin that she couldn’t quite understand. His hand was fisted in the pillow case above her head.

And it was everything. It was perfect, this moment. It couldn’t last forever.

Oliver groaned from deep in his gut and came inside of her, twisting his hips as he did so, to grind against her clit.

“Oliver…” Felicity breathed. “Oh my God.”

“Just… give me a minute,” Oliver muttered, keeping his weight on his elbows so he wouldn’t crush her. “I know you want to clean up, but just…”

He kissed her again, long and deep until she almost forgot she needed to breathe. Then he pulled out of her with a sigh and rolled off the bed to walk to the bathroom. Felicity heard the rush of the faucet and closed her eyes, her fingers dancing down her abdomen to play with her wet and well-used pussy.

She was drifting on a wave of pleasure and after-shocks when Oliver returned and ran a warm, damp cloth up her legs. Gently, he took her hand and kissed it, moving it out of the way so he could clean the valley between her thighs.

Felicity drifted off to sleep.

When she woke the next morning, there was a cup of steaming coffee by her nightstand and her alarm was shrieking. She groaned as she turned it off. As a general rule, Oliver didn’t sleep very much and would not normally be in bed with her in the morning. So she wasn’t surprised when he was gone. She pushed herself out of bed and into the bathroom to start her morning routine.

By the time she was showered, and halfway on her way to presentable, a cup of coffee settled mostly in her stomach, Oliver was returning from his run, sweaty and glistening. She nearly rolled her eyes. It was obnoxious how good he looked in the morning. He removed the headphones from his ears and pressed a sweaty kiss to her cheek.

“Hey. Good morning.”

“Good morning to you.” Felicity turned the straightening iron on and leaned forward in the mirror to do her mascara. “Big plans today?”

Oliver shrugged. “Tommy and I have some business to take care of….”

This was her opening. For some time now, she’d been thinking about what to do -- clearly, Oliver was happy with Tommy around. And she was finding she was too. The situation now -- where Oliver and Tommy pretended to be nothing more than friends to spare her feelings -- it wasn’t sustainable. There had to be another solution. Felicity gathered her courage and whirled to face Oliver. “I think we should talk about Tommy.”

Oliver stilled in the process of getting undressed for a shower, but only momentarily. He was kicking off his shoes and removing his shirt when he responded. “What about Tommy?” Oliver turned the jets on and stepped under the massive sprayer while Felicity gathered her thoughts.

She took a deep breath. “Mostly about how he still loves you. And you still love him.”
“I’m with you, Felicity.” Oliver’s voice was flat. “I can’t do much about where my heart lies, but I can promise you loyalty. You don’t have to worry about us… falling into old habits.”

“Loyalty isn’t good enough and love doesn’t have to be a zero sum game,” Felicity said, putting down her mascara as her hands were trembling. “Clearly, you want me. Clearly there’s… last night would not have happened if there’s not something elemental between the two of us.”

“It was pretty amazing,” Oliver agreed, a faint, smug smile crossing his face.

“It’s not just sex, either,” Felicity said. “I know it’s not. I know you well enough to know that you don’t look at me like you look at anyone else. Oliver.” Felicity took a step forward, toward the shower, laid her hand on the tile, just close enough he could reach it if he wanted, just far enough he could avoid her without obvious hurt. “I’m not jealous. And I’m not worried about you being a man of your word.”

Oliver ducked his head, studied her form. “You’re not jealous.”

“No.”

Oliver killed the shower and sighed. “So why bring it up at all?”

“Because I desperately don’t want you to resent me in ten years. I’m terrified that we’ll turn, slowly, into Moira and Robert Queen. Maybe there was something there once, you told me that. But they killed it, the two of them, together. Or maybe we’ll turn into my parents, you know -- they had moments where they were fire but everything else was ice.” Felicity swallowed. “I think… I think if you promise me to stay with me forever, to be loyal only to me, you’d keep your promise. I know that about you. I don’t doubt that you would.”

“Okay.” Oliver crossed his arms over his chest. “Where’s this going, Felicity?”

“If it were Christmas,” Felicity said, tentatively smiling, “and you could ask for everything you ever wanted, what you would ask for? Santa Claus would deliver. No matter what.”

“I’d want Thea safe. I’d want you in my bed, every night. In my arms during the day. I’d give you the kids you said you wanted. I’d want my city free and clean.” Oliver shook his head. “And I’d want Tommy. In all the ways that I’ve always had Tommy.”

“But it’s not right for you to be without him,” Felicity said. “I’ve thought that a lot recently. And I’ve thought…” She cleared her throat. “I might have a solution. I don’t get jealous but I don’t… I don’t want us sneaking around, either. I don’t want to pretend like I don’t know what you two are to each other. I don’t want to pretend that I’m not attracted to Tommy.”

Oliver’s face was slowly, slowly relaxing. “You’re attracted to Tommy.”

“Yes. I guess I should have mentioned that earlier. I thought about doing notes or something so I would keep my thoughts organized, but I thought it was obvious? I mean…” Felicity sighed. “What I’m saying is you should invite him into our bed. We should see if it works… the three of us.”

Oliver blinked and tilted his head, still so carefully neutral Felicity was starting to feel anxious. “As a threesome thing?”

“Yes. I guess I should have mentioned that earlier. I thought about doing notes or something so I would keep my thoughts organized, but I thought it was obvious? I mean…” Felicity sighed. “What I’m saying is you should invite him into our bed. We should see if it works… the three of us.”

Oliver wasn’t moving. He wasn’t speaking. Felicity was deeply
terrified that she’d ruined everything. “I just want to see… Please don’t… Oliver, you have to give me something here. I don’t know if you hate the idea or if you…”

Like a sprung coil, Oliver moved fast, reaching for her hand, and tugging her into the shower. She was up against the tile, with his mouth on hers, before she could even blink. By the time their lips separated, Oliver was panting. “I could never hate an idea like that. I could never… Let me… just… I will take care of Tommy -- if he says no, it won’t be because he doesn’t want you, I promise you that. I can see it in his eyes. You’ve just… opened a world I never thought I... I need to show you how brilliant you are. I need to.”

“Oliver,” Felicity protested, “the dress that I have on right now is silk.”

Oliver pulled it over her head and threw it across the bathroom. “Not on anymore.”

“I have to be somewhere in…”

“I’ll be fast and thorough. And very, very thankful.”

And he was.

**

Starling City, six and a half years ago.

The summons came the morning after Tommy returned from Lian Yu. He’d left Oliver behind to do what must be done. Jetlagged, exhausted, trembling with so much knowledge he’d never had before, he’d hoped to take himself for a long, cleansing run. In the old days -- just a few months ago, these old days were -- he would have turned to a bottle of whiskey to help him process. But Oliver believed that he had enough intelligence and wit to keep their sister safe until Oliver could return, and Tommy needed to be intelligent and witty enough that that faith was justified.

Tommy opened his bedroom door to find a Dearden footsoldier waiting there, arms crossed in front of him. “Good morning, Mr. Merlyn.”

Tommy tried to affect a pleasantly surprised expression. “David. Nice to see you. How’s tricks?”

“Your presence is required in Mrs. Queen’s office,” David said, his voice deep and his expression deliberately neutral.

Tommy’s system went from sixty to overdrive in zero-point-nothing seconds. Instant clammy palms, racing heart, trying to jump out of his chest. He tried to focus on relaxation techniques he’d learned in a yoga class with Laurel once, but he couldn’t remember if he was supposed to inhale for six counts or exhale for ten or if it was the other way around. He stuck his hands in his pockets and strolled down the corridor to Moira’s office, or he tried to. He startled at every sound, jumped at every draft.

“Calm the fuck down, Merlyn,” he whispered to himself, trying to picture Ollie’s -- no, Oliver’s face. His new face. The one that was hard and unforgiving and changed.

He pushed open the door. Moira was waiting for him, standing on the Persian rug in the middle of her office. “Good morning, Thomas,” she said pleasantly. “I trust you had a good trip.”

Tommy couldn’t breathe. She knew. But -- how much did she know that he knew? He suddenly felt like he was drowning in an ocean he wasn’t prepared for.
“Did you enjoy the scenery on Lian Yu? It’s a bit… homogeneous for my taste,” Moira said, smiling. Tommy felt a little like he had been confronted by a shark -- all sharp teeth and a thirst for blood.

“I uh…”

“What an inspiring burst of initiative and resourcefulness you’ve shown, darling. And I had almost given up hope, really, that would ever show any of your father’s… panache. But I should know by now not to distrust my instincts.”

“I don’t…”

Moira’s face went cold. “It seems you’ve stepped firmly into the world of the grown-ups, Thomas. And one of the rules in this family, for grown-ups, not for over-grown children as I have so graciously allowed you to be, is that one must be useful.” Moira circled Tommy, slowly. “Can you think of a way in which you might be useful to me?”

“I…” Tommy shook his head hopelessly.

“Not at present, probably, since you’ve no practical skills,” Moira allowed. “But with a little practice. A little training.”

“Ma’am, I…” Tommy struggled for words. “Whatever you think I am capable of, I…”

“I know my son. And I know that he probably promised you the world. And that he probably asked you to care for Thea, didn’t he?”

Tommy’s heart sank. But he lifted his chin and spoke surely for the first time. “I won’t hurt Thea.”

“For God’s sake, you idiot child.” Moira shook her head. “Why on Earth would I need you to hurt Thea? No. I’m far more interested in molding you into the kind of man who will one day protect the one remaining connection you have to Oliver.”

“I would do anything to protect Thea.” Tommy swallowed. “That’s the truth.”

There was a letter opener. On the desk right behind her. If he could get past her, he could have his hands on it in a matter of seconds. He could probably kill her before the guards she had stationed outside the door could kill him.

“I know how the Merlyn mind works,” Moira continued, deliberately stepping in front of Tommy’s view of the letter-opener. “So I offer you a deal. Something in return for… your continued gracious service.”

“What kind of a deal?”

“If my son comes back from that island -- and it is very likely that he won’t -- Slade Wilson is notoriously difficult to please and he knows I would accept nothing less than a version of Oliver that is completely up to his… high standards -- he will be a very different person. But perhaps there will be enough of him left that the two of you will continue to share your… special connection.”

Tommy’s stomach roiled in his gut. Waves of cold washed over him. “We love each other.”

“So he says. But Oliver is easy with his love, in ways you will never be.” Moira waved a hand. “Still, it is conceivable that in several years’ time, you will want to remain by his side. If he comes back, he will don the green hood and become the strong arm of this family.”
“That’s a legend.” Tommy protested. “Just… just a boogieman story they tell the kids in Starling City so they can sleep better at night.”

“No,” Moira said. “It is the way we stay at the top of the food chain. It is the way we keep this family superior. The legend of the green hood, the ruthlessness he displays -- our reputation is built on this. But I am willing to make an addendum, for you. I am willing to give the Hood a Shadow.”

“Why?” Tommy shook his head. “Why are you doing this?”

“Because I took you into my house,” Moira said softly, in a tone that might otherwise be sweet, “and I cradled you when you were sick and I watched you grow and all along I thought there might be something underneath those vapid eyes. I hoped there was, if only to twist the knife in your father’s gut. It’s gratifying to be right. You owe me, Thomas. You owe my family your life -- Malcolm surely would have killed you. You owe my son your heart. And you owe my daughter your allegiance.”

“Otherwise?”

“I send you back. Oh, Thea will be sad, of course. But she’s young enough in time she’ll hardly remember her brother and the man-who-almost-was. Malcolm does not take your… abandoning him as lightly as you think he does. I’m sure he’d let you live for several months before he killed you slowly.”

“Why -- why do this to Oliver?”

“Because I can’t afford to have adults running around like children anymore.” Moira shook her head. “Do you take the deal?”

Tommy felt like he was signing his soul away -- like he ought to be standing at a crossroads somewhere. He closed his eyes. If he said no, he would be abandoning Thea -- something Oliver asked him specifically not to do, not that he could have anyway, and he would be as good as dead. If he said yes -- would he go to the island as well? What lay ahead of him?

Both paths seemed murky and wrought with evil. Neither sat well in his gut.

Tommy hung his head for a moment, but then lifted it with determination. “Yes. I will take the deal.”

“Good.” Moira walked around to her desk, reached in a drawer and took out a vicious-looking knife. “Bring him in,” she called.

Four foot soldiers brought in a man who had been hog-tied and bound. His eyes were bloodshot and he looked, to Tommy’s mind, terrified. Which made two of them.

“Tommy, this is Brad Donohue. He’s here, in this room, because this is exactly the kind of threat I want to train you to eliminate. You see, Brad is a hitman for the Donohue family with a particularly disgusting trademark with a fetish for eyes. He collects the eyes of his victims, keeps them on a shelf. His intended victim was Thea.”

Tommy’s eyes went wide.

“He’s been neutralized, of course, and retaliation was swift, but I thought I would leave the final administration of justice to you. He wanted Thea dead. So he dies.” Moira handed him the knife. “If you want the life I’m offering, you’re the one who is going to kill him.”

Tommy took the knife. It felt strange and cold in his hand. All of the footsoldiers stood back. None
offered advice. None looked away, either. It was the worst kind of stage, Tommy thought. And there
was no exit, no curtain call.

He knelt. He took the man in his arms, who struggled violently, kicking and screaming. Tommy grit
his teeth and pulled the knife across the man’s throat.

To his horror, it didn’t do much more than scratch the surface of the skin.

“If that’s the way you’re going to go,” Moira said, “you’ll need more pressure than that.”

Tommy’s eyes filled with tears, his stomach heaved. He pressed as hard as he could. The blood -- the
blood was a river. The blood was an ocean. Covered his hands, covered his pants, covered his shoes,
covered his socks. The smell was intense. Copper and salt and urine, eventually -- eventually. It
wasn’t like in the movies. No. Brad Donohue hung on, gasping for air, gurgling, choking, clutching
at nothing. It was interminable, his death. It was unbearable, watching him die.

Tommy never looked away. He thought he owed the act of taking a life the dignity of watching what
he’d wrought.

He stood, and his socks squelched in his shoes.

Tommy lost everything in his stomach.

It seemed ages that he stood there, retching, unable to control it.

“Clean him up,” Moira directed the foot soldiers when it had finally, finally stopped. “Do what you
have to do to dispose of the body. Thomas?”

He couldn’t speak. He could only look at her through jaded eyes.

“You might want to toughen up, darling. You’ll need a stiff spine and a strong stomach to do the
work I’ll require of you.” She opened the door to the corridor. “Oh, and welcome aboard, Mr.
Merlyn. Or perhaps I should call you Shadow.”

**

Starling City, Present Day

At half-past noon, Felicity burst through the door of the restaurant, Sara right behind her. Felicity
moved quickly wherever she went, Sara had noticed over the past several days. On this occasion, she
was nearly running. “The maddening thing is,” she was saying, “he’s never late, and I never intend
to be late, but it just works out that way. It’s some kind of universal conspiracy or something.”

“You’re cute,” Sara said, sticking one hand in her pocket as she scanned the restaurant, her eyes
examining every square inch of the noisy bar and grill that Felicity had chosen for this meeting. She
catched sight of a giant man with arms the size of tree trunks, who wore a placid expression on his
face. He, too, was watching the restaurant with professional eyes, and he was armed -- at least two
handguns in a holster under his jacket. “Is that him back there?”

Felicity caught John’s eyes and waved a hand. “Yes.”

“Oliver’s description doesn’t disappoint,” Sara said under her breath. Oliver had told her to look for a
tree of a man, armed to the teeth, whose expression almost never changed.

“John’s physical appearance is quite the asset in terms of sheer intimidation,” Felicity agreed.
“Fortunately, he has almost no bark at all, but an incredibly deadly bite.”

“That may be the nicest thing you’ve ever said about me,” Diggle said, getting to his feet. He wrapped Felicity in a friendly embrace and patted her back. “Holding up just fine in that penthouse with Queen?”

Felicity’s face relaxed into a satisfied smirk. “More than fine. John, this is Sara Lance.”

John’s eyes narrowed. “Ah yes, the competition.” Then he smiled. “Pleased to meet you, Miss Lance.”

“Sara is fine,” she said, shaking Diggle’s proffered hand. “I hope you don’t mind me sitting in on your meeting.”

“Felicity’s driving the bus,” John said. “I just grease the wheels every once in a while. If she trusts you to be here, then I trust you to be here.”

They were seated quickly at the table, drinks ordered and menus dispersed before Felicity turned to Diggle. “Did you get the information I asked for?”

Diggle nodded, reached under the table for his briefcase and pulled it out, retrieving a manilla file from inside of it. “Yes. Everything my informants could get me about UNIDAC Industries is in there. Anatoly might be able to dig up something more specific on Merlyn Global, given enough time.”

“Good. Thank you for doing that so quickly.” Felicity tapped the file with her fingernail. “You’re both here because Oliver and Tommy and I feel that it’s important that you both have all of the information that we have, so that you can make informed decisions going forward.”

Diggle didn’t seem surprised by this. Sara, on the other hand, raised an eyebrow.

“Oliver and Tommy have explained some of your… situation to me,” Felicity said to Sara. “The position that your family is in.”

Sara nodded, slowly. There was not an ounce of pity on Felicity’s face, or a degree of cruelty. She was just stating facts.

“I had hoped that you would be interested in helping us,” Felicity said. “As you might have guessed, Sara, I was brought back from Russia because Oliver was interested in preventing Thea’s… absorption into the life.”

What a kind way to put it, Sara thought. She hadn’t been absorbed. She’d been grafted, an alien plant stolen from her roots, planted where she didn’t belong. The life had changed her -- the League had changed her. She was not the same Sara that her family thought they had lost those years ago. She was down-to-her-bones different.

And the thought of Thea going through something like that -- the kind of painful, raw, skin-scraping pain she’d been through in order to come out the other side a weapon, a tactical thinker -- that didn’t sit well with Sara, who had memories of Thea as a much younger child.

Still. Sara raised her eyebrows. “So. Oliver marries you. You take on the Dearden matriarchy. End of story, right?”

“Not precisely,” Felicity said. “Oliver and I… and Tommy. We strongly feel that as long as Moira is in the picture, Thea’s life is in danger.”
Sara’s eyes flashed. “So you want my help in killing Moira.”

“I want your help,” Felicity said, looking at Diggle first, and then Sara, “draining the abscess from the wound in Starling City.”

Diggle blinked. Sara could practically see the gears turning in his mind, the tumblers setting into place. “You want to bring down the family?”

“There’s no family, there’s nothing to return to,” Felicity said. “Nothing to fight over.”

“You’ll leave a power gap in Starling City that no one will be able to fill,” Sara said flatly. “The streets will break out in war.”

“No, we aren’t abandoning Starling,” Felicity said. “We’ll protect it through the other side. Prevent the Bratva or the Triad from stepping in. Starling is, and always will be, Dearden territory. But the Dearden family will no longer be what it was. We start by taking down Moira. Then we undo all the evil we can.”

“What’s in it for me?” Sara asked. “I’m not interested in petty revenge.”

“Freedom,” Felicity said simply. “Moira will never let you fly free. Your skill set is too invaluable to her. They called you the Canary in the League, didn’t they?”

Sara shrugged. “Someone I knew there said that I knew how to sing in a cage.”

“Yeah, well. With your help,” Felicity said, “we’ll burn the organization to the ground, and there will be nothing to hold you here anymore. You could return to your family. Or not.”

Sara thought of long, dark hair and a quick, surprising laugh. Patient hands and soft lips. Nyssa. She could return to Nyssa.

“We’ll probably all die trying,” Sara said. “Moira Queen is a snake in the grass. You think you’re three steps ahead of her, but inevitably she’s been waiting for you to step the wrong way.”

“Maybe that’s true. But isn’t it worth the risk, to try for your freedom?”

Diggle cleared his throat. “What about me?”

“John, I have long considered your debt to me repaid.”

“No,” Diggle said. “I mean -- what do you need me to do?”

Felicity sighed. “I’m sorry, John. But I need a man on the inside. How interested are you in being a Dearden foot soldier?”

“About as interested as I was in getting the Bratva insignia tattooed on my chest. Not at all. But you say you need my help, I’ll do what you need.”

Felicity flushed. “Thank you, John. You have always been a far kinder friend than I have deserved.”

Sara’s lips twitched. “And I?”

“Keep me alive until the wedding,” Felicity said shortly. “After the wedding, everything changes.”
Chapter Summary

Tommy's disinheritance becomes front-page news, and Oliver, Felicity and Tommy must overcome years of hurt if a relationship between the three of them is going to work.

Chapter Notes

Fondest thanks to Abbie, who very kindly cleaned up after me tonight while I edited with a headache. I'll be out of town this weekend to visit my grandmother who fell and broke her knee. I wasn't going to be able to get you the chapter on Monday like I normally do, so I pulled the trigger early. Chapter 13, I will post on Thursday next week.

Chapter Twelve: Action and Reaction

Tommy washed his hands, a stream of red draining down into the sink, and sighed. He reached for the brush at the top of the sink and scrubbed his fingernails clean. A knock at the door of the bathroom didn’t give him pause. The only people who would feel comfortable coming this far into his rooms at the Manor would be Thea or Oliver.

“Yeah?”

“It’s me.”

Oliver, then. Tommy smiled in the mirror and shook his head. “I was supposed to come to your place.”

“This is better. Besides, Felicity’s already gone. So there wasn’t much to do there.” Oliver pushed open the door. “Hey, those are work shoes.”

“Yeah,” Tommy said shortly. “Moira had some knife work for me this morning.”
Oliver made a sound that could be most easily classified as a growl. “Without me?”

“No need for the big guns on this one,” Tommy said, and his stomach gave one, hard lurch. He kept his cool. “Not the kind of thing the actual Hood needs to be worried about.”

Oliver’s brow furrowed. “I don’t like it.”

There were too many ears -- too many ways Moira could be listening to this conversation. Tommy nearly hissed in frustration. Here, he couldn’t tell Oliver that he didn’t mind being here so much, because the clock was ticking down in his mind. One way or another, the time would come when he wouldn’t have to do this kind of thing in the name of Moira Queen anymore.

“I’m perfectly capable of taking care of myself.”

Oliver crossed his arms over his chest. “Your ribs are still broken.”

“Sort of,” Tommy said. “More like healing. Three-quarters mended. It’s fine, Oliver.”

He looked upwards deliberately, reminding Oliver of the bug they knew was in the ceiling.

“You ready to go?” Oliver asked, finally. His voice hadn’t quite settled to even.

“Yeah,” Tommy said. “Let’s go sell some newspapers.”

Oliver had driven to the manor in his favorite fire-engine red coupe. It hung low to the ground and zipped around the curves that led down into the city proper under Oliver’s careful guidance. He’d been taking those bends at 80 miles an hour since he was sixteen years old, and only once had Oliver lost control, in a loose Mercedes. They’d gone flying off the road, sailing into a ditch. They’d been young enough then that they’d laughed at it -- at the way their hearts pounded in their throats, their pulses racing in their wrists. Even after that, Tommy had never been nervous in a car with Oliver -- it might have even solidified his trust, since they’d walked away from that car injury-free.
This particular day they didn’t talk, not that Tommy minded. He put his sunglasses on his face and soaked in the silence between them, the roar of the engine, the steadiness of Oliver’s hands on the wheel. This moment in time was solid and good and real. And as much as Tommy was steeling to lose his one-on-one time with Oliver, knew that it would be infrequent and more precious the more time Oliver spent with Felicity, as Felicity became Oliver’s wife, he just wanted to enjoy his life-long friend’s company.

They slowed significantly as they entered the city proper. Oliver navigated them back towards the area of town he lived in now and pulled up to a gourmet burger restaurant which had been popular with the who’s-who of Starling for some time. After a morning like his, Tommy wouldn’t usually eat, usually found it impossible, but he found himself creeping towards human a little bit quicker this morning.

Maybe he was getting good at it, after all. He wasn’t sure how he felt about that.

The pair of them got attention from the moment they stepped out of Oliver’s car. Oliver in his beat-up jeans, the collar of his jacket turned up, and Tommy in his clean-cut suit. They were well known figures in Starling City. He knew, objectively, they made quite a picture. On a normal morning, heads might turn. On this morning, when Felicity had just leaked the information about his disinheritance from the Merlyn Global fortune, they were already a topic of conversation. And no one, he was sure, expected him to be out and about in public today.

It was a ploy. It was all set up by Tommy and Felicity and Oliver; they were counting on people reacting like this, but it still got Tommy’s neck hair up. Fuck them, he thought. Fuck their morbid, sick fascination with his family drama and fuck the entire world.

“All right?” Oliver asked quietly before he opened the door of the restaurant. “You don’t want to do this, we’ll figure out some other way.”

“Fuck ‘em, let ‘em look,” Tommy said shortly, and pulled the door open himself.

“Oh, Mr. Merlyn,” the hostess said. “Nice to see you… today.”

Tommy smiled. “How about that weather, huh? Very… weathery. Listen, Ollie and I would like a table. I know we didn’t make a reservation, but, you know how it is. I had a hankering.”

“Of course,” the pretty red-head said, flushing. “Anything for you, Mr. Merlyn. If you’d like, I can
get you something… a little more private, perhaps?”

“The usual table is fine,” Oliver said. He crossed his arms over his chest and spoke firmly. “We don’t have any reason to hide today.”

“No, of course not,” she said, clearly flustered. She fumbled a bit with the menus. Cleared her throat. “I mean -- of course. I will get you a table. And Mr. Merlyn? I know you don’t know me but… some of what they’re saying about you, I mean… I guess I’m trying to say I understand. My family sucks out loud, too. There’s not money for lawyers or anything but they’d kick me to the curb legally if they could.”

Oliver clasped Tommy’s shoulder. “Thanks, Mariah,” he said, his voice softening, and Ollie would know the hostess’ name at their favorite restaurant.

Tommy extended his hand, shook Mariah’s, and pulled her in close. “Hey, you know what?” he said. “Fuck them all. We don’t know need ‘em.” Then he winked.

“Damn straight, sir,” she said.

Their usual table was in the best part of the restaurant, near the widest window. They’d chosen this table because it fit their obnoxious playboy personas perfectly -- it was precisely the kind of “come to be seen” place that Oliver Queen and Tommy Merlyn would have frequented before the island.

The waitstaff were attentive, efficient and polite, but it didn’t take long for the other patrons of the restaurant to catch on that Tommy and Oliver were there in public, eating burgers and drinking beer at noon on a Thursday, like it was any other day.

And it was, Tommy thought, except now the world thought he was penniless, which was mortifying by itself. When the waitress wordlessly handed the check to Oliver, Tommy gently took it and pulled his credit card out.

“Oh, sir…”

“It’ll run, sweetheart,” Tommy said softly. “Thanks, though.”
Oliver caught his eyes, a storm inside of them. Tommy had been friends with Oliver since birth, practically, and Tommy knew that expression well. Oliver was ready to hit someone or something to protect him from the world. Not that Tommy needed it, really. But it was good to have Oliver by his side, to know that Ollie would start throwing punches if Tommy just asked him to -- that’s all he needed.

Particularly when they were accosted outside the restaurant by a gaggle of paparazzi that shouted horrible things, trying to get Oliver and Tommy to react. But they marched, shoulder to shoulder, hands fisted in determination not to hurt anyone, to Oliver’s car.

They were nearly there when a heart-stoppingly pretty young woman pushed to the front of the crowd and shouted: “Mr. Merlyn, Mr. Merlyn!”

She had large doe eyes, just sweet enough that Tommy found himself stopping. “Yeah?”

“I’m Iris West? Central City News.”

“Hey Iris West,” Tommy said, opening the car door. “Back up!” he shouted to everyone else. “Jesus, do you want to get hit by a car? Moron paparazzi dirtbags.”

Iris pressed forward. “Mr. Merlyn, just a moment of your time. Can I ask you a few questions?”

Tommy looked at Oliver. “I did say I would pick the most polite one.”

“That you did.”

“We’re going for a drive,” Tommy said shortly. “I’d answer some questions for the length of that drive.”

He could see the debate on her face, weighing whether or not to get in the car with two men or not. “I have a taser.”

“And you should use it, if you feel uncomfortable,” Tommy said. “But I give you my word. Just a quick drive across town. I’ll tell you what you want to know. Within reason.”
Iris grabbed her bag with one hand and nodded, getting in the car, despite the shouted slurs and protests of the mostly-male paparazzi around her. Oliver sped away from the curb, leaving them behind.

“Can I record this?” Iris shouted over the roar of the engine.

“Sure,” Tommy said. “Not sure how much you’ll be able to hear, but -- yeah.”

“I’m willing to take that chance. I don’t know how much you know about me, Mr. Merlyn, but getting the story right is what’s important to me.”

“First of all, it’s Tommy,” he said, “‘cause Mr. Merlyn reminds me of my dad, and I think you know why I would want to avoid that. And secondly, I know quite a bit about you. You were high on the list of reporters I’d be willing to talk to.”

“There was a list?”

“Of course there was a list,” Oliver said. “Tommy’s… savvy.”

“I thought you weren’t going to say anything,” Tommy teased Oliver, more affection than he would probably like slipping into his voice.

“I’m not even here. I’m the driver,” Oliver said, nodding his head.

“So fire away, Ms. West,” Tommy said. “The ice cream place I like is only five minutes away. And that’s all the time I’ve got for reporters. Even ones I am inclined to like.”

“There’s been a lot of speculation about the reason for your disownment since the news broke late last night or earlier this morning. One of the predominant theories is that your father is cutting the apron strings because he feels you’ve squandered your inheritance or because you’ve been lazy,” Iris said. “Is there anything you might want to comment on?”
“Is it true?”

“No.”

Iris lifted her eyebrows. “You don’t have anything more to say? I mean -- there is a contingent of people who think your father is just -- that there’s a possibility that there was a history of cruelty between the two of you.”

“Let’s couch it as a very mutual break-up,” Tommy said, neatly sidestepping the question. “Fueled by mutual disregard.”

“I have sources that say you’ve spent very little time with your father since your mother’s death,” Iris pressed on.

“You have very good sources,” Tommy said, shaking his head. “Although one could say that was relatively common knowledge.”

Iris waved a hand. “Common knowledge. Never officially acknowledged.”

“Consider it acknowledged then. My father and I try to spend as little time together as possible.”

Iris leaned forward. “Why?”

Tommy bit the bottom of his lip. He was never the same after my mother died. He was never interested in parenting the child he actually had. “Any number of reasons.”

“So no answer to that, then?”

Tommy pointedly looked out the window. “Hm.”
“What’s next for Tommy Merlyn? Are you keeping the last name?”

Tommy shrugged. “It’s mine. It was my mother’s.”

“Planning on joining the rest of us in the working world, Tommy?” Iris asked, her voice abruptly teasing.

“I’m not destitute,” Tommy said flatly.

“Excuse me?”

“Not that I think people in the working world are destitute -- it’s just that there’s an assumption out there that I was living on my father’s money and it’s just not true.” Tommy uncrossed his arms and sighed. “The only thing that will change for me at all, is that when my father finally kicks the bucket, they won’t knock on my door to try and foist Merlyn Global off on me.”

Iris blinked. “You don’t want it?”

“No.” Tommy shook his head. “Definitely not.”

“What do you want, then?” Iris asked. “There are people who would do anything to be the heir to a fortune like that.”

“Because they don’t know what it costs,” Tommy said. “No, I think I’m going to be a lot happier without Malcolm or Merlyn Global in my life. Maybe Queen Consolidated will have a spot for a person completely without skills. What do you say, Queen?”

Oliver grinned. “There’s always a spot for you, Tommy.”

Iris ducked her head and smiled. “Well, you two have a very sweet friendship.”

The sun was shining. He’d finally, finally let the gates open. Tommy couldn’t hide the love in his eyes. “A sweet, manly friendship,” he asserted.
“Oh, of course,” Iris said, amusement coloring her tone. “I would never say anything otherwise. Do you mind if I get a quick photo? I just have a cell phone, but the resolution’s pretty good.”

“Sure. Sunglasses off?” Tommy asked.

“Whatever you feel,” Iris said. And she snapped a quick picture of him, sunglasses down, as Tommy looked out the driver’s window. His hand lightly brushed Oliver’s shoulder across the back of the bench seat. “Very nice,” she said eventually. “One of those shots will work for the boys downstairs. I’m going to do some more poking. Do you want me to send a copy of the piece to you? I won’t be able to give you much lead time, and I won’t edit it, but it will give you a head’s up as to what I wrote.”

Tommy nodded. “Sure. Go ahead.”

Oliver pulled into the ice cream parlor parking lot. “This is where this ride comes to an end. Do you want us to call you a cab, Miss West?”

“No,” she said. “I have my laptop and a hankering for a celebratory double scoop of chocolate.” She got out of the car, got her bag, and paused. “I’m not sure why you chose me, but… thanks, for taking a chance on me.’

“You’re welcome,” Tommy said. “Write the shit out of your article.”

She flashed him a bright, confident smile. “Guaranteed.”

Iris West walked off, beautiful long legs striding across the parking lot, hips swaying, and Tommy sighed. “Well,” he turned to Oliver. “There’s one doodle that can’t be undid, home skillet.”

Oliver blinked slowly. “What?”

“Oh my God.” Tommy rolled his eyes. “It’s like you spent two years on a deserted island.”
A long moment passed. Oliver started the car, pulled out on the main drag and flipped the music off. “I’ve never heard you address any of that stuff in public before. You doing okay?”

“Yeah.” Tommy stretched. “I think in a weird way that was cathartic.”

“Good.” Oliver nodded. “You know -- you know I’m proud of you, right?”

“Jesus, Oliver,” Tommy said. “You want to have a moment right now?”

“No,” Oliver said. “I’m just saying. I’m proud of you. I don’t know if I could… talk to a reporter like that about my family’s dirty laundry, so.”

“I did it for Thea. You could probably do anything for Thea, as well,” Tommy said.

“Yeah, but I didn’t get asked to do that, and you did. So thank you,” Oliver insisted.

“It will be worth it, in the end,” Tommy said. He rubbed his hands together briskly, called up an excited smile. “When it’s all over -- I’m going to go somewhere other than Starling City, I think.”

“Yeah?” Oliver shot him a quick glance, his eyes swiftly returning to the road. “Where are you thinking about going?”

“Thought I might climb a mountain or something,” Tommy said. His cheeks felt like plastic. They might set this way. “Find myself in a Tibetan monastery. I don’t know.”

“Ah.” Oliver swallowed. “So -- it’s all going to be over and you’re going to abandon us?”

“Nah. You’ll have Felicity,” Tommy said brightly, “and you can focus on making brilliant, babbly and broody babies…”

“Nice.”
“Thank you. I worked that up.” Tommy sighed. “And I think -- I don’t know. Dad took off after Mom died. He came back fucking crazy. But he came back certain. Maybe time away would do something like that for me.”

Oliver pulled over. He put the car in park. He turned, his eyes set. “Or maybe that’s not what you need at all.”

“It wouldn’t have to be a mountain, Oliver. I could just as easily find myself on a topless beach in Spain.”

“Good. Felicity and I will come with you,” Oliver said, nodding like this was the best idea ever.

“You are really not understanding this ‘solo mission to find myself’ dream I have going here,” Tommy said. “And don’t think I don’t know it’s because you want to see Felicity topless on the sand.”

Oliver took his sunglasses off and smiled. “That would be nice. But it’s because we want to be where you are.”

Tommy’s breath caught. “Who? You and the frog in your pocket?”

“No. Felicity and I.”

Tommy’s skin went cold. Ice cold. And then it was suddenly too hot. And his heart was racing. “Oliver…”

His friend didn’t get the hint. Oliver pressed on. “I’m supposed to invite you over tonight.”

Tommy lifted an eyebrow. “For dinner. I can do dinner.”

Oliver shook his head. “No. I mean yes. I mean -- not just dinner. Felicity and I want you to join us. After. In our bed.”
“Oliver.” Tommy was almost mad. He was approaching that, anyway. That’s what this emotion was. Huh. “We have been down this road before. We have discussed this before. We said never again. Not after Laurel.”

Oliver swallowed. “I know, but… it’s Felicity. She’s the one who -- she’s the one who wants to do this.”

“Well, I appreciate the invitation. I know how hard she’s been working to make me feel like one of the family, but this is a touch too far. I promise I’ll still love myself if she doesn’t sleep with me.” His voice was cold, flat.

Oliver snapped and punched the dash. “Tommy!”

“You don’t scare me,” Tommy said. “And you can’t intimidate me into changing my mind.”

“You know that’s not what I meant.” Oliver growled. “You just… aren’t listening. Felicity is attracted to you. I am attracted to you. I… I love you. And I don’t want to give you up if I don’t have to.”

Tommy’s stomach twisted and his heart raced. He couldn’t breathe against the weight of the words. “I want you to give me up. You’re going to be married to Felicity and we told each other, we promised we’d do better than our fathers and that means keeping our pants zipped once the rings go on.”

“I’m going to be married to Felicity and I am going to be in love with you, and both of those things are true. Felicity is giving us a way for us all to not be so… miserable.”

“It’s a good thought, but it doesn’t work that way,” Tommy said. “It really, really doesn’t.”

“Tommy, please.” Oliver’s eyes shimmered with want, with frustrated tears he wouldn’t cry. “Come over tonight. Let’s just… see if it works. What if it does?”

“What if it doesn’t?”
“Then nothing changes,” Oliver said fiercely. “If it doesn’t work, I’ll fly you wherever you want to go when this is all over. I won’t pitch a fit. We’ll do it your way. But can we try it mine?”

“This goes right, this goes bad, either way you end up with a heart that’s not in a million pieces. You’ll still have your wife and your house and your life,” Tommy said through grit teeth. “This goes bad? I can’t come back from another Laurel Lance. I can’t do it. And that would be child’s play compared to this because we were kids then and none of us knew what the fuck we were doing.”

“Exactly. None of us knew. We know better this time.”

“It sounds good in theory. But here’s what happens, Oliver. I trip all the way in love with Felicity sings-in-the-kitchen Smoak. I get used to her smiles in the morning, to sleeping between you two. I get attached to us.” Tommy wiped his eyes. “And then it all falls away. It doesn’t work, and you and Felicity? You’re still a unit. And I’m still on my own. But now I’m on my own with the knowledge of what could have been. With memories of how it was. And it’s just like I’m sixteen again and you’re taking Laurel to the prom and fucking her in the back seat of your Mustang and I’m dying inside cause it could have been all of us and it’s not. Only now I’m not sixteen. Now I’m thirty and I can’t love a girl I haven’t fucked with my best friend. Fuck you, Oliver.”

Tommy shook. Oliver looked devastated.

“I didn’t realize you were still upset about that…” Oliver shook his head. “Christ, Tommy, if I’d known…”

“Yeah, well, you didn’t fucking ask.” Tommy shook his head. “So don’t, okay? Just… don’t.”

**

_South China Sea, 7 years ago_

Everything was salt, and everything was pain. Salt under her nails, in her mouth, in her hair. The water lapped, lapped, lapped at her skin and the sun beat down relentlessly and she floated on a slab of wood she was lying prone on.

And she waited to die.
And then there was nothing, a stretching yawning blackness, a void. Peace. And then sudden, terrible pain. A stabbing in her gut.

“And then sudden, terrible pain. A stabbing in her gut.”

Sara sighed. “Mom, I don’t want to get up.”

Pain. Blinding hot, white pain on the back of her neck. “I’m sorry, my angel, but I am not your mother.”

No reason to wake up for that, no reason at all. She fell back inside her mind.

Eventually, she roused herself. She was naked and cold, lying on a table. Slowly, she convinced herself to sit up and take stock of her surroundings.

And she saw Moira Queen, seated on an ornate armchair across the stone-walled room she found herself in. Light flickered, as though it were produced by candles, a breeze swept over her skin. Her breath froze in her throat and she fisted her hands.

“What’s happening? Where am I?”

“You’re alive, for one thing, darling,” Moira said sweetly. “Which is an unexpected surprise, really. When they fished you from the water, we thought for sure you’d not pull through.”

Everything hurt, but most pressing was...

“My skin is…” Sara looked down. Blisters and bruises and huge chunks of skin peeling off.

“Healing. You were exposed to the elements for quite some time,” Moira said. “There will be others, later, that can tell you more about what happened to you. Perhaps.”
Moira stood, and Sara saw for the first time the large, jeweled knife in her hands. “Mrs. Queen, I don’t…”

“You need to understand that had you been a man, I would have ordered your death without a second thought,” Moira said. “Having little patience for those who would betray their own family. However, that you are a woman, and a Lance woman better yet, saved your life.”

“Where am I?”

“Nanda Parbat,” Moira said. “You won’t find it on a map and there are not many who would speak its name aloud, but that is where you are. Nanda Parbat. Home of the League of the Assassins, and Ra’s Al-Ghul.”

Sara’s eyes widened and she attempted to run for the door. No matter how hard she pulled, the door was locked and she was trapped.

“Sara, Sara, Sara. I have plans for you.”

Sara screamed, panic setting in. She pounded at the door of the room. “Let me out of here! Leave me alone.”

“No longer an option,” Moira said, calmly crossing the room. There was nowhere to go. Moira was right there, her knife brandished against Sara’s neck, before Sara could think to respond. “Sadly, you chose to get on a boat with my son, and the world thinks you both dead. If you would like to live, you will stay here. The League owes me a favor. They will train you, make you into one of their own. You will owe them a debt. And then you will owe one to me.”

“And if I refuse?” Sara spat. “What happens if I say fuck you to this turn-me-into-an-assassin bullshit.”

The tip of the knife dug into the skin of Sara’s throat. “Then I kill you where you stand,” Moira said. “And I kill your father, and I kill your sister.”

“You can’t.” Her heart was fluttering wildly -- her stomach felt sick. She would have never thought Moira capable of anything like this. But… so many of her thoughts were being overturned.
Moira leaned forward. “I convinced my son to take a boat ride, and he ended up at the bottom of the sea. My husband became inconvenient and they found him dead in an alley in Starling City, the victim of a tragic mugging gone wrong. I have engineered the death of many and I want you to know, I do not lose sleep. I am willing, Ms. Lance, to give your family the grace of my mercy.”

“What are you going to do to me?” Sara sobbed.

Moira lifted Sara’s hair, turned her around so that she could see her neck in the mirror on the far wall. A strange, awful brand was burned there, red and sore at the top of her spine. “I will have you remade into something useful, angel. Sara Lance is dead. They will give you a new name here. I imagine you will find it to be much more suiting. I know I did.”

**

Oliver shut the door of the penthouse behind him quietly, leaned up against its solid length. The world had basically tilted on him and he was struggling to find sure footing. He’d thought, just for a few moments, that he could have it all. But he couldn’t, because once again, he’d fucked it up, hadn’t thought through the consequences of his actions in the past.

He was still paying for the things he’d done ten years ago. Not that he didn’t deserve to pay for them. Tommy had trusted him, and he’d fucked it up, and then they hadn’t ever talked about it, and he had just assumed that new hurts had covered up the old pain.

He’d thought, foolishly, that Tommy had forgiven him.

Felicity appeared in the foyer, a purple dress swirling around her long, fantastic legs, her eyes full of concern. “How’d it go, baby?” she asked, her voice soft. “I got the notification from the security system that you were home, but…”

“I’m an idiot,” Oliver said, and covered his face. “I’m as much of an idiot as I ever have been.”

“No, you’re not,” Felicity said firmly, striding across the floor to hold his hands in hers. “What happened? Did the interview not go well?”
Oliver shook his head. “No, we found that reporter you’re a fan of. Iris West.”

“Good. I was hoping that she would get sent out here,” Felicity said.

“Tommy did a good job. I’m sure the article will send Malcolm into a fury,” Oliver continued.

“Okay, but you still look like someone kidnapped your kitty,” Felicity said. “So something had to have gone wrong.”

“I… asked Tommy. About your solution to our problem.”

“Oh.” Felicity’s eyes went comically wide and Oliver nearly chuckled. “That’s the thing that didn’t go well?”

“That’s an understatement,” Oliver said. “He was -- ” He sighed. “We tried to do something like this once before. In high school, with Laurel Lance, when we both fell in love with her. Well. Tommy went first, he always did trip into love easier than I did, and then I followed. But we were all stupid, all young and… it should have been obvious Laurel wasn’t comfortable. We shouldn’t have tried it to begin with. I should have just stepped aside, but I think there was a part of me, back then, that just knew Laurel was doing it because she wanted to keep me, she didn’t want to lose me to Tommy. And I knew Tommy knew. And I knew it had to be killing him but I just couldn’t be…” Oliver searched for words. “I didn’t do anything about it. We never told. It just… exploded. In pain and jealousy.”

“Oh, Oliver.”

“We never talked about it. I just assumed… it was a long time ago. But it wasn’t, really, was it?”

Felicity wrapped her arms around his middle. “I’m sorry, Oliver.”

“It’s not your fault.”

“I should have asked more questions,” Felicity said. “I should have broached the question with a little more care. I… I probably should have been the one to ask. So he would know I didn’t think
he’s not some… consolation prize, or an also-with.”

“An also-with?”

“You know, those infomercial things? Where they sell you the one crap thing but it’s ‘also-with’ something else so you think you’re getting a good deal?”

Oliver shook his head. “It’s not your fault.”

“Let me apologize to him. Let me fix this,” Felicity said. “I feel like -- this wouldn’t have happened if I had just… thought things through more.” Felicity sighed, stepping away from Oliver. She fidgeted, playing with her engagement ring. “Do you think…”

“What?” Oliver hadn’t seen her this distressed before, this uncertain of what to do. Even in the darkest moments in Russia, it had seemed like she could see the next four or five logical steps in front of them.

“I feel like I… I’m responsible. Do you think if I apologized, Tommy would listen? Would it help?” Felicity removed her ring, slipped it back on her finger, over and over again. “Would that just make it worse?”

“It wasn’t you.” Oliver reached for her, but she stepped neatly out of his way. “Felicity, I promise you, it wasn’t you.”

Felicity shook her head. “I wasn’t certain. I should have waited until I was certain.”

“No, Felicity. This is about what happened between me and Tommy in high school.”

“Or it’s about how happy you are when it’s just the two of you,” Felicity said. “I can see why Tommy wouldn’t… why he would resent or not want…”

“Felicity, please.”
“I’ll apologize.”

Oliver caught her hand in his. “You’re not listening to me.”

“We need everyone on the same page,” Felicity said, nodding. “We can’t have this… out there. Making things difficult. I’ll clear the air and… do you think he’ll listen to me?”

Oliver dropped her hand. “I sure hope he listens to you better than you are listening to me.”

“Oliver, don’t…”

“I’m going for a walk.” He sighed. “Do what you want.”

**

Felicity waited nervously until the knock came. Her gut twisted and her nerves were singing. She’d misstepped. She’d misstepped terribly -- for the first time since she came to Starling City, she hadn’t read the situation right. Of course she knew she wasn’t just playing a game, but she hadn’t weighed the consequences right here.

She took a deep breath, and Felicity opened the door of the penthouse and smiled weakly at Tommy. “Thanks for coming,” she said softly. “I didn’t think that you would.”

“I thought it had to be important,” Tommy said, sticking his hands in his slacks pockets and looking anywhere but her.

“It is,” Felicity said earnestly. “It’s terribly important. Won’t you come in? I mean all the way. We don’t have to stand here in the foyer. We could go sit in the living room. Or I could get you something from the kitchen?”

“I’m not very hungry,” Tommy said, and Felicity felt a sting down deep in her belly because usually Tommy was amused by her rambles, gifted her with his brilliant smile and a quick quip. Apparently she’d ruined that too. “Wherever you’re comfortable is fine with me,” he said.
“The living room?” Felicity hated that her voice inflected a question there, but she was so uncertain. “I’d be comfortable in the living room.”

“So we’ll go there,” Tommy said easily.

“I’m sorry.” Felicity blurted it out, and covered her mouth. “You have to know that. Oh, God, Tommy, I’m so sorry.”

And then, to her mortification, she burst into tears. Tommy’s eyes widened. “Oh, Felicity…”

“No, no. I can do this,” Felicity said, brushing past him into the kitchen for a tissue. “I can do this. I owe you this.”

“You don’t owe me anything,” Tommy protested.

“Yes, I do. Because I went and tried to make things better and I made things worse, which honestly I didn’t consider to be a possibility and yet here we are,” Felicity said. “You have to know I’m sorry. I didn’t want you to think, although how could you possibly think anything otherwise, that I’ve been trying to use you or…”

“Felicity…”

“I just assumed there was chemistry between us,” Felicity plowed on. “Because, you know, I certainly felt it on my end. Admittedly, I’m not one hundred percent the best at picking up on subtle social signals, but I was sure. And now I’ve cocked up your relationship with Oliver and with me and I am incredibly sorry.”

“Felicity, no.” Tommy stepped forward, took the tissue from her hand. “Stop crying, okay? It would take a lot for you to mess with my relationship with Oliver. We do this. We… something happens and we only talk about it fifteen years later because someone forces us to -- it’s what makes us men, or something.”

“Hm.” Tommy agreed. “It wasn’t…” He sighed. “It's definitely not that I’m not attracted to you.”

“Oh.” Felicity’s voice was small.

“But being attracted to you -- it isn’t enough.” Tommy dropped his hands.

“I see,” Felicity said. “Okay.” Of course it wasn’t enough. It was never enough -- not enough for people to stay, once they were done needing her.

“Jesus, don’t… don’t look like that, okay?” Tommy ran his hands through his hair. “You look like I stole your candy or something.”

“Okay,” Felicity repeated, and she tried to straighten her spine.

“We were sixteen when we both fell in love with Laurel Lance. Did Oliver ever tell you that?”

“Some.” Felicity tried to keep the curiosity out of her voice… to let Tommy tell her what he was comfortable telling her.

“We would fall in and out of relationships with her for the next three years. Me and Laurel. Laurel and Oliver. Back and forth like some demented soap opera love triangle.” Tommy sighed. “And then we tried what you’re suggesting. We thought we were being smart. But we weren’t, not really. Laurel couldn’t take watching Oliver and me together. Oh, she tried. She just… and her jealousy ate at the bonds of her relationship with Oliver, with me. It was a constant power struggle between the three of us. We didn’t know how to talk. It was fucked from the start. When it blew up, Oliver and Laurel were the couple left standing.”

“Tommy, I’m so sorry.” Felicity took a step forward.

“I wanted you to know that. I wanted you to know that I want…” Tommy sighed. “What you’re offering, if it would work, it would be exactly what I want… but it doesn’t. It doesn’t work.”

Felicity laid her palm up and open on the kitchen counter, for Tommy to take if he wanted. “You know I’m not Laurel Lance.”
“No.” Tommy tilted his head to the side, considering. “And you’re not Moira Queen.”

Felicity huffed out a surprised laugh. “No, I’m not that, either.”

“You’re not trying to maneuver me into a position,” Tommy said flatly.

“Well, I’d like you in certain positions, but we’re all allowed preferences,” Felicity said before she thought. “Oh, God.”

Tommy’s lips twitched in amusement. He shook his head.

“This isn’t because you…” He sighed in frustration. “I just want to make sure. Don’t fuck me because you’re afraid I’m going to end up all alone.”

“No!” Felicity shook her head. “Tommy, that’s not… Oh, I fucked this up in a spectacular fashion. I want to sleep with you.”

“I gathered that.”

“No. I want to sleep with you.” Felicity found herself stepping closer to him. “It’s not because you’re Oliver-adjacent. It’s because you have the prettiest smile in Starling City. It’s not because I’m afraid you’ll end up alone, it’s because you make me laugh. It’s a little bit because we’re both so in love with Oliver Queen that it’s maddening. It might be nice to have that in common with someone else. Someone who might want to strangle him as much as I do.”

Tommy laughed, and his hand slipped into Felicity’s open one. “That’s… universal, unfortunately.”

Felicity closed her fingers around his. “You and Oliver love each other. Oliver loves me. He’ll admit it, eventually. At least, I think he does. I’m almost certain. Eighty-five to ninety percent. I… profoundly like you.”

Tommy ducked his head. When he lifted it again, one corner of his mouth was tucked up in a smile.
“I profoundly like you, too.”

“And that could be something more, someday,” Felicity said. “If we try. But I don’t… please don’t let me pressure you. I just couldn’t go on letting you think I was, that I was… that it had anything other than to do with the fact that you’re incredibly sexy.”

“Incredibly sexy?” Tommy laughed. “Huh.”

“Believe it or not,” Felicity said, “I ran through about six other choices before I settled on that one.”

Tommy took her measure in a glance. “I… you know what? I believe that.”

“I’m not saying we dive right into anything. I’m saying we try one night, see where that lands us.”

Tommy crossed his arms, dropping her hand. “And if it doesn’t work out?”

“Then we -- “ Felicity sighed and waved her hands, flustered and unsure at Tommy’s change of attitude. “Then we go back to the way it is now, except I won’t hold Oliver to the ludicrous expectation that he only ever sleeps with me.”

“What if that’s not what I want?”

“It’s up to you. It is, one hundred percent, whatever you want,” Felicity said. “I’m not… I keep fucking this up.”

“No, you don’t. Keep talking,” Tommy said gently. “I am listening.”

“If you want a clean break, God, I think it would kill Oliver, but he could do it. But don’t do it on my account, okay? I’m not worth it.” Felicity rushed through the words.

“Felicity--
Felicity paced around the counter, hands gesturing emphatically. “I would even, at the end of this, if it’s what Oliver wants, then… I can quietly step back. The pre-nup divides our assets extremely fairly. I… there are things I want. A child, eventually. Oliver’s promised me that. But I would step back. I give you my word.”

“Felicity—”

“I know it’s hard to take someone’s word, given what we do, but I hope you would take mine. The very, very last thing I came here to do is make things worse, or cause you pain.”

“Felicity!” Tommy took her hand. “Felicity, Felicity, Felicity… Don’t. Just… let me breathe. Let me think.”

“I’m sorry. I can’t stop it’s this thing my mouth does when my brain just whirls it’s like there’s nowhere for the thoughts to go but out.” Felicity wasn’t panicking. She wasn’t. She hadn’t had a panic attack since she was fifteen years old.


“Oliver trusted me to fix this, you know,” Felicity said. “He thinks I’m a genius. And I am, I really am. But there’s -- there’s so much here. And I didn’t want to mess up.”

“You aren’t messing up. Baby, you aren’t messing up.”

She couldn’t stop herself. The dam was open and she couldn’t shut the floodgate now. “I can’t do it. Oh God, I can’t do it. I have to sit across from fucking Moira Queen every day and pretend I wouldn’t rather shoot her in her pretty, vile face with a .45 than talk about hors d’oeuvres, which was a lot easier in the beginning than it is now. I just can’t… and the way she talks about you, the way she treats you. And all of these things are inside my gut, churning around and I can’t let them out. I can’t do it.”

Tommy wrapped her up in his arms. He smelled like cinnamon and oranges and his arms were strong. “It’s okay, Felicity, let it out.”

“It makes me sick, it makes me sick,” she chanted.
“I know.” His voice was rough. “I can’t eat, I can’t sleep, but Felicity, you have to know that you coming here was like a light at the end of a long tunnel. It might be a lot of pressure, but you can do it. And if you mess up -- Oliver and I are pros at fuck-ups, we’ll roll with it. We’re all going to be okay.”

Felicity wrapped her arms around his neck, inhaled the spot on his collarbone she knew would smell the strongest of his cologne. “I hate being wrong.”

“You weren’t wrong, Felicity,” Tommy said. “You weren’t, okay? I’m just… messed up.”

“We’re all messed up,” Felicity said. “We should try being messed up together.”

“Being together doesn’t scare me,” Tommy confided. “It’s what happens when it all falls apart.”

“Why are you so sure that it will?” Felicity asked.

Tommy shrugged. “I’m not that lucky.”

“I was born in Vegas,” Felicity said. “And let me tell you, there’s no such thing as luck.”

Tommy ducked his head, laid it on top of Felicity’s. “You know, Smoak, it’s pretty fucking hard to say no to you.”

Felicity hummed in her throat, content in his arms. “So don’t.”

Tommy sighed. “Alright.”

Felicity’s eyes widened. “You mean that?”

“One night,” Tommy said firmly. “One night. You and me and Oliver. Let’s… try it out. See what happens. If it doesn’t work, we walk away. No one’s hurt.”
Felicity nodded, though she didn’t think that scenario was possible. If Tommy walked away, there would be no way to prevent the hurt she would feel. That Oliver would feel.

“One night.”
I Am My Beloved's, And He Is Mine

Chapter Summary

Oliver, Felicity, and Tommy start to solidify into a triad, and there's a party in Starling City to celebrate Oliver and Felicity's engagement.

Chapter Notes

Thanks so much to Abbie who stayed up late to beta this edit. Thank you everyone, for sending me messages about my grandmother -- her knee is healing. Thank you for your incredible, loving, and intense response to the last chapter!

The next chapter will be up on Monday.

WARNING: This chapter contains a homophobic slur.

A whirl of emotions had settled permanently under Oliver's skin. After years of being numb -- and God, after the island, he'd been so numb -- to feel this alive, to feel this hopeful, it was almost painful, like all of his nerves were aware all at once. When Felicity had come to him and told him that Tommy had agreed to try, just for one night, it had almost been too much.

It was too much like all of his dreams, the ones he hadn’t allowed himself for years, were coming true.

It was probably stupid, Oliver decided as he toweled off from the shower, his hands shaking, to be this nervous. It wasn’t like this was the first time he’d ever done this. Except, he thought, stepping into a loose-fitting pair of sweatpants and pulling a gray t-shirt over his head, it was the first time he’d ever done this -- invite Tommy into a loving, stable relationship, one that he felt rock solid in, and risk it all on the chance that things would get better, and not fall apart.

The bathroom door opened and Felicity leaned against the doorjamb, her eyes scanning him quickly. While she was appreciative of his body, it was his face that she was focused on this time. “Hey, baby,” she said softly. “You feeling alright?”

The rush of love he felt nearly cut him off at his knees. He’d been twenty-one when Moira had cut out his heart, made him eat every piece of love he’d ever had and swallow it until it cooled. He’d loved Tommy and then he was cut off from him, walking around without his right arm, without a lung to breathe while he learned to turn off his humanity and kill without a thought. He’d loved
Thea, and that was forced into allegiance, loyalty, until he was a knight to her, every brotherly thought to protection and sacrifice. He’d loved the thought of Felicity, but couldn’t stoke that flame into a fire for fear Moira would kill it, too.

But in the same room as Felicity Smoak, in the same time, he couldn’t stop the hope. He couldn’t stop the love. He had no idea how to handle it. Words had never come easily to him. He was no natural storyteller. Somewhere between his brain and his tongue, the words always got caught, feelings seemed too immense for the language he had for them.

He knew Felicity better than he thought she was even aware. Knew what it must have taken for her to go to Tommy, to lay it all on the line, to let down her mask and apologize and… That’s not what people did for him. Not out of love. Out of fear, sure. Out of desire, definitely. But not out of love.

That Felicity had even offered what she did in an effort to make him whole again -- to make it so that he wouldn’t have to constantly choose between Tommy and her, so he wouldn’t feel guilty about the way his heart only felt whole when he had access to both of them… Words caught in his throat. He wanted them to be there, wanted to draw them out, to tell her thank you for the opportunity before it even happened, but he didn’t want the pressure of his gratitude to force Felicity into anything she wasn’t comfortable with.

Her eyebrows raised. “Oliver?”

Frustration swelled. He knew only one way to communicate what he was thinking to her. He lifted her chin and bent to kiss her. The kind of kiss he saved for her -- gentle and sweet, lips pressed against hers, over and over again until he laid his forehead against hers. “Just -- thinking.”

Felicity wrapped her arms around his neck and stood on tiptoe to sniff his skin. She didn’t believe him, but she was choosing to let it go for a moment, he knew. “Hm. You smell nice.”

He chuckled. “Thank you.” He bent to sniff at her neck, too, just so that she would laugh against his skin. And she did. No one else thought he was funny, laughed at him the way that she did. “You smell nice, too.” He drew in a deep breath. It occurred to him that if he was nervous, and he’d done this before, it stood to reason that she was nervous, too. “Are you alright?”

“I’m a ridiculous nervous wreck,” Felicity said, laughing. “I’ve never done this before. I don’t know… What should I expect? I mean, I…”
Oliver’s thumb found her side, stroked it gently while he thought. “Nothing you’re uncomfortable with,” he said finally. “The second you think it’s not working or… you just say the word and whatever it is, it stops.”

Felicity’s eyes were full of… something. Unshed tears. It made Oliver’s stomach clench. “Baby, if you’re scared, if you’re so scared, then we won’t. I don’t want to scare you.”

“No, I’m not… I mean I am,” Felicity said, “the logistics of two… you know, cocks, is a little bit… But that’s not it, really…”

“I mean it,” Oliver said. “Nothing you can’t handle. Maybe tonight we just lay there and kiss? As much touching as you want, or as little.”

“I want to see you and Tommy kiss,” Felicity blurted. “Like, a lot. You can’t be in a room and not picture the two of you kissing. So I would like that.”

Oliver grinned. “I like kissing Tommy. Like a lot. So that’s good. You’ll like kissing him, too.”

Felicity blushed. “I’ve been thinking about it. I almost did, the other day, when we were talking. His mouth was right there. I could have.”

Oliver’s cock twitched and he reflexively squeezed the skin under his palm. “I want to see that. You all light and him all… dark. I want to see that very much.”

Felicity looked away from him. “How does -- oh fuck. I’m just going to ask. How does penetration usually… work? I mean? Do you take turns or…”

“Whatever you want.” Oliver brought his hand up to play with the hair lying against the nape of her neck. “You could have us both. You could just have one of us. Tommy and I have both… uh, penetrated the other. It could work that way, if you wanted.”

Felicity made a sound, a helpless sound. The kind of sound she usually made when he had her pinned underneath of his tongue and she was scrambling for purchase. She was a bright red color. “You’d let me watch?”
Oliver nodded. “I would.”

“Could I… touch you? While he fucks you?”

Oliver couldn’t breathe for wanting. “Yes.”

Felicity shivered. “Oliver?”

“Yeah?” Her pupils were blown wide with arousal, and Oliver bent to kiss her neck, in the spot beneath her ear that she loved and he grinned when she yelped.

“Oliver, I can’t concentrate,” Felicity muttered. “I can’t think.”

He pulled back immediately. “I’m sorry, I’m just…”

“I want you so much,” Felicity confessed, and then covered her mouth. And then sighed. “Oh, fuck it. I’m not scared, Oliver, because I know you’ll be there and I don’t ever not want you and… I’m just scared because…”

“Tommy,” Oliver said, knowing that’s what she was worried about.

“I don’t want him doing this because he feels pressured or… I hate that we hurt him,” Felicity said.

“Yeah,” Oliver said, remembering with full clarity the expression on Tommy’s face, the fury and the hurt. “I…” He nearly cursed his thick tongue. He had to try. “Baby, I didn’t tell you what -- what you going and talking to him, what that meant to me.”

“I broke it, I had to fix it,” Felicity said, her expression obstinate.

“No,” Oliver said. “I broke it. Seven years ago, eight years, ten years ago… I’ve been breaking it my whole life.”
“Oliver,” Felicity protested. “You know that’s not true, don’t you? Tommy loves you. You still love him. There’s nothing about your relationship that’s broken.”

“He loves me,” Oliver agreed, “but I still… didn’t tread lightly, back then.”

“Let’s help each other walk softly, then,” Felicity said, running her hands up his biceps. The doorbell rang, and Oliver’s heart began to race again. “Here he is,” she said, her voice low and soothing. “Are we ready?”

Oliver had once stood on top of a five story waterfall and jumped, sure that his death lay at the bottom of the falls. He’d had submachine guns pointed at his head. He’d had pieces of his skin torn off, slowly, burnt off with pokers and flogged off him with whips.

“Yes,” he said, and his stomach settled the way it had all those times before. Whatever pain came of this -- for surely there would be pain because nothing before this had ever been allowed to stay pleasurable -- it would be worth it, these hours they would have together.

He opened the door to the penthouse. Tommy’s face was set, his eyes unreadable. Probably, Oliver thought, to hide his nerves. Which was good -- at this point it was a crapshoot to see if they would make it through the night without one of them rabbiting off. Oliver resolved to be the rock, right then. Tommy was unsure of his place -- and nothing Oliver could say would make that better, other than time, and Felicity -- Felicity was scared she wouldn’t be enough. And Oliver wasn’t sure, himself, why these two people had chosen to love him so completely, was sure he didn’t deserve it, but he could push down on all of that and make it okay, he could.

“So,” Oliver said, as he shut the door. “Um… dinner?” He led them down the hallway to the kitchen, following Felicity’s voice.

“I made pizza! Or, I didn’t. Gino’s did. Oliver says you like sausage?” Felicity covered her mouth. “Oh, God. I did not mean for that to come out the way it did.  But I did make the salad. The salad I very much made. From scratch. Well, not from scratch. But from the vegetables. Oliver?” She threw a pleading glance his way.

He turned to her, took her hand. “Breathe. You’re okay,” he said, dipping to whisper in her ear. “You’re not making anyone uncomfortable.”

“Except me,” Felicity whispered back.
“I’m nervous, too,” Tommy said, rocking back on his heels. “If that, uh, helps.” He stuck his hands in his pockets. “We could do other things first. Things we’re nervous about. Then it would be out of the way. And we could do pizza after.”

“Oh.” Felicity blinked and tilted her head to the side. “You don’t think we should…”

Tommy shrugged. “I’ve never liked to eat on a nervous stomach.”

“He’s nervous because he wants to kiss you,” Oliver said, winking at Tommy. *Come on, old friend, play the game with me,* he hoped his expression said. Tommy’s eyebrows lifted, but his expression softened.

“Oliver,” Felicity protested weakly.

“It’s true,” Tommy said, setting his shoulders and stepping closer to Oliver and Felicity. “The thought of kissing you -- well, that’d be enough to make any man nervous.”

“You guys, you don’t have to…”

Tommy lifted her chin gently, caught Oliver’s eyes over the top of Felicity’s head. “Are you sure?” At Oliver’s nod, he dipped his head to gaze in Felicity’s eyes. “And you?”

“Yes.”

“Okay, then.”

Tommy’s hands framed her cheeks, and slowly their faces drew together. And then Tommy was kissing Felicity. Felicity never let go of Oliver’s hand, but she did go up on tip-toe, and threw her other arm around Tommy’s neck. Oliver dropped her hand and wondered, in that moment, if Tommy’s world shifted the way that his had the first time he’d kissed her. From the outside, it certainly seemed like they dove into each other, savored each other. He gave them time and space for them to learn each other, though his hands ached to touch -- and there was so much, between the two of them, that he loved to touch.
Their lips parted, room enough for a breath between them. And Felicity let out a shuddering sigh. “Oh boy.”

“I told you,” Oliver said, winking.

“Okay, your turn,” Felicity said. “I get the feeling it’s been a while.”

Tommy turned to Oliver and shrugged. Oliver, given permission, couldn’t hold back. He pushed Tommy back against the kitchen counter, wrapped his hands around the nape of Tommy’s neck. Tommy laid his hands on Oliver’s wrists and Oliver brought his forehead to Tommy’s. They hadn’t touched each other like this except very rarely since he got back from Russia -- those moments when they knew for sure they weren’t being watched, when their self-control snapped.

“Oliver,” Tommy said. “The lady wants you to kiss me.”

Oliver was smiling but his pulse was racing. At first touch, he was tentative -- would Tommy welcome him? Would it feel the same? But Tommy’s lips were firm, his mouth sure. And Oliver slipped into an old familiar path. They’d been kissing each other since they were fifteen years old, knew each other’s mouths and hands and bodies inside and out. It still felt like fireworks. Tommy’s teeth nipped Oliver’s bottom lip and Oliver returned the favor. Finally, they pulled away from each other, reluctantly and slowly.

Oliver felt like he’d run a mile. He laid his forehead against Tommy’s, turned to look at Felicity, who was chewing on her thumbnail, her eyes glittering with want. “You guys can do some more of that,” she said. “I mean, that was practically art.”

Tommy held out his hand. “Come here, Felicity,” he said. “Come kiss Oliver. I want to touch you, too, is that okay?”

“Um, yeah,” Felicity said, dropping her hand. “If that’s what…”

“Felicity,” Oliver said, “come here. Let me kiss you.”

“Okay.” Felicity’s mouth was sweet -- tasted of her lipgloss and Tommy’s breath mint and she had her hands hooked around his neck in no time. Patience, Oliver told himself. With Tommy, fast would reassure. With Felicity, fast might panic. She flinched for a second when Tommy’s hands found her
hips. Oliver stopped.

“Still good?”

“Yeah,” Felicity said. “I just… wasn’t expecting that.”

Tommy kissed her cheek. “I thought about going for your ass first, but I decided to be classy.”

“Yes, by all means, let’s have a classy threesome,” Felicity said, laughing.

Tommy slowly lifted the hem of Felicity’s dress. “Kiss him,” he said lowly, “and I’m going to explore.”

Oliver’s mouth found hers once more, persuading her to concentrate on him for the moment. The dress stayed on, but Tommy’s hands spanned Felicity’s thighs, played with the elastic of her panties. When Tommy’s finger brushed against her clit, Felicity pulled away from Oliver to lean against Tommy, who wrapped an arm around her middle keep her in place while he gently brought that nub to attention.

Felicity whimpered and rocked her hips against Tommy’s hand. Tommy bent to kiss her ear, brought her earlobe into his mouth and sucked on it. “Fuck,” Felicity hissed.

“Not yet,” Oliver said, “but soon.”

Tommy’s eyes shone and Oliver couldn’t help himself, he bent and kissed Tommy. He could feel the twist of Tommy’s wrist as his fingers worked gentle circles against Felicity’s clit as Tommy’s wrist would occasionally brush Oliver’s cock, and it was all perfect.

And then Tommy’s phone rang. The special shrill ring he’d chosen for Moira. Tommy froze. “Oh no.”

“Motherfucking…” Oliver pulled away from both of them and kicked the kitchen counter when his phone started to ring as well. “Is she fucking psychic?”
“Moira,” Tommy said calmly, into his phone, holding up a finger to shush Oliver. “Yes, I’m with Oliver. Having dinner at his place. Ah, I see. I agree. That’s a threat we need to eliminate immediately.”

Oliver paused. Something in Tommy’s tone was off. He crossed his arms over his chest. His ardour was slowly fading away. Felicity was rearranging her dress and combing her fingers through her hair. Tommy listened for several moments, making general noises of agreement. Then, finally. “Yes, ma’am. Of course. I’ll let him know. We’ll deal with it immediately.”

“What’s happened?” Oliver demanded.

“My father made a move,” Tommy said. “Known Merlyn footsoldiers in the Glades, looking for protection payouts. An amateur move, but…”

“One we can’t allow,” Oliver said through grit teeth. “All right, let’s go shut it down.”

“Does Moira need my help?” Felicity asked.

“Perhaps you ought to go offer it,” Tommy said. “With this happening, Moira will be more suspicious than usual of her allies.”

“Agreed,” Oliver said.

“Okay, then. Wait here.” Felicity disappeared and came back holding two bugs in her hands. “These go in your hoods. The receiver goes in my ear. I’ll know you’re safe. Or I’ll know you aren’t.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Tommy said again, but this time his tone was colored by genuine affection and respect. Oliver beamed. “Thanks for the head’s up this time.”

Felicity coughed. “I’m trying to be better about surveillance without permission.”

Tommy winked. “Sure, baby.”
Felicity launched herself at Oliver. He caught her gratefully, the weight of her impacting against his chest abated somewhat by the fact that he was so grateful to have her in his arms. “Don’t be an idiot out there tonight, okay?”

Oliver’s heart twisted. “Okay.”

Tommy pushed off the counter, took off for the door. Felicity raced to catch him, tugged on his arm. “Hey.”

“Yeah?”

Then Felicity pulled his head down to hers, kissed him until her hands were buried in his hair. “Don’t you be an idiot either, do you hear me?”

Tommy flushed and looked at the floor. “Yes, ma’am.”

“You’re my boys,” Felicity said. “And I want you to come back, both of you. In one piece this time.”

Oliver nodded. “We will. See you on the other side, Felicity.”

He and Tommy headed out into the night.

The rhythm they’d been struggling to find earlier easily snapped into place as soon as they slipped the hoods over their heads. Here, they knew each other’s moves, knew what to expect from each other.

Starling’s streets were dimly lit at the best of times, an orange-red glow from street lamps in disrepair created pools of oddly-colored reality, pools which Oliver and Tommy sidestepped. They slipped down a back alley and knocked on a garage door, Oliver in front, and Tommy in back, his eyes sweeping across the alley and down the street.
“Anatoly,” Oliver said as soon as the door opened. “Good to see you again.”

“Aw shit,” Anatoly sighed. “What the fuck do you want?”

“Information,” Oliver growled. “And is that any way to talk to a family member, hm?”

The door opened no further and Anatoly huffed out a breath. Oliver’s patience stretched. “You can talk to me,” Oliver said, “or I can call Felicity and let her know how… unhelpful you are being.”

Anatoly shook his head. “That… won’t be necessary.”

“Open the door,” Oliver said, pushing on the door until it gave way, “and tell me where I can find the Merlyn footsoldiers.”

“The Dearden lady sent the two of you after some unruly idiots stepping out of line? That’s like using a flamethrower on a hill of ants,” Anatoly said.

Tommy snorted behind Oliver. “Malcolm doesn’t hire ants.”

“Sooner would be better than later,” Oliver said.

Anatoly sighed and called over his shoulder. “Hey, the princess’s boytoy is here. The Merlyn boys still over on 32nd?” At his colleague’s affirmative answer, Anatoly turned to Oliver and Tommy. “They’re over on 32nd,” he said, “but for the record, I think Mrs. Queen sending the two of you after them is bound to stir up more trouble than she realizes.”

“I’ll be sure to tell my mother that a Bratva foot soldier thinks she should rethink her course of action,” Oliver said, rolling his eyes. “That will go over well.”

“Thanks for your help,” Tommy said with a wink. “We’ll be sure to pass that on to Felicity.”

“Yes, yes, you tell the princess I said hello,” Anatoly said. “Now get the hell out.”
As the door shut behind them, Tommy smirked at Oliver. “He’s friendly.”

“He grows on you,” Oliver said. “Sort of like a wart.”

It wasn’t worth getting on their bikes again just to cover the few blocks they would need, so Oliver and Tommy went up and over -- up a fire escape to the top of a roof and over the series of rooftops. This was good, Oliver thought. There was something… good, freeing, about flying through the air with Tommy at his back. It was the way it was supposed to be.

His mother’s training had taken everything from him, but it had left him this, in the end. A body capable of doing this, a friend and trusted comrade next to him. He’d take that training and bring his mother’s world to the ground.

But first… Oliver and Tommy stopped on an industrial roof. Tommy switched on his voice modulator and said, “That’s a Merlyn SUV down there.”

“They want this,” Oliver said. “Malcolm needs an obvious confrontation to sell his men on the war that’s about to come.”

“Yes,” Tommy said. His phone buzzed with a text from Felicity. “Felicity says we should give them what they want.”

Oliver grinned. “She’s the boss.”

He let loose an arrow fit with an explosive device and watched, satisfied, as it broke through the back window of the unoccupied SUV and exploded.

“Here they come,” Tommy said, and he slithered down the side of the building ahead of Oliver. Unusual enough, but Oliver figured it might be more personal in the wake of Tommy being disowned by his father, and so he didn’t say anything.

Pressed against the building’s walls in the pools of darkness, Oliver and Tommy waited while four Merlyn men ran out of the building, shouting at each other and cursing. Once their backs were all turned, Oliver nocked his bow. “Go.”
The deadly dance began. Oliver had gone up against Merlyn’s men before -- they were trained in basic street thuggery and had the same fondness for handguns that class of criminal often did. So the name of the game was speed. Tommy’s long knives took out one while Oliver used his bow and arrow to take out two.

The last, Tommy assaulted with his fists. Punishing blow after punishing blow until at last he got the final man on the ground.

Oliver couldn’t hear the the first thing the man said, but he heard Tommy’s low chuckle. “Fuck you, too, Fred.”

“Is this how it’s going to be? Going to be Queen’s fuckboy for the rest of your life now?”

Tommy snapped, plunged his long knife into the man’s shoulder. The man screamed in agony, arching up in pain. Tommy lifted him by the collar. “You tell my father that this territory is off limits. You tell him I’ll enforce it myself. Every night if I have to. Tell him, or I’ll find you and cut off this arm right here.”

“I ain’t telling your father shit.”

Tommy brought his foot down on the handle of the blade, pushing until the knife had gone almost all the way through the man’s body. Fred went white, nearly passed out, and opened his mouth in a silent scream. “Did you think this was a game?” Tommy bent down, slapped Fred’s face lightly. “Stay awake, Freddy boy.”


Oliver stood back, watched the street. The faint howling of sirens warned they didn’t have much time. “Shadow. Sirens.”

“Stay awake,” Tommy hissed, turning the voice modulator off. “And tell my father what I’ve told you. Tell everyone else that you lost a fight to a faggot. Chew on that tonight and wonder how long they’ll let you live.”
“Shadow. Now.” Oliver knew they only had seconds.

“Fuck you, Merlyn! Fuck you!”

Tommy chuckled. “You should be so lucky.”

Oliver and Tommy fled back to the shadows, his knife embedded still in his victim’s shoulder, up and over, and away.

**

The week that followed was a very special kind of hell for Tommy. His interview with Iris West hit the press, and pretty much blew up. Oliver and Felicity both enjoyed the article and what they called its astute observations, but he took some guff from the Dearden soldiers about the “pretty boy” picture Iris had used to complement the piece. Contrary to slowing down media interest in his dissolved relationship with his father, it only increased. During the day, Tommy found maneuvering around Starling City to be more of a pain in the ass than it usually was.

Whether he was out to lunch with Oliver and Felicity or spotted escorting Thea around shopping malls and boutiques, there were photographers following him everywhere he went. The tabloid headlines ranged from the irritating to the hilarious, the salacious and wildly speculative, to the oddly on-point.

Thea was a nearly-constant daytime companion. She’d decided to close ranks, apparently, and stand by his side. He was so grateful that she’d forgiven him, decided to stay in his life and to allow him to stay in hers, that he was incapable of feeling smothered.

On Tuesday of that week, they went for lunch at a bistro and defiantly sat outside, ignoring the paparazzi camped out on the other side of the street, drinking large iced teas and eating over-priced toasted sandwiches and home fries, which they smothered with malted vinegar and soaked up the sunshine.

“Should have known you were my brother,” Thea said lowly. “Given that this is the only sane way to eat french fries and you’re the only person I know who understands this.”

“On the important topic of french fry preparation, we are genetically very similar, yes,” Tommy said.
“I wish I could tell the whole world to fuck off,” Thea said abruptly. “I wish we could tell everyone that you are my brother and Malcolm Merlyn is a huge dick.”

“You might not want to claim me by the time everything is said and done,” Tommy said, not lifting his head.

Thea threw a french fry at him. “You’re my brother. Shut the fuck up.”

And that had settled something in his chest, something uneasy and uncertain. The look on her face, her stubborn mouth so much like his, the certainty in her voice.

But other things remained… uncertain. After their aborted foray into the world of threesomes, Oliver, Felicity, and Tommy hadn’t managed to make their schedules line up. Not for a lack of trying, but Moira had an almost-eerie way of grabbing their attention, individually or in groups, or exhausting them beyond the point of being interested in sex.

On Thursday of that week, Felicity sent a group text that she strongly suspected they were bugged, because this series of unfortunate events could not be a coincidence. She couldn’t find any bugs in the apartment, no matter how many times she swept or had Diggle and Sara check.

It was an endless exercise in frustration, until Sara found someone trying to break past the complex security system Tommy and Oliver had installed while the three of them were out. Moira was doing her best to get eyes and ears in the penthouse. It surprised exactly none of them, but now that they were aware of it, they were more careful than ever.

It was slowly killing Tommy. Oliver could touch Felicity any time, and anyway that he wanted. Meanwhile, the only place Tommy could touch either one of them was in his dreams, which grew more charged and erotic as time passed, and never seemed to stay confined to the night, where they belonged.

He closed his eyes and felt Felicity, grinding against his hips while he fingered her, imagined her hand around his cock, imagined Oliver eating her out, imagined Oliver fucking him, over and over, every possible arrangement of their bodies. In the shower, on a bed, on counters, on couches.

He’d been so close to having what he really wanted -- he was besieged by images he couldn’t escape from, Felicity’s hands in his hair while he ate her out, his mouth around Oliver’s cock…
The erotic dreams he could deal with. It was another kind of dream that was almost more insidious that kept creeping into his conscience. The kind of dream where he started to wonder if he could build a life with Oliver and Felicity, after this was all over, and Moira and her endless manipulations were gone from their lives.

He wasn’t greedy. He just wanted lazy mornings, the three of them together. Meals together, to be allowed a presence in their lives that he wouldn’t have to be afraid of.

He found reasons, as many of them as he could, to spend time with Felicity and get to know her, one on one. He found as many reasons as he could to kiss her. Mostly because she always looked a little surprised in the moments before and after it happened, and because she was good at it, and because…

Because kissing Felicity was fun. He wasn’t falling in love with her, even as it was increasingly clear that Oliver was head over heels in love.

As much as the marriage had been contrived, Oliver and Felicity were flush with happiness in each other’s presence, and Tommy sat back when in their mutual company and appreciated the glow. The lengths he’d gone to to make Oliver smile when he’d first gotten back, and all Felicity had to do was look at him the right way and his old friend, who was now unnaturally solemn, would crack. It was hard not to be jealous, but in truth, he just wanted his friend happy, and the more Oliver and Felicity settled into playing the elated couple, the more it was clear they weren’t just playing a role. A real and solid partnership was forming between the two of them, and Tommy was silently relieved. He believed that they would need each other, their strengths working together in unison, to bring down Moira.

Moira, who had never once let anyone in, who, as far as he could tell, had only ever loved Thea. It was a goddamn storybook cliche, counting on love and trust to bring down pure evil, but there had to be a reason all the storybooks went there, right? He was counting on there being some truth there.

He ran a cloth over the base of his .45, which was nearly gleaming at this point, shoved the magazine back in the clip, and visually inspected the gun.

“Hey,” Oliver said from the doorway of Tommy’s manor bedroom. “Mom said you were in here.”

“Polishing up everything for the big party tonight,” Tommy said with a grin. “We all wanted to look our best.”
“Listen, I just came by…” Oliver looked up at the ceiling and sighed. “I got something for Felicity.”

“Nicely done,” Tommy said. “Buying things for fiancées being a long and noble tradition.”

“This,” Oliver said, sitting down on the couch next to him and showing him a picture on his phone. A picture of a beautiful green… and black… corset. Green, obviously, for Oliver. And black…. “I bought it before… anyway. She’s wearing it tonight. I hope.”

Tommy could have strangled him. There was no way he could respond to that the way he wanted to here. He wanted to -- he… what the hell was he supposed to think? Felicity would be walking around at a party meant to celebrate her union with Oliver alone, and she’d be wearing his color as well. “It's… nice, Oliver. Really nice.”

“We’re both really excited to have you over tonight after the party,” Oliver said softly, clasping Tommy on the shoulder. “We’ve been waiting to finish our game until you could make it.”

“You could have picked it up, started another... game,” Tommy said, flustered. “There wasn’t a need to wait.”

“Yes, there was,” Oliver said. “Well, I’ll see you tonight?”

“I’ll be there with bells on,” Tommy said. “How could I be anywhere else?”

**

Felicity stepped out of the shower to find Oliver standing there in nothing but a pair of Calvin Klein boxer shorts and a smile, holding a wrapped package. She’d taken the day off of training with Moira to spend getting ready. She’d had her nails done, a massage, and everything had been waxed, plucked and prodded into submission. She’d spent an extra long time in the shower, belting out old jazz standards at the top of her voice.

In a few minutes, a woman would be coming to do her hair. And her very delicious, half-naked husband, whom she hadn’t touched in a week to do more than kiss, was standing right in front of her. It was enough to make a sexually frustrated woman cry.
“Unfair,” she said. “You know what that does to me.”

Oliver grinned and handed her a towel. “I’m not the one who’s wet and naked. I’m also not the one who said ‘let’s not have sex until we can all have sex together.’”

“I stand by my point,” Felicity said. “And I didn’t know it would be a week.”

“I know,” Oliver said. “I don’t care what we have to do to avoid Moira tonight… burn a building down on the other side of the Glades… I don’t care. I’m having you tonight. You and Tommy.”

“Hm. What if I’m the one doing the having?” Felicity asked, widening her eyes comically.

Oliver chuckled and brought the package out from behind his back. “I have a gift for you. Well, I have two gifts.”

“Oh,” Felicity said. “I got you something as well. I thought we would… wait until we were dressed?”

“That would kind of defeat the purpose of mine,” Oliver said. “I took a risk that you would like it.”

Felicity ripped into the packaging, set the box on the vanity, and, one hand on her towel, coaxed the box open. “Oh my God, Oliver.” She dropped the towel and lifted the corset. “Oh my God.”

“I know, I, uh…”

“It’s beautiful,” Felicity said. “It’s incredibly beautiful. And…” she ran a hand on the fabric. “Oh, it’s soft. I can’t wait to put it against my skin. And it’s so obviously yours and Tommy’s.”

Oliver ducked his head. “…I was hoping it would work under your dress?”

“Oliver Queen,” Felicity said, swaying her hips as she walked to him, pressed her naked body
against his, “were you getting turned on by the thought of me walking around wearing your colors? Wearing *Tommy’s* colors? Where no one else could see it?”

“Yes,” Oliver breathed. “Incredibly.”

Felicity held up the excuse for panties that came with the corset on one of her fingers as she kissed his cheek. “If I’m walking around wearing that corset, this will be soaked before the night is over.”

“Good,” Oliver said. “That’s the way I want it.”

Felicity thrilled. “Where’s my other present?”

“Ah,” Oliver reached around her, picked up a long velvet box. “Jewelry is the Dearden family tradition. Which… fuck that.”

“Agreed,” Felicity said.

“But appearances must be kept up, so…”

Felicity opened the box. “It’s a ringlet,” she breathed. Tiny emerald roses, impossibly detailed with tiny black centers on a row of… those were probably diamonds. Oh shit. He’d given her diamonds. To wear in her hair.

“Not earrings, or a necklace, or a ring,” Oliver said. “Nothing that would tie you to my ancestors. But close enough to the tradition that no one will question it.”

“I can’t wait to infuriate Gladys when I tell her I have to wear this tonight. We will have to change our entire plan,” Felicity said. “Oh, Oliver. They’re beautiful.”

“I’m glad you think so,” Oliver said. “I would probably normally say something really cliche and awful about how beautiful you are right here, but you’d laugh at me.”

“Maybe.” Felicity opened her makeup drawer, pulled out a package. “I heard the tradition was a
handgun, but… I’ve never seen you use a gun when you could use a knife, so..”

She watched with bated breath while he opened the package. She’d called Anatoly, and had this shipped over from the finest knifemaker Russia had to offer.

Oliver unsheathed the blade and turned it in the light. Tossed it from one hand to another. It fit, to her eye, perfectly in his hand, the carved handle inset with gold. He stopped tossing the knife, studied it. “It says something. I’ve never really gotten good at reading in Russian.”

“The handle says, um…” Felicity flushed. “For Oliver, beloved husband. And the blade says ‘be swift, be sure’.”

And oh, had she agonized over that inscription. Oliver went still, his eyes unreadable. “Felicity…”

“You don’t have to say anything,” she said. “I know, that you um… maybe you don’t feel the same way? But I thought you should know. That you are. Beloved. By, um. Me.”

“Be swift, be sure?” Oliver asked, sliding the knife back in its sheath.

Felicity’s stomach sank. “I was hoping that knife would… take care of you.”

Oliver picked her up, set her on the vanity. “Felicity, look at me.”

Felicity swallowed, brought her eyes up to his. Oliver brought her hands to his lips, kissed her engagement ring, and then the palm of her hand. “What if I want to say something?”

“Oliver…”

“I mean, I really want to say something,” Oliver said. “If I said something, it would be true.”

Felicity smiled through tears. “You don’t have to say anything. There’s not an expectation…”
“No. There’s not and -- that makes it worse. Because this wasn’t supposed to happen.” Oliver grimaced. “It would probably be better for everyone if it hadn’t happened.”

A tear slipped out of Felicity’s eye. “Oliver, it’s okay.”

“It’s just that I let her take everything from me. And I thought I was okay with not loving anyone ever again, with that part of me being dead.”

“There’s not a part of you that’s dead,” Felicity protested.

“I can’t breathe, sometimes, for how much I love you.” Oliver let out a breath, like he’d been holding one in, like he’d been punched in the gut. “And -- everything you’re doing for me, for Tommy, that you doubt that I would… I am yours. And you are mine. I will be swift and sure because my dreams are all about us on the other side of this thing.”

Felicity jumped into his arms, and he caught her with a surprised “oof”. She kissed him over and over again. “It’s all going to be okay,” she said, after a long moment. “We are all going to be okay.”

**

The room fairly shimmered with candlelight, and Starling City’s elite and the upper echelon of crime families from across the West Coast rubbed elbows at the swanky Vision West hotel in downtown Starling City. Crystal chandeliers hung from the ceiling, the tables were adorned with tall crystal vases containing mountainous flower arrangements.

Iris West could hardly believe she was invited, actually. She’d been to wedding receptions that were less fancy than this engagement party for Oliver Queen and Felicity Smoak. If it hadn’t been for her break-out interview with Tommy Merlyn, which she still couldn’t believe had actually happened, she wouldn’t be in this room, covering the party for her bosses.

She’d tried to protest -- covering the social beat was not where she wanted to end up, long-term, but her connection to a key person at this party meant that she was in an incredible position. Drinking her one glass of champagne, jotting down observations on her cell phone, trying to find anyone that would give her a quote about anything, and chowing on deliciously-stuffed mushrooms.

She was washing one down with a swig of champagne when the room erupted in applause. She set
her champagne down and joined the crowd as Oliver and Felicity entered the room. Iris had had an almost-embarrassing crush on Oliver since he’d made his first appearances in the media as a teenager.

For all that she would have laid money down that Oliver was fucking Tommy Merlyn, he looked absolutely besotted with Felicity Smoak. They made an insanely attractive couple -- Iris tried to think like an entertainment reporter and take note of what they were wearing, what they did. Felicity’s strapless deep-green gown was offset by beautiful blonde waves left down, cascading around her shoulders. Oliver in his dark suit next to her, accents of green in the thread, if she had to guess.

Cheeky, she thought, given the rumored Queen family connection to Irish mob activity. Almost as cheeky as the slit in Felicity’s dress that went all the way up her thigh.

She was making notes about those details when she caught the tail end of a conversation.

“...can’t imagine what Moira Queen was thinking, allowing such an allegiance. She’d be far better off getting that Thea girl married off. Maybe to the Merlyn boy,” one man was saying. “Can’t imagine a union with the Russians is going to help her strained relationship with them, anyway.”

“Well, you know she’s kept that Merlyn boy under her roof for nigh on twenty, twenty-two years now, you’d think that would have tied them closer, but Malcolm doesn’t want anything to do with the boy,” the other man said. “With Merlyn’s men trying to make inroads on Dearden territory, maybe the Russians are who Moira is going to turn to in her hour of need.”

“If that’s so,” the other man said, “she’s likely to start a war. The Triad’s only been gone from our city twenty years. They’re looking to come back in. The stranglehold Moira’s had on this city is liable to fall apart. And all because her son likes to fuck pretty Russian blondes.”

Iris sat very, very still.

“Still. You know who her uncle is, right?” the second man said. “Yuri Smoak -- I wouldn’t want to be on his bad side. Even from this side of the pond.”

Iris closed her eyes, mouthed the words to herself. Yuri Smoak. She would remember that name. Something tickled at the back of her brain. Something her father had said once. She’d put the pieces together. She always did.
It was almost impossible not to catch sight of Tommy Merlyn and Thea Queen. Thea Queen’s dress was daring and black, exposing most of her back and a good portion of her cleavage. She clung to the arm of the man who was, by all accounts, like another brother to her. Except now Iris had something else to consider. She watched them for a long moment, and couldn’t spot any signs of chemistry between them, never mind that Tommy had to be nearly thirty years old and Thea was approaching her eighteenth birthday.

Iris wasn’t naive enough to think those kinds of relationships never happened, but she hoped for Thea’s sake that wasn’t the case here.

She’d spent five honest minutes with Tommy Merlyn, and that was usually all she needed to get a good measure of a person, to learn to read them, at least on a basic level. She watched him greet various guests, laughing and clasping hands with quite a few. His charm seemed to be a universal trait.

At one moment, though, he turned in the direction of Oliver and Felicity, who were making the rounds separately from him. He probably thought he was safe -- a crowd full of people usually meant no one was really paying attention, no one was really looking at him. And there was an expression on his face -- it made Iris’s breath catch. Lust, she could have guessed at that, the way he’d looked at Oliver before -- longing, hope… Just for one second, Tommy’s soul was on his face.

Iris didn’t make a note of that. Some things weren’t meant to be written about. Not in the papers Iris wrote for. She turned, giving him the moment he thought he had just to look, and took a handful of peanuts from a tray on the bar.

She reached for her glass of champagne to wash them down with and slid off of her barstool, turned, and found herself face to face with the engaged couple. “Mr. Queen. Ms. Smoak.”

“Hello, nice to see you,” Oliver said, his face amused and entirely too attractive. “Felicity, this is Iris West, the reporter that wrote such nice things about Tommy.”

“I particularly liked when you called him a dark Irish dreamer,” Felicity said. “Nice to meet you. Are you enjoying the party?”

“Ah yes -- I… would you mind answering a few questions?”

“The dress is an independent designer here in Starling, goes by Shado,” Felicity said. “Oliver had the
ringlet commissioned as an engagement present. We’re thrilled to be getting married, we aren’t releasing details about the ceremony.” Felicity smiled, not unkindly. “Is there anything else? I thought I’d spare us a little time.”

“No, that… I mean.” Iris squared her shoulders. “Not at the moment.”

Oliver shrugged. “Door’s open.”

“What if you don’t like my questions?”

“You did all right by Tommy,” Oliver said. “To our minds, that means we owe you a favor. You’ll excuse us, won’t you?”

Iris nodded, shaking her head as they took off. She reached for her cell phone. “Barry,” she muttered, “you are not going to believe this.”
Chapter Summary

Tommy, Oliver and Felicity spend the night together. Thea and Felicity have a heart-to-heart. And the Diggles reunite.

Chapter Notes

Thanks to Abbie, once again, for going over this with a fine-tooth comb and helping me work out some kinks. This chapter features explicit sex.

The clock had worked its way around to nearly two a.m., when Felicity, Oliver and Tommy turned the key on the penthouse. Felicity’s carefully constructed blonde waves had deflated somewhat -- they’d removed the circlet in the car, and it was stashed in Oliver’s pocket; Oliver and Tommy’s ties had long since come undone and hung rakishly from their necks. Felicity was riding a high of giddy exhaustion as she gestured for Tommy to give her his shoulder.

“These shoes are murder,” she said on a sigh, in Russian.

“But they make your legs look fantastic,” Tommy replied in a halting version of the same language, holding her steady with one hand while she stepped down and out of the sky-high crystal-accented stilettos.

Felicity shot him a wide-eyed look. “You speak Russian?”

“My vocabulary is a lot better suited for explaining how I would gut you than talking about shoes or legs, generally,” Tommy said. At Oliver’s snort, he flushed. “Also, um. I can read it much better than I can speak it. For…”

“Tell her,” Oliver said, grinning. “Tell her why you learned Russian.”

“Oh my God,” Felicity said. “You were referencing Whitman the other day. I had talked myself out of thinking you were. But you totally were.”

“He’s a fan of the dead crusty whities,” Oliver said, pulling on his tie until it came off of his neck. “The sadder, deader, and more pathetic they are, the better.”

“Why is this happening to me right now?” Tommy asked, looking up at the ceiling.

Felicity laid her head on his shoulder. “You’re pretty dreamy, Tommy Merlyn. Dark and handsome men who like poetry, that’s pretty much the definition of sexy.”

Tommy grinned and swept Felicity up in his arms. “Is that so? Oliver, I’m the definition of sexy. Did you hear that?”

“We must have laced that corset too tight,” Oliver said. “She’s got oxygen deprivation or something.”

Tommy stilled, his hands clasping together on the back of Felicity’s dress. “You laced her into the corset?”

Oliver nodded, winking at Felicity. “I told you he’d like that. Just like he enjoyed knowing what was under that dress, watching you all night.”

“Do you want to see it?” Felicity asked, a smile teasing at her lips. “It’s so pretty. I stared at it for a while once it was on.”

“Stared at it and wouldn’t let me touch,” Oliver said. “Which is just cruel.”

Tommy fiddled with the hook-and-eye closure of Felicity’s gown. “Were you teasing him, baby, the way he likes to tease?”

“Just a little bit,” Felicity said, a shudder creeping over her at how much she wanted her gown
undone, wanted Tommy’s hands on her. Her voice almost trembled with want. “I’m not as good at it as he is.”

“Hm,” Tommy said, and he kissed her neck, hands spanning her waist before one pushed aside the material of the slit of her dress to caress her thigh. “This dress is sinful, baby. I think I caught a glimpse…” His thumb traveled up, hooked the string of her thong. “Oh, I did.”

“Tommy,” Felicity nearly whined.

“Did you show me the string of your panties on purpose, baby?” Tommy asked her, his voice low and soft in her ear. “Were you trying to torture me?”

“Not torture, just…” Tommy’s flat palm cupped her between her legs and she squirmed. “Tommy, please…”

Tommy abandoned her legs and ran his hands up her body, pushing her hair aside and undoing the clasp that held her gown together. One tug on the zipper and the gown fell to the floor and… Felicity saw Tommy’s eyes go onyx, blown wide with desire. He pulled her close once more. “I want to fuck you with this on,” he said, kissing her earlobe while he ran a hand over the textured material of the corset. “Then I want to take it off and worship every inch of you.”

Oliver was moving -- moving to the other side of the room. Sitting on the armchair and watching, elbows on his knees, his eyes glittering in the soft glow of the room.

“I’m so wet,” Felicity whispered. “I just want you to touch me. Please.”

Tommy yanked her thong down and fell to his knees. “Spread your legs, baby girl. I’m going to make you come.”

“Oh, fuck,” Felicity breathed and leaned against the wall, her legs spread wide. Oliver must have taught Tommy something about teasing, she thought, because he kissed his way up her inner thigh and down the other side to the opposite knee. He tempted himself, rubbing his thumb over the folds of her labia, spreading some of that glistening wetness on the lips of her sex.

Felicity wrapped her hands in his hair, fistfuls of dark strands between her fingers. Her nails scraped against his scalp as she tried to direct his attention where she wanted it.
And suddenly, he was there, his tongue buried inside of her. The sweet penetration had Felicity panting. One hand left his head to brace her against the wall. Christ, she thought -- how long was his tongue?

He found the sweet spot inside of her, the one that made her go instantly, embarrassingly wet, as though she weren’t turned on enough already. “I want, I want…”

Oliver stirred and leaned forward even further.

Tommy pulled his mouth away from Felicity’s pussy, his mouth fairly glistening with her juices. “You must look so pretty,” he said, sliding his finger inside her. “Spread out against that wall. Tell Oliver how it feels. He wants to know.”

“It feels… oh, I can’t think when you do… shit…” Felicity’s hand fisted against the wall, the other pulled Tommy’s head closer to her. “Oliver, Oliver, he’s so… he’s so good. I just… I want to come already. Please-- just.”

Oliver jerked, like he was having a hard time holding himself back. Felicity rocked her hips against Tommy’s tongue. “Fuck,” she chanted. “Fuck, fuck, fuck. Oliver, he’s so good. Tommy, you’re so good, just...”

Tommy’s attention turned to her clit, sliding another finger inside of her and chuckling against her sensitive clitoris.

The soft vibrations were enough to send her over the edge. Felicity shook as she came, her fist hitting the wall.

It was like someone had broken the chain that had kept Oliver in his seat, because he launched himself out of the armchair, lifted Tommy off of his knees, pushed him against the wall next to Felicity and kissed him.

It was every bit as pretty as Felicity had hoped. The rhythm of their mouths, how they moved together, how quickly shirts came unbuttoned in the heat of the moment. When they finally broke apart, both dress shirts were undone and Tommy’s pants were unzipped. Felicity grinned at them, while Oliver held Tommy’s face in his hands.
“You did so good. You should have seen her face,” he was whispering. “Should have seen the looks she was giving me. It was perfect.”

Felicity wrapped her arms around Tommy from behind, laying one hand on his flat abdomen. “You did,” she said, standing on tip-toe to lay her head on Tommy’s shoulder. “And you did such a good job keeping your hands to yourself,” she said to Oliver. “I think that kind of behavior deserves a reward, don’t you?”

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Tommy grinned at Oliver, and the picture was so perfect Oliver almost came right then, Felicity in nothing but her corset, Tommy well on his way to naked and both of them looking very much like they would like to eat him for lunch.

Tommy dropped slowly to his knees. “I agree,” he said, pulling Oliver’s pants down. “You wanna see something he likes?”

Felicity’s grin was sly. “Yes, very much.”

It had been so long since they’d done this, since Tommy had been on his knees in front of Oliver. But his hands were sure and practiced. He had his fist around Oliver’s cock in no time, Oliver’s boxers around his knees. Oliver’s eyes nearly crossed. It never felt like this when he did it himself, and it was still different when it was Felicity’s hand around him. Felicity’s hands were cared for, manicured, soft. She used a sweet, gentle pressure to bring him to his knees.

It had never been like that with Tommy. Tommy’s hands were rough, with beautiful long fingers and after years of doing this with each other, knew Oliver’s cock as well as his own. He used a spit-moistened hand, stroking Oliver’s cock up and down before he looked up at Felicity.

“Why don’t you give him a kiss?” Tommy asked. “Distract him a little so he doesn’t go too soon.”

Oliver nearly groaned. “Tommy…”

“Payback is a bitch, Oliver,” Tommy said, and Felicity was slinking over, beautiful in her corset. It
caught the light, reflecting off of the green satin at its base. Oliver remembered in one crystallized moment lacing her into the corset, how thick and inelegant his fingers had felt, how soft and sweet her skin had been.

His cock twitched and that was all the invitation Tommy needed. His mouth was on Oliver and Oliver threw his head back. God, Tommy Merlyn’s mouth, the spread of Tommy’s hands on Oliver’s thighs.

“Don’t come,” Felicity said, sidling up next to him and wrapping her arm around his neck. “I want to watch.”

“Fucking Christ,” Oliver breathed. “Tommy, your mouth…”

“So good, right?” Felicity asked. She brought her mouth to Oliver’s and kissed him. Oliver found himself rocking gently back and forth in Tommy’s mouth. He couldn’t help himself. There was so much to feel.

Felicity pushed Oliver’s shirt off of his shoulders, kissed the scar on his arm where he had taken a bullet pushing her out of its way. It took some convincing to get his shirt all the way off, and Oliver probably could have helped, but… Tommy scraped his teeth gently on the head of Oliver’s cock.

“Fuck. Shitting hell.”

Felicity giggled, kissing her way across his shoulders and down his pectoral muscles until her mouth was preoccupied with his nipple. Her tongue was busy, swirling around until it was all Oliver could do to keep from moaning.

Felicity pulled away from him and winked at Tommy. “Normally he’s got much more of a potty mouth.”

Tommy nodded carefully but didn’t let loose of Oliver’s cock and Oliver bit his lip and looked up at the ceiling. “I’ll say anything,” he confessed. “What do you want to know?”

“Where do you want to come?” Felicity asked. “In Tommy’s mouth?”
The thought was delicious. Tommy’s mouth, his quick, wide grin… Oliver could picture him wiping away his come with the back of his hand, the way he used to when they were first learning how to do this together.

“Yeah, that… that could be good.”

Tommy’s mouth popped off of his cock with a slick wet sound and Oliver gasped at the loss. “Tommy, what the --”

“Sore jaw,” Tommy said with a grin. “How about Felicity’s mouth?”

“I…” Her lipstick tonight was bright, bright red. She wore a corset of his colors. Of *their* colors. He’d waited for this without knowing he was waiting for this. “Please.”

“Baby, you know I can never resist you when you say please,” Felicity said, dropping to her knees while Tommy slowly rose to his feet.

The sudden change -- it might have thrown off the rhythm, teased him away from an orgasm. It might have. But not tonight. Tonight, Felicity’s beautiful, perfect mind was turned to torturing him, to indulging him.

Fuck if he didn’t love her brain. And everything it was capable of.

Felicity didn’t just use her mouth. She used her hands, her fingernails. She hummed in the back of her throat and his eyes nearly rolled back in his head.

Tommy tweaked Oliver’s nipple affectionately. “That’s a hell of a sight, buddy.”

“You should *feel* it,” Oliver said. “You have got to… Felicity! Please, I can’t…” He rocked his hips, he scrambled for purchase. “I’m going to come.”

Felicity released him and winked. “Good.” Then she dove right back in and the suction -- Oliver groaned. It was-- indescribable, a white-hot pulsing orgasm. He gripped Tommy’s hand so he wouldn’t pull Felicity’s hair.
“Fucking fuck…” Oliver gasped, his hips pumping once more. He closed his eyes against everything. “Felicity, Felicity… let go, baby, please…”

When Oliver opened his eyes, Felicity was standing in front of him, swallowing his come. It was the prettiest sight Oliver had ever seen.

“Baby,” he breathed. “You are… everything.”

Felicity grinned. “I know.”

Tommy caught Felicity’s hand, brought her close and kissed her. And Oliver’s previous thought was proven immeasurably wrong -- that was the prettiest sight he’d ever seen.

“You promised me you’d fuck me,” Felicity said, in an almost coquettish tone of voice. “Why don’t we move this to the bedroom and you can make good on your word?”

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Tommy and Oliver shed the last of their clothes on the way to the bedroom, and Felicity was the first to fall backwards onto the bed. Oliver pushed her back and spread her thighs, dropping his mouth to the valley between her legs. Tommy threw himself on the bed next to Felicity and laid back, his hand around his cock, stroking it slowly while Oliver worked Felicity back up to a frenzy.

God, she was pretty. And the sounds she made, Tommy thought. The sounds she made while they ate her out. Little mewls, little gasps, curse words on a moan. So bubbly and verbose out of the bedroom, she turned intense and focused inside of it.

It was devastatingly sexy. Until she did speak. And then it was... perfection.


Oliver turned on him with an evil grin. And oh, Tommy’s cock was already hard, already weeping
with want. That look on Oliver’s face would do nothing for his self-control.

Oliver went after blowjobs like he did almost everything else in his life, with single-minded determination. Before Tommy could say anything, his legs were spread and Oliver’s mouth was on him.

He hissed and arched. Oliver used the opportunity to cup Tommy’s ass, to give a light but stinging slap, ran his thumb back from Tommy’s cock to play with the rim of Tommy’s asshole.

“Oliver, Oliver… Fucking hell, man.”

Precome coated the head of his cock as Oliver pulled away. Oliver licked it all away, one drop at a time, and Tommy nearly cried for want of more pressure, suction, something… anything.

“You’re going to love this,” Oliver said, crawling up Tommy’s body to kiss his lips. “There’s nothing like fucking Felicity, I promise.”

Then Oliver rolled away and it was Felicity and Tommy in bed together. “Come here, Tommy,” Felicity beckoned, her legs spread and ready for him. “Please. I’ve been thinking about this all day.”

Tommy ran his hands up and down the corset, latched his mouth over one of her satin-covered breasts. “Fucking love this,” he gasped, all control gone. “Fucking love you walking around, my colors next to your skin. Fucking love the way you look when I call you baby. Fucking love the way you taste.”

Oliver reached for a condom and covered Tommy’s cock, then Tommy gripped himself with one hand, lined it up with Felicity’s pussy, and slid home. “Oh Christ,” he moaned. “Should have known I would love the way you feel.”

“Uh,” Felicity grunted. “Oh my God.”

He’d been dreaming about this. In various shades, in different colors, different places, one way or another, almost from the moment he’d met her. He almost collapsed over her from the sheer awe of having his daydreams clash with reality so profoundly in that his imagination could never measure up to the tightness of her pussy, the way her scent changed ever-so-slightly with sex, the dazed-glassy eyes he could never have predicted, the undulation of her hips that was so rhythmic and persuasive
against his own.

They ground together, savoring the delicious friction between the two of them. Oliver lay back on the bed next to them, his eyes heavy with exhaustion and want. He didn’t, however, speak. Tommy appreciated that his friend wanted him to have this, to have his moment with Felicity.

And she never took her eyes off of his, never reached for Oliver the way that Laurel used to, never breathed Oliver’s name.

Tommy found her clit with his thumb, circled it a few times. “Want to ride?” he asked, as his limbs started to shake.

“Yes,” Felicity didn’t hesitate. She pushed him over and climbed astride him. Her hips rolled in a circle and Tommy tried to fuck his hips up but she pushed him down. “Slow.”

“Baby.”

“Just a minute, I think…” Felicity’s fingers descended to her clit, circled it vigorously. Then her pussy was spasming all around Tommy and she was laying back against his knees and Tommy couldn’t help himself.

“Fuck fuck fuck,” he chanted. Over and over and over again he pushed his hips up, and Felicity brought her weight down, and chasing this orgasm became the only thing Tommy could think about. He let himself be selfish in the moment, his hands gripping Felicity’s ass. “Gonna come, gonna come…”

“Oh God please,” Tommy gasped, and Felicity rolled off of him, onto her back. Oliver’s hand was right there on Tommy’s cock, removing the condom and then pumping Tommy to completion. Tommy fell forward on his hands, shaking his head. “I can’t, I can’t…”

Oliver kissed his earlobe. “Ours, Tommy.”
Tommy came. He could have wept. He bunched his hands in the sheets and shook through it, and when he was done, Felicity spread his come over the corset, working it into the material.

Tommy kissed Felicity. He tried to persuade her with his tongue, with his lips, of his gratitude. Tried to tell her what the night had meant.

He registered that Oliver had left the bed but he didn’t understand why until Oliver handed him a damp cloth for himself, and set to work cleaning up Felicity.

“Tommy?” Oliver’s voice was almost as deep as it was with the voice modulator.

“Hm?”

“I laced her in,” Oliver said. “Did you want to unwrap her?”

Tommy nodded wordlessly and tossed the cloth aside. “Sit up, baby,” he said softly. Felicity held out her hands, let Oliver and Tommy help her get upright. It took a minute -- his brain still wasn’t working all-the-way-right, but Tommy got the laces loose, and Felicity huffed out a breath as the corset disappeared.

And now the expanse of Felicity was exposed. Gorgeous, lanky, long. Skin for miles, now marked with red lines and angry indentations where the corset had dug in. Oliver and Tommy soothed the redness away with hands and mouths, tracing the lines with their fingers, kissing her skin over and over again.

They took turns quietly disappearing to the bathroom, but the sun was rising through the bedroom window as they all, finally, arranged themselves on the king bed. Tommy and Oliver pulled Felicity to the middle. Wrapped themselves around her, hands stroking her, mouths pressed to her skin, to her cheeks, to her lips.

“You don’t have to,” Felicity protested. “Really, you…”

“Let us say thank you,” Tommy whispered. “You were beautiful tonight.”
“So you were you two,” Felicity said firmly. “I mean, off the Richter scale gorgeous.”

Oliver said nothing. But there were tears in his eyes that neither Tommy nor Felicity chose to acknowledge in that moment. The three of them drifted off to sleep, idly stroking each other.

It was more than Tommy had dared hope for.

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Thea smoothed her skirt over her knees and adjusted her sunglasses. Her drink -- a fruity iced concoction, was sweating in the sun of the patio of the restaurant. She’d seen a few reporters taking pictures of her from across the street, but any moment, Felicity and her over-sized bodyguard would be joining her and she would have nothing to worry about. For the moment, Roy sat next to her, his arms folded over his chest.

Not even twenty minutes ago, she’d had her tongue down his throat and his hands had been occupied, driving her to distraction. Now his eyes were alert, scanning the street, and he responded to most questions with grunts. So much for being the only object of his attention.

“We’re not in any danger,” Thea said. “You don’t have to go all… caveman on me.”

Roy shook his head. “Got a message from your brother. He says to be on high-alert, and he’s probably watching right now, so let me concentrate. The very last thing I want is to give Oliver a good excuse to kick me off a rooftop. Or strategically stick arrows in me so I’ll stay alive for sixteen or seventeen hours before he kills me.”

Thea raised an eyebrow. “You think Oliver would do something like that?”

“I think Oliver has done stuff like that,” Roy said. “And probably would again if I failed when he trusted me to keep you safe and alive.”

Thea shook her head. She didn’t like thinking about the things Oliver did -- the things she knew he was capable of. For years, she’d remained in the dark to Oliver’s job description. She’d grown up with footsoldiers in the house, knew basically what they did. When Oliver’s ship had gone down, the Oliver that had left her had been lighter, not incapable of hurting anyone -- certainly he had hurt many people -- but the foot soldiers had treated him like a kid, she remembered. Joking, laughter.
Something changed when he got back. Within a week, they flinched when he spoke, gave him space in the hallways. Footsoldiers who had teased him all his life now went silent when he entered a room.

Thea didn’t know why, not until she started dating Roy. Roy who hadn’t grown up in the life, who had been offered a shot as a soldier as a teenager, he didn’t have the same urge to protect Thea the others did. He didn’t want to hurt her, but he didn’t obscure the truth of what her brother did from her.

Sometimes the stories made her sick to her stomach, made her clench her fists. But maybe something was broken inside of her because she never thought less of him. Moira had told her once that everything they did, they did for family. That the brutality was necessary.

But the Oliver she knew -- he was different than the one who left, in a lot of ways -- he didn’t laugh or smile quickly, he was brusque and didn’t want to spend time in the house like he used to, and now, knowing what she knew about their mother, the things that Oliver had been living with, Thea understood. He was still gentle with her. The rock of Oliver’s love -- of Tommy’s love, it was what made sleeping down the hall from Moira bearable for the last few weeks. It seemed that no matter who Oliver became to cope with what Moira had done to him, Thea was going to love him without condition.

Thea caught sight of Felicity as she crossed the street, and she stood, shaking off her thoughts, and giving a little wave, sat back down.

“That was adorable,” Roy said under his breath.

“Shut up,” Thea said. “I haven’t exactly made the best impression on Felicity. I’m either being a jerk at her or I’m throwing up all over her and she’s going to marry my brother. So I’m not going to embarrass myself this time. And… Tommy’s, fond of her too, so…”

Roy chuckled. “Fond of her? That’s what they call it these days?”

Thea shot him a look. “Yes. They’re good friends. That’s all they are.”

Roy rolled his eyes. “They don’t look at each other like good friends. They look at each other like they want to f--”
Thea let her voice go cold. “They are good friends.”

“Babe.”

Thea knew with absolute certainty what she was about to say was the truth. “Do you understand me? They are good friends. To say otherwise -- you’re going to get somebody killed. The family wouldn’t be tolerant of anything else.”

Roy’s eyes widened, and then he nodded. “I guess you’re right.”

“No, Roy, I don’t guess, I know.” Thea shook her head. Ever since Oliver had shown her the corset, and she’d started paying more attention, she’d felt her heart beat a panicked staccato whenever she thought about what her brothers were risking. “Everything that’s happening -- the balance is so delicate. We have to be careful or this could all fall down around our heads.”

“Difficult to be careful when I have no idea what I’m being careful of,” Roy said. “It’s like a fucking minefield out here.”

“Hopefully Felicity will fill me in some more on what she’s thinking. And not just on the bridesmaid dresses,” Thea said.

Felicity opened the door and stepped out to the patio. “Thea!”

Thea smiled, holding out her arms for a hug, absurdly pleased when the older woman drew her in tight and squeezed her. “Hey, Felicity.”

“Thanks for agreeing to have lunch. I know things have been crazy.” Felicity held out her hand. “Roy, right? Oliver has nice things to say about you.”

Roy furrowed his brow. “He does?”

“Insomuch as you’re the only boyfriend Thea has ever had that he hasn’t threatened to throw off a
Roy chuckled. “No, he’s definitely threatened to throw me off of a roof.”

Felicity waved a hand. “He didn’t mean it. He has a very dry sense of humor. Do you mind if Thea and I have a private chat? My bodyguards, Mr. Diggle and Ms. Lance, are sitting at a table just over there. I’m sure you’d be more than welcome to join them.”

Roy nodded. “Sure. I’ll let you two ladies do your thing.”

“Great.” Felicity smiled and waited until he had left before she sat. “How are you holding up?”

Thea smiled tightly. She didn’t want the other woman to think she couldn’t handle the truth, when Felicity had so clearly gone to bat with her brother… _brothers_, to give it to her. “I’m just fine.”

“You are?” Felicity’s tone was mild, if a little disbelieving. “You don’t have to tell me if you’re not. I know you don’t know me very well. I won’t think less of you if things have been difficult, though. And I would listen if you want to talk.”

Thea took a long sip of her drink. That her brothers, both of them, trusted Felicity, was a good sign, since Tommy and Oliver trusted practically no one. And Felicity had been the one to convince Tommy and Oliver to tell her the truth.

“Everything’s changed,” Thea finally decided on. “I’m just -- I’m so mad about everything and it’s hard to hide it from Mom. It’s like she’s got radar vision or something. And everything’s… it’s like the ground is always shifting under my feet. Tommy and Oliver, they kept all these secrets but now I’m learning some of it and I’m scared for them, scared that whatever you have planned will get all three of you killed.”

Felicity reached for Thea’s hand and squeezed it. “I know,” she said, her eyes serious behind her glasses.

“I didn’t understand, when Ollie got back and he was a different person. Mom told me she’d sent him away so he’d come back stronger, ready to protect me. But I didn’t need a brother who was capable of protecting me. I just needed _my_ brother.” Thea squeezed Felicity’s hand. “And when he got back scarred and hardened, Mom just said -- this is what we do. These are the sacrifices we make
for the good of the Family. She was sorry about the boat sinking -- that wasn’t intended. But she wasn’t sorry that he could do the things he could do.”

“Oh, Thea, honey,” Felicity said.

“And so I asked Ollie to get me out,” Thea said. “Because I don’t want that kind of life, where I’m expected to throw my brother’s soul away in the name of a greater good. I can’t help but feel I started this whole mess, that you wouldn’t be here, that Ollie and Tommy wouldn’t be risking what they are, if I had just… been willing to do what they did for me.”

“No, Thea.” Felicity shook her head. “I -- it might be selfish of me, but I, for one, am grateful for you. Without you asking for help, I wouldn’t be here. When Oliver left me in Russia, I thought for sure I would never see him again. That we would never be able to reconnect -- that I would have to live for quiet conversations in the middle of the night, that he would have to watch me marry someone else, and I would have to do the same. You are a big part of the reason why I get to be happy this way.”

Thea teared up. “Do you love him? I mean, really?”

“Yes,” Felicity said. “I do. I do love him really. Because he is willing to do the things he’s willing to do for you, for me. For Tommy. And I never would have met Tommy, would I, without you?”

Thea nodded, forcing the questions she had about how Felicity felt about Tommy, what she intended for them, to die on her lips. This was not the time or the place to go all protective sibling on Felicity.

“So you see, I owe you a lot.” Felicity said with a smile. “There is trouble coming, I won’t deny that. It’s likely that the next few months are going to be extremely dangerous, for all of us.”

“What is happening, exactly?” Thea asked, leaning forward. “Can I help? You said I should help.”

Felicity reached into her purse, laid her cell phone on the table and punched in a code. “That should disrupt any long-range listening devices for a few moments. We don’t have much time, though. Malcolm’s connection to your mother was already weakened. We have done our best to ensure that it crumbles. That means that Malcolm is likely to make a play on one or all of our lives. From now on, you don’t go anywhere without a bodyguard. I mean anywhere. We can’t trust anyone inside the Family except the four of us, and Roy.”
“That’s why he’s been more… intense than usual,” Thea muttered.

“Yes. Oliver and Tommy nearly killed two Merlyn men last week,” Felicity said. “They couldn’t have made a more public statement if they wanted to.”

There was something -- something underneath Felicity’s voice, that worried Thea. “Are they okay?”

“They’ve made themselves targets,” Felicity said simply. “They’re both terrifyingly competent, but it’s not without its dangers.”

Thea squeezed Felicity’s hand. “They’ve been targets before. Things usually turn out okay, right?”

Felicity nodded. “With that in mind -- that all of our lives are in danger, these are for you.” Felicity handed her a manilla folder.

“What are these?”

“Apartments. Bought and paid for,” Felicity said. “Throughout the city, a few in Central City, one in Metropolis.”

Thea’s eyes widened. “Why?”

“It might come to all-out war,” Felicity said. “We’re going to do our best to avoid that, but if it happens, these are places you can go. Take the list. I haven’t looked at it. I could be tortured for hours and have no idea where you are.”

Thea’s eyes widened with shock. “Felicity…”

Felicity’s eyes were hard. She shook her head. “You have to promise me. If Oliver or Tommy or I tell you to get out -- pick one of these apartments, go. There are things at each of them that would help you, and Roy, if you choose, disappear.”

Thea swallowed. “Oh my God. Do Oliver and Tommy…”
“No. They don’t even know there’s a list. This is between you and me,” Felicity said. “They know there’s an extraction plan for you, but the less they know, the better.”

“Is there an extraction plan for you?” Thea asked, narrowing her eyes.

“If it gets to the point where an extraction plan needs to be set in motion,” Felicity said, “it will be far too late for one to be effective for me.”

Thea pushed the manilla folder back. “Then I appreciate the thought, but…” She trailed off. If her brothers and Felicity weren’t going to make it, she wasn’t sure what the point was.

“Take it, Thea,” Felicity insisted. “You don’t ever have to look at the list. But if you want to get out, find yourself needing to get out, you’ll have some options this way. You’re an adult. I’m not going to force you to do anything -- the choices you make are yours. I’m just trying to give you... more.”

Reluctantly, Thea took the folder. “I appreciate the thought.”

Felicity tapped her phone again, removing the illusion they were safe. “Now, what were you saying about the strapless dress for the wedding?”

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Diggle was removing his jacket and tie when a knock made him pause. Since he wasn’t expecting company, and he hadn’t ordered food, he removed his handgun from its side holster and hid the gun behind his thigh as he opened the door a crack. He relaxed as soon as he saw the person on the other side.

She pushed the door open, her hands on her hips. “Have you completely lost your mind?”

Diggle stepped aside and sighed. “By all means, come in Lyla. I just love uninvited guests. They make me feel all warm and fuzzy inside.”
“You’re a dick, Johnny.”

“I’m trying to think what I’ve done in the past twenty-four hours to justify that, and I’m drawing a complete blank.” Diggle finished removing his tie, threw it on the couch. “I’m drinking if you’re going to yell at me.”

“I’m not yelling. I just want to know what the fuck you’re thinking.” Lyla crossed the room to the bar, got two glasses out, and poured generous shots of Scotch for each of them. “I don’t understand why we fought like hell to get out of Afghanistan alive for you to do your best to get in the middle of a fucking mob war.”

“You have a lot of room to talk.” Diggle took the glass on the right, threw the shot back and swallowed. “Infiltrating the Dearden family is liable to get you killed if they find out who you’re working for. Which is -- who, exactly? FBI? They’re the only agency I can think of with enough muscle to convince you to get back in the game who would be interested in the Deardens. Unless you took Waller’s offer.”

Lyla shrugged.

“You didn’t.” Diggle sighed. “That woman…”

“We’re not talking about me. I’m observing and reporting only. It’s perfectly safe. You are volunteering to step in front of bullets. For who? A Bratva princess who’s got blood on her hands? I thought you told me after the war you were never going to put yourself in that position again.”

“You don’t know anything about Felicity Smoak or what she’s capable of, what she came here to do,” Diggle said.

“I know enough.” Lyla set her glass down, laid her hand on Diggle’s forearm. “I know that you think she’s responsible for getting you and Andy out of Russia alive.”

“Because she is.”

“And if that’s true,” Lyla said, “then don’t you think you’ve long since paid her back?”
Diggle sighed. He couldn’t bring himself to pull back from Lyla. She’d always had this power over him. “It’s not about paying her back. It’s about standing by a friend while she tries to do something I believe in.”

“What is that? Tell me, John.”

Diggle moved her hand from his arm. “We’re not married anymore, Lyla, remember? And now that I know you’re working for Waller…”

“You don’t owe me a thing. You’re right.” Lyla ground her teeth. “I just wish you would tell me why you’re taking stupid risks for a criminal. You know things are heating up between the families. My contact in the ER has seen at least three of the Dearden footsoldiers in the last week. Merlyn’s ramping up for something.”

“I know. But I really believe, when all is said and done, you’re going to be eating your words about Felicity Smoak,” Diggle said. “That much I can tell you.”

“You’re going to keep your head on a swivel?”

“Always.” Diggle reached for her, laid his hand on her shoulder. “What about you?”

Lyla shrugged. “Like I said, not a lot of danger in what I’m doing, but I’ll keep my eyes open.”

“Good,” Diggle said, releasing her shoulder to walk back across the room to the bar. “Good talk.”

“You’re infuriating,” Lyla said without heat.

“Yeah, well. You’re beautiful.” Diggle poured himself another shot of Scotch.

“You think that’s going to work on me?” Lyla said with a laugh.

“It’s not a line, it’s the truth,” John said. “You’re beautiful, and I appreciate that you cared enough about me to come over here and kick my ass, as unnecessary as it is.”
“Yeah, well,” Lyla echoed. “I guess this is where I say I just couldn’t bear it if something happened to that beautiful ass of yours.”

John sat his shot glass down, crossed the room. “I’m going to kiss you.”

“Oh good. I was hoping you would.”

As familiar as coming home and as intoxicating as whiskey. Lyla tasted like Scotch and her mouth moved under his the same way it always had, but that didn’t detract from the rhythm his heart was pounding, the melody his blood was singing. Lyla, Lyla, Lyla.

It had killed him to walk away all those years ago, but they had been making themselves bitter and cold -- what they were becoming was poison, toxic.

Diggle didn’t know if this was any better, if this was any smarter, this giving in. If they were different enough people that the story might have a different ending. If undoing all the work he’d done in training himself not to think of her as his, not to call her first thing in the morning, not to think of her before he gave in to sleep at night would end in tears or not.

“Johnny, this isn’t smart,” Lyla said, as she broke the kiss. “It’s really not.”

“You want to stop?” Diggle asked, ready to step away, drop his hands.

“I’m overdue for some stupid,” Lyla said. “I don’t want to stop.”

The time for thinking passed, sliding through his hands like water. He had her jeans unzipped, she had her hands down his pants, and their mouths never disconnected as they walked themselves over to the couch.

Fast, but oh -- so satisfying. They knew each other so well, could navigate each other’s bodies with a sort of sexual shorthand. Diggle knew exactly how to make her scream, how to make her pant. She knew how to make him see stars, how to make him curse.
And when he came inside of her, weight braced on his forearms, their eyes locked, it was what he’d dreamed about for months, for years. More in recent days since he’d seen her in the Queen manor, knew she was close, knew she was there. Within reach.

She reached up, took his head in her hands, brought him down and kissed him. “I was right,” she sighed. “That wasn’t smart at all.”

“But it was good,” Diggle said, smirking as he bent to lay an affectionate kiss on her breast.

“That’s never been a problem.” Lyla sighed. “We’re good in a war. We’re good in bed.”

“Yes,” Diggle said. “Yes we are. Stay.”

Lyla raised startled eyes to his. “What?”

“Stay. For tonight. For as long as you want. I’m headed for a war or so you say, and there’s no one in my bed. I could use you at my back, I want you in my bed. We could be good together for a while longer.”

“And then, what? After this is over we walk away?”

Diggle shrugged. “If that’s what you want.”

Lyla sighed. “I’ll stay for the night. We’ll talk about the rest later.”
The Coronation of a Queen

Chapter Summary

Oliver and Felicity's wedding day has arrived.

Chapter Notes

This is the end of Act One. I want to thank Rosie and Effie and Ash and Kris for all of their handholding and pushing and gushing in Google Docs. I want to bow at the feet of Abbie, who puts up with me disagreeing about possessive improper and proper nouns with her, who makes sure I have all of my facts straight and my ducks in a row. This story is complex and consistent because of her.

Thank you audience, for coming with me on this journey... I hope you've enjoyed the first Act. It gets a little bumpy from here.

I'm taking the next full week off of posting, so that hopefully, I can complete Act Two in its entirety before I begin posting it. I'm not that far off. Next update, therefore, will be Monday, August 17.

thanks for your patience, guys!

The day of the wedding dawned, and rather than the clear, bright sunshine that had been forecasted for a solid week, a misting, relentless fog settled in its place. Felicity could not have been more pleased, to everyone’s surprise. She liked the rain, knew her bubbe would have been just as gleeful -- rain was a good sign on a wedding day. A sign of the Torah. A sign of life.

She’d met Oliver in the rain -- a story she kept to herself. But she thought it was fitting -- to start a new chapter of her life in the rain. In Starling City rain. Their wedding in the Queen family gardens on the manor property would be tent-covered now, giant white canvas creations, the construction of which Felicity watched from her dressing room. She hated to make the workers stay out in the weather, and made a note to talk to the event planner and make sure they were compensated extra for the discomfort.

She had no mother to help her into her dress, and Thea was her only bridesmaid, so rather than having a crowd around her that morning, she took her shower, blow-dried her hair and applied her make-up by herself. She stepped into the lacy, complicated undergarments she’d chosen with care to wear under her wedding gown by herself. She unzipped the garment bag that housed her dress -- the dress she’d planned on shopping for by herself.

But that hadn’t happened. Between the reluctant opinions of John Diggle, and Tommy’s unexpected
assistance, who had showed up as she was leaving and invited himself along, she’d ended up with the kind of dress she hadn’t thought to allow herself. A dress, she thought, fit for a princess. Her uncle Yuri had cried over Skype at the pictures she sent home of herself in the beautiful satin ballgown.

She ran a fond hand over it. A knock on the door had her pausing. But she slipped a white satin robe over her shoulders and tied it while she opened the door. “Tommy! What are you doing here? Come in!”

Tommy stepped inside and shut the door behind him. “Oliver’s a wreck. Well, as much of a wreck as he gets these days.” Tommy rocked back on his heels, putting his hands in his jeans pockets. “I offered to walk over and check on you as a service for humanity.”

“Oh.” Felicity smiled, fingered her mother’s necklace that was resting in the center of her chest. “You can assure him I’m not running for my life. Has my uncle arrived yet?”

Yuri was supposed to have been in Starling two days ago, at the start of the wedding festivities, but business had kept him in Russia. Felicity was trying her best not to let his absence color her enjoyment, but it was difficult when her side of the aisle was already going to be a little threadbare.

“Not yet,” Tommy said. “But I’m sure he’ll be here in time. That’s what he said on the phone last night, right?”

“Yes,” Felicity said, nodding. “Yuri is… particular about his word. I am sure he will be here on time.”

“Hey, aren’t you supposed to be all dolled up by now?” Tommy asked. “I heard something about pictures, and you’ve got the veiling thing in an hour or so.”

Felicity nodded again, feeling tears well up in her eyes. “I should get ready. It’s just that wedding dresses aren’t really made to get into by yourself.” Her breath hitched on a sob, and she struggled to get control of herself. “Thea -- she should be here any minute, she can help, so…”

“No, no, no, no crying, Felicity, come on…” Tommy wrapped Felicity in his arms. “I’m sorry, Felicity.”
“It’s stupid,” Felicity choked. “I just really want my mom.”

“Baby, that is the furthest thing from stupid,” Tommy muttered, rocking her gently back and forth.

“I just kept thinking about how -- oh, she’d hate that I’m wearing my hair down, you know? But she’d love the dress. She’d probably want me to ask the seamstress if we could sew some more crystals on it, because there was no such thing as too much bling for Donna Smoak.” Felicity wiped her eyes, but Tommy didn’t let go of her. “I keep trying to find this perfume she wore -- only for special occasions. I never saw what it was called, but I remember the bottle and I remember she’d let me wear it, too. It’s my wedding day and I don’t smell right and my mom’s not here to help me into my dress and tell me I look pretty and bully me into wearing my hair up, to talk me into wearing the red lipstick. It’s my wedding day and I don’t have my mom.”

“I’m sorry,” Tommy said, and he wasn’t apologizing, Felicity knew, he was empathizing, from the bottom of his soul. “I know.”

“And nobody will let me see Oliver,” Felicity continued. “Which is stupid, by the way. You’re the first friendly face I’ve seen all day. I had to get myself into the corset that goes on under the dress and… it’s not fitting right and… In an hour I have to go out there and look Moira Queen in the face and listen to her welcome me into her family and I just won’t be able to do it if this corset isn’t on right…”

“Can I help?” Tommy’s voice stopped her mid freefall. “I can’t do anything about Oliver. Or your mom. But I think I can work out a corset and a dress.”

“Would you?” Felicity pulled back from him. “Ugh, I’m sorry. I just cried all over you.”

“That’s what I’m good for,” Tommy said, rocking back on his heels. “You want to… retouch… anything, before we attempt to get you settled in?”

“Yes,” Felicity said, wiping under her eyes once more. “Probably everything.”

She slipped the robe off and padded to the bathroom. Her eyes were wrecked. It took ten careful minutes to reconstruct her work, and an extra dose of the setting spray so that Felicity would trust it. Tommy stood in the doorway, watching her.
“I remember my mom putting on makeup to go on dates, before big nights,” he said softly. “It’s one of the things I’m one hundred percent sure I remember right, actually, because Dad used to throw fits that Mom would let me play in the bedroom while she did her thing. I had a red fire truck -- I wanted to be a firefighter pretty much exclusively from the time I was three on -- and I must have driven her crazy, driving that thing all over creation. She’d let me play till she was done, then she’d tuck me in bed and kiss me goodnight. She’d smell like cinnamon and oranges and she’d leave a lipstick ring on my forehead. Those are good memories. I’ve always kind of liked watching women do this, ever since.”

Felicity swept bronzer across her cheeks and turned to Tommy. “I guess we should be glad we got the time we did.”

“You can be, if you want,” Tommy said, smiling sadly. “I’m still pissed. I wasn’t ready to let her go. Wear the red.”

Felicity set down the mauve she’d been contemplating. “What?”

“I see you, looking at the lipsticks. You said your mom would talk you into the red one, so… I say go with that.”

“Oh.” Felicity smiled sardonically. “Well, Moira did say that I should strive for class. We talked about a mauve color.”

“Baby, there is nothing more classy than a red lip on a mouth as kissable as yours.”

Felicity’s jaw dropped. “Did you just use a line on me, Tommy Merlyn?”

Tommy pushed off the bathroom doorjamb and stood behind her, studying the ties that held her corset together. “I might have. It made you smile, didn’t it? As an expert women’s undergarment engineer, I believe I’ve found the problem.”

Felicity raised an eyebrow. “What kind of certification did you have to go through to get awarded that title?”

“I got Patty Hinky’s bra undone in less than a second in the backseat of a Ferrari going 85 miles an hour,” Tommy said. “That was much more complex than this. Just a second.”
“Who was driving?” Felicity asked. “Oh wait, don’t tell me.”

“Oliver. He almost went off the road. Patty Hinky had excellent tits.” Tommy chuckled. Oh, he had deft, clever fingers. The ties were loosened, adjusted, he found the sensitive spot on her ribs and brushed it before he closed the ties again. “Yours are pretty fantastic as well.”

“They’re too small,” Felicity said, dismissively. “Excellent underwear helps.”

Tommy gently smacked her ass, kissed her shoulder, and ran a fond hand over her breasts. “They’re fantastic. How’s that? Feel better?”

Felicity gently cupped her breasts, ran her hands over the material of the corset. “I think it fits better.” She turned around to face Tommy. “What do you think?”

“I think Oliver’s tongue is going to fall out of his mouth,” Tommy said. “I think you should wear that to get married in. Just that.”

Felicity laughed. “I think there might be some objections to that.”

“Not from me. Not from Oliver.”

“Yes, well. Let’s try the dress on, see what you think.”

Her arms over her head, Felicity found herself standing in the middle of her bedroom while Tommy gently fit the ball gown on her. She pressed a hand to the embroidered bodice while he laced up the corsetry in the back, held her breath while he fluffed out the skirt. He was quick and confident, and he made Felicity laugh as he helped her step into her shoes.

“There’s the bride,” he said softly, his eyes swimming with tears. “And she’s a beautiful one.”

“Give me away?” Felicity asked, impulsively.
Tommy blinked rapidly, taking a step back from her. “What?”

Felicity wouldn’t let him move away. She filled the space between them. “If Yuri’s not here. My God, I don’t want to walk down that aisle by myself. I really, really don’t. It would mean everything to me if you would walk with me.”

Tommy swallowed, his eyes anywhere but on hers. “Are you sure that’s what you want?”


“Felicity, I don’t know what to say.”

“Say you’ll do it,” Felicity said. “It would mean the world to Oliver, to me, that you’re trusting us both… with each other.”

Tommy’s mouth closed and opened. “Baby…”

“Think about it. Just… hold on.” Felicity darted across the room, moving faster in a ballgown than he had ever seen anyone move. “We got you something.”

“I don’t understand.” Tommy sighed. “It’s your wedding day, you get the presents. That’s how it works.”

“I get Oliver,” Felicity said. “That’s more than I was ever hoping for. And you did so much to help with everything, helping me with the dress, and all of it and... I -- we -- well, we were hoping you would accept this.”

She handed him a flat box with a black ribbon tied in an intricate bow. He opened it carefully, untying the ribbon patiently. It was almost more than Felicity could take. He’d admired Oliver’s knife, held it in his hands, tossed it a few times. This weapon was not its twin. This weapon was its superior.

“I understand you recently lost your knife,” Felicity said softly.
“It wasn’t anything special,” Tommy said under his breath. “It wasn’t… this.”

“The handle says ‘for our beloved Thomas’,,” Felicity said, laying her head on Tommy’s shoulder. “The blade says ‘so much more than a shadow’.”

“Felicity…”

“I know today -- it isn’t going to be easy for you,” Felicity said. “I know… I’m so grateful to you.”

“You don’t have to…”

“I have to say thank you,” Felicity said fiercely. “That’s what you do when you know a friend is dying inside a little and they’re doing it with a smile so that you can be happy.”

Tommy swallowed. “Okay.” He couldn’t say anything else. He couldn’t speak. He almost couldn’t breathe.

Felicity brought his cheek to her mouth and firmly pressed until there was a ring of bright red lipstick on it. She laid her head on his shoulder and sighed. “I wasn’t supposed to fall in love with either of you, you know that, right?”

Tommy coughed, wiping his eyes.

“I love you, Tommy.” She said it quietly, on a breath, the only way he heard it was because it seemed the very air stilled so that he could. “I love you both.”

A knock startled them. Thea pushed open the door. “Hey guys,” she said, “Tommy, you need to get dressed pronto. Felicity? You need to come with me.”

**
Oliver studied himself in the mirror as he finished buttoning up his tuxedo shirt. He told himself he wasn’t nervous – he’d sent Tommy to check on Felicity because he knew she would be having a difficult time, knew today was going to be harder for her than she would say. Maybe in Tommy she would have someone to confide in, to talk to – he hadn’t been allowed to see her since last night, the old tradition of not being allowed to see the bride strictly enforced by Dearden men, who were under orders to keep him away until Felicity had been veiled and was the rightful matriarch of the family.

In keeping with the tradition, Oliver had tried to sneak out the window, and had been dragged in easily by his foot to hoots and hollers. He had tried to sneak out the door and had been tripped. It was all in good fun, everyone got a laugh out of it, but the urge to see Felicity was an itch in between his shoulder blades he couldn’t scratch.

The train he’d started them all on was barreling down the tracks and it was too late to stop it now. It was exhilarating and terrifying all at the same time. In a few hours, Felicity would be his wife and his boss, and all of their plans -- everything he and Tommy had been talking about, dreaming about, since their last night together on Lian Yu, would be coming to a head.

A soft knock on the door had him lifting his mouth in a smile. “Come on in.”

“Hey,” Thea said as she entered his room. Oliver turned to greet her and his breath caught in his throat. He still got angry down to his bones that he’d missed the slow process of her growing into a young woman, didn’t get to witness the subtle way her face had changed. So it still threw him for a loop when some part of him was still expecting his kid sister, and a young woman in a black ball gown, cut to accentuate her features, stood there instead. “Tommy’s getting dressed and I left Felicity with Mom. It won’t be long now before they do that creepy ceremony.”

Oliver’s lips twitched. “Good. Want to help me with these cuff links?”

“What do you do when I’m not around to do this for you?” Thea asked, her tone light and teasing.

“I fumble around like a jackass, mostly,” Oliver said, chuckling. “Or I find the nearest pretty woman.”

“Yeah, well, lucky for you, Felicity’s going to be around now,” Thea said softly. “So she can do this from now on. I’ve never seen these before.”

Oliver shrugged. “They’re Dad’s. I don’t usually wear them because it upsets Mom, but it’s my
wedding day, so.”

Thea paused. “He’d be really proud of what you’re doing, you know?”

Oliver avoided eye contact with Thea. “Well, I didn’t do much to make him proud when he was alive, so, I guess I have to hope what I’m doing now counts for something.”

“It means the world to me,” Thea said. “If that… counts.”

“Hey, don’t… don’t cry, okay?” Oliver drew her into a hug. “I’m getting married, not getting executed.”

“I know, I know.” Thea wiped her eyes and settled into his hug. “Are you going to save a dance for me?”

“I’m always going to save a dance for you Thea. There are only two women in the entire world I dance with. Pretty soon, they’re both going to be named Queen.” Oliver winked, noting the surprised pleasure in Thea’s eyes. He tried to remember the last time he’d been able to gently tease her like this.

“You’re a cornball,” Thea said, sniffling. “But thank you.”

“Felicity and I got you something,” Oliver said, and cleared his throat. “Normally, I guess, uh, she would give it to you, since you’re her Maid of Honor, but I asked her if I could do it.”

“Oh,” Thea said, smiling with delight. “What is it?”

The box was far too large to contain a necklace or some other traditional trinket. When Felicity had first told him what she thought Thea needed more than anything, he’d been hesitant. But recent events had led him to believe that she was right.

“A gun?” Thea’s eyes widened. “You bought me a gun? Who are you and what have you done with my protective older brother?”
“I think Felicity has talked to you about some of the things that are happening,” Oliver said. “And how we fear there might be more danger before there is less.”

“Yes,” Thea said, suspiciously. “So now you’re giving me a gun? If your plan was to not scare me, I want you to know that it’s failing miserably.”

Oliver’s eyes went serious and dark. “I don’t want you scared, but I do want you aware, want you ready. Just in case you ever get in a bad spot and you have to protect yourself.”

“Wow.” Thea turned the gun over in her hands. “Ollie, I’m just not sure…”

“Tommy’s going to show you how to use it.” Oliver shifted uncomfortably. “Felicity… pointed out that, uh, we may have been doing you a disservice, not giving you certain tools. We were trying to protect you, but, um, it turns out we may not always be there, so. This is for… that… possibility.”

“I am really tired of the people in my life making plans for what happens when they leave me,” Thea said softly.

“I’m not planning on it. Hey.” Oliver caught Thea’s hand. “My time away from you taught me two things: I can’t necessarily do anything about whether the rest of my time on Earth gets to be long or short. Secondly: I will move heaven and earth to stay here for you. You are the best of me, Thea, the reason I can still look myself in the mirror sometimes is cause I know I’m still your big brother.”

“Oliver…”

“Take the gun,” he said softly. “Don’t point it at anything you don’t fully intend to shoot. Pull the trigger after a deep breath. I want you to have it, not because I think I’m going to die, but because I think you’re not always going to be in my direct line of sight. And I’d like you to be able to protect yourself if that happens.”

“Okay. Just don’t talk about leaving me again,” Thea said. “I can’t stand to lose my brother again.”

Oliver nodded. “I promise, I’m going to do my best, Thea.”
Thea took his hand, squeezed it. “I’m supposed to go to the veiling.”

“You should go,” Oliver said. He wouldn’t be allowed to go, somewhere in the hazy middle between a footsoldier and a true Dearden -- he didn’t need to see the veiling to accept Felicity as the matriarch, and mob families were more than a bit suspicious. No, the next time he saw Felicity she would be wearing the traditional veil, and walking down an aisle to his arms. To be his wife.

“And leave you here by yourself?” Thea asked. “You look like you’re having a stroke.”

Oliver snorted in amusement. “No, I’m just… getting married.”

“Yeah, to Felicity Smoak,” Thea said. “Not stroke-inducing at all. Unless you’d rather be marrying Tommy Merlyn.”

Oliver blinked and shook his head. Thea had yet to outgrow the bluntness that he was at turns amused and frustrated by. “I love Felicity, Thea. And I… love Tommy, as well. It’s complicated. I don’t look this way because I’m not happy that I’m marrying Felicity.”

“Okay,” Thea said, avoiding his eyes. “I’m happy for you, then. I just didn’t want you tragically marrying someone you didn’t really love in the name of saving me, you know? Although I’ve seen the way you look at Felicity. And I… Tommy is my… you know… so… that’s not awkward at all.”

Oliver nodded. “But he’s not mine.”

“No, of course not,” Thea said, blushing. “But.”

“You want to talk about this now?” Oliver asked, amused. “Really?”

“I just want to know that you’re going to be happy,” Thea said. “And I don’t want you to lie to me.”

“I’m doing everything I can so that when this is all over, I will be happy. For the first time in a decade there’s a possibility I could actually be happy.” Oliver smiled at her. Really let himself smile.
Let her see the hope he was feeling. “That’s the farthest thing from a lie I’ve said all day.”

**

The wedding was to take place in the evening, but this ceremony, the one she and Moira had been prepping for for several weeks, was the most important to the Family. Had Thea been the heir, this ceremony would have taken place on her eighteenth birthday, the time for her to don a hood of her own. As it was, Felicity’s veil would symbolize the passing of power from Moira to Felicity.

She’d argued loud and long that Oliver should be there, but Moira wouldn’t hear of it. So Felicity walked by herself from her room to Moira’s office -- which was large enough, once the furniture had been moved aside, that they could gather with all of the Dearden family footsoldiers.

Felicity checked the room as she entered it -- Moira and Thea stood front and center, and there were rows upon rows of Dearden footsoldiers standing in a block. Dressed in suits, some with their arms crossed, some whispering to their neighbors, none of them looked exactly thrilled about this development. Well. Felicity held her head high, sweeping through the room in her fitted ivory gown. Never faltering, not for a moment.

When she reached the front of the room, she stopped and faced the block of footsoldiers. She scanned them each, looking for Tommy’s face. He wasn’t there either. Felicity nodded to herself. She could do this alone, if she needed to.

“Each member of my family wears a hood,” Moira began, “to symbolize the highwaymen from which we came, and the foremother who first wore one to conceal her identity as she took the life of the man who murdered her husband.”

Felicity felt a cold calm settle over her. This part of the story she had always identified with. She was not his wife yet, but the thought of someone killing Oliver, or killing Tommy -- she would be just as murderous, just as deadly, as the first Dearden woman had been.

Thea cleared her throat, clearly nervous, but she spoke without stuttering or verbal static. “I pass on my birthright to my sister-in-marriage, for the betterment of the Family. I do so without objection.”

“Does anyone here object?” Moira asked. Felicity raised an eyebrow and stared down the soldiers, daring one of them to voice a dissenting opinion. A few of the men shifted, but nobody spoke. It was a long, uncomfortable moment.
As Thea nodded and turned to gather Felicity’s hood in her hands to symbolically pass to Moira, the door opened in the back of the room, and Diggle and Tommy stepped inside.

Something that had been tense inside of Felicity loosened, immediately. If the worst happened, she thought to herself, it would be forty against three, which was a lot better than forty against one.

“Then, with this hood,” Moira said firmly, “we welcome you into the Family.” She laid the white satin material over Felicity’s head and draped the excess around her shoulders. Felicity would, per family tradition, leave it up until Oliver let it down at the ceremony.

There was no going back now.

**

The hours leading up to the wedding were maddening for Oliver, who, ever since his time away from Starling City, found it a chore to be idle, to wait. On the day of his wedding, it seemed, anything he might offer to do got shot down. Once he was dressed for the ceremony, there wasn’t much he could do.

Tommy returned after the hooding ceremony, and all he would say was that it had gone well, and that Felicity looked incredibly beautiful. To which Oliver had grit his teeth, because of course she did -- he was more worried about what unhappy foot soldiers might be planning than what Felicity had been wearing. But Tommy told him to relax, to enjoy his wedding day.

And he’d poured him a shot of pure Russian vodka. Oliver had tossed the liquor back, let it burn down his throat and warm his stomach.

“Times like this,” Tommy had said quietly, “makes you miss Robert. He would have something to say -- something profound, some words of wisdom.”

Oliver laughed. “I loved Dad, but he’s the last man on Earth I would take marriage advice from. Unless it was in the context of ‘this is what I did, do exactly the opposite’.”

Tommy nodded, and turned to face the clock on the wall. “Just a few minutes, we should leave for
the ceremony site.”

Oliver reached for Tommy, cupped his hand around the back of Tommy’s neck, and kissed him.

“The wrong person opens that door,” Tommy said, pulling away, “You’ll get us both shot.”

“Yeah,” Oliver said, sighing. “I just wanted…”

“I know how you feel, Oliver, and you don’t have to apologize,” Tommy said, “or to try and make it up to me. We both knew this day was coming and -- I got a lot more out of it than I ever thought I would.” He swallowed, his voice quiet. “She told me she loves us.”

Oliver nodded. “I know.”

“Do you?” Tommy asked. “She said she loves -- that she loves both of us. You and me. Same time.”

Oliver slowly smiled. “I know.”

“If this is some kind of game she’s playing, some card she thinks will keep me in line, then--” Tommy’s hand clenched, his voice shaking, “I want to believe her.”

“Felicity doesn’t lie about love,” Oliver said earnestly. “She knows enough -- she’s not cruel in that way.”

Tommy studied his hands, and Oliver found that he couldn’t read his friend’s expression. As much as Oliver was slowly coming alive again, he knew it was a different kind of struggle for Tommy, whose only experience with love that didn’t manipulate was… Oliver.

“Did she tell you?” Tommy asked him, avoiding his eyes, but Oliver could see they were full of tears. “That she loves you? That she loves me?”

“I know Felicity,” Oliver said simply. “I know what she looks like when she loves. I saw it in her eyes. She saved the words for you. She probably knew you needed them.”
Tommy nodded, slowly, as if it was all making sense. Some part of Oliver’s stomach sank. “But she wouldn’t have told you if she didn’t mean it,” he pressed on. “I meant it when I said she’s not cruel.”

“We should go,” Tommy said.

“Hey, you remember Susan Dempsey’s party, summer after junior year?” Oliver asked. He could see in Tommy’s eyes that he could remember -- hopefully with the same vivid Technicolor palette Oliver could -- the taste of tequila, still new to them at that point, fast hands in the pool, driving home in Oliver’s car, falling into Oliver’s bed…

“What about it?” Tommy asked.

“You told me then I shouldn’t love you,” Oliver said. “I hope you know I did then, and I do now. You’re a far better man than I am. I don’t know if I could stand next to you and watch you marry Felicity. Watch Felicity marry you.”

“It’s not so hard,” Tommy said softly. “Not when it’s you two.”

Oliver leaned forward. “Please let me kiss you one more time.”

Tommy sighed and nodded. Oliver pressed his lips to his, a slow, measured movement. He memorized the feel of Tommy’s mouth, savored Tommy’s hands fiddling with his collar.

It was Tommy who pulled away again. “Enough of that. Let’s go get you married,” he said softly.

Yet, when they got to the wedding site, Tommy swiftly abandoned him with a pat on his arm, told him he had one more thing to grab. No amount of insisting would get Tommy to budge on telling Oliver what it was, though.

The justice of the peace pulled Oliver to the front and the music started without Tommy. It wasn’t so bad in the beginning -- Oliver retrieved his mother from the back of the tent, seated her in the front row next to Walter. Then Oliver watched with wide, almost-panicked eyes as music started and Thea walked down the aisle towards him alone. She only got a fourth of the way before Oliver walked down to give her his arm. She beamed at him and laid her head on his shoulder as they walked to the
It was an explosion of flashes and “aws” as Thea stood on tiptoe, laid both of her hands on his cheeks, and kissed him there. Oliver teared up and swallowed the emotion whole.


“Thanks.”

The triumphant chords of the wedding march started and Felicity appeared from around the bend, escorted by Tommy Merlyn. Oliver couldn’t help it. His eyes filled with tears. His wife, his lover — walking towards him together. And Tommy — Tommy, the bastard, was grinning, knowing exactly what Oliver was feeling in this moment, what it meant to him. If he could have dreamt of a perfect moment, it might have been this — Felicity in her bejeweled white, her golden hair falling in waves from underneath the hood, her eyes shimmering with tears, Tommy all in black, all charm and ease and happiness.

Oliver might have met them halfway down the aisle — he intended to, but he couldn’t let go of the image, couldn’t let go of the dream. It ached in its sweetness, in its impossibility. He waited, awestruck, until Tommy and Felicity were in front of him. Then he was released from the spell that held him immobile, extended his hand to Tommy, who took it, and pulled him for a hug.

“Thought you wouldn’t mind if I brought Felicity to you,” Tommy said softly. “She’s all yours. Take care of each other.”

Oliver nodded, but couldn’t speak. Felicity stepped forward, waited. As Tommy moved to stand behind Oliver, Oliver gently touched the edges of the hood that obscured most of her face. “Hello,” he whispered.

“Hey, baby,” Felicity said just as softly.

“Mind if I…”

Felicity nodded and Oliver lifted the hood gently back away from her head. She lifted her chin to meet his eyes, and he caught sight of the black and green stones of her circlet sparkling in her hair. She’d worn the symbol of her allegiance to his family, as was the tradition, but underneath of it, had
declared her loyalty to him, to Tommy.

In his life, he’d been carried away by emotion before, acted without thought -- in violence, in rage, despair. This impossible, deep swell of love that pushed up from his core, threatened to send him floating, it was new. He needed something to anchor him, something to ground him.

His hands went to her forearms, and gently he lifted her up on her toes. Automatically, her hands went around his neck and they kissed, and he could feel the ground and not at the same time. He was dimly aware of cameras flashing, of the sweep of laughter that washed over the room, a swell of applause that broke out.

The justice of the peace gently cleared her throat. “Traditionally, that sort of business goes at the end, Mr. Queen.”

Oliver wiped his eyes with the heel of his hand that wasn’t wrapped around Felicity’s. “Sorry, your Honor. Couldn’t help myself. But uh, you can’t blame me there, can you?”

Her mouth quirked in amusement. “No, I certainly can’t. Well, we are gathered here today for reasons that are increasingly obvious,” she started.

The rest of the ceremony passed in a blur for Oliver. He remembered, vaguely, saying the traditional vows, sliding the ring over Felicity’s finger. He remembered the look in her eyes when she’d said hers, slid the simple band he’d insisted on over his finger.

He would tell his children that he’d held his breath until he could kiss her again.

He wouldn’t mention the face in the crowd that, in his memory, stuck out the most to him. Malcolm Merlyn, invited to keep up the appearance of an alliance, sat towards the middle of the congregation, and as he and Felicity passed on their way out, Malcolm’s face was carefully blank -- the kind of look he used to get right before he would find a brand new way to wound Tommy. It sent a shiver right down Oliver’s spine, even in that moment. He pulled Felicity even closer as they walked down the aisle, away from him.

At the back of the tent, standing with his arms crossed, tears streaming down his face, stood Yuri. Felicity broke into a little sob the moment she saw him, dropped Oliver’s hand, and ran into her uncle’s arms.
Oliver waited while they whispered to each other in Russian -- Yuri was fiercely apologetic, and Felicity was so glad to see him that she waved off his apologies.

“You wear your hair down?” Yuri finally said in English.

“Just for you,” Felicity said. “You always say you like it this way.”

“Moira gave you a hood, I see. Perhaps this will be a successful merger after all. Queen.” Yuri extended his hand, shook Oliver’s. “I didn’t get a chance to threaten you properly before the ceremony.”

“There’s no need to,” Oliver said. “Felicity’s imagination is terrifying enough to keep me in line.”

Yuri nodded. “This is, of course, very true. But I keep you from something -- that woman you hired to organize all of this, she is waving at you frantically. I will stop monopolizing your attention. Felicity, you will save me a dance?”

She nodded. “I was hoping you wouldn’t mind stepping in for Daddy. I um -- always kind of pictured dancing with you, since you took care of me.”

“It would be a joy, my tulip. And Davidov -- in heaven, he will be very jealous of me. It will be worth it.”

Oliver pulled Felicity close as she nodded, tears falling from her eyes. “Thanks, Uncle Yuri.”

“You’re welcome.”

Oliver’s plan for immediately after the ceremony -- to pull Felicity to a secluded area and kiss her thoroughly enough that she would have to reapply the bright red lipstick which surely must have annoyed his mother was foiled. The photographer insisted on more formal portraits of the two of them together, the wedding party (there was a shot Oliver loved, in particular, of Tommy and Thea sticking their tongues out at each other and looking so much like brother and sister that he wondered how they’d missed it at all), family portraits. It was exhausting, even for Oliver, who had spent much of his life being photographed for one thing or another.
Then the outdoor space was frantically transformed, as guests milled about with cocktails in the
manor. Oliver tried to talk Felicity into sneaking upstairs, but she resisted his efforts, introducing him
instead to more members of the Bratva in Starling, putting his Russian skills to the test. They were
able, for the most part, to avoid Oliver’s mother and Malcolm Merlyn.

Tommy kept them both in champagne and Thea seemed to be on dress duty, helping Felicity
maneuver through the room with grace. Dinner and drinks followed the cocktail hour. And then
someone handed Tommy a microphone.

“I’m Tommy Merlyn,” he said with a small, self-deprecating smile, “for those of you who uh -- don’t
know. I’m Oliver’s best man, and this is where I give a speech. I did some research, because public
speaking is not my forte -- about what I was supposed to say. The Internet said, you know -- relate a
personal tale, preferably embarrassing, make ‘em laugh, then make ‘em cry. But uh, my mother --
she was Irish, you know? And um, she always used to say that if a story couldn’t make her laugh
while she was crying then it wasn’t any kind of a story at all.

“This is the story about the kind of man you’ve decided is right for the rest of your life, Felicity
Queen,” Tommy said, “and I waited to tell you this story because um, it’s too late now, and Oliver
can’t kill me because there are too many witnesses.” Knowing laughter broke out in the crowd. “This
is the story of how Oliver Queen and I, aged sixteen and fifteen and nine months, respectively, stole
a taxi cab and drove from Starling City Preparatory Academy to my mother’s clinic in the Glades,
where we were promptly arrested.

“You should know,” Tommy continued, ignoring the way Oliver’s eyebrows were crawling up his
forehead, “that none of this was my idea.”

“Bullshit!” Oliver said, laughing.

“I have the microphone, and therefore, I am right. It was not my idea,” Tommy said. “That’s
important. What happened was all Oliver’s fault. See uh -- my mom died when I was a kid -- no,
don’t awww for me I’m not crying in public -- and it was the anniversary of her death. Sort of a
rough day for a kid. But Oliver, um, from the day she died he swore we were brothers.” Several of
the Dearden men in the crowd nodded solemnly. “And every year he’d come up with some crazy
stunt we’d pull, you know, to get my mind off of it. That’s how Headmaster Dickens’ car ended up
in the gymnasium, actually, in the spring of ‘01, for those of you in the audience who know what I’m
talking about.”

Raucous applause and laughter rippled through the room. “Yes, that’s right. The statute of limitations
is over and I’m owning up to that one. Taking credit, if you will. It was a bastard getting that Lexus
through the doors but worth the sheer fury on his face.”
Felicity took Oliver’s hand, and squeezed while she laughed.

“So this was the year that Oliver decided all of our pranks thus far had not gone far enough. Had not been outrageous enough. Oliver says to me, ‘Merlyn,’ -- we went through this phase where we addressed each other by our last names everywhere we went and it was fucking adorable, thank you very much -- ‘Merlyn, we need to do something epic and I know just the thing’,” Tommy swallowed, and reached for his glass of water. Oliver ducked his head, shaking it. “Uh -- Oliver says we should break out of school, you know, drive to the clinic and give every cent in our bank accounts to the clinic. That was the year my father and I first had uh -- creative differences over what to do with the trust in my mother’s name. I was just a snot-nosed kid but I knew it would piss him off and so did Oliver. In that way, it was a double-bonus.

“So Oliver says we should take his car. We’re, at this point, on a mission from God.” The room chuckled. Oliver laced his fingers with Felicity’s. “Well -- we get out of Algebra, and thank god for Mr. Pinsiotti’s chronic narcolepsy problem, that wasn’t hard at all -- we get out the back doors of the school. And who’s standing by Oliver’s car?”

Oliver shook his head and muttered under his breath. “Headmaster Dickbag.”

“Headmaster Dickbag,” Tommy said triumphantly. “Just walking around it, looking for contraband or something. So we can’t use Oliver’s car. But someone had left a taxi running in front of the school. Oliver Queen, upstanding member of society, and your husband, Felicity, this man turns to me and says, I swear to Christ, ‘Let’s steal a car’. But you have to understand, he said it like ‘let’s open presents’, like it was the best idea ever.”

Felicity laughed and laid her head on Oliver’s shoulder. “I believe it,” she said softly.

“Let me tell you about this taxi. It was a sweet ride. It smelled like…” Tommy waved a hand. “Well... an indescribable sewer, really. It went zero to sixty in three point five minutes. And Oliver still took the turn out of the parking lot on two wheels. The cops were waiting for us at the clinic -- apparently Oliver and I hadn’t been subtle enough about our grand plans -- someone at school narked on us.

“So we’re getting arrested for the very first time. And instead of calling his mother or the family lawyer, like someone who’s not an idiot, Oliver calls the clinic and makes an anonymous donation in my mother’s memory from the county jail.”
“So, that’s the kind of man you’ve married, Felicity. The kind of man who will convince you to skip 10th grade Algebra, steal a running taxicab, and forget to call a lawyer when in jail. That’s the man I’ve been proud to call a friend and a brother for all of these years. I am entrusting him to you, and I know you can trust yourself with him, because Oliver’s always been the kind of my-family-is-your-family, think-of-somebody-else first man that he doesn’t see himself as. He’s a good man, Felicity. He’s the best man. From now on, I’m entrusting him to you. He’s yours. Take care of him. I hope you have years and years of happiness together.” Oliver was fire engine red, he knew it. Felicity was crying, and so was he. Tommy lifted his champagne glass. “To the bride and groom.”

Everyone echoed his sentiments and Oliver felt Felicity’s hand on his arm. He turned to her and she kissed him, several soft kisses in a row. Her hand lingered on his cheek. “Because I’m sure he wishes he could,” she whispered in his ear.

Oliver nodded, unable to speak. Thankfully the DJ announced that it was time for the first dance, and Oliver took Felicity’s hand and led her on the floor, the gentle sweep of her dress behind her the only sound he could really focus on. Oliver tucked his arms around Felicity and she laid her head on his chest as the soft strains of “Can’t Help Falling in Love With You” played over the speaker.

Her hand in his. The sweet, pure scent of her hair underneath of his nose. His ring on her finger. And everyone’s eyes in the room on them. He longed for the moment when they would no longer be scrutinized and he could act on the way he was feeling, touch her hair, kiss her hands, lay her down on a bed and persuade her with his tongue to never, ever leave him.

Tommy caught his eye across the room, gave him two thumbs up, and Oliver gave him a watery smile in return. Felicity nuzzled closer and Oliver closed his eyes. With enough effort, he could imagine they were the only ones in the room.

And that was bliss.

**

Tommy watched his best friend turn in gentle circles around the dance floor with Felicity in his arms, a sweet ache taking up residence somewhere just south of his breastbone, an old familiar pain. He caught sight of Laurel Lance across the room, talking with one of their classmates from Starling Prep, and briefly contemplated going over, pouring lemon juice on that old wound.

Thea Queen, though, bless her beautiful soul, seemed to have an instinct for when he was about to make a poor choice, and hopping up on a barstool next to him, laid her head on his shoulder. “That’s never going to work, Tommy,” she said, her words a little slurred, maybe from exhaustion, but
probably from the champagne she was very likely sneaking.

“I know,” Tommy said.

“I mean, Laurel Lance is dyed-in-the-wool down-to-her-bones law enforcement do-gooder. And those are good bones,” Thea said. “They’re just not bones that are compatible with your bones.”

“I know,” Tommy said again, gesturing for another whiskey on the rocks.

“Besides which, you owe it to… whoever, to get the hell over Oliver and Felicity before you jump in the sack with them, right?” Thea asked.

Tommy chuckled. “That would be a hell of a trick, kid.”

“Exactly, old man,” Thea said, reaching for his whiskey glass. Tommy neatly pulled it away from her. “Oh, don’t be mean, Tommy.”

“Don’t get drunk at your brother’s wedding,” Tommy said, suddenly bone-deep tired with the day. “Come on, Thea.”

Thea pulled back. “I’m not.”


“Clearly, you don’t,” Thea said, signalling the bar tender. “Water for me, apparently. Please. Oliver tells me you’re going to train me to use the gift he gave me this morning.”

The DJ had moved on from the first dance and the father of the bride dance, and loud, obnoxious dance music took over. The crowd swarmed on the floor, and Tommy noticed out of the corner of his eye that Felicity was making an excuse and heading for the exit. Probably needed a break, he thought sympathetically.

Cold dread swept over him when he noticed that his father had also noticed that Felicity was leaving.
Tommy scanned the security around the room -- surely someone would follow her. But no one did. He was already reaching for his knife on instinct when he remembered Thea had said something to him.

“Not now,” Tommy said. “But eventually, yeah. I’m going to go for a little bit of a walk. The air’s getting stale in here.”

Thea nodded, reached for his hand and squeezed it. “Okay. I love you, Tommy. You know that, right?”

He bent and kissed her cheek. “It’s all that gets me through the night sometimes, angel.”

He knew how to be the center of attention, and he knew how to slip through a crowd unnoticed, and he used the latter skill to get across the dance floor to the exit. The night air assaulted him, almost bracing in its freshness, the mist from the afternoon having died away to pure, oppressive humidity.

His father moved well, always had -- so soft and so quiet that unless you had trained with him, he was almost impossible to perceive. But Tommy had, and however brief and aborted his time with his father in Nanda Parbat had been, he’d learned some valuable lessons there about his father’s… habits.

But his father had learned next to nothing about him. Tommy had resented that at the time, the way all of his efforts had fallen short of some invisible marker that Malcolm expected him to meet and overcome. Now, Tommy nearly grinned, because he was more than ready for his father, and his father was nowhere near ready for him.

Tommy had his knife, his new, beautiful, perfectly weighted, sculpted for his hand, knife out and ready as he followed his father. It was easy enough to sink into the role of the Shadow, swift and silent and unobtrusively deadly. Tommy waited, and he watched. With escalating tensions between the Merlyns and the Deardens, he didn’t think his father would attempt something against Felicity, not seriously, but he couldn’t take the chance.

He was ready when Malcolm reached for the gun. Regardless of whether he meant to use it or not, Tommy couldn’t tolerate his father reaching for a weapon around Felicity.

He attacked with fury. The first brutal swipe of his knife caught his father unawares and cut a swath of his skin from forearm to shoulder, as Malcolm lifted an arm to block the attack. “Tommy?” he
asked, his eyes going wide.

Tommy didn’t respond, he just lifted his foot and kicked his father as hard as he could in the center of Malcolm’s mass.

Malcolm jumped up, reaching for the gun in its holster. Tommy threw his knife, knocking the gun from his father’s hand. Enraged, Malcolm abandoned the gun and attacked.

Merciless, swift and brutal. They exchanged blows rapidly, panting with exertion. Tommy bled from his mouth, ached in his ribs.

“You’ve improved some since we last fought, boy,” Malcolm sneered. “Should’ve spent less time fucking Queen, more time on your technique. Or is it true what they say and Queen uses you as his live dildo to fuck his girl, hm?”

“You don’t --” Tommy swung his weight around, taking a risk on a roundhouse kick to his father’s face. Malcolm caught it with his hands, threw Tommy’s weight backwards. The impact with the ground knocked the wind out of Tommy and he gasped for breath. “You don’t get to touch her. Or talk about her that way.”

“Oh bless you, idiot boy, you’ve fallen in love with Queen’s girl again, haven’t you?” Malcolm chuckled, putting his foot on Tommy’s chest.

Tommy kicked up, aiming for his father’s groin. Malcolm wheezed and fell to the ground. “You’ve underestimated me again.”

“I can see that,” Malcolm said, as they both struggled to their feet. “I don’t have time to play these games.”

Malcolm attacked again, furious, his face deadly calm. Tommy couldn’t escape the memory of that face, coming after him with a belt, once with a poker. The flash of memory was the moment of weakness Malcolm needed.

The knife was on the ground by his feet. He picked it up and rushed Tommy. Nothing could have prepared him for the impact. Malcolm pushed him up against the wall of Queen Manor, his own knife pressed against his artery.
“Go on, twitch, boy. I’d love to see you bleed out on your own knife.”

Tommy reached up, tried to pry his father’s forearm off of his windpipe. “Fuck you,” he whispered.

“I’m not the one airing family dirty laundry in front of all of those nice wedding guests,” Malcolm snarled. “No, I think… I think fuck you.”

The distinctive sound of a safety clicking off a handgun had them both pausing. “Get away from him,” Felicity said -- in a voice Tommy had never heard her use before. It was cold and flat. “Get away from him now.”

The knife fell to the ground with a thump. Malcolm slowly stepped back and turned to face Felicity.

“Don’t you fucking speak,” Felicity said. “It is all I can do to keep from putting six in you right where you stand.”

“Do you want to start a war?” Malcolm asked, a smile slowly growing across his face. “Then go ahead, Mrs. Queen. The foot soldiers just love matriarchs who start wars on their first day in office.”

“Oh it wouldn’t be my fault,” Felicity said sweetly. “I can’t have you running around threatening my soldiers, see? I can’t have you running around hurting my family.”

“Family or sex toy?” Malcolm asked, with a chuckle.

“Diggle?” Felicity called. “I’m wearing a white dress. Pistol-whip the idiot. Drop him by the side of the road somewhere for me, please?”

“You wouldn’t dare --”

John Diggle, like some kind of avenging angel, appeared out of the shadows. With ruthless efficiency, he did as Felicity asked. Malcolm crumpled to the ground. Felicity handed him her gun and rushed over to Tommy.
“Oh, your beautiful face,” she muttered, framing it with her hands, rubbing her thumbs over some of the already-forming bruises. “Are you hurt anywhere else?”

Tommy shook his head. “Just my dignity.”

“You saved my life,” Felicity said. “We’ll have to let the soldiers know there was an attack. We were expecting this. Just… not so soon.”

“Yeah, well,” Tommy said, rubbing the back of his neck. “We can leave out the part where he kicked my ass.”

“He didn’t,” Felicity said briefly. “You would have won out in the end. I know it.” But her hands were shaking, and so was her voice.

“You’ve been gone from your own wedding for a while, Mrs. Queen,” Diggle said softly. “I suggest you take Mr. Merlyn back to the party. Sara and I will deal with this mess here.”

Felicity held out her hand. “What do you say, Tommy? Take a turn around the dance floor with me before your cheek goes an impressive shade of purple?”

“Thought you’d never ask,” Tommy said.

He held her hand, loosely, back to the reception. Drew her onto the dance floor. Caught Oliver’s eye, who grabbed Thea’s hand and pulled her out as well, and the four of them swayed gently close to each other to the strains of “The Way You Look Tonight”.

Tommy would have liked to focus on the sensation of dancing with Felicity, the beat of the music, the softness of her hands. Instead, his heart was racing and blood was singing through his veins.

Oliver finally got close enough that Tommy could lean over. “Malcolm made an attempt to do something to Felicity,” he said.
Oliver nodded, his eyes immediately shuttered. “Are you both okay?”

“Yes,” Felicity said immediately. “We were expecting this, remember?”


Felicity nodded. Tommy nodded once, and pulled Felicity close. Executing a quick turn, he sang under his breath. “There is nothing for me but to love you... and the way you look tonight.”

Felicity laid her head on his shoulder, her lips close enough to his neck that she might have kissed him there. “Same goes.”

Tommy’s heart stuttered, might have stopped completely for a moment. But he didn’t correct her. There was nothing to argue about.
Fractures

Chapter Summary

Act Two opens with a bang as Tommy, Felicity and Oliver try to navigate life now that Felicity and Oliver are married.

Chapter Notes

Many many thanks go out to the reviewers of the last chapter -- I’m so sorry I haven’t gotten to respond to your reviews, but it’s my priority for the end of the week. Thank you for your patience while I took a short break.

Thank you to Abbie, who gives tirelessly of her time, and Kris, and Effie and Rosie, the Google Docs crew, whose commentary on this chapter was hilarious and awesome and kept me going.

I hope you enjoy Act Two! Big things are coming for our threesome.

Lian Yu, 6 years ago

The rickety plane seemed to do nothing but bounce over the China Sea. The pilot Tommy had hired to take him to Lian Yu airspace seemed to take it in stride, so Tommy determined that other than a strong dose of Dramamine, he would do his best not to freak out about the way the plane seemed to get tossed on the thermal wind currents.

“You sure this is the place your friend landed?” The pilot asked, yelling into his headpiece. “Doesn’t look like there’s anyone living there.”

“That’s the way Moira would want it,” Tommy said, lowly enough that the pilot wouldn’t hear. Then he lifted his voice. “Yes, I’m sure.”

“You going to be okay jumping out of a rig like this?” The pilot asked, for about the third time in the past hour.

“Oh, you know us idiots with too much money and too much testosterone,” Tommy said easily, “this isn’t my first time making an ill-advised decision regarding parachutes and airplanes.”
“Hey, it’s your closed-casket funeral, kid,” the pilot said, and he threw open the back hatch. “Any time now ought to put you on the southwest coast of the island.”

“Awesome,” Tommy said. He’d chosen that beach at random. There was no way to know where Oliver and the people Moira were paying to train him were making camp, not with the satellite images Tommy had used to figure out which island Oliver was on.

“Good luck, Merlyn,” the pilot said. “Hope you find your friend.”

“Me too,” Tommy said, closing his eyes. Then he was running, jumping, and falling. There was always a moment, every time he did this, where the wind rushing in his face stole his breath and he felt weightless and free, right before gravity tugged hard at his center. Always a moment when he considered what it would be like to just -- fall.

But Oliver was expecting him, counting on him -- even if he didn’t know for sure that Tommy would find him, he knew Tommy was looking for him. Or Tommy hoped he knew. He pulled the chute, felt the familiar sudden jerk on his body weight, and started to direct his fall.

He was running when he hit the ground, letting the chute fall away. He gathered the material back up, shoved it in his pack. He’d packed enough rations for a few days, several bottles of clear water, a good knife, and an extra pair of socks. He hadn’t learned much in boy scouts, but the ‘be prepared’ thing had stuck with him.

He wasn’t prepared, however, for the arrow that came whizzing out of the trees, nearly striking him in the shoulder. He didn’t remember much of the training he’d received, very reluctantly, from his father briefly in Nanda Parbat, but he did remember that when projectiles were headed your way, you hit the deck and crawled to cover.

“Freeze!” A harsh voice, thick with an Australian accent, cut across the thin air of Lian Yu. Since there was nowhere for Tommy to run, and nowhere for him to hide, he did exactly as the voice asked and, and out of habit, raised his hands.

“Don’t shoot!” He yelled back.

The man running towards him was built like a brick house -- tall and thick with muscles. His sheer size was intimidating. The look on his face more so. “Who are you?” The man demanded. “And
“I’m Tommy Merlyn, and I’m with the agency of… exactly no one,” Tommy said. “I’m here because I’ve got information that leads me to believe Oliver Queen is here.”

“Oliver Queen is dead.”

Tommy shook his head. “No, he’s definitely not. They tried to sell me that story and it’s just not working.”

“Hm, fascinating,” the man said. Then he lifted his arm, brought it down with speed and force and everything went black.

When Tommy blinked his eyes open again, he was lying on the floor of what appeared to be an old airplane. And Oliver Queen’s beautiful face was across from him. Tommy closed his eyes and swallowed.

“I know you’re not a dream because I can smell you from here,” he said on a groan. “Not in the good way.”

Oliver’s eyes lit up and he grinned. “You fucking idiot.” He launched himself across the space and wrapped Tommy in his arms. They clung to each other on the floor of the airplane. Tommy buried his face in Oliver’s shoulder, breathing hard and inhaling.

“You’re alive,” Tommy found himself saying over and over again. “You’re alive.”

“And you found me,” Oliver said, pulling back. “I don’t know how you found me.”

“It wasn’t easy,” Tommy admitted. “And I’m sorry it took me this long, but I’m here. And I’ve got us transport off of this island in the next forty-eight hours.”

Oliver was clearly shocked, not nearly as thrilled as Tommy had assumed he would be. “Off of the island?”
“Yeah,” Tommy said, slowly. “What do you say?”

Oliver shook his head, disbelief coloring his eyes. “I…” he sighed. “I want to.”

“You want to?” Tommy got to his feet. “Oliver, some Australian dude knocked me out. I jumped out of an airplane. I flew across the North China Sea in an airplane built by Matchbox, all to rescue your stupid ass. Come home with me.”

“What do I have to go home to?” Oliver lifted his eyes to Tommy’s.

Tommy felt it like a punch in his gut.

“Think about it, Tommy.” Oliver fisted his hands. “Dad starts to figure out some of the hinky shit she was up to with Malcolm, figures out that Malcolm is… that Thea is his… And Dad’s dead. She catches us together and she ships me off over here because being with you makes me weak.”

Tommy closed his eyes. “I guess… I guess that’s not much to come home to,” he admitted.

“If I came back home with you,” Oliver said, “before Moira thought I was ready? No way she’d let me be with you. If she didn’t kill me on principle. Kill us both on principle. But let’s say she doesn’t -- that she’s amused by my escape and not enraged by it. We’d either have to hide, like we were before, and hope she doesn’t kill us, or we’d have to go back to being just brothers. Just friends. And are we just gonna -- live that way for the rest of our lives? Can you do it?”

The hope he’d been living on was slowly dying inside of his chest. “So what -- I leave you here with crazy Australian guy? And I go home alone?”

Oliver dropped his chin to his chest. “That crazy Australian guy -- he’s training me.”

“To do what?” Tommy asked.

Oliver’s voice was cold. “To be strong. To think on my feet.” He paused. “To kill.”
“Oliver.” Tommy’s stomach twisted. This was not going the way that he wanted it to go. Not at all. “Is that what you want?”

“No.” Oliver shook his head. “But it might be what we need. You have to go back to Starling.” He sighed. “Moira -- she didn’t blink when she ordered Dad dead, she doesn’t care that she’s ruining our lives. It’s bad enough it’s us. But someday it’s going to be Thea. Thea’s life that she’s tearing apart so she can remake her into someone capable of leading the Family.”

“So I go back to Starling and -- what do I do in the meantime, Oliver?”

“Watch our sister,” Oliver said fiercely. “Just like we planned, back in Starling. I’m going to learn everything I can possibly learn. I’m going to let Moira think she’s made me into the kind of man she needs me to be.”

“Oliver.” Tommy couldn’t keep the edge of desperation out of his voice.

“And whatever game you need to play to stay alive in Starling City,” Oliver continued, “that’s the game you should play. For Thea.”

“Right,” Tommy said, locking his emotions down. “For Thea.”

“According to tradition, we’ve got something like six years before Moira has to start handing authority over to Thea,” Oliver said. “Six years. I -- I will try not to be away in all that time. Slade and Yao Fei say if I make good progress, Moira will let me go back home. She has a plan for me, I guess. Something she wants me to do if I survive this process.”

“Of course she has a plan,” Tommy huffed out a laugh. “There’s always a plan.”

“Keep an eye on Moira. We’re going to get Thea out of this life, somehow, and we can’t do that if we don’t have an idea of what she’s up to,” Oliver said, sighing. “I’ll try and find a way to stay in touch.”

Tommy nodded, slowly. “All right.”
“I know this isn’t the way you wanted this to go,” Oliver said.

Tommy laughed so he wouldn’t cry. “Oliver, I should know better by now than to ever think things will turn out the way I would like them to.”

“I can go back with you. I just thought we were in agreement, then and now, that Thea…”

Tommy nodded. “Thea gets out. Thea deserves better.”

“Yeah,” Oliver said. “She does.” Tears started to stream down his face. “But it means you have to leave.”

“It means you have to stay here. By yourself.” Tommy crossed the room, wrapped Oliver in his arms. “I’m sorry.”

Oliver buried his head in Tommy’s shoulder, and Tommy threaded his fingers through Oliver’s hair. “I missed you.”

“I know. I missed you too.” Like an arm, maybe, or a leg. How hard it’d been to draw a full breath.

“I want you to know that this is the last thing I want. If it wasn’t for Thea, I would take off with you tomorrow,” Oliver said.

Tommy bent, kissed Oliver’s head. “I know. She misses you too, you know. She’s… probably not going to speak to me because I left her there alone.”

Oliver bunched his hands in Tommy’s shirt. “I…”

Oliver lurched forward and pressed his lips to Tommy’s, and all Tommy could think about was, Oliver’s hands on his face, then on his neck, then playing with the hem of his t-shirt. “Really, Oliver?”
“One last time,” Oliver said softly. “If you want.”

Wanting had never been the problem. Whether this would cauterize the wound or leave it bleeding, Tommy couldn’t say. Either way, he’d have to leave Oliver on his own on an island with two of Moira’s lackeys while they… remade him.

His hands were already rougher, his lips were chapped in a way that he hadn’t ever allowed them to be before. And his body, well-kept before the island, was leaner, harder than it had ever been. Oliver had always been good, but six months without Tommy had injected an edge of desperation that had never been in their encounters before.

Oliver dropped to his knees and had Tommy’s jeans unzipped in a matter of seconds. The Oliver that had given Tommy his first-ever blow job would have teased him, playing with Tommy’s expectations before following through.

This Oliver? This Oliver braced his hands on Tommy’s thighs, pulled Tommy’s boxer briefs down and took Tommy inside of his mouth.

Tommy went light-headed with how fast he went hard. He leaned up against the wall of the airplane and cursed. “Jesus fucking Christ, Oliver.”

Oliver released him, hard and quick, so it made an audible sound and scraped his fingernails down Tommy’s thighs. “You’re going to remember this.”

Tommy’s vision went blurry with tears, but he threaded his fingers through Oliver’s hair, pushed gently on Oliver’s head, and Oliver got the message. He sucked the head of Tommy’s cock, his tongue sweeping across the head. Tommy pumped his hips, and Oliver took it, passively letting Tommy fuck his mouth.

Tommy caressed Oliver’s scalp, laid his head back against the wall, gently thrusting. He didn’t want this to be over, not any time soon. If Oliver wanted to get him off fast, he had his ways, Tommy knew, so he wanted to savor the moment, as well. Would he ever forget the way Oliver looked, right in this moment? On his knees because he knew what they were giving up when they were giving up each other.

“You have to promise me,” Tommy gasped, as Oliver flicked his tongue against the head of his cock. “You have to promise me to come back.”
Oliver’s hands gripped Tommy’s thighs, but Tommy gently held him in place. He didn’t want Oliver to stop, wanted Oliver to listen.

“I can handle it if we can’t… do this,” Tommy said. “I can, I promise. I just can’t handle it if I never get to see you again.”

Oliver lurched forward, opening the back of his throat, and the pleasure was so intense that Tommy arched his back. “Fuck you, Oliver. Fuck…”

Tommy was coming, then, so hard he thought he might see stars, and Oliver was jumping to his feet, holding Tommy’s face in his hands, and kissing him. He tasted like Tommy and some sort of exotic plant and he smelled ripe. And his hands were huge and his mouth was dominating and Tommy? Tommy was crying.

“I don’t want to go back without you,” he managed. “What am I supposed to do in Starling City without you?”

“Stay alive until I can come back for you,” Oliver said, and he was crying too. “It’s going to be lonely without you here.”

Tommy ducked his head, and Oliver touched his forehead to his. They stood, the two of them, breathing in unison.

Tommy reached for Oliver, for his cock, but Oliver shook his head. “Not unless you really want to, Tommy. I don’t want to make this harder on you. I just… I want to hold you.”

“Nothing you can do is going to make this easier,” Tommy said. “Oliver.”

“Tommy.”

They kissed over, and over, and over again. Sweet, long kiss. Languid kisses. Kisses that acted as though they had all the time in the world, although their hearts racing belied the truth.
Slowly, they moved together to the floor, arms wrapped around each other. In quiet whispers, they plotted and planned. Eventually, the conversation dried out. They could have slept. But they didn’t. They stayed awake, hands clasped, until the sun came up over the island and it was time to say goodbye.

**

Felicity snapped her bubbe’s quilt over the bed in the family wing of Queen Manor. Her wedding ring glistened in the light and she hummed as she smoothed out the pattern over the expensive mattress. A quiet knock at the door drew her attention.

“Come in,” she called, and she moved around the bed to the nightstand where she kept her gun.

“Miss Smoak,” Moira said, as she entered the room. She paused a moment, tilted her head, as if she had forgotten. “Oh, excuse me. Mrs. Queen.”

Felicity smiled. “What can I do for you, Moira?”

“I was just checking to see how you and Oliver were settling in,” Moira said, playing with the strand of pearls around her neck. “That’s a beautiful quilt. I never would have thought to put it in this room, however.”

“Thank you,” Felicity said, running her hand fondly over it, ignoring the slight disdain in Moira’s voice. “Family heirloom. I took it with me from Starling the first time, and I never took it off my bed in Russia. It wouldn’t feel like home without it. Oliver and I are settling in just fine, thank you very much.”

“I want you to feel welcome to make any changes you need to,” Moira said graciously. “I haven’t lost sight of the fact that this house is now Oliver’s. If there’s anything you want done --”

“We’re thinking of having Tommy moved back into the family wing,” Felicity said brightly.

“Is that so?” Moira asked, raising her eyebrow.
“He’s just been indispensable to me as I make the adjustment to be here,” Felicity said. “And Oliver’s a different person with him around -- lighter, easier. The suite next to ours is unoccupied, isn’t it?”

“Uh, yes. Thea had made mention that she might --”

“Thea’s excited as well,” Felicity continued. “Apparently she’s got visions of sleepovers dancing in her head.”

“Sleepovers?”

“Late night movies,” Felicity said, waving her hands. “I can’t get the boys talked out of this state-of-the-art sound system.”

“We have a theater room,” Moira protested.

“Not quite like cuddling on the same couch, throwing popcorn at the screen in your pajamas,” Felicity said. “We’re going to do our best to make it as homey as possible.”

“Well,” Moira huffed. “I… You will likely disturb the soldiers, all this ruckus… they’re used to a more sedate wing.”

“Oh, Moira,” Felicity said with wide eyes, “If you’re nervous about the noise… You know, I’ve been thinking, perhaps it’s best you and Walter got a wing to yourselves?”

“That’s… generous of you,” Moira said, laying her hand flat on her chest. “I wouldn’t want you to go through the trouble of…”

“No, it wouldn’t be trouble for me. There’s that lovely suite of rooms on the west side with the attached bath and the sitting room,” Felicity said. “Some minor redecoration and it will feel just like home. That way we won’t disturb you with our rambunctiousness.”

“That’s… thoughtful of you,” Moira managed.
“Oh, it’s nothing,” Felicity said. “Now, tell me.” She turned her attention to Moira, crossed her arms over her chest. “What do you think of the drapes in here?”

**

Tommy entered the door of the Queen mansion, whistling. It was a bright and sunny day, not as unrelentingly, miserably hot as it had been, and he’d just completed a major purchase of Queen Consolidated stock. Or rather, one of his subsidiaries had. The penthouse he’d purchased for Oliver and Felicity to live in was on the market, and an offer had come in at five percent over what he’d paid for it, a tidy little profit he’d tuck back into his trust. If he chose to take it -- he still hadn’t decided, a few improvements, he could probably increase the profit margin to seven, eight percent…

He made a brief detour to the kitchen and stole a green apple from a basket Raisa kept on the counter. The crispness and acidity exploded across his tongue and made him grin. “Simple pleasures,” he muttered under his breath. He turned on his heel to go but was caught by the distant sound of someone calling his name.

“Oh, Mr. Merlyn, Mr. Merlyn!” Raisa ran up to him. “I hate to bother you, but this package just came for Ms. Felicity, and I thought perhaps you might be going…”

“I’m headed up that way,” Tommy said, extending his hand to take the thickly padded envelope. “Thanks, Raisa.”

“Perhaps you might also have a word with Ms. Felicity?” Raisa said, stepping forward. “She’s got Mrs. Moira in quite a… mood.”

“She does?” Tommy asked, his eyebrows raised.

“Not even twenty-four hours back from her honeymoon and she wants to go… changing things,” Raisa said, wiping her hands off on her apron.

“Changing what things?” Tommy asked.

“Tommy!” Thea bounded into the kitchen and, wrapping one arm around his shoulders, swung
around him to kiss his cheek. “I didn’t know you were back!”

Tommy wrapped his arm around her middle and kissed her cheek in greeting. “Only just. I had a meeting with my accountant.”

“I’m falling asleep already,” Thea said, laying her head on his shoulder. “Dull, dull, dull.”

Tommy smirked. “Hm. I was about to run this package up to Felicity. Is she in Ollie’s suite?”

“I think so,” Thea said. “She’s got plans from an architect she’s looking over.”

Tommy’s eyebrows twitched. “An architect?”

“I told you, Mr. Merlyn,” Raisa said, “changes.”

“Interesting,” Tommy said. “Well, I’ll just go up and check in on her, then.”

Thea bounced on her toes. “I think you’re really going to like what Felicity has planned.”

The apple suddenly seemed like a stone in his stomach. “Hm, a plan? Well, I already like the sound of that.” He fixed a bright smile on his face while Thea tugged him up the stairs.

Thea pushed open the door of the suite of rooms Oliver and Felicity were making their own. “Felicity! Look who I found!”

“Oh good!” Felicity darted out of the bedroom, her hair in a high, ruthlessly straight ponytail. She’d removed her glasses for the wedding and most of the engagement festivities, but they were back now. Her purple dress flirted with her mid-thighs and swirled as she moved at a quick clip. She embraced Tommy enthusiastically. “Hey there!”

She smelled like lemons and coconut oil -- slightly different than usual, and when she tucked her chin down and buried her nose in his shoulder, he allowed himself to hold her for a moment, cataloguing the way she made him feel. Soon enough he’d have to have the strength to wean himself
“I’m going to leave you two,” Thea said, her bright voice shaking him out of his reverie. “But I’m so excited!”

Felicity grinned, biting her lower lip as she waved good-bye to Thea and pulled away from Tommy. “Do you want something to drink, Tommy?”

“Uh, it depends,” Tommy said, rubbing the back of his neck. “Whatever you’re up to has Thea excited and Moira six different kind of pissed, or so Raisa says. Am I going to need a drink?”

“Hopefully not,” Felicity said. “Unless you like a drink to celebrate? Oliver wanted to be here. He’s supposed to be back soon. I had the most awful craving for Indian food I think I’ve ever had in my life. There wasn’t any to be had on the island.”

“No, no Indian food on the Queens’ private island,” Tommy agreed. “It’s very sad. But uh, did Oliver make you one of his world-famous grilled cheeses? They’re world famous because they’re terrible.”

“I try to keep Oliver away from the kitchen except for in extreme pancake emergencies,” Felicity agreed. “It’s better for everyone involved.”

“He makes a mean chili,” Tommy countered. “I mean that it’s literally mean. Every time he makes it it’s like -- you just don’t know if your lips are going to make it or not. Next time you’re craving something spicy, you should try his chili.”

“I’ll take that under advisement,” Felicity said. “Come on, I had them move the sofa from the penthouse in here. What do you think?”

Tommy could close his eyes and just remember what it had been like -- the four of them, all lounging together on that immense piece of furniture, curled together, end to end. “Uh, it looks a little fun in here with all the, you know -- wainscoting and all.”

“Hm. It is a touch fussy for my taste,” Felicity said. “But we’ll be changing things around. Oliver assures me he’s not overly attached to anything in this room.”
“He shouldn’t be,” Tommy said, dropping onto the sofa and rubbing his hands over the material. “This isn’t his childhood room. No -- Oliver was, hm… other side of the hallway, three doors down? There’s a tree outside of his window that is perfectly climbable. It facilitated a lot of… trouble.”

“Did it,” Felicity said, grinning. “Lots of sneaking out, going to make out with girls and party?”

“Mm,” Tommy agreed. “And some minor to moderate drug use, some larceny, some petty theft. We were criminals from the start, Ollie and I.”

“Criminals or bored little boys with too much money and time on your hands?” Felicity asked, sitting next to him. She laid her head on her palm.

“Nah, no excuses for the way we behaved,” Tommy said. “We left a wake of destruction in the path of our mutual narcissism.”

“You’re not being very kind to your past self,” Felicity said.

Tommy sighed. “There’s no reason to be. But what about you? What kind of mischief did past Felicity Smoak get up to? Was there a convenient tree outside of your window?”

“Ah, that would be a no,” Felicity said. She dropped her hands to her skirt and played with the hem. “No trees, convenient or otherwise. No best friends to convince me to do anything… narcissistic. No friends at all, really. I mean, not that I was… sad. I wasn’t, really. I just - I was this American girl who couldn’t shut up, you know? And Uncle Yuri was… well, Uncle Yuri. Not exactly the kind of person your average Russian teenager wants to get to know.”

Tommy knitted his eyebrows together. “Friends at all?”

“Not to speak of. Of the, um… in-real-life variety. Friends on the internet, of course. Uh… discussion groups, forums, that kind of thing. I loved… love computers. I have a talent for them.” Felicity dropped the hem of her skirt. “So I guess you could say I spent my misspent youth getting into trouble in cyberspace. No good stories there. I certainly never peed on a cop. Or stole a taxi.”

Tommy laughed. “The former, we were this strange mix of drunk and high -- like standing on this
precipice and the world is spinning, you know? And it seemed like it would be hilarious. And it was. Right up until... well.”

His father had bailed him out of jail. Tommy had been just eighteen. He’d tried to fight back against Malcolm’s righteous fury, his dangerous embarrassment, so assured of his manhood now, so sure he could get his father to stop.

He couldn’t.

But that wasn’t a happy story and Felicity didn’t need to be the keeper of all of his sad ones. “Not one of our proudest moments, I have to say.”

“What are you proud of?” Felicity asked. “I mean -- you don’t have to, if that’s too probing or…”

“Thea.” Tommy ducked his head. “I’m proud of Thea. I know it -- she’s not always sober, you know. I couldn’t keep her away from all of that. I tried. But she’s kind. She’s… a little bit selfish but she never, ah… she never pulls the kind of shit Oliver and I did. And she’s open and she’s loving. And she’s never had to do the kind of shit we have to do.”

“You guys did a great job,” Felicity said, reaching out to touch Tommy’s hair. He wanted to pull away, and did, after a moment, but… he hadn’t done the most kind thing. He shifted away from her, just an inch. But it allowed him to breathe. To think. “Thea’s... amazing. I’ve really enjoyed getting to know her. I can kind of see why you and Oliver are all over this big brother stuff with her.”

The door to the suite swung open and the scent of spicy Indian food wafted through the rooms. “Oliver, we’re in here!” Felicity called.

“We?” Oliver asked with a grin. “Hey, Tommy!”

“You look like you got some sun,” Tommy said, standing up to accept Oliver’s easy embrace. “Did you have a good time?”

Oliver shrugged. “Felicity kept me drunk enough I didn’t notice I was surrounded by water on all sides.”
“That is not what happened,” Felicity said firmly.

“That’s the way I remember it,” Oliver said with a soft smile. “Hey, Felicity.” He drew her close and kissed her, and she sank into it with a soft hum. Tommy sat back down, crossed one leg over the other and took out his phone. No way was he going to watch that and want that.

When he looked up again, Oliver and Felicity were both looking at him. He smiled brightly at them and closed the phone down. “So, uh…”

“Got you your favorite, Tommy,” Oliver said. “Chicken tikka masala. I figured you’d show up to say hello.”

“Well -- thanks,” Tommy said, clearing his throat. “I could have gotten supper on my own.”

“Why worry about it?” Oliver asked. “So.” He flopped down on the couch next to Tommy, flung his legs out over the coffee table. “I hear you pissed my mother off, Felicity.”

“She was a bitch first,” Felicity said, under her breath. “She implied my bubbe’s quilt wasn’t high-class enough for this room. She’s lucky I didn’t shoot her then to be honest.”

Tommy’s eyes widened. “I sure hope you’ve had this room swept for bugs.”

“Did it myself. Finished just as soon as you showed up, really,” Felicity said. “And as soon as Moira’s out, this whole wing will be safe.”

“Moira’s out?” Tommy asked. “Where’s Moira going?”

“The other side of the house,” Felicity said.

Tommy’s mouth twitched. “The guest wing?”

Felicity waved a hand. “Technically, she is our guest. Oliver’s father left the house to him upon his marriage.”
“Hm. It’s certainly a ballsy opening move,” Tommy said.

“It’s not the opening move. It’s just the first one she’ll see coming,” Felicity said. “There are some other changes I want to make.”

“Thea mentioned something about an architect?” Tommy asked. “If you’re planning on remodeling Raisa’s kitchen without her input, you might go the way of the czars.”

“No.” Felicity sat down on the other side of Tommy. “The architect was for this room.”

“Getting rid of the historic wainscotting, I see. Good old Rudyard Douchebag Queen the first would be properly horrified, and I applaud this decision,” Tommy said lightly, getting up from the sofa to move across the room.

“No,” Felicity said softly, her eyes watching his every move. “We were thinking you might like to move back to the family wing.”

Tommy lifted his chin in acknowledgement. “Yeah?”

“Yes,” Oliver said. “It just so happens that no one is using the suite next to ours.”

“Next to yours?” White-hot lancing pain. Centered somewhere in his gut and pulsing outward. “You want me to sleep in the bedroom next to yours.” This was a brand new kind of cruelty. The house had been built in the late 1800s, expanded and remodeled, but the walls were still thin. “Fuck you, Oliver.”

“What?” Felicity asked, her eyes darting wildly from Oliver to Tommy. “What’s going on? Did I miss something?”

Oliver looked just as confused. “Tommy, I don’t…”

Rage exploded out of Tommy’s mouth. “Listen, maybe you can fuck me and walk away, and spend
all your time with someone else. Maybe it doesn’t bother you to go hot and fucking cold all the goddamn time, but it bothers the fuck out of me. So. No thank you. I won’t sleep in the room next to you and listen to you fuck your wife every fucking night.”

“I don’t understand.” Felicity’s eyes welled up with tears. “I thought we had…”

“Tommy, you know I don’t… Fuck. This is all fucked,” Oliver said, his hands fist ed. He spoke through grit teeth. “Tommy, I love you. I’m not walking away from you.”

“You married someone else.”

Felicity’s face crumpled.

“I’m sorry, but it’s the fucking truth,” Tommy said fiercely. “You married someone else, and we always told each other that we’d be better at this than our fathers. You owe this woman your loyalty. And you’ve got mine because… Christ, Oliver, I would walk over hot coals for you. But I will not … linger around the edges of your life, watching in the window of your marriage, pretending that there’s a place in it for me. I just won’t.” Tommy sighed. “And I can’t believe that you would be so cruel as to ask that of me. So again… fuck you.”

Felicity played with her wedding ring, her eyes filled with tears and her attention seemingly fixed on her fingernails. “I’m sorry, Tommy. I’m afraid this is my fault.”

Tommy shrugged. “It’s not your fault, Felicity. I can see why you’d think this is a good thing -- might, you know, boost my self-esteem, reinforce my value to the Family. But you don’t have to maneuver me. I’d die happily for this family. I’ve already given my allegiance.”

“This wasn’t about that,” Felicity said, her eyes flying upward to Tommy’s. “It really wasn’t. I swear. I love you -- I told you I love you. Oliver loves you. We didn’t want to hurt you. We want you close.”

“As close as you want to be to us,” Oliver said. “Anytime you want to be with us. Which -- for us, for both of us, is all the time.”

Tommy laughed. “You go away to a tropical island with each other and suddenly you come back and what…”
“No, not suddenly,” Felicity said fiercely. “Did you think I would tell you I loved you on the day I married another man just to hurt you?”

“It keeps me right where you need me,” Tommy said flatly.

“Oh, now I’m pissed,” Felicity said, standing up. “Fuck you, Tommy Merlyn.”

“You have,” Tommy said.

Felicity let out a scream of frustration, her hands extended in the air by her face, fingers taut with tension. “Listen here, you damaged over-privileged jerk. I don’t tell people I love them to keep them right where I need them, you bag of dicks. I tell them that because it’s true.”

“I don’t want it,” Tommy said. Oliver and Felicity both looked shocked. “I don’t. I don’t want to be the next-door dildo or the live-in lover. So thanks, I guess. But no thanks.”

Felicity nodded. “Okay, okay.” She wiped her face. “Okay.” She nodded again, and took off, brushing past Tommy. “I’ll be in the bedroom, Oliver. Tommy, you’ll be gone when I get back.”

“That’s probably for the best,” Tommy said. The bedroom door slammed behind Felicity and Tommy was left with Oliver.

Oliver, whose eyes burned with rage and confusion. He sat very, very still on the couch. Tommy knew his friend well enough to know that this was the Oliver that worried him. A still, silent Oliver meant that he was trying to compress what he was feeling, that it was too overwhelming to be released immediately.

“I’m going back to my room,” Tommy said stiffly. “I’ll talk to you tomorrow.”

“No,” Oliver said, standing. “No. We’re going to hash this out. Because I thought we understood each other.”
“Yeah, well, I thought we understood each other too,” Tommy said. “Guess we were both wrong.”

Oliver exploded. Rage crossed his face and he bent and flipped the coffee table like it weighed nothing. “I’m not wrong about you.”

“Well, I’m far more likely to listen to you now that antique furniture has been tossed,” Tommy said under his breath.

“I’m not wrong about you.” Oliver was quiet, almost like he was stalking him as he stepped over the table, got close to Tommy without touching him. “You love us both. You want us both. But what? You don’t think you deserve it? So you mouth off to Felicity and hurt her feelings cause you figure she’s the weak link?”

“Where’d you get your PhD in psychotherapy again?”

“Lian Yu. When I had to figure out the men around me or be killed,” Oliver said. “And you’re not an easy man to read but I like to think I’ve been learning about you my whole life, and the only time you’re that much of a no-holds-barred dick is when you want something but you don’t think you deserve to have it.”

Tommy clenched his hands into fists. “Oliver.”

“Felicity wanted to surprise you,” Oliver said softly, taking a step closer. “She thought maybe, if she offered, you’d see that she was serious, that she really wants you in our lives in this way. She thought it would be good for your relationship.”

“She thought wrong,” Tommy said darkly.

“Part of that… most of that, that’s on me. Because I thought for sure you’d know I was serious. I thought -- I never thought that you would think I would think of you that way, that I would use you that way.” Oliver took Tommy’s hands, and Tommy felt some of the walls he’d been building start to crumble. “I’d never… I didn’t realize you were so hurt by all of this.”

“Because you didn’t look.”
“I guess not,” Oliver said. “But you never said anything, either.”

“Does it matter?” Tommy nearly spat.

“Yes, it does, because you two love each other and I love both of you and you love me and we’re fighting and it looks like we’re all falling apart and that is the very last thing we need right now,” Oliver said. “When you -- when you brought Felicity down the aisle to me, it was like all of my dreams were coming true. Both of you, together. It’s more than everything I ever wanted.”

Tommy looked away. “Oliver, you know that if there’s any question of whether or not Felicity has been loyal to you, the footsoldiers will kill her. You know that this… relationship pushes Moira, and she’s unpredictable enough as it is. You’ve been through enough in your life. You deserve this happiness and I’m willing to give it to you. To the two of you.”

“It’s going to take all three of us,” Oliver said. “It doesn’t matter if we’re fucking or not. We’re going to need all three of us. And we’re going to get sideways looks, always, because of what happened in the past. So, if the assumption is already going to be there…”

“Oliver.”

“You say you want me happy,” Oliver said. “I am happy as long as I have you in my life. In my arms. In my bed. In my heart. Please, Tommy. Think about it.”

Tommy nodded, once, and left the suite of rooms, his hands in his pockets.

**

“Punch!” Sara said, holding up the glove. “Turn your hip and give it some power.”

Sweat dripped from every pore in Felicity’s body. She would ache in the morning, would pay for every time the other woman threw her to the ground or forced her to do lunges. But she was learning more about how to physically protect herself than she’d ever learned before.

She grunted with the effort of putting her body through its paces. On a mat across the room, Oliver
and Diggle were working through some moves as well. Diggle’s military training made him an almost-even match for Oliver’s unconventional, dirty style of fighting, and they exchanged good-natured barbs with each landed blow.

“Okay, that’s enough of the theory,” Sara said, throwing her gloves on the ground. “I’m going to attack. Defend yourself.”

“What?” Felicity hardly had time to blink. Sara moved like a whirlwind. The moves they had worked on in slow motion now needed to be recalled in real-time and executed against one of the deadliest assassins the world had ever known.

Block, duck, defend. Punch, oh no -- Sara caught her weight off-balance and threw her to the floor, whirling her baton over her head before she brought it down near Felicity’s throat. “Dead,” she said simply. “But alive for three more seconds than you would have been even a week ago.”

“Well, that’s reassuring,” Felicity drawled.

“Sometimes three seconds is all you need,” Sara said.

Felicity sighed, unmoving from the mats. “It sure seems like a lot of effort for not a lot of reward.”

Sara dropped to the mat and stretched out beside her. “That doesn’t sound like you, Felicity.”

“Oliver tried to warn me,” Felicity said. “About what it would be like, coming here. I don’t know if I took him seriously enough.”

“Hm,” Sara said. She had a way of not saying anything that made Felicity want to fill the space with more words. But not in a painful way, not because the silence was yawning and desperate, but because the silence was comfortable. Felicity knew every word was being weighed and measured, evaluated, listened to. Sara was so careful with listening that Felicity didn’t mind letting the words fall out of her mouth. Sara would sort through the extra and find the words with meaning.

“It’s not that everything is awful,” Felicity said. “When Oliver left Russia I thought I’d never get to hold him again, and that was awful. Then we got here and I worried that maybe, just for a split second, he couldn’t love me ever, because he loved Tommy. And that was awful. Moira is awful. She’s... I’ve always known she was cruel, but...”
Sara’s breath caught. “Indeed.”

“And I thought I had… fixed things. That, you know, all of this was a problem. I just had to arrive at the solution. Or that this was a chess game, and I just had to make the right moves.” Felicity closed her eyes, shook her head. “Oliver is counting on me to know what to do and I am fucking up every other time I turn around.”

“Oliver does not count on or expect perfection,” Sara said softly, the smooth alto of her voice strangely soothing to Felicity. “None of us do. We value your ability to adapt and fix mistakes, not the fact that you never make them.”

“It’s a lot easier to fix mistakes when it’s broken hardware and buggy software,” Felicity said. “It’s a lot harder when it’s someone else’s real live feelings you’re destroying.”

“Destroying?” Sara raised an eyebrow. “That doesn’t seem like you.”

Felicity let out a huff of air. “I called Tommy a bag of dicks.”

“I’m sure he deserved it,” Sara said.

Felicity chuckled, laying one hand flat on her abdomen. “I thought what I was offering would make him happy.”

“It’s difficult to listen when no one is really speaking,” Sara said. “Perhaps this was one of those… necessary moments, in every relationship, when assumptions need to be challenged.”

“Speaking from experience?” Felicity asked.

There was a long pause. Felicity had just opened her mouth to walk her question back when Sara spoke. “Yes.”

“How did…”
“She assumed I would give up my soul for her,” Sara said flatly, “and I assumed she would walk away from the family that was slowly poisoning her for me. Both assumptions were wrong.”

Felicity swallowed. “I’m sorry.”

Sara shrugged. “Don’t be. I love her still. I think there’s some part of me that’s waiting for her to show up here. She’s fond of dramatic statements like that. But if she doesn’t ever come here, if I never return to her, for a few moments in time we found happiness with each other.”

Felicity sighed. “That’s beautiful. That’s almost… at peace with the universe. I can’t get there. I’m too busy wanting to, I don’t know, make all of Tommy’s pencils really really dull or hide his smartphone or… find some other way to make his life miserable.”

Sara laughed and tapped Felicity on the shoulder. “You’re cute.”

“Thanks.”

“And I never thought of the pencil thing with Nyssa,” Sara said. “I might have to borrow that.”

“It’s all yours.”

“Don’t look now,” Sara said, “but I think the object of your ire just walked into the room.”

Diggle and Sara, each aware of the strange tension that had taken over the three of them, quickly made their excuses as Tommy stripped away his shirt and took up a staff to fight Oliver. Felicity walked over to the edge of the mat, where she’d been keeping her shoes, and sat to put them back on.

She didn’t watch them, moving with each other in a familiar dance. She didn’t watch the play of their muscles across their backs, track the way their tattoos shifted on their skin. She had far too much control of her own faculties to do that.
Then she cursed, because she’d been attempting to put her left shoe on her right foot.

Without a word to either of them, Felicity made for the door.

“Felicity?” Tommy’s voice seemed… smaller in this space.

“Not right now,” Felicity said, without turning around. “I’ll see you guys later.”

“Felicity!” Oliver called. “Please.”

Felicity turned then, and put her hands on her hips. “What?”

“It’s been a couple of days,” Tommy said. “And uh… I’ve been thinking. Oliver and I have been talking some, too… and, it’s not an excuse. I was an asshole. I’m just not used to, you have understand, with Moira…”

Felicity could have spit. “I am not Moira.”

“No, you’re not,” Tommy said. “I’m sorry, this is coming out all wrong.”

“Well, you can try again tomorrow,” Felicity said. “I’m really not in the mood to hear it.”

“That’s fine except I’m sorry and I love you.”

Felicity felt waves of hurt and pain and anger sweep over her. “You think that fixes things?”

“No,” Tommy said, dropping his staff and walking to her. “No, I know that it doesn’t. But I made you doubt that I did, that I do love you.”

“What does that mean?” Felicity asked. “Exactly?”
“It means I’d like to move in next door. I’d like to try with you two, if you want me to,” Tommy said softly.

“You sure you want to sleep with someone you’re always convinced has an ulterior motive?” Felicity snapped.

“I deserve that,” Tommy said softly.

“Damn straight you do,” Felicity said. “I’m mad as hell. Oh, I could strangle you.”

“I’d…” Tommy closed his mouth. “It’s hard for me to trust.”

“Yeah, well, you’re not alone on that banana boat on this particular island,” Felicity said. “So. You say you don’t have excuses but either you trust me or you don’t. Either you believe me or you don’t. But don’t you fucking ask me about my fucking childhood, sit next to me on the fucking couch and touch my hair and look at me with those eyes and then turn around and tell me you don’t want me. You’re an asshole.”

“I am. One hundred percent.” Tommy nodded. “I’m a bag of dicks, I’m an asshole.”

Felicity sighed. “Okay.”

“Okay?”

“Yes.” Felicity said.

“I owe you both an apology,” Oliver said. “If I would have thought -- at all -- about how Tommy might see things, I would have asked Felicity to do this a different way.” Tommy and Felicity looked at him. He leaned against his staff and smiled at them ruefully. “For someone who’s convinced I know my best friend better than anyone on the planet, I sure have made some missteps lately.”

“I could have handled it better. I know I should have handled it better,” Tommy said.
Felicity chuckled. “All of this… honesty. It’s making me a little light-headed,” she teased. “Whoops, think I’m going to sit down.”

She found a seat on the mat behind her gratefully, and Tommy and Oliver both swept in, looks of concern on their faces.

“Are you okay?” Oliver asked.

“Just fine,” Felicity said. “I’m just thinking that… this is the last one of these that we can afford. For the time being.”

Tommy and Oliver exchanged looks. “What do you mean?” Oliver asked.

“If we’re all in this together, we have a long way to go,” Felicity said softly. “I’ll start by not trying to fix everything all at once, and reminding myself that there’s history here, things I probably can’t… fix.” She sighed. “Oliver is going to work on not making assumptions about what Tommy is thinking or feeling and vice versa. And Tommy?”

Tommy looked at her. “Felicity?”

“I need you to believe that there are people… me, Oliver… Thea… who love you. Who want you around. No ulterior motives. Okay?”

Tommy nodded, apparently acceptably chastised. “Okay.”

“I love you,” Felicity said softly. “And that doesn’t come easy to me, so. Don’t let it go easy either.”

Tommy lifted her chin. “Can I kiss you?”

“At this stage in the game it’s mandatory,” Felicity said. And then Tommy’s clever, brilliant mouth was on hers. And she had missed it so much, in all of her anger and all of her hurt.
They were both breathing heavy by the time they broke apart. Oliver cleared his throat.

“I… have a suggestion.”

They both looked at him.

“You two need time together,” Oliver said. “Away from me. You need to figure how you two work… in every way. Tommy and I have had that time. Felicity and I have had that time. But you two? You haven’t. I think it’s going to be important.”

Felicity and Tommy looked each other in the eyes, and Felicity nodded slowly. “I think… I think you’re right.”

“I don’t see how it could hurt,” Tommy said.

“Good, you can start tomorrow,” Oliver said. “I have to handle a Queen Consolidated acquisition in Vancouver, so you two will have a couple of days to yourselves.”

“I thought that wasn’t going to be for a couple of weeks,” Felicity said, furrowing her brow.

Oliver shrugged. “They’re moving up the timetable. It probably won’t take long. In the meantime…”

Felicity took Tommy’s hand, smiled. “Quality time, apparently. But uh -- if you’re going to go on a trip, it’s probably best that we do some stuff tonight.”

“Some stuff?”

“Make-up sex.” Felicity said, ducking her head to blush. “All three of us. I think it’s very important.”

Oliver and Tommy chuckled, and Felicity leaped to her feet, running for the door of the gym. “I will be naked and in bed before the two of you pick your jaws up off the floor.”
She almost was. She only lost the bet by virtue of one sock, and Tommy’s quick hands. But rather than gloat, he used those quick hands to bring her to orgasm, and his mouth to soothe away some of the hurt from the last few days.

They weren’t broken, the three of them. Not yet.
Remodel

Chapter Summary

Tommy and Felicity take the time to build their relationship, only for our trio to take another blow.

Chapter Notes

Thank you for your patience with me as I dealt with a rocky start to my semester from a mental health standpoint. There was a SNAFU with the people who are supposed to make sure I have all the credits I need to graduate ... anyway. I had a little breakdown. I'm back now. No worries about me. Regularly scheduled once-a-week posting will probably be on Tuesday from now on.

When Tommy opened the door to the penthouse, he wasn’t exactly surprised to see Felicity on her knees, gently placing things into a cardboard box. Oliver had left that morning for his business trip, and Tommy and Felicity had planned to spend the evening together. All day long Tommy had found himself thinking about it, when he wasn’t thinking about the night before.

Felicity’s hands and Oliver’s mouth. The sweet, careful slide inside of Oliver. Watching Felicity’s hands on Oliver…

It had been difficult to concentrate, to say the least. Tommy cleared his throat and shook his head.

“When you told Moira you needed to pack tonight, I didn’t realize that was anything more than a cover story,” Tommy said.

“Just a few things I had tucked away here and there,” Felicity said, jumping to her feet, she brushed her hands on her dress nervously. “Cash, guns, safety deposit numbers…”

Tommy lifted the pizza box he was carrying awkwardly. “I picked up Gino’s.”

Felicity raised her eyebrows and wrung her hands. “Uh -- Oliver goes on and on about that place. But we haven’t been able to get there yet.”
“That’s what he said,” Tommy said, “and given that eating at Gino’s is the Starling City equivalent of Holy Communion, I could no longer allow that to stand. I asked Oliver what you like. I hope he’s not wrong.”

Felicity sidled up to him and cautiously laid a hand on his shoulder. “Oliver knows how I like my pizza. I’m sure it’s not wrong.” She paused, and tapped her fingers. “Would you be opposed to a suggestion? About how the rest of this night should go. Feel free to shoot me down. I’m just... thinking.”

“What do you suggest?” Tommy asked, laying a long, thin slice of everything-pizza on a napkin and biting into pure bliss.

“No more Oliver talk for the rest of the night,” Felicity said, reaching around him for a napkin and a slice herself. “If... this is going to work, then we need to do that without needing Oliver to bridge the gaps.”

“Okay,” Tommy said slowly, his eyes searching hers. “So -- what do you want to talk about?”

Felicity picked a slice of pepperoni off his slice and popped it in her mouth, grinning while she chomped. “Whatever you want to talk about.”

Tommy bent and laid his forehead against hers. “Hey now, that’s my favorite part.”

“What do you know? It’s mine too,” Felicity said. “Particularly when it doesn’t belong to me.”

“So what you’re saying is that you’re a pepperoni thief,” Tommy said.

Felicity nodded seriously. “Of the worst kind.”

Tommy smiled gently. “I’ll have to keep that in mind.”

“How do girls keep from kissing you all the time?” Felicity wondered, laying her finger against his
lips. “It’s not quite fair.”

“I’ve been told it’s extremely difficult.” Tommy lifted Felicity and set her on the counter. “I sympathize with your struggle but I have to tell you, you can kiss me any time you want.”

“I’ll have to keep that in mind,” Felicity said lowly, and pressed her lips against his. She tasted like cherries today, cherries and sweetness and tomato sauce and the heat of pepperoni on her lips. And her tongue swept into his mouth and it was a little like she was staking her claim to him. She drew back from him and caressed his cheek. “Hm, you’re good at that. Lives up to the hype.”

“Thank you very much,” Tommy said. “I uh -- I brought a bottle of wine and some plastic cups. You want some?”

“I never turn down wine, and given that I never got to do the traditional college thing, I feel like drinking wine out of a plastic cup is a coming-of-age-ritual I need to check off.”

“I’m an old expert at this.” Tommy pulled the corkscrew and the wine from the bag he’d brought with him, hyper-aware of Felicity’s eyes watching him. His hands shook a little as he worked the cork out of the bottle. It finally popped loose and he poured the merlot into two plastic cups. “I’m well aware you’re supposed to let this breathe, but… this felt like a eat-pizza in the kitchen, drink wine out of plastic cups, turn on some tunes sort of night, so…”

“That sounds incredibly nice,” Felicity said, accepting the cup gratefully.

“And um, I noticed you like the old jazz stuff, so…” Tommy opened his phone, selected the right playlist.

“Hm, Ella Fitzgerald,” Felicity said. “My uncle Yuri loves jazz, you know that?”

“No, I didn’t,” Tommy said.

Felicity picked absently at a pepper before she removed it deftly. “That’s where I get it from. Mom’s more of a Madonna and Debbie Gibson girl. And I like that too, but I spent a lot of nights working on homework in Yuri’s study listening to the Lady is a Tramp.”
Tommy reached across Felicity’s lap and stole a piece of her pepperoni. “Tell me, Felicity, would you go to Harlem in ermine and pearls?”

“Nope. Won’t dish the dirt with the rest of the girls, either.”

“Such a tramp,” Tommy teased, sliding his hand up her thigh. “I can’t say I have a problem with it, though.”

“Good, cause neither do I.” Felicity swung her legs but didn’t do anything to deter Tommy’s wandering hands. “Oh, this is a good song.”

“Hm,” Tommy agreed, singing low with the song playing on his phone. “The way you wear your hat, the way you sip your tea.” He gently tugged on Felicity’s hand and she slid off of the counter. He spun her out and brought her in close, so they shuffle-stepped-swayed to the beat. “The memory of all that, no no, they can’t take that away from me.”

Felicity joined in on the chorus, finding the harmony effortlessly. An easy sort of disbelieving joy settled over Tommy as they danced. Oh, they were being careful with each other. Still stepping a little lightly where they had run roughshod over each other the day before. But Felicity hadn’t hesitated to dance with him, even kicking her shoes off in time so that she could twist and twirl as Tommy directed.

“Where’d you learn how to dance?” Tommy asked.

“Oh, that would be a Donna Smoak thing,” Felicity said, flushing. “I was kind of awkward as a kid. I mean more awkward. Physically. Not just -- you know, the way it is now, where I talk way too much and make everyone uncomfortable. I mean, there was that, but there was also the fact that I tripped over everything and generally got in the way. She enrolled me in this ballroom dancing class before she died. I kind of liked it, and it was something I could do in Russia without speaking much of the language. What about you?”

Tommy chuckled. “Moira insisted Oliver and I both learn so that we wouldn’t embarrass her. Oliver never quite embraced it.”

“But you liked it?” Felicity asked.
“In terms of strategies for getting to hold girls close and smell their hair and not being obvious about it, it’s hard to beat dancing,” Tommy said, winking.

Felicity laughed and laid her head on his shoulder as the song transitioned to a slower number. “Ah, your misspent youth.”

“Youth? Hell, it still works today,” Tommy teased her gently. “All those hours with Madame Zerova are worth it if I get to shuffle around the kitchen with you.”

Felicity stopped and lifted her chin. “That’s very sweet.”

“It’s the truth,” Tommy said. “I like spending time with you.”

Felicity fingered the material of Tommy’s jacket and pushed it gently off of his shoulders, setting it aside. “I like spending time with you, too.”

“You know, I was going to love you no matter what, because of the way you made Oliver feel,” Tommy said. “But then I met you, and I talked to you, and…”

“Same,” Felicity said. She lifted her eyes, practically swimming with desire. “Tommy, I want…”

“What?” Tommy asked, his voice dropping.

“Kiss me again,” Felicity said softly. “Knock my socks off this time.”

“Yes, ma’am.” Tommy pushed her against the kitchen counter, lifted her skirt and pressed his mouth to hers. Her hands made quick work of the buttons of his shirt, the fly of his pants, and soon he was standing with his shirt open and his pants undone.

“Where does this dress unfasten?” Tommy panted against Felicity’s lips.

“Zipper down the back,” Felicity muttered and Tommy found it, pulling gently on it until the fabric parted. His mouth found the sweet spot on her neck and he kissed her there while he persuaded the
rest of the dress off of her.

“I wanted to do this the day of your wedding,” Tommy said softly, palming her one of her breasts through her bra. “There you were, all done up in white lace and pretty for Oliver, and I wanted to fuck you so bad. I didn’t think you’d ever let me again.”

Her eyes were heavy-lidded with desire. He could see the truth in them. “If you would have asked…”

“No. I’m glad we’re doing it this way, in the end. You and Oliver deserved that day.”

Felicity pushed his shirt off of his shoulders. “And you and I deserve this.”

“Yes,” Tommy said on a gasp as Felicity slid off the counter and pulled his boxer briefs down to apply her mouth to his pleasure.

Tommy closed his eyes against the sensations her mouth created, the things that seeing her on her knees did to him, the dark desires that welled up inside his mind. He settled for burying his hands in her thick hair, holding her with gentle pressure. She had a creative mouth and her tongue was practically magic. Her fingers scraped along his thighs and Tommy couldn’t help himself. He rocked his hips, then paused. “Okay?”

Felicity pulled off of him with an audible pop and nodded. “Okay. I’ll pull back if it gets too much.”

Tommy nodded. He was ever-so-careful as he fucked her mouth. It was the best kind of challenge, not to hurt her, to go deep in her mouth so slowly, with such control, savoring the wet heat, so different than her pussy, the feel of her breath on his cock. He couldn’t stop his hands from playing with her hair, threw his head back and groaned.

When he could convince his eyes to open again (watching was half the fun), Felicity was running her hand down her body and inside of her panties while she sucked him, and Tommy couldn’t help himself, couldn’t turn on a filter that would keep what was in his head from coming out of his mouth. “You’re so pretty when you touch yourself.”

Felicity hummed in agreement and it sent a shiver down his back. “Felicity, baby…” She hummed again. Tommy pulled his hands away from her head and fist them against his sides. “I’m going to
come if you keep that up.”

“None of that.” Felicity pulled away from him, the pop of her mouth releasing him making his cock twitch. “I want you inside of me.”

“Bedroom,” Tommy said, holding her hand as she got to her feet. They kissed and touched and laughed on their way down the hallway, and when Felicity fell back against the mattress in the bedroom, Tommy caressed his hand down her side all the way to her knees, indentions from the kitchen tile pressed into the reddened skin. Tommy kissed his way down her thighs to her kneecaps.

“Tommy,” Felicity gasped as Tommy nibbled on the sensitive skin on the inside of her knees. “Tommy…”

“Your legs, baby, they drive me at least fourteen kinds of crazy,” Tommy said, “in that short skirt all day I kept thinking I wanted to do this, wanted to taste you here.”

“Please,” Felicity practically whined, “touch me.”

“I am touching you,” Tommy said, and he slowly brought his hands up to the valley between her legs. “What do you want, more specifically?”

“Put your fingers in me,” Felicity said. “Put your mouth on me.”

“At the same time?” Tommy grinned. “That can be arranged. Eventually.”

He liked to tease himself, when he had the time. Liked to explore. Felicity’s pussy was a book he’d like to know front to back, a song he’d like to have memorized. The way it tasted, the way it smelled. The different sounds she’d make for tongue, for teeth, to demand more, to pull away when it was too much.

So much more to learn about each other, Tommy thought. A clock ticked, faintly, in the back of his mind. Would they have the time? He used his thumbs to part her gently.

“Are you going to tease me?” Felicity asked playfully.
“No,” Tommy said honestly. “I’m going to enjoy you.”

Felicity gasped and Tommy smirked as he licked a fresh wave of juices from her pussy. He flicked his tongue against her entrance but it was too soon for that. He hadn’t learned her well enough for that.

Felicity mewled and arched under his attentions and Tommy laid his forearm flat against her pelvis. “Hold still, baby girl,” he said.

“Tommy…” Felicity keened as Tommy brushed her clit with his thumb. “Oh shit, oh shit.”

“Easy, easy,” Tommy muttered. “Just stay easy.”

“I can’t,” Felicity said, shaking her head.

“Oh yes, you can.”

Slow, sweet. If he slid his thumb inside of her and flicked her clit with his tongue at the same time, she practically sang. Oh, she cursed his name as he worked her, persuaded her up, up, up to the precipice of pleasure, then gently let her down again.

“Please, let me come.”

One finger. Just one. Slowly. So slowly that Felicity tried to pump her hips, but couldn’t. “Not right now, baby girl. I’m enjoying this pussy too much.”

“Tommy…”

A slight curve to the finger. How would she react? Where was the…

“Fuck me!” Felicity cried out.
There it was. Tommy brushed up against the spot over and over and over again. Felicity’s vocalizations went higher and higher and higher in pitch.

And it was time to let her down again. He drew his finger out, kissed the inside of her thigh while she gripped his hair. “Fuck you, Tommy Merlyn. Please… please let me come.”

“Soon,” Tommy promised. “Just… trust me?”

“Oh god,” Felicity moaned as Tommy turned his mouth to french kissing her pussy. He treated it like he would a mouth, took his time, savored the flavor. It wouldn’t be enough for her, but he would be able to smell her on his skin and the thought sent a shiver clear through him. His cock was weeping and his body was demanding release of its own but…

Spread eagled, held down by the weight of his arm, desperate and longing for his touch. *His* touch. His fingers inside of her.

Two this time. A slow, steady fucking. Their eyes locked while Tommy thrust his fingers in and out. “Felicity, Felicity… you’re so gorgeous, baby. So pretty, all well-fucked and spread for me. Are you going to come?”

“I want to, please…” Felicity spread her legs further. “My clit…”

“Oh this?” Tommy asked, and he turned his mouth to sucking it and… Felicity… Tommy grinned. Felicity screamed.

Her back arched. Her toes curled. She tugged lightly on his hair as she came, shouting at him in Russian, in English…

She was still shaking when Tommy crawled over her. “Gonna make love to you right now, okay?”

“Mmmmm…” Felicity nodded. She gasped and wriggled as Tommy reached into the nightstand for
a small package, ripped it open, and drew a condom over his cock. And then slowly -- so slowly… he entered her.

He wasn’t going to cry, but the weight of the moment seemed to sink in on him. He was inside of her. And he had all night. Felicity rolled her hips underneath of him, locked her arms around his neck, and whispered, “Slow?”

“All night,” Tommy promised in the heat of the moment, and Felicity giggled.

“I love you,” she said softly, playing with the hair on the nape of his neck. “I love you so much.”

He didn’t want to thrust. He didn’t want to leave her. He was all of the way inside of her and there was no reason, no reason at all that he should leave the warmth of her pussy. Not with her eyes shining up at him like that. He could live here, complete in her, connected to her, for the rest of his life. There were no words for what he was feeling except the ones she had already given him.

“I love you too.” His instincts drove him. Contentment might have won for a moment, but... he needed to move. Needed to move her.

They moved together in a perfect rhythm, Felicity following his lead as they ground their hips together, gasping and closing her eyes every time his pelvis brushed against her clit. Tommy gripped the pillows behind Felicity’s head and held on.

Oh, he wanted to come. He wanted the release. The tension was almost unbearable and it was taking every ounce of his self-control not to. But Felicity was pliant, warm, sated from her climax, in love with him and in his bed and in his arms.

A few more minutes and he might almost believe this was real, that this was happening, that this was something he deserved.

Felicity raked her fingernails across his shoulders, and the sting of the pain against the warm, simple pleasure sent a shudder to the base of his spine. “It’s okay, baby,” she said softly. “Come.”

Tommy gasped. He couldn’t hold back any longer and he closed his eyes, shaking through his orgasm. Felicity reached up and brushed tears away from his eyes, and kissed him.
“Thanks,” Tommy said softly, pulling out of her and discarding the condom in a smooth series of moves. He laid back on the bed and Felicity took his hand.

“I can’t wait to do that again,” she said, and giggled.

Tommy laughed and covered his eyes. “Give me a minute.”

“An orgasm like that?” Felicity settled into his side and tapped his arm with her fingers. “You could have several.”

She kissed his shoulder and pushed herself upright. “I’ll be right back.”

“Okay.” Tommy locked his hands together behind his head and sighed. Dimly, he could hear the sounds of Felicity moving around the bathroom. He closed his eyes, concentrating on how, for the moment, he was soaked in pleasure, his limbs heavy. For now he could forget the stress of the last few days.

Felicity returned, her hair swinging about her shoulders, a smile lingering on her face. “You look comfy.”

“So do you,” Tommy said, shifting on the bed so that one leg lay flat and the other was bent at the knee.

Felicity watched his movement and licked her lips. “My god, you’re ridiculous,” she muttered. “What with those thighs and those abs and… all.”

Tommy grinned. “You’re pretty ridiculous yourself, baby.”

Felicity laid herself down on the mattress next to him, flinging one arm over his chest and snuggling in close. “I don’t want to go back to the real world.”

“I was just having that same thought myself.” Tommy sighed, and brought one of his hands down to
play with the strands of Felicity’s hair. “I don’t know, what do you think? Let’s run away to Mexico. Moira won’t notice if you and me and Oliver and Thea just… disappear.”

Felicity chuckled. “And what would we do all day?”

“We could learn to make tamales. Buy a roadside stand…”

“Hah!” Felicity threw one leg over his. “I don’t think you’d be very happy as a tamale-maker.”

Tommy shook his head. “No. I don’t think I would be, either.” Tommy exhaled and turned a charming smile to Felicity. “I really like fucking you, though. Do you think I could find a way to get paid for that?”

Felicity laughed, throwing her head back and holding her stomach. “Ah, if only.”

“Seriously, though,” Tommy said, rolling over on his stomach. “Let’s be serious for a moment, while it’s just the two of us and no one’s listening. These attacks my father has been launching.”

“Yes,” Felicity said.

“They’re just a distraction,” Tommy said. “I can almost guarantee it. I know my father far better than I am comfortable with. He’ll make a big move soon. Your ascending to the heir in place of Thea was something he never counted on.”

“Hm,” Felicity agreed. “But what is he trying to distract us from?”

Tommy shrugged. “His peace with Moira has always been tenuous at best. He would prefer to wipe out the Deardens completely, but he can’t hold back the Triad by himself. He needs to do something to get Thea back in the line-up, or figure out how he can manipulate you. The only reason he tolerates Moira is because he thought, eventually, he’d be able to control Thea.”

“I think he is drastically underestimating your sister,” Felicity said. “I think everyone underestimates your sister, actually.”
“She’s pretty awesome.” Tommy sighed. “If only… well. She’s been pretty much sober since you showed up, so… that’s good. A step in the right direction.”

“I think we both know what it’s like to lean on something when it’s too hard to handle the world by itself,” Felicity said, her thumb brushing his forehead. “Don’t we? I escape to my computers or my movies or my wine. You… what? Oliver makes it sound like you just buy property for fun…”

“When I’m not falling into a tequila bottle, sure,” Tommy said. He captured her hand and kissed it. “I just wanted Thea to escape even that part of this life.”

“Yeah, well, we can’t protect her from everything,” Felicity murmured, and yawned.

“No, I guess we can’t.” Tommy closed his eyes, reached for the sheet and pulled it up and over them. “Although I have to say that’s damned disappointing.”

“What? That she’s growing up and getting some bruises on the way?” Felicity tucked her head against his shoulder and closed her eyes. “Don’t be ridiculous.”

Tommy rolled over suddenly, pinned her down, and blew a raspberry against her neck while she shrieked and laughed. “I’m not being ridiculous, you are.”

“Oh my God, stop,” Felicity said, squirming, and then she found the spot on his side that made him flinch and he rolled off of her, clutching his side. But she followed him, teasing him with tickles until he flipped her over again.

His eyes were serious, his mouth tilted upwards just slightly. “This probably won’t last long. It… definitely won’t. I don’t get that lucky. But you know something?”

“What?”

“Right now… I’m happy.”
Felicity reached up and cupped his face. “I’m happy, too.”

**

Oliver stepped off of the plane’s stairway and down onto the tarmac, buttoning his suit jacket as he did so. He looked around for Felicity or Tommy, but only noticed one of the Family’s black town cars parked on the asphalt. “Mr. Queen?”

It wasn’t Tommy, it wasn’t Felicity… Neither of his lovers had come to greet him. Instead, Roy Harper was waiting for him at the bottom of the stairs. Which was just perfect because Oliver had spent all day wanting to punch someone in the face, and here was a candidate he wouldn’t even feel bad about.

“Harper,” Oliver said through grit teeth. “Just the person I wanted to see after three days away from my wife.”

“Ah, well, um,” Roy coughed. “Sorry about that, sir.” He held up a case, which Oliver knew contained his hood and his bow. “There’s been an incident, sir. Just came over the radio. To… Mr. Merlyn was on his way already and Mrs. Queen the younger told me to shake my ass to pick you up.”

“Did she now?” Oliver reached for the case. “You know, Harper, you can call me Oliver.”

“Really?” Roy looked incredulous.

“You still sleeping with my sister?”

“Yes.”

“Then no. Not really. Drive.” Oliver flung himself in the backseat and started to undress swiftly. “What’s the situation?”

“It’s at the docks, Mr. Queen,” Roy said, his eyes firmly on the road while Oliver made quick work of discarding his suit and slipping into the hood. “We believe our shipment from Russia is under
attack.”

Oliver’s eyebrows crept upward. “Is that so. Merlyn again?”

“Yeah, the old bastard one, not the newer, more pleasant model.”

In spite of himself, Oliver chuckled. “This is good. I’ve been wanting to punch someone in the face.”

“I got that vibe, sir.”

Oliver smirked. Roy was getting way too comfortable with him. “I still haven’t ruled you out, kid.”

Roy lifted one side of his mouth in an almost-smile. “Oh believe me, sir, I don’t doubt that for a minute.”

Roy pulled the town car over in a dark alley, where Oliver’s Ducati was waiting for him. Oliver wasted no time throwing his leg over the saddle and firing up the engine. He barely heard Roy shout at him over the din of the machine roaring to life. “Want me to suit up, meet you there?”

“No,” Oliver said flatly. “Get back to the house. Tommy and I can take it from here.”

“Oliver…” Roy shouted in protest.

“Go home!” Oliver kicked the motorcycle into gear and zoomed around the young footsoldier. There was nothing like the streets of Starling, not really. Not when he wanted his head cleared and his heart sure. Being away from home all of those years, he’d thought that maybe the city would have lost some of her ability to soothe him. But no, he knew Starling, like the back of his hand. He’d tramped all over it like he owned it as a teenager, and now he slipped in and out of her dark corners, could draw the layout of her alleyways and connected corridors with his eyes closed.

Ah, Oliver thought as he swerved to bypass an oncoming truck on 42nd street, pulling out of O’Leery’s bar and pub, some things never changed. There was something reassuring about that, even after only a few days away.
His mind settled into the place it needed to go quickly. Once, he’d found it difficult to reconcile this part of his life with who he was. It had been easier then to think of himself as two different people: Oliver Queen, who was a brother and a son and a friend, and the Hood, who was ruthless and served the Family above all.

He took the corner on Mulholland as tight as he could and felt his stomach drop out. Blood surged through his veins. He was utterly calm even as he was completely ready.

“Oliver?” A voice cracked through his internal calm. He might have startled a bit, if it had been any other voice, except for Tommy.

“Felicity. You have news for me?”

“Oh good, it worked!” Felicity’s voice was bouncy, cheerful. Oliver’s lips twitched. If he had ever smiled under the Hood, he might now. “I was concerned, without a field test. Then again, I did design this technology myself, so…”

As much as he had missed her, Oliver needed to concentrate. His tone was all business. “You have news?”

“Yes. Two Merlyn-suspected attacks on Dearden-controlled properties in the last few days. Tommy has a source inside his father’s organization that gave us a lead that Malcolm was planning a hit on this shipment coming in tonight.”

“Wait. The shipment?” Oliver pursed his lips and resisted the urge to punch his Ducati. “Has Merlyn lost his mind?” He pushed the bike for the last bit of speed he could eke out of the motor.

“Are you suggesting that he ever had possession of his entire mind? Because I think I disagree with that premise.”

“Felicity.”

“What? I’m just saying.”
Oliver chuckled. “Hey, I missed you, but…”

“Yeah, you’re probably about to get shot at. I’ll shut up. Don’t… just be careful, okay?”

“Always.” Oliver skidded to a stop at the docks and wondered where Tommy was for just a moment before he heard the first gunshot. He jumped off of the bike, quiver and bow ready, vaulted up a cargo container and ran along its top silently.

Or as silently as possible. They were still metal containers and he was still a large man. As soon as he neared the firefight -- near the series of cargo containers marked with the Queen Consolidated seal that contained a large number of illegally modified weapons that their Bratva Allies in Gotham were expecting any day now -- he ducked and ran as low to the ground as he could. But not low enough. Merlyn’s men noticed right away that he was on the roof of the container, and he started taking fire.

“Jesus Christ, Oliver, you could have come in with some subtlety,” Tommy’s voice cracked over the comm in his ear.

“I’m wearing a green suit and firing arrows, Tommy, subtle is not really what I do,” Oliver said, grinning as the first bullet grazed his shoulder. “Shit, that one’s going to sting.”

Tommy launched himself out from behind the container and fired a rapid series of shots from his favorite handgun. Two of Merlyn’s men went down. Center-mass body shot, just like he trained for every day. Oliver gave him a nod in thanks as he dropped to the ground and rushed a group of three men trying to get the container unlocked.

“That’s mine, you’ll find,” he said, not bothering with the voice modulator. No one here tonight would live to testify on what his voice sounded like. He nocked an arrow and fired it, taking out one, before the other two rushed him.

He was thankful for Felicity’s gift in that moment. He’d kept the knife in a holster on his quiver and it was easy enough to retrieve when the arrows became impractical. One of the men drew a gun and Oliver attacked without mercy, using the weapon to wrench the man’s arm back. The bone broke with a sickening crunch, and in a series of practiced moves, Oliver swiped a deep wound through the assailant’s carotid artery. He didn’t linger to watch him bleed out.

Oliver had no idea what the next man was thinking, but he rushed Oliver with all of the skill of a
defensive end. Unprepared for such an amateur attack, Oliver had no time to set his weight against the assault. He flew back against the container wall, jarred down to his bones.

“Fuck,” he wheezed. “That really fucking hurt, asshole.” He rammed his knee into the man’s groin hard enough that the man went white and hit the ground.

Oliver pulled out his bow and very coldly put two arrows in the man’s chest, rubbing at his neck afterward.

“Oliver, look out!” Tommy’s panicked voice was all that alerted him to the presence of a sniper rifle on another container.

Fire. White-hot, scorching pain. He’d been hit. If he hadn’t been moving, it would have been a solid kill shot. As it was, the pain was immediate and overwhelming. He hunched over and tried to breathe, tried to shove it down where it belonged, somewhere it wouldn’t register in his conscious mind. It didn’t work. Slowly, he slid down the side of the container.

Tommy came around the corner, pushed Oliver aside, and leapt up the side of the container, running like a madman for the sniper. “Tommy, what are you doing?” Oliver hissed.

“You’re the third man he’s taken out,” Tommy said, drawing his gun and firing wildly. “He’s got to go or he’ll pick us off one by one.”

“No by yourself, you idiot!” Oliver ignored the screaming in his nerves and tried to lever himself up the container.

But with his injured shoulder, he couldn’t make it up and over in time to help. He could only watch as Tommy avoided a hail of bullets -- miraculously, and land two solid head-shots in the sniper. Oliver clutched his shoulder as Tommy ran back to him.

With the sniper gone, it was relatively quick work. Oliver had trained all of these men himself and the Dearden men moved as a unit, systematically eliminating the Merlyn foot soldiers with relatively few casualties. By the time it was all over, ten of Merlyn’s men were dead, and only four of Oliver’s.

“Felicity?” Oliver said, once the bullets had stopped flying. “Baby, are you there?”
“You okay?”

“Well, I’m not bleeding out yet,” Oliver said, sighing. “Can you send a cleanup crew out here? Four of ours are down.”

“Were they definitely Merlyn’s?” Felicity asked.

Tommy nodded at him, and Oliver closed his eyes. “Yeah, Tommy recognized enough that we’re sure.”

“We’re going to have to take him out,” Felicity said. “A disruption in this shipment would have been… bad for relations, even with you being married to me.”

“Yes,” Oliver agreed. The edges of his vision were going gray. “Hey, Felicity?”

“Yeah, baby?”

“Tommy’s going to bring me back to the house. You uh -- you might want to have Dr. Michaels there for me, okay?”

He had time enough to hear Felicity shout Tommy’s name before he lost consciousness.

**

Felicity held it together. She called the doctor, she followed Digg’s calm instructions to prep their bedroom for Lyla to do whatever kind of emergency first-aid she would have to do to save Oliver’s life. Tommy had assured her he was driving as fast as he could. Felicity flew down the stairs as soon as she heard the massive doorbell’s chime ring throughout the entire Queen manor.

“Lyla!” She said, smiling tightly as she led the doctor inside the house. “I am very glad to have you on speed dial. You got here just in time, I think. The boys should be here any minute.”
Lyla was all business, matching Felicity step for step as they both jogged up the staircase. “Am I headed to Oliver’s room?”

“The master bedroom, actually,” Felicity said.

Lyla paused and lifted a corner of her mouth. “Good for you.”

Moira swept down the hallway and met Lyla and Felicity at the entrance to the master suite. “I got notice. Oliver’s been shot?”

“Yes.” Felicity gestured to Lyla that she should go in the bedroom. “In the shoulder. Tommy’s bringing him here.”

“How far out are they?” Moira asked, wringing her hands.

“Just a couple of minutes,” Felicity said. She didn’t particularly like Moira, not really, but she could sympathize with the worry on the woman’s face. “Tommy says not to worry. Oliver’s taken worse, apparently.”

“Oh,” Moira said. ”Well, that’s reassuring.”

Felicity nodded. “Four of the other boys didn’t make it.”

Moira’s face settled in to stone. “I heard. But the cargo is secure?”

“Yes,” Felicity said. “Anatoly was glad to hear his brothers wouldn’t be missing out on their weapons.”

“I’m sure he was,” Moira said, rolling her eyes. “We cannot allow Malcolm to continue to test us this way. I can’t imagine what he’s thinking.”

“He’s thinking we’re weak,” Felicity said, crossing her arms.
“Only because he hasn’t taken the time to fully research you, my dear.” Moira waved a hand. “Oh, I know, we have some… differences of opinion, but when Oliver came to me with his scheme, there were very few women I would consider to take my place. You were on the short list.”

Felicity lifted one side of her mouth in an almost-smile. “Well, thank you, I guess.”

“You don’t like me, and that’s fine,” Moira said. “You think I’m cold, or manipulative. But are you ready to go to war with Malcolm Merlyn without my help?”

“I’m not sure war is the direction we’ll go in,” Felicity said softly. “I’ve already lost four men to this… foolishness.”

“You’re thinking targeted assassination?” Moira asked. “Malcolm has been trained by the very finest assassins in the world. I can think of no one who could best him in hand-to-hand combat.”

Felicity was saved from having to answer. The front door burst open and Tommy rushed in, Oliver’s good arm draped around his neck. Tommy was talking to him in low tones, and Felicity could see that he had used part of his hood to bind Oliver’s wound. She found herself running down the stairs to support Oliver’s other side and wrapped her arm around his middle. “Oliver, oh my god,” she found herself saying, as she and Tommy maneuvered him towards the impressive staircase on the way to the master bedroom.

Felicity was just thinking about how difficult helping him up the stairs would be when Diggle appeared from the downstairs hallway and gestured to Tommy. “You’ve been carrying him a long way. Let me help you.”

“I’ve got him,” Tommy said through gritted teeth.

“Felicity, run up ahead and tell Lyla that he’s on his way,” Diggle said, gently pushing her away. “Getting up the stairs will go easier with two of us, Merlyn.”

“Go,” Oliver said through grit teeth, and she could hear the pain in his voice. “Tommy and Diggle have me.”
“Okay,” she said, and used her nervous energy to run up the stairs. Moira stood at the top of the landing and watched Diggle and Tommy lift Oliver, bearing his weight between the two of them. “He’s going to be okay,” Felicity said, laying a hand on Moira’s arm.

“Well, he’s conscious and talking, that’s a good sign,” Moira said, her eyes filled with worry. Felicity nodded and skirted around her mother-in-law.

“Diggle and Tommy are on their way up the stairs with Oliver,” Felicity announced to Lyla.

“Good. I can use Johnny’s help,” Lyla said evenly. “He wouldn’t make a half-bad paramedic, if he wasn’t so hell-bent on playing soldier everywhere he goes.”

Felicity nodded, deciding to stay as far away from that marital dispute as she possibly could. They didn’t have to wait long. Tommy and Diggle must have lifted and carried Oliver the last few steps, because he hung limp and barely-conscious between them.


Tommy blinked as he helped set Oliver down on the bed. “What?”

“You’ll want to be helpful, but you’re more likely to get in my way. He’s going to be okay. Just… go for a walk. I’ll let you know when you can come back in,” Lyla said, turning her attention to Oliver. “Johnny, want to hand me my scalpels?”

“There’s nothing I’d like more, Dr. Michaels,” Diggle drawled.

Felicity held out her hand to Tommy, and he took it as they walked out of the master bedroom.

“Moira’s in the hallway,” Felicity whispered. “But -- are you okay?” She stopped them both in the living room of their suite, and ran her hands over Tommy’s arms, up to his face. “You didn’t take any bullets?”

Tommy ducked his head. “I got lucky this time.”
“I was listening on the comms,” Felicity said softly, reaching up to pet his sideburns with a finger. “I heard Oliver chew you out.”

Tommy shrugged, clearly uncomfortable. “My father sent a sniper. Someone had to take him out. Especially since he hit Oliver. Can’t let that kind of stuff go. It makes the men nervous.”

“So you… you went after him yourself.”

“Yes.”

Felicity swallowed past her tears. “You couldn’t send someone else to do that?”

Tommy met her eyes evenly. “Not and live with myself at night.”

Felicity nodded, and stepped closer to Tommy. “I need something from you right now.”

“Anything.”

“Promise me you… you didn’t make that decision lightly.” Felicity wrapped her arms around his neck and pressed her nose into his clavicle and inhaled. “I need to know you’re being careful.”

“As careful as I can be,” Tommy said softly. “It’s not exactly safe, what I do.”

“Okay.” Felicity pressed a kiss to his neck. “Okay.” She sighed. “Moira and I have four difficult phone calls to make.”

“You should do that. The longer you delay -- the worse it will go over,” Tommy said softly, but he didn’t let go of her. Felicity didn’t want to let go of him either.

“I know.” She sighed. “This is the part that I really, really don’t like.”
She could see the moment when Tommy decided to throw caution to the wind. He lifted her chin and kissed her. She fist her hands in what was left of his hood and went up on tiptoe to kiss him back, a low, satisfied hum in the back of her throat.

“I’ll stay here,” he said, pulling away from her and stepping back slightly, something like panic or fear in his eyes. “Wait for an update on Oliver.”

Felicity squeezed her arms around him one last time. “Okay. I’ll be back as soon as I can be.”

Tommy smiled. “I know.”

Felicity forced herself to walk away, out into the hallway, where Moira was waiting for her. “Better take this to my office, my dear,” Moira said softly. “We don’t want any interruptions for these phone calls.”

“Of course.” Felicity followed Moira down the hallway and around a corner, down a set of stairs to the main level. Cold dread seeped into her bones. Technically, this would be the first raid that had happened while she was in charge.

And four men had died.

Felicity was certain there would be… resistance to that. She pushed down that fear, and the guilt, and the blame. She could cope with all of those emotions later.

Now she had four hearts to break. Four families’ lives to destroy. And she could lay it all at the feet of Malcolm Merlyn.
Growing Pains

Chapter Summary

Being a teenager is hard. It's harder when your brothers are mafia and no one tells you what's going on. Poor Thea Queen.

Chapter Notes

Unquantifiable thanks must be laid at the feet of Abbie, who battled fatigue and illness to double-check this chapter for me before I posted it today. I adore you, darling.

I apologize for the late update. Yesterday was insane. I started at 7:15 in the morning and didn't get home until 10:15 and not a single minute of that day did I get near a computer. Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maximus culpa.

WARNING: mentions of child abuse in this chapter.

Tommy paced the hallway outside of Oliver’s room, back and forth until his vision swam and he felt a bit dizzy, exhaustion beating at his every nerve. He checked his watch, though he couldn’t say that he was really paying attention to the time, only that he was constantly doing the math in his head -- forty-five minutes since he left Oliver, an hour, an hour and a half… Waiting for word from the doctor was endless.

Felicity and Moira still hadn’t returned. Tommy, as much as he longed for Felicity’s presence, someone he could lean on, was grateful for the reprieve from Moira. He wasn’t certain he would be able to hide how he felt from the eagle-eyed Dearden matriarch. Not when his emotions were already stretched so thin. And Moira would find some way to poke at that exposed weakness, kick him when he was down. Or she would store it in her quick and cruel brain, and use the information that his heart was still wrapped around Oliver Queen later on.

Diggle opened the door, one hour, forty-two minutes, thirteen seconds later. “Hey man,” he said tiredly. “Think we’ve got him stabilized.”

Tommy nodded. “Good.” He pushed off the wall and ran his hands through his hair. He took a full, deep breath for the first time, felt some of the tension in his shoulders relax. “That’s… more than good. Thank you. Thank you for your help.”

Diggle shrugged. “It’s the least I could do.”
“It really wasn’t,” Tommy said firmly. “You could have chosen not to show up, so. Thank you.”

Diggle nodded. “All right. Then you’re welcome. Lyla would let you in there now, if you wanted to go.”

“Probably ought to wait on Felicity,” Tommy said, sticking his hands in his pockets, looking anywhere but the perceptive ex-soldier in front of him. “He’ll want to see his wife first.”

“The way I understand things, I really don’t think it’s going to matter which one of you comes through that door first,” Diggle said evenly, “so long as he doesn’t wake up alone, and it seems like Felicity has got other things she’s taking care of at the moment. She won’t mind you going in, either. I think, in fact, she’d insist on it.”

Tommy nodded. “Yeah, all right.”

“If you don’t want people to think something’s going on, you should stop acting so squirrely,” Diggle said, crossing his arms and narrowing his eyes. “The only thing that’s going to get folks talking is if all of a sudden you’re refusing to act like you’ve always acted.”

Tommy shook his head. “You’re right of... “ He blinked. “What do you know?”


Tommy nodded slowly, amusement and something like relief coursing through him. “All right.”

Diggle clapped him on the shoulder. “Go in there, Merlyn. You’ll kick yourself in the ass later if you don’t.”

Tommy agreed and pushed through the open master suite door. Lyla was finishing up, returning her supplies to a hefty medical bag. She didn’t look up before she greeted him. “Hey there, Donatello. How’re the ribs?”
“Healed just fine. They tell me part of that’s thanks to you, so.” Tommy shrugged. “Thanks. How’s Oliver?”

“Oh, he’ll live, although it’s a mystery how. Not necessarily from this set of injuries. It’s just that I don’t know that I’ve ever seen a man take so much punishment who wasn’t a professional MMA fighter,” Lyla said. “And given how much of his skin is scar tissue already…”

“Yeah, Oliver doesn’t like to talk about that,” Tommy said, shutting that line of questioning down real quick. What little he knew of what had happened to Oliver, he wouldn’t share without permission, and what he didn’t know, he wasn’t sure he wanted to know.

“That makes sense.” Lyla nodded, tilted her head to the side. “Must have been… traumatic.”

Tommy lifted one corner of his mouth. “What are you hoping to find on this little archaeological dig?”

“Just making conversation, trying to know my patients.” Lyla lifted her hands. “Nothing more, nothing less.”

“Mmm.” Tommy walked over to the bed, took a seat next to Oliver in an armchair that had been pulled up for that purpose. “He’s going to wake up soon, I imagine, and what he would do to both of us if he thought we were discussing his private business is not worth mentioning. You said you want to know your patients? All you need to know about Oliver is that he’s a dangerous man.”

“I gathered as much,” Lyla said dryly. “And I quite like dangerous men. You know, I married one.”

Tommy nodded. “Well, he’s likeable. So there’s that.”

“So are you.”

Tommy flashed a grin at her. “Oh, it’s all an act.”

There might have been too much of the truth in his expression because Lyla faltered a little. “I doubt that,” she said.
“I’ll just wait here with Oliver,” Tommy said, crossing one leg over the other and pulling out his phone. “Do you need to do anything else?”

“No. He should wake up shortly.”

Tommy nodded, but didn’t look up. He’d learned how to be dismissive from the best -- no one could communicate utter disinterest in humanity like Malcolm Merlyn, and as much as he hated his father, that little personality quirk came in handy from time to time.

Lyla was clearly off-balance. “I’ll leave you to it.”

Tommy nodded, pretending to be fascinated with whatever was happening on his screen. After several minutes, he looked up. He’d done played a few rounds of Tetris, and sent a quick text message to Felicity to update her on Oliver’s progress (he was still asleep), and had done some fiddling with some of his accounts, moved money around, bought stock in a few different companies. The beginning of an idea, an inkling of a move he could make against his father was tickling at the back of his mind. He made a note on his phone and then rose smoothly to his feet.

There were voices outside the doorway -- voices he recognized.

Stiffly, he got out of the chair. His clothes were soaked in sweat, and Oliver’s blood. He should change. Whenever he snapped out of the fog surrounding his brain, he would very much regret not showering and putting on clean clothes. He knew that much.

A group of four footsoldiers were arranged in a semi-circle outside of Oliver’s door. They’d each cleaned up, had their wounds tended to. Danny, Mike, Joey, and Stephen… good boys, each of them, and each of them legacies in the Dearden family. They’d had fathers that served, grandfathers that served.

These were the kinds of kids Tommy had worked extra hard to remain in favor with. He never forgot, not for a moment, that he was an interloper here, a newcomer. Without his connection to Oliver, which had been largely happenstance, he would not have risen quickly in the ranks.

“Tommy,” Joey said -- and of course it was Joey, he was the leader of this particular pack. “Any news on Ollie?”
Tommy nodded. “Seems like he’ll live.”

The boys chuckled, and shifted, looks exchanged between each of them. “That’s good to hear,” Joey said. “Very good to hear. Where’s his wife?”

The hackles on the back of Tommy’s neck slowly began to rise. “Well, she’s got some phone calls to make, boys. So I’m sitting in until she can get here.”

“But doesn’t seem very Family-oriented, this Felicity girl.”

“Mrs. Queen,” Tommy said firmly, reestablishing a boundary Joey had just tripped all over, “is incredibly Family-oriented. Oliver’s injury isn’t life-threatening. When he wakes up he’s going to be annoyed that there was any fuss over it at all, you know he will. Knowing that, she chose to call the families of the four boys we lost today with the elder Mrs. Queen rather than sitting here, playing nursemaid to someone who really doesn’t need it.”

“You know, when Mrs. Queen, the first Mrs. Queen, was running things, we didn’t lose four men on an operation,” Stephen blurted out. “I mean, a guy here or there, sure, but… four guys?”

Tommy grit his teeth. “We lost four men today because of my father.”

Each of the boys standing there dropped his head. Danny cleared his throat. “Nah, man, that douchebag’s not your father. You signed papers and shit, didn’t you?”

Tommy chuckled. “All right. We lost four men today because of Malcolm Merlyn. And -- all of our combined inability to see that Malcolm was this type of a threat -- none of us imagined that this is what he would do, that this is the shipment he would risk. And now we know. Let me tell you something, boys. If Felicity Smoak didn’t see it coming -- there’s no way anyone could have seen it coming.”

“Yeah, right,” Stephen said, snorting.

“You know that story? The one the Russians like to tell whenever you go drinking? About how one of theirs figured out how to bring the entire credit card industry in Russia to its knees?”
“Yeah?”

“That was Felicity.” Tommy tapped the door way with his knuckles. “She’s a certified genius. But she’s not omniscient, and you wouldn’t expect Moira to be, either.”

“But I am sorry,” Felicity said, softly, from the other end of the hallway. Tommy had no idea how long she’d been listening, but it was clear it was long enough. “I am very, very sorry.”

The group turned to look at her.

“Obviously, I didn’t know them well. I don’t know any of you well, yet, but…” Felicity shook her head. “I don’t want to make another phone call like that ever. And I certainly refuse to make another one because of Malcolm Merlyn. Moira and I are working together to put a plan in motion that will neutralize him.”

Her eyes flew to Tommy. He nodded, imperceptibly. Whatever information he had about his father’s organization, he would give to her freely.

“Yeah, all right then,” Joey said, and with a nod, the boys shuffled off down the hallway.

Felicity stood as close to Tommy as she could without drawing suspicion, and laid a palm on his shoulder. “I don’t think they believed me.”

“It takes a while to develop trust,” Tommy said. “They’ll see, eventually.”

Felicity’s eyes flickered towards the master suite. Her nerves only showed in the slight shaking of her hands, the way she paused before she asked. “Is Oliver…”

“Still passed out,” Tommy said, pushing the door of the bedroom open for her and letting her precede him in. “Lyla must have gone heavy with the pain meds.”

“Oh, he’s going to hate that,” Felicity said softly. Then she shut the door behind them and wrapped
her arms around Tommy’s neck. “I just need a hug, okay?”

“Yeah, of course.” Tommy let himself sink into the affection, the summer-scent of Felicity filling his nostrils and erasing the faint vestiges of gunpowder and blood that he’d been inhaling since the fight had broken out.

“You should take a shower,” Felicity said, but she didn’t move to leave his arms. If anything, she pulled herself even closer.

“I know,” Tommy agreed.

“Soon.” Felicity sighed. “Just not yet.”

Tommy started to sway, his hand moving to the small of her back. “Someday, when I’m awfully low,” he sang softly. “When the world is cold…”

Felicity’s breath caught on a sob but she sang the next phrase. “I will feel a glow just thinking of you… and the way you look tonight.”

A rustling from the bed drew both of their attention, and they stopped swaying to meet Oliver’s alert eyes.

“Oliver!” Felicity said, rushing from Tommy’s arms to Oliver’s side. “How are you? Oh, that’s a stupid question, you were shot. I mean, are you feeling any pain? I mean, more pain than you should be feeling?”

“Oh, I was feeling fine,” Oliver said, drugs coloring his tone, his voice higher than usual. He closed his eyes and leaned back against the pillows. “I’m sad you stopped, actually. You can both sing to me anytime you want. Or to each other. I’ll listen.”

Felicity laughed and pressed a fierce kiss to his cheek. “You’re high as a kite.”

“Won’t last long,” Oliver said, taking her hand, and reaching out his other. “Tommy, what are you doing all the way over there?”
Tommy’s heart swelled. For one terrifying minute, before he’d been able to assess Oliver’s condition for himself, he’d been worried that one errant bullet had taken out his best friend. Despite what he and Oliver let the foot soldiers think -- the island hadn’t given Oliver super powers or made him any less vulnerable to projectiles. He crossed the room and took Oliver’s other hand.

“This is good,” Oliver said, relaxing even more. “I love you guys. I missed you. Getting shot sucks. I wanted to have sex. Probably not gonna happen tonight.”

“Probably not,” Tommy agreed.

“We missed you too,” Felicity choked out. “No more getting shot before you say hello, okay?”

Oliver chuckled. “All right.”

Tommy didn’t say anything. He couldn’t, not when Felicity reached for his other hand, and they all sat there in silence, listening to Oliver draw deep breaths. This was one of those moments, Tommy thought, that if he could freeze, he would, and return to it whenever it seemed like he was alone, this moment with both of his lovers’ hands in his, and the space to feel like they could be comfortable together.

This was the last time, Tommy told himself, that he would watch Felicity’s face fall, that he would have to watch Oliver suffer pain like this -- no matter what -- the next bullet headed Oliver’s way, he would be right in front of it.

**

Thea woke the next morning to a knock on her bedroom door. She’d been sleeping lightly these days, so she rolled out of bed and rubbed at her eyes as soon as she heard the sound. A knock first thing in the morning either meant that breakfast was coming to her, which only happened on special occasions, or something had happened to her brother… brothers. She had two now. She steeled herself for the worst.

Felicity was on the other side of the door, dressed in one of her trademark knee-length dresses, stylish and tailored, although her eyes were weary and red-rimmed behind her glasses.
“Is everyone okay?” Thea asked, before Felicity could even speak.

“A mission went bad last night,” Felicity said.

Thea nodded, stepping aside and gesturing inside her bedroom in an open invitation. Her insides were screaming, but she tried to be calm. Tried to behave as rationally as possible. “Oliver or Tommy this time?”

“Oliver.” Felicity stepped into the bedroom, took a seat on one of the chairs when Thea pushed it in her direction. “He took a bullet in the shoulder. It wouldn’t have been a big deal, except he’s been injured there before, apparently. There were also four other casualties, all fatalities.”

“He has?” Thea’s brow scrunched. “Not that I remember.”

“On the island,” Felicity said gently.

“Oh.” Thea sat on the bed. She studied her hands, worried at the cuticles of her fingers, searched for something to say. “Oliver doesn’t talk about the island with me.”

“He doesn’t talk about it much with me, either,” Felicity said. She crossed one leg over the other and came as close to slouching as Felicity ever did. “So don’t feel alone there. I think it’s just one of those things where… he doesn’t like to think about it, let alone talk about it.”

“When he got back, I was all obsessed with trying to make him talk to me about it,” Thea said. “I wanted to know everything about what he went through -- like, I don’t know, I thought maybe somehow that would save our relationship, you know? Cause I thought he was dead, and I mourned him… but he was just… walking around some island somewhere, working for the Russian mob, and… everyone just let me believe he was dead for a long time. Eventually, you know -- they told me he was coming back, but I wasn’t going to believe he was alive until I saw it with my own eyes.”

Felicity reached for her hand. “I’m sorry that happened to you. I’m not sorry, obviously, that Oliver ended up in Russia, but…”

Thea squeezed Felicity’s hand in her own. “It just feels like there’s whole parts of my brother I’ll never understand because he won’t let me.”
“Give him time, and he might,” Felicity said. “I can’t make any promises of course, and Oliver’s stories are his own to tell, or to keep to himself. I think he’s got that urge, you know, to keep the ugly stuff from you, the way he always has.”

“I wish he wouldn’t,” Thea said, dropping her head to stare at the carpet. “I wish that he and Tommy would have been honest with me from the start.”

Felicity nodded. “Well, I can understand that. I can also understand their urge to try and keep you safe.”

Thea sighed. “Is Ollie… I mean… obviously he’s okay, but…”

“He’s going to be out of commission for a couple of weeks, perhaps more,” Felicity said, and drew in a huge yawn. “I’m sorry.”

“No, you’re all right. You’ve probably been up for a while,” Thea said. “You should get some sleep.”

Felicity nodded. “I grabbed a few hours late last night, but I think I’m still exhausted.”

Thea drew her into a hug. “You should go, get some more rest. I’ll stop by your room and keep Ollie company this afternoon. Maybe I can kick his ass in Parcheesi or something. That ought to annoy him into getting better quicker. And Felicity?”

“Hm?”

Thea released her, and took in a deep breath. “Can you get me the names of the four men who died? I… I know I’m not the matriarch, but I did grow up around these men, and it’s very likely that I… I will want to pass on my respects.”

Felicity nodded, a sad smile crossing her face. “I absolutely will do that.”
“Thanks.” Thea watched Felicity leave, and then shut her door behind her sister-in-law. A quick check of her phone told her that it was an acceptable time to be awake, for most human beings, and she decided to get her day started.

She sent a quick text to Roy, letting him know that she wanted to go out and about in Starling that morning, and that he should be ready, if he was still on bodyguard duty. She went about her morning routine, smiling faintly when she got the expected naughty text in reply, about how guarding her body was the least he wanted to do to her, and Thea rolled her eyes.

She splashed water on her face, reaching for the expensive face cream she liked so much, and tried not to think too hard about how her brother had been shot last night, and she hadn’t even known. No one had bothered to tell her that Oliver was being sent out, or that he’d been injured.

Her hands shook. A little with fury, a little with fear. Felicity had come to tell her, herself, and that was nice enough, but… surely someone should have come and got her last night?

Maybe life was changing. Maybe she would just -- quietly and firmly be pushed aside. She hadn’t wanted the life, she told herself, but she didn’t want to give up her family, didn’t want to be left out of what was happening.

She felt a rolling wave of nausea sweep through her, but she ignored it. Allowing herself to wallow in these emotions would do nobody any good. It felt like the house was pushing in on her, making it harder to breathe.

She needed to get out. Another text to Roy, and she was heading out her bedroom door. Having her life together was a bit too much to ask, she thought, but she could sure put together a killer outfit, and her hips swayed with confidence as she left the family corridor for the grand staircase that led down to the main foyer.

As she passed Oliver and Felicity’s door, Tommy’s opened. “Hey, there,” he said softly. “Where are you going so early in the morning?”

“Out,” Thea said brightly. “This place is a little... oppressive today. Need to breathe some freer air.”

Tommy smiled in faint amusement, and the slight condescension of that expression annoyed her more than it might usually. She grit her teeth, frustrated.
“Well,” Tommy said. “Be sure you take Roy with you. Tell him I said to be on high alert. It’s getting dangerous out there.”

“Oh, you mean cause Ollie got shot?” Thea said sweetly. “By Malcolm Merlyn’s men, right?”

“Yes,” Tommy said, drawing out the word ever-so-slowly. “That would be why.”

“Good to know,” Thea said, and she turned and headed down the staircase.

“Wait. Thea, wait. Are you mad at me?” Tommy’s voice was incredulous.

“Nope. You acted exactly how I expect you to act. You just… met expectations, that’s all.”

Tommy ran down the stairs until he was in front of her. “Hey, whoa. I can’t do teenage passive-aggression right now, Thea. Come on.”

“I’m not being passive-aggressive,” Thea insisted, brushing past him. “And I’m not mad at you. I’ll bring Roy with me, but not because I’m so scared, but because he’s my boyfriend and he’s the only man in this building that doesn’t treat me like I’m some… some kid.”

“People died last night, Thea,” Tommy said, his voice quiet and his eyes cold. “I can’t let you walk out of this house unless I know you’re going to take your safety seriously.”

“I have my gun,” Thea tossed back. “I think I’ll be okay. It’s just to the coffee shop for some breakfast, and then to the mall for a new pair of shoes. Do you think that’s okay? Or should I start asking for your permission now, since you’re so hell-bent on pretending to be my father when we both know…”

Tommy’s eyes flashed. “Thea.”

“Get out of my way,” Thea said. “Unless you want to apologize to me.”
Tommy crossed his arms. “For what?”

“Ugh. Move.” Thea ran past him to find Roy waiting for her in the entrance way. “Come on, let’s get out of here.”

“Harper!” Tommy’s voice froze them both in their tracks, but Thea tugged insistently on Roy’s arm.

“Ignore him,” she said. “He’s just being a dick.”

“I can’t ignore him,” Roy said. “He already kind of wants to kill me. And Oliver definitely wants to kill me, so I feel like I’ve got to save face where I can, you know.”

Thea huffed. “Would you like to have sex again, ever?”

“Come on, baby, that’s such a kid move,” Roy said. “You know you won’t do that to me.”

Thea nearly screamed. “Go,” she said instead, her voice cold. “Go get your marching orders like a good little soldier.”

Roy nodded. “Wait here.”

Thea crossed her arms, checked her phone, and when more than a couple of minutes had passed, turned and left the building without Roy. His slick little bike was parked out front, she noticed, so he would have plenty of time to catch up, and she had no interest at all in spending one more minute in the Queen manor.

She turned the engine over in the BMW and backed out of the massive family garage, whipping down the drive and around the curves that led into the city. Tommy had taught her to drive on this road, told her stories about the things he and Oliver got up to in high school in the cars they bought, sold, wrecked and repaired.

She didn’t want to think about either of her brothers right now. She lifted her eyes to the rearview mirror, and sure enough, Roy on his deathtrap of a bike was right behind her.
“Make sure you keep a safe distance, asshole,” Thea muttered under her breath, and punched the gas.

The bass in the stereo system she had custom installed was fantastic, and it rocked the seats as she drove through town. More than one person stopped and stared at her, but she didn’t care. The music was loud enough that it shut down the thoughts she couldn’t keep from swirling in her brain. That meant it was the right volume.

She turned into the coffee shop’s parking lot to grab her favorite vanilla latte, Roy still right behind her. For a moment, it looked like he might try to get off his bike and follow her but she shook her head firmly. “Stay, boy,” she muttered.

Coffee in hand, she returned to her car and headed to her favorite mall. Killing the engine on her car, she sorted herself out, bag, coffee, sunglasses, and stepped out of the car.

Roy pulled into the stall next to her, his bike jerking to a stop. “Jesus, Thea!” He shouted as he took his helmet off.

“Let’s go shopping,” Thea said, striding away from him. She was mildly surprised when Roy caught her arm.

“Don’t,” he said, through clenched teeth, “ever do that to me again. Tommy almost killed me. Then he almost killed you.”

“Get your hand off of me,” Thea hissed. “Aren’t you supposed to be my bodyguard, not my manhandler?”

“Tommy said you were pissy. Listen, you’ve got to stick close by me today, okay? We’re like, at Defcon four or some shit.”

“Fine, I’ll stick close by you, but I don’t want to talk,” Thea said, and she took off, Roy easily catching up with her.

They walked in silence to the mall, Roy’s eyes sweeping back and forth, every motion
communicating that he was on high alert. Whatever Tommy had said to him had scared him into a more overt level of seriousness than Thea was used to. She couldn’t decide whether she was annoyed by or attracted to this version of her boyfriend that gave her curt instructions and expected her to follow them.

More likely annoyed.

They were almost inside the building when Roy snapped. “Run!” he shouted, turning around.

“What?” Thea’s eyes widened. A man in a suit of black, his face obscured by a mask, attacked Roy. It was fast and fierce, but somehow quick and efficient. Thea could see that Roy tried to defend himself, tried to launch a counterattack, but he was clearly overpowered.

A quick series of punches -- one to the gut, one to Roy’s perfect face, and a well placed kick, a sickening crunch that Thea could hear from ten feet away that announced a broken bone somewhere, and Roy fell to the ground, unconscious.

Thea turned to run just as Roy went down -- for a split second, she considered running towards him, but the man was clearly coming after her, so… She fumbled with the catch on her bag. The gun was there, where she’d kept it every day since Oliver and Felicity had given it to her.

It was loaded. Not many bullets, but…

Suddenly, she was flung up against the wall of the building. The wind rushed out of her lungs and she saw stars as her head cracked against the cement.

Her gun hit the ground, and the assailant kicked it away from her, one of his large hands holding her against the wall by her neck. “Guns are not very useful in close-quarter combat, Ms. Queen,” the man said, and his voice, though being modified, was oddly familiar. “You would think one of your brothers would have told you that.”

He was pressing on her windpipe. He was pressing on her windpipe and it was painful, the kind of pain she hadn’t ever experienced. She kicked her feet, trying anything to get him to let her loose, prying at his hands with hers.

“Let me go,” she hissed with what air she had left. “Let me…”
“No, I’m afraid I can’t do that, Ms. Queen. Or should I say… Ms. Merlyn.”

“That… idiot…” Thea gasped for breath, “is not my father.”

Her assailant reached up with one hand and pulled the mask down off of his face. “You can run, you can hide, but the truth will always be there, Thea. I will always be your father.”

Seeing Malcolm’s face only enraged Thea. “If you gave a shit at all about me, you would let go.”

His voice was all fatherly concern, patronizing. “I do give a shit about you. That’s why I’m demonstrating… to you, to your family, that having you walking about unprotected is… unwise.”

Malcolm pressed harder on her windpipe and she choked.

“This is the problem with Moira. She takes my children, and she allows them to become weak. If you had grown up with me, this wouldn’t even be an issue for you,” Malcolm said, scowling.

“I am not yours,” Thea said, kicking even harder. She finally managed to land one on Malcolm’s shin, but he didn’t even flinch, and Thea found herself, despite her intentions, deflating a little.

“Let her go!” Roy shouted, limping on his good leg, the other all… oddly bent, at such a weird angle that it seemed impossible that he could stand.

He had her gun in his hands. It almost shook, but he held it steadily at Malcolm’s head.

“Oh good,” Merlyn drawled. “The idiot boyfriend has a gun.”

“Please,” Thea said. “If all you wanted to do was scare me straight… all right, I’m scared, okay?”

“I wanted to send a message,” Malcolm said, and he drew his knife.
“Don’t you fucking touch her!” Roy shouted, and he cocked the gun.

“To your brothers,” Malcolm continued, as though Roy hadn’t even spoken. “To your sister-in-law. To your mother. I want them to know that no one is safe.”

“Don’t hurt me,” Thea begged, some part of her instantly, profoundly ashamed. Oliver would never have begged. Tommy wouldn’t have begged. Felicity and Moira, with their matching rod-of-steel spines, wouldn’t have begged. Thea couldn’t find it in herself not to.

“I don’t think hurting you will be necessary,” Malcolm said, and he flipped the knife in his hand so the handle was pointing to Thea. He dropped her, letting her hit the ground. Her hands went instantly to her throat and she took deep, gasping breaths. “Take this.”

“What are you, psycho?” Thea asked, her eyebrows scrunched together.

“No,” Malcolm said. “I had a point to make, and I made it. Take the knife, Thea. Learn how to use it, to protect yourself.”

“I’m going to kill you,” Thea said, backing up against the wall.

“Very unlikely, princess,” Malcolm said, smiling condescendingly, and Thea’s stomach turned. “This is a gift for you.”

“I don’t want gifts from you.” Thea’s eyes flashed. “I don’t want anything to do with you.”

“You see how easily I got to you, don’t you?” Malcolm said softly, stepping closer to her. Thea’s hand flew to her neck immediately. “You see how easily I got through the protection they gave you? You might want out of this life, but you can’t escape it. Your brothers can’t save you. The only thing you can do is prepare yourself for what’s about to come. And when you want to do that -- you can come to me.”

Thea dug down deep, tried to find her spine. Tried to sound convincing. “I will never, ever, take your help.”
Malcolm smirked. “Strong words from someone who begged, not even five minutes ago, for me not to hurt her.”

“Fuck you,” Thea spat. “And take your fucking knife, I don’t want you or your… anything… near me.”

“We’ll see about that,” Malcolm said, and he threw the knife forcefully so it whizzed past her ear and embedded itself in the wall behind her. Thea let out a sob and covered her mouth. “I’m going to win this war, Thea. Are you going to be ready?”

Malcolm moved like lightning, sweeping down on Roy and disarmed him. Then, laughing, he walked away, shaking his head.

“Roy!” Thea pushed herself off of the wall and ran towards him.

“Yeah, babe?” His face was going increasingly white.

Thea pushed up off of the ground and ran to him, helping him to a bench. “Thanks for playing big damn hero. I appreciate it.”

Roy hissed in pain. “That’s what they pay me for.”

“We’re calling an ambulance,” Thea said firmly.

Roy nodded. “Okay. I think he broke my leg, the fucker.”

“Yeah.” Thea shook her head, and dialed 911.

The next few hours passed in a rush -- the ambulance wailing, rushing them to the nearest hospital, filling out forms, following Roy from room to room. Eventually, finally, he was settled, and he was asleep.
And it occurred to Thea that she was completely alone. And completely without protection. She panicked. Her hands were shaking as she dialed Felicity’s number.

“Hey, I need to borrow a bodyguard,” Thea said, and then she broke down in tears.

Felicity and Diggle must have flown, Thea decided, from the Queen Manor to the hospital, because they were there within ten minutes. Felicity had her arms open halfway down the hallway and Thea ran to them, wrapping the other woman in a hug.

“Are you okay?” Felicity demanded, pulling away to inspect Thea. “Oh my God, your neck…”

“I had someone look at it,” Thea rasped. “I’m fine.”

Felicity nodded and used her thumbs to wipe away some of the tears from Thea’s cheeks. “Okay. I’m so glad. Diggle is just going to do a sweep of the area, and then we’re going to go back to the manor, okay?”

“But Roy…”

“Is coming with us,” Felicity said firmly. “Lyla’s on her way to sign the papers. We’ll get him home where he can rest and not be constantly poked and bothered.”

Thea sniffled, and then hated herself for doing so. “He’ll like that,” she said, trying to straighten her shoulders. “He’s a big baby about needles.”

“Aren’t we all,” Felicity said dryly.

“Thanks for coming,” Thea said softly. “You’re the only one I could trust not to shout and act… ridiculously.”

Felicity nodded. “Well -- if it makes you feel better, I decided to wait and tell Oliver and Tommy until we get back,” she said. “They can shout at you in the privacy of your own home, then.” But she smiled to soften the blow.
“I didn’t realize, I guess… I was completely helpless. I wasn’t… I wasn’t ready at all, and it all happened so fast, he was right there and he could have killed me.” She started to shake, and wrapped her arms around herself. Felicity drew her to a chair in the waiting room, and made them both sit down.

“He didn’t,” Felicity said softly. “The only thing you can do now is -- decide what you want to do with this experience.”

“I don’t want to be scared,” Thea said. “I don’t want to -- see him coming around every corner or see his face when I close my eyes.”

Felicity pursed her lips. “Some of that might happen, no matter what you choose to do,” she said carefully. “I don’t know of any way to stop your brain from -- processing something like this.”

“I want to be ready, though,” Thea said firmly. “The next time that he comes for me, I want to be ready. I want to at least have a shot.”

“We could speak to Sara,” Felicity said, tapping the arm rest of the chair she was sitting in. “I’m sure that she would be willing to teach you.”

Thea thought for a moment. “Do you think so?”

“Yes,” Felicity said. “She’s got strong opinions about women being able to take care of themselves. As do I, really. Sara already works with me, helps me stay sharp.”

“Mrs. Queen?” The always-professional and utterly calm John Diggle appeared. “We’re ready to go now.”

“Thank you, John,” Felicity said. “Let’s go.”

Thea found herself pulled up, Felicity’s arm around her shoulders as they left the hospital. Roy slept in the backseat of one of the Queen family’s dark SUVs (Thea’s car, she was informed, would be picked up later) all the way back to the manor. When they arrived, several footsoldiers left the house to help retrieve Roy from the back seat and get him settled on one of the family’s wheelchairs.
As soon as they entered the house, Thea could feel eyes on her. She swept her gaze up the stairs and saw Tommy standing at the top of them, his face a mask of calm that obviously covered up his anger.

Her stomach sank to her shoes as he came down the stairs. “You want to yell at me, don't you?”

Tommy shook his head. “Get your boyfriend settled and then come see me.”

Thea shot a look at Felicity, who nodded in support. “Moira had Raisa prep the guest room on the ground floor for him,” she said. “Take your time.”

Thea nodded and brushed past both of them to take control of Roy’s wheelchair from Diggle. It might be said that she dragged her feet, took extra time helping Roy out of his wrecked clothes and into the softest pajamas Thea could find. She fetched him a glass of water, read all the information on his prescriptions, and tucked him into bed.

“Not that I don’t appreciate the attention,” Roy said sleepily, “but I can’t help feeling like you are using me to avoid a difficult conversation.”

“I’m sorry.” Thea crawled in bed next to Roy, tucking herself into his side and laying her head on his shoulder. “I was kind of a bitch to you today. I was upset with Tommy and Oliver and I took it out on you. And then your leg got all fucked because of me. Your job sucks.”

“Happy to do it. And I didn’t take it personally, ” Roy said, closing his eyes. Thea inhaled. He smelled like the hospital, and faintly like the cheap fabric softener he used on all of his clothes. “I know you’re having a rough time these days.”

“You should be upset when I'm being rude to you.” Thea buried her head nose in his shoulder. “You shouldn’t run after maniacs who already broke your leg for me after I acted like that.”

“Hey. There’s nothing you could do that would make me leave you to Malcolm Merlyn. You know I... you know how I feel about you.”

“You scared me, you idiot.”
Roy snorted. “Yeah, well, you scared me, too. But we’re going to be okay. I promise.”

Thea let him hold her while she cried, his arms sure around her.

A soft knock had Thea lifting her head. Oliver stepped inside the room, his eyes tight with the pain of moving. Thea sat up straight. “Ollie, what are you doing here?”

“Felicity tells me that you two had an adventure this afternoon,” Oliver said. “I just wanted to come down here and make sure you were okay for myself.”

Thea launched herself off of the bed and ran to Oliver, wrapping her arms around his neck. Oliver grunted a little with the impact against his injury, but refused to let her move. If she didn't know better, she would have thought Oliver was crying, moisture brushing her cheek where he brushed his against hers.

“What happened to your neck?” Oliver asked. Of course he would notice. Of course that would be the first thing he asked.

“He uh…” Thea thought she was probably about out of tears. She hoped, anyway, because her eyes were dry and blinking was starting to be painful. “Malcolm choked me against a wall.”

Oliver grimaced. “Thea, I…”

“It's okay, Oliver. I will be okay.” She tried to straighten her spine, stand up straight under the weight of his gaze.

“You don’t have to be okay right now,” Oliver said softly. “You were attacked. It’s okay to need some time.”

“You wouldn’t,” Thea said. “Tommy wouldn’t. Felicity and Mom wouldn’t.”

“Yes, we would. Each of us would,” Oliver responded. “Tommy wants to talk to you.”
Thea felt all of twelve. But it had to be said. The reason for her reluctance. “He’s going to yell.” She didn’t want anyone yelling at her. She didn’t think she could take it.

“No, he won’t,” Oliver said. “He just needs to talk to you. And I want to talk to Roy.”

“It’s not his fault.”

“No,” Oliver agreed. “I owe him an apology. Tommy and I... and Felicity... we asked him to walk into into a dangerous situation and we didn’t provide adequate back-up. We’re lucky that things went the way they did. Roy needs to know we aren’t going to let it happen that way again.”

Thea’s eyes widened while her heart softened. “Oh.”

“Go talk to Tommy. He’s kind of a wreck. Needs one of your killer hugs.” Oliver gave a wink, obviously dismissing her. Thea left her brother and her boyfriend to talk and went to find Tommy.

**

Tommy waited in the library, a single glass of bourbon in his hand -- and it would be one glass, no more, no matter how much he longed to get lost in the bottle -- gathering his thoughts. He’d almost lost Oliver, and then Thea, to his father in the space of a couple of days. He hadn’t thought that he could hate Malcolm any more than he already did, but where the relationship had once cooled, new rage had settled in its place.

His eyes were transfixed by the amber liquid, its smooth heat warming his throat as he took a sip at a time. It wouldn’t have been that long ago that he would have tossed back the alcohol in a single gulp and drank the whole bottle. He couldn’t afford to do that now. Not with Oliver out of commission and the Family at war.

But, oh, it was tempting...

The door opened and Thea, her eyes red-rimmed and blown wide with the remnants of fear, entered the room, letting the door close behind her.
“Before you say anything, you should know that I’m sorry.” Thea held her hands up. “You tried to make me listen this morning, and I wasn’t hearing you because I was upset about something else with Oliver, and I’ve learned my lesson. You really, really don’t have to yell. I promise, I’m sorry.”

Tommy set the glass down carefully, moved it several inches away from his hand. His heart ached in his chest. He closed his eyes, thought about what he wanted to say.

“It’s going to be hard, sometimes,” Tommy said, “me and Oliver realizing that you’re growing up, figuring out how to treat you. I realize that you were hurt because no one told you about Oliver as it was happening.”

“It was kind of shitty.” Thea said, suddenly uncertain of the turn the conversation had taken. “He might be married now, but he’s still my brother.”

“On the other hand,” Tommy said, tapping his fingers on the arm of the chair he was sitting in. “There was a lot going on -- Felicity had to deal with making difficult phone calls, we would have had to explain to you what was going on, and there were already people moving in and out of Oliver’s room, and it wasn’t a life-threatening injury. You see? It was… complex.”

“I still feel like I should have known,” Thea said. “I… I always want to know, when you guys are hurt. I want to know when I should be worrying.”

“I can understand that. We’ll work on that, okay? But -- you.” Tommy sighed. “You’ve got to work on not -- not storming out of here when you don’t get your way or you’re a little upset with me. At least until things settle.”

Thea nodded, her eyes filling with tears. “I am sorry, Tommy.”

Tommy lifted his eyes, and for the first time, caught sight of the ugly bruise that was developing along Thea’s neck, in the distinct shape of a man’s hands.

“He had his hands on your neck?” Tommy asked, standing quickly and crossing the room, lifting her chin gently.

“He was choking me,” Thea said, and her voice wavered. “Against… against a wall. I couldn’t catch my breath. I remembered you told me once that if someone grabbed me I was supposed to kick them
“as hard as I could and I tried that, but it didn’t work on him.”

“No, it wouldn’t,” Tommy said, with a sigh. “I’m sorry, Thea.”

“He told me he just -- he just wanted to send a message,” Thea said, the edge of her voice going from frightened to pissed. “He said he wanted to show me how weak I was, he said that… that Mom takes his children and makes them weak.”

“You’re not weak,” Tommy said firmly.

Thea refused to meet his eyes. “I begged for my life. I asked him not to hurt me. I cried.”

“Thea, a man who is more than twice your size was squeezing your windpipe. You did what anybody would do in that situation. You’re not weak.”

Thea shook her head. “Ollie tried to tell me that too, but you guys forget, I watch you all the time. I know it’s possible to… not.”

Oh, but they had. Tommy’s fist clenched. They’d simply had that instinct, the instinct that their lives were worth something, worth preserving, pounded, kicked, choked out of them. Tommy longed to go back to the days when he would have begged for his life.

“I was eleven… yeah, I must have been about eleven, the first time Dad tried to choke me,” Tommy said flatly. “I begged then.”

“Oh my God,” Thea said, her hands going to her mouth.

Tommy fidgeted with his cufflinks. Then, impatient with himself, he sighed and forced himself still. “See, I wanted to play at Ollie’s house, not spend the day with him in our boring house. And by that time, you know, I’d kind of gotten used to just keeping my mouth shut, not making waves. You couldn’t make him happy, either way, but I hoped just -- being a non-entity would be enough to keep me out of harm’s way. Except this day. This day Ollie and Robert were going fishing and I… I so wanted to go.”
“Tommy.” Thea gripped his forearm.

Tommy looked her right in the eye, a quiver in his voice he couldn’t get rid of. He hadn’t ever let her see the damaged child he’d been. Maybe that had been a mistake -- she needed to know that it wasn’t weakness to beg. “I begged and begged until he snapped. I thought he was going to kill me. There was such rage in his eyes. Then they went dead right about the time I lost the strength in my limbs to kick him and fight back. He let me go and I… I cried. I begged him to let me go. I swore I’d never ask him for anything again. I didn’t get to go fishing that day, because you could see the bruise.”

Thea’s lips quivered. “Tommy, I never knew. I mean, I knew he was an ass, but…”

“The point is, he can’t make you stronger,” Tommy said, pushing aside her concern. “He’s an ass who beats children, who thinks the way to control his children is to terrify them. Because he’s not strong. Nobody that’s got real strength strangles their child.”

“No, I know,” Thea said. “I would never -- I told him I didn’t want anything to do with him.”

“This is -- this is why you’ve got to…” Tommy took in a deep breath. “I don’t trust him. He wants you under his thumb or he wants you dead. And what little sanity he had, he’s slowly lost over the years. I can see it in his eyes, now, when I look at him. So that means, we’ve got to start taking everybody’s security a lot more seriously. No more day trips with the undertrained boyfriend. From now on, you don’t go anywhere without Diggle or Sara with you, or both.”

“Felicity said Sara would train me to do some hand-to-hand stuff. Help me maybe get to the point where, if it happened again, I wouldn’t feel so helpless.” Thea’s voice caught. “I don’t think I’ve ever been that scared, Tommy.”

He hugged her close and rocked her back and forth. “It’s okay. It’s okay that you were scared.”

Thea sniffled. “What happens now?”

Tommy pulled himself together, framed Thea’s face with his hands and kissed the top of her head gently before he moved on, his tone business-like. Thea wanted to be treated like an adult, to have information. This piece at least, he could give her. “Well -- now Felicity and I try to convince Oliver that he’s not well enough to track Malcolm down and kill him himself, slowly, by hand. And then we come up with a plan. Because we can’t let this go unanswered.”
Tommy could feel the shudder move up and down Thea’s spine while he held her. “Nobody else is going to get hurt because of me, right?”

Tommy sighed. This was another one of those situations where he had to weigh whether he should tell the truth or not. “Not because of you, Thea,” he finally landed on, “because of Malcolm’s actions. A lot of these footsoldiers, you know, they think of you like a sister, you’ve been around them since you were little, and we can’t… no one would stand for us letting him put his hands on you, even if Felicity and Oliver and I wanted to ignore this happening, which we don’t. But when we go after Malcolm, it’s likely that someone will get hurt. He trains his men well, and… things happen.”

“I hate this,” Thea confessed. “I hate all of it. I don’t want him to touch me. But I don’t want you and Oliver or even Felicity to get hurt. I don’t want us to be at war.”

“I know,” Tommy said. “It’s not… ideal. But we will be okay.”

Thea sighed and snuggled into his arms. “Do you really think that, or are you just trying to make me feel better?”

He tightened his arms around her, laying his cheek flat against her shoulder and breathing deeply, taking in her scent, holding onto this moment of holding his sister with that breath. He was only going to get so many of these. “Maybe a little of both.”
Many thanks to Abbie, who once again, kept me comma-honest, the plot consistent, and asked the hard questions. I'm so glad that she's in my life.

_Starling City, 5 years ago_

Moira hadn’t felt anything when she read the report of Robert’s latest… indiscretion. A young woman at the company -- it seemed they got younger, year after year, these interns that he took under his wing, made them feel as though they were the center of the universe, and lured them to his bed. How she’d raged in the beginning of their marriage -- the fits she’d thrown, the threats she’d made…

Now she just felt cold. Cold towards the man who had given her Oliver -- probably because the boy was turning out so much like him, impulsive, selfish -- if Robert had his way, Oliver would be allowed to drift along in the same path, paying attention to neither family business -- Queen Consolidated or the Dearden family, wasting his life on alcohol and women and… the other kinds of company he preferred to keep these days.

She’d allowed it. She’d looked the other way for years on the debauchery, the drugs, the orgies. Allowed both of the men in her life to act selfishly, irresponsibly.

Until Isabel Rochev.

She’d been the first of Robert’s dalliances to dare make a play for her husband’s permanent affections, to try and usurp Moira’s place in Robert’s life. And she’d been the first to try and wrest control of Queen Consolidated from their hands when that had failed.

Moira didn’t have the time or the patience to deal with business crises on both sides of the coin. She counted on Queen Consolidated’s legitimate business to hide her illegitimate ones. Not to mention, Robert’s influence on Oliver was becoming unbearable. The boy was lazy, insolent.

Defiant.
The tabloid on her desk had her son’s picture splashed all over it, and the statement from her credit card company verified the tale the tabloid was telling. A weekend of drunken behavior -- damaged hotel property, strip clubs…

He had no interest in school. Clearly, since he’d dropped out of UCLA without telling her. He had no interest in a job. No reason to believe there would be consequences for anything. Her mind made up, Moira tucked the tabloid under her arm and walked down the hallway to her son’s room.

She knocked briefly on the door, but didn’t pause to make sure Oliver allowed her in. It was, after all, her house. The first thing she noticed was the mess. Bottles on the floor once filled with liquor were now empty. A packet of red pills sat on a table, surrounded by a pill crusher and a credit card.

Then her eyes flew to the bed. Her son was completely naked, his eyes closed in bliss, his hands in… in Tommy Merlyn’s hair. Tommy Merlyn, who currently had his mouth on Oliver’s cock.

Oliver twisted and writhed in pleasure. “Oh my God, Tommy. So fucking perfect. So…”

Tommy’s hands were on her son’s thighs, and she could see, even from the doorway, that his cheeks were suctioned in from effort. Clearly not the first time he’d done this.

“Going to come in your fucking mouth,” Oliver was gasping. Moira didn’t make a sound. Not that they would have noticed -- Oliver’s voice had that quality she’d come to expect when he was high.

Moira’s stomach dropped and turned. She’d thought -- after their attempt with Laurel that the boys had learned better, thought that Oliver was currently sampling the charms of the younger Lance sister. But no. No -- Oliver was fucking Tommy Merlyn, getting high, and drinking her money away.

She didn’t move, not for a long moment. She weighed her options, and then silently turned on a heel and left, closing the door soundlessly behind her.

For some time now, she’d weighed what she would have to do if this continued, the choices she would have to make. Between Isabel Rochev, and her son’s lack of… decorum. Something drastic would have to be done.

“Well, I’m going to need a meeting with Michael,” Moira said, to one of the foot soldiers standing guard outside her office.
The man practically hopped into action, bolstered by her tone of voice. She seethed in her own anger for a minute but then let it fade to cold righteousness.

“Michael, I’m so glad you could come,” Moira said, as soon as the most loyal member of her family was inside her office. “Shut the door behind you.”

When Moira had conceived an heir outside of the bonds of her marriage, it was Michael she trusted to keep the secret and to keep watch. When Moira needed something done quietly and quickly, it was Michael she trusted. In his younger days, it had been Michael that had worn the green hood that was the emblem of her family. He was a first cousin to her -- the son of her mother’s brother, and his father had worn the hood before, too.

He’d never married, never had children. There was no one left in his family to pass on the burden to -- and no one in hers that was worthy enough, yet, to wear it.

“There are going to be some changes around here,” Moira said. “Some that I consider to be long overdue.”

Michael was, as always, unruffled. “Yes, ma’am.”

“I would very much like your help.”

Michael nodded. “Whatever you need.”

“Good. Robert has become… inconvenient.”

To his credit, Michael only lifted an eyebrow slightly. “Recently, ma’am?”

Moira was more amused than anything by his insolence. “Oh, you never liked him. You can admit it. But the influx of his capital saved this family in a rough patch. For that, I was more than inclined to let him live to a natural death. Unfortunately, he’s abused the privilege.”
“Yes, ma’am.”

“You know what to do,” Moira said, waving a hand. “I’ll trust you to handle the details.”

Michael inclined his head. “Nothing that can be traced back to us, of course.”

“Nothing protracted or drawn out, either,” Moira said, her voice cold. Michael had a tendency to get… creative. And Robert, while he’d done everything to hurt her that he could think of over the last twenty-five years, was still her husband. “The man is the father of my son, after all.”

“Of course.”

Moira was through with having useless men in her family. Robert was too far gone to change, but Oliver… Oliver might be able to. The decision to kill Robert hadn’t been an easy one -- she’d loitered over it too long, to begin with. She didn’t have the strength in her to order another death in the family. If Oliver could be redeemed, could be *worth* something, then it would be necessary to try and do that.

For the phone call she was about to make, Moira shut the doors to her office firmly, and dialed the international number. In general, she was not a patient woman, but for this, she could wait. She jumped through the necessary hoops until…

“Moira Queen.” His voice was just the way she remembered it, smooth and just-this-side of deep. She wasn’t scared of anything, but she might, in the right context, be scared of this man. “You are not the type to call in the middle of the night. You’re not the type to call at all.”

“I have been waiting to cash in that favor we discussed,” Moira said. “I was hoping I would never have to, but… circumstances have become… untenable.”

“Of course. I am a man who always pays my debts,” he said. “What is it I can do for you?”

“My son. He refuses to become a man,” Moira said, pushing down the wave of regret that threatened to overwhelm. “He is not willing to do what must be done for the family.”
“You wish me to kill your son.”

“Or send someone who can make a man of him,” Moira said. “Someone who can teach him what he would need to know to wear the mantle of the hood.”

There was a pause on the other end of the phone. “My associates and I… we could do that. The man we would send back to you would bear little resemblance to the child you send me now, though.”

“Good,” Moira said coldly. “Something has to change.”

“What will your husband say about this plan of yours?”

“Not much,” Moira said, checking her watch. “Of course, given ten minutes, he won’t be saying anything. At all. Ever.”

“And they say Ra’s al-Ghul has a cold heart.”

“Ra’s al-Ghul does not bear the burden of being a woman in a man’s world.”

**

Starling City, Present Day

Felicity woke snuggled up next to Oliver, his arm wrapped around her. He still smelled faintly like the body wash she’d bought for him, his bandaged shoulder on the opposite side from the one she usually slept on. She could hear the sound of the shower running, and Tommy’s voice as he sang. She was -- for the most part, for the first time in her life, absolutely content.

She missed her mother, she missed Uncle Yuri, of course, but -- she was building a family here, building a life here. Oliver had gotten hurt but he was still alive, still here, underneath of her fingertips, his chest rising and falling steadily as he slumbered. Tommy’s faint imprint, on the other side of her, was still warm. If she rolled over and pressed her nose to the pillow he used, it would
smell faintly of citrus and cloves.

She’d slept the night away between them, a jumble of arms and legs, exhausted and sated. Indulging herself, she reached for Tommy’s pillow and hugged it to her body. In a few minutes, she would force herself awake, slide out of bed, and get her day started.

The shower turned off. Felicity couldn’t bring herself to move. She curved her body into Oliver and kissed his bicep absently.

Tommy emerged from the bathroom, a black towel, thick and soft, wrapped around his waist. His Dearden tattoo, the intricate Irish cross, covered the whole left side of his torso, and he had a tattoo of twisting vines with beads on them in a rosary pattern to honor his mother around his right bicep. Water dripped down the carefully sculpted planes of his abdomen.

Felicity licked her lips. “Good morning,” she said softly, sleep still coloring her voice.

To her delight, Tommy crossed to the bed, sat down next to her, and cupped her face. “Good morning. Still sleepy?”

“Mm,” Felicity said, snuggling into his pillow. “Still very tired.”

Tommy hesitated a moment, but then he bent his head and kissed her, pulling her gently away from Oliver and towards him. Felicity went with it, sitting up slightly so that she could kiss him back, bare feet sliding in the Egyptian cotton sheets. He tasted of mint and he smelled so good… Felicity tugged lightly on the towel around his waist and it fell to the floor.

Tommy chuckled and pushed Felicity back gently until she was underneath of him. He bore his weight on his forearms and his knees as he kissed her, running his hands up her thighs, pushing the faded grey t-shirt of his she stole and regularly wore to bed out of the way.

“Too tired for this?” Tommy asked, winking at her as he pulled down her panties.

“I’m sure I can find the energy to bear it somewhere inside me,” Felicity said, and covered her face. “Oh my God.”
“Oh, I’ll be inside you, Smoak,” Tommy teased. “Just give me a minute.”

“I’ll give you more than a minute,” Felicity said, spreading her legs so that Tommy could work his magic. “I’ll give you several minutes.”

She turned her head and saw that Oliver was awake. Awake and watching them, his eyes glittering like jewels. He hadn’t said anything, made no move to participate, just watched, a faint smile on his face.

She was lost in Oliver’s eyes when Tommy slipped his tongue all the way inside of her and curled it up. “Fucking hell!” Felicity arched her hips.

“Shhh,” Tommy said, moving his mouth away from her to kiss the inside of her thighs. “Slow and steady.”

“If you wanted slow and steady you know better than to touch me there,” Felicity said, blushing.

“Sit up a little,” Oliver said softly, and he helped her work the nightshirt up and over her head. “Beautiful.”

Tommy crawled up Felicity’s body to lean over and kiss Oliver good morning, and Felicity slowly worked her hand between her legs, circling her clit while she watched. The kiss started slow, almost lazy, two people who knew each other exceedingly well, knew what buttons to push. It turned passionate gradually, a flame slowly coaxed to life.

Oliver’s hands caressed Tommy, up his thighs, over his ass. Tommy ground his hips into Oliver and both of them gasped. Felicity bit her lip, dipping her finger inside of herself and whining in the back of her throat. She knew exactly how that felt.

“Come here,” Oliver said, his voice husky, as Tommy worked his way, in kisses, down Oliver’s neck. “Let me kiss you.”

Felicity tucked her hair over her ear and bent to kiss him while Tommy stroked and licked Oliver’s abdomen down to his cock.
“I thought,” Oliver said softly, just quiet enough she could hear it, “I would come right then, when I woke up and saw him eating you out.”

“He’s so good at it,” Felicity said, watching Tommy’s face light up and fade to pleased pride. “I love his tongue.”

“Come here,” Oliver said. “Straddle my face.”

“Mmm,” Felicity hummed in anticipatory pleasure. As soon as she was seated, facing the end of the bed so she could watch Tommy suck Oliver off, Oliver’s tongue picked up where Tommy’s had left off. “Why don’t you fuck him while he does this, Tommy?”

Tommy paused, lifted his head. “That’s up to Oliver. What do you think?”

Oliver let out something that sounded like a strangled yes, mixed with an oh god yes please, and a primal whine.

Felicity never, ever grew tired of watching Tommy prep Oliver for this. He slipped one lubed finger, then two, inside of Oliver, and fucked him mercilessly with them while Oliver whined and gripped Felicity’s thighs with more strength than he was probably aware he was using. His tongue was lazy, slightly distracted, but Felicity didn’t mind. If she tapped him, he would focus and put more effort into it, but for the moment she was floating the hazy edge of an orgasm somewhere in the distance, appreciating the view.

Finally, Oliver was ready. Tommy spread Oliver’s legs even more and lined his cock up. Felicity gestured, a sort of give-me curl to her hands. “Come here,” she said. “Let me get you ready.”

Oliver arched his hips in protest, but Tommy ignored him, crawling up Oliver’s body to kiss Felicity.

“Stand up,” she said to Tommy. “Carefully. I want to suck your cock and I can’t any other way.” She bent over and scratched Oliver’s pectoral muscles gently. “Focus, Oliver.”

Oh, when Oliver was trying… Mmm. It was so good. His tongue flicked her clit, played with her labia. He teased the edge of her pussy with a finger, made her long for something more inside. Meanwhile, she focused on the things she knew drove Tommy crazy.
He had his hands buried in her hair, gently pulling it away from her face, putting no pressure on the back of her head, and it was just… so utterly Tommy that Felicity hummed in pleasure, and Tommy twitched.

She persuaded him to a full erection with her hands and with her mouth and he rocked back and forth carefully in her mouth for minutes before Felicity pulled off of Tommy’s dick.

“Oliver’s been so patient,” Felicity said, pumping Tommy’s cock slowly with one hand. “Don’t you think you should fuck him now?”

“Yes,” Tommy said. “I definitely think I should fuck him now.” Tommy laid back down on the bed, persuaded Oliver’s legs apart.

“Careful, go slow,” Felicity said. “We don’t want to pull his stitches.”

Oliver, underneath of Felicity, let out a strangled laugh. Then a low, aching groan, as Tommy worked his way home.

If Felicity could take a picture, she might take one of Tommy’s face in that moment, utterly content, aroused, beautiful and perfect -- or maybe of the way his strong, lithe form contrasted against Oliver’s more bulky body.

Oliver slid another finger inside of her as Tommy slid inside of him.

Tommy fucked his hips into Oliver, his body taut with control.

Oliver’s tongue flicked against her clit.

She leaned forward, wrapped her hand around Oliver’s dick, twisted her wrist around it in the same rhythm Tommy was using to fuck him.

A litany, a rhythmic, fast-paced flow of words, strung together without much sense, fell out of
Oliver’s mouth as he pulled away from Felicity. “Fuck… can’t… shhh… oh… please… I… just… fucking… Fuck… me… can’t… please… Tommy… please… Felicity… Felicity… Tommy… oh right there fucking… fuck I….”

“You can come, Oliver,” Felicity said, sliding off of him. “You can come all over my hand.”

Oliver opened his eyes. His mouth was wet, dripping with Felicity’s scent. He reached over his head for the headboard and arched his back, his abdomen flexing and shifting under Felicity’s hand and he shook as he came, spurts of come falling over Felicity’s hand, dripping down her wrist.

He relaxed, but only for a moment, as Tommy seemed to lose himself, pulling Oliver closer to him, leaning forward to brace all of his weight on his palms. Felicity could see that he was chasing an intense orgasm, that Oliver spasming around him had driven him beyond control.

“It’s okay,” Oliver said, his voice heavy with bliss. “Come, Tommy. Come on.”

Tommy stilled for a moment, his eyes shut tight against the pleasure coursing through him. And maybe this was the moment, Felicity decided -- maybe this was the moment that she wanted frozen in her brain forever, the perfect view she had of the two of them, the way they locked hands and stared at each other for a moment, like they still couldn’t believe they were allowed to have this.

Felicity ignored the feeling that, for the moment, at least, she was on the outside looking in. She turned to get some water.

“Where are you going?” Oliver asked, growling playfully. “You left before the good part. For you.”

“Come here,” Tommy said, curling his fingers. “Neither one of us got to finish you off.”

“Come back to bed,” Oliver said, and Felicity found herself drawn, like a magnet, in between the two of them. Oliver worked himself upright, and held his arms out to her. “Lay down with me, baby.”

If any other human being had uttered that sentence, Felicity might have laughed at him. But Oliver’s voice was husky, and he had that look in his eyes that he sometimes got, like he had everything in the world he ever wanted and he wasn’t sure what he’d done to deserve it.
Felicity loved that look.

She sat, practically on his lap, and with gentle hands, Oliver spread her legs wide open so that her thighs were on the outside of his. He pulled her hair to the side and laid lazy, sweet kisses on her neck. His hand slid down her stomach to her clit, and he circled it with his third finger.

Tommy, on his knees, found a space between Oliver’s legs, and he captured her lips with his. Felicity squirmed underneath Oliver’s patient fingers, Tommy’s persistent mouth. She couldn’t close her eyes because she didn’t want to miss anything, yet it was so hard not to…

“Forget everything. Forget what you remember and what you’re going to remember,” Oliver said. “Just let it all go.”

She stopped trying to remember everything. She stopped trying to crystallize everything in her memory. She came.

And she let go.

**

Before Nanda Parbat, before Nyssa and the training that had wiped out what was left of her soul, the coffee shop on Troost and Third had been within walking distance of Sara Lance’s house, and she and Laurel used to walk there on Tuesday mornings before school and get an iced caramel macchiato to split, passing it back and forth on the trip to the brick-faced Starling Preparatory Academy they had scholarships to attend. Their uniforms were often second-hand, and rather than the designer bags their classmates carried, they had knock-offs, the daughters of a cop and a criminal prosecutor turned judge.

Sara had good memories of this place, and no matter how -- tumultuous her relationship with her sister got (they were too close in age, always competing with each other for attention at school and at home), the walk from Jitters to the school was always, at the very least, companionable. She opened the door, smiling at the faint tinkling of bells, and studied the menu like she didn’t know precisely what she wanted.

A quick sweep of the room told her that, for the moment, at least, she was relatively safe. There was even a spot facing most of the exits open near a wall, so she wouldn’t have to cope with awkwardly standing around until someone left and she could be seated.
She ordered her caramel macchiato and took her seat, crossing one leg over the other, her phone laid flat on the table. Too many times she’d seen clients and hits go down because they lost their focus to their phones, so easily distracted when they should be on alert at all times.

Sara had a feeling she’d go out violently, but she didn’t want it to be because she was trying to get the high score in Bejeweled and someone got the drop on her.

Removing the plastic top of the coffee cup, Sara inhaled the fragrance, letting herself slip into actually enjoying it. There was no fancy coffee in Nanda Parbat. Not much in the way of kindness there, either, but here in Starling, at least, she could get the coffee.

The door opened and Laurel stepped in, scanning the room, and when she saw Sara, her face settled into that sort of -- resigned, hopeful, yet disappointed expression that she always seemed to wear around Sara. Wondering what was wrong with her today, Sara took a sip of her coffee without cooling it and fought the urge to curse as it burned her tongue. The sisters didn’t speak or move to greet each other while Laurel ordered her coffee, but she walked without hesitation over to Sara once she had her cup in hand.

“Hey,” Laurel said, opening one arm. Sara accepted the hug, closing her eyes briefly and savoring the feel of her sister’s arms around her. It hadn’t been that long ago that she had thought she would never see her again, after all. “What are you doing here?”

“Oh, I was hoping you were just as nostalgic as I was this morning,” Sara said, gesturing to her table. “Can you spare a few minutes and chat?”

Laurel nodded, and Sara wanted to do anything to dissolve this awkward, strained distance between the two of them.

“So,” Laurel said, as she took a seat and crossed one leg over the other. “What’s new?”

“Oh, you know,” Sara said a bit lamely. “Not much.”

Laurel tapped the side of her coffee cup with one manicured nail, sighed impatiently. “Sara, you don’t come find me at Jitters on a Tuesday morning because you’re feeling nostalgic, and you don’t have that running-rabbit-scared look in your eye unless there’s something going on, so tell me what it is you think I need to know.”

Laurel had always been whip-smart, Sara thought, whip-smart and observant and tough as nails.
She’d spent most of her childhood trying to be Laurel, and then she ran from it when she was a teenager -- too much to live up to, too much pressure, much easier to be the complete opposite of that. Then she’d died. And then -- well. She was as far now from Laurel as night was from day.

“Malcolm Merlyn attacked Thea Queen yesterday,” Sara said softly.

“He did?” Laurel looked genuinely shocked, her quick brain already working through the consequences of such an act. “That… that will start a war.”

“We believe that’s his intention,” Sara said, her eyes constantly sweeping the coffee shop. “The peace between the Deardens and Malcolm’s organization has kept this city from descending into chaos for the last ten years.”

Laurel snorted. “Yeah, well, you should see the cases that come through my door that are side products of your so-called peace.”

“You should see what will happen to this city once this all starts devolving,” Sara snapped. “Laurel, open your eyes. You might not like what keeps Starling afloat, but you damn sure ought to acknowledge it.”

“What? Do you honestly expect me to feel bad for the Deardens?” Laurel scoffed. “Is that what you’re getting at, because I have to tell you, it would have to be a sub-zero day in hell.”

“Laurel, come on, now.”

“No.” Laurel set her coffee down and folded her hands. “Moira Queen is responsible for taking my baby sister from me and I don’t feel like forgiving her for that. And Oliver Queen should have died on the boat like everyone thought he did.”

Sara’s heart stopped in her chest. “Laurel, I’m right here.”

“Are you?” Laurel shook her head. “You can’t rest. You watch this restaurant like some kind of war veteran, expecting there to be danger at every turn…”
“That’s just called situational awareness, Laurel, and it saves lives.”

Laurel made a sweeping gesture across Sara’s form. “You sit with your back against a wall. And you -- and you… I know what it is Moira Queen expects you to do for her, and you do it. And my baby sister wasn’t capable of… of any of that. She was a good person.”

“No,” Sara said flatly. “She wasn’t. Your baby sister ran off with your boyfriend. And it wasn’t a Disneyland trip, Laurel. We got on that boat to… well, you know what I got on that boat to do. And before that it was parties and drugs and using people to feel good about anything. I’ve never been a good person.”

Laurel’s face shut down. “Yeah, well, you wouldn’t be this if it weren’t for Moira Queen, so you’ll excuse me if I don’t cry about the criminal elements in my city being ready to tear each other apart. There’s a part of me that welcomes it, actually. Saves me some work. And hey, if the Deardens go down, then you’ll be free.”

Sara took a long sip of her coffee. “Is that what you think? That if Ollie and Tommy go down I’ll suddenly be able to be your sister again?”

Laurel looked away, but the answer was written on her face.

“Oh Laurel,” Sara said, her heart breaking in sympathy. She’d long ago accepted that she was never going to be the person her family still mourned again. “I can’t go back. Even if I wanted to.”

“You could stop the killing,” Laurel said, her eyes flashing to Sara’s. “You could, I don’t know… start tending bar or something?”

“Laurel, the only thing I have on my resume for the past five years is professional killer. I don’t know what you think is going to happen to me that will erase that fact.” Sara got to her feet. “Listen, I just came to tell you that things are about to get very, very dangerous for me, and for my friends. I need you to stay out of it. Whatever happens for the next few weeks -- just, don’t try to save me or go after Moira. Not until we get this sorted.”

“Well, that’s a new request,” Laurel said, rolling her eyes. “It’s not like I stay out of your life now.”

“Laurel, I need you to take this seriously,” Sara said softly. “The Deardens and the Merlyns are
going to be marching to war and you cannot get in the middle of it. Even if it looks like I need help.”

Laurel bristled. “I can take care of myself.”

“No, you really can’t.” Sara swallowed. “You know what happened to the last D.A. You know Moira’s responsible for that. You try to interfere now… things could get messy. You’d have both Malcolm and Moira after you and it would be a competition to see who could kill you the fastest, in the most horrible fashion. I don’t know that I could protect you, so I’m asking you. I know you and Dad are always scheming, trying to find me a way out of my contract with Moira. I just need you to take a break.”

“You want me to take a break. From pursuing justice for you.” Laurel narrowed her eyes, her voice flat.

Sara lifted her eyes. “I don’t want justice. I do want you to take a break. I want you to tell Dad, too. Tell him -- tell him it’s important to me.”

“You’ve got that look in your eye. You’re not planning on disappearing again, are you?” Laurel asked. “I don’t think Dad would survive losing you again.”

“I don’t have any plans, but then, I never do,” Sara said, shaking her head. “I’m just -- I’m trying to do the right thing here, Laurel. I’m trying to keep us all alive. If I have to leave Starling to do that, I will.”

“Okay, well then, thanks for the head’s up, I guess,” Laurel said. She flung her bag over her shoulder. “I’m going to go to work now, and put some criminals I can touch behind bars. There’s a fleet of girls going missing from the Glades -- homeless kids, mostly, a few of the teenaged junkies I see regularly.”

“Girls going missing?” Sara knitted her eyebrows together. “Do you have a theory?”

“Yeah, my theory is this city’s a shitty place to be a homeless kid,” Laurel said, “and I think someone’s snatching them up off the street. That’s not you guys, is it?”

Sara sighed. “Come on now, Laurel. You need to know there are some things I won’t do. Surely you know that.”
“If it’s not you or the Deardens, it’s someone who does the same kinds of things you guys do. And I’m sure that they sleep just as well at night.”

Sara hadn’t slept well in years. “All right. Why don’t you go save the world from people like me, Dinah Laurel Lance?”

“That’s exactly what I plan to do. See ya.” Laurel was already on her phone and out the door. She paused, and looked back, put the phone down. “Hey, Sara?”

“Yeah?”

“You’re going to be safe, right?”

Sara lifted one corner of her mouth. “I’m going to try.”

Laurel nodded. “Okay. I love you.”

That had always been true. Sara’s heart twisted in her chest. Her sister deserved so much more than the sister she got. “I love you too.”

**

There was a knock on the door of the room Felicity was slowly turning into her office. She let Moira keep hers on the first floor. Hers was on the second, in the family wing. Closest to Thea’s room, it overlooked the back gardens and one particular rosebush that had reminded her of Uncle Yuri’s house in Moscow. The roses were a brilliant yellow that caught the light, rimmed with pink on the edges, and when Felicity opened the window, she could just catch their scent. In the full heat of summer, it was only pleasant enough to do that in the evenings, and it felt enough like home that Felicity was slowly becoming comfortable in the space.

Though the house had been constructed in the twenties, during the economic boom that had facilitated an urban explosion in Starling when Jonas Queen had opened his first steel manufacturing plant down by the docks, Felicity had tried to marry elements of the art deco style that would have been the hallmark of the house in its heyday, and the modern touches that would make the space
more authentically hers.

Her elaborate computer system, the one that she’d indulged her tastes in, was finally set up. Sometimes, first thing in the morning, she would come in, coffee mug clutched lovingly in one hand, and look out her window, and over her desk, and feel… settled.

The ghost of Malcolm Merlyn was lingering over everything these days, the decisions they made, the conversations they had. They would have to focus on that problem, and ways to eliminate it. One step at a time.

She sipped at her coffee while she crossed the room. Her eyes widened slightly when she saw Moira on the other side of the door. “Well, good morning. I didn’t expect to see you. Not that seeing you is a bad thing, of course. Just that I wasn’t… you don’t normally come here, first thing in the morning.”

“I thought we might take a trip together this morning,” Moira said. Her lips twitched, in the same way Oliver’s sometimes did when he was amused by her babbling but couldn’t show it, but there was a harsh edge on it, a kind of smug cruelty that almost never crossed Oliver’s face, and never directed at her. “I’ve come by some information that I think… well, it’s best you and I handle it.”

Felicity pushed her glasses up her nose and turned her computer off. “Okay.” She unlatched her desk drawer and removed her gun, placing it in her bag.

Sara was waiting for them out in the hallway, arms folded in her leather jacket. “Good morning, Felicity.”

“Oh, coming with us, are you?”

“Me and Diggle. Two other boys from the family in a car that will follow at a safe distance.” One corner of Sara’s mouth lifted up in a smile. “Oliver’s taken over security here at the house since the attack on Thea. We talked him down from a fully-armored escort.”

“The thought is touching,” Moira said mildly, “but I don’t think we need to draw quite that amount of attention for a little field trip like this.”

“A field trip?”
“Yes. Walk with me.” Moira gestured down the hallway, and the three of them, swiftly joined by Diggle, made their way to one of the Queen family SUVs. They were seated in the back, while Sara and Diggle sat in front. Moira smoothed her skirt down. “When Malcolm and I… allied ourselves together, our primary objective was to rid the city of a mutual enemy.”

Felicity already knew most of his, but she nodded. “The Triad.”

“Yes. Chin na Wei and the Triad were ignoring long-standing truces, trying to infringe on territory. Malcolm and I thought it would be in our mutual interest to band together to clear up that particular set of obstacles. Malcolm made his money split evenly between legitimate business, and designer drugs. Among other things.” Moira looked out the window, smiled ruefully. “I am… many things. But there is a kind of scum I will not allow to taint my life, a particular kind of snake I will have nothing to do with.”

Felicity nodded again -- this, too, was well known among the criminal element. Moira, like her mother before her, and her mother’s mother, was not opposed to prostitution, exactly. Felicity knew the family owned brothels, all run by women, all kept to very strict standards. But the Deardens had always drawn a hard line at human trafficking. No one in their brothels was coerced. No one was underaged. To the best of their ability, the girls were protected.

“Malcolm… has never had such qualms,” Moira said. There was a quiver in her voice -- something like regret, maybe. “He needs the people, you see. To test the drugs, to be the pushers. That sort of thing often leads to … other things. As a condition of our alliance, the brothels that he used to run, the sweatshops in the Glades, the human testing… he assured me it was all shut down. I had no reason to disbelieve him, until recently.”

Sara turned from the front seat. “I had breakfast with my sister.”

“Your sister the DA?” Felicity asked. “How did that go?”

“I was giving her a warning,” Sara said. “I was hoping she would take me seriously, but she… well. That doesn’t matter. What does matter is she said there’s been a rash of girls going missing in the Glades.”

“Malcolm has already made several moves to usurp our agreement,” Moira said. “For several days now, I know you’ve been monitoring his activity, as have I. I was worried he would return to old habits.”
“And now there’s evidence to suggest he has,” Felicity said, raising her eyebrows. “Okay.”

“It cannot be tolerated, any more than his recent actions can be tolerated,” Moira said. “But I am reluctant to start with kicking down doors. So we begin with a little reconnaissance.”

Felicity raised her eyebrows. “And you and I are going to do that?”

“You and I are going to take a tour,” Moira said gently, “of a Dearden facility. It will get back to Malcolm through his many spies that you and I are poking at this particular corner of our operations.”

“You want him aware?” Felicity asked.

“I want to see what he does,” Moira said. “It’s been a long time since I’ve considered Malcolm an enemy, although he was never a friend. I want the opportunity to study his behavior.”

Felicity shrugged. “All right.”

“Besides,” Moira said, waving a hand, “it’s high time you got to see this side of the Dearden family pie. You will be in charge of it soon enough.”

Felicity wasn’t quite sure how she felt about that, but she nodded. At the very least, it was true.
Red Light, Green Light

Chapter Notes

My final semester is nearing a close. Thanks for your patience with me. I promise, this story hasn't been abandoned. I just am updating and working on it as I can. Thanks so much for reading and enjoying this story.

Starling City, Two Years Ago…

Tommy's feet were soundless as he landed from a solid five-foot vault onto the garden patio of a Starling City judge. It was a pretty enough spot, Tommy would have thought, if he allowed himself flights of fancy on occasions like these. It might have been the judge's wife who had an affinity for yellow roses, and they grew in large bushes all along the outside walls of the stately brick house.

From the moment he had landed, the knife hadn’t left his hand. Someone like this wouldn’t normally have armed security, but then His Honor didn’t often go around sentencing major players in the Starling City mob game to life without parole.

There were whispers, quiet ones, away from Moira’s listening ears, that there might have been something she could do for Adam Hunt before the sentencing came down, yet she had chosen to wait until the night after the trial to deal with it. Too little, too late, some said, unless she wanted Hunt in a cage and was only going after the honorable Dent as a stop-gap measure to save face.

Tommy didn’t much care, either way. He had a job to do. And he didn't have many qualms about doing it. Not anymore. He was familiar with the urge to stand up, to fight against the will of the Dearden and Merlyn families.

He was also familiar, in ways that perhaps the Gotham-born Dent was not, with the consequences of doing so. It never ended well. Dent had been warned. But he had chosen to be a hero.

Tommy sure hoped he died like one.

It didn’t behoove Moira, or him, to drag out the inevitable. His orders were to be as quick and as
clean as possible. Dent's death, as far as the Deardens were concerned, was a simple matter of taking out the trash. Efficiency, not cruelty, was the name of the game.

It sent a clearer message, to Moira’s mind. Do what you were told. Or be disposed of. It was that simple, and as far beyond a matter of losing her temper as it possibly could be.

A state execution, and Tommy was her chosen hangman.

His pulse didn’t race the way that it used to -- something like numbness had settled over his skin instead. It was getting easier and easier to imagine himself only as the masked figure who emerged at night and dealt Moira’s terrible justice. He felt half-dead, and almost wished that this time, his skills would fail him, and at last, he would be allowed to stop.

This was not that night. There were armed guards, but they were no match for Tommy’s skill as he disposed of each of them quickly and silently, knocking them unconscious before they had time to grunt.

He checked each bedroom -- discovered the sleeping tousled heads of two children tucked snuggly into massive beds, five years younger or so than Thea. His intrusion woke neither of them.

He thought they deserved to sleep in a world where they still had a father as long as possible.

Down the same corridor as the children's rooms at the end was the door to the master bedroom. Dent's wife was very likely there with him, Tommy thought. He had no intention of orphaning children tonight. He would have to do some maneuvering to make sure the wife didn’t get in his way. There was no good way to kill a man quietly -- and Tommy had tried to find one.

He took a risk that the man, a noted workaholic, was in his office -- if he was, and the wife wasn’t, that would solve a lot of Tommy’s qualms.

He had no such luck. Dent’s office was empty. He took a quick moment to peruse the judge’s desk. There were notes from the case against Hunt on top of a pile of papers, open cases, closed cases. He was looking to make a mark against organized crime in Starling. Tommy almost wondered if the man were going to run for office.

Wouldn’t that just thrill Laurel to pieces, he thought. Laurel, who’d so often spoken of Harvey Dent
with something akin to hero worship. Dent had been a remarkable prosecutor before he’d been a judge, and Laurel couldn’t say enough about the things he did for Starling. If she knew what he was doing she would -- well, she would hate him. But they hadn’t talked, spoken a civil word to each other in years, not since Oliver’s boat had “gone down” in the South China Sea with Laurel’s sister on board.

He allowed himself a moment of regret. Then he walked away from the desk, closing the office door behind him. He didn’t pause, didn’t hesitate, didn’t think, from the moment he opened the master bedroom door until it was all over.

**

*Starling City Private Airstrip, Same Day, 2 Years Ago*

Oliver didn’t know exactly what he’d been expecting when he stepped off the plane from Russia, but it hadn’t been this. His arm was still in a sling to take the pressure off of his bullet wound near his shoulder, and it ached and throbbed. Felicity had tried to push painkillers at him before he’d gotten on the private jet, but he’d turned them down -- not being as alert as he could have been had yielded dangerous circumstances in Russia. He’d thought that, at the bare minimum, Thea or Tommy would be waiting for him on the airstrip. Instead, a black towncar was waiting for him, a uniformed driver standing next to it.

The driver barely lifted his head, greeted Oliver politely, took his duffel bag filled with the meager possessions he’d managed to get ahold of and threw it in the trunk of the town car.

The ride back home -- one he’d dreamed of for so long -- was nearly-silent. The driver didn’t acknowledge Oliver, or speak to him. Oliver felt no urge to talk to him either. His fingers itched. The cell phone in his pocket was capable of calling Felicity. With one press of his finger, he could hear her voice, feel reassured, feel confident.

He’d known that this would be hard. But he hadn’t anticipated feeling… disembodied, as though his own skin weren’t quite real. The air was close, almost oppressive. Everything about the situation he found himself in felt wrong.

The towncar arrived at the manor much quicker than Oliver was anticipating, and yet somehow it was much too fast. He felt like he’d squandered the time lost in thought, not preparing himself for whatever horror his mother had waiting for him. He knew for sure, down to his bones, that if Thea and Tommy knew that he was on the way home, nothing would have stopped them from meeting him at the plane.
Would she finally make a move to kill him? In one way or another, he’d been waiting for that shoe to drop since the island, since Slade Wilson had told him what would be required of him to live. He had fully anticipated failure, and though Felicity had assured him Moira was ready for him to come home, Oliver wasn’t so certain.

Felicity hadn’t looked his mother in the eyes the way that he had, hadn’t known the coldness there, the utter lack of feeling where once there had been motherly regard. He had a knife in his boot, a gun in a holster on his back. His beloved arrows were being shipped from Russia, and he felt almost-sick without their reassuring presence.

Home. He was back home. It was everything he’d wanted -- everything he’d worked for. To come back here, to Tommy and Thea. He just hadn’t anticipated Felicity Smoak. He’d thought -- he’d thought he was too wrapped up in how much he missed Felicity Smoak to crave someone else like that. He wished that she were there to hold his hand, to say something that would take his mind off of the dark thoughts that whirled relentlessly in his mind. Or, in her calm, pragmatic way, she would walk him through all the possibilities, help him come up with solutions before the problems presented themselves.

He had one stupid moment where he wished Tommy could meet her -- wished that he’d talked her into getting on a plane with him and coming here. No way would her Uncle Yuri let her leave -- in many ways she was as much a prisoner to her family as he was to his. But he let the fantasy wash over him. Tommy and Felicity would love each other, he thought. They both had that rapier wit, those quick, lightning smiles. Felicity’s runaway mouth would give Tommy’s smart one a run for its money.

But he wouldn’t live long enough to see either of those mouths, ever again, if he didn’t get his focus back.

The driver opened the door, tipped his hat. “Mrs. Queen says you’re to go right to her study.”

Oliver opted not to speak, nodding his head in acknowledgement. He’d used to talk a mile a minute. The men would probably expect that of him, but he’d come to learn the value of silence. He’d not been a naturally intimidating man -- there had been no reason to be. But from Slade Wilson, he’d learned that silence, and the patience to wait, to observe, would often make people nervous enough that they would give more information than they wanted to, than they planned on.

“I would hurry, Mr. Oliver. She’s in quite a mood. Something about the Hunt verdict.”
Oliver had tracked the case on the other side of the Pacific, watching with some interest as the family accountant took the downfall for some of the routine money laundering that was normally well-hidden enough to not be a problem. He had his doubts that Moira was really that upset about Hunt going to jail. But she would want her henchmen to be. The illusion that she cared -- that each family member was valued and she would personally do her best to see they remained free -- was a crucial one in maintaining loyalty across generations.

Again, Oliver didn’t say anything. He just stuck his hands in his pockets and strolled through his childhood home, noting the little changes. The painting of a ship tossed at sea that had been his father’s favorite was removed, replaced by an explosion of abstract color -- bright greens and blues and reds in streaks offset by troubling expanses of white. It was unlike his mother’s taste, and very much not his father’s.

He cocked his head to the side. Either Thea was making art decisions now, or someone else was living here, and had enough clout to demand something go on the walls. Interesting.

He dared not loiter, though. The few men he passed in the hallway were careful not to look him in the eye. One of his hands left his pocket, went to the gun at the small of his back. Moira’s men didn’t sneeze unless they were instructed to -- so it appeared they were told to ignore him. Which didn’t bode well for him.

If his mother planned to kill him -- well, he’d kill her first. He steeled himself toward that possibility, absolutely prepared to do what he had to do. He wouldn’t survive the onslaught of footsoldiers who would come once they heard the gunshot -- and he would truly regret doing it, but he wouldn’t be passive and let her destroy him.

Not again. Not when he’d just come from Russia and remembered what drawing a full breath was like, what laughing was like. He’d be damned if he’d let his mother kill him in her parlor while the rest of the world stood idly by.

He pushed the door open, senses on high alert. His mother was seated at her desk. She was wearing one of her trademark suits -- the palest, pale pink he’d ever seen, so close to white he might have called it that if not for the pearls his father had given her when she’d given birth to Oliver resting against her breastbone, whose whiteness picked up the pink of the suit.

The door shut behind him and he folded his hands in front of himself, waiting patiently while his mother ruffled papers, signing things, moving them from one pile to another. He’d seen Felicity do similar things to underlings she was particularly displeased with. The wait was supposed to make him anxious.
Instead, the thought of Felicity made his lip twitch. He could play this game. Slade Wilson had made him wait for hours in a single tree, hardly breathing, so that he could shoot one of the deer that lived on the island, so that he would have enough meat to live through the winter. A few minutes in Moira’s study would not ruffle his feathers.

Finally, Moira dropped her pen and lifted her head. “Oliver, there you are.”

“Here I am.” He lifted his chin. “Where is Thea?”

“She’s in bed,” Moira said evenly. “I have an assignment for you.”

“Of course.” Oliver didn’t move to sit in one of the chairs. It was clear she didn’t want him comfortable, wanted him off-balance. He could only fight that by staying firmly planted on his two flat feet, ready for anything.

Moira raised her eyebrows and stood as well, coming around the desk to stand in front of it. ”I assume you’ve been following the Hunt case.”

“It made for interesting television, even on the other side of world,” Oliver said.

Moira’s lip twitched. “Yuri and Slade were right. You have picked up some things while you were away.”

“I do believe that was the point.” Oliver folded his arms over his chest. “The Hunt case.”

“Yes.” Moira sighed. “It’s unfortunate, but sometimes we must -- make moves to ensure that our understood position in the city does not… shift.”

“You think that the establishment wants to make a move against the family?”

Moira folded her arms in a mirror position of Oliver. “I think they believe, falsely, that now would be the perfect time to move against us. There hasn’t been, in quite some time, an enforcer of mythical strength for people to fear -- there’s an increased false sense of security, due to the internet and outsiders coming in, trying to make the kinds of changes they think they’ve been capable of making
elsewhere.”

“You’re talking about Gotham and Harvey Dent.”

Moira shot him a look full of pride. “I was. And I am talking about the DA, David Song. My sources inside the district attorney’s office have let me know this is just the first of a series of cases they plan to launch against the family.”

Oliver thought it would be too much of a stretch to affect concern, so he went for interested. “Do they have enough evidence to go after you?”

“Not at the moment, no. I’m very careful. However, now is not a good time to be fending off an investigation of any kind.” Moira uncrossed her arms. “This is where you come in.”

“You want me to eliminate the threat,” Oliver said.

“Indeed. I’ve met Song at a few fundraisers. He won’t listen to reason. He needs to go. Once he’s out of the way, his replacement will step up.”

Oliver couldn’t be too interested at this point. He wanted his mother to believe that she had stamped the humanity out of him, flattened him out and forged him into a weapon. “Okay.”

“I have everything you need to kill Song in this folder.” She tapped a manilla folder on her desk, but didn’t move to hand it to him. “His routines, his club memberships, his address.”

“Is this some kind of test?” Oliver asked, finally uncrossing his arms. “If so -- what’s a passing grade?”

“Get in, kill him, get out, without detection or remorse,” Moira said. “Once your task is complete, I will let Thea know you’ve come home and that you are going to take your proper place in the family as the Hood.”

Less than an hour in Starling City and she wanted the blade of his knife soaked in blood. Oliver nodded. He’d expected no less from her. “Okay.”
Moira studied his face for one long, unending moment. Then she pushed off the desk and strode across the room to a sitting area, sat on a sofa and crossed one leg over the other. “Of course, I can’t send you out in the field on your own.”

Oliver grit his teeth. The very last thing he wanted was a babysitter his first night out in Starling City. Though he understood why Moira would perhaps want him watched, it still grated. “I can assure you, that’s not necessary.”

“I can assure you, it is.” Moira pressed a button by the sofa, and a buzzer sounded. “Send him in, please.”

“Who’s him?”

“Someone uniquely suited to be your backup,” Moira said, her face giving away nothing. The door to the office opened, and a man, broad through the shoulders and narrow in the waist, stepped through the door. He was wearing a ski mask that obscured his facial figures, and walked silently. Yet there was something about him that was familiar. Something about him that said Oliver ought to know him.

“Oliver?” The man ripped his mask off, and Tommy’s face -- thinner, sharper -- appeared. Oliver could see the stain of blood on his hands, could practically smell it in the air. “Oliver, you’re back?”

“Tommy.” Tommy had blood on his hands. Oliver blinked. Tommy was here. But Tommy had blood on his hands.

He fisted his hands and sucked in a deep breath. What good was all of the training on the island if he couldn’t control the anger that swept through him. He wanted to explode. He grappled for control.

“Oliver, Tommy is going to be your backup for the evening, and possibly for the foreseeable future, provided this goes as well as I hope,” Moira said calmly, her eyes shifting from Tommy to Oliver and back again.

“Tommy is going to be my backup.” Oliver carefully avoided Tommy’s eyes -- Tommy who had gone still and silent. “Tommy doesn’t have the training to be my backup.”
“Of course he does. He has precisely the right training.” Moira’s mouth twisted up in a little smile. “I thought he would be uniquely suited to be your shadow. He seemed so content to be one before you went away.”

“What did you do?” Oliver asked, inadvertently taking a step closer to Moira. He couldn’t stop himself. Felicity would have said something about his face, about how he ought to school it to hide his rage. “Tommy -- what did you do?”

“He learned to be useful,” Moira said. “His specialty is clean-up and retrieval. He’s quite competent.”

Clean-up and retrieval. Oliver knew precisely what that meant. He felt sick down to his core. Tommy had become a murderer, and a thief. And all in the name of Oliver’s family.

Finally, Oliver allowed himself to look at Tommy. He barely heard Moira over the rushing in his ears. “You have twenty-four hours to kill David Song, the two of you. Otherwise, you will both have proven to me that you are not the men I have been assured you have become. Dismissed.”

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*Starling City, Present Day*

Felicity opened her eyes as her alarm clock shrieked. “Oh, God, someone… turn that off,” she moaned, her hips meeting Tommy’s rhythmically. Oliver kept one finger on her clit, massaging it gently, while he hit the snooze button. “Can’t think…” she said softly.

“Good. Thinking’s the last thing I want you to do.” Tommy set a punishing pace. What had started out as languid morning sex was quickly becoming breathtaking.

“Demanding,” Felicity said on a gasp.

“He is, isn’t he?” Oliver asked, amusement coloring his voice. “If he thinks he doesn’t have all your attention…” Oliver’s voice trailed off while he bent his head to flick her nipple with his tongue. “He just gets… rough.”
“Are you touching yourself, Oliver?” Tommy asked.

“I can’t help it,” Oliver confessed. “You’re so gorgeous, the two of you.”

“Don’t pull something,” Felicity said, snapping out of her haze for a second. “You’re still in a sling for fuck’s sake…” she let her language devolve into a slur of Russian curses.

Tommy reached around her and slapped Oliver’s good wrist lightly. “One of us will get that. Be good, make Felicity come.”

“I can do two things at once,” Oliver protested.

“Not with only one good hand, you don’t.” Tommy lifted Oliver’s good hand, kissed his palm. His hips never stopped moving. Felicity felt a thrill run through her. She didn’t want to think about what it meant that she was so crazily turned on by Tommy’s full attention being on Oliver while he fucked her. “You know what to do. Do it well. Then we’ll make you see stars.”

Then both of them had their attention on her, the weight of their gaze and their hands and their creative minds. Oliver worked his way down her body until his tongue met Tommy’s cock as it slowly entered her body. Felicity nearly arched off of the bed. “Fuck, fuck… oh shit, oh…”

It was like he was greedy for her. Greedy for the taste of them. “I want you to come, Tommy,” Oliver rasped, “then I’m going to eat it out of her.”

It was more than Felicity could take. She nearly cried as she came, shaking and shuddering, driven to madness by the sight of them, the feel of them. She tried to push her body away, but Tommy and Oliver held her still, so she couldn’t hurt herself on the headboard. Tommy spread her legs even further, pumped his hips and groaned as Oliver’s tongue never quit.

“Oliver, Jesus, I can’t…”

“Come on, Tommy,” Oliver coaxed him. “Come in our pretty wife.”

Tommy gripped the sheets and flexed his back, the orgasm drawn from deep in his belly, hot and fast
and powerful. “Shit, shit, shit…”

Tommy rolled away from Felicity, and Oliver practically dove to lap up the come, his thumb finding its home on Felicity’s clit. “Oliver!” Felicity practically squealed.

“Take it for me, baby, please,” Oliver whispered. “I can’t get enough of you.”

“I can’t, I can’t…”

“You’re so beautiful, so perfect. You can do this, I’ll go so slow, I’ll be so careful…” Oliver’s tongue was deep inside of her. It was embarrassing how wet she was, how warm and ready and liquid her muscles felt. “Felicity, baby, you should taste the way you taste when it’s you and him together…”

Oliver shuddered as Tommy raked his nails down the curve of his ass. “Lot of talking for someone who’s supposed to be eating.”

“Mmm,” Oliver closed his eyes, circled Felicity’s clit with his thumb. “So good. Jesus!” Tommy had wrapped his arms around Oliver’s middle and gripped Oliver’s cock in one hand. “Tommy!”

“Ssssh,” Tommy said, winking at Felicity. “I’ll go so slow. I’ll be so careful.”

“Tommy…” there was an edge of a whine in Oliver’s voice. “Please.”

Tommy gently pushed Oliver’s head out of the way, gathered some of the moisture at the vee of Felicity’s legs, and used it to moisten his palm. “Where do you want to come, Oliver?”

“Tommy…”

“Where?”

Oliver closed his eyes and wet his lips. “In Felicity.”
“Hm. Are you ready for that?”

“Yes, I... Christ, Tommy, I get any harder and...”

Tommy bit Oliver’s earlobe gently, guided Oliver’s cock to Felicity’s pussy. “This okay, baby?” he asked her.

“Mm,” Felicity agreed, spreading her legs even further. “Come here, baby.”

Oliver slid inside of her easily, setting a slow but powerful pace. Felicity ran her hands up and down over the powerful muscles in his arms. “You’re so beautiful,” she nearly slurred.

Tommy chortled, and Oliver’s eyes widened. “Handsome, baby, I’m handsome.”

“No, you’re beautiful. Like... a Raphael statue. All muscles and beautiful eyes. Much better cock than any of those guys, though.” Oliver laughed, and it sent a shiver right through her. “Oh, do that again.”

Oliver couldn’t stop, his body shaking while he thrust. He bent and kissed her neck over and over and over again. “Fucking hell. I love every single fucking thing about you.”

“Same goes. I love your beautiful face and your beautiful cock and that serious line you get between your eyes,” Felicity said. “Come inside me, baby.”

Oliver always had a hard time saying “no” to her. He bent, touched his lips to hers, and kissed her thoroughly while he came.

The alarm clock rang shrilly, its protests as loud as they possibly could be. “Someone shut that thing off,” Felicity said into Oliver’s neck, pleasantly sore. “I’m serious.”

Tommy reached over, flipped the dismiss button on her phone and sighed. “This is your morning for that thing with Moira, right?”
“Ugh.” Felicity threw an arm over her eyes. “I forgot.”

“Don’t go.” Oliver was always a bit of a drunken puppy after sex. He sloppily kissed her neck. “Stay here. Fuck us some more.”

Something inside her clenched. “Ugh, that should not be as attractive as it is. And I can’t tell your mother that I can’t make it to our appointment because you have a really nice cock.”

“You should try,” Oliver said, grinning. “See what she says. Better yet, tell her Tommy has a really nice cock.”

Tommy beamed, flopping over on his back. “Thank you, baby. It also happens to be the truth.”

“Not happening,” Felicity said, summoning her inner Black Widow. If Natasha Romanov could do whatever she did, then Felicity could leave her two gorgeous boys, naked, heavy-lidded from sex, well-pleased with themselves, and head into the cold shower and get ready for her day. “I am going to be a responsible adult.”

“We could save time here,” Tommy said.

“How’s that?”

“We could all shower together.”

Felicity cocked her head to the side. “That would be time-saving. Oliver would have to be careful of his arm, though.”

“You two can sponge bathe me,” Oliver said, winking.

**
“You’re late,” Moira said, as Felicity came down the stairs.

“Sorry,” Felicity said. “Couldn’t be avoided.”

Moira pursed her lips. “Of course, I trust your judgement.”

Felicity nodded and avoided rolling her eyes. Her mother-in-law never said anything without a fine layer of subtext. The subtext here being, of course, that Felicity was irresponsible or wasting Moira’s time. It had been worth it, of course, Tommy and Oliver were both very clever, very talented… very sexy. She nearly hummed with satisfaction.

Sara opened the door, poked her head inside. “The car’s ready to go when you are, Mrs. Queens.”

Felicity chuckled. “Sara’s coming along as well?”

Moira nodded. “Oliver insisted. Ms. Lance and Mr. Diggle will be our escorts for this outing, and a car of men will follow at a safe distance.”

“Hm.” Felicity glanced up the stairs towards the bedroom, almost in reflex. “That’s a little much for a trip around town.”

“Oliver gets antsy when he’s cooped up,” Moira said, with a gentle smile. “Antsy and a touch… overprotective.”

“Perhaps,” Felicity said slowly. She took out her phone and texted Oliver a smiley face and a wink, knowing he would be mostly confused by that style of communication, unable to resist poking at him. “Still, I suppose we can indulge his paranoia.”

“The men are well trained enough they won’t get in our way,” Moira assured her, gesturing towards the front door. “After you.”

Felicity nodded, chuckling with delight when Oliver’s predictable text rang through to her phone. Nothing, she typed back, I just adore you, even when you’re being a touch overprotective.
Felicity smiled. *Always. Stay safe, whatever you get up to today.*

She put the phone away, crossed one leg over the other after she settled into a leather seat. Diggle turned the engine over and they were away.

“My good friend Sophie is the head of the Dearden house,” Moira said, as the city sped past them, blurring into blacks and greys and greens in the car window. “Make no mistake about it, Felicity, the women we’re about to meet are paid to do whatever the men who pay for their time ask them to do. But they are well-fed, they are taken care of -- the men who attempt to abuse them, if they dare risk it, are sought after and punished. There will always be whores in the world, so long as there are men, but these women are, at the very least, safe and comfortable. We call them escorts or call girls, we tell them they’re not prostitutes or sluts.”

“But they are?” Felicity asked, leaning back in her seat.

“As much as Sara is, at her base perhaps, a murderer. Or your Mr. Diggle a mercenary. There are far kinder words. I choose to use those instead.”

Felicity nodded and bit her lip. Her phone buzzed in her hand. *Hey. I forgot to tell you. I adore you right back.*

For some reason, she felt tears welling up in her eyes. She pushed them back down and straightened her shoulders. Moira couldn’t see any signs of emotions in her -- she had to be just as implacable as her mother-in-law was.

“Got it,” she said brightly.

**

The mansion, and it was a mansion, was in one of the nicer districts of Starling City. Not one, Felicity noted, where high-class members of society would own a home themselves, but not one they would be embarrassed to be seen in. The lawn was immaculate -- giant rose bushes lined a paved...
walk, their blooms open in the light of morning, stretching up to the sky. Mr. Diggle eased the car to a stop and walked around to let Felicity out. Sara did the same for Moira.

“Sophie will be expecting us,” Moira said. “So she’ll have some sort of light refreshment waiting for us. The staff here are excellent -- nothing, of course, to compare to what we have at the Manor, but certainly more than adequate for the girls who live here and the clients who are serviced here, although that is, of course, rare.”

Felicity made a noncommittal noise and turned her mind to cataloging everything she saw, everything she felt. More times than she could count, her ability to recount small details about a place, a person, or an event, had been her saving grace. Maybe some of Oliver’s concern was wearing off on her -- but if Malcolm would so directly attack Thea, have his men take on Tommy and Oliver, then it stood to reason that perhaps she and Moira were being watched, that Malcolm was waiting for an opportune moment to attack the matriarch and her heir-in-training.

Diggle, who always had excellent instincts, and who probably had conferred with Oliver before they left for the day, kept one hand on his gun, his eyes constantly sweeping back and forth. His military training had always been self-evident, from the moment Felicity had met him while he had been searching for his brother in Russia, but now he wasn’t even bothering to hide it, making himself as broad a target as he could, walking in front of Moira.

Moira was the one who pressed the bell for entrance. Its deep tone rang for only a second before the door opened.

“Moira!” The woman who answered the bell was dressed as immaculately as the Dearden matriarch was, a single strand of pearls set against a royal blue pantsuit with a cream blouse. She had high cheekbones, charmingly dusted with freckles, and her hair was thick and white, shot through with grey.

This was no one’s grandmother, Felicity thought as she took the woman’s measure. There was steel in the woman’s gaze, iron in the handshake they exchanged as introductions were made. She had no problem with that. There was no small part of her that wondered, idly, if that would be the impression she would give off in her middle age.

“I have, of course, ordered something light for us from the kitchen,” Sophie said, indicating that the group should step inside the ornate front door. “I remembered well your enjoyment of a midmorning snack and a cup of tea from school.”

A fond smile crossed Moira’s face -- the most genuine emotion, Felicity thought with a faint tinge of
“You do think of everything,” Moira said gently.

“Come this way.” Sophie said. “All of the girls live upstairs,” she said to Felicity as they walked through the corridor to a large sitting room. “They share living quarters, and no children are allowed. We consider this floor to be the main living area. There are rooms where the girls receive training in foreign languages and currencies, stock exchanges, the finer points of golf, how to tie a proper knot in a necktie… any part of their knowledge which might have been incomplete upon their hire to service our class of clientele, we try to correct as thoroughly and as quickly as possible.”

Something soured in the pit of Felicity’s stomach. Little thought was given, she noticed, to whether the women employed here actually wanted to know these things. Moira’s voice from the car, the things she’d said, washed over her.

“Sit anywhere you would like,” Sophie said, all graciousness and the perfect hostess. “Rosita will bring in a tray shortly.”

“The house is very well ordered,” Moira observed. “I don’t believe I have ever seen the floors gleam so much.”

Appreciation danced in Sophie’s eyes. “Thank you, Moira. I will admit, I had the staff put in a little extra care, knowing you and Mrs. Queen were coming to make introductions.”

“There’s no need to be nervous,” Felicity said, ignoring the offer of a seat to study a painting in the corner of the room. Done in the style of the romantics, it was all soft colors, a woman laying replete on a bed, coffee-colored hair falling in curls around her body. Something in her face intrigued Felicity. She couldn’t help but smile back at the woman -- it was an expression she knew well. Whoever had painted this woman had obviously just laid with her (or the woman had satisfied herself, Felicity thought, and entertained that fantasy for a moment). “I have no intention of fixing things that are not broken.”

“Are you a great lover of art?” Sophie asked, taking a seat and crossing one leg over the other.

“Mm. Not so much myself as my Uncle Yuri,” Felicity said, leaning closer to the painting. There was a touch of white on the woman’s thighs -- not enough to be obscene, enough to be cheeky. “His home in Moscow, in particular, is something of a museum. Pieces constantly moving in and out as he
acquires the things that are more to his taste. My cliche love of Monet and Degas remains a point of contention between us.”

“I remember standing in front of a Water Lily painting for almost an hour once,” Moira said unexpectedly, “trying to count all the different shades of blue.”

Felicity shot her a smile.

While they were engaging in conversation, a silent woman entered the room and laid refreshments on the coffee table. A steaming mug of tea, a carafe of coffee, the kind of insubstantial sandwiches Felicity found frustrating on principle, all arranged in a neat semi-circle on a bed of lettuce.

Such fussing, Felicity thought, for a little snack. She dared not show her amusement. It might be a little too common, or perhaps too Russian, for Moira’s taste.

She took one of the light sandwiches -- carefully crustless, and nearly flavorless, worked her mouth around eating it for politeness’ sake -- and focused more on the cup of good black tea Moira poured her. A conversation ensued about profit margins, improvements to be made in security, in background checks for potential clients.

Some of Felicity’s initial fear eased a little. In spite of her misgivings, it seemed that the safety of the girls seemed paramount in Moira and Sophie’s minds. She gleaned that none of the girls took clients without a rigorous application process and discreet, but deep background checks. For a higher fee, men could purchase “membership” and be allowed use of one of the appointment rooms downstairs. Otherwise, clients booked rooms at approved hotels or, provided they had a good track record, took the girls back to their own homes -- something much less popular with the married clients, for obvious reasons.

Felicity’s heart ached a little for some of the working women she’d known growing up in Vegas, when her mother had been doing her best to make it work without her husband’s mob connections. She’d busted her ass waiting tables, to the best of Felicity’s knowledge, she never had to do more than that, but Donna Smoak didn’t judge coworkers or customers who had to supplement their income or made their living entirely by selling themselves.

More than once, they’d found themselves awoken by the sound of someone knocking at the door in the middle of the night, hoping to escape a pimp or an overly excited john, Donna Smoak’s apartment a good enough place to stop before they fled Vegas. Felicity never knew how they knew - - maybe Donna mentioned once or twice that she knew something about leaving an undesired life behind, but the girls had come to her mother for help.
She had fond memories of them -- the way they painted their faces, the jokes they told that she didn’t yet understand. She had liked the way they seemed to understand just how wonderful her mother was, truly, down deep, not just that she was jaw-droppingly beautiful.

Felicity asked enough questions of Moira and Sophie to get a better idea of how things worked. She pulled out her tablet and made a few notes. Although it was not her intention to get into or stay in the prostitution business, there were things to be learned here.

After a time, Felicity rose to her feet, their meeting over, and was shaking hands with Sophie when one of the girls walked into the sitting room.

Immediately, she flushed red, which Felicity might have thought adorable if not for the ugly bruise covering one eye -- it was purpled and black, the skin around it freshly swollen, and Felicity hissed in sympathy. “Oh my, what happened?” she asked, crossing the room immediately.

The girl threw up her hands. “Nothing! I fell.”

Felicity whirled to face Sophie. “Did she?” Her voice was cold. Diggle got to his feet, one hand on his gun, ready to mete out whatever justice Felicity demanded.

“This is Diane,” Sophie said calmly. “She’s something of a klutz.”

“Sophie would never tolerate the girls being hit under her watch,” Moira said, confidence in her long-time friend evident in her voice.

“I really did fall. Off of a jetski, actually,” the girl said, chittering nervously. “I’m sorry to worry you, Mrs. Queen. I saw the pictures of your wedding, by the way. Your dress was total excellence.”

Felicity’s mouth curved in a smile. “I’m glad you think so.”

“You can be dismissed, Diane,” Sophie said coolly. “We will speak later this evening. You damage that beautiful face of yours, you damage company property. The loss of revenue will, of course, come directly out of your paycheck. We have discussed this before.”
To her credit, Diane’s chin never wavered, though Felicity could see the blow of not receiving all of her pay was hitting the girl hard. “Yes, ma’am, of course,” she said meekly.

As she left the room, Sophie turned to Moira and sighed. “It is one of the more troublesome aspects of managing this place. The girls are forever wanting this or that pierced, wanting tattoos removed or added, skipping classes, skipping meals or sneaking food in…” She shook her head. “It quite reminds me of being Head Girl to be honest with you.”

She and Moira had a hearty laugh at that, and Felicity’s stomach twisted in her gut. Diggle laid a gentle hand on her shoulder. “I’ll have the car ready for you in just a moment, Mrs. Queen.”

“Thank you, Mr. Diggle,” she said softly. “You are, as always, a solid treasure.”

Diggle’s mouth twitched with amusement as he left the room.

Goodbyes were given, compliments exchanged over trivial matters, and soon they were on their way, Diggle opening the car door for Felicity so that she could arrange herself in the cabin of the car.

“I appreciate your concern for the girls,” Moira said, as they pulled away from the house.

Felicity weighed what to say. Expressing feeling akin to them -- their lives and bodies owned by other parties, controlled and weighed and measured like cattle -- that was bound to offend Moira. She went with a slightly different version of the truth. “I find myself more easily moved to concern for women than for men.”

“Indeed,” Moira agreed. “The world does everything it can to keep our sex fairer and weaker, politically, physically, financially -- and then it scorns us for the weakness it engenders in us. I feel no pity for men.”

Felicity nodded once.

“There is, of course, as I said before, no need to worry about the girls under Sophie’s care. She is… exacting, strict, as she must be. There are a few older girls there, but for the most part, our clients’ tastes runs to women in their twenties. However, by the time the girls have aged out or retired, they
Felicity lifted shocked eyes to meet Moira’s.

“I never could stomach the way my mother ran the business,” Moira said softly. “Of course, by the time of her death, we’d had many such disagreements. She had no problem despising the women of the world, particularly those who felt prostitution was their only way out of the hole life had thrown them in. Before I was matriarch, there was little to distinguish a Dearden brothel from any other den of ill repute -- beatings, trafficking…” Moira shook her head. “I cleaned it up.” Her teeth flashed. Shark’s teeth in a warrior’s mouth. “Much to the chagrin of some of the old guard.”

“You don’t strike me as one who tolerates dissent.”

Moira’s eyes flashed over Felicity’s. Like she had so many times before, Felicity felt she was being assessed against some standard she did not have access to. “I am not,” Moira admitted. “Those who were bold enough to admit their feelings publicly died quickly. Those who sought to hide it… they were driven out of corners like the rats they were, and exterminated.” She leveled her gaze at Felicity. “You might have to do the same thing here.”

“You know about what happened in Russia,” Felicity said, her eyebrows raised.

“Hm, as much as Yuri does, perhaps more,” Moira said. “Bratva men are not as close-mouthed as they would like you to believe.”

“Then you ought to know I have no doubts about my ability to clean house,” Felicity said evenly.

“I have no doubts about your ability to ask Oliver to do so for you,” Moira returned.

A flash of anger, so quick and deep she couldn’t tamp down on it in time. “You made him into a weapon,” Felicity said, her tone almost sweet, “you can hardly blame me if I use him the way you intended him to be used.”

She sent him a silent apology. She only thought of him as a weapon in her coldest, most logical moments, the ones she wasn’t entirely proud of.
“Of course, now you’ve made it so Thomas will walk on hot coals for you as well,” Moira said, her tone conspiratorial.

Felicity shrugged, doing her best to fight back the anger and the self-loathing. It was clear Moira was congratulating her on her manipulation of the situation she found herself in, as though they were similar people. That comparison had been a source of enough strife in her relationship that she found it repulsive. She ignored the bile in her throat. “They were both a little love-starved. I sometimes get my Russian and English idioms mixed, but there is one about flies and honey, isn’t there?”

Moira inclined her head, a regent gracefully acknowledging a hit. “It seems there is.” She took in a deep breath. “I will not lie to you, Felicity. Malcolm’s practices in this area were repugnant to me at the time of our first alliance. It was a point of the agreement that he dismantle his operations.” She shook her head. “The things I saw, I vowed never to see again. Obviously,” she continue, “Malcolm must die.”

Felicity blinked.

“Not because he violated some trade agreement, although that would be sufficient enough for me. He laid his hands on my daughter. He cannot be allowed to live. The trip this afternoon only determines how long he suffers before he dies.”

Felicity nearly came out of her seat. She wanted to scream. It wasn’t enough, she thought, that Malcolm called Tommy a faggot, wasn’t enough that he beat him, scarred him, rejected him. Wasn’t enough that he’d had Oliver shot.

It only mattered that he’d touched Thea.

Felicity swallowed. “I feel the exact same way.”
Chapter Summary

Felicity must face the emotional consequences of the person she must be to succeed in her mission, and Diggle and Sara are awesome.

Chapter Notes

Wow. So... I owe everyone who is still reading this a cookie. I'm sorry -- life got crazy there, but the good news is that after 10 years and a lot of hard work, I now have my Bachelor's degree. Back to regularly scheduled weekly updates, if all goes to plan!

Thanks to absentlyabbie, who cheerlead, cajoled, browbeat, and moved commas around for me. If this fic is good, it's because of her.

Starling City, Present Day

Felicity was carefully composed as she opened the door to the master suite. She toed off her shoes, every instinct in her screaming in her head to break down, but she ignored the irrational compulsion. She let her hair down, opened the master bedroom door and walked straight through without calling out for Tommy or Oliver or looking to see if they were there. It was all she could do to keep from running. She dropped her clothes without a care, stripping on the way to the bathroom. Skirt, hosiery, blouse, bra, panties -- all left behind in a steady trail. Tears fought their way to her eyes but she refused to give them quarter.

The immense shower was just what she needed. She programmed the many jets for as hot as they could possibly go. It was a punishing, searing, relentless heat. Not enough to burn but definitely hot enough to cleanse.

She leaned against the wall, closing her eyes. She didn’t move. She didn’t adjust the jets -- she let the water hit her, hot and hard. Cleanse her of her sins, if she believed in that sort of thing.

She didn’t. But she believed in grime, in filth, the kind that sticks to a soul and weighs it down, blackens it. What kind of person was she twisting herself into? She’d been asking herself some variation of that question since she was sixteen years old, and her life had taken such a drastic turn with the death of her mother, her move to Russia. The first time she’d killed a man.
This was a different kind of grime. Tommy’s face swam in her memory -- the things she’d seen Malcolm do to him, the things she’d heard him say to him, the scars that covered his body, that had rendered him so broken. She had wanted nothing more than to stand up for him -- but she couldn’t. She couldn’t.

He hadn’t been there, but in his absence, she’d let him down. She’d sat next to Moira, and in her she had seen a reflection of herself -- who she could be, left unchecked and out in the cold. It suddenly made sense in ways it hadn’t before, the way Tommy had pulled back from her, the times he’d accused her of being like Moira. No wonder he had such a strong reaction to their similarities.

It broke her, that thought -- that she might be too like the woman she called her mother-in-law for Tommy to ever let it go, to truly love her the way she was coming to love him -- she let out a heart-wrenching sob and slid to the floor of the shower. She’d wanted too much to somehow be an instrument of some kind of grace, to make Tommy’s life better, to make Oliver’s life better. But it seemed everywhere she turned she was misstepping, causing damage where before she had hope to do some good.

She was messing everything up. And in the end, she’d have what Moira had -- a family she couldn’t trust, because when they’d needed her, she’d looked the other way and played a game instead of treating them like people, not pieces she could manipulate to her advantage.

“Felicity?”

If there had been a knock, she hadn’t heard it. She took in a deep breath to try and reply, then another, then another, until they were shallow, almost like hiccups, and she couldn’t get control of herself. She let out a strangled cry and then covered her mouth, trying to take back the sound. But it was too late.

“Felicity?” Tommy burst through the door. He stopped and blinked, taking stock of the situation. She could see utter shock on his face and tried in vain to stop the tears, to push herself off the shower wall and quit this hysterical fit she couldn’t seem to shut down. She’d never let him see her this broken, but she didn’t have the energy to try and pull herself together for him, so she turned her face away.

“I’m okay. Really,” she said softly, hoping that would be enough that he would leave her alone, let her process what she’d done. Maybe she could put a bandage over the wound and hide her shame and be able to look him in the eye again. There was a long moment before Tommy responded. She could tell he was weighing his words, as uncertain as she felt.
“You don’t have to be,” Tommy said. “Maybe it won’t help to tell me. I could get Oliver, if you…”

“No.” Felicity’s voice was flat. Telling Oliver would be worse. Oliver, who looked at Tommy like he was the sun in the sky. The things she’d had to say about Tommy, think about him -- let Moira believe she thought about him -- they wouldn’t sit right with Oliver. He’d figure out, sooner or later, what a cold-hearted bitch he’d shackled himself to, for better or worse, and he’d start to realize the truth: that there wasn’t that much difference between his mother and his wife. She didn’t know if she could take watching that realization in Oliver’s eyes at the moment. “I don’t want to tell Oliver.”

To her shame, that broke her. She bent her head to her knees once more and sobbed.

Without warning, the shower door opened. Tommy had toed off his shoes, his socks, but his tailored slacks and crisp gray shirt were sure to be ruined. Still, he slid against the wall to the floor with her, his hand rubbing her back gently. “Whatever it is, it’s not going to destroy your relationship with Oliver.”

She shook her head. “You don’t know that.”

“I do.” Tommy’s voice was heavy with self-awareness. “Time and time again, I’ve done things, I’ve said things… and I think, you know, this is the time he’s going to realize what everyone else in my life has realized all along: that I’m not worth staying for. But he never does. Once he chooses you, you’re it. We kind of lucked out that way, Felicity.”

“It’ll be different this time,” Felicity said, unable to stop herself from leaning into his touch.

“What makes you say that?”

Felicity blinked, drew in a deep sigh. “I believe Oliver can tolerate being hurt, personal betrayal, he can forgive that easily enough. But I don’t think he could forgive me if I hurt you.”

There was a long pause. Tommy reached for her hand. “You haven’t hurt me yet. Not in a way I can’t forgive. That’s what matters to Oliver.”

She was shaking her head again.
Oh, this would hurt. But she’d failed him. She’d failed him in the worst way -- the way he expected to be failed. She’d treated him the way he had always been treated, like he was a tool, like he was a weapon, like he could be discarded at any moment when he ceased to be useful to her. A fresh wave of pain caught at her stomach.

“I’m such a bitch,” Felicity said, forcing herself to draw away from his touch. “I’m a cold-hearted bitch.”

“Felicity.” Tommy’s voice was flat. “Baby… there isn’t a way in the universe…” he sighed. “Just tell me what happened?”

“I let you down.”

“No.” His response was instant, firm. “No, you haven’t.”

She felt as vulnerable as a child, at the mercy of Tommy’s good graces. She wanted to beg for forgiveness, have it promised before she articulated the transgression. But she couldn’t do that -- couldn’t lock Tommy into something he couldn’t follow through on.

“You remember how you -- in the beginning, you thought I was manipulating you, just like Moira is always manipulating you.”

Tommy leaned over, kissed her shoulder. “I was wrong, baby.”

“No, you weren’t.” Felicity wiped her eyes, cleared her throat. “I’m exactly like Moira Queen. I found that out today, and I… I’m having a hard time dealing.”

“Bullshit.” Tommy reached for her hand, threaded his fingers through hers.

“I said you were a weapon.” Felicity was crying again. She couldn’t stop herself. “I said all I had to do was point you in the right direction. And she laughed with me.”

“Baby.” Tommy’s throat was closing with emotion. “You were doing what you had to do.”
“I hate myself,” Felicity whispered. “I hate what I’m turning into.”

“No.” Tommy’s eyes were filled with tears. He bent and kissed the back of her hand, over and over again. “No, baby, don’t.”

“I’m turning myself inside out,” Felicity said, “playing all of these games, trying to stay ahead of her, trying to keep us all alive, and all it is doing is turning me into her.”

“No.” Tommy lifted his eyes, framed her face in his hands. “You, Felicity Smoak-Queen, you are nothing like Moira Queen. You couldn’t carve out enough pieces of your soul to succeed if you wanted to be like her.”

“I…” Felicity struggled for words.

“Moira never twisted herself into knots over me,” Tommy said sadly. “She never broke down in the shower over what she did to me, what she did to Oliver. She never cried because a decision she made got us hurt.”

Felicity’s eyes flew up to his, shocked.

“I heard you, the other night,” he said softly, “crying for Oliver, crying for us. Baby -- you are as scary-sexy-smart as any person I’ve ever known, and maybe that’s what you’ve got in common with Moira, but she never gave one single goddamn about me. And you do. And you could never, ever be her. I don’t worry about you loving me anymore. I don’t worry about you leaving me. I know, right down deep, that you do the things you do because you love me.”

Felicity launched herself into his arms, the water drenching them, soaking through his clothes, but she didn’t care. He smelled exactly right: citrus and cinnamon, his hair falling over his eyes because the water removed the product he wore in it. His hands were sure and steady and strong.

“I love you,” Tommy said against her ear. “I love you, I love you, I love you. And you didn’t let me down, Felicity. The furthest thing. You make me so fucking proud.”

Oliver, his arm still in a sling, opened the shower door, his eyes stormy. Felicity had no idea how
long he’d been listening. He held out a towel for Felicity, and one for Tommy. “Come here, you two,” he said roughly.

With some effort and a little grace, Felicity and Tommy got up off the shower floor and wrapped themselves in towels (Tommy after he disrobed). Oliver gently wrapped Felicity’s hair for her and drew her in a hug. Tommy watched, silent, for a minute, before he crossed the room and leaned in himself.

“There’s not a thing either of you could ever do that would make me stop loving you, make me stop wanting you, make me stop dreaming about you and the day when all of this is over,” Oliver said quietly. “So… just. Know that, okay?”

Felicity sniffled and buried her head in his shoulder, surrounded on both sides by Tommy and Oliver.

“Don’t hate yourself, baby,” Oliver continued. “You have been my saving grace. Maybe Tommy’s, too. It’s rough right now, but it’s not always going to be like this. One way or another, it will all be over soon, and none of us will ever have to pretend with her, ever again.”

Tommy nodded, his hands sliding to Felicity’s waist. He bent and kissed her cheek, and then down her neck. “Let us show you how much we love you,” he whispered.

Oliver waited for her nod, and then, with gentle hands, he undid the knot at the top of her towel so it slid to the floor. And he dropped to his knees, while Tommy helped Felicity sit on the edge of the bathroom countertop. The marble was cool against her skin, but Oliver’s mouth was hot and insistent. He pushed her legs apart and parted her with his thumb.

“I love how wet you get before we even get started, baby girl,” he said, his voice dropping an octave. “I love that you’re ready.”

But he didn’t touch her there. Instead, he turned his attention to the inside of her thighs, kissing and nibbling.

Tommy bent his head to Felicity’s ear, kissing her cheek before he pulled gently on her earlobe with his teeth. Felicity shivered from head to toe. “You both are teases,” she hissed.
“No,” Tommy said, “We just like to take our time and appreciate you. Believe me, we are aware of how lucky we are to have you. We like to take the time and savor that luck.”

Felicity had seen him flip a knife over and over and over again in his hand, constantly practicing, different blades, different weights. He could hit a target from across the room with a butter knife if he wanted. She was keenly aware of the callouses on his hands from that training regimen as they slid over her skin and danced around her navel.

“I want to touch you,” Felicity said suddenly.

“Which of us?” Tommy asked.

“Either. Both.”

“Mm,” Tommy let out a sigh. “I don’t know that that’s enough information. What do you think, Ollie?”

“I think I’m a little busy,” Oliver said, and he slid a finger inside of Felicity, slowly, so slowly she hissed at the persistent, tempered invasion. She spread her legs and pumped her hips, silently begging for more. “You can touch Tommy, if you want.”

“I always want,” Felicity said.

Tommy chuckled. “You aren’t the only one.”

Felicity reached for him, turned his face to hers and kissed him while Oliver slowly worked another finger inside of her. When he curved both of them at just the right angle, the one she’d taught him to find in Russia with patience and precision, she squealed into Tommy’s mouth.

He laughed, thumbing her nipple. “Good, huh?”

“Makes me want to come right now,” Felicity said.
“Good. Come, right now,” Tommy said, “and then we’ll take you to bed and make you do it again and again.”

“I don’t know if I can,” Felicity said.

“Work with him.” Tommy guided her fingers down to her clit. “You know exactly what you like, baby. You can get there.”

The pleasure was building. A spiral that started in her center and worked its way out. She could almost taste her orgasm. She strove for it, pumping her hips, swirling her clit. Oliver slid another finger inside of her and her eyes went wide with shock, lust and pleasure. It was enough to push her over the edge.

She pushed Oliver’s head away, his hands away, scooted back while the orgasm rocked through her, but Tommy held her close.

“Good,” he said in her ear. “But we can get you there again.”

They took her to bed and did just that. Over and over and over again. Until she was sore and wrung out, beyond exhausted and tired. The last orgasm they gave her sent her to sleep. She was aware, faintly, of the two boys taking care of each other while she slept, but when they were done, they wrapped their arms around her, and they slept too.

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“I don’t like this,” Diggle said as he maneuvered the sedate, unremarkable sedan through the streets of Starling to the Glades. Nothing in his tone or his grip gave away that he was stressed, but there were faint lines at the corners of his mouth.

“I don’t like it either,” Sara said, her eyes glued out the window, constantly evaluating the area for threats, “but I like the idea of taking Felicity to this place without running recon and knowing what we’re up against even less.”

In the short time they’d known each other, Sara had come to appreciate John Diggle’s pragmatism, his soldier’s instincts, and his loyalty to Felicity. There were very few men she would trust enough to go into battle -- Tommy and Oliver had eventually earned their stripes, although that had taken time
and effort. The League’s training had done its best to remove what little patience she had for men from her, and they’d mostly been successful.

But Diggle she’d trust to have her back. He certainly wasn’t trained to think the way she was trained to think, and in many ways, she appreciated that. It made her chosen directive of protecting Felicity that much easier because they each saw threats in different ways.

Aside from his professionalism, the man had a droll sense of humor and a self-awareness that she found refreshing. Under any other circumstance, she would have enjoyed a quiet midnight ride with the man through the streets of Starling City. But they were in Merlyn territory after dark on a busy business night for the red light district, and it wasn’t exactly a secret what side of the brewing war Sara and Diggle were on.

“Let’s go over parameters one more time,” Diggle said. He was a soldier. He liked parameters. Sara could appreciate that, even as they flew out the window as the mission changed. “Observe and collect data only.”

“Yep. Prepare a sitrep for Oliver’s perusal tomorrow so he knows what kind of protection to insist on.”

“Interesting that Moira lets him make those kinds of calls,” Diggle said, noncommittally. As a bid for information into the way the family worked, it was pretty subtle, Sara decided, and as such, ought to be rewarded.

“It was always the plan for Oliver to be in charge of things like security. Traditionally, that’s the Hood’s job.”

“Was it now?” Diggle asked, his tone free of any judgement. “What would your role be… traditionally?”

Sara grinned. “I’m a brand new tradition. I make the rules up as I go. Pull over here,” she said, indicating an alleyway between a tattoo parlor and a liquor store. “Technically this is neutral territory and Big Jimmy, who owns both of these businesses, doesn’t tolerate gang bullshit going down on his watch. He won’t be able to do much if Merlyn’s men decide to make a move, but in general, the boys avoid starting shit in his territory out of respect.”

Diggle nodded. It was very possible, Sara knew, that none of that was brand new information to the
man, who had grown up in the Glades. On the other hand, he might even know more about the traditional territories than she did, although her on the job training had been incredibly thorough. Still, Diggle never gave away more information about himself than he absolutely had to – an instinct that Sara could appreciate.

They left the sedan locked and walked casually down a few city blocks. Starling’s night life was bustling: twenty-somethings and the underaged-with-fake-IDs milled about in blocks, shouting at each other as they moved from club to club.

She fought the urge to draw her gun as she noticed a man standing in a well of darkness, watching a group of girls pass by with lascivious intent in his eyes. Diggle squeezed her waist in warning. “We can’t save the world,” he said softly.

Sara’s every instinct was singing at her. This was the kind of situation that was fraught with danger for the unaware. She knew from experience -- intoxicated, not paying attention, isolated from the group of friends they came out with -- this was when girls and women got stolen from the streets.

“No, but we can save those girls.” Sara pushed him gently with her hip. Obligingly, Diggle walked over with her. “Move along, creep,” Sara said, as soon as they were able to get close enough.

“Nothing to see here.”

“I’m not doing anything…” the man whined.

Sara drew her gun. “I said move it.”

The man turned tail and ran.

“Well, I have to say our cover of a couple out for a night on the town is really working out well so far,” Diggle said, rolling his eyes.

Sara smirked. “What? You don’t threaten perverts on dates?”

“Not me, usually, no,” Diggle said, with a small, secret smile. Not for the first time, Sara wondered about his relationship with the good Dr. Michaels, who thought she was so very clever at hiding her affiliations. But Sara had the kind of connections that someone like Lyla Michaels only dreamed
about, and she knew exactly who Lyla was working for.

She just wasn’t sure why Lyla was undercover in the Dearden family just yet, and that was the only reason the woman was still alive. If Diggle was truly emotionally attached to her, as he seemed to be, it would be a real shame to have to kill her and ruin another of her fragile friendships.

Sara sighed. In many ways, life had been simpler in Nanda Parbat. Certainly not better. But definitely simpler. No emotional entanglements allowed. No cleaving to sentiment. Only the League and the law of Ra’s al-Ghul.

She touched her neck, a phantom habit from the time when she’d worn the necklace given to her by the Heir to the Demon.

But there was nothing there -- hadn’t been anything there for two years, and it was likely that there never would be anything there again.

Diggle’s frame slowly stiffened as they drew closer and closer to Merlyn’s… facility. Brothel would be too nice a word for it. Even the underworld thugs that Sara had spent the last week beating information out of were reluctant to describe just what went on in the building.

Her palms were already itchy. She’d always had a hard time with injustice. Maybe, she thought with a laugh, it had come from being the younger child. It hadn’t been fair that Laurel got to go to prom without her, got to have later bedtimes, got to date, got to wear make-up, got to wear heels, got to grow up without Sara being able to march in lock-step right with her. The resentment had festered until they were both actively trying to hurt each other.

And that competition had changed the course of her life forever.

Diggle spun her, pressed her up against a lamppost, leaned in as if he were going to kiss her. All in all, it was a pretty good series of moves, Sara thought clinically. “I’m seeing a patrol that sweeps by every five minutes.”

“Mm.” Sara played with the lapel of Diggle’s jacket, lifted her head flirtatiously like she was daring him to follow through. “I’m seeing a bouncer at the front with some actual military experience, I’m guessing.”
Diggle nodded. “Only one confirmed entrance on this side.”

“There’s at least a way out the back, as well,” Sara said. “We’ll have to walk around to to confirm, of course.”

She caught movement out of the corner of her eye. A flash of black hair and a whip-thin frame skirted the edge of her field of vision. What the hell.

“Ten more seconds here,” Diggle said, dropping his head. “I’m pretty sure these guys coming up this side of the walk are Merlyn goons.”

“Awesome,” Sara said, ducking her head. They’d know her by sight. Diggle, probably less so, since he was a new hire. On the other hand, he had knocked Merlyn out with a pistol at the wedding, so it was possible that his picture had been passed around and a price was on his head.

Diggle pressed his lips to hers, and she gave in to the moment. There was no heat between them, so she could focus on the mechanics of it, a good, thorough kiss. Sure enough, the public display had the Merlyn men looking the other way as they passed. They broke apart with a mutual chuckle at the awkwardness and then shook the moment off.

“We can’t do that again,” Diggle said. “We need to move around to the back.”

A thud, and then a soft clang off to the right had Sara turning her head. Whoever was following them was decent enough. Not decent enough to escape detection, but good enough that if she or he had been following someone not military or League trained, they might have gotten away with it.

Diggle paused, following her eyes with his. “What do you see?”

The outline of a teenager, probably, Sara thought. Maybe feminine, maybe masculine -- it wasn’t obvious, and she was certain that was intentional.

“A cat,” Sara said. “Following us.”

“Hm.” Diggle sounded as though he didn’t quite believe her, but he let it slide, taking her hand in his
and walking slowly down the length of the block before they crossed the street to try and see what the back exit looked like.

For a moment, Sara thought their shadow had given up. But the soft sound of footsteps following them picked up after only a few hundred feet.

Sara turned, caught sight of the young woman who was following them -- only her eyes were trained on the Merlyn building. She had made her way up a fire escape only a few feet away from the brothel.

“Go on ahead,” she told Diggle softly. “I want to check something out.”

Diggle nodded. “Head on a swivel, Lance.”

“Always.”

Without another word, they broke apart. Unlike the teenager, Sara had the experience and the skill to make her way up the fire escape without detection. By the time she’d landed only a few feet away from the girl, it was too late for her to escape.

“What are you doing?” Sara asked. To her credit, the girl only startled slightly, her eyes widening as she took a step back.

“Nothing,” the girl said bad-temperedly, forcing herself to relax.

“Good. Go home,” Sara said.

“Go fuck yourself.”

Despite herself, Sara laughed. “Cute, kid, real cute. I’m serious. Go the fuck home. Whatever it is you think you’re doing, it’s a good way to get yourself killed.”

“Yeah?” The teenager shrugged her shoulders. “Why do you give a shit?”
“Cause I’ve seen enough kids die and I don’t think going out at the hands of Merlyn’s men is the way you want to go.”

The girl shook her head. “What the fuck are you doing here?”

“I’m casing the fuck out of the joint,” Sara said, leaning in, enjoying the game she was playing. “What the fuck are you doing here?”

“Lot of money moving in and out of that place,” the girl said. “Some of us have bills to pay.”

“Now that’s just stupidity,” Sara said softly. “Go rob a convenience store or something.”

The girl tilted her chin, all arrogance and self-assurance. “Yeah, well, they wouldn’t be a challenge like this place is.”

“Go home,” Sara said. “I mean it. Wherever that is -- go back there. I don’t want to have to shoot you.”

“Why? It sounds to me like we’re on the same side.”

Sara narrowed her eyes, shook her head. “Better I shoot you than they haul you inside there, beat you, rape you, sell you, and kill you. Which is kind of their M.O. Or didn’t you know what kind of a place you were planning to rob?”

Sara could see in the girl’s face that she knew exactly the kind of place she’d been planning to try and gain access to.

The teenager shrugged. “I’m light and quick. Nobody’s caught me yet.”

Sara reached out, lightning-fast, caught the girl’s wrist in her hand, let her elbow fly up just short of knocking the girl out. “You aren’t that light. You aren’t that fast. Someone with more than a minute and a half of training is going to catch you someday. That’s just the way the cookie crumbles. Don’t
let it be tonight and don’t let it be here.”

The girl flinched. “Jesus, lady, what the hell are you?”

Sara laughed harshly. “Someone with more than a minute and a half of training. Are you going home?”

The girl sighed. Her eyes tracked from Sara down to Diggle, who was now standing at the bottom of the fire escape with his arms crossed. “You guys are probably going to blow my cover anyway.”

“Yes,” Sara agreed.

“All right, all right. I’m out.” The girl launched herself over the ledge and ran off in the other direction.

Diggle waited while Sara lowered herself down more gently. “You probably saved that kid’s life tonight, you know?”

Sara shrugged. “I might have just delayed the inevitable.”

“Yeah well, sometimes the best you can do is the best you can do,” Diggle said. “I think we’ve got enough information to take to Oliver, at any rate.” He sighed. “The more I see, the more I’m convinced there’s no way this doesn’t turn into a bloodbath tomorrow.”

“It’s been awhile since Moira Queen herself shed blood in the streets of Starling,” Sara said absently, dusting her hands off on her pants. “You have to wonder if reminding people what she’s capable of is part of the plan.”

“You know something you’re not sharing with the rest of the class, Lance?”

Sara shot him a look filled with amusement. “Oh, so many things, Diggle. But not on this particular issue. Moira Queen does not see fit to share her motivations with the likes of someone like me. But I feel comfortable with rampant speculation.”
Diggle nodded. “In any case I think the mission parameters tomorrow ought to be: be prepared for anything.”

Sara laughed outright. “Aren’t those the mission parameters every time?”

Diggle sent her a self-aware grin. “Particularly when Felicity Smoak is involved.”

Uncaring now of preserving the illusion that they were together, since they had left Merlyn territory, they headed back towards the car on a different route than they had taken to get to the brothel.

As soon as the car started, Sara reached into her pocket for the wallet she’d lifted from the teenager. It had a library card -- a few discount grocery cards, receipts, one dollar and forty-seven cents in change, and a faded ID with only one readable name: Cindy.

*Starling City, 2 years ago*

“Go go go!” Oliver shouted at Tommy as the building began to rock underneath their feet.

“Already gone!” Tommy said, jumping through a window with his forearm out to protect his face from the shattering glass. “Come on, Oliver, let’s go!”

Oliver was right behind him, landing with a thud. Tommy and Oliver took off running like twin bullets down the Starling City alleyway. “Your mother said we needed to send a message. Do you think this is what she meant?” Tommy asked, huffing.

“I think this is the only kind of a message Thomas Calloway will understand,” Oliver said.

They were a good distance away when the explosive blew. It wasn’t enough to break the windows of the building -- but it was enough to destroy years of research. Oliver might have even felt bad about it, if Calloway hadn’t been using trafficking victims as research subjects in Dearden territory.
Moira didn’t have many lines that she drew in the sand. That was one of them. Oliver was more happy than usual to lend his newly acquired talents to putting a creep like Calloway out of business. Unless he ran to someone deeper in the underground and got out of town and started somewhere else.

Oliver closed his eyes against such a thought. He could only do so much. He could only care about Starling City, and what happened to her.

Flush with victory and riding the high of completing their task, Tommy and Oliver grabbed a quick shower at the gym they both belonged to so they could head back out into the Starling night. In the old days, they hadn’t had to look very hard to find a party -- the party went wherever they were, of course.

They’d flown all over the world, rented yachts, bought out football stadiums, water parks. Spent more money on hotel suites and champagne than some people made in their lifetimes. They’d put all of their time and attention into burning through the money they were allotted, year after year.

Now -- things were a bit different. Oh, there were still people who wanted nothing more than to party with two billionaire heirs, men and women who were more than happy to ride their coattails to a good time. But now, the constant partying, the people who participated in the lifestyle… Oliver thought it was a bit like an uncomfortable suit. Made his neck itchy, his palms sweaty. The guise didn’t lay well over the features of the new man Moira had insisted he had to become.

And now -- now Tommy was the same way. Oliver felt sick to his stomach every time he thought about it -- what his best friend must have gone through to become the person that flew through broken windows at his side, who didn’t blink at the kind of brutality Oliver had learned to live by, who was quick and precise, almost elegant in the way he fought. In a way -- Moira had truly given Oliver a gift -- a reason for his best friend to stick by him, to not blink at the kind of person Oliver had become.

But she’d also ruined the thing that Oliver had believed he was sacrificing himself for -- the opportunity for Thea and Tommy to remain untouched. That betrayal burned right down to his bones, ignited his blood.

“Oh, you’re not mad, Oliver,” Moira had said, a regent to her knight. “In time, you’ll come to see that this was the best solution for everyone. He simply wasn’t going to stop looking for you, and that kind of devotion deserves to be honed.”

Honed. Sharpened. Forged. Pain, and the grinding away of edges. This is what he’d come home to,
he thought -- nothing but an ever-present and lingering pressure from above to be stronger, to be better, to be harder. Home.

Home for Thea’s beautiful eyes and the way she was growing into a young woman. Home for Tommy’s quick grin and laugh.

Home. Away from Felicity.

His throat ached. His stomach hurt. For one shining minute, he’d had almost everything he’d ever wanted in Russia. Almost everything. But the last few years had taught him that happiness was never complete -- he could never have everything he wanted. The second he did, it would be wrested from him by some force greater than himself. He reached into the slacks he was planning to wear that night, pulled out the cell phone Felicity had programmed for him.

It was easy enough to locate the gallery. Picture after picture of Felicity and Russia. His favorite was one she took. He was kissing her cheek, totally absorbed in her, but in her eyes he thought he could imagine something like love as she stared at the camera. His heart twisted in his chest.

“Hey,” Tommy said, a towel slung around his waist, his hair dripping water. “Everything okay?”

“Yeah.” Oliver closed the image down. “Just letting my mind take a wander.”

“Hm. Might be a good thing. It might not be.”

“I was with someone. In Russia.” Oliver blurted it out.

Tommy raised an eyebrow. “With someone?”

“Yes.” Oliver sighed. “I just -- she was… she is important to me. I couldn’t not tell you. It wouldn’t be honest.”

“And we’ve got enough secrets already,” Tommy acknowledged. “So -- she?”
“Yeah,” Oliver said. “She’s the niece of the Bratva Captain Moira sent me to do my training with.”

Tommy snorted. “Good to know you still have the same preservation instincts you’ve always had. If there’s a hilariously inappropriate woman to fall for, Oliver Jonas Queen will find her and fuck her.”

“It wasn’t like that. I mean… it was. But it wasn’t.” Oliver’s brow was knit together.

Tommy’s voice was low. He laid a hand on Oliver’s arm. “Did she make you happy?”

“Yeah.” Oliver closed his eyes. “She did.”

“Good. You deserve some happy.”

Oliver reached for his pants. “That’s all you have to say about it?”

“Yep.” Tommy dropped his hand, reached for his boxer briefs, stepped into them. “I… you know how I feel about you, Oliver. How can I be anything other than happy that one moment out of the last few years didn’t suck for you?”

“What about you? Did you find anyone that makes you happy?”

A self-deprecating grin crossed Tommy’s face. “I don’t have the same kind of luck you do, Queen. There were women, sure. A few men, when the mood struck me. But no one that ever put that look on my face.”

The strangest combination of guilt, happiness, and sorrow washed through Oliver. In a perfect world, he thought, this is where he would grab Tommy, risk kissing him, show him that he was still the biggest part of Oliver’s heart, if his heart were still a thing he gave out. But he couldn’t. He couldn’t.

Hate. Hate for his mother. For the situation she forced him into. Rage against the world. Sorrow. He shut down the feelings. All of them.

Ignoring the storm swirling inside of him, he dressed quickly in the kind of clothes Oliver Queen
would be expected to go clubbing in. Tommy dressed next to him and Oliver spent most of his time trying to ignore, trying not touch, the way the darkness of the shirt emphasized the paleness of Tommy’s skin.

Some things were worth sacrificing happiness for, he thought. Thea needed him here. He might not get to touch Tommy the way that he wanted, or have Felicity in his bed. But he had his best friend at his back every night. That was more than enough for him.

Hours later, they made it back to the Queen manor, making certain to keep the proper amount of distance between them. Still, Tommy was making jokes, and Oliver let himself laugh at his impersonation of Carter Bowen’s foray onto the dance floor of the club they’d escaped to. It was the first time he’d really laughed since he got back to Starling. It felt good. It felt right.

“Oliver, Thomas?” Moira’s voice cut through their conversation from the parlor. “Why don’t you come in here?”

Cold dread made its way down Oliver’s spine. There was a note in Moira’s voice that made spiders crawl over his flesh. She was a little too happy, a little too pleasant. Next to him, Tommy stiffened as well. Automatically, Oliver reached for the knife he kept at the base of his spine. Tommy grabbed his wrist and shook his head slightly.

A few deep breaths and Oliver pushed open the door of the parlor.

And nearly fell to his knees.

“Sara?”

She raised a hand, waved a little. “Hey, Ollie. Guess what? I’m not dead.”

**

*Starling City, Present Day*

“You have your gun?” Oliver’s face was drawn with pain and impatience. The pill Felicity had
practically forced down his throat to help with the tension in his muscles around his bullet wound had yet to sink in. She knew, if she and Tommy hadn’t practically sat on him, he would have gone along on this particular trip. But Moira had been convincing that Malcolm wouldn’t take her and Felicity as a threat, especially if they showed up with only two bodyguards.

“I have my gun,” Felicity said evenly.

“Shoot first, ask questions later,” Oliver said. “I’m very serious about that. Your safety is… everything.”

“I know. I’ll have Diggle.” Felicity smiled brightly, trying to hide how uneasy the situation made her, as well. She trusted Diggle implicitly, but Merlyn was a next-level threat and she would much rather have Oliver and Tommy close to her. Especially with Moira at her back. Given what had happened earlier -- the way she’d reacted to the person she’d had to pretend to be, Felicity wasn’t relishing the prospect of spending more time with her mother-in-law.

“Diggle’s the best,” Oliver agreed without raising his voice, “but he can only do so much. So you promise me, you act as paranoid as… well. As me.”

Felicity chuckled and kissed his cheek. “I’m going to be okay.”

“I can send Tommy to follow you. You won’t even know that he’s there,” Oliver offered, waggling his eyebrows. “He’s the best of the best.”

“Moira would know he’s there.”

“I don’t give a shit,” Oliver said darkly.

“It kind of flies in the face of our plan to sneak in under the radar,” Felicity pointed out.

“I don’t like it,” Oliver said again. “I’m supposed to be the head of security. I can’t guarantee anyone’s security if you and Moira refuse to listen to me.”

Felicity went up on tiptoe and pulled his lips down to hers. Slowly, gently, she kissed him, over and
over, until some of the tension faded from his frame and his eyes were just a bit dazed. “I’m listening to you. I’m wishing we could do it your way.”

“Get in, get out. Recon only right? Sara and Diggle told you what they saw.”

“Yes,” Felicity said. “We’re just going to get a feel for the scope of his operation. See if he’s really broken the agreement with Moira.”

“Oh he has. I wouldn’t be surprised if that was the first thing he did once the relationship between the families started to break down,” Oliver said. “Mom’s insistence on being civilized in this one area has always been a sticking point between the two of them.”

“Good to know.”

Oliver sighed. “I really can send Tommy.”

“I have Sara and Diggle. They’re both scary in their own right.”

Oliver nodded. “Yeah, but they don’t know Merlyn like Tommy knows him.”

Felicity shrugged. “Is Tommy worried about us?”

Oliver’s mouth quirked up in one corner. “Tommy’s always worried about you. And me. He’s a worrier. It’s a thing he does.”

“He’s not the one keeping me from leaving the house at the moment.”

It was Oliver’s turn to kiss her. “Believe me, if he could have this job, he would.”

Felicity’s eyes narrowed. “Why can’t he?”
Oliver shook his head. “He’s got some big stock transfer today or something. He explained it to me like I was supposed to understand it. I nodded when he paused for breath. But I don’t think I passed a single business class at any of the four colleges I attended so it all went over my head.”

Felicity tugged on his ear gently. “That’s only because college is the last place you wanted to be. You know that, right? You’re one of the smartest guys I know. Don’t sell yourself short.”

Oliver let out a harsh chuckle and sighed. “How did we end up here?”

“You were fretting. I was distracting you,” Felicity said. “I also think you’re incredibly handsome, for the record. Like, sculpted by the gods pretty…”

“All right, all right.” Oliver lifted both of his hands in an ‘I surrender’ motion. “You’ll be careful.”

“And you’ll rest while I’m gone,” Felicity said, tapping his chest with a single finger.

“I’ll do my best. It’s hard without you or Tommy around.”

“We’ll take a nap together when I get back,” Felicity said. “I’m exhausted myself. Someone kept me up last night.”

Oliver grinned. “You’re welcome.”

A soft knock at the master suite door announced Diggle’s presence. “Mrs. Queen?” He said formally, in deference to the foot soldiers that walked the hallways of the manor. “Your car is ready, and Mrs. Queen is waiting for you.”

Felicity looked at Oliver, her lips quirked in amusement. “She’s waiting for me. That’s a polite way of saying she’s tapping her foot and generally being a miserable human being.”

“I’d tell you to tell her you were taking care of me, but I don’t think that would gain you much traction with her,” Oliver said ruefully.
Felicity lifted his hand to her lips, kissed it gently. “I love you. I’ll be back soon.”

As the door shut, Oliver waved at her. “Keep your head up, Felicity.”

“Always, Oliver.”

This car ride was different than the one that had come before. There was no polite conversation, no attempt made at pretending civility or a relationship between the two of them. Each woman was lost in her own world.

Until Moira spoke. “My son insisted you carry your own gun.” It wasn’t a question.

“Yes. He’s very particular on that point, my husband,” Felicity said, carefully looking out the window. “The one time I was caught without one nearly ended disastrously. I think both of us would prefer not to repeat that experience.”

“Hm. I seem to recall the Russians sending him back with a few more holes than I sent the original model with,” Moira said evenly.

“If your question is whether or not he has one of those scars because of me, I would not hesitate to tell you the truth: He does.” Felicity tapped her knee, almost in counterpoint to Moira’s manipulation, her efforts to get Felicity off-balance.

“Still, apparently you both learned your lesson.” Moira tilted her head to the side. “At the beginning of our marriage, Robert would insist on such things for my safety as well.”

Felicity narrowed her eyes. “Did you need a reminder?”

“Hm? No. But sometimes it’s nice to have the illusion that someone cares about you beyond what they care for themselves, isn’t it?”

Ice slid down Felicity spine. She steeled herself. “Indeed.”
“You’ll soon see what I mean. Queen men aren’t given to impulse control, particularly around something they’ve already indulged themselves in,” Moira said, breaking away from Felicity’s gaze. “Although for your sake, I hope not.”

Tommy. She was talking about Tommy. Again. Felicity grit her teeth and took deep breaths. “Oliver knows better than to betray my trust. That’s a lesson you taught him well, when you killed his father.”

Moira’s eyes flashed. “That’s quite an accusation.”

Felicity tossed her hair and responded in Russian. “Yuri’s sources are always impeccable.”

“You’re playing a dangerous game,” Moira responded in the same language.

“Yes,” Felicity said, but left it at that. She had decided, after last night, that allowing Moira to think they were allies, or that they understood each other on any level, would require too much damage to her own soul.

The tension was crackling between them when the car slowed, and Diggle got out to let Moira and Felicity out. Sara stood on the sidewalk, her eyes constantly sweeping back and forth.

Moira stiffened as she surveyed the property. “Rebecca would be furious,” she said softly and shook her head. “All of this in her memory and if she knew it would kill her again.”

The building had once been one of Rebecca’s clinics. Tommy and Oliver had saved most of them -- but this building, this facility, had been beyond repair and nearly condemned, so they’d moved the clinic up and over several blocks to a better building, but Merlyn Global hadn’t let go of the lease.

On paper, it would be empty. In reality, it was anything but. Bodyguards loitered in front of the building, and there were bars on all of the windows, no fire escapes on second and third story windows. In more than one way, it was immediately evident that the place was a trap -- a firetrap, a prison.

Nausea rolled through Felicity. “I think it’s safe to say Merlyn has violated your agreement.”
A shoe flew through the plate glass of a second story window. It was a thick-soled boot. Felicity’s eyes flew upward. “What the…”

They heard a blood-curdling scream and then there was a shout. “Help me!”

Without a word from Felicity or Moira, Sara was off like a shot, Diggle right behind her. “Get in the car,” he told Felicity before he took off. “If you get in the middle of this, Oliver will kill me.”

Moira was more than happy to make her way to the backseat and wait, but Felicity couldn’t do it. She tried. She paced back and forth by the car, but at the sound of the first gunshot, she took off running towards the action.

Time and time again Oliver had made her fire the weapon in her hand. Over and over -- she could still hear his voice telling her aim, breathe, fire. Guns weren’t his specialty, but that didn’t mean he wasn’t absolutely deadly with one -- actually, the man had uncanny aim with almost any form of launched projectile, she thought…but then forced herself to focus.

Diggle and Sara had taken care of the guards that had been standing in front of the building. Felicity slowly swept through the front rooms -- clearly they’d made their way up the stairs towards the girl, but that didn’t mean there wasn’t someone twitching downstairs that could make their lives miserable.

While she moved, meticulously checking for enemies, she noted the conditions the brothel was in. Locks on the outside of the doors. The girls were locked in at night. Little food, but copious booze and pills in the kitchen: they were kept drugged. Filth everywhere. They were humiliated. She could put these facts together as quickly as she could solve a Rubik’s cube. Bile rose in her throat.

Someone was crying behind one of the first floor bedroom doors. But there wasn’t time -- the alarm had surely been raised. Felicity couldn’t pick the lock.

“I’m coming back for you!” She shouted through the door. “You just have to hold on, okay?”

Sara and Diggle burst down the stairs, carrying a bruised and bloodied, nearly-unrecognizably human form between them. If she had been conscious before, and she must have been, to make the inhuman sounds she had been -- she was not now, and that was clearly a blessing.
Felicity’s heart twisted in her chest. “Oh my God,” she said, rushing forward.

“What the fuck are you doing in here?” Diggle asked, more harshly than he intended, she was sure. “I told you to wait in the car.”

“I couldn’t,” Felicity said simply.

“We’ve got to go. I can hear Merlyn’s back-up arriving,” Sara said. “We’re good, but we can’t take on an army by ourselves. Not and get this girl to safety.”

“Oh, we’re coming back tonight,” Felicity said through her teeth. “And we’re bringing our own army. We can’t let this go another day.”

“Where do we take her? A hospital? Do you think she’s got somewhere to live?” Diggle asked.

“No. No hospitals,” Sara said. “Merlyn will be watching them. Her life would be in more danger there than anywhere else. I lifted her ID when we ran into her last night — I don’t think the address she gave was real — it’s a fairly well known squat for Starling City homeless.”

“Well, that makes it really simple then,” Felicity said, holding the door open for them as they brought Cindy out into the street. “She comes home with us.”
Gifts

Chapter Summary

Tommy, Oliver and Felicity move forward in their relationship in a big way, Thea makes a decision, and everything goes to hell in a handbasket.

Chapter Notes

I know! I know! I've been gone for so long. I've been grieving some losses in my personal life: the end of a relationship, the unexpected death of an aunt, there were several family traumas... I was graduating from school, then I was starting a new job, then... well, anyway. My creativity was tapped. Anyway. I'm back. And I'm finishing this bitch. Slowly but surely.

“You always bring me home the nicest gifts,” Tommy said blithely as he opened the front door to let Diggle and Sara in, carrying Cindy. Still, his eyes moved quickly over the girl and he gestured down the hallway. “We’ve got a guest room ready for her,” he said, “and Lyla is willing to come by and have a look.”

“Really, now,” Moira protested, not for the first time. “We have safe houses all over this city. We don’t take in strays.”

Tommy’s face set and Felicity shook her head. “She’s my guest, Moira.”

Moira’s face set. There was nothing she could do now -- the house was Oliver’s, and by extension, Felicity’s. In this matter, her hands were tied. “I would think very carefully about the message you are sending,” she said softly to Felicity.

Felicity nodded. “I will,” she said, watching Diggle and Sara carry Cindy down the hallway. “I’m going to let them get her settled. In the meantime, I’m going to see if Raisa can be persuaded to make me a cup of tea. For some reason, my stomach won’t settle.”

“No, thank you, dear,” Moira said, her voice cold as ice, impenetrable. “I have some business to attend to in my office.”
Felicity nodded again, and the two women parted ways. Tommy crossed the room and took Felicity’s elbow. “Are you okay? You are looking a little pale.”

“I’m perfectly fine. I just don’t like to see young women getting beat up, that’s all.” Felicity drew in a breath. “And we had to leave the other girls behind. We’re going to have to move fast if we want to shut the operation down.”

Tommy nodded. “My father put a man named Ethan Monroe in charge of that part of his business.” The way he said the name had Felicity glancing up.

“You know him?”

“Mm.”

“What about Ethan Monroe?” Oliver asked, coming down the stairs. Felicity could see in his face that he hadn’t taken his pain medicine -- clearly when she’d asked him to take it earlier, he’d faked it. She fought the urge to strangle him. His insistence that his head remain clear would probably slow his healing while his body worked to keep the pain under control and repair the damage, but of course he wouldn’t listen to her about that.

“He’s in charge of my father’s trafficking operation.”

Oliver’s face went absolutely still, the way it went just before he released a fatal arrow. “Is that so.”

“Okay, so you both know who that is, but neither one of you are telling me anything,” Felicity said.

“That was part of my meeting this morning, actually. I’ve just acquired the majority in publicly owned stocks in Merlyn Global, independent of my father,” Tommy said, “and some of my sources inside the company were briefing me on some of the less… savory aspects of the business.”

“Okay,” Felicity said. “Where does Ethan Monroe come in?”

“He’s a lieutenant in Merlyn’s organization,” Oliver said briefly, “and I’ve been meaning to kill him for a while, so this will be a good enough excuse.”
“Why?” Felicity kept pressing, noticing that the boys were avoiding looking at her.

“He’s the kind of person who can sleep at night after he deals in underaged women and drugs, Felicity,” Tommy said softly. “And he’s been around since we were kids.”

There was a story there, Felicity knew, but one they both shied away from. “Do I need to know anything more than that?” Felicity asked.

To their credit, they looked at each other and gave the question proper thought. “He shot me once? He’s not overly fond of ‘faggots’ when he’s sober, and way too fond of them when he’s not,” Tommy said shortly. “I shot him back, but neither one of us were sober. No permanent injuries. Still.”

“Still. You were a seventeen-year-old kid,” Oliver said.

Tommy shrugged. “I survived.”

Tears, sudden and insistent, sprang up in Felicity’s eyes. “You know what? You two need some happy stories.”

“I’ve got a couple,” Tommy said, shooting her a significant look. “And it doesn’t matter. I’m not a scared seventeen-year-old kid anymore and he can’t get the drop on me.”

“No, he can’t,” Oliver agreed. “But he’s hasn’t stayed alive this long in Malcolm’s employ by being stupid or incompetent, and I don’t think we should make the mistake of underestimating him.”

Tommy nodded. “I wasn’t planning on it.”

“Okay,” Felicity said, nodding her head and tapping her fingers on her thigh, as though she were trying to reset herself. “We can’t have this conversation here,” she said softly. Dearden soldiers passed around them in the foyer, no one obviously listening, but some of them still had loyalty to Moira, and might be reporting back on what they ‘happened’ to overhear.
Tommy and Oliver nodded. “I’ll tell Diggle to give us an update on the status of the young woman as soon as there’s something to know,” he said, “and I’ll meet you guys up in Felicity’s office?”

Felicity nodded. Oliver wrapped his arm around her shoulder as they walked through the corridors of Queen Manor, pressed a kiss to the top of her head and sighed. “We’re going to need to keep an eye on Tommy.”

“What aren’t you two telling me about Ethan Monroe?” Felicity whirled, crossing her arms over her chest.

“Tommy said there was no permanent damage -- but I think there was,” Oliver said, reaching for Felicity’s hand like he needed an anchor. “By that time, I think he’d stopped consciously expecting Malcolm to give a damn.”

“Maybe consciously. But expecting a parent to love you? That’s an instinct that’s hard to kill,” Felicity said.

“Yeah. I think he thought maybe Malcolm might… initiate some kind of… retribution, but Malcolm never did. Tommy got shot and Malcolm just… let it happen.” Oliver shook his head. “Malcolm always was a cold son of a bitch. Ethan Monroe was the final nail in the coffin of Tommy expecting anything like fatherhood from Malcolm. It’s hard to know with Tommy -- he’s got a thin handle on his rage these days.”

“So you’ve noticed that too?” Felicity asked, stepping closer to him and fingering the collar of his shirt.

“Mm,” Oliver said. “I’m not panicked, yet.”

“Neither am I.” Felicity said.

Oliver wrapped his arms around her and she automatically looped hers around his neck. “I’m glad you’re okay.”

Felicity smiled. “I had Diggle right with me. I was never in any real danger.”
“Mmhmm,” Oliver dipped his nose into the spot on her neck where she dabbed her perfume on every morning and inhaled. “Believe it or not, Diggle is not actually bulletproof.”

Felicity tapped Oliver’s bandaged wound. “Neither are you.”

**

Russia, two and a half years ago…

“This is not my problem,” Yuri said patiently. “I cannot make these men respect you. Only you can make these men respect you. You wanted a position in the family, I give it to you. Now you have to earn your way.”

Felicity huffed impatiently. “I am earning my way. The family’s doing better than it has in twenty years because I brought us into the twenty-first century.”

“Yes, yes. This is all money, and money is well and good, but these are Russian mobsters, my dear. Sometimes it takes a few bullets to get ideas through their thick heads.”

Oliver, sitting in Yuri’s office, patiently working on an arrow shaft with a fletching knife, lifted one corner of his mouth in a half-smile.

“American boy, you are smirking,” Yuri said. “You agree with me, yes?”

“That Russians are thick-headed? Sure,” Oliver said, winking at Felicity.

“You have always been squeamish, my Felicity, and this is why I did not want this life for you,” Yuri said mournfully. “I try over and over to tell you to stay in your office, make your money for us there, but you wanted to be captain, and so here we are…”

“You’re telling me to start dropping bodies.”
“This man who disrespected you -- who did not follow orders. You had him killed, yes?”

“That’s the standard punishment,” Felicity, her eyes darting over to Oliver. “I felt I had no choice.”

“And you did not,” Yuri said. “Fear of death is sometimes the only thing that will make a man… conform. Your American… friend, he seems quite willing to enforce your will. Use him.”

Felicity glanced over at Oliver and flushed red. “Oliver’s not a weapon.”

“Yes, he is.” Yuri’s voice was gentle. “And he is your lover, yes? He warms your bed at night, you sneak around my house and giggle like school children together. You look at each other and I see love, yes. For love, a man would do far worse things than ensuring that you are… respected.”

Felicity swallowed. “I can’t ask Oliver to do that.”

“Can’t ask Oliver to do what?” Oliver asked, in his increasingly-passable Russian.

“Would you kill for Felicity?” Yuri asked in English.

“I already have.”

“Well, then, this will seem like a…. what is the expression? Cakewalk?” Yuri walked over to the bar in his office, poured himself a stiff drink. “If there is a faction of the family that, as you say, is ignoring your orders, then you must deal with them.”

Oliver nodded. “You have to deal with them before they deal with you. Being Yuri’s niece will only keep you protected to a point.”

“I know that,” Felicity hissed.

“So there is no problem,” Yuri said. “You figure out which of these men are causing the problem. You take them out. Then we deal with the consequences, yes?”
“Okay, fine, but leave Oliver out of it.”

“Mr. Queen stays right where he is,” Yuri said firmly. “He knew what it would mean when you took him into your bed -- either his death, or his absolute loyalty. If he fails you, there is a fate far worse than death that awaits him, and even his mother would not be able to save him.”

“That’s not necessary,” Felicity said, waving a hand.

“You’re my only living niece.” Yuri crossed the room, wrapped her in a hug, pressed a kiss to her temple. “The only of my blood still alive in the world. Mr. Queen sympathizes with my position, I am sure.”

Oliver said nothing, his face intractable, almost unreadable. Not for the first time, Felicity wondered what they did to him on the island, what pieces of his soul they cut out to make his face capable of such… blankness.

“You don’t have to threaten his life, Uncle Yuri.”

“It’s fine, Felicity,” Oliver said finally. “Yuri and I understand each other.”

“Well, I’m going to need a drink. The testosterone in here is just a little too much to bear,” Felicity said stiffly, and crossed the room. She poured a glass of amber-colored alcohol. “I’m not squeamish. Or weak.”

“No, my darling, you are not,” Yuri said. “It was… a poor choice of words.”

“I just don’t like doing things without a damned good reason. Especially things with permanent consequences.”

“If you do not kill these men,” Yuri said flatly, “they will kill you.”

“That’s a really good reason.”
Sin woke slowly to pain and an unrelenting cottonmouth, and the characteristic heavy-headedness that made it clear she’d been dosed with some high-quality pain medicine. “Stellar,” she breathed, trying to convince herself to open her eyes, find out where she was.

“Hey, hey, hey, slow,” a voice said. It had a gentle rasp to it, sweet and female. It was a good voice. “If you’re going to wake up, take it easy. I know a thing or two about coming back on the wrong side of a bender, and well, I’ve never been beat as bad as you were. So I can only imagine that part. Still, I know the last thing you probably want is someone blabbing in your ear, so…”

Sin smacked her lips, cleared her throat. “Water?”

“Right here.” As her eyes slowly opened and met Thea Queen’s steady blue ones, Sin felt them widen in shock. “Go on, take it.”

Words were precious right now. She could only say the most important thing on her mind. “You’re Thea Queen.”

“Have been since they stuck that name on me eighteen years ago,” Thea said brightly. “You’re in my house cause my badass sister-in-law saved your ass, and I’m here because… well, it makes me feel useful and that’s in short supply these days.”

There was a fog swimming in her mind, clouding the filter that usually prevented her from saying what was on her mind. “You’re prettier in real life than you are in the mags.”

“Yeah, well,” Thea brushed her hair back behind her ear. “You’re also high right now. So we’ll take that with a grain of salt. Anything else I can get you?”

“Where am I again?”

Thea leaned forward, put her elbows to her knees. “You’re in the Queen family mansion.”
“Oh. I thought I heard you say that, but I thought it couldn’t be real.” Sin took another small, slow sip of water. “I’m incredibly high right now.”

“Yeah, you are. And you just kind of inadvertently stepped in the middle of a gang war, actually,” Thea said, “which I can’t apologize enough for. My brothers are about to come in here. They’re going to ask you some questions.”

“Thought you only had one of those.”

“I do.” Sin was high, but she wasn’t stupid. She didn’t miss the quick flash of color on Thea’s cheeks, the subtle way she tried to clear her throat. “I do have one of those. But Tommy, he’ll be with Oliver. He’s like my brother.”

“Okay.” Sin decided she would unpack that later. “What are they going to want to know?”

“Everything you know.” Thea sighed. “That brothel you got beat up in. Do you know who runs it?”

“Ethan Moore. He runs everything in that neighborhood.” Sin swallowed. “Can I get some more of this water? It’s… really good… water. Very wet.”

Thea chuckled but took the glass of water. “I’m going to tell Oliver and Tommy that you’re awake. Don’t worry about it. They just want to get the brothel shut down.”

“Why?” Sin asked.

“Well, it’s one part Malcolm Merlyn tried to kill me a couple of days ago, one part they’ve decided his organization needs to blow up, and one part they’re better guys than they like to think they are.”

Sin blinked. “Okay, then.”

“I’ll just go and get them now.” Thea smiled at her. “I have a feeling we’re going to be good friends.”
Sin blinked again -- it seemed the most she could do in the face of the whirlwind that was Thea Queen taking charge. “Do I have a choice?”

“Not really, no,” Thea said, with a wink. Then she was gone, and Sin slowly sipped on the water next to her bed, trying not to drift off.

When the door opened again, Sin forced herself to sit more upright, and she had to bite her tongue hard to prevent herself from asking if everyone around here got hit by a gorgeous stick or what. If she went for people with penises at all, these two might have been her type. The men that entered were both tall, broad in the shoulders, covered, bare arms hinting at tattoos that wound their way up over ridiculously defined muscles. This wasn’t the kind of strength developed in a gym. This was the kind of strength that was developed because it was used. Sin had lived long enough on the streets to easily recognize it.

These men were the kind of strong that was scary, if you thought about it for too long. So she tried not to. They were followed by a woman, much shorter than them, whose blonde hair swung in a ponytail behind her. Although she was the last to enter the room, the men both turned and looked at her before either one of them spoke.

Ah, so she was in charge. Sin grinned. She could dig that.

“Hey, look at that,” the dark-haired one said, “she can sit up and open her eyes!”

“Tommy,” the blonde woman said softly, a gentle reprimand. She turned her attention to Sin. “How are you feeling? Last time we all saw you, we weren’t certain how badly you were hurt.”

Sin shrugged. “My ribs are busted, I think. It’s hard to tell, they’ve got me on the good stuff.”

“You know you’re hurt, but it’s hard to care. Hey, I’m Oliver Queen.” The man in question extended his hand for Sin to shake it. “I’m sorry you got hurt.”

“Thanks for having your people rescue me,” Sin said, clearing her throat. “And, you know, putting me up in your personal digs. That’s fuc… swell of you.”

“You know you’re hurt, but it’s hard to care. Hey, I’m Oliver Queen.” The man in question extended his hand for Sin to shake it. “I’m sorry you got hurt.”

“Thanks for having your people rescue me,” Sin said, clearing her throat. “And, you know, putting me up in your personal digs. That’s fuc… swell of you.”

“Just doing the decent thing,” the woman said, and also brought her hand out to shake. “I’m Felicity Smoak-Queen, and that’s Tommy Merlyn.”

“All right then, Sin,” Tommy said. “We don’t want to take too much of your time. We know you want to recover, and we want to give you time to do that, but if we could pick your brain for just a few moments…”

“Thea told me you guys are going after Malcolm Merlyn.”

The men exchanged looks but Felicity just nodded. “It's in our best business interest to remove the competition.”

That was about what Sin had expected. “That’s as good a reason as anything else, anyway.”

“Plus, he’s my father and I know better than almost anyone what a shit human being he is,” Tommy said easily, collapsing into a chair on the other side of the room. Oliver found a chair next to him. Only Felicity remained standing. “So we’ve got a personal interest in taking him down.”

Oliver and Felicity both nodded. There was something under the surface here, something that, maybe if she wasn’t high, she would have picked up on. Sin toyed with that thought for a second before she cleared her throat.

“Ethan Moore snatched me off the street because uh… he found out I’d been stealing from him.”

“Ballsy,” Tommy said, and Sin heard a note of appreciation in his voice.

“Thanks.” Sin shifted, felt something tug, and carefully rearranged herself again. “I don’t normally get all Robin Hood on my marks, but I figured Ethan Moore was a guy who could spare some change. Besides, there’s rumors going around that some of those girls aren’t working for him willingly, and I thought… well, I don’t know, I thought if I got in there… I might be able to see something…”

Felicity laid a hand on Sin’s bed as she stepped closer, resignation in her eyes. “What did you see?”
“About what you saw, probably,” Sin said. “I don’t know how useful what I have to say will be.”

“We’re going in tonight,” Felicity said. “Neither Moira nor I can stand to let what we witnessed go for long -- if we’d had any idea what was happening, we would have shut it down earlier. Alliance or no.”

Sin swallowed some of her water as opposed to laughing outright. She’d grown up in Starling’s underbelly and she knew Moira Queen was many things -- merciful or charitable was not really one of them. But perhaps these people knew more about her than she did.

“I can tell you how I got in, for one thing…”

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Sin talked for probably thirty minutes, answering questions and telling her story until she was practically asleep. Then Felicity, Tommy and Oliver left her room and walked as a unit to the office Felicity had turned into her own space. Tommy’s head was spinning. He knew, immediately, what had to be done. He also knew that Oliver wasn’t going to like it.

They passed several footsoldiers, who made their customary rounds throughout the Manor with a little more attention to detail than perhaps they would have before. But Oliver’s injury and the attack on Thea had them all on edge -- well, that, and the lack of mercy Oliver was showing whenever he caught someone slacking.

It was, at the very least, highly motivating, Tommy thought. If the men had thought Oliver was scary before (and they had), they were still unprepared to deal with cooped-up and overprotective older brother Oliver Queen, who had to lean on employees to protect his family when he would much rather be out there standing in front of bullets for them himself.

Felicity’s office was very much her space, but it hadn’t taken long for Tommy and Oliver to find their spots in it -- Oliver plopped down on his favorite armchair and ripped his sling off so he could lay his arm on the armrest. Tommy took a spot on the end of the buttery yellow loveseat and crossed one leg over the other.

Tommy folded his hands in his lap, felt a smile tug on the edges of his mouth. “The final stock transfer was complete this morning. We -- well, technically me, but all of us -- we are the majority
shareholder of Merlyn Global, Incorporated. “

“Have you heard from your father?”

Tommy shook his head sharply. “I have excellent taste in lawyers. It will take Dad’s lawyers and investigators a few days to untangle all the knots to get to the center of the Tootsie Pop.”

“I do appreciate a good mixed metaphor,” Felicity said, grinning, as she plopped down next to him and laid her head on his shoulder. “Good work, Tommy.”

The weight of her hair almost tingled. He thought that kind of shit only happened in books -- or when Oliver touched him, but he felt a connection to her that was almost tangible at this point. She yawned and cuddled in closer to him. He lifted an arm and pulled her closer, a funny twinge in his stomach when he felt her draw in his scent, and sigh happily.

Oliver toed off his boots and stretched out sideways in the armchair, laying his feet on Tommy’s thigh. “What a long, sucky day. With one victory.”

“One major victory,” Felicity said firmly. “We’ve got to take our wins where we can get them.”

“Felicity was right back there,” Tommy said, laying his head back against the cushion. “It has to be tonight.”

Oliver nodded. “A quick nap, and I’ll be ready to go.”

“No.” Felicity and Tommy said it at the same time, in the same tone of voice.

“You’re staying here,” Felicity said, patting Tommy’s thigh. “You’re injured, and you’re in no shape to be leading an urban assault, for God’s sake.”

“I’ve done far worse things in worse shape than this,” Oliver protested.

“Because you’re an idiot and no one was around to tell you so,” Felicity snapped. “I’m sorry, but
Tommy swallowed a snort. Oliver was gearing up to get mad and that would help exactly no one. “It also has to be me.”

Oliver stood up, jarring his injury. Tommy could see the pain in the immediate whiteness of his face, the way he grit his teeth. “Tommy, you…”

Tommy stood as well. “I need you to listen, because I sense that you’re about to say something dumb and I want to say my piece before you try to martyr yourself on the altar of my fucked-up childhood, okay?” He drew in a deep breath. “This is why it’s good that there are two of us. You could fight right now, it’s true, but you don’t have to, and one of us ought to stay back here in case my father decides that a full frontal assault on the Manor is the way to go. Oliver, this is why I was trained to do what I was trained to do.”

“We’ll use the comms, just like we always do,” Felicity said, unmoving from the couch. “Oliver and I will be able to listen to every word that you say, everything that happens. You’ll take a team of footsoldiers you trust. Get the girls out, take care of Ethan Moore.”

“Once the girls are out they’re going to need medical attention, most likely,” Tommy said.

“No, let’s backtrack this conversation for a second. I’m still back on you going by yourself,” Oliver said.

“I won’t be going by myself,” Tommy said. “I’ll have the men with me.”

“You won’t have me.” Oliver crossed his arms over his chest for half a second before he had to set them down, unable to stop the gasp of pain.

“Oh for fuck’s sake,” Felicity snapped, and grabbed the sling. “Quit moving it, Oliver, you’re going to rip it open and then it will bleed all over and we don’t have time for that right now, not to mention I am at my limit of you two bleeding in front of me.” She threw the sling at him and got to her feet.

“It just doesn’t… sit right,” Oliver said, finally, as he fit the sling on his arm. “Sending him out in the field against Ethan Moore without me for back-up.”
“We’ll send Diggle, too. And Sara.”

Oliver narrowed his eyes at her. “We’ll need Diggle and Sara at the house in case Malcolm…”

“I am perfectly capable of picking up a gun and defending my family and my home if I need to,” Felicity said. “Not to mention, you’ll be here with me. And even injured, you’re as good as three foot soldiers.”

“Only three?” Oliver asked.

“Well, you’re injured, so no bow use for you,” Felicity said. “I was accounting for that in my calculations.”

“You guys?” Tommy let amusement color his tone. “We need to focus here.”

“Yes, medical attention for the girls,” Felicity said, her laser focus back on the problem at hand. “I’ll call Lyla.”

Oliver lifted an eyebrow. “Moira will pitch a fit.”

“Your mother can fuck off,” Felicity said, off-handedly. “And maybe she won’t, given that this particular situation has disturbed her, too. In any case, her opinion matters not at all.”

Tommy and Oliver exchanged a look and nodded at each other.

“What about law enforcement?” Felicity asked. “Should we tip off SCPD?”

Tommy nodded. “At my signal. In case there are survivors. The law can pick up after us.”

“Okay,” Felicity said. “Factoring in all that Sin told us, I think that’s a solid enough plan.”
“Okay, good,” Tommy said. “We go just as soon as it’s dark enough to give us some cover.”

“Okay.” Felicity nodded, then looked down and twisted her hands. “Ugh, this is the part that I hate.”

“The waiting?” Tommy asked.

“Yeah. All the decisions have been made, now we just… sit here.” Felicity sighed, and toed off her pumps, and unzipped her dress, dropping it to the floor. “Sit here and do nothing.”

She plopped in Oliver’s chair and ran her hands down her body. “Unless, you know, someone has a better idea.”

“Oliver, lock the door,” Tommy said in a strangled voice. “Please.”

Oliver grinned and crossed the room, turning the lock on the door. There was an immense rug in front of the fireplace, deep and soft. Tommy held out his hand to Felicity. “I have a better idea,” he said huskily.

Hand in hand, they walked to the rug, and Tommy pulled her down, the fire flickering in its grate behind them. For one single, shining moment, it all hit him. Oliver watching him and Felicity, desire in his eyes, Felicity in her underwear, already wet and wriggling and waiting for him.

“Touch me, please,” she whispered.

“What if I just want to look?” Tommy lifted her head up, gently pulled the ponytail out of her hair, arranged it behind her in a halo. “Spread your legs, baby.”

She did. “What now?”

“How do you start when it’s just you by yourself?” Oliver asked, standing by the fireplace.
“Oh, I… Hm.” Felicity closed her eyes, hummed, ran her fingers down her body, rubbed her whole
hand over her panties, pressing gently, danced back to caress the vee of her thighs. “I start by
imagining you two, usually.”

“Pull your bra down,” Tommy ordered. “Leave it on, just… I want to see the tips. Are you wet?”

“Getting there. I love this part,” she whispered. “When it trickles out of me into my panties and no
one knows what you’re doing to me, but me…”

“Show me. Take off those panties.”

The panties came off slowly, and she tossed them to Oliver. Tommy watched as Oliver tested the
inside for moisture, and grinned. Oliver took his shirt off and threw it across the room and dropped to
his knees, laying down on Felicity’s other side.

Felicity flirted with her clit, teasing herself.

“What are you thinking about now?” Tommy’s voice was thick with tension.

“I’m thinking about what it looks like when you two kiss.”

“What kind of kiss do you like to watch?” Tommy asked, his voice all Irish cleverness and charm.
“Sweet and gentle? Hard and dominating?”

Felicity flushed, her knees dropping open a bit more. “I love it when you take his head in your hands
-- there’s always this look in your eye like you can’t quite believe it.”

“Like this?” Tommy drew Oliver close, framed his face in his hands, and they kissed. Oliver all
golden and tan, Tommy in stark colors -- they could both use more time in the sun, she thought idly.
But as usual, their hands couldn’t stay chaste, and soon they were pushing at each other’s pants,
dragging them down over muscular thighs and slim hips.

As soon as Tommy’s hand touched Oliver’s cock, Felicity gasped, and the two of them turned to
look at her.
“She liked that,” Oliver said, his eyes hooded with pleasure. “Almost as much as I liked it.”

“I just… think about how you two probably learned to give handjobs on each other,” Felicity muttered, “how hot it is that you’re still together, that you let me join you.”

“Baby, we were looking for you before we even knew there was a you,” Tommy said. “But yes, we… practiced on each other.”

Oliver snorted, took Tommy’s hand. “We were a bit obsessed, the way you get with a new toy.”

“You’re still obsessed,” Felicity laughed. “Not that I can blame you. I wanted to play with Oliver every minute of every day when we first got together. It’s the same with you, Tommy.”

Both men flushed. Tommy bent forward, laid a gentle kiss on Oliver’s jaw. “Good thing we’re inspired because as you know… practice makes perfect.”

They used their long-practiced skills to the best of their abilities then, coaxing orgasms from each other while Felicity coached them gently on what she liked to see, what she fantasized.

It took a minute for Tommy to catch his breath. Felicity slid down his body until she laid half-on top of him, her head just under his chin. Oliver’s cock, sated and limp, lay on Tommy’s thigh, and he kissed Tommy’s cheek before he rolled completely off of him. Tommy had Felicity’s cum on his tongue, Oliver’s spent on his stomach, and his own was… all over Oliver’s pelvis.

“Someone should get a Kleenex. Or six. Or seven,” Tommy muttered, closing his eyes. “Maybe a whole liter of water. Just for me.”

“Poor baby. You were a hero,” Felicity said, teasingly, and she unfolded herself, got to her feet and retrieved the box from her desk. Tommy heard several thunks, the slide of a drawer open and closing. But his eyes were closed.

He nearly started when he felt Felicity wipe off his mouth with a damp Kleenex which she wet with a pitcher of water from her sideboard, then move down his body, not missing any detail until he was completely clean, and there was a small pile of tissue next to him. Then she did the same thing to
“Thank you baby,” Oliver said sleepily. Both men watched in fascination as she did the same thing for herself, cleaning between her thighs and delicately wiping off her fingers.

She straddled Tommy then, and his eyes widened in shock. “That was very sexy, baby, but I can’t go for round two right this second, although if you’re not satisfied…”

“Oh, shut up,” Felicity said, laughing and rolling her eyes. “I just don’t want you to try and run away.”

Tommy narrowed his eyes. “Why would I…”

Felicity reached for the box she had hidden behind the tissues. It was velvet and… “Oliver and I think you should know exactly how we feel about you.”

Tommy felt the first flush of panic. “What is this?”

“You make us complete,” Felicity said softly, and passed the ring box to Oliver. “There’s never, ever been only two people in our marriage. And we never want there to be.”

“She’s our wife,” Oliver agreed, opening the box to show Tommy. “And you’re our husband. At least… in our hearts. We’re hoping you’d feel the same way. And maybe that you’d wear this.”

It was a simple enough band, black and gold -- with green engraving on the inside that said “Ours.”

His heart raced like a gun had gone off on some starting line to a race he hadn’t even known he was entering. “Everyone will…”

“Fuck everyone,” Felicity said. “Only not literally. We’d prefer you only fuck us. Together or separately. For the rest of your life. I mean, that would be the one rider on the ring.”

“I’m being serious Felicity,” Tommy protested.
“So are we,” Oliver said. “We want you to have it. We want people to know. You’re just as important to us as we are to each other.”

A sudden, piercing longing. So deep in his gut that it hurt. He braced his hands on Felicity’s thighs and turned his face away for a long moment. Even in his wildest, deepest, darkest dreams, he’d never imagined this.

He couldn’t have it. No way the world would be this kind to him. This would be snatched from him like every other piece of happiness he’d never had, like any other promise of family that had been dangled in front of his face.

“If it’s too much, too soon…” Felicity trailed off. “I know we sprung this on you, we didn’t ask or prep or… Oliver and I have had time to get used to this idea…”

“No, I want it!” He couldn’t bear for her to think otherwise. Not for a single second. “Christ, Felicity.”

There was nowhere for the emotion to go. He sat up, holding Felicity in his arms until she was straddling his lap then he ducked his head forward until he laid his forehead against her shoulder.

“Baby,” Felicity muttered. Then Oliver was sitting up, arranging himself behind Tommy, his thick thighs on either side of him, his stomach to Tommy’s back.

“We’re not going anywhere,” Oliver muttered. “You can want this, Tommy. You’re allowed to have it. We’re giving it to you.”

“The consequences…” Tommy shook his head. “You two know how the Family will react to this. We can… I can wear it in private.”

Felicity lifted his hand to her mouth, kissed the palm of it. “You can wear it in public. We’ve talked about the consequences. No more of the Family treating you like you’re less. You’re one of us.”

“You can’t just… will people to understand. Or kill everyone who thinks this is a perversion.”
Oliver kissed his neck. “I’m not giving you up and I’m not hiding.”

“Take it,” Felicity said softly. “Maybe we start with just… wearing it in private? Then -- as you get more comfortable…”

Oliver took the ring out of the box. Slipped it onto Tommy’s left hand. “Wear it now. Maybe you’ll never want to take it off.”

Oliver knew him far too well.

**

When Tommy dressed as the Shadow, later that evening, he stared at his hand for a long time. The weight of it was new, but seemed right. But there was nothing for it. He searched all over for a chain. Maybe he could wear it against his heart. But he couldn’t find anything… right. So he stuck it in his pocket and gathered his men and rode in silence to the spot they were parking their vehicles, some three blocks away from the brothel.

He’d selected men that were the most competent, the men that he and Oliver decided were the most efficient and trustworthy, the kind of men that wouldn’t mind laying down their lives if they needed to because this crossed the invisible line they’d drawn in the sand for themselves.

His training had been thorough -- self-defense, hand-to-hand, urban warfare tactics, strategy. Very rarely did he have to lead an attack like this, but it wasn’t his first time. He moved quickly and quietly with his men down the back alleys of Starling, for once ignoring all of the invisible territory lines, not caring whether or not they were tipped off to his father -- this assault would be far too quick and too thorough for his father to send reinforcements in time.

He and his team made it to the backdoor of the building -- the backdoor of his mother’s old clinic, and he let that old hurt seep into his veins for a second before he shut it off -- he had to be calm and in control. It was only in the movies that emotionally-wrought onslaughts ever ended anyway but tragic.

They waited patiently for the other team to get in place, completely silent. He was hyper aware of the ring in his pocket. It occurred to him that the last time he had seen Ethan Moore, the man had nearly killed him. Moore might actually succeed this time.
None of the men on this mission would ask. They were more loyal to him and Oliver than they were to Moira, even if the truth came out, it was likely none of them would care.

But if he died with the ring on his finger, Oliver and Felicity would know how he felt about them. How sure he was of them. The risk they had taken in giving him the ring would be justified. It was a way to send a message. To the world, sure. But to his spouses, more importantly.

It was worth it.

A sense of relief, almost like his body was settling, solidifying into reality, swept over him. There was no magic in a ring. Tommy knew from his own life that it couldn't guarantee fidelity or lifelong love.

There was magic in how this ring made him feel, though. Like he was welcomed. Like he belonged. Slipping it on his finger, he could practically feel their arms around him.

He nodded to himself. He wasn't going to take it off. It felt too right right where it was. Then, on his mark, Murdock blew the door in. And all hell broke loose.

The very last thing his father or his father's men expected was an ambush. That meant that the first thirty seconds were pivotal, that's when their advantage would be the most clear.

Most mobs didn't train in urban warfare the way that the Dearden family did. And Tommy’s father didn't view these girls as one of his highest valued assets. That meant that the men guarding the doors looked tough but that was about it.

In short, it was a bloodbath. Two of the guards standing in the back room went down without a shout. That room opened up to a long hallway with a series of doors.

“We let the girls out once the area is secure,” Tommy said into the comm unit. “It does not do them any good to get their freedom only to die in the crossfire.”

The comm crackled with agreement from various soldiers. The mission was running as smoothly as possible.
Then Tommy heard shouts and machine gun fire. He raced up the stairs to the second level. He knew from his days in his father's organization that the upper floor women would be the women that men paid top dollar for... women who specialized in submitting to anything, or women who specialized in the opposite. Highly trained. High class.

These women might not take kindly to being interrupted or a change in management. Or it could be that his father had concentrated his resources there.

“Heading up the stairs to help,” Tommy informed Oliver and Felicity.

“Keep your head on straight,” Oliver said in an even tone.

“Will do.” Tommy clicked the comm unit off.

This hallway was kept dark deliberately. The men who used the very exclusive women on this floor would not want to chance a sighting -- so appointment times were booked very carefully and extra precautions were taken so that customers couldn’t be recognized by passing

The first of his men to breach the top floor would have found that an advantage. Now, as Tommy made his way through the corridor, the element of surprise was not in his favor. He crept, his gun in close to his shoulder, sweeping left and right. The ruckus was coming from the end of the hallway but he didn’t want to get taken out by someone lying in wait. His prudence paid off as he easily disarmed and disabled two low-level guards.

Without Oliver to have his back, without Felicity’s voice in his ear, the world faded away to cold numbness. That kind of focus used to be an old friend, used to be necessary for him to do his job. It had been replaced, eventually, by a drive to return home to Oliver, to Felicity. Something about this encounter felt different.

The last time he’d seen Ethan Moore, the bastard had shot him. He’d been a teenager at the time, and Moore had discovered he and Oliver together. Tommy had spent the last several years of his life hiding who he was, behind one mask or another -- the straight playboy, the inept son, the quiet scapegoat. He couldn’t escape the feeling that those masks were slowly being pulled away from him, even as he stalked into the room.
He walked into a hell of a firefight. His men had freed the women who had obviously been chained here, and stood between them and Merlyn’s men. The training Moira insisted on for his men was paying off -- they were able to get them near the door.

“Go!” Tommy shouted. “Get out!”

“You!” It was shouted across the room -- a shocked tone of voice, with a fine layer of rage over top of it. Then Tommy didn’t have time to think, because Ethan had opened fire on him.

Of course he’d been shot before, but it wasn’t an experience he had any interest in repeating. He darted across the room in zig-zagging patterns until he’d come face to face with Ethan. His thoughts boiled down to single words: disarm, deflect, block, punch, knife, duck…

Ethan may have had some training in hand to hand combat, but now that Tommy had no reason to hide his skill, there was no match between them.

Hit after hit landed, and Tommy took those blows that he had to -- his ribs would be sore for a few days, but it wasn’t long before the room was clear, and it was just Tommy standing over Ethan, laying broken on the floor.

Tommy took his knife from the holster. The knife Felicity had given him. He twisted the ring on his finger over and over again while Ethan stared up at him.

“If you’re going to kill me, Merlyn,” Ethan spat, “You’re wasting valuable time being a melodramatic fag.”

Tommy kicked his kidney as hard as he could, and Ethan howled in pain. “Don’t rush me. I’m mean when I’m rushed.”

He tossed the idea back and forth in his mind, but found that really, he had no choice. Someone had to confront Malcolm. It might as well be him.

“You get to live,” Tommy said generously. “But only because I need you to carry a message to Malcolm for me.”
“Mr. Merlyn,” Ethan gasped, “has very little interest in what you do or don’t do.”

“That might have been true before,” Tommy said, “but I imagine he will feel very differently once he realizes that I am responsible for this, the loss of all of these girls, and now I own the controlling share of Merlyn Global Enterprises.”

“What’s the message?”

Tommy grinned cruelly. “You tell him his faggot son just kicked his ass. You tell him… you tell him to come after me, if he’s got the stones for it.”

**

It was a dream, or a memory, or some combination thereof. In the hours between dawn and full morning, Thea was drifting between sleep and reality, worries turning over and over in her head. She couldn’t forget the looks on the faces of the women her brother had saved tonight. She couldn’t get over the expression on his face, somewhere between pride and worry.

She’d done an incredibly selfish thing, in asking Oliver to save her. She knew that now. Knew it down to her bones. Her mother and everyone who might know something about anything was saying they were on the verge of war. There was no way to stop it.

Somewhere along the way she’d let herself become this person -- a damsel to be saved, a helpless victim. But she’d lived her whole life in murky waters -- there was no reason she should depend on anyone else to build her a lifeboat. Not when she saw that her brothers were finally on the road to some kind of happiness. It didn’t look like the happiness at the end of a book, where everything was too shiny and too gold, too tightly wrapped. No -- it looked like real life happiness, the kind that was a little lopsided, uneven, unconventional. For that kind of happiness, Thea thought she’d be willing to give up everything.

Someone was braiding her hair. She’d kept it long for ages, worn it long in pigtails and ponytails, the ends of it curled and frizzy. Sometime around the time Oliver had “died”, she’d started taking more time with it herself, eventually cutting it off, but someone was braiding it now. Patient, even hands. No tugging, no pulling. Her mother’s hands had never been that patient.
“Dad?” Robert Queen had been a sailor, and more than just a casual one. Before he’d died -- been murdered, much too early, he would get up in the early mornings, head down to Starling Bay, and take the yacht out for long trips, sometimes weeks at a time. Although he sat on the board of a multinational company and ran its day to day operations, he’d had hands like a workman, and Thea had precious memories of him carefully plaiting her hair in the hours before dawn when he was going to take her with him.

In the way of dreams, she was able to look at him without feeling the oppressive weight of what his loss had done to her, to her life. The knowledge that he wasn’t her “real” father made the cry of joy she’d wanted to utter stick in her throat.

“It’s okay, baby,” Robert Queen said, his hands never pausing.

She knew she was dreaming -- she always knew when she was dreaming, and she desperately wanted to never have to wake up from this dream. “Everything’s so fucked up, Dad. And it’s all my fault.”

“No one is entirely to blame for what is happening now,” Robert said. “There are far too many factors in any given situation to lay the blame on any one person’s shoulders, most of the time. In this case, very little if any of the blame can be laid on your shoulders.”

“I asked Ollie…”

“Oliver has been taking bullets for you since before you understood that what goes up must come down,” her father said, efficiently tying off one plait and moving on to the next. “And as for young Thomas Merlyn, he’s been taking bullets for Oliver for longer than that. If anything, you’re all damned by their lack of self-preservation.”

“What do I do?”

Her father said what he said nearly every time she’d come to him with a problem. “Think about the unthinkable. If everything conventional is impossible and tried -- something unconventional may be exactly what it is needed.”

“That’s not helpful, Daddy.” Thea shot him a look, but Robert just chuckled at her.
“I can’t give you the answer -- not when you are already thinking it through. I can only give you strength, and hope. There.” He quit braiding her hair, bent down and kissed the top of her forehead. “I will see you again, dearest.”

Thea’s eyes welled up. She looked down at the second plait, half undone. “Daddy -- you didn’t finish it! Come back here and finish it, please.”

But Robert was gone.

Thea got to her feet, walked across the room to the mirror, and finished the braid herself.

**
All Roads Lead to Rome

Chapter Summary

It was always going to come to this -- all of the boys’ plans come unraveled with deadly consequences.

Chapter Notes

I promised slowly but surely. This is slowly but surely. I'm working as I can. The story has been plotted to the end, so it's just a matter of expounding on what I planned, all those years ago. Continued thanks to Abbie for all her help!

Failure was not a taste Malcolm Merlyn liked to let linger in his mouth. Rage, though -- that was a familiar sort of fuel. It’d kept him going when he’d lost Rebecca, over the years as his son had proved again and again to be a crushing disappointment. Whatever sort of validation he’d expected from having an heir had been denied him by his son’s very being. He was at once both weak and unmoldable -- he didn’t have the structure to be made into something strong, something worthy of redemption, but refused to crumple.

And up until recently Malcolm had stopped just short of homicide within the family. He was no Moira Queen, to slash and burn the very ground he’d worked so hard at preserving. The boy was, for all of his faults, the last remaining link he’d had to Rebecca. That fact alone had kept him alive as he’d turned out to be all of the things Malcolm had no patience for.

He’d tried to stop the unnatural attraction to the Queen boy. He’d tried to emphasize discretion in taking multiple partners -- Malcolm certainly had nothing against hedonism, but it was not the sort of thing that would endear his son to stockholders and the public… and he certainly had no patience for forming emotional attachments to inappropriate people.

When she’d been alive, Rebecca had been the perfect partner. Oh, she’d started out mouthy, the way they all did, but by the end of her life she had been a docile, supportive spouse. Malcolm frequently found himself nostalgic for her gentle, reassuring touch. Raising Tommy without her had been an exercise in gritting his teeth and getting through it. He’d wanted children, of course, to carry on his name, but the expectation that Rebecca, with her woman’s touch, would be their anchor in the world.

Maybe that was the problem. It was just that his son was moorless. One more thing that the Glades, and the underbelly of the world that had inhabited that vile place, had taken from him. His only son
and the man he could have been.

But now. Now his complacence in not monitoring Thomas had come back to bite him. And Malcolm made so few mistakes, in business and in life, every step measured, premeditated, that the misstep he’d made in taking his eyes off of his son rankled down to his bones. All of this time, his son had been lying like some kind of jungle cat, tricking the great fools of the world into thinking it was a lazy animal, too replete to move.

And now his company was bleeding out arterially and his oldest friend was in critical condition.

His hands fisted. All the time he’d allowed his son to spend with Moira Queen, thinking she might be able to make him into something worthy -- she’d turned his only child against him and probably orchestrated this great betrayal. The dissolution of their alliance had been fraught with tension, but he had thought them both understanding of the way things would have to be.

But it appeared the Deardens wanted war. Malcolm was more than happy to bring it to them, with their ridiculous traditions and over-inflated sense of value. Moira Queen had inherited an empire, married well to enhance that empire, and stood like an Ice Queen over her kingdom all of her life. Malcolm had been born to wealthy parents -- certainly not what he was used to now, but wealthy enough that their untimely deaths had set him up financially to start his company from the ground up.

And now he was pissing it all away because he’d underestimated a sworn enemy. Self-hatred swirled, and then settled.

Retribution would have to be swift, and brutal. It went without saying that his son couldn’t live -- not with this kind of betrayal attached to his name, and not with this small victory over Malcolm to his name.

A quick series of knocks at his office door interrupted Malcolm’s pacing. A quick check in the mirror and his face was wiped of expression, of the tension that had set in since realizing just what his son had accomplished this afternoon.

“I’m sorry for the interruption, Mr. Merlyn,” his secretary, a young woman with sharp eyes and blonde hair, whose name he hadn’t quite bothered to memorize just yet, stepped inside. “But you have a visitor who is quite insistent.”

“Who is it?”
“Ethan Moore, sir.” She swallowed. “If I may say so, sir, you may want to come out here to receive him. Otherwise you might have to replace your carpet. He’s in bad shape.”

Malcolm had to hand it to her. She hadn’t run screaming from the room, and there was only a slight tremor in her hand. He’d hired her because he’d gotten a sense during her interview that she had a spine of steel with a great pair of tits to match and there was nothing more he liked in a woman that particular combination of traits. If she managed to make it through this evening’s events without babbling details or losing her head he might just bother to learn her name.

Calmly, he buttoned one button on his suit jacket and exited his office. He’d known Ethan Moore for almost three decades, and the man had been a vital part of his organization nearly from the beginning. After Rebecca’s death, he’d found enough similarity in their viewpoints that at one point he had considered him almost a friend, until the man had shot his son. Malcolm himself had little use for the boy, of course, but when he’d been seventeen, Malcolm had still been holding out hope for some kind of revolution in character, particularly after Moira cracked down on her heir, and so he’d been upset. If Thomas had needed that sort of discipline, it ought to have been his hand that delivered the blow.

The punishment he had rendered Ethan Moore had strained their relationship beyond the point of friendship, but now there was something almost better about the cool tide between them -- it flowed with the waters of fear and respect. Waters Malcolm was much more comfortable swimming in than affection.

“What did you walk into this time?” He asked as he exited the office. Moore was clutching his side, a river of blood in his hands. “Tell me quick, before you bleed out on the antiques.”

“It was an ambush, sir. A Dearden ambush. They said you were in violation of the treaty.” Ethan bit the words out over top of what must have been an incredible amount of pain. Malcolm’s fingers fairly itched to put him out of his misery. His labored, panting breathing put Malcolm in mind of a dog. An injured dog in need of barnyard mercy.

“Moira.” Malcolm bit the words out. “She has gone too far this time, I..”

“No. Sir. It wasn’t Moira.” Ethan drew in a deep, gasping breath, shook his head again. “Not even her faggot of a son.”

“No?” Malcolm, of course, knew that Oliver had to be out of commission. He’d still be injured, of
course, from the railyard scuffle. “You’re telling me one of Moira’s footsoldiers got the jump on you and your men, and you ran back to me with your tail between your legs?”

“No, sir,” Ethan shook his head emphatically. “It was the younger Mr. Merlyn, sir. I didn’t think he could fight like that. I didn’t think he could… Sir. He dropped out of the training in Nanda Parbat. He… he was like something else.”

Malcolm didn’t growl, although it was a near thing. The edges of his control were fracturing. He hadn’t felt this powerless, this behind the times since…

Rebecca.

The night of Rebecca’s death, he’d been this on edge, this betrayed… that time by the city that had given him his fortune, the people he’d thought he’d raise up out of the hell of poverty, only to be shown that they weren’t worth it. A wave of disappointment swept through him. Would no one ever be worth it?

Now he would have to eradicate the Deardens along with the entirety of the Glades -- the slaughter would be like nothing Starling City had ever seen, a great purge of the sickness that had its grip on the city by the bay. In the confusion, he would rise to the top, a natural leader, and under his rule, no scum would ever be allowed to clog even the drains of the city that was his own.

Regardless of whether or not they shared his blood. He’d thought his days of siring progeny were over, but clearly with the next generation he would have to…

No. Malcolm fisted his hands. That was the next step of the plan. The next thing to worry about. Right now, first steps had to be taken. First -- take care of those who had failed. Failure would not be tolerated. If the Deardens hadn’t killed them, he would himself.

He ran his blade clean through Ethan Moore without a thought, without pity, a good arterial sweep that ended his life as quickly and painlessly as he could render it gone. The woman behind him gasped.

“Call down to Doug,” Malcolm said. “Tell him to dispose of the mess. I have somewhere I need to be.”
“Mr. Merlyn I…” Suddenly all of his attention was on her, and she quailed a bit under that weight, but then straightened her shoulders. “Of course. I can get that done right away.”

“Good.” Merlyn let a charming smile cross his face, unaware of how very like a snake he looked in that moment. “I may just learn your name yet.”

**

It was still early morning hours when Thea finished the last touches on her outfit for the day. The leather pants and graphic tee might have been a little Buffy the Vampire Slayer, to be honest, but she needed to feel like she could conquer the world today -- too much hung in the balance. Her brothers’ very lives and happiness depended on her owning up to her destiny and taking ownership of her fate. That demanded shit-kicking boots and killer eyeliner, at the very least.

The knock at the door threw her. She was never awake this early and most of the staff wouldn’t dare to disturb her -- not unless there was an emergency and someone was severely hurt (and maybe not even then, Thea thought with a bit of remembered bitterness). She took a deep breath to still the incredible pounding in her heart. In some ways she was every inch her mother’s daughter. By the time she opened the door to let her visitor in, a calm, implacable mask was in place over her features. No one would ever know how much they’d startled her.

Until she saw it was Felicity, looking harried and at the end of her rope. She looked up from the cell phone she was tapping on furiously and smiled at Thea wearily. “Oh good, you’re awake.”

The expression on Felicity’s face made Thea’s heart race. “Has something happened?”

Sensing immediately what had panicked Thea, Felicity laid a hand on Thea’s shoulder. “The most important thing you should know is that Tommy is okay. He’s got a few bumps and bruises but he’s still in better shape than Oliver at the moment.”

Thea pressed a hand to her heart, which was still pounding away at her rib cage. “Oh, thank God.”

“I said the exact same thing, actually,” Felicity said with a weak chuckle. “Anyway, Tommy sort of… inadvertently went superhero on us, and long story short, there are twenty girls downstairs -- some of them victims, I’m sure, of human trafficking, others… well, I… at any rate. There’s a lot of work to do.”
“Are any of the girls hurt?” Thea asked, pushing past Felicity into the hallway. “Have you asked Raisa to open up the guest wing?”

“Some of the girls are,” Felicity said evenly. “Some of them are just very… very young. The proper authorities are on their way.”

“Good,” Thea said decisively. “Point me in a direction, let me help.”

“I could use your managerial mind in getting supplies, rooms opened, and of course we’ll need to make sure all of the girls who need it get medical care.”

“Did you call Dr. Lyla?” Thea asked.

“Not yet,” Felicity said.

“Good, that’s the first thing I’ll do.” A plan, which had been percolating in the back of her mind, sprang forward and Thea nearly buckled under the strength of it. It would change -- well, it would change everything. If she was smart, very smart, she could save her entire family. Her entire family minus her mother. But then, her mother had made so many sacrificial choices for the family without anyone’s consent already, Thea figured she was almost owed the betrayal.

She was Moira Queen’s daughter after all, told from birth that she could do anything she wanted, have anything she wanted, if she was sly and clever enough. What she wanted was her brothers, her sister-in-law, and the child she suspected Felicity was carrying to be safe, happy and healthy away from Moira’s machinations and the underbelly of the world they’d been forced to live in.

Enough was enough.

“Good,” Felicity said, speaking over Thea’s internal monologue, “that’s one more thing off of my to-do list. I’ll leave you to it.”

**

Tommy winced as he disrobed, the removal of shirts and pants aggravating sore spots. His phone chimed as he set his pants in the hamper, and he checked the notification. Victory was a cold comfort
as he noted with satisfaction that he’d acquired controlling stock in Merlyn Enterprises, right from underneath his father’s nose.

He wondered for a moment what his mother would think of him. He knew with certainty that he did not lead the kind of life she had wanted for her son, but the sedate, quiet world of a banker, or a heart surgeon, that kind of life was far out of reach now. But the character of the man he was -- what would she think? He’d killed, in the heat of the moment, and in cold blood. He’d been a hero and a villain.

He’d betrayed his father. But then, his father had betrayed the memory of a woman he’d claimed to hold sacred.

An eye an eye makes the world blind, Tommy thought, but then justice was not about kindness. And the women he’d rescued today deserved justice, rather than his holding on to something where familial affection should be.

He showered quickly, hoping to restore his energy enough that he could leave his room, descend the stairs and help Oliver and Felicity as they helped the girls, and hide from officers of the law who would shortly be swarming the house that he’d had anything to do the with blood bath at the warehouse.

The girls were sworn to secrecy and the police were to be told that an anonymous savior had dropped them at the Queen house, knowing they would be well taken care of there. It was a thin story at best, but without any witnesses, and with all evidence carefully destroyed, it was a story they would have to believe. Of course, it meant that the police would increase surveillance of the house, but then, they’d been watching Oliver and Tommy closely for nearly a decade now, and hadn’t captured anything they could act on. Tommy felt secure that he had nothing to worry about.

He pulled on sweatpants, drew the drawstring tight and looped it quickly, cotton socks, tennis shoes. He was about to pull on a t-shirt when his window shattered inward.

Even the most battle-hardened soldier would have been shocked, and the moment it took Tommy to process what was happening was all the time his father needed to press his advantage, charging at him with his fists branded.

The first blow Tommy was too slow to block, a solid hit right to his kidneys. He saw stars and doubled over. The second series of kicks went right to his ribs, then fists to his back, to his sides. By the time his father had him on his back, Malcolm raised his foot as if to stomp on his face.
Tommy seized it and drew his father off balance, jumping to his feet and reaching for the knife in his
nightstand.

“You reach for a knife when I hear stories of you being the greatest ninja since Bruce Lee?”
Malcolm taunted him. “I hear you went through my brothel like some kind of avenging angel. And
no one was prepared for it.”

“Yeah, I reach for a knife, Dad,” Tommy drawled sarcastically, through panted breaths. “This isn’t
exactly a fair fight.”

“Interesting turn of phrase, fair fight,” Malcolm said, drawing his own knife. “It seems you and I
have always been on an uneven playing ground. In the beginning, it was I who had all the power, I
was your father and you were a child. But in recent days, it has become clear to me that you have
been hiding your true self from me, son, hiding like some coward under the bushes every time I pass
by. It must have been something, burying your pride and groveling like some kind of snake all those
years.”

“You stomped out any last vestige of pride in me long ago,” Tommy said. “I honestly don’t know
why you’re surprised.”

“I kept waiting for you to stand straight, like a Merlyn.” Malcolm rushed him again, and their knives
clashed together in a horrible, clanking grind. Over and over again. Knee lifts to chests, fists to faces.
It was a bruising, punishing fight.

Malcolm was old where Tommy was young. But Malcolm hadn’t been up all night, hadn’t expended
all the energy Tommy had.

But Tommy knew the environment. He threw precious objects, used the room as well as he could.
Still, nothing could help the fact that his father had brought a gun to a knife fight.

The moment he could, Malcolm drew his weapon from his holster, cocked the hammer, and fired
into Tommy’s abdomen.

“You may have my company, but it will do you no good if you are dead. I wonder what your will
says. Hm, out of some misguided sense of family loyalty, the shares most likely go to your sister,
don’t they? Well, she may be wily, but I imagine she’ll be easy enough to control once I spin the tale
of what a dark, twisted piece of shit you are. It won’t even have to be true. All of you children,
you’re all so starved for affection, so wanting for love. All I will have to do is pretend to care about her, about her stupid little life and her ridiculous friends, her fashion and her interests. A few Daddy-daughter dates and I’ll be able to undo all of the damage I’ve done in a lifetime of neglect. You see, I did it over and over again with your mother. With Moira. Women are all the same in that way. You’d know that, if you were man enough to like them.”

Tommy covered his stomach, blood rushing from between his joined hands. “You son of a bitch.”

“No, son, I can say with authority, that’s what you are. Now, normally, I’d be worried about a crowd of people rushing in here but it seems you have an army of do-gooders in your house. People tramping up and down stairs. Shouting, this and that.” Malcolm dusted off his hands on his pants. “Gunpowder. It does get everywhere.”

“Get out,” Tommy wheezed.

“What if I want to stay here?” Malcolm’s smile was luminous, lit by some inner evil, some inner demon that Tommy couldn’t even fathom. “What if I want to watch my only son die?”

“Go to hell.”

“Oh.” Malcolm tilted his head. “I hear someone coming. Guess I’m leaving after all. Nothing they can do for you. That’s a lethal shot. I might go to hell, but you’ll have to save me a place, son.”

Tommy crawled to the door, ignoring his father. It took all of his strength to open it. The world became grey, voices hazy.

Still, he knew for sure who it was who saw him first. Thea Queen, her eyes large, her skin pale. “Tommy?”

“Get a doctor,” he said, his voice very far away, even from his own ears. “Although I don’t think it will do much good.”

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Thea screamed, the sound wrenched from her throat, as Tommy pitched forward and landed on his front. A rush of people came forward to help her. It was a blur, what happened afterward, Oliver and Felicity’s harrowed faces, Dr. Lyla’s patient hands, an emergency blood donation she would do as many times as they needed her to.

“He might not make it,” Oliver said, once there was nothing more for any of them to do. “All of our cleverness, all of our planning, and he might not make it.”

They were seated in the living room, the one person notably absent Moira. She hadn’t attempted to speak to any of them yet. Not that Thea wanted to see her, particularly, but could it kill the woman, just for once, to pretend like she gave a damn?

“I’m sorry,” Felicity rasped. “You brought me over here to help, and I didn’t see this coming, I didn’t…”

“Who did this?” Thea asked.

“Most likely Malcolm Merlyn,” Moira said, standing the doorway. “Our sentry guards let me know the window in Thomas’s quarters was broken. There’s evidence of the wall being climbed. One wonders why, after all of these years, Malcolm finally snapped.” She entered the room, laid hands on the top of the sofa where Felicity was sitting, and smiled, her teeth daggers. “At least until my spies in Merlyn’s organization let me know that Thomas infuriated his father by acquiring controlling stock in Merlyn Enterprises.”

Felicity stood and turned to face Moira. “It sounds to me like he was only acquiring what he was owed.”

“I can’t disagree,” Moira said. “But, of course, that got me poking around as well. Were you aware that a controlling interest in my company has now disappeared into, well… the hands of the three of you?”

“I can’t say that I’ve ever sleep stock-purchased,” Oliver said, one corner of his mother quirking up. “We’re well aware.”

“You’re pulling out lots of blocks in the tower that is your lives lately, the two of you,” Moira said coolly. “I hope you know what you’re up to. And I hope you think it’s all worth it at the end of the day, when young Thomas gives his life for the dream of the three of you, what? Running the two
biggest crime families in Starling? After all the resistance you gave me when I was training you towards that very aim.”

“You of all people ought to understand dynasty building,” Oliver said. “There are sacrifices we make when we want to see the world is a better place for the ones we love.”

“Really now. I can’t say I ever thought I would see the day when you would be so cold-hearted over young Thomas.”

“Young Thomas is a man whose decisions I respect very much,” Oliver retorted. “Besides which, he’s not going to die. He won’t allow it.”

“We shall see.” Moira turned and walked out of the room. Then and only then did Felicity collapse back into Oliver’s arms on a quiet sob.

“He’s going to be all right,” Thea said decisively. “He won’t abandon us now.”

“We hope not,” Oliver said grimly. “We’ve always known, though, that this was the risk…”

“Still.” Felicity shook her head. “He took too many chances -- he was too reckless, stealing the company out from Merlyn’s feet.”

“Wait. You guys didn’t know that was going to happen?” Thea looked shocked.

“No.” Felicity sighed. “We would have told him it was too much danger, too soon.”

“Watch your back, Thea,” Oliver said suddenly. “If he… if he doesn’t make it out of this, everything he owns in this world comes to you. Including those stocks. Merlyn will make you a target before you can even blink a tear in grief.”

“It comes to me?” Thea rubbed her forehead. “But what about the two of you? He loved the two of you.”
“He loves you in a different way,” Felicity said, putting fierce emphasis on the present tense. “He sacrificed a lot to make sure you were happy. Both of your brothers did.”

Thea crossed her arms, instantly put off. “No one asked me if that’s what I wanted.”

“That’s just what we do for family,” Oliver said. “We walk over hot coals without thinking.”

“Moira wouldn’t walk across the street on a mildly warm day for me,” Thea muttered.

“Moira’s broken. Malcolm’s broken. We don’t have to be that way.” Felicity reached across to Thea, took her hand. “We’re choosing not to be. Aggressively.”

Thea got to her feet, quickly. “Well, I am too. I need to just… take a short walk. Clear my head. Will you…?”

“We’ll call you the instant we hear anything more, we promise,” Felicity said.

Thea nodded, and left the room. Instead of heading for the gardens as Oliver and Felicity must have assumed she would, she sent Lyla a text message.

I know who you are. I want to help.

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