Dark Arrow

by Palaserece

Summary

Malcolm Merlyn learns he is Oliver's father when the Chinese run Oliver's DNA to confirm his identity.

Notes

Author's Note: It's been a long, long while since I've attempted to write anything. At this time, I do not have a beta, but I am in the market for one! I appreciate any and all potential feedback as I am definitely rusty and bound to be making many, many mistakes.

Also: I took liberties and made Oliver 18 when he went with Robert. I felt it worked better for my idea.

Disclaimer: I do not own Arrow or any of DCs wonderful characters, but I do feel inspired on occasion.
Since his return from Nanda Parbat, Malcolm Merlyn rarely, if ever, experienced surprise. Yet, the bumbling physician from Hong Kong accomplished the feat without even trying.

"You will come, yes?"

"Yes," the alpha took command of the conversation, fingers on his free hand clenched into a bloodless fist. "As this is a delicate matter, I'm sure I can ask for your discretion in the matter. Appropriate compensation goes without saying."

"Yes, sir!" The reply was eager and satisfied the agitated CEO of the doctor's compliance. For the time being anyway. Silence could only be bought for so long. "Anything else, Mister Merlyn?"

"Keep him sedated until I arrive tomorrow." A decision that had potential to negatively effect his efforts building a relationship with Oliver, but a necessary evil until Malcolm had more information.

"No problem, sir. We look forward to your visit."

The line went dead. Malcolm inhaled sharply and took a moment to allow the shock to sink in.

Oliver Queen was alive. If that bit of news and the potential ramifications of what Robert might have told the boy weren't overwhelming enough, the doctor's announcement was: Oliver was his son. Not Roberts'. His. An omega that survived incredible physical trauma to over twenty percent of the young man's body, if the Chinese physician was to be believed.

Moira's deceit--and that little tidbit stoked a vicious, inner flame--had been uncovered by archaic laws upheld by the Chinese government. The physical exam confirmed the faint scent of an omega male--a rarity like their alpha female counterparts. Following international protocol for identifying missing persons, Oliver had been fingerprinted and a DNA sample taken for comparison and proof of identity in order to arrange for an emergency passport from the U.S. Embassy in Hong Kong. And that's where China's policy with omegas came into play.

The DNA match proved the castaway's identity was the omega registered as Oliver Queen, however, the database fortunately pulled the match's familial DNA donors: beta Moira Queen and alpha Malcolm Merlyn. Adhering to traditional Chinese practice, Dr. Chow contacted the alpha parent in question rather than a mother that happened to share the same name.

With the Undertaking close at hand, all things in Malcolm's life had to be managed with the utmost consideration to concealing the plan. Allowing Oliver to remain ignorant to his parentage was off the table. The assassin's biology refuted the possibility of not being involved in his child's life as protector and provider. If he was completely honest with himself, uncovering the truth in this manner was a bitter pill to swallow, causing resentment to shift and build in new directions in depths of his mind.

Standing sharply, Malcolm Merlyn donned his CEO persona to arrange for an immediate
flight on a private jet to Hong Kong citing a need to confirm some arrangements with a subsidiary of Merlyn Global. No questions asked; the sheep never questioned the wolf’s motive.

There were far too many unknowns for the man to feel at all relaxed. Too many questions that needed answers or required carefully crafted deceptions for questions he would be unable to answer honestly. There were no certainties save two:

Moira Queen would pay for her deception. And his omega child was coming home with him.

The nurse fidgeted restlessly--jittery creature that she was--as she escorted Malcolm and his bodyguards through the winding corridor to a private room where his son was resting. His son. Still such a strange prospect that held a degree of excitement.

Over the course of the flight, the CEO used the excess time to familiarize himself with the eighteen year old playboy his child had been prior to the Queen’s Gambit; granted, as Tommy’s father he was far from unfamiliar with Oliver, but he could truthfully acknowledge that Tommy’s omega friend had not exactly possessed qualities worthy of remembrance. Oliver Queen had been a true James T. Kirk; High IQ troublemaker with an arrest record buried beneath the wealth of his family name. A false name, but a powerful one nevertheless, Malcolm admitted ruefully.

Aside from sealed juvenile records, the boy’s past was coddled and catered to. From personal experience in the league, the former assassin had imagined many possibilities, but had discarded the existence of the playboy. Whatever was left of Moira’s reckless child that showed up with a police officer dragging him home with a chagrined Tommy was gone.

Raising his hand to stifle the woman's attempt at speech, her jaw closed with an audible click at the obvious dismissal before making a tactful retreat behind a raised clipboard, scurrying off in the opposite direction.

Now was the moment the last twenty-two hours had been about.

The door swung inward before he had a chance to reach for the knob and the light scent of an omega entered the assassin's sensitive nostrils before the stench of a beta's presence overcame the pleasure of his son's hidden presence. Despite his annoyance at, yet another, disturbance, Malcolm plastered a pleased smile to his face and forced himself to address the wiry-framed man with owlish eyes blinking behind dark, round lenses.

"You must be Dr. Chow," he stepped into the man's space, feeling his smile morph into a smirk as the bumbling fool smiled foolishly even as his steps carried him away from the intimidating presence Malcolm posed. "Thank you for looking after my son."

"No problem," the man bowed in a deliberate bob before gesturing at the starkly white room where a long curtain shielded the obvious occupant from sight. "The sedative has been most effective and he won't be waking for another hour or two. I would be happy to discuss his condition with you in more detail if you'd like."

"Perhaps later," leaving no doubt from his tone who was in charge, while still smiling pleasantly. "My associate has written out a substantial donation at the counter for you to pick up at your convenience, Doctor. I would like a moment with my son now. Alone."

"Of course, of course," the balding man lifted a hand placating before stepping outside.
Whirling, Malcolm stepped inside and shut the door, nodding slightly to his accompanying bodyguard indicating a desire for privacy. In the backdrop the faint and beeps of the hospital's monitoring equipment beyond the screen.

"The moment of truth," he mumbled aloud before reaching out and shoving the cheap curtain aside to gaze upon the unknown. The slumbering man—certainly not the witless boy—lay unnaturally still in a repose only artificial means can accomplish. Dressed in a simple hospital gown with a painfully thin, white-again blanket that seemed wholly inadequate and rather out of place on the bronze skinned, well-developed musculature of the boy.

Approaching felt like a journey more than a few steps. As he drew closer, Malcolm could see the obviously fresh haircut, light stubble from a day's growth, over tan cheeks. Bare arms showing the occasional white lines of scar tissue. The omega's chest rose and fell shallowly and the alpha father felt a yearning like he hadn't since...her. Permitting himself a moment of weakness, Malcolm dipped his head to nose against the hollow of his omega's throat, inhaling with a deep groan he didn't bother suppressing; herbs, pine, and salt were the scents that were easiest to identify but there was something else; pressing his nose into the soft hollow of the slumbering man's throat he noted traces of scent that previously he would have only noted on Tommy as a child. Yet here was the irrefutable proof of lineage, deep in the castaway's veins. Basking in the scent, the alpha rumbled in a moment's contentment.

Wanting nothing more than to bask in the presence of his son, the tactician inside him demanded he assess the situation before taking any further time to indulge emotion. With great reluctance, Malcolm stepped back and considered the box wedged beneath the hospital bed over the boy before settling on his son.

With gentleness beguiling his own capabilities, the father drew the bedding down with a powerful tug, displaying lily white legs with a soft dusting of hair. Pale comparatively so he must have worn long pants. Starting at one end, he ran his fingers each calloused foot, the reflexive response in curling toes drawing a soft smile of parental fondness from Malcolm. How many moments like this had he missed simply because he didn't know? How many soft smiles had he lost to Robert Queen?

A few healing nicks on bare toes accompanied lines of crisscrossing scars on calves from what appeared to be deliberate strokes of a knife, to the assassin's examination. Upward his exploration continues, to patterned scars from possible burns and falls until the hospital gown blocks his perusal of his son's thighs. Without batting an eye, he tossed the gown upward to bunch it around the Omega's neck only to freeze.

The sudden appearance of a multitude of scars over Oliver's torso in various stages of healing drew a displeased snarl unbidden from his throat and he forgoes his original intent. Swallowing harshly Malcolm mapped the raised starburst pattern at the shoulder of an arrow's exit wound with his fingertips, traversing the several jagged scars, that were more than likely created with a blade, and other injuries appearing to be shot at close range with a firearm. The injuries to the abdomen could easily have proven fatal...how? How could his son have survived so much repeated abuse? Malcolm Merlyn was no stranger to pain and torture, the years in Nanda Parbat had been incredibly informative, but little short of a miracle could have prevented infection in Oliver's wounds. Then stranger than scars was the bright, blue Bratva tattoo proudly displayed on the omega's breast. Malcolm felt he had more questions than when he began.

Once again Oliver's legs bore obvious injuries from knives but... Spreading the boy's leg to his expose perfectly normal soft cock, mentally breathing a sigh of relief at the lack of genital
mutilation, the Alpha noticed the unmistakable impression of a bite mark in the soft skin of his son’s thigh. Nostril's flaring in abject rage, Malcolm yanked the gown down and drew the blanket up his son's chest more aggressive than strictly necessary.

The sensible, businessman inside the alpha recognized that an alpha likely bedded his boy during a heat. Whether by force or with consent, the assassin wasn't thrilled with either option as latent instincts surged into overdrive.

Turning his attention to the trunk in an attempt to stifle his anger, Malcolm bent and retrieved the oversized box tossed it unceremoniously on the bedside table. Casting a cursory glance toward the slumbering male every so often, Malcolm made quick work of the lock and flipped open the lid before settling back into an analytical mode.

The bow was a surprise but the man that was Al Sa-Her felt a thrill race up his spine at the implications of the weapon. The weapon itself was beautifully constructed and well-cared for yet it was obvious to Malcolm that the skill required to draw the string let alone shoot confirmed that a friendly party stayed with Oliver for some time and taught him to deal with an enemy presence on Lian Yu. His son was a killer. The thought shouldn't be so exciting. But.. his omega son was a killer. How beautiful!

Perhaps once they had established trust, Malcolm could show him some tricks. The idea now that had taken root was absolutely insatiable. Fingers flexing over the bow, he imagined standing behind his son and teaching him secrets only those in Nanda Parbat ever learned. His boy's musculature was impressive and his own training could only refine what the island had transformed his boy into.

Herbs painstakingly wrapped, that would have to be researched for curiosity's sake. An arrowhead that would be further consideration even as he mentally filed the characters away for a rainy day. A green hood covering. A rather ideal camouflage tactic in a forest. Yet the piece appeared old and oddly traditional. Ah. A gift or an inherited item.

And then the book. Though this copy was damaged and aged due to exposure with the elements, it was absolutely unmistakeable. Suppressing the urge to react out of hand, Malcolm took a moment to consider the ramifications and possibilities of the book. Robert's missing presence all but guaranteed the man's death, but it did not confirm when he died or what he may have told the omega prior to his death. That itself was a deeply troubling matter, but what to do about it? Killing his child was out of the question. The only remedy was to wait for Oliver to awaken and begin the process of uncovering what his son knows or thinks he knows. Worst case scenario, he would spirit the omega away to Nanda Parbat. Al Sah-her could request Ra's al Ghul's aid with high chances of success. Despite being told of his son's survival and existence barely twenty-four hours prior, Malcolm was not fond of the idea of separating from his son.

Stowing Oliver's gear with care, but leaving it obvious that the contents had been looked at, Malcolm adopted the typical parental role of: watch and wait. Who could stand these uncomfortable chairs? Possibly the price to pay for being economical. Without hesitation, he took his son's hand and caressed the knuckles gently, his own finger pads tracing the lines of callus' that confirmed his omega an archer. Continuing the light massage along the back of the finger joints, Malcolm Merlyn prepared to play a tantalizing game of manipulation with everything to lose and Oliver to gain.
Chapter One

Lian Yu

The roar of pounding water caused Oliver to automatically recoil in fear, heart beating wildly like the frantic motions of a caged sparrow. The waterfall was not immense by any standard, more of cascade, but it was staggering to a boy that had lost his world to the sea. Still a safe distance away, the omega felt his fear spike as his breathing took on a frantic edge.

"Closer."

"We seem plenty close to me!" Even so, the reluctant youth took a step forward before shooting a betrayed glance at the Chinese archer whose tone betrayed no emotion. In their brief time together, the pair made use of a fresh water stream strictly for drinking water and to wash as much as a pair of omegas could clean themselves without soap. Yet somehow, Yao Fei had puzzled out the source of Oliver's anxiety and decided to tackle the issue, much to said boy's dismay.

"Closer."

"I really don't understand why this is necessary, anyway. It's not like I plan to go swimming anytime soon." Yao Fei's tone refused to be moved by his rather logical reasoning, much to Oliver's consternation. Instead the archer prodded the resisting teen forward with his bow.

"Closer."

"I really don't think-" Yet another forceful nudge interrupted his protest, enraging the youth.

"Closer."

"I do not need to go into the water!" Oliver whirled and shoved his against the bow in his mentor's hand, attempting to get the other man to see reasoning. "Stop it!"

"Closer!"

"No! I am not doing this," the rebellious teenager made a full appearance as he lunged awkwardly at the other man. Yao Fei parried his clumsy motion, the pair spinning. Once. Twice. Three times? Oliver lost count as he pushed again at the other man in desperation and failed as the green-clad figure twisted away with the ease of a comic book hero. "So what if I'm a little nervous around water? What does it really matter?"

"We are here."
Caught off guard, the castaway hesitated, feeling a light mist of cool--no--wet, air graze his cheek. Living on Lian Yu came with endless days in the range of ninety degree weather so a break from the discomfort should have been ideal. For the castaway, it was the source of his nightmares up close and personal.

The monstrosity of water cascaded fifteen feet from the crest, creating a deep pool of water that was sorely unimpressive but was enough to leave the younger male a wreck. Desperately backpedaling, the omega's flight was halted by a pair of arms gripping his shoulders firmly, wiry frame pressing against his captive's back.

"You will not survive if your fears are greater than your resolve."

The shove between his shoulder blades sent the youth staggering to the edge of the water. Yao Fei's method of instruction was not for the faint hearted and Oliver wanted nothing more than to turn around and run. But this was Lian Yu: there was nowhere to run.

Like a prisoner walking to his own execution, Oliver peeled sweat dampened shirt along with his raggedy trousers off and tossed them onto the rock near the reserved Yao Fei. If he could survive being shot by an arrow and then having it ripped from his body, he could try to do this.

Not allowing himself more time to ponder the matter, he leapt. With a plunge he was surrounded on all sides by waves of freezing water that cooled his skin and surrounded him with memories from what felt like yesterday and moments from long ago. Standing in the pool, Oliver forced himself to wade further, toes sinking into the muddy bottom until he stood under the battering force of water.

"I'm not the man you think I am. I failed our city."

Laurel's sister and one of his own best friends disappears into the dark waves. "Sara!"

"Right my wrongs, but you've got to live through this first."

A parade of horrors that hollowed his spirit.

When Oliver lifted himself free of the water, he dropped into a seated position and buried his face in his knees. To his astonishment, Yao Fei dropped down beside the forlorn youth with his bow carefully balanced across his knees. Inching closer to his mentor for warmth--and perhaps a measure of reassurance-- a tiny, vengeful part of the teen wished Yao Fei would protest or scold him, but the other man said nothing as Oliver wasted precious daylight allowing the sun to dry him.

"I've never been much of a swimmer," on whole, his tone only vaguely accusatory. "I mean, we had a pool at our house, but I just never cared for swimming. Didn't interest me, I guess."

Oliver never intended to discuss his father with anyone, least of all with a man that nearly killed him scarcely a month prior. And now, Yao Fei was a mentor and could potentially be considered his closest friend aside from Tommy Merlyn. The silence should have stopped him, but like a broken dam, Oliver couldn't hold back the tide.

"When I was a lot younger, my dad used to take me everywhere with him," The omega adopted a wistful tone. "Took me to his office where his assistant used to give me a pop that I would never, ever be allowed to have back home. Sometimes we would go to the zoo, just the two of us or the museums to look at big airplanes. We were so close. And then one day, everything changed; my dad never came to my soccer games anymore, he stopped taking me the office, no special movies or zoo trip. And if he was home, he spent his time with Thea. I knew for sure that I'd done something
wrong though when he stopped telling me he loved me. I heard him whisper it to Thea all the time, but never me. "

"When our boat went down, there was water all around. Cold and so dark. It dragged my friend Sara into that emptiness," Oliver's voice broke and he took a precious moment to grab his clothing, voice somewhat muffled as he dressed while talking. "After I made it to the raft, my father told me that he wasn't the man I thought he was and that he had failed our city. Then he shot himself in the head. I never thought he loved me, but he killed himself to save me anyway."

"Oliver."

Yao Fei's tone was quiet and revealed little of the other man's thoughts.

"One right does not balance the wrongs."

"So what do I do then?"

Yao Fei ignored him and stood, free hand grasping Oliver's hand and hauling him expertly to his feet. Sighing in resignation and far too emotionally spent to argue, the omega allowed the older man to take lead, surprised when the archer steps into his path and drops a hand lightly onto his shoulder.

"Shēngcún"

Oliver's breathing hitched at the soft look Yao Fei directed his way that was out of character from what he was used to experiencing with the other man. But it resurrected the distant memory of Robert Queen sitting by his much, much younger self answering questions about dinosaurs. It was... parental and made the young man's heart clench at the surge of affection he felt for this man.

The moment lasted exactly that: a moment. But it revitalized him in ways Oliver could not have previously imagined. Taking a final backward glance at the waterfall with it's terrible, majestic beauty, the youth turned and darted after his mentor with renewed vigor.

~~~Present~~~

Groggy. Everything felt heavy and far away. Over top his body, a weight was settled over his body, leaving the omega feeling light confusion until his brain rebooted: off the island. A rustle and the faint sound of shifting limbs had Oliver's instinctual need for self-preservation force himself to concentrate; careful not to alter his breathing pattern, he conducted a threat assessment. Chemical cleaning products, perhaps a high end aftershave, and a particularly potent alpha scent layering the hospital room. There was something about the smell that felt familiar even if he couldn't place it.

One of the Argus folk? Somehow he doubted Amanda Waller would have permitted him to regain consciousness if she wanted to kill him, but that didn't rule out the possibility of another round of forced recruitment.

Definitely not the doctor or nurses that Oliver had previously encountered so that left him no choice but to take the proverbial plunge and react accordingly. Steeling himself, the Queen heir immediately zeroed in on the box he brought with him from the island, the white of the room with its variety of medical equipment and...not who he expected.
Tommy's dad? Baffled took the cake on this one. Malcolm Merlyn had been a presence that frequented business dinners with his parents and could occasionally be witnessed interacting with Tommy. And bailing the pair of them out of jail once or twice with an unimpressed expression that was patent alpha.

The man sitting next to him with a tailored business suit, a slight upturn of the lips, and calculating azure eyes felt so surreal that it just didn't make sense. There was no logical reason Malcolm Merlyn to be here unless...

Jerking upright, he lurched forward and snagged the other man's wrist.

"Where are they?" Malcolm's expression softened, his free hand making a placating gesture that caused Oliver to involuntarily relax a fraction. "Thea and my mom. They're fine?"

"Moira and Thea are safe and sound back in Starling. I give you my word."

A knot of tension unwound from Oliver's guy and he shuddered once before noting he still had the older man's hand in a bone-crushing grip.

"Sorry," he offered, more displeased with his loss of control than truly apologetic.

"No apology is necessary." The sincerity caught Oliver off guard and made him feel more than a bit off-kilter.

"Why are you here?" Why you? Where is my mother? Even Tommy would have made sense! But Malcolm?

"You're more direct than you used to be," the other man shifted, his posture slumping even as his face crumbled in some nameless emotion before that too vanished. "But I'm afraid the reason for my being here isn't so easy to explain. But allow me to say again that your family is fine. I promise."

That wasn't at all ominous. If his mother and sister were safe and well, there was no logical reason to be apprehensive. And once again... no reason for the elder Merlyn's presence here. If it was as simple as his mother's request, the other man wouldn't appear so conflicted.

"Whatever it is, just say it."

"When you returned from the island, you were given tests to confirm your identity, correct?" Malcolm paused, waiting for confirmation that Oliver offered with a puzzled nod. "It's rather standard procedure that serves as a formality for the issuance of an emergency passport and as a safeguard to prevent both identity and property theft. The thing is, there was an issue with the DNA test."

Oliver felt a tremor of grief break through his control.

"Because my father is dead." The words themselves sound as hollow as his voice.

"Actually, that's the thing." A foreign pressure settles under his chin and Oliver feels himself go rigid as the movement slides and a palm is partially cupping his cheek, forcing him to meet the alpha's demanding gaze. "Your father is very much alive."

Incomprehension accompanied by a heavy dose of disbelief wind through his system. Witnessing his father kill himself had been one of the most shocking moments of his life, but the honesty reflected in Mr. Merlyn's face suggested he was missing the point.
Unbidden, a memory surfaces and his mind reflexively flinches in dread:

"Oliver." Moira Queen's voice is vibrant in the manner only memory can be.

"Why doesn't dad tuck me into bed anymore? He still tucks Thea in every night. Did I do something to make dad hate me?"

"Oh Oliver," the beta pulls her son into a warm embrace, rubbing his back in reassuring motions. "Sometimes when adults are upset with each other, they behave differently than normal. And I know your father hasn't been spending as much time with you lately, but that doesn't mean you did something wrong. It doesn't mean he doesn't love you. Things will be back to normal soon, you'll see."

Things had never been normal again. And this truth was more devastating than memory.

Malcolm Merlyn was his father. It made so much sense now. The looks his father gave him. The lack of interest. The isolation. Robert Queen's love had been conditional on blood. A dying man's request that he right his wrongs with a look of guilt. What was he going to do about the list? What was the point of everything?

For the second time in his life, Oliver Queen felt his world view shatter into dust around him. Wrenching himself free of the alpha with a defensive growl, the omega rolled out of bed and darted for the door. Across the room in scarcely a handful of seconds, he was unprepared for the alpha to appear in front of him, pivoting his hip into Oliver's abdomen, nimbly gripping Oliver's arm and tossing him to the ground.

Recovering mid tumble, Oliver used his own momentum to grip the other man's wrist and send him into... a perfectly executed roll that he recovered from with a wickedly pleased expression Oliver had never seen the like except on the all-too-rare occasions he impressed Slade during a training exercise.

"There is fire in you," the alpha practically crooned, slipping into a perfect defensive stance. "Your eyes are the same as mine, how could I have ever missed that you were mine."

"I'm not yours!"

Rushing the man was potentially one of the stupider moves he could have made in light of the demonstrated abilities Oliver had witnessed. Wherever Yao Fei was watching from, the man was rolling in his grave.

Merlyn sidestepped him and the castaway dropped into a crouch, jamming his elbow toward the larger man's abdomen. Once again, the other man blocked the blow by snapping his knee into Oliver's bicep. Snarling, he tried again to strike at the older man only for him to block each of his movements with an ease that only an individual on par with Slade Wilson could have managed. Panting harshly as the lingering effects of the sedative sapped at the adrenaline rush his body was running on, Malcolm pressed the advantage, flipping them both to the ground and grappling for both of the omega's arms. And then all at once, the alpha pinned both his wrists over his head, free hand gripping the back of his neck in a tight grasp.

"You're done," the command evident from the tone and his position of subduing the struggling man from behind.

First fight off the island and he had been bested already. Unable to control the urge any longer, he felt his eyes begin to burn and he blinked in shame as moisture began to build. Tears were
a weakness not permitted on the island, but maybe that was okay. Oliver would later wonder how and when the alpha--his alpha parent, Jesus Christ--coaxed him back onto the bed where he curled up with his nose buried in Malcolm's neck like a bad stereotype.

If anything, he should be more concerned about how the other man bested him like it was child's play. For the first time since Slade Wilson, Oliver felt safe.

Oliver's last thought before he succumbed to the breaking dam of emotion wasn't about Malcolm. Or Robert.

'Mom... how could you lie to me?'

Chapter End Notes

Author's Note: This section was a challenge for me as I'm still getting back into the swing of writing, but I very much enjoyed working on it and I hope all of you enjoy it as much as I have.

On another note, thank you for all the kudos and comments. I'm rather overwhelmed by the response--particularly because I feel super rusty in my writing but hopefully each chapter comes a little easier than the last. Thank you again for the support.
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: I own nothing and make no profit writing this!

Author's Note: This chapter was very difficult for me to write and I acknowledge that all errors are my own as I've had no luck in finding a beta reader. Slade and Oliver's sections came much easier than Malcolm's this time around and have definitely contributed to how long it took to write this portion.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Lian Yu

In all of Slade's years of experience in Naval and ASIS operations he never expected Oliver Queen. The little shit had no natural talent for training exercises, whined more than his ex-wife, and had no survival instincts whatsoever.

It would seem even on this hellhole of an island, Slade Wilson could be surprised.

A lanky, unskilled boy joined him in an attempt gain control of Fyer's airstrip. It was risky from the get-go and the ASIS agent felt no surprise when the washed up playboy botched his one job. And then the kid went and saved the day with a quote from an old book. Yep, somebody up there had to be laughing.

And then the perky little shit smiled crookedly, declaring he intended to rescue Yao Fei from Fyers and his fellow mercs. With a request to call his family if he failed to return, the gangly omega tore off into the woods leaving the alpha hollow with the sense that he would never see the kid again.

It was a humbling thing to witness a hapless kid smile in the face of death. And it caused the ASIS agent to feel something he never imagined he would feel in this lifetime: shame. The kid was barely out of his mother's apron strings and yet the boy had the courage to do what Slade Wilson, a world-class assassin, had not considered doing. Oliver made him want to be a better man.

The airstrip was bright like a starburst of artificial light, compared to the dark of the forest. Nudging one of the bodies with a toe, he took a last, longing look at the airstrip with its promise of a way back to civilization before deliberating turning away.

"Okay kid," a calloused thumb ran over the braiding on the hilt of his katana. "You better survive until I get there to save your ass." Once a decision had been reached, Slade never doubted himself. Doubt was just one more way on a ridiculously long list of ways for a man to get himself killed.

Running through layers of dense foliage to Fyer's encampment, a rumble stirred in the alpha's chest as his mind dreamt up a grisly demise for anyone unfortunate enough to cross his path, Slade silently prayed that his kid had stayed out of trouble.

This time would be different, Slade promised himself. This time he had someone to
Hong Kong

The Mercedes turned into the private hangar, cruising toward the runway where Merlyn Global's private jet awaited its CEO.

"Not good enough. I need someone that can think outside the box.. someone that does not play by the rules." A flicker of annoyance soured what had been a half-decent start to his day, Malcolm wished minions were not such a necessary evil. While he considered himself a reasonable man, his tolerance only extended so far. Perhaps he ought to look into a new personal assistant? "I expect a new dossier of potential candidates on my desk tomorrow morning. Consider this a personal incentive if you like your office. Thank you."

Not a moment too soon. The car came to a smooth stop and the alpha stepped into a cloud of smog as his bodyguard opened the door. Professionally the Chinese were excellent business partners, but personally he despised the smog coating the city and tainting the air. He could not wait to get back just to breathe easier.

"We've been expecting you, sir. All safety checks are good and Captain Lynch is in the cockpit prepared to take off as soon as your son arrives, which should be no more than two minutes, Mr. Merlyn."

"Excellent, Mr. Andrews," he provided the expected amount of courtesy to the towering hulk of a man, before diverting his attention to the employees vacating the area. "Take my briefcase on board. I'll greet him myself."

"Sir." Taking the implied dismissal at face value, his bodyguard took the case and disappeared aboard the aircraft.

After their initial encounter the previous evening, Malcolm had held his son for nearly three hours. In that time period, the alpha took the time to memorize the addicting scent of his son that smelled strangely of cedar and something herbal. An alpha parent normally engaged in scenting with young children, but in this case his alpha biology needed this as much as Malcolm needed the emotional connection. How was he going to let him go? Better yet, how had he become attached so quickly?

Upon waking, the blonde immediately distanced himself and aside from the occasional fleeting query, the omega had rebuffed attempts at conversation and looked very much like a captive resisting interrogation; perhaps his son had been at the mercy of a torturer once as the array of older and newer scars hinted more than a few tales.

Moments later, the distant purr of an engine drew closer until he could see the black shape of the car turn the corner and prowl toward him. Watching the car roll to a stop, the inner analyst prepared for the next exchange with his son.

The man that emerged from the car was staring at the airplane with his lips drawn into a thin line in with an array of emotion flickering through the depths of sapphire eyes. Not taking his eyes off his son, Malcolm waved the subordinate accompanying the blonde toward the plane. Clapping his hands together once, the businessman grinned toothily.

"Shall we?"
A thin grimace split his son's face before vanishing beneath the reticent mask.

"Sure."

Deliberately, the alpha turned and offered the comfort of his back before casually turning and climbing the steps into the jet. Nodding to the first officer that stood to the side, ready to close the hatch, the businessman stripped off his suit jacket, tossed it onto the plush leather couch and loosened the tie around his neck. Oliver's footsteps were nearly silent behind him and if Malcolm had not been listening, the younger male would have gone undetected, save for the newly familiar cedar smell. The footfalls faltered, as Malcolm expected they would, and the alpha's smile turned predatory even as he retrieved a pair of bottled waters from the small refrigerator.

The plane was lavish as would be expected with the private plane of a Fortune 500 company should be. A mini kitchen complete with stainless steel appliances, white leather couches running parallel to one another with a long oak coffee table sporting a boxed game of monopoly. A door to the back lead to the staff lounge and the restroom, not that the staff area would be of any use to them.

"You went through my things?" The chest rested next to the coffee table with a wrathful Oliver hovering over it.

The accusation stained the air and Malcolm sighed, taking a moment silently admire how magnificent Oliver was in his fury and felt pride at the clenched hands and trembling lips that demanded explanation. The assassin's portion of the brain goaded the boy on, even as he extended a placating hand.

"The Hong Kong police department was rather insistent I'm afraid," he remarked without offering any apology, inwardly enjoying the flight of emotions across Oliver's face. "Apparently contraband was a surprisingly big concern for their lost castaway. So, yes. I did see your things and I'm sorry that your privacy was violated but they were going to look whether I was there or not. At least I was able to convince them to let you keep the bow."

Giving his son a moment to mull over his feelings, Malcolm set one of the water bottles in neutral territory next to the chest, before settling himself into one of the comfortable seats, and leaned forward to lift the lid on the cardboard game box and set to sorting and counting out two piles of colorful, starting money for the game of Monopoly. In the background, the engines from the jet revved up and the plane slowly began to move as an intercom sounded in the background.

"Mr. Merlyn, we are preparing to take off now. Be advised that I recommend seatbelts at this stage of the flight. ETA to Starling City is 14 hours."

Deliberately ignoring the pilot's announcement, "I thought we might play game while we're in flight."

"You're not going to ask me anything?"

"When you're ready to tell me, I want you to tell me. But I would rather you were honest than telling me something that isn't true," he spoke carefully, extending a stack of colorful currency to the skittish youth. "Our relationship itself was a deception and I really don't want whatever we might build in the future to be ruined by lies."

"Now," Malcolm dictated while shuffling the Chance cards. "I've arranged for your mother to meet you at Starling City Hospital shortly after we arrive--"
"You told my mother?!

The panic was rather amusing to witness as his son appeared physically shaken and accusatory.

"Oliver," keeping his demeanor in a surprised yet supportive state and he moved onto the Community Chest cards. "Of course not. As upset as I am to learn your mother kept this from me, I don't want to come between you and your mother. And Thea. If you want her to know that you know someday, that's fine. But I'm certainly not going to make that decision for you. I arranged for the authorities in Hong Kong to contact her and let her know they were in the process of sending you home. Obviously I asked them to omit certain details."

If all went according to plan, it would be a fairly short reunion anyway.

"That's... I appreciate that," the sincerity was not forced but it seemed cautious like a dog that had been kicked far too many times to believe in kindness. "I really don't know how to process any of this. Not really."

"And you don't have to," Malcolm conceded firmly before offering Oliver the box of tokens to choose from. "Do you think there is anything easy to process about finding out I had a son that I was never told about? There isn't a manual for this type of thing, Oliver. But I do think we have 14 hours to kill so what do you say. Let's play a game, that I will win. And we get to know each other a little bit better."

"You want to have father son bonding over Monopoly? Aren't we a little old for that?" To his delight, the boys weathered fingers dug into the box before dropping the dog on the Go space.

"Old enough to beat you," Malcolm replied in a light teasing manner, feeling his own reservations ease as Oliver responded positively. "You were gone five years and before that I only saw bits and pieces of you. So we'll have a game and talk at the same time. And if there is anything you're not comfortable talking about, just say so. Be honest."

Seeing his boy struggle with the proposal, Malcolm retrieved the shoe and plopped it on the board and passed the dice to his omega.

"Youngest goes first."

"What do you want to know?" the omega rolled a pair a pair of twos and his forehead wrinkled as he begrudgingly paid the middle, his next roll landing the boy visiting jail.

"What's your favorite color?" The CEO smiled triumphantly as he paid for his acquisition of St. Charles Place.

"Green," the reply was automatic and his son looked baffled by the question. "What are we in Kindergarten?"

Oliver rolled better this time around, scooping up an orange property.

"We can pretend if you like," he fired back, as he rolled again and purchased a second piece of pink property. "I told you that I was going to win. And for the record, I happen to be very fond of black. It goes with everything. Do you want to work when you go back?"

"I suppose I'll have to do something," the blonde acknowledged as he waved the get out of jail free card triumphantly; each interaction seemed to ease the tension until his son embodied a Cheshire Cat. "My mother will want me to join the company. You don't expect me to call you dad,
"While that might be appealing to me, I don't want you to do so unless it's something you want to do. What do you miss eating? I'm not a half bad cook if you want to come over for dinner sometime."

"Cheeseburgers are difficult to come by on a deserted island." The imp smirked devilishly, tossing one of his big bills Malcolm's way and scooping up Pacific Ave. "Where did you learn to fight like that?"

Ah here we go: the source of that inquisitive spark. If only you knew, the assassin thought.

"Do you remember when I went away after my wife's funeral?" Malcolm tossed the dice and watched Oliver nod hesitantly. "I went to a place in mountains of Tibet that specializes in dealing with emotion and physical combat. In my time there, I excelled as a student and to this day, I practice every day to maintain what I learned."

"Would you be interested in practicing with me sometime?" The alpha gambled with the question, relieved when the omega didn't recoil, in fact he sat forward with an eager glint to his eyes.

"I'm always up for learning new things."

The alpha permitted the content look on his face to broaden as Oliver's own tentative smile tugged at the older man's heart.

"You said where you went. Sort of. Why did you go?"

It was Malcolm's turn to flinch as he took a deep breath, exchanging money for the railroad space. Countless hours had been devoted to preparing for Oliver to ask this question. All that was left was to accept the inevitability of pain.

"You don't have to answer if you don't want to."

"It's alright, Oliver," the softness in his son's voice was new and not something he recognized hearing. If Oliver had already begun to feel something familiar, it was a victory worth the pain of remembrance. "When Rebecca died, I changed. I was no longer a man that I recognized in the mirror. I was a stranger. The one thing that hadn't changed was how much I loved Tommy and how much I cared about the people in my life. I swore to myself, after what happened, that I would never let anything happen to anyone else that I loved ever again. But I couldn't protect my family back then. So I left, swearing never to return until I could protect my family. Now I can."

The pair sat in relative silence with only the click of dice, the rustle of paper, and the whirring of the engines between them. Probably for the best as it gave Malcolm some precious moments to anchor his emotions appropriately.

"Have you ever told Tommy?"

Releasing a soft 'hmm' from under his breath, Malcolm blinked owlishly at the young man drumming the board thoughtfully.

"Have you ever told Tommy... what you just told me?"

"Ah." One of the few topics the alpha felt immeasurably uncomfortable with. Shrugging helplessly, he took a sip of his water and fiddled with the cap. "I'm sure you remember that things were strained between Tommy and I after I got back?"
"I remember." His omega held the dice poised but waited for him to continue. "Tommy complained that you turned into a drill sergeant while you were gone. That you were different."

"He wouldn't be wrong," he shifted a bit to relieve pressure from a cramp. "I definitely do not deserve to be winning any father of the year awards, but I've always loved him. I think Tommy resented me for leaving and I just didn't know how to reach out to him. And now...we're practically estranged. Maybe, you can help me bridge the gap with your brother."

"Yeah," the clipped reply was hoarse. "Maybe."

"Tommy missed you. He even went looking for you once in China, strangely enough," Malcolm observed his son with a calculating look. "Do you want to tell him?"

"No!" The reply was instantaneous. "Well, not right now. I'm not ready for that."

"Understandable," he brought his diplomatic skills to the fore. "But he will be suspicious if he finds out you're spending time with me. And, I do want to get to know you. I really hope you come around. To train with me if nothing else."

"I don't mind training," Oliver remarked, raising his voice a hair. "But I'm not ready to tell Tommy. Not yet."

"Would you want a job at Queen Consolidated?" The question was unplanned, but Malcolm was desperate to regain control of the conversation at this point.

"I'm not sure," his son hesitated slightly, scent spiking for a moment before settling. "I kind of had some things I wanted to do, but I'm having doubts and I'm just not sure I want to commit to a desk job."

"If you want it, I think I might have something in mind that's right up your alley," he mused, suggesting but not pushing. "But no pressure. Just letting you know the offer is there and it's very flexible."

If his son had a comeback, he never shared it. Mulling it over, Malcolm decided to press one more time.

"Did your friends make it off the island?"

"How did you know about that?" Oliver riled again.

"It wasn't a difficult leap," He gestured at Oliver's torso. "Unless you're claiming your scar tissue was self-inflicted, you got away from whoever did it to your by yourself, and you taught yourself to use that bow, you were not on that island alone. Someone taught you to survive."

"You're right," Oliver's tone was accusatory. "But I'm not ready to talk about that."

"Let's move away from the hard stuff," Malcolm ended that point of the conversation. The answering look of relief was enough. "Now, I did say that I was going to beat you. I intend to make good on that promise."

After putting in a quick reappearance at his welcome home party, Oliver made a hasty
retreat. Emotionally conflicted summarized his general feelings from the past few days.

His mother stepping into the hospital had been a relief. Even knowing his mother had not
told him about his biological father, Oliver had missed her tremendously. The soothing tenor of her
voice, her beautiful golden hair, and the scent of floral perfume and non-threatening beta. Yet his
excitement withered like a flower out of sunlight when she took him home.

Rather than being able to bask in the wonder of being home, he was immediately thrust
into offering a fake smile to Walter Steele. The man seemed honorable and generally a considerate,
caring individual but it merely served as a harsh reminder that fathers were replaceable. Moira's
cockamamie scheme to hire a bodyguard created more problems than it solved and made it
impossible to conduct any activities without someone reporting his absence.

Thea had been his true joy to see until he discovered just how far done his sister had fallen.
The alpha-female had blossomed into a tough cookie that was not about to pull her punches--
shutting him out of her affairs with cruel dismissal. Adding in the drugs, the alcohol, and a flippant
attitude, Thea Queen surpassed Oliver in her carefree approach to life and the older brother had no
idea how to stop it.

Tommy was difficult to interact with because none of it felt natural the way it had five
years ago. His best friend--and slightly older brother--still maintained a true persona of a partying,
playboy. Once upon a time Oliver would have danced, drank, and fucked any attractive and willing
alpha or beta, but his time away left him incapable of enjoying what were once simple pleasures. The
drinking and partying dulled the senses and held no appeal, while sex with strangers only reminded
him of all he lost to Lian Yu. Adding in the complication that his 'best-friend' was also his brother,
even if Tommy was unaware of that not-so-minor detail, added a new level of awkward to an
already messed up situation.

Seeing Laurel again had been every bit as awful as he imagined it would be. Before the
island, the omega fancied himself in love with beautiful, intelligent Laurel until nerves got the better
of him and he slept with Sara. The beta was bitterly unforgiving and he could hardly blame her for
despising him. While he could not change the past nor would he ever forget the last moment he saw
Sara Lance, Oliver felt an apology was the least he could offer, Laurel.

Now though, the image of Malcolm Merlyn popped into his head and a small voice in the
back of his mind plead with him to contact the man. Since his return to Starling, he had not heard
from elder Merlyn save a concerned phone call after his kidnapping; Oliver had assured the growly
alpha that he was unharmed, was doing well, and assured him that he would visit soon. At the time it
had been merely words, but maybe he really should.

After their talk on the flight home, Oliver had actually enjoyed playing monopoly with
Malcolm. Despite losing, it prompted the pair to watch an old James Bond movie and argue over
how unrealistic the villain was; after which the pair shared a soup lunch--Oliver was still on a
restricted diet, played a game of cribbage, and took a rest for the final leg of the journey.

It had been oddly fun and he sort of missed the man. And unlike his mother and Thea, not
everything was a lie.

In any case, the Starling City vigilante was ready to head home for the night.

Stepping out of the cab, he prepared to head inside when he noticed a distinctly unfamiliar,
black mustang parked to the side of the house. Unless Walter was more of a car man than he
appeared to be--Oliver seriously doubted it--this car did not belong here. Glancing around, the lights
in the house were dark as if the house itself were in a slumber. The front grounds lights were dark,
but the outdoor lights around the side of the house were still brighter than ever.

Following the trail of luminescent spheres, the killer in Oliver insisted something was off about everything while the rational portion of his brain insisted five years did wonders for growing paranoia. Sticking to the cover of shadows under the wall, the archer moved around the eastern side of house where winding concrete paths and overhangs littered the garden. If not for a sudden movement he might have missed it, but the glint of gold was bright even in the shroud of darkness. A click of heels on concrete and his mother's face appeared in the stretch of shadow, pacing ever so slowly back and forth.

Instincts tingling, Oliver ducked behind a hedge at the tell tale scratching of shoes over concrete approaching his mother's location. Risking a glance, a greying man of average height approached his mother. Somewhat alarmed, Oliver retrieved a long pocket knife he kept secreted in his pocket and held it at the ready. The man's voice broke the whispered stillness of the chirping crickets and filled the air with its own nonchalant evil as only the truth can.

"The police failed to identify the men I hired to kidnap Oliver. And never will. Shall we arrange another abduction?"

"No." The utter lack of denial in his mother's voice betrayed him to the core, leaving him slightly nauseous. "There are other ways of finding out what my son knows."

Mom...who are you?

Utterly bereft, he fled.

The Queens Garage was just off the front of the house and it took Oliver all of a minute to arrive and drag his motorcycle outside; he slipped his helmet over his blonde spikes, climbed onto his motorcycle, and sped away. Away from Thea's drugs and spite. Away the house and it's memories. Away from her betrayal. What kind of mother has their own child kidnapped? Back before he lost his faith in humanity, Oliver had daydreamed of a life where he had a child with his alpha; even in that fantasy, the omega had known that protecting that child would be his number one goal in life. A goal his mother obviously did not share. If Oliver had not gained a variety of skills on the island, those men may have killed.

Blasting through the few traffic lights, Oliver drove on autopilot down the paths that inevitably lead to Merlyn estate. While not as large or lavish as the Queen's mansion, it was not from lack of funds, but rather from a practical standpoint. While spacious, the house was more suitable to a large family home rather than an ostentatious show of wealth.

The sensors on the outdoor garage lit up as he pulled his motorcycle into the driveway. Dropping his helmet to dangle on the handlebars, he strode quickly toward the door, and knocked once against the heavy oak panel.

With a click the door swung open with the welcoming alpha spice and the peculiar image of Malcolm Merlyn in a fitted navy bathrobe, one hand holding a sheaf of paperwork.

"Oliver," Tommy's father dropped the folded paperwork and stepped into his personal space, flooding the distraught omega's nose with it's reassuring presence. "What is it? What's wrong?"

"I didn't know where else to go." Stomach in knots, Oliver yielded his troubles to the one person that might be able to help him. "Dad, can I please stay here."
He nearly missed the way the other man's breath caught before he was pressed firmly against the alpha's chest and he released at tormented gasp. In response, the others arms sealed around his back and all but dragged him inside, somehow slamming the door and if the resounding click gave any indication. Allowing himself to be manhandled, Oliver took the guiding steps backward until he was made to sit down next to the other man.

Surrendering to a primal need for comfort, he locked his arms around his father and turned his face to bury his nose in the valley where the neck meets the shoulder. A low rumble of pleasure greets the omega's movements and the pair sit nestled together awkwardly against a wall, a heavy palm rubbing slow circles over the plains of his spine.

They sat like that for nearly an hour if the constant ticking of the grandfather clock down the hall was any indication. Drifting in slumber, Oliver relaxed as the pairs breathing patterns synchronized and each lungful of alpha pheromones stroked his biological clock, inducing relaxation.

"I think we need to talk, Oliver."

"I know," he muttered with a regretful sigh.

"I know I said I wouldn't push you about what happened on the island and I won't, but whatever happened to put you into this state, I need to know." The rubbing on his back resumed as if in anticipation of Oliver's tension. "I doubt this is related to your exploits as Starling City's hooded crusader." The rubbing continued but the free hand raised to graze Oliver's neck in warning. "And not to worry, I understand why you did what you did. But, something has you riled and I want to know what it is."

"I killed people," he countered softly, challenging the alpha even in a subdued state. "A normal person wouldn't be okay with what I'm doing."

"Normal is boring anyway. Besides, no one ever claimed love was a rational emotion." Love? Maybe the shock came from Robert's obvious lack of it, but he had no time to think on it as he was suddenly drowned in suffocating pheromones. Attempting to pull himself up, Oliver only partially succeeded before the alpha gripped his neck in a vise grip and forced him to meet the raging cerulean gaze. "I told you before that I swore when I went away that no one would ever hurt someone I loved. And I never wanted anyone to know the pain of loss I felt that night Rebecca died. And I won't. If killing those men is something you feel you have to do, fine. But let's not pretend you didn't know that I would recognize that hood of yours."

For a few wordless eternities, father as son simply stared at one another with only the tick tock disturbing their exchange. Oliver swallowed as the hand flexed expertly over his neck and squeezed ever so slightly, drawing out an involuntary swallow. What could he say? The rational part of his brain had refused to trust Malcolm and the man's knowledge had left the youth with a conundrum. To risk exposure by his father or develop a separate identity. Neither option had been favorable, but in the end the omega decided to risk it. Finally, the hand dropped from his neck only to slide downward to grip his hand, hauling him to his feat with no indication that it had been particularly difficult.

"I'm glad you didn't deny it," his father's rage diminished to a simmering pride reflected in pools of hypnotizing azure that left the younger man perplexed. A hand gestured him up the stairs and his body complied instantly, falling into step with Malcolm's motions. "But I think we should discuss your vigilante activities tomorrow. Tonight, you tell me what happened."

"My mother had me kidnapped."
Inwardly appalled at his lack of self-restraint, he shamelessly shunted blame on his omega biology. Oliver spared a moment to wonder if he missed the memo on alpha mind-control voodoo in class, before sneaking a look at his father's mystified expression.

"You're sure?"

Perhaps that was why Oliver found himself so disarmed by the other alpha; the man never dismissed what he said even when the claim--or accusation--was outrageous. Smiling self deprecatingly, Oliver snorted bitterly. "Out of the horse's mouth."

"I can't imagine doing that to you or Tommy for any reason," the words were clipped and restrained as the pair walked down a shadowed hallway only to stop at a room just one door down from the master. "Do you have any idea why she would possibly do something like that?"

"I think so," the blonde blinked at the exhaustion touching the back of his mind. "Maybe we could discuss that tomorrow too."

"Whatever you need." The tone was short and his father was apparently unhappy waiting, but he agreed all the same.

Relieved, he stepped into the guestroom that had expensive, overly ornate beast of a bed that looked far too soft, with a rich looking down comforter that looked like heaven.

As if reading his mind--or perhaps just his body language--Oliver found himself guided toward a heavy plush rug near the window and pressed down onto it. A loud whoosh left the exhausted omega covered in the heavy fabric and he pressed himself into the perfectly uncomfortable rug and felt utterly relaxed and warm.

"I'll protect you now. Go to sleep."

The voice was far away as years in exile afforded Oliver the talent of being able to fall asleep nearly on command. Tucking his face away, Oliver allowed himself to slip away, feeling somewhat elated that he had a father that actually cared for him.

"Thank you," he murmured, drowsy and unable to think clearly. "Thank you for not being like him."

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It was a beautiful thing when timing works out. Manipulating the pieces on a living chess board took a deliberate measure of finesse but all things must fall into place. Allowing Moira to believe she could deter Malcolm's involvement with a staged kidnapping was the perfect catalyst for Malcolm's plans. A basic instruction to Mr. Benoit delayed his little meeting with Moira until Oliver's subsequent return home.

Vitura was a strange thing. It was infinitely more potent when ingested, but when the skin was exposed to the raw substance, like it had when Malcolm had been calming his distraught son earlier, it functioned much like overconsumption of alcohol. It made Oliver admit a few things that would accelerate the development of trust between them and as their relationship grew stronger, the division between mother and son would fragment until all that would be left was victory.

Pleased with the success of a few days plotting, he set his alarm for an easy start. He had work to do.
Author's Note: Yay! Now that I've arrived at this point I can hopefully start with some of the more action scenes.

Thank you all for your support as this writing project is my way to expand my imagination and improve my writing. Thanks again!
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: Still don't own Arrow or any of it's characters. What a shame!

Author's Note: If you don't like sex scenes between two male characters, this story and chapter in particular is probably not for you!

Also, beta readers don't exist so all the mistakes are mine!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Felicity Smoak offered a few cheery morning salutations as she walked through the halls of Queen Consolidated with a bounce in her step. With a sway in her hips, a tune on her lips she sauntered into her--oh so tiny--office and flipped on the lights, booting her computer to life with deliciously rapid speed.

Within twenty-eight minutes--not that she was keeping count, at all--Felicity resolved the technical issues imported from technologically challenged and freed up her schedule for some personal pet projects.

Connecting her cell phone to her computer for some Beyonce, she surfed the web while monitoring a diagnostic program running in the corner of her monitor. Feeling slightly parched since she skipped her morning fruit cup with latte from the corner cafe, the computer whiz fished a bottle of water from her purse. Twisting the cap, she glanced up and panicked at the sight of the navy wool suit jacket--showering her keyboard, desk, and her new dress--crap--soaking her keyboard.

"I am so sorry," she babbled, cheeks burning as she twisted around. Towel. Towel. Towel. Bingo! Digging the napkin out of her lunch bag, she turned around and blanched at the puzzled, amused expression on the impeccably dressed, super attractive alpha that smelled just a bit like heaven. "Oh my god. You're Malcolm Merlyn!"

Foot catching on her desk, she frantically dabbed frantically at her keyboard, mouth morphing into a cartoonish look of dismay as her applications started opening new windows.

"I know how this looks," she started, growing more and more flustered with each passing nanosecond. Keep it together girl! Why oh why did this happen on days when she skipped her morning latte? The alpha just quirked an eyebrow and offered that patented powerhouse expression that always set her heart a flutter for the unobtainable type. "Okay, well maybe I don't know what this looks like, but you have to believe me when I tell you this isn't normal for me. You're just scary. Well, not like horror movie scary, just intimidating scary. And I'm just going to stop myself there. Can I help you with anything, sir? Mr. Merlyn?"

"I came to ask you how you like working in the IT department of Queen Consolidated," the CEO flashed his pearly lights that set the tech-savvy omega's heart aflutter. "Because I'm looking to hire someone with some very specific skills. I've made some inquiries which lead me to believe you're the person I've been looking for."

"Yeah I definitely am." Oh god, someone really needed to gag her before she could make
an even bigger fool of herself. Wringing a napkin between her fingers while swiping at an imaginary strand of hair, nausea set to work twisting her intestines into knots. "What I meant by that is that I'm definitely your girl. IT girl. But isn't it sort of a conflict of interest for you to offer me a job what with our companies affinities. Not that I was looking for another job anyway. You know. And you must have a number of candidates lining up your door!"

"Oh Miss Smoak," the CEO appeared delighted as he gestured commandingly and a slicked haired minion entered the room smoothly. Mr. Gelled Spikes Bodyguard stepped from the hallway and offered her a manila envelope, which she took rather gingerly, and excused himself with a deferential nod to his boss. Did all Merlyn's employees treat him like the King of England? "I look forward to hearing back from you with what I anticipate to be a favorable response."

The alpha smiled that melting-heart-smile and turned, only for Felicity to release a high pitched "meep" when he pivoted and tugged a deceptively simplistic handkerchief from his pocket and tucked the cloth into her hand and gave a pointed look to the damp computer hardware. "Until next time, Miss Smoak. But it looks like you need this more than I do."

Wow. Surprisingly calloused hands for a businessman. Sexy. The linen square with the delicately monogrammed letters that probably cost more than her new--very damp--dress.

Sweeping out of the room, a whoosh of breath escaped her mouth and she managed a choked, "Thanks for stopping by Mr. Merlyn."

And then she was devastatingly alone in her office feeling terribly confused. Nothing left for it, she mopped the excess water with the businessman's hanky.

"What the heck?" No, really. What the heck was going on? What was Malcolm Merlyn doing here? And who did he think he was barging in and bedazzling her with that million dollar smile? And that really, really alluring scent?

And why come to her? Surely a guy of his standing had any number of computer experts lining up to work for him. Probably not with her mad skills, but even so!

Flipping open the envelope she skipped the summary page and eyed the figure at the end before dropping the file.

"A hundred and fifty thousand dollars!" Slapping a hand over her mouth in utter mortification, noting two of her colleagues peering at her awkwardly from the hallway. "Sorry. Just got some odd news."

The looks she got overly communicated that they thought she was off her rocker. Wouldn't be the first nor the last time she was at the end of that kind of look.

"Well," Felicity tiptoed to the office door and closed it with a click. "This definitely warrants at least a read."

And a hack. And boy oh boy, maybe she could afford those new shoes after all. Maybe.

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No way.

Any number of scenarios invaded Oliver's thoughts on how his morning would go, but a hasty breakfast of eggs and sausage after which a beautiful, ebony bow was shoved in his hands was more than a bit unexpected.
"You can't be serious?"

"Oh, but I am," his father--now wasn't that a trip to be calling the other man that--smirked, downing a glass of water and retrieving another black recurve bow with a grip far too familiar to be coincidence.

"You're familiar with a bow."

"I am." Smirking, the alpha retrieved an arrow from a ebony quiver slung over his shoulder, nocked the arrow, effortlessly bent the bow and fired, the arrow striking a distant target with a reverberating thunk.

As an archer, Oliver recognized the distance prevented any explanation of beginner's luck, but it was Malcolm himself that told the true story; the man's stance screamed relaxed, but the alpha's posture suggested a greater knowledge than could easily be accounted for. No ordinary person should be capable of keeping up with Oliver after training with Shado, Slade, Maseo and all the experiences that accompanied them. Yet in their initial encounter, Malcolm had taken him down with such ease that the omega had chalked it up to the sedative, but the way he shot that arrow... Doubt began to fester like an infected wound, awakening the darkened recesses of his mind that taunted him with harsh whispers.

Swallowing down the bile gathering in his throat, Oliver snagged an apple from a fruit tree off the patio and chucked it high into the air. As expected, the fruit was skewered mid-fall as an arrow returned the fruit to the tree.

"I wasn't lying to you when I said I was trained in mountains of Tibet," Malcolm's tone oozed regret, the visage of calm shattering as the man's face became a warzone of determination and sorrow. "I went to a place that I could learn to protect people I care about. But I didn't tell you because I didn't want you to see me in a negative light, though I suppose it may be inevitable at this point."

Fingering the haft of is bow, Oliver felt apprehension morph to a profound sense of relief. The portion of the omega's brain geared toward survival settled it's ruffled feathers and he allowed himself to be hopeful.

"I trained in Nanda Parbat under the tutelage of the League of Assassins." Okay, not exactly what he expected but from the few interactions they shared, it explained things a bit better. "During my time there I came to learn many things and do many things that would no doubt be shocking to your ears." Yeah, he doubted it. "I became a killer, Oliver. I did it to protect people I love, but I'm still a killer. I don't expect you to forgive me for that, but I do want to be honest with you. Ra's al Ghul eventually released me from his service but in the time I was there, I became someone else. And since then, every single decision I've made has been to care of people I love."

"Does Tommy know?"

"No." His father's tenor dropped and his cheeks tightened as momentary anguish flitted over the alpha's face. "I don't think I could stand to see the disgust in his eyes. Why burden him with the weight of my sins when he hates me enough as it is."

"Why are you telling me the truth?" This was it, he thought: the moment of truth.

"Because I'm being selfish," the alpha murmured. "I think I needed someone to know the truth, regardless of the consequences. And I know a piece of me hopes that in telling the truth, it will help you with your own burden in some small way."
Relief. Rather than a spinning web of lies, he found a father. Someone who was damaged just like him. Someone who understood what it to watch the life fade from someone's eyes. How many people were six feet under because of Oliver? And the League of Assassins? So what? Oliver's hands were far from clean. And if his time on the island and all that had come after had taught him anything, it was that nobody had clean hands. No one. But what they chose to do now, was on them.

Testing the bend on the elaborate bow in his hand, he felt a euphoria that consumed the loneliness he had felt for far too long. Retrieving three arrows of exemplary craftsmanship, he fired in rapid succession. Once. Twice. The third arrow was snatched mid-air by a grinning Malcolm.

"Okay you've got to teach me that!" Joy evident in the cadence of his voice. But for real. Being able to grab incoming missiles would be a significant combat skill that he was sorely lacking in.

Malcolm's relieved bark of laughter sent a flush of warmth through his body that the younger man revelled in. "I'll teach you that and anything else you'll allow me to teach you."

"You're on." For once things felt light with excitement, the sting of Moira's betrayal easing.

A moment later, Malcolm invaded his space, twisting the arch of his bow into the string of Oliver's and twisted. The bow went sailing and his father offered a cocky smirk with an arrow sighted in his direction.

"So much to learn, my young apprentice."

"And I look forward to it." How surprisingly true, but maybe it was time to share a little something of his own. "Do you remember seeing a book in my things that I brought back with me from Hong Kong? You see, Robert Queen had a book he wrote with a list of names..."

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How exactly had archery lessons with his dad come to this?

Loitering in the shadows, the pair were obviously differing in appearance with one clad in inky black and Oliver donning the green Hood regalia with a dark forest green veil that concealed his face aside from his eyes.

When Oliver found out Laurel was in a court dispute with Martin Somers, the archer was determined to bring assistance to his old friend. Although the list was not held in the same regard as it had been for the past five years, Martin Somer's name did appear in its pages.

Which meant he had work to do.

"Face paint is not an adequate disguise," the alpha insisted, holding out the simple cloth covering.

Mouth twisting like an unimpressed teen, he accepted the fabric with a grimace. "I don't see the point. If someone is close enough to see my face, it's end of the line anyway."

"The point is to not be stupid," the alpha sniped, waving a hand in front of his face. "A poorly timed escape, surveillance camera, or any number of things can compromise your identity.
To Oliver's astonishment, the veil did not impair his vision or hinder his breathing. It was possible that Malcolm had been correct regarding a facial disguise, but the fate of the cowl was still up in the air as far as he was concerned.

Returning to the vantage point, Malcolm boxed him into a corner and crossed his arms with a critical eye.

"Let me get this straight," the alpha looked at him incredulously and Oliver stood his ground against the tirade. "You kill the men protecting Martin Somers without blinking an eye and then you string up a big-wig criminal that shares a partnership with the Chinese Triad and order him to confess his guilt."

When you say it like that, it sounds pretty dumb, he conceded silently.

"If we sink to their level," he explained, feeling somewhat defeated by the lack of understanding in his father's azure gaze. "We become no better than assassins. Surely you of all people can appreciate the need to give people a chance to change."

"Oliver," Malcolm's disappointment leeched from his voice leaving only a tired parent in its wake. "You can't claim justice when you kill one man and give another a second chance. And because you didn't kill Somers tonight, mark my words, there will innocent casualties as a result. I guarantee it. I'll see you at home."

The footfalls on concrete was all the younger man heard as his father turned and vanished into the darkness.

For once, Malcolm seemed off basis in his beliefs. Killing could not always be the acceptable solution to the world's difficulties. Or what else would happen.

Pulling out his cell phone, Oliver sighed at the missed message count, scrolling down the list; one missed call from Walter Steele, two from Tommy, five from his mother, and seven from Thea. Great. If there was something that could sink his ship even more it was that mess. The text message count was not pretty either, but apparently he missed his "coming back from the dead" hearing. Great.

Malcolm had been right.

Concerned with her safety, Oliver visited Laurel under somewhat false pretenses and discussed a few things he certainly would have preferred to have left unsaid. The beta was far from forgiving, but it allowed Oliver to feel semi-optimistic about having a friendship with her.

The arrival of a far too familiar opponent made everything more real: Chien Na Wei. A killer of her par   was dangerous enough in a one on one encounter but with Laurel to protect and a few bonus assassins added to the mix left him without options.

Until an arrow went right through the smaller opponents! Malcolm appeared through a shattered window and the Triad assassin fled. Unable to risk speaking to his father, the timely arrival of Detective Lance brought its own devastating news. Laurel's protective custody officers were found dead outside in their cars, both leaving behind families with small children that would have to survive without their loved ones.
Now he was standing in front of his gear, rolling the bow between his hands in silent contemplation. What was it all for? Righting the wrongs of a man that despised him for not being his son? In trying to coerce the criminal elements to a form of justice, Laurel--someone he cared about--would have been killed if Malcolm had not showed up. A few families would never see their mother and father again because he let Somers go.

Malcolm was right.

What did he actually want? An image of a tanned face with dark hair taunted him from memory. He wanted people to never experience losing someone they loved as Oliver had lost him. Loneliness was a special form of agony.

The scent proceeded the footfalls and he was prepared for the hand to drop lightly onto his shoulder.

"You were right." Only sorrowful truth there. "I think I wanted to believe that there could be a better way."

"I used to believe there was another way," the silky voice soothed his sensitive nerves. "But there isn't."

"Will you come with me?" Will you come kill with me? What a loaded question, yet Oliver felt no doubt for what the answer would be.

"Of course."

The pair seamlessly scaled the warehouse, one black the other a shadowy malachite, but both invisible to the guards. Taking up opposite positions on the rooftop, the whispy twang of arrows singing across the veil of darkness was the only hint to the silent executions occurring from above.

"Take the inside, I'll cover out here."

Taking the initiative, Oliver dropped down from the upper ledge and swung himself through the thin layer of warehouse glass, rolling into a crouch through a cascade of shimmering shards. Slinking forward like a feline on the prowl, the archer readied an arrow. Taking a few steps around precariously stacked boxes, the sound of running footsteps alerted the omega and he turned, releasing the arrow into the unfamiliar beta.

Detecting no one else, the archer sprinted across the open area to uncover the rat. Martin Somers was cowering and the omega could smell the piss from the sniveling alpha that had involuntarily urinated in his fear.

Lifting his bow, Oliver took aim. "I hope you said your goodbyes, Martin."

"Get away from him," the powerhouse female alpha snarled in Mandarin from across the room, hair appearing like glistening snow in the moonlight.

"No," the quiet timbre of his father's words sounding foreboding at even a hushed whisper. "I suggest you get away from him."

A dark arrow divided the air, snagging the female assassin in the shoulder. Chien Na Wei stumbled, recovering enough to completely dodge the incoming missile and disappear from Oliver's
line of sight.

Turning back to the squirming mass of humanity that wept so piteously, Oliver wavered for a moment at the barrage of pleas directed his way. The arrow felt heavy like it carried the weight of a thousand cares. Behind his eyes a parade of images from the previous day weighed the scale of judgment. Laurel's screams as terror rained down upon the both of them. The lifeless police officers. His father's warning. Fyer's with his merciless threats. Sara...

The arrow sang and the body of Martin Somers folded in on itself, taking Oliver's doubts with him.

As police sirens wailed in the background, Malcolm stepped closer and pulled down the cowl covering his face.

"You did what you had to."

"I know."

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Lian Yu

The sun shone with disgusting, beautiful heat that tormented the aggravated castaway. Shucking his sweat soaked shirt in distaste, Oliver tossed it carelessly over a stump.

Of all the poor luck in the world, his heat had to show up now. A regularly pleasant sunshine boiled him alive and his body that had adjusted to near-starvation conditions wracked his thin frame with persistent hunger pangs. To make matters worse, his pants—the only ones he had—felt disgustedly damp and unless the omega felt like strolling into Fyer's camp to beg for some supplies, he may as well get used to feeling damp for the next couple of miserable days.

Suppressing a discomfited huff. Oliver peeked into the plane, an overriding sense of relief coursing his veins at the sight of the alpha reclining in restful repose. The ASIS agent's battle with his former partner, Billy Wintergreen, left the man with an injury that rapidly became debilitating as infection set in. Necessity drove him to retrieve "Yao-Fei's magical herbs of healing," as Oliver called them. Slade had improved dramatically since taking the herbs two nights ago, refusing the younger man's offer of assistance to relieve his bladder yesterday. Today the stubborn mule worked through a series of stances with his sword before Oliver managed to bully the startlingly compliant alpha into a nap, where the man remained in blissful sleep ever since. In spite of Slade's obstinate nature, he could not help but admire the other man's determination, even if the alpha could be insufferable.

Prior to a near death experience and washing up to a never-ending nightmare, Oliver could safely say that Slade Wilson would never have appealed to him on any level. The man was crude and did not mince words. If he thought you were an idiot, he would say it to your face—had said it many times—without blinking an eye. The man trained religiously and taking a break was for girl scouts and asking questions generally resulted in a verbal backlash that would make drill sergeants weep like pubescent boys. The man was blunt to cruelty, constantly irritated with Oliver for pretty much everything. Probably rightfully so if he was being honest.

And yet, Slade came for him. It was... not something he could have ever appreciated before. But now... it was humbling to feel something so foreign stirring deep within. It didn't hurt that the Australian had the body of a god and a handsome face that the beard merely accentuated.
For now, it was time to rustle up some dinner. He had plenty of time to fret over his emotions concerning Slade at a later time.

Setting off into the woods, alert for any out of place sounds, he made the rounds of the three traps he salvaged from Yao Fei's cave. The first one was disappointingly empty with the bait seeds still inside. Discouraged, with a rumble in his stomach, Oliver trudged on to the next location, swatting absently at insects lured to his exposed torso. Score! Scooping up a grey, trapped petrel in the second trap, he hurried in the direction of the final trap, spirits lifted by the assurance of a meal. To his amazement, the last trap contained a rather plump rat. What once he would have considered vermin, the rotund rodent had the omega practically salivating. Carefully lifting the wood cage, Oliver marched back to the crash site with creeping stirrings of optimism in his mood notwithstanding the revolting side effects of his monthly setting in.

No more than five minutes later, he walked into camp to see Slade resting on a fallen log just outside their makeshift home, looking oddly naked without an arsenal of weaponry attached to his person. In a mere two-day span, the former intelligence agent appeared miraculously improved since receiving a dose of herbs. Perhaps magical was an appropriate explanation for the alpha's rather remarkable recovery.

"Your color is better," he remarked to the other man as he lifts the traps up for the other man's inspection, silently praying the alpha did not tease him about his heat. "I brought dinner!"

"What are you my mother now?" There was no malice in the statement but rather frank amusement with a hint of pride. "Good work with the traps kid. We'll reset them and put them out again after the sun goes down."

Even without his shirt on he was uncomfortably warm and he felt like he was about to come out of his own skin. Resigning himself to a bathing excursion later on, Oliver unceremoniously plopped down onto a nearby boulder and gingerly snared the struggling bird from inside the trap.

"Sorry," he apologized more out of habit than genuine remorse as he deftly snapped the bird's neck and settled into preparing the body for roasting. Compared to his disastrous technique the first time he plucked and cleaned a bird, his performance was nearly flawless.

Boy oh boy would Thea give him a good ribbing if she could see him now.

The distinct scent of Slade teased his nostrils and the omega inhaled deeply, eyes unconsciously fluttering shut. Blindfolded in the midst of Fyer's camp--perhaps even a concrete jungle--Oliver felt confident he would be able to identify the alpha by scent alone. In the past the omega had taken scents for granted, never bothering to learn anything beyond basic identifications. Now, attuning his nose to scents was a basic tool in his survival kit. In this particular setting, Slade's personal odour had imprinted on the younger man's memory after scarcely a handful of days. Slade was smoke with a dash of hot spices and his scent was a comfort even if the man himself was agitating.

Applying the bird to a spit, Oliver knelt and breathed life back into the weakened embers, coaxing them into a light flame and immediately roasting the bird. A light cook was all they could risk at this point, any longer would attract Fyer's men like bees to a hive.

It was bewildering when Slade dropped onto the hardened rock next to him and unscrewed a canteen of water, setting it between the two of them. Turning back to the fowl, he pulled it off, silently thrusting the stake in the other man's general direction before smothering the fire with a few handfuls of dirt.
Brushing his hands free of excess dirt, he accepted a hearty portion of meat from the alpha, biting into it with relish. Heaven. The slab of meat was stringy, undercooked, and absolutely delectable. Reaching down for the canteen, his fingers brushed empty space and he frowned, noting the other man eyeing him with a peculiar glint before deliberately offering the canteen. Taking it, he took a gulp only to find himself grow a little coltish as Slade shifted until they were close enough to rub elbows.

Oliver had experienced sex before with males and females of nearly all orientations, but he never shared a heat with an alpha. It had never been relevant. After all his experience on Lian Yu, sex was remembered as something frivolous that had no place in this new world. And like a house of cards, his new world prepared to tumble.

Slade Wilson showing interest in him seemed unbelievable and improbable, but his instincts were screaming that an attentive alpha was making himself available. And the scent was intoxicating enough to drown in.

Pulse racing, it still startled him when the alpha leaned his nose against his neck and took a deep whiff. Breath stuttering, the last thing he expects happens: Slade pulled away and returned to feasting on the remainder of his bird.

"I'd finish eating if I were you," Slade's tone was deceptively casual and set his teeth on edge. Turning to tell the other man to mind his own business, he faltered at the roguish twist to the other man's lips and the way the man's colossal pectorals rolled beneath the skin-tight, black tank-top the man was wearing. "Because I'm gonna fuck you after you finish eating, kid."

The world around narrowed until the only thing he could concentrate on was the audible thumping of his frenzied heartbeat and the tantalizing alpha pheromones teasing his nostrils. Oliver could scarcely recall wolfing down the remaining pieces of meat in his hands, his soaked pants grew warm as another wave of fluid seeped from his backside. And then, he was done eating and all that was left was the breeze and the light hum of crickets in the backdrop. Slade looked like a large panther prepared to spring as he sealed the gap between them.

"Ready?"

Heat roared its way to life within his chest and building desire for some nameless something surged through is body. Lunging forward, Oliver sealed their lips together, hand sliding up to tangle and twist in the mane of dark locks. Faint aromas from their meal, a slight hint of tangy herbs, and something otherworldly that he never experienced with anyone--not even Laurel. The alpha returned the kiss with his own brand of enthusiasm, talented fingers deftly gliding over his abs, and mapping the flesh around his partner's scar tissue.

The alpha pheromones steadily increased in intensity, leaving the omega panting as the chemicals in his brain went into overdrive. Each moment fueled a frenzy that ripped away another piece of carefully guarded control and left him helpless in the Australian's control--a thrill beneath the fear. Oliver, refusing to surrender so easily, tackled the alpha to the mossy ground below, swiftly sliding atop the alpha's lap. Grinding their hips together, he was rewarded by the elation he saw in Slade's darkened eyes.

After faking his interactions and emotions with his family and Laurel for years, Oliver had a fairly keen intuition when a person was truly invested in him. Slade Wilson was not faking those
expressions. The other man's expression of lustful wonder belonged to him. Every action from Slade was parried with a response from him; every movement a seductive dance that served to fan the fires between them into something powerful, something nameless.

A rough bite to his nipple followed by a hand slipping into his pants rather forcefully yanked him back into the moment.

"Stay with me."

Nothing less than a command.

Releasing a whimper, Oliver allowed himself to be pushed down, legs lifted, and slick-sodden pants slid off his body to his relief. Once again, his body responded in an unfamiliar manner as his cock wept on his stomach, straining painfully hard in a way the blonde had never experienced before. Nothing had stirred his body like this. Yesterday's Oliver Queen slept with his fair share of people and the only one that tried to be something beyond a casual fling was Laurel, even she paled in comparison to what he experienced in this moment.

Slade rose before him, the last traces of sunlight caressed the tanned, bulky muscles that removed his clothing with military precision, that offered a feast of flesh for the omega's hungry gaze. Pupils contacting with each lungful of scent, he drank in the weeping length between his alpha's legs. The purpled length was thick, uncut, and easily the largest cock he would ever take. Licking his lips, another flush of liquid oozed from between his slickened cheeks.

Not for the first time, Oliver found himself thankful that he was experienced in bed. The younger extending his hand to grip Slade's in a firm grip, the blonde tugged sharply and hauled his pleased lover to their mossy bed.

A moment later his wrists were twisted over his head and a tongue insisting diving between his lips like a conqueror claiming a virgin conquest. The headiness was unraveling any aspect of composure, leaving Oliver breathless and squirming.

"God, Kid. " The words broke their kiss, mouth travelling to nuzzle his neck before nibbling his jugular in light play, eliciting a string of pitiful whimpering that Oliver would certainly deny later. "So fucking gorgeous. Tell me you want to be mine, Oliver. I need to hear you say it, kid."

The answering wave of pheromones should have been answer enough, but another portion of him was surprised by the other man's insistence and yet oddly touched. Slade wanted Oliver, not just the omega. Not just the sham of a billionaire Laurel had fallen for. Most surprising was how much he wanted the other man too.

"Please keep me," the words fell out of his mouth--sounding oddly pathetic to his own ears. In this instance, his weakness was a surrender.

The possessive growl rumbling in Slade's chest relaxed him he way only biology could, replying in low dulcet tones. "Don't worry about a thing, kid. You're mine now and I'm gonna take care of you."

It seemed like the thing to soothe a child in distress, but the alpha dipped his head and brushed his lips across his brow and nuzzled him with a stubbled cheek. So this was what acceptance felt like?

Further analysis would have to wait, as Slade pushed his legs apart--running a finger the
length of his cock. Sucking a breath, he fought to keep still as his lover dipped his head to nibble his inner thigh along the skin of the femoral artery--nuzzling the area. Another moan freed itself from his throat as the alpha nibbled at the flesh tenderly.

When the teeth sank into his thigh, he pitched upward only to be held down with a hand to his throat, applying enough pressure to assist Oliver in regaining his faculties. Vision white, the teeth relaxed and released his thigh. The sting was still there but as Slade continued to worry the bonding bite with the tip of his tongue, the omega felt the heady sensation creep back into overdrive as their scents mingled to create a crude mating bond.

Out of no where, a finger pressed against his entrance jolting Oliver's back into a reflexive arch. The intruding digit paused and the omega willed his hips to relax against the grassy earth, granting entrance to the thick finger. The grip around his throat eased up until the hand released him, travelling down the landscape of his chest. It came as a further shock when his alpha's mouth travelled north from its current location and swallowed his cock. With a hoarse cry, he discovered his hands had been released at some point when he buried his hands in the coarse spikes, gripping tight in desperation. The alpha grunted lightly but allowed his touch, working another finger into the wet channel.

Choking back a scream, Oliver held on for dear life as his lover mercilessly worked a finger over the sensitive gland, while the alpha's tongue wove a tantalizing dance of licks and suckling on his own painfully hard cock. A third finger worked into him now, but it was far from enough with his head already swimming in pheromones.

"Now." Oliver hardly recognized the feral command he hissed at his mate as he lost himself to the heated need.

Instantly, Slade jerked fully alert, the cock slid free of his lips as he sat up, and Oliver's hands fell to his own chest limply. The alpha lifted his legs and nuzzled the oozing bite mark on his inner thigh lovingly, before dropping down to gaze at his omega with an intensity Oliver found frightening.

"Have you been knotted before, kid?" The intensity in the alpha's voice soothed his straining need momentarily.

"No." It was a quiet admission and the flash of pain in the other man's eyes made his own heart clench strangely.

"The first time is going to hurt," the alpha's voice was laced with regret, cock settling against his exposed entrance. "It will get better though. That I promise you, Oliver. You're mine now, kid. Just let it happen and concentrate on me."

No further warning came as the cock--finally, thank goodness--breached his entrance with a single, powerful movement. The alpha swallowed his cry, their tongues winding together in a carnal dance as old as time. Slade's girth retreated to his body's disappointment; his length pulling back and his tongue receding only to sheath himself completely in a second thrust. Their mouths parted and Oliver breathed through the heated furnace their bodies created as sweaty skin slapped together, tilting his head to nip the underside of his mate's jaw. The gesture drew a pleased purr from Slade's lips, the older man picking up the pace to stretch the channel farther and farther, pounding on the gland that drew his lover to the brink of sanity until all Oliver could think about was Slade.

"Look at me!"

Slade growled heavily, a nameless sentiment that Oliver could not recognize framed the
larger man's dark expression as he thrust deeper, sex and Slade polluting his senses until he could not
discern himself from the alpha. Beaded droplets of sweat rolled down his forehead even as he felt
himself releasing ragged gasps, eyes blinking wide as the alpha thoroughly fucked him. As he neared
the precipice, Oliver reached out to grasp the alpha's hips, yanking on the hips in a desperate attempt
to fulfill himself. Feeling himself reaching the apex, he issued a series of strangled moans as his
partner continued the punishing pace.

Even at the height of pleasure, the omega reined in the scream to a strangle prayer.
"Slaaade."

"That's it," The alpha cooed against his jaw, returning to nuzzle the juncture of neck and
shoulder. "Let go."

"Slade!"

The world went gray, stealing Oliver's sight. A rush flooded his insides as he reached
climax, cum erupting between them to coat their chests in sticky sperm. And then he felt it,
expanding his insides in ways that it could not possibly take. Instinctively retreating, his alarm grew
as an iron pair of arms sealed his fate and the pain grew exponentially. Wrapping his arms around the
alpha, Oliver sucked in a rattling breath as he burrowed his face into the other man's neck,
mindlessly pleading for an end to the pain.

A shudder rocked against Oliver and distracted him enough to see a look of patent bliss
overtake the typically ill-tempered alpha. A moment later, Oliver's breath fluttered as he felt his
insides contract around the knot and... dull the pain? The pain had not exactly vanished, but it took
backseat to the pheromones that blanketed him in a chemical nirvana.

A large hand moved between their sweat dampened skin and moved to squeeze his upright
cock. Again? The motion of Slade's hand was rough and frantic, calloused thumbs rubbing over his
tip and up and down his length. The knot inside him swelled and released a third load of cum and it
caught Oliver off-guard when his alpha began to thrust shallowly, rubbing hard against an overly
sensitized prostate gland. The rough hand, the thrusting, and a final surge of cum from the knot sent
the omega sobbing over the edge. Chest heaving, the blonde collapsed boneless against his...what?
The enormity of what had happened struck him. Mate? Was he mated? The alpha looked down on
him, that peculiar fondness lining his face again as he dropped a finger to run it over the light stubble
on his chin.

"You alright, love?"

Snapping to attention at the whispered endearment, Oliver flailed awkwardly as he opened
his mouth slightly and moved his lips--nothing come out. The fluttering returned full-force to his
chest with that poignant fear. Never had he ever believed he could have more than the barest
semblance of a normal relationship. But fuck normal. Slade and Oliver were furthest from normal he
could fathom and even if was more than a mite selfish, the omega wanted this.

"I feel something for you," the words were hesitant and brimming with the uncertainty
churning in his gut. "I've never allowed myself to really try with anyone. And I can't tell you that I
won't do something to mess up... whatever this is, but I can tell you that this feels good to me. Being
with you."

Feeling oddly insecure with his answer, Oliver looked away from the potential rejection,
only for his lover's fingers to slide beneath his chin gently but firmly and turn his face back.

"You talk too much, kid," his heart sunk only for his face to be pulled a hairsbreadth away
from the other man. "But you're still mine."

They were filthy, Oliver certainly had acquired more than one mosquito bite during their lovemaking, and now he felt even more hungry than before dinner. But, for now, his glass was no longer empty, it was brimming with something nameless.

Chapter End Notes

Author's Note: This chapter was a ton of fun to write. I loved writing Felicity because she has so much personality that can be taken advantage of. The Slade/Oliver scene was emotional to write but I think it came out okay all things considered.

I have to say thank you again for all the support I've received from my readers. You all are wonderful and you make my day.

One last thing, I would like to state for the record here that I will not be abandoning this work. However, I will not commit to an update schedule. With a job and summer weather here, I will do my very best to update as quickly as possible, but I won't adhere to a schedule because it isn't practical. But I do promise that updates will continue to come as fast as I can crank them out.
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: Still don't own anything here. Darn.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Lian Yu

"Rise and shine, guys!"

Years of living on survival terms wrenched Slade Wilson from resting to alert in a split second. Registering no panic in his fellow alpha or his overly cheerful mate, the temptation to retreat into his stranded islander's version of a cozy bed proved as tempting as the Devil himself. It was rather a shame he never felt the attraction of angels.

"Come on! I'm making breakfast."

Hold your horses, kid," the alpha ceded the argument with a grumpy retort, blinking blearily to adjust to the light pouring into their makeshift abode. Shado rose from the alcove opposite Slade, stretching her arms above her head and cracking her neck. Skilled fingers swept in loose strands of hair into a low pony tail with a strip of leather.

"Can't believe he's making us get up this early," The complaint habitual and oozing fond disbelief. "But I hope your cooking lessons with him have paid off. The last time he cooked, we were stuck in the forest for hours."

Already, dressed from vest to boots, the alpha swiped at the grit around his eyes while making certain his weapons were still securely in place. The trio slept in their clothing with at least one weapon, upon Slade's insistence, tucked into the folds of their clothing. The lack of an obvious island presence meant little when Fyer's and his men were simply the ground forces hired by some unknown entity that could send replenishment forces at any given opportunity. Paranoid, is what Oliver labelled him on a daily basis, but the Australian saw the approval in Shado's eyes and the lack of argument from his quarrelsome mate. And so their clothing had seen better days and smelled worse than disgusting, but no one commented.

"Oliver has come a long way in such a short time, particularly considering how little he knew when he arrived here," Shado projected her father for a moment and the alpha felt a pang of regret that they had been unable to save his life. "And if he's happy, than I'm happy too." For an alpha, Shado remained remarkably patient with all of the youth's blundering, to the point that she indulged the omega's whims even when they were clearly frivolous rather than practical. Doting in parental fashion was something Shado seemed to enjoy and for that reason alone Slade put up with it.

"He has." And that was that. Slade strode out of the plane, his chagrined omega standing over a popping fire outside the plane with a steaming pan they had salvaged from Fyer's camp.

Shado vanished into the brush to manage morning ablutions, and the big man resigned himself and wandered over to his companion. Nuzzling into back of his neck, a pleased purr from his
lover encouraged his own rumble of pleasure. Cheek to cheek, he greeted the other man with a firm
squeeze over the younger man's developing abs, smiling at Oliver's strangled intake of air.

"Morning love." Glancing down, he cocked a brow only to receive a smug look from the
younger man. "I see you've been a busy little bee this morning. A nice change from us dragging you
out of bed."

"Asshole," Oliver muttered, but there was no venom in his tone as he continued to stir the
runny mass of eggs. "Go find a tree to piss behind. And you better hurry because we aren't waiting
for you!"

Taking a last whiff of his omega's enticing scent, he released him and stomped into the
woods to find a tree. Making quick word, he relieved his bladder and walked to the stream to rinse
his hands more out of habit than actual hope of being clean.

When he returned to their makeshift dining area, Shado was already seated with a tin bowl
of herbal-scrambled eggs and a portion of wild nuts. A beaming Oliver extended one of the carved
stone bowls with his own portion of eggs and nuts. Accepting it gratefully, Slade tucked into it,
blinking when he realized it was tentatively edible, good even. Eggs and nuts. Unusual but
deliciously filling to stave off the constant thrum of hunger.

"When did you get the eggs?" He asked in between scarfing down another large bite.

"I gathered them this morning from one of the sea bird's nests on the cliffs," the omega
declared smugly. "Neither one of you noticed me leave either."

Slade felt uncertain whether to feel dismayed or proud by the revelation; on the one hand,
his mate's skills were improving but on the other hand, he was not happy about Oliver disappearing
without telling one of them where he was off to.

Shado the mind reader interrupted his train of thought before he could formulate a reply.
"It was a nice surprise, Oliver. And I'm pleased to see you using some of my seasoning techniques. I
think I'll take you out with the bow this afternoon, too. You've come far, but you still have a great
deal more to learn. And after you catch us dinner, we can have a bath."

"Didn't we just bathe the other day?" Slade interjected, popping the remaining nuts into his
mouth in a single, delicious crunch.

"More like eight days," Shado shot him a disgusted look that he just rolled his eyes at.
"None of us smells particularly attractive, but you absolutely reek Slade. I'm not sure how Oliver can
stand your stench."

"Very carefully," his mate replies with a mischievous grin. "It may help that he has a very
big--"

"And that's quite enough," Shado extends an elegant hand to ruffle the omega's hair, and
shoot him an exasperated look that would have quelled the hardiest of Fyer's mercs but did nothing
for Oliver. "I think Slade's been a poor influence on you."

His omega leaned into Shado's the touch like he was affection starved. Over the past
several months, from the safety of Slade's arms, his loved confided bits and pieces of a loveless
childhood. Each insight was like a puzzle of Oliver's life that painted a picture of devastating
loneliness. It was what made him so loyal to Yao Fei's father affection, so desirous of Shado's sisterly
mothering, and so fiercely devoted to him that it rather awed the former ASIS agent.
"Oh, and here." A bundle of black fabric was dropped unceremoniously into his lap. Staring at it dumberly, he raised his gaze to see Shado staring at a similar parcel with a perturbed look; her narrow fingers unwrapped the cloth and Shado lifted a coil of seashells from the cloth. Corals, lapis sea snails, and a tiny starfish attached to a thin wire formed a crude, if beautiful bracelet. The female alpha stared at the piece in shock before her expression morphed to vibrant fondness.

Standing up, Shado tugged Oliver into a hug, the lanky youth wrapping his arms around her with cerulean eyes blinking back tears.

In a second flat, Slade unveiled his own gift. A cord of leather tied around a beautiful carved obsidian arrowhead. Running a finger of the tip, he was pleased to note how sharp the piece was as a bead of crimson welled up from his finger. Sliding the leather over his head, he finds himself at a loss of words to illustrate the swath of emotions that threatens to consume him.

To hell with it. Words were clumsy things anyways. Slade stood and put his arms around his tiny little family; Shado grunted, Oliver tucked his head into his shoulder, and both put an arm around him, freely gifting their affection. Suddenly Lian Yu didn't feel like the cage of purgatory that it once seemed like. The two most important people in his world were in his arms and life could not be more perfect.

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Tommy Merlyn hated a lot of things. Parties without alcohol. Being hit on by other alphas. Cars like the one Laurel had--not that he was judging--with no air conditioning. Getting stuck overnight in jail with gangbangers from the Glades was definitely awful. Fig Newtons. You know, the little things. But of all those things, spending more than five minutes in his father's condescending orbit could literally be considered a form of torture.

And now he needed to visit dear old dad to see if he could borrow the company jet on the off-chance he could persuade Laurel to take a weekend trip with him to Aspen. Since the "Hong Kong incident", as his father referred to it, Tommy had to request permission from his father before the flight crew would agree to take him anywhere.

"It's not too late to buy first class seating," he muttered to himself, checking his mirrors and switching lanes as he drove toward Merlyn Global. "But Laurel probably would probably prefer privacy, right?"

Born to privilege, Tommy had never been required to fight for anything. For the first time in his life, he found someone worth fighting for and he really, really did not want to screw it up. The parade of nameless, brainless specimens of human idiocy no longer satisfied him. No pretty beta or omega could. Just intelligent, funny, and extraordinary Laurel.

Wrapping his knuckles on the steering wheel of his maserati, he keyed in the automatic dialing on his phone with a simple: "Dad work."

"Calling Dad Work." The computerized voice intoned. One ring later came the expected pick up from his father's long-term secretary.

"Malcolm Merlyn's office, Francine speaking. May I ask whose calling?"

"Hi Francine, it's Tommy and--"

"Oh Tommy!" The brunette flinched at the decibel level, rapidly keying down the volume of the offending voice. How a man with such a chilly persona ended up with a secretary like
Francine, Tommy never quite figured that out. For a jabberbox, the woman must be incredibly proficient at her job. "I haven't seen you in so long! I bet you've grown up a lot in-

"Yeah, well, three or four years can make a difference," he broke her statement before she could unleash another storm of cheeriness upon him. "Actually, I need to talk to my dad about something important and I was hoping I could talk to him."

"I'm afraid your father is out, Tommy."

"Late lunch at this hour?" He glanced at the dashboard with its lime 2:30 and shook his head.

"Oh no," she gushed, voice dipping into a conspiring whisper. "Mr. Merlyn is out of the office on personal business today and asked me not to disturb him at home unless it was a dire emergency. Which, knowing your father means--"

"Yeah I know what you mean," he hastily cut her off, pulling a u-turn and heading toward Merlyn Manor: his personal purgatory. "It was nice talking to you Francine, but I've got to run!"

Not eager to engage in a verbal sparring match with his father, that would inevitably cause him to feel less than five years old again, Tommy swung the car into the only drive-thru Big Belly Burger in the city.

"I would like a Bacon Lover's Melt to go with fries and a coke."

Giving a vaguely affirmative reply to the attendant checking his order, his phone display flashed blue with an unexpected incoming caller.

Clicking the speaker on, he accepted the credit card reader from a cute little redhead and winked at the girl, grinning wickedly at the explosions of scarlet that emphasized her adorable, freckled cheeks.

"Hey there, Speedy." He traded the flustered girl the credit machine for a steaming bag of goods, snagging a French fry from the bag. "What can I do for you today? Hope lunch wasn't one of those things because I just got these delicious looking," he popped the fry into his mouth and groaned at the perfect taste of a salty, fried potato and merged into traffic. "--scrumptious fries for me. And I'm not sharing."

"Shut up about your stupid fries for a minute!" Thea's upset voice sobered his teasing instantly.

"What's going on?"

"Just tell me you've heard from Ollie." The alpha was not an alarmist by nature, but it did nothing to quell his own tension. "We haven't seen him in three days. Mom is freaking out and getting ready to call the cops and I'm barely holding it together. So please tell me you know where he is or that he told you where he was going."

"Oliver's missing?" Suddenly feeling less than hungry, he jerked the wheel to avoid a near collision, flinching at the reactive chorus of honking horns, and pulled over, flicking on his emergency flashers and took a breath. In the back of his mind, he was fearful that the kidnappers must have returned, but the rational portion of his brain leaned toward something else; he could still see the Oliver grinning and joking at the party, but the smile never quite reached his eye. "I swear to you that I have not seen Oliver since his welcome home party! I've called him several times but never got any response. I figured he was just trying to get back to normal. Or something."
"Oh god," Thea groaned and the brunette could hear the girl that was like a little sister to him fighting back tears. "I just can't deal with this again. It was hard enough the first time, but I just can't--"

"Now wait a minute!" Tommy dropped his head to the steering wheel and ordered his brain to think. "I can't imagine what Oliver went through on that island, but maybe he just needed some time to himself. After all... being alone for five years must make it difficult being back around people. Or I don't know... he could be out having fun. Either way, he's probably just dropped off the radar."

"Yeah, okay, maybe you're right, Dr. Merlyn," Thea joked, sucking in an audible breath. "He just can't do things like this. Doesn't he realize what Mom is going through? What I'm going through?"

"And that is something you need to discuss with him, but for now take it easy. I have to run to my dad's place but I'm gonna check out some of your brother's old haunts. And I'll find him. I promise."

"Thanks Tommy," Thea mutters. "You're a better brother than, Ollie, you know that?"

"Don't say something you don't mean," Tommy riled, taking up a shield for Oliver as he always had. "Oliver's been through a lot and I think we can expect some unusual behavior for a while. No one comes back from something like that unchanged."

"You really should consider a career in psychology, Merlyn." The sass returns to Thea's voice, and Tommy restarted the car.

"I'll give you free sessions, kid!" She snorts and hangs up on him.

Worse off than he had been before, Tommy pulls the car back into traffic, feeling tense and nervous.

Pondering Oliver, Tommy wondered if he had missed some crucial clue that could explain his friend's behavior. He was not naive enough to believe that five years away would leave his friend unchanged, but perhaps he deceived himself into thinking the other man was perfectly fine.

Smiles were strained. Laughter laced with a bitter edge that someone who had not spent years around the person would dismiss. The party life reinforced Tommy's gut notion that something was off with Oliver Queen. How much of his best friend remained beneath the facade?

Diverging from the highway, he took the long road with the manors placed every few acres. Each home was an ode to an architect's vision; villa, colonial, plantation. You name the style and it could be found in this portion of the high society homes. Merlyn Manor was a smaller but no less glamorous home with Asian inspired architecture. Practical, beautiful and frighteningly lonely.

"Here we go dad, please don't let this be a circus today, he plead.

Pulling his car up the garage, Tommy stepped onto the tiled floor and admired the gardener's decorative trellis near the front door and inserted his key into the lock. The door swung open soundlessly on perfectly oiled hinges. Stepping inside, he paused at the barrage of metallic clangs and heavy movements.

"--not keeping your blade up." Okay that was his dad but what was this about blades?

"I'm rusty, okay! It's been a while!" Oliver. In five years he had not forgotten that unique
tenor of the omega's voice and today was no different. But now his own alpha notions were disjointed by his best friend’s disappearance from the Queen family only to be discovered with his father: Ice King Merlyn. Disney really ought to phone his father about sequel ideas for their Frozen franchise.

Tommy took a step down the hallway, rage on step away from snapping.

"As your father I sympathize." What. Wait, wait. What was that? "But as your teacher, I know you can do better."

A heavy grunt preceded the shattering of something delicate, and probably expensive, ending with echoes of splintering wood. To Tommy Merlyn, the pain lancing through his chest felt like a giant horse had just planted it's hoof in his chest and deprived him of air.

"Gotcha." Oliver's ego popped in for a visit and Tommy sneaked as quietly as possible the last few steps down the carpeted hallway.

The room looked like a twister had come through it. Couch cushions were strewn in all four corners of the space, stuffing poking out of various holes in the upholstery. The television appeared to be in fair shape from its wall mount, but the surround sound speakers were hanging from their cords like victims of a crime. The coffee table was missing a leg while glass from one, no, two broken vases littered the floor. Strangest of all, Oliver was holding an honest-to-god sword with a shit-eating grin while his father struggled to stand from the wreckage of a dining room chair, dusting himself off before retrieving yet another sword from the floor near... a cracked window.

"Impressive." The pair laughed together so lightly, so freely: another bullet to the gut. Peering around the corner, the alpha inwardly cringed as Malcolm smiled so honestly in a way that he had forgotten the other man was capable of. His father was happy and that joy was not reserved for him. And all of this became far too much for him to bear.

"What the hell is going on?"

And like dousing a flame, the joy bled from the faces of his father and best friend turned something more? Assessment returned to his father's eye as he transformed into the CEO of Merlyn Global and all at once, Tommy fell under the microscope of the more dominant alpha.

"Tommy, it's not what you think!" Oliver looked stricken. Good. A moment of guilt wracked him but was quelled by the anger.

"What exactly am I thinking, Oliver?" He threw the pair of them disgusted looks, his own pheromones bleeding off his skin. "I get a frantic call from Thea because you've been gone for days and your family is worried sick." His father remains stoic while the blonde reacted with a satisfying flinch. "And I come to talk to my dad only to find you two practicing for a promising career as Hollywood stuntmen or god knows what the hell you're both up to destroying the house. But the real kicker is I just heard something that I want confirmed. One way or another." Oliver's bloodless face should have been evidence enough for the words Tommy was definitely not prepared to hear, but he looked the older alpha in the eye and growled. "Is it true?"

"It's true Tommy," Malcolm spoke quietly and he felt himself sink to his knees in submission as the fight drained out of him. Unexpectedly, he finds his shoulders gripped in a grip that would certainly bruise. "Tommy please."

Looking up, he felt surprised to witness a crack in his father's armor as the other man visually plead with him.
"What dad?"

"I know this won't mean much, but we didn't want to hide this from you." Not inclined to believe the declaration, the imploring look shattered his defenses. "Please, just listen to what we have to say."

"This better be good." Voice more of a croak, he permitted the older alpha to pull him to his feet and the three of them waded through the mass of broken household supplies and sat down on the mostly clear couch.

Tommy looked like a wreck. There had been crying, screaming, anger. Malcolm's eye might require some ice, but the truth was more or less out, aside from their vigilante side project and the details of Lian Yu.

"God I need a drink," his brother, god help him, truly looked shot with red rimmed eyes and a dazed look. "So my dad found out you are my brother, your mom had you kidnapped for some fucked up reason, and you've been playing getting to know you with each other for the last couple days. With swords. Does that not sound like bad television?"

"Yep," Oliver admits, bagged out on the couch next to Tommy. "But I didn't exactly come back unscathed either. So... maybe being a little screwed up from everything should be mandatory."

"I'm just glad we're all talking." The omega felt the alpha next to him stiffen up at their father's voice. Gently, Oliver pressed lightly against his brother, his relaxed posture automatically loosening Tommy up. "How about I order some take out."

"Sure," he muttered, surmising it should be about that time. "Order something Chinese?"

"That's fine," Tommy muttered vaguely, disbelief still etched on his face.

"You should come train with us sometime." The offer was spur of the moment and strangely genuine, even if he had no intention of including Tommy in his hooded escapades.

"Yeah, right."

"Why not?"

"I'm not exactly," Oliver observes his brother's vague gesture to the room. "-into destroying furniture."

"I know that you don't have a great relationship with Malcolm," Oliver started, rushing at the dark look on Tommy's face. "But maybe this is your chance to reconnect because it's never too late. And I know that I haven't been around in the last five years, but I would like a chance for our friendship to grow and I still want to get to know Malcolm. So.. I really hope that you do think about it because I want you back in my life."

For a long moment the pair just sat there together, staring at the sun dropping lower outside.

"I'll think about it."

"That's all I could ask for," Oliver admitted, feeling an intense surge of relief. "Are we okay?"
"Yeah, we're ok." His brother muttered. "But you need to contact Thea at some point tonight."

"I will."

"Well, I guess I have a little brother now."

"Oh don't even start!"

Oliver had no desire to return to the Queen estate. But dinner was long since over and no viable excuse to remain. Stealing himself, he walked to the garage where his bike was parked in a vacant spot, aggrieved that he was being forced away from his family.

Malcolm's scent had betrayed no indication of his frame of mind, but Tommy's was fraught with reined in aggression that appeared in anxious alphas. Oliver nodded once to his father before dropping his arm to squeeze his best friend's arm lightly.

"I need to do this. And don't worry, everything will be fine."

Tommy guffawed, leaning against the wall to let it take his weight. "You really need to work on your lies, baby bro. And besides, I'm not exactly thrilled about you being around someone that had us both kidnapped."

"You know that you're barely older than me, right?" Oliver jibed, climbing on his bike. "And don't worry. I'll be fine."

"I gotta use everything I can to my advantage," Tommy crossed his arms, adopting a more serious pose. "Just be careful."

"I will."

Meeting his father's cool, cobalt gaze, the omega nodded once. A barely perceptive movement from the alpha and Oliver revved the bike up and took off without a backward glance. The tight sensation in his chest eased up a bit.

The pair of alphas had slipped into a silence with Oliver's disappearance, both men ending up standing around the kitchen, leaning against the marble countertops.

"I know that it never exactly came up." Tommy opened as diplomatically as possible, taking a gulp of liquid courage. "But I need to know why you cheated on mom. Because all my memories have you two being happy. Like, really genuinely happy. I need to know what happened."

Downing his own drink, Malcolm toyed with clump of white pillow stuffing with a finger. "I loved Rebecca more than anything. Losing her was a loss that I cannot explain to you how painful it was. But, believe it or not, when your mother found out she was pregnant, she panicked and left me."

"What?" Surprise utterly unfeigned.

"Your mother was gone from the time she found out for nearly five months. I looked for her everywhere but it was like chasing a ghost. I'm definitely far from proud of this, but Robert and
Moira came by every night for a week after she left. I was a devastated wreck so Robert handled my business while Moira stayed with me as moral support. She told me Robert had been unfaithful to her and...we slept together. It wasn’t planned and it was only the one time. And we stayed friends. Your mom eventually came back and we reconciled. And.. went on to live happily ever after until. You know.”

"Did mom know?"

"Yes, I told her the truth," he admitted. "She never blamed me even if I blamed myself."

Thea Queen's reality was in a state of turmoil. In the living room, her mother sat hunched over on the couch, clutching her brother's old graduation picture in between bouts of tearful despair. Walter Steele, truly the rock in the emotional storm, had one arm slung across her mother's shoulders while the other hand spoke to a police officer on the phone. And her brother was missing. Again. Deja vu minus the pillar of emotional support.

It looked like her mother's sobbing had petered off for the moment, thank goodness. At least a temporary respite was nice, she thought ruefully. But the real kicker was that her mother had done nothing to deserve this. None of them had. Maybe Tommy had a point. Maybe. But Thea could not reconcile the absent brother with her anxious mother.

Walking away from her minor espionage moment, Thea brushed imaginary dust from her designer and tank, tiptoed to the front door, and stepped out into late evening dusk that. The air was defiantly warm, inviting the mosquitos out to bite, but enduring mild discomfort was well worth a break from the indoor emotional rollercoaster.

Taking her phone out for the millionth time that day, Thea thumbed through the list of irrelevant messages from her friends, deleting. The last missed message from Tommy simply read: on his way home. Equal measures relieved and upset, the female alpha noted the time stamp at nearly half an hour ago. Good. If Ollie was coming home, she was going to be right here waiting to nail his ass to the grass for behaving like such a jerk.

Folding her arms, Thea took up a vigil behind one of the granite pillars, affording her a view but concealing her in the foliage. It was not a long wait before the sound of an engine powering up the driveway cut through the chirping crickets. The motorcycle pulled up and her brother yanked the helmet off but made no motion to get off the bike.

All of Thea's protective notions begged her to confront her errant sibling and give him a tongue lashing that was sure to clobber some sense into him, but the body language on her brother was enough to halt the alpha in her tracks. Despite the poor lighting, the hunch in the omega's posture screamed defensive. One of Oliver's hands fisted in his hair and the blonde collapsed against the frame of the bike, letting it take his weight.

Damaged. Hurt. What happened to you? Protective instincts coming to the forefront of her mind, Thea felt the anger dissipate at the large man huddled over his bike like a security blanket. Somewhere out there, someone--not something--had done something to her brother that had caused the person she perceived to be absolutely indomitable crumble.

All at once, Thea was hit by a powerful visceral reaction that had her seeing red. Recognizing the danger she posed, the alpha let herself inside and bounded up the staircase to her
bedroom. Everything was so perfect. The fancy oak desk, the ritzy four-poster bed, her big screen tv. Everything in its place and it was hideous. Downstairs she could hear her mom and Walter calling her Oliver's name and she quickly shut the door and screamed.

Dad had been the lucky one after all, he did not have to see what they had all become.

Cries intermittent with aggressive snarls, the alpha attacked the wall, ripping at the posters of pop icons until they were little more than shredding between her fingers. The laptop became her next unfortunate victim merely by proximity; she flung the expensive apple product into the marble fireplace with a satisfying crunch.

Was suffering the price they paid for being born a Queen, she wondered. With some difficulty, she managed to flip over her desk; a wave of pens rolled across the floor, a stack of textbooks upended, and picture frames cracked spitting up fragments of glass. All her classmates accused her of having the easy life, but they knew nothing! What did her money get her? Huh? A dead father, a mother that forgot to be a mother, and her brother that she had left curled up--possibly crying--and hurt by god knows who.

Retrieving the baseball bat she kept from back-in-the-day, Thea swung it at the bedside lamp, knocking the light askew and causing the bulb to flicker. Swinging again, the bulb exploded into a bunch of satisfying pieces. Moving on to the pictures, she glared at Robert Queen.

"If you hadn't have taken that stupid boat," she hefted the bat and sent it smashing into the glass frame. "None of this would be happening! Maybe we would still be a normal family!"

Prowling across the room, she lifted the bat and swung at the window as hard as she could. Smashing glass should be listed as a therapeutic exercise. Look at those shards fly, she thought as she swung again, it had a beauty all of it's own.

"Thea stop!" Mom sounded like she was crying again. What else was new? She shattered another pane of glass.

"Thea! Stop it right now!" Gosh, Walter actually raised his voice. Maybe pigs did fly, she mused.

The oversized body enclosing her in a forced embrace brought with it her brother's omega scent that flooded her nostrils with relief even as she was forced to the ground, the bat wrenched from her hands with a strength that left her feeling exhausted like a small child. Then hands brushed her sides and began whispering things to her, things that were probably not true anyways.

"What on Earth was she thinking?" You just try to figure that one out mom, Thea thought vaguely as she resorted to using Ollie's scent as a stabilizing agent. "Maybe I should contact Dr. Prescott."

Oh hell no. "You are not sending me back to the bitch of a shrink!" Shirking her brother's loosened hold, Thea stumbled to her feet, thankful she was still wearing her heels from earlier when something cracked underneath her meager weight. "So, I got a little upset, but I'm fine now. Just fine."

Walter, sweet man that he was, lifted his arms and turned around to take in the destroyed furniture and hangings. "Thea, you have to understand this doesn't exactly look like upset is a fair definition! I think your mother might have a point and--"

"I don't need to see a shrink," her blood boils. "What I need is for my family to be okay."
And we're not! Look at all of us! We are definitely not okay!"

Damnit. Her mother choked, practically collapsing against Walter as she began to weep rivers. So much for her mascara.

"Thea, we can fix this," Moira spoke through the morass of grief. "We just need time. But if you're really this upset, then honey let us get you some professional help."

"I really don't think that's necessary," Oliver summoned their attention from her side, ignoring everyone in the room but her as he reached out and settled his arm over her shoulder. "I'm going to be training in a self-defense program several days a week. I thought it would help me with adjusting to life back here. And I think it would be a great idea if I were to spend some more time with Thea. So, she'll come with me and any issues she needs to resolve will be done there. Together."

"Oliver we haven't even finished discussing your absence and I'm really not sure it's a good idea for Thea to be taking karate classes for this," Moira said with a look of confusion mirrored by herself and Walter.

"The solution to a problem is not always the obvious answer," Oliver remarked tonelessly, drilling holes into the floor.

Walter and her mother looked at one another in bewilderment, before Thea noted the oddly solemn cast to her brother's face as he squeezed her shoulder once before departing without another word, disappearing as if the last few days never happened and presumably--possibly--going to his own room.

Soon enough the staff arrived to take over the clean up detail while her mother regained herself with a few barked commands. Glancing down, she felt a shred of regret when she looked at the wreckage of her computer. Hopefully the IT tech could recover that research paper for biology or life was really going to suck.

Stepping out into the hallway, Thea trudged toward the closest guest room to crash in for the night. Rounding a corner, she took a glance at Oliver's room at the end of the hallway. Her brother had been skittish if Thea had to label his behavior. It would be easy to pin the peculiar behavior on a reaction to her meltdown, but she somehow doubted it. Whatever it was, she was determined to pay closer attention in the future.

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"Excuse me," the blonde smiled hopefully at the plastic surgery Barbie seated at Merlyn Global's information desk. Beach babe, despite her appearance, offered her full attention at Felicity's approach, pausing mid-keystroke.

"How may I help you today?"

Shifting her purse onto her shoulder, Felicity smiled at the other omega in what she certainly hoped was a friendly manner. "I'm supposed to be meeting Mr. Merlyn about a job offer and--"

"Oh, quite right. Miss Smoak I presume?" A manicured hand flagged down a dark suited Italian beta with a roguish glint in his eyes.

"Um, that's me!" She acknowledged before pointing a finger toward the suited muscle heading her way. "Is he Mr. Merlyn's bodyguard or something? Because I swear I'm not concealing
a gun or anything."

Plastic Girl's smile came with a laugh that Felicity imagined pigs made when they were being butchered.

"No, of course not," she giggled again, Felicity winced. Her poor ears. "Frederick will drive you to your meeting."

"What do you mean, drive me?"

"Miss Smoak?" The man's voice was as ridiculously attractive as he was and made her wonder if everyone looked like that. Taking a glance around, she was relieved to note more than one bald head and several greater than size zero women. "We really need to get going if you want to be on time."

"Where exactly are we going?"

"To your new office," the man remarked casually. "Mr. Merlyn thought you would appreciate the space."

Right. So, the Alpha CEO was nuts. Good to know that little detail had not been exaggerated.

Frederick winked as he escorted her to the waiting car and she took the opportunity to have a slight panic attack. The drive took less than five minutes to pull up in much-too-large, brick facility with a warehouse entrance opened to an active construction team buzzing in and out like a hive of bees. Google suggested the location was previously a bread factory that had gone under a year ago. But the square footage indicated by the blue prints was ridiculously oversized. What on earth had she gotten herself into?

As they pulled up front, Frederick--and who in the world names their child something that pretentious--was at her door in scarcely a handful of seconds, offering her an arm. Accepting gingerly, the omega stepped out of the car and looked at the workmen bustling around carrying paint cans, boxes of tile, and power tools.

"Miss Smoak, I did tell you I would be seeing you soon."

And there was Malcolm Merlyn approaching from the maw of the beast, giving her breathing complications in his impeccably tailored navy suit and plum tie knotted artfully at his throat.

"I suppose you did," her pulse went nuclear as the alpha stepped into her space and tucked her hand under his elbow, and ushered her into the building without so much as a by-your-leave. Brain short-circuiting, Felicity could only nod dumbly as he asked her if she read over the contract and found the proposed salary fair.

"Now," they were inside now, ducking and weaving around workers carrying all sorts of materials down a hallway. "I'm sure you would like to have more details about what kind of work you would be doing if you choose to accept."

Turning the corner, he leader her into what appeared to have been the main floor of the factory with conveyor belts, ovens, and leftover plastic wrap littering the floor.

"Don't worry about this," she felt his hand pat hers reassuringly, but it merely came her heart the go ahead to beat erratically. "Assuming you hand in your two weeks notice with Queen
Consolidated after our conversation, I've hired a literal army of men to have this place completely
unrecognizable. I would have started from scratch, but the stonework on the outside is in remarkably
elegant condition and will make a perfect foundation frame and save us a lot of time."

"But why would an IT expert require this much space?" The omega asked dumbly, somehow certain the answer was going to be ridiculously extravagant.

"They wouldn't." Malcolm released his grip on her arm, much to her disappointment, stretching out a hand as if touch alone could make an idea tangible. "But the new head scientist for Merlyn Global Group's brand new applied sciences division will need space for her projects, wouldn't you agree?"

"I don't think I'm qualified for this," the whispered denial leaves her internally screaming. An offer like this is once in a lifetime for someone like her. "I'm really good with computers, but what you're asking here is crazy! I'm not a biology expert or a lot of things experts!"

"Your university projects were ground breaking in information technology but somehow never garnered the attention they deserved," Malcolm prompted her. "Why do you suppose that is?"

Okay he had done a background check on her? In a way that could be understandable but it was also incredibly creepy to think someone had investigated her so thoroughly. But on the other hand, a salary like that probably came with an invasive price tag.

"I just assumed that--"

"Stop right there," the alpha dictated, still looking attractive even if the order did ruffle her feathers. "The saying about assumptions is absolutely correct, particularly in this case. The government has employed your little information project in some of its major overseas projects."

"What?" Definite news to her and boy a violation of that level diminished the impact of Malcolm's little background check by a tremendous degree. "How can they do that? Do you know how many hours it took to piece write the coding and test the connective threading! My social life took a nosedive during that period of time. So, where do they get off ripping me off like that?"

"Your professor sold it to the CIA for a pretty price I'm told," the CEO appeared sympathetic as her jaw dropped in shocked outrage. "But the point is, you are more than capable of developing technology and advancing the future. I'm going to provide you with the resources and you are going to do extraordinary things Felicity Smoak. And this time, the credit will all be yours."

Wrangling in her temper was difficult; learning her doddering old professor had stolen her work to make an extra buck smarted in ways she had not expected. But the opportunity to create based on a whim was incredibly appealing.

"Am I going to have a team?" She felt like Cinderella as she looked around the room at the different things, her dreams about to come true with a wave of the alpha's corporate wand.

"Since this is a new venture for the company," Malcolm explained, rubbing his palms together. "My son Oliver will be working with you on project ideas, but the board of directors has only given us the go ahead for the space and the two of you for now. And the company would like our initial product something simple that can help the police or our deployed military forces in a simple, integral way. And preferably something we can mass-produce with little difficulty."

"So, not quite creative licence," she was unable to conceal her disappointment.

"For this first project, we need to get the applied sciences division on it's feet," Malcolm
acknowledged her point. "But if we can immediately begin making money out of the gate with a military or city contract, you will have your creative licence, Felicity. And if you can get the ball rolling, I'll allow you to hand pick a team of your choice to work on whatever you want. We just need that opening piece of equipment to open the door."

"This has to be some bizarre dream," she accuses the other man, still gaping at the space around them. But ideas, sure, she has loads of them. And apparently loads of money to develop them if she can create something marketable.

"Let's go have a nice dinner at one of my favorite Mexican restaurants and we'll eat chips, let you calm down a little, and then you can ask all the questions you want."

"I think I'd like that," she replies, feeling her ears burn as he leads her out.

After escorting Felicity home, Malcolm glanced at his watch and waited until the timing was perfect. Donning his League uniform, he scaled the side of the building until he was level with the omega's apartment balcony. Briskly setting to work, he let himself into the blonde's apartment, unsurprised to find her curled up on her couch staring dreamily into space.

Such a useful little thing; highly intelligent, gorgeous, and rather endearing. Malcolm felt a hint of regret that he was forced to drug her, but no matter.

"Felicity," he knelt before the vacant eyed blonde and took one of her hands in his own and rubbed her knuckles lightly. "I need you to do something for me now."

"Anything you want," she murmured, sitting up to nuzzle against his shoulder blade. "I like your smell."

Body reacting to her proximity, the alpha shifted away and plunked his personal laptop before the dreamy blonde.

"Felicity, there's something I need you to do for me."

Strands of seaweed and white foam coated the flour-white sand of Langkawi's beautiful coastal beach. Groups of milling children constructed sand villages with extensive moats, people of all ages frolicked in and out of the water for a refreshing cool-off, and resort pavilions assembled a rainbow of colorful umbrellas for tourists to relax with a glass of refreshing lemonade.

It was a unique brand of paradise lacking only the isolation of a deserted island. Seeing the happiness blossoming across the multitudes, Slade Wilson had no difficulty believing this place meant "the land of wishes." After all, today was when he set the groundwork for making his wish come true.

The Australian wistfully fingered the obsidian talisman dangling from a silver chain. The leather had long since worn away and though it pained him to alter the gift in any manner, the risk of loosing the arrowhead, that his omega had painstakingly crafted, was no option.

"I'm glad you kept it."

"I'll never part with it," Slade promised the shade matching him stride for stride as they reached the overlook destination. Leaning against the railing, seagulls chirped at the onlookers vying
for a snack. But today he had no eyes for others. Today was for another purpose.

Seated in the shade thirty paces off the shore, a woman with honey blonde hair sat drying from her afternoon swim in a functional black bikini, nibbling on a strawberry offered by long, tanned digits. Like the night to the blonde's day, the woman was caramel skinned, brunette, and predatory to her companion's doleful gaze. Wedged beneath their towels, his trained eye identified a pair of weapons on the women. At least they had not been foolish enough to vacation completely unarmed.

"She looks happy," the toneless observation could have been misinterpreted as simple commentary, if not for the derisive twist to the bearded lips.

"I would have enjoyed sitting on the beach with you, Slade," the heated, if somehow wistful baritone remarked as he stepped close. So close that the alpha could nearly believe his dead lover might actually touch him this time. "As a matter of fact, we had a lot of plans. It seems unfair that she got the happily ever after when it's her fault that we never had ours."

"She will pay for taking you and Shado from me," Slade assured the unsettled spectre, tugging a glock free of his jacket and taking rapid aim, heedless to the distressed stirrings of the nearby civilians. As intended, the bullet embedded itself in the dark haired woman's shoulder blade, a painful but not lethal shot.

The woman reacted like a warrior, ignoring her pain and instantly tackling the blonde to the ground, carrying her from Slade's sight. The agent could admire the other woman's determination and regretted the woman's choice in a lover. It would be a bittersweet moment when the time came to take her life.

"Quit messing around," his omega growled at him. "They're going to get away!"

Breaking into a dead run, the ASIS agent barreled through the sea of tourists lining the lane to the beach cafe, aware that local authorities would arrive on the scene--far too late--in approximately four minutes. Diving and weaving through the crowd, the unmistakable blonde hair called to Slade like a siren song, directing the big man after his prey.

"She's going to get away." Oliver's voice hissed in his ear, a constant companion even when the alpha could not perceive him.

"She won't!" He swore.

Shoving a slow to move bystander into a stand of snow cones, Slade heard the distant hollering of Malaysian police. Turning down an alleyway, the agent scaled drain pipe and raced across the rooftops, make frequent leaps to span the distance between buildings in order to reach the fleeing women's destination ahead of them. The brunette's wound would hinder them just enough for Slade to ambush them ahead of their escape route out of the country.

Landing on the ragged aluminum roof panelling of the League's private escape route, Slade smirked when the pair of women entered his vision.

Got you, bitch.

Timing his leap, he threw himself over the edge and crashed into the pair of women. Instantly, the brunette drew a sword and sliced into Slade's upper arm, disbelief spreading over her face as the blade of her sword came away bent. Smirking, he elbowed her in the sternum, a satisfying crack resonating even as a blow to the back sent him stumbling with the tickle of its force.
"Now, that almost hurt."

Turning, he gleefully took in Sara Lance's horrified expression.

"You're dead!"

"Clearly I'm not," he mocked her, kicking out only for the girl to use that fancy stick of hers to block the movement. "Looks like you learned a few tricks during your time with the League. Did they teach you to take responsibility for your actions as well?"

"Run!"

A pair of arms wrapped themselves around his neck. Instinctually, he threw himself backward, clawing at the insect clinging to his back.

"Nyssa!" The Lance bitch rushed toward him, swinging her pole at his unguarded abdomen. Grunting as the steel dented with the blow, he finally managed to fist his hair in the wad of silky, dark tresses and gave a ruthless tug. There was a reason he kept his hair cropped so short and this would be the reason.

His hostage refused to whimper as he wrapped his hands around her neck in a perfect vise.

"Uh, uh, uh," he tutted, petting the other woman's silky hair with patient gentleness. "Wouldn't want me to do something we'll both regret, now do you, Sara? Or is it Ta-er al Safar now? Doesn't really matter. But what I can't figure out is why an organization that demands a zealous sort of loyalty for their leader, would allow someone that has betrayed people over and over again to become one of them."

"She is no traitor," the pretentious little hostage sniped at him. Rolling his eyes, Slade gripped the other woman tighter, making it a struggle to draw air. Hopefully that ought to keep her quiet.

"I did not kill Oliver and Shado!" The blonde screamed, chest heaving sporadically beneath the swim wrap. "Please, Slade. Let her go and kill me."

"Don't kill her," Oliver snorted, walking to stand by the blonde. "Death would be too easy now. She doesn't understand what it is to lose her family. She took us away from you, it only seems fair that she gets to experience the same."

"Sara, death is far too simple for you at this juncture. But don't worry, when this is all over, I'll be happy to ease your suffering."

The choked sob from the blonde followed by the panicky whimpers from the crumbling assassin in front of him satisfied him utterly. Tightening his hands, explosive powder drowned his vision in black and a few timed blade strikes caused him to grunt and drop his limp prey to the ground.

The sound of two pairs of booted feet landing on the concrete tingled his senses as he stumbled to his feet. Charging through the smoke, Slade swore at the empty area, unsheathing his sword and sprinting into the ramshackle hangar.

The plane door was already in motion and Sara was poised at the exit, pulling in the hatch. Extending his sword in her direction, he called out after her.

"Run while you can, Sara! I'll find you!"
"Consider it done," the priggish voice acknowledged from the end of the line. "But don't hang up yet."

Quelling the urge to chuck the phone off a bridge, he forced himself to continue packing his gear. "Well?"

"Does the name Oliver Queen ring any bells?"

"What kind of game are you playing?" the alpha snaps at the man, glancing at the dangerously flickering shade observing him from across the bed.

"Good grief you need to get laid," the operative huffs. "I was just wondering because they pulled him off Lian Yu a couple weeks ago. You know.. that same hellhole you were rescued from."

"What?"

Never in his life had Slade Wilson experienced such agony, like a man slowly being slowly flayed layer by layer. Hope was such a dangerous emotion that lurked in the shadows preying on a man's weakness. And here was Slade's kryptonite.

Ripping open the lid to his laptop, the state of the art piece of equipment's screen booted to life. A few rapid key entries later and the assassin's throat had seized; his omega's shoulder length hair was replaced with an almost military style hair cut and fitter than ever, but his eyes even from a picture looked world weary."

God, Kid.. how could you have been there all this time? How did you survive?

"Change of plans...get me a lift to Starling City within the next day and I'll double our agreed amount."

"You got a deal, DS!" The cocky little prick responded before dial tone met his ear.

Glancing again at the computer screen, he skimmed the first three articles offered by google news. They were hardly informative pieces, but they all painted the same picture: Oliver is alive.

The ghost seemed less solid, more translucent now and like a stone settling at the bottom of the river, Slade stepped away from the reticent spirit.

"You're alive so I won't need you anymore."

"You will," Oliver's image morphed; the features smoothed, the hair darkened, and the eyes became sharper and the vestiges of sanity were shuttered away by Shado's smooth, even tones. "After all, Oliver will need our protection now more than ever. And when the Canary returns to Starling, we'll be waiting."

Chapter End Notes
Author's Note: As usual, thank you to my readers for your support and your comments always mean a lot to me.
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: I do not own DC Comics or Arrow, I just write about them.

Author's Note: For the record, I love all the Arrow characters, but AU means things happen.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

After the previous night, she had been absolutely bushed. But a little exhaustion did not stop her brother from rousing her at the crack of dawn, looking disgustingly wide eyed and bushy tailed. Growling like a disgruntled cat she dislodged the cocoon of blankets and stretched languidly. A sharp thrust to the gut drew her fully alert at the pile of clothes in her hands.

Thea Queen wanted to crawl back under the covers and go to sleep, but her brother's giddy smile in combination a genuinely content scent stayed her hand. Today could be the first step toward rekindling the strained relationship between her brother and her. Under the circumstances, the alpha was prepared to bend a little and go the distance.

Slipping into a plain lead colored t-shirt and loose fitting pair of sweats, Thea stumbled down the stairs, somehow avoiding her fox eared mother, only to be ushered into a car with a bottle of water and a piece of toast pressed into her hands.

Off they drove, Thea's internal clock protested the pre-dawn state while mechanically chewing on bland toast. Before the alpha knew it, the car pulled up outside Tommy Merlyn's apartment and her brother disappeared while she had a sip of her yucky, tepid water, before returning less than four minutes later, practically tossing his stunned best friend into their backseat. The snippy male looked utterly edible wearing nothing but sweats and a shirt rumpled from several hours of sleep; Tommy's ruffled, midnight mane lacked its typical gelled state and looked particularly edible to her eyes. Straightening, she halted that train of thought before it could leave the station.

"Well good morning to you guys too," the billionaire scion groaned from the backseat miserably, smacking Oliver's seat. "If you told me where we were going, I don't remember. But why do we need to be up this early?"

"Because there is no time like the present," her brother chirped like a content songbird. "And besides, you're both up and rearing to go."

"Speak for yourself."

Hearing her brother's laughter was like a balm to her broken heart. Yes, she could endure a few rude awakenings if it meant she would come to know what happiness was like.

Five minutes out from Tommy's apartment, Oliver pulled the car to a building lit up like a Christmas tree in the middle of the night. Bright lamps, workers like ants on the go, and even a paint crew working on the outside of the recycled building.

Not bothering to wait, her brother sprung from the car, beckoning them to follow.
Swearing she was going to regret this later, Thea unbuckled her seatbelt, hearing the grumbling in
the back signifying that he was doing the same. The pair of them stepped outside and followed the
blonde as he lead them inside.

"What are we doing?" Merlyn reluctantly followed, looking as if his boots were growing
heavier with each step they took, navigating the sea of construction workers.

"Trust me," Oliver remarked, eyeing his best friend with a mischievous glint that made
Thea feel more than slightly uneasy. "He's waiting for us."

If Tommy's clenched jaw was anything to go by, he knew who her brother was referring
to. They stopped at a wall with side entrance that definitely could not be considered up to code. A
rickety flight of squeaky stairs with absolutely no handrails lead to the utter opposite of the plastic
coated walls.

The subfloor room had a mini training centre with a set up like nothing she had seen in
anything other than television. The floor was expertly covered in costly tatami mats covering the
extensive space and divided into sections; an open floor space with racks of what appeared to be
practice weapons, practice dummies and targets in the far corner, training bars and equipment in
another corner with a lot of things she had no clue as to their purpose, and a tiny desk in the far
corner of the room.

Strangest of all, Malcolm Merlyn, one of her father's old friends, crossed the room to greet
them dressed in a robe? The expected ease that the deceptively easygoing alpha greeted them with
immediately set off Thea's spidey senses, but she had yet to have an opportunity to bring it up as her
jubilant brother greeted Tommy’s dad in a strangely relaxed manner and the older man promptly lead
the trio inside and gave them the grand tour of the training equipment and the small bathroom that
somehow included a full shower with fluffy black towels.

After the pleasantries lulled them into a false sense of security, her brother set a bowl of
water on a table and the female alpha knew the true meaning of hell.

"You know, when you told Mom we were going to train together, this was not exactly
what I thought you meant," Thea crossed her arms, glaring into her blurry reflection in her fifth bowl
of water sitting in front of her. "But sure, I'll smack water while Tommy get's to attack a giant,
padded pole."

A few solid thumps and a bare-chested Tommy peeked his head from around his position,
wiping his damp forehead with the back of his arm. "This takes way more out of you than I
thought," the older alpha huffed. "I've only been at this for thirty minutes and I'm already sore.
Wanna trade?"

"I'd love to," Thea moved to stand up only for her brother to shoot her down with a look.
"Or I can just hit this water again." Striking it as hard as she could, droplets splattered across the tarp
that her brother thoughtfully placed in her water area, successfully hitting Oliver's bare foot.

"We're going to train for three hours today," Oliver adopted a commanding tone that
mirrored the presence of military drill officers. "You guys keep doing what you're doing for now and
you'll trade after you finish the first hour."

"Lucky me," Thea grunted, still thinking this was stupid but going along with it for now.
Slapping the water one more time, the remaining water sloshed out and the alpha reluctantly picked
up the hose, Malcolm had thoughtfully brought from the bathroom, and refilled the bowl. "What
exactly is the point of this anyway? I get what Tommy is doing... kind of, but why am I doing this?
And why aren't you doing anything?"

"You're strength training," her brother informed her gently, bending down to lift a long metal rod. "And trust me, I'll be getting to work in a minute."

"Turn your hips more Tommy," the patience of an experienced teacher radiated from the older alpha as he placed a guiding hand on his son's hip. "And use the strength from the ground beneath your feet. That is the source of your ability."

"Thanks," Tommy's lack of a snappy retort was its own eyebrow raiser. It was common knowledge between the kids that Malcolm and Tommy never got on, but after observing the two of them together, Thea saw a pair of stubborn mules mend their fences: she felt hope.

A thunderous clang resounded just as her hand struck the water. Thea never felt the droplets, hit her already damp pants, but her mouth fell open in shock and she covered her mouth with her palm to silence any noise. Oliver was hanging from a thick silver rod, muscles rippling and bulging as he climbed the salmon ladder by what appeared to be force of will alone. The clangs with the Olympian level strength training should have been an awe-inspiring moment, but bare skin held a nasty little secret that drowned the glory of the omega's prowess.

Scars everywhere; burn patches, wrinkled patches of flesh from god knows what, short white lines, long white lines, and dark, jagged patches of flesh that clearly were potentially lethal injuries. If she had been angry last night, it was nothing like grief infused fury that slipped over her now. This had to be it. It had to be the source of the trauma her brother was going through.

It hit Thea like a freight train.

"You weren't alone," the words tumbled out, drawing looks from all three in the room. One startled. One intent. One appraising. "Someone fucking did that to you!" Thea abandoned the water bowl and tore up the ground in her rush to make it to her brother, who dropped down from his climb, smelling apprehensive and tense. Stopping short of physical violence, she pressed a finger beneath one of the messier looking abdominal wounds. "And you lived through this and came back looking like we should send you off to compete in fitness competitions, so someone must have helped you! Someone must have saved you. What happened? And don't you dare lie to me, Ollie."

Nose picking up the proximity of the two other alphas, she ignored them in favor of the panicked expression on her brother's face. The roar in the back of her mind still wanted to hit someone, but she managed to lock it down for the time being.

"You're right Thea," but the response came from the source that continued to make less sense with each interaction. "Oliver was not alone on Lian Yu. He was tortured."

It was what she expected, but the blow still felt like a punch in the gut. Blinking rapidly to suppress her tears, they came all the same. Sniffing, she knocked away the arm that tried to wrap around her in a protective cocoon.

"Don't touch me," the growl was defensive even if there was little heat behind it. "How did you get away?"

"There were people on the island with me," Oliver's voice was clear as a bell, but still sounded lost to time. "A lot of bad people, but a couple good ones. They kept me alive and helped me become something else."

"What happened to them?" Tommy's voice interjected, laced with curiosity.
"I don't want to talk about it," Oliver's reply was rich with regret and Thea wiped the last of the moisture from her eyes. "Maybe someday I'll be ready to tell you about them, but not today."

"Okay Ollie," Thea conceded as her brother visibly shutdown in front of her, a sorrow like no other swelling inside her as her protective instincts reacted to her brother's pain.

Numbly, Thea swung an arm around her brother, rubbing her cheek against his for a moment before releasing him and returning to the bowl of water. She still wanted nothing more than to hurl the thing against the wall, but instead she refilled the bowl and viciously smashed the placid surface. Over and over and over again. Until Malcolm's guiding arms moved her to the practice dummy that she attacked viciously with her arms and legs over and over and over again.

Time passed in slow motion and Thea felt tension slip away as the target dummy became an outlet for her rage. It may have helped to listen to Tommy whine every time he refilled the water slapping bowl, but each strike against the dummy was another victory against one of the faceless opponents that tortured her brother. Inwardly, she vowed to herself then and there that no one would ever harm her brother like that again. Ever.

After two more hours of crude and unusual punishment, Thea collapsed to the ground in a pile of human jelly, prepared to enter a deep and satisfying coma. A short distance away, she could hear Tommy wheezing in a squat near the wall, her brother teasing him lightly.

Malcolm reappeared in a full suit looking sweat free and refreshed, appearing utterly nonchalant as if the alpha had not been engaged in a stick battle with her brother scarcely ten minutes ago that left Tommy and her gaping.

"Oliver, you need to wrap this up here if you don't want to be late."

Weird became weirder.

Thea's body may have quit on her, but her hearing was sharper than ever, enabling her to catch the low toned exchange between Tommy and her brother.

"Is dad taking you to the courthouse?"

"He is," Oliver's voice sounded reassuring. "I wanted to thank you for coming with us this morning. I enjoyed having you here and I know he did too. And... do you mind driving Thea home if I leave you the keys."

"Don't worry, I'll get Speedy home safe and sound." Thea frowned, disturbed by the morning's revelations in general but uneasy with missing the elephant that was clearly in the room. But she was nothing if not tenacious and if Oliver was not going to offer up a confession, she could find easier prey.

In a flash, her brother was next to her sliding an arm under her shoulders, dragging her into a sitting position.

"Tommy's gonna make sure you get home." God her brother was a control freak. "But I wanted to tell you how amazing you were today. I think you're progressing much quicker than I did when I was away."

It was a barely a tidbit of information, but Thea gobbled it up like the tasty treat it was. "Slapping water was definitely not how I pictured my morning, but I can truly say I got a good work out."
"See ya, Speedy!" Oliver brushed his lips over her sweaty brow, radiating contentment before rising and disappearing into the small bathroom off to the side.

Rising to her feet, Thea jumped, swearing as Malcolm Merlyn appeared out of nowhere, extending a bag toward her. Snatching it with muttered thanks, Thea did not bother concealing exactly how creepy she thought the dominant alpha's little act was, mildly disappointed that the older man appeared utterly unaffected.

Gingerly peeking at the contents of the bag, she grimaced at the folded set of clothes that just had to be her least favorite options and not her best looking colors.

"Oliver anticipated that you may want to change your clothes."

"Thanks," Thea took the pile from him, unable to resist quenching her inquisitive nature intermingled with a not-so-subtle jab at the older man. "You know, you and Ollie seem a little bit close. Which is odd because I don't remember you being particularly close with Tommy let alone my brother. If you think you're dating him, I promise you that isn't going to happen."

"While I appreciate your misguided attempt at threatening me," something distinctively feral and outside the parameters of normal lit up the other man's face. "Oliver is in absolutely no danger from me. In fact, it's rather the opposite. But as to the nature of our relationship, all I'm willing to tell you is that your hypothesis is incredibly wrong. I'm sure we'll see you again soon, Thea."

Oliver chose that moment to reappear in a dress shirt and grey suit that accented his athletic frame. He half waved in her direction before crossing toward the exit, Malcolm a pace behind the omega herding him up the stairs.

"Do you want to go for breakfast?"

The phrase was deliberately hopeful, and Thea tossed Tommy a pleading glance, allowing her eyes to widen. The brunette's initial dialogue of excuses wilted under the patent Queen gaze and he nodded briskly.

A change of clothes, one messy pony tail later, and a short drive brought them to a semi-respectable diner that had a few red-eyed customers wolfing down hangover platters and senior citizen clientele gossiping over steaming mugs of caffeine.

An overworked waitress with dark rings under her eyes feigned a cheery smile and offered them ice waters and plastic menus to peruse. It took Thea five seconds flat to decide on basic eggs, bacon, toast and hash browns as her appetite returned with a vengeance from the first whiff of cooked bacon.

"So," Thea allowed Tommy fall into a false sense of security, waiting a few minutes for the brunette to finish checking his emails. "Is your dad having sex with Oliver!"

"What!" Who knew Tommy Merlyn's voice could elevate to such a high pitch? This girl! "No!"

"Then explain to me how my brother suddenly became so chummy with your father of all people!" She leaned across the table, palms flat on the surface, refusing to back down. "He's been home a couple weeks and the pair of them interacting like that makes zero sense. So, you come out and tell me where your asshole father gets off banging my brother when he just gets home!"

"No, they're not," the other alpha's posture slumps and he swallows uncomfortably, looking around as if someone were prepared to spring out of the ground and attack him. "Look, it's
"Then explain it to me," she challenged him. "And preferably not some bogus story, about why your dad is training and spending time with my brother."

The waitress showed up at that precise moment and she got to enjoy watching Tommy Merlyn scramble to figure out something to say. Thea rattled off her well-prepared order and Tommy's face blanched momentarily until he managed an order of pancakes and bacon.

"Still waiting, Merlyn."

"Look," Tommy buried his face in his hands. "I just found out about this myself and I haven't even begun to wrap my head around this. We shouldn't even be discussing this!"

Wrapping her knuckles on the table, Thea growled. "Grow a knot already and tell me what's going on with my brother!"

"That's just it!" Tommy whispered, defeat in his posture like a soldier about to be executed. "Apparently he's my brother too."

Like a star going supernova, memories exploded outward and Thea struggled to maintain an even expression as she connected the dots. For an instant, the face of Robert Queen took shape in her mind before she callously abandoned the dead in favor of saving the living. Her brother's peculiar disappearance and the bizarre interaction between Oliver and their mother: the pieces fit. Oliver obviously discovered their mother was lying and turned to his biological parent for support. And the real kicker was, the omega seemed so at ease with the CEO.

"So he found out the other day?"

"No," Tommy admitted quietly, worrying his lip while exuding a disgusting amount of pheromones. "The Chinese ran Oliver's DNA and they contacted my dad instead of your mother. And he went to China and brought Oliver back. It's just...they decided he would just go home with your mother."

"If that's true," Thea said, something out of place. "Then why did Ollie take off and not return any of our calls for all those days?"

"I'm not answering that," Tommy said, settling back into a mulish pose with a pair of crossed arms that made the resemblance to Oliver all the more uncanny. "Oliver's reason for taking off like that is not for me to share, but I want you to know he did have a legitimate reason. You're just not going to hear that sort of thing for me."

Ominous. How many times could her world be turned inside out, upside down, and otherwise demolished? A lie of this magnitude caused her to question everything she previously believed about her mom and dad. And by Tommy's omission, there was a trial by fire yet to come.

"Hear are your breakfasts. Let me know if you need anything else."

The waitress deposited a couple plates of steaming food in front of them, and stalked off before they could so much as make a request.

"I just can't believe all this," Thea spilled, twirling her fork into her egg, ravenous in spite of herself. Maybe she really was a stress eater; in any case, famished was her middle name! "Oliver is stranded for five years on an island, tortured, and is apparently a viable contender for Top Fighter. And then his whole world is turned upside down again before he even makes it home. I'm just... I am
so, so sick of everything happening to him. I hate it."

"Yeah I know what you mean," Tommy remarked, chewing on a piece of toast and taking a hearty swallow of juice. "I don't know how Oliver's still as sane as he is after going through all of that. Maybe my dad is helping him with that though... you should have seen what they did to the living room."

"Can't be any worse than me taking a baseball bat to the windows," Thea mutters.

"You? When was this?"

"Last night," Thea mumbles, wolfing down her second slice of bacon. "It's how I got recruited for our little training regime."

"I guess it's a week for home repairs then," Tommy actually laughs, the flesh around his eyes crinkling with amusement.

"I suppose you might be right," Thea muses fingering the bill the waitress left for them. "Guess since we're both stupid rich it really doesn't matter who pays for this. But I'm gonna do it anyway...since you're apparently related to me."

"Indirectly!" Tommy insisted, snatching the bill out of her hand before she can react and jogging to the register.

"So, my brother's a Queen and a Merlyn. We should have made him pay."

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Explosions were small fry in the lives of special forces operatives. Tools of the trade to distract, divert, or kill a target. Explosive devices were daily points of training exercises in ASIS units. Their use and function rapidly became another area of expertise for Slade, merely another tool of the trade.

Now all of the alpha's experience left him vulnerable to panic as bomb's burst in spirals of grit and dirt. Ahead of him, darting like a deer through the forest, his mate zigzagged around the smoking holes scattered in the vicinity of their makeshift home. Toward Shado.

The ground rocked beneath their feet, tremors racing through their body up and outward. And his body that he trained for thousands of hours, betrayed him in his most desperate hour. Oliver, darting between spurts of erupting earth, persistently managed to put just a little more distance between them, carrying him further and further out of sight.

"Oliver! Oliver!" Over and over he called, the vibration of his screams drowned in the litany of the bombardment. In battle, pain was an inevitable foe that crept up on its target when least expected: a blast threw the alpha skyward, eating away at his flesh until the pain was all he knew accompanied by a profound sense of loss. Oxygen escaped his lungs as his back made contact with an unyielding surface, dragging him into unconsciousness.

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"One birth control flower coming up!"

Slade tossed the lavender petal bloom in Oliver's direction, a distracting flash of forearm catching it with a huffy snort.
"If you weren't so fixated on my ass, I wouldn't need it."

"Trust me, sweetheart. I'm not the one begging for it during your heats."

"And you think spending three of them together makes you an expert?"

"Absolutely!"

Pinned to the ground, the pair wriggled out of their pants and came together with a quick, harsh stream of pants that left them both delightfully breathless.

Lost in the daydream of distant yesterdays, reality proved itself a harsh mistress as the joy of remembering was overtaken by present day confrontation about to take place. Restraint was a skill set that deteriorated along the trail of hardship and definitely lacked advocates after all he had done and all he had seen. Somehow, he would have to master the forsaken skill it before this lunch with his mother turned ugly quickly.

Opening his eyes to the comfy, retro diner, Oliver folded his hands on the table and listened for the bell announcing the comings and goings of downtown customers. Bubbling coffee wafted in the background, saturating the air with its distinctive aroma. Framed pictures of model cars hung above each cherry red booth, with chess board black and white squares covering the floors.

A waiter in a themed white dress shirt with the cuffs rolled up to expose the thick forearms accompanied by an openly flirtatious smile that bordered into the territory of unprofessional that Oliver shut down with polite but disinterested body language.

"Hi my name is Jason, and I'll be your server today." The overly forward beta retreated into a mask of professionalism. "Can I get you something to drink while you're waiting?"

"An iced tea would be perfect, thank you."

"No problem, I'll get that for you right away."

A family of five passed his table, a harried looking honey blonde omega with a wispy curled infant strapped to her chest, followed by a tall, Hispanic woman with gorgeous spirals of dark hair. Identical boys wearing matching plaid shirts overtop their jeans paused to grin at him cheekily, one pausing in his march to extend a chubby finger in his direction.

"You're a boy too!" The tot declared it proudly, flashing his miniature teeth Oliver's direction as if he had just blurted out the secrets of the universe.

"I sure am." The cherub burst into a fit of giggles and he caved to his hormones, smiling ridiculously wide in return.

"Ethan!" The alpha barked causing the boy to jump a foot in the air like a Looney Toon character as the woman set her tanned arms on her hips. "Come on, when we say it's time to go, it's time to go."

"Bye, bye." The cheeky lad waved at the amused Oliver and skipped out of sight. A part of him wondered if Slade would ever have wanted children. After everything they had been through, perhaps it was better that the poster children for PTSD remained childless. Even if the thought of a miniature Slade running around made his hearth clench in ways better left unmentioned.

Automatically waving awkwardly to the boy's back, a subtle cough distracted him to where his mother and Walter stood in matching camel pea coats, the latter assisting his mother in
removing her own.

"I was surprised you didn't put up more of a fight when I asked you to meet us for lunch," Moira reprimanded him in a gentle, condescending manner that an outsider would easily mistake for simple teasing.

Not to be drawn in by the obvious ploy, Oliver just smiled benignly as his mother and Walter took their seats across from him.

Server Jason returned in the nick of time with a dashing smile and Oliver's iced tea that he accepted with a grateful nod. Gulping down a quick sip of his drink, Oliver utilized the beverage order to sneak a quick peek at his texts, shooting a coded three letter reply to his father. Tucking it away, he resumed the facade of nonchalant, playboy son for inspection. His hopes for delaying the inevitable round of questions were stonewalled by the parents requesting two orders of the daily lunch special.

"I'll just have the fish and chips please."

"I'll go put those orders in folks. And I'll be back with your drinks in a jiffy."

The pair wasted no time to go from friendly to open concern. Or rather, his mother pretended to be worried like one of Hollywood's greatest and brightest.

"Oliver." Surprise, surprise: Walter Steele braved the icebreaker moment. "Your mother and I are a bit concerned about you. I think we can all agree that your behavior since getting back is rather distant."

"And if that is a result of your experiences," his mother extends her hands toward his, causing him to reflexively flinch backward. Recoiling as if burned, Moira's face transformed into a perfect manifestation of sorrow that sickened the blonde with how deceptively caring it seemed to be. "Sweetheart we're just really worried here. I really feel that you could use some help."

"Look, I realize that things have not been going particularly well." Understatement of the century, but he needed to remain calm. "But I'm just fine. Thea and I are both going to be just fine."

"Well forgive me if I don't exactly believe that." Moira Queen's skeptical undertone revived the memories of his mother's betrayals. "Because you missed your court appearance to bring you back to life and you haven't been responding to our attempts to contact you. Oliver, something is clearly bothering you. So, please, just allow us to help you. Please."

"You might not be aware of this, Oliver," Walter interjected, looking so terribly earnest that Oliver felt guilty for ever imagining the other man could be involved in his mother's scheming. Even so, trust is a luxury he could not afford to risk with an outsider. "But your father was my best friend. And while I can never take his place, I care very deeply for both you and Thea. I want to be able to help you with whatever you need."

"This isn't about sex is it?" Mouth puckering like he had eaten a sour lemon, Oliver glanced at his mother in disbelief. "Because sweetheart, if you were in heat and are afraid to talk about it, I assure you that you would have nothing to be embarrassed about. Walter and I can introduce you to several suitable candidates for--"

"I can't do this." The words burst from his mouth like an erupting volcano, throwing down the proverbial gauntlet and stifling his mother's running commentary. "I can't keep pretending."

A baby wailed in the backdrop, a group of teens were snickering over their smart phones a
table up, and silverware clinked in the backdrop; still, a pervasive stillness lay over the family discussion like a plague that Oliver was becoming all too accustomed to.

Turning an apologetic eye to Walter, the omega sighed and filed away the kidnapping conversation for a rainy day.

"Mom, I know."

That facade of calm was absolutely flawless: his mother was the epitome of the perfect liar. If he had not overheard the conversation in question, her composure alone would have distracted him from the truth.

"Know what, Oliver?"

"I found out about Malcolm."

A crack in the armor and a flash of panic in his mother's eyes. Moira visibly swallowed and her breathing picked up for a pair of seconds before it was visually suppressed. Gotcha. Smirking in satisfaction, he leaned toward his mother, delighted that she shrank backward from him. Walter looked back and forth between the pair with a puzzled look.

"It's not what you think," the faintly choked plea fell on deaf ears. A little late for denials, mom.

"It's exactly what I think," the omega growled, stance shifting from complacent to aggressive in half a second. "I had a father. A real father that actually wants to get to know me! And you kept that from me, knowing how much that would have meant to me!"

Relief? Why did she look so relieved? Like a weight had been lifted from her shoulders, Moira Queen fell into a business battle stance and sat forward.

"Oliver, you're absolutely right," she conceded far too easily and Oliver waited for the punch line that was inevitably coming. "I chose not to tell you about Malcolm and I was wrong to do that."

"Malcolm Merlyn is Oliver's father?" The dumbfounded shock was rather priceless on the proper Englishmen and convinced the blonde to the other man's sincerity as his mother cleverly reached out to clasp her husband's fingers in an artful demonstration of a united front.

"Yes, Walter. Robert knew and the news didn't exactly agree with him, but I chose not to tell you. " She made eye contact with Oliver that he imagined was supposed to soften him to her plight. It failed. "Because at first Robert was a wonderful father and you were both inseparable. But by the time that changed, Malcolm had gone away after losing Rebecca and when he got back he wasn't the same person. He wasn't someone that I thought you should be around because he isn't stable."

Of course not, Oliver reasoned. Having someone you love taken from you changes your perception of the world and people in it. He himself could testify to that. And in the last few days, Malcolm had made remarkable progress with Tommy. And his mother's pathetic attempt to pass the buck to his father did nothing for improving his opinion of her.

"That's funny mom," Oliver stood up, flipped open his wallet, and dropped a twenty on the table. "Because the man you kept in my life hated me and didn't want me around. Malcolm wants me around! And Malcolm has been nothing but supportive of my relationship with you despite some well founded misgivings. Now, I have a job now so if you decide to cut off my trust fund, that's fine.
But I really don't want to talk to you right now."

"Oliver please just listen--!"

Slamming his fist into the table, the silverware rattled and a few drops of his drink sloshed to the tabletop. Pulling back, the looks of concern directed by nearby customers signalled it was time to make a hasty departure.

"Goodbye mom. Walter."

Excusing himself, he walked away without so much as a backward glance.

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Oliver had been what she considered to be a difficult baby. Constantly spitting up sour smelling milk, finicky every time his diaper became even slightly damp, and fussily refusing to nap unless he was dozing in somebody's arms in the rocking chair. At night, Moira had been compelled by a frustrated Robert to finally hire a night nanny to take over the hellish nightshift. In those moments, she often wondered if the tiny little omega instinctively searched for a scent he could not find, causing some of his sleep problems as some of the books on alpha/omega children suggested.

As her children grew, Moira had been aware of the shift in Robert's affections after discovering the truth the cheerful omega child. While not outright bastardizing Oliver, her son was forevermore treated as a black sheep and there had been nothing, short of leaving Robert, she could do to prevent her boy from being ostracized by the man he called father. On her darkest days, the beta wondered if she had been right in not telling Malcolm but she buried that notion along with Rebecca. When Merlyn returned from his sabbatical, brandishing plans for a scheme nothing short of diabolical, Moira had known she had made the right choice.

And now, the cost of silence seemed to be losing her son all over again if the lunchtime fiasco was anything to go by.

In a perfect world, Malcolm would become a protective, perfect father figure that would do anything to protect his children, but in all Moira's dealings with the treacherous snake, she had no doubt the other man would kill both his sons to accomplish his goals.

On top of her mistrustful son, she now had to contend with Walter prying into the missing funds she used to salvage the Queen's Gambit. If Walter and therefore Malcolm discovered the boat, Oliver would be in even more danger than he already was.

Picking up the phone, Moira dialed mastermind for all of the Queen family woes, bile tickling her throat with each ring.

"Hello Moira. I've been expecting your call."

"We had a deal, Malcolm," she remarked angrily. "If I cooperate, you leave my family alone."

"I rather imagine that discovering you kept my son a secret from me renders that particular part of our agreement void, don't you think?"

"He almost died because of you!"

"No," the feral roar had her backpedaling nonsensically into a wall as she held the phone. "He almost died because of you! Because you never told me the truth! But I would keep in mind just
how far I'm willing to go if I even suspect you're attempting to derail our plan. Keep your head
down, Moira. It really is the best for all concerned."

   Moira fell to her knees as the dial tone went flat, hand over her mouth as she cried in
despair.

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   What a day. Training with Tommy and Thea, meeting a judge privately to return from the
dead, and a disastrous meeting with his mother. Oliver was practically vibrating with the need to
prowl the rooftops with his trusty bow.

   A pair of shared texts and a quick trip to the Merlyn Applied Sciences building had the
father son duo discussing the next step of their plans.

   "The training area we established downstairs is for our use, but the room won't be listed on
any official documentation from blueprints to work orders. As a base of operations, it will not
officially exist and the only way to access the area will be through a trapdoor in your office. This
temporary exit will be completely sealed after they finish the private entry."

   "And what stops the construction teams from spilling the beans?"

   "The overseas contractors I've hired to work on the building specialize in covert operations
facilities. They may be charging exorbitant prices off the books, but the results are going to be
everything we wanted and more," the alpha rattled off the details like it was a recipe for a particularly
delicious dessert. "And I've hired someone that should be invaluable to developing useful tools for
special operations. Felicity Smoak handed in her two week notice to Queen Consolidated this
morning. She will be the new director of Merlyn Global's Applied Sciences Division."

   "What exactly is my cover role for the company?" Oliver found himself more than just a
bit dubious about the whole thing. "I hardly think a less than stellar high school graduate who never
had the chance to attend a higher education facility is qualified to oversee scientific discoveries."

   "I think you're selling yourself just a little bit short," Malcolm chastised him, opening up
the computer files for tonight's project. "I think coming up with an idea is just as important as
implementing the necessary skills to produce one. But one of your main tasks will be testing any and
all prototypes and reporting your findings back to the company. And... any prototypes developed
should be field tested anyway... wouldn't you say?"

   "That sounds a bit more up my alley," he grins. "So, now that Thea and Tommy are going
to be training with us, what exactly are we going to tell them?"

   "Before you surprised me by bringing Thea," Malcolm pulled up the Bertinelli file and
shot a look at his son. "I was thinking we might have considered telling Tommy, but your sister has
put us in a bit of a tough spot."

   Since learning Malcolm was his father, Oliver had never experienced the grade of coldness
Tommy had depicted in his stories of the man's glacial personality. If anything, it felt like a gap had
magically materialized, dividing the omega from his father. After establishing a parental bond with
Malcolm, he was reluctant to permit distance between the one person in the world he could trust and
the person that he grew closer to each and every day.

   "Hey," he dropped his hand on the older man's shoulder, dropping to his knees with a light
thud and pressing his cheek against the wool covered thigh, in a position of trust. Oliver could still remember curling up for the last time against Robert as the biological parental craving called to all alpha and omega youngsters experiencing a need for reassurance. To this day, he recalled how painful Robert's rejection had been as a small boy.

Drawing in a deep breath, the omega basked in the paternal presence, mutely pleading with the alpha not to deny him. A breath later, a hand descended to card through his spikey hair and Oliver sighed hoarsely, nosing his father's thigh. "I know I should have told you I was bringing Thea. I just knew she needed me and I thought you would understand that."

With his own apology forthcoming, the elegant fingers tightened in his hair once before smoothing his scalp soothingly as the chasm between them disintegrated. "And you were right to give her the help. She is so incredibly protective of you Oliver. I'm happy you have her in your life."

"Thanks Dad," he nuzzled against the hand once, before climbing back to his feet and peering at the computer screen. "Bertinelli?"

"Crime in Starling City is worse now than it was ten years ago. From bottom feeder gangs to the big time crime syndicates that have infiltrated the city, Starling is being overrun by these criminals. The glades are a lost cause with violent crimes at an all time high," Malcolm gave the description and Oliver was struck again by how his father really should have been a military tactician. "Starling has a lot of gang activity but most of them are disorganized, unlike their large mob counterparts. The Chinese Triad and the Russian Bratva have deep, established roots and for now we will not be able to engage them. On the other hand, the Bertinelli Crime Family routinely blackmails families, imports countless drugs and weaponry to the streets, and kills innocent civilians and their organization has already been under fire by an unknown assailant. We have an opportunity to disrupt one of Starling's greatest foes by removing the kingpin from power."

"You've really been doing some work," he whistles, scanning the information highlighted on the screen. "This looks like it was hacked from the FBI database."

"It was." Pride laced Malcolm's voice as he mentioned it. "I asked Felicity if she could send me some files on it this morning and she definitely surpassed my highest expectations."

"You seem fond of her." He dropped the comment casually but his father caught on and rolled his eyes.

"I'm twice her age, Oliver," the fond, yet exasperated glance of a incredulous parent targeted the blonde. "I only hire the best and that is exactly what she is. I was just lucky enough to stumble across her before someone put her talent to use."

"Okay, okay," Oliver surrendered, pulling out the hooded legacy left to him by two people that deserved better than to die on the godforsaken island and smoothed the worn fabric gently. Donning the final piece of gear, he flipped the top up, fingering the veil reflectively.

"Put it on," The alpha's directive left no wiggle room to argue and his father was probably correct about implementing a disguise being a wise idea. Glancing at the other man already garbed and cowled in the inky confines of his League uniform, Oliver raised the veil with a nod.

Nodding in sync, the pair take to motorcycles Malcolm purchased after Oliver badgered him merciless until he surrendered to the inevitable and had them delivered earlier that afternoon from a cash exchange several hours, and several hundred miles away.

The Ducati bikes purred down the road as the pair ate up the road with their speed racing.
Bertinelli lived in one of the upscale neighborhoods on the eastern side of the city that looked like a renovated Victorian era residence.

"The guy has hardly any security," Oliver whispered as they parked in an alleyway up the street. "This should be a cake walk."

"True," Malcolm trotted ahead of him soundlessly, scaling the perimeter fence with rapid, agile motions. "But cutting the head off the snake will cripple the organization long enough for us to shut them down for good and get these thugs out of our city."

"Roger that," Oliver jumped, catching himself of the iron wrought gate and dropping down the other side in a controlled roll. "I'll take this entry."

"I'll manage the front," Malcolm melted into the cover of darkness, undoubtedly circling the property. Oliver approached wrap around deck and risked a glance in the window. Jamming his elbow through the glass, the omega quickly reached inside and turned the lock and stepped inside the large kitchen with dark cabinets and stainless steel appliances. Heavy footfalls approached from the hall and he raised his bow, releasing the arrow into a pudgy Italian beta reeking of cologne, that collapsed with a heavy thud as the arrow tore through his jugular.

Not bothering to conceal himself any longer, Oliver vaulted the island and sped past the bleeding corpse, ducking into the living room to avoid a hail of gunfire. In the distance he heard a man cry out accompanied by another round of bullets.

A tall blonde man that the archer vaguely recognized from the FBI files as one of Bertinelli's lieutenants entered the room and he fired two more arrows; the first pinning the mobster's hand to the wall, causing him to drop his gun, while the second penetrated the shoulder bone with a debilitating shot. Dipping his head into the hallway, another suited thug lay prone with his father's distinctive ebony fletching sticking out of his back.

Leaping over the scarlet pool, he arrived at the front door only to stop dead. His father crouched next to a stunningly gorgeous woman, carefully propping her up against the stair banister, the shaft of the dark arrow embedded in her chest. A picture of a powerful woman, she thanked her executioner for his assistance, firmly clutching a silver revolver in her lap.

"I couldn't let you take the shot," the woman's cough rattled as white foam emerged from the corner of the brunette's mouth flecked with crimson. "I had to be the one to kill him. After what he did to me, I had to be the one."

"The paramedics are on their way," the robotic monotone concealed his voice from the cameras that were no doubt secreted all of the house, but did nothing to disguise the regret in the cobalt gaze.

Out of nowhere, the redheaded omega seized Oliver's gloved hand in vice-grip, the intensity of her gaze bordering on fanatical. "Promise me you won't stop! My father destroyed so many lives including mine. If you can stop that from happening to more people, please keep going."

"Helena," the command prompting the fading omega to tilt her head upward. "I promise you, that we will do whatever is necessary to save this city."

Watery streams slipped down the face of a woman that looked like a porcelain doll with a morbid case of vampirism, with her perfect alabaster skin marred by dripping blood. Grip tightening again, her head turns to look at the forgotten body laying peacefully a few feet up, her face free of pain.
"Thank you for setting me free." The grip on Oliver's glove slackened and fell away, the dying woman sighed once as her body tilted. Sirens picked up in the distance just as Helena's chest stilled, eyes fixed in a permanent state of bliss skyward looking like she was searching the heavens.

Gently as if she were made of spun glass, Malcolm lowered the dead woman to the ground and tenderly closed her eyes.

"We have to go," Oliver made an abortive movement to retreat only to lean down and take his father's shoulder and tug.

The alpha acceded to his demand and the pair abandoned the Bertinelli residence and retreated to the place they stowed their bikes. Revving to life, the pair sped off into the darkness. Shooting his father worried looks as they drove down back routes to Merlyn Mansion, Oliver felt strangely inspired by the woman's parting words for them. They would likely never know what drove Helena Bertinelli to kill her father, but her final plea would not go ignored.

"She came out of nowhere," Malcolm's voice buzzed in his ear, causing him to swerve slightly in surprise. "It's not often that someone can surprise me, but she got in the way of my sight and took the blow. Bertinelli hesitated and she just unloaded into him. I'm not honestly sure who was more surprised."

"It wasn't your fault," he consoled the alpha as best he could while the pair were riding home."

"I know it wasn't my fault," Malcolm remarked with a sigh. "That isn't what's bothering me."

"What is?"

"How willing she was to die for her revenge," there was an edge to his father's tone that Oliver attributed to grief. "And how insane she seemed to be."

"I think the important thing to remember here is that it was her choice to step in front of that arrow," Oliver reminded his father gently as they pulled back up to Merlyn Manor and parked the bikes in the garage.

Throwing back the hood and dropping the veil, Oliver stomped into the house bow in hand. The alpha trailed behind him, unfastening the sword from his belt.

"At least we got the streets cleaned up a bit." Oliver commented. "But man, clearing the city up has sparked my appetite. I'm gonna raid the fridge for...oh god."

Oliver faltered mid-step in the kitchen sensing his father draw up short and inhale sharply.

"What the hell is this?"

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Thea got in the car with her upset friend before he could take off completely, ignoring his heated commands to get out of the car. Patiently ignoring the abusive tirade, she buckled her seatbelt until he got the hint and finally drove off.

Idly hoping Starling City's finest were pre-occupied elsewhere, and likely were as the radio rattled off the details of the Twin Archers takedown of the Bertinelli crime family. That news went over as well as could be expected and Tommy flipped the switch and powered them down the
highway at breakneck speeds.

"As much as I love a good race," Thea gripped the expensive leather tight enough she was certain her fingernails would leave puncture marks, shooting a glare at the other alpha. "Pull your knot out of your ass and slow down."

A grunt was Tommy's only response, but nevertheless the vehicle slowed from death-wish to harrowing.

"So, our family is serving up some justice to some criminals," Thea found herself defending her brother as the mafia was not exactly on her Christmas Card list. "Could be worse right?"

"Yeah, they're killing people," he mocked her, slamming on the breaks, and blasting his horn. "Literally killing people! Forgive me if I'm not exactly okay with it!"

"I'm not exactly okay with it either," Thea yelled back at him, slamming her fist on the dash. "But I'm not going to go tell the police about it either. Is that what you plan on doing?"

"No," he spat, turning a corner and parking illegally next a fire hydrant. Misdirected anger here we come, Thea groaned internally. "I just can't believe my best friend and my father are out shooting people full of arrows! I can't even fathom that! I always knew my dad was a cold bastard, but apparently his mood swings actually result in people dying!"

"Do you wish Laurel was dead?" She challenged him, defending her brother in his darkest hour and taking Malcolm Merlyn along for the ride.

"Of course not!" Tommy denied, crossing his arms and adopting a look of disbelief.

"Funny," Thea laughed bitterly. "Because if that masked archer that we now know was your father had not got there in time, your girlfriend would have been killed by those Triad assassins. So, is your dad a bastard for killing those guys?"

"Oh my god," Tommy leapt out of the car, Thea hastily following the taller man as he paced the roadside even as cars whistled by. "This is fucking crazy!"

"Maybe they have a reason for all of this."

"Like an explanation?" At least there was hope in the interest.

"Yes," she declared, standing up straight. "And I want to hear what they have to say. So let's go back and at least hear them out. Because I really, really want there to be some kind of reason or conspiracy for all of this."

"You really need to consider becoming a motivational speaker," Tommy choked out half laugh, half sob. "Because this is nuts."

"Yeah, well, at least we can go down informed."

"Ok then, let's go hash things out with our fucked up family members that just went on a killing spree. Why not."

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Sucking in heaving breaths, Thea lay in an uncomfortable heap amid broken glass, cutlery,
and what appeared to be a tomato squished into her hair. Tommy looked like a horror movie victim with remnants of a bloody nose, egg shells clinging like limpets to his hair, and a twisted grin that would have made Gotham's Joker proud. Oliver's face was a mask of a sickly orange juice with a smear of something relatively green on his chin. Malcolm mysteriously evaded the worst of the damage, sporting a mere smudge of ketchup on his otherwise pristine face.

"What does it say about us that we solve our problems by demolishing the contents of a kitchen in a singularly violent way?" Tommy asked no one in particular.

"It means it's not just your dad and my brother that are altercation junkies," Thea offered up her thoughts on the matter, extending her arm into a puddle of something squishy that made her think of wet pasta. Nose wrinkling, she rolled over and buried her face in her arm, plagued by what she had learned in the past hour.

Learning the origin of Oliver's crusade had been difficult for Thea to hear, but that was nothing compared to learning that their mother was sinister enough to arrange for her son to be kidnapped by men with guns, to what purpose they did not know. It left Thea conflicted with her perception of the flawed but loving mother that had always been there for me, with this description of a person so foreign and full of deception and manipulation.

Thea's personal misery had not improved much with Malcolm's little revelation regarding his history with a group called the League of Assassins. Naturally pale Tommy looked like pasty chalk and had difficulty wrestling the fact that Malcolm was a trained killer.

Strangely enough, murder was the least of Thea's worries since this little exercise in honesty drew the deception out of her brother's speech. For the first time since Ollie's return, she felt sensed a complete level of honesty pass between the two of them, which was a bit of a miracle.

"Dad," Tommy's laughter had died down from where he sat with his back to the wall. "I just want you to know that I'm not sure how I feel about what you and Oliver are doing... but I'm not going to tell anyone. But I also want you to know that I'm glad that we're actually in the same room doing more than just pretending to interact. I'm glad we're talking. As far as the rest goes, I'm going to need some time to process."

Rolling her eyes, Thea snorted. "Man up Merlyn and grow a pair." Taking in the range of expressions from interested to startled, she rolled to her feet and walked to her brother and wrapped her arms around him, smelling the relief pouring off him as he returned her embrace enthusiastically. "If you're going to be out taking down some criminal operations, then I guess I better start taking our little training sessions more serious. Guess we better get going again tomorrow morning."

Releasing him, she smacks Tommy on the back, the brunette's confounded expression totally worth it.

Twisting about with a dancer's grace, she looked Malcolm in the eye. "So, Mr. My Brother's Dad!" The older alpha's lips twitched, betraying his amusement while twin chuckles in the background tickled her senses. "In light of recent revelations, do you have a spare bedroom I could borrow until I can figure out a more permanent solution? You know, unless you and Oliver levelled those the way you guys did the living room."

"You're welcome to stay as long as you like, Thea." Her keen eyes didn't fail to see the happy spark light up her brother's face at Malcolm's little declaration. "I have enough rooms for whoever wants to stay."

"Well, glad that's settled." She saluted the primary alpha with a semi-respectful nod that the
older man returned in kind. Picking at the tomato in her hair, she made a face. "I hope your guest rooms come with bathrooms because I really, really need to clean up."

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Quentin Lance was having a heck of a day and it was all thanks to the vigilante duo setting to become his latest headache rapidly progressing to obsessive migraine. Hilton, reprising his role as partner of the year, dutifully offered the detective a steaming latte as they pulled out a white board to refocus their ideas.

"Let's start with the obvious," Lucas prompted, raising his marker to write Black Archer in one corner and Green Archer in the other. "Our two men."

Taking a sip of caffeine, the detective pens Adam Hunt under the Green Archer's name. "In this first scenario, our guy had no obvious source of backup and we found no evidence or eyewitness testimony that puts him there."

"But that wasn't the first encounter," Lucas stepped in, rapidly scribbling a point in the center of the board. "Our Robin Hood player made an appearance to rescue Merlyn and Queen from their kidnappers. The problem with drugged testimony is that we can't be sure our other player wasn't involved here. Those men died from friendly fire and another a broken neck quite some distance from the original scene. So, I'd say we have nothing at this point."

Simmering in a cloud of annoyance, Lance finally just shakes his head. "Okay fine but we can assume nothing about that first incident. So, our next confirmed appearance is our Dark Ninja at my daughter's house." Lance paused as he wrote the confirmed note underneath the other name, an idea fanning to life. "Queen was there again. That seem like coincidence to you?"

"At this point in our investigation, I think it's odd but I don't think it means what you think it means," causing the beta detective to deflate like a balloon. "Anyone with a history like you have with the kid is going to see what isn't there, Quentin. If it comes up again, we look into it. For now, let's stay with what we know."

"Alright fine," lifting his hands in the universal sign for surrender, he set his coffee down and jotted Martin Somers name on the center of the board and circled it. "But this here was definitely our confirmed joint task force between our two archers. "Between eyewitness accounts from the few who survived their injuries, they stated the pair left the scene together amicably."

"And then we had tonight's mess," Lucas wrote Bertinelli in the middle. "Salvati stated he was attacked by our boy in green, which we have no reason to doubt. "He also claimed to overhear the conversation that took place with Helena Bertinelli and our two intruders."

Finally a mistake! Blood heating up in excitement, Quentin rubbed his hands together and looked at his partner like a junkie fixing for a hit.

"That's the weird part," Lucas said. "I'd almost not believe it but Salvati confirmed that she iced her father and that her killing was accidental. Apparently she admitted to deliberately moving into the path of the arrow meant for her father so that 'she' could be the one to kill him. And after she shot her father full of lead, she thanked our vigilantes for their service and asked them to continue with their upstanding work."

"You've got to be kidding me!" He turned a full 360, hands lifted skyward begging for an answer. "So their victims are giving them the thumbs up now? Seriously?"
"Seriously."

"Ok, so we know they have exemplary combat training. Former special ops?"

"It's definitely possible," his partner added the idea to the bottom of the board. "We still have no solid bio confirmation either. Our eyewitnesses are all saying something different. Alpha. Beta. Omega. Even a female alpha thrown in there for good measure. Adam Hunt has labelled our green guy as definitely male, but is a bit unsure about the rest. It's a muddle of gender politics. Even our scent dogs seemed confused. So I'm thinking they're spraying their clothing with something to muddle the senses and make it a bit more difficult for us to id them."

"Okay, so these boys may or may not have been working together since the beginning," Quentin tallied with his fingers. "They're expect archers and escape artists--"

"The one in black also uses a sword on one of his vics in the Somers case."

"A sword?" Pursing his lips, Quentin scribbles that nasty little tidbit. "These guys allergic to modern weaponry or something? I just don't get it. Bows and arrows, and now swords. Just what this city needed."

"Bertinelli and his men have been on the rocks the past few weeks, I'd say it's vigilante related except a bunch of poorly shot mobsters doesn't exactly match the M.O. of our boys."

"We need to get ahead of these pricks somehow," a myriad of ideas swarmed the detective's head as he imagined a thousand possible scenarios.

"Lance, Hilton!" Someone called from across the room. "Someone dropped a line to the press and they are all over this!"

"Shit!"

Quentin tears across the room in a handful of seconds in order to read the news headline. "Twin Archers takedown Mob Kingpin" as the reporter stands outside the crime scene tape and embellishes the story to make the pair out to be heroes: it boils his blood to imagine a pair of killers all jazzed up for their crimes.

"I guess we got a name for them now, boss," one of the new cadets remarked cheerfully, chewing on a chocolate bar.

Ripping the treat out of the guy's fingers he tosses it in the trash and spins to address the crowd of dumbfounded officers.

"Those guys are not heroes," he points a finger at the crowded room. "These clowns seem to think they can go around shooting people full of arrows and there isn't anything wrong with it. I'm telling you these guys are a pair of murderers and we--and I mean we--are going to take them down. Is that understood!"

"Yes, sir!" The resounding affirmation said it all.

"I see you're having fun," an all too familiar voice detonated his bad mood and he whirled around with a genuine bounce in his step only to falter at Laurel's crossed arms.

"Hey baby," he stepped in and put his arm around his shoulders only to be stopped by her glare. "Okay I can see you're upset, sweetheart. Is something the matter?"
"Dinner."

Oh shit.

"Honey I'm so sorry! I lost track of time, but it's only eight, we can still go out if you want."

"Dad," Laurel's tone thankfully softened and she steps toward him still holding onto her briefcase. "I think it's a little late for dinner, but you can take me home if you want."

Grabbing his keys, he waved to his relieved looking partner and swept out of the room with his baby girl in tow.

Lian Yu

It took every ounce of self-control Oliver possessed not to breakdown when Shado and Slade arrived brandishing arrows and firearms on Ivo and his thugs. The initial elation was short lived when the omega came face to face with the blackened expanse of dead flesh that covered at least half of his mate's body.

After escaping the posse of Ivo's hired hands, Oliver ripped his hand away from Sara as if he had been touching something toxic rather than just holding her hand.

"Ollie please, I'm really sorry about before, ok! I was just doing what I had to do!"

"I saved you from them," he spat. Aware of the intense scrutiny he was under from his family, Oliver stepping closer to Sara even as she stumbled backward in a futile effort to put distance between them. "Stay with us or go: I don't care. But any debt I ever owed you is gone. I don't owe you anything!"

Pivoting on his heel, twigs and foliage collapsed beneath his shoe with a satisfying crunch. Shooting a look to Shado, he nodded once and the alpha returned her own imperceptible look before moving toward the forlorn looking beta and speaking with her in low tones. If it made him evil, fine, but her decision could have cost the lives of the people that he loved and there was no room for second chances on Lian Yu.

Heart beating erratically, Oliver approached his lover with a caution typically reserved for hunting, focusing on the dark planes of burnt flesh that covered half of the man's body. It was not lost on the blonde how much pain Slade had to be in just to keep standing. Each ragged breath Slade took in front of him looked like it was drawn from sheer force of will and that lead the omega to one inescapable conclusion: Slade was dying and there was nothing that could be done. There was no rescue coming and his alpha was beyond the help Yao Fei's herbs could have provided him. Borrowed time was all they had left.

"Kid, did they hurt you?"

'I'm not the one dying,' he wanted to tell him. Suffocating in misery he managed a jerky shake of his head that did nothing to stifle the sob emerging from his throat. Slade was dying and the only thing he could concentrate on was how terrified he was to be alone. 'Please don't leave me. Please don't go. I love you, please don't leave me.'

Smelling if not sensing the distress pouring off him, a muscular arm gripped him with a startling level of strength and pressed Oliver's face into the undamaged section of his throat.
"Oliver?"

"I'm not the one whose hurt," he intentionally neglected to mention the bullet wound, knowing his lover would only take the news personally. His fingers grew brave in his desperation, lightly moving upward to trace the edge of the crusted skin. "You're hurt Slade. Really bad and I don't know what to do."

"Hey," the alpha crooned, comforting him as if he was not standing from mere force of will with debilitating injuries. Slade's stubbled cheek nuzzled his forehead, the big man's nose rubbing in his hair to scent him. To memorize him, he realized as tears fell again.

"We need to get going," Shado's practical nature cut across their bonding moment. "Sara just told me what Ivo and his men are looking for and if we can find it, it might help Slade."

Hope was a dangerous dream on Lian Yu, but it renewed him where nothing else would. Shifting into a determined posture, Oliver slung his mate's good arm over his shoulder to take the brunt of his mate's weight.

"Let's go then. You can fill us in as we go."

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What on earth had possessed her to go out for groceries? It was late, dark, and her favorite Trader Joes was inconveniently located across town. Still, when her car stalled on the way back home, smack dab in the middle of the Glades, she could admit to feeling apprehensive.

After phoning her Triple A membership, the aghast operator claimed it would be a whopping two hours before they could get out to offer her assistance. Feeling a sense of disbelief, the omega felt oddly justified in hacking the company's systems only to discover that most of the contracted responders simply refused to answer calls to the Glades. How could that be legal?

After wiping the condensation off the window after cooling her heels for half an hour, Felicity squinted into the darkness. The occasional passerby shot her a furtive look but no one approached her. Sure the news reported an incredibly active crime element in this section of the city, but that certainly didn't make everyone a bad guy.

Staring at her tablet in mock desperation, her tummy nudged her with a not so subtle rumble declaring, 'hey lady, we haven't eaten since that eleven am lunch. How about some snacks.' Well, she should be fine just grabbing a snack. Sneaking another look, she hopped out of her car and shut the door behind her for good measure. Popping the trunk, she rifled through the paper bags and until she found a package that felt right. Yes! Freeing the box of fruit bars, she opened the cardboard and fished out two before tossing the package back into the bag. Slamming her trunk, she tore open one of the packs and bit into the blueberry flavored gelatin with a low moan of pleasure.

Yep, that hit the spot alright. Moving around to the driver's side door, she took another hearty bite in her mouth and fumbled with the keys in her pocket. A weighted pressure slamming her into the door knocked the wind out of the blonde and smothered her in a sour alpha scent that was rank with aggression. Terrified, she choked out the bite of fruit bar and shivered in the squeezing grip.

"Look you can take my keys and my purse!" She dropped both to the ground, breathing growing more frantic as a pair of bony hips pressed harshly into her from behind. "Just please, please let me go!"
"Shut your trap!" The man shook her vigorously, causing her teeth to rattle in her mouth.

Looking around in desperation, Felicity was overcome with shock as she noted a pair of dirty men in rags watching them silently from an alleyway not ten feet away. A couple teens in hooded sweatshirts eyed the surreptitiously with a contemptuous lack of empathy.

What are you just standing there for?

"Please help me!" She called out, her scent transmitting distress. Horror cycled into a living nightmare at the startling revelation that no one was coming, backs turned to her plight. "At least call the police! You've got to help me!"

"I said shut your trap, bitch!" The man gripped the back of her head and she screamed helplessly as he slammed her forehead into the window, the crack of glass obvious against her face. Keeping her eyes closed, clear chunks of glass pressed against her eyelids, informing her that her glasses had cracked. Spiking fear overrode the rational aspect of her brain and left the blonde vulnerable as a hand that smelled faintly of gasoline snaked it's way underneath her top, and sliding beneath the wire of her bra as Felicity sobbed hoarsely. The other hand moved to her skirt and dipped beneath it to fondle at the lace underwear and stroke her skin.

"Please no. Please no. Please no!" Her eyes fluttered open, and she could see through the cracked mass of glass that her wails fell on deaf ears as the onlookers watched with vague disinterest as the man tore at her skirt until it was hanging by the seams, leaving her panties on display for all to view and no one to save her. No one cared and no one was going to stop this man from raping her.

Oh god, this was it she thought. This was how she was going to die? With a bunch of people refusing to save her from one of the most grisly fates imaginable. The sound of a zipper coming undone drew a fresh wave of tears to her eyes.

Steeling herself for the inevitable, her attacker grunted before slumping against her back like deadweight. Cautiously hopeful, Felicity stepped to the side and her attacked crumbled to the ground like a puppet with cut strings, a shiny ebony arrow sticking out of his back.

Brain kicking into gear, she whirled around to face her savior, shrouded completely in dark cloth and holding large bow barely a handful of paces away. The media storm covering the pair of men left no doubt that her hero was one of Starling's vigilante archers. Instead of fear, the omega felt a swathe of relief and unending gratitude.

Apparently the archer had not expected her to run at him if the faltering step backward indicated anything. Maybe it was the absurdity of a woman with the tattered remnants of a skirt that kept him statuesque, but her heeled feet pounded the pavement as she ran toward the man. Flinging her arms around the stiff figure, she buried her face in the taller man's chest and breathed a sigh of relief as she sank into her omega headspace in the presence of a capable protector. The only thing that mattered to Felicity was how close she came to being raped and more than likely killed that this man had saved her.

The archer slung an arm around her and rubbed her back lowly, drawing a happy sigh from the blonde.

"Are you alright, Felicity?" The disguised voice sounding strangely hypnotic. Something in the back of her mind prompted her to examine why the vigilante would know her name, but she filed that information away for a time that wasn't two minutes after escaping a traumatic ordeal.

"No." Her body continued to be experience tremors as if electrified, and she desperately
soaked in some much needed human contact. "No one was going to help me. They just watched. How could they just watch?!!"

"Because people living down here forgot how to be human." The disgusted conviction behind the statement resounded even through the disguise. "I'm going to get you out of here."

Nodding dumbly, the alpha--incredibly foolish that anyone believed differently--gently prodded her backward as if coaxing a spooked horse, which she supposed was not inaccurate. A powerful arm extended his bow until it was brushing her hands. Felicity stared at him foolishly before experiencing a light bulb moment. Accepting the bow, she held it carefully, the smooth plains of metal reflecting eerily in the darkness.

"Now what?" she whispered, the lot of bystanders had predictably vanished in the wake of the archer's arrival, finding a disturbing amount of satisfaction that they had fled.

A moment later, an arm lifted beneath her knees and the other lifted her beneath her arms and carried her. Judging from the lack of labored breathing, this guy had no problem carting someone around.

"Oh my purse!" Her dark savior paused, offered her a look that clearly conveyed he thought she was an idiot before bending awkwardly and tossing both keys and purse into her arms.

"Thank you," she said as she stared at the veil beneath the shroud of darkness, staring at the forward facing eyes that she thought looked dark blue but with her glasses as messed up as they were, she was not willing to testify to that. The man's attention flickered to her before resuming their hike down the street.

"Your welcome."

The frightened girl inside wanted to tuck herself into the man's shoulder and just forget everything, but another fragment of Felicity Smoak was terrified that she would never see this man again. So, she held the archer's bow and attempted to memorize him. Fingers smoothed the lightweight fabric that looked defiantly heavy hand sewn that warmed her despite the cool breeze tickling her bare legs. The man was too heavily clad to see anything but she memorized the shape and contour of the eyes and the hue she became more firmly convinced was a deep azure. She would have given anything, including her new job, to look at the man even once without the veil.

All too soon, working street lights appeared and the vigilante briskly approached a brighter avenue. Startling her, she felt the hands carrying her deposit her gently in the grass, plucking the bow from her fingers that mourned the loss even while clutching her pink purse.

"I can see a police car just ahead. You need to go tell them what happened." Without another word, the archer vanished into the treetops leaving a dishevelled blonde in his wake.

Her mother truly did have the worst timing, she thought as the theme song to Tetris began chirping in the purse she was numbly holding.

"Hello?"

"Hey honey! I haven't heard from you in days! What's going on with you, girl? You meet any cute boys lately?"

Apparently her alpha delayed panic attack was back in force.

"Felicity honey? Felicity! Sweetheart what on earth happened??"
"Mom, I just had the worse day ever," she vented, finding a seed of genuine relief in hearing her mother's voice for once. "And I think I'm in love."

The squeal of excitement nearly caused her to drop the phone.

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Passing through the security gate, Slade Wilson shouldered his bag firmly, gaze affixed to the television broadcast featuring a business piece on Queen Consolidated's acquisition of Unidac Industries. Corporate nonsense that ordinarily would not have caught his attention save that it mentioned his omega's family.

As he approached the baggage claim of the bustling airport, vibration in his pocket started buzzing at the expected time and he accepted the incoming call.

"I'm not doubling it."

"Tetchy!" The analyst whined on the other end of the line. "It's hardly my fault that your little interaction with your target lead to some third world shithole closing down air traffic for a couple days. You're lucky I found those smugglers to get you out of there after 48 hours. You could at least say thank you!"

If the man was not one of the best hackers in the world, the Australian would have murdered the little twat ages ago. The man had a point though when he claimed it wasn't his fault, not that he would oblige the other guy with that comment.

"Did you make the other arrangements?"

The dramatic sigh was more suited to a woman experiencing menopause than a man living on chips and soda in his late twenties.

"Of course I did! Everything you need is in your email inbox for however long this little vacation of yours is going to last. There is one thing that's a bit of an issue though."

"What's that?"

"Your omega is off the grid. He isn't staying home and my attempts to ping his cell phone's gps is not working the way it should. My surveillance information guarantees me that your boy is still in town, but where he is right now I'm not sure of."

"I need you to get me something to go on. Anything. " Slade told the other man. "You get me something on him and I will owe you a favor. And you know I always pay my debts."

"Yeah, it's a little amazing how honorable you are for being such a dick."

Glancing around the busy terminal, his eyes widened at the image highlighted on the television. One of them looked like one of those League lackeys following the Lance bitch while the other was unmistakably garbed in Shado's green hood. Sentiment had always been his kid's weakness and it looked as if that had not changed over the years.

"Dig up as much on these Twin Archers in Starling as you can and I'll still double that amount."

"You got it, Wilson. As much as I hate you, I love working with you."
"The feeling is assuredly mutual."

Ending the call, he drank in the shadowy picture, excited and around to discover his love alive, well, and on the hunt like a lethal angel.

"I'm coming for you, baby," he promised the vision on the screen.

"If the League doesn't get to him first," Shado's comment caught him off guard and his breathing took on a ragged edge.

"She won't," his words failed to impress the spectre who gazed on him so dispassionately. "I won't let her take him from me again."

"Time will tell."

Lian Yu

The Mirakuru injection had failed and judging from the reactions of her companions, so had her hopes of surviving Anthony's wrath. Seeing Oliver's response to the hoax escape plan on the freighter had been like a knife to the gut, but the "better him than me" chant absolved the loss; then an image of her father appeared in the back of her mind that coaxed her conscience into interceding before the beta scientist had Oliver executed. At least now, if she ever made it home, Sara could face her father with a clear conscience.

Oliver was a textbook trauma case of an omega witnessing their mate's death. The fight had utterly gone out of her old friend in such a way that two of Ivo's goons were required to drag the unresisting blonde away from the dead alpha. A pang of sympathy tugged at the girl even as fear coiled like a serpent, striking her in the heart.

The troop paused in clearing, shoving the prisoners to the forest floor. Instantly the Chinese woman pounced on Oliver like a lioness guarding her cub; a flow of senseless Mandarin accompanied by protective pheromones provided the alpha the illusion of power despite the bindings on her arms. It was like a picture of something vibrant amidst a horror beyond description that seemed so out of place in the nightmare they were living in.

Turning away from the pair, pretending it was merely a method of giving the two some privacy to mourn, Sara threw herself upon Ivo's mercy, kneeling before him like a prisoner before a king.

"Anthony, since you rescued me I've done everything you've ever asked and more," she choked, desperate to placate the anger in the older man's face. "I liked working with you, but you have the mirakuru now. Please just let them go and don't kill them! Don't kill me, Anthony! Please!"

The soldiers surrounding their huddled prisoners guffawed and commented to each other with leering grins shot their way and Sara felt a chill run down her spine and gnaw at her bones.

"Sara," Anthony's silky voice whispered in her ear. "We did accomplish a great deal together and for that I'm going to give you this chance to show me how sorry you are."

Please not sexual favors, the blonde cringed at the raunchy jeers of the surrounding men.

"Anything Anthony," she resigned herself to a distinctly unpleasant fate. "Just tell me what you want."
The man's smile was not a pleasant one, in fact it looked positively reptilian: a crocodile smile. Slipping his hand into his practical, brown jacket, Ivo pulled a gun free and pointed it at the huddled pair a few paces from him. Reacting to a wordless command, two of henchmen ripped the struggling alpha away from Oliver and jerked her upright, the green hood falling down to expose the luxurious ebony tresses. The omega quivered in the early stages of shock and grief, barely responsive to outside stimuli.

"I'm giving you thirty seconds to pick one of your little comrades," the doctor spat in disgust, giving her a loathsome glance. "You pick one to live and one to die. If you can do that for me, then maybe I'll let you live after all."

Instantly she pictured the little bed Anthony had given her with it's warm blanket. The lack of fear she felt even when observing him do appalling, disgusting things to his test subjects. She still did not want to die.

Stumbling to her feet proved difficult with her hands tied behind her, but Sara staggered as she glanced at the cowering pair. There was no doubt in her mind that Anthony would pull the trigger on all of three of them if she did nothing. Taking a shaky step between the two, she glanced between them both, settling into a rapid analytical mode like a doctor dispassionately triaging his patients.

Oliver had made it pretty clear that he felt betrayed, rightfully so she hated to admit it, by her actions on the boat. But it was every man and woman for themselves. This time though, she could give someone the gift of life. And the omega was pining away for a dead guy anyway. Shado had been strictly neutral in their interactions, neither including her in conversation but responding and replying to any and all inquiries, going so far as to offer her a handful of nuts during one of their breaks to allow the big man to rest his injuries.

Shado was kind but from the motherly way she had soothed the younger man, her loyalty was absolute. If the murderous gleam the woman was clearly shooting her way, the choice was already made. Shado looked at Oliver and then back to Sara once before turning away with a bowed head. The selflessness of the woman kneeling before her gave Sara pause enough to ponder where her own sense of sacrifice had gone. She was scared all the time since the Queen's Gambit sank and all she thought about was survival. Never would she have considered offering up her own life. Maybe she had lost her soul to the sea after all.

"Ten seconds, Sara!"

"Oliver," Shado's voice radiated affection and pride. "Wǒ ài nǐ. Shengcún" (I love you. Survive.)

Instantly, Oliver broke into blubbering sobs.

With no time left, Sara dropped herself into a human's shield position in front of the omega and Ivo nodded once, took aim, and fired into the back of Shado's head. Instantly the alpha crumpled into a heap and lay still, Oliver's broken hearted cries eating up the night.

Sara choked, turning toward the woman she barely knew that lay disturbingly still. My fault, the whisper prodded her inside and she choked her conscience into silence.

Suddenly Oliver jolted upright, head tilting back as if testing the air, and swivelled to glance in the direction they'd come from. Like a demon rising from hell, the alpha--the dead alpha--appeared slamming one of Ivo's men into the air in an arc to land with a sickening crunch at least twenty feet away. The remaining mercs turned to intercept the Lazarus man, while Ivo fled into the
forest like the rat he was.

One of the man's fists appeared through a gaping hole in one of the soldiers while Slade rapidly tore the remaining men apart, chest heaving with a frenzied exertion as he grunted, inhaling sharply and freezing at the sight before his eyes.

Sara was thankful she was already sitting and especially thankful that her arms were bound to mark her as a prisoner as a savagely dark cast like a storm took over the big man.

"Slade," Oliver's voice croaked and it took a second to realize Oliver's scent broadcasted distress like a beacon in the dark.

Flinching sideways at the alpha's approach, she nevertheless turned to observe him scoop the omega up like a child, snapping his bindings with a snarl. The blonde attached himself to the big man like a lemur, snuffling tears muffled as he hid his face. Her breath caught as the big man moved to where their fallen companion lay face down in the dirt. The big man seemed indecisive for a moment before dropping down next to the limp body and brushing a limp piece of hair clumped together by blood and brain matter.

"He just shot her, Slade. He killed her." The whimpered statement was so young sounding that Sara found herself taken aback. Tommy, Sara and Oliver had all been about the same age with Laurel being the responsible party with a year's more life experience. It was a shock to think of herself as a frightened nineteen year old but that's what they were.

"Don't you worry about a thing, sweetheart," the alpha's tone softly murderous. "That son of a bitch is going to get what's coming to him. I promise you that."

The most frightening thing for Sara was she didn't doubt Slade Wilson's word for an instant. And if he ever learned what she had done, Ivo's description of Mirakuru recipients mental state was enough for her to realize it would be a death sentence. If she wanted to ever get home, she would need to do something about this mess.

Glancing back to the huddled pair, Oliver had moved so his back was pressed against the big man's and he was rubbing his cheek against Shado's limp hand where a bracelet of seashells hung in solemnity.

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The last few days of Walter's life felt so unbelievable that it all felt like a fabrication. It had been a shock to hear Oliver viciously slander the memory of his best friend with the revelation of his true parentage, but still something he could sympathize with both parties. Moira's reticence to sabotage her son's relationship with Walter was totally understandable. But once again, Oliver's anger could be seen as reasonable.

Thea destroying her room was more than likely a cry for help that they could fix, eventually, with counseling. Manageable.

The deal breaker was the old saying 'just when you think you know someone' that had come to life this evening at an old storage locker. What on earth was he to say to his wife? His best friend dies on a boat that his wife quietly salvages the wreck for a rainy day. There was no sane reason for hiding such a travesty.

Pouring himself a healthy glass of scotch he had been saving for a rainy day, a heavy tread
of footfalls caught his attention. Looking up, he stood up abruptly, extending a hand toward a bemused Malcolm Merlyn.

"Thank you for coming, Malcolm," Walter shook the man's hand and gestured the leatherback chair that the alpha fell into as if it were a throne and not just a chair. "I know last minute notice is an inconvenience, but I'm glad you indulged me."

"We've been business partners for a long time Walter," the brunette shifted in his suit, looking rather comfortable. "But something tells me I'm not here to discuss the office. So, pour me a glass and we'll talk."

"Right you are." He poured the other man a glass and lifted his own in a mock salute. "To Robert."

"To Robert."

"Look, I invited you over here to talk about two topics. And I think you can surmise at least one of them."

"Oliver." The words were like a spell.

"Indeed, I quite recently learned that you are in fact his biological father. Which of course, you're already aware of," he slumped in his seat, downing his glass in one go. "And I honestly can't imagine how I would feel to learn someone kept your child from you. In fact, I could understand if a part of you hated Moira for keeping that from you, but I'm begging you to talk to Oliver on her behalf. Please."

"You're a very compassionate individual Walter," Malcolm's tone dropped a notch. "And I'll consider your request. But that's one topic so I'm quite frankly curious as to what else we could have to discuss that's personal."

Coughing into his fist, he leans forward and says. "I know you and my wife were close for a long time and still were up until Oliver came back. I want to know if she ever told you that she salvaged Robert's yacht."

Something dark filtered into the alpha's gaze before it passed so swiftly, Walter wondered if he had imagined it.

"Moira recovered Robert's ship," jilted admiration from the other man reignited a strong feeling of wrongness. Malcolm stood up, downed his scotch and the beta stood too, feeling wary without any obvious cause. "It seems my old friend's list of transgression grow greater each and every day."

The businessman stood, reaching over his desk and seizing Walter's hand in his own and shook it firmly."I truly am thankful that you told me, but I can honestly say I didn't know that Moira did that," Malcolm's smile was menacing as the man stepped away. "Goodbye Walter."

 Unsure how long he stood there, Walter finally relaxed a fraction, moving around his desk to pluck the empty scotch glass from the arm of the chair.

Out of nowhere, three solid shots to the back riddled him from behind. One, two, three. There was no time to experience pain, only a sense of detachment as he crumpled to the ground with three perfect bullet holes in his back.

He was dying. He had to be dying. Thinking became a fight and he could hear
gurgling...and choking? It had to be choking. Where was Thea? Moira? The darkness was a siren's song and he was helpless to resist: and the song was death.

Chapter End Notes

Author's Note: Thank you again to everyone who has supported my writing and leaves me kudos and comments. It's truly humbling to discover people like what I'm writing so far and I only hope that my writing continues to appeal. So thank you!

On a secondary note, if you noticed anything off with the formatting, something is not quite right with my microsoft word and I am not sure how to correct it so I tried to do it by hand. So all the mistakes are mine. And still no beta so it is what it is!
Chapter 7

Lian Yu

A limp body was nothing to a man with veins burning green; Slade lead the way, Sara and Oliver trailed after him like a pair of straggling pups. The trek gave the alpha an opportunity to catalog the changes in himself. Shifting Shado absently, the obvious lack of hindrance backed up the strength variable he noticed from the altercation. Resistance to injuries. The call of chickadees, crawling mice, and his omega's hampered breathing made it difficult to focus on any one sound. Additionally, his nose appeared to be working overtime. Moss, urine, and dried blood from a wound Oliver no doubt concealed out of concern, the brunette would have to quash that bad habit out of his mate if it was the last thing he did.

As they approached the coast, Slade's attention wandered to their blonde companion. The woman was trouble if soft-hearted Oliver spurned her. But the beta bitch could wait until he dealt with the imminent threat that Ivo posed. The sluggish movement of the blood through his veins triggered a little voice to whisper ominously, but he suppressed his doubts. Doubts were hazardous when defending another person.

But when they reached the lonely graves of Yao Fei and Robert Queen on the cliff side, with the rocks covered in moss and bird shit, his mate's face crumpled, the blonde devolving into a personal hell of the likes the alpha had never witnessed in the young man; Oliver Queen did not cry nor did he hesitate to rush, recklessly into the thick of danger, but the blonde balked at adding another grave to their sad little cemetery.

Setting her down gently, mindful of his strength, Oliver dropped to his knees immediately, the coastal wind blowing his hair in a way that on any other day would have been mesmerizing, but today seemed like a symbol of what they had lost.

"She deserves more than this," the grieving tenor drifted on the wind, his mate futilely smoothing the ebony strands from the devastatingly blank face. The girl stood awkwardly in the backdrop, staying a respectful distance from his omega and skirting the periphery of their little resting spot. "She deserves more than to be stuck in purgatory forever, Slade."

"Then we'll set her free."

A fire was a singularly bad idea, but Slade silently dared Ivo to come with his goon squad. To allow him to wrap his arms around their throats and squeeze until they were writhing slabs of dead flesh. In lieu of that pleasant thought, the alpha excused himself to rip some branches off a tree
as easily as if it were paper. Tossing them to the side, he bent down to wrap his arms around the bole of a tree, startling when the entire tree uprooted, showering him in needles, grit, and dirt. Conflicted by the pervading sense of wrongness that accompanied superior strength, he set the tree down as gingerly as he could, brushing the grit off his hands.

Turning, caution warred with fear in Sara's eyes. Somehow, the beta's dread inspired his own approval only to be trumped by the awe shining like a star in his lover's eyes. Seeing even the briefest glint of happiness was such a boon to the inner conflict raging through his system since awakening alone on the submarine.

Transferring Shado to the tree triggered the memory of nearly a dozen farewells the ASIS officer made on distant battlefields, some to the dying, some to the dead: always difficult. Slade fingered the hood that seemed to symbolize a family's legacy and made the decision. A few quick tugs of the clasps and the green hood came free. Turning he offered it to a stone-faced Oliver who grasped the material and hugged it to his own body after a moment's hesitation.

"You were her family, kid. You know how she felt about you," Oliver nodded absently, knuckles painfully white as he held onto the hood with a funny sort of desperation that took a toll on the heartstrings.

"See you on the other side," his farewell was matter of fact, with the emotion buried for a better day. On the far side of the makeshift pyre, Slade swore he could see Shado standing in the vibrant sunlight that shone so radiantly in the sky, eyes like obsidian staring unblinking into the light.

The Lance girl appeared at his side offering a gas lighter surprised him. Giving the skittish doe an appraising look that caused her to make a hasty retreat behind the omega, Slade stepped back to allow his kid to say goodbye.

"I'll see you again."

If there was any justice in the universe, Slade knew that declaration to be true.

Without needing to be prompted, Slade brought forth the lighter and approached the makeshift pyre, knelt, and set it aflame. Moving back to wrap an arm around his lover while hyper aware of the foreign intruder to the side, he watched orange flames gnaw at the wood and lick at Shado's body until the flames consumed the log and it's dead passenger in bright orange and white fire. Oliver shuddered beside him and he squeezed the younger man, but eyes drawn to the flame like he had been hypnotized.

Minutes flew by and the blaze grew in strength until Shado's body was engulfed. But then, Slade looked up startled to see the black haired beauty standing quietly, solemnly across from him with her father's hood lowered to expose the strangely blank stare. Confused, the Australian looked from Oliver and back to the fire cremating the body, casting a towering spiral of smoke into the sky. Beyond it, other-Shado seemed utterly unaffected by the blade.
"Protect Oliver. Protect Oliver. Protect Oliver."

The voice resonated like a sinister bell.

"I will."

Twin gazes locked on the big man, one baffled and the other marked by realization. Slade saw neither look, but made his promise to the entity that wore Shado's face, missing the wince cross his omega's face as he was squeezed more firming into Slade's side.

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"You kicked my ass!"

Oliver saluted his moping brother while casually downing a second shot, smacking the glass down on the bar with a loud clang. The pair of them were sweaty and they definitely smelled something like a pig.

"You were better today than you were yesterday," he assured the indignant alpha with a lightly teasing jab. "And on the bright side, look at all the attention you're getting."

And it was true. A pair of beta chicks in the corner sneaked peeks from a corner table, lingering on Tommy's exposed biceps, giggling every few minutes. A petite alpha in a red biker vest kept shooting the both of them sultry looks from her lone wolf pedestal at the opposite end of the bar. On top of all that attention, their harried waitress had taken the time to slip Captain Oblivious her number. Not that he had noticed if the damp ink was any indicator.

"I don't care. The only person I'm interested in is Laurel. And Laurel doesn't see me as the relationship type. And she isn't wrong. I'm the same person I was when I graduated high school. Everyone has moved on except me. Even you have your," he gestures helplessly at the grinning omega. "archer thing and that fake management job my dad got you. I'm just the same old Tommy Merlyn, the bird that never flew."

Rolling his eyes, Oliver took a sip of the water he ordered along with the round of shots, trying to even out the intake. Poor Tommy though, Oliver felt for his brother. He really, really did.

"I think you've changed a lot Tommy." Lifting his hands he made a box and lifted his finger to fake the click of a camera. "The Tommy Merlyn I grew up with would never have trained with me or behaved like a responsible adult. And if you want a job, I could certainly use a partner at applied sciences so that offer is on the table. " Seeing Tommy scoff bitterly, he rushed to interject. "But listen, if you want Laurel, you just have to connect with her and see value in the things she finds important. If she has a cause, make it yours. And just be honest with her."

Instead of acknowledging what he said, the Alpha visibly squirmed before abruptly changing the subject. Oliver obligingly dropped the issue for the moment.

"You remember how we dyed Coach Sampson's hair blue?"

Basking in the renewed humor of their prank schemes involving the football team, Oliver remembered what an amazing day that had been to see the sparkly baby blue hair. Even the combined wrath of Robert and Moira hardly put a chink in the armor of the impetuous teen he had been.

"I remember that and putting urine in his water bottle. And we didn't even get caught with that one!"
"We were epic bastards!" Tommy laughed so hard, he started choking, drawing Oliver close to slap his grinning brother on the back. As the laughter died down, Oliver was transfixed by Tommy's face, slowly transforming from mirthful to something infinitely more reserved.

"What is it?"

"I just feel like you never really made it back from that island," the lull in the mood shuddered like a final breath, transforming the relaxed dynamic into a miniature nightmare that left Oliver at a loss to manage the emotional toll. "Not that I blame you, but because I don't really know what happened I keep picturing all these horrifying scenarios. If that weren't bad enough, I know that some of the stuff my imagination generates is potentially real. And as selfish as it is, I'm left with the thought that because I can never truly understand what you went through, I'm never going to get my best friend back."

Not so far from the truth, the Omega swallowed thickly, beating back the emotions to maintain an element of composure. Slade, while admitting he loved Oliver, had warned him time and time again that emotions were more lethal than a gun to the face. Now, even with the best of intentions, Oliver Queen felt like Tommy was drowning and there was no chance of completing a rescue. And yet the only remaining avenue was to jump in and give it his all.

"I'm not the same person that left Tommy," In his mind's eye, he watched Fyer's collapse beneath the weight of a kill-shot, never to rise again. Fire, water, Slade's voice screaming unintelligibly only to be reduced to silence. "But I don't think that means you aren't my best friend. It just means that drunken orgies don't hold appeal anymore. Flashy parties are no longer exciting. I think you just have to decide if you can accept what I've become."

"You're really into some intense, chick flick moments aren't you?"

Relief flooding his veins like a shot of pain relief, Oliver smacked the other man upside the head, shoving his shoulder. "Fuck you, Merlyn!"

"Now you're just insulting yourself," Tommy shot back cheerfully. "But really. You and dad are a pair of dramatic motherfuckers. Big speeches, fucking swords, and ninja costumes! Christ!"

Lip twitching once, twice, he caved. Busting a gut, it was all the omega could to stop himself from falling out of his chair. Clinging to the table like a raft, the pair giggled uproariously.

"So how is it that you're so cool about Laurel and I?" Tommy, more perceptive than Oliver gives him credit for, reads something in his body language because he soars immediately. "Or you're more cool with it than you're letting on."

"That's not what this is about," Oliver scanned the bar patrons as a precaution before motioning for another drink. "This is about me wishing that things from the past turned out different. I'm not jealous of you being with Laurel. Scouts honor, I could care less. I'm just painfully aware of what I've lost."

"What you've lost." The puzzled tone prompted his friend to shift, planting his chin in his palms until he snapped upward in realization. "You lost someone! Not Sara?"

"Not Sara."

"You said you weren't alone on the island." And we have a winner, Oliver thought, observing the dawning horror grow in his friend's face. "Do you want to tell me about her?"

"Him," taking pleasure where he could in Tommy's gobsmacked face, the blonde jabs
"subtly at his brother. "Why so shocked? Like I never turned your head in high school!"

"And there goes my buzz," His brother complained loudly, looking at him incredulously. "The fact that I know what I know now makes that hormonal nightmare all the more sickening. But not, I'm just surprised. You had a type. Sort of."

"My paradigm shifted."

"And you became a philosopher," Tommy teased, the mood relaxed as it ever could be. "What was his name?"

"Slade," somehow, the thought alone was not like a shot to the gut and Oliver breathed life into a memory. "His name was Slade."

"You guys were close?"

"We mated, Tommy."

That little tidbit got a startled reaction as the Alpha roved over his body as if expecting to uncover some insidious hidden surprise. "You're serious?"

"Yes. And it was absolutely amazing. Our scents meshed and he marked me. And no I'm not telling you where, so don't bother asking." The expected relief flashed over Tommy's face and Oliver rolled his eyes. "I loved Laurel, but not like this. I've never been with a person that made me want to be better than what I am."

"What happened?"

Like flipping a switch, Oliver felt emotions slam on the breaks, his brain slipping in to neutral; likewise his brother recoiled, looking vaguely apologetic as he realized what must have taken place.

"Not today." Probably not ever. Contrary to popular opinion, Oliver knew that some wounds never heal, they just lie in wait to damage you.

Pocket buzzing as his phone vibrated, the blonde seized the opportunity to turn away from his brother. Relieved that it was not Moira again.

"Hey dad." Dropping the phone from bloodless fingers, Oliver looked at Tommy in shock. "Walter's dead."

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Police officers and crime scene analysts trolled the area like pesky insects; Detective Lance, annoying father of his son's girlfriend, had questioned him once, reviewed the security tape, and was back again with yet another round of tiresome questions.

Security footage confirmed Malcolm's previous assertion that he not been present for the shooting, more verified by the time stamp indicating his presence in the lobby when the shooting occurred.

"Mr. Merlyn," bulldog Lance stood a few feet away from him with his arms crossed in what the alpha supposed was meant to be an intimidating stance. Amateur. "We would appreciate it if you could fill us in on the topic of conversation you two were having during this incident."
"Dad are you okay!" Tommy, with Oliver hot on his heels approached him with a few protesting officers following behind them. Amusement crept into his mind, but he leashed it with practiced ease.

"I'm fine. Walter was killed by a sniper," Malcolm mustered his outrage and put it to good use.

"Looks like people are dropping like flies around you, Queen," Lance took a jibe at his youngest, reaching out to jam a finger into his chest, only for Malcolm to seize the detective's wrist and knock it out of the way with a thunderous growl that garnered the attention of the surrounding officers.

"Don't you touch my son!"

"Your son?" Too late to rein in the instinct, Malcolm shoots the omega a wordless apology that Oliver, such a remarkable young man, shakes off.

"I just found out when I got back," Oliver's tone was quiet but full of quiet threat.

"And that is what Walter asked me here for," Malcolm interjected smoothly, summoning attention away from his children. "Oliver, understandably, is not getting along with his mother so well and Walter asked me to speak to my son about that. While I have no hard feelings for Walter, I'm not quite ready to forgive Moira depriving me of my parental privilege. But detective, I warn you and your colleagues not to reveal what I've told you to anyone else. I consider this a private matter and not one for the media to dissect my son. And if the press does hear about this, you can expect a lawsuit in your office promptly."

Detective Lance looked like he had swallowed a particularly sour lemon, gritting his teeth slightly.

"You're free to go."

The elevator opened at that same moment as a gurney with a sealed body bag was laying on it, still as only the dead can be.

With the worst possible timing, Moira Queen came tearing into the building, took one look at the gurney and fell apart.

Malcolm reached out and wrapped an arm around Oliver, who had gone distinctly rigid at the sight of his mother on her knees, restrained by officers, and crying hysterically.

"Go," he urged his son, allowing the emotional moment to play out. What he was giving Moira now, would be gone even more quickly in the coming days. With a lingering look of distress, Oliver approached his mother looking more like a timid sprite than the lethal killing machine he was. His son's tentative touch was immediately noticed by Moira who threw her arms the omega and sobbed. Countless minutes passed and Malcolm waited. Finally that beautiful blonde raised her tear swollen gaze, saw him. Smiling like the Cheshire Cat, Malcolm tilted his head and blew her a kiss that only the grieving beta took note of with her reflexive flinch.

Game on, bitch.

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In Felicity's world of coded variables, what had always set her apart from her schoolmates was her ability to think outside normal parameters and apply her concept to a real life. Doctors had
their patients. Felicity had her computers. The only difference is her vision is to take the wheel to the next level rather than cycle through endless repairs over and over.

Replaying the life-changing encounter from the previous night, her brain, much like a computer, analyzed the facts and came up with a thousand possibilities but the big question mark was how she knew her alpha rescuer. Whether it was a lack of living witnesses or just a fluke, the failure to identify the gender of the vigilantes seemed like poor police work. But the real mystery—and boy did she hate mysteries: screw you James Patterson!—was the fact that the man knew her name.

What are the odds that she knew some guy that went around killing people for the common good? Better than average and as someone proficient in the art of counting cards, the odds were definitely in her favor. Felicity did not have a lot of close friends. In fact, she had begun to wonder if she was the unknowing victim of some viral plague that everyone had neglected to mention. So that left the pool of possibilities pretty limited.

Sirens blared down the street, causing Felicity to abandon her yoga pose and dash to the curtains, peeking outside. Inwardly she berated herself for caving to futility. The archer was not about to show up at her door and announce himself, particularly not during the daytime.

Turning the news on just in case, her stomach fluttered as a handsome photo of her old boss was put up on the screen along with a hotline for potential informants to contact the police. This morning she had taken the liberty of hacking the police database, coming up empty handed with no potential leads. Walter's killer in all likelihood was a professional, meaning he was in the wind. Turning away from that little tragedy, the omega took a breath of relief and examined the schematic on her computer screen. Instead of choosing to be afraid, Felicity decided to confront the close call like a general, calling in the troops. Or in her case, a schematic she had been working on tirelessly for the last couple days. Certainly Mr. Merlyn would not expect her to have anything ready for a prototype phase for several weeks, but the IT tech liked to consider herself a proactive individual on occasion.

A knock at her door had Felicity on her feet breathing harshly, armed herself with pepper spray and hid behind the door.

"Whose there?" Could her voice sound anymore spooked, she wondered, condemning the fears plaguing her. Maybe she was not as over it as she thought.

"Felicity, it's Malcolm Merlyn." Oh thank goodness, she could breathe again. Sighing, she let her head fall back against the door with a thunk. "May I come in?"

"Oh. Oh! Yeah hang on!"

Ripping open the locks, it only occurs to her after she's flipped open the door how ridiculous she probably looks in a Tweety-Bird tank top and work out shorts, while Malcolm looked scrumptious as ever in a pinstriped business suit and golden tie. The Alpha's face was a mask of brooding concern that narrowed Felicity's attention to laser-focus precision. There was something off. Something missing. Something right in front of her.

"I was worried about you."

Worried. Why? Reason? Analyze? Like lightning trapped in a jar, her thinking processed, accessed and computed the only possible explanation left. Two plus two equals four. Concerned Malcolm combined with that tantalizing scent equals the only verdict left to consider: her new boss was a god. Vigilante. Hero.
"It's you." In a flash, Malcolm's cheeks went ashen and she immediately set out to reassure him, planting her hands on his chest, for once able to ignore the noticeably firm pectorals. "I'm so relieved it's you."

Bewilderment in the man's face, Felicity grabbed the hideously expensive tie and jerked him inside with strength that astonished herself and appeared to impress her overly attractive employer.

Indulging herself, the blonde gripped the large hands in her own, fingers brushing the rough, callused skin that she imagined the brunette devoted countless hours bending a bow to gain such a tough exterior. A hike in breathing accompanied by her nose detecting a faint stream of Alpha pheromones caused her to drop the hand and look up at the brunette sheepishly.

Pupils slightly dilated, heart racing, the omega felt comfortable diagnosing an attraction with the afore mentioned symptoms. Granted, she felt her brain overtake her biology and she took a step back.

"I guess it's a foregone conclusion that I'm attracted to you," Felicity croaked, looking at the peeling paint of her apartment wall and cringing when she realized the living room was not in it's typical pristine state. "I have to stand firmly behind the fact that I don't sleep with people until after we've dated for a while. Not that you've asked me out, but just so you know... in case you did. So, moving right along. Thank you so much for saving me. You are my number one hero and I have spent the last few days brainstorming some gadgets to make for you ... in the case I ever found you again. And well, you're my boss so. Hello!"

"Gadgets?"

Oh, yeah that probably does sound confusing.

"Yeah," gesturing for the brunette to join her on the couch, which he did albeit a bit stiffly, she picked up her tablet and opened up her encrypted file and passed it to Malcolm.

"I've kind of nicknamed them Bug Bots," Felicity admitted, maximizing the few on her project schematic. "But this little project I'm working on is particle energy powered scouts. Basically it's a visual/auditory mini-drone that has the appearance of a tiny little insect. The ground one is definitely doable but the flying one may take me some fine tuning... and obviously I'll have to actually make it, but I think it has the basics to be something great. And.. I thought a surveillance tool might be handy for sketchy, vigilante situations."

Only after her mouth stopped moving did she realize her hands had been moving like a private, finger puppet show. Fighting the urge to kick herself, she bit her lip, sneaking a look at the wry twist to the Alpha's lips, she caught a sharp turn of the azure eyes pinning her like a bug.

"You're incredible." Flushing redder than a beet, the man turns to her and in all her life she had never seen a man look at her like she had hung the moon. It was kind of amazing really, allowing someone to come into her life, examine her, and find her intellect attractive was headier than any drug.

All at once, an invasive nose was at her throat, breathing deeply in a way that left Felicity trembling in shock.

"Felicity, would you like to have dinner with me?"

Two plus two equals four. Her hero was an inch away. And she wanted to kiss him now
more than anything else in the world. What it all added up to, the omega was uncertain, but she was determined to find out.

Boldly going where Felicity had never gone before, she leaned forward, twining her arms around Malcolm's neck, delighting in the rumble as their chests came together just right. The alpha's aristocratic nose brushed against her own and turned, lips coming together in something beyond the territory of chaste but still restrained. It ended before it really began even if their bodies clearly begged otherwise.

"I'd really, really like that," she mumbled, mouth scarcely an inch from his lips. "But I think I should probably change first."

Malcolm's laughter was infectious and soon they were giggling like a couple of teenagers on the couch.

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"Okay Ollie, the funeral is tomorrow at ten and we have to be there for it. So, don't stay out too late with Malcolm."

"Thea, it's only five o'clock now. It'll be fine." Ending the call with Thea, Oliver flipped up the hood and tugged the veil upward, covering his face.

Attaching the earpiece, he felt semi-amused to hear his dad's chatterbox girlfriend--and wasn't that a trip--bemoaning the computer set up at the base, listing all the modifications she was making to their systems. The blonde had yet to meet Felicity in person, but if Malcolm's lax attitude conveyed anything, it was utter trust, which meant the son felt compelled to give his father the benefit of the doubt.

Their evening target was a bit of a departure; rather than criminal lowlifes, Felicity used a computer algorithm to locate the headquarters of a local cult that had sprung to notoriety and out of the police control. Lead by a fanatic by the name of Simon Cage, demonic worshippers escalated from low-key meetings to physical conflicts with non-believers. Typically, the ranting of a few twisted individuals would not have even turned the omega's head, but after the cult began abducting and murdering small children over the past few days, the cult made the top of Oliver's hit list.

"It was an old convent," Felicity's voice filtered over the microphone. "The blueprints don't indicate anything special except that there is a large basement complex, but with the size of this place, the kids could be anywhere."

"Thank you," Malcolm responded for the both of them. "We need to maintain radio silence for now."

"No problem."

"I like her," Oliver smirked from behind the glass, only for his father to cuff him lightly on the shoulder. Malcolm had a hypersensitive awareness for anything up to and including that.

Separating in the hopes of covering more ground, they took diverting hallways, Malcolm up, Oliver down. Mold, graffiti, and trash covered the dank hallway, until finally a whisper of voices from around the corner drew the archer's attention.

Turning, Oliver confirmed the men wearing scarlet hoods over denim trousers matched the
cultist description and fired arrow after arrow, stepping over gurgling corpses in his path with a satisfied gait, suppressing a sneeze from years of dirt caking the walls.

"Oliver," his father's voice broke radio silence, meaning something important had come up. Pausing in his hallway, he carefully freed two more arrows from his quiver, waiting. "I located the children and I'm going to have to get them out. You're on your own in here" 

"I'll call an ambulance," Felicity chimed from the background and Oliver felt a sliver of respect for the plucky blonde as she deliberately did not contact the police, even though their arrival would no doubt be imminent.

"Cover my retreat."

"Always." Malcolm's response assertive and full of confidence. "Be on your guard."

Proceeding into the lower complex by way of stairs, he loosed two more arrows into his opponents, ducking and rolling to avoid a slew of gunfire. Downing a third opponent and peeping from behind a crevasse, Oliver sprinted the length of the corridor, flinging the door wide.

Nothing. Scanning the room, Oliver slipped into the stone chamber lined with worn, oak pews, tattered scarlet hangings, and a grotesque pulpit adorned with over a dozen dripping candles and tiny heads with shrivelled skin dangling from rope.

Horror was something he had grown accustomed to, but this was far and above the most repulsive, distressing scene he had been so unfortunate as to witness. Or incredibly fortunate if one considered the arrows on his back.

A movement from the side of the room lured his gaze. Darting forward, the omega took careful aim and fired true, an arrow catching the man in the gut. Approaching with caution, a balding man with rows of dyed black teeth looked positively giddy, blinking upward like a naughty child. Without hesitating for an instant, he affixed another arrow to the bow and drew it back.

"I hope you meet the things you worship. And I hope they make you suffer eternities for what you and your friends have done."

"Ashes, ashes, we all fall down," the man giggled hysterically and Oliver released the arrow, feeling relieved when the man's twitching fell silent. Something thick and choking filled his nostrils then, and Oliver recoiled, taking a few steps backward as static filled his ear.

The variable they had neglected to consider, was madness that coincided with zealotry. The cultist's body exploded outward, fingers and fire rushing outward to lick the walls hungrily. Instinctively, rolling, Oliver ripped at the singed veil that had quite possibly saved him from breathing in the explosion, the archer dropped and rolled, smothering the fire clinging to his body. Smoke stung his eyes as he blinked blearily, fumbling for his bow only to grab the string and find two heavy, dangling pieces that must have snapped apart in the explosion. Swearing, he tossed them to the ground, startled by how rapidly the fire was progressing until the sprinkler at the ceiling weakly started spraying the area with something that distinctly smelled not like water.

Focused on finding an exit, Oliver raced into hallway, doing his best to avoid the sporadically placed sprinklers that made the fire burn hotter and spread faster. In his ear, he faintly heard Felicity's voice intermittently screaming something about arson, but he just grit his teeth and ran down the opposite passageway, running headfirst into a pair of robed goons wielding flamethrowers as they assisted in the hallway fire.
Far from defenceless even without his bow, Oliver swung a muscular arm around the nearest man's throat, utilizing the screaming man as a human shield against a surge of fire aimed his way. Burnt flesh and screams lit up the hallway, as the dying omega in his arms flailed helplessly. Shoving the burning man toward the other, his body took an involuntary movement sideways, his world spinning and carrying him to the ground as he breathed in another lungful of smoke. It stung and he felt himself growing weaker.

The second attacker, having apparently dislodged the other man, stood above him with a psychotic leer, levelling the nozzle of the flamethrower at Oliver's face. A sense of profound calm overtook the blonde as he envisioned the end.

Shado...Slade...wait for me.

The scream from above jerked what was left of Oliver's awareness upward to see a sword exiting the zealot's chest, dripping blood on Oliver's bare face. A second later, the sword disappeared only to slice expertly through the man's head, evenly decapitating him. The corpse fell to the ground, but maybe here was the proof that the dying saw visions. What a beautiful sight... Slade, in black assault gear brandishing a silver blade.

Closing his eyes in contentment, he was stunned to feel himself being lifted and tossed over a shoulder, an aggressive tone of voice, straight from his dreams, issuing a command.

"No, Oliver! Stay awake, kid! I'm getting you out of here!"

Slade? His mind was screaming at the blonde, but he was having difficulty processing what he was hearing. Slade's voice? The vibration of his rescuer's motions seemed far away as his eyes drooped to narrowed slits. Somewhere beneath the sting and the blood, his nose picked up a familiar aroma that roused him enough to grapple weakly at the black Kevlar, desperately nosing the fabric to confirm or deny his sanity.

Underneath the smell of flame, it was there: wind, smoke, and minty Alpha. Slade was alive! Slade was here!

Slade's gait slowed momentarily, and the bunched muscles shifted, the hand bracing his body holding him firmly while another fumbled for something the man must have been carrying. A second later, the sound of a lock being opened and the doors flung wide. And he could breathe again. Sucking in a delicious mouthful of air, Oliver choked over and over, lungs working to free itself of the smoke.

Sirens in the backdrop sounded dangerously close, but Slade was running again. Fisting a hand in the back of the black pants, his swollen eyes blinked at the backside he was facing, mentally labelling the attractive buttocks as definitely belonging to his lost lover.

A van at the side of the road opened up and probably-Slade opened the side door and unceremoniously tossed him inside. Landing with a grunt, Oliver began a round of hacking and coughing that distracted him momentarily while the van's engine rumbled to life, tires peeling out as the van took off, turning expertly down a back lane alleyway.

A minute later, hacking finally under control, Oliver sat up slowly, feeling somewhat out of sorts and a combination of excitement and unrealistic fear. Projecting his emotional state, his palms grew sweaty and the inevitable pheromones swarmed the vehicle. The driver up front's breath caught in the singularly, military manner that was all restraint confirmed what he needed to know.

Before he could say a word, a buzzing in his pocket drew his attention and he realized
Malcolm was probably alternatively freaking out or plotting to kill Slade. Both options were bad. Sliding the phone out, he rapidly keyed in a quick text.

**Got out with the help of an old friend. Can't talk now. See you at the funeral tomorrow.**

Turning his phone off, Oliver's heart rate soared as the van came to a stop, the driver getting out and the side door opening.

Oliver Queen could not say what his expectations were for this moment; in his world, his mate had died an unfair death and his own life had been saved for reasons that never quite seemed feasible. To see that duel orange and black mask again was as exhilarating as it was terrifying.

Throwing back the hood, purposefully exposing his face, he waited in silence while the alpha in front of him stood, the mask tipping down to where sat on his knees, tilting upward to drink in the planes of his face.

Finally his nerves got the best of him and he approached the big man like a mouse would a cat, gloved hand extending to touch the smooth plastic frame. A powerful fist catches his own hand in a bone-snapping grasp that sends a shiver creeping down his spine. Finally the mask comes off and all Oliver can focus on is the neatly trimmed beard, the dark hair with a bit of silver coming into the sides and that expressive grin that reached twinkling mocha eyes.

Lunging forward, the hand gripping his hand releases him and they are face to face, noses brushing; the impossibility of the moment resonates until Oliver shatters the dream and uncovers the reality as he brings their lips together in a sweet, needy kiss. Slade's mouth is all ash and mint, with a feather light touch kicking into brutal desperation. His alpha's hands rub over his hair, beginning a progressively possessive journey south, rubbing the omega's back through the heavy coverings, not stopping until he slides beneath the bent knees to fondle the curve of his ass.

Arching from the touch his body was no longer accustomed to feeling, the blonde kissed his lover one more time, before breaking to wipe at his damp eyes and sink into the Australian's chest and seal himself in the protective embrace.

"You were dead!" Oliver's voice cut a hysterical edge. "But you were alive! I swear I didn't know. I didn't!"

"I know," the warm palms lifted him with that Herculean strength, Slade simply carries him out of the van. "I was sure you had been taken from me too."

Dropping his head onto his alpha's chest, he ignored the surrealism of the situation and simply huddled closer into the protective arms that squeezed his thighs in what Oliver was sure was supposed to reassuring but caused him to bite his lip in a light groan.

They were in the parking lot of a low-cost motel with an apparent lack of security detail on the perimeter.

At the doorway, Oliver looked him in the eye and Slade lifted a key up and slipped it into the lock.

"I guess this could be our version of a threshold moment," the bearded man grinned, drawing an unwitting laugh from the blonde.

"Looks like it."
So he was carried over the threshold only for the pair of them to burst into giggles like a pair of teens rather than a forty-something ASIS member and a vigilante that had just completed a mini killing spree. The Australian gently set him on his feet, kicked the door shut, and took him by the hand and pulled him toward a perfectly uncomfortable looking queen size bed with the cheap cotton sheets and an older comforter: just like heaven.

Slade turned to him then and drew the archer to him, wrapping gorilla arms around him, suckling at his bottom lip. Oliver grunted, mouth falling open as his mind raced a mile a minute, overwhelmed by the man's presence and just so, incredibly happy.

"It's been too long," the words were garbled and fevered with the rise of his body temperature. Deft fingers located the fastenings on the Kevlar vest and nimbly worked them open. Slade appeared to share his enthusiasm, hands sliding reverently beneath the green hood and tugging it over Oliver's head. Cooperating with their joint clothing removal, Oliver turned to strip out of his leather garb, bending over like a stretching feline to offer Slade an appreciative view of his backend while unlacing his boots. If the growl and hands squeezing his cheeks covetously had anything to say about it, the teasing had been successful.

A few moments later left him naked as the day he was born, pinned perfectly between the stressed alpha that scrutinized the many new scars with a venomous frown that was partially endearing, partly exasperating. Rubbing lines along the sensitive flesh of Slade's back, the elicited groan was deep and triggered a pleased purr from his own chest to know he could still effect the other man after so many years separated.

But they were both too wound up for long exchanges of pleasantries as both of them were well beyond the point of no return.

"Please, Slade," his breathing already reduced to deep, throaty pants after a handful of moments.

"I know, kid. I know."

Hands like granite seized his hips and the dark hair disappeared between his splayed thighs, to mouth along the original mating mark in his thigh, fingers winding in his lover's thick, dark hair. Lip pressed to the scarred bite and the tip of a tongue licked the outside. Heading falling backward, eyes fluttering close, he loosed a sigh of understanding. On the island, the bite and the resulting months of reinforcement sex had allowed their scents to mingle and mesh into the distinct smell of a mated pair. Now, time had wheedled away the scent until the last traces of the alpha had been erased, leaving only the faded scar as evidence of what had once been.

"Do it." Start it again, he thought--no, begged.

The euphoric agony hurt much more than he recalled the first time, the scar tissue overly sensitive. Setting his jaw, Oliver focused on the pain, willing it to become an extension of pleasure. Bit by bit, the focus on the discomfort fell away until the omega was able to concentrate on the thick tongue running along the wound, the fingers smoothing along his thigh in light circles, and the musky smell of his Alpha's vigorous arousal revived his own waning erection until he was once again stiff and leaking from his cock and his hole.

Finally having enough, Oliver lifted his legs and twisted in an admirable move that would made a contortionist proud, pulling himself away from the laving tongue flip the pair of them over. Shuffling around, he pulled the Aussie up and straddled his waist, a jolting surge of encouragement rising from the rumbling chest. Their cocks rubbed together in a heated friction momentarily, while
meaty arms cradled him in a vise grip, forcing him to grind together closer and closer.

"Fuck me, Slade."

The whisper was fierce and taunting, the omega leaned inward and bit the alpha's ear, eliciting a delicious snarl that stirred the blood flow. Reactively, Oliver felt the relative, superman, shift to grab his hips and press against the ridiculously wet opening and push inward. The muscle gave way with little resistance, sliding inside with a firm pop.

"Mine, Kid, mine. All mine!"

Slade's babbling turned the dial on his lust, ramping up the gratifying spikes with each harsh thrust deeper and deeper inside him. Mewling and scrabbling for a secure grip on his Alpha's sweaty back, Oliver managed to bridge the gap between their frantic need, managing a single kiss with a duel of tongues that inevitably lead to a tactful surrender on his part to the conquering mate that swept his mouth with ownership in its intent.

Balls tightening, Oliver wrenched away, raising himself to frantically sink harder onto the stiff prick lodged inside him, sobbing as it struck his prostrate over and over. He had forgotten what it could feel like to be so intimately connected to another person. How could he have forgotten what it felt like?

Emotionally drained and chasing instinct, Oliver allowed the bigger man to press him down on the bed and thrust over and over, until the climax shot out of nowhere like lightning, drawing a scream of ecstasy as he clenched hard around the pounding cock, vision going white as a sense of pleasant well-being blanketed him in relief. Distantly he heard Slade calling his name, groaning, his eyes flickering open:

Slade was a vision; back arched, chest heaving, pupils tiny pinpricks that made him look positively feral. Slade Wilson was beautiful.

Lack of heat meant no trigger for his Alpha's knot, but he was utterly sated. His mate pulled out and immediately rolled Oliver onto his side and slid in behind him in position for the big spoon.

Closing his eyes, he drifted on a wave of sex and the slight meshing of scents reviving in their skin. It was a natural perfume only happily mated couples experienced and Oliver nestled back into the other man's arms feeling like the most fortunate person in the world.

Following their initial lovemaking, they lay together, committing the moment to memory. Slade simply needed to run his hands over the tangible proof of his mate's existence. The texture of the scars familiar add the multitude of additional scars that gutted him. Evidence that Oliver was more than a tantalizing siren of his illusions. And eyes that betrayed the depth of depravity Oliver had witnessed in the trenches of human suffering.

It left Slade with the inescapable conclusion that Oliver had survived against all the odds. Survived and remained faithful to his memory. Such devotion rendered Slade off balance and he blinked back tears, internally berating himself for his lapse. Before the blonde in his arms sensed his slip in composure, Slade buried his nose in Oliver's hair and just breathed inward.

"I thought you were dead." The whispered confession triggered the alpha to press himself
closer to his lover's back.

"I probably should have been," the admission was easy for him considering what had happened. "Without the Mirakuru, I would have been killed. Of that I'm certain. But I washed up on another island called Pin Yin that had a local population. From there, even though I was certain there was no chance you would have survived, I returned to Lian Yu just to be positive and when I found no trace of you, I returned to ASIS for a while before being discharged. After that, I did some odd side-jobs as a mercenary. Eventually I started working on something else that I have yet to finish, but let's save that for later."

"I can't believe how awful timing can be," Oliver remarks with the bitterness of a serpent, running his fingers of Slade's arm. "Have you ever heard of A.R.G.U.S.?

Those were sly, underhanded folks if his limited encounters with the agency was anything to go by.

"They're an unofficial branch of the United States government special operations," Slade recited it like it came from a textbook. "From my experience, they tend to have dirtier hands than their compatriots"

"Understatement," Oliver snuffled wearily. "They rescued me from Lian Yu only to recruit me to become one of their agents. It didn't work out so well for either of us, but I was told no one else was recovered. It's a long story but suffice it to say, our relationship was but the first of my many stops before I returned to Purgatory for a time. I did some terrible things Slade, things that I'm not sure make me a good person anymore."

"Pfft," the Australian looked out him incredulously. "And you think that I'm any better? Because I'll tell you right now that I've done some things I regret and I can promise you that I'll do some more. But I can't carry that weight around or I'll never get up in the morning. And I won't let you either, kid. You'll drown in it."

"Guess you better stick around then," Oliver murmured, pitch dropping to trace whispers. "Stay with me."

"I'm never leaving you again," the alpha crooned, kissing the delectable neck in front of him and dropping his head down, lazily taking note of the bewitched cast to ghostly voyeur observing soundlessly from the corner.

"Protect him."

"I'm going to protect you." A promise banishing Shado's spectre for the time being.

After resting in each other's arms for an hour, the pair mutually agreed a shower was in order if the continuing residue of smoke overlaid with sex gave any indication. Slade found himself quickly pinned to the wall, his lover's wicked gleam as he claimed a need to inspect his assets; if the love of his life felt the need to savor the taste of his cock like a child licking a lollipop, well, it would take a stronger man than Slade to deny himself such a treat.

One healthy bout of shower sex later, a quick phone call to a local pizza delivery, and the pair sat on the bed, munching on slices of pepperoni pizza, and turned on Star Trek reruns--at his lover's insistence. Oliver lounged Indian style against the headboard looking absolutely ravishing in his boxers, while grinning at the screen. Slade shook his head absent in idle bemusement as he threw on a plain, white t-shirt before dropping down beside his mate, sweeping one arm around his omega's broad shoulders while taking a large bite of his pizza.
"Don't you think the Captain having sex with a pretty girl on every single planet would reflect poorly on Starfleet's reputation? Why would they give him command if he can't control himself at all?"

"I like the honesty in the characters," the blonde gesticulated viciously in the air with one hand, becoming even more animated as he talked, which Slade found to be particularly charming. "Kirk is imperfect and that's what makes him so special. He's closer to what an actual person is like—not some idealized, romanticized fabrication."

"Oh please." Secretly the alpha was pleased with the blonde's reasoning even if he was not keen on showing it.

"You know what I really like about this show?"

"Could not begin to guess."

Oliver tossed him a lecherous look that caused his lower half to stir in interest. "The fact that Kirk and Spock are definitely getting some off-screen action."

"Kirk wouldn't be sleeping with all those Beta women if that were the case."

"That was just because he was insecure. Those two always are looking out for each other—thinking of the other person's safety above their own. Like we did."

Maybe there was something to Oliver's secret science fiction addiction after all.

"Exactly like we do."

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"Okay, now watch the tape," Lucas started the playback on the single cross street camera that gave them a limited angle of the religious whack jobs' hideout.

On screen, the smoking building was already well on its way to burning to the ground, the door shut. A second later, the heavy wood door burst off its hinges, landing thirty yards off in the center of the street. Smoke poured out and the tape's grain flickered with the poor quality. A moment later a man—it had to be a man with how massive he looked—in a black and lighter colored mask appeared out of nowhere carrying a very familiar archer sans bow hanging oddly limp over the man's shoulder. Five seconds later, the pair vanished off camera to the left.

"Is this for real?" Lance covered his eyes with his hands, elbowing Jefferson in the side as practically the entire precinct crowded around the computer monitor.

"Afraid so!" Kelton the resident tech wizard proclaimed, fingers dancing over the keyboard in a slight attempt to improve the grain of the image.

"Replay it again," Lance ordered, watching the short clip for movement or any indication.

"Looks like the cultists are going masked now, sir!" The plucky new recruit chortled in between snacking on a box of fries. A chorus of dismissing groans caused the lanky shit to shrink down defensively. "What?"

"A cultist wearing body armor, swords, and military grade guns," Lance snorted derisively, the sentiment echoed by all non-rookie officers in the room. "Decides to break into the building they locked and burned down only to bust in and rescue the man they were trying to burn
alive. Great theory there, Parker."

"Our boy in black brought out those kids," DeMarcos submitted his input casually, fidgeting under Quentin's scrutiny. "All the kids were telling us and their parents at the hospital was how the 'man in black' saved them and protected them from the bad guys on the way out. That's the third time he has confirmed to rescue targets, so maybe they ain't so bad after all?"

"Not so bad?" Lance moved forward, getting into the dark toned man's personal space and looking him square in the eye. "Do you know how many corpses we recovered from that building? Huh? You don't? Well, I do! Nine and counting. The fire department will update us as their investigation continues. While I'm happy as anyone here that those kids were saved, those men are not heroes. They killed nine people tonight alone. Maybe more! I don't know!"

"Okay, sorry," DeMarcos stepped backward, eyeing the detective with a look of apprehension.

"Look," Lucas intervened, earning the attention of the crowd with his firm tone. "What we don't know right now, is who this masked guy is and what his play is. Fact of the matter is, he's carrying away an unconscious man in this tape."

"Missing person?" Lance extends his head toward heaven, pleading for a miraculous dose of divine mediation between himself and the idiots. "Some masked nut rescues our vigilante, and we have to classify it as a potential kidnapping. I can't even believe this is real life! The cops have to look for our vigilante that's been kidnapped by another masked murderer. Mark my words, this is just another member of our Archers' group. Probably off to embark on a sexual tryst."

"Christ!" The Commissioner stormed into the office, the crowd parting like it was the Red Sea as the man approached the tech and shook Kelton by the shoulder, eliciting a protest from the bony man. The alpha officer glared at the people in the room, the new recruits pissing themselves as they took a step backward. "Kelton, you are going to find out who is leaking this shit to the press! And when you do, that person is going to wish they had never fucked with our investigation!"

"So, what exactly is the press saying?"

"Take a look for yourselves." The commissioner set the channel to local news reporting agent Penny Stanton.

"If you're just joining us now, I am live outside Starling General where survivors of the Glades Arson were brought tonight. Those survivors were five children all under the age of five years old and while their names are being withheld at this time, we are told they were rescued by a vigilante duo commonly referred to as the Twin Archers. Earlier this evening, after failed attempts by police to capture the cultist regime allegedly responsible for the torture and murder of four children over the past week, witnesses claim they saw the Twin Archers enter an abandoned building to rescue these children only for cultists inside to seal the exit and burn it to the ground.

"On a surveillance tape, that we will be playing in a moment, an image of a masked man is seen rescuing one of Starling's heroic archers from the blaze," Quentin closed his eyes, ready to scream. "The question on everyone's mind here is the safety of one of the men responsible for saving these small children and what the police are preparing to do. Unfortunately, attempts to speak to the police department have been rebuffed and Starling City can only pray that their guardian angel is safe and sound after a harrowing encounter with death."

"Turn this trash off," Lance hollered, stalking off to his desk and ripping open a sheaf of paperwork. Footsteps pounding behind him had him retorting shortly. "What!"
"Hey man, it's just me," his partner attempted to be soothing.

"Okay, I'm sorry," Lance folded his hands awkwardly. "But I just can't believe a pair of murderers are winning the person of the year award around here. I mean, if justice is killing, what is the point of doing this job. I just don't get the glorification."

"It's the media, Lance. You have to expect them to twist the story in order to make their ratings."

"Yeah... I guess."

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Elsewhere:

Amanda Waller hovered over her subordinates who functioned with an efficiency of any networked computer system: nearly flawless.


Satisfaction tugging at the stern visage, Waller bent down to speak into the microphone. "This is Mockingbird. Heron, return to nest."

"Orders acknowledged, Mockingbird. Heron out."

A general cheer rose up from the room along with light clapping. Looking at the jubilant faces around the room, the beta smiled while wishing the group of employees well. Everyone that served under the command of A.R.G.U.S. tended to start out believing in protecting America, and sometimes the greater part of the world, with actions that would no doubt put them on the losing end of an ethics panel. Eventually that enthusiasm would wane as reality stared them in the face. Their job description was literally to be the dirty little secret of their great nation: officially non-existent. And as Amanda observed the technicians of the command room team celebrating, she felt a trickle of remorse. How many of these people would ever experience old age? How many would be quietly euthanized like a dog being put to sleep in the name of mercy? Once you joined up, there was no getting out despite what the paperwork might imply. You were either in or you were dead.

Efficient, successful outcomes was the prize of any operative worth their salt and Amanda Waller was the best. The beta loathed surprises as their existence rather indicated a pawn that had overstepped a leash. Today was no different.

"Waller," Anderson, one of the few team members surviving past the five year mark drew her attention from across the room with a giddy look. "Got something you'll want to see from the Starling City news."

A stream of the video with a play by play by the local media told everything Waller needed to know.

"Get our new operative in here in ten. Looks like we have some business to discuss."

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Thea's wondered if she could translate her existence into something a little less--totally, beyond screwed--and settle for normal messed up families. Here she was in towering black Prada heels with the lacy Valentino mini-dress, watching her mother apply waterproof mascara that would
enable her to cry and look fabulous all at the same time. Maybe her mother assumed beta meant different, but Thea could clearly smell her distress echoed by a stark fear that could not be so easily explained away.

At first, the alpha assumed Moira was in fear for her life, but intermittent spikes of rage raised red flags that she only remembered experiencing around the time her father passed away. It was a peculiar anomaly that Thea failed to rationalize away and left her rather stumped.

In any event, she had a solid mystery on her hands for later perusal. Fun, right.

The funeral and burial would take place on the Queen Estate because it was not weird at all to have a gravestone for drowned father number one and literally casket containing daddy number two buried side by side. Best friends beyond the grave as they say? In any event, it made Thea nauseous just thinking about all of that.

Raisa popped her head in the doorway to let them know guests are arriving. Mother, ever the perfect hostess, descends the stairway to greet her sympathetic guests. A nasty part of her urged Thea to consider how practiced and rehearsed it must be by this point.

Taking a moment to breathe, Thea stepped down the hall, nose picking up traces of a once unfamiliar, now everyday smell of Malcolm Merlyn taking up residence in the foyer.

"--if you think this is over. You are wrong. I'm not going to let you win, Malcolm. Stay away from my son or I can promise you that I'll burn your world to the ground!"

Just when Thea thought there was a chance they could talk to her mother and maybe take a stab at fixing the chaotic mess resulting from underhanded kidnappings and vigilantism, the Beta starts threatening people like a psychopath off a bad television program.

"I came to Walter's funeral out of respect for an old friend. But I think it says more about you than it does about me that you're threatening me. Me, of all people."

Closing her eyes against the excess rage, Thea ran to the restroom, clogged the drain, and turned the water on until it filled to the top. Hitting it as hard as she could, a spray of water drizzled down the mirror, distorting her reflection. Slamming her hand down again, again, and again; each motion alleviated Thea's sense of helplessness, allowing it to slip away like water down a drain. This she could control. This she could do without recourse.

Emerging refreshed if a bit sodden, Thea trekked down the stairs to the outdoors where rows of seating was set up along with an elaborate flower arrangement above a cherry wood coffin. Immediately she looked away from the casket, unable to cope with thinking about loving, kind Walter trapped in a box forever.

Milling around, Thea felt a bit of surprise at seeing Malcolm standing next to an attractive, young Omega with her arm laced through his, leaning in as if to hear what the other man was saying. Was the Ice King actually dating? Crazy.

Moira was in the midst of a group of business cronies, leaning in a bit disgustingly close to Frank Chen. Christ mother! A little early isn't it, not bothering to mask the bitter expression on her face the display in front of her.

Frowning, Thea finally stopped the back of a ebony haired brunette that she knew. Tommy! Thank god. With impressive precision for someone on heels in a grassy setting, she made a bee-line for the other alpha, draping an arm over his shoulder in absent relief.
"I am sooo glad that you're here," Thea pressed against the other man, smirking when he shoved her off. "You seen our brother?"

"Our brother?"

Fuck. Falling into flawless--lying-must-be-genetic--cover story mode, Thea gave Laurel an expression that reads, 'well, duh' and crossed her arms.

"With how close we all are it isn't so unbelievable is it?"

"I suppose you have a point there," Laurel radiates sympathy, moving to embrace her, which Thea returns with a bit of desperation that takes even her by surprise. Maybe the universal constants are things to be cherished after all. "But no, Tommy and I came together and we haven't seen Ollie yet."

"He better not skip the funeral." Please don't she begged him silently. For all of her mother's pile of sins, Walter was a good man and no one will have her ever believing otherwise.

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Nanda Parbat 10 years ago

Replacing evil with death. That was one of the pleasurable directives within his power as Ra’s al Ghul. Sweeping through the cavernous fortress that had weathered the rise and fall of empires, the leader of the League accepted the bows of fealty from the sentries lurking in the shadows. Torches flickered as he approached and the alpha liked to imagine they too shuddered in fear.

Pausing his progress outside a training room, he peered inside, heart thawing ever so slightly. Nyssa lashed out with her sword, sweeping at the aging instructor who moved with mystifying grace for a man nearing the end of the journey. Wrinkled eyes narrowed shrewdly, offering a short nod before returning to the teenager attempting to disarm him. His daughter's movements echoed a dance with the rebellious twinkle in her eye that would definitely test the fortitude of his patience in the coming years. Yet in this moment, Ra's could experience fatherly pride to witness the birth of another assassin with skills to rival the majority of the League's roster.

Nyssa felt into a respectful, deep bow worthy of any assassin only to be swept of her feet and pinned with a killing blow to the sternum by the chuckling old man, eyes widened in spent mirth.

"Dead!" The gleeful declaration was met by a scornful look from Nyssa.

"I was greeting my father. You cheated!"

"There's no such thing, young mistress. In this life there is only survival and death. And you, distracted, would be dead."

The scarlet to his daughter's face looked like she was about to erupt like a volcano. Unable to resist, Ra's laughed hard enough that his chest hurt and his daughter looked absolutely astounded while the old man merely smirked knowingly as those nearing their end are wont to do.

"You have an amazing teacher," the Alpha remarked to his fiery daughter who crossed her arms and huffed, unwittingly warming the man's heart. "You would do well to drink in his wisdom and savor it like you would precious wine, saving it for the opportune moment. But for now, go and practice your archery. I will join you later and personally offer you further instruction."
"I live to serve," the dutiful recitation was automatic and revived the pride running through his veins as his daughter bowed and instantly made her way to the exit, paused and called. "Thank you, father."

The sentiment drew a frown to his lips that his daughter never saw as she retreated into the catacombs with effortless precision. Attachment was dangerous. Fealty was absolute. But sentiment... could be the death of an assassin.

"How is she progressing?"

The bare crown of the man's head showed light sweat but the man himself exuded no obvious signs of exertion.

"In what avenue?"

"Do not mince words with me," his tone was gentle but authoritarian and Alpha as it refuted the riddles. "I'll not ask again nor should you seek permission to give me the truth."

"Skill wise, Nyssa will be one of the finest warriors in Nanda Parbat, daughter of the demon indeed," the old beta's voice strictly neutral, but tempered by fire and combat. "But she is no successor. For all that she was raised among us, she holds a candle for love and normalcy that she is yet too young to see in herself. While I admire her resistance to squash out her weakness, her inability to do so disqualifies her from inheriting your mantle, my lord."

"Is there any chance Nyssa may yet grow out of them?"

It was weakness for Ra's al Ghul to yield to doubt let alone voice them to anyone, but his old mentor was not long for this world and was his only true confidant in the decades rare instance where doubt festered.

"None."

"Finding a worthy successor is like searching the vastness of the ocean for that one particular fish," his voice drew a nod of agreement from the other man.

"You will succeed, my master," the weary master said with a confidence that restored any trace of doubt the Demon retained. The old man dropped into a cross legged pose, dropping his head to his chest in a gesture of submission and meditation. "Death comes for all, that is never in question. But the master of death is a most patient hunter. Until tomorrow?"

The question asked by all servants to demonstrate and convey their utter submission. Ra's recognized the true question lying in wait like a serpent and he remonstrated with a simple declaration. "Tomorrow."

You still have use, the alpha thought critically, glancing at the weaponry that had quietly been replaced in training racks on the walls. Your life is not yet forfeit.

Al-Owal appeared a respectful distance down the corridor with a reverent bow, eyes fixed dutifully at the floor waiting to be recognized. Wondering if this was how God must feel with the adoration of his worshipers, the Demon's Head approached the man and gave him permission for life.

"Master, three new supplicants are awaiting your judgment."

Ah, the time to test the mettle of humanity had come. Fingering the inlaid hilt of his sword,
Ra's swept into the room with the flair of a crowned king. The fabric of his robe grazed the concrete floor before he turned in the sparse chamber of stone to gaze upon three faces radiating curiosity. The first man in the lineup was a gentle faced, omega wearing homespun clothing likely from Iran, a tall blonde beta with a wide nose with rich western clothing worse an unconcerned haughty expression common among young people, and the last was caramel skinned alpha with a clean shaven face and short cropped hair wearing rumpled clothing that smelled mildly offensive of sweat a dirt. All in all, an intriguing bunch.

"You've all come seeking something that you have been unable to find in your lives before. You have been granted an audience with me, now tell me children, why are you here?"

Stopping in front of the omega, the alpha felt an instant aversion at the fear pouring off the other man as he trembled before him. "Speak."

"My lord Ra's al Ghul! My life is unremarkable and unmemorable. There has never been anything special about me, but if you'll allow me to train here, I'll offer you my sister. She--"

Ra's accepted the handkerchief offered by one of the sentries, dismissing him with a wave and wiping down the sword that had sealed more than a thousand fates. Dropping the bloody rag atop the headless corpse, he avoided the bloody floor where the blubbering man's corpse cooled.

"Selling one life to earn you another is not an acceptable bargain," he spoke aloud, silently warning the remaining men gazing upon him with understanding eyes. Good, he thought, perhaps one of them would have promise. Directing his shining blade at the remaining man, satisfaction filled him at the petrified man blinking at him owlishly from his spiffy jacket. "Speak."

"I brought you a gift," the mouse squeaked to the prowling cat, opening an expensive case full of colorful currency from all over the globe. "There's nearly two million dollars that I've acquired to bring you this present. All I'm asking in return is that you consider training me to be a top-notch assassin."

"If you were to be trained here, what will you want to do with what you've learned?"

Ra's despised asking questions he already knew the answer to, but permitting the fool to see the error of his choices was essential.

"Kind of obvious," the rich boy mocked the Demon's head, clearly forgetting the lesson his predecessor failed in the previous engagement. "I can cut you a percent of what I--"

"A cut, I will certainly take," the alpha stared dispassionately at the gurgling head, the lips still moving, eyes spinning. Turning to the final man who strangely enough seemed incredibly unimpressed, eyes haunted by something far off. Impressed so far, he turned to the last man kneeling. "Speak."

Rather than looking him in the eye, the Alpha knelt and offered the back of his neck to him for easier access.

"I've spent my life haunted by things I've done for my country," the accent was strongly South African. "I used to know what I was fighting for, but all I saw was a morass of blood and more blood. Purposeless death and all I became was a survivor. I want to be more than just a man that survives things. I came here because I want to be your sword." The man dared to look at Ra's questing eyes, an expression of unwavering commitment attracted him like no other. "I want to be a weapon of justice. So please, teach me and allow me to find purpose in your service."

"What is your name?" A pin drop would have been loud.
"Richard Crabb."

"Richard Crabb is dead," Ra's al Ghul sheathed his blade, kneeling to take the man's calloused hands in his own and pulled the elated Alpha to his feet. "Henceforth you shall only be known as Shamshir."

"What does it mean?"

"Shamshir is an ancient term for scimitar. You asked to be my sword, so you shall be."

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Nanda Parbat: Present Day

The Demon's Head paused outside the infirmary's archway, fathering himself for the inevitable encounter. Not with trepidation, but to prevent himself from acting rashly. Maintaining his presence as an untouchable effigy was no difficult task for a man with his lifespan, but as a parent, he found his temper grew shorter as the predictions of his departed master proved correct.

Nyssa, for all that she impressed him as an assassin, persisted in disappointing him.

Shamshir emerged from the room, bowing deeply, patiently awaiting a command. True to his namesake, over the years the assassin rose through the ranks with devout dedication, mastering the art of the blade under Ra's tutelage. Not limiting his mastery to the sword, he took up several other forms of combat and rapidly earning a reputation as one of the League's most efficient killers. If that were not impressive enough, the alpha had obeyed Ra's from the start like an angel subservient to his god. It was a rare breed indeed that never once questioned the purpose behind an order. Shamshir was the first to resist such a temptation and perhaps that was why he earned the respectful whisper that traced his footsteps like a lover. 'Demon's Blade,' they purred. 'Death's emissary.'

"Await me in the Pit."

A solitary nod that filled the League's leader with pride and Shamshir carried himself down the corridor, footfalls a whisper in the cavernous hall.

Sweeping inward, the torches flickered at his entry into the infirmary chambers where a dozen empty beds sat against the bare walls. At the far end of the room, the high priestess with her layers of beads and jewels knelt beside the bedside in whispered prayer. Where the priestess was bedecked in finery, the plain faced Omega physician was simply attired in plain robes of cream. Next to her, Sara Lance called Ta-er al Safer wrung her hands uselessly next to the bed where his daughter, stripped of ornamentation and garb sat with a grey gown sparing her dignity but doing nothing to disguise the thick wrapped bandages over her torso as she sat on a raised bed that was more function than comfort with bare white linens.

"My daughter, it pains me to see you hurt," how true the words were should have been obvious from the displeasure radiating from his gaze as he looked upon the blonde woman that seemed to be the source of their family's misfortune for the past few years. "Tell me what came to pass that brought you this injury."

Easier than reading a book, Ra's perceived the wordless communication pass between the pair as they exchanged telling looks that assured him that a story would be told, but perhaps one colored in special ways.

"Ta-er al Safar and I looked into the information you requested," the words came easily much as truth often does, with his daughter's eyes never once straying from his own questing orbs.
"But the trail is several weeks old and a dead end. We chose to indulge a day of relaxation before returning home."

Scoffing at that, he eyes the pair of them with frank disapproval, taking note of the defiant tilt to his daughter's chin that reminded him so much of her mother.

"You engaged in frivolous activities that I discourage for exactly that purpose," he scented the coiling upset in his daughter's smell and merely shakes his head. Sara he ignores. "Continue."

"I was shot from a distance in a place that would debilitate but not kill." Truth. Interesting. "We retreated but this man was no ordinary individual. My sword bent when it touched him."

"Bent?" Certainly legends spoke of men with invulnerability, but in a mythical sense rather than a practical. Considering the Lazarus Pit, Ra's would reserve judgment for the time being.

"Yes father," Nyssa sounded suspiciously relieved. "Shamshir and his men arrived before this man could kill me as he threatened to do."

"Who was this man?" Seeing the painfully blank expression on his daughter's face, he turned the look to Sara whose eyes dropped to the ground more out of fear he suspected than respect.

"Father, Sara told me--"

"Nyssa, I can only hope after all these years that you've learned to speak when spoken to. Not before."

Like a scolded child, his daughter deflated into silence. In some respects, he imagines it was the best he could hope for under the circumstances.

"Ta-er al Safer," his call summoned the stoic blonde's face upward like a victim awaiting execution. "Who was he?"

"His name is Slade Wilson," the words popped from her mouth like a cork from a bottle of wine. "We met on Lian Yu."

"Apparently that meeting ended poorly enough that he felt the need to track you down and attempt to murder my daughter in the street." Turning his disapproving gaze on his daughter, Ra's swept out of the room without so much as a backward glance, knowing Nyssa would confront him on the matter privately.

The Lazarus Pit was a simplified form of beauty as it bubbled continuously. Shamshir was a pillar of devotion where he knelt in supplication to both the pit and Ra's.

"Rise, my son. " Once the man sprang to his feet with the grace of a big cat, Ra's placed a hand upon the man's shoulder. "You have my thanks for saving Nyssa's life. But now, you must tell me what it is that my daughter and the Lance girl are concealing."

"If that alpha was ever human, he is no longer. Our attacks had no effect on him. But the heart of the matter is, he named Ta-er al Safer a traitor and claimed his actions were retribution for her role in his mate's death."

"Bold accusations that I feel are interesting enough to warrant looking into," he mused, pacing the chamber. "But attempting to kill my daughter is not something I take lightly either."
"What would you ask of me?"

His servant stood before him, a burgeoning fire raging in the depths of his eyes that pleased Ra's to know end. To command death itself, was true power, true ecstasy.

"Shamshir, I want you to locate this Slade Wilson and when you do, contact me, but do not engage him until I give you the order. Find him and report what you discover."

"Yes master." Excitement was a thing he heard from Shamshir only in moments such as this, perhaps it would be better to consider it bloodlust.
Chapter 8

Lian Yu

"I can't believe he took off like that," Oliver growled in disbelief, adjusting his mate's scarf around his own neck, comforted and ticked off at the same time as they patrolled the forest. Waking up without the hulking alpha wrapped around him like an octopus was out of character, but literally MIA was off the reservation.

Matching his pace, Sara jerked at every croak and chirp the forest offered; in better circumstances, the blonde would feel amused by his friend's antics, but under the circumstances Oliver felt like a helpless housewife. "Slade would never, ever wander off without telling me where he went. Especially with Ivo's goons potentially being out there, it makes no sense."

"The hallucinations have started," Sara's comment caught him off-guard, instantly prepared to deny the accusation. Slade was not nuts. Hearing the derisive snort, the beta grabbed his arm, interrupting his stride. Trouble by her words, Oliver shrugged the hands off him and kept on going, stubbornly burying the niggling doubt growing within. "Listen, Anthony might have been obsessed but he wasn't crazy. I learned a lot during my time with him and I know what the side effects of Mirakuru are. Before I fell asleep last night, I heard Slade talking to someone. At first I didn't think anything of it, but when I opened my eyes, I saw that you were asleep and he was talking to empty air."

Stomping through the undergrowth, the seed blossomed until he could no longer suppress the creeping suspicion. The idea of the warrior that Slade was succumbing to hallucinations seemed utterly farfetched. If Oliver had not witnessed the disturbed—almost jumpy—way that the alpha had been behaving the past few days he would have discarded the idea off-hand. Yet the way his mate stared off into the distance for periods of time, caused him to falter in that train of thought. Could the Mirakuru have been responsible for those long looks and unexplained behavior?

"What do you know?" Over the week, the pair had reminisced and the anger at Sara's actions dimmed like a dying flame. In his own way, he could understand how fear may have caused the girl he once knew to do some things that belonged in the realm of unbelievable. If Oliver could kill without flinching than it was certainly possible that Sara had been frightened. And since separating from Ivo, the blonde never once complained when Slade set a punishing pace that left the pair of them exhausted nor did she voice an objection when their meals were still barely palatable, with bloody juices dripping off 'cooked' flesh. Everyone deserved a second chance and so the omega quietly banished his prior anger and focused on remembering that they had once been friends.

"When I was with Anthony, he was obsessed with Mirakuru," Sara's low alto faltered, her
face a struggle with some nameless emotion as they stopped at an rocky overhand and watched the freighter. "He failed over and over to recreate the serum based on his research but each attempt was a failure. But the notes the Japanese scientists left behind clearly listed the side effects."

Dread rising, Oliver gripped the rock face until his hands whitened with the strength of his grasp, waiting the inevitable commentary.

"And?"

"And it described the recipients as seeing visible manifestations of real people that slowly drove them mad." The beta's fingers rested on his shoulder and squeezed softly, Oliver swallowing sharply and leaning in to take comfort in their proximity. "None of the test subjects lived very long after being dosed with the serum. Some even killed themselves."

"So, the Mirakuru is driving Slade crazy?" The statement seemed so empty, so pointless. And he wanted it to be a lie more than anything.

"I think we can assume that his judgment is impaired," Sara squeezed his shoulder again. "I'm sorry Ollie, but you said yourself that Slade disappearing was out of character for him."

"Great," the omega stood, lifting a rock and hurling it into the brush where the crunch of dead foliage was the only result. Hefting another rock, he chucked it at a nearby tree and watched it bounce off the bark, taking a patch of moss with it. "So, what are we supposed to do now? Slade is off god knows where possibly doing something risky and apparently talking to voices in his head."

If they were back in civilization, he could hire the best scientists in the world to help his lover, but stuck on the island all he could be was a pillar of support. What could he do? Really, what could he do?

"Anthony never made the Mirakuru," Sara's sliced through his thoughts like a blade. "But he was able to replicate a cure."

"What?" The odds of that being the case were beyond risky and left Oliver feeling more than a little dubious despite the time he had spent with Sara. "How is that even possible?"

"It was his life's work, Ollie!" The faint awe in the beta's tone left the omega with a sour stomach as he looked at her in horror. The blonde raised her hands pleadingly in his direction and stepped into his space. "I know what you think of him and I think you're right, but that doesn't mean Anthony isn't brilliant. I helped him make it and there is a cure for the Mirakuru on the Amazo."

"If that's actually the case," Oliver conceded, pacing back and forth. "What good does it actually do us? He isn't going to give us the cure."

"No, he won't," the beta admitted, placing her hands on his shoulders. "But he would trade for it."

Twisting away from his friend, he gawped at her like a fish, mouth opening and closing soundlessly. "Are you out of your mind?" The spluttered comment failed to rile the blonde even a bit. "You want to give Ivo the Mirakuru?"

"No. But I can see how much you love Slade and how much he loves you. And I think giving Ivo the serum is preferable to you losing him forever." The beta said it was such earnestness that it crumbled his fragile resolve with how true it was.

"This is a bad, bad idea." Oliver dropped his face into his hands, fingering the green hood
as if his fallen comrades could impart their advice. "But you're right. I can't lose Slade. So, the Mirakuru is hidden in the plane, how are we going to make contact with that prick?"

"We use the walkie talkie," Sara rushed, seemingly nervous and maybe not without good reason, he thought. "We'll set up the exchange."

"Okay then, let's go talk to Ivo."

The trip back to the plane was quicker, their footsteps hasty out of necessity. Sara looked determined if a bit nervous to confront her previous captor and Oliver could hardly blame her. Soon enough, they reached the plane and all that was left to do was make first contact with the devil.

"Whose going to do it," Sara was wide eyed and uncertain and reflected exactly what Oliver felt.

"Both of us," the omega decided, approaching the radio equipment, wondering what Slade would tell him if he were here. Probably tell him to quit being a moron and forbid him from making the trade. Or he would just smash the equipment.

Feeling the pit in his stomach widen, he lifted the walkie talkie to his mouth, clicked it on, and spoke in a rush. "Amazo freighter, this is Oliver Queen. I suppose it's high time we talked."

Not shattering the radio into a thousand pieces tested his commitment, but imagining what could happen to his alpha if he backs out solidifies his fragile resolve. Standing over the crate of green serum that should have been lost to the sea, the pair wait.

"Oliver," Anthony Ivo's voice sounded slick and a bit amused. "I'm surprised it took so long for you to contact me. Do I have something you need?" Oliver looked at Sara angrily only for the blonde to shake her head in furious denial. "A way off the island perhaps?"

Relieved, he backed away, offering the beta space as a peace offering that his friend accepted easily enough.

"Anthony it's me."

"Sara. I'm a bit surprised to hear from you seeing as you keep stabbing me in the back. Makes a man feel unappreciated."

Oliver watched the blonde swallow hard, clearly looking torn as she bit her lip. "Anthony please just listen to me. We're going to bring the Mirakuru to the beach and all we want is the antidote."

"A bit unwell, is he?" The scientist sounded far more interested than perturbed. "Slips in concentration, heightened irritability, conversation with people not there perhaps?"

"Now you listen up," Oliver snapped, gripping the radio tight. Ignoring the warning look Sara shot him, he fulfilled a promise made in the darkness of the Amazo's bowels with a fresh bullet wound hampering his rest. "You free your prisoners as a sign of good faith. None of them deserve to be your lab rats! And you will send no more than one of your men to the island or the deal is off!"

"Not a chance."

"Then you can forget about the Mirakuru," Oliver unzipped his pocket and lifted a pocketbook of matches, noting the horror crossing Sara's face.

"Ollie no!"
"Listen up you rotten bastard! I'm going to burn your precious serum until there's nothing left, Ivo," Oliver hissed, striking a match until one was lit properly.

"Fine. You be at the beach in one hour and I'll have the prisoners meet you there."

"One hour." Oliver chucked the radio across the room, hearing the beta's breathing settle down from the dispute. Shaking the match out, he dropped it to the ground and grinded it into the dirt for good measure.

"I really, really wish I could put an arrow in that guy." Oliver muttered, walking over to the crate and snagging a handle. Sara raced over and lifted the other side, nodding absently before smiling crookedly.

"That was some creative thinking there, Queen."

"Thanks, but I feel like I just made a deal with the devil," he shivered, dropping down to lift the crate and adjust his grip on his bow. "We better get going if we want to get there on time."

A few close calls from tripping over loose stones from the rough terrain, the pair made it to the forest edge where a boat filled with unwashed, filthy occupants that looked far worse for wear than Oliver was after over a year with only a waterfall as a proper bath.

Setting down the box carefully, he drew his bow, drawing an arrow from his quiver and notched it carefully.

"While it looks like they're following our instructions, we can't trust them." Oliver stepped out, weapon brandished as he approached the beach. "You follow behind me with the crate. I'll cover the both of us."

"Okay." Sara's response was meek and agreeable, but Oliver had no time left.

Stepping into the sun, he pointed the arrow at the dark-skinned mercenary staring at him spitefully from the boat while his passengers scrambled to get off and away to relative safety. A familiar, scrawny man stumbled in his direction, the wizened face wild and grinning despite the circumstance.

"Oliver, you kept your word! I knew you were a good one."

The heavily accented English extracted a smile of his own, though his eyes continued to assess the mercenary in the boat.

"Bring the serum here," the mercenary demanded, pointing to the boat with a smile that would make a shark proud. "Then I take you to get your cure."

"That was never in the agreement," Oliver snapped, glaring daggers at the man and drawing the bowstring back just a bit more.

"Then you won't get what you came for."

"Fine, Sara load it up. I'm going to give Anatoly directions to the plane." Seeing the blonde nod slightly, he kept his sight trained but motioned for the wizened Russian to come closer.

"Oliver, don't tell me you're going out there," the Russian omega hissed, gesturing to the craft. "They'll kill you if you go."
"This does seem more than a little fishy," he acknowledged bitterly, feeling like the desperate man gambling his life away. "But I'm not so easy to kill. And Sara told me the man has something my mate needs. I have to try."

"You cannot trust that girl," the lined face begged him desperately. "She is no different than that man. She's evil."

"I think you're wrong," he looked at the blonde holding the crate in her arms and back to the Russian. "I think she made some poor choices and she's trying to do the right thing now. And I have to do this. For Slade."

The man muttered something in Russian that was in all probability making fun of him, but the omega just felt a sense of relief. But there was a final favor to ask. Just in case things went as wrong as he feared.

"Anatoly, there's a submarine that collided with a reef from World War II. If there is even a remote chance that you could fix it and get off this island, you need to do it. And if I don't make it back, make sure Slade goes with you."

"You're a good boy, Oliver," the Russian places a hand on his shoulder and patting in a familial manner. In different circumstances, Oliver imagines they may have been lifelong friends. "If you live, come see me in Russia and I will teach you to speak the tongue and drink the vodka. I will never forget that you saved my life. So don't die on that boat."

"Guess we'll see."

Walking forward while maintaining a fixed position was not difficult, but it was awkward. Stopping just short of the craft, he maintained his offensive posture and noticed Sara huddling near the boat's bow.

"You can stay here too. There's no reason for you to have to risk your life going back there," he addresses his friend with concern, feeling touched that she was willing to go as far as she had.

"No, this was my idea," Sara replied, rising with the perseverance of a queen. "If things go south, I'm our best chance of not ending up dead. So don't bother trying to talk me out of this, Ollie. We're both going."

Feeling touched by her bravery, Oliver smiled weakly in return and shook his head. "Well, I guess we're both the fools."

"Shut up and get on the boat," the mercenary growled, sobering the momentary good humor.

Stepping into the craft, the craft rocked slightly beneath him and Oliver had to fight down a wave of nausea as he looked at the waves. Grateful for Yao Fei's diligence, he cast off the fear clinging to him like a web blanket and felt a web of serenity flow over him. Focusing on the task at hand, the archer's fingers flexed and with each passing moment, Oliver found himself surprised that a rain of gunfire had not descended upon him from above.

For a moment, he could have sworn he heard someone calling his name. Turning his head, he scanned the shore where he left the group of refugees, seeing only bony Anatoly waving in the distance. Offering a tentative wave back, he turned away, convinced his mind was playing tricks on him. Just ahead the Amazo loomed along with Anthony Ivo, watching them draw closer like a
hungry wolf. At last, ropes were tossed down, fastened, and the boat was hauled aboard the freighter.

"Sara, thank you." She was risking her life for someone she had been walking on eggshells around; if that was not true compassion, Oliver could not have known what was.

"Don't thank me, Ollie," something strained in her voice.

Finally the boat appeared over the side of the deck and Oliver immediately trained his arrow on Ivo's smirking face.

"I appreciate your dedication but let's settle our transaction like civilized people, shall we," Ivo remarked before turning his gaze to the crate, looking as if the world had fallen away leaving nothing before him save that.

Swallowing bile, his mind flashed to Shado's limp body and the smell of gunpowder. "You killed someone I loved for no reason, Ivo. Nothing is civilized about you." Swallowing harshly, his nose detected Sara's scent approaching from behind. "So give me what we agreed upon and send us back to Lian Yu."

Wham. A blow to the head knocked him off balance and set the world a kilter. World spinning like a merry-go-round, Oliver moved only to retch violently, choking. Looking up, he blinked until his eyes focused on the blonde standing over him with a look of vague apology.

"Our plan worked well with the exception of our jail break," Ivo's voice sounded not so far away. Two sets of arms hauled him to his feet, and jerked him upright, causing him to breathe harshly as his brain came back on line. "Well done, Sara."

Sara...wincing from the pain, he turned his head to see the Judas creeping forward to tuck herself into Ivo's chest and sigh contently. Mouth falling open as the agony of the betrayal set in, he felt rage rise up and he screamed.

"Why? How could you do this, Sara! We've been friends for my entire life! How could you!??"

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Two hours before Walter's funeral

Tommy Merlyn was as prepared as person could be to attend a funeral. Truly, he could say that he had little to no connection with Walter, but seeing how devastated Thea was by the man's death made him feel the need to be supportive for her sake.

Taking the stairs two at a time, he crept past the numbered doors as quiet as a mouse until he reached the last one at the end of the hall. Equal parts excited and nervous, Tommy rapped his knuckles on the wood, a feminine voice calling out a hearty "be right there," drew an unwitting smile to the alpha's face. A few moments passed, allowing Tommy's nerves to build, until the apartment door flew open.

Laurel Lance had always been a vision of beauty. Honey colored hair that fell in soft, wavy curls down her chic little pant suits, with an excess amount of rings that contrasted with her business image in a way that made her unique in a world of norms. To say the alpha had always been attracted to Laurel was the truth, but he never mustered the courage to approach her until a year after Oliver's disappearance. Laurel was like an untouchable piece of exotic treasure, to be seen and not touched, but Tommy wanted to be near her like he had never wanted anything in his life. Today,
Laurel was ever the exquisite masterpiece with her hair pinned up save a few spare ringlets of hair teasing her collarbone and a little black dress with shimmering stones.

"You look beautiful."

"Well, thank you, Tommy," Laurel lead him into her spacious apartment, finding it as unlived in as ever save the stack of CNRI folders strewn over her coffee table. "Can I get you anything to drink?"

"Hmm?" Wake up, space cadet! Tommy berated himself for feeling inattentive. The last thing he needed was to jeopardize the tentative relationship status he had with Laurel. "No, no I'm good."

"You feeling alright?" The beta's concern softened his mood like a dog getting petted.

"Yeah. I'm just worried about how Thea is going to be doing at the funeral," the alpha confided, flopping down onto the plush couch that smelled faintly of the incense the attorney burned so often. Lurking beneath the surface of Tommy's thoughts, he pictured his father and Oliver as they identified the origin of the shooter's bullet and canvassed the scene like a couple of crime scene investigators. It had been quite the sight, but he was glad Thea had not been there to endure how little they discovered. No motive. No evidence. No suspect.

The rustle of feet over carpet announced Laurel's impending arrival as she dropped down next to him, picking up a cushion to play with the tasseled end. "I feel so bad for Moira. I saw what my father went through when my mom left and I know how devastated she must be."

"Yeah I guess," a lack of conviction in his tone as he remembered waking up in a warehouse bound to a chair, prepared for his head to be blown off by the men that had taken him and his best friend.

"Tommy what's wrong?"

Laurel's soft, smooth fingers reached over to trace the back of his knuckles before settling on top. Spellbound, Tommy turned his wrist until their palms met and he interlaced their fingers.

"To be honest, the last couple weeks have been absolutely ridiculous," the alpha grunted, shifting his knees to become more comfortable, finding it a bit strange to have Laurel look at him with such an intense focus. "I can't tell you everything that happened, but I can tell you that I've been left with so many doubts and questions."

"Well, whatever is bothering you," Laurel's words evoked a peculiar tenderness even as she squeezed his hand once hard. He returned the grasp in kind. "I've had a lot of practice being a good listener."

"What do you think of the vigilantes?" The question comes out like a shot and Tommy barely has time to be horrified before Laurel responds.

"You realize one of them saved my life," Laurel's voice is soft and definitely not offended, but borderline teasing.

"Yeah I know," Tommy grunted, inspecting his shoes for imaginary dust before turning back to Laurel and drowning in her perfect mocha gaze. "And I don't think I've ever been more relieved in my life."

"I don't really know why you're thinking about the vigilantes," Laurel reasoned with him,
leaving him breathless. "But I can tell you that my dad and I have very different perspectives on the matter. I don't know how I feel about the vigilantes shoot-to-kill policy, but I do know that criminals previously deemed untouchable are no longer just getting away with it. And after they saved those kids, I hope they keep doing what they're doing and they avoid getting caught. If my dad heard me say that, he would totally freak out, but they're killing murderers and saving innocent people. I can't say what they're doing is right, but it doesn't feel wrong either."

"Simple as that," he mused, picturing his father and brother vanishing into the darkness in their costumes. Laurel's response to what Tommy had been struggling with for so long settled the conversation he had with Oliver. Could he accept Oliver and his father for who they were? It took his girlfriend's honesty to settle the storm of misgivings and allow the alpha to find redeeming value in the choices of people he cared about. Maybe he owed Oliver a favor or at the very least he would make an attempt not to complain when the pair of them worked him until he was a puddle of stiff muscles.

"So, are you really going to tell me what's actually bothering you," Laurel poked back like any good attorney would, easing forward to tuck her head against his shoulder. Taking a deep breath of relief, the alpha lifted his hand to run his fingers through the wispy curl dangling in front of her ear. "Because we still have a good hour until we have to get going to the funeral."

"Look, you can't say anything," earning a suspicious nod that made him wince, Tommy continued to pet Laurel's hair, paranoia causing him to experience extreme apprehension. "But my dad was the one who brought Oliver home from Hong Kong after he was saved from the island. They discovered something that has kind of turned everything on its head."

"What happened?" Laurel Lance pulled back, the epitome of unpredictable as she oozed concern for a person she had so fiercely claimed to despise. "And how is your dad involved?"

"Oliver's my brother."

A pin drop, a look of incomprehension, and he might have flinched backward a hair. Finally dead silence while Laurel pulls back with her arms crossed. "I'll admit I'm very, very surprised."

"Look, you can't say anything," earning a suspicious nod that made him wince, Tommy continued to pet Laurel's hair, paranoia causing him to experience extreme apprehension. "But my dad was the one who brought Oliver home from Hong Kong after he was saved from the island. They discovered something that has kind of turned everything on its head."

"What happened?" Laurel Lance pulled back, the epitome of unpredictable as she oozed concern for a person she had so fiercely claimed to despise. "And how is your dad involved?"

"Oliver's my brother."

"You're telling me," Tommy swept his arm around his girlfriend's shoulders, and hauled her into a hug where he quietly nosed her neck, recognizing the biological response wouldn't be forthcoming, but needing to be close to the beta all the same. "There's some other things too, but Oliver and Thea are not getting along with their mom due to basically drama that's thicker than blood."

"I'll bet your dad was a bit upset."

"Understatement of the century. Dad was absolutely furious and from what I understand, tensions between Moira and my dad are at an all time high. And I don't think Walter's death has cooled their jets."

"Well, can't say that I can blame him. Not knowing you have another child is a big deal. I would have been upset. Oliver and I aren't on the best terms anymore, but I still feel sorry for him."

"Me too," Tommy whispered, staring up at the sky. "Me too."
Tightening his arm around Laurel, the pair sat in the hushed stillness until a light knock disturbed the relative silence.

"Were you expecting anyone?"

"No," Laurel appeared as perplexed as he felt, rising and crossing the room with a helpless shrug. The beta peered through the peep hole, jerked around to glare at him accusingly. Confused, he mouthed 'what did I do,' causing his girlfriend to roll her eyes and throw open the door. "Mr. Merlyn, hi. I wasn't expecting you. Please, come in."

In waltzed his father and the brunette found the conditioned nausea never made an appearance, instead the younger alpha was filled with a quiet sense of fulfillment that had been carefully nurtured over the past couple weeks. The relationship was still fragile in its infancy, but gone was the toxic tension that used to poison their parental bond.

"Tommy, I can't say I'm surprised to see you visiting your girlfriend," Malcolm remarked good naturedly in a way that made the young boy in Tommy light up like a star. "But I came by to see Laurel."

His girlfriend shot him a raised eyebrow accompanied by that look that he quickly shook his head at, silently pleading innocence to the interrogation.

"Well, come and sit down. I'll help however I can," Laurel, practiced diplomat with words took a seat next to him while his father dropped down across from the both of them.

Skipping the pleasantries, the older alpha tugged right in to the reason for his visit. "Laurel, I've been told CNRI is going to need donations if you want to continue the work you do," his father shifted into CEO mode in a way that might be a hair creepy. "I'm prepared to make a ten million dollar investment in your firm."

Tommy blinked in shock, noting Laurel sitting up, poorly concealed excitement in her gaze before a trace of suspicion brought forth a solid frown.

"What's the catch?"

"Very astute, Miss Lance," his father remarked shrewdly and Tommy felt his old suspicious nature coil in his gut. "The donation will be yours under condition that you represent me in a civil lawsuit against Moira Queen. Seeing your lack of surprise, I'm going to go ahead and assume Tommy's told you about his brother."

"Yes, Tommy told me about Oliver, but Mr. Merlyn you have to understand that I was friends with the Queen family for years." It was a beautiful thing to watch his girlfriend dig her heels in and refuse to concede her argument, particularly knowing how intimidating a presence his father cut. "I think that presents a conflict of interest and I really think you should consider someone else. Or in light of Walter's passing, consider waiting."

Impressed with Laurel's initiative to go to war with his father, Tommy held his breath and waited to see what would happen, feeling torn regarding what he was hearing.

"While I'm aware this is a difficult time for her, discovering she concealed my son from me took a great emotional toll that I'm not prepared to excuse," his father paused for a moment, staring out the window into the sun before his lips pinched, conveying a depth of anguish Tommy had never witnessed from the man. "Out of respect for Moira and Oliver's relationship, I have chosen you to represent my interests in an attempt to keep things quiet while setting the ball in motion. So yes, there
are more experienced attorneys that I certainly could seek out, but perhaps not ones that are discreet while still being compassionate. I don't want to alienate my son, but I'm not prepared to let his mother get away with denying me the opportunity to be his father."

"Okay, Mr. Merlyn," Laurel clapped her palms together, reaching out to shake his dad's hand firmly. "I'll do this, but I'm doing it for the kids. Tommy, Thea, and Oliver deserve to have things as low key as possible."

"I wouldn't have it any other way," his father nodded, reaching into his pocket and brandishing a check in the air before depositing it in Laurel's shaking hands. "I trust that will keep CNRI and all the impressive work you do in business for some time."

"It'll be a huge boost for us," Laurel confirmed, reaching out to take Tommy's hand and squeeze once before allowing their fingers to lie together in a tangled mash.

"Wonderful," his father rose, lifting a hand to motion them back. "I can let myself out. I'm going to pick up Felicity for the funeral. I'll see you both shortly. Laurel, son."

And then there were two.

"Your dad has it bad."

"Oh god, gross. Shut up!"

Laughter won the day as the pair cuddled up on the couch, letting time pass.

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Slade stood behind his omega, adjusting Oliver's tie from behind, amused by the visible tent in the blonde's pants. Not immune by any means, his own length had stiffened with interest, his groin firmly against his omega's clothed ass.

"If it wasn't for this bloody funeral," he nipped the shell of a delectable ear, earning a reflexive gasp from the younger man. "I would have you again, here and now."

"Well then let's go so we have an excuse to leave early if we need to."

"Now, there's an idea I can get behind," Slade finished knotting the tie and released the younger man, feeling out of his skin jittery in the customized black suit he purchased for formal mission settings. Perhaps too much time enduring kill or be killed settings fed the discomfort, but Slade could easily spend the rest of his life in military fatigues with the familiarity of a Kevlar vest and would feel as restricted a bird in the sky. Slade supposed he truly had become a paranoid bastard, ingrained habits refuting the simplicity of civilian life; although, if his omega intended to spend his nights getting trapped in burning buildings and getting shot at by criminals, a little compulsive behavior could be downright healthy--lifesaving even.

"You're not coming back here. You're moving in with me."

My oh my, his omega was still a demanding little chit. Thank God that some things never changed.

"As you wish," he bowed, serving the younger man a dose of the royal treatment. "I always knew you would be the perfect, nagging wife someday."

"God you're such an ass!" There was no heat, only gleeful joy that renewed the soul.
"Damned straight," he remarked, retrieving a large duffle from the closet and depositing it on the bed to add the few miscellaneous items he placed strategically around the room. With Oliver's help, Slade's meagre possessions, primarily weaponry, much to his mate's dismay, were collected and the room abandoned.

Dropping the old key off, the two of them got into the parked van, the younger man looking around at the interior and radio equipment curiously.

"I arranged for one of my old contacts to set me up with a practical vehicle that would be ideal for covert operations. I think an unmarked van with proper equipment is way more valuable than a flashy set of wheels," Slade explained, watching Oliver nod in interest as he took in the potential space the vehicle could have.

"Definitely good for team ops."

"Indeed." Glad you agree, he mused silently, noting the blonde's surprise when he took the appropriate exit toward the family mansion. "It took me a little longer to track you down once I realized you weren't at home." The slight 'oh' expression quickly morphed to chagrined. "But the extra days did give me time to access the vigilante information, which was incredibly interesting. I hope whoever your partner is, doesn't mind a third companion because someone needs to save your ass."

"It's just my dad," Oliver spilled in a rush, a reactionary force rather than allowing his brain to process. Either way, this was something he wanted to hear as he was pretty positive Robert Queen was buried next to Yao Fei on the island. "When I got back, they tested my DNA and contacted my biological father and we have been working together since then. His skill is incredible. To be honest, I don't think I could beat him in a fight."

The implication behind the statement stung, but Slade brushed it off and snorted, "I think I'll have to discover that for myself with a friendly spar." But that was a fascinating little tidbit regarding his mate's father. Robert Queen, had the man still been alive, would have become intimately familiar with his fist several times over; knowing the man had more than likely intentionally mistreated a child did not do much to change Slade's opinion of the man.

Oliver tugged at his tie as they approached the monstrosity the Queen family called a home, a nervous habit that alerted him to something amiss.

"I know that talking you out of helping on missions is out of the question." At least the kid picked up common sense while we were separated, Slade thought, parking the van part way up the stretch of driveway behind one of the many parked vehicles. "But I've only had you back for less than a day and I think if I lost you again... well, I'm sure you can imagine."

"Hey," the alpha leaned in, fingers taking his mate's stubbled chin and coaxing him closer, claiming his mouth in a kiss tasting of protein bars and toothpaste. A perfect heaven. After a brief duel of tongues, they separated and Slade took the unfortunate job of being the adult. "We better get going or we're going to be later for your step-father's funeral. And some old bitty is giving us the evil eye."

Sure enough, Oliver sat up quick enough that he conked his head against the glass. Laughing, the Australian bailed out of the van, gleefully noting disapproving looks from passing mourners, while Oliver let himself out of the other side of the van, once again tugging on the lapis tie.

"Quit messing, you look ravishing and believe me I would know," he stated in an
obnoxiously loud voice that set the omega's lips into a thin line. Rubbing his hands together, he felt positively optimistic about the prospect for tonight's activities: they always did enjoy a good fight before fucking.

"Can we just go?" Heeding the warning symptoms of impending bitchiness, Slade made a tactful retreat and lifted his hands in surrender, offering his arm to the blonde.

"I'm sorry if I upset you." True even if he did not regret the act itself, but he never wanted to hurt Oliver. His kid had been hurt enough already. "You know I've never been soft, but seeing you smile is a weakness of mine."

Bribe accepted, the blonde's posture softened and the archer tucked his arm into Slade's elbow, where the alpha cradled it like treasure and the pair joined the steady throng of mourners making their way to the house.

"So, does this father of yours have a name?" Slade kept his tone low enough to prevent eavesdroppers listening in whilst loud enough for Oliver to pick up on the question.

"Malcolm Merlyn and I think you'll like him. He trained in Nanda Parbat and he's quite the swordsman."

The League of Assassins. Only years of crafted control prevented Slade from having a Mirakuru induced outburst. It seemed almost too coincidental for a member of the League sheltering the person he despised most on this Earth, shared membership with his omega's father. Even the thought that Malcolm may have once broke bread with the harlot slimmed the chance of building trust to fairly poor odds. Reigning in his temper was not the simple mastery it once was, but Slade had wrestled with his symptoms for four years until he could live as normal an existence as possible with thanks due to his iron-clad control.

"The League of Assassins," he commented, sensing Oliver's surprise. "You forget who I used to work for. I've encountered their members before but I have to admit this is the first time I've heard of a member living outside of Nanda Parbat."

"I'm told my father was released from their service after he completed his training. He came back before I left with Robert Queen actually."

"Interesting. I can't wait to meet him." And to test his mettle, to see if he is actually everything a father should be.

Reaching the edge of the outdoor pavilion where a guest list was being enforced to keep out the press, Oliver and he were able to bypass the wait as members of the family and enter the outdoor area where large groups of people were gathered talking and waiting for guests to finish arriving and if his watch was accurate, they had a healthy fifteen minutes to wait for Oliver's family to attack them like a bunch of rabid hyenas.

They were accosted by a few boring individuals that reeked big business that Oliver brushed off like annoying gnats. But Slade recognized Malcolm Merlyn before he was introduced; while his mate was busy dealing with yet another nosy imbecile, Slade had been scanning the crowd, senses on high alert even if it seemed unlikely that anything would occur in this setting. In the midst of a crowd, Slade noted an attractive blonde sneaking starry eyed glances at the brunette alpha next to her, watching him speak to an old man like it was the most fascinating conversation in the world. It was normal enough to dismiss if not for the sudden stiffening posture before the man's head tipped subtly. Ah, scenting the air, Slade was reluctantly impressed. The alpha's left hand extended slightly and Slade felt realization hit as a gentle breeze brushed past him and the fingers went down. The
clever bastard had been testing the direction of the wind.

And there it was, Oliver's father--unmistakable from the eyes alone--locked on the two of them dead on; like lightning in a bottle, Slade watched the rival alpha assess his son before fixing his eyes on him. For the first time in years, the Australian felt a keen sense of danger and thrill from the very real threat in the other's mans eyes. Almost quick enough to pretend otherwise, Oliver's father returned to his conversation as if no exchange had taken place.

"Ollie!" The squeal came from the left, the omega knocked off balance by a brunette heartbreaker that even Slade would have been tempted by had Oliver never stumbled into his hideaway. The girl was lanky, all alpha, and the vicious mirth in her posture made her undeniably adorable to Slade's eyes. Waiting for it, he was not disappointed when the girl jerked back like she had taken a bite of something particularly rotten.

"Oliver you made it!" Another alpha, but this one came with an accompanying beta female that appeared oblivious to the possessive stench emanating from her. Someone's desperate, Slade thought in disgust, nose wrinkling for a brief moment as he shifted away from the new arrivals.

"Who is this?" The beta chimed in helpfully, shooting him an appreciative look that he responded to with a wink. The girl blushed and he smirked: he still had it!

"This is Slade," Oliver addressed Laurel, firming disentangling himself from Thea and reinitializing contact with Slade's arm, earning a rumble of pleasure from him. "And Slade, this is my sister Thea, my best friend, Tommy, and his girlfriend, Laurel Lance."

If it were possible for the younger sister to turn even greener, she was well on her way, but Slade was distracted by the comely beta with her all too familiar namesake. The girl must have felt the force of his stare because she returned his frank appraisal with a raised brow that riled him. The Australian desperately wanted to question her, but recognized this was not the appropriate opportunity and so confined his curiosity.

"You let some guy fuck you and brought him as a date!"

"No!" There we go, watching Oliver's cheeks flush redder than a tomato uncoiled the spring in his gut.


Interest piqued, the alpha stepped forward and offered his hand toward the brunette looking like the cat who had gotten the cream.

"Slade Wilson. It's a pleasure to meet you. I'm Tommy Merlyn," the undisguised excitement freed tension the alpha did not realize he was carrying, improving his good humor. The boy's handshake, while not particularly strong, was firm and they shook carefully before the other man looked back and forth between Oliver and Slade with a sheepish look. "Thea's not wrong, you guys really are broadcasting. I wouldn't be surprised if you two are on the cover of tomorrow's society pages even with the ban of reporters. That being said, I'm thrilled to meet you. The way Oliver told it, I thought you were dead."

That little declaration earned startled looks from the pair of women; Thea looking uncertain if protective and the beta flat out lost.

"I'm not surprised. I don't think there was a more horrible time in my life than when I thought I saw Oliver die."
The trio's mirroring looks of horror set Oliver into damage control mode. "Yes, Slade was on the island with me and we'll talk about it later since it looks like the funeral is going to start in a few minutes. I should probably take a moment to talk to my mother."

Before anyone could waylay them, his omega all but dragged him toward the front of the area where Moira Queen, looking like she had been through the ringer with the raccoon eyes and the slight tremors passing through the blonde's clenched fist. Moira Queen looked like a dog backed up into a corner and that made her a cautionary tale.

When Moira saw the pair of them her shoulders slumped and the woman moved to embrace Oliver with open relief in her expression. His omega's guarded stance triggered his own protective instincts and he scanned the hugging pair, seeing nothing but a grieving mother holding onto her child for a semblance of comfort. What was he not seeing?

"Sweetheart, I'm so happy you're here," her unfocused watery eyes blinked, subtly looking from her son to him and back again. "Who is this?"

"Mom, this is my boyfriend, Slade. But I need to grab Thea so that we can all sit down together."

"Of course," his mother replied with the expected amount of patience, her eyes flashing to assess him with a calculated frown before the widow again besieged by another group of mourners.

"Smooth," he remarked to his disgruntled omega as they secured themselves a pair of seats far and toward the back of the pavilion, dropping into the uncomfortable plastic chairs. "You want to tell me what that was all about? And don't bother denying it, you're a better liar than you were before but I can still read you like a book."

"Not here." The terse reply informed him that the issue was serious and something his lover definitely feared being overheard. Translation: dangerous.

A few people moved as if to approach them, only to shy away with the warning glare directed by the Australian alpha. Tugging Oliver over with an arm loosely around his mate's waist, the kid yielded and leaned closer for a public PDA.

"Feel my chest," the words came out dirtier than he intended and his omega shot him a look like he had murdered a puppy.

"We are not doing that and--"

"No," a warning hum in his voice silenced the omega who glanced around before listening attentively. "Trust me and do it."

Curiously the skeptic skated his fingers across the crisp white dress shirt, before pausing on a lump, and then carefully tracing the bumpy a shaped lump. Patiently waiting for the younger man to figure it out, he knew immediately when a pair of hands snaked around his neck and his omega moved to almost straddle his lap, their lips coming together organically. Tasting, teasing, and gentle. More than a few whispered comments citing 'inappropriate' and 'indecent' were thrown around, but kiss lasted a moment and it was precious all the same.

"You still have it." Oliver's voice epitomized awe, even as he retook his seat, continuing to stroke the alpha's cheek in a manner that drew a rumble from Slade's chest.

"It was all I had left of you," he imagined the black obsidian dangling from the chain beneath his clothing. "There wasn't a day that went by when I didn't look at it and remember."
Like the sun, Oliver's smile brightened the darkest of souls. Taking his omega's hand in his own, he caressed the calluses and the smooth skin on the back, lightly stroking.

At last, the minister arrived and got the show on the road. Several people had been slotted to speak about 'dearly departed Walter' and lauded his charitable, business, and personal life. Basically everything that makes a funeral boring. Oliver's sister took the stage to thank the man for being there for her family in their darkest hour. Moira's speech, especially the last bit was unsettling if a bit telling.

"And lastly, I want to address the party responsible for my husband's untimely death. Know that you struck down one of the best of us. And for what you have done, there will be a price to pay."

"I can't believe they ditched the lunch!" The alpha inside Thea rattled the cage, infuriated that she had been railroaded by her sneaky, vigilante brother. She was so going to practice her throwing with actual daggers next time!

"I can," Tommy unhelpfully chimed, ever a strain to Thea's exaggerated patience. The crowd was thinning as people headed inside, eager to take advantage of Queen style hospitality.

"Your dad and his girlfriend are ditching too," Laurel pointed out the polar opposite twins sneaking around the side exit.

"Oh come on," Tommy remarked dubiously, squinting at the pair in disbelief. "My can't be dating her. He's old enough to be her dad!"

"He's still an attractive man, Tommy," Thea relished in the wounded look the other alpha shot his girlfriend, only to realize Malcolm and the hot chick were nearly out of sight.

"Oh hell no!" Full on dashing across the dew-laded grass in high heels was tricky, but the cries of alarm from her companions made it worth it. Knocking aside a branch, she came within sight of the couple approaching a waiting limousine. "Wait! Malcolm! Hold your horses, what's the rush! You don't have another funeral to attend, do you?"

Turning, the blonde looked somewhat perplexed and the large man sighed, unable to conceal an eye roll as his eldest son approached from behind with an out-of-breath Laurel clutching her purse for dear life.

"Felicity," the group's head alpha made a sweeping gesture of the group. "My son, Tommy and his better half, Laurel. And my son's sister, Thea."

"Nice to meet you all," the blonde waved at the group with a friendly but respectfully neutral expression.

Opening her mouth to lay into her--strange-mentor-possibly-father guy, her jaw falls the rest of the way open a wail of screeching tires heads their direction with an accompanying hail of gravel shot into the air like a bullet barrage and a white van, standing out like a sore thumb amidst the company of top of the line vehicles, barreling toward the group only for the breaks to squeal and come to a stop behind the limo blocking it's path.

Prepared to utter a string of obscenities, the words die when her brother pokes his head outside the passenger side door with a cheeky grin, unable to see anything but the general outline of the vehicle's other occupant through the tinted glass.
"Dad. Guys!"

"You're leaving the funeral too?"

"No...we paid our respects to Walter and decided not to stay and listen to a bunch of people that didn't know or care about Walter try and make themselves look good to mom."

"That reminds me," Malcolm intervened while the rest of the crowd stood around like they were one bowl of popcorn away from an Oscar winning drama. Or comedy. "Walter mentioned something to me the night he died. It may be nothing, but I'm going to check it out. It's probably nothing but I want my conscience to be clear. So I'd love to stick around and chat, but Felicity and I have some sleuthing to do. And Oliver, I would very much like to meet your new friend later tonight."

Taking a moment to revel in her brother squirm, the previous statement set the brunette's blood into a powerful roar. In the backdrop, Thea could hear Laurel whispering to Tommy, Felicity feigning a cough and nudging Malcolm, and her brother exchanging bits of rapid conversation with this Slade character.

"What did he say?" The words themselves were an attack and alarmed everyone in the nearby vicinity. Out of the corner of her eye, she spied Tommy making an abortive movement in her direction only to be derailed by a stricken looking beta. There was no room to care in Thea's vocabulary, as far as she was concerned a breadcrumb on the road to hunting down Walter's killer was on the table and she would be damned if she let Malcolm be secretive about everything. "What did he tell you?"

"This isn't the place to have this kind of conversation," Malcolm glanced around, no doubt pinpointing every person within scenting distance.

"Enough!" To everyone's astonishment, the driver's side door of the van opened and out stepped the large, tanned Australian alpha that had that intimidating aura going for him. Pointing at the van, the voice of a military drill commander shouted. "The lot of you get into the van. Oliver insists on going with his father and I think it would be much simpler if we skipped the hormone fest and move on to the part where we're all going together."

At first nobody moves and Thea feels her skin rile at an unfamiliar alpha ordering her around, but then the sound of heels on concrete resounds and Malcolm's blonde bombshell lets go of his arm and walks around to the passenger door of the van.

"Hi Oliver, I'm Felicity, your new work partner and I'm sort of dating your dad. Yeah, awkward." And hilarious, Thea thought, watching the scene unfold and noting the eldest Merlyn's calculating expression accompanied by a green-gilled Tommy. "I was the voice in your head the other night, so hello there. But if we're all taking this little trip together, it's better if I navigate since I actually know where we're going. That and I tend to get carsick in the backseat. So, if you'd move that would be terrific."

"Sounds like she told you, kid. Into the back!"

Watching her gobsmacked brother shuffle into the backseat under the duress of a tiny blonde chick was probably one of the top five moments in Thea's life. Then again, witnessing the flash of devotion in the big man as he gazed with a soft fondness at Ollie was enough to take her breath away and cause her to feel like an intruder. An intruder in a driveway full of idiots. Wonderful.
It took until Felicity had hopped into the car, buckled her seatbelt, and start a conversation with Oliver's sexy, love boat before the rest of them heeded the call to action. Malcolm was the next into the vehicle in the second row of seats, next to Oliver and close enough for the two dominant forces to collide. Knotheads. Feeling above her biology, Thea clambered over past her brother, knocking knees with the blonde and finally securing a place in the final row of seats. Laurel looked mortified but determined in a way that was genetically Lance ingrained: curiosity killed the Lance after all. And Tommy brought up the rear, looking uncomfortable but unwilling to comment.

The limousine pulled away and Malcolm tucked away a cell phone, Thea realizing he must have told his driver to bugger off.

"So where to?"

"I got the address right here," Felicity freed her tablet from her pink purse up front, and started relaying driving instructions to the Australian up front. "Malcolm and I don't know what Walter found, but I was able to dig up an address where money from an offshore account had been used to store something. My guess is that Walter went there and told Malcolm he found something. So, we're going into this blind."

"What Felicity said is true, but because Walter mentioned finding out something shocking... I felt that it was worth investigating."

"And witnesses can only make the evidence that much more credible," Laurel, ever the crafty thinker interjected, impressing the car's occupants with her forethought.

Unable to quash her curiosity and if the estimated driving time was any indicator, she had the time, Thea reached out and grabbed her brother's hand, feeling him squeeze her hand in return even if he didn't turn to look at her. "You said you met Slade on the island, how did you meet?"

At first she was certain Oliver was not going to answer her and she felt a little ashamed for pushing him so hard.

"There were a lot of people on the island at first," like a spell had been cast over the van, the occupants tuned in with rapt attention, even Slade with those intense eyes watched from the rear view mirror. "I met a man named Yao Fei first. Let's just say he was my friend and he saved my life several times. Eventually Yao Fei, in order to save my life, gave me a map with directions on it. I didn't know where I was going or what I would find, but it eventually brought me to this crashed airplane. And I found Slade there."

Imagining was difficult when there were so many missing pieces of the puzzle, but gradually, her brother was opening up bit by bit and the picture was not a pretty one, but maybe not everything was so terrible.

"I was going to kill him," the accented voice announced cheerfully from the front to his appalled listeners, Thea repressed her laughter with amazement. Did her brother know how to pick them or what? "But when he punched me in the face I decided to give him a chance. After spending a lot of time together, we made the decision to mate. And the rest, as they say, is history."

"I have a hard time reconciling you ogling Oliver like he's your favorite flavor of gummy bear with nearly killing him," thank god for Malcolm's girlfriend, Thea flopped back against the stiffly uncomfortable seats, elbowing Tommy when he moved too close. "Like did you guys start getting along after a few rounds of violent, hate sex?"

The driving alpha bellowed out a hearty chuckle, turning the vehicle down a deserted
"Someday, if Oliver feels up to it, we'll give you the full gory story of Lian Yu but suffice it to say we ended up together because we wanted to be," Slade remarked quietly, Thea feeling disappointed and noting the disquieted father sitting next to Oliver, shooting his son's mate a disapproving frown. Good grief, it was like a Dr. Phil session waiting to happen. She could see it now. "Help, my assassin father doesn't approve of my significantly older mate and I'm afraid he might kill him!"

The van rumbled to a halt outside an enormous storage building. From the outside, there did not appear to be anything particularly special about the place. Waiting for the herd to climb out of the vehicle, she noticed Malcolm looking three seconds away from murdering Slade after the man quietly attached himself to Oliver, the Australian nosing her brother's neck in a not-so-subtle manner that made the female alpha feel queasy just picturing what the pair of them had been up to since their reunion.

Watching Felicity spring out of the van like an energizer bunny on crack was humorous. The blonde wasted no time approaching the door and tampering with the electronic panel. Malcolm looked at Slade and Oliver like a kicked puppy, stalking after Felicity with his Captain Grumpypants persona, while Thea trailed the pairs of couples, feeling somewhat left out like one of the unpopular kids in high school.

Out of nowhere, an arm jerked her flush against her brother's side and she takes a whiff of the scent of a fresh mating and gags, futilely trying to free herself from the omega's clutches.

"Not so fast there, speedy," the tone is affectionate and she slumps in defeat, walking as a threesome with her brother and his mate that she had known for all of fifteen minutes. When had normal become this farce?

"I got it!" The girl had skills, she thought, everyone walking up the ramp only to hear the doomed. "Oh my God." Malcolm remained silent, but his scent broadcasted a spike of disharmony as the man stood rigid and unmoving in the doorway, blocking the view of everyone else.

"What is it?"

Without a word, the pair stepped inside and off to the side.

"What the hell?" Tommy Merlyn's voice laced with outrage.

"I guess this was why Moira lied about the money," the female omega mumbled, sounding close to fainting, but her comment narrowing Thea's world to pinprick. "She salvaged the Queen's Gambit, but I don't understand why she kept it a secret.

"Why would my mother have my brother and his best friend kidnapped?" Thea vibrated with anger, looking at the wreckage and the mountain of lies that each shred represented. "Why would someone lie about recovering the boat that her husband and her son died on? What kind of person does this kind of thing and just pretends everything is fine! This is wrong! If I ever see her again, I swear to god I'll kill her!" Jerking away from the hands grasping at her, she jerked away, shrieking as if burned. "My mother killed my dad! Oh my God she killed dad and Sara and Oliver. Oh my God, Oliver! She tried to kill you! She tried to kill you! I'm going to fucking kill her!"

Something stung her arm, cutting through her panicked babbling and everything felt airy
and distant and miraculously free of pain. Thea closed her eyes and surrendered to merciful darkness.

To be honest, Slade had not planned much, after arriving in Starling, beyond recovering Oliver and staying with him. The former ASIS agent had no agenda save joining in his omega's vigilante escapades and protecting him from himself if necessary.

Discovering his mate collaborating with his father was shocking, but he felt determined to adjust and accommodate the situation. Oliver's siblings and the spare significant others were yet another surprise. While his arrival certainly rattled the cage, the clan collectively had been outwardly welcoming if some of the individuals--namely daddy dearest--remained conspicuously reserved.

The funeral, naturally, had not been an ideal introduction site, but the little diversion and the boat's discovery rocked the foundations of everyone in that little group, including himself. The information he had gleaned was rather damning; Oliver's mother had his mate kidnapped and interrogated, lied about the paternity issue, and was concealing the wreckage of the ship that nearly sentenced her own child to death. From the alpha's perspective, she was a threat and never to be alone with Oliver ever again.

Now, he stood outside the bedroom that was clearly frequented his omega if the overlaying scent was any indicator. Inside, Oliver was curled up protectively around his sister whose earlier outburst lead Slade to drug the overwrought teen with a sedative he kept on hand for missions. The girl had spent the last hour crying intermittently and was now speaking quietly with her brother.

Down the hall, a door opened and Malcolm Merlyn stepped out, the hallway filling with his presence. Carefully the man closed the door with a light click, leaving his other son and distraught girlfriend in relative peace.

"Feel like a drink?" At once, his offer yanked the other man's raptor sharp gaze snapped to alertness, coolly eyeing Slade before nodding once.

"Let's take this downstairs."

The pair meandered down the staircase, trudging past the kitchen counter covered in construction materials, to where the other man gingerly retrieved a pair bottled ales, handing one off to him.

"Thanks," he lifted the bottle in salute while they took seats on opposite couches, staring into the darkness.

"I don't trust you," Malcolm's voice, blatantly powerful, was definitely used to getting what he wanted. But the admission brought a wry smile to his lips. "I get the impression that feelings are mutual in this way."

"Oh that's certainly true," Slade cut to the chase, not wanting Oliver to walk in at a sensitive moment. "But where you don't trust me because you seem to believe I'm here to take Oliver away from you, I don't trust you because you're a member of the League of Assassins."

"I'm glad you're a direct individual, Mr. Wilson," the father sat forward with an eerie twist to his mouth. "And I am a dangerous man, just like you are. I did train with the League, but I left. So, we're at an impasse."

"Do you know Sara Lance?"
Watching for it, recognition touched the eyes along with a flare of confusion that was almost instantly masked, but there all the same.

"If you're asking than am I correct in assuming she survived the Queen's Gambit going down?"

"Yes," for all the man's airs, Slade felt compelled to believe Sara Lance was not something the man knew about. "Sara Lance is the reason Oliver and I were separated all these years. I thought both of them had died because of that evil bitch, up until a year ago."

"Sara's alive?"

Closing his eyes in resignation, he tracked Oliver's distraught movements across the room until he dropped down next to Slade, folding in against his side in a manner that brought a great deal of comfort to the big man.

"To my irritation, yes. I tracked her down and almost had her but she and her pretty girlfriend got away."

"What is it you're really trying to tell me?" The older alpha threw down the gauntlet, folding his hands in his lap.

"That conniving traitor joined your precious League of Assassins," Slade's fist slammed down, the sickening snap of the couch arm crunching causing Malcolm's eyes to narrow on his hand and his mate to freeze up like a startled deer. "Sorry. Most of the time I can control the anger, but knowing she tried to have you killed and she's still out there sometimes gets the best of me."

"Slade." Tucking his arm more firmly around his omega, he pressed a kiss to the top of Oliver's head.

"Oh that I can understand," Malcolm Merlyn sat up thoughtfully, eyeing the shattered couch arm like it contained an endless array of possibilities rather than a trip to the furniture store. "But I think trust is something to be earned rather than freely given anyway. So, shall we agree to a trial run and see where things end up."

"To a trial run," he tipped his beer up, feeling like he had somehow been drafted into a battle he was not prepared to fight.

Urging Oliver back to his feet, he all but carries him back upstairs to a bedroom smelling of nothing but stale sheets and disuse. Spooning up behind his lover, he imagines that Malcolm Merlyn would keep him on his toes and he feels that trust is a long way off with a man like that. Too slick to trust, he thought drowsily, burying his face in the ticklish spikes of the omega's hair.

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Oliver stood on the sidelines, observing the intricate clash of bamboo sticks cracking like thunder as his father and Slade spun, ducked, and dodged each other's strikes. Both men's chest were glistening with sweat, though Malcolm was visibly tiring faster than the Australian; whether the Mirakuru had anything to do with that, Oliver was unsure.

Over the last several days, the pair had grown to what the omega hoped was a mutually understanding, certainly sparring partners if nothing else. The pair had been at it for over an hour while Oliver drilled with his siblings. Thea had a knack for accuracy so he had set her up with a round of strength training followed by some practice throwing, before releasing her for a much needed round with the practice dummy. Tommy may be able to use a pistol effectively, his brother
would never be an archer. But the brunette had excellent muscle memory, surprising even himself how quickly he caught on to hand to hand combat. Judging from what he had seen, Oliver felt confident that staff training could be the next step for Tommy; whether or not the alpha desired to join their little escapades was irrelevant, their family bonds were only growing stronger.

The two hour compressed work out session ended squarely at seven am, with Malcolm and Slade ending their duel at two points each and a stalemate. The CEO monopolized the shower, emerging less than seven minutes later looking immaculate in a pressed suit and tie. The rest of them showered and changed, separately at Thea's pointed warning as she held a dagger threateningly.

"Great job today man," Oliver complimented his brother, noting the flush of pride as the alpha flexed his muscles demonstratively.

"Thanks, dude." Smug practically radiated from the billionaire scion, making the blonde gag theatrically. "Oh come on! Laurel is happy and I'm sure Slade was just as happy to see you buckle down a little."

"That depends," Slade offered not-so-helpfully. "One could argue that he became more of a distraction with how bloody sexy he became. I lost my focus once when he used a takedown maneuver I'd taught him. Bloody irritating with how proud he made me!"

Trooping up the stairs, Oliver looked around the office and felt oddly strange at how professional the layout was.

"No worries love," Slade sidled up, pressing his hips into his backside in a way that caused his eyes to flutter. "I'll help you move your desk during your lunch hour."

"Ugh," Thea groaned from the far side of his desk. "Save it for home?"

"Hi guys!" Felicity poked her head through the door and waved at them cheerfully. "It's our first official day of work together! Yay! I've been working on some ideas for everyone!"

Watching the blonde bounce out the door, Oliver wondered what they had gotten into.

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Later in the day, the brothers each sat with a an I-pad on either side of Felicity, the trio comparing notes on simultaneous issues.

"I'm ordering a new custom bow for Thea and myself," Oliver added to the list, blinking at the computer screen in thoughtful concentration. "What kind of alloy do you want to use for your Bug Bots, Felicity?"

"Order me titanium sheeting and aluminum composites," the tech wizard ordered, fingers flying over the keyboards. "We should also order some test fibers for Tommy's electrical netting. If that stuff actually works for you guys in the field, it's going to be awesome!"

"And I think you should add some additional body armor to the list."

Tommy's suggestion caused Oliver to falter and look up at his friend in surprise.

"I've been thinking that I'd like to go with you and dad into the field. I know I'm not ready yet, but I will be sometime."

"More body armor it is," Oliver grins, filling out a request for extra Kevlar.
"Well boys," I think we have a few concepts ready to go. It'll take me a few days to finalize the coding and a few field tests to iron out the kinks, but we've done good!"

Lian Yu

Over the past week, a plan had slowly taken root within the alpha's mind as he calculated the risk reward factors of various plans until finally he settled on an idea that would present the most guaranteed course of action for Oliver's safety.

It had been painful to leave his mate while he slept, with the Lance girl that relied more on Oliver for protection than the other way around. Options were few and the lack of scouting parties from the Amazo caused every instinct the alpha had to scream something was amiss. Eventually, the persistent reminders from Shado's ghost proved persuasive enough that he headed toward the ruin of Fyer's camp where the missile launcher remained intact and ignored. Far from a natural with advanced computer programming, it took Slade some work but he managed to calculate the launch and set it on a timer for one hour.

A full out marathon run took him through the forest and up the winding paths to the beach overlook within a half hour, faster by far than he had ever been able to run. Pausing where the forest overlook turned to sand, he took in a group of milling people looking like they had come straight out of a refugee camp stood upon the beach, gazing at the Amazo and speaking in hushed tones.

A sense of foreboding encased the alpha like an icy cloak, driving fear to his heart. Descending the beach, the sand sinking beneath his weight. The pack of rabble scattered like a parting wave with the exception a bony man standing by the shore.

An omega with a shrewd cast that alerted the alpha that he was encountering no fool. In any case, if there was a leader among of this particular crowd, Slade had a feeling he was looking at him.

A frank look of appraisal was shot his way from the head to toe scan."You're Oliver's mate?"

Vaguely he recalled the kid mentioning a Russian prisoner that he promised to return for, but why would Ivo release him? A pervading sense of unease chilled his blood and Shado's spectre appeared at his side, serving only to increase his panic.

"Where is he?"

The man's overly thin frame slumped slightly before shooting a sober glance over his shoulder. "Oliver told me that, the girl, Sara told him they had something that you needed aboard the Amazo.Apparently the boy bargained for our freedom and a cure for you in exchange for the serum that lunatic has been looking for."

"What!" Frantically looking around, Slade felt his heart plummet as he saw a small boat with a lithe archer poised nearly two thirds of the way to the freighter. A freighter targeted for destruction. Oh God.

No!

"I tried to stop him, told him he couldn't trust Ivo or that nasty blonde bitch, but he wouldn't listen to me."
Not bothering to listen to another word, Slade waded into ocean, ignoring the chilly temperature and the Russian's objections in favor of lunging forward, arm strokes propelling him forward at an accelerated speed from his previous capabilities.

"Oliver! Oliver! Stop! Oliver! OLIVER!"

The wind gusted in his face, drowning out the sound of his cries. There was perhaps ten minutes left before the missile strike and he had to get there and get there now. Taking a breath, Slade dove beneath the surface and swam like a fish, adopting a pace no human could possibly match. Keeping beneath the surface, his lungs filled to capacity, the need to take a breath felt far away and only rapid, powerful kicks and strokes mattered. If he failed, Oliver would be killed either by Ivo or the fiery inferno.

"Hurry! Hurry! Protect Oliver!"

Out of nowhere, the freighter appeared in front of him and Slade gripped the metal side, blinking away the sting of saltwater and breathing easily, amazed by how fast he made it to the ship, but not having time to marvel. Grasping a dangling rope, the alpha seized it and scaled it, coming over the side onto the deck with a powerful roll. A mercenary, perhaps five paces away turned only for a thrown dagger to the throat silenced the man.

"Why? How could you do this, Sara! We've been friends for my entire life! How could you!?"

The anguish lacing his mate's voice alarmed the former ASIS agent assessing the group of goons Ivo had assembled, seeing two of them restraining his enraged mate while Sara Lance cuddled up with Shado's killer. Fucking traitorous whore.

"Before I kill you," Ivo taunted, Slade drawing his swords and ran forward. "I want you to know that I do have the cure for Mirakuru. But I never intended to let you live so don't feel bad. Sara is a talented young lady after all." The man passed the cure off to Sara who moved away from the boat and walked the vial toward the edge of the ship, holding it over the edge. Seconds before his sword made contact with the first man's neck, Oliver's eyes met his in stunned surprise, his lover's eyes darkening with that spirited promise that infused the young man. Surrendering to the dance of death, Slade sliced and diced, cleaving the first mercenary's body clean in two, while his next blow neatly decapitated the next man. A bullet hit him, ricocheting off like a pebble against a wall of stone.

"Yeah!"

Feeling invincible, he noted Oliver flipping one of his attackers to his back and snapping the man's neck. Satisfied with his mate's temporary safety and no time to spare, Slade vertically sliced his next opponent from groin to nose, spurts of scarlet fueling the bloodlust as he pivoted, aimed, and threw one of his swords toward Ivo's fleeing back watching him collapse with a satisfying scream, only for it to become choked as his lungs flooded with blood. The bullets, while doing little damage were annoying and so he set about executing the resisting fighters, the soldier in him still amazed by how quickly his opponents fell and did not get up.

Finally there was no more resistance, only mottled corpses, most by his hand but a few with arrows sticking out of their vital organs. Face flushing with pride, he turned to see Oliver, at the far end of the freighter, with an arrow aimed at the treacherous snake quivering like a three year old by the railing.
"Hand over the serum and I won't kill you."

Just look at him, Slade thought while exuding admiration for his omega handling the traitor. Leaving his lover to finish his business, Slade moseyed over to the fallen Anthony Ivo, tugging his sword out of the limp corpse and used the death man's trousers to clean his blade. That done, he sheathed his swords and turned his face into the wind, silently telling Shado they had avenged her death and left a feast for the gulls. The breeze carried the tang of copper intermixed with the salty, ocean wind and made it quite simple to tune out the pair behind him. Tilting his face upward into the sun, a dark cloud blotted out the light and Slade looked up, eyes widening in horror.

"Get off the boat!"

Inhuman speed or not, Slade knew he would never make it to the omega in time. Feet moving just the same, he whipped around barreled toward where Sara was holding that damned vial toward Oliver--too little too late--while the pair of them froze like a pair of deer in the headlights.

"Oliver get off the boat!"

But there was no time! A missile meant to avenge Shado was now to be the instrument of their deaths. Leaping over obstacles, his vision narrowed on Sara gasping in fright whose poisonous whispers were intended to seal Oliver's fate. And so they had, but her face was not what he wanted to see before the end.

Oliver met his eyes with a kind of helpless regret that he would have given anything to soothe. 'I'm sorry,' he could not hear the words, but he could read the movement of Oliver's lips. 'I love you.'

Endless possibilities. A dream with a thousand possible conclusions for a happy ending they would never realize together. They were going to die on the edge of Purgatory and he was not going to make it. There would be no last chance to take the other man into his arms and whisper promises into his ear. Mirakuru was not enough to save the man he loved.

Inevitably the blast hit him, throwing him up and backward until he was falling, crashing against wood, metal, and water and enclosed in a watery grave.

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Maintaining control was a necessity with the Undertaking nearly at hand. Life as Malcolm knew it had been uprooted with the power of a single phone call that rocked his world paradigm. Discovering a second child had tested is limits of control, but Oliver rapidly became a necessity that he could not abide sacrificing. The list had been momentarily problematic until Moira unwittingly sabotaged her relationship with Oliver with her kidnapping fiasco. And if his son still wanted to cross names off the list, the alpha reconciled that loose ends were being swept under the carpet, and that would be that.

The killing itself was surprisingly therapeutic. Certainly he had killed as Ra's prize student on more than his fair share of occasions, but it was a release to go out with his son and watch the evil being cleansed with every swing of his sword. The monster raging had quieted and the alpha was not sure how he felt about that.

And then, Oliver's presence in his life kindled a relationship with Tommy that he long thought was beyond reach. They were speaking and interacting without--mostly without--exploding into a horrific argument. Tommy trained with him for over a week, secretly impressing the father with his resilience, and had even quietly inquired about a job with Oliver and Felicity that was a
roaring success judging from the trio's first day. Malcolm Merlyn had a family again and he was not about to let anyone take it from him.

Not Slade Wilson. And certainly not Simon Cage.

The warehouse was eerily silent save for the stuttering whimpers of the crumpled man at his feet. Utterly dark with only mice and rats occupying the abandoned space, it amused Malcolm to no end how the cowering sack continued to stare toward the shattered window pane with desperation that no doubt mirrored his own victims. Despite his notorious hatred for the Glades, the apathy of its citizenry gave the location temporary value: a perfect kill site. People to hear the screams and ignore them. Give the abandoned crayon factory a look while stubbornly ignoring the weak draw of conscience. There would be no sympathetic calls to the police from a populace polluted with fear and suspicion. No one to interrupt. And no one to care.

"No one is coming to save you, Mr. Cage," Malcolm did not bother concealing his voice. A lack of cameras and witnesses made him bold and it was not as if the trembling cultist before him was going to survive to tell the tale anyway. Besides, a body performed that job adequately without interference. "Certainly not your followers that you left to burn alive with my son."

"I'm sorry! I'm really sorry!" The whimpering merely inspired his creativity.

A well placed kick sent the injured zealot sprawling on his back, weeping like a naughty child. The nicks and slices to the man's arms and legs dyed the fabric of his shirt and jeans in thick, crimson splotches that added some attractiveness to the bearded fanatic with his bulging, fear-stricken eyes.

"Death is the final stage of life," the alpha channeling all that Al-Sah-Her was in his deceptively inviting posture as he crouched before the man like a predator preparing to feast on its prey, the man shaking harder with a nearly audible heartbeat. "It brings out the truth in people. As you yourself are humbling yourself with apologies evoked by fear. If you truly possessed an ounce of the conviction that I do, you would have tried to kill me half a dozen times to at least give yourself the chance of living. You tried to kill my son and for that I've come to take your life. Nothing you say will alter that outcome. But even knowing this, you beg me to spare your life like a coward. And because of how disappointed I am, I think I'll have some fun before I kill you."

As expected, the mouse lunged at the snake with a pathetic shriek, fingers clawing fruitlessly at his clothing, legs trying to kick at his abdomen. Twisting with a grace patiently enforced by Ra's over the course of years, the assassin evaded the panicked fumbles, deftly planting his knee in the man's spinal column and listening to the satisfying crack, watching the man collapse like a ragdoll to the ground.

"My back! My back! What have you done to me?"

Patting his gloved hands, the alpha made a displeased sound at the blood coating the leather that reeked in his nostrils. Mentally noting to himself to purchase a new pair, he nonchalantly planted his foot on the man's back and grinded at the injury, delighting in the muted sobs from the beta below him.

"No less than you would have done to what is mine."

Considering the man below him, he considered a fitting end for the man. Displeased with the basics, Malcolm decides the only fitting end is the one he condemned so many to.

"Don't go anywhere," he taunted his victim cheerfully, trotting off to retrieve the accelerant
he brought from the bag he had left hanging in the corner. Popping open the can, he could hear the faint sound of struggled motions behind him. Rolling his eyes dispassionately, the alpha turned to glare at his quarry struggling in vain to use his arms to drag himself away. Adrenalin had gifted him with a good six inches. Well done, he thought snidely. His footsteps elicited a barrage of panting breaths that Malcolm found strangely suitable. "I thought I warned you not to go anywhere!"

Flipping the beta over with a measured kick, the man's eyes looked like they were about to pop out of his skull. Perhaps they would. Dumping the can of accelerant, the terror came to the forefront of the man's brain, screaming a chant of "No, no, no! Please don't! No, no, no!" And endless pattern that he tuned out while coating the screaming man. Lighting a match, he turned and tossed it over his shoulder. The cries of anguish and the accompanying burst of light on the factory floor told Malcolm all he needed to know. The glow of the screaming man illuminated the three cohorts hanging like sacks of meat from the ceiling, dripping blood from their slit throats. A rather stunning sight that he imagined would make a beautiful design on an artist's canvas.

Leaving the factory by window was the only rational thing to do. Murder in the Glades was a common enough occurrence, but the fire would draw the reluctant attention of the police and fire department.

'Let them come and see what I have done,' Malcolm nodded absently, the wind tugging at his garments in soothing tickles. The rage at nearly losing his child was appeased and the world regained a semblance of color.

Racing over the rooftops, his feet carried him away from the fire and opposite to where he stowed his car for the evening. A delayed text arranged for his car to be retrieved from the theatre parking lot in half an hour with a note about staying out for the night. Vague but not unexpected behavior for the billionaire boss.

Thoughts of Oliver on the arm of the long lost mate unsettled him in ways he was no prepared to admit. It seemed unfair to get his son only to have that joy taken from him so early. And something at this point indefinable felt unnatural in the possessive tone of this Slade Wilson. The other man was clearly a dominant force, but Malcolm was a rival force prepared to derail the Australian. Though the past several days gleaned critical insight into the man that loved his child. The man was utterly devoted, unnaturally strengthened, and opened the door for an opportunity Malcolm Merlyn long since shelved. Begrudgingly, the alpha had come to admire Slade Wilson but he would wait and observe for now and decide later.

A sense of bitter weariness overtook the assassin that had carried out his fatherly prerogative on this evening. Finally, the middle-class apartment appeared before him and he quickly scaled the building, dropping down onto a tiny balcony with flower pots in garish pinks and purples shined proudly in the moonlight.

Removing his gloves, and shucking his hood and veil, Malcolm ran a finger over the delicate petals of a plucky violet, a sense of pervading sadness leaving a raw void of emptiness that yearned to be soothed.

Tapping on the door lightly, his ears detected a hint of motion before the standard apartment blinds raised and his adorable, blonde omega blinked back her shock from behind the attractive frames and immediately opened her door.

"Malcolm!" The nervous jittering of the nerdy bombshell bridged the gap within and thawed the ice of his heart. A pair of pale hands reached out and hauled him into the apartment. "Caught me off-guard with that one. I wasn't expecting you! Not that you can't stop by!" She rushed to say in that adorable way. "I just wasn't expecting company!"
A thin camisole, that did nothing to disguise the graceful hang of her breasts, overtop a pair of floral shorts was proper sleep attire and since it was probably pushing eleven o'clock, perhaps he should just go.

"I can go. I didn't mean to bother you so late."

"It's not a bother," the hand gripped his wrist firmly in a way that sent his pulse racing, dilating his pupils. "Just, what's going on? You seem on edge."

"I am not a good person, Felicity. Someone like me should not be around someone like you." Where that outburst came from, Malcolm did not know. All in all, he felt utterly unsettled like a bird with overly ruffled feathers. Inexplicably he felt a strange measure of self-loathing as he considered how much better the omega would be off around someone else.

"Hey," the blonde slipped around until she planted both hands on his shoulders, dipping her head so she can look him in the eye, looking so patient and so loving that it literally took his breath away. "Whatever you've done. Whatever you're planning to do. I'm not leaving, okay. You don't have to be afraid."

Breathing once, he dropped to his knees and pressed his face into her knees, like a supplicant requesting the benediction of his god. That scent that Malcolm could only describe as adventurous and playful tugged at his senses and he inhaled desperately, listening to the blonde draw in a ragged breath.

"I am not a good man," he confessed, head bowing in submission. "I'm a killer. I've killed many people in Starling City and I intend to kill many more. I've seen the future and seen the aftermath of yesterday. There are so many types of evil out there, Felicity. I promise you that I am one of them. Unlike most men, I will do whatever it takes to bring my dream to fruition and to rid this city of darkness. And if the cost is in blood, I will bear that crucible. Anyone that threatens the dream or the people I hold dear will be dealt with in the language universal to mankind. And I will smile at them as they die."

Strangely, the brunette felt talented fingers running through his hair, instinct causing him to nuzzle at the omega's fingers like the treat she was. No fear had touched the blonde's scent, if anything, she smelled tantalizing like a piece of fruit ready to be plucked from the tree. Ripe and ready for the taking.

"I rarely ever give people the ability to choose their own destiny," his voice had dropped a decibel, a light purr accompany his phrases, head tilting to stare into the eyes of brilliant sapphire and a tenderness that surpassed his aged memory of Rebecca. "Whether people realize it or not, their destiny has been orchestrated by my hand. But for you, I'll give you the choice Felicity. You can choose to go and I will free you from the cage that I've prepared for you and you have my word that I will never bother you again." The omega's breathing stuttered and he pressed onward, determined to control the tide for the time being. "But if you choose me, there is no going back. We will belong to each other utterly and I will give you the stars. If you ever thought to change your mind, I will crush that delusion like a wave upon the sand. There is no going back from this choice. You will belong to me forever."

The shining sapphires betrayed no indication of the inner workings of Felicity Smoak, a peculiar paradox from the omega he had come to desire so desperately.

"There is no choice here, Malcolm," The choice of words crushed the alpha's hopes slightly. "Before I met you, I could never imagine feeling the way I do in this moment, but what I lacked was a proper perspective in reality. Before you saved my life, I thought I was going to die.
Although death isn't something I'm particularly looking forward to, what haunts me about that night wasn't the man. It wasn't the prospect of rape. Or death. It was how many people saw and did nothing. I got to see how truly evil our society has become. You came. You, for all your poignant bravado, are not evil. You're not the monster you think you are. Those apathetic people out there that sat and watched like it was some entertaining spectacle. Those people are the animals. Those people are the evil monsters that mothers whisper about in the dark. Whatever grand scheme you've concocted, I will not judge you. I will listen to what you have to say and I will stand by you. There is no choice to make, Malcolm. I already chose you."

Disbelief attached itself to the alpha, radiating anxiety, but a careful search of the blonde's face made it clear that his omega was utterly determined and perhaps as impassioned as he when it came right down to it.

Rising, Malcolm hoisted Felicity in the air, delighting in the squeal of surprise as he carted her off caveman style in search of her bedroom. It was rather easy to identify as it was the room in the apartment that smelled the strongest of the blonde's scent.

Tumbling her with gentle care to the bed, he climbed atop her and nuzzled his face into the juncture of her neck, breathing in deeply, hand sliding over the swell of her breast to feel the uneven rise and fall of his lover's chest.

Malcolm's sex life had been reduced to voluntary celibacy for the past several years, leaving him with doubts regarding his performance. But he buried those doubts beneath the placid exterior like his master had taught him, walling away the conflict and settling into a mindset of firm control.

Like a man starving, he devoured her lips, tongue diving into the inferno of her mouth that tasted of cocoa and rainbow marsh mellows, mapping the boundaries of the damp cavern. Felicity's arms wrapped around his neckline like a lifeline, back arching until her breasts pressed firmly against his chest. Coaxing her tongue with his own, he lead her back into his own mouth and sucked lightly on the muscle, shifting his weight to fumble with the hem of the fabric covering her pebbled nipples.

Pulling back, the alpha was caught off-guard when the omega minx ripped her top off, a bit more carefully removing her glasses and setting them on the tiny nightstand, and crossed her arms impetuously.

"I'm not taking anything else off until you take some of that off," she gestured and Malcolm felt himself look down stupidly. "And yeah, lose the sword and arrows."

Cursing himself for being a fool, the elder Merlyn stepped up and stripped away his clothing, never before realizing just how irritating the layers of clothing actually were. Weapons stowed within reach, on the floor beside the bed, while clothing and body armor was dropped in a mound on the floor until all that remained was a pair of silky black boxers. Malcolm felt no discomfort for exposing his body; physically he was in perfect shape with toned body from hours devoted to maintaining an assassin's physique and skill. And if the scent of the staring omega was evidenced, she found his body appealing too.

Returning his attention back to the waiting female, he balked at her sitting completely nude with her legs crossed, revealing milky pale thighs and shaved skin of her exposed vaginal lips, that drew out a throaty exhale even as he was aware of his erection jerking to an alarming hardness from sheer want.

"You don't look bad yourself."
"Lovely," the alpha purred, slinking forward like a panther until he was on all fours in front of her. The smell hit him like a brick wall to the face and for a second his vision blurred and it took a force of willpower to maintain is composure.

"Malcolm?" Curiosity and concern as her cool fingers touched his skin, like a cool bath to his fevered flesh.

"It's been close to a decade since I've done anything like this," the words seemed far away, as he grew drunk on desire. "And my control is hanging by a thread."

"Then let go of it." Foolish, he thought. This can't end well. "I want this too."

Before she had the opportunity to react, he was on her, flipping her over harshly and moving up behind that picture perfect ass, hard cock pressed against her, rubbing lightly. A litany of obscenities tumbled from his blonde's lips, the alpha's fingers gripped the hips in front of him firmly but not painfully so. Leaning forward, he nosed against her neck, irritation spiking until he swiped at the hair with a growl and lowered his jaw until he could scent the tender skin on the back of her head lightly.

"Felicity," his voice summoned a startled murmur from in front of him.

"Yes?" The reply was strangled and while there was apprehension there was also sensuous excitement.

"This is your last chance," the frayed vestiges of control prepared to snap. "Be sure because there is no going back from this. Not ever. Once I do this, you belong to me forever."

"Just do it already! Cripes! I hope this isn't as painful as everyone says it is."

Only Felicity could lighten the occasion of something of this magnitude, one of the many reasons the omega had hooked him so thoroughly. Unfortunately for her, nothing so akin to perfection came without a measure of sacrifice.

"Don't say I didn't warn you!"

Without further warning, Malcolm sunk his teeth into the back of his omega's neck, feeling waves of ownership and primal victory come to life. Distantly he heard his new mate cry out in pain, her scent flaring in distress that the alpha rallied to appease, tongue laving at the injury and purring in possessive arousal.

Shifting her body, his cock prodded her inner folds until he could sink inside. Not virgin tight, but nonetheless exquisite to feel the body shudder around him as his erection drove into the velvety tunnel, extracting a breathy moan of renewed excitement. One hand raised to fondle Felicity's perfect, perky breast, circling the nipples and squeezing the flesh as his omega whimpered helplessly, her own arms preventing her from collapsing outright as he continued to thrust into her over and over.

Recognizing the signs of his own body revving up, he reached around and slid his fingers down the smooth planes of his omega's navel to the smooth folds of her pussy. From the hitch and strangled cry as his fingers caressed the area, Malcolm knew the touch pleased her. Pausing to angle his thrusts carefully, positioning his body lower, he felt his mate rise up slightly and press backward to meet him as he worked to brush against that spongy nub inside the blonde's body.

Dropping his chin to Felicity's shoulder, he swapped hands to give attention to his omega's other breast and carefully brushed his fingers against her clit, causing her body to spasm and force
him to hold her in place.

"The next time we do this should be in front of a mirror," Malcolm whispered, fingers rusty but skilled as they circled her clit, cock still angled to rub against her inner walls. "Because I want to do this to you where you and I can watch together as you fall apart while I fuck you. I can just imagine those beautiful blue eyes and those flushed cheeks when I make you cum."

Felicity's scent told him his new mate was close, on the verge of falling over the precipice, which rather explained the babbling words falling from her mouth like loose strings of phrases.

"Oh God. Oh God. Oh God. Malcolm! Oh God, Malcolm! It's too...oh it's too much. Oh God. Oh Malcolm!"

"That's it," he was prepared for her to reflexively flinch away from his fingers, but he released her breast and cradled her firmly beneath him as she wailed her way to orgasm, his pleasure spiking as her body seized up and milked his cock for all it was worth. With a shout, he spilled himself into the blonde, relaxing against the blonde's spine and moving his arms up to wrap around her and roll them both on their sides, his cock remaining tucked inside his omega's body.

"For not having done it in a bazillion years," Felicity's voice is slightly hoarse. "You really knew your way around down there."

"I aimed to please," he ran a hand over his new mate's pale flank, entranced and somewhat in disbelief of reality. "I'm happy you said yes."

"Me too, you great lout," Felicity turned around and thumped him, startling him back and causing his cock to slip free of the blonde who sat up and flicked on the lights and slid her glasses back on her face. "I like cuddling, but I feel gross. Like seriously. I need a bath."

Lips curling into a grin, Malcolm stalked after his impetuous omega, quite certain the bath would lead to a shower after they were done with it.


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In the distance, an assassin stepped onto the tarmac, prepared to carry out his task and if necessary, mete out the will of the Demon's Head.

In a parking lot devoid of surveillance cameras, Moira Queen swallowed her fear and offered a fee to the white haired woman that smiled like the devil.

In a central hub of Starling City, an A.R.G.U.S. operative accepts the orders and prepares.

Chapter End Notes

To all my readers, all the work that goes in to this is for you and I can't tell you how much the support means to me. So, thank you to everyone who reads, leaves kudos, and reviews. It never fails to brighten my day. Thank you again for your support!
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: No money is being made off this delightful bit of writing and I certainly make no claim as to own anything.

Thanks again to my wonderful beta reader for coming through for me!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The instant Malcolm appeared in their secret training room, Slade was practically bowled over by the pungent scent wafting off the older alpha; testing the air, his own nose felt fairly confident the other man's spicy new scent was a testament to a plucky, blonde omega that worked upstairs. Delighted, he shot a knowing leer toward the other man, prepared to wager some of the unsettled paternal urges would be satiated.

Every morning since the funeral, the pair had, by mutual, non-verbal agreement, chosen to train together in the mornings. Each dawn brought their emotional rollercoaster on new and exciting twists and turns; bitter resentment, envious sulking, and finally determined serenity. And each of those mornings the pair of them fueled their combative relationship with dodges and strikes, developing communication with a clash of blades rather than the emptiness of words. Begrudgingly, Slade found himself coming to look forward to the morning spars and felt respect worm it's way into his thinking. It was strange that even under the spell of Mirakuru, his own dominance unwittingly yielded to the elder alpha. Biology could be a real bitch, but it coerced him into not quite hating the other man.

Perhaps the most rewarding aspect of their workouts was the ability shed his crafted leash on control and free himself to abandon limits. Slade, ego aside, knew he was a talented duelist, but Malcolm's ruthless, cutthroat tactics were refreshingly bold. The Australian favored using two blades to apply a rapid barrage of strikes designed to eradicate his opponent's weaknesses, while Oliver's father favored combat with one sword, utilizing an array of precise techniques and practiced skill to take advantage of an opponent's mishaps and seize the high ground. More often than not, Malcolm was the victor of their little bouts, but it just fuelled the challenger in the alpha, driving him to become better.

With each passing day, he adjusted his tactics and provided fewer openings for the assassin's attack. And if the other man incorporated a few of the Australian's rapid strike manoeuvres, he could hardly fault the other alpha for doing the same thing as him. Oliver's father was an amazing combatant; each time they fought, Slade felt more confident that the other man was coming to accept his presence just as he was adapting to a life remaining in one place.

Today in particular, the older alpha smelled different and projected a certain lightness that defied even newly mated status. Curiosity infecting his mind, Slade made the opening comment as he swung at the other man's head with a bamboo sword without so much as a warning word.

"What's got you into such a peculiar mood?"
"I've decided that I don't hate you," the rueful remark confirmed what the Australian already suspected. Mutual respect sure was a bitch. Blocking the retaliating strike, Slade kicked out with his leg, unsurprised when the other man dodged the blow. "In fact, I think we need to discuss this Sara Lance situation."

Lashing out particularly viciously, the wood whistled as it parted the air, nearly grazing the elusive man. "I'd rather not, but I'm guessing that isn't an option."

"Ra's al Ghul is not about to allow anyone to attack his people without responding in kind. I may be able to delay the inevitable, but my family lives in the public eye. A confrontation is only a matter of time and we need to establish a plan."

"What do you have in mind?" Parallel blows landing on open air, only for a leg to sweep against his own, carrying him to the floor. A practice sword nudged the back of his neck, unwittingly summoning a smile to his face. "Nicely played."

"I was one of my master's best students," the other man revealed with a wistful tone that belonged to a different time. Even so, the other alpha neatly leapt over the backward strike that Slade aimed at him, allowing the Australian to regain his feet. "And because I was a good student, I realize how very real the danger is in this scenario. You won't be the one that's in danger. It will be Oliver they come for."

"Then let them come!" In the periphery, Shado watched him with the blank sneer the hallucinations donned when they seemed displeased. Distantly he heard the snap of splintering wood as the pieces fell from his hands, feeling the weight of an examining stare. "Sara Lance is a traitor and I will kill her and anyone else the cowards send."

"We will kill them," the other alpha acknowledged in that soft voice reserved for sick children; Slade glared at the other man in disgust, Malcolm looking utterly nonplussed. "But we need to plan."

"What do you have in mind?"

"So glad you asked."

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Dragging her sorry hide up the stairs after a shower, following yet another ass beating, Thea grimaced at the bruises that felt like they were a little bit of everywhere. Slade's arrival seemed to have provoked a more enthusiastic, sadistic streak in their taskmasters. Oliver focused more of his attention on thrashing her in hand to hand combat and allowing her to take her first few shots with a bow that made her want to scream in frustration.

To her eternal amusement and Tommy's horror, Slade took the lead as the young alpha's primary instructor, while Malcolm maintained a position as a glorified torture master, overlord type. It became overly clear that her lessons were focused to long range weaponry with hand to hand combat with short range daggers added into the mix; Tommy on the other hand was training with a glorified stick that Malcolm affectionately called a 'stave.' Weirdos. In any case, she felt more than elated to be left out of a personal relationship with Slade Wilson's fists.

Stepping out of Oliver's office, Thea watched Felicity, Tommy, and Oliver sitting around a group of 5-6 computer monitors exchanging a barrage one-part techno babble, and two parts ridiculous. The alpha in the bunch sported a bruised cheek that Thea desperately wished she could watch him attempt to explain away to Laurel, but with how intent the man seemed on the discussion,
any reasonable amount of teasing would sail right over his head. Pity that.

"Microscopic robots as in nanite tech is practically a pipe dream!" Felicity crossed her arms deploringly. "Only a crazy genius could possibly get something like that to work. And not to mention, can you imagine how dangerous that kind of power would be? The wrong person at the helm and you practically could control everything!"

"I don't really see a problem with the genius aspect, Felicity." Ollie definitely had a point there. From being around the blonde for even just a short time, it was clear that her talents were wasted on basic computer programming, a challenge was definitely right up her alley.

"And I think the risks are rather minimal as long as you can control the command prompts and perhaps make nanites effective only to their particular job. Medical nanites, surveillance types... etc."

"Well you guys have fun," Thea passed the nerd trio, pausing as a thought struck her. "Have you guys considered working on a flexible, thinner Kevlar? That would probably sell like hotcakes."

"That's...actually an interesting idea." Tommy adopted that thinking pose the female alpha had begun to associate with Malcolm in CEO mode. "I'm not an expert, but I could work up a list of possible polymers for Felicity--"

"And give me just that much more work to do," the blonde whined, smacking her keyboard with an irritated look. "But whatever, Oliver, can you update the shipping requisition and fax it to your father's office. He's presenting that thing to the board sometime today."

"At three, I think." Thea offered before she could stop herself. About facing, she practically dashed for the door. "I got ten minutes to be in his office, with that disgusting herbal tea he likes. Ugh."

"Bye Speedy!" The brothers called in unison, equally calling jinx on one another in the distance.

A fire lit under her ass, Thea booked it to the office in record time, nodding toward the security that had become accustomed to her presence in the last week. Pausing at the coffee bar in Merlyn Global's lobby, she ordered the herbal drink from hell before booking it into the elevator just before it could close with a ding. Acknowledging the morning greetings from curious coworkers with a tight-lipped smile, Thea made it to Malcolm's office with seconds to spare, waving to his overly cheerful secretary.

"I still don't know why you hired me," Thea mused with a complete lack of ceremony as she stormed into the office, slamming the door carelessly behind her, enjoying the brunette's unimpressed stare as the glass rattled threateningly in delicate panes. "What do you want me to do today?"

"You're going to look over my list of memos, prioritize them, and respond to them on my behalf." The older man instructed patiently, gesturing to the empty chair with a tiny desk in the corner of the room that had magically appeared two days ago.

"Alright, but if someone complains that is totally on you, not me," Thea muttered, dropping down in front of the waiting laptop to get to work on the paperwork.

"I'm proposing to Felicity."
Okay, definitely out of the blue and made even less sense to tell her. Swiveling in her chair, the brunette shot the CEO staring at her back an incredulous look. "Did you need permission or something? Because if so, I'm willing to give my blessing."

"She's going to say yes," Malcolm sounded perfectly confident about that little fact, meaning she definitely did not want to know what kind of funky stuff they had gotten up to. "I'm worried how Tommy is going to take it."

"Okay look, Tommy's an alpha," Thea smirked, a series of lewd possibilities filtering through her brain. "You reek of Felicity in a happy mating, scented sort of way. Any alpha with more than heat on the brain is going to realize that a mating bond is serious. Marriage is just the paperwork at that point. And since Tommy's still overproducing hormones, I'd say it's a fairly safe bet that he suspects it's a foregone conclusion. You could always wait until she goes into heat and you beat the shit out of anyone that comes near her cave-alpha style."

Watching the alpha's shift in color had been amusing, but hearing the sudden rush of breath while the CEO squeezed a pen was still the purest form of entertainment. Rattling the man's cage had somehow become something she lived for.

"I suppose you make an excellent point," he deigned to respond, looking for all intents and purposes like he had bitten a lemon. Score one for Thea!

"Heck, the only thing I'm surprised about is that Slade and Oliver haven't dropped another bombshell on us. Next thing you know those lovesick morons are going to be mailing out babyshower announcements."

Hearing the expected growl was all too perfect. That made two in under a minute!

Moira Queen sipped her morning tea, scanning the morning paper with a frown. Tonight was the night that she would take revenge on Malcolm for all that he had done, for all her family had suffered.

The funeral had been ten days ago. The meeting with the Chinese Triad had taken place six days ago. Two nights ago a wire transfer for five million dollars went out of her personal banking account. Last night, the Triad confirmed that today would put an end to Malcolm Merlyn.

Checking her messages, the mother felt another flush of resentment creep into existence as she read a string of messages from corporate vampires but not a word from Oliver or Thea. At the funeral, Moira felt hopeful that the tension had deflated, but it appeared she had underestimated Malcolm yet again. The back of the twisted mire of negative thinking caused the beta to fear the damage between her children to be permanent, but, the more rational portion of her brain counseled patience and she reminded herself once again that by the day's end, her obstacle would crumble into dust and she could finally, finally but the man's evils into the past.

"Mrs. Queen?" Raisa's voice announced itself from the doorway, appearing duly apologetic as she wrung her hands in an apparent display of anxiety.

"Yes, what is it?" What more could go wrong, she wondered, begging for it to be a call from the office.

"Mr. Stuart has called and asked if you have seen today's news."
"Thank you, Raisa." Uncertainty prodding her like a series of pinpricks, the blonde maintained her composure long enough for the door to close with a light click before lunging for the remote, dread coiling like a hungry serpent.

Mashing the power button, the television over the mantle flickered to life and quickly turned to a local news station that featured a striking picture of that smarmy faced, Malcolm Merlyn. A moment later, a live clip featuring her rival with a petite blonde that caused the beta to wonder if a man's tastes ever really changed; Tommy, Oliver and dear God, Thea appeared standing together at a press conference.

"If you're just joining us, I'm Sally Rogers and a member of Starling City's elite has just made a shocking allegations just this morning against deceased billionaire Robert Queen's wife, Moira. According to Merlyn, a recent DNA test has conclusively proved that Oliver Queen is the alpha CEO's son and not the late Queen's Gambit victim. Now, we've contacted an expert to discuss the ramifications of--"

Turning the television off, Moira buried her face in her hands, breathing deeply through her nose. Absentmindedly, she twisted the elegant diamond studded watch that Walter had given her as a gift, squeezing lightly.

"Get them in while you can, Malcolm. Tonight is the end for you."

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John Diggle strolled down the sidewalk in jeans and a leather coat and ducked into the Big Belly Burger where Oliver Queen was seen entering ten minutes prior. Discovering his former client, the beta’s last straw when it came to rich brats, was one of the infamous Twin Archers of Starling City had been a hefty slice of humble pie for the war vet. Discovering A.R.G.U.S. had not only been aware of, but technically supportive of the vigilante’s habits had been just another blow to his tenuous faith in humanity.

Then after that big reveal, the head honcho of A.R.G.U.S., Amanda Waller herself, tasked him with uncovering the identity and whereabouts of an assassin codenamed Deathstroke. When John asked what Oliver Queen had to do with finding some guy in an ugly mask, his boss blew him out of the water with another truth: Oliver Queen was a former--albeit coerced--A.R.G.U.S. employee that felt nothing but enmity toward Amanda. But, since the billionaire in his vigilante alter ego was witnessed being rescued by Deathstroke, they needed someone to reach out to Oliver that would not be killed on sight. Namely him: John Diggle.

What a bunch of bullshit. It was almost enough to persuade the beta to tell that smirking bitch to shove it up her ass, but the thought of mopping vomit off even one more spoiled, knot brained kid stopped him cold.

So here he was, stepping into the diner, instantly zeroing in on Oliver Queen, absently offering a nod to one of Carly's co-workers, and assessing the blonde sitting with his back to the door. From a side profile, the veteran noted the omega's deceptively relaxed posture, one foot braced against the opposite booth, one hand twiddling a fork; such an innocent posture but Diggle had heard about the skill of the Archers and imagined a fork in the hands of such a man could be as lethal as he wished it to be. Even from this distance, he could see the omega's nostrils flare out, testing the air; rarely did John find himself envious of anything or anybody, but the heightened sense of smell enjoyed by the alpha/omega community population was one of those rare prizes that would forever be beyond reach.

 Striding forward, John dropped an arm to the table, whispering in a friendly if chagrined
tone of voice, "if only I had known what you were up to when you ditched me all those times."

Body language demonstrating no sign of surprise, the omega cracked an eye, smiled like the ham he pretended to be, and dropped his foot from the seat opposite in open invitation.

"Hello John. Is that a gun in your pocket or are you just happy to see me?"

Clever little shit, which was why he was never underestimating the nearly twenty-four year old ever again. Sometimes it was easy to forget how young the guy was, but never how dangerous.

"Afraid it's just a gun today," he played into the banter, leaning back to engage the vigilante on his terms. "Seems you really are a busy man. Heard that press announcement about you being Malcolm Merlyn's son. It seems you two must have really connected. What was it? Board games or archery?"

A pink tongue slid out and wet the omega's lips, causing him to swallow reflexively.

"Bit of both maybe, but something tells me this little meeting is more than just catching up. So why are you really here, John? Or better question. Who sent you?"

So, that's how he wants to play it, John thought, leaning forward and placing his hands on the table, prepared for any reaction.

"I'm with A.R.G.U.S. now and they sent me to ask what you know, the nice way."

A storm of hostility thundered across the blonde's face with the suddenness of a lightning strike, a myriad of expressions ranging from tormented to grieving appearing before disappearing like the flick of a switch, causing the beta speculate as to whether he imagined all that pain.

"Tell Waller to forget it." Okay that growl was no trick of the mind nor was the bitterness seeping from the words like an open wound. "She is not going to put a leash on me ever again."

Whatever his thought regarding vigilantes and Oliver Queen, the veteran was perplexed by a level of resentment that he had seen time and time again in trauma survivors of war. Oliver's reaction parodied salt in the wounds and he felt ashamed for being the cause.

"Look man, I swear I'm not here to bring you back. But there's a bad motherfucker in town and we just need to know what you know. Can you at least confirm some facts for me?"

"Fine. Ask away."

The omega sat back, arms crossed with a faintly mocking expression and perhaps a hint of disappointment. Not one to be provoked, John fished a pair of photographs from his pocket and lay them side by side on the table. One was a visual of a man in a black and orange, ugly mask and the other the same character carrying away a semi-conscious Oliver.

"This man in the photograph is from a team of highly trained assassination duos renowned for their high rate of success that we call Deathstroke. For the past few years, this guy has gone solo and A.R.G.U.S. has had a hell of a time getting a confirmed location on this bad boy. But then he pops up on the grid hauling you out of a burning building. So, what's the connection, Oliver?"

Leaning forward the derision tacked on to Oliver's tone is expected even if it draws a wince from the stoic vet. "If I choose to answer your questions and that's a big if, you're asking me to betray someone that saved my life. So tell me, John. Why are you after this Deathstroke character?"
"From what I understand," he replied, inwardly acknowledging that he knew very little. "Is Waller wants to recruit him for some kind of special taskforce she's putting together."

Considering Oliver's 'you've got to be kidding me look,' Diggle felt hopes of a successful outcome were slim to none at this point. But out of nowhere, the omega's expression shifts from antagonistic to serene in the blink of an eye.

"I appreciate the offer, mate." John whipped around at the Australian accent, landing on an incredibly buff, older alpha with dark hair and caramel colored skin, eyeing him like a wolf after sheep. The man nodded to Oliver who shuffled over instantly. The alpha plopped down, a thick arm draping possessively over the blonde before turning to him, making John feeling like a bug under a microscope even as realization hit him hard. "But I'll be declining your organizations generous offer. And as far as any more intrusions into my personal matters go, stay away from my mate."

The last was definitely a threat and John took it that way, rising slowly and stepping away from the booth.

"And here I thought you were gonna stop surprising me, Queen, you did it again," he commented, watching the pair track his steps back. "Maybe I'll be seeing you around, Oliver. DS."

Swiftly leaving the building, he waits until he's in the safety of his car before dialing the number that picked up instantly.

"John." Waller's voice really did sound like the devil.

"We entirely misread the Deathstroke situation."

"Return to base. I want you debriefed immediately."

"On my way."

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Floyd Lawton's lips smacked together as he popped a wad of gum into his mouth.

Back in his room, in the seedier parts of town, his personal tattoo kit sat prepared to add a shiny new name to his lower abdomen.

Lining up the sight for the family eating at a fancy restaurant, Floyd saw dollar signs in his sight as he settled the scope on the chest of yet another smug mark sipping his wine like the sycophant he was.

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Shifting in his seat uncomfortably, Malcolm squeezed Felicity's hand once under the table, ears detecting a low murmur of pleasure from his blonde mate. Feeling a returning pressure, his fingers danced across his omega's palm and he presses down slightly, smirking at the elevated pulse rate thrumming beneath his fingertips.

The restaurant was like a bustling hive of bees, waiters swarming the dimly lit ambient setting. The candles did nothing to settle the alpha's mood. On the other side of the table, Tommy is moving his hands animatedly as he chats with his giggling girlfriend. Oliver, seated on his right, grins at his gobsmacked sister being harassed by a persistent Slade who continued mercilessly teasing.

All in all, the spirit of mirth and cheer had captivated the team with how perfect everything
"So, I'd like to borrow your attention if I may," Malcolm broke the conversation, watching it falter and subside like a retreating wave. "Whether or not it's impractical for how quickly this decision was made, I'm sure you all, by smell if nothing else, are aware that my relationship with Felicity has changed on a more permanent level."

"Yeah that message came across smelling ripe with cheer," Thea chimed in without a trace of mockery in her tone; in fact, if the alpha was not mistaken, his assistant looked incredibly smug.

"I'm happy that you've found someone and.. I think Felicity and I are becoming pretty good friends since we started working together."

Turning to his oldest son, the elder alpha feels a tremor of pleasure rush his system. Tommy's crystal blue eyes brimmed with life and lacked any trace of resentment Malcolm feared might exist from Felicity's impromptu jump in status. Next to him, he could sense the omega fairly bursting with content pheromones. Giving a nod to boy who had so rapidly become a man, his son smiles slightly.

"I like working with all of you," Felicity gushed, giving the group a conspiring look. "And I like spending time with all of you outside the office. But thank you. You know, for saying that."

"I really need to get myself a date," Thea disrupted the awkwardness effortlessly, bringing a humorous twitch to the sober-faced assassin. "I'm the odd woman out at this party."

"But no less loved," the Australian ruffled her hair affectionately, slinging an arm around the twiggy brunette's frame. "And don't worry. I'll be sure to wake you up every time Oliver and I happen to be awake in the early morning hours."

"Ugh, gross," Thea stuck her tongue out while the rest of the group chuckled politely.

"What my man is trying to say," Malcolm hummed in approval as Felicity pressed in against his side, the alpha accommodating her petite frame effortlessly. "Is that he wants to make things official."

A lily white hand lifted into the air, flashing a platinum band with the princess-cut diamond gleaming proudly from her finger.

"Oh my gosh that's beautiful!" Laurel gushed from the background.

"Knew you were a possessive bastard, Merlyn." The humorous bastard turned sparring partner declared with a good natured eye roll that amused where it would have once riled the primary alpha. "Congratulations. If you hurt her, I'll smash your face in."

Certainly not an empty threat, but such promises were considered expected from an omega's family so Malcolm took it in the spirit the warning was intended and smiled graciously.

"Congratulations Felicity," Oliver rose from his seat, wrapping an arm around his fellow omega with a pride that suited him. Over her shoulder, Malcolm noted the moisture filled sapphires sparkling happily as they looked his direction. "I'm happy for you, dad."

In the backdrop, he heard a few other salutations including a lewd remark from Thea, but the sudden transition in his son's eyes as the pupils narrowed and his lip furrowed summoned the alpha's attention away from the party.

"Oliver, what--"
Before he could react, Felicity was roughly shoved to the ground, his instincts prickling in defense of a woman that belonged to him. Instantly, the surge of fear in his son's eyes paused the alpha's motions as the blonde threw himself against his chest. Instinctively wrapping his arms around the heavy omega as the pair fell, distantly he heard something shatter like it was a distant cry.

"Dad!" Tommy's voice a dull roar like a ripple on a pond, soundless. A thousand screams: an outcry from nearby patrons and staff members alike before everything fell quiet.

Oliver jerked in his arms, groaning before a pressing deadweight filled his arms. Mindful of potential damage, the alpha settled himself in a defensive stance, putting his torso above his son's squirming body.

"Oh my God. Oh my God, Ollie! I'm calling 911!" Laurel's voice, the alpha's brain registered, a growl in his throat.

Slade, his natural second in command, flipped the dinner table in order to put a barrier between them and potential threats. There had to be more than one hitman, Malcolm's hindbrain raged; Voluntarily releasing his son into the arms of the alpha that had appeared at his side, he peeked over the table in the direction of the gunfire, fumbling around for some sort of weapon.

A hand touched his shoulder, his body instantly identifying the scent that meshed with himself. Snatching his omega's wrist with pinpoint accuracy, he dragged the startled blonde closer, his mate complying with the harsh treatment with respectful endurance. Shoving Felicity toward Slade and trusting her to another alpha's care rankled his mind, but defending the territory was definitely his most vital task at the moment.

Gripping a steak knife in one hand, he rose to a crouch and examined the crowd, fishing for potential enemies and coming up empty handed.

"Dad, I just called 911!" Tommy, his nose informed him, was pressed nearly against his spine, while Laurel's frantic breathing indicated she was low to the ground but within Tommy's reach. "There were two shots and it must have come from another building!"

"Oliver!" Thea's voice, always so expressive, was strangled with panic. The aspect of his brain that was Al Sa-Her mentally made a note of her reaction under pressure and added fear training to the girl's training regimen.

"I'm fine." Sparing his wounded child a glance, he felt extreme pride to see the blonde on his knees albeit with grimace of pain panting hard, Slade at his side taking the brunt of his son's weight. Sweat beaded along his forehead, but the young man continued to look around for invisible threats despite his sister's ongoing waterworks.

"Keep your guard up," he commanded, impressed by how quickly his son followed direction and maintained his composure. Behind Slade, he saw his own mate working furiously at her tablet, no doubt ensuring the proper authorities were on their way.

Masking his own worry, he approached the huddled group at a crawl, stopping short only when a warning rumble from Slade drew his own instincts to the surface for another round and he snarled.

Duly chastised, the big man deigned to allow Malcolm to come closer and inspect the pasty faced youth looking one gust of wind away from collapsing.

"Dad, are you alright? I was so sure I wouldn't make it in time."
"Takes more than a bullet to take me down, kiddo," the father leans in, inspecting an injury to the side and perhaps a graze to the shoulder. "Looks like you were very lucky."

"Whoever did this won't be," Slade's voice was a death sentence that Malcolm was all too prepared to carry out.

"Ambulance is three minutes out," Felicity's practical voice was a relief to a sea of fear and he dropped down next to her, slinging an arm around her shoulder. Maybe it was unforgivable weakness, but he needed comfort in that moment to quell the anger. There was no doubt in his mind who had orchestrated this and for that, she would pay.

"Don't worry, Thea, I've had worse," the reassurance for Thea did not seem up to task as it increased the outpouring of tears. The beta girl dropped down next to Thea, looking composed of uncertainty and realization.

Not sparing more time for trivialities, he continued to leach comfort from his mate and otherwise kept his eyes glued to Oliver, a paternal itch satisfied as he watched Slade cradle his son like he was a priceless treasure.

A siren in the distance, the whisper of gossip fairies, and the notable countenance of Tommy gazing resolutely into the distance as if by staring alone he could discover the shooter's identity.

Perhaps his son had changed more than even he had realized.

A startled rasp snapped him back to high alert as his son jackknifed in Slade's arms, cobalt spheres blinking rapidly.

"Poison. Slade, it's poison!"

Oh god. The calm receded and brought forth droves of frenzied alarm in their little family.

Poison was small potatoes to a League assassin and he berated himself for not considering it sooner. Watching his son arch helplessly in the big man's arms, Slade's roar caught him off guard as the Australian fisted his hand in Malcolm's shirt.

"Someone grab a medical kit, and they better pray it comes with a transfusion kit."

"Get me the first aid kit now!" The authority in his tone scatters the wait staff.

"Ollie, please don't die! I can't do this again! I can't!"

"Stay with me sweetheart," Slade demanded. "

Right. The restaurant maitre d, looking overwhelmed with panic, practically shoving the kit into the alpha's arms. Ripping into it, Malcolm tosses useless bandages, syringe, pockets the scissors thoughtfully and rips open the clear tubing for their particular needs.

"Stay awake Oliver," his son hollered with a notable desperation at his limp brother.

"Come on, kid!" Slade ripped the needle open and positioned it expertly over a vein, smacking the wrist. "Booze!"

Thea shoved a bottle in his face that Malcolm watched the other man dump over Oliver's arm, managing to keep the omega restrained despite the obvious tremors coursing through his body.
A dash of alcohol there, a needle inserted into the struggling blonde and the other needle was thrust his direction.

Finding his own vein, his omega stepped in, carefully fished it into the vein. Blood rolled out and there was little left to accomplish but a wait and watch stance.

Sara Lance stood outside the entrance to the Lazarus Pit like a voyeur, despising her own hesitation. Two of the stationed protectors eyed her with thinly veiled suspicion, likely holding their tongues only due to the importance drilled into them by the Demon's Head on respecting the chambers.

If Nyssa knew she was here, her lover would be horrified and properly so, but for the first time in her life, Sara wanted to put someone else above herself. Initially their relationship was mostly one-sided apart from the physical, but as time passed, Sara found herself inexplicably falling in love; in the morning she would prepare a special tea that Nyssa liked, in the evenings she enjoyed rubbing away lingering aches from the strain of the day. Sara Lance had considered emotions fleeting, but her dark, beautiful alpha made her feel like the impossible was possible and that even she could love.

"Why do you linger in the shadows like a thief in the dark?"

Closing her eyes, she embraced the identity of the Canary, repeating it over and over in her mind as she stepped into the cavern lit by torch and candlelight alone. The Lazarus pit bubbled like a living entity rather than a fount of water; today it almost seemed to glow like the pit was constructed of pearls rather than simple stone. Like anyone who entered this chamber, the blonde heard the call of the bubbling water like a lover's whisper, urging her to sink her fingers beneath the surface.

To touch the water without permission was to invite death.

Walking across the stone floor, the torches whispered as she approached the pool where Ra's reclined in the water, leaving only his head exposed. With eyes that read the soul like it was merely words written on paper, the Demon's Head lifted a hand from the water, waving her forward expectantly.

Without allowing herself any further reservations, the beta sank to her knees in a show of submission, fixing her eyes firmly on the ancient stones kept polished by dedicated servants of the League.

"Ta-er al-Sahfer," her name rolled off Ra's tongue. "Stand and speak your mind."

Rising to her feet, the blondes struggled to find words, finally managing, "Nyssa sustained injuries that are still hindering her, with your permission, Master I would--"

"Use the Lazarus Pit? I'm afraid you already know the answer is no. The injuries were hardly life threatening." The Demon's Head Rose, unabashed to be seen naked and he was hardly defenceless. Wrapping himself in a heavy drape of fine black linen with gold threading, Ra's stood above the Lazarus Pit like a god. "Was there anything else?"

"Do you even care that she was hurt?" The words erupted from her mouth before she could effectively cork her emotions. "She could have been killed and yet you would do nothing!"

"I forgive your outburst as I can see that your mind is in a state of conflict," Ra's words struck her like a physical blow and she staggered backward. "I care a great deal for my daughter and her wellbeing, even when I do not agree with the choices she makes. And, as you know, I have sent
one of the League's greatest warriors to discover more about your attacker."

"Why don't you approve of me?" The words come from between grit teeth, Sara intentionally looking away to avoid her master's wrath.

"A father never likes to see his daughter hurt, a concept that I'm sure your father championed from the moment you were born," Ra's descends the steps leisurely, the mantle of status draped over his shoulders. "And I felt the same watching my daughter grow into adulthood. When she brought you home, I instantly saw a girl that had never accepted responsibility for her actions. To this day, you have become a fierce warrior but one that had never truly committed herself to our way of life. And a warrior that runs from her failings is not one that I would give my blessing to."

"And if I were to take responsibility for what I've done. What then?"

"I doubt we will ever know."

"I'm going to prove to you that I can change," Sara remarked, officially dismissing herself. "You'll see!"

Bowing low, Sara backed out of the room before rising and all but fleeing the sight of Ra's. Lip practically shredding as she worried it in her teeth, the blonde raced down the hallway to where she shared quarters with Nyssa. Opening the heavy door, she stepped into the room with its luxurious cushions and silk bedding. At her appearance, the attractive alpha on the bed cracked an eye, a smile coming into existence as if the woman had just seen the face of her gods.

"There's my Canary," the sultry voice of Nyssa broke through the remnants of sorrow and she wore the mask of happiness like a true pro. "Where've you been flitting around?"

"Nowhere special," she climbed onto the bed, wrapping her arms around her lover while mindful of her injuries. "I did arrange to have your meal sent up here so we could eat together."

"Something to look forward to," the dark haired woman turned, capturing her lips in a passionate, dominating kiss that typically had her flat on her back in no time.

"Hey. No funny business until you're all well," she gently pressed the older woman back against the pillows, brushing a piece of dark hair out of her face. "I'm the luckiest girl in the world."

"And don't you forget it," Nyssa quipped, the pair bursting into snorts and laughter like a couple of school girls.

Thinking of a relic that she saved from back in the day, Sara pondered her next move, while tipping her face into her lover's chest. If she had to prove herself to Ra's so be it. Nyssa was worth fighting for. Nyssa was worth proving everything to the Demon.

Waiting for her lover to drift back to sleep, Sara calculated the arrangements that she would need to make in order to reach Starling City as quickly as possible... and to settle things with Slade once and for all.

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Thea allowed Tommy to tug her into a one-armed hug, staring at the far hallway with a foreboding demeanour that was sure to give hardened criminals pause. Doctors and nurses buzzed past, lost to their own world, useful in the sense that they did not stop to gawk or question. Fine by her.
"You doing okay, Speedy?" Tommy's voice was like a warm blanket, soothing and caring the way any older brother should be. Leaning more into the taller brunette, she nestled into the bicep that had had swelled over the past weeks with muscle growth.

The other alpha had practically undergone a transformation, just like her. Discovering secrets was apparently the road to turning their lives around. Overnight, Thea's recreational drinking and drug habit had dissipated into an oblivion overnight and she suspected Tommy's dedication to his new job and training regimen nipped any extracurricular habits in the bud. And the lingering looks directed toward Laurel indicated anything, it was how determined the man was to live up to the pedestal she existed on.

Laurel was handling the police down the hall, probably for the best since the beta had nothing to hide, while the pair waited for news on Oliver. A piece of Thea pitied the poor soul sequestered in a room with Malcolm and Slade, the two alphas hardly knew the meaning of the word restraint. There was no way that man made it out of that room without pissing himself. Poor bastard.

"Oliver's been through worse." And was that just not the bitterest pill of all? "But that's not what's bothering me."

"What is?" Apprehension in your tone, Merlyn? Probably should be.

"That man was trying to kill your father. And I have a pretty good idea of who hates your dad's guts."

Silence was not golden, but it sure spoke for itself. No denials forthcoming, Thea felt free to reflect on her mother. The monetary means and possibly the contacts to hire someone. It... fit. After all, what was an assassination plot after killing your husband and kidnapping your son?

"It could be the same person responsible for Walter's death if he were targeting the powerful in Starling."

"Oh come on, Merlyn," Ripping herself away from Tommy, she stared at the tight-lipped man in disbelief. "After everything that's happened and everything we've found out, are you seriously defending her?"

"No, well maybe," Tommy sighed, slamming his fist into the wall with a harsh thump, a slight crack forming in the plaster. Good thing you're rich Merlyn, if the stink eye from the staff proved anything. "I just think that assuming your mother tried to kill my dad is a pretty bold move. And... the fact that Oliver is the one that got hurt. I don't know Thea. I just hate thinking a woman that used to make me grilled cheese and feed me dinner almost every night for two years is the root of all evil."

Rubbing her face wearily, Thea refuted the memories daring to surface of winter night making cocoa and firm embraces with a motherly hold. She had to be objective if there was any possibility of getting through this. Regardless of what the police thought, or what Tommy said, the alpha knew the truth: her mother was not a good person.

"Thea, Tommy." Like a summons, she felt herself spin and rush toward the paternal alpha with Tommy hot on her heels. Skidding to a stop, Thea roved Malcolm's face for indicators, finally noting the alpha's tense, but not angry scent.

"Oh thank god," the words blurted out of her mouth before the man uttered a word.

"He's going to be okay, but the injury to his side shattered a rib and passed through some
lung tissue. Although his recovery time should be minimal, Oliver won't be up to a lot of activity for a while." Okay so vigilante activities were off the table for as long as they could keep her brother pinned down. Since discovering the omega's secret, it had become rather apparent that inactivity brought forth the crazies.

Finally capable of experiencing relief, Thea felt tears burn the inside of her eyelids as she shuddered insensibly. If she lost her brother, what else would she have? A pair of arms that radiated strength snared her and pulled her against the alpha's chest. Malcolm. The man epitomized patience, allowing her teasing threats without comment, merely accepting her snarky attitude and offered her that job. A job that she did not exactly hate... but seemed so beyond her. Arranging for her to take long-distance university courses while working next year, assisting her in gaining access to her trust. The man was doing everything that... a father would do.

Stunned by that revelation, she tucked her face against the man's chest, she wept bitterly and held on to the man that had adopted her without Thea so much as realizing it.

"It's okay, Thea." Soothing the way only a father's voice could be.

A moment later, a third body was tucked against them and Tommy's arms were wrapped around the both of them, face hidden against his father's shirt. Feeling foggy in the haze of reassuring hormones, Thea managed a few fumbled words.

"Thank you, Malcolm. Thank you for being here."

"You're like the daughter I always wanted, Thea," Malcolm's voice was gentle, as if expecting her to bolt. "And Tommy always treated you like a sister anyway."

"Yeah." Ah shucks, Tommy's voice was clearly emotional and she was too sappy to call him on it.

Pulling away from Malcolm, she peered through the glass of her brother's door, taken aback by the joy coating Oliver's expression. Cuddled up against his alpha, the omega was making faces at the laughing man, seemingly carefree. Probably high on a drug cocktail, her brother caught sight of her peeking through the glass and waved brightly while masking a wide yawn.

"Oh man, he's higher than a kite."

"What, really?" Tommy's voice piqued with interest, shuffled up behind her and snorted loudly as off-key singsong chimed from inside the room. "I'm going in. You coming?

"You go ahead," Thea stepped back, smiling lightly. "I'm gonna grab myself a drink from the coffee bar downstairs. I'll be back in five. You guys want anything?"

"Nah I'm good," the alpha opened the door, a delighted cry of "Tommy!" coming from within. "Hey buddy."

"I'm going to retrieve Felicity from accounting," Malcolm murmured, checking in on the pair. "Use the expense card I gave you and get yourself whatever you want and get an extra two iced coffees, please."

"You got it, boss," she saluted the man cheekily, earning a returned smirk. "Be back in a flash."

Abandoning the doorway vigil, Thea ghosted through the hallway, sidestepping distracted medical personnel directing gurneys and iv equipment. A bleary eyed college student struggling to
make ends meet greeted her at the tiny coffee stand with the standard nametag and cheap, uniform t-shirt; Thea dropped a twenty into the bin recognizing it was enough to make the beta's night without making her look like a spoiled rich bitch like most of the world thought her to be.

Two drinks for Malcolm, a pair of hot chocolates for Oliver and Slade complete with whipped cream, and a hot latte for herself to drown in. Balancing the drink carrier and taking a deep gulf of piping hot coffee hit the spot perfectly. Heading back to the elevator, she stopped cold at the golden mop of hair that was unmistakable in the sterile hellhole.

"Thea!" The beta approached on swift moving heel clicks, the perfect image of parental discretion. "Have you seen, Oliver? I've heard what happened and I came right away!"

To hell with the drinks! Chucking the drink carrier against a wall, the janitor down the corridor issued a high pitched shriek of disapproval. Guilt would have to wait for another day.

"You stay the hell away from my brother!" Closing the gap between them, Thea observed her mother recoil like a wounded animal, stumbling away from the alpha driving her backward. "This is all your fault! You can deny it all you want, but I know the truth! And I am not going to allow you to ruin my life! Or Ollie's life! You stay the hell away from him!"

"Thea, listen sweetheart you don't understand!" Her mother's pleas like a desperate plea to some pagan god. "I swear that I did not do this to Oliver! I love you and I love your brother! You're both my reason for living and I would never do anything to hurt you!"

A crowd of spectators continued to grow, one or two pulling out cell phones. Great. In a matter of hours, the Queen family drama would put out their next chapter.

"Well, that would be nice to hear," Thea mocked, leaning in until they were barely inches apart, scenting the mire of panic in the beta's scent. "Except that I don't believe you. I know that you are a liar and everything you're telling me is a crock of bullshit! I don't want anything to do with you and I don't want you going near my brother!"

"Thea, please." Good grief she was sobbing like a bratty baby.

"I'm afraid that Oliver has a very short list of permitted visitors." Out of nowhere, Felicity Smoak rounded the corners with a pair of Malcolm's bodyguards flanking the omega who looked utterly corporate in a skin-tight, black mini-dress. "And considering I'm the one that filed all of my stepson's paperwork, I can assure you that your name is not on there. So, I'm going to go ahead and have Mr. Palmer walk you to your car."

"What, you can't just--"

Muscled goon was already in motion, clearing the distance and stepping cleanly between Thea and her mother, shielding her from sight.

"Actually, I'm pretty sure I can." The ire in Felicity's tone could have shattered steel with the power in her voice. "And Moira, I'd stay away if I were you. You really don't want to piss me off."

Shivering, Thea was taken aback by arm slung around his shoulders, patiently guiding her away from the epicenter of conflict and tugging her toward the stairs.

"Matthews, after you take care of that personal matter Mr. Merlyn asked you to attend to, pick up some fresh drinks."
"Yes, ma'am." The suit was out the door in the direction his partner had gone in two seconds flat, the perfect soldier.

The woman next to her was closer to becoming a sister than a parent, but somehow the petite blonde exuded comfort that Thea sorely needed. The last view of her mother had been an agonized, shell of a woman that made it difficult for the alpha to retreat into her emotional shell.

"It's alright, Thea," the omega's voice soothing the brunette like a lullaby. "Let's go see your brother."

"Okay." Was that her voice? A gentle hand ran through her hair, tapping her skull in rhythmic pats.

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In the privacy of her limousine, Moira clutched the portable tablet in her hands she warily turned the device on.

At first the footage appeared just odd and random, but when she saw the familiar image appear on the screen and the resulting gunshot, she knew Malcolm had won.

Nothing left to do, the beta sobbed and sank into a hopeless oblivion.

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"Alright then," Nuducerdo shut the door to his cushy office, gesturing to the seats in front of his desk.

Gingerly, Quentin fell into a seat, noting his partner Lucas dropping down as well while Captain Stein opted to hover like the oversized lummox he was. Half a second later, Kelton, the dumb twat tech guy, stumbled through the door, turning to shut it with an awkward motion.

"Sorry I'm late."

"Enough pissing around," the beta rumbled, glaring at his comrades in disgust as the eyes zeroed in on him. Stalkers. "What do you want, Commissioner?"

"I asked you all here." Ordered, Lance thought while rolling his eyes. "To discuss our little vigilante problem. Because I feel like we're as close to catching these bastards as we were the first day."

"Don't forget we got some a-hole targeting CEO's now too," Stein added with a tone oozing false concern. Suck up.

"I already assigned that case to Pike," Nuducerdo stood, pacing behind his desk like a trapped animal. In a manner, Quentin supposed he was; after all, the press was like a pack of rabid dogs and they'd been all over the coverage since the assassination attempt on Malcolm Merlyn ended with Oliver Queen's hospitalization. Lance could admit he hated the little prick, but he did not want to see another vigilante loose in Starling targeting people. "Our concern lies with our Twin Archers and our wild card masked man. So, let's hear it people, what do we know?"

"The kids rescued from the church seem fairly convinced our black archer is an alpha," his partner offered the Commissioner like it was a bribe or something. Kicking the other man's shin, his partner blinked at him and shrugged helplessly. "And alpha behavior fits the criminal profile."
"Right because murderers always fit the profile," the beta mocked the group, sitting back in his seat with a huff. "The press is out their talking about how great it is to have a group of psychopaths running around killing people. I reached out to the CIA and they told me our new player is an internationally known assassin. So we got a couple local killers teaming up with a hardcore killer and the media is spinning it into a love story. So you tell me, how the hell am I supposed to do my job?"

"How you deal with any stray dog gone bad," the Commissioner's comment caught Quentin off-guard and he leaned forward, planting his palms on his knees in a pose that he hoped conveyed his lack of confidence. Still, dubious as he was, the detective fell intrigued enough to pay attention. "You give them a big, juicy steak."

"Great," Stein muttered, the big man folding his arms grumpily. "We don't have a steak."

"Not so fast," the Commissioner looked crazed-obsessed like the whacko fanatics looked right before a hit of crystal. "Kelton, tell them what you reported to me earlier."

Instantly, Lance snapped his attention to the thin, nerd shifting uncomfortably under the weight of a room full of officers' attention. Almost more than what Noducerdo asked, the beta desperately wanted to smack the guy upside the head and ask him why he brought the information up with the boss instead of the people leading the charge in the investigation.

"I wasn't able to backtrack the signal, but someone has definitely been poking their nose into our systems." The omega shifted warily again, fiddling with the laptop tucked under his arm. "I'm good but they're better than I am. But since I'm still good, I was able to at least find out what they were after. It looks like information correlating to our vigilante cases was snooped pretty hardcore."

"And this helps us how?" Lance mutters aloud, directing the question to no one in particular before narrowing a glare at Kelton. "Because if our so called expert can't find the hacker I really don't see how this is beneficial at all."

"You want to plant false information and set a trap," his partner offered, causing the Bingo sign in Quentin's brain to go off with a ding, ding, ding!

"Not exactly," Kelton interrupted with a derisive snort that subtly, Quentin approved of. About time the twit grew a spine. "False information is going to look suspicious because it would be untrue and look ridiculous for enough compelling information to appear from nowhere."

"We're going to throw the vigilantes into the Triad's hidey hole." Astonished, Lance observed his boss rub his hands together. "We might not be able to obtain a warrant or catch them in the act, but we've known for years where the Triad's main building is. And we've been unable to do anything because our hands are tied. But, if we can flag the information as updated and ongoing, feed just enough new information to get our vigilantes interested."

"Now that is bold," Stein whooped like the football player wannabe the jackass was. How the hell did he ever become Captain? Skill certainly could not have been involved. "We let the vigilantes clean out the Triad base. If they succeed, we can send S.W.A.T to swoop in and arrest the bastards. If they fail, we can noose the Triad! Either way, it's game!"

"So, the solution to bringing the vigilantes in is a trap that seems to have a high probability of resulting in the death of a bunch of people," Lance found himself incredulous and a little nauseated at the prospect. Everyone knew he was as anti-vigilante as they come, but sinking to their level seemed dirty somehow.
"Criminals," the Commissioner seemed amused by his reaction, which further sickened the detective. "And like any operation, if they surrender than no one need die. Besides, I'm a little bit tired of the body bags left behind by these assholes. Let's take'em out boys!"

A chorus of yeahs shattered the office silence with the exception of Lance who nodded in agreement, feeling somewhat dismayed even if he understood the underlying concerns. The archers had wrought enough havoc with their disregard for the law. No one wanted justice more than Lance, but pitting two lethal forces against one another to accomplish the task felt like a question of guilt hung suspended in the room and Lance was not sure where he stood now.

Cradled in one powerful arm, Oliver gripped Slade's shoulders with his hands while the big man used his keen intuition to pick his way onto mansion's tile rooftop using only hand and his feet for balance. The omega felt confident that the Mirakuru would provide the strength and the Australian's personal loathing for convention would provide the raw determination.

"Can't believe you talked me into this," his alpha grumbled, but there was a distinct lack of heat that drew a smile to Oliver's face.

"Because you and I are poster children for PTSD and hate confined spaces," he remarks glibly, reaching up to nip his alpha's chin playfully, the big man squeezing his rear in a warning note of retaliation. "And if anyone tells me to take it easy one more time I'm going to kill someone. Their love is smothering me."

"Killing some A-hole would probably be more entertaining," the alpha grunted, but nonetheless deposited him onto the tile surface, a lingering finger tracing his cheek affectionately. A second later, the big man vanished from sight to retrieve their bundle of goodies for the night.

Hunkering down in his t-shirt and sleep pants, he barely had enough time to revel in the windy chill of fresh air and the seeping cold of the uncomfortable roofing before Slade was back with a single pillow, heavy comforter, and a water bottle.

"A pillow?" Scrutinizing the fluffy object, he earned a shrug from his nonplussed mate.

"You're going to fall asleep on my chest like usual and I thought it would be best to be comfortable if I don't want to have a hard head like you."

Too anyone not as familiar with Slade, they would have assumed the comment insignificant, but the omega recognized the slight wariness. But a pillow was a pillow and his alpha more than most deserved to have some comfort in his life if that's what he wanted.

"Get down here then, I'm cold!"

"Such a princess," the drawl was expected and desired. Cozying up to the alpha, Oliver sighed and attached himself like a burr to the Australian, lifting his eyes to the panoramic display of twinkling lights in the sky accompanied by the even present sphere of a beautiful moon.

Tugging at the blanket, the omega minded his hip, adjusting the folds of fabric to cover his lover and himself adequately before retreating into the artificial cocoon, stretching like a cat at the big hands stroking his back.

"How come you didn't stay with ASIS?"

"After I lost you, I never quite recovered. And I think I lost my focus and commitment to a cause that I'd stopped believing in. I could tell you a fairytale, but the reality is that after everything
I'd been through, I felt like I had nothing left to fight for. But finding you, that's worth fighting for. You, are worth fighting for."

"I love you, Slade."

"My balls are going to fall off from all this sappy crap," the alpha groaned, pressing his lips to the top of Oliver's head, arms lightly rubbing circles along his back. Despite not returning the sentiment, the omega snuggled in carefully, drawing in breaths that became increasingly even as the exhaustion set in.

"Slade, you're still seeing things aren't you?"

It was a question he should have known was coming, but he felt all the more unprepared without a speech. Floundering, Slade breathed shakily, turning to watch the lithe Chinese woman squatting on the far side of the rooftops; a voyeur visible only to eyes infected by green poison. His reaction had not gone unnoticed if the omega's somber tone proved anything.

"Who do you see over there?"

Unable to lie despite his desperate desire to do so, he nodded, his lover reaching up to stroke his cheek. Suddenly needing the comfort, he subtly tipped his head, the fingers rubbing soothingly.

"I used to see you," Oliver shivered in his arms slightly and the alpha tightened his grasp. "Now it's always her." There was no need to name the obvious. "She talks to me like my conscience. Only, she reminds me of my failures."

The hand slipped back beneath the covers, tracing across the stretched cotton shirt and caressing his chest.

"Ignore her," the whisper was soft, voice muffling as his lover tucked himself into the juncture of Slade's shoulder and neck. "You have me, now."

"I do have you."

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"How you feeling buddy?"

Tommy took a profound stab of satisfaction to see his brother jolt upright in surprise, brandishing a freshly polished arrow from where he sat at in the Merlyn kitchen, grinding metal to lethal points. Perhaps honing the weapons of his chosen profession could be construed as a craft project... complete with the therapeutic benefits.

"Slade's been spending too much time teaching you how to sneak up on your opponent," Oliver mumbled, looking a bit to white around the eyes and a bit shifty. Somebody's been avoiding the pain pills, Tommy thought to himself. "Why are you here anyway. Aren't you supposed to be at work?"

"Slade's been teaching me everything and still calling me a 'lazy yank' so I have a feeling that poison did more damage to your system than you want to let on," he admonished his brother while pilfering the fridge for sandwich fixings, not bothering to prevent the clanging in the fridge. "Besides, I thought I should come have lunch with my brother that's been out of the hospital two entire days and is somehow managing to drive everyone, including Slade, up the wall with his bitchiness."
"I'm not bitchy," there was uncertainty in the tone that made Tommy smile as he slathered a healthy dollop of mayo on two sandwiches, before reaching for the expensive sliced beef.

"Of course not!" Tommy remarked in his most patronizing tone he could offer, grinning at the blonde stomping over toward the sandwiches. "Which is why Thea is squirming in the hot seat, doing our dad's job in company meetings today while dad is going hiking with your mate." Exaggerating his tone, Tommy smirks at the blonde's sullen expression. "And by hiking, I mean tracking down this Deadshot character that Felicity dug up for previous curare connections. I'm guessing when you said something mouthy, he decided to give you a few hours to cool your jets. And here!"

Plopping down a perfectly delicious looking sandwich on sliced French bread with all the fixings, Tommy tucked into his sandwich with no little enthusiasm standing over the kitchen counter. Oliver sighed, folded his arms and reached for his own sandwich and took a nibble. Eyes widening slightly, he took a heartier bite.

"Thanks for the sandwich."

"No problem, man. I can understand how the attention can be a little overwhelming."

And he truly could empathize. Bad enough that he had gotten hurt, but a houseful of alphas with only one other omega to run interference had to be messing with his head. After all, even he could be lightheaded around a swamp of pheromones.

"Oh here," Tommy plucks a pair of beers from the counter behind him, praying his brother did not pause to wonder why he had opened them before making sandwiches.

"Sometimes it's just too much to have so many people around," Oliver accepted his beer with an eager swig causing Tommy to do an internal happy dance when the omega failed to comment on the taste. "Slade isn't normally the mother hen type, but the Mirakuru fuels paranoia. I'm worried about how that makes him feel."

"I don't consider myself to be an expert in mysterious substances that give a person super powers," Tommy downed a swallow of his own beer, allowing the cold beverage to settle his nerves. "But I do know that if Laurel had been injured, I'd probably want to be with her and I'd be terrified that whoever had done this might come back. So maybe you should just try to remember that people are not exactly rational when it comes to people we care about."

The two of them lapsed into quiet, but he found himself shooting considering looks to measure the other man as he finished the sandwich and sipped on his drink with a slightly glazed look to him. Running on gut instinct, Tommy flipped open his mobile and went down the list of contacts to Slade's number and hit send.

Two rings later and the Australian's voice picked up the other line with a confused. "Yes?"

"Slade, it's Tommy," not missing for a second the way Oliver's eyes jerked upward and blinked hard, he moved behind his tiring brother, placed an arm on his shoulder to keep him in place and provide support if necessary. "Oliver just wanted to talk to you."

Without further ceremony, he pressed the phone against the omega's ear and patted the blonde on the back.

"Sorry about earlier," the apology tumbled out of his brother's mouth like a dam breaking. "I just hate feeling.. weak."
Unable to hear the other man's reply, he can smell the relief coming off the omega and finds himself pleased that he made the correct decision.

"Okay, Slade. Are you coming home soon then?"

"Okay, good. You too. Okay."

The conversation ends with a click, Oliver's weight falling against Tommy easily.

"You gave me something."

"Yep." Not seeing a point in denying the obvious, Tommy slings an arm around Oliver's shoulders and half-carries the other man toward the new leather couch, pausing when the blonde stumbles and guides him into a lying position. Tossing a blanket over the rapidly blinking omega, he smiles softly. "And I did it because I care. So, take a nice, drugged nap and Slade will be here by the time you wake up."

"Hate you."

"Right back at you, bro."

Walking away from the sleeping man, he feels a sense of accomplishment and heads for his car. Time to head back to the lab and see what genius girl had come up with in his absence.

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"I see you have not forgotten our ways, Al Sa-Her."

Malcolm dropped onto the rooftop in full assassin's regalia, bow at ease as a sign of respect to his supposed brother in arms. Ra's was a fool if he believed even for a moment that ceremony displaced true loyalties.

"Shamshir, the living blade of Ra's himself," he intoned with a courteous nod that the other veiled man returned in kind. "If Ra's wishes for me to visit again, he only needed to ask. I will always heed the call of the Demon's Head."

His words appear to have relaxed the other man's rigid stance. Gloved hands flip back the hood and drop the veil to reveal the loyally rigid face that personified stoic. Looks like someone was ready to play ball after a heavy dollop of flattery.

"Nyssa was nearly killed by a man," the man accused him with a heavy drawl. "A man named Slade Wilson. One can imagine my surprise to find him living under the roof of one of our own."

Refuting the bait, Malcolm stepped closer while maintaining a completely non-threatening posture.

"Slade Wilson has spoken to me and admitted that he had a run in with the League while pursuing Ta-er al-Safer." Keeping to truth would avoid garnering additional suspicion. "His words carry hefty allegations that caused me to stay my hand until I could speak to Ra's. After all, even I am subject to the rulings of the League and I felt he would like to know that he has a potential traitor in his midst."

"A traitor?" The furrowed brows, thinned lips: like taking candy from a baby.
"All I ask is that you tell Ra's what I have to say." Holding a hand up as if performing a pledge, Malcolm did what he did best: performed. "And if the Demon's Head orders his death, I will abide by that decision."

"Your loyalty is remembered, Al Sa-Her," Shamshir bowed. "Speak."

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Missions were officially crazy.

Decked out in navy blue leathers, Kevlar, and a blue mask, Tommy felt like a badass. Or a clown. Either way, if Laurel ever discovered what he was doing, his ass would be grass.

Strictly speaking, when he asked to join the team for a mission, his father was the only one that did not immediately slam the door and throw away the key. Oliver was firmly against his participation, citing lack of inexperience; his brother's alpha merely choke slammed him into a mat and walked away. Difference of opinion to the extreme.

In the end, it was Oliver's injury from the attempted assassination that enabled Tommy to tag along as a glorified bodyguard. Since his stitches could reopen from strenuous activity, the omega was relegated to providing cover fire while his father and Slade assaulted the Chinese fortress. You know, if one considered a dilapidated school a fortress.

A highly publicized string of gang related violence linked to the Chinese Triad had caught the attention of Felicity after a close inspection of the linked police reports. The alleged base of operations had been pinpointed by the police, but apparently a series of silenced witnesses and scare tactics had prevented law enforcement from making a firm move. Thank goodness assassins were not limited by petty things such as search warrants and proof.

Now, from the rooftop of a catholic cathedral, Oliver prepped his bow and watched for movement from the Triad's base in an abandoned school. Tommy held the smooth metal pole in one hand, feeling like it more of an extension of his arm than a lump of titanium. Still, he felt a little ridiculous sitting on a rooftop like some movie extra.

"My street cameras are negative, so I'd say you boys have a go."

"Copy that," his brother tapped his transmitter, Tommy's mind blown by how casual Felicity seemed with their operation.

"Assault team is heading in."

Out of the darkness, the alphas darted across the road, pausing outside a steel gymnasium door. Watching Slade punch the frame and the entire door get knocked off was a trip. Sure, he expected the super strength after learning about the effects of a serum the big guy was exposed to, but that old saying rang true: seeing is believing. Afterward, the pair vanished into dark structure.

"They'll be fine," Tommy offered, his brother shooting him a look from behind the green veil. "See if I try to be comforting again."

"I should be out there."

"You're lucky Slade didn't leave you handcuffed to your bed the way he threatened to do."

"I'd have gotten out."
Yeah, he could imagine. Sighing, he realized the waiting had to be the more difficult task. Faintly they heard an occasional round but aside from that there was an utter absence of movement. Shifting his weight, Tommy gripped the staff tightly, squinting into the darkness.

"Something isn’t right," Oliver shifted like a restless bird, stretching to his full height and scanning the periphery. "Felicity, something’s off. Can you please recheck your cameras for anything?"

"Oh crap! I was watching for police cars, not a lack of them! They've put up roadblocks at the end of each road, but I can't see them. Slade! Malcolm! Are you both okay?"

"We're ok!" Malcolm's voice soothed their nerves before they could unsettle, but Oliver jolting upright like he had been shot again was enough to draw Tommy's attention.

Before he voiced his fear, the omega's palm slapped over his mouth and gestured to the ground. Tommy blinked before he noted shadowy, uniformed shapes moving in from the outside of the concrete ocean, carrying heavy weaponry.

"We've got heavy company," Oliver's voice, grim like a physician about to deliver bad news.

Feeling helpless like a child, Tommy stood up and watched Oliver's hooded head turn skyward, scanning the rooftops. Following Oliver's trail, the alpha caught sight of a flicker of movement atop one of the larger corporate structures to the south. Turning to look north, a high rise apartment complex there was at least two more, effectively caging the pair of alphas in a trap.

"Tommy, you need to leave." Oliver's voice was quiet, determined and resigned in the way that he always imagined a martyr was before their execution.

"Are you nuts? They have snipers on the roof and a ton of men on the ground."

"Which is exactly why you need to leave now," Oliver's voice cracked like a whip, the alpha flinching away from the rage in his brother's voice. "I am going to do what I do best because if I don't, we'll never see them again. But this is not what you signed up to become. So, you need to leave. Go, Tommy!"

Out of nowhere, an old image of his father on his knees, the last promise his father made him before he vanished, leaving him alone.

"You can't leave. You said you'd always be there."

"I know, but you have to be strong now. I'm going somewhere where I can learn how to make sure that no one will ever hurt us again."

Whatever the price was, the alpha was not about to allow his brother to pay it alone. The promise his father made belonged to more than just Malcolm Merlyn; Tommy had a family to protect now.

Tossing his radio away, he stomped on the hardware and ground it beneath his boot. "Not this time, dad." Turning he was just in time to witness the rapid fire burst of arrows sail through the moonlit sky like a couple of dark banners felling their targets with frightening accuracy, the snipers from the northern building falling. Following his brother's lead, he watched the man race to the far side of the area, fire an arrow and jet across to the far building. Unable to follow, Tommy set climbing down from the church roof, astonished by how easy it was compared with what he expected, perhaps those workouts were doing something for him after all?
Landing on solid ground, he kept to the bushes and watched a team of officers armed to the teeth approach the far building. Watching them, Tommy hovered in the shadows, clutching the staff, waiting--no, praying an opportunity presented itself for him to lend a hand.

Chapter End Notes

Author's Note: Okay, this was a particularly challenging part to write and I have no idea why that is. On the bright side, I think the next chapter should come a bit easier.

Anyway, I hope you all are still enjoying this and thank you to everyone that has left lovely kudos and comments because they're a wonderful treat to come home to after a long day! Love you all!
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

Thanks again to my amazing beta reader Theimpossiblegirl_123. You inspire me!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The last of the northern snipers dropped out of sight with no further movement. Pivoting, Oliver forced himself to acclimatize to the shingled terrain as he raced over the slanted surface, readying the arrow with the coiled rope attachment.

"Felicity, can you pick up their chatter and transmit it?"

"Way ahead of you! Hold on. Oh god, they've been given the go ahead for lethal rounds. They have sights on the building. Malcolm I swear to God you better make it out of this!"

Definitely a disaster scenario but he was not about to let a few stitches hold him back from doing what was necessary."I'm working on clearing the snipers, but we're going to have to come up with an exit strategy. I sent Tommy away." Some things truly were better left unspoken.

"Be careful." Spoken in perfect unison: overprotective dicks.

Tuning out the radio, the survivor of countless atrocities shifted his stance, the stitches pulling taut. There was no time to worry about trivialities or how Slade was going to strap him to bed once this was all over. Firing the arrow, he used his upper body strength to control the turn and avoid slamming his injured side into the building; instead, the archer planted his feet on the aged bricks and shimmied up the rope like a squirrel. Reaching the ledge, his fingers grasped the edging and physically lifted himself over the top, ignoring the screaming pain in his side and the strain in his arms. Training automatically kicking into high gear, Oliver rolled to his feet and rapidly counted four sniper rifles with their wielders on their knees with sights on and two guards; Tweedle Dee on his walkie and Tweedle Dum guffawing awkwardly with the last sniper in the row.

From the moment he had witnessed the sniper's lasers and heard Felicity's frantic announcement the omega resolved himself to do what had to be done; in theory, Oliver believed the police were friends not foes, but reality was a harsh mistress. One could wrestle with ethics and laws of nature, but a choice between Slade or Malcolm and the man aiming a weapon in their direction left no option at all. Choice, it seemed to Oliver, was simply a fabrication created by people who had never confronted evil.

Tonight, Death came a-knocking and his tools were green arrows.

Drawing back the bowstring, he wondered if he could ever be considered a good person again. Loosing the arrow, Oliver watched it slam into the first sniper's neck, the man dying with a laugh in his throat. Maybe he was a good person. Another arrow whistled a mournful melody as it passed through the air, pinning a female alpha with a shrill cry that ended prematurely. Maybe he wasn't a good person. Another two arrows lodged themselves in the officers struggling to free their side arms, the betas collapsing heavily to the rooftop. But even if he wasn't good. The last two snipers lifted their hands into the air, the universal sign of surrender as they stood, the pair blubbery useless strings of words that fell on deaf ears. Loosing the arrows, a sense of serenity overtook the omega as
he observed arrows striking their marks, the force of the blow causing the pair to fall through the air. The arrows or the fall would kill the men, the archer was not picky. *It didn't really matter anyway.*

Slade, the man he lived for. Malcolm, the father he would die for. Thea. Tommy. Words did not convey how precious they were to Oliver. There is no one he wouldn't kill and nothing he would not do for them.

Shouts from below meant his little slaughter had been discovered. Disregarding the burn in his side, Oliver fired the coiled arrow back toward the cathedral, the wind tickling his face as he swung down and away from the killing grounds reeking of copper. Feet taking the brunt of his descent, Oliver instantly disengaged the rope and dropped over the roof side of a two story drop, gritting his teeth to prevent losing the scream as they fell.

Immediately, the omega rose to his feet behind a pair of public garbage and recycling bins, ducking gunfire. Fumbling with the volume control he turns the radio back on.

"I've disabled the snipers and now I'm about to engage the S.W.A.T. team."

"To hell you are!" Slade's snarl should have caused an earthquake from the decibel of his scream. Wincing, he dialed the volume down and shifted his bow, sacrificing footing to ensure a clear shot. Firing an arrow into the midst of six opponents, he grimly ducked beneath the cover, wondering what the ETA on the enemy's backup was while a hail of gunfire struck the cans at his back.

"Oliver, stand down." The assertive command from his alpha parent caused the archer to grit his teeth against the biological urge to submit to the order. He was not about to turn into a useless breeding bitch that easily.

"Not this time. Just get yourselves out of there." Ripping the piece out of his ear before his alphas could voice anymore objections, Oliver vaulted the bins, reactively shooting another projectile into the lead officer's chest, the man's legs folding beneath him like a sack of potatoes. Somersaulting to avoid a lethal round of gunfire, Oliver winced as a bullet grazed his arm and his stitches finally tore open, causing his pain receptors to work overtime. Running on adrenaline and limited time, the archer rose unsteadily to his feet and lunged, tackling two of the nearest opponents to the ground.

From behind, the echo of feet smacking pavement fueled his fears and Oliver ruthlessly latched onto the neck of one of the thrashing males beneath him, twisting until the struggling male collapsed beneath him with a sickening snap.

Abandoning the body, the archer faltered when he saw Tommy slamming the end of the staff into a man's spinal column with brutal efficiency. Judging by the bloodcurdling scream coming from his brother's victim, the hours spent practicing with Slade were far from idle to demonstrate such skill in such a short period of time. The remaining two officers turned with guns raised; instinct kicking in, Oliver twisted his body, sliding his hip into the closest man's pelvis and throwing him into a takedown. Opposite him, Tommy smashed his stave into the officer's windpipe, the man collapsing into a gurgling heap.

Moving to finish the man beneath him, Oliver's startled when the man flipped him on his back, jolting his side and causing the blonde to scream even as a fist races toward his face. Apparently his attacker didn't expect resistance, allowing the omega to divert the blow reactively only for the beta to thrash like a rabid dog, lunging for his gun, apparently forgetting about the man behind him.

Tommy Merlyn's expression was positively murderous as he wraps his arms around the
man's neck, squeezing the flailing man's neck in a chokehold. The bulging man dripping spittle should have been his focus, but the growling alpha behind him won the day, all but feral as he squeezed the life from his opponent. Finally, the body stopped fighting and dropped like a dead doll.

"See you try and murder my brother again. Fucking dick!"

Twisting Oliver watched the alpha shake the body one last time before finally allowing the man's corpse to fall to the ground. Sirens and the hum of a police chopper sounded in the background, distracting the omega from the current scene.

Attempting to clamber to his feet, Oliver hissed, the alpha instantly picking up on the distressed scent and dropping down to assist him to his feet. Weakness was abhorrent, but he found himself leaning against Tommy all the same.

Footsteps had them both tense until they saw the familiar duo racing toward them at breakneck speed. The scent of his alpha made the previous day's events seem far and away, unimportant. Malcolm appeared at Tommy's shoulder, surveying the scene like the tactical genius he was and giving Tommy an appraising look that meant... something that his mind could not process at the moment. And then, Slade was there looking relieved and righteously pissed off, which might have bothered him more if he hadn't been teetering on the brink of unconsciousness. Reaching out with the hand that had not gotten grazed by a bullet, Oliver smiled vaguely at his mate.

"You're going to need to carry me."

The admission made him feel guilty but his lover swept him off his feet with ease and he relaxed against the Kevlar vest that smelled intoxicatingly safe. Drowsy with the adrenaline wearing off, Oliver felt the pain intensify in his side, and he released a strained gasp only for the world to spin and everything faded to darkness.

Vaguely, he could still hear voices, sirens, and the sound of car doors slamming, but it all felt so surreal. Closing his eyes, he surrendered himself to his alpha's care as consciousness fell away.

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"Kid's out cold," the grimness in Slade's tone had Tommy turning to look at the ashen faced blonde tucked into the big alpha's embrace. Despite his best efforts, his brother had been injured and the brunette felt nothing but guilt. Turning away so he didn't have to look at the results of his failure, he stared into the darkness, willing his father to get them home and away from the mess they had left behind.

"How bad is it?" Even from his depression, Tommy felt like he had landed in an alien reality where his father was friends with a man as screwed in the head as he was.

"One of us is gonna have to put in a fresh set of stitches when we get back, he's soaked them through. Otherwise, he's doing remarkably well for what he managed to accomplish. How's the kid up there doing? He had a certain look to him."

"I'm fine!" The retort came out so rapidly that the answering grunts of disbelief made him feel indignant underneath the layers of blame.

"You took a life tonight, kid," Slade reprimanded him, his brother moaning softly from the back. "More than one. You're not fine!"

"They tried to kill Oliver," Tommy heard how pitiful his voice sounded and found himself repulsed by the sound. Killing people apparently ran in the family. Why should he get special
treatment for saving Oliver's life? The van took a turn down the winding back home but even ten minutes seemed so far away. "They were going to kill you and I was going to lose everyone I love. I was not about to let that happen and I don't even feel bad for killing them! What does that say about me? That I don't even care!"

Out of the blue, the van veered off the road and Malcolm shoved the vehicle into park and the alpha turned and looked him right in the eye.

"Tommy, tonight is going to change who you are forever," his father's voice cut through the voices in his head, ebbing the stream of guilt. "Whether you choose to absolve yourself of this lifestyle or embrace it, you're at a crossroads now. And no matter what you decide, I want you to know that I'm proud of you. And that I love you."

Words that seemed like foreign entities that had no business in the world of a Merlyn heir. A sudden hand brushing against his hair nearly caused him to jump out of his skin, but he stilled and let the questing fingers brush through his hair once before gripping the back of his neck and pulling his unresisting body into his father's arms.

Inhaling, his senses, already on overdrive from killing those men, thrust him into territory that felt so utterly foreign and so miserably wonderful.

"I love you too, dad."

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Wrangling a grumpy Oliver into bed had been a simplified challenge, but Slade nevertheless took his time to prevent injuring his mate's delicate body with so much as a stray jostle. So much had gone wrong over the past few days that it made it difficult for the Australian to appreciate the things that had gone right.

The foray with the Chinese Triad had not been particularly difficult, but the sheer number of combatants had slowed their progress and made a hasty retreat impossible. All in all, seeing the fallen police officers and the two brothers together in the midst of a ring of corpses told a story that screamed emotional trauma. Slade was not worried about his omega, but Tommy was another story and definitely better left to Malcolm's care.

Oliver was tall and broad so wrestling him out of his clothes was akin to undressing an uncooperative infant. The omega has roused from the fainting spell, grumbled like a bear, and snuggled into the mountain of pillows like a prissy cat while the Australian retrieved the specialized first aid kit his father-in law had quietly dropped off.

While Malcolm could possibly be considered his friend, Slade intended to talk to Oliver about finding their own place because sharing a roof with his mate's family was becoming more of a nuisance to their sex life than Shado had been from three feet away.

Returning his attention to his omega, his eyes feasted on Oliver's exposed torso, the scars and the curve of gorgeous musculature rising and falling with each breath. The scene was rather marred by the open patch of flesh with the rows of obviously torn skin. The area itself flushed an angry red with the beginnings of infectious buildup around the original sutures. Knowing a secondary row of stitches would be painful even if they were necessary, Slade reached out and gripped his omega's hand, greeting the slivers of sapphire with a broad smile.

"You got pretty banged up in that last scrap, kid." Not bothering to dismiss the pride in his tone, Slade leaned in close, mindful of his omega's injury, and planted a firm kiss on the other man's
lips, purring softly when the lips parted enough for him to sweep his tongue in briefly. Pulling back with a groan, he shot the blonde a heated look that had his omega blushing to his roots despite probably feeling like crap. "I don't approve of you being reckless with your life, but I can hardly fault you for doing the exact thing I would have done in your shoes."

"Do you think I'm still a good person?" It was a question stuffed with every inch of doubt the archer must have felt when killing those men, tearing a hole into Slade's own heart.

"There's no such thing as good and evil. I've told you before, everyone is in this life for themselves." The statement probably sounded harsher than he intended, but the alpha never wavered as he watched the grim look on his blonde's face carefully. "The police commissioner was in this to make himself look good when he ran for mayor. Wiping out the vigilantes and the Chinese Triad in a single blow makes a cop's resume shine. But you know as well as I do that losing someone we love is no choice at all. You made the right call and I'm damn proud of you. Heck, I might be prouder of Tommy for dropping a knot. Christ, the kid might have potential after all."

"Better not be getting any ideas," his omega's insecurity vanished and with it brought out the playful imp that he secretly adored in the younger man. "Because I'm supposed to be your favorite."

"Oh you're my favorite alright," Slade smirked, turning away to rummage through the first aid kit. "There are just some things that can't be taught, sweetheart."

"Bastard. Now get that needle and let's get this show on the road."

Retrieving the threaded suture needle, Slade noted the nod of recognition in the younger man's face and leaned in to press the torn skin together; slowly, he painstakingly applied a neat row of efficient butterfly stitches that had been practiced year after year on foreign battlefields across the globe.

"You got some of Yao Fei's herbs from my bag?"

"We're gonna need to visit the island if we keep using it as often as we have been." Not an entirely worthless idea either. Somehow, it seemed appropriate to return to where the two of them had begun their relationship and apologize to the ghosts they had left behind. "And I have some ground up into a nice glass of water for you to drink after. How's the pain?"

"I've had worse," his omega's tone was nonchalant but it struck a nerve with him nevertheless simply because he knew it was true and he knew he had not been there to protect the other man. Ignorance wasn't bliss, it was a bullshit cover up for the guilty agony.

"Doesn't make it right."

Finishing up the semi-professional stitch job, the mulish alpha felt surprised by the finger prodding his forehead with an assertive poke.

"Hey." Looking up, his mate had crossed his arms over his bare chest, looking faintly annoyed. "You can't treat me like I'm made of glass, Slade. You of all people know that I'm not going to break."

Tossing the needle away, he took the damp cloth to wipe at the coppery smell that disturbed him by existing.

"I know, kid." Leaning up, he prompted the other man to shove over which he did albeit moodily. Smirking in spite of himself, Slade offered his mate a glass of the herbal water which he
drank efficiently even if he grimaced at the bitter liquid a moment later.

"Don't think I'll ever get used to the taste." The blonde stuck out his tongue and wordlessly passed his omega a chocolate bar he had unwrapped just for the occasion, while turning on the television to a crime scene investigation program.

"This should help with the after-taste."

Boy oh boy did it. The alpha watched with a satisfied glance as his mate wolfed down the candy bar like he hadn't eaten in days, looking utterly forlorn after successfully polishing off the chocolate.

"Chips?" Slade passed the dejected blonde a bag of nacho flavored Doritos he had secreted in the bedside table, watching him light up like a kid on Christmas and tuck into the bag.

"Man, Slade," the blonde muttered while Slade watched a group of characters surround an autopsy table while the medical examiner rattled off random details. Inwardly he grinned like a lunatic with each crunch his lover made as he attacked the chip bag, managing to snatch a couple in between Oliver's delighted munching. "Not sure why I'm so hungry tonight, but I feel pretty good."

"I'd say that's the Vicodin that I mixed into your herbal water talking tonight because you're gonna be miserable tomorrow," the alpha muttered sympathetically, mentally ticking off a list of activities that might distract his sequestered mate and came up empty handed. Blast.

"I wasn't hurt that bad," the omega snapped, turning his attention to the television and watching intently.

"Nope, but since your body is gearing up for your heat and your stitches have already torn once, I won't be fucking you." The casual nonchalance seemed to pass unnoticed until the bag of chips went flying and a feral-eyed omega gripped him so tightly that Slade felt certain it would have been painful if Mirakuru had not been a factor.

"What the fuck do you mean that I'm going into heat and that you won't fuck me?" At least his mate had not denied the stirrings of hormones he was beginning to emit, Slade thought idly, though he really ought to have made some popcorn because a show like this only comes once in a while. Slade blinked at his mate, rolled over, and made a face.

"Your stitches are going to pull if we have sex."

"Not if we're careful!"

"By definition, an alpha knotting his omega is not a simple tumble in the hay, Oliver. And you and I, have never been soft people."

"Your nose has always been better than mine," Oliver muttered, defying logic and swinging himself into a straddling position over Slade's crotch, blocking his view of the television. Sighing heavily as he sucked in another breath full of his lover's heady scent, his hands automatically rose to steady the wobbly blonde's bare hips, mentally kicking himself for completely undressing the stubborn omega earlier. Seemed the harlot inside his lover was alive and well and just maybe the only way to keep his sneaky lover abed was too, quite frankly, bed him. "And you know that I'm tough enough, and stubborn enough, to be just fine. So quit talking about all the ways you're not going to fuck me and fuck me already."

"Good god, you're a slut tonight!" Tipping the blonde onto his undamaged side, the Australian surged over the other man, dropping down to inhale the honey rich scent permeating from
"Your slut," the blonde laughed, as fake police sirens sounded from the television. Archer's calluses danced up his sides until they reached his denim waistband, slipping beneath the surface and drawing forth a litany of rumbling breaths.

Cock swelling in appreciation, Slade seized the blonde's wrists and thrust them above his lover's head and pinned them.

"You asked for it!"

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"I told you all," Quentin pointed the finger at the somber crowd in the PD office building, following the Commissioner's announcement regarding the police death toll. Noducerdo looked like someone had just shot his wife with raccoon eyes and a bleak expression. "Those guys just took out a bunch of our guys! Let me say it again, our guys! Not some drug lord, rapist or thug. A bunch of uniformed officers. On the bright-side, we can save a buck by having a mass funeral."

"Lance, you're not helping." One of the cadets that he had failed to make piss her pants spoke tiredly rubbing her eyes. Foster? Farmer? Who really cared what her name was anyway?

"Maybe not but we started with a couple of archers and now we're up to four confirmed vigilantes sighted working together. And what do we have to show for it?" Slamming his fists on the nearest desk, the detective showered the crowd with a stack of paperwork before looking out at everyone with a desolate expression mirrored on the face of every single person in the room. "We have no physical evidence tying anyone to these crimes. We've got a boatload of arrows from corpses that we haven't been able to trace for anything except their material. But guess what. No big deal! We have plenty more for the lab rats to examine once the coroner pulls them out of our guys--"

"That's enough, Quentin!" His partner snapped, pacing in front of the beta's line of vision, striking a nerve as he took in the scandalized looks he was getting from his peers. "A bunch of our guys died and we really don't need you throwing it in our faces!"

"He isn't wrong," Captain Stein added, sucking down a healthy gulp of coffee while munching on a donut. Leave it to one of the highest ranking police officers to fuel stereotypes, Quentin mused moodily while glaring at the wall bitterly. "And we definitely need to feed this to the press before they hear about that little massacre at Triad HQ."

"You guys do what you need to do but I'm out." The detective snagged his keys, phone, and jacket and walked away from the mourning officers before anyone, particularly the commissioner, could muster up a protest. Screw them. They could finish up their little pow-wow without him tonight.

Out in the expanse of stars and traffic lights, Detective Lance desperately fished for a shimmer of normalcy. At the end of every day, the only thing that kept him going was his little girl. Punching her number into his phone, he wandered past a few concerned pedestrians that eyed him with cow eyed sympathy that made him want to knock a few of them to the ground.

A few long rings later and Quentin felt his heart soften. "Hello? Dad?"

"Hey sweetheart, it's me," the cop fingered his badge, tossing it into the air and catching it. After tonight, he wondered what the symbolism really stood for in this downtrodden city. "What are you up to tonight, honey?"
"I'm filling out paperwork for Malcolm's case against Moira. I'm filing it before Judge Rodriguez first thing in the morning."

"I hope you don't intend to stay up too late then. You always seem to work too hard."

"Don't worry about me. But daddy, is everything okay? You don't seem quite like yourself tonight. Is everything okay?"

"It's just.." the beta struggled to come up with a believable lie and found himself unable to do it. "I needed to hear your voice."

"Daddy what's wrong? Daddy!"

For the first time in years, Quentin felt a dam burst inside and unleash emotions he wasn't prepared to face.

"God, Laurel," he looked up to the sky, praying for help that wouldn't come. "I just don't know what to do anymore."

Moira Queen sat huddled on a folding chair in the back yard in pajamas and Walter's pea coat, looking not at the cloudless sunshine or the calling birds chirping merrily. Nor did she find solace in the chattering chipmunks dashing across the treetops of majestically waving branches. A few feet away, the marble slabs proudly naming her beloved husbands stood tall and perfect under the stretch of the sycamore, one grave empty, the other sporting freshly turned earth, and both with bouquets of fresh chrysanthemums over the top.

For what seemed like her entire life, she had worked to create a happy, safe home that her children and grandchildren would fill the halls with laughter and joy. How naive had she been too long for something so impossible? It had not seemed so hopeless at the time, but life was a cruel bitch with the devil alive and thriving.

The wet whisper of leather upon the grass accompanied by that same scent that had once enchanted her like the foolish idiot she had once been. Moira Queen may indeed be a beta, but even her poor sense of smell could pick Malcolm Merlyn out of a crowd blindfolded.

"I was wondering when you would show up," Defeat was alive and well in her voice that cracked from disuse. It killed her to ask, but she surrendered to the motherly need to know. "How is my son?"

"Our son is recovering from what you did to him," the mocking tone had her close her eyes in shame, a tear she could not afford to spare dripping down her cheek. Why did he have to do this? What more could he take away? "From what you tried to do to me."

Shivering, Moira turned to face her attacker, feeling atypically calm and the tranquilized hysteria in her mind proposed it was because there was nothing left he could possibly do to her.

"What do you really want, Malcolm?" Truly, she was intrigued if a bit skeptical.

Impeccably dressed from head to toe in the vestments of a CEO billionaire, Malcolm Merlyn was a perfect opposite to her bunny slippers and lack of decorum. And she could rather care less.

"I came to make sure the message I asked Felicity to deliver was clear to you."
Threats. Go ahead, she thought, do your best. It was rather pathetic and showy at this point in the game.

"Oh yes, the keep quiet or else speech was fairly specific," Moira rose, fighting off the dizziness from lack of sleep and nourishment, shuffling toward the graves. Turning, she placed one hand on each headstone and faced her tormentor. "Every time I imagine that you can do no more to me, you prove me wrong. First you arranged for Robert to disappear, taking away Oliver too for a time. And somehow you decided that by killing Walter, you could inflict a devastating blow. Congratulations, you succeeded. As if the cake needed additional icing, you've alienated the trust I once shared with both of my children to the point that I can't even visit my son at the hospital and my daughter is convinced I'm the devil incarnate, which is also your doing as you whisper poison in her ear from your office day in and day out. But do me the courtesy and tell me one thing, Malcolm. Did. She. Know?"

The businessman folded his arms in front of him serenely, a nasty little smirk teasing his lips as he stepped closer to her. Her instinct was to recoil from the imposing alpha, but in this she refused to cede to the other man.

"No. She has no idea." Oh thank god, the beta felt instant relief rushing her system like pleasurable drug. Even if her daughter never spoke to her again, Moira could protect her from knowing what Malcolm had forced her to do. Could save her from facing prison. Could save her from hating herself for killing a man she had loved as a second father. "So long as I have your full cooperation."

There was always something when one made dealings with the devil.

Looking back at the first time she had cradled Oliver's scrunched body, she had known what true love could be. Thea had been an absolute angel with her feathered dark hair, staring about with such an innocent curiosity. There was nothing she would not give if it saved her children. Carrying the burden of hatred, that was a cross she could bear for the both of them to protect them from the monster before her.

"Do what you need to do, Malcolm," the beta squeezed the tombstones of the men she had loved and lost, she stifled a sob and waited for the instructions.

"We need to discuss the Undertaking."

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Okay, so a CEO's job was not all rainbows and sunshine it turned out. Malcolm, lucky bastard, was enjoying a cozy business lunch with the president of Palmer Technologies to discuss potential business mergers. While her boss was chowing down on a juicy steak, she was stuck in the office reading through reports and sending out emails making decisions and occasionally breaking someone's balls for what she considered poor performances. All in all, she felt like she was managing a preschool instead of a corporate hierarchy. Not that it was not a challenging job, but deciding what was a sound, fair business practice over a poor choice was not exactly difficult.

Tap. Tap. Tap. Thea looked up from the laptop's screen to see Tommy Merlyn's face on the other side of the corporate glass. Rolling her eyes at the man's antics, the alpha strolled in like the preening peacock he was, a pair of file folders tucked under his arm. It was her first chance to see Tommy since the disastrous mission from two nights past. True, she had connected over the phone with Oliver and gotten the rundown from Malcolm, but it still had not felt real to the Queen heiress.

"Heya Speedy! What are you up to? And my goodness you look disturbingly grown up
today. What's the deal?” The other man looked relaxed in a button down navy shirt that emphasized the color of his eyes in a thoroughly attractive manner; enhancing his overall roguish demeanor, the cut over the man's eyebrow looked like any young man's bar hustles but no doubt was leftover from his first night out with the rest of the family, which tugged at the Thea's strings of envy.

Self consciously smoothing the edges of her pleated skirt, she ducked that little issue. "Doing your dad's job for him while he's out meeting with Ray Palmer," Thea muttered from the cushy office chair that no doubt cost a fortune but made up for it with excessive comfort. "Personally, I think the guy heard about Felicity's pitch to the board last week and wants in on our applied sciences wing or I should say, access to our genius. And it isn't a crime to dress nicely."

"Felicity is a catch," Tommy plopped into one of the leather chairs opposite Malcolm's desk and dropped a stack of files onto the desk.

Observing the paperwork as if it might randomly go up in flames, she quirked an eyebrow at the other alpha and leaned across the glass desk and snatched up a folder, flipping it open to scan a prototype before dropping it to the table.

"You already knew you had the go ahead to start putting together and testing her little inventions," she drummed the desk thoughtfully, eyeing the slight darkness under the other man's eyes. "You came for something else. If you wanted to see your dad, I can have him come by your building on his way back."

"Uh, no." The other man coughed furtively, wringing his hands lightly and dropping the pretense of a casual visit. "I actually came to talk to you. You know, if you're okay with that."

Intrigued, Thea rose and walked around the table and dropped down into the seat next to Tommy rather than across, hoping it made the situation less imposing for whatever had him feeling so nervous.

"You know I'm happy to help however I can, but I do have to satisfy my curiosity. Why me? Why not Ollie? Or your dad?"

"To be fair, Oliver is tied up in the most literal, disgusting ways imaginable at the moment." Okay solid point there, Thea conceded, mirroring Tommy's TMI posture to perfection. "My dad is using my girlfriend to sue your mother so we have a bit of conflict of interest in this discussion."

Ah, the plot thickens. Suddenly, Thea felt more than a little discomfited by the heavy implication in that loaded situation.

"Yeah, my psychopath, murdering mother is definitely a mood killer," Thea mumbled, wanting to bury that topic in a drawer and pretend it had never come up. "But still, why me?"

"Because you and I have gone through all of this together and you understand my situation better than anyone else."

"I suppose we do have a lot in common." And boy did she wish that did not have such a heavy connotation. "So, spill the beans already. And don't make me beat it out of you because I might actually be qualified to do that these days."

"Not a chance."

Conflicted is thy middle name, Thea thought absently as she watched the other man neutrally, drumming her fingers against the glass while the alpha coughed and exhaled audibly.
"I'm serious about the beating."

"I know. I just don't quite know how to phrase this." A sigh before the storm. "When I killed those men the other night, I didn't feel the way I think that I should be feeling."

"I didn't know there was a protocol for doing that sort of thing," Thea hinted quietly, feeling lucky that she had been spared the choice Tommy had been forced to make. Sure, if it came down to it, she would kill some dirt bag to save Oliver. But the other alpha had been backed into a corner with the life of a cop on the line. A good guy. Not some serial killer, rapist, or gangbanger. Someone who was supposed to be the hero.

"I witnessed a bunch of police officers open fire on my best friend without so much as offering the 'come out with your hands raised' speech that you expect them to do. They were there to kill my dad, Slade, and Oliver in cold blood. When I saw what they tried to do, I just reacted. Before I knew it, they were dead on the ground in front of me."

Wow, no, wow. In storms Tommy Merlyn to stir the pot of controversy, Thea fisted her hands neatly, concentrating on the carpet's geometric pattern while contemplating the vision of the brunette snapping someone's neck with an imaginary crunch. What did it mean? What was she supposed to think? Murder had been on her brain since discovering the Queen's Gambit. On restless nights—which practically meant all nights—inability to rest kept her thinking about what it would feel like to see Moira Queen die. Did that make her a bad person or just human? How would a person's opinion change if they knew she fantasized about filling her mother full of arrows or smothering her in her sleep with a pillow?

Death is powerful. Fear of death even more so.

"You don't have anything to say?"

Verbally summoned from her brooding session, Thea jerks like a livewire, knocking over a sheaf of memos from the desk and finding the way they layered the floor particularly annoying.

"No, no, no," she promised the disappointed Merlyn, snatching the other man's wrist when he moved as if to leave. "I'm sorry I spaced out for a second, but it was because I was thinking about what you said and how I felt about it. So, please just sit back down and let me try and put what I'm thinking into simplified form."

"Okay sure." The bastard's ruffled feathers vanished for a preening smile like the peacock he was. "And Thea... thanks."

Rather than replying to the thank you, Thea deflected the attention verbally. "I think that I believe there is a darkness inside everybody. Some people suppress it, but I have a feeling people like that number the fewest. Some people pretend they don't have it. Others, embrace it. And then there are people like us that want to use it for good. And I really don't think that makes us bad, especially when faced with someone killing a person we love."

"I was happy they died," Tommy's voice was painfully strained and Thea squeezed his hand encouragingly, shocked when the taller man leaned against her like a literal pillar of support. "But when I killed those men, I became someone else. I think I finally understand why Oliver and my father are the way they are. But that understanding comes at a price."

"What's that?" Tommy doesn't seem to notice how stupid she sounds for which she is eternally thankful.
"I'm going to have to break things off with Laurel."

"What the hell?" The alpha prods the other man, shaking him by the collar and eliciting a recoiling jerk.

"What was that about?" Tommy asked as if he were the aggrieved party that had just had a bombshell dropped on him.

"Why are you breaking up with Laurel!"

"Because I love her but I can't live with being someone she hates!"

Oh. Oh! Connecting the strings on the web, Thea closes her eyes when she remembers the vehement passionate Detective Lance that filtered down to the beautiful attorney. The beta would not have held back her thoughts and feelings from the dead cops and obviously Tommy was experiencing backlash from the incident albeit indirectly. In war there were always casualties; Walter, Thea and Oliver's relationship with Moira, and now Tommy's romantic life. Apparently misery really does love company.

"I don't think I could do that either." It felt like a copout but what could really be said to that statement? Living a lie did not sound like a good idea under the best set of circumstances.

"Seriously? You're not going to try and give me a song and dance about how things are going to be okay?"

"I could do that," Thea nods thoughtfully. "But why should I do that when we could skip the line of bullshit and cut to the chase. Laurel is on the side of the angels and her daddy spends his nights trying to hunt our family down. And it's pretty obvious that you intend to go out there with them again so it's a simple equation. y does not equal x; you are going to have to make a choice and it's pretty clear that you're choosing to put her above your own needs to make sure she isn't hurt by the fall out."

"It's almost annoying how perceptive you are." Tommy finally admits, using her as a veritable cushion. "I spent the entire night agonizing over this decision and I feel like everything just became miraculously clear."

"Happy to help." At least she could admit that was true while absently carding her fingers through the ebony haired alpha's hair affectionately.

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"Crap! Crap! Crap!"

Malcolm was right... like usual, 'what a bastard', Felicity thought fondly. If she had just moved in, she would not be running around her apartment like a chicken that just had its head cut off, frantically dressing so that she would not be late for work. Not that it really mattered if she waltzed in late, but her sense of self respect vehemently protested the old "fucking the boss excuse" even if it happened to be true.

Cripes! She had one Dior heel but where was the second? Oh! Dashing over to the countertop, she rescued her second shoe from atop the microwave. Throwing it on, she turned and hustled for the door, only for the bell to sound mere seconds before she turned the knob.

Oh that had to be Malcolm! Blinking owlishly, the omega double checked her flawless complexion in the mirror and considered the possibility that an extra half hour spent with her mate
could function as a business meeting and special, personal time. Yippee!

Flinging open the door with a throaty, "Hey sexy!" Felicity stumbled backward in horror as her mother squealed at her from the other side of the door, tight blouse bursting from the excessive cleavage as Donna Smoak flung her arms around her daughter's neck and squeezed. Unable to breathe due to either the horrified shock or oxygen deprivation—either explanation was equally likely from her perspective—Felicity struggled against the cloud of her mother's bouncy omega pheromones, silently wishing the earth would open up and swallow her whole.

"Oh sweetheart I'm so excited to see you." Least someone is happy, Felicity thought glumly as she endured another round of squeezing and kisses from her perky mother. "When you told me about meeting that man, I just knew I had to come see you right away! When I called you the other night, your special guy answered the phone and he told me I was welcome to visit you anytime! So here I am! And I can tell your scent's got a new kick to it so my baby girl is all grown up and bonded! When do I get to meet him?"

"That's terrific," she managed, secretly plotting to kill Malcolm as her stomach turned with that shocking turn of events. Assassin or not, her man was going to be taken down by her nanites as soon as she finished coding them! Bastard!

"Oh honey, do you want to go for breakfast?"

Ugh. The mere mention of food sent her stomach rolling again. And that was strange, she felt like she was about to throw up. Oh! Oh! Totally channeling an escape artist contortionist, Felicity slithered out of her mom's arms and booked it for the bathroom.

'Please not all over the floor or all over me!' Finally, the porcelain god was within reach. Collapsing to her knees, the omega leaned over and retched; scrambled eggs, sausage, and English muffins gagged her as the pureed nightmare came up.

"Oh sweetheart, this is wonderful! I'm so happy for you!"

The flighty happiness of her enthusiastic mother kicked Felicity in the gut and she heaved once and twice more until she was gasping weakly, tears in her eyes, and flinching at the semi-soothing touch of acrylic fingernails scratching her back. Even though her mother drove her crazy, this had to be one of those motherly, redeeming qualities.

"Thanks," she mumbled, gagging at the taste of acid and yuck. Making a face, she nearly regurgitated again as she saw her mother's giddy grin. "Why are you happy for me? I just vomited and now I'm definitely going to need to change my shirt."

"Oh honey!" Did her mother know that she visibly vibrated when excited? "I just can't believe you moved away, found an attractive, wealthy mate to take care of you, and now you're having a baby! I'm just so thrilled for you, sweetheart!"

"Baby?" Feeling her IQ plunging with each passing second, Felicity glanced at the white toilet swirling with lumpy clumps or partially digested food. Pregnant. The word felt heavier than a pile of stones and she choked harshly, her mother's hand rattling her spine as she breathed through a series of tears, fears, and anger.

She was having a baby. A baby with her mate. A baby conceived outside of heat too. Not unheard of but not typical...Malcolm was so dead. And she was sooo calling into work today.

Feeling desperate and for once feeling fortunate that her mother was on hand, Felicity
clambered to her feet and threw her arms around her mother's shoulders, relaxing as the other woman shushed her soothingly and stroked her hair.

"Don't you worry about a thing. Let's go and just have fun. And then you can take me to meet your man!"

"Mom, I don't think I can be a mom."

"Well honey," her mother's voice was borderline incredulous and loosened the knot in her gut. "If I can work sixty hour weeks to keep one genius child cared for, I have a feeling you'll figure it out too. I never regretted any of that."

"Thank you, mom." And for the first time for as long as she could recall, Felicity felt her response was genuine.

"So how about we get you some ginger ale for that moody child your carrying and see if that settles things down a bit."

"Okay."

Fiancé or not, Malcolm was still a dead man!

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"Hold still!" Slade snarled, fingers sinking into the black and blue bruises that had collected on the ivory thighs over the past few days. Listening to his mate groan from the abuse satisfied Slade for the time being and he returned his attention to the delectable rear end poised expectantly in the air. "Spread yourself for me, kid. Show me how much you want this."

It was a delight to watch his mate's resistance crumble and the hands reach back and pull his cheeks apart, whining from the strain of the awkward position. Absolutely delectable looking hole, the alpha thought to himself, nosing at the sticky, puffy orifice that was dripping semen from the repeated rounds of sex from the heat cycle.

Sticking out his tongue, he flicked it over the slightly wrinkled opening, purring in approval when his omega shuddered hard, continuing to shake from the strain of remaining still. Closing the gap, Slade applied suction to the area, sweeping a mouthful of salty cum into his mouth while the archer wailed from the attention, the creak of the headboard sounding from further up the bed.

"Be a good bitch and hold still," the alpha's voice dropped another decibel as he patted the shivering flanks lightly, returning to lave at the abused muscle with his tongue. Even as the blonde visibly wilted like flower, he swept his tongue into the hot passage, delighting in the way the hole reflexively clenched causing his lover to press back like the needy little slut he was. Pulling away with yet another mouthful of cum, he brought a hand up to prod the rim, watching the muscle quiver from the touch.

"Slade I can't take anymore."

Complain, complain, complain. Eventually, his mate would learn and submission would become less difficult during heats.

"Of course you can," he chided his love, forcefully inserting three fingers into Oliver's passage, feeling them slide in easily due to the zealous rounds of fucking, instantly locating the prostate and rubbing the abused nub insistently. "I bred you good for the last few days, now you're
gonna do this for me, baby. You can do it."

Instantly, his omega clenched around the fingers, a desperate whine filled with pleasurable agony bursting from his mouth. Continuing to stretch the hole and pump the fingers in and out while constantly brushing his spot, Slade watched through hooded eyes as sweat dotted his mate's back and bleary eyes blinked at him with an exhausted wariness over his shoulder, a litany of pleading moans hardening Slade's already alert cock.

Not permitting Oliver any more time to protest, he slid his pinky finger in to mingle with the other three fingers, widening the channel and thrusting gently against the prostate gland. Oliver's hands had long since given up on their task, desperately supporting his lanky body beneath him. Nuzzling the bare spine fondly, the alpha pressed a light kiss to the sweaty back and observed the omega pressing backward to fuck himself on Slade's waiting fingers.

"Good boy," the alpha hummed lightly, reaching around with his other hand to circle his omega's dick and caress the weeping head thoughtfully, tickling the shaft.

"Do it."

Smirking at the supplication accompanied by the beseeching, desperate gaze, the alpha positioned his thumb at the tight entrance and pulled his fingers out part way and slowly worked the entirety of his hand inward. For a brief moment, the muscle resisted the pressure and the Australian was forced to pause, listen to Oliver's harsh panting, and continue to physically press the hand inside.

"Oh fuck, Slade. Oh fuck, I can't! It's too much, Slade! We can't!"

"We already are, baby." Truly he was in awe. A final good push and his lover's body shuddered and squeezed painfully tight around the fist. "You're incredible Oliver. You look absolutely amazing right now. So gorgeous."

His omega's only response was a weak whimper and the alpha moved his fist carefully, locating the bump and rubbing it rapidly with his thumb. Instantly, the channel relaxed and the blonde's distressed scent quickly bloomed into pleasure, Oliver thrusting back against the fist in shallow, weak movements that spoke to his mate's exhaustion from days of sex that had lead up to this moment.

"That's it, kid. Your taking my whole fist. So fucking sexy."

Out of the blue, Oliver jackknifed upright, clawing frantically at the wooden headboard in desperation as he froze and wailed long and loud before collapsing into a boneless heap on the bed.

Watching his lover fall apart with his ass filled with Slade's fist was more than enough to send him tumbling over the edge from virtual sexiness. Releasing onto his lover's spent back, the alpha carefully slid his fist out of the stretched hole, whispering a quiet 'sorry' when his mate made a moue of protest. The puffy, gaping hole looked positively edible and the alpha's cock twitched with interest, but he reined in the frenzied hormones and spooned up behind Oliver.

"It was better than I thought it would be," Oliver's whispered admission was hesitant and evocative. "Maybe we can do it again sometime... but not right away."

"For someone that was just knotted several times, you seem a bit overly stressed about a little fist."

"Little!" Then a pitiful slap to his forearm merely made him cuddle the blonde tighter. "You must have some of the biggest mitts of anyone I've seen. And fuck we smell bad."
Okay, the alpha would give him that. Their bedroom was saturated with the scent of sex to the point that the Australian had serious doubts that it would ever be completely scent free after the marathon heat cycle they had just endured. And they both had splotches of wet and dry semen caking their bodies. But for Slade, it felt like love at its finest and he had no regrets. Still, a warm shower could definitely be in the works.

Yao Fei's herbs had done the trick and Oliver's stitches were no worse for wear despite his omega looking like a victim of abuse rather than the recipient of an enthusiastic alpha. But thinking about Oliver's injuries also made the big man wonder if his blonde was still using birth control. The caveman brain argued that he should be pleased if his prowess impregnated his omega, but the rational part recognized neither one of them were ready for children at this juncture. But still, problems for later.

"We do," he agreed. "I just think we should lay here just a little bit longer."

"We are always going to want just a little bit longer." Was that a proverb? "But I haven't left this room in days. You only left to get food and scare the crap out of innocent pizza delivery guys."

"He said something smelled good," he defended himself from Oliver's ridiculous accusations. "And that punk had it coming."

"Yeah, some poor sixteen year old really had it coming," Oliver muttered, tracing circles on Slade's forearm. "Maybe Tommy and I could catch a movie later today. I know you don't care for the cinema so I figured asking you was a long shot."

"It's good to know you're sense of judgment is spot on, but you can go with your brother. But let's nap for a bit first."

"Sounds good." And his omega's voice sounded equally groggy. Good. Settling down, the alpha relaxed and set his mind at ease.

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After avoiding the city of her birth for so many years, Sara found it strangely surreal to traverse the familiar, yet bizarrely alien landscape that Starling City had become in her absence. Some buildings remained frozen in time, with only the occasion fresh coat of paint or chips siding marring her memories, while others were replaced, renovated, or knocked down. A city never stops evolving and changing, but still Sara felt a sense of nostalgia for all that she had sacrificed for her new life.

Memory road inevitably lead her to the Lance family home that was a ghost of its former glory, with its occupants scattered far and wide. It twisted the knife to see her father so alone in the world and her sister so determined and strong. Laurel was devastatingly beautiful and she seemed so happy dating Tommy Merlyn of all people. And so, Sara sacrificed her first night in the city to spend the evening pensively shadowing the steps of her father and sister, soaking up their faces in order to remember.

Realizing Ollie had, against all odds, survived nearly derailed her plans for dealing with Slade. Knowing how much Nyssa meant to her made it that much more difficult to wear the mantle of guilt that she carried with her.

Sometimes life was unfair. Often, it was cruel.
Slade Wilson was an obstacle in her way. If she perceived killing him as anything beyond a kindness to a rabid dog, the beta feared her conscience would cause her to back out. In order to truly prove herself to Ra's and shed any doubts that she was Sara Lance no longer, Slade had to die.

Contacting and persuading Shamshir had been easier than she had anticipated it to be. The man held nothing but cold disdain for her, the dog mirroring his master to perfection. But the other man had readily believed that Ra's had challenged Sara to kill Slade Wilson as a testament to her loyalty.

Using the League’s information, she chose to stake out Merlyn Global's building where the ASIS agent trained regularly. And sure enough, there they were, Slade Wilson in the passenger seat of the Lexus and Al Sah-Her driving the black vehicle.

Discovering the cantankerous Malcolm Merlyn was the legendary pupil of Ra's al Ghul that students still whispered of with excessive awe had been another surprise, but Sara was not about to let the man get in the way of what she had come for.

Casting her doubts to the wind, the blonde assassin lobbed an explosive device toward the car, a twinge of admiration as the elder alpha called out a warning and threw himself to the side just as the vehicle exploded in a hail of billowing clouds of black smoke and flame with pieces of the vehicle spinning away in all directions.

The magician's reflexes spared him fatal damage, but even from a distance she could see stains of crimson seeping through the white business shirt and slacks. The bow was far from her best mastery, but her aim was true and she fired a pair of arrows toward the downed Merlyn and abandoned him in favor of her true target.

Shamshir was already defending against a physical attack from the singed alpha that looked none the worse for wear despite the explosion. Mirakuru truly worked wonders in the regenerative capacity. One of the assassins swords had been ripped from his arms, but he still managed to keep Slade at arm's length.

Hold on, she thought silently, pulling out the arrow with the serum that Anthony had spent countless, painstaking nights crafting as an antidote for his dream. Pulling back the string, she fired.

Chapter End Notes

My sincere appreciation to everyone who has taken time to read this story. Kudos and comments have warmed my heart so thank you to all that have taken time to do that. I hope you all are still enjoying this little project of mine.
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: Not that anyone cares, but still not making any funny and I claim no ownership.

Author’s Note: Thank you again to the Impossiblegirl_123 for being my second set of eyes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

"Caught in a Bad Romance!" Gosh that felt good to let loose and just belt out some songs once in a while.

Adjusting the mirror on the Bentley she borrowed from Malcolm's hoard of work vehicles, Thea stomped on the gas pedal and sped down the lane while belting out some tunes. Blaring on the horn when some dick nearly ran over a woman pushing a stroller, Thea swore under her breath and determinedly memorized the license plate in order to turn the jerk in later; humming under her breath, Thea signaled and turned into the drive thru for Stardust Coffee House to satisfy her latest caffeine crave.

Rolling her window down, she winced when an infant from the car ahead shrieked heartily. Kids were.. interesting but not special enough for Thea to want anything to do with them outside the role of potential auntie, providing Slade ever knocked up her brother. Definitely not opposed to that scenario! Picturing the gruff Australian managing a couple naughty toddlers while her brother cooked in a pink apron that she would thoughtfully buy for him: perfect.

"Hi there, what can I get for you today?"

"Medium iced caramel frap please. With the whipped cream!"

"You got it. That'll be $3.39 at the first window."

Score!

Somehow Thea doubted that Tommy had worked up the nerve to speak to Laurel. The Merlyn heir's balls had definitely dropped, but her old friend definitely was sensitive to 'picking the right time'. If Laurel had been Thea's girlfriend, she would have done it fast and quick like ripping off a band-aid. Either way, she was staying out of it even if she hoped the other alpha did not continue to string the beta along much longer; after all, Laurel was an enjoyable person when you weren't on her shit list.

Exchanging spare change for her drink, she smiled tightly at the flirtatious grin on drive-thru boy's face, noting the way the man faltered at her less than enthusiastic response. Shut down, buster.

Relaxing to Katy Perry's witchy 'Hot and Cold,' Thea pulled out of the drive thru, took a sip of liquid nirvana, and turned toward the applied sciences division for a little therapy workout session with Malcolm and Slade. Malcolm was her primary instructor, but Thea had come to appreciate a healthy brawl with the Australian even if she paid for the exertion with black and blue marks.
Swerving a little aggressively, Thea grunted and acknowledged that perhaps a tiny little part of her desperately wanted to prove herself just as capable as Tommy Merlyn.

She was not jealous of Tommy. Not really. Not exactly. A piece of her just felt that it was ridiculously unfair when the other alpha had been allowed to go on the last mission while no one had considered asking her to come along. Not even as a glorified bodyguard!

When the niggling voice in her head suggested that it might have been for the best that she hadn't been along since the end of that story, she quashed the voice with a bitter edge. Thea felt confident that they had excluded her for sexist reasons or because of her age or both! Which was totally bullshit! If someone wanted to point out stereotypes, they should be pointing at Oliver and declaring a moratorium on omega participation in battle situations. This wasn't the 1800s or god forbid the 18th century when females and omega rights were pretty much bound into knots of barbaric rules. The way she saw it, Tommy was no more skilled than she was. Which left only once choice: she was going to prove those knotheads wrong.

Pulling up to an empty intersection at a red light, Thea groaned even though she knew she was behaving like an impatient toddler. Turning to longingly look toward her destination, the alpha frozen like a statue and choked on her coffee and felt a stream trickle out of her mouth, down her chin.

Like something out of an action thriller, a car exploded casting a pillar of smoke into the sky while people scattered around the vehicle.

"Oh my God..."

Red light forgotten, Thea turned and jerked the car up to the curb, not even feeling the jolt when the car scraped the pavement. Listening to her own ragged breathing, she ordered herself to get a grip as she ripped her seatbelt off and fumbled for the gym bag she had carelessly flung onto the passenger seat.

Eyes on the scene, she zeroed in on her boss, on his knees, off to the side looking injured but alive. A breath she never realized she was holding, loosened in her chest and the alpha calmed enough to look for the other combatants. Slade, deadly as ever appeared to be intent on a dark robed figure that looked suspiciously like Malcolm in his archer gear meaning the League they had been whispering about had finally deigned to make an appearance...

Tugging desperately at the bag that housed a set of tempered steel throwing knives Malcolm had gifted her with; a handful of days ago, the older alpha had surprised her after a particularly successful training session when her aim had been nearly flawless and he expressed his pride with her success. Palming two of the six knives, a glint of reflected light blinded her for a second and she lifted her hand, shielded her eyes and screamed.

A blonde archer standing on the rooftop loosed a pair of arrows toward the man that in her heart she named father.

"Malcolm! Fuck!"

Up and out of the car, the brunette fumbled for the latch, feeling it give and knowing she couldn't do a damn thing except desperately pray.

Except Malcolm could. The man's hands were extended in front of him, a missile gripped in both hands. Maybe there was a God. And he had better teach her how to do that!
But first, take the head off the snake.

Thea took a teetering step on her heels and angrily ordered herself get over there and help her family. Ahead of her Malcolm, defying the villain he claimed to be, sprinted across the parking lot toward Slade like a hero with his hair mussed and his face and torso bloodied; the man called a warning to the Australian battling the shrouded assassin: too late.

Ahead of her, Slade screamed as if electrified and all the brunette could see was an arrow shaft embedded in the muscle tissue of the big man's arm and lines of red shooting out of the wound. Instantly, her mind conjured up her brother's image and the devastation it would wreak on their family and Thea moved.

Tail on fire, Thea ate up the concrete with her long strides and with her fear fleeing her with each determined pace.

A parking lot away, Malcolm masterfully placed himself between an oncoming blow from the robed assassin and Oliver's mate, grabbing the blade with his bare hand, and handily disarming his shocked opponent. Cheering him on, Thea grinned as the alpha turned the sword on its former master and lunged toward the offending swordsman.

Slade, the man's face ashen from his injury whipped around and startled Thea by how pain stricken rapidly shifted to caveman levels of outrage. Fucking knothead! Precisely the opposite of what he should do, the Australian barreled forward like a bull seeing red, engaging the archer that had dropped to the ground, abandoning her bow in favor of a staff.

Ducking behind the burning wreckage of Malcolm's car, Thea hoped she maintained the element of surprise, heeding the lessons her teachers had literally pounded into her about utilizing every possible advantage against an enemy combatant.

'There is only survival and death.' Fine. She had to make sure they were the ones staying topside.

A clash of blades more than likely sourced back to Malcolm and his partner with an exchange of grunts and heavy breathing she couldn't put a name to. Peering around the car wreckage, she saw Malcolm more than holding his own against his opponent seeing as one of the combatant's arms appeared to be dangling by strings of sinewy muscle that had done little to dull the assassin's determination.

Slade on the other hand looked pissed off but dangerously pale against the tan of his skin with the arrowhead protruding from his shoulder.

"If you came here to kill me, I think you'll be disappointed. But I suppose I shouldn't be surprised by your cowardice, Sara!"

Oh God. Oh no. Oliver's one-time girlfriend. The smiling bombshell with a sense of humor that never failed to include Thea in the older kid's activities when she was around. A Sara that mirrored the woman that gave birth to Thea in proving to be nothing but a liar and conniving cunt.

Hearing a gurgling grunt, Thea spared a necessary glance to confirm that Malcolm did not need an intervention. Apparently her concern was unfounded as the older man jerked his sword free of his opponent's body and uttered something that sounded vaguely Arabic to his opponent.

"Pressing an advantage does not make me weak!" Jerking back to watch Sara, Thea centered herself and settled the pair of knives into both palms and centered her thoughts. "But it looks like
time is up so why don't you make this easy on yourself and I'll make your death quick! Not that you
deserve it!"

Gauging the distance and testing the wind with her fingers, Thea stepped from behind the
wreckage, mindful of the surrounding area as she side-stepped metal, glass, and miscellaneous
carnage. Slade saw her, Thea instantly felt confident of that fact, but he betrayed nothing in his
expression even as she lifted her arm into the air.

"I always told Oliver that everyone was out for themselves. You've proven me right over and
over. Why should now be any different?"

Thea never gave the blonde assassin the opportunity to reply. The first knife flew from her
left hand mere seconds before her body shifted into a lower stance and freed the right hand's blade.
In parallel if a second behind, the two blades slammed into the blonde's back, one nicking if not
outright severing her spinal cord while the other aimed to collapse the bitch's lungs.

"See what happens when you can't keep your mouth shut, bitch?"

Slade dropped to his knees in a fit of laughter and possibly blood loss as his long time enemy
collapsed in a convulsing heap.

Standing upright, Thea moved toward Slade, pausing momentarily to stare down at the
woman in her death throes, wondering if this was how boring death actually was.

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Sara Lance never had more than an abstract sense of what her beliefs were regarding the
afterlife. For her, life and death were absolutes. As an assassin, the blonde felt no great need to
absolve her conscience or to feel guilty for ending a person's life. But each time she killed, her
perspective shifted until individual granules of thought grew into a great mountain of reflective--
bordering upon hopeful, thinking.

If there was a God, she prayed he was merciful even to those who refused to apologize.

A blow. Another.

Dazed, Sara haphazardly flailed like a fish out of water until her back makes contact with a
patch of concrete judging by the way her head jostled on the ground. Everything hurt and a dull roar
in her ears accompanied by the wail of police sirens in the backdrop. Distracted, Sara tried to move
only to gag as he throat filled up. Rolling weakly to the side, she hacked up a thick smattering of
scarlet and stares at it blankly. Lifting her right arm since it hurt the least, Sara's fingers reflexively
moved across her chest to the center of the pain and felt the sharp metal tip jutting out of her chest,
explaining the difficulty breathing if one of her lungs was collapsing. Lower in her abdomen, an
equally lethal blow had more than likely sliced into her kidney.

I'm dying. The numb declaration robbed Sara of her rational mind and she searched the area
feverishly for a familiar streak of long, thick hair and felt terrified when she came up empty handed.

Even listening to Slade Wilson's mocking laughter was not enough to prepare the fatally
wounded beta for the sight of Thea Queen standing above her like an avenging angel with a
dispissionate look that seemed so foreign to Sara's memory of an adorable little teenager that pouted
and raged outside her older brother's door.

"Thea."
Somehow Sara expected something more than just a raised eyebrow and an unimpressed stare. That expression belonged locked away in the training rooms of Nanda Parbat. Not here. Not tarnishing her memory of a girl that she held and had considered like a little sister.

"You fucked with my family. You got what you had coming."

So that's it then.

The brunette turned from her, rubbing her hands as if she had taken out the trash, which Sara supposed she had in the metaphorical sense. Vaguely, the sirens grew louder and the shuffling feet and whispered words indicated how utterly they had failed Ra's. She had failed Nyssa.

And here, at the end of everything, Sara was alone and Nyssa was nowhere to be found. Beautiful Nyssa with her flowing ebony mane and that warm half-smile that displaced her inherent sadness when they were alone together just the two of them. In her heart, the beta knew her lover was already desperately working to track her movements and find her. From the first, Nyssa had forever been Sara's ardent defender both physically and verbally. In fact, Sara could count on one hand the number of instances they had been apart for longer than a day in the last few years. And now a more permanent form of separation was about to take place and there was nothing the blonde could do to stem the tide.

'God, if you are real, please let her find me.' After all she had seen, after all she had done, Sara Lance feared very little, but dying alone was one of them.

"Oh God, I don't want to die alone."

As if in answer to her prayers, voices called out from nearby, including one that haunted the passageways of Sara's youth. It was distant, but her father shouting out orders in a crowded room was as familiar as the sound of her own voice. Blinking as her vision narrowed and her body felt increasingly cold, Sara still recognized her father's partner, Lucas if she remembered correctly, hovering above her with horror on his face that had aged only with laugh lines.

"Quentin! Jesus Christ, Quentin get over here!"

Dad. God had to be real. Of all the possible responding officers, her father was first to the scene.

"What is it Lucas?" Sara found her dream-like attention sharpen slightly and she turned her head in time to witness the visceral, gutted look play out on her father's face and then the man was on his knees next to her, cupping her hair and screaming. "Where is that ambulance?! Christ, Sara! Oh my, baby! How is this happening?! Sara, come on stay with me, baby!"

The tainted joy etched with disbelief was clear enough to read and Sara smiled even as she choked again. Strong arms slid beneath her armpits and hauled her into her father's comforting arms, and she felt a measure of contentment that had been long in coming.

"It's okay dad," she frowned, reaching out to pat the anguished face streaked with tears. Maybe she should be angry that her life was slowly ebbing away, but if she had to spend her last moments on earth with her father, she didn't want her last emotion to be resentment. But maybe she could perform a final act of penance for Nyssa; if this was it, she wanted her lover to be proud of her and possibly forgive her. "I'm so sorry daddy."

"Baby, oh baby you don't have a thing to be sorry about, sweetheart. You just stay awake, okay Sara. Can you do that for me honey? Oh God sweetheart, stay awake. I'll call Laurel and we'll
get your mother to come down and you're going to be fine. So just hold on for me baby."

Leave it to her father to ramble endlessly while she was dying. Fighting the blur as her vision spotted and detail became fuzzy, she pressed her fingers to her father's face and rubbed it tenderly with her bloodied fingers in an attempt to soothe the fear she heard in his voice and attempt to comfort him.

"Dad." God, death was a seductive lover in its perfect imitation of slumber; warm, inviting, and pain free. Still, she fought against its hold as her body shutdown. But she was stubborn too and maybe willpower could buy her the time to say and do what she needed to do. "I'm not a good person anymore. Done so many bad things."

"Sara, sweetheart. You don't need to talk. Just stay awake ok? I love you so much so you gotta fight, baby! You have to! You just gotta, fight ok?"

"That's kind of my problem dad." And wasn't that true? Ever since that cursed boat went down, she had been fighting so hard to stay alive and what did she have to show for it? A trail of bodies, the brand of traitor, and little else except the underserved love of a single good woman. "I made some bad choices, daddy. I'm here because I was hired to kill Malcolm Merlyn. I'm sorry, daddy."

Even with her faculties in shambles and her sight all but gone, Sara could hear clear as a bell. The short inhale from her father and the reflexive grasp on her shoulders was oddly telling. The attack of conscience had prompted her lie, spinning a web of deceit to protect Slade for Oliver's sake. At the end of her life, if she could spare the man that was once as close to her as a brother some extra pain, she owed it to him to try; for her final act, Sara had given Oliver the ultimate show of atonement: a perfect lie.

The burden of disappointing her father was a bitter pill, but her waning strength did not afford time to regret her decision. Eyes fluttering shut, she heard more than felt her raggedy, wheezing gasps as blood frothed as the twang of copper spilled from her lips.

"Oh my, God! Sara please open your eyes, baby! Don't do this sweetheart! Wake up! Where is the fucking ambulance! Sara!"

"They're still two minutes out, Quentin!"

"That isn't good enough! She isn't going to last another thirty seconds at this rate!"

Daddy. Struggling to comply, she felt her eyes open but she could only make out vague shades of greys amidst splotches of darkness.

"Sorry daddy." her words sounded choked and far away, but she summoned a smattering of willpower, needing him to understand. "Love you.. Sorry.. So sorry... Love you...don't..b'sad."

"Baby listen to me. I love you so much. I love you so much, damnit Sara. Please God don't leave me again. Please no. Sara please-""

"Tell...Oliver...sorry..didn't..mean it...and..Laur'l."

Goodbye daddy.

Nyssa: thank you for loving me.

Death was not a tunnel leading to the shelter of a warm light nor was it some endless parade
of fire and darkness. It was a mystery that she would have eternity to solve and the pathways were free of pain and all the hardships the world offered.

Time was up and her heart fell still.

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Quentin Lance sat outside the coroner's office waiting. Rubbing his swollen eyes wearily while stubble scratched his palms, the beta felt sapped of more than just energy. Losing Sara to the sea had been its own challenge, but gifted with seeing her for a few moments while she bled out had been a bit much even for his stout heart.

It was a challenge to ignore sympathetic glances that made the beta want to lash out and punch someone proved challenging, and so he resolved to bury his face in his hands.

Just learning his daughter had been alive had been mind boggling. Hearing his daughter confess to be a hired assassin had been almost too much to bear.

But watching her die. Jesus Christ.

Lucas, after hearing her confession, had summarily had him removed from the case and spoke to the commissioner. Not that he cared. It was just a job. And a job the beta did not feel all too confident about if his shaky demeanor was any indicator.

"Daddy! Daddy!"

Oh Christ. What was he going to tell her? What could he tell her?

Looking upward, he knew perfectly well how haggard and strange his appearance had to be to his daughter.

"Laurel." Her name came out as a croak.

Instantly, his daughter in her smart navy blue suit dropped her briefcase and dropped down in front of him, clasping his hands. Unable to bear her searching eyes, he dropped his forehead to the top of her head and put his arms around her, burying himself to avoid confronting the barrage of emotions that left him helpless.

"Daddy, what's going on? What are you doing here? Did something happen to Lucas?"

Choking down a sob, Quentin pulled back and found himself smiling painfully despite himself to see how earnest and supportive Laurel was being. His daughter, for how driven she was, never gave an inch and god he was so proud of her. And he didn't want to do this to her. News like this could slay a heart of stone, what was it going to do to the remnants of their sad, little family?

It turned out by some stroke of luck or perhaps misfortune, that the medical examiner stepped outside with trace smears of blood, Sara's blood, soiling his rubber work apron.

"Mr. Lance." Dear God, Quentin wanted to vomit.

"Detective." The reply was hollow even if it was an automatic defense to whatever it was this man was about to say to him.

"Detective Lance." A man being agreeable to a grieving father. Grip falling lax around Laurel, he stood and instinctively tugged his daughter--living daughter--he corrected himself, under
his arm and braced for impact. "If you both would like to come see her now, that is certainly fine."

"See who?"

That inquisitive, accusing spark that made his daughter so special and so perfect felt like a noose around his neck. Tightening his grip, he felt his daughter shudder and turn as he prompted her toward the door, feeling guilty at the sympathetic gaze lingering over the pair of them. And Laurel, sweet Laurel, picked up on the atmosphere right away.

"What's happening?"

How could he possibly answer that? Instead of trying, he lowered his hand to his daughter's lower back and prompted her forward which she did with hesitant, clipped footsteps.

Through the doorway, a long steel table with a sheet covered body sat in the centre of the room with basins and tools near at hand. A hundred cases and more than his share of bodies had brought him to this very room time and time again, but not another ten thousand visits could have prepared him for this contemptible moment.

Laurel was still and even his nose could detect she scented heavily of confusion. Of course, she didn't see and her mind would take more than a moment to process. Quentin dropped his hand away and moved to stand next to the pale, still body of his youngest child and felt his throat seal up again.

"What? I don't understand."

'I don't either.' The words wanted to escape his throat, but Quentin couldn't speak as he took a hold of the lifeless hand and stroked the back, absently noting the calluses lining the impossibly long fingers.

"..Sara.."

Around the other side of the body, he could hear his daughter's breathing deepen as she sucked in panicked breaths. Not indifferent to Laurel's suffering, Quentin raised his watery gaze to poor Laurel who had one ornamented hand clasped over her mouth while those mocha eyes welled with matching tears.

Glancing down to the eyes that had been thoughtfully closed by a medical staff considering they had been open when she died, Quentin reached out and stroked the icy cheek with the back of his knuckles before the bile in his throat became too much and he turned and all but ran out of the morgue.

Ignoring his daughter's tearful protest, the detective ran out the back of the building and leaned over the hedge of the parking lot and vomited. Breakfast, lunch, that afternoon snack that Hilton insisted on stopping for came up. Retching again and spitting harshly, the cop wiped his brow and tried to swallow down another round of bile.

"Tell...Oliver...sorry..didn't..mean it..."

What had she meant? What did it mean?

In a daze, Quentin stumbled to the side of the road, ignoring the conspicuous, suspicious glances of passers byers and muscled his way toward an idling cab and sliding inside. A fleeting thought of Laurel touched his mind, but he dismissed her out of hand, boiling thoughts focusing on a playboy billionaire he needed to confront.
"I'm supposed to be waiting for someone, Mister."

"I'll give you a hundred dollar tip if you get me to Starling General in ten minutes."

The cabbie didn't bother with additional comments which the detective felt fortunate for as he jerked the wheel and directed them into traffic.

At the hospital, Quentin numbly emptied the contents of his wallet onto the seat and clambered out of the taxi; sucking in a lungful of cigarette smoke from errant pedestrians, the detective waved absently to the cabbie and turned to confront the sterile fortress of glass with an uneven sigh.

On numerous occasions, cases lead Lance and his partner into the heart of this hospital; assaults, rape, and victims of attempted murder. Today was a first for the beta. Today he desperately needed answers in order to make sense of the wrench thrown into his life: Sara's death.

And the source of his answers was no doubt just a few floors away.

Charming the nurses was absolutely out of the question after the toll taken today; security guards automatically were eyeing him up like he was a ticking time bomb. Shit, maybe that was not entirely inaccurate. Either way, flashing his badge appeared to be working the expected magic and had provided him access to patient rooms.

Bypassing Malcolm Merlyn, the detective followed the instructions for one Slade Wilson's room, figuring that man would be his best bet in tracking down the former castaway, Oliver Queen. And it would seem he was not a cop for nothing.

The door to the next area was open with a curtain drawn back to provide the illusion of privacy. But it did nothing to filter out the sound of voices and boy--much to his eternal chagrin--did that omega's voice resonate.

"You should have taken the painkillers, Slade."

Apparently the Queen kid was having a domestic with his injured lover. Lance wished he had the details of the report, but after finding Sara the rest was a messy blur.

"I don't need them. You're welcome to distract me if you can think of anything that might get my mind off this little scratch."

"That's fucking it! I'm getting them to dose you for my sake if not your own. You're not going to be healing as fast as you used to." And it would seem Oliver Queen was that kind of omega. Who would have thought? "I'll be right back."

If the beta had been in a better state of mind, the playful banter between the couple might have made him laugh. Or ostensibly want to get drunk and bleach his brain.

Oliver froze outside the hospital room, scent radiating exasperation clearly aimed at the hospital room's occupant. The blonde looked fifty shades of remorseful and perhaps a touch weary? Hiding much, Queen? Quentin had devoted countless hours toward resenting and hating Oliver Queen and he hated to think there was not a good reason for it at the end of the day.

The omega crossed his arms in a pose that screamed defensive and jerked his head to the left. Nodding once, he followed as the younger man pivoted and strode down the hallway a fair distance until he turned and stood inside an alcove looking aged in the eyes and not at all like the rambunctious teen that had vanished with his youngest in tow over five years past.
"I'm sorry to hear about Sara."

Swallowing thickly, the detective silently begged the little bitch to say something that would justify knocking his teeth in, to no avail. Scanning the remorseful young man in front of him, the arrogant little bastard his daughters had grown up with had been nowhere to be found; standing before him was a quiet, somber young man that wore humility like a cloak and still somehow made the detective want to punch him in the face. Because changed or not, Quentin had been a cop for too long to not know when someone was hiding something. Oliver Queen had secrets and whatever those were, some of them concerned Sara.

"That's funny," his laughter laced with bitterness that even he could not erase. "Because you seem to be the only person that wasn't surprised to find out Sara hadn't died on your family's boat. You want to tell me why that is?"

"Detective, I can see that you're angry." Understatement pal, the beta fisted his hands until he felt the stabbing pinch of his fingernails gnawing at his palms. "But I had nothing to do with Sara's death."

He snapped. Snagging the collar of the omega's black t-shirt, he slammed the kid against the wall; Oliver's struggles seemed oddly muted, focusing on diverting the beta's own fingers from his windpipe even as Quentin pressed the advantage and used every ounce of body strength and smarts to keep his quarry pinned and his foot compromised.

"You had everything to do with it." The smarmy bastard charmed fools from all walks of life and played on the emotions of both of his children. The omega's blue gaze appeared utterly unaffected by his tirade, which further infuriated the parent. "My daughter was only on that rotten boat because of you! She wouldn't be dead now if it wasn't for you!"

In retrospect, seeing the way the omega's eyes had darted to the spot over his shoulder really ought to have alerted the beta about the approaching danger, but somehow the detective never expected it: grief could blind the hardiest of souls.

Arms snaked around his neck and ripped him off like an angered bear, sending the grief stricken detective into the wall with a harsh crunch that had the beta rubbing his head ruefully. Damn that hurt. Caught off guard rather than strictly hurt, Quentin shuffled a pair of steps, using the wall to regain his balance before turning to confront an alpha radiating authority in spite of the bandaged shoulder and hospital gown; Oliver simply quirked an eyebrow at him, ducking beneath the alpha's good shoulder and taking the alpha's weight.

"Your daughter was on the island with Oliver." Attention grabbed, Quentin took a tentative step toward the mated pair, riveted by knowledge the infamous mate of Oliver Queen promised. "Until they were separated. While your anger might be understandable, if you ever put your hands on my mate again, I'll remove them."

"It's okay, Slade." Quentin didn't bother to conceal his surprise when the blonde intervened quietly. "I can't imagine how the detective is feeling right now. That being said, if you want to ask me something, just do it. Because Slade isn't going to go back to bed unless I take him."

Fuck. Watching his daughter struggle to breathe and gasp out an apology had been too much. Now, confronted with one of the few people on Earth that he hated--even if unjustly so--Quentin felt a war occur in himself that he wasn't prepared to fight.

Not now. Not ever. And still he was out of options.
"Before she died, Sara said she wanted you to know that she was sorry. What was she sorry for?"

The expression on Oliver Queen's face was something Quentin hoped he never witnessed again. No artist's rendering could ever hope to captivate the canvas of emotions that erupted like exploding stars. A taste of fear. A war with agony. Compassion hedged with wariness.

"Sara and I were separated because we were in the wrong place at the wrong time and it was her idea to be there. I can only guess that she felt guilty about that."

Oliver Queen wasn't lying, Quentin felt confident about that, but the omega hadn't really told him anything either. The fact that Sara had not died....until now proved just how small of a perspective he really had. And Oliver Queen had answers, some of them anyway. And someday he would have those answers, but judging from the grim line to the alpha's mouth, that day would have to wait.

"This isn't over, Queen."

"I wouldn't expect any less, Detective."

The alpha's prickly scent prevented Quentin from turning around and smashing the cheeky bitch's teeth in, but only just.

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Countless stitches and several hours later and Felicity felt like she could finally breathe again. Getting an emergency call while she had been halfway through a pedicure was definitely not how she imagined her day going, but seeing it in person had been like a knife to the heart.

After the mini-excursions, she had become accustomed to patching up scrapes for Malcolm, but nothing had prepared to see the man she loved practically mummified under his hospital gown. And watching him play it off like it was nothing hurt her deeply.

Felicity had known she was in love with Malcolm Merlyn and she had realized when he slept with her that first time that they were in this for the long haul, but so close to losing the other man had been absolutely petrifying.

"Oh my goodness! Your poor alpha looks like he needs a serious pick-me-up, darling!" No shit mom. And now, she couldn't even have a stiff drink with him because alcohol and her mini Merlyn did not mix!

Felicity stiffened as her mother swabbed her mate's lips with a sponge; rationally, she recognized her chagrined alpha only had eyes for her, but her mother's breasts looked one misstep away from popping out of her blouse; her morning was spent tearfully shopping with her mother, and goddamnit she was so not prepared to be a single mother!

"You know what would really be wonderful," the alpha rasped, Felicity instantly moving closer to dab his sweaty brow with a damp washcloth. The CEO pointed to his pile of clothes resting in the corner. "My wallet is in the pocket of my pants and I know we've all missed dinner. Donna, I know it's a lot to ask and I hate separating you and Felicity, but would you mind picking up some take out from anywhere you like for the three of us to eat tonight? I just can't stomach hospital food."

Recognizing the diversionary tactic for what it was, Felicity shoots her mother an earnest, thankful look that used to work for her as a child.
Oh please, mom, come on, she thought eagerly.

"Oh Malcolm I would be happy to do that! And don't worry about a thing! Felicity and I will take excellent care of you, not to worry! I'll just be back in a jiffy!"

Eager beaver that she was, Felicity rolled her eyes while her mom blew the two of them a kiss and ran for the door.

"Mom!"

"Yes, darling?" The puzzled, absent expression on her mother's face commandeered some of her stress and allowed her to smile softly at her clueless mother.

"Here." Stepping away from her mate's bedside, she rifled through the clothing to retrieve the wallet and handed it over to her mother who smiled goofily. "Malcolm has cash that you're welcome to use in here. And thanks, mom. I'm glad you're here."

And, oddly enough that seemed to be true. Her mother brightened like a flower in the sunshine, whirled around, and exited the room with the fast paced clip, clip of heels.

Waiting a good thirty seconds, Felicity rushed to the door and closed it gently before returning at once to the hospital bed. Malcolm had wordlessly shifted and raised a bandaged arm; incredibly relieved, the omega all but threw herself onto the bed, tucking her head under her alpha's chin while mindful of her glasses.

Purring softly as her anxiety bled away, Felicity closed her eyes and wondered how long it would be before her mate's nose recognized a subtle change in scent more akin to a pleasant aftertaste. At least, that was what her nose would describe the change in her coworkers.

In any event, considering the frigid downright devious look her perturbed mate was eyeing the door with, something dangerously not good had to be on his mind.

"What is it?" Pulling back, Felicity slipped a finger into the pocket of her wool coat, sliding against the smooth, reassuring back of her trusty I-phone. The stoic alpha appeared lost in his pensive, broody mood and she was not about to put up with that. Extending a finger, she brushed against the bandage on his forearm with a single finger and applied pressure.

The alpha recoiled with a hiss, blinking back to full awareness and glaring at her; Felicity simply folded her arms and gave the sour alpha an unimpressed glare.

"Spill."

"I'm just trying to decide what our best options are." She watched her fiance massage the wounded arm, grimacing shallowly and radiating the displeasure of a wet cat.

"Care to elaborate on those deep, dark ideas?" Goading the man she loved was not a particular joy in her life, but spending copious amounts of time with Malcolm had taught the omega that her mate needed someone to be his sounding board. Desperately. Especially when he didn't think he did.

At first, her beloved archer refrained from commenting—just as Felicity suspected he would. Digging out her phone, she checked her emails in a careful show of patience that she knew the alpha was shrewd enough to realize was simply a ruse.

Finally, the silence caused the brunette to cave to the inevitable just as Felicity had known it
"Sara Lance's death is a catalyst that will draw the attention of Ra's al Ghul. Not only that, but A.R.G.U.S. is still at large and they are considerably more unpredictable than the League."

"Don't forget we have the police department to contend with now," Felicity remarked glumly, considering the other two groups her mate had mentioned and feeling frustrated by how little information she possessed on the groups. That would have to change...yesterday.

"They will be a non-issue," Malcolm asserted in that commanding tone that made her toes curl and pulse skyrocket. Poor timing must be her middle name! "Lance can make all the noise he wants to but Sara's confession, witnessed and heard by the man's partner, absolves the both of us from responsibility and guilt."

"Great." Felicity attempted to unobtrusively cross her legs and pushed nervously at the bridge of her glasses, all the while hoping her scent wasn't broadcasting her ill-timed interest. Pregnancy hormones? Seemed stupidly early for those to be an issue. "So what are we going to do about the League?"

After all, a gang of murdering thugs did not seem at all promising, particularly now that Slade had been cured. Cured? Was it actually a cure of that... whatever he originally had been targeted by?

"Don't worry about the League. I know how Ra's thinks better than anyone and I think I have a plan for dealing with him." A palm expertly dropped onto the fabric of her dress and slid beneath the garment, toying with a patch of skin along her inner thigh; Felicity sucked in a ragged breath and hastily deposited her phone on the thin mattress. "But I'm going to need your help, your ingenuity and perhaps a bit of understanding in order to manage the A.R.G.U.S. situation."

Why did she get the feeling that she wasn't going to like where this conversation was headed? Sometimes Malcolm's methods lingered on the outskirts of palatable, but Felicity could hardly argue with his results; nor did the omega feel compassionately compelled toward evildoers that would have left her to die on the pavement without lifting so much as a finger. Whatever her mate decided, she would hear him out, dispute his ideas if necessary, but inevitably she would help him—misgivings aside.

"What exactly do you have in mind?"

Felicity almost felt physically ill when she spotted the tremor of relief and the knots of tension dispel and the fingers that had stalled on her thigh resume their vibrant caress.

"I think if we can use our knowledge of both organizations and weigh their potential goals we can do more than evade them. I think we can wipe the board and provide a new, fresh start for our family." The alpha lifted his hand free of her skirt and pressed it tenderly against her abdomen and rubbed light circles against her midriff. Jerking upright, the brunette nodded once and Felicity bit her lip at the utterly wrecked, overjoyed cast to the man's face that made her lean toward him until their noses were brushing and she could smell the decaffeinated tea from earlier. "And everyone in this city."

This man was like a magician weaving a spell over her senses, causing her to forget precisely why the conversation had ever sounded shady. Their lips met in a careful, slow dance of tongues and caressing lips. It lasted a mere instant but it was enough to leave the blonde feeling utterly breathless.

"Tell me, before she gets back."
"Let me tell you about a dream that I've had for years. Well, it's rather more of an Undertaking really."

Standing on the opposite street, a faceless onlooker to what the press are labelling the latest in a series of assassination attempts; while not exactly inaccurate, the journalists had ended their investigation with the utterance of the police captain this evening, merely accepting his word as gospel and burying the chance that anyone outside the Merlyn/Queen family would know the truth.

Reporters hassled the cops opposite the crime scene tape and the alpha had even witnessed a plucky looking teen dive under the tape with his camera phone in a futile attempt to score pictures and improve his social standing or build on an existing dipshit rep. Aside from that, nosey civilians—as Thea had come to think of them—perceived the world from an extremely limited, binary point of view.

Once upon a time, Thea Queen might have too. But her delusional reality ended as the darkness in the world unfolded. Her mother, for reasons that still seem unfathomable, had committed atrocities against their family and possibly countless others. And now Thea had watched the light in Sara's eyes go out and felt nothing but satisfaction. Could a person still be considered caring and loving if they experienced not even an ounce of remorse for the act? In truth, she struggled now because Thea Queen did not want to become like her mother; that empty, soulless shell of a human being that had forgotten what love was.

The alpha's nose found Tommy before he found her and she leaned against the supportive arm on her shoulder.

"How did you find me?"

Tommy's laughter could have been bottled and sold as a tincture for the soul; instantly, Thea felt her tension dissolve and vanish as if it had never been.

"Well you see, I work with my father's super nerdy soon-to-be wife and it turns out I'm not completely hopeless at picking up tips. So I pinged your phone's GPS and voila! Here I am."

Felicity's bag of tricks really should have been less surprising, but she never considered the boys to be apt pupils. Maybe that ought to change.

"You did what you had to do."

"I know. I know," she whispered, longing for the weight of the blade filling her palm again. Across the street, fire department workers looked to be consulting with the crime scene unit as they exchanged words, gesturing toward the shell of Malcolm's car on occasion. "I almost lost it when I saw her attack your dad."

Deflecting attention appeared to be a skill not solely owned by Oliver Queen. Gauging Tommy's reaction, she sighed in relief when the other man simply nodded and wondered why she had felt so afraid.

"I think that's because he's as much your father as he is mine at this point."

A lump welled in her throat and she pursed her lips even as salty wetness tickled her nostrils. "Come on Thea. Let's go see him. It's been hours and you know what kind of trouble the old man can get up to in that amount of time."

"It's not him we should be worried about," she deadpanned. "Those poor nurses. Between
"Right you are!" Tommy jerked her away from her position opposite the parking lot. "Let's get going. Dad is waiting."

"Yeah, okay, Merlyn."

Thea wasn't ready to allow herself the luxury of adopting another father. If he bore that title and perished, she lost more than just the man that had trained her.

Merlyn Global's security appeared to be having a heck of a time keeping out unwanted reporters going by the split lip and skewed tie on more than one of the men.

"You go ahead, Thea."

"You're not coming?" She shot back at the other alpha, gripping her purse a smidge tighter than strictly necessary.

"I'll be there. Somebody needs to get those two a change of clothing to come home in. They might keep them overnight but I guarantee you both of them will be plotting to escape in no time."

"You may have a point, but you better be back here soon."

"Scout's honor."

Thea nodded to the resident bodyguard and gingerly turned the knob and rolled her eyes in disbelief before shutting the door non-too gently. Malcolm looked alert and annoyed while taking a hearty bite of orange chicken directly from the take out container. Felicity, dutiful mate that she wasn't, chowed down on her own container of delicious meal; the legendary Donna Smoak in a breast bursting mini dress waved cheerfully from where she was stationed next to Malcolm, offering to dab the billionaire's face with a napkin.

"Did a floral shop go out of business and leave all their plants to you?"

Because seriously, the flimsy tray typically found in hospital rooms was completely covered in flower decorations while the floor against the wall looked like a memorial with how jam-packed it was with expensive roses flowering shrubs.

"Merlyn Global's numerous business partners," the alpha muttered, somehow appearing dignified even when munching take out. "You get the thrill of making sure each and every plant receives a thoughtful thank you notice."

"Pfft," Felicity snorted, shoveling another bite into her mouth with an enthusiastic moan. "All she has to do is hand them to your secretary."

"You must be Thea!" Felicity's mother lit up like she was witnessing the second coming of Christ—ignoring of course that the Smoak's were Jewish. Thea accepted the hearty greeting and the hug with as much grace as she could muster, smiling weakly. "You are absolutely gorgeous!"

"Ah thanks," she muttered, uncomfortably looking toward and amused Malcolm for assistance and finding nothing except a snarky grin. "I'm so glad you came to visit. Though... sorry about the timing."

"Mom and I were just stepping out anyway," Felicity coughed, Thea sparing the woman a
thankful look as she grabbed her mom and tugged her outside. "Need to fix our makeup."

"But sweetheart," she heard Donna say in confusion. "I just did that an hour ago."

"Well, I can always use your help with mine," Felicity returns gamely and the door clicks shut.

"You don't sound hurt." Thea felt her tone bordered on accusing as she stared at Malcolm's bandages, tracking the sporadic placement and imagined how many lay beyond her sight beneath the cheap hospital fabric. How close to dying had the man come? "And you look ridiculous in that thing."

"Better than Slade though," the teasing in his voice did nothing to lighten Thea's spirits as she slunk unwillingly closer, ringing her hands.

Why was she even here? This was Oliver's dad. He was just her boss. It shouldn't be painful to breathe. It shouldn't matter if he was in pain. If he was laughing. Smiling. Or dying. It shouldn't matter. But if that was actually true, why did it?

"You're an idiot you know." This time she looked him square in the eye and prodded the man in the chest with a miserable glower that infuriated her all the more when he continued to regard her with a placid, charmed expression that had not business existing in this context. "You could have gotten yourself killed today! You're just a reckless moron like everyone else!"

Slamming her fist viciously into the bedside table, Thea felt satisfied when the array of potted plants collapsed to the ground in a broken heap, scattering dirt across the floor.

Breathing as hard as she was, Thea was unprepared for the arms to tug her already off balanced body backward. Flailing, the older alpha spun her around and tugged her into a hearty embrace that she initially resisted until pulling back earned her a growl in her ear. Freezing, her pulse raced and she sucked in a shockingly soothing parental scent.

Instantly, her arms responded and she surrendered to the hug, chin resting on Malcolm's shoulder and broke down like a small child. It felt surprisingly good to just cry and have someone rub her back and tell her it was okay.

"I'm not going anywhere, Thea."

"Liar," she mourned, sniffing tearfully. Promises were things normal people did and she had no such illusions. Not anymore. "Every time someone comes into my life, something happens. I just can't anymore. I can't do it."

"You already are," Malcolm's words hypnotizing, like the voice of a god, and it left Thea clamoring to hear every single syllable. "You're stronger than you think. You're just like me, stronger because of how important the people in your life are to you. As you are to me."

Fisting her hands in the flimsy hospital gown, Thea chokes and cries; the alpha continued to pet her back as if she were an unhappy kitten though she would be hard pressed to admit the light touch was soothing.

"This doesn't change anything." She refused to say the words. Saying it, made it real.

"I'll be here when you're ready." Malcolm ignores her pathetic attempt to divert the truth and simply rubbed her back gently.
"This is messed up," she sniffed, pulling away and rubbing her sore eyes tiredly. "You're the one in the hospital and I'm sure I look way worse than you do, old man."

"Not as bad as you'll look after your next training session." They shared a grin, the door squeaking open to the mother-daughter duo waltzing into the room.

"Oh my goodness, child!" Thank God for Donna Smoak. A second later a tender hand was cupping her chin and carefully blotting her face with a tissue. "Sweetheart, that's why God made water-proof mascara! Why don't you come with me?"

Thea looked at the bouncy blonde and found herself smiling softly, accepting the woman's prodding with a watery smile and allowed herself to be let out, pausing to wave to the couple on the bed and calling out a bright.

"Be back soon..."

"I'll be waiting."

'Thanks dad,' Thea wanted to say. Maybe next time she would.

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"You know, hospitals are not exactly comforting locales," Oliver complained to Slade while looking through a magazine in disgust. "A room with empty walls, crappy cable television, and absolutely no privacy."

"That isn't why you object and you know it."

That shuttered the empty conversation instantly and Oliver abandoned the pretense of interest and chucked the senseless media drivel into the conveniently located garbage. The chair squeaked as he moved slightly and the omega glowered as his mate, hoping the silent ridicule might inspire the other man to change the tone of their conversation: to no avail.

"You're right," he admitted, reaching out to grasp his lover's hand. "And I tend to bungle everything when I try to put things into words, but I can't seem to prevent that. This place just makes me feel unnerved."

"The place is a shithole," the alpha offered the token concession; grunting he gave a pointed look to his hand.

Rolling his eyes, the omega reached out and slid his hand beneath his alpha's thicker palm, experiencing the sense of personal inadequacy rising as he was forced to confront the reason for their visit.

"This is all my fault."

So it was. Since Slade arrived, the alpha had been unwittingly recruited as a feature member of Oliver's crusade. And visiting hospitals seemed to be right up there and regular. And not even 24 hours since his heat's end, they were back here with Slade in a more critical state and cured of the Mirakuru. Disaster after disaster.

So caught up in his self-loathing, the omega was unprepared to be seized by the neck in a clawed grasp and jerked close until he was nose to nose with his alpha who all at once smelled like he had bathed in a wash of possession and danger: all directed at him!
"Oliver Queen," Slade's voice sounded deceptively even tempered for a tone that made the blonde want to roll over and offer his throat in submission. "From day one you've managed to rile my temper and inspire my affections like no other person ever has. I never wanted an omega. If you weren't such a courageous little shit that wormed your way under my skin, I would never have discovered what happiness could actually be. So, don't you ever so much as think that I regret anything that's happened. You're my mate and I love you. God knows why, but it's true."

Feeling the fingers gripping his neck loosen with that inspired declaration, Oliver dropped down and buried his face in his mate's lap, basking in the other man's pungent alpha musk.

They stayed that way for a while.

"Feeling better Slade?" Felicity poked her head in the doorway, looking apologetic at what Oliver imagined had to be the ripe smell about her that screamed sexual contact which was just yuck; truly he never considered himself to be squeamish, but something about picturing a parent doing the dirty with another person was a bit too much even for him.

"Too much better," his alpha rumbled in mock disapproval. "Oliver forced me, against my better judgment, to take some drugs. I don't much care for that."

"I bet you don't!" Oliver winked at him slyly, while whispering conspiratorially toward his fellow omega standing in the doorway. "I'm sure you managed to get dad to take something too."

"Perhaps," she acknowledged with a faint smile edged with weariness. It was odd to see the blonde so out of sorts and exhausted looking, but all things concerned the blonde was turning out to be one tough cookie; Felicity was not crumbling under the strain of their nightly activities nor was she yielding to their lifestyle, rather the blonde had inserted herself and was making herself invaluable. "My mom and Thea are sitting with Malcolm and I was hoping I could persuade you to run and get us some ice cream."

Okay that was weird. Scanning the blonde, he took no notice of anything obviously wrong with her other than dark circles and smudged make up around her eyes, likely from crying.

"Is everything okay, Felicity?"

Seeing how the blonde snapped to alert and opened her mouth as if to answer before closing it, Oliver felt a vague feeling of trepidation tease his gut. The conspiracy theorist in him screamed something was up in a definitely bad way while the rational brain cautioned against unnecessary, silly panic.

"I'm pregnant!" And once again, not exactly the news he expected the other omega to just blurt out of nowhere.

Staring at her dumbly, Oliver looked to where Slade was reclining in his hospital bed with a lewd, knowing look in his eyes that caused him to reach out and thump his mate on the arm.

"What?" As if he didn't know, Oliver muttered internally.

"That's amazing news," he stepped away from Slade and slid his arms around the petite woman and held her close. Like a startled fawn, it took the other omega second, but within moments her arms were painfully tight around him and occasional shivers ran up and down her spine. Even so, the blonde carded her fingers through his hair in a gesture that reminded Oliver of his mother in ways that made him ache.

Pulling back, he smiled widely and found her shared enthusiasm infectious as even Slade
appeared cheerful. A baby. He was going to be a brother again! And that prospect was delightful and shocking. "I can't believe how quick that was for you guys. When did you find out?"

"This morning," the blonde replied automatically, staring at her shoes with a blush highlighting her cheeks.

Ice cream! Oh! Now that made... a bit more sense and felt much less out of place.

"Don't worry, I think I can handle picking up a cone for junior and Slade," he teased his alpha, earning a reproving snort. "What kind do you two want?"

"Chocolate." Slade's tone practically screamed 'duh!"

"Strawberry and chocolate please." The blonde blushed, looking mildly ashamed but he reassured her with a grin.

"I'll be having a scoop of mint topped with chocolate!"

Patting his soon-to-be step-mother's shoulder affectionately, Oliver reached out and squeezed his alpha's fingers; the Australian offered a responding squeeze and the omega breezed out of the hospital room, pausing at the doorway to poke his head back inside.

Felicity offered a bemused, if oddly somber wave, while Slade hammed it up with a pointed glance to his lap and winked slowly. Forever a lecher, but reserved for him alone. Saluting and giving the duo a mock bow, he whipped around and called over his shoulder jauntily.

"Call me if anything else tickles your fancy!"

Oliver missed the full extent of Slade's reply, but between "itch" and "ass" he was quite certain he didn't need to know. Smothering his laughter was harder than it should have been if the scandalized expressions from an older couple adequately indicated anything.

Starling General's hospital hardly seemed foreign as this was his third experience wandering the halls. Stopping outside the gift shop that was located--quite deviously--at the entrance to the hospital, Oliver paused.

Inside the little boutique a Hallmark Card had vomited up the expected 'get well' amenities.. Walls of cards with an array of balloons to match their sympathies; stuffed bears, all manner of snack food, mugs, and figurines. And of course, the standard religious paraphernalia from pretty much every major religion under the sun. The only thing the store lacked was something Oliver felt compelled to purchase for his father and mate. Not a single item appeared to be worthy of a second glance and that opened an array of old wounds.

It seemed so senseless, so silly, but the omega desperately wished there was something he could justify bringing back to show the pair how much they meant to him, but nothing caught his eye.

With a sigh, he bypassed the store and nearly bowled over his brother outside the automatic doorway.

"You're leaving?"

Feeling like a busted kindergartner, Oliver rubbed his head ruefully. "Nope. Felicity asked me to pick up some treats for everyone so I'm playing delivery boy. You going up to see dad?"
"He can wait fifteen more minutes," his brother about faced and pointed down the street to the giant ice cream cone lit up with lights. "Let's go."

They walked in silence, which Oliver could admit he was thankful for. Almost loosing Slade had been draining to his reserves even if he had put up front. And his head had only really ended just over twelve hours ago so that was even more exhausting.

The dart came out of nowhere, striking him in the neck and he felt his body collapse with all the grace of a limp noodle. Oliver tried, he truly did try, to open his mouth and scream but his tongue felt thick and heavy and thinking felt like sand paper even as he slowly relaxed into unconsciousness.

Tommy. Where is Tommy? Please God let him be okay.

Hands, none too gently lifted him and tossed him into the back of something moving. A truck, his mind thought feebly as he fought the roar that caused his vision to abort and decline.

"Mockingbird, mission accomplished. Returning to base!"

Fucking bitch! Oliver's last thought as he succumbed to sleep was how much he intended to enjoy watching Amanda Waller die a slow, misery-laden death.

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Ra's stood before the Lazarus Pit, staring at the trembling surface of the water, praying for some sort of guidance.

Lifting his ringed hand, the Demon's Head eyed the hand that looked as ordinary as any limb could possibly look: except things had changed. The veins on the back of his hand looked as if overnight blue worms had wriggled beneath his flesh where before the skin had been smooth with his veins far from the pronounced state they were in now. While the callused fingers remained strong, his nails had an aged brittleness that belonged to the fingers of men in the twilight of their lives, ready to go out to pasture.

Fear was anathema to Ra's al Ghul, but the change in his body was an omen even he dared not ignore.

The passing of Sara Lance was observed in the halls of Nanda Parbat with the concern free exchange one might use to discuss the weather. In frank terms, the final chapter in Ta-er al-Safer's story concluded as all, save one, expected. And that one, his daughter, would be the lone mourner of their society when she heard the truth; though he expected there was little Nyssa could accomplish half a world away in Australia, where he had sent her with false information two days prior.

Where once he would have been vexed--enraged even--to learn of Shamshir's death at the behest of Sara Lance, the Demon felt elation of the sort he had rarely experienced since his ascension. Tonight, in just a few hours time, there would be a feast in remembrance of him and there he would announce his discovery.

Strange things prophecy and even stranger when they were unexpected. Shamshir, called his blade, engaged the alpha Slade Wilson in combat only to lose his life in the process. And it had been written that, 'the man who doesn't perish at the blade of Ra's al Ghul will become Ra's al Ghul.'

Lifting his hand higher into the burning light of the candle, he rejoiced in reverent prayer, thoughts on his fallen servant.

"Forgive and have mercy upon him. Excuse him and pardon him. Make honorable his
reception. Protect him from the punishment of the grave. And the torment of the fire."

'Thank you.' Is what he wants to cry to the heavens, the revelation of the prophecy accomplished only by the sacrifice paid in blood.

Allowing his hands to fall to his sides, Ra's turned to the door and swept out of the room and walked toward the main hall where rows and rows of banquet tables laden with food and drink covered the table in celebration while his assassins garbed in black stood dutifully awaiting his arrival.

The priestess in her fine silks and jewels bowed deeply as he approached her side and he turned to address his men.

"Tonight, we feast in the honored memory of Shamshir, Blade of the Demon. Tomorrow, I depart Nanda Parbat in order to bring you all the answer to the prophecy and a true heir to the demon. Let us begin!"

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Lian Yu

"My side still hurts," Oliver whined piteously, scratching at the makeshift bandage Yao Fei had covered him with along with those foul smelling herbs.

"You complain more than baby. More than wife."

"I do not!" The youth's mouth shut with an audible clack and he flung himself backward onto the dirt floor of their cave, wondering if Yao Fei was ever going to forgive him for being a spoiled rich kid that new next to nothing about... pretty much everything. On the other hand, "you're married?"

The shaggy haired man never looks up from where he sits around their tiny campfire skinning some sort of squirrel critter. "Long time ago. Not anymore." The archer carefully laid the hide a distance away from the flame and settles their dinner on a stick.

"I'm sorry."

A grunt followed by their water canteen was chucked at his head, the blonde cursing his companion under his breath. Even he could take a hint though.

Stepping outside, he wandered the two minute walk to the brook, jumping out of his skin every time a bird called or a twig snapped under his foot. In any case, he wasted no time filling the thing and raced back to the cave as fast as his abdomen could permit. Who knew the dank, creepiness of a cave would one day become a comforting retreat?

"I got it," he dropped down next to the older omega, comforted simply by proximity even if the archer was pricklier than a porcupine. "I don't think I could have ever escaped without you back there," he admitted shallowly, thoughts wandering. "I really felt like there was no way out of that trap."

"Every trap has weaknesses," Yao Fei turned the meat over their little fire, pointing a finger in his direction pointedly. "To survive, you must become stronger than your cage. Use head."

Considering he had not been hoping for a response that was not along the lines of comfort, Oliver felt more discouraged than he had before. Until now, he had purposefully focused one escape
without suffering any more injuries and hopefully never encountering that German prick, Fyers, ever again.

Yao Fei had stripped him of any illusion of escaping unscathed or possibly ever escaping period. The life of Oliver Queen had been reduced to vague advice on surviving his next encounter as a prisoner and avoiding masked assholes. Wonderful.

"Oliver."

"Hmm?" Maybe he had forgotten to do something again? Sitting up, he startled when the older man reached out and dropped a hand on his shoulder and squeezed it once hard.

"Never give up."

Oliver lifted his own palm and laid it over top Yao Fei's hand and returned the sentiment, feeling his emotions flicker and his scent noticeably shift from misery to something loosely reminiscent of hope.

"I won't."

It was a promise made on a spur of the moment reaction, but it was advice that came in handy time and time again.

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Blinking against the bright light, Oliver Queen remembered his vow to Yao Fei as the devil's voice tickled his ear.

"Nice to see you again, Mr. Queen."

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to everyone who reviews and leaves kudos because writing is a lot of work and it's nice to know when your audience enjoys your work. Thank you!
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: Continuing to own nothing and profit from nothing.

Author's Note; Okay! So, I actually can say that real life took a couple of tricky turns for me in the last couple weeks, which lead to a delay in updating. I discovered I was allergic to bees which seems ridiculous, but definitely true and resulting in hospital business. Also, your writer was stupid enough to swallow a tiny bit of plastic from a spoon at Wendy's so...I can honestly say that intubation is scarier than it looks on television. All the same, at least my week has been interesting. So, sorry for the how long it took but I had some unfortunate issues happen in my life that make me feel pretty stupid. But, the truth is rather unflattering most of the time :(

Thanks again to everyone that is continuing to read.

Hell was one of those concepts that branched outside of the precepts of faith into the general populace; from there it had been watered down and repurposed until it was finally funneled down to be become a petty insult used by everyone and appreciated by no one.

The simplest, truest definition of hell is a prison, much like the one Oliver Queen found himself in now. Truly, the young man couldn't imagine a worse fate, aside from Slade sharing his misfortune, than being enslaved by A.R.G.U.S. in his own, personal super-max.

Fucking poetic.

Awakening sluggishly with his tongue thick and his ears feeling they were bursting with cotton, the omega lifted his hand to claw at his ear; except, the motion was prevented by an unyielding pressure on his wrist. Frowning, Oliver carefully opened his eyes with a slivered gaze and reflexively blinked away at the startling bright lights.

Once his eyes adjusted to the change of scenery, the omega took a peek at the sterile, white walls devoid of color but layered in fancy, state-of-the-art medical chamber with tons of shiny tools and beeping machines. Barely a couple feet away, Tommy slumbered in blessed unconsciousness--probably due to the IV drip hooked into the crook of his rest. Even though it might have grounded him to have the alpha awake, Oliver conceded it was probably best to let the other man get what little rest he could before the nightmare truly began.

Shivering from the relatively cool temperature of the room, Oliver frowned when he realized he was naked from the waist down with only a thin hospital sheet carelessly tossed over him; apparently the nursing staff in A.R.G.U.S. penitentiary were just as frigid as the ward boss herself.

No guards. The cuffs were firm and there were no obvious tools he could procure for later. Even the basic saline drip was cleverly inserted into the flexure of his elbow and out of his range of motion. Only one door in a windowless chamber, though a security camera was noticeable at the doorway beyond their parallel hospital beds.

"Amanda!" Oliver glared right into the lens of the white camera as it whirled and turned to
focus on his glaring face. "I thought we agreed you were going to stay out of my life already. Obviously you want something from me, but you better let my brother go!"

A lack of response was obvious, but it didn't prevent him from beginning to string together increasingly imaginative metaphors denigrating the A.R.G.U.S. director. In different circumstances, Oliver would have been going bonkers strapped to a bed with nothing to do except count ceiling tiles and wiggle his toes. Considering the alternatives, the omega considered creating vulgar insults a palatable compared to dwelling on a future shadowed in misery.

"If you're captured by an enemy, they may try to break you with humiliation. You alone are responsible for how you choose to feel. Don't allow them conquer you, set yourself above them."

Taking aim with the bow, Oliver permitted Shado to step into his space and adjust his elbow slightly.

"It seems like it would be easier to just not get captured," he quipped, grinning cheekily as his arrow lands within the radius of the makeshift target the alpha had made on the tree.

A moment later, the omega is flat on his back with a dagger pressed hard into his sternum with his mentor looking bored with her arms crossed in front of her.

"Sometimes things are out of your control," Shado embodied a patient tutor working with a particularly slow pupil. "And it will be up to you to react to situations appropriately."

Voices disrupted the quiet lull and startled the omega that felt fuzzy, thirsty, and increasingly uncomfortable as his bladder alerted him that it was high time to relieve himself. A lack of clock in the white room prevented him from having a true concept of the passage of time, but hazarding a guess based on the drained IV bags perhaps two to three hours max? And still, his brother was asleep?

The sound of a lock turning snapped Oliver's attention back to the doorway in time to witness a pair of typical, middle aged men wearing white lab coats, plaid shirts with a tie, and the expected dress pant to complete the look. The pair of chuckleheads probably shopped together too.

"I need to use the bathroom."

"I just don't know what my alpha is going to want for her birthday."

"Get her a massage. My wife loves the spa."

Oookay. So that was how they were going to play it. Fine. Not saying a word, he breathed inhaled deeply through his nose and attempted to relax while keeping his focus on what the two were doing. The pair had donned gloves and one of them had dosed his brother's IV drip, definitely keeping the alpha from rousing. But why? Now though, the pair were heading toward him armed with a syringe with something slightly orange in color.

"I guess, but she keeps telling me I need to be more romantic. I'm worried that I need to do something to prove my love. I guess I should buy her some jewelry or a new car. Do you think she'd like that?"

Not that his relationship was Slade existed anywhere in the realms of normal, but the pathetic simpering in the omega doctor's tone grated on Oliver's last nerve. Seriously, if Slade ever
demanded that sort of affection he would more likely get a well-deserved knee to the groin. Granted, even as dysfunctional as his family was, the other omega's idea of buying affection seemed grossly irresponsible.

"Damn. What about a manicure and pedicure with it! My girl loves that shit!"

Spa-suggestion, a red-haired bearded beta with a disinterested stare, jammed the needle into the drip and he felt a flash of something cold in his arm before a strange sense of panic nearly jolted him into speaking. His arms. Legs. It was. All the sudden, clammy fingers were touching the inside of his wrist and he jerked away—except he didn't. Sensation apparently was perfectly functional but the archer was unable to access his higher motor functions except...carefully, the blonde shifted his neck slightly and felt his heart rate calm slightly.

"Slightly elevated heart rate but nothing to worry about," the mousy omega—David—squeaked, rubbing his hands together lightly in a smell that betrayed his stray agitation, obviously not from his patient. "I just wish I had your confidence, man."

The pair turned and dragged a surgical tray littered with equipment toward the bed. Biting his tongue, he pictured Yao Fei—stoic in the face of death—and made a valiant effort to make the man proud.

"You just gotta be chill man! And take her out to an expensive restaurant where she can where one of those bazillion dresses of hers!"

Latex hands tossed back the sheet and unceremoniously attacked his pants with surgical scissors, exposing his limp penis to the party. A quick movement, of a tube attached to a bag and a lubricated tube was rammed up his urethra with professional, rapid motions that made his teeth rattle. Fuck. That must be what reverse childbirth feels like. Refusing to flinch, Oliver pants when the men remove the straps with a carefree attitude and continue their flow of nonsensical conversation and flipped the rattled omega onto his front without so much as a by-your-leave. Shado's advice ran like a mantra through his head and he ordered himself to keep his mouth shut and not give them the satisfaction of a reaction.

The cool metal pressing against his back was informative enough and he grit his teeth as the blade—probably a scalpel, his brain supplied helpfully, cut into the skin next to his spinal cord. Breathing in light pants through his mouth, Oliver allows reality to slip away and fades melts into a more comforting setting; away from the rattling metal tray, the uncaring physicians discussing their next bowling tournament, and the unyielding pain lancing pain that feels like a fire is slowly eating away at his back.

The beach is otherworldly; the exposed tide pools reflecting the ebbing sunlight glistening like a tropical version of a rainbow; coral oranges, burnt pinks, and searing reds interspersed with amber splatters. Exposed sea stars appear to shrink away from the light along with their barnacle cousins, longing for the tide to roll in and smother them in a gritty seawater. An undisturbed world, lacking the tarnish that man leaves upon nature.

Shado was off gathering herbs, leaving the mated duo to hunt tonight's fare. The twilight on the beach was often treacherous to fumble around in the dark, but for tonight Slade carried a torch and a handcrafted spear with a pair of crabs skewered on the end. Oliver pretended he hadn't witnessed the crustacean's legs continuing to move in spite of their impaled state and simply enjoyed breathing in the salt air and exploring one of the few parts of their home that was mysterious and beautiful at the same time.

Even the gruff Australian had been persuaded to leave his shoes back at camp to prevent
the wear and tear from additional exposure to the salt water. Not caring that he looked like a hyper four year old, Oliver raced from one tide pool to the next, grinning as his toes sank into the mucky surface and staring at fish no bigger than a finger nail darting to and fro in an aquarium sized pool of water.

Slade, rarely demonstrated restraint, but he exuded the patience of a saint, only reprimanding his mate with a gentle tap to his hip whenever Oliver strayed too close to the shoreline or lingered too long at any one tide pool.

When the sun completely vanished and only the moon cast it's eerie glow on the couple exploring their island prison, Slade put an end to their little adventure with a yield of five crabs that would feed them for a good two days, three if their hunting was miserable tomorrow.

Before they turned away from the wind's lash, Slade planted his spear and settled his makeshift torch against a rock. The alpha reached out, eliciting a surprised meep from his omega and enclosed him in his arms, nuzzling his icy cheek and nipping the edge of his jaw. Purring softly in reply, Oliver tipped his head and drank in those dark burning hues that looked like polished obsidian in this light.

"I love you."

The wind and water erased all evidence of their foray on the beach, but the omega would never forget how the sand squished and the oceanic wildlife witnessed Oliver Queen kissing the only man he would ever love.

Oliver roused from his meditative state with a grunt when a particularly vicious spike of pain raced down his spinal column when the chatting physicians flipped him onto his back that, despite the heavy bandage, could not prevent the shock of pain plaguing his nervous system and it was all the archer could do to prevent losing control and calling out.

Slade. A part of him dreamed that he could call his mate's name and the alpha would charge in, brandishing his beautiful blades, and slaughter the pack of fools. Even Oliver knew that would not be possible with both his father and lover injured the way they were. But that didn't mean the duo wouldn't come because sure as the rain falls, Oliver knew his family would come for them.

Glancing to his left, Tommy remained blessedly unconscious despite the rough jostling he must have experienced when the surgeons turned him onto his stomach. There was nothing he could do for his brother to offer comfort, but he could watch and learn what he could.

While his paralytic was wearing off, his straps had been reattached and no painkillers for his back; that would not necessarily be a problem for him since suffering had simply become a way of life during his five year absence, but Tommy was going to be a wreck.

The one benefit to not having a drug-addled mind became instantly clear to Oliver after the doctor made the incision into his brother's back. Okay, the omega's brain processed on overdrive as the assisting doctor raised a cylindrical object, approximately two centimeters long and quarter the length wide, up and over the lightly bleeding would and pressed it into cavity held open by his surgical partner.

A tracking device, was Oliver's initial thought, but the relatively large size of the device caused him to think otherwise. Considering the pair of men appeared to be almost dead centre his back, they had to be inserting the device absolutely parallel with the spinal cord. Which meant... what? A tracking device and--"
Oh. It hit him like a punch to the gut: an explosive device. That was... definitely problematic, which Amanda no doubt counted on to ensure total compliance.

Stopping himself before he could instantly fall into the trap of hating himself for something that definitely was not his fault, Oliver recited his promise to Yao Fei even while his instincts screamed for Slade. What he would give to just curl up in the alpha's arms and wake up from this dream.

'Get it together,' Oliver ordered himself. 'Stay focused.'

At the end of the day, their salvation rested in the hands of their family: notably Felicity. All Oliver could do now was do all he could do to keep Tommy and himself alive until help arrived.

Perhaps they were not on an island, but Oliver Queen had returned to purgatory none the less.

"Shengcún."

Oliver Queen closed his eyes.

And so it began.

Tick tock.

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Day one of enforced captivity was mercifully erased by the powerful cocktail of narcotics that kept Tommy in a haze of off-key singing and slumber. Regardless, the alpha felt a keen sense of misery when drugs were not forthcoming the second day and he was left to his cell with a wound that announced itself with searing pain anytime he moved, rolled over, or bent over. So pretty much every time he so much as twitched. Period.

Tommy Merlyn was alpha enough to pick his battles and refusing to eat was not a sacrifice he was prepared to make at this time. The whining grate of the deadbolt pulling back and a latch twist opened a hatch big enough for a plastic tray to slide through and drop with a clatter to the floor of his cell.

"What the hell is this?" Tommy hollered after the retreating guard and received the expected lack of response that was beginning to grate on his nerves. Stealing himself, he plopped down onto his cot and stared at the Styrofoam tray with its contents littering the floor like a pathetic picnic; a whole wheat sandwich with what appeared to be meat, cheese, and nothing else wrapped in plastic still bearing signs of ice crystals inside the bag--fresh out of the freezer. Nose wrinkling he looked to a long, unsliced cucumber and a red apple, conveniently sliced into finger-food that a Kindergartner would appreciate. No drink.

Apparently the plastic, pink cup next to his sink was definitely multi-purpose.

It wasn't that Tommy was a picky eater he was just... spoiled. That had to be the word for a billionaire playboy heir turned... whatever his job description at Merlyn Global was called. The point was, he loathed wheat bread for the disgusting grainy texture of the bread and cucumbers tasted vaguely of the toothpaste the hygienist used at the dentist's office. The apple was okay. Probably.

Even if he had never had a boring red apple since he preferred the colorful variety their housekeeper stocked their home with.

But this all certainly should be edible even if this wasn't his preference. If he could kill a
man, he could certainly eat a whole wheat sandwich. Right? The rumbling in his stomach felt like unwanted peer pressure when he gazed morosely at the unappetizing sandwich again.

"Apples first," he whispered firmly, mentally ordering himself to get a grip. "You can break a man's neck, you can certainly eat this."

Reaching out to touch the plastic wrap, Tommy picked it up, only for his brother's voice to distract him from his mission.

"Ham sandwich, cucumber, apple?"

"Yep," he hollered, unwrapping the plastic and tipping the apple wedges into his palm to the approving flutter of his tummy. Okay that definitely looked more appealing than it had five seconds ago.

"I need you to smell your food before you eat anything."

Seriously? Alone on an island for five years and his brother's concern was the smell of his food. After surviving all that time, the alpha would have imagined that Oliver's priorities might have readjusted to a level befitting a peculiar level of normal. And those glistening, pale apples looked incredibly appetizing at the moment--far more than his sibling's paranoia.

Licking his lips, Tommy raised a piece to his mouth.

"Don't you fucking dare, Tommy. I need to know if some of your food was poisoned too!"

What? Shit!

Flinging the poisonous--apparently-- apple against the wall, Tommy scattered the remaining slices and all but threw himself at his tiny sink, scouring his hands with the hotel size soap bar.

"Why didn't you fucking say something earlier?" Seriously! All his brother had to do was reference Snow White and he would have been on board. Wincing, he tried to pretend it had not been close to a full day since his last meal.

"I did. You just weren't listening. Now open all of your food and tell me what they smell like."

Okay so he had just washed his hands. Seizing his toilet paper, he rolled a bit over his fingers to use as a makeshift glove. Dropping down on the floor at the edge of his cot, Tommy leaned over and took a hearty whiff of one of the apple slices. Sweet. Crisp. It didn't particularly smell strongly of anything though.

"My apples are cut up and they look like apples," he fumbled for a good description, swearing and smacking the floor with his palm and ignoring the sting. "They aren't discolored...does that mean they're poisoned?"

"No." Oliver sniffed, a 'you idiot' pinned to his reply that blew the wind out of the brunette's sails. "Does it smell like anything else? Any visible puncture marks?"

"They smell like nothing. A little sweet. And hang on." Fumbling with his practically mummified hand, he turned one of the slices over in his hand. "This one doesn't look to have marks. I suppose I should check the others too?" Receiving no reply, he grumbled and winced when the stitches in his back protested, but continued to move from slice to slice to inspect the fruit. "I don't
"They should be fine to eat then."

"Now you tell me," Tommy groaned, peering at the apple slices scattered over the floor like a tornado had hit them. Seizing the nearest one, he devoured it whole and swallowed in scarcely two bites and moaned appreciatively.

Oh God, red apples were amazing! If they ever got out of this, he would have to add them to the shopping list!

"Just smell your cucumber and your sandwich." God his brother was going to be Slade's perfect, nagging wife someday.

"Fine," the alpha grunted. Reaching for the packages, he ripped them open held them up to his nose. The sandwich reeked of salty ham and processed cheddar but nothing obviously wrong aside from how icky it looked. Skimming his nose along the surface of the cucumber he paused; taking a second, deep sniff he paused and inhaled deeper, picking up something that seemed out of place in the phallic shaped veggie.

"The sandwich seems okay but the cucumber reminds me of shop class in high school... even though I spent most of my time making out with omegas, I still remember that smell."

"Heavy metals poisoning. Don't eat it."

Not much of a hardship there, Tommy waved a dismissing goodbye to vegetable that he highly doubted for palatability as he chucked it off to the side of the room.

Gathering his apples and sandwich, he laid them out on his mattress and grabbed his cup from the sink and filled it with water for good measure. Sitting down for his first rationed meal since...ever, Tommy felt indecisive and somewhat reluctant to eat. Oliver's disquieting mood indicated that this organization was definitely not trustworthy, but surely they would not starve them after going to all this trouble to kidnap them.

But then why had they drugged one thing and not all?

"Oliver?" As an alpha it rattled his pride to rely on a family member his biology dictated 'he' should be protecting, but in this situation he was little more than a dimwitted novice to his experienced sibling. "Should I save any of this?"

Please let me eat, Tommy thought listlessly, tugging on a crust of the wheat bread and munching on the ill-tasting grain with enthusiasm.

"No, eat it all. You need your strength more than we can afford paranoid tactics."

Way to bruise my ego, bro. Not needing to be told more than once, Tommy tucked into the sandwich ravenously. Ham was not his favorite, nor was the bread at all tasty but it satisfied the bitter ache in his gut and allowed him to relax marginally. The apples were crisp and delicious even if the lukewarm water was not the best accompaniment to his meal.

Definitely not complaining about his dad's cooking ever, ever again.

No longer in the throes of hunger, Tommy extended his legs in front of him and stretched his arms out in a maneuver Slade taught him to ease aches and loosen his muscles. The side effect of these exercises was his brain's inability to shutdown his thoughts.
Tommy had not spoken to his girlfriend since Sara's death and his father's hospitalization. All his procrastination had lead to only more pain. Instead of doing the right thing, he had waited and now it was too late to spare the woman he cared for further pain. Not only was she being forced to weather the storm of Sara's death alone, but the beta also had to contend with her boyfriend's disappearance.

Guilt was miserable and it made the brunette nauseous the more he imagined the harm he had inadvertently done to someone who deserved it the least.

"Is this what it's always going to be like?"

The sound of his voice should have shocked him by how over-burdened and forlorn it was, but Tommy figured it was par for the course considering the last couple weeks of his life included becoming a cop-killer, his father's close-shave with death, and now becoming an unwilling guest of a secret government agency. Really, they ought to have their own television show: Keeping up with the Merlysns!

"I'm not a mind reader," his brother's voice sounded distant and heavy, the omega's voice visibly weighted with strain even though he was unable to discern anything by scent for the time being. "But I can tell you that this life that Malcolm and I warned you about isn't for the faint of heart. It's why I tried so hard to keep you and Thea out because I didn't want you to be burdened with secrets and the cost of having them. It's why I blame myself for dragging you into this."

"Oh don't even start condescending to me," Tommy snapped, on his feet in a flash to smash his fist against the metal door, hearing his voice bounce off the empty walls of the darkened corridor. "I made my choice! I chose dad and I chose you! And Slade, Felicity, and Speedy too! I don't regret my choice and I'm man enough to take responsibility for my decisions, even when the outcome is miserable."

"Huff and puff a little more there, Mr. Wolf," Oliver said after a moment of silence and Tommy grinned, reminded of Thea's roguish personality that never failed to lighten his most dour moods.

"Yeah... I just wish I had broken up with Laurel before the world fell apart. Now, this is going to end badly no matter what I do."

"She'll forgive you." A nice lie, Tommy thought vaguely, leaning against the wall and glaring blearily at the blinking camera staring at him from the ceiling.

"I miss Slade," his brother's voice wavered for the first time and Tommy closed his eyes, not prepared to deal with the potential fallout the implication may bring. This was neither the time nor the place to fall apart and if the infallible archer fell, the brunette knew he would too.

"Well, so what kind of big brothers do you think we'll be?" Tommy scrambled for something, anything to offer up to change the subject to something less dour. "God help us if it's a girl because she'll be an imp like Speedy!"

"I think that would be amazing."

Hope. Tommy would have to ask Felicity, if they ever escaped, if the name was appealing because at this point, an unborn baby was the only hope they had left.

'Hurry dad,' the alpha felt a chill pass over him and gut intuition suggested that his brother
was fragile like a pane of damaged glass; all it would take would be one solid blow to shatter him to pieces. 'He isn't going to last.'

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The last time Thea Queen set foot on the grounds of her childhood home had been the morning of Walter's funeral: a day for unpleasant revelations. Now she was riding Ollie's motorcycle at warp speed in some desperate attempt to assure her brain that she was definitely doing everything in her power to get her brothers back--even seeing her.

In the not-so distant past, the alpha could never have dreamed that life might burgeon into a series of familial calamities with the latest being the abduction of her brothers; one by blood, one by choice but the end result was the pair of them had been plucked from the face of the earth like something out of an alien abduction. Scrambled security cameras and a pile of conflicting eyewitness accounts confirmed that A.R.G.U.S. was the only viable candidate for the boys' vanishing act.

Releasing her grip on the handlebars for a second, Thea swiped angrily as yet another tear scorched her swollen eye.

Malcolm had taken the news like a rock, the only visible sign of distress being a visible twitch in his cheek before the alpha had stoically asked Felicity to work on infiltrating A.R.G.U.S. computer systems--an order the omega apparently took dead serious. The blonde had appeared noticeably tense when Thea recalled looking the woman glued to her computer with a tense desperation that seemed drastically different for her; then again, Felicity's agitated behavior wasn't atypical for an omega missing her children.

And Thea was going to shelve that line of thinking before her next line of tears got her recruited for Dr. Phil's latest sob story.

If anything remotely positive--and that was really stretching it thin--came out of this family crisis getting to see what Shakespeare and all those ancient, love-obsessed fogies meant with their poetic verses and their allusions to this intangible force that bound individuals like they were under a drunken spell.

Once upon a time, Thea would have declared love to be this simple, fuzzy concept that was flighty and full of happiness. Like her father and mother and how "in-love" they appeared to the naive eyes of an idolizing toddler. Until reality came along and shattered the delusion and left Thea in the smouldering ruins of lies.

Love for Ollie and Tommy even when they were over-protective ass-hats was an easy concept and she never doubted that brand of love. But she had been left more or less emotionally adrift without a clue about what love could be between lovers.

Slade, predictably, had not taken Oliver's abduction well. Thea felt confident that Tommy's disappearance alone would have rattled the big Aussie, but her brother's loss had left the other man wrecked. Thea had been there to inhale the initial scent of raging desperation clinging to the big man like an avenging thundercloud. Slade had gripped a necklace in bloodless fingers that Thea, despite her inherent nosiness, had failed to notice before. Necklace in hand, the alpha paced his room with a frenzied panic, scent bouncing all over the spectrum but never settling into any definable form.

Half an hour into watching Slade deteriorate into a raging, blubbering had fueled her own anxiety and she had watched helplessly until the parents arrived--thank God. Malcolm had arrived in short order with Felicity and her mother in tow looking fragile enough that a good strong wind might blow the pair of them over.
Against everything that Felicity had come to believe of the Australian, the unthinkable happened; like a slap to the face, Thea had watched Slade pause, tilt his head, and freeze. Then she observed Malcolm performing his pivotal role as the family's dominant alpha approach the other man and drop a bandaged arm over the swordsman's shoulder: and the younger alpha visibly crumbled and wept silent tears looking shattered and horribly stricken.

A lump formed in Thea's throat and she pressed the gas harder, desperately trying to escape the desolation that haunted Slade's entire being enough to the point that he literally required Malcolm's strength to process his anguish from losing his omega.

And so there was the answer to Thea's question; a painfully, ridiculous answer that was simply that love was when your entire existence became so wrapped up in another human being that you cease being capable of functioning.

Now that she had her answer, Thea found the prospect of loving someone so completely somewhat terrifying. Love was surrendering a portion of the fundamental will to survive. Talk about horrifying!

Love was off the table.

Roaring to a close, Thea pulled her bike to a stop and plopped her helmet down over the handlebars and just stared at looming walls like they were something out of a gothic horror movie rather than a place she had once called home.

Shaking off the urge to flee, Thea felt for the blades she had concealed in the sleeves of her brother's leather jacket since the night he was whisked away from them. To her nose, it was a comfort to have her brother's scent surrounding her like a cloud of comfort in the back of her head.

Bracing herself, she stepped up to the door and nearly jumped out of her skin when the door pulled open to Raisa who look fit to burst with joy; unfortunately, the alpha could not and refused to share the woman's cheer and masked her emotions to the best of her ability.

"I'm here to see my mother."

"Well, of course but she's in a meeting and-"

"Then they'll have to pardon the interruption."

Like an eel, she slithered between the housekeeper and the doorway, ignoring the woman's protesting stutter. Taking to the halls she had haunted with games of hide and seek with her brother, Thea made a beeline her father's study turned mother's sanctuary. Time for an invasion.

Using both hands, she parted the doors with as much force as she could muster, smirking when the doors cracked against the wall with an echoing crack only to frown by exactly who her mother's associate appeared to be.

A startled, exhausted looking Laurel was sitting on the sofa cradling a box of tissues and looking far too cozy in suspiciously close proximity to her dismayed yet desperately hopeful mother.

"Thea." Her mother's eyes watered and she shook her head once, pleading desperately with that sappy look that made the alpha's fingers itch for the blades tucked into the leather jacket.

"I'm just here to talk about the case that Malcolm is bringing against your mother," Laurel appeared oddly defensive, which paired perfectly with how close the two of them were. Heck, the guilty look on Laurel's face spoke to a woman who was grieving on multiple levels, but Thea found
herself completely unwilling to overlook the transgression of the woman sitting before her.

"Yeah you really look like you're really talking shop," Thea pantomimed with a powerfully, sarcastic gesture that caused the pair of betas to draw back like a pair of startled birds. "I'd say I was sorry that your sister is dead, but since I'm not a pathological liar like mom over there, I can't say that I am. You know, since she tried to kill--"

"That's enough!" Woo, mom isn't a total pushover, Thea thought brusquely. The alpha quirked an eyebrow as her mother stretched to her full—not at all intimidating—height and expressed an outraged point of view that nearly caused the brunette to bust a gut laughing. "Laurel's sister just died. You'd think you'd be able to relate to how it feels to lose someone you love."

Oh mom, poor choice of words.

"I couldn't agree more," Thea invaded the pair of women's space, lips twisting into a feral snarl. Reaching out, she gripped her mother's slender bicep in an iron grip and grinned nastily as the beta winced and futilely attempted to pull back. "Since both Tommy and Oliver have gone missing."

The alpha didn't miss the distressed whimpers both betas simultaneously emitted, but she did shake Moira's arm a tad roughly judging by the delicious flinch crossing the older woman's face. "I was just thinking to myself, as I wallowed in self-absorbed misery, that I know an expert in killing family members and disappearing them while flying under the radar."

"Thea, there is nothing and nobody in this world that means more to me than you and your brother." Oh please, save it. Thea groaned as her mother monologued like a villain in a Bond movie. "And I would never, ever do anything that would hurt either of you! I know that things between us have been difficult, but Thea, you have to believe me when I tell you that I had nothing to do with their disappearance."

Laurel, apparently recovered from the verbal attack, stood up and went on the offensive like the feral feline the bitch was.

"I may be representing Malcolm, but you have no right to walk into this home and accuse your mother of kidnapping her own son! Moira might have made some mistakes, but so does everyone." Even your precious Sara, Thea thought bitterly as she recalled the copious number of bandages that she had seen on Malcolm's back the other night. "And I'm not going to allow you to treat her like this. So take your hands off her or--"

"Or you'll what?" Thea released her 'mother's' arm with a light shove that her mother sadly recovered from with hardly a stumble. Fighting the desire to run a finger along the blade of one of her concealed knives, Thea invaded the younger beta's space and shoved a finger right up against Laurel's foundation covered cheek. "Give me a break, Laurel. I am sorry that you get to relive this unhappy adventure of funerals and shit, but open your big, pretty eyes and get a fucking clue. You're supposed to be a lawyer!" Thea almost paused when she saw the honey haired beta's lip quaver and her scent quell, but the alpha quashed her doubts and plowed onward. "My mother is the reason my father is dead and I'm sure Walter's convenient disappearance isjust a big, fat coincidence. So, wake up! My brother and your boyfriend mysteriously go missing? Come on! While I might be willing to consider that my mother doesn't know where they are any longer, I certainly believe she sold them out like every other person that loved her was thrown under the bus."

Pivoting on her heel, Thea was not immune to the devastated sobbing of her mother, but she had to get away before the temptation to throttle her mother became more than just an itch in the back of her head.

If asked, Thea could not recall getting on her bike and driving into the city; not the wind in
her face, the vibrating hum of the engine beneath her body, or the way the buildings melted away into nothing and she was suddenly in the glades at a traffic light, looking at the waste of human life walking mechanically like zombies up and down the concrete pathways riddled with trash, prostitutes, and graffiti.

Before her training, Thea would have probably rattled off the high-crime statistics reported on the news, but the reality was staggeringly more appalling. Maybe, just maybe, if the entire place burned down the filthy dirt-pile would be salvageable. Preparing to drive out of the hellhole, a faint scream drew her attention.

"Stop! Please, just leave me alone! Stop! Oh, no please, no!!"

And the high-pitched girlish quality guaranteed Thea would be unable to walk away from the cry of distress. Looking around, she saw a few of the 'zombies' stir, glance vaguely in the direction of the screams, before shifting their gaze and proceeding business as usual. No wonder Felicity had been so tight-lipped about the Glades. A den of snakes, the lot of them!

Wheeling her bike in the direction of the persistently more desperate screaming, Thea ended up in front of an alley. Rolling to a stop, she palmed the blades and stepped into the dimly lit path crawling with disease-ridden vermin. Down the alley, she saw four men in addition to a sobbing chick and some Abercrombie jock; thugs wearing Rocket jerseys and gangster bling, restraining a sobbing blonde twig sporting a black eye and fat lip--overkill much? The goons appear to be more focused on a brawl that was taking place behind them with a sturdy looking dude with a buzz cut in a red hoodie. Boy wonder looked to be busy choking on his tongue and getting thrown against the wall. Somebody was playing the hero and doing a shitty job of it.

Not wasting time second guessing her decision, Thea set aside doubt and threw both knives and was already running forward before the two goons jerked backward like dying fish as the blades cleanly sliced through their jugulars. The would-be victim--obviously a drug addict with her twitchy limbs--darted past the running alpha. She let her go and paused only to yank her blades free of the gurgling men and saw the men beating on hoodie boy obviously had not witnessed her approach. But while she was confident of her aim, moving targets could lead to striking the wrong target.

Running forward, she utilized her momentum to slam her elbow in a disabling blow into one of the remaining attacks spine before leaping atop him like a monkey. The man jerked back like a livewire, clawing at her hair: too late. Thea drank in the scent of spiking terror as she eased the bloody blade along the man's jugular and cut into it like it was butter and not a throat. Good thing that guy is already wearing red, Thea thought to herself as he fell like a log, showering the kid in blood.

"Damnit!" Looking at her bloody fingers, she shot the jerking body a dirty look and kicked the dying rapist in the groin, sending him tumbling away to die facing broken beer bottles and a filthy wall. Stepping around the pair, it looked like 'Jailbait' was holding his own as he exchanged a heavy punch with a scumbag barricading him against the wall.

Bored and unwilling to suffer another five minutes of cliché television fights that lasted absurd lengths of time, the alpha approached the attacking beta and jammed the blade at an angle neatly up beneath the man's rib cage and directly into a lethally, squishy vital organ.

Watching the man freeze and fall to the ground in a stuttering heap did not even phase the alpha and she was left with an inescapable conclusion that something had to be wrong with her to watch a man drown in his own blood and feel nothing at all except a despicable sense of satisfaction.
"Are you okay?"

Huh? Oh. Abercrombie was an attractive looking beta with a square jaw and a split lip standing scarcely two steps away, favoring his left leg. Noting a queerly cheerful upturn to the teen's lip, Thea snorted and shook a bloody knife at him.

"You're asking me? Are you serious? You should be looking in a mirror buddy!"

Rather than intimidated, the kid limped until they were sharing the same breath and looking at her with... was that admiration? Maybe the guy had been hit in the head one too many times. But if the freeloader thought she was going to give him a lift to the hospital, he had another thing coming!

"You seem a little rattled."

"Once again, you're the one looking like somebody kicked your teeth in," Thea muttered, wondering why the guy was arguing the point to someone pointing a knife barely an inch from his face. "And what were you thinking taking on four guys alone anyway? There are easier ways to off yourself."

"Like I'm assuming you did, I heard someone calling for help and I came," the beta remarked smoothly, lifting a bloody finger to poke at the flat of the blade, grin widening when she held it firmly against his micro-assault. "And isn't it a little hypocritical to get all up in my face when you just did the same thing?"

"That is not the same thing at all," Thea jerked backward, wiping her knife on her pant angrily and stowing it in her sleeve. "I have training, unlike you. I can handle myself. You can't. So why don't you do everyone a favor and stay home next time."

"And what happens to the next girl cornered in an alley at night? I'm not a nice guy but I'm not a coward that runs from a fight either. And unless you get your rocks off by killing dudes, which- " Hoodie boy gestured to her leather sleeve with a perplexed look. "You just might, than I don't expect you coming back around these parts to save anybody."

"I might surprise you!" Though up until this moment, visiting the Glades again had been the furthest thing from her mind. What is it with idiots getting under her skin? Glancing down the alley, her bike was still where she had left it; thought that could be because she had taken the keys with her, but even so: small mercies!

"You know, you might wanna get your other knife from that last guy you dropped."

Oh. So numb-nuts actually had a tolerable suggestion? Who'd have thunk it? Stomping past proved difficult weaving between blood pools and the alpha bumped into the guy, glaring at him when he steadied her, and knelt to retrieve her knife from the warm corpse. Nose wrinkling from the permeating scent of iron, Thea avoided touching the body and tugged on the handle, swearing when it resisted her pull.

"For someone that just killed that guy, you seem a little squeamish over there."

"I'm not!" Thea insisted, gingerly applying pressure to the dead man's back and pulling back on the knife.

"Would be a little more convincing if you weren't guarding those high heels like they were made of gold." Busted, she shot him a glare and longed to smash-in the bastard's arrogant face, but failed to convince herself that the mouthy beta actually deserved a beating.
"What do you care what I wear?" She growled, needing to prove that her heels really weren't a big deal and planted one of them on the corpse's back end and tugged backward, the blade sliding free with a crack. Oh well, a broken rib was not about to hurt a dead guy.

"Aren't you worried the police are going to come looking for you?" Hood boy countered.

Thea couldn't be bothered to deal with the idiocy of Starling City's finest. And even if they did find anything, the alpha felt confident that Felicity would arrange for a convenient lab accident for any trace of Thea Queen that appeared in the database.

"Not really," she admitted, taking a second to wonder why she was still talking to this moron. "And your welcome, you know, for saving your life. I'd stay away from the fighting if I were you because you are sooo not good at it."

Turning to leave, a hand grabbed her wrist. Training kicking in, Thea automatically twisted free and seized her attacker's wrist and twisted it until hoodie boy was kneeling on the ground in front of her, hissing in pain.

"Had enough?" Thea intended to snarl but it came out embarrassingly closer to a purr. Oh God, please don't let him have noticed that!

"Teach me to do this," the beta gasped, turning to look her in the eye with such an earnest look that she nearly choked.

"Are you out of your mind?" The moron was delusional!

Dropping his arm like a ton of bricks, the guy winced but got to his feet and looked her dead in the eye. "You saved my life and as small as you are, you dropped four guys and none of them were pushovers. Teach me."

"We don't even know each other?" She replied stupidly. Okay, Thea, she scolded herself internally; what the hell kind of comeback was that?

"I'm Roy," the beta extended a strong looking hand dotted with blood. "And you are?"

"--I am absolutely not teaching you jack shit!" Thea spun and pressed her advantageous uninjured status to run back to her bike. "Have a nice life, moron!"

Hopping on and starting the engine, she absolutely did not look back toward the alleyway where boy wonder was left with a body count she felt no inclination to atone for.

Humming to herself while racing home, Thea never noticed she had forgotten about Oliver for even if it was an incredibly small period of time.

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74 hours since Oliver's disappearance and he had far too little to show for it. Of course, Starling City's finest had absolute squat even though the news dramatically came up with incredible angles and storylines despite the absolute lack of leads the public realm had on the disappearance of the Merlyn scions.

In a room reeking of sweat and fear, Slade planted his foot into the centre of a scrawny, blonde A.R.G.U.S. operative's back and applied pressure, twisting the scumbag's wrist upward and opposite the man beneath him, slipping the shoulder out of joint with a delightful pop.
"I don't fucking know anything!"

"That's strange." Slade applied pressure to the dislocated limb, the agent floundering and sobbing like a baby. "Because I worked for the Australian government for years. And let me tell you, they are not the cushy sort like your pansy-ass CIA or traitorous scumbags like your precious A.R.G.U.S."

"Please." A piteous moan with teary, mossy eyes blinking up at him rapidly. Pathetic.

Deliberately ignoring the quavering man's call, Slade continued in a light tone. "Right. As I was telling you, my information might not be the most current, but I certainly know things." Seeing the bulging eyeballs threatening to pop out of the man's sockets, the alpha patted the man's head like he would a dog. "If our positions were reversed and you were the one interrogating me, I would know better than to claim I didn't know anything. See, I have to assume you are relatively new to your organization if you didn't catch the basics in interrogation tactics." Oh dear god, the man was muttering religious prayers under his breath. Sweet Christ. "And so, David, I know that you won't have a clue where your boss hang's her coat, but inside the puny little skull of yours is a whole other ballgame. You know names. You know locations of headquarters and safe houses. You know things that you don't even realize that you know. And I'm going to assist you along in squealing like a pig."

The bawling sack of flesh wailed wretchedly and--cured or not--fought the irrational urge to crush the man's skull just to watch his brain smatter across the concrete floor of the empty slaughterhouse.

Pausing, Slade lifted his nose to the air and grunted. Company would be incoming in no time judging from the scent. Too bad he didn't have time to clean up Davey's mess.

"Please, I really don't know anything about Waller taking your omega! You have to believe me."

The mention of Oliver's name triggered a reaction and, before he could stop himself, the Australian dropped his grip on the man's arm only to brutally smash his heel into the writhing alpha's hand to the floor and ground his heel into the fragile digits of the man's hand. Crunch.

The human pig wailed a litany that would not doubt have won him favors with the Oscars.

"Don't so much as think his name," Slade roared, satisfied by the vigorous, enthusiastic nodding from his guest.

"What is it with warehouses and bad guys?" Malcolm's snarky voice called from around the corner, in typical Merlyn fashion.

Turning to greet his father-in-law and friend, he noted the still healing cuts on the archer's face and felt a pang of remorse for bringing Sara into their lives. Felicity, looking impeccable as ever if a bit exhausted and pale held the alpha's arm while shooting his prisoner startlingly detached glance.

"Oh please help me! This guy just attacked me, please help me!" The trio looked down at the operative looking positively relieved to see the pair walking in as he shot Felicity an imploring look, obviously attempting to prey on her omega instincts. Too bad the moron had gotten the wrong idea.

"Oh we're definitely here to help," Malcolm smiled congenially, before lifting Felicity's hand to his face, sniffing it, and releasing it after nipping the flesh side of her palm slightly. Looking
back to their dismayed prisoner, the billionaire winked at him slyly. "Just not in the way you would prefer."

"True enough," Felicity's tone was like a leashed tornado, preparing to break free but she certainly smelled more than a little flustered in reaction to her alpha's proposition.

"I have things under control," Slade felt compelled to defend his rescue efforts for Oliver out of some primitive sense of insecurity that he felt ashamed to admit he was affected by.

"You're not going to help me?" The miserable prisoner moaned in disbelief, looking back and forth between them all in horror.

"Oh put a sock in it!" Slade smashed his fist into the man's gut, delighting when the man folded like a stack of twigs, gasping over and over.

"That kind of defeats the point of acquiring information," Felicity, bless her, ever the voice of reason like some beacon in the darkness. "And there are ways of getting it that don't involve beating them."

Now this he had to see. "Enlighten the room then."

"Nooo..."

"With pleasure," Felicity pulled a syringe free of her pocket with a cocky smile that was distressingly out of place on the tech savvy omega's face. In a swift motion that made Malcolm's face light with pride, Slade watched Felicity inject the A.R.G.U.S. bitch with unnecessary force.

Nothing obvious happened and Slade looked to Malcolm desperately and received a single shake of the man's head in answer while Felicity accepted a tablet her mate handed her and started rapidly attacking the screen.

"What are we--"

"This!" Felicity smugly smacked a button on the screen with a smile that could have drowned out the sun. "Now talk."

The operative sang like a bird with loose lips and eyes that looked to be screaming with each exchanged word.

Finally, Slade felt the hurricane within subside as relief settled in. Sighing in relief, the alpha stiffened when Malcolm's hand dropped onto his shoulder; what would be a completely comforting gesture to most was more akin to a grenade about to go off.

Not daring to breathe, he fought the urge to shove the other alpha's invading limb off and rip him a new one. Friend or not, the proximity was not something that Slade felt particularly comfortable with.

The fingers flexed once before releasing him with only the vague scent from the dry skin of Malcolm's palms left behind on his shoulder.

"Walk with me?"

Innocent query defiantly diplomatic in concept but definitely more of a command. Flexing against the verbal leash, Slade stared hard at the floor before wordlessly setting off for the opposite end of the dilapidated structure. Dodging puddles of questionable content and scuttling rats, his
friend wordless joined him a fair distance from the 'questioning.' Glancing back, it appeared Felicity had the situation well in hand; the blonde was poised like a scientist over an experiment, fingers dancing over the tablet in her hand while her victim writhed on the ground.

"You know, I never imagined sweet, little Felicity as the apathetic, master torturing type. You've done quite a number on that girl."

A far from subtle accusatory jab, but Malcolm flashed his pearly whites like a shark about to gobble up his next meal.

"I think I had very little to do with any of that." Malcolm's admiring gleam impossible to miss even in the low light, but Slade folded his arms and eyed the other man critically. "Prior to your arrival, Felicity was nearly killed by a man that was prepared to make her last moments on earth completely unpleasant. Since then, one could say she had a change of heart regarding those she perceives as criminal. Not unlike Oliver's change in perspective on Lian Yu, right? I'm just glad you were there to help him when he saw the ugly side of humanity."

Guilt's sting stung harshly and Slade felt the urge to apologize for making a statement that moments ago seemed perfectly agreeable. Looking at Felicity now, he couldn't help but picture his Oliver's quiet confidence grown on the back of experiencing and committing countless sorrows. The blonde was a victim of circumstance, drawn into conflict by necessity and a change the fabric of her soul.

"I'm sorry."

Words were hollow, but they were all Slade could offer on the back of the emotional blowout.

"No apology is necessary," Malcolm appeared to believe that which truly informed Slade how much the other man deserved one and that burned like a bitch. "There's a danger coming that may be potentially fatal for Oliver and Felicity and it's why I wanted to speak to you alone."

Shifting into offensive mode, Slade growled softly. "What have they done now?"

"A.R.G.U.S. is hardly an innocent party, but they hardly pose the threat that Ra's does. When Ra's comes, and believe me he could be here at any time, he will be here to reward us to or to punish us. And trust me, if this goes south, he won't hesitate to kill Oliver just to punish you for it."

It was not that Slade did not believe Malcolm, but hadn't the League pretty much declared their position with Sara's little appearance? As far as Slade was concerned, they weren't friends.

"What is it that you're not telling me? Aside from your organizations murderous tendencies, I fail to see how any outcome with them is going to be positive."

"We should leave Tommy and Oliver with A.R.G.U.S. until after we deal with the League."

"Are you out of your mind?" Repulsed by the mere suggestion, Slade takes several steps back while his blood pulsed, clamoring for his omega's swift return and rebelling against any delay. "I'll rescue him myself, but I am not going to let them remain captive a moment longer than necessary."

"And if the remaining, unwilling prisoners save them from being executed from Ra's while you and I implement my plan, I'm all for a temporary separation. You have to know the boys are tough enough to handle it."
The trouble was, Slade did know it, but railed against it on instinct and pure resentment. After being separated from his mate for years, permitting a moment of deliberate separation was almost too much to bear. But if Oliver died, there would be no recourse except to follow him. Surviving once, Slade credited that to the Mirakuru and his vision of Oliver, but twice would be too much even for him.

"Tell me more about the League and this plan of yours."

"Thank you, Slade. As someone who lost my first mate years ago, I can't tell you how thankful I am that you're willing to hear me out."

"Don't mention it." If his reply was edged by more potent gruffness than usual, Malcolm wisely refrained from commenting.

Dinner was a quiet affair prompted forward by the notable determination of one Donna Smoak clad in a festive apron with hearts and kisses. Felicity couldn't help but feel famished in spite of the circumstances. Glaring down at her abdomen sullenly, the blonde just knew that her closet full of dresses were not going to last more than a month, perhaps two if she was lottery-winning lucky. Either way, the omega had a sinking suspicion that she was going to be wider than a blimp and her current wardrobe would never fit the same again because she remember what her mother had mentioned about expanding hips. Oh she was cursed!

"And here we go!" Her mother deposited the last cutting board with a steaming pizza on the table with an exaggerated flourish and clapped her hands together in the form of perfect prayer hands. Oh mom, really? "Let's pray everyone?"

Semi-horrified, Felicity's eyes darted to the table's other two occupants to surprisingly find Slade restraining a comment tremendously well with only a bulging neck vein conveying annoyance. Malcolm, man had she won the jackpot, feigned enthusiasm like a pro and did not so much as bat an eye with the request, merely folded his hands and looked toward Donna indulgently.

Felicity felt her heart resume beating and relaxed a fraction.

Like a prima donna putting on the performance of a lifetime—not entirely inaccurate, Donna lifted her hands skyward and addressed the ceiling fan with gusto.

"Dear God, we are ever so thankful to be having this meal together as a complete family. "Oh fuck! We're missing the boys you idiot, was the omega's first thought and she all but swallowed her tongue, eyes bursting to look toward Slade who looked about ten different shades closer to becoming a tomato and begged God for a bit of divine intervention before the alpha exploded like a bomb or snapped and killed her mother. Either which, while understandable, was not in the best interest for the occupants of the room. "And we thank you for this delicious bounty of frozen pizzas! Amen!"

The front door opening and slamming shut in a house rattling motion was like the distraction that was meant to be the answer to her prayers! There was a God after all!

"Thea!" Felicity jumped to her feet and called down the hall urgently toward the aggravated smelling alpha, vocally begging the teen to save the day. "We just put some dinner on the table. Come eat? Please!!"

It didn't escape her notice that the other two alphas had noticeable perked up only to frown
as the footsteps thumped ever closer.

"I met some dumbass in the Glades tonight!" Eyes narrowing, Felicity felt her glower weigh heavy with disapproval from that little proclamation. Well, time to nip reckless behavior like that in the bud!

"Why were you in the Glades? That place is crawling with all sorts of dangerous lowlifes."

The looks from all three occupants of the table flew right over the spectacled blonde's head along with her own scent broadcasting threatening, protective hormones.

Thea sauntered in the hallway looking like she was some carefree... 'Care Bear!' Some people obviously had no sense of self-preservation. Clenching her hands, she zeroed in on Thea's blouse and flew around the table so fast that the two seated alphas hardly had an opportunity to get to their feet.

"You have blood all over your blouse!" Felicity exclaimed, gripping the sleeves of the leather jacket she was wearing and jerking backward, lowering her nose to sniff the sleeve! Sight going red, the omega ripped the jacket off the bony teens shoulders and hurled it to the ground. "What on earth happened!"

"Look," Felicity noted the young alpha's eyes darting to her mother and back nervously before the girl's expression took on a protesting note. "I'm just--"

"Oh save it!" Turning, the omega waved imperiously to the trio and snorted at the gobsmacked looks on the trio's faces. "You guys eat. Thea obviously got into a fight with her friend." She threw in a creative spin for Malcolm to calm her mother with. "I'm taking her upstairs to clean her up and handle the situation. I expect to have two plates of pepperoni pizza set aside for us when we get back. Clear?"

"Crystal," it appeared Malcolm had overcome his bout of shock and nodded approvingly. Slade looked a bit more bemused and a little less sad so Felicity would count her victories where she could get them.

"Oh sweetheart, you're turning into a perfect, little mother. I'm so proud of you."

Pretending her mother had said nothing was infinitely more practical than acknowledging the senseless abomination of her impending motherhood?

"Thea, we're going upstairs." Whatever brought out that particular cowed state of mind to Thea Queen, Felicity found herself relieved that she would not have to argue the point. "March!"

The young alpha groaned but did an about face and plodded toward the stairwell, all the while muttering under her breath about overbearing omegas. Good. If these alphas just accepted the natural order around here, they wouldn't have any more problems.

On their way up, Felicity once again pretended not to hear Malcolm echo her mother's sentiment.

"Felicity is going to be a wonderful mother."

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"The Twin Archers have quite the rap sheet, Mr. Queen." Amanda Waller's silky voice maintaining a facade of goodwill that challenged the blonde's control; but the omega coolly
reminded himself that any show of weakness would be instantly preyed upon by the venomous beta. Well, and the techno grade cuffs attached to a titanium interrogation table, did not exactly give him much leeway for an escape attempt let alone giving him a crack at another attempted murder charge. "It's quite the shame that you dragged your brother into this mess. Or maybe I should be thanking you. After all, Tommy Merlyn has skills that I can definitely put to use around here."

'Don't react,' he ordered himself. After all that had been done to him--foremost, separation from his alpha--Oliver found it nearly impossible to maintain an aloof demeanor. But Malcolm Merlyn's son was not about to surrender so quickly to a simple statement regarding his brother; shuttering his emotions, Oliver observed the beta fold her hands and sit up, obviously realizing her initial baiting tactic had failed: access denied bitch!

When the door of his prison finally opened, Oliver behaved like a docile sheep and permitted the guards to cuff his hands; not once did the omega complain, not even when a guard prodded his shoulder aggressively nor when the alpha of the two copped a feel of his buttocks in a way that made him feel less than clean.

"I suppose I should inform you what the implant next to your spine is for."

"Tracking device. Explosive device. Obvious."

The stilted response appeared to have jumpstarted the operative's creativity like some dark symphony; the light in her eyes, the upturned lips, the seductive yet cozy posture ignited the viciousness in the dark skinned woman and she leaned forward with a radiance like exploding fireworks bursting with rapid precision over the woman's face.

"Yes," the word a caress as she leaned forward lightly and the archer unwittingly found himself intimidated by the inky darkness in the blown pupils scarce inches away. "Except yours is much more special. If you contradict a single command or decide to cause me any grief, I blow up your brother."

Tommy looked like a hangover victim with squinting blood shot eyes when they ushered the alpha from his cell, the brunette protesting vehemently the rough treatment and the tightness of the manacles.

"Endure it."

The only comfort he offered and though he instantly felt guilty, the survivor in him knew that coddling his brother would slim their chances of making it out of this alive far more than anything else. Ignoring the betrayed, owlish blinking from his sibling, Oliver focused on counting the number of steps, while his eyes calculated the number of doors and the rough layout of the hallway as they were ushered down a flight of stairs.

"Touch me again and I'll break your arm!" The Merlyn alpha raged behind him, smelling overwhelmingly of heightened adrenaline and anger even from behind the omega.

Recognizing the serious tone, Oliver scuffed his feet and resisted the pull on the electronic cuffs momentarily and tossed a look over his shoulder at the bristling guards lifting their tasers toward the threatening--if dead on his feet--brother.

"Tommy," he snapped, his scent spiking in his irritation that enabled the omega to defuse the spat between the biological warfare going on with bared teeth. "A.R.G.U.S guards are constantly bored because security is the lowest clearance level." That earned him baleful regard from all in the room save his irate sibling who had cocked his head, vibrant blues pleading for help. "You're making
their day. Settle it down."

"What do you want?"

Why was life always throwing curve balls? Maybe he deserve a slice of apple pie life with Slade but he sure as hell wanted it all the same; no fears, no worries, no death. Just joy.

"You see, Mr. Queen. Someone very close to you contacted me and expressed concern with your proximity to your father."

Bile rose in his throat and his ears pounded until he could see nothing at all. Who? His fingers itched for the absent bow even if he wouldn't know whom to aim at. Unless he did... after all, there was only one individual on the planet that begged him in daily texts to not believe his father and to stay far, far away. Mom... what have you done?

"What do you want?"

"Well," the devil smiled softly and tugged his strings like an expert puppet master. "I'm assembling a taskforce of individuals with certain skills. You're going to be codename: taskforce X. I'll have them take you down to meet your new squadmate after your brother learns to suck it up."

The door swung wide as the bolt opened and a large, spacious room with a myriad of weapons and training equipment appeared before their eyes.

"Get in there, Queen!"

Stepping into the room, he glanced from the targets until he settled on a man standing in an orange uniform matching his own.

"These suits have been mouthing off about some partners," a brash, lanky male uttered with a queer touch of confidence in his smirk. "Welcome to the Suicide Squad!"

Slade, hurry.

"All that you were is gone. And now, all that you are is what I allow you to be."
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

So, this chapter, for now, is not edited by anyone save me due to a list of reasons that are not mine to offer. My beta reader will get around to it when she has time. So any mistakes are definitely mine.

Also, I have considered making short chapters that would be posted much more frequently, but I'm not sure it would make a difference to all of you. If you actually have a preference for longer but more infrequent versus the shorter more frequent, you can let me know. Otherwise, I'll just do what I can do.

I want to thank all of you who have stayed the course with me on this incredible writing journey. All I can say is you're all amazing and thank you all for your support!

Thank you for your assistance.

The bouquet of roses that Raisa deposited on the coffee table were the picture of elegance with the mix of long-stemmed white and crimson roses in an exquisite bunch, artfully arranged in an antique collector's dream-vase. The costly floral arrangement was secondary to the mocking ridicule of a note sealed in a thick, monogrammed envelope that betrayed the sender's identity with the flourished M that renewed the beta's nausea and made the tray of tea and scones upon the table turn her stomach from the scent alone.

Each new encounter with Malcolm Merlyn left Moira reeling as the isolation between herself and her children widened until a chasm divided them, leaving the mother helpless to span the distance separating them. Knowing what the alpha was capable of left her to sleepless nights and dreams of outcomes ending in freshly turned earth while each night a different name tormented her upon a marble headstone.

After her last unfortunate encounter with the alpha, the beta had isolated herself in her home; away from the pleas from the board and away from the whispers of the media following Malcolm's proclamation claiming fatherhood of her son. Not to say that her legal team hadn't visited and a hideous amount of letters that looked like miniature mountains stacked precariously on her desk--likely notes containing the personal opinions of half the country's brownnosing crowd that had nothing better to do than provide unwanted commentary on her life that was falling apart quite well enough without the parade of ridicule.

And now a note that renewed the mother's rampant nightmares and caused her knees to lock and her fingers to shake ever so slightly. Breathing heavily, she scanned the parchment again, searching for some possible explanation for the contents of the notes, but coming up empty. A thank you note made no sense; her previous encounter with her ill-advised lover had been anything but beneficial to the home-wrecking alpha and after deliberately having her son removed from his situation, the note made no sense at all.

Crinkling the note into a ball, Moira hurled it at the fireplace where it landed on a
cheerfully cracking log and instantly lit up with a healthy, yellowish flame. Definitely not a victory, but it felt better than nothing.

"We need to discuss the Undertaking."

"Oh I'm sure you intend to give me the credit for this little genocide of yours," Moira laughed tonelessly and shivered despite the layers she was wearing.

"A necessary evil," the alpha folded his hands neatly and the beta wondered what she had ever found attractive about the vampire. The bastard's icy demeanor would surely create a cold front even south of the border. "But with A.R.G.U.S. set to isolate Slade and some of my mutual friends coming into town, we have a lot on our plate. So, keeping your mouth shut is all I ask. Simple. Clean. You won't have to get those dainty hands of yours dirty."

It had taken a few days to muster up the nerve, but Malcolm had made his last mistake when he dropped that little nugget into her lap and she absolutely refused to sit on it. Of course, Moira had recruited the assistance of a computer specialist that had tracked down the organization Advanced Research Group United Support as an obscure operation with ties to both the FBI and CIA respectively. To imagine that a covert--probably black ops--type group was tracking Oliver's companion had been shocking and rather scary. That in mind, as a mother, Moira opted to reach out to the organization with the hopes they could help her.

After Malcolm's threat regarding Thea, Moira was hesitant to do anything, but learning that the alpha had once again escaped an assassination ploy had been enough to push her over the edge.

Using the number retrieved by her personal hacker, Moira made contact with a woman named Lyla that had been sympathetic to her concerns and assured her that they would be happy to take Oliver out of harm's way until their agency dealt with Malcolm and that foul--far too old--alpha sleeping with her son.

Certainly she had felt uncomfortable knowing that her baby was kidnapped--even for the greater good--but Malcolm was dangerous. Perhaps this Slade Wilson even more so. But the beta felt confident that there was no way for the man to pin the blame on her when the organization had already been actively looking for them.

Until the roses.

Grasping the phone off her desk, she punched in Malcolm's cell number that she had long since memorized and waited with dread in her gut and gnawed the end of a fingertip restlessly.

"Moira, always a pleasure." Oh, she was sure it was for that sadistic bastard. Taking a deep breath, she fanned her neck with her hand as a hot flash crept up on her and drowned her in a perpetual ocean of heat. "Did you like the flowers?"

Having no desire to listen to the viper's voice longer than necessary, she went on the immediate offensive. "What did you mean?"

"Care to specify?"

Slamming her fists on the desk, she gritted her teeth from the jarring vibrations as her frustration coursed her veins like an icy bath.

"You know exactly what I meant, Malcolm! I certainly haven't done anything except ignore you since our last, unfortunate encounter. So do me the courtesy of being honest."
"True," the businessman quipped and an urge to track the man down and shoot him in the face flared briefly, but knew it would be a futile venture all the same. "But you took the bait I laid out for you just like I knew you would. You've always been predictable, Moira. It's one of the many reasons I always look forward to our time together."

Oh God, no. Skin clammy and having difficulty breathing, Moira's knees folded and she found herself splayed on her side, inches away from curved leg of Robert's mahogany desk. The phone was still pressed tight against her ear in a tight grip and the blonde heaved in a panicked breath, alarmed by the reverberating chuckle from the alpha in her ear.

Predictable? What? All at once, it was difficult to breathe and she was gasping for air and clawing at her throat.

"Take a deep breath, Moira. In and out for me." To her horror, she felt her body comply with the alpha's relaxed order and blood flow resumed and her breathing stabilized. "Very good. I would be absolutely devastated if something happened to you." Shut up, Moira thought fuzzily as her vision blurred and tears fell freely from her eyes, flooding her nostrils with scent of salt. "I'm sure you're surprised to hear that I knew about you contacting A.R.G.U.S. for me, but really, Moira. You're a savvy CEO like myself, you should know by now that if I give you information, I do expect you to make use of it."

Why would he do that? Having his sons kidnapped did not exactly appear to benefit the knothead in any obvious way. Why? Why? Why? No matter which was she looked at it, the equation came out wrong and unsolvable. What variable was she missing here?

"I don't understand." Her voice croaked like an inflated bullfrog and she fought against the rug under her cheek as she coaxed her limbs into a semi-sitting position propped against the desk leg.

"Let's just say this makes a business merger of mine a whole lot simpler, particularly since you have provided us with a legitimate scapegoat." Maternal instinct crumbled and the beta heard a loud ringing in her ears as her vision spotted with white. Suddenly it was only too obvious. Oh God... he wanted her son with them. This was just another opportunity to puff himself like a peacock and turn himself into the good guy and frame her...

How could she have been so stupid?

"Why are you doing this?" Please stop, would have been a more ineffective plea and it took everything she had to continue pleading with her tormentor.

"Because I will settle for nothing less than total victory."

Click.

Oliver. Thea. No, please, no.

Moira allowed the trauma of what she had done carry her into blissful unconsciousness.

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Glancing at her phone, the blonde smiled softly when the confirmed delivery notification popped up from the floral shop and snapped her phone shut with a light click. By her estimation, her mate would be receiving an aggravated phone call in a little while from Moira. Oops! Too bad she would not be there to snap a photo of the look on his face!

Now, time to get ready because there was plenty to do before the Ra's meeting later on!
Fumbling with her purse, Felicity unzipped the butter soft leather and presto! Lifting her new jeweled butterfly hairclip into her hand, she slipped it in place and twirled in place; admiring the glint of twinkling sapphires amid the amber wings, she eyed her appearance critically and frowned.

While the omega was still the same girl who hacked government servers and built her own supercomputer with her free time, inside Felicity felt conflict for the first time since getting together with Malcolm. Two days ago, she had been an active participant in torturing another human being for information using nanite technology of her own creation. Looking down at the glittering stone in the ring on her finger that spoke volumes, much as her blended scent did, to the strength of her relationship. But even love made her question her convictions when she considered the night before.

The man she tortured had screamed and plead in the name of faceless children he would never see again, and all because she had pressed a button. No human being should have that sort of absolute power she now possessed simply by possessing a mind that saw beyond the lines of computer coding to the possibilities lying just within reach.

Strangely though, what kept her up at night was a lecture in her philosophy class; in particular, a discussion of Lyn White's simplistic statement that was her choice of topic for her term paper. “The greatest ethical test that we're ever going to face is the treatment of those who are at our mercy.” It made the blonde question her own motives even though Felicity found the reasoning for her actions...necessary.

And here she was rationalizing the mistreatment of another human...that did not exactly sit well with her.

Taking her thumb and swiping at a teeny smear of mascara, Felicity grumbled to herself and reached for her lip gloss. Like a jack-in-the-box, her mother popped into view causing her to let out a shrill, girlish shriek and jumped back against the marble countertops of the ludicrously oversized, yet deliciously luxurious bathroom--okay, she adored it!

"Anything wrong in here, darling?"

"Wrong? No, why would anything be wrong?" Flumoxed, the blonde fidgeted with the waistband of her new couture skirt and smoothed it apprehensively. No bump--not yet--and not a wrinkle in sight so obviously she was fine. Of course she was.

"Well honey, you just kinda look a little green around the gills so I thought you might want this." A heavy metal basin was matter of factly presented to her and though she would have sworn up and down that she had felt fine up until then, the omega instantly hurled into the bowl. When did her mother's intelligence exceed her own? God, she was going to have words with this child when they reached teen years!

Child. Oh. This was actually happening. Shit.

"Oh that grandbaby of mine is giving you trouble again," her mother cooed in disgusting delight, brushing her hair back with her hand. "But don't worry, you can just tell him that grandma is going to move to the city so that she can be close to him. Yes she is!"

Oh no. Oh no no no no no!

Promptly, Felicity vomited again.

Warm hands rubbed her shoulders and it felt reassuring even though she knew she must look an absolute disaster now that her eyes were dripping tears and snot was leaking from her nose.
"I'll take over from here, Donna."

Sweet relief, thy name is alpha! Like an addict, she sucked in a desperate breath of Malcolm's rich, heady aroma and abandoned the filled basin and followed her nose to her suit-clad billionaire and all but collapsed against him. Like magic, the man's arms adjusted and out of nowhere she found herself admiring the blue ceiling design and blinking owlishly at the light in the bathroom.

Vaguely she was aware of her mother's hasty retreat by the disappearing sound of heel clicks and she relaxed, pressing her face into the rich sweat gland at the base of Malcolm's neck.

"I'm disgusting right now. Sorry."

"I think your worries have made you ill, not our son."

"Son?" How in the world had he deduced such a thing? Maybe he could smell it?

"Not that you have any evidence at all," Felicity muttered dubiously as she all but melted against the puffy goose-down pillows in her bedroom. Oooh that felt positively scrumptious and maybe this absolutely had to be a slice of heaven. "And I think it's a girl and a clever omega one to boot!"

Not really, but she could not just let him walk away so utterly smug. Though, considering the personality of young Thea, perhaps she should retire to an empty corner and pray for a string of sons to avoid the woes of a female teen.

"I suppose we'll sort out the results of our little wager in a few months."

"Indeed." Now there was an incredibly bemused cast to the man's face as little crinkles split around those vibrant sapphires that just sexified her man that much more. "So, flowers hmm?"

"I couldn't resist!" And boy was that true. For whatever reason, Felicity just could not stand the other woman even a little bit and so the blonde reflexively grasped one of the feather pillows and squeezed it angrily. "I don't know what it is, but something about that woman just makes my skin crawl!"

"Jealous, are we?" Sultry fingers slinked up her back and rubbed her neck tenderly. Oh that was good. Pressing back against the massaging fingertips, the omega all but purred on the alpha's tender ministrations.

"Jealous?" She parroted dumbly before her brain kicked into high gear and denial burst from her mouth. "Absolutely not. I have nothing to be jealous of! Not her naturally blonde hair nor anything else. I'm not. Definitely not jealous."

"Perhaps not," the baritone brushed against her ear, sending a chill up her spine even as the heady scent retreated with an almost apologetic kiss placed at her collarbone. Callused palms patted her back apologetically and she moaned as they retreated with a apologetic pat. "And even if you were jealous, I would just tell you that you're already everything that I want and you have nothing to worry about." God, how could she ever doubt this man? Loving him was like drowning in a pool of sinful heaven? "I have to attend a meeting with the board and set Thea up to take over until the storm is behind us. Besides, this will be good practice for her once Moira is out of the way."

"You're always thinking in the future terms," Felicity gripped his hand and pulled harshly until the weathered cobalt eyes turned to look upon her questioningly. "I think it's what makes you so successful, but don't forget what's happening in the present with our family."
"How could I possibly forget." The fingers slide into a full palm that moves to trace her abdomen with a besotted look that Felicity never experienced from her own absent father. Moments like this were what families were made of. "Our life together is just beginning, Felicity. Everything we're doing is what we have to do for all of our children's happiness. We want the future to be safe and happiness to be assured."

Eyes watering, she wiped furiously at her eyes, turning away and taking a breath. 'Get it together,' she ordered herself. 'Come on, girl. Malcolm's right. Keep it together.'

"I'm sorry," she choked, gripping her pillow in fisted fingers. "I know you're right, I just hate that the boys are with them right now when we know exactly where they are!"

"I miss them too," her normally stoic lover buried his grief beneath the mask of stoicism like the practiced pro he was, causing the blonde's heart to ache for her poor mate. "While delaying their rescue is regrettable, it's the best possible choice we could make. I'm going downstairs to make a few calls, but I shouldn't be gone long so take it easy, alright?"

It was only through force of will that the blonde allowed the alpha to completely disentangle himself and slip away. For a moment, she clung to his larger palm and traced one of the few remaining scabs with the tip of her finger before releasing him reluctantly.

"Come back to me."

"Always." The confident alpha smiled and pressed a kiss to her palm before turning to seize a throw at the bottom of the bed and tossing it expertly over her shivering form and tucking in the corners. Without ever addressing her misgivings, the man had eased her fears without needing to voice so much as a whisper. Strictly speaking, she felt ashamed of her doubts and didn't want to fill Malcolm's plate any more than it already was.

Knowing it was only her biology screaming did not make it any easier for the pregnant omega to watch her alpha walk away. As a person that believed in mind over matter, she was astonished by the tremendous amount of effort she was forced to expend to protest the man stepping through the door and walking away. Her own nostrils flared as her body excreted a high dose of distressed pheromones that she felt certain would bring her mate charging back in. It did not.

The door did indeed swing inward, filling the room with an alpha presence, but it was a broad, muscular Australian and not Malcolm that entered their territory. The predatory, slinky movements of Oliver's mate spoke volumes and alerted the blonde that this was far from a social call considering how daring the man was being as he intruded into the private chambers of an alpha that was technically a superior in their hierarchy.

"Slade?" The hair on the back of her neck stood up and the omega heard her voice crack and saw something darken in the man's eyes that belonged in mug shots and scary movies. The man in front of her was not Oliver's mate, rather this was the special forces operative that patrolled dark alleys and killed without second guessing. Oliver's alpha made her laugh. This man made her tremble.

"Hello, Felicity," the heavily accented drawl played over her skin as the man approached with the light steps of a practiced predator that vibrated a frightening, feral demeanor; feeling trapped like a rat, Felicity threw back the covering and inched her way to her knees in a pose that would hopefully permit her to flee if necessary. "Forgive me for the impromptu drop in, but no matter how many times I go over my conversation with Malcolm the other day, I feel like something was missing. And she agreed with me."
She? Uh oh. Had Thea and Slade puzzled something out without Malcolm realizing it? This would teach her mate not to allow her to bug their house with surveillance bugs! Shooting a glance to the window, she winced as her fear of heights kicked in and looked toward the cracked doorway behind the towering alpha and waited to spring.

"I don't know what you mean," she remarked, oddly composed even though she got the distinct sense tense man in front of her was hardly hearing her. Channeling Malcolm, Felicity looked the man square in the eye and summoned every ounce of creativity she possessed to finagle her way out of this with a bit of finesse—except that her opportunity never came.

A sudden flicker of something harsh and lethal edged its way into Slade's eyes and she blinked only to find herself pressed forcefully and painfully hard against the head board. Instantly, the blonde thrashed and clawed at the fist gripping her throat, her scream stifled by a palm that still faintly smelled of Oliver Queen.

"I allowed myself to believe Malcolm's perfect little lies for long enough," the alpha hissed dangerously close to her ear. Tears resurfaced and she whined piteously as the man shook her rough enough to rattle her teeth and surface her fears.

Oh God, my baby. Tugging fretfully at the alpha's hands, she struggled vainly to get the man off. The man's knees were painfully resting on her thighs, effectively pinning her like a ragdoll despite her earnest efforts to free herself from Slade's grasp. Each failed attempt to dislodge the bigger man brought about horrible feelings of fear and remorse for failing to protect herself and for failing to see what their plan was doing to Slade's sanity.

The hands squeezed her throat again and she choked, gagging from lack of air as her vision spotted. Please God, don't let this be it for my child. Please! Please!

"In a moment, I'm going to remove my hand, but believe me when I tell you that if attract your mother's attention, I will kill her in front of you."

Prepared to agree to anything at this point, Felicity shook her head in vigorous agreement, even if her motions were restricted. Think fast, she urged her brain, rapidly considering the faults in their current plan while examining the visibly shaking man with eyes that seemed wild like an animal rather than a human male. Something was wrong and even in her precarious predicament, the blonde wanted to repair the torn relationship with the man in front of her and preserve the life growing inside her.

"Excellent," Slade's tone reverted to a dangerously congenial tone that Felicity felt more than a little uncertain about. The grip on her throat and mouth went slack and she gulped in a breath of air and prayed that Malcolm finished his call and returned quickly because time was running out and she still had no ideas.

"I want you to know that I didn't want to have to do this to you." Although Slade certainly sounded remorseful and even presented the perfect, grieving alpha, there was a madness in the depths of his eyes that shone like a kindled flame.

Why would he do this? Each moment offered her another opportunity to categorize and rationalize the man's behavior, but his statements coupled with his behavior still felt premature for a man that literally jumped off rooftops and waged war on street thugs with their family. Something drastic, something strange must have set the man off. But what?

"Slade, this isn't like you! You wouldn't go around hurting people that you care about!" Desperation mitigated her fear and she threw caution to the wind and plead in hushed, exaggerated
"And I love him!" Slade interjected bitterly, sweat beading on the big man's brow. Wait... sweat. That made next to no sense. While aggressive, there should be little to no exertion in restraining herself---further blow to the ego there. "Which is why when my gut is telling me that something smells funky, I'm going to follow the stench. And I feel more than confident that you know what I'm talking about, don't you Felicity?"

Maybe. Maybe not. Either way, confessing to an unknown accusation carried more risks than possible rewards at this point. Time to try another approach.

"Slade, you don't look well," the omega in her urged caution even as she wrapped an arm protectively around her stomach and she continued to whisper lies faithfully in the ear of the enraged man. "Please, let me take you back to the hospital and we'll see if you have an infection or something. You have to know that you're not making sense. This isn't you, Slade."

"I don't need a hospital!" The alpha jerked back and ripped open his t-shirt over his bandaged injury--what the hell? Audibly gasping, Felicity leaned forward to look at the expanse of undamaged tissue marred only by slight mark barely the size of a nickel. There was no way an injury like that could have healed so fast or left such a faint mark. There was no logical explanation except...

"The Mirakuru!" Ignoring the fact that Slade had just violently assaulted her, Felicity lunged at the Australian, not missing the slight pop to the man's eyes as she grasped him and felt his clammy forehead. "The cure that Sara shot you with. It didn't work. But you still look like crap, that doesn't make sense either. Slade, you have to believe me when I say that you're confused and I really, really just want to help you here."

"You have to be lying," Slade muttered to himself, shaking slightly as he jerked back and away from her questing fingers like a fidgeting toddler. Still, Felicity witnessed the doubt cloud the dark man's eyes before the expression shuttered. All she had to do was pick until the emotions unravelled.

"Slade, if that cure was only a temporary fix, you might continue to have after-effects. Please just let me help you." Seeing the unwavering look to the trembling alpha's posture, Felicity reached out to lay a hand on the man, jumping like a startled bunny when the man recoiled as if burned and the final piece of evidence she needed fell into place.

"Withdrawal, of course!" Moving back to create space between them, she breathed a sigh of relief, not missing the wince from the big man as lines of remorse tugged at his mouth. "I should have put that together days ago. No wonder you've been acting so apish. So listen, you have to understand that-

"I don't care about me right now!" The big man spun away from her, planted his hands on his knees and panted so violently, the omega feared he might collapse into a heart attack at any moment. Something inside the blonde shattered as the man turned back toward her looking utterly gutted and desperate in a way that tore at her emotions. "Malcolm keeps spouting a line about how dangerous the League is, but so what? There is obviously an endgame here that I'm not seeing. Tell me there isn't Felicity! Tell me!"

A thousand confessions warred within her breast. If she fancied, Felicity could reveal countless plots against Moira, big business, and the seedier walks of life. One thing that her mate constantly remarked upon was how false the lie sounded to the ears compared to the ring of truth. But the real complication was what was safe to tell him and what was important enough that he
Wetness hit her hand and she glanced downward, surprised when another salty drop dripped down her cheek to soak the front of her blouse.

"Malcolm wants to eliminate Ra's al Ghul completely without compromising the safety of our family because he feels it's the only way to put a permanent end to the issue with the League." Felicity deliberately looked askance and fixated on the wall as if it alone held the secrets to the universe while presenting a portrait of honesty that--with a dash of luck--Slade might believe. Inside, she felt hollow and a tad resentful for being responsible for the downtrodden alpha's emotional turmoil. "And when A.R.G.U.S. picked the boys up..."

"He saw a chance," Slade sagged backward, the muscled giant allowing the bed to catch his weight as he succumbed to violent shivering. In the back of her mind, Felicity felt a bit shocked that the raging Australian had accepted her answer so easily, but seeing the bloodshot eyes and the distraught twang to the man's scent truly said it all: exhaustion. Poor Slade, the man's thinking was obviously impaired.

"Hold on," Felicity tentatively moved forward and seized the abandoned afghan and wrapped it around the quivering mass of muscles and pulled the resisting Australian backward until the alpha collapsed against the surface for a time. Reaching behind her, she avoided her own pillows and yanked one of Malcolm's luxury pillows out with a tug. "If you can lift your head for me, I'll slide this under for you." Like a broken soldier, he complied soundlessly, glazed eyes looking far and away into a future only he could see. "That's gonna feel much better."

"I'm sorry for hurting you," Slade's words came at a sluggish pace, a single tear falling from bloodshot, dark eyes. "I know if Oliver were here, he would be ashamed of how suspicious I've become."

"If I was going through what you were, I can imagine I would have seen conspiracy theories everywhere." Though knowing what she knew now, Felicity would be hard-pressed to believe any bit of proof she hadn't dug up herself. Gosh she hated lying to him. "Just take it easy."

Felicity sat next to the still alpha for quite a while, staring into space and keeping vigil. After a time, she rubbed at a particularly tender spot on her neck only for a low growl from the doorway to yank her to attention.

"What's going on here?" The low, threatening query caused the both of them to jerk upward in fright.

Felicity jumped and the other alpha retreated backward as if scalded. Malcolm, like a dark avenger, appeared seemingly out of thin air, even his scent abruptly tantalizing her nostrils. In the space of two seconds, her mate was looming over her, all business as he grasped her hand and smelled her. The temperamental alpha's frown deepened when his eyes flickered to her throat and Felicity swallowed reflexively, awed by the feral posture of the typically controlled male.

Receding footsteps alerted her to Slade's departure and while she was relieved, she definitely felt a portion of responsibility for being one of the factors that brought the big man to this juncture.

Impulsively, the blonde snatched up Malcolm's hand and squeezed it once and felt a surge of pleasure when the older man returned the affectionate gesture despite the simmering scent glands exuding discontent.
"Please don't be hard on him," Felicity dropped her head in a primal offering of submission, maintaining an even yet hopeful tone. "Slade's a good man, but he's confused." Malcolm's light hum suggested he picked up on her hint, but she still knew that the assassin needed all the facts before even the remote possibility of evoking goodwill could exist. "The cure didn't work. And not only that, but he's been hit hard by withdrawal. I'm surprised he's even functioning with all that's gone on. So, I realize that you have every right to be upset and I'm not exactly thrilled, but I get it. You know, sort of. So be nice? Please?"

"As you wish.". She turned her face up and squeaked as a bare of lips ghosted over her own before kissing her heartily. 'Oh no I just threw up like fifteen minutes ago!' Even so, the aftertaste did not seem to have deterred her mate much and the blonde felt a little disturbed by his enthusiasm as a tongue sought entry that she willingly granted and snaked inward to coax her own into a carnal dance.

A moment later, Malcolm retreated with a sigh and brushed the hair out of her face and tweaked her nose like he would an amusing child. Not the best comparison and the blonde winced slightly.

"Stay here."

No problem, she thought, curling into the bedding and turning away from the no doubt unpleasant conversation to come.

'O Oliver, hold on. Slade isn't going to make it without you for too much longer.'

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Out of the room stepped his father-in-law, ally, and friend that had just cause to exact punishment on him. Had their positions been reversed and he discovered Oliver in a similar state, the other man would not have escaped his presence unscathed.

"I don't expect you to forgive me, but I do want you to know that I am sorry and that I never intended to harm her." Slade spoke mechanically while looking at the far wall; the Australian offered no excuse for his action as he would not have believed a word of it anyway.

Slade's mind was unravelling like a tapestry and all that was left were remnants of a once sane person that would be better off confined than saved. Oliver's scent still clung to him like a stale perfume, awaiting a proper breeze to erase all that they had become since their reunion. Even now, the alpha felt completely unsure if he still smelled his missing omega or if he was clinging to a fantasy that existed only in his mind.

Glancing down the hallway toward the winding stairwell, Shado stood with her arms folded with an unimpressed glare; his long-dead companion lifted her father's bow and drew the string. Even from the not insignificant distance, Slade could hear the slide of the bow and the adjustment as an arrow slipped into place. Bracing himself, he could not help but flinch and stagger backward like a drunkard, taking a few moments to breathe and stare back down the empty hallway.

Shit, he really was losing it.

"Slade." Malcolm. Searching for the source of the noise, the alpha blearily followed the sound to the older alpha wearing a distinctively agitated frown while still managing to look contemplative. Slade scoffed lightly, blinking as his vision swam momentarily. "You're not well."
What was the use in denial when the assassin could smell a lie from a mile off.

"No, I'm afraid not." Been a wreck since your son vanished, Slade thought vaguely.

"After my first wife's untimely passing, I've become far beyond protective of my remaining family members, Felicity in particular." Shocker. Slade felt another blow strike his armor, leaving a crack to his facade. "It wouldn't take an intelligent individual to tell me that you're not in your right mind at the moment, but crazy or not, you touch my omega again and I'll bury you. That said, I do forgive you this one indiscretion because we are friends and family."

His anxiety fluctuated before settling and Slade reached out and patted Malcolm's shoulder once, unable to articulate his gratitude as he was so overwhelmed by different emotions.

"I feel crazy." And breathing life into that belief was its own brand of horrifying.

"Keep it together for Ra's and I promise you that we will be that much closer to getting Oliver back. Having him gone is unbearable for me too."

"When will he be here?"

"Tonight."

Swallowing, the alpha cleared his mind and made an attempt to distance his emotions and put a tighter rein on his control, but it felt like putting a band-aid on a gut wound. Years of military training ought to have instilled a better sense of control but nothing could have prepared the alpha for this abhorrent weakness. Lifting a hand, he watched his muscles flex in minute spasms that no matter how hard he concentrated, they persisted.

"I'm not in control, Malcolm. I've never been in a situation where my body and my very brain betrayed me. I loathe feeling so miserably weak and yet it's out of my control with nothing to be done about it."

"Then come with me and we'll work through the afternoon on meditation techniques ritualized by the League," the other man's voice was urgent, fraught with determination that attracted him like a moth to the flame. "It should help you regain your mind and ignore the worst of the physical manifestations of your condition."

"Alright." Voodoo bullshit might have sounded ludicrous back in the day, but after all the things he had seen, a meditation technique was fairly tame. "Lead the way."

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City air was a foul, smouldering creature that inflicted toxic fumes upon unwilling visitors. Sifting through the pollutants in the air, Ra's identified the individual scent signatures of his companions as he descended the cargo ramp from the belly of the plane. One stood out from the not so distant past while another radiated alpha with the taint of power and desperation.

Slipping his fingers outside the pockets of the heavy robe, the Demon's Head soaked in the assassin that was his yet not standing with a neat, formal bow of supplication aimed in his direction. Contrasting with his partner, his Magician's counterpart stood tall and defiant in the face of their initial meeting: Slade Wilson.

It was a contradiction for people to assume that selecting a young heir was the wisest course of action. In his experience, plucking a fruit once it only after it had been given proper time to ripen was ideal and the man standing opposite him was a seasoned fighter and tactician with many
years to rule as Ra's al Ghul ahead of him. The Australian alpha just a few paces off exuded power with a commanding build, a pair of swords peeking from behind simple, black Kevlar. Nothing struck him as frivolous, every detail was functional in some way.

Like a wave of Centurion guards, his shadowy accompaniment fanned out in perfect form behind him while still leaving a respectful five-foot gap around his person for personal space.

"Al Sah-Her," he greeted one of his greatest and most disappointing pupils warmly; the slippery alpha had such a wealth of potential and unmatched skill that stood out from the herd, the Magician was a legend even now amongst their ranks. "I greet you as a father receives an absent son and express my regret for the actions of two of my number that were lead astray. I trust you are recovered now."

Slade Wilson's posture betrayed nothing while his ebony eyes darted about in a manner that denoted self-assured confidence and a quiet authority ascribed to those who live and breathe in a world in which the battlefield is a persist companion rather than selective realities. His new heir was a work of a master painter; brush strokes of imperfections harmonizing into something radiating greatness.

"There is nothing to forgive, Master." Ra's felt his benevolence swell with pride as the alpha before him bowed and embraced the League's practices with a committed countenance rather than that of a person placating unwelcome visitors. "I would be pleased to present my companion--"

"Al-Amir." The name rolled off his tongue organically, selecting the name after more than a century of experience judging men by the smallest of details. "Slade Wilson's reputation proceeded him, but I promise you that the name nations will tremble to know will be Al-Amir."

Al Sah-Her, all the wit and cunning of a fox, broke the stillness with an assertion of truth that surprised him just by how perceptive his student could be.

"The Demon's Head does not leave Nanda Parbat for simple recruits, what is it that you're not telling us?"

"Your ability to see beneath the surface continues to impress me, Al Sah-Her," he conceded, locking eyes with his Heir-to-be, pleased when the younger alpha rebukes his smile with a narrow frown.

"Call me what you like. Just tell me what you want."

Arrogance infused his heir's voice like a cloud, but there was a measure of something perplexingly out of place in the man's overall tone. Studying the bulky man again, nothing overtly obvious alerted tickles Ra's senses, however, his instincts never failed him except a stiffness in the way the man held himself that he had attributed to irritation... but, perhaps there may be more than he could see at this time.

"It is as Al Sah-Her stated," Ra's stepped closer, each movement testing the ground beneath him even while his men remained statuesque behind him. "I do not leave Nanda Parbat without a specific purpose in mind. On this occasion, I came to this city to make you an offer that I would not extend to you if I did not believe you were worthy."

"You want him to take your place," Al Sah-Her's stunned tone of voice resonated from behind his facade of disquiet and once again the Demon's Head felt a swell of pride for his former student's intellect. If the alpha had not demonstrated such driving ambition and a thirst for power, he would have been a perfect candidate to replace him. While flaws can be overcome, the request for
dismissal from the League had shaken his faith in the man. But what an asset the man would be.

"I sometimes think your name is not as apt as it could have been, but correct indeed." Turning to Slade, the Demon’s Head accepted the derisive snort and the rueful shake of the man's head without comment. "I would like to ask you a question first, Al-Amir. And I would like you to consider your answer carefully. Tell me what do you desire most in this world?"

The question itself was a test of character in order to reveal an individual's honesty. The Magician's armor clinked slightly as he turned behind him; Ra's paid his protégé no mind, focused on the conflicted Australian before him with the beginnings of sweat lining his brow. An idea began to take shape in his mind, but the Demon's Head required just a bit of confirmation first.

"Oliver."

In a flash, the alpha in front of him was rigid as if being flayed alive, with masked agony simmering in the depths of his eyes before it vanished in a flash: withdrawal. How quaint. Not intimidated by the challenge presented, Ra's folded his hands and attempted to capture the spirit of understanding. This man had lost as so many of his followers had in the pursuit of this life. Yet, perhaps this too could serve as an advantage.

"Your mate I take it?" The inquiry was gentle and required no verbal reply judging by the tightness lining his heir's cheeks.

"And my son."

News often travelled fast, but the Demon's Head found himself truly stunned by the light declaration from his side. And pleased: a plan took shape.

Glancing to the archer who gazed at him with such a frankly imploring disposition, the assassin felt like an opportunity had arisen that would afford him incredible success. Still, the answer to the disquiet radiating from both men had to be something outside the ordinary.

"Where is he?"

"Taken by A.R.G.U.S. cowards." Resentment and outrage seeped off the alpha in droves, swarming the area with the result of a hormonal outburst. Mentally, Ra's noted that control of primal instincts would definitely be a priority during training. "And if you think I'll leave with you and abandon Oliver to those nut jobs, you got another thing coming."

"They took Oliver and my older son Tommy," Al Sah-Her offered from his side with the demeanor of a soldier about to enter a battle. "Oliver is easily a match for myself and Slade in skill." Now, that captured his interest and had a distinct appeal. "Tommy's training is still early but I think he will be incredible given more timing. I have no doubt that A.R.G.U.S. will put their talents to use."

Perfect. Ra's doubted the two alphas recognized what they had done done, but the gauntlet had been dropped and it would be a small matter to recover the two men. As for the A.R.G.U.S. group, the League had reported about the underhanded tactics of the shady government agency on many separate occasions. With a swipe of his hand, Ra's would destroy the pretentious agency that held no true place in the workings of darkness.

"If Slade agrees to become my heir," he watched the big man frown while the Magician sighed in lofty expectation that amused the assassin to no end while he shot the older of the two a devastating grin. "And you agree to return to me, I will put the full resources of the League into
recovering your sons. In fact, I will extend an offer of membership to both boys should they desire it so that my heir need not be parted from his mate. This is a mercy I have never offered, but will do so under the condition that Oliver join and serve the League as well."

The disquiet was tense--as expected--Al Sah-Her brimmed with displeasure as he was want to do, with a singularly displeased look to his face that was not as attractive as the man imagined. Even so, a raw, charged determination was expressed by the towering brunette and he lumbered closer, shaking his head even as he offered a stiff bow.

"You have a bargain." Behind the Herculean man, the Magician nodded curtly with a dissatisfied twist to his lips.

"Let us go home then, Al-Amir," Ra's intoned, triumph resonating from every pore. "Heir to the Demon."

John Diggle officially hated his new boss. And after months and months of wiping vomit off the sons of people so rich they shat gold, it took a lot to top that.

Listening and watching the A.R.G.U.S. crew laugh and place bets while a couple of yahoo physicians sliced open Oliver Queen's back had been sickening enough, but learning it was an explosive device had settled like bad fish in his stomach--that is, not frigging well.

Confronting Lyla had been about as successful as lassoing a twister: not going to happen. His ex-wife calmly regurgitated the basic facts about the playboy billionaire that basically amounted to the twisted bottom line of bullshit that John expected from terrorists, not his own people.

To A.R.G.U.S. these people were expendable tools because they were killers. Apparently summary executions were cool if the rap sheet sang the right song; although the former officer would deny it to his grave, he felt Oliver Queen deserved praise over condemnation for his vigilante work. And that wasn't so easy to admit.

Nodding to a pair of A.R.G.U.S. coworkers he fondly called, "Waller's Suit Goons," the beta bypassed the guards and rounds the corner until he was standing in the hallway of the two young men. From down the hall, feeble snores while the windowless cell barely a foot away remained conspicuously quiet.

"We keep running into each other in the strangest places, John."

Son of a bitch, how on earth was that kid so good with his nose? The omega emphasized his name with tacked on bite that he could only assume was meant to be abrasive; in this instance, it rather had the opposite effect of drawing out the beta's begrudging admiration.

"Next time we'll stick to burgers and fries if that sounds good to you," Diggle offered, vaguely.

Shuffling toward the door, the bulky soldier squatted down, unnerved by the sterile, chemical scent of the cell. Peeking through the thin metal slat, John met with weary, azure eyes tempered with the observation skills of a warrior in the midst of battle. From his days in the desert of Afghanistan, Diggle had seen the same lined, harsh looks on the faces of his battle-hardened soldiers trapped in a country and a fight not of their own choosing; that peculiar awareness never faded until the day they set foot on home soil again.

"Did you know what they were going to do?"
"No." Lightning quick, he snapped out a reply, feeling compelled to disassociate himself from an organization that he regretted joining with every fiber of his being. "If I had, I would have stopped them."

The gut jerking laughter proved nearly his undoing as he gaped at the omega through the tiny peephole, clutching a gut and practically giggling, but he held his ground and found himself strangely comfortable with his mutinous line of thinking.

"Yeah, you go right ahead and get right on that, John." Oliver Queen did patronizing the way only those born to cash seemed to be capable of doing before sagging backward, weariness tinged with vague amusement that settled his ruffled feelings rather tidily. "I'm sure Amanda would have humored you before having you shot for insubordination."

"Amanda Waller isn't going to kill me."

Probably not. Even if his own voice sounded far from confident; how did this omega constantly manage to get under his skin?

"Like it even matters," Oliver snorted, leaning against the wall tiredly. Though, considering it was after midnight, the reason the other man was still awake was potentially more relevant. "But you didn't come here to debate the convictions of your glorious leader, what is it you want, John?"

More than anything, Diggle prayed the earth would swallow him up and prevent this moment from happening, but there was nothing he could to stop what was about to happen. But he could be there to mitigate the fallout as bet he could.

"Waller is sending you into the field tomorrow with Lawton and your brother," the beta sighed, rubbing his knuckles over his eyes. "And I'm going to be leading the team."

Quiet settled over them with only shallow breathing and a faint scent of calm washed over the beta's senses and made him feel light.

"Well, congratulation John. I'm sure you'll be one step closer to that promotion Waller has up her sleeve."

There was a notable lack of bitterness with that statement, but John found himself experiencing notable claustrophobia.

"This isn't what I signed up for." More than anything, the beta wanted to be seen as different from the rest of the corrupt agency that he desperately wanted to sever ties with, but felt the repercussions of divorcing the organization far more devastating than his previous marriage. "I just wanted to get out of private protection and feel like my life had meaning again. But that didn't include surgically implanting C-4 into a person's back."

"Well, forgive me if I can't exactly summon the energy to feel bad for you right now." Okay that was deserved low blow. Ouch.

"I'm sorry, Oliver." Why was he apologizing? It was not like it could alter the outcome in any way, but it felt necessary and just all at once. "Just try and stay alive while I figure this out, okay?"

"You do know there are cameras on us right now, right?"

"Yeah well, I know for a fact that the cameras have been on the fritz all day."
"In that case, if you could get a call to Felicity Smoak, that would be super."

"Second I get a shot at it, I'll try to contact your girl. Take it easy, man."

The omega's scent became a little less hostile, unless that was his nose and imagination playing tricks on him. "John, thank you."

"Don't mention it. Just don't die."

"Will do, John," the omega interjected smoothly with traces of hope that hadn't been there before lacing his voice. "Keep it up and we'll make a vigilante out of you yet."

"I hope not." Because what would that mean for him then?

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"Your brother is gonna get us all killed! Unfocused and reeking like the pining bitch he is!"

"You shut the fuck up!" The heavy clang of something heavy and metal tossed with deliberate force against the wall. Now that was oddly telling.

Yanked rather abruptly out of his daydream, the omega turned toward the scene of the quarrel and fought the urge to slam the two dickheads to the floor and knock their heads together; after all, a head injury could only be an improvement upon the relentless bickering that had been going on for the last three hours.

"Oh come on," Lawton's slimy voice baited the rumbling alpha, sounding borderline gleeful; then again, Oliver supposed entertainment in prison was hard to come by. "If you were a real alpha, you'd do us all a favor and knot that skanky bitch--"

A gasping whoosh of air forcefully expelled from the beta's lungs followed by a pair of grunts; one masochistic and the other agitated in origin. Someone has small penis syndrome, Mr. Lawton.

Adjusting the leather strap of the quiver of arrows that A.R.G.U.S. had oh so generous provided, Oliver eyed the far end of the room where his brother had the smarmy beta pinned to the wall. Fingering the fletching on an arrow, the archer's irritation spiked: can't let an alpha off leash for more than a minute!

Lifting the bow from his table of field equipment, Oliver pulled back, adjusted for the substandard draw of the bow, and fired. The near brawl ended abruptly when the slack jawed males jerked apart tensely and stared at the arrow embedded in the plaster just inches from their eyeballs.

"We done comparing dick measurements?" The omega offered a smile only a mother could love and enjoyed the slight recoil on their face. Maintaining the act for the crowd took all the willpower he had, but he felt he managed it. Barely.

"I'm just calling it like I smell it," the sharpshooter shrugged off the alpha's arm and prowled toward him; Oliver felt far from intimidated and met the beta's approach with a raised brow. "I've been a soldier and I recognize withdrawal when I smell it. You, my friend, are not going to be on your game when they send us out for this mission in the morning."

"Oh I wouldn't be so sure of that." Walking up to the beta, Oliver crossed his arms and shot him a warning look. "Whatever you think you know, you're wrong. I've experienced things and
took part in things that make your petty assassinations look like toddler games. So, I suggest you shut your trap and refrain from speaking. Unless you want an arrow to the jaw."

The grating whine of the bolt pulling back and the door swinging open stiffened the trio before additional commentary could be added.

"I have to say, Mr. Queen. You are as eloquent as you ever were." Sarcasm dripped from the dispassionate beta's every tone as Amanda Waller strolled inside as if she owned the place, which, in the sense of power Oliver supposed she did. Watching his old enemy examine them like meals for sale at local meat markets proved the most telling.

"Cut to the chase, Amanda." There would be no noticeable chinks in the beta's armor to be uncovered with an exchange of pleasantries; Amanda Waller was a reptilian creature; cold-blooded and an expert in manipulation. The best case scenario he hoped to play on was her overconfidence.

"Somebody's in a real hurry," Lawton sneered, caressing a rifle--missing ammunition of course--and blowing Oliver a kiss. The pasty twig really needed an attitude adjustment and bomb or no bomb, Tommy might just take out the sniper. "Hope you're not like that in the bedroom. I like to take my time."

"Shut your mouth or I'll shut it for you permanently I swear to God!"

"Boys." The beta's voice was like the caress of a false god; heavily alluring and altogether seductive in a way only forbidden fruit tended to be. "Settle down."

From the hallway, Oliver smelled the presence of his night time visitor and smiled ever so slightly. If here were fortunate, he might acquire a few seconds during the fieldwork to speak to the man. All the same, if the opportunity presented itself, the omega was determined the risk reward factor was skewed in their favor.

As expected, John sidled into the room with such a sour face that surely could have gone on a warning label for milk reaching its expiration date. The former soldier crossed his arms and glared at the vast array of weaponry, Amanda, and Deadshot and something shifted and John looked visibly prepared to crawl out of his own skin. Perplexed, he glanced to Lawton, noticing the man's posture had lost some of its edge--perhaps intentionally backing down? But why? Vowing to look into that little matter on another occasion, he shifted his attention back to the Amanda who was circling their little group like a hawk, and eyeballing Tommy's choice of weapon with a frown.

"Take the stick if you must, but take a gun too." Amanda spun away from Tommy who looked on the verge of assaulting her, the alpha's limbs trembling and his scent exuding rage like a caged lion. "I'm sending your happy little group on an extraction operation."

Closing his eyes, Oliver fast counted to ten. Another screw up that he was being forced to clean up.

"What was it this time?" Unleashing the derision like a weapon, Oliver glowered into eyes that were inky with a dangerous, edged darkness. "Infiltration gone wrong, a missing agent, or just a special heist for kidnapping?"

The serpentine woman walked toward him and crossed her arms over her tailored jacket and reached out with burgundy nails to scrape the edge of his neck with a caress far too reminiscent of claws to be comforting. Not willing to permit himself to falter--not for this harridan--he stared into the soulless pit with all the defiance he could muster even when the snake curved into a delighted smile.
"An ambassador's foolish daughter actually."

Because kid's these days weren't stupid enough.

"You're sending us to rescue some spoiled, princess?" For once, Oliver shared Lawton's disdain.

"Hardly. She stole plans for ongoing military operations in the Middle-East. Recovering the girl is optional and hardly a requirement. Retrieving the plans before they fall into the wrong hands is a high priority. All you need to know is that you have a go to do whatever is necessary to recover the plans."

"I can finish the debriefing if you want." Diggle grunted from where he rested against the wall with a vaguely disinterested look about him despite gaining the witch's attention.

"Well, then, gentleman," Amanda strode toward the door authoritively and place a single, possessive hand on John's shoulder. "This is Taskforce X's mission commander Diggle. You will obey every instruction as you will obey my own. I'll leave him to debrief you on the specifics of the plan, but I will be with you through your earpiece through the entire mission. Any attempt to deviate or compromise the mission will result in your execution. So, I would consider that carefully."

"Suicide squad." Deadshot's humorless laugh emphasized the mood of the room perfectly.

"Good luck." Good riddance, he thought with a flash of annoyance.

Feeling a tremor race up his spine, the omega fought back the urge to reach out and use the table as a prop for balance even as his nervous system released tremor after tremor on the unfortunate omega.

Distantly, the archer heard John start some bullshit round of introductions and Oliver tuned it out in favor of regaining a measure of self-control. Perhaps Amanda Waller had unintentionally done him a favor...if he didn't get out of here he was going to lose his mind.

Why were they taking so long?

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Drowning at the bottom of a liquor bottle was worse than Quentin remembered it being. Of course, back in the day he could hold his liquor with the best of them, but after several years of sobriety, the detective--formerly, he reminded himself bitterly--he reminded himself bitterly--nursed his single drink that was enough to give him a buzz and wallow in the misery his existence had become over the last week since...well, since the world was flipped on its head.

Taking another desperate swig of his Guinness, Quentin knew that returning to alcoholism was not the balm that his soul needed, but it felt like the only option left to someone with as many woes as he had.

When Nudocerdo--the walking windbag--removed him from the case, Quentin had chucked the detective's shield at the man and stormed out. The numerous missed calls on his answering machine likely alluded to a reprimand and unpaid administrative leave, but the beta couldn't give two shakes of a rat's ass.

Fuck it. A job was a job and his daughter was dead. Again. This time with a dying
confession of attempted murder on her lips. So fuck his job, they could keep it.

Even so, Quentin could not bring himself to order a second drink even though he stared at the taps longingly. Even now, he could hardly bear to picture Laurel's disappointed face when she found out--and boy, there was no question of that! One thing for sure, his daughter had the tenacity of a pit bull and she was not one to let up on anything or anybody.

Shit, he really needed a drink now.

Slamming a pair of bills onto the bar, Quentin stumbled away on unsteady feet that came with reliving the worst day of his life all over again.

"Love you. Sorry. So sorry... Love you...don't..b'sad."

"Baby listen to me. I love you so much. I love you so much, damnit Sara. Please God don't leave me again. Please no. Sara please--"

"Tell..Oliver...sorry..didn't..mean it...and..Laur'l."

What had she meant? Call him crazy, but something felt missing. Something that he couldn't see, but what? And worst of all, Quentin felt positively certain that Oliver Queen had withheld something at the hospital.

The kidnapping of the two billionaire scions later that night just confirmed the cop's instinct that something was wrong and somehow Sara had been involved in something bigger, more dangerous.

And now the only person that might know something was vanished like waves upon the sand.

Of course, one could argue the true reason that the detective was sitting in the bar was to avoid Laurel. Of course, that would lead him down the path of being a worse parent than he already perceived himself to be--yikes! Easily nursing his beverage, Quentin could admit he didn't want to see the desolate despair on Laurel's face since his daughter was hit by not one, but two losses in a single moment.

Life really was a bitch.

The jingle of the bar door swinging shut behind him followed by a stiff fall breeze nearly bowled the detective over. Zipping up his coat, he shivered slightly and fumbled with his zipper, finally managing to tug it up to his chin.

About to turn and walk toward his parked car, a flash of headlights and the inevitable crunch that came from a vehicle collision revitalized the semi-maybe-retired-detective and he zipped toward the blaring high-beams, yelling at a couple of stunned teens cradling their skateboards to call the police.

What the cop didn't expect was for a sleek door to an expensive SUV to swing open and for a woman in an elegant wool coat and attractively styled blonde hair to stumble from the car like a drunken sailor swearing profanities that would have caused some of the guiltiest mobsters to recoil in leering shock. The scent rolling off the bumbling blonde marked the woman as distinctly beta while the overdose of high end perfume marked the lady as somebody's trophy wife.

The gasping blonde turned around, Quentin swallowed thickly and rescinded his previous statement and assigned rich widow to his mental white board. Moira Queen. Good god the woman
was a sight turning in circles and making the art of breathing look difficult. Wrenched out of his stupor by a honking driver, the beta darted forward and grasped the woman's hand's in his, inwardly surprised by how thin the bones were, much like a tiny bird than a human being.

"Alright, Mrs. Queen," he mustered up all the compassion he had available, which obviously wasn't much since he unwittingly released a hearty sigh when the woman's stammering cut short. Taking a peak into the vehicle, nothing looked obviously amiss save that the expensive car was lodged in the belly of another metal beast. "You been drinking tonight?"

Timid like a beaten dog, the blonde shivered and squeezed his hands with a sort of helpless desperation the seasoned officer noted in battered wives that were fearful of reprisal. Burying his personal feelings for the moment, Quentin allowed over twenty years of experience to guide his gut appraisal and he carefully stepped into the trembling woman's space; as he moved to place a guiding hand on her back, the shaking woman practically melted against him and fell into his arms, gasping like the victim of a drowning.

"Please, help me. I can't take anymore. I just need help." There was a genuine level of desperation that tore at his stony resolve until it crumbled like dust in the wind. Lifting his arms, Quentin rubbed circles over the stricken woman's back and unable to contain his personal shock.

To think, he would be inflicted--willingly--with the presence of Moira Queen would have been laughable five minutes ago, yet here he was embracing the woman after she had smashed another car into smithereens. What was the world coming to?

"You want to tell me what happened?"

The woman in his arms shuddered and the detective was unable to prevent himself from embracing the woman as tight as he could against his chest, dropping his chin to rest on her shoulder. It occurred to him that offering comfort to a long-time enemy was not so hard; maybe, just maybe, Quentin was learning to let go of that heady resentment.

Apparently mutual despair could trigger decent human behavior. Who would have guessed?

Nudging the weeping woman in his arms, Quentin's ears picked up the telltale sound of sirens and sighed in exasperation.

"They're going to have questions for you and you're going to owe a butt-load of money that you obviously can afford to pay. I'll go with you to sort this out okay, Moira."

The watery eyed woman lifted her had from where she had buried it in his jacket and stared at him with a puzzled frown that didn't sit too comfortable with the seasoned officer.

"What?"

"Why would you want to help me?"

The lack of accusation accompanied by the shocked pallor to the beta's face just planted the proverbial cherry on top and confirmed his notions that he really was a fucked up individual.

"You're having a panic attack and I'm not a total bastard." Whether he was trying to convince the disbelieving woman in front of him or himself, who really cared? The only thing that really mattered was that he wanted to help because that desperation he glimpsed in her eyes was far too reminiscent to his own during the doll-maker's appearance. And maybe he needed a little redemption.
"So, I'll help you sort out this mess and then you and I will go get a burger and some fries since you look like you haven't eaten in days."

It was true too; the billionaire's wife had always been of a slight, petite build, but the attractive woman appeared positively skeletal, with all the bones in her hands prominent under his calloused fingers.

"A burger and fries?"

Finicky, but somehow he noticed a sliver of hope spark with the intensity of bursting star and like the sucker he was, Quentin was hooked.

"Unless you don't want to?"

Determination settled like an old friend and the tremors vanished in the woman before him even as the approaching squad cars lights appeared round the corner.

"I would really, really love that Quentin."

Unable to resist, a half smile teased his lips and the detective felt like a veil of negativity was lifted from his shoulders and at long last he could breathe again.

"Alright then, just let me make sure they don't arrest you."

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Dragging her sorry ass out of bed after yet another fabulous night of tossing and turning was not doing Thea Queen any favors. If it was not for an absolute fortune in high-end cosmetics, the alpha knew for a fact the rumor mill at Merlyn Global would explode with activity if she came to work looking like a raccoon. The pitying glances accompanied by somberly offered cups of tea over the past week had been damaging enough to her already fragile mental state.

Of course, it did not help one bit that Malcolm and Slade were both behaving like super shady characters--granted they were shady--but, something was off. Whispered conversations, glances exchanged when they thought she wouldn't see. A plan was in the works to save Tommy and Ollie but nobody would tell her squat! And since her hacking skills were zip... the alpha had zero chances of discovering what they were working so hard to conceal from her.

Slamming into the curb with a dull flinch, the alpha rolled her eyes and yanked the electronic key away from the steering wheel and into the Prada purse next to her. Sticking a tongue out at her reflection, Thea grimaced when she saw the aged look on her face that seemed so out of place to the carefree, drug haze that she had quite merrily existed in, up until Oliver rattled the foundations with his stormy return.

Taking a moment, Thea fingered the concealed holsters that Felicity had wordlessly dropped off a pair of nights ago, feeling noticeably more relaxed with a mode of defense at hand. It wasn't that she wanted to hurt anyone, but necessity overrode the best of intentions.

Slinging her purse over her shoulder, the alpha shuddered when it dawned on her that she had forgotten to brush her teeth. Shit. Knowing she was going to do nothing save obsess over it, the girl spun on her heel and punched in the main floor of the elevator rather than the top floor and Malcolm's cozy office.

The built in cafe had coffee, but the snotty barista that flirted with anything with a pulse was definitely not the person to test the limits of her patience today. Nodding to the doorman that
dutifully held the door as she stepped out, she exhaled against the chill that tickled her cheeks with the threat of winter's chill as she marched down the pavement in her leather boots toward the food truck run by a flamboyant omega with a penchant for bow ties and English vests.

"Miss Queen! You look positively frigid, today! Must run in the family!"

Smiling in spite of herself, she knocked a strand of hair out of her face and leaned toward the sandy haired man with his arms crossed over his checked lapis vest.

"I'm sure you would know better than I," she gloated, arching a pointed eyebrow at the jaunty barista and pointedly motioning toward the man's receding hairline.

"Oh you hush yourself," a ringed finger wagged in her direction. "Now tell me. Are you having a caribilicious monstrosity with a side of whip and drizzle of chocolate sin?"

"You betcha." They shared mirroring evil smirks that may have scared off one of the brave souls stepping into line behind her, but her coffee-foe seemed un-phased so she let it slide.

"3.45." Cash only distinctly left unsaid.

"Right." Obviously her head was still in the clouds, focused on Oliver, instead of her present situation. Reaching into her wallet, she brushed against her keys, make-up bag, gum packet. Frowning, she yanked her bag up and opened the lid. Where was her wallet? At a loss, she stuck her hand in and found herself rather empty handed.

What on Earth?

Distinctly uncomfortable, Thea opened her mouth to apologize and offer the coffee man her soul in order to preserve her own life when the grinning moron from Lowlife-Ville popped out of the crowd; the bruised teen flashed a look that would have caused the majority of the female population to swoon in delight but merely made the brunette feel fairly nauseous. When he winked at her, the alpha felt her feathers ruffle and she shot him a warning glare even as he waggled a five dollar bill in the air and handed it with a chivalrous wave to the impressed looking barista.

"Somebody has the hots for you?" A low whistle startled Thea into action as she reflexively accepted the cup shoved at her by Jake who addressed Abercrombie with a sorrowful look. "Good luck with this one. She takes after that stuffy strumpet, Merlyn. Both of them, moodier than hornets!"

"Oh put a sock in it, Jake!"

Not knowing what else to do, the alpha grabbed Ray or whatever his name was and hussled him away, taking a hearty swig of her drink even though her nerves were still in twisted knots.

"If I had known you like being so controlling, I would have propositioned you differently." Oh Jesus. The smarmy dick looked disgustingly pleased with himself as he stopped their progress near one of the decorative planters outside the skyscraper.

"I told you to get lost," she hissed, shaking his arm harshly and becoming increasingly irritated by the gleeful look playing on the douche bag's face as he held his hands up to offer a false sense of surrender. Obviously he was trying to loosen her up, but dipstick didn't know she wasn't a pushover like possibly every other girl he had ever spoke to was. "So why are you here, Ray?"

"So harsh!" The beta leaned into her space smelling more like nostril clogging cologne
than an actual human being and Thea had to resist the urge to smack the flatten the guy. There was nothing she wanted to experience less than Malcolm going ballistic on her after bailing her out of jail in front of a live audience prepared to record each and every detail on their cell phones. "And it's Roy. You'd think you could remember my name since I just paid for a coffee that you didn't have money for!"

Resentment on high, Thea's cheeks flamed with embarrassment and she released her grip on the muscular arm, pretending the bystanders were not gazing at them intently.

"I just didn't get my wallet out of my other purse this morning because I was tired. I work out a lot." Why exactly was she telling him this anyway? It wasn't as if she owed the asshole an explanation, yet here she was, rambling on and on like a big ninny. Sometimes she really, really hated herself. "So, thank you for the coffee and I will pay you back."

"Thea," the alpha ignored the shiver that went down her spine from the revoltingly coy tone the beta used when he crossed his arms and adopted a slightly less sketchy pose as he shuffled his feet almost nervously. "If you wanted my number, all you had to do was ask."

"In your dreams, Roy," Thea bit back a groan, downed another oversized sip of her drink and enjoyed the fluffy whipped cream teasing her tongue. Heaven in the midst of hell: delicious. "And while I appreciate the gesture, I'm still not teaching you anything. That being said, I really ought to get back to my job. So better luck next time, find someone else to harass."

Saluting Roy mockingly, she stepped around the fit male and made it two clipped steps before the moron's chipper voice jerked her to a halt that almost broke the heel off her shoe.

"Just wondering, do you want this back?"

What now? Whipping around, she bumped into a disgruntled man arguing with someone on his Bluetooth, the guy gave her a nasty look but continued onward like the oversized troll he was. Rubbing her shoulder where it had collided with the man's elbow, Thea zeroed in on the leather embossed wallet in forest green with tooled silver clasps and started in outrage.

Thief! Reactively, her hand fist and she eyed the undamaged eye socket, imagining a second bruise inflicted by her knuckles to give her stalker a matching set! How dare he!

"Give me back my wallet now!"

Okay, that little comment drew more than one stare to their collective audience, causing the brunette to feel more than a little disconcerted. Fuck. Please let the local paparazzi be stalking someone else today.

"Or what princess?" That smug little weasel pocketed the purse and approached her with a sly grin. "You'll knife me?"

"Oh don't tempt me," she purred, lunging forward to grab a fistful of the hoodie of questionable cleanliness only to be met with air as her opponent danced away. Oh so that's how it's going to be! Feinting to the left, the beta darted right; gotcha, the alpha thought as she swerved, changing her direction with ease and sent the pair of them crashing against back of a bench that was empty save an old baba glaring at them down her spectacles from the opposite end of the bench.

"I'll give it back if you meet me tonight," the beta chimed somewhat breathlessly as he stared at her a little too intently for comfort. It was only in that moment that Thea realized her knee was planted dangerously close to a groin that was not exactly uninterested despite the deathgrip she
had on his shirt. "Please Thea?"

It was the soft plea in Roy's voice that shattered her anger and rebooted her control. What am I doing, she wondered? Stepping away, she stared at her hands and considered how easy it had been to push Roy off and away from her. What was happening to her? What would Oliver say if he could see her now? Somehow, Thea could not imagine her brother being proud of her getting into a brawl with someone over something so trivial.

Despite cataloging the approaching scent, the alpha felt surprised when an arm tentatively draped itself across her shoulders and tugged her toward the main doors of Merlyn Global.

"Come on Thea, let me walk you inside." The playful beta now sounded closer to that of an older brother shepherding an errant sibling. It wasn't something Thea wanted to experience, she had enough older brothers even if two of them were... unable at the moment. "Tell you what, I'll let you take me out to dinner later but just this once because I'm definitely not interested in you that way."

"Liar." Strangely, her voice had a choked tension in it that almost sounded like it did when she was crying. Oh no.

"Well, I'm not into stuck up rich girls that are only interested in getting their nails done."

"What about girls that beat you up?" Thea wondered aloud, enjoying the weight on her shoulders that felt more companionable than fragile. It felt good, maybe a little relaxing. "I really wanted to black your eye back there."

"See, you sound like far more trouble than you're worth," Roy sounded far off and Thea jerked out of her fog when a ping sounded. Elevator? Glancing around, she noted the scandalized looks directed toward the two of them from practically every direction; Roy, like a modern Aladdin, took the looks in stride and ignored the derisive looks from the world that perceived him as a dirty novelty in his tattered clothing that was the complete antithesis to a young lady that was surely born to greatness. Yet, the arm remained around her shoulder until she looked him in the eye and he smiled, something genuine and a little sad, but lovely all the same.

"So I'll see you tonight, Queen?"

A few busybodies coughed, perhaps a few snorted and all of the sudden Thea felt the world was a little too shallow and people should mind their own fucking business.

"Sure, be back here at 6:00."

Flabbergasted, Thea Queen watched the jaunty teen vanish around the corner and for once felt herself utterly at a loss for words. Killing people? No problem. Letting Slade beat the shit out of her? No sweat! Dealing with an attractive stalker? She was so, so screwed.
"You've gotta be kidding me? Oh my God!"

Thea Queen collapsed into a heap of giggles that rattled through her limber frame and infected her with such a high that it put all of those psychedelic experimental goodies to shame.

God it felt amazing to just let go and laugh! Yep, this was bliss.

"What?" Roy sounded positively scandalized and Thea felt a flutter in her stomach that she determinedly quashed as she cracked an eye at the stumped face of her beta wonder boy as he whined as manfully as possible--or rather girlishly in her humble opinion. "Come on, it can't be that bad! It took forever to put this together!"

Tomato red spandex that accentuated each and every curve of Roy's muscular torso that would doubtless have all gender orientations quivering in their pants... Yummy! But observing that spandex grip the poor beta's ass cheeks like a pretty boy ballerina was too much for the alpha to stomach. Thea snickered and slapped a hand over her mouth in a doomed effort to conceal her mirth.

"Unless you plan on rescuing would-be-brides from their bachelorette parties, I think you're out of a job!" the alpha sidled off the bed and nudged the disgruntled pouter's hip with a suggestive pat, grinning when Roy backpedaled into precariously hanging closet door.

Score one for me! Feeling positively giddy, Thea danced away and flopped backward, exploding into a gut tickling peel of laughter that filled the room and her soul with a hearty dose of necessary humor. It had been so long since she felt good--and boy did she feel great--that the alpha had almost forgotten what happiness felt like. Absently she wiped a stray tear from her eye and basked in joy.

"I spent..like two days working on this thing." Roy sulked like the angst-ridden teenager he probably still was, fueling the warm happy glow inside the brunette. Half a second later, the bed jerked as the pouting man flopped down beside her and sighed heavily. Thea closed her eyes, refusing to concede to the grumpy gloom hovering over Roy like a cloud.

Internally humming, she externally smirked when the beta's scent flickered ever so slightly and the bed dipped when he turned to face her, her instincts honing in on Roy scantly a few centimeters away.

Cracking an eye, Thea was caught by surprise to note something akin to baffled reverence emanating from her shady companion that conquered the doubts in her heart.

Everything about Roy was easy. When she tried to push him away, he returned the next day like a stubborn weed and refused to be cowed by the vicious quality of her outbursts. When she raged, screamed, and even attacked him once, he took it all without complaint; she had added additional holes to the interior of his house, thrown questionably safe items at his head, and even shoved him off a balcony for asking too many questions. Rather than balking when thoughts of her displaced brothers brought out an emotional downpour, Roy supported her without making her feel ashamed for the show of weakness. Somehow, Roy Harper wormed his way into her life until Thea felt hope again in this bleak, miserable chapter of her life.
And hope could be a foolish premise, but it felt awfully fun.

Pushing aside her personal qualms, Thea swung her arms around the beta, her dominant urges perking up at the shiver that raced up Roy's spine as she grinned toothily.

"Roy Harper," she mused, delighting in the dutiful way the beta's pupils contracted and his throat contracted as he sucked in a strangled breath. "You have failed this uniform."

Attacking her boyfriend's mouth, Thea tumbled them until she was seated atop the thin uniform material and pinned Roy's hands above his head. Purring contentedly as the beta gasped and shifted restlessly, Thea nimbly dipped her down to lap at the corner of writhing Roy's mouth. Not one to waste an opportunity, Thea reached down to grip Roy's swollen penis through his hideous spandex and kneaded gently, watching her partner's face flush and breathing shorten to light gasps and flood her nose with the beta's arousal.

Searching for the zipper, the whirring beep sabotaged Thea's efforts to strip the ridiculously dressed beta and screw him into the mattress until he begged for mercy. Roy groaned in frustration, much to Thea's delight, as she released the beta and snapped up her cell and accepted the incoming call with an exaggerated perky tone, smacking Roy's fingers when inched up her thigh and repressed a snort when the beta swore loudly.

"You have reached the illustrious Thea Queen, speak now or forever hold your peace!"

"You're in the Glades." Rolling her eyes as Felicity's ruffled feathers echoed in her ear with the hissy displeasure of a wet cat, the alpha turned back to Roy lying on his bed stripped to the waist sporting a flush and a hesitant, embarrassed smile that tugged at Thea's heartstrings! "What are you doing in the Glades? I'm pretty darn sure we covered this in detail before I left! And I'm pretty sure your--Malcolm's secretary is in full agreement!"

"Relax! You don't have to look after me." Exasperated by the smothering verbal antics of the savvy omega, Thea shook her head at a hopeful looking Roy who instantly adopted an annoyed if resigned look: kicked puppies had nothing on her man. Wagging her fingers at the sulking beta, the alpha crossed her arms and adjusted the phone so that it didn't strain her neck while Felicity huffed unhappily in the backdrop.

"I should have stayed home." Good grief, was that a touch of despondence in Felicity's voice? Pregnancy sure didn't do the blonde any favors in the higher thinking department.

"I'm gonna go grab a drink," Roy muttered, stomping out and down the hallway, which Thea ignored in favor of concentrating on Felicity.

"From the limited info you guys left me with, and don't think I'm not holding a grudge for not sharing, you are key to getting my brother back so my sympathy is rather limited I'm afraid." Scooting away from the untidy bed, Thea peered out the window--paranoia besting her--before grimacing at the dust coming away from the ancient, yellowed blinds of Roy's bedroom. Maybe she should pay to have the place cleaned? Dubiously staring at the filthy layered blinds she reconsiders that and idly wonders how much it would cost to 'accidently' have the house demolished? "Besides, I'm with Roy and you know that I'm way more dangerous than pretty much anyone around here. Malcolm, Slade, and Ollie made sure of that!"

"That is exactly why I worry," Felicity mothered relentlessly, which reluctantly warmed the exasperated alpha who just may admit to herself that it felt nice to have someone fuss over her...even over the phone. And maybe it was the pregnancy hormones, but the blonde was definitely more obsessive than Ollie which was equal parts awesome and dismaying. The things she put up
"Are you even listening?"

Blinking, Thea soaked in her amusement and acknowledged—privately for she was not suicidal at this juncture in her crazed life—that perhaps ignoring a temperamental, pregnant omega might not have been the best move and scrambled to come up with something personal to redirect the conversation.

"I'm thinking about having sex with Roy!" Blurted that out earned a startled response followed by a violent crash from the bedroom that did not concern her the way it might have before training. A little bruising never hurt anybody as far as Thea knew! The other end of the line had fallen distinctly silent which worried the alpha until she heard the cackle of mirthful laughter erupt like a volcano, exploding over the phone and abusing her poor eardrum.

Yanking the I-phone away from her ear, Felicity's giggles subsided after a moment and Thea nervously scratched at a speck of pale peeling paint on the wall.

"So, whose going to top?"

What? What? What?! Like a spooked horse, Thea leapt about a foot and gaped at her reflection helplessly one part horrified, one part elated by the bold question that should be more than obvious to most people that took biology in high school.

"How can this not be a TMI moment?" Was what her voice wondered aloud even as Roy fumbled around in his bedroom, rifling through drawers and clearly up to something going boy audible swearing.

"Because we're family and I actually seriously want to know!"

Sharing bizarre could create warm fuzzy sensations that felt definitely not equipped to deal with at the moment thank you very much.

"I'm just so thrilled I could make your day," Thea muttered sulkily, eyeing the bathroom door as it vibrated from the chaotic nightmare ensuing with rustling and swearing from the other room. A pity her things were in Roy's living room or the brunette might have considered escaping out the bathroom window. It might sound kooky, but Thea had tested it out last week in order to slash some tires from some of Roy's nastier thug buddies that she had soundly informed him he was no longer allowed to hang out with. Not allowed meaning: stay away from on pain of a thorough sack-wax. "And I can't believe you want to know. I wouldn't want to hear about what you and Malcolm get up to in the bedroom!"

"Guess that means you're topping!" Groaning into her fist, Thea counts backwards from ten to regain something akin to a measure of sanity.

"You'll be the last to know."

"We'll see about that," Felicity sipped on something that no doubt is highly caffeinated and full of sugar and Thea has never been more thankful for the thousands of miles separating them. "Three days."

Three days? Oh! Oh Thank God! Swarmed by an intense wave of light-headedness, Thea gripped one of Roy's grungy pillows until she felt sure the blood would stop flowing and breathed in and out harshly and sniffing miserably.
"Three days?" Sounding miserably tiny for an alpha's voice, Thea mentally kicked herself in the nads and ordered herself to buck up. Not that Roy was someone to impress... but whatever.

"Three days, sweetheart," Felicity's voice was lethally soft and Thea just about drowned in the visions of sinking into the woman's embrace and hiding there until her boys came back. "We'll probably be back to the city inside a week barring Slade and Malcolm doing something dangerous and scary that derails the plan."

The plan: the perfect bitter pill to clear Thea's head and destroy any lasting ounce of sentiment. Feeling her lips thin, she fought the urge to just chuck the phone into the toilet. The lack of any detail whatsoever into this rescue mission never failed to piss the brunette off. So, they trusted her to run a billion dollar empire but not help rescue her brothers.

"Well that's just great." Not bitter at all. Not a bit.

A few precious moments of silence passed over the phone with nothing save a light tapping that sounded suspiciously like a keyboard; Thea shifted grumpily as the omega kept her waiting like some kind of misbehaving teen. Which... may or may not be an accurate descriptor.

"I know you don't think it's fair, but this has little to do with your capability and everything to do with needing someone to hold down the fort." Not buying that load of BS in a million years. "In fact, Malcolm is hoping that you might look into some peculiar information regarding some subsidiary of Queen Consolidated."

Out of left field and not even she could resist that little nugget of temptation.

"What is it?"

"I'll send you the files tomorrow morning," Felicity assured her and Thea hoped this would conclude the exchange since her curiosity had piqued with Roy's continued absence. "Will you check in with my mother and make sure she hasn't burnt the house down while we've been gone?"

"No problem." Additional comments were not forthcoming simply because Thea was not ready to be attached to anyone else. "Come home soon."

"Will do! And please, please try to stay out of trouble." The gooey pleasure practically radiated from the phone and Thea itched with the strain of discomfort.

Ending the call without another word, Thea prodded the bedroom door open and stepped into the hoarder's dream of a hallway.

"Roy?"

"I think this outfit might work better!"

Following the sound of Roy's voice, Thea felt herself become giddy as she imagined the monstrosity waiting for her in the next room. Please God let it not be more spandex! Feet squishing unpleasantly into carpet that had to be ridden with disease, the brunette peered round the corner into the living room where the television blared old episodes of Buffy.

"What do you think?"

Wearing military fatigues probably purchased at the flea market, Roy sounded enduringly hopeful in a pair of combat boots. A Jason mask that looked like it had seen better days--and a dozen nights of trick or treating--covered Roy's face and Thea felt her grin like up like a Christmas Tree as
she stared at her costumed protégé.

"Paint that bad boy and we'll have a mini-Slade!" Not exactly true, but Roy puffed up like a rooster in excitement and that moment made everything else fall away except this moment.

"So you like this?" Down boy! Thea grinned and stroke up to the preening beta and planted her hands on his shoulders and squeezed in a rare demonstration of affection.

"I think we're on the right track," Thea conceded, shaking her head in amusement. "I think I should make a few tweaks though."

"Yeah, okay fine," the muffled reply came as Roy shoved the mask off his flushed face, breathing heavily.

Taking a look at Roy's pink lips, Thea groaned internally and willed her hormones under the control of a leash. If Slade could be patient and control himself around Oliver long enough to teach him a few things... she could master something as mild as a swollen knot.

"Training," she rasped, shifting her feet awkwardly.

Roy hardly had time to grunt out a low 'huh' before she slammed him to the carpet in a takedown maneuver, pinned his wrists, and applied pressure to his throat tight enough to be threatening but far from a lethal situation.

Roy writhed and kicked, while she squeezed his windpipe and blessedly regained control of her higher faculties. Hooray for aggression suppression and the wonders of absent erections.

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"When you made that outrageous claim about going out for burgers and fries, I should have known better because I think this place could easily become addicting."

Chomping into a colossal bite of beef with bacon and sautéed mushrooms as the proverbial icing on the cake, Quentin grinned despite his cheek being stuffed like a chipmunk and reached for his coke to take a hearty swallow. Across from him, Moira was holding her burger in a manner the beta could only classify as dainty, wearing a bemused look as her eyes danced this way and that, soaking in the retro interior with a open incredulity.

"Yeah well, I just thought after all the time we've been spending together, we could use a little bit of something different," he teased, enjoying the way the blonde's sparkling azure hues twinkled like jewels. A niggling reminder cautioned Quentin of the dangers of attaching himself to Moira Queen of all people, but after a month of daily interaction and shared stories...even an old dog like him could admit that he had been wrong.

"You make a solid point," the blonde promised, manicured fingers lifting a fry to nibble on it once before taking a heartier bite. "And this is incredibly delicious."

The admission was sincere and the probably-retired-detective nodded in approval when Moira tucked into her meal with none of her previous reluctance, looking as if every bite revived the stick-thin woman. Allowing his food to absorb his attention, he surrendered his alert status and permitted himself a rare moment to just relax and enjoy.

Absently reaching for the ketchup, he faltered mid-squeeze when he caught a glimpse of the blonde looking utterly unguarded with an expression of gratitude with shaky vestiges of hope that pierced through the armor of his heart and left him reeling.
Mouth going dry, Quentin hastily took a sip of coke and tried--utterly unsuccessfully--to rein in his own emotions with no success. In a nutshell, the beta realized he was fucked well and good. His long-suffering, suppressed conscience piped in that perhaps it was a healthy change while his grudge holding protested everything.

"If you're still concerned about my driving, I'm happy to assure you that I informed your fellow officers at the precinct that I'm prepared to pay for all outstanding damages and refrain from driving until I see a therapist." Moira rattled off the line with the finesse of a seasoned politician, managing to look sincere and refined like the untouchable blue blood, which Quentin supposed she was.

"That might be what you told those geniuses at the precinct," the beta took care to keep his tone relaxed in between delicious bites of fries and burger. Across from him, Moira's cheeks had regained a bit of color and she did not look a few shades from collapsing from hunger which was a definite plus in his book. "But you and I both know why we're both really here tonight."

"Just so."

What Quentin could only characterize as a shy smile teased the corner of Moira's mouth before the blonde visibly, consciously relaxed and stared at him with sorrow that wasn't ebbing, but rather was buried deep in the depths of her eyes like bottled lightning; perhaps he recognized the look as the same one that he silenced at the bottom of a bottle--or at least the dreamy remembrance of such things.

Licking a bit of bacon grease off his finger, the fingers of his other hand skated over the table to prod the baby-smooth back of Moira's hand in a lingering caress that he pretended not to hear her light intake of breath.

"I got something I want to show you after we get done here."

Watching the sharp-witted woman nod thoughtfully was positively sublime compared with facing his own reality.

"As if you need to ask." The gentle acquiescence a keen reminder of all that had transpired in their shared confessionals from their estranged relationships with their children, and the mutually confusing deaths of people in their lives.

The rest of their meal passed in quiet much as Thanksgiving meals do when the guests are too busy chowing down to chat. Lance's cell dings with an incoming text that he purposefully ignores for the shame of being incapable of facing Laurel, which does nothing to ease his guilty conscience. Moira's phone does not emit so much as a peep, which Quentin knows to be a knife to the mother's heart. Human beings are fickle, but real life even more so.

Their waitress, young, perky thing that she is deposits a check on their table to which Quentin allows Moira to pick-up do to the logical agreement all concerned. The pair nodded at one another without speaking and head out of the restaurant before trudging into the miserable deluge that was pouring over Starling.

"Ah, hell I didn't even think to bring--"

"An umbrella?" Amusement colored Moira as she nonchalantly raised an umbrella over their heads like a an apprentice magician with a soft, distracted smile.

"I guess you are prepared for everything."
"Not everything." Quiet regret returns like a pair of shackles to Moira's face and Quentin loathes himself more than he could have ever imagined possible.

Desperate to salvage their evening, Quentin hastily gripped the blonde's arm and drew her close as if proximity alone could banish the negative thoughts plaguing the both of them. They walked past people from all walks of life but Moira never faltered, not even when a dirty young man with scraggly pants approached and asked for money--Lance may have provided a box of French fries to fill that particular void.

"I don't think I ever would have tried dipping my fries in a milkshake if you hadn't prompted me," Moira comments with a levity about her that lightens his mood and tethers Quentin to the present.

"Laurel always enjoyed doing that when she was a kid." Reminiscing had become a habit to avoid lately, but Moira brought forth a crazy need to share.

"Thea had quite a sweet tooth too," Moira remarked slowly, but Quentin listened for tension but only heard a slight wistfulness from the other beta. "Oliver was more savory. Loved muffins but not the sweet ones. Corn bread. Odd little things like that."

"Sara liked..." Instantly his throat closed with a clack and a reassuring squeeze from Moira's fingers grounded him in the moment. "--she liked cheese."

Three blocks down, Quentin tugged the unresisting woman into a mostly empty lot and gestured to a giant white motor home that looked pretty good aside from a noticeable dent on the front bumper. Inside the front window, a generic For Sale sign remained faintly visible despite the late hour, though the street lights were more than likely responsible.

Releasing his grip on Moira's hand, he whirled and rubbed his hands together thoughtfully. "I'm thinking about just going for it and buying it!"

"That?" The dubious tone rubbed his ego abrasively, but he pasted on a brave face and nodded sharply all the same.

"You and I have spent so much time worrying about our children, that we forgot about ourselves somewhere along the line. I know it's crazy, but I think we should just hit the road and get away from everything for a while."

"You mean running away."

Okay, Quentin admitted to himself that her lackluster reaction was not exactly what he had been hoping for, but beggars couldn't exactly be choosers.

"Maybe we are," he swallowed, eyeing Moira hugging herself in a sort of sad desperation that made Quentin feel that much more desolate. "But that drive in me has just up and disappeared. I can't be what Laurel needs and if I stay here, I'm either gonna go crazy or I'm gonna end up killing somebody. And after everything you've told me, don't you think some time away might do you good?"

Watching the blonde turn and pace back in forth like a caged tigress was possibly one of the top five nerve-wracking moments of Quentin's life and that sort of accomplishment was somewhat horrifying. Swallowing down the bile that still faintly tasted of ketchup and salt, he watched the distraught beta fret, mutter, and look positively distressed in a manner that left the old cop feeling like a jerk.
"You know that it's my fault that Oliver's missing right now. I don't think I have the right to just run away from my life."

Despite the comment not being aimed at him, Quentin felt it like a punch to the gut nevertheless. Shamming was a talent that he never mastered, so he settled for an awkward side shuffle that kicked stray pieces of gravel into the street and pressed his lips together in what was no doubt a poor show of civility as he struggled to regain an ounce of his trounced pride.

"You think I'm running away?"

"You know I think more of you than that."

A flicker of regret danced in Moira's eyes for a moment before vanishing as quickly as if had never been. Those fingers that his own had become accustomed to holding over the past few weeks reached for him. Quentin almost felt guilty for stepping away when Moira looked stricken by the rejection before she veiled the hurt with a vaguely haughty look that befitted an uptight rich woman with far too much time on her hands.

"It really doesn't matter what I think does it?" Spinning away, Quentin did what he did better than most: he lashed out. "Just forget it. I wouldn't want to deprive you of sitting in your big house all alone, worrying about people that would sooner kill you than forgive you. So, save it, Moira. I'm out."

Perhaps he could and should be ashamed for allowing his temper to get the best of him, but Quentin could not find it in himself to care.

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The days blended together in Slade's world until the alpha could be certain of nothing save his sanity was fraying like a thread.

In the darkness of his training cell, Shado unhelpfully persisted in glaring at him. Hour after hour. After hour. Sleep evaded him and his mind rebelled against a fear of its own making and a nightmare from which there could be no reprieve. The counselor became the tormentor and Slade was trapped and Oliver was still beyond his reach.

Days and days spent under the thumb of Ra's al Ghul, answering to a name that Slade hardly considered to belong to him, all sense of time was distorted. The Demon's Head personally trained with him after every two meals--that, Slade felt confident in thinking, appeared to be true. Spears, swords, staves; no art was left untapped and each mastery was pounded into his body while Shado showered him with insults.

Sometimes Malcolm would join Ra's in their bouts, interjecting lively conversation in what otherwise would have been truly dull exchanges of the long-term goals of the League.

Lined formations amid torchlight as devout servants greeted their master with sobering loyalty. A sea of black cloaked killers that took away the mystery in Malcolm's garb when there were a hundred--no, a thousand--stood in reverent silence. The crowd parted like the Red Sea and the chilling caress of Ra's al Ghul's voice chilled the Australian to the core.

"Welcome home, Al-Amir."

"Slade," Malcolm's voice sliced through her sinister illusion poised Indian style with a mocking glance. Jerking upright, he blinked at the grave cast to the man's face and blinked owlishly.
A priestess was chanting a line of Persian bullshit that Slade was too riled up too appreciate while Malcolm knelt across from him stripped completely save his trousers. Scars marking his father-in-law as a seasoned combatant should not have come as such a surprise, but it was...seeing him in such a state.

A branded A jutted out from the elder alpha's skin, but the priestess chanted a song and poured some sort of flowery, sacred oil over the man's head as part of a reintroduction into the League. Slade did not consider himself an atheist, but the ceremony would have been laughable had it not been performed by a group of grim-faced murderers.

"Are you prepared to relieve yourself of your former name and swear yourself to my service?"

"Swear to uphold your end and I'll give you my oath that everything save 'him' be gone."

"The most powerful nations of the world were built upon strong alliances and so shall it be with us. Swear."

"Slade!" The command anchored him in the present and he shuffled to his feet, feeling unnaturally edgy, taking in the shadowy crevices of the room with overactive suspicion. Uncovering nothing to balance his thoughts, the alpha met the cold azure gaze and fisted his hands.

"Oliver?"

"Three days." Expecting a negative after receiving the same lackluster response every day, it jolted him upright and he pretended not to hear the rustle of Shado climbing to her feet.

"You want me to fight him?"

"No," the Demon's Head strode around the cavern, ridiculous robe dragging on the floor like some pretentious king, which Slade secretly thought the man fashioned himself to be. Like a hawk, Ra's circled himself and a veiled man kneeling next to Ra's. "I want you to kill him. Or in turn be slain."

The loyal slave bowed once to his master before charging toward Slade like a reckless suicide bomber that he had decapitated outside Baghdad. Letting the sheep run at him, the wolf lunged as the last second and seized the man's blade, foot rising to crush the man's ribcage in a single, brutal strike that tossed the assassin into a heaping sprawl across the room.

Shattering the sword between his hands, Slade marched over to where his wheezing opponent was struggling into a sitting position--no doubt repeating some bullshit mantra about loyalty until death. Slade could give a shit. Kneeling, he snapped the man's neck with the ease one might murder a baby bird and stepped back with a strictly neutral look shot toward Ra's.

"Your strength has incredible merit, but I can see that some creative measures will need to be taken in order to showcase your skill and make improvements. Come."

Three days. He could hold out for three more days. For Oliver anything was possible.

"But that isn't our biggest concern." Maybe not for you, Slade thought ruefully as he scanned the dark chamber thoughtfully. "I'm here to bring you to Ra's now. If all goes well, I believe you have a chance of ridding yourself of those delusions. Permanently."

"He's lying." Shado's voice brushed his ear and the alpha felt the Chinese archer take up position next to him, pressing her weight with enough force that Slade adjusted his weight to
compensate despite knowing rationally she wasn't even there. "Surely you must know that there is no escaping me."

It was a risk--no, a hope--worth taking.

"Then let's do this."

Malcolm whisked him past his guards and down toward the catacombs of Nanda Parbat without another word.

A flurry of motions left Slade disarmed and incredibly frustrated with the speed at which his new master moved while wearing a damned dress! Rising to his feet, he retrieved his blades from the sandy plateau and assumed an offensive guard and fed off the challenging aura emitting from the dominant alpha across from him.

"Again," he demanded, determined to use his observations from before to his best advantage.

At the base of the stairway, one of the more vast chambers with vaulted ceilings and crackling biers illuminated a hall of perhaps a hundred assassins armed to the teeth and kneeling before a particularly proud looking Ra's al Ghul.

Maintaining an even, un rushed pace was difficult with his frayed link to his mate calling to the alpha like a siren song, but Slade felt he managed to maintain a disinterested appearance while he bowed, in a charade of respect, to his master.

Malcolm separated himself from him and bowed once before Ra's before assuming an at ready position that his father-in-law had earned as one of the most skilled swordsman next to Ra's himself.

Malcolm spun, ducked, and wove in between a ring of five combatants, easily avoiding blows that would permanently disable or potentially kill a lesser man. Like magic, the man used his body like a tool and disarmed his opponents one by one with the finesse of a dancer. Entranced, Slade barely registered his Master's arrival until a heavy, ringed finger dropped onto his marblesque shoulder in a show of rare comaraderie.

"When I'm done with you boy, you'll be even more impressive than Al Sah-Her."

"My liege!" A pair of guards dragged a strangely garbed figure, slight of frame toward them and threw the person to the ground with all the care one might give their garbage at the end of the week. "We found someone trying to enter your halls uninvited."

"Tell me, then," the compelling voice sounded reproving but still slightly...off. On guard, Slade watched the proceeding with interest and studied the room with something akin to curiosity. "Why is this individual still living?"

"She is known to Al-Amir."

Instantly, Slade stiffened as a hood was yanked off to reveal the person that it couldn't be but somehow was. Lusterless locks of raven hair and those accusing dark eyes blinked as if pained by the light. Even more perplexing was the lines of fear as his hallucination gained a voice.

"Slade, why are you doing this? We need to rescue, Oliver! Let me go, please!"

Oliver sighed and nuzzled deeper into his neck. Restless, the alpha nevertheless purred
softly for his mate who slumbered away, clueless to his lover's turmoil.

The campfire--rare luxury that it was--crackled merrily in the windless conditions and kept the worst of the evening's chill at bay. Perched on a log, Shado stared into the flame with a solemn, grim expression that defied the intrinsically positive nature of the young woman.

"Can't sleep?"

His whispered query roused the lounging alpha and she folded her arms and smiled bitterly at the orange blaze before tossing on a spare log to fuel their little fire.

"I just think that even if we get off this island, it won't change anything."

Snorting, he rubbed his omega's back, delighted at the approving sigh his sleeping mate made before lifting a skeptical brow toward the woman he viewed as a sister.

"I think you're wrong. When we get out of here, you and I are going to take care of this kid and find you someone pretty to shack up with too. And we're going to get our happily ever after because we fucking deserve it."

Shado smiled and half-sobbed, half laughed as she wrung her hands. Oliver stirred and Slade dipped his head to nuzzle the young blonde once until the omega shivered and resettled in his arms.

"Promise me that you'll take care of him no matter what the cost?" The whispered plea should have been too quiet, but a helpful breeze carried it to the Australian and he looked to the devastated Chinese woman that stared at Oliver as if he were a priceless treasure rather than a worn out young man that had not had a proper shave in months. Even so, he caught the edge of tension lining her eyes that only came with a frightening depth of love and nodded once jerkily.

"Always."

"Then maybe I'll be able to rest after all."

At the time, he assumed when she hunkered down in her bed that she was referring to basic REM cycles, but the back of his mind felt more than a little unsure of that.

Wielding his promise like a shield, Slade ignored the pretense and envisioned only an obstacle blocking the way to his goal.

Witnessing the fearful woman take a step backward as a random soldier shoved a dagger in her numb fingers, Slade trembled as he attempted to harness the conflict he was feeling.

Behind her, the columns of assassins shifted forward with the unstoppable flow of a Roman phalanx, enclosing the alpha and the wide-eyed woman at his feet in a square arena offering no place to run.

"Stand," he ordered the spectre, that had somehow regained the fumbling graces of the living, as she rose on petrified feet with her eyes bulging like a rabbit staring down a wolf.

"Slade," the blubbering insulted his memory of the friend he'd lost and twisted the alpha's gut. "This is a mistake! You would never have done this!"

"In inevitability, all things change," his thoughts lingered only on winning the trust of a madman so that he might secure the freedom of another. "Now fight!"
Like someone possessed, his friend lurched toward him, swinging her daggers in a wild arc that dismayed him with the lack of skill he knew that Shado possessed. Slade blocked the blow with ease and with his second sword, he shoved it through Shado’s chest. Inwardly crumbling, he turned away for a second and breathed. Blood filled the air as the dying beta choked on his own blood.

Wait. Like a veil had been lifted, Slade turned and looked around the room with uncertain apprehension in each motion.

Looking down, Shado’s elegant features were displaced by frightened features of a young man no older than Oliver had been when he had been shipwrecked. The narrow sea-green gaze looked at him with such a pitiful accusation that the alpha found himself instantly perplexed.

Turning to Ra’s, he looked around the chamber that had emptied of the dozens of men, leaving only Ra’s and a patiently waiting Malcolm watching his confusion with appraising pride.

"Since your arrival, you’ve have consumed a rare herb, centuries old, that causes your conscience to come to the forefront of your thoughts." The explanation dispelled his doubts and for the first time since being infected by the Mirakuru, Slade felt that his faculties were completely under his control rather than fragmented to pieces. "For each person it’s different. Some people see family and loved ones. Others encounter trusted friends and teachers. Who did you see?"

"My best friend." The answer flowed with honesty and Slade felt no shame in the prolonged farewell. Shado deserved better than to have her memory tarnished by a false phantom. Even more than a simple herb, Slade felt like something else has occurred here that could not be dismissed so easily.

Shado was gone... perhaps forever this time. Perhaps only a moment. Only time would tell.

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Flashes teased the outskirts of thought. Mission after mission. An ironic, cryptic message from Felicity: survive—as if he hadn’t heard that one before. More recently, clearing a terrorist cell from jihadists in Jordan in an ancient Christian village of all places. Amanda choosing to blow the building after he confirmed the presence of a crucial military target and then...nothing.

"--fucking bitch. Jesus Christ! Oliver, come in! I need to get in there and help him! Oliver!"

"Can it, rich boy! Your brother ain't no bitch! He can look after himself! We got incoming!"

"Put a sock in it! Queen! Oliver!"

Aside from the potent ringing in his ears, the unholy bickering that existed as a constant, for the past several weeks, between Tommy and Floyd blared in Oliver Queen’s ear and roused the omega back to a state of consciousness.

In a state of disconnect, the archer felt his body convulse with a series of hacking coughs; survival 101 kicking in, he reflexively spat out a mouthful of dust while all his muscles contracted in protest against the strain of sudden motion. Swiping irritably at his eyes, he absently noted black residue and sticky blood sticking to the back of his arm, but that was secondary to the ringing in his ears that nearly drowned out the squabbling trio.

"Come on, Queen! Answer me."
"Oliver! Oliver!"

"Shut your pie holes! You bitches are leading them right to us with your goddamn wailing! I told you he'll be back so shut up and shoot!"

Nose wrinkling against thick plumes of black smoke, Oliver shook his head and clambered to his feet, noting a distinctly painful twinge just above his right knee. A fumbled assessment identified a thick piece of metal jutting from just beneath the kneecap, but there was no time to baby himself with something as petty as a field bandage for a wound that had been kind enough to not hit an artery.

The concrete shell with smouldering piles of rubble had a gaping hole in the roof of what had no doubt been a historical site of an old church. Upon the far wall in the midst of garish graffiti designs, a massive wooden cross had nearly disintegrated beneath tongues of flame, which struck a chord in the battle-worn archer despite the pervading numbness his existence had become during A.R.G.U.S operations.

Bracing himself against a worn stone pillar that had survived the span of time and Amanda's callous detonation of the building, the survivor narrowed his focus to a stifled groan echoing from the far side of the smoky interior that has transformed into ground zero from Waller's hair-trigger decision making.

Spying his bow miraculously still intact all by its lonesome under a 'skylight,' the archer buried his reaction to his injury and darted across the room and seized the bow; reaching back, the omega paused and inhaled sharply at his lack of arrows.

"Not today," he muttered, picturing Amanda's lifeless body in front of him. Oliver refused to let the conniving bitch wash her hands of him so quickly.

In the backdrop, he heard Tommy's whoop of relief, which the omega pushed aside. A premature celebration was a sure-fire way to find himself a permanent resident of this forgotten shrine in the foothills of Jordan: Oliver Queen was not prepared to die. Not yet.

Bursting into motion, the omega raced toward a fallen combatant he had felled from a rooftop engagement before the bomb went off. Dropping beside the faceless victim, blood caked fingers tugged the arrow free of the unresisting corpse and Oliver grimly tallied an eighteenth casualty, at his hand alone, from today's foray. Ripping a second arrow from the corpse's gut with a loud squelch; the archer's nose wrinkled in distaste as he refitted the bloodied arrow to his quiver, the second arrow at ready in his fingers, as he retreated into the labyrinthine shadows of rubble and smoke.

Outside, the persistent hum of machine guns rattled the cagey omega, but Oliver pursued the raspy, coughing sound until he felt absolutely positive the sound originated from just beyond the smokescreen in front of him.

Lunging through it, he barely had a second to register the startled, shocked look on the face of a dark-eyed terrorist. As he released the arrow, it occurred to the archer that his prey looked entirely like a startled animal pleading faintly for its life just before it ended. Perhaps a flair of innocence to a soul butchered by intolerance and radicalism. Either way, watching the life depart and the body sag backward afforded Oliver's his own brand of relief.

"Nineteen," he muttered aimlessly, not bothering to retrieve the arrow a second time.

"Green Arrow," the devil caressed his eardrums with a mockery of Yao-Fei's legacy that
never failed to cause Oliver's heart to flinch like an animal caught in a trap. "This is Mockingbird. Confirm elimination of target and prepare for an extraction unit. 5 minutes."

"Acknowledged." Fuck. You. And if that asshole survived a direct hit from a missile, the dick deserved to walk the hell out of here.

"Oh fuck, Oliver! Thank God, you're alright!" Though Oliver had doubts his brother would be if the exchange of ammunition kept up like that.

"We got a couple cowboys but I got sight on them so you do your thing and I'll cover you."

A swell of fondness tugged on the omega at the comment from the sniper that had unexpectedly had a complete change of attitude following their initial mission after witnessing Oliver ruthlessly dispatch a group of enemies and save his life. Since then, the beta's cynical personality continued a saga with Tommy whilst simultaneously solidifying his role in their lives. Enough that if they ever got out of this hellhole, Oliver would not hesitate in the slightest to offer the man a place in their lives.

Such was the loyalty of A.R.G.U.S. slaves.

Laying his trust and fate in the hands of his comrades, Oliver ran full-tilt out of a smoking hole under an unstable archway that looked a stiff wind from collapse. Darting beneath the fragile structure, the omega erupted into action as he landed behind a rock wall and two bullet-ridden vehicles with men wearing no body armor and wielding machines guns peppered the far wall where one of his comrades was cooped up.

Without pausing to reconsider, Oliver fired his final arrow into the exposed back of a young man lifting an RPG unit, neatly ripping through the youth's spinal column and allowing the boy to fold into a dead pile. Instantly, he acquired the attention of the remaining four men. His presence registered but the combatants reacted to slow; Oliver slung his bow over his shoulder vaulted the rocky outcropping, hearing the whiz of Lawton's sniper rifle zinging and a pair of thuds in the territory he fled.

Rolling down the hill of rocks, Oliver gritted his teeth as the surface tore at his skin and reopened healing scrapes from Nairobi's mission two days ago.

'Ignore it. Survive.'

Oliver regained his feet and ran down an old alley way, catching sight of an attacker leaping from his periphery. Twisting, he grappled with his opponent and used the torque of the man's body to toss him to the ground and wrench the man's neck upward and twist with a furious snap. Dropping the body limper than a doll, the archer darted down a ways until he heard the dull roar of a military extraction van lumber down a street.

Hammering the cobbledstone, his leather boots pounded the pavement and carried him toward a rumbling truck where Tommy stood in his black uniform with a light trickle of blood dribbling from a head wound, but the alpha looked utterly relieved to see him. Not a moment later, Floyd and Diggle appeared round the opposite corner looking winded but mostly alright even if Lawton's arm looked a little worse for wear.

Clambering aboard the transport, Oliver plopped onto a bench wearily and eased himself into a position that favored the shrapnel in his leg and dropped his bow onto his lap. Fingering the drawstring, Oliver felt his mind wander to Slade and wondering what was keeping the big man. Not
for an instant did the omega doubt his alpha's commitment, so that only caused him to imagine a thousand scenarios with nothing comforting left.

"Alright." Some nameless A.R.G.U.S. twit that was no doubt gunning for a promotion piped up with a rumbling no-nonsense tone that would make a girl's prom date piss their pants but didn't do much for seasoned killers like the three of them. "Hand over your weaponry prisoners."

"Sit your ass down and we'll pretend we didn't hear you," Tommy snorted, looking incredulous as he crossed his arms that looked to have swelled to twice the size they had been prior to their arrival. Continuous missions and 24-hour training rooms apparently did have benefits that were rather mind boggling. His brother was a force to be reckoned with all on his own.

"You say the word, boss and I'll make his death look totally accidental." Floyd offered to the Squad's churlish leader cheerfully.

Just as the minion reached for his weapon, John interceded and stood in the moving truck.

"Officer, these men are under my command and until we get back to home base, they stay armed. Is that clear?" When the mook offered a stiff, unhappy nod that wafted of the beta's bristling displeasure, Diggle rounded on him. "You're heading to medical as soon as we get in. Your brother can drag your sorry ass there."

I would have felt more offended if John had not taken the opportunity to press something into my palm that I instantly palmed and tucked away.

Three Days.

"If it's all the same to you, John," he mustered a false-mocking tone and felt his resolve tighten fractionally. "The boys can patch me up. I'd be more comfortable with them too."

That earned him a pair of calculated stares, but Oliver simply pretended he had not noticed.

"Your call but I'm not allowing any painkillers."

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"Hold still for one more second," Floyd muttered from the corner, poised over his brother's seeping injury with a sewing needle to apply the last row of meticulously surgical stitches.

Convinced the omega was well in hand, Tommy turned to shuck his shirt and trousers with military precision; where once he would have shivered and developed a healthy patch of goose bumps, the cool temperature hardly phased the alpha.

Attending to his injuries felt like normal after over a month in hell; peroxide patches, a careful swipe of antibiotic ointment, and a bandage slapped on for good measure. Laurel would never recognize him like this. Swallowing down the hurt that continued to plague him, Tommy sighed at the macabre landscape of scrapes, cuts, and bruises that painted a sort of grotesque rainbow across the canvas of skin.

And the leftover gore smattering his cheeks and sinking into his scent pores nearly drove the alpha to irrationality. Sure, he knew what signing up to patrol Starling's streets would mean, but becoming the hit man--blackmailed slave--of the United States Government was a little much even for the sturdiest individual.

He missed Laurel. But if he brought her up one more time, his bunkmates just might
"She's gonna get you killed." Shamelessly eavesdropping, Tommy stood up and stared right at the spot where Floyd was easing his stubborn sibling onto a foam training mat. Oliver himself looked peaked and ashen, his eyes barely flickering as the sniper positioned his limp limbs. "So I'd be dreaming up a plan while you lie there all lazy like!"

"Shut it, Lawton."

Oliver's words slurred as the omega's eyes fell closed in between short exhausted breaths. A dirty arm lifted into the air and swayed like a flag at half mast, before falling down like a weighted sack.

Stern protective instincts dissolved his final layer of control and Tommy roughly gripped an oversized towel from a neat stack and tugged it off the table. Shaking it open, he approached his resting brother, conscious of Floyd's hawk-eyed stare from above as he slung the thin fabric over his brother's torso and a good portion of his legs. Whether it was hopeful thinking or not, he thought that Oliver appeared a touch more at ease with the makeshift blanket.

"Pretty sure he's unconscious and not just sleeping. Though he'll probably transition to snoozing soon enough."

Knowing his companion's detached, clinical assessment of Oliver's condition was just part of the cynical, PTSD killer's less-charming personality traits made it easier to understand and get along with the other man.

"I could have lost him today."

What would that have meant for him? Impressions of Amanda Waller presented the dark-eyed woman as a puppet-master wielding cruelty as a cloak and controlling them with the finesse of a chess grandmaster. Tommy was no genius, but even he could connect the dots and recognize that his role in this A.R.G.U.S. plot was to serve as a pawn to control his brother. But if the parameters of the game had shifted and Oliver's life had become expendable, what purpose did he have?

"We're considered expendable assets," Floyd quipped with a wry twist of the lips the alpha had come to associate with the bitter sniper. Dropping into a crouch, he tracked the other man as he flopped to the ground next to the shallowly breathing omega and methodically stripped off the concealed weaponry and ammo, chucking it against the wall. "They don't see us as any more sentient than a piece of equipment. We're weapons that are useful but ultimately disposable. I suspect your brother's alpha is of such interest to these dicks pure and simply because ASIS is a giant question mark that they desperately want to fill in some blanks."

Rubbing absently at a smarting bruise stinging his thigh, Tommy pondered the probability of Floyd accurately assessing the situation, strange as it was. "I don't buy it," he didn't fight the urge to run his hand along his brother's exposed arm before settling at the wrist to test the reedy flow of Oliver's pulse throbbing beneath his measuring fingertips. "Foreign intelligence can't be worth all the trouble they've gone to."

"Believe what you like, but cracking the code of one of the world's most reclusive, foreign agencies is like dangling a juicy, meaty bone before a starving mutt." The sarcastic scoffing caused the alpha to shift defensively except--Floyd's witty mask deflated like a balloon without air, leaving an exhausted, stricken shell behind. Instantly, Tommy felt ashamed for his reactive dismissal of his companion--no, his friend's hypothesis.
"We're going to get out of here." Squeezing his brother's unconscious hand once, he scarcely recognized the venom oozing from his own voice as he snarled bitterly. Reaching over, he snatched up Floyd's arm and shook it so violently the other man jerked backward defensively, eyes popping wide to blink at him in startled wonder. "We all have people to live for and I'll be damned if we don't make it out of here. You too, Floyd. That baby girl of yours deserves better than for her father to die in some bullshit, senseless scenario."

Tommy didn't miss the way the sniper flinched backward at the mention of his daughter and shift away to glare at the wall angrily. Resolve ignited, the alpha curled himself around his omega sibling in hope of warming the injured man, sniffing in heavy whiffs of powder, dust and Oliver's unique scent devoid of any lingering traces of the Australian alpha. The absent aroma was a blow to Tommy let alone his grieving brother and it felt like something else had been ripped from their unfortunate family yet again.

"My daughter is better off not knowing me." Floyd's voice, tainted with a nasty snarl of emotion was a dangerous prospect at this juncture in the game and so Tommy listened to the sniper's voice bounce of the walls of their 'cell. "A killer that can't escape the war isn't exactly father-of-the-year material. I just hope my wife found a suitable stand-in for her."

"My girlfriend deserves better than a man that kills people in a mask," Tommy muttered, closing his eyes as the adrenaline dissipated, evoking a wave of battered exhaustion in the brunette that he was no more capable of staving off than a tidal wave. "And before I came here, I was going to break up with her."

"So you say."

Ignoring Floyd's accusing snort that Tommy recognized stemmed from the other man's lurking insecurity, the alpha kept his composure even as sleep teased his mind and continued to speak on sleepy autopilot.

"The thing is," he swallowed lightly, a strange memory of Laurel marching into the courthouse with the determination of an avenging angel lighting a smile to his wounded heart. "Thinking of her is what's keeping me alive. It's strange because I would die for my dad, Oliver, Thea and even Slade or Felicity without a second thought. But what's keeping me alive is realizing how much I still love her and how much I still want to be with her...even if she deserves better."

"A little selfish isn't it?"

"Maybe we deserve a little selfish," Tommy muttered, easing away on the wings of slumber where life was not so troublesome.

"I don't believe in second chances, kid. But maybe I do believe in you."

Chapter End Notes

My beta reader is absent so all mistakes belong to me. Also, I'm so glad this chapter is over because I hated everything about it. Thank God it's over so I can move on to bigger and better things.
Adam Parsons was a retired Navy Seal with half-a-dozen tours of duty in the Middle-East under his belt. The lean Texas native returned from the war with medals, more than a couple scars from scraps with enemy combatants, and PTSD--big surprise, every soldier that saw combat was suffering from night terrors and miserable therapy sessions.

An apple pie, civilian life seemed unappealing and nearly impossible for Adam and the ex-soldier felt incredibly fortune that A.R.G.U.S. recruited him away from a life of coping with a heavy dose of alcoholism. Performing necessary dirty work and existing in a technical grey area was a comfort for a veteran unsettled by the false sense of security that life had become. So it was with a rare breed of enthusiasm that the military man signed up for a new and exciting service to his country.

Disappointment was a commodity of most soldiers, however, he never expected to become a glorified doorman for the A.R.G.U.S. field facility. As the new guy on the team, Adam supposed that being benched for his first op was to be expected, but that didn't stop him from moping when the others on the carrier dropped hints about a mysterious 'Taskforce X' that was being brought in to handle a terrorist nest encroaching just inside the borders of India.

And when the terrorist cell is lead by a high-ranking Al-Qaeda member, A.R.G.U.S. dispatched a team of its best and brightest... which somehow didn't include him. That had been a serious blow to his confidence and rather hard to process.

Glumly glaring at the endlessly conspicuous glances aimed at him from bold Indian women that apparently saw nothing wrong with being caught staring. And stare they did; at his sweating brow, his out-of-place dark suit, and the beads of sweat accumulating on his brow that were obviously lining his brown. Ugh. At least in the desert he wasn't the only American sweating like a pig.

And he supposed the broad redhead, Pete Johnson, was patrolling the opposite street of the dilapidated shell that looked nothing like the state of the art interior.

Out of the throng of veiled and turbaned civvies, someone full on tripped into his side; like the gentleman his mother raised him to be, he reactively steadied the wobbly female that was grinning up at him in an abashed manner. First impressions suggested lovely and off-putting which fit together about as well as cats and dogs. Sapphire eyes twinkled with coy amusement, but the heavy bonded scent lingering with traces of the woman's alpha crushed his initial attraction like a bug. A darn shame too because she was one fine specimen.
"So sorry." Even though a veil obscures parts of her features, Adam finds himself enchanted by the hint of honey colored locks and the porcelain skin that sported tinted pink cheeks. Against his will, the alpha found himself stirring with interest, practically crawling out of his skin when she touched his hand with her own delicate one.

Swallowing with difficulty that he could not even pretend was because of India's ridiculous heat-wave, the alpha managed to keep his tone even. Somehow. "Not at all, ma'am. Glad to be of help."

True too. Bumping into a gorgeous--even if she was bonded--blonde had been the most interesting thing to happen all day.

"Well, I have to go. Maybe I'll see you around." The blonde omega winked at him playfully and much to his consternation, sashayed away with a playful wave that left the man praying to any and every listening deity that they did meet again and she might magically be separating from her alpha that had mistreated her for ages.

"You betcha!!"

In the fifteen seconds before the world turned filmy and awareness slipped away, Adam focused not on the strange possibility that the lone Caucasian female he saw in the last four hours and how strange it must have been to happen to bump into him outside a government facility. Instead, he fantasized about running in as the knight in shining armor to save the sweet, shy omega that had just wandered into his life.

Moments later though, like a computer being rebooted, Adam's eyes flickered and turned slate dull and empty with as much intelligence as a pebble in the lane.

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"Woohoo! Neuro bug bot is a go!" Felicity whooped and keyed in the next command from her tablet in a dingy, icky alley where a couple of bums eyed her up warily. A few keyed in clicks later and the ARGUS doorman was, for all practical purposes, lobotomized of higher functioning until she terminated the link or circumstances changed for the vehicle in question. Either way, she had seen that 'interesting' service record of his so...cool dice! "Well, at least those government contractors won't be able to say I don't field test my products!"

Alert hearing left the omega way ahead of the grungy man sidling up to her; whether he desired to sate his need for booze or something less palatable, Felicity had no intention of obliging him. Spinning in the uncomfortable Indian sandals under the traditional sari, a far cry from the supportive footwear she was accustomed to, the blonde took no prisoners.

Eyeing the vermin inching along the wall like an insect while the other schmucks eyed them both warily, Felicity frowned and keyed in a series of command prompts into her console. Tapping her foot impatiently, she rolled her eyes at the snaky expression coating the ill-dressed man as he reached for her as if he believed himself to be cornering a wounded creature.

So the jackal mistook the lion for a sheep?

"Sundar," the sleezebag whispered in something akin to worshipful lust and stared at Felicity like a starving man before a feast while continuing to utter lines in Hindi that she understood not-at-all. Shooting the oaf a baleful glare, another moment lapsed before the creep's syllables petered off. Finally, the bot kicked in leaving nothing but an expressionless, slightly dazed looking husk of a would-be-rapist behind.
"At least you're quiet now because that is definitely a vast improvement!" Felicity rolled her eyes, turning to tap on the open screen and pulled up her webcam before ordering Bug Bot A to head indoors and stand next to the nearest ventilation unit. Footfalls from the entrance of the alley announced themselves with the telltale squeak of high-quality leather and familiar scent of her faithful bodyguards—though she had to admit she was peeved they had taken so long to arrive.

"What kept you?"

"Local authorities detained us momentarily. Our apologies, ma'am. It won't happen again." Tim sounded apologetic and conclusive, but the omega knew that Malcolm would be less than understanding of any lapse in her protective detail; whether or not Felicity required an escort hardly mattered to the other alpha.

"You're right it won't." When she finally deigned to glance toward the tall male omega, Felicity felt mildly amused by the restrained look guarding Tim and his partner Jerry's faces. Seeing the short nod from the blonde, Felicity smiled graciously, prodded the tablet again, and shifted her feet with a frown. God, she needed to get out of these damn shoes.

Tugging out her I-phone, Felicity shot her newest robot an annoyed snort; on an intellectual level she was more than aware there was something distinctively wrong with the way she processed ethics these days, but considering how well her life was going lately, she wasn't going to complain or delve too deep.

A single ring later and the line picked up and that familiar voice blanketed every inch of her like a warm embrace.

"Felicity." Ooh she could melt into a puddle of marshmallow goo right now just from hearing his voice. 'Say it again,' she yearned to beg him, but her rational mind shut down the thought before she could bring it to life. After all, they had only been separated for a few weeks...err month. Something. And this was sooo not the time or place to be having an omega fluff moment.

"It's working like a charm!" Her excitement burst out of her like a gunshot and she giggled freely in contentment, the anxiety seeping away as if it had never been. "I even used it to handle some creepo in the alleyway. It was so freaking awesome!" Tim and Jerry shifted restlessly as if the action would spare them their master's derision. And ooh... maybe she ought to have held back on mentioning alley-man.

The aggressive growl that her mate rumbled was perhaps one of the sexiest things she had ever heard. Pregnant or not, the omega felt one more growl away from exploding like a needy, heat stricken omega because it had been far too long since they had been intimate and emotionally... well, it was nice to hear him react so possessively. As soon as she got Malcolm home, she intended to exploit every dirty trick in the book if it meant keeping him with her; one thing was certain, they were never, ever going to be separated for such a ludicrously extensive period of time ever, ever again!

"You promised me that you were going to behave and stay safe." Guess that meant her mate was feeling a little small in the nads. Whatever, she could feign understanding of ridiculous, alpha notions with the best of them. "I thought Tim and Jerry were going to be with you the entire time." Ooh stars, she was definitely confining him to her bed for a week after they got home! Maybe she could get him to growl while she licked chocolate off him! Yep, that was definitely a plan worth making.

"Where were they?" Who? Oh! Gathering her scattered thoughts was more difficult than she had anticipated. Crap, daydreaming while testing software was sooo unprofessional.
"Yeah, okay, I will. And they've been with me the entire time. It's not their fault that some weirdo thought I was attractive." The blonde brushed him off with quick agreeability and a little white-lie treatment that he would hopefully accept at least in the short term because they really, really had bigger fish to fry. And boys to bring home. "Now we've got a job to do so can we please focus on that? My bots are in and I'll need three--" Okay, maybe a quick bathroom break...shouldn't have had that last espresso. "No, shit! Okay, give me five minutes and you're good to go!"

"Felicity." The command in Malcolm's tone broadcasted dominance loud and clear and she--and the two other dingbats--jerked to attention. "Get in there and do what you need to do, but I want you out of there and on the plane within the hour. I have some loose ends to wrap up here and then I'll bring the boys home to you."

"Roger that." And boy was she counting the hours until they were back together.

"You can count on us, sir."

'Oh mind your own business,' she wanted to scream at the impertinent man that she had just covered for.

"Very well." There was a pause and Felicity felt a knot coil in her gut at the complex reality of what that could mean. After all, there could be no assurances of a safe return. Not for anyone. But as much as she needed her alpha, their baby needed a living, breathing father.

"Just, come back, okay?"

Ignoring the looks exchanged by the suited chuckleheads, she listened to Malcolm breathe in a deep sigh and imagined she was there, an ear pressed up against the alpha's bare chest while listening to the reassuring thump, thump of her mate's heartbeat. Even now, she could dream.

"I love you." It wasn't a promise. Except that it kind of felt like one anyway.

"Stay safe. Your son is going to be a hell of a soccer player."

Hearing the sharp intake of breath registered with the blonde that she had made the correct decision in informing him.

"Go home. I'm bringing our children back to us."

"I'll be waiting." And with the press of a button, Malcolm's voice vanished; the Hindi market still bustled with haggling, her tablet was beeping, and Tim was being an annoying hindrance and trying to grasp her attention. Still, she had a job to do and after it was over... then she could break down and have a nice, relaxing cry.

One would think the pungency of human waste and garbage would permit even a pregnant, hormonal omega to stave off tears... but apparently missing your mate had side effects that someone neglected to mention in health classes. Sniffling hard and darting a finger beneath the rip of her glasses, she dabbed at the accumulating moisture roughly before huffing angrily.

"We gotta get going." Oh. Wait. Beeping!

Attacking the screen of her tablet, a feeling of self-satisfaction washed over the blonde and her gloomy outlook vanished. The board was green and flashing with an indication of a successfully completed directive.

"Wow that was way quicker than I expected. " Speaking aloud but to no one in particular,
Felicity hummed an off-key note and entered a query into the unit before necessity caught up with her and the blonde walked toward the waiting car parked down the lane. At the same time, she keyed in a series of command prompts directing Amanda Waller's brain and set to work ripping apart the coding for the implanted explosive device in the boys' backs.

Sliding into the Lincoln, she allowed Tim to delegate instructions to circle the block and pull up front but she didn't bother with it. Before she forgot, Felicity keyed in a command for alley-boy's bot, ordering him to start cleaning up the streets. And that command prompt was sooo open to interpretation that Felicity sadistically refused to clarify the command and left the man to the mercy of a haywire bot.

Revenge is a dish served sweet, baby.

"Okay." She ordered her troops into battle. "Take us to the front facility and let's get going."

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Sometimes Oliver wondered how he survived the onslaught of sound after existing in the isolated bubble provided by Lian Yu where the sounds ranged from the cry of gulls to the pounding footfalls racing through the undergrowth of trees and perhaps an occasional blast of gunfire. Shado had exercised her vocal cords only if and when she decided words were necessary; Slade enjoyed sarcastic wit, but still even then the alpha had been prone to lapse in prolonged periods of silence. Oliver alone had been the dissonant chord in the forest that refused to harmonize with the quiet, but it made it that much more alarming to discover his own voice lost in a collective of voices and sounds until he longed for the peace the island offered.

Now he was stuck in the middle of two equal and opposing forces that would no doubt be the end of life as he knew it.

"Who the fuck does that nasty bint think she is?"

And here we go again. Oliver gritted his teeth and fought to center himself. Just one more day. He could survive one more day of these idiots and then he would be with Slade. And then...

"Seriously, Tommy-boy? Who even uses the word bint? Next your gonna be telling us that Waller 'vexes' you. Fucks sakes, Merlyn."

"Quit whining like a little bitch, Floyd. And besides, I'm not the goddamn moron that offered to help Waller pull the stick out of--"  

Rubbing his throbbing temples, Oliver suppressed a sigh as he watched Tommy hiss like a churlish cat at the snarky sniper. Prep for a mission that practically had suicide written on the files had more of an appeal than listening to these two banter like the best-friends-in-denial that they totally were.

Pre-island Oliver Queen may have been jealous of his position being usurped even if it had been a natural, unconscious decision on Tommy's part that he felt confident his brother had not even realized; but the omega that returned home from the island recognized that his bond with Slade had supplanted Tommy's position in his life.

And besides, Tommy could moan and groan about Laurel all he wanted, but the alpha's smell no longer mourned for an absent partner. While Lawton's relationship with his brother was undeniably platonic, the bond between the two men had evolved mission by mission and the duo
were practically joined at the hip and may as well share a brain so closely were the two linked. Bickering aside, Oliver hated to admit that the pair may have his father and himself beat when it came to field work.

Adjusting the fit of the Kevlar vest, the archer quite deliberately shifted his weight, compensating for the pain in his injured knee. Overworking his knee was probably not the smartest choice, but since it was his only option, Oliver was not about to start complaining now...besides, a tweaked knee was hardly as nasty as an arrow through his collarbone that Yao Fei had given him.

Giving the camera in the corner a nasty look, the omega centered himself and reached for the bow that had become a trusted ally in this world of enemies and tested the bowstring's pull out of habit before grunting once in satisfaction and fixied it over his shoulder.

"Here. I thought you might want to bring this." The just-in-case was transparent enough without literally saying so.

"Yeah, sure." Floyd sounded uncomfortable as any killer was when confronted with an emotional situation that was not exactly in their domain of control and Oliver could sense the tension from across the room...not that he cared, but it was distracting him from assessing his arrows. "I guess today is as good a day to die as any, right?"

"Fuck sakes, Lawton, don't go all Klingon warrior on me. I have enough problems with Oliver's suicidal notions." A distant, microscopic piece of Oliver Queen wanted to protest the comment, but his every action of late had been with the single goal of achieving victory whilst sparing his brother as much pain as possible. Not that he was going to tell Tommy as much, but their odds of survival were more likely to plummet if the alpha sustained injury; while his brother had come a long way with his skills and talents, working while injured was not something he excelled at. Not yet. "Although, I'd hazard a guess to say that Slade is ten times the daredevil my brother is and that is fucking saying something."

"Oliver's right over here you know," he muttered under his breath, but nobody acknowledged his grumbling which meant they hadn't heard or they took the low road and were ignoring him. Sighing, the omega swore that his father better pull off the promised rescue today or Lawton's blaze of glory would begin to sound ten times more appealing.

"You ain't foolin' nobody, Merlyn." Floyd mocked him, but even Oliver could identify the levity in the sharpshooter's tone. "If one of us is kicking the bucket today, it'll be your sorry ass and that ghetto stick of yours. What self-respecting killer gets into melee combat when he can sit back and fill them with lead or arrowheads?"

And the headache haunting Oliver helpfully fledged into a full-blown migraine. Just great.

Stomping over to the counter, he unscrewed the cap of an unlabeled bottle and downed a painkiller--that Waller begrudgingly dropped off yesterday--and swallowed it dry. Shaking his head as the pill scratched his throat, Oliver surveyed the map of the terrorist nest they had been assigned with lip curling disdain. More dirty work designed by a woman that needed her neck snapped more than anyone else he had ever known. And cleaning up a mess that should be a full-scale military operation was not a simple task: James Bond bullshit just didn't fly in real life. A pity, that.

"You're just jealous of my mad skills, Lawton."

And then, too quietly for anyone unable to hear that resonating cry of a pin dropping, he heard Floyd whisper a mumbled "thank you."
If he hadn't heard the sniper shifting in a way that suggested he was attempting to avert attention rather than draw it, Oliver would have dismissed the comment offhand. Curiosity getting the best of him, he turned and froze; anything he had been prepared to do or say faltered and died on his tongue.

The sniper was gazing down at a photograph with a look of unease and miserable wistfulness that tainted the air with a melancholy thicker than molasses. Watching the man stroke a finger over the crinkled, worn photograph of a tiny toddler that was no doubt well into grade school told Lawton's story better than any interaction ever could.

In that moment, Oliver swore to himself that when--not even lingering on if--they escaped this form of indentured servitude, he would arrange for some discreet assistance for Floyd; perhaps a foreign therapist or better yet, a skilled man like Yao Fei that could assist the other man in channeling some of those negative emotions. It was a colossal challenge, but Oliver Queen was not about to back down from any challenges. Not now. Not ever.

The door rattled and the trio jerked to alertness, the spell breaking over Lawton as he hastily vanished the picture into his pocket.

Diggle poked his head into the room with a strangely determined look and a sharp nod in Oliver's direction.

"Time to move out."

Glancing to Tommy, he noted the coltish terror in his brother had vanished and Oliver spared a second to mourn the loss of that innocence. Guiltily, the omega wondered exactly when death had become a welcome prospect rather than something to be feared.

"Oliver?"

Reaching out and slinging the last of the supply rounds across his shoulder, he walked toward his brother and reached out to squeeze his brother's shoulder, mood brightening slightly when the alpha returned his crooked smile and the manic look diminished slightly. For a moment, he allowed himself to see the tight lines around the brunette's eyes that had not been there before this ARGUS nightmare and the way the bones of his face stuck out more sharply than before. Feeling a lump grow in his stomach, the omega reached out and wrapped his arms firmly around the other man, feeling him stiffen before relaxing and returning the embrace so tight that Oliver could feel the other man's fingers clutching him painfully tight--he just couldn't find it in himself to mind today of all days.

"We're going to be okay." He whispered a false promise and hoped it had a granule of truth. "You're an amazing brother. Just thought I should tell you that."

"You too," the words were clipped, but the alpha was broadcasting mixed emotions in his scent that alleviated Oliver's concerns completely.

"Okay, okay fine."

Oliver burst into laughter when the pair of them were suddenly squeezed into a painfully tight group hug with all three of their faces smashed together in an unattractive, totally unsexy manner.

"We must look like a bunch of a-holes," Lawton remarked cheerfully, catching Oliver's gaze and deliberately lifting his middle finger toward the security camera in the corner and winking
at the omega wickedly.

"Let's do this," Oliver pushed out of the embrace with a renewed level of confidence that had not been present before. "Waller, we're ready."

Game on.

"They either think way too much of our talents or they're trying to kill us." Floyd snorted derisively and the alpha fought back a hysteric chuckle, before his voice hardened hatefully. "Because we're as expendable as livestock to Waller."

The A.R.G.U.S. leader did not bother accepting the bait. Too bad. While the chips may have rendered them helpless, he was not about to allow the beta to turn him into her whipping boy. Not in this lifetime.

Creeping over a pile of rubble from a halfway collapsed building, the alpha peered through a crack in the wall and blinked at the brightness from this insane daytime op Waller had thrown them into. Taking a hearty sniff with his keen sense of smell, he noted scents overlapping scents, but nothing smelled fresh and nothing smelled close.

If their luck prevailed, they would be out of here tonight and this would all be just a bad dream.

Except it wasn't. The niggling sensation in the back of Tommy's mind wailed like someone in mourning. Premature feelings of happiness may do the trick for now, but the alpha realized that Slade and his brother had never recovered from the trauma their experiences had inflicted on the both of them--perhaps they get out of here only to be tormented by their own minds. Considering the blood on his hands, the alpha considered that perhaps it would be best to linger in the delusion that father and Slade would magically ride in like heroes, smite the evildoers, and all would be well. If pretending bought him a few days of grace, he would take it.

Running his fingers over the silver grooves of the metal staff, Tommy swallowed his guilt and forced a smile.

"I can't see anything," Tommy muttered, carefully setting the pole to the side and dropped to his knees to achieve a better line-of-sight on the building across the way. After first nothing, a bird, and than...Ah, traces of movement after all. "Actually, I think I see a pair patrolling the target building."

The target being a terrorist cell. Of course, because when wasn't it terrorists? Because apparently catching assassins or foiling illegal weapon importation would be far too trivial. So nope, they were being sent into the lion's den with nothing but Diggle's assurance that Waller was being dealt with.

"Kick the chatter. Taskforce X, this is Mockingbird." As if we didn't fucking recognize your voice, Tommy snorted. God he hated that bitch. "You have a go."

"I see three units of ground patrols," Lawton rattled off the details like the soldier he had been, communicating with his unit quietly and with a serenity that defied the logic of their precarious situation. "And I see a pair of women about twenty meters East of your location. They're carrying something."

Shit. If there was one aspect of these enforced missions that Tommy would never, ever get
used to. It was the collateral damage caused by the brainwashing of innocent people.

"Focus." Diggle's voice was like being doused with a pail of cold water and Tommy swiped at invisible sweat as he blinked at the crack, jerking back in fright when he heard the sound of footsteps over gravel.

Sucking in a breath, he heard the footsteps approach and continue onward without any signs of slowing and that in itself was an enormous relief.

"I'm ready." Oliver's voice radiated a calm that Tommy sorely wished he shared. There was a lingering part of the alpha that just wanted to scream 'to hell with it' and wait for whatever rescue operation was coming. Except they really had nothing to go on and nothing to prepare for. The rescue could occur anywhere from now to the extraction. And Felicity had to be involved somehow if they were going to be rescued whole and intact instead of in a million pieces.

Hearing no sign of the patrol, Tommy rose from the rubble and readied his weapon in one hand before tugging a group of grenades free and gripping one of the pins with assertive readiness.

"Be careful." God his brother was going to make some poor kid an overbearing mother someday.

"Alright, Merlyn," some of Floyd's cockiness emerging in his voice. "Light those bastards up. I got you covered."

"Somehow that isn't all that reassuring."

"Your lack of faith in insulting!"

"Can it, Lawton," Diggle projected irritation like no other.

Saying a silent prayer, Tommy exited the back of the building and took a position on a pile of wreckage that hopefully was not booby trapped to high heaven and tugged the pin free and held the catch in place before aiming it randomly toward a parked car next to the ramshackle building that served as an enemy base of operation.

Did this make him a terrorist? If it did, then oh well. His control of the situation was limited to the gun pointed at his brother's head should he fail to complete Waller's orders. Not that blowing up a building should be justifiable, but he would stow his guilt and save it for actual philosophers. Or a psychiatrist.

Flinging the projectile like it was a football, it flew up to the rooftop of the rectangular structure and vanished over the ledge. Palming another grenade, he braced himself. A plume of smoke followed by a burst of rubble that rattled his jaw. Squeezing his eyes shut against the burst of smoke, the alpha coughed harshly while his eardrums rattled. Far and away, outbursts from north, east, south, and every other which way in distant Arabic that he could not and did not care to begin to puzzle out.

The distinctive zip of Lawton's rifle as it reaped a victim. Rapid gunfire from around the corner heading his direction. Daring to open his eyes, he squinted through the dust cloud and gingerly stepped over the rocks--still fearful of potential booby traps in waiting.

"Wahoo! Those bitches act like they ain't never seen a guy with a bow and arrow before! Wish I could capture the look on those sorry fucks faces before your brother carves them a grave!"

Numbly, Tommy chucks a grenade in what he hopes is the direction of the incoming
forces before retreating, rubbing his eyes frantically in an effort to rid himself of the dust.

Boom.

"I can't see shit. I should have taken the goddamn goggles."

"Lawton's got eyes on you, man. Just stick to the plan and we'll call out these mofos as we see 'em." For an ARGUS scumbag, Diggle really was a comforting voice to listen to. Maybe after this was all over, they could invite the guy out for a pint? You know, if Slade or his father didn't get to him first. Dizzy on his feet, Tommy planted the staff and stopped to wipe at his eyes in irritation.

"Fuck sakes, Merlyn. We told you to take the damn glasses. Shit, you got three guys heading your way. Only one of them has a gun so don't fuck it up."

Why wasn't Floyd dropping them if he'd sighted them? Shit.

With no time to contemplate the contradiction further, Tommy breathed and ordered his body to still. *Typical enemies are dumber than bricks. All you have to do is out-fox them and let their blunders be your death stroke.* Slade's words resonated to such a degree that he almost expected his teacher to appear at his side with his katanas in hand. Not today; today, Tommy Merlyn was alone and it was not his day to die.

Hearing a muddled exchange of whispers and footsteps, Tommy held himself still and waited for the morons to approach and make their mistake. Sure enough, a man wearing a war-torn jacket layered with ammunition took heavy steps passed without pausing to check the alley--artificial pathway--and Tommy struck like a waiting viper.

No hesitation, no missed opportunity.

Smashing the metal butt of his staff into the gunman's temple, the extremist folded like a house of cards, his body falling to the natural state of dying in an instant. Whirling, Tommy allowed the natural swing of the weapon to deliver a solid blow to the next man's face and hardly flinched as the bone inverted the young man's nose and smashed his face apart. With any luck for the miserable victim, the blow would be fatal.

The third attacker raced forward, appearing either un-phased or lost in the train of zealotry, swinging a knife wildly. Preparing to meet the clumsy lunge, Tommy startled when the sing of the sniper rifle zoomed overhead and dropped the third man with a humming pop.

"So you can't be fucked to take down the guy with a gun, but you pick off the third musketeer?"

"That's how I roll, baby! So say thank you and get moving! You're gonna have a shit load of company soon. In fact, it might be better if you backtracked because fuck you're about to get swarmed."

"Why aren't you shooting some of these bastards?" He wondered aloud, turning tail and vaulting over the rocks and landing on a silver door of the formerly parked streetcar.

"Oh, you know." A pop through the mic gave Tommy a sneaking suspicion that he was chomping through a healthy wad of gum: bastard. Half a moment later, a corpse dropped to the ground in a twisted heap of snapped bones, sightless eyes staring up at him blankly. "I just figured the guys on the rooftops trying to shoot you like a fish in a barrel *might* be more important. Next time I'll let them kill ya."
"Negative. Proceed Deadshot." Thank you, was what he wanted to say, but knew Floyd well enough by now to know the other man would read between the lines.

Oliver shouted over the mic and Tommy's stomach lurched as he listened to a round of gunfire before his brother's ragged, very-much-alive voice whispered over the mic. "One of them winged my leg, but I'm mobile and I'm fine. Keep going!"

Trusting his brother despite his concerns, Tommy loosed another grenade and hurled it from the direction he just fled and sprinted toward an entrance down the way.

"Merlyn! Drop!"

Trusting and reacting, he flattened himself like a pancake, hearing something whiz past where his torso had been and strike the wall. And there went the majority of his hearing. Debris flew everywhere; splinters of wood and rock pelted his back in a storm created by some sort of explosive. Dust and black smoke clouded his nostrils, effectively rendering his sense of smell ineffectual. Blearily he sat up, noting a patch of blood soaked ground the overly veiled body of a woman--oh sweet Christ! In her hands that seemed not so innocent or separate from this war, an RPG launcher.

"Fucking bitch!"

Somehow Tommy felt sure that Lawton probably had something to add to that, but his own voice was lost in the dull ringing in his ears. Climbing to his feet unsteadily, the alpha stared at the gaping, flaming hole in the structure and glanced back toward the street. Being unable to hear Lawton call out enemy combatants, the streets were possibly more deadly than the target building. Waiting barely a second, the alpha hardened his determination and darted through the gap in the wall and into what appeared to have been a decrepit bathroom even before the explosion smashed it to smithereens.

Readying his stave and feeling his equilibrium re-establish itself with each new step, Tommy kicked the partially obliterated door wide, already following the swing of the door with a powerful half moon arc of the staff--and made contact. The alpha grinned as he felt the give of snapping bone, already stepping into the space and redirecting the reach of the weapon as he took in a second shocked, wizened man gazing stupidly from a crouched position next to a table littered with a king's ransom worth of weaponry. Stepping onto the back of the man he had just delivered a blow to, he swung the weapon wide and met air.

The Arab dodged the motion and reached for the gun at his side. The absurdity of humanity, Tommy thought to himself. 'The belief that a gun can solve all their problems.' It would take the man at least four seconds to draw, attempt to aim, and try to kill him. And Tommy only required two seconds.

The first second allowed the alpha to eliminate the short distance dividing them with the dexterity strengthened under Slade's thrashings and Waller's insane field work: lessons paid off. A second had Tommy planting his knees the scruffy man's backside, wrapping his stave around the smelly man's neck. Along the metal stave, Tommy felt the vibrations as the man's throat screamed either in terror or for assistance while fingers grappled with the long pole with the desperation of realization. The futile intentions hardly mattered to the alpha; delivering a deliberately methodical twist, Tommy felt a dark swirl of satisfaction as the fight instantly went out of the opponent and the body sagged as the full weight of the corpse hit him.

Annoyed, he threw the man down and shook his head in an attempt to clear his hearing; the thrum of some sort of verbal exchange was taking place, but the words were fuzzy and distorted as if his ears were stuffed with cotton.
Down a hallway littered with more weaponry, Tommy heard movement and shot to his feet. Not prepared to wait for his opponent to come to him, he saw the handle rattle and skidded to a light stop and waited. The door swung wide and he again jammed the man in the face, eyes widening as he took in at least five terrorists.

Drowning in self-doubt, Tommy reacted on instinct; pivoting his hip, he jerked forward and smashed the butt of the staff into the gut of one and elbowed another in the face. Redirecting his arm, he felt a bullet snap one, two, no three times into his Kevlar. The blows sent him tumbling to the ground with an oomph. Striking wildly, he caught one of the men with his staff and tipped the man. Hesitating for a second, he released his grip on his weapon of choice and traded it for grabbing the falling man, bracing him up in a vice grip as the remaining attackers peppered him in bullets. His human shield gurgled and sagged against him, earning a slight bubble of sympathy that from Tommy that diminished with the now familiar sting of bullets catching his arms. Two.. maybe three stray shots.

'I'm going to die.'

Instead of the relief he expected to feel after living under the reins of ARGUS, Tommy only felt a volatile raging despair. He wasn't ready to go. Not yet. After countless hours torture, exhaustion, and fighting to keep his brother from the edge of despair... this... this could not be how things were supposed to end. Floyd needed someone to keep him motivated and help the man find the courage to live again. Oliver needed to find Slade and live some sort of happily ever after that hopefully didn't involve giggling ninja babies. And Felicity and his father were going to have a baby that he desperately, terribly wanted to see grow up. And.. and... he just didn't want to die.

Please God, just let me live. Please!

Before he was aware of what was happening, Tommy felt a hand touch his arm. Hissing, Tommy dropped his grip on his human shield and shot forward to punch the offending touch. Blinking toward a black clothed man, his mind whispered urgently while his nose inhaled sharply. Ignoring the caution, he snapped his weapon toward the attacker with a particularly vicious lunge. The figure danced backward with a lethal, unexpected grace that set Tommy's teeth on edge. Drawing forward, he was startled again to find the other man rush him and flip him onto his back and pin his arms above his head with an ease that shocked and unsettled the alpha. Jerking, he ended up with a face full of black cloth that gagged his nose and eyes. Breathing in heavily once, his struggles instantly came to a screeching halt as his brain rebooted.

Feeling the firm grip on his hands slacken, Tommy reached out and gripped the front of the ebony garb and tugged it toward him demandingly; the other body did not resist his demand, instead caged him in a comforting pull of arms. The brunette felt his vision fuzz as moisture filled his eyes and he buried himself in the comforting scent and aura of the powerful, familiar alpha.

"Father." Tommy wept, and he could faintly hear his voice crack like a small child's and didn't care. The arms tightened around him, squishing his injuries and even that didn't matter. He was safe and nowhere on Earth felt safer or better than this. "Father, you came. I knew you would. Oh God, dad. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you!"

No doubt his father was whispering something important in his ear. But his mind only concentrated on the faint first phrase his ringing ears deciphered.

"I love you."

It was an end as much as it was a beginning. It was more than enough.
If Tim or Jerry felt uncomfortable with walking into a covert government operations facility, the pair wisely chose not to mention their misgivings.

Fanning herself wearily, Felicity silently swore that she would never, ever step foot in a facility that lacked proper air conditioning ever, ever again. The security officer dutifully keeping pace with her like the dog he was had reported that Waller did not want to draw attention to the temporary site with such a frivolous, temporary purchase. Yet another reason that Felicity felt everyone should be thanking her graciously for.

At the control room, Felicity entered a command into her tablet and tapped her foot impatiently. Perhaps she should tweak the receivers on her bots? They certainly took their sweet time responding with the speed of a snail.

"Finally." Felicity muttered irritably as a glazed-eyed redhead stood by the control panel of the door, blinking dumbly at the floor. Frowning, she mentally noted that working some extra coding to mimic human expression may be a good idea. Oh well, that's what field testing was for.

Stepping into the control room, the blonde rubbed her protuding tummy affectionately for a moment before surveying the room and strolling up to where a woman stood in the centre of the room, clearly maintaining what would have been a central command location with a satellite topographical map being projected on the far wall. Three glowing dots pulsed merrily and Felicity surmised must indicate the location of the operatives invading the hive of terrorists.

"Jerry, go pick up some take away because your boss's kid is starving me out." Pointing to Tim, she noted him jerk upright with a wary alertness that she rather approved of and she nodded once appreciatively. "Tim can stay with me for Malcolm's peace of mind. And Jerry?" Washing him with a cheerful kittens and rainbows smile that they both knew he didn't buy for a moment, Felicity pointed to the door. "Be back here in twenty minutes. Get moving."

"Ma'am." With a salute that would have made many a drill sergeant proud, Felicity pondered her options before sliding an arm around Amanda Waller's frozen frame.

"So," she whispered as if they were old friends. "What on Earth should I do with you?"

Not really expecting an answer, Felicity patted the unresponsive woman and snapped an interfacing cord from her purse and linked her tablet to the main console and began entering a few data sequences. It was easy as pie to locate the self-destruct mechanisms once she knew what to look for. There were three and that drew Felicity up short. Clacking her nails on the keyboard, she keyed up an entry on Floyd Lawton before shaking her head before directing the pre-loaded virus from her tablet and directing it to eat and corrupt the explosive command. The devices themselves could be removed with little to no danger and Felicity felt little concern with removing them after they were deactivated.

Finally, Felicity ordered her virus to infect and erase all of the available ARGUS files it could find and unclipped her tablet and stood up.

"Your services are no longer required," Felicity murmured gently, almost kindly as she rubbed the still woman's shoulder and actually looked the dark skinned woman in the eyes. Unlike the others, Felicity had left Amanda Waller conscious but out of control and the woman appeared to be screaming behind the beautiful, dark eyes. "If it's any consolation, you have an hour to think."
Perhaps the time was a bit frightening, but Felicity found not an ounce of sympathy for someone that had kidnapped her kids. Step they might be, but hers all the same.

"And really, the smoke will probably kill you before the fire so that's something, right?"

Patting the woman's arm cheerfully, Felicity keyed in a final series of commands to the control room occupants and watched the robotic motions of the human hosts jerk to their feet unsteadily.

"Golly, I better make a note of that shaky motion factor. See if I can do something to ease that part of the brain function and smooth out those wrinkles."

Turning, Felicity patted Amanda on the back one more time.

"Remember, I gave you a whole hour! Plenty of time, right?"

Not bothering nor caring to look behind her, Felicity exited the room and the milling insects that were calmly setting up explosive lines all around the room, she turned and shot a look at Tim.

"Problem?"

"Not a one Mrs. Merlyn." The quiet acceptance was enough for now, but Felicity mulled over the idea of giving the man a raise when they got back to Starling... or what would be left of it. Perhaps they could rename it something more inspiring?

"It's still, Miss Smoak," she corrected him gently, but enjoyed the use of her soon-to-be name. "The wedding isn't until next month, Tim. You know that."

"A formality, ma'am."

Shrugging, she nodded slightly and stepped outside, pleased to see the car waiting for them. Tim opened the door for her and the pregnant omega was supremely pleased by the blast of cold air accompanied by the decadent aroma of chicken and fragrant cumin. Oh yum!

"Gimme!" Giddy like an overly excitable child, Felicity snags the take out dish and fork as the car purrs down the street toward the airport. Taking a mouthful, she moans around a bite of chicken with steaming rice and chews happily.

Fishing her abandoned phone from her pocket with her left while shoveling in bites with her other, she motions with a fork toward Tim who instantly retrieves a bottle of Coke from his suit jacket, pops it open, and offers it to her. Taking a sip, she moseyed down her contacts to one that Malcolm insisted would be swift and reliable and punched in a message.

The response was quick and expected.

**As the Demon commands.**

Huffing exhaustedly, Felicity resumes eating cheerfully and thinks about how much poor Thea will need her back home after the fireworks.

Slade loathed the League armor that felt like an ill-fitting costume. In the days since he had 'killed' Shado, his mind had returned from the verge of insanity and with that return, the alpha's ill-
tempered, impatience revived with a vengeance. Pretending to have the emotionless, killing serenity of Al-Amir was grating and the Australian craved to slice every last black hooded dick into a pile of ribbons.

Standing on a rooftop next to his master, Malcolm, and some other sycophant that Slade had not bothered to learn the name of, the alpha used every resource in his long and varied skill set to project an outward patience and quiet acceptance. Anything less would be considered suspect to Ra's.

"As promised, my heir," Ra's voice seemed infused with theatrical drama that belonged to cinema and not this nightmare that his mage had been wading through for weeks and weeks without him. And truly, they had barely been together after all these years and this happens? Life had been far too unfair to them. If it was the last thing Slade did, his omega would be done. They were going to have a normal life once and for all.

"I never doubted you for a moment." The leader of the League of Assassins had no need to utter falsehoods when truth could be wielded in an effortless way to injure or grant absolution.

"The men await your command, milord." A nameless, dutiful assassin dropped to his knees in a crouch, waiting like a lapdog at his master's feet.

Slade felt the Demon's Head studying look with the height of intensity that Slade would have snarled at, but restrained with a patience clouded by his desperation.

"Oliver."

Malcolm's declared whisper drew him up sharply and Slade took a single step forward and scanned the distant building. From where he was standing, he could just make out the familiar movements of a tall figure executing a pair of rooftop combatants with but a twang of his bow. Cries of alarm from the assaulted party and Slade drew in a sharp breath when he saw the archer roll out of the line of fire with the graceful, practiced maneuver he had spent countless hours drilling into his omega's overly thick skull.

"Oliver," he agreed.

Beneath his skin, his blood pounded and bubbled as his instincts insisted upon a reunion here and now. The time for patience was at an end.

"Shall I lead them, Ra's?"

"No," he cut of his father-in-law with a severe look before striding to the edge of the rooftop. "I will lead our men and I will earn myself the right to call myself Heir of the Demon."

Sensing approval in his 'master's' posture, Slade managed a curt, deferential bow--frowning when he noted that his mate had vanished from his line of sight.

"I can see that Oliver Queen will be a fitting mate indeed. I look forward to seeing what else he's capable of. " There was pride and interest in the man's voice that Slade was not sure he was particularly thrilled about. "Go then. Lead our forces as you are meant to. A prize for a prize."

"As you command," Slade managed to choke out neutrally before spinning and vaulting to the next rooftop, aware of the influx of soundless soldiers bounding after him with the silence of an evening breeze. Addressing the borrowed men, Slade paused long enough to speak his words. "The first group, I want you clearing the side streets so these bastards don't get any ideas about flanking us. Second group, clear this main building. It's extensive and it will take time, but it's doable. Spare no
All but one fell behind and Slade's nose detected Malcolm's near proximity.

"I'm going to find Tommy." Bridging the final gap, Slade almost snaps his emotions are so close to running rampant and the wisp of that familiar smell that has all but vanished upon his own skin. The alpha wants to--no, needs to immerse himself in his omega more than he has ever needed anything. "Grab Oliver and we'll get out of here."

"I hardly needed to be told that," he spat, irritation overriding his sense of kinship with the elder alpha.

Not bothering with apologies, Slade drew his sword and made a dash for the stairwell downward and hastily followed the scent. Shouts and cries of alarm were being readily offered up by dismayed extremists unprepared for interference from Nanda Parbat's finest.

Dropping down, he smiled faintly as he stepped over a pair of bodies with arrowed lodged in the chest cavities and spewing blood in a growing puddle: Oliver's handiwork. Ducking under a loose beam, Slade heard a shuffling sound and he turned and neatly beheaded a beta attempting to sneak up on him armed with a rifle far too large and bulky for the stickish frame.

Nose on the case, he trailed his way to a door where bursts of gunfire have become almost continuous. Walking into the fire, the bullets tickle his Mirakuru enhanced flesh around his arm and he scowled in annoyance. It took less than five seconds to cross the room and dispatch the pair of presumptuous fools with the simplest swing of his sword.

Brushing off the tickle of bullet wounds, the alpha refocused his nose and followed the trail of his omega's scent; Slade went from an all out sprint to a full tilt run, barreling around the corner and colliding with... Oliver! His nose knew before his eyes saw and Slade wrapped his arms around Oliver and jerks him back--far and away from potential dangers--and walks them both against a wall with his back exposed and his mate in his arms.

Hands are scrabbling at his back and Slade buries his nose in the omega's scent gland under his throat while squeezing the daylights out of the painfully slight figure. He hears Oliver sigh and whisper a mantra, of "Slade, Slade, Slade." Instantly his body reacted and he bit the smooth elegant column of Oliver's throat lightly and than with an almost zealous need, piercing skin and wetting his mouth with the bloody, biological scent that radiated his mate--his mate!

Gunfire and shouting, but it's at the periphery and it seemed somehow unimportant to the alpha now that his mate is safely ensconced in his arms purring submissively while he lapped at the bite with his tongue. Except... this was not precisely safe. Sensing his protective instincts surge to the forefront of his thinking, Slade paused to lick the wound on his mate's neck once, twice more before pulling away and finally, drinking in his omega's face and finding the blonde disturbingly fragile. A tension line over Oliver's forehead, darkened eyelids and a pale pallor accompanied by a notable loss of weight that rekindled the alpha's protective instincts and made him question his own worth. This never should have happened.

"You came." Oliver's voice almost sounded incredulous and Slade hated himself all the more for how happy the omega looked. "I wanted to give up so many times, I don't know what I would have done. By I kept going because I knew you'd come."

"Shush, it's over now. I'm taking you home." Dipping forward to nuzzle his lover's jaw lightly, the alpha purred as pleasure returned from its state of dormancy along with his lover. Oliver gripped him tight and met his lips in a light, tender caress of lips before the archer seized control of
the kiss, biting at his lips and inserting a leg between his thighs.

"We gotta get out of here." Slade muttered against those petal-soft lips before catching Oliver's bottom lip between his teeth and nipping it tenderly.

"The chip?"

"Felicity's way ahead of you babe."

"Oliver, what the fuck are you making a porno? I thought you had gotten injured!" The verbal disruption startled the Australian enough for him to pull away slightly with a slight frown and he turned to scan his mate's body, noticing the blood soaking one of the man's legs and frowned as he dropped down to probe the injury carefully. "That building just got swarmed with a bunch of robed dudes and the next thing I know you're sounding all hot and heavy in the middle of a fucking warzone. And I can't get a hold of your goddamn brother so talk to me!"

Oliver adopted a more serious, battle-hardened posture that Slade resented for the return of that grim, haunted look in the jaded sapphire depths and the way his mate shooed his concerned attentions away.

"Your father is looking for your brother as we speak," Slade reassured his mate gently, reaching down to wrap a supportive arm around his mate's waist and accept some of the other man's weight in order to ease his mobility. To his joy and pleasure, the omega did not instantly pull away, but almost sagged into his arm.

"That must be your boytoy." Slade's eyes bugged momentarily at the implied insult before morphing into a subtle frown. "So, where should I meet you?"

The presumption on the part of the stranger was fascinating, but considering the lack of surprise on Oliver's face, he reserved judgment for the moment.

"We're rendezvousing on the rooftop. Be there or be left behind." Slade growled into his mate's ear, not missing the wry, exhilarated look his mate shot his direction.

"Roger that, Big Daddy!"

Giving Oliver a reassuring squeeze around the waist, the alpha hustled his mate back up the stairs, pleasantly surprised by how thorough the League must have been to prevent any encounters. Though, Slade could silently admit the League of Assassins had not inherited the name for nothing.

Reaching the rooftop, Oliver drew up short with a stiff pose. Standing upright, Slade growled at the sight of a shorter, veiled assassin glowering at them with eyes infected by a hellish amount of pain and aiming an arrow right at his mate's chest.

"Move an inch and I'll slaughter him where he stands."

A woman then, and one whose voice was tainted by grief. There could be only one possible candidate than.

"Ra's daughter." Slade could almost scream such was his frustration at the moment. While he felt almost positive that he could shield Oliver from the arrow, the slightest chance of failure was unbearably high.

"The very same," she hissed, her grip on the bow nearly creaking with how hard she
squeezed the weapon.

Slade made a movement and the bowstring tightened, freezing him in place with the force of her hatred.

"This a jealousy thing then? Because if you want to be your daddy's lapdog, I'm happy to offer you the job."

The woman half-laughed, half sobbed and he was repelled by the rage in her look. "You took Sara from me! So I'm going to take that which you love best!"

"Drop it Nyssa!"

Oliver whipped around, eyes brightening considerably despite the wretchedness of the situation. Slade smiled in genuine pleasure as Malcolm Merlyn aimed an arrow hardly a few paces away from Nyssa's head; Tommy, a flush of pleasure flooded the alpha to see his young protege standing next to his father--clearly injured judging by the copious amounts of crimson gore clinging to the kid's sleeves--and yet with an iron defiance about him that hummed dangerously.

"Al Sah-Her," there was a strangely comforted tone to Nyssa's voice that seemed starkly alien under the circumstances. "If I have to die today, it brings me pleasure to know that it would be at your hand. And oddly righteous considering I'm about to take the life of your son in turn."

"Daughter."

Oh fuck this shit, Slade prepared to throw Oliver to the ground in case the mentally impaired woman in front of him loosed the arrow.

Nyssa jerked, eyes drifting askance to see the arrival of Ra's and a pair of guards.

"Surrender yourself at once." To Slade's joy, Ra's expression appeared like he had bitten into a lemon and his mouth crinkled with distaste as he glared at his daughter. "Your position is rather precarious at the moment, but I'll deal with your insubordination at a later time."

Nyssa, sensing the desperation of her plight loosed her arrow; simultaneously, the men at Ra’s' rushed to seize the grief-stricken female. Slade moved, but Oliver proved quicker; the archer stepped forward fearlessly--every instinct in Slade's body crying out in horror--and snapped the arrow from air barely an inch from his face.

Relief was short lived as a familiar zing of a sniper rifle echoed across the terrain and Nyssa al Ghul collapsed lifelessly to the filthy rooftop just before the escort arrived to restrain her. The blank, sightless stare of the broken woman sent a cool shiver through the collective group and he realized in the horrified stillness that Ra's daughter had just dropped dead.

"Hells bells, boys!" The voice from over Oliver's radio buzzed from nearby. Shielding his eyes from the son, he noted a pair of men a couple rooftops distance, looking down on them with apparent disgust. "That was one crazy bitch."

"Floyd no!" Tommy's voice was shattered anguish as he lunged toward the edge of the rooftop, as if a closer proximity could shield the incoming duo from death.

Recognizing that their fragile safety net was rapidly disintegrating, Slade moved to free his sword from his sheath.

"Kill that--" Ra's command became a strangled, wild gasp and Slade fumbled with his
sword only to draw up short as stared at the scene unfolding.

Malcolm stood behind the Demon's Head with a blank, narrow expression, the end of his sword sticking through the man's chest.

"You taught me everything you know, Master," Malcolm's voice was eerie and overflowing with genuine regard as he spoke in a clear voice. The accompanying assassins fell completely to their knees, foreheads planted to the ground in a gesture of ritual supplication of the like that Slade had never before witnessed. "And with all I have learned, I will lead the League into a new age."

Ra's glassy eyes blinked when the sword was jerked cleanly from his back, lips mouthing words soundlessly as a froth of blood spilled the ground and stained the rooftop of a man that had lived more than his share of a lifetime. Slade slipped closer to Oliver in order to support his wounded mate more easily as they witnessed an antiquated, haunting ceremony that would follow them the rest of their days.

*Forgive and have mercy on him.*

*Excuse him and pardon him*

*Make honorable his reception*

*Protect him from the punishment of the grave*

*and the torment of the fire.*

"I should have known you were the one all along," the words were quiet and somehow awed. And though his view was missing by Malcolm's robe, the words resonated with him all the same and made them seem like a benediction. "The veil has been lifted from my eyes and I see you. You are the destiny of the League. In my death now, I have no regrets."

Malcolm bowed his head once in return and accepted something from the dying man before delivering a final blow that Slade recognized to be the other alpha's choice for mercy.

A moment later, the rooftop was overflowing with more than a hundred assassins, bowing deeply and completely. Only himself, a horribly confused looking Tommy, and Oliver were left standing. Though Tommy appeared to be torn between watching this spectacle and waving the sniper and the last man over to join them.

"It's over?" Oliver sounded uncertain and Slade tucked the archer closer to his body and sent out what he hoped was a reassuring swath of affection in his arms.

"Let's get you out of here."

Vaguely he heard Malcolm delegating tasks and ordering his new men to return to Nanda Parbat for the ceremony and all that rot. Slade hardly gave a shit. In his arms, he held that which meant the most to him.

And with all they hoped to accomplish... they had won. Actually, truly, won.
"I can't believe we're breaking into a sealed crime scene!" Thea moaned sulkily, but leapt over the tape with a nimble bound just the same; Roy hopped down with a reflexive stumble that made her look graceful by comparison and waggled his brows at her with a quirky shrug that she just shook her head at. Her stalker-boyfriend promptly about faced and trotted over to one of the taped body outlines with the bloody smears staining the flooring--perhaps permanently.

"You agreed that something was fishy about someone killing all those scientists and stealing whatever project they were working on!" Roy retorted with a presumptuous arrogance that just made Thea want to smack the conceited bugger upside the head. Except that Oliver wouldn't have hesitated to investigate something so bizarre as these senseless killings. Whatever it took, she was going to prove it to him and everyone else that she had what it took to join their ever-growing team.

"I guess I just never imagined that I would be breaking into a crime scene to look for clues the cops are too stupid to find." Breaking the law to save the city: no longer so farfetched.

"You've got to be kidding me?" The beta's voice was the flooded with amusement and he chuckled lightly, causing her to draw up short and glare at him.

"What the hell is your problem, Roy?"

"You," he guffawed and Thea felt her cheeks flush with annoyance. "You have to admit that it's a little funny to think you would be concerned about being arrested for trespassing after you've single-handedly killed a bunch of guys right in front me? You do see point I'm making, right?"

"Can't argue that one." Only because it was so miserably true.

But they did not have time to dwell on petty things any more: back to work. Looking around the spacious room with computer hardware and a rather obvious empty area along the back wall, Thea wondered what exactly she was supposed to look for. The newspaper article had attracted her interest, but who was she kidding? If the police had nothing for motive, how was a high-school grad supposed to find something they missed?

"Don't you own this company?"

The question came totally out of left field and Thea deliberately wandered away from Roy, gloved fingers skating over the surface of a glass desk covered in sticky coffee drips.

"Why do you ask?" Somehow there was dread coiling like a predator in wait and it made the alpha feel uneasy.

"When you grow up where I did, sometimes you just remember things," Roy shrugged, shuffling away from the outline and moving toward a desk riddled with bullet holes to tug open one of the drawers. The beta flashed her a grin when he stuck his hand inside the drawer and began rummaging around. "And I remember some news report on Walter Steele's death saying something about one of his final acts as CEO was to oversee the purchase of Uni-Dac Industries. And I'm pretty sure this is it."

Thea had no recollection of the merger, but she had never really paid much attention to
anything business related until Malcolm had set her up with a job at Merlyn Global. It was unsettling at the very least to be so utterly schooled in her own family business by Roy of all people.

"Accounting records. Go figure." Roy sighed and dropped the pile of paperwork to the table and stomping off to tear open another drawer.

"Accounting records?" Shelving her whiney bitch routine for later, Thea crossed the room to the file folder neatly labelled 'tax records' and flipped the folder open.

"Yeah, but it isn't a lead." Roy's response was muffled from where he was flinging personal items off the desk like a tornado with limbs.

"I wouldn't be so sure of that," she muttered.

The best records at Merlyn Global were the tax and expense account records that were diligently tracked, marked, and recorded with dutiful flourish. If there was going to be information, she might find something in this.

"What are you looking for?"

"Not sure," she remarked absently.

Flipping past initial details of employee wages, meals, and year-end salary increases, Thea scanned several pages worth of parts that made her head swim and wish futilely for an engineering degree.

"This is hopeless," she dropped the folder back down, scattering paper in all directions. It was barely a glimpse, but Thea paused and dropped to the ground to search for a signature that she could have sworn she recognized. Rifling through the pages, she faltered and lifted a page from the ground that was different from the others for all the right reasons. And all the wrong ones.

It was a simple authorization transfer of funds to Uni-Dac's research and development team in seismic research. What made Thea's stomach curl was the familiar arching signature: Moira Queen and the date almost a year to the day after Oliver and her father disappeared.

What in all the hells...

Instantly nauseated, Thea crinkled the innocently damning form and stuffed it into her pocket, trying to bury the word seismic and the connotation behind the word.

"Roy, I need to get out of here."

The beta must have sensed something in her tone because he was at her side in a flash.

"What is it?" Roy prompted her urgently, shaking her by the shoulders. "What's wrong?"

"I don't know." That was the truth at this point, right? But Thea sensed it was far more complex than what she was expecting. "But somehow my mom is connected to this. Roy, we need to find her."

And Roy. Gods, sweet, loyal Roy nodded without thought and wrapped an arm around her shoulders. Instantly Thea pressed herself into the beta's chest and eagerly accepted the comfort like a child hiding from the monster in the nightmare. So she followed Roy's stumbling, faulty guiding and retreated into her mind and away from the threat lying in wait.
Thea had no clear recollection of how they got out of the building, but all the sudden she was sitting in the passenger seat of her own car with Roy backing them out of the lot.

"--and one day she just kind of left." Roy was practically babbled if one could do so in an entirely relaxed manner while cruising down the freeway. "And we shouldn't even go into the subject of my dad."

"Your mom left you?" Thea connected with reality and flinched when she saw the battered, sorrowful look slide over Roy's face before it vanished beneath the beta's cocky bravado and flashed her a smile that pained her more than reassured her. How much had she missed when brushing off the other boy--no, man. The man sitting next to her hadn't been a boy since the cradle when his life had already been falling apart around him. It made Thea feel all the more selfish considering her world had been considerate enough to fracture within weeks of her high school graduation. "I'm sorry, Roy. I never realized that about you. I'm sorry."

"I'm better off without her anyway," Roy rolled his shoulders, but Thea noted the bloodless fingers gripping the steering wheel like a lifeline and ever so gently reached out to pat Roy's knee.

"I know how you feel." And her words were not just some bullshit comforting sob story, they were real and they were genuine in shared misery. "My mom has really, really shown me that I don't know her that well at all in the last year. It's been sort of a relief just to sever ties and get away. And now... I'm afraid she's done something terrible even if I'm not sure I'm ready to believe it."

"What kind of story would you like Thea?" Her mother's lap was cozy and her tiny fingers snagged a blonde curl wistfully wishing she had such pretty hair too.

"A real fairytale," Thea demanded, daring her mother to say otherwise.

"Well, not all fairytales are real," her mother tweaked her nose gently and Thea giggled in spite of herself. "But the lessons they teach us remain forever."

"Hey," Roy reached out and prodded her gently. If he noticed her rubbing her eyes, he had the tact--for once in his damn life--not to spoil it by saying something. "Let's pick up some food before we go. You probably won't feel like eating later, so let's grab some grub and then we can go see your mom. Deal?"

A second later and her fingers were gripped and interlaced with Roy's long digits and squeezed.

"You're buying!"

"That's what you think, princess!"

The phone ringing jerked her awake and Thea nearly tore the bag in half when she recognized Felicity's ringtone.

"Easy tiger," Roy half-teased, half sarcasm. "You can always call her back!"

"Can it Roy!" Finally locating her phone, she swiped accept and lifted it up. A thousand possible greetings were bypassed in favor of pacifying her fears that her brother really wasn't coming home this time. "Oliver! Did you get Oliver?!!"

"Yes!" Oh God. Feeling somewhat faint, Thea planted her palms on her thighs and breathed freely for the first time since they were taken. "Both of them are on their way home with Malcolm as we speak. They should arrive in a few hours! I'm so excited I can hardly breathe!"
"Me too," she gushed, her eyes burning as they filled up with enough tears to fill the ocean. Roy took her hand and gave it a powerful squeeze and Thea sobbed. Oliver was coming home, but her mother had never felt so far away. What was she going to do?

"Oh sweetheart, don't cry!" Felicity sounded upset, which made Thea feel even more guilty and she just cried all the harder. "Honey, can you put Roy on?"

"Roy?" How did Felicity know that she was with Roy? Of course, the blonde had an uncanny ability to literally know everything before the rest of them did.

"Yeah, I need to talk to him Can you put him on please?"

"Okay." Sure, why not. It certainly couldn't make the day any worse.

Too caught up managing her emotions, she thrust the phone in Roy's direction, dropped her head against the glass pane and drifted. Images of her smiling mother taunted her with how false the reality seemed. Memories of the father that had vanished, never to return home to spend time with her ever again. Oliver returning from the dead only to be taken away again. And now to be returned to her and their... family.

A shred of awareness prodded at Thea. Her hand, no, her knuckles were being tenderly massaged by newly forming calluses that Roy had gotten from working with her on knife skills. Neck cricking as she sat up, she squeezed Roy's fingers again once before letting them go.

"What'd I miss?"

"Oh, probably everything," Roy teased gently, but not completely absent concern. "I stopped and picked up Mexican for you, me, and Felicity. She told me everything was paid for and I should bring you to Mr. Merlyn's house."

"Oh hell." That just sounded ridiculous enough to intercede. "Don't call him that. He's just Malcolm or--" Trailing off, it struck Thea like a physical blow and a small part of her felt as if she had betrayed Robert Queen's memory. Viciously, Thea rejected her own misgivings and embraced the transition. The man had never pressured her, but he always, always had been demonstrative of the obvious affection he felt for her. "Or dad. But I think he might not take it so well if you addressed him that way."

"Why, because we've only been seeing each other a short while?"

Scoundrel! "We're not exactly dating anyway."

"Does that mean I'm free to date the next attractive alpha I meet?"

"You can do what you want," Thea grimaced, recognizing that Roy was intentionally giving her a hard time and refusing to rise to the bait.

"And I want you." The hand squeezed her own and she bit her lip, staring out the window into the sunset to watch the colors bleed together in a harmony of yellows, oranges, and pinks.

The remainder of the drive passed quickly and the house came into view, Thea felt more relieved than she had a right to be as the car pulled up outside of the large home. Before she realized what she was doing, Thea had seized the takeout, grabbed Roy possessively by the forearm, and all but dragged him inside.

Kicking off her boots, Thea released her grip on Roy's arm, and tossed the takeout bags on
the table; following her nose, the alpha raced into the living room to find Felicity sitting Indian style on the sofa with an excited smile on her face.

"Hey girl!" Felicity must have intuitively read something off in her face because she was immediately beckoned forward with two open arms stretching out to reach her. Feeling the urge to cry all over again, Thea tucked herself into Felicity's embrace for a moment at least. Intentions went to hell when she scented the protective, loving hormones the omega was emitting all aimed solely in her direction.

With a whine, she surrendered completely to the blonde and gave herself permission to grieve.

"I think mom--Moira," she spat venomously, though muffled by the chiffon top the rounded omega was wearing. "I just have a feeling that she's done something terrible. There are so many things that she has done but denies all the same. And now today, Roy and I found something today that I need you to look into because I just don't know--"

A cry of alarm from the television set would not have sparked a reaction from Thea had Felicity not stiffened up, the arms around her becoming iron bars so tight was the hold.

"Holy fuck!" Roy's voice channeled alarm, confusion, and sympathy that was so genuine that it made Thea feel all the more guilty.

"Roy!" Thea reacted instantly, struggling to turn around and see what the fuss was about. When she finally managed it, her jaw dropped and she froze in horror, recalling the word outlined on the accounting sheet bearing her mother's signature.

"My name is Moira Queen. And God help me, I've failed this city. In an effort to free this city from the corruption that has taken hold, I have used my companies resources to develop an earthquake device--"

Unable to take anymore, Thea felt herself jerk back and away from Felicity. Far and away, she heard screaming and imagined someone was being killed. Half a second later, she mercifully embraced the loving unconsciousness.

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"Thank you for your cooperation," the blonde alpha punk mocked them from the doorway and Quentin's jaw clenched when he heard Moira weeping quietly after what that little asshole had made her do. "I'll inform Ra's al Ghul that your death reflected your cooperation." Oh screw you, Quentin Lance thought vaguely while clutching the fatal wound to his gut, wishing sorely he had brought his handgun along for the ride. If he had, perhaps they both could have avoided this fate. "And Detective, I'm sorry you got caught up in this, but I'm sure you understand how a living witness might be a problem. And not to worry, I'll light the match by the door so you'll bleed out before the fire makes the room."

"Son of a bitch!" Quentin hissed as the kid swept out of the room, the door falling shut with a dull click that sealed their fates.

Quentin Lance had imagined himself prepared for death. As a police officer, he had early on learned that it was much better for his family to have everything prepared; a cremation and a simple funeral were already laid out in a will and his few possessions were left to Laurel even if he hoped she chucked most of the junk he acquired over the years. Never in his wildest dreams had he been prepared to die when he went to visit Moira Queen. Perhaps if anyone should know better, it should
be someone like him that knew death lurked around every corner, but he spent so much time trying to be in control that when it came down to it, he was just as human as the next guy.

"I'm so sorry, Quentin." Moira was anguished laying next to him with the pair of them bleeding out from nearly identical wounds to the lower abdomen and it wrenched something inside him to think that the poor shell of a woman was dwelling in misery even when there was only minutes of life left to them both.

"Sa'll right," he muttered and found it honest even if he did have a thousand regrets--Laurel at the top of that list. Turning over with considerable difficulty, Quentin took a breath through his mouth, slinging an arm around the quivering woman and nestled in close to her neck, drinking in her perfume. "After Sara... nothing could be that bad."

God, he felt tired. Even the injury to his side didn't seem to hurt so much. Medically, he knew that was rather a bad sign, but when that punk expertly stabbed them both he had known they had moments only.

"Still sorry," Moira mumbled, trapped by memory of the demands made by their 'captor.'

"I'm just sorry I didn't have more time with you," Quentin's voice whispered, sinking into Moira's hair and feeling reassured knowing that he was comforting someone and his death meant something.

"I'm glad I'm not alone." Quentin tightened his arms--or tried to, since his limbs were becoming frightfully numb--around the fast fading woman.

So this was it. A tingling chest, an overly stick puddle, and a woman he could have easily spent the next two decades with. Not so awful. Laurel would take it poorly, but his daughter was one tough cookie with some amazing friends... she would be okay. Quentin had to believe that now.

"Thea..." Moira sighed, her shivering long since subsiding into a drowsy, formless tug. " Whh..." Quentin choked, his vision tunneling even as he stubbornly, insistently forced his mouth and overly thick tongue into action. "She..will...be..fine. Just rest."

"Thank you."

Responding with action, Quentin pressed an almost apologetic kiss to the back of Moira's head and surrendered to the inevitable encroaching darkness.

*See you on the other side...it can't be much worse than this.*

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Their method of rescue was a serviceable cargo plane that military operations might utilize; there was ample space for both cargo and passengers, or in this particular instance, over a hundred members of the League of Assassins and the de facto leader's family.

Upon boarding the craft, Oliver had surrendered to Slade's insistent, fearful care and found himself with his back to Slade's chest and his double injured leg propped on a metal crate, that his alpha had unceremoniously emptied, and tenderly propped up.

Now, the omega relaxed into the arms that held him tight with bear-like strength and permitted himself to let go. It should have been incredibly difficult to unwind, but biology had slammed the door on his fears with the initial flood of alpha hormones. In a very true sense, Oliver was riding a natural, hormonal high that eased him into a much needed rest.
Shifting a bit, Oliver sighed expressively when the arms tightened around him, cocooning him a tighter, firmer embrace that eased some of pain from the emotional trauma over the past month. Waiting, the omega felt a vague curiosity roll over him when he felt his alpha's muscles contract and ease after a few minutes. Almost impish if only because he longed for the painfully tight reassurance, he moved just a hair and---bam. The arms snapped to taught, protectiveness in an instant. Immensely satisfied by the development, he smiled stupidly and allowed himself to purr for the alpha behind him.

"I love you," Slade rumbled and Oliver felt a surge of affection for his mate that he would blatantly express his feelings with such blatant frankness.

"More than anything," he replied gently, weakly moving to lace their fingers together and sink into headspace.

The rub of the Australian's stubble along his neck sent a shiver riding down the archer's shoulders and he pressed back against the other man, seeking comfort and reassurance rather than a need to sate any lustful needs.

"Slade." His voice was urgent and sounded painful to his own ears.

"I'm here, kid. Always."

Shuddering, he reached back and up with his hand, tracing Slade's mouth, picturing the curve of those lips breathing, kissing, tasting and--

"You know that we're sitting right here, right?" His brother muttered something unintelligible, but the man's hiss of pain was enough to draw Oliver away from the depths of his pleasure.

Blinking, he vaguely notes there are dozens--probably way more than that--assassins studying them with vaguely uncomfortable looks suggesting they were mortified to have been caught staring.

"Jealous?" Slade's voice tickled his ear, sending a jolt like lightning into his brain to fire up the synapses.

"That was pretty tame ya uptight bastard." Lawton's voice sounded close, but farther away even as he addressed his brother from an arm span away. "Not like they were flashing us." Typical Floyd, always trying to use humor to distract people from their own insecurity.

"Even while we're stuck around a bunch of killers?"

"What's wrong Tommy?" The words came, but held no strength--only basic curiosity. All the energy the omega had dedicated to being his brother's protector since their capture was expended and Oliver had no reserves to fall back on. The island had made him resourceful and strengthened him physically, but every person came to a point where their bodies just had nothing left to offer: Oliver was at the end of his tether.

The arms supporting him massaged his arms gently and Oliver turned toward the cockpit of the plane; Tommy looked miserable with makeshift bandages around his arms but still managed to appear thoroughly freaked out by the black clad killers looking like a bunch of scavengers on the periphery. Lawton plopped down with his rifle over his knees with a perplexingly nonchalant attitude contrasting with his brother. Diggle, Oliver spared him a moment's thought--long enough to locate the man that appeared to be trying to disappear into the background. Which worked out fine
for Oliver because while it was possible that he could have befriended the man under different circumstances, the archer refused to consider the military man blameless after connecting him with ARGUS.

"Pot, kettle. You don't exactly think your dad is the root of all evil do you?" Slade countered carefully, shifting to alertness in a way that seemed important even if Oliver was having a difficult time pinpointing precisely why it mattered.

"Evil is more of a spectrum anyway," Floyd rattled off in a profoundly existential manner that caused Oliver to snort in disbelief--only Lawton could still manage to surprise him with a line of bullshit like that. "Waller wasn't even all that bad considering some of the depraved fucks that I've come across in my line of work. Sure, the bitch was a snake, but she wasn't advocating some of the shadier practices that take place out there."

"My father isn't evil," Tommy sounded absolutely vehement, which roused some alarm bells in Oliver's brain but his response opposed the alarm and merely snuggled into Slade's arm more insistently. "So don't you fucking imply that ever again."

"I'm pleased to hear that." Dad. The muffled swearing and abrupt silence suggested his father had popped up like an apparition.

"Dad, just what the hell is going on? Are you seriously in charge of the League. The one we spent all this time worried about? Because seriously, dad, what the hell is going on?" Tommy's hysterical outburst dragged Oliver from the luring haze of sleep and he watched his father drop down next to a heaving, wild-eyed Tommy with the staggering patience of a teacher with a particularly confused pupil.

"Guess we should be impressed he lasted this long," Floyd interjected, sounding far too relaxed and especially far too happy lying on the metal floor of a cargo plane.

"I am Ra's al Ghul now," Malcolm informed the group more for Tommy's benefit than the rest of them who had quite clearly understood the message based on the utter subservience of the accompanying League assassins that had leapt at their father's lightest command and never once questioned him regarding their diversion to Starling City instead of Nanda Parbat. "But that isn't important right now. And it certainly isn't all that I am. First and foremost, I am your father."

A moment later, the defiant posture dissolved and his brother slumped forward with a bowed head looking rather stricken.

"I didn't think you were coming."

Scunching his fingers into fists, Oliver shuddered in sympathy at the faint, disheartened proclamation that summed up his brother's outburst quite tidily. The archer had done everything in his power to spare his brother, but the damage lingered and so Oliver mourned for the wound that no eye could see.

"I will always come for you."

An instant later, his brother was gathered into his father's arms and squeezed.

"Things are going to be alright, son." Oliver blinked as his father pulled back and tugged a slim bottle free and uncorked the glass frame.

"Malcolm, is that--?" Slade rumbled, seemingly shocked about something so innocuous put him more on alert than he had a right to be considering his present condition.
Not bothering to reply verbally, the alpha nodded curtly before pressing the container to Tommy's lips, spare hand rising to insistently apply pressure to Tommy's neck. Holding his breath, Oliver couldn't contain a murmur of surprise when his brother took a hearty swallow.

Faintly he could hear the other man's startled gasp, but already his father was moving toward him and pressing the vial to his mouth.

"What is it?" Not exactly suspicious, but perturbed by Slade's lack of objection considering his father's intrusion into the other alpha's territory. What exactly had happened to develop their trust to such a complex degree.

"Drink it." This time the command issued from his own mate rather than his father, not that the disabling glance his father shot him wasn't intimidating.

Surrendering to the inevitable, Oliver drank. And choked.

Gulping down a 2 Litre of soda had been a stupid teenager's joke but Oliver recalled the bursting oxygen bubbles tickling his throat and sloshing in his stomach uncomfortably for hours. That was nothing to the sensation that felt like pop rocks on an acid trip as it surged through his system. For an instant--a genuine blip in time--Oliver's vision whitened and a travelling numbness encroached his body until there was little left but the sound of his breath coming in desperate pant and a notable lack of pain.

"Better?"

Like parting a veil, the shutters lifted and Oliver sat up in shock and rolled to his knees. Fingering the holes in his pants, he stuttered in disbelief as they came across smooth, unblemished skin and absolutely no pain. And he didn't even feel tired. In fact he felt fantastic.

Leaping to his feet, Oliver spun in place; all the hurts of the past month felt as if they had been wiped clean. Idly he noted his brother going through a similar reaction and turned. His father was observing them both with overblown satisfaction and Slade looked... happy.

Sparing no attention for anyone else, Oliver lunged into his lover's arms only to laugh--genuinely, truly laugh, and fully, completely grab the Australian's neck and devour his mouth like he was starving. From a certain perspective that account wouldn't be untrue.

"Dad what was that?" Who cares? Even if his reaction was an untrue reflection of his curiosity, the blonde was not about to expend effort questioning the wonderful gift he had been given. Pulling away with a lingering nip to his alpha's intoxicating taste, Oliver shifted uncomfortably at the very persistent need straining the seams of his pants.

"The Lazarus Pit in Nanda Parbat contains waters that perform incredible feats that would not ordinarily be possible," Malcolm explained. "What you have experienced is but the least of those.

"Can't wait til I get you home," Slade murmured for his ears alone, breath whispering over the shell of his ear in such a way that the omega imagined should be utterly illegal. "I'm afraid you won't be on your feet again for quite some time."

Biting his lip, he deliberately stepped away much to his own and his body's vocal protests. Yet even with the eyes pretending not to watch them, Oliver knew they were not much of a deterrence at this point and only space would preserve the shred of his frayed control.

"--going to live?"

Apparently not paying attention was coming back to bite him in the ass.
"What was that?"

All attention redirected to him before Lawton stepped in to squish the remnants of his dignity like a bug.

"I know you got cock on the brain, Queen, but you can worry about getting boned later." Slade chuckled and merely grinned wider when he saw withering look Oliver shot his way. Lawton was not one Oliver could bother blaming because the sniper's sole form of ammunition had been provided by himself. "Your dad is just saying how he's moving the League's base to Starling. Though I question your old man's sanity if he wants to settle down in Starling. That place is an infested shithole if there ever was one."

"We're working on it!" Tommy shot defensively.

"Mr. Lawton," The new Ra's al Ghul smiled with the panache of one skilled in reptilian diplomacy. "While I will always be thankful for your efforts protecting my children, I would advise you not to be careless with your statements. And remember exactly who you're talking about."

"Dad!" Scandalized and torn in the way one could be only when caught between family and friends, Oliver waited for Tommy's inevitable faux pas.

Except unpredictable Lawton reacted with a belt of laughter and nodded once with a not-quite mocking salute to Malcolm.

"Hear you loud and clear, boss," Floyd, remarked before prodding Tommy toward Slade much to his own surprise. "Tommy needs a moment with the big guy if you're alright with your dad, Queen."

Once again, Malcolm surprised him by deferring to the 'request' and sliding an arm around his shoulder and gently leading him away. Shooting a quick look over his shoulder, he exchanged a look with Slade that quashed most of the separation anxiety teasing his senses. Turning around, he allowed Malcolm an acknowledgment and return to flying the oversized plane.

"If I didn't know what you were going through, I would imagine you weren't happy to see me."

Instantly submerged in guilt, Oliver dropped the pretense and threw himself at his father like a gangly youth rather than the fully grown, lethal omega he had become. Fulfilling his dearest hopes, his father accepted the embrace. The assassins arms swept around him and one hand carded through his dirty hair in a soothing gesture while his mind overloaded on parental, protective pheromones.

"I'm sorry." Desperately he wanted the other man to understand, to forgive his lack of sincerity.

"I know. I'm not upset, Oliver." Oliver could smell the truth and he sighed in relief. "It just killed me that I couldn't get you out of there sooner. I'm the one whose sorry."

Stepping away, he noted the determined if bitter looking man before him and realized just how much weight the other man had been carrying.

"I think you give yourself too much credit for what happened," Oliver remarked, noting the approaching city lights below with wonder. "If we want to lay the blame at the door of the guilty, Waller admitted that my mother--Moira, was involved. I'm starting to doubt every memory I ever had of her. Even the good ones."
"I'm sure there is an explanation," Malcolm draped an arm around his shoulders protectively, but Oliver found himself rebelling against the notion that his father was defending her of all people. "I've always believed your mother loved you more than anything."

"Don't defend her dad!" Oliver stepped away and smashed his fist into the metal siding, swearing when he heard a familiar crack and grimaced quietly.

The pain did little to dull his irritation that was rapidly overwhelming his thinking. Malcolm wasn't exactly the source, but Oliver felt almost betrayed when the man had defended the woman responsible for their separation.

"I just don't want to be wrong about making this sort of accusation." Calmly his father reasoned with him.

"Yeah, well, Amanda Waller gloated about that quite vocally," Oliver muttered, whirling to stalk out of the cockpit before logic caught up with him and stopped him in his tracks. "And I know you're just trying to be a good father, but I honestly hope I never see her again."

Neither one mentioned the because to that statement. Some things were unnecessary.

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"You wanted to talk to me, Kid?" Slade crossed his arms patiently toward the rear of the plane. The assassins in the area had instantly dispersed, giving their little group the illusion of privacy for their little pow-wow. Tommy clearly was agitated in a way that Slade had never seen his student before.

"It might be helpful if you beat the shit out of him while you talk." Tommy's new partner in crime chimed in helpfully from where he was dutifully checking his gun for jams and cleaning the edges with a cloth. "He's angisting like a bitch."

"Fuck you, Lawton. I'm fine."

Raising a brow, the Australian watched the younger alpha throw his partner a disgusted look while shifting from foot to foot in a jittery manner reminiscent of an addict in need of a hit. But Slade recognized the manifested signs for what they really were.

Slamming his fist into Tommy's face was possibly as therapeutic for him as he knew it would be for the younger man. Quicker than thought, the brunette launched to his feet and retaliated with a harsh punch of his own that Slade danced away from. The pair exchanged another pair of blows before Slade caught him in a takedown and pinned the younger man. Each movement the kid made came with a practiced flow that lacked the discordant choppiness that had been present in the novice. His student may not have the knowledge and tricks that came with seasoned learning, but what he did know, he knew well.

"I have to say I'm impressed," Slade smirked while rubbing a particularly solid strike to his jaw; while the serum erased the damage within a moment, he was more than aware that the blow would more than likely be permanently damaging. "Every strike you make is planned to be a finishing move. Impressive, but you've passed up some great opportunities to disable or pin me in favor of a killing stroke. You're angry."

"Understatement much," Tommy spat, only to kick out with deliberate force.

Dodging the bow, he planted his elbow in the younger alpha's kidney, pleased when his next blow was caught and deflected smoothly. "Care to share with the class?"
"We got kidnapped. You saved us. Pretty self-explanatory, right?"

Rolling to his knees, Slade caught an approaching fist and yanked it toward himself, deliberately pulling Tommy off balance and planting him face first to the frigid, metal plane surface and sweeping his arms into a lock. It was like throwing gasoline on a fire. Tommy jerked, rocked, and fought with all of his considerable strength to struggle free. Slade didn't give and held fast to the struggling youth and waited until the kid had exhausted himself and hung limp in his grasp.

"What you're experiencing now is something I've seen a thousand times over," Slade spoke casually and without an ounce of pity. Being a listener was important, but alienating the other man by offering unwanted sympathy would only make matters worse and they really did not need that. "You've seen things, done things, and now you've been rescued. Saved!"

When the struggle resumed, Slade jerked him up and slammed him forcefully into the metal, unforgiving floor and waited while the youth whimpered in pain.

"But right now you hate yourself and you wanted someone to make you hurt." When the body beneath his tensed up, Slade released him and climbed to his feet. "Because you're punishing yourself. So all that's left is... to ask you what exactly you're punishing yourself for."

Slade almost expected Lawton to chime in, but the sniper refused to move from his corner of the plane, though he did see the man give Diggle a speculative glance. Whatever the man's reasons for keeping quiet, the Australian found himself thankful.

"I forgot about her." Ah, Laurel: Slade wasn't surprised. The words were a quiet declaration like one might whisper in the sanctuary of a house of worship, but Tommy's entire posture was hunched inward in a display of shame that struck a chord in the older man. In truth, Slade had not expected Tommy to divulge anything so quickly, but now seeing the way the kid hung his head in near despair, he felt almost honored that the kid had come to him for the talk he obviously needed. Trust was not something easily given and Slade would show the other man respect in turn.

"Why does it bother you?" He countered gently. "I'm happy to give you an outlet for your feelings and beat you up, kid, but why is this bothering you?"

"Because I've loved her for so long and she deserves better." There was a choked quality that Slade determinedly avoided, though he crouched down, with some difficulty as the plane dipped into a descent, so they were eye to eye with the desperately sad looking young man staring at him as if he'd hung the moon.

"Maybe you both do." Slade challenged Tommy gently, seeing a seed of uncertainty that he swiftly moved to cultivate. "I promise you, even in my darkest moments, my thoughts were always with Oliver and thinking about him. If Laurel is not the center of your universe than your instincts are trying to tell you something that your heart is denying."

"I never really thought of it like that." Tommy sounded intrigued and perhaps a bit happier, though that could easily be a misconception that Slade was playing right into.

"And it only took an ass kicking to get you thinking," Lawton sounded positively giddy from the sidelines. "You better go back to school. You need it!"

"Sorry about the jaw kid," Slade hissed in sympathy when Tommy touched the discolored flesh with a curse and a wince.

"So I fix you up and you take it upon yourself to workout with Slade?"
Malcolm's voice is coolly amused and non-threatening despite his silent approach. Sighing, the alpha thrust the now familiar vial at his son with an annoyed look.

"Sorry dad." And some of that Merlyn pluck had revived in the young man that gratefully accepted his father's offering with a hearty guzzle and the expected round of sputters.

"I told you Merlyn, it's way more polite to swallow." Floyd chimed in helpfully. "Spitting is for bitches."

The water of life from the Lazarus Pit spewed out of Tommy's nostrils; Slade wasn't sure which was better, Malcolm's blank stare or the horror from the milling, not-watching assassins who bore witness to the debasement of their sacred water.

"Dad! Something's happening!"

Oliver's voice was like a summon and the group made for the cockpit just as the plane shuttered and began landing in a much bumpier fashion than expected.

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What on Earth?

Nearly bowling his family over in his haste to get to the exit, he hollered over his shoulder for the pilot to release the locks and sprinted down the ramp even as the ground vibrated and trembled beneath his feet. Behind him, he heard more than a few crashes and curses, but that seemed far from important to what he believed they would find outside.

Outside, the sky overhead was a brilliantly dark blue with only the faintest shine of yellow on the western horizon. But even the beauty of the painted sky was nothing to the reality that teased his sight.

The landing strip, an isolated private strip that he didn't recognize, appeared to ripple and caused his eyes to have difficulty focusing on the ground. Blinking away, the omega fell back on his survival training to keep him on his feet while his family stumbled toward him like drunken sailors.

From their current elevation, Oliver could almost look down on the city. The lights that should have been bright, vibrant, and illuminating the sky with artificial stars were flickering before going out like candles. One by one, the lights vanished while the ground shifted and stirred; from even far off, he heard the horrifying rumble of the earth gasping as buildings that had once seemed to touch the sky shook and disappeared. And then the lights within the city blinked once before falling into a darkness comprised of lack of light and a plume of dust rising into the air and enveloping the city in a cloud that left nearly everything completely visible.

"My God, can you imagine the casualty list?" Slade's voice was incredulous and his palms heavy and distracted upon his shoulders. "I wonder how much of the city was damaged by that quake."

"It's staggering." Oliver murmured, finding a peculiar beauty in the disastrous scenario. "Absolutely, unbelievable."

"Do you think Waller is behind this?" For once, Lawton sounded subdued and quiet.

"Considering her change in status, I highly doubt that." His father hinted with just a pinch of smugness--he would consider the implications thereof at another time.
Despite the arms--surely attempting to be comforting--wrapping around him, Oliver only had eyes for the dust covered city that was disappearing in front of him.

*Beautiful.*

Chapter End Notes

Yay. One chapter to go. Much love all!
"Isn't he just scrumptious?!!" Felicity kissed the newborns scarlet cheeks for the umpteenth time, heedless to the approving smiles of the League healers as they bowed once and stole away to give them private time with their new arrival. "You know I thought bliss was getting married and having a bunch of hotshots from ASIS sign multiple contracts for my software, but this? Nothing has ever come close to being so amazing! Look at him, Malcolm!"

Malcolm listened to his wife coo cheerfully to their son and made a light 'hmm' of agreement while smiling in a soft, genuine manner that frequented the alpha's face more and more often of late. And now the arrival of little Michael held the promise of even more wonderful days ahead of them. Pride and joy infusing his very being, the new father drank in the vision of his beautiful mate cuddling their little blue eyed prince to her chest. Life could never become better than the circumstances of their current life. Not a thing.

Tucking in next to the new mother, Malcolm's fingers skirted the blanket to trace the backs of his omega's elegant fingers before dipping to trace the infant's chubby digits. The tiny mouth opened and closed like a gulping fish until the babe sneezed, lips smacking softly, and eyes drooping shut with patent Merlyn reluctance.

"He looks like his big brother."

The boy resembled Tommy almost completely save a slightly softer facial structure that favored Felicity's bone structure. And the newborn alpha had been as impatient as Tommy had been: both of them two weeks early and quick, relatively painless deliveries to their overjoyed mothers.

"Definitely not talking about me then?"

Malcolm breathed in a sigh of pleasure and heard his cheerful mate call out a greeting to his fair haired son peeking inside the hospital room and focused completely on the sleeping bundle in his wife's arms. Beckoning the timid omega inward, Oliver slipped in with Slade at his heels holding "It's a boy" balloons, flowers, and a stuffed giraffe.

"Ah, guys that's so sweet!"

Malcolm bent down to lift the babe and gently take him into his arms. The tiny infant grumbled once before snuggling into his father's warmth. A rumble built in his chest that was a completely typical biological response, at least that was what he intended to tell Felicity when she relentlessly teased him about it. Nuzzling his son's fuzzy head, he stepped closer to his approaching child and offered the baby to Oliver.

"Oliver, this is your little brother, Michael." Malcolm gloated and felt no guilt in doing so.

Oliver paused, looking askance to Felicity before reaching out and accepting the tiny babe into his arms.

"Hey Mikey," Oliver christened the babe with a beatific kiss and a moniker that spoke volumes to the amount of trouble Felicity would be putting up with over the coming years. "I'm your
big brother, Oliver. I'm going to teach you how to destroy mommy's cell phone, chew daddy's paperwork, and even build block towers. You and I are going to have a blast!"

Slade dumped the flowers with a dissatisfied snort, helped himself to a congratulatory candy, and slung an arm around Malcolm's shoulder in a relaxed pat that merely had the elder alpha shaking his head in mock reproof. It was a rare thing that the new Lord of the League permitted casual touch, but Slade Wilson was like a force of nature and far beyond the control of even the most powerful men.

"Congratulations, mate. The kid's a looker." Malcolm could not agree more. "Sorry we're late. Oliver insisted on toppling that little group before they became an actual threat."

While he felt more than convinced that there was a little more involved with their story than what he was getting, Ra's chose to let the comment slide for the time being. There were more important things like watching Oliver stare at his infant brother with a profound look of wonder and a relaxed joy that was just beginning to emerge again in his son after all these months. Trauma was a demon of the mind and not one to be regarded lightly; in the case of Oliver Queen, his scars were numerous and deep and only a lot of time and patience would break those chains.

"He gets it from his mother," he replied with utter sincerity on his tongue. His son had seated himself next to Felicity, probably unaware that he was leaning against the blonde woman ever so slightly; the two of them were giggling and fussing over the newest addition to the family with delightful ease. So much so that Malcolm felt compelled to ask a question that he would never have been able to ask his son, but Slade, he could ask.

"Have you and Oliver ever...?"

"What, kids?"

Nodding curtly, he winked at Felicity and grinned when her cheeks tinted pink, pleasing him immeasurably.

"Well, all I can you, Grandpa, is that you're going to have to wait and see," Slade's response sounded a little too self-satisfied and he watched his friend vividly saunter across the room and wrap his arms around his son like an overgrown lummox. Oliver instantly relaxed against his mate and Malcolm's eyes zeroed in on the rather obvious placement of Slade's hands across his son's abdomen accompanied by the suggestive leer thrown his way.

Well aware he was scowling, Malcolm stepped out of the crowded bedroom for a much needed breath of fresh air that lasted no more than a second when his pocket vibrated. Noting the name of the caller, he relaxed infinitesimally and his previous cheer returned in earnest.

"Tommy!"

"Dad!" Noticeably out of breath and it put a damper on his enthusiasm as worry gripped the father. Ever since Slade's contacts with ASIS recruited Tommy and Floyd into service, his son's schedule had become sporadic. And with a high success rate, the missions and the money—not that his son wanted for a so much as a penny—flowed. Over time, the haunted, almost hunted look, had morphed into a wry confidence and self-awareness that had previously been a dormant, non-existent personality twist. Upon seeing the positive results the field work had brought to his son, Malcolm's lingering reservations had vanished.

"Son, what's happening? Do you need help!" He barked, mind racing a mile a minute. It would take him moments to dispatch his men, but at least a few hours to arrive even by jet and--
"Dad I'm fine! Relax! I can hear you freaking out from here." No of course not, the father rolled his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose. Because rounds of gunfire and explosions were just everyday life in the Merlyn Clan. "Just tell me if I have a new brother or a sister. Come on, sister!"

"I'm afraid Michael is going to be a perfect little clone of yourself." Still concerned even if he kept his tone neutral, Malcolm caught the eye of one of his men in the hallway and gestured pointedly at the phone. One swift, deep bow and the shadow vanished to track his son's tracking signal from the lower control room.

"A boy, darn it I lost the bet!" Tommy's tone sounded anything but disappointed, though the connection rattled and his son let out a soft oomph."Floyd says congrats in a much more colorful manner." No doubt. "Dad, tell Felicity congratulations and we'll see you in a couple days, okay? I gotta go if I don't want to get held up."

The indefinite comment was left out for obvious reasons.

"Come home in one piece, that's all we want," the alpha soothed the regret in his son's voice even as he planned to have an extraction unit on standby. "Just stay safe and send me a message as soon as you're out of there. Give them no quarter."

"God dad, you should be a dictator. Love you, bye!"

Brooding, he smelled the other alpha before he heard the pattering of footsteps and turned expectantly as Thea all but sprinted around the staircase dragging her bemused beta boyfriend with her. Opening his arms, he wound them around the only daughter he would ever have and nuzzled her cheek once in greeting.

"You look happy." An observation that Malcolm was rather keen to note more often. Since he had arranged his clever bit of revenge against Moira, he had taken pains to be there for the mourning children--and city populace--left in the wake of the quakes. Careful nurturing and the offer of stability had paid off for the alpha as far as the Queen siblings went. Oliver had abandoned the use of his family name altogether while his sister took up the reins as the reluctant CEO of Queen Consolidated under the tutelage of himself--all according to plan. "You have no idea how wonderful it is to see you smile."

"That's because she busted the balls of some nosey reporter from Metropolis," Roy muttered in disgust. "I swear, those lowlifes will do anything to make a buck."

Metropolis. Malcolm kept his expression sympathetic and disdainful and squeezed Thea a bit more protectively. He might have to dispatch someone to 'manage' the problem if they dared approach Thea again. And while he would have to wait until he could get Roy alone to confirm it, he had a suspicion that those meddling reporters might be trying to sleuth out the true. There was no evidence left to find that would lead back to him concerning his involvement in the machines that killed 1263 deaths, but the longer they were in town snooping about... best to get rid of them quickly.

"Nothing I can't handle." Confidence instilled every word and Malcolm glowed with pride as Thea pulled away and folded her arms in the business dress that made her look incredibly amazing.

"So, baby huh?" Roy smacked his hands together, looking awkward and uncomfortable even if he was trying--and failing miserably--not to show it. "What do we got?"

"Michael Merlyn."
"Another boy?" Amusement clung to her voice like a second skin as the girl cheerfully switched topics to even more pleasant things. "The name definitely fits that whole regal thing you got going. Guess you're gonna hope for a girl next time."

"There won't be a next time." There came a point where enough was enough and one child was more than enough. Their lives were already overwhelmingly busy and there was no indication of things ever slowing down. And that was just the way they liked it. "Besides, you are all the girl I need."

Thea leaned out and hugged him once again, painfully tight, before stepping away while deliberately not looking him in the eye; though even with the space between them, he could smell the salt in her tears. Roy moved in and dropped an arm over her shoulders and just supported her quietly.

With a motion, he mustered all his authority as Ra's, pointed toward the door, and nudged his daughter.

"Go see her." Go see your mother.

Without another word, Thea vanished inside with Roy on her heels. For all his good qualities, the beta was quick to scare even if the boy was skilled at hiding it.

"My Lord," a pair of shadows appeared in casual clothing that Felicity had insisted they all be provided with and bowed with eyes to the ground.

"What is it?"

"On behalf of all who serve you, we offer our congratulations." The perfunctory response rattled off of Balthazar's tongue before the other man looked him dead in the eye and reported cautiously as if waiting for the old Ra's mood swings to rise in his new leader. "Damien Darhk was sighted in Austria. Would you like us to send men?"

"No." Malcolm shook his head, smiling faintly at the shocked looks from both men broadcasting confusion in the air. "My predecessor's failings are no longer a concern of the League. If Darhk makes a move against us, the League will respond, but at this point... allow the old fox to believe he has outwitted us. If the time comes, this show of mercy can easily be rescinded."

"My Lord."

"Was there anything else?"

"Only that a batch of nineteen trainee hopefuls have arrived to offer themselves into service, my lord."

Nineteen? That was an unheard of number of hopefuls to arrive in a single cluster. In the past, the League typically accepted twenty out of eighty per year and even that had been considered high. Yet, the possibilities were truly limitless. No longer did he live under the thumb of another man; Malcolm Merlyn was Ra's al Ghul, one of the most powerful figures in ancient history... and could be the most influential in modern one too. More recruits, more skilled bodies, equated to that much greater influence. A day to usher in a new era of change and have a hand in altering the destiny of an entire world.

"I will be down momentarily. Await my arrival."

"As you say, my lord."
And once again, he was alone.

Cracking the door, he watched Thea tucked up against Felicity like a burr while holding her new brother like he was the next great treasure in the world. The pair had been virtually inseparable outside of sleeping arrangements for a month after Moira's death, fostering a bond between the two of them that Malcolm found advantageous. The alpha's smirk widened at Roy's horrified expression as Slade made an offer to assist in 'training' him. 'Tough luck,' he thought, 'the big man's taking a liking to you.' Oliver was rummaging through a bag before triumphantly retrieving a diaper. He almost wanted to stay and watch, but Felicity waved from the bed. He returned it and held up his watch and tapped it twice; his wife, understanding creature that she was, nodded once and went back to her children.

It took moments only to dress in the ceremonial regalia of Ra's al Ghul and take the elevator from the new Merlyn Mansion to the subterranean levels that housed a system of artificial caves simulated to reproduce the effect of Nanda Parbat with much more technology and capability than the previous locale provided.

Stepping off, the spacious common area with long meal tables fell silent as the room took time to bow to their leader. Malcolm accepted all before taking one of the side tunnels to the main greeting chamber that was more ceremonial than functional.

One at a time, and one after another, Malcolm listened to each man and woman speak in turn. The requests were all the same: training as an assassin. The reasons were different and varied as were the ages, status, and race. To the silent surprise of his men, he went through the first eighteen and accepted fifteen initiates and killed only three with impertinence that grated him.

Signaling the for the final supplicant to be brought in, he observed a tall male omega sporting a scraggly beard with coal black hair. It was clear that the ill-dressed man had missed a good meal or two, but there was still something about the man that felt strangely familiar. When Balthazar jerked the blindfold free, Malcolm had his answer as the blinking sapphires stirred a memory of board meetings and parties from the early days of his life.

"You're Ra's al Ghul?" The incredulity should have been insulting, but coming from this familiar, foreign young man it was rather endearing.

"Don't allow your eyes to deceive you, young Bruce," he reprimanded the youth with a quiet voice, pleased when the callow young man jerked back at that little revelation in shock. Curious though; the omega appeared entirely unsettled but his scent radiated a determined anger that would not be cowed so easily. "Your sense of perception is skewed and unreliable. Only with considerable training is that fixed."

"How do you know my name?"

"Our faces attract world-wide attention, Mr. Wayne," he shot the young man an amused look, idly wondering how long it would take the youth to puzzle it out. "Surely you didn't think that patch of fuzz on your face would conceal your identity from the League of Assassins?"

The jibe was ignored as the youth's eyes widened comically. "You're Malcolm Merlyn!"

"A name only," he commented, stepping closer in order to force the young man to strain to look upward at him. "Does it sum up the reality of who I am? Or is it an illusion, a smokescreen if you will, between the world and Ra's al Ghul."

"I don't know." Good.
"What do you seek?" Malcolm asked the kneeling young man, memory recalling vaguely that Bruce Wayne should roughly be close to the age of his sons.

Ah. The iron resolve in Bruce Wayne's eyes settled into place again and his scent was all anger and sorrow: lovely.

"I seek the means... to fight injustice. To turn fear... against those who prey on the fearful."

"That power will only come after you have mastered your own," Ra's al Ghul commented softly, weaving the first lines of a web to trap the fly. "Give me your allegiance, Bruce Wayne, and I shall set you free."

"You have it," the vow was sworn so easily and so sincerely that Malcolm almost pitied the youth for the trap binding him.

"Let us begin."

"You wanna get married, Kid?"

"Oliver Wilson doesn't quite have the ring I was hoping for," Oliver murmured from his place tucked up against Slade's chest under their comforter. "Though Slade Merlyn sounds nice."

"Hell with the damn names," Slade snuggled deeper into their bedding, purring when his mate's fingers stroked over his chest rhythmically. "We'll get married, we'll invite whoever we want and neglect the rest, and the names hardly matter. What matters is that I love you."

"As I love you."

"How on Earth are we going to explain the ridiculous, complexity of our lives?" Slade wondered, already sounding as if he were half-asleep.

"Oh I don't know, but I'm sure it would go along the lines of something absurdly dramatic." The omega's eyes shuttered closed and his reply was lost on his sleeping partner. "My name was Oliver Queen."

Chapter End Notes

I want to thank everyone that reviewed and left kudos. Every single one of you is amazing and I feel privileged that you took the time and effort to give me feedback and brighten my day.

On a secondary note, I'd like to say this was a long journey and I'm glad that I did it. As my first fanfiction project, I found this incredibly intimidating but very rewarding. I believe I've grown significantly but I also see that I still have a lot of room for improvement and a long way to go. I'm definitely still a student trying to find my way in the writing world and I hope that I continue to evolve in future projects.

But yeah, thank you to everyone again. I know my story was far from perfect and that
some things could definitely be improved, but I think as a learning/writing experience for myself, that I'm proud of what I accomplished.

Best wishes to you all!

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